

Class is Dismissed

Thomas Frank

I suppose I should be grateful to Larry Bartels. After all, it's not every author who gets to have his work assailed by the director of a prestigious Ivy League political science research center. It's even more unusual to be class-baited by a Princeton professor.<sup>1</sup>

These are high distinctions indeed, and I thank him for honoring me by his attentions.

The fundamental assumption animating Bartels' attack on *What's the Matter With Kansas?* (WMK) is that studies like mine—based on movement literature, local history, interviews, state-level election results, and personal observation—are inherently inferior to mathematical extrapolations drawn from the National Election Surveys (NES). Indeed, Bartels seems to understand his assault on WMK as a blow struck for responsible academic professionalism against a contemptible “pundit literature.”<sup>2</sup> My own feeling, after watching him steer his science around the proving ground, is that this vaunted research device is in reality a rickety and most unreliable contraption.

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<sup>1</sup> In comments made to the *Daily Princetonian*, Bartels explained that *What's the Matter With Kansas?* is “particularly satisfying for liberal intellectuals because it puts the blame on poor people rather than those like them.” See

<http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/archives/2005/10/19/news/13521.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> In his paper “What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas?”, Bartels makes a distinction between, on the one hand, “journalists and pundits” who are charged both with liking WMK and believing a certain controversial poll result, and, on the other, the “academics” who know better, pages 2 and 1. For his thoughts on “pundit literature,” see the account of the *Daily Princetonian* for October 19, 2005, in which we read that “Bartels explained that the difference between his conclusions and those of Frank are indicative of a wide division between ‘pundit literature’ and political science literature.” Needless to say, Bartels' attitude of smug professionalism makes his efforts to class-bait me particularly comical.

To begin with, consider the barren landscape of American politics as Bartels describes it—a featureless tundra swept of history, ideology, and any hint of the raw emotional resonance that everyone knows politics possesses. His NES America is not a place that I recognize. It might as well be the moon.

As for his results themselves, they are cratered with error. Here are five that I will explore in this initial response:

- A *primary error* in the foundation of Bartels' argument; a mistake so basic that it effectively negates his entire effort;
- Numerous *peculiarities* that cast additional doubt not only on Bartels' results (already nullified anyway by the primary error) but also on his methodology;
- *Egregious misrepresentation* of my own thesis; and, partly as a consequence,
- Findings that, in fact, *validate* certain central points made in WMK; plus, finally,
- A fatal failure to make a *threshold argument*.

## 1. Primary error

The phenomenon of working-class conservatism has proven difficult for liberals to grasp over the thirty-eight years since its emergence, but with Larry Bartels' essay we have wandered out of the realm of gaping incomprehension and into the land of willful denial.

Working-class conservatism exists. Yes, the phenomenon is complex, but nevertheless it is an important, if not the preeminent reason for the continuing electoral weakness of the Democratic Party. Since the late 1960s sociologists and historians have published book

after book about working-class conservatives; poll results repeatedly confirm their ongoing existence; Democratic strategists fret about how to win working-class votes; and conservative newspaper columnists gloat openly about the Republicans' victories among this volatile demographic.

Bartels' response to all this is simply to close his eyes and define the issue away. Arming himself with a fact that is well-known to poll-readers everywhere—that society's very poorest members tend to vote Democratic—he simply switches the labels, claims that those poorest Americans are “the working class,” and—hey presto!—declares the problem solved. Nothing to worry about, go back to sleep.

Bartels performs this spectacular feat of reassurance by defining “working class” as “people with family incomes in the bottom third of the income distribution,” (11)<sup>3</sup> which is to say, people with household incomes below \$35,000. To justify this definition, he brushes off other ways of determining working-classness. First, subjective self-identification: You can't trust people to give their own class accurately, Bartels writes, because that might be an effect as well as a cause of their political views. (page 11. Remember this: it will resurface later on.) Second, Bartels argues that educational levels can't be used to determine “socio-economic status” because more people get college degrees now than in the old days.

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<sup>3</sup> All page numbers are from Larry M. Bartels, “What's the Matter with What's the Matter With Kansas?,” a paper he presented at APSA in 2005 and that is also available on his website: <http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/kansas.pdf>

And that's it. Bartels' own definition—household income below \$35,000—is simply supposed to be beyond controversy, as he implies in a double-negative passage so windingly indirect that I had to read it over three times to get it:

Nevertheless, as a general matter, it does not seem implausible to suppose that people's *relative* positions in the *current* income distribution provide a meaningful, historically consistent indication of their socio-economic status. (11)

Well, I can think of half a dozen reasons why it *is* implausible, and I'm not even a political scientist. Maybe those people are students or recent college graduates or just starting out in the workforce or not married yet: They will promptly cease to be “working class” by Bartels' estimation as soon as they get a promotion or get married. Maybe those people are professionals who just don't make very much money, like, say, a newly minted poli-sci PhD who is an instructor or an adjunct somewhere: They may be struggling but they are not “working class” by anyone's definition. Or maybe those people are retirees, living on pensions or Social Security—a large and growing segment of the population, but not necessarily “working class.”

In fact, according to a pair of professors who have also analyzed the NES data for 2004, over a third of Bartels' “working class” demographic are, in fact, retirees. Eight percent are disabled. Only a third of his chosen cohort are actually employed, and only half of these are over the age of thirty.<sup>4</sup> *This is not a profile of “the working class” as anyone uses the term.* This is “the poor,” “the young,” and “the retired.”

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<sup>4</sup> See “Will the Real White Working Class Please Stand Up?” by David Gopoian and Ralph Whitehead, Jr., found at <http://www.emergingdemocraticmajorityweblog.com/donkeyrising/archives/001317.php>

But then comes the flimsiest assertion of them all: Bartels claims that he is authorized to define the working class as the bottom third in household income because (a) the newspaper columnist David Brooks once described the “white working class” as “poorer folks”; and (b) because I myself wrote in WMK that, when I spoke of class, I meant it “in the material, economic sense, not in the tastes-and-values way our punditry defines class.”<sup>5</sup>

If Bartels wants to quarrel with David Brooks, that’s fine with me (although in Brooks’ defense, we should note that he has since offered a more precise and even Bartelsian definition of the class of people he’s describing<sup>6</sup>). As for me, I no more endorsed Bartels’ particular scheme for interpreting NES data than I did the Iraq war.

A close reader of WMK will notice that, in the two sentences after the one that Bartels cites to make his preposterous claim (“Thus, here I follow Frank’s lead”), I list several characteristics that I associate with working class neighborhoods in Johnson County, Kansas, among them:

- “slightly lower real estate values”

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Bartels acknowledges that retirees pose a problem for his schema in a footnote, and then assures readers that leaving them out doesn’t change his results. But we never get to see the revised figures, and of course it *does* change his parameters in one significant way: He’s no longer talking about a third of the white population.

<sup>5</sup> As the last eleven words of this quote from me (omitted by Bartels at the crucial moment, page 11) make clear, the goal of this sentence was to distinguish myself from writers like . . . *David Brooks*, with his famous stereotypes of salt-of-the-earth red staters and arrogant, affected blue-staters.

<sup>6</sup> In his New York Times column for December 8, 2005, Brooks writes: “To win, Republicans depend on white rural and suburban working-class voters making \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year. Conservative Republicans offer almost no policies that directly benefit these people.”

- “lower per capita incomes”
- residents who are “less likely to have college degrees”.

At no point do I say anything about Bartels’ particular and highly suspicious metric:

“family incomes in the bottom third of the income distribution.”

However, there is an easy way to truly “follow Frank’s lead”: use educational attainment as a proxy for class. As it turns out, this is a fairly common practice among pollsters. The reason they use education this way is simple: Unlike Bartels’ poorest-third measurement, which includes all sorts of people who will not be or have not been lower-income forever, education predicts long-term life chances and thus suggests where people will end up. It has the added benefit of being widely available, since educational background is frequently included in poll questions.<sup>7</sup>

Let’s test Bartels’ results using education as an indicator of class. When you measure the white working class using the commonly used metric of white people who do not have a college degree, it turns out that *white working-class voters chose George W. Bush over John Kerry by a substantial 24 percentage points.*<sup>8</sup> What happens when we break down

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<sup>7</sup> See pollster Ruy Teixeira’s discussion of this issue, <http://www.emergingdemocraticmajorityweblog.com/donkeyrising/archives/001178.php>

<sup>8</sup> See the January 4, 2005 article by John Judis and Ruy Teixeira in *The American Prospect*. They write that

the key to Bush’s victory was reviving Reagan’s support among the white working class. According to the post-election survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps/Institute for America’s Future, Bush enjoyed a whopping 24-percent edge among non-college-educated whites, compared with a 19-percent advantage in 2000. (Clinton had actually carried this group by a point in each of his election victories.) Insofar as whites still make up 77 percent of the electorate and non-college-educated whites represent a majority of the white vote, that increase alone accounts for most -- perhaps 70 percent -- of Bush’s improved performance in 2004.

those figures by household income? Pollster Ruy Teixeira has done the math, using exit polls:

[A]mong non-college-educated whites with \$30,000-\$50,000 in household income, Bush beat Kerry by 24 points (62-38); among college-educated whites at the same income level, Kerry actually managed at 49-49 tie. And among non-college-educated whites with \$50,000-\$75,000 in household income, Bush beat Kerry by a shocking 41 points (70-29), while leading by only 5 points (52-47) among college-educated whites at the same income level.

Conclusion: the more voters looked like hardcore members of the white working class, the less likely they were to vote for Kerry in the 2004 election. That's a problem--a *big* problem--that Democrats have to take quite seriously.

This would seem to suggest that Bartels' conclusions are quite wrong.

But maybe if we ignore the educational category, and restrict ourselves to household income stats, like Bartels suggests, maybe then the problem will go away. Nope: When white voters are broken down by household income into *quintiles rather than thirds*, it becomes plain that the Republican Bush won every quintile except the very bottom, as an August, 2005 study by the Pew Research Center demonstrates. (In fact, the *only* family-income bracket in which the Democrat Kerry prevailed among whites was "\$0-\$14,999.") What's more, the results of the Pew study show considerable deterioration in the Democratic position among low-income white families *just since 1992*. With regards to what the Pew study calls the "Lower Middle Income Quintile," the fourth lowest out of five, the trend is particularly alarming:

Here is where the GOP gains have been strongest. Republicans still trail Democrats among all people in this bracket by 35%-28%, but the GOP now leads among whites in this bracket, by a slim 33%-29%. Back in 1992, the Democrats led the GOP among whites by 33%-28% and among all people by 38%-24%.

By the way, the headline of the Pew news release announcing the study is this: “GOP Makes Gains Among The Working Class, While Democrats Hold On To The Union Vote.”<sup>9</sup>

Let’s try one other method: Subjective self-identification by class. Bartels dismisses this as unreliable, but he never actually gives us the NES results on the subject so that readers can decide for themselves. This made me curious, so I inquired about those results from the 2004 NES. What a surprise: White people who identify themselves as members of the working class are reported to have chosen the Republican George Bush over the Democrat John Kerry by a significant margin.<sup>10</sup>

The more one examines the data, the more it seems that the *only* way to achieve Bartels’ results is by the simple trick of changing the labels, by calling the very poorest voters “the working class” and pretending that other definitions simply do not exist. And here it is important to note that Bartels actually *omits from his charts* the results for the middle third in household income—the very demographic where most observers would locate most of the actual “working class.” Not only has Bartels measured the wrong group of voters, but he has prevented his readers from seeing the correct data.

But none of these sleights of hand will suffice. You can argue over names, you can twist the data, you can even refuse to acknowledge the data, but the problem is still there, the Republicans still entrenched in power. Forget “white working class”; call them “middle

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<sup>9</sup> <http://people-press.org/commentary/display.php3?AnalysisID=114>

<sup>10</sup> According to Alan Abramowitz of Emory University, who I consulted on this matter, white people who self-identified as working class in the NES chose Bush by 54.4% to Kerry’s 45.6%.



Americans”; call them “the Pepsi People”; call them whatever you want: what has happened cannot be changed or wished away.

## 2. Miscellaneous peculiarities.

Apart from this basic mistake, parsing the data the way Bartels chooses to do leads inevitably into a number of other errors.

- When NES respondents are asked to specify the class they are part of, Bartels rules the results out as hopelessly unscientific. But then he proceeds to use subjective data without hesitation to establish both religiosity as well as how liberal or conservative people are. This is a fatal inconsistency. Either we accept subjective self-identification—in which case Bartels must acknowledge that his thesis is refuted by NES class self-identification data—or we rule it out across the board, in which case his arguments about the culture wars are badly compromised. It is worth pointing out, in this connection, that the faultiness of piety surveys is notorious and well established. Asking people how religious they are is basically inviting them to lie.<sup>11</sup>

- Bartels points out, again and again, that upper-class people vote Republican, that they are more conservative than poor voters, indeed that they vote Republican by a greater

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<sup>11</sup> Americans routinely exaggerate their church attendance in polls. See the article by C. Kirk Hadaway and P.L. Marler published in 1998 in *The Christian Century*, reproduced online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=237>. See also the 1998 article by Andrew Walsh in *Religion in the News*, [http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RIN%20Vol.1No.2/Church\\_lies\\_polling.htm](http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RIN%20Vol.1No.2/Church_lies_polling.htm)

margin than do people lower down on the economic ladder. By itself, this is pretty unremarkable. And yet he returns to the theme obsessively. For example, on page 3 he writes:

Similarly, McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal . . . have shown that income has become an increasingly strong predictor of Republican partisanship and presidential voting since the 1950s. If that is so, where are Frank's working-class conservatives?

In passages like this, Bartels seems to suggest that there is a finite pool of conservatism in the land, and that by hogging such a large share of it, these upper-income Republicans have somehow limited the degree to which poorer people might also be conservative. Alternately, he expresses surprise that anyone interested in the decline of liberalism might decide to study working-class conservatism when a larger percentage of upper-class people are also conservative (page 15). But surely it doesn't take a political scientist armed with fifty years of NES results to see that the phenomenon of upper-class conservatism is historically less novel and less consequential than that of working-class conservatism. We have had upper-class conservatives since the dawn of the Republic; by themselves they can't win elections to any office other than treasurer of the country club. It is only when some people from less exalted precincts cast their lot with these upper-class conservatives that the political scene gets interesting.

- Bartels completely ignores the particular pieces of evidence that I put forward in WMK in support of my thesis. He doesn't challenge these at all. This may be because WMK is largely concerned, as its title makes very plain, with events and political culture in the state of Kansas. Bartels' data sets, meanwhile, are concerned only with national contests between the two major parties. By definition he cannot generate detailed accounts of the

political wars I describe in Kansas, which are usually between the two factions of the local Republican party, and which are fought out in elections for the state legislature, the school board, the governor's office, and U.S. Representative.

Extending this argument, I should point out that many of the accounts of the backlash that we have are local and highly particular: the Canarsie neighborhood of New York in the Sixties and Seventies, the Boston busing riots of the Seventies, the emergence of the "Reagan Democrats" in Macomb County in the Eighties, the anti-abortion crusade in Buffalo in the Eighties and Nineties, and so on. In some of these cases, the blue-collar subjects in question continued to vote Democratic in presidential elections even as they turned against liberalism locally. Little of this would be ascertainable via Bartels' NES data, which would probably lead him to believe that none of these historical chapters ever took place.

### 3. Culture Wars

Bartels discussion of the culture wars is skewed by a serious misunderstanding of my argument. He compounds this error by adducing evidence that is (a) feeble, (b) miscategorized and that, thanks to his original misinterpretation, actually serves to (c) *support* the argument I make in WMK.

Let us begin our inventory of error on Bartels' page 22, where we find a quote from me pointing out that "backlash *leaders* systematically downplay the politics of economics" (emphasis added). Bartels reads this as meaning that "working-class *voters* attach more weight to social issues than to economic issues," (emphasis added) but of course that is not what I wrote. The distinction may be subtle but it is important: Conservative leaders argue that "values matter most" (the phrase is not mine, by the way; it is Ben Wattenberg's), but in fact "values" only matter as much as they have obviously come to matter because the other party, i.e. the non-Republican party, has either largely accepted the conservative economic agenda or is perceived to have largely accepted the conservative economic agenda. Either way, economic issues are effectively removed from the table, and social issues are highlighted. This is important because economic issues are the area where working-class voters are historically most liberal. And this is why I spend so much of WMK's final chapter faulting Democrats for accepting the conservative economic agenda and why I exhort them to rediscover the economic liberalism of the past. In a proper, clearly drawn contest between economic liberalism and cultural populism, I believe, economic liberalism will win.

Bartels proceeds to examine the conservatism of the "white working class" (of course, they aren't really the white working class, see "Primary Error," above) by focusing on three survey questions: Their subjective self-identification as liberal or conservative, which we can dismiss for reasons given above<sup>12</sup>; their views on abortion; and their views

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<sup>12</sup> Either Bartels accepts subjective self-identification, in which case he must admit that the majority of white working-class people chose Bush over Kerry, or else he rejects subjective self-identification, in which case he cannot simply bring it back into his narrative whenever it suits his purposes.

on some kind of full employment/comprehensive welfare-state measure, which he nicknames “government jobs.” This last is, by any standard, a strange choice for analyzing voters’ views in 2004, because it has been almost thirty years since Congress last seriously debated a full employment bill and because America has been speeding away from the cradle-to-grave welfare state ever since then, with politicians of both parties in rough agreement on the subject.

On abortion, Bartels tries to becloud the uncomfortable facts with confusing verbiage (see page 18 and 19), but ultimately he must admit that his data shows that lower-income voters are more conservative than high-income voters on this question *and* that there was a rightward shift in the attitudes of lower-income voters after 1992. Here I have an amazing coincidence to report: *That is the very same period I describe in What’s the Matter With Kansas!*

On full employment/“government jobs,” Bartels finds that low-income voters are more liberal than high-income voters, to which I can only say: No shit.

Bartels’ conclusion from this data is that lower-income voters are mildly conservative on some things and mildly liberal on others, and that therefore it’s just a wash. No change. Nothing to get excited about. Everywhere you look it’s just nice moderate moderation, as usual. (p. 19)

Ah, but there's another factor to consider here: Reality. Abortion is, as everyone knows, a live issue these days, hotly contested by protesters in the street and candidates in the field. This is an issue where one's views matter in determining one's vote, from the top of the ticket to the bottom. Full employment, on the other hand, is an issue that comes wheezing and creaking out of the 1970s, from the era of Hubert Humphrey and wildcat strikes. Were you to canvass the entire country in 2004, I doubt that you would have found more than a handful of major-party candidates still openly pushing for such a dramatic extension of the welfare state—and you can rest assured that any such candidate was well calumniated for his or her dangerous radicalism.

So then: On the cultural issue, where the voters in question are more conservative, they are permitted and even encouraged to express that conservatism. On the economic issue, where these voters are more liberal, there is nothing. No choice. Such a scenario is obviously going to end with such voters behaving more conservatively. This is the thesis I advance in *What's the Matter With Kansas?*, and Bartels' data thus bears it out nicely—or, that is, his data would bear it out nicely if his data was actually concerned with the working class (see “Primary Error,” above).

Now let us turn to Bartels' evidence itself. Bartels scoffs that the conservative turn on abortion is “a remarkably modest base on which to build a new ‘dominant political coalition.’” (By the way, this last quote from me refers to the current dominance of the Republican Party over national politics. Bartels brings it up *seven times* [pp. 1, 5, 7, 8, 19, 29, 30] in order to laugh at it. Could he possibly think the Republicans *aren't* dominant?)

He writes this after examining *only a single question having to do with the culture wars*. Of course the results are modest: *He's only looked at one issue!* Later on in the paper (page 21) he augments this with a second "social issue question," an item about "women's appropriate social role." Which gives us a grand total of *two*.

What has Bartels left out? Let's see:

- Bias in the news
- Bible banning/the "war on Christmas"/persecution of Christians
- Busing
- The "culture of life"/stem cells/Terri Schiavo
- Evolution
- Flag burning
- Gay marriage
- Guns
- Hollywood/entertainment issues
- Offensive art
- School prayer
- Swift Boating, i.e., liberal betrayal during Vietnam
- Tenured radicals/university issues
- Trial lawyers
- Vouchers/home schooling/public school issues
- Windsurfing/latte drinking/Volvo driving/blue-state tastes generally

How do *these* issues test? Are some of them more powerful than others? Do some of them appeal to different demographics than others, as in the classic definition of a "wedge issue"? Unfortunately, Bartels does not or cannot tell us.

Bartels *does* include affirmative action in his calculations, a backlash beef since its inception, but he categorizes it as an economic issue (page 20), which would certainly be a surprise to Lee Atwater and Jesse Helms.<sup>13</sup> This is a bad gaffe, and a consequential one:

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<sup>13</sup> In some ways, affirmative action is the original "wedge issue." Also, as long as it's supposed to be *my* theories that we're testing, please note that affirmative action is mentioned

Affirmative action is one of only three “economic issues” Bartels uses to compute relative “issue preferences.” What happens to Bartels’ calculations when we move this issue into the correct category? Of course, I am not a mathematician and am thus unable to judge. My guess, however, is that his results would be, as they say in Kansas, shot all to hell.

#### 4. Religion

Bartels spends several pages testing whether or not religion is “distracting religious white voters from a hard-headed pursuit of their economic policy views.” (27) This is an interesting argument, but it is not one that I make. Although I do indeed use colorful language to establish that religion is a part of the cultural background in Kansas, I do not evaluate its role systematically. Sometimes I wish I had, but I didn’t. The brief snippets of mine that Bartels cites, all drawn from different parts of WMK, are simply not enough to prove anything more than my fondness for sarcasm.

Numerous other authors *do* make such arguments about religion and politics, however, and perhaps Bartels can reformulate his data to pick a fight with one of them. I will warn him, though, that his argument here depends heavily on subjective self-identification, a tool he finds it useful to rule out elsewhere and that, in the case of religion, has been widely discredited (see above).

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several times in WMK as a standard backlash issue (although one whose power is minimal in the state of Kansas), on pages 6, 180, and 266 n. 3.



## 5. Threshold argument

Now for a big, honking hypothetical: Let's say that Bartels is right; let's say that none of the above rejoinders have been made; let's say every single argument he makes in his paper is correct—that working-class people aren't moving away from the Dems, that most of them don't care about cultural issues, et cetera. Then, he assumes, *What's the Matter With Kansas?* can somehow be dismissed.

But even in this extreme hypothetical situation he is wrong. Our quantitative expert never answers—or indeed even asks—the underlying questions on which his assumption is based: What percentage of the public, exactly, must be involved in a movement or a cultural enterprise in order for it to merit examination? Does a movement have to be growing in order for it to be the subject of a cultural study? And if so, at what rate?

*What's the Matter With Kansas?* is, at its core, a cultural study, a look at the rhetoric and ideology of right-wing populism. At the end of the day such a study does not require or depend upon a majoritarian argument of any kind; it only requires that the cultural formation in question is *significant* or is somehow *worth examining*—the same basic test I applied to the advertising industry in *The Conquest of Cool* and to management theory in *One Market Under God*. I make no systematic claim in WMK that the mindset or beliefs I describe are the only or even the predominant way of thinking among working-

class Americans; in fact, on page 16 I describe them as being peculiarly well-suited to a party whose candidate *lost* the popular vote (as Bush did in 2000). On several occasions I refer to working-class people and working-class locations where the backlash mentality is clearly not dominant: the upper Midwest, Kansas City, labor unions, various friends of mine, etc. In my earlier book, *One Market Under God* I even argued the backlash does not win over the working class in its entirety, but instead works by chipping away at it, by fragmenting the old New Deal coalition.<sup>14</sup>

Bartels' assumption, meanwhile, is that the only legitimate objects of study are those that result in electoral majorities or that can be quantified and tested by the National Election Survey. This is manifestly absurd. Think of the countless studies of important thinkers, artists, authors, war heroes, architects, movements, and ideas that are found in every library in America. Almost none of them would be permissible under such a standard. Indeed, were Bartels' notions to be applied uniformly, they would rule out almost all of the humanities.

So let Bartels meet *my* standard. Does he show that right-wing populism is not significant or that it is not worth examining? Does he prove that Bill O'Reilly doesn't really talk about the "liberal elite" and that nobody who makes less than \$50,000 a year listens to Rush Limbaugh? Does he show that the Nixon administration made no effort to build a "New Majority" out of white working-class votes or that the current administration made

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<sup>14</sup> OMUG, pages 26 and 27. At the time OMUG was written (1999-early 2000), I also believed that the backlash was a spent force. I was clearly wrong about that.

no effort to woo working-class voters in West Virginia and Ohio? Does he show that all these things are negligible aspects of American life?

No. He merely attempts to prove that the majority of the white working class does not vote Republican and that most people don't really care about culture-war issues. Even if we overlook his many errors and grant this argument, he cannot meet my test. Even if they are a minority, right-wing populists do exist, and some people really do care about culture-war issues.

Even then, in this extreme hypothetical situation, I believe, it's *still* worth studying working-class conservatism. After all, the two major parties are coalitions of groups from all walks of life, and the slightest change in the loyalties of these groups is often enough to determine victory or defeat. Success doesn't require a solid majority *from each group*, just a majority when all the different components are put together. Whether or not working-class conservatives are an outright majority of working-class people, they are undoubtedly a prominent target of Republican electoral efforts. I could amass dozens of quotes from the last thirty years to prove that Republican strategists believe this, but I think the evidence is overwhelming and all-too-familiar to the population of the country that lives outside Princeton, New Jersey.

Although it's easy to forget when reading authors like Larry Bartels, these are not times of nice moderate moderation in Washington DC. Nor is the pendulum just going to swing back one fine day and restore the status-quo-ante of, say, 1968. Conservatism has

changed the face of America and of the world. The changes it has wrought are largely irreversible. To respond to all this by just blowing it off—by asserting that it's a waste of time to examine the populist conservative mindset—is folly on a magnitude that not even a political scientist can measure.