

**What's the Matter with Appalachia?**  
**Why culture trumps economics in the Appalachian region**

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## Part I: Introduction

The presidential election of 2016 showed that even the most educated experts can miss important trends or shifts that have the power to completely restructure the political landscape. President Trump won states that he was not expected to win, including Wisconsin and Michigan, as well as the traditional swing states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida, and North Carolina. As a Washington Post article published the day after the election put it: “We were wrong. The polls were wrong. We fundamentally misunderstood this election. We thought Hillary Clinton might be winning red states. But Donald Trump won blue states.”<sup>1</sup> What the polling experts and political pundits failed to identify in 2016 was the importance that “backlash culture” and “rural consciousness” would have in flipping states that were expected to go blue. The building resentment among the white working class across America, specifically in the Rust Belt and Appalachian regions, was massively underestimated. This is not a new trend, nor is it one that has gone unacknowledged by the academic community. A number of works have been published on this subject, including Thomas Frank’s *What’s the Matter with Kansas*, Katherine Cramer’s *The Politics of Resentment*, the historical *Power and Powerlessness* by John Gaventa, and the story of the struggle of the white working class by J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*. What made 2016 such a surprise was that Trump was able to mobilize working class anger in a way that no politician before him could, and that, in doing this, he was able to accelerate the transition of lower income white citizens to voting against their own economic interests.

This essay seeks to show that low income, often white voters from the Appalachian region are in fact voting largely against their own economic interests by casting their ballots for

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<sup>1</sup> Blake, Aaron. 2016. “Donald Trump just blew up the electoral map.” *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/08/donald-trumps-path-to-victory-is-suddenly-looking-much-much-wider/?utm\\_term=.f67bfb13162b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/08/donald-trumps-path-to-victory-is-suddenly-looking-much-much-wider/?utm_term=.f67bfb13162b) (October 21, 2017).

the Republican Party. It will then attempt to explain how and why this paradox came about by exploring the unique and insular culture of regions like Appalachia. We will begin by studying existing literature regarding the relationships between income and voting behavior before turning to a new analysis of existing polling data to show that, in certain regional areas (specifically Appalachia), this literature does not tell the whole story. This analysis seeks to show that these lower income voters are in fact becoming more likely to vote for Republicans over time. Using this information in conjunction with the available literature, the essay will attempt to explain this seemingly paradoxical trend by focusing on the extreme importance of “rural consciousness,” a concept introduced by Kathy Cramer which she suggests acts a lens through which rural voters see politics and the world.

To be sure, there are innumerable factors that contribute to the way each individual casts his or her vote, but as elections continue to play out with inexplicable results, it becomes ever more important to identify trends and patterns, especially those that may seem paradoxical. In rural, low income parts of the country, such as Appalachia, low income voters are becoming more likely to vote for the Republican Party and against their economic interests due to an insular culture that reinforces their perceptions of being neglected by urban elites, and that has been taken advantage of by aggressive Republican strategy and a complete absence of Democratic effort.

## **Part II: Income and Voting Literature**

If I am going to suggest that low income voters are going against their own economic interests by voting for Republicans, then I must begin by establishing that low income Americans fare better when Democrats are in power. Larry Bartels’ *Unequal Democracy* provides just this information. Bartels suggests that “continuous Democratic control [of the

Presidency] would have produced little or no net increase in economic inequality since the late 1940s... In contrast, the projections imply that continuous Republican control would have produced a significant increase in inequality...”<sup>2</sup> Bartels also demonstrates that income growth for the lowest income bracket (those in poverty) is very low, or even negative, under Republican government.<sup>3</sup> Using Bartels’ work as a foundation, it is apparent that Republicans will not help improve the lives of lower income citizens. This information is generally accepted as true by much if not all of the literature written on the subject of voting behavior, which can be explored with this in mind.

Thomas Frank’s 2004 book “What’s the Matter with Kansas” attempts to provide an explanation for why low income voters are choosing to support the Republican Party by focusing on voters in Frank’s home state, Kansas. Frank provides his analysis of policy effects using anecdotes rather than hard data like Bartels. Nonetheless, both reach the same conclusion. He then suggests that low income voters are voting for Republicans (based on qualitative observation) and argues that this is mostly due to a cultural disconnect that he calls the “Great Backlash.” He suggests that this movement “mobilizes voters with explosive social issues—summoning public outrage over everything from busing to un-Christian art—which it then marries to pro-business economic policies. Cultural anger is marshaled to achieve economic ends.”<sup>4</sup> According to Frank, this backlash is the result of a targeted propaganda strategy employed by the conservative factions of American politics to peel working class voters away from the Democratic Party. This strategy is executed through emphasis of social issues and downplaying the relevance of economics. Through this, Frank suggests that right-leaning pundits

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<sup>2</sup> Bartels, Larry. *Unequal Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey. 2016. Pg. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Frank, Thomas. *What’s the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. Metropolitan Books. New York, New York. 2004. Pg. 5.

and strategists have mobilized a system of victimhood and blame that focuses the anger of low income voters on a “liberal elite,” who they suggest are behind the moral decline of society. Frank’s analysis provides an accurate description of the polarization that is happening in America but fails to fully identify its drivers and relies too heavily on simple observation.

Thomas Frank argues that lower income Kansans are voting against their own interests, and he uses historical analysis to illustrate his point. He begins by exploring the Kansas of a century ago—an outlier state where radical social policies enjoyed broad support and where left-wing Populism was able to gain a real foothold.<sup>5</sup> He transitions from the triumphs of the common man in the early 1900s to those of the high-class elites at the turn of the next century. For support, he leans on the story of Westar, a Topeka-based power company whose CEO made “millions of dollars in compensation even while the company’s share price plummeted and employees were laid off to reduce costs.”<sup>6</sup> These gains for the Kansas elites (and elites throughout America) are reaped from the efforts of the working class, a group which business executives are able to take advantage of thanks to Republican policy that is friendly to corporations and unfriendly to regulation and labor protection. Frank suggests that this phenomenon is the result of elites using the moralism of their working class constituencies to convince them to de-prioritize their own economic interests and instead vote solely on social issues like marriage equality and abortion. The politicians that they elect based on these moralistic interests then vote to deregulate corporations and to erase labor protections from the books, allowing business elites to further their economic dominance on the backs of the low income voters who put the politicians in office.

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<sup>5</sup> Frank, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Frank, 39.

Frank argues that the increased focus on social issues in elections is the result of a targeted political strategy developed to increase the electoral success of the GOP. The political right has endeavored to make economic issues largely irrelevant in the minds of their voters in order to take advantage of their moralistic opinions. As Frank puts it, “the great goal of the backlash is to nurture a cultural class war, and the first step in doing so... is to deny the economic basis of social class.”<sup>7</sup> The right has shifted business and the economic market out of the realm of political argument and into a space where the march of business and capitalism is simply how the world works—the unquestionable American way.<sup>8</sup> The Cons (far right conservative politicians) take advantage of the ideologies and perspectives of low income Kansans to foment the “backlash culture” which focuses so heavily on moral and social issues. This restructuring of issues has produced massive success for the Republican Party in lower income, rural areas, not just in Kansas but throughout the United States in places like Appalachia, and has created the culture war which Frank identifies as an aspect and result of this political strategy.

Frank’s analysis of the political climate of Kansas successfully identifies the strategies used by the right to win over working class voters and accurately describes the state of mind of those voters who buy into the backlash ideology. However, he fails to support his argument with quantitative evidence and places too much of the blame on a Republican party which he paints as a malicious force, intent on deceiving voters just to betray them by legislating in favor of big business. The observation that Frank does not support his argument with quantitative reasoning is one of the biggest criticisms of *What’s the Matter with Kansas*, and it has spawned its own series of responses, including Larry Bartels’ *What’s the Matter with “What’s the Matter with*

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<sup>7</sup> Frank, 128.

<sup>8</sup> Frank, 128.

*Kansas*,” in which he suggests, with the support of polling data, that the white working class has not become more likely to support Republicans than the wealthy over time and that social issues are not eclipsing economic ones.<sup>9</sup> By not including any kind of statistical analysis, Frank fails to illustrate that the complicated trends which he describes in such detail are, in reality, happening, and opens his argument up to refutation. Frank spends very little time placing any blame for the transition of low income Kansans from Democratic to Republican on the Democratic Party.<sup>10</sup> While his indictments of Democratic strategy, or lack thereof, are largely accurate, he downplays the significance of these factors in his work. Instead, he targets the political right as some kind of menacing, plotting evil bent on stealing from the poor and giving to the rich. This is a theme that I will return to, but now I will explore a highly detailed quantitative response to the assertions made by Thomas Frank: Andrew Gelman’s *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State*.

*Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State* is Andrew Gelman’s response to the rising popularity of the idea that low income voters are trending Republican. He argues that this is not the case, effectively heading Frank’s argument about culture and political strategy off at the pass. Indeed, when he discusses *What’s the Matter with Kansas* in his introductory chapters, Gelman quickly deals with the basis of Frank’s argument: “...both sides on this argument are trying too hard to explain something that’s simply not true. Lower-income Americans don’t, in general, vote Republican.”<sup>11</sup> Gelman argues that the actual paradox of American voting is why poor states go to Republicans and rich states go to Democrats, despite the inaccuracy of Frank’s theory. He suggests most of the pundits and non-scientific theorists of American politics are

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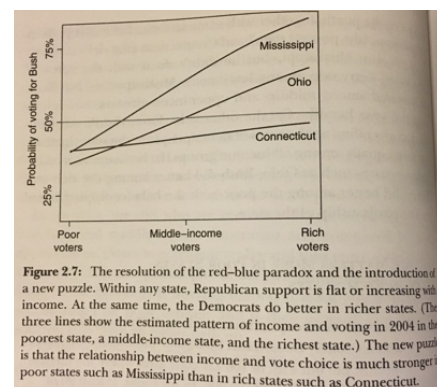
<sup>9</sup> Bartels, Larry M. “What’s the Matter with “What’s the Matter with Kansas”.” *American Political Science Association*, 1 Sept. 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Frank, 242-248.

<sup>11</sup> Gelman, Andrew. *Red state, blue state, rich state, poor state: why Americans vote the way they do*. Princeton University Press, 2010. Pg. 16.

misidentifying the problem by focusing on low income voters, who consistently vote more Democrat than their wealthier counterparts. Instead, he argues that higher income voters are actually much more likely to vary in their party support depending on their home state. Culture, in Gelman's work, is the battleground of the rich, not of the poor, and it is in this constituency that elections are won and lost. He does, however, acknowledge that it is puzzling that economic conservatism persists despite the fact that Democratic policy is better for the majority of Americans, and he tries to provide some possible explanations for this phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> While the arguments Gelman makes are undeniably supported by the data he presents, his methodology ignores key factors that may affect how voters determine what issues are important, such as cultural differences that can stem from divides between rural and urban areas. These important considerations can be overshadowed by looking at states as single units, rather than analyzing cultural regions within and between states. Gelman's assertion that higher income voters are actually more likely to vote against their economic interests than those with lower incomes is supported by data on a general level, but when looked at within more coherent cultural regions, this explanation oversimplifies the voting paradox.

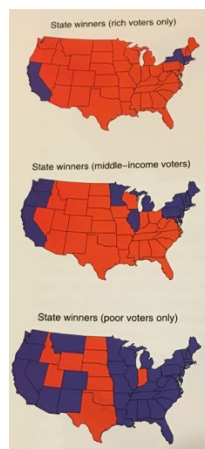
Andrew Gelman suggests that the paradox is more complex than the "contrast of rich Democrats and poor Republicans as sometimes imagined by pundits."<sup>13</sup> Gelman uses his data analysis to effectively show that low income voters are not more likely to vote for Republicans than wealthier voters in the American aggregate. He suggests that the issue for elections is not with how low income Americans vote, but rather with high



<sup>12</sup> Gelman, 139.

<sup>13</sup> Gelman, 7.





income voters.<sup>14</sup> He uses graphs plotting the probability of voting for Bush against income to show that the differences in how states vote is largely decided by the upper-class.<sup>15</sup> Gelman also provides a color map that illustrates who would have won each state in the 2004 Presidential election at each individual income bracket to show that the familiar rich blue state, red poor state pattern appears when we look at high income voters, but the map is significantly more blue when we look at only low income voters.<sup>16</sup> According to Gelman, based on

this data, “It is middle- and upper-income voters who drive the political culture war,” not the lower income voters as is suggested by Thomas Frank and much of the media.<sup>17</sup>

Gelman acknowledges the paradox of the persistence of the success of economic conservatism, and tries to provide some explanations for it in terms of strategy. He puts it simply: “One of the big questions in politics, in the United States and elsewhere, is why lower-income people vote for economically conservative parties.”<sup>18</sup> He suggests a number of possibilities, including aspiration, fairness, skepticism, the two-party system, and history.<sup>19</sup> But since his data shows that lower income voters do, in the aggregate vote for Democrats, the question becomes one of why Republicans still win elections.<sup>20</sup> Gelman suggests that, although social issues could be a partial explanation, the real driver may be that, “although the economy does better under Democrats on average, the Republicans have tended to outperform the Democrats during the fourth year of each presidential term.”<sup>21</sup> I would contend that another

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<sup>14</sup> Gelman, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Gelman, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Gelman, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Gelman, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Gelman, 139.

<sup>19</sup> Gelman, 139-140.

<sup>20</sup> Gelman, 140.

<sup>21</sup> Gelman, 141.

explanation works better without assuming so little of voters' awareness of economic trends: while culture may seem less important than economics on the aggregate, some swaths of low income voters in important swing states may privilege social issues due to their specific cultures during elections, and vote against their economic interests. This motion of low income voters to the right decreases the correlation between income and voting to preference Republicans in key states. Low income voters may form a coalition with higher income voters (who *are* voting in their economic interests) to get enough votes to tip the scales one way or another, and commit all of a state's electoral votes to the Republican Party. Winning coalitions can be complex and consist of disparate groups with seemingly nothing in common. To assume that voters are simply duped by the strong final years of Republican Presidents, one must also assume that these voters are mindless enough to miss the fact that their fortunes are consistently worse with a conservative in the White House. The more constructive conclusion to draw is that the paradoxical voting behaviors are being driven by a cultural disconnect, much like that described by Frank.

Gelman's explanation of the relationship between voting behavior and income within states overlooks key factors that may not appear important in the aggregate, but can have a serious effect on American electoral outcomes. Gelman provides a brief description of trends within states, but makes little room for the importance of the urban/rural divide. This happens because Gelman does not compare Republicanism between these different geographical areas, instead focusing only on whether the correlation holds.<sup>22</sup> This mistake is minor in the context of almost all elections and polls, in which the voting will of rural areas is easily eclipsed by urban areas in most states. With the advantage of hindsight however, I would contend that this

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<sup>22</sup> Gelman, 71.

fundamentally flaws his analysis, in that he ignores cultural regions such as the Rust Belt or Appalachia, in which a predominant culture is consistent across the borders of states. It is safe to hypothesize that the correlation between income and voting behavior will be less pronounced in these areas, because culture is so consistent. The consistency of culture in these areas will lessen the statewide correlation between income and voting, to the advantage of Republicans. What makes these areas relevant and deserving of study (beyond the simple fact that voting Americans live there) is that they played a vital role in flipping the outcomes of key states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin in the 2016 Presidential election. In the electoral college system, many battleground states are won by just a few percentage points which translate to a few thousand votes—a small enough number that successful mobilization of a constituency can flip an entire Presidential election. With this in mind, I will turn to my own statistical analysis to fill the crucial gaps left by Gelman's.

### **Part III: Analysis of Appalachia**

Both Larry Bartels and Andrew Gelman challenge Thomas Frank's analysis of low income voters in Kansas because they find statistical trends that do not support his assertions. I would contend that their analyses are also inaccurate because they focus on too broad a sample and ignore geographical and cultural consistencies. By focusing on a specific area in which the backlash culture is pervasive, the effects of the rise of this ideology will become much more apparent, and it will become possible to analyze a vital aspect of the voting populace in America. Through statistical modeling, I will show that low income voters in Appalachia *are* becoming more likely to vote for Republican candidates, as Frank posits. I will also explore changes in voter turnout in a selection of the counties analyzed to showcase why this constituency matters in elections, a nuance that Gelman misses. When viewed in this context, the data show that low

income voters are voting against their economic interests and committing their votes to conservative candidates.

In order to properly analyze the constituency in question, we must first situate the data correctly. For the polling data in this essay, I use the Cooperative Congressional Election Study from 2016, 2012, and 2008, conducted by Brian Schaffner and Stephen Ansolabehere out of Harvard University.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this essay, the CCES provides detailed information regarding state and county of residence, family income, and vote choice, that are necessary for the desired analysis. To narrow the sample size to the desired cultural region, I selected voters who lived in counties identified as part of the Appalachian region according to the Appalachian Regional Commission.<sup>24</sup> In order to further focus this cultural region, I chose to include only states that are in the northern part of Appalachia, and may also be considered part of the “Rust Belt.” This will increase the intensity of the effects of the culture, if any, and also largely mitigates any effect that racial division would have on the result in the south, a possible issue identified by Gelman.<sup>25</sup> To better compare my data to those of Gelman, who uses 5 income points in his explanatory income and voting graphs,<sup>26</sup> I collapsed the approximately sixteen income brackets assessed by the CCES into five brackets, which I classified as low, low-middle, middle, upper-middle, and upper income. I decided on income ranges for each of these brackets based on income classifications made by the Tax Policy Center.<sup>27</sup> While collapsing income into fewer data points increases error, it makes the results significantly more simplifiable into

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<sup>23</sup> Ansolabehere, Stephen; Schaffner, Brian F., 2017, "CCES Common Content, 2016", [doi:10.7910/DVN/GDF6Z0](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/GDF6Z0), Harvard Dataverse, V3, UNF:6:Hacct7qJt1WXOGPb63A5Gg==

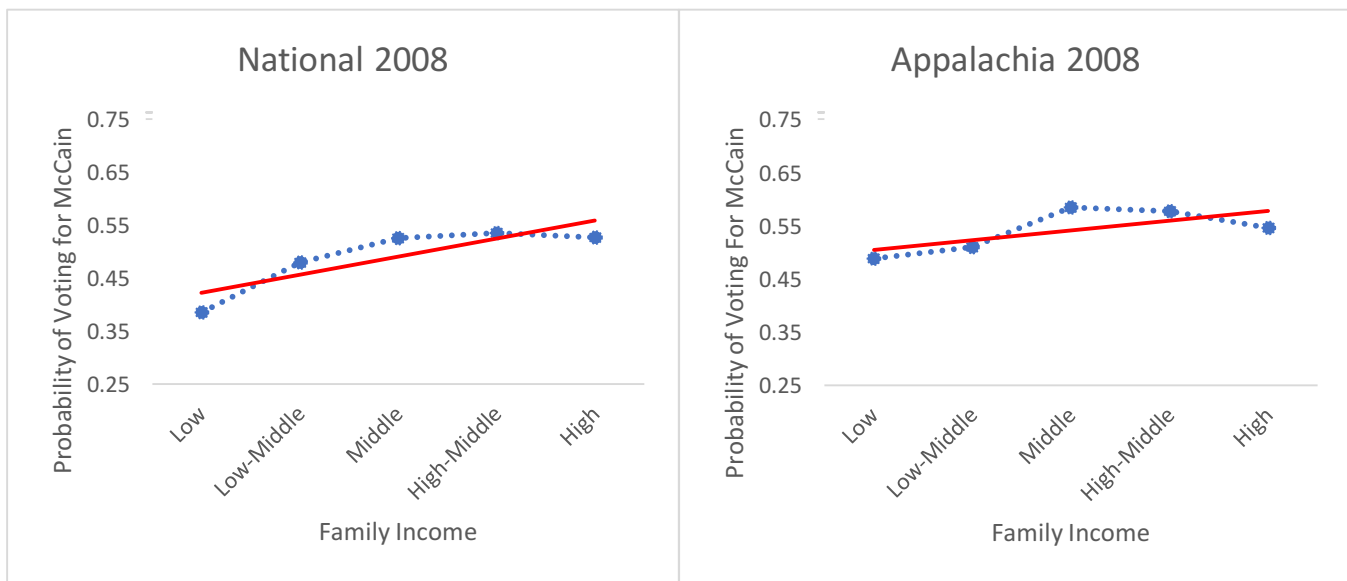
<sup>24</sup> “Counties in Appalachia.” *Appalachian Region*, Appalachian Regional Commission, [www.arc.gov/counties](http://www.arc.gov/counties).

<sup>25</sup> Gelman, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Gelman, 50, and Gelman, Andrew, et al. “Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What's the Matter with Connecticut?” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, Feb. 2007, pp. 345–365., [www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/research/published/rb\\_qjps.pdf](http://www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/research/published/rb_qjps.pdf).

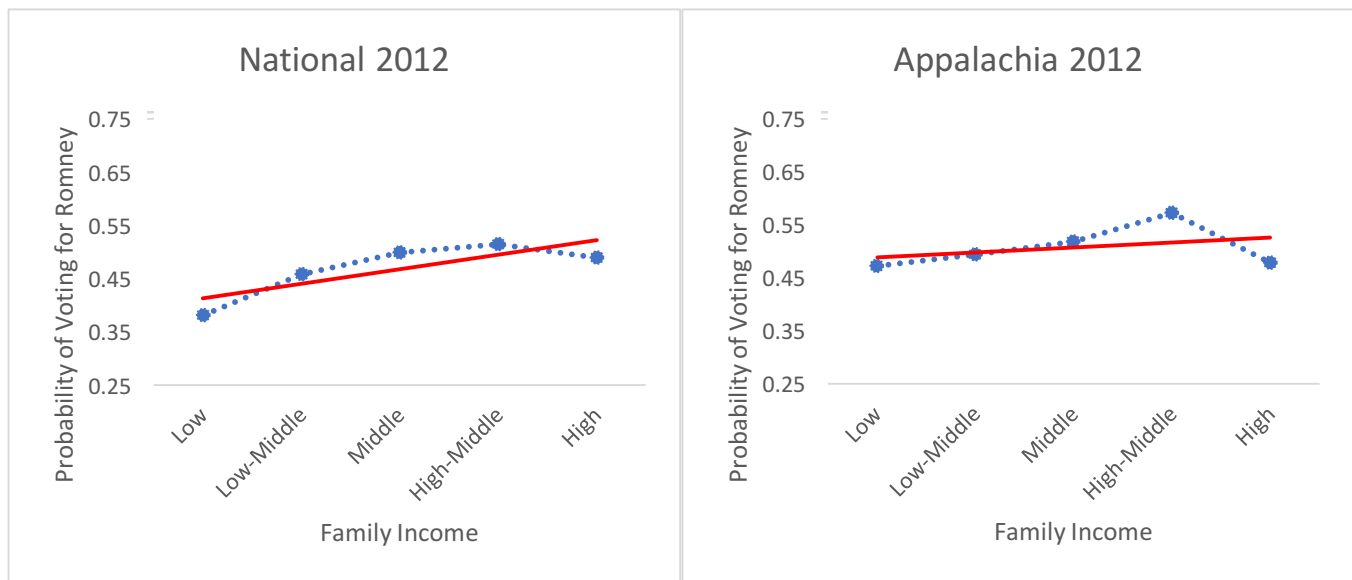
<sup>27</sup> “Household Income Quintiles.” *Tax Policy Center*, Urban Institute and Brookings Institution, 3 May 2017, [www.taxpolicycenter.org/statistics/household-income-quintiles](http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/statistics/household-income-quintiles).

behaviors at different income brackets, and the trends found hold in a sixteen income point analysis. To determine the probability of an individual voting for the Republican candidate at each income bracket, I charted the total number of individuals who voted Republican in each of the brackets divided by the total number of individuals who voted in each bracket. I then ran a least squares regression analysis to mirror Gelman's lines of correlation between income and voting preference. This is a simple non-linear bivariate analysis that includes the influence of no other variables. While this allows for many confounding factors, the motion of voters over time will show why this analysis is informative. I ran this analysis for the Presidential elections of 2008, 2012, and 2016, and ran a similar analysis without geographical limitations to compare Appalachian to national correlations in those same election years. For more details on specific counties analyzed and exactly how the income brackets were collapsed, please see the endnotes.<sup>i</sup> We will now turn to the results provided by the statistical analysis.



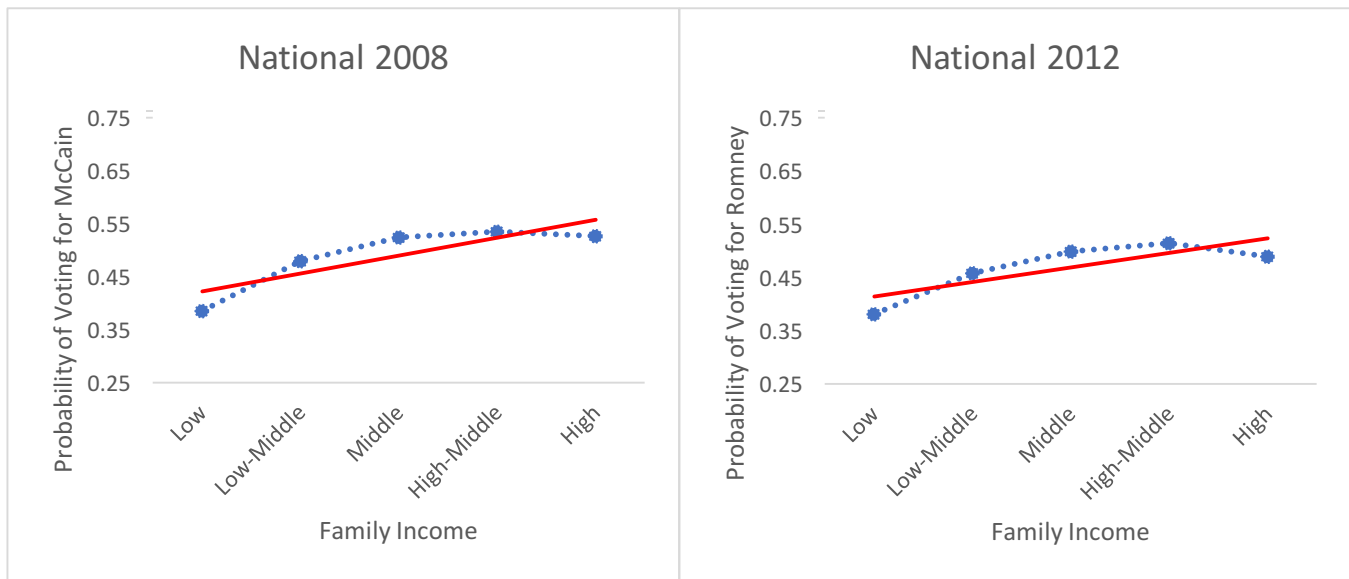
The analysis of the 2008 election supports the trends found by Gelman in *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State*, but defies his suggestion that the culture war is a battle between the wealthy. Both on the national level and in the cultural region of Appalachia, the probability of voting for McCain increases as household income increases. These trends match with those

found by Gelman and support his overall claim that low income voters are not more likely to vote Republican than wealthy voters. However, it is apparent in Appalachia's graph that there is a smaller difference between how low and high income citizens vote. It is also apparent that this significantly flatter line is not the result of a more liberal wealthy population, but a more conservative low income constituency: in Appalachia, high income voters are not far from the national probability of voting for McCain. At the other end of the spectrum, however, low income voters are much higher than the national probability of voting for McCain. This is an opposite finding to what Gelman identifies in Connecticut, where the line is similarly flat, but is the result of high income voters leaning liberal, bringing their preferences more closely in line with lower income voters.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that, in the Appalachian cultural region, it is low income voters who are more likely to forsake their economic interests when they vote. This trend is often offset by state and national voting results, where urban areas that behave more like Gelman's findings have much more power. When these regions are considered in the proper context, however, it is clear that something closer to Frank's analysis is at work.



<sup>28</sup> Gelman, 18-19.

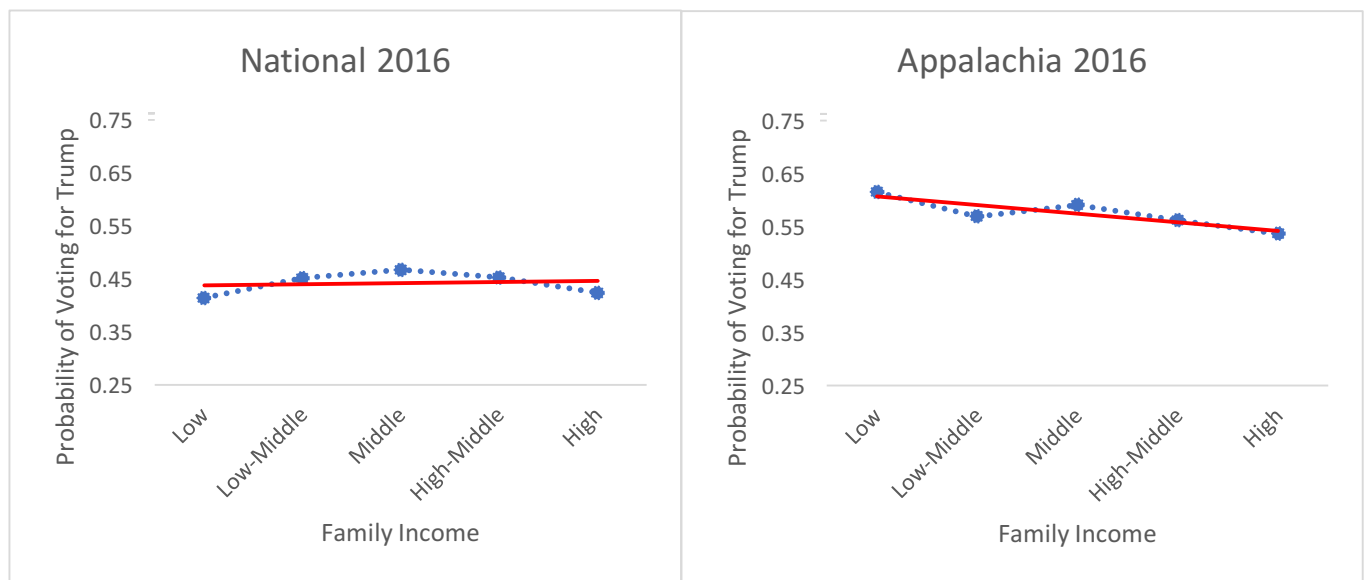
Similar trends are present both nationally and in Appalachia in 2012. The national line relating probability of voting for Romney to income has almost the same slope as that of voting for McCain in 2008. Gelman's analysis holds on a national level in 2012 as well, but as I have explored, this finding largely obscures the cultural shifts happening in more rural regions of America. When viewed on its own, the correlation between income and probability of voting for Romney in Appalachia is minimal, as the regression line appears to be nearly flat. Higher income voters are near the national probability of voting for Romney, while low income voters are much more likely to vote for Romney than their national counterparts. This suggests a similar refutation of Gelman's suggestion as the 2008 data; the culture war in Appalachia is being fought by lower income voters. When the 2008 and 2012 data are compared to each other, it is clear that the correlation between income and vote preference is becoming less important over time.



The graphs appear to show that this drop in correlation is due to a swing to the left in the preferences of the wealthier voters of Appalachia, but it is important to note that the national line of correlation moves downwards from 2008 to 2012, suggesting that the 2012 data set surveyed more Obama supporters. When taking this into account, it is possible that the change in

correlation from 2008 to 2012 could be due to a more significant motion of low income voters to the right than is clear in this graph. Regardless, it is apparent that the relationship between income and vote preference is changing over time in Appalachia.

The Presidential election of 2016 has been described as a rule-breaker. Donald Trump's ascendance to the American Presidency defied every expectation, analysis, and poll leading up to the election. The 2016 income and preference graphs for the US and Appalachia show us why.



The trends present in these data have no clear precedent when compared to those of 2008 and 2012. Both results depart radically from the expected, as the relationship between income and vote preference on the national level has almost completely departed from Gelman's finding. While there is still an increase in probability of voting for Trump as income increases, it is almost completely nonexistent, suggesting that either high income voters have moved left, low income voters have moved right, or a combination of the two (when studied with all 16 income points the correlation is similarly nonexistent, but actually slightly inverts like the Appalachia correlation). By turning to the results in Appalachia, the answer becomes apparent. The trend described by Gelman has been completely inverted, and the correlation between income and vote



preference is reversed. In 2016, low income voters in Appalachia were more likely to vote for the Republican candidate than their high income counterparts. This finding is shocking for a number of reasons. Firstly, the probability of high income voters supporting Republicans in Appalachia has stayed approximately the same over the three elections (if we assume that the move in 2012 was due to an oversampling of Obama supporters), while the probability of low income voters supporting Republicans has seen a major leap over these three elections, moving from approximately 50% in 2008 to approximately 62.5% in 2016. Secondly, it appears that the 2016 CCES again oversampled the left, which may mean that Appalachian support of Trump is actually understated. Third, the jump in Republican support among the low income voters of Appalachia may serve as an explanatory factor in the change in correlation between income and voting preference on the national level.. If a large number of low income voters in key cultural regions flipped to support Trump in 2016, the national correlation between vote preference and income would flatten out, as the low income part of the line moved upward and the higher income part stayed the same. Low income voters in Appalachia became more likely to support the Republican party than high income voters in the 2016 election.

Low income voters in Appalachia and other, similar cultural regions became a more important constituency in the 2016 Presidential election due to increased turnout. Thomas Frank asserts that the low income voters of cultural regions like Appalachia and Kansas are angry, and that the Republican party has found a way to mobilize that anger against the “liberal elite.”<sup>29</sup> What sets 2016 apart from previous observations is the fact that Donald Trump found a way to switch working class rage into overdrive. Using a selection of counties in Appalachia, we can see how turnout has changed from 2008 to 2016. Starting with my home, Somerset County, PA,

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<sup>29</sup> Frank, 68.

McCain won 21,686 votes in 2008, while Obama received 12,878.<sup>30</sup> In 2012, Romney received 23,935, and Obama had 9,420.<sup>31</sup> This shift demonstrates that Obama lost support while Romney gained support, and that fewer voters turned out in 2012 (34,564 in 2008, 33,355 in 2012). The key change happens from 2012 to 2016, however, when Trump received 27,379 votes, and Clinton claimed 7,376.<sup>32</sup> Not only did Trump beat Clinton by the largest margin in the studied elections in Somerset county, but votes for him brought turnout levels back to a slightly higher level than 2008 (34,755 total votes), when the election was relatively much closer. This trend is not isolated to Somerset County, and the next two counties are selected at random from the data set to demonstrate the consistency of this result. In Elliott County, KY, the results for the studied elections were as follows: 2008 – Obama: 1,535, McCain: 902; 2012 – Obama: 1,186, Romney: 1,126; 2016 – Trump: 2,000, Clinton: 740.<sup>33</sup> Total turnout followed the same pattern as that of Somerset County (2,437 in 2008, 2,312 in 2012, and 2,740 in 2016), and the margin of victory actually flipped from +25 Democrat to +44.2 Republican. Tuscarawas County, OH, will serve as a final case study. The results were: 2008 – Obama: 21,498, McCain: 20,454; 2012 – Romney: 21,420, Obama: 17,516; 2016 – Trump: 26,918, Clinton: 12,188.<sup>34</sup> Again, total turnout was similar to that of Somerset and Elliott Counties (41,952 in 2008, 38,936 in 2012, and 39,106 in 2016), and we see another County flip from a Democratic victory (+2 D) to a Republican landslide (+35.7 R). This suggests that voters are leaving the Democratic Party in droves to vote Republican in the Appalachian cultural region, and that turnout for Republicans is skyrocketing

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<sup>30</sup> “Election Center 2008.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, Nov. 2008, [www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/county/#val=PAP00p6](http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/county/#val=PAP00p6).

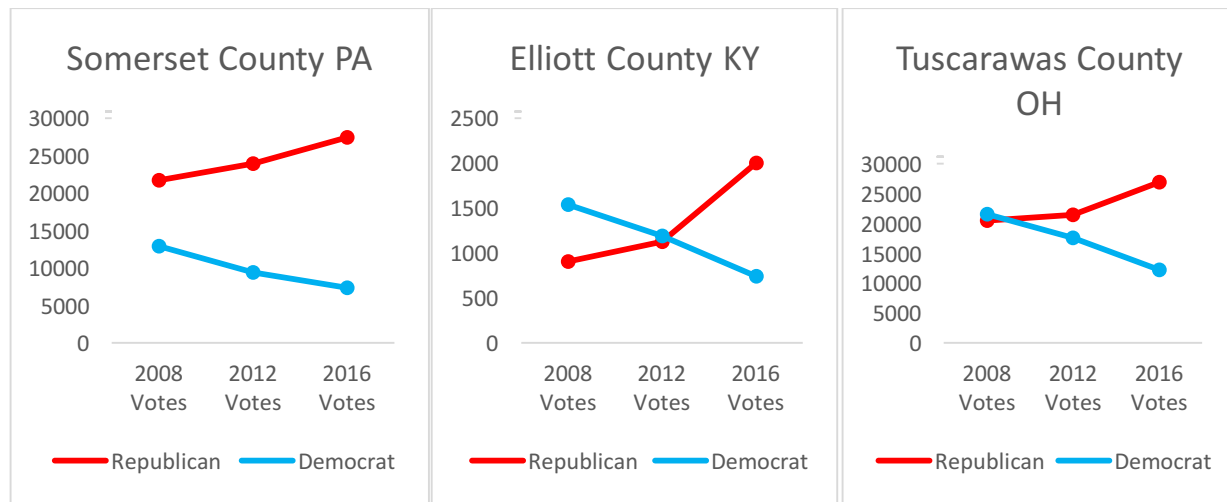
<sup>31</sup> “2012 U.S. General Election.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, Nov. 2012, [www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/state/PA/president/](http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/state/PA/president/).

<sup>32</sup> “Election 2016.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, Nov. 2016, [www.cnn.com/election/results/states/pennsylvania](http://www.cnn.com/election/results/states/pennsylvania).

<sup>33</sup> “Election Center 2008,” “2012 U.S. General Election,” “Election 2016.” *CNN*.

<sup>34</sup> “Election Center 2008,” “2012 U.S. General Election,” “Election 2016.” *CNN*.

far past previous levels which made these rural areas electorally unimportant. This transition is most easily visualized graphically, where the change is stunning.



The Appalachian Cultural region is trending to greater support for the Republican Party, and this is largely due to the movement of low income voters choosing Republican candidates, against their own economic interests. The data analysis clearly show that these trends are happening over time, and that they are statistically significant, to the point of affecting the results of Presidential elections as was illustrated by 2016. The change in correlation over time in Appalachia signals that the income vs voting analysis is adequately informative, because this change is unlikely to have been caused by any simple explanatory factor not considered here. As time goes on, low income voters in Appalachia are becoming more likely to vote for the Republican candidate, and counties are being won by Republicans by increasingly larger margins. This region was easy to ignore when low income urban turnout eclipsed any significance that the rural parts of these states may have had, but now the trend has progressed enough that these voters represent a relevant voting block than can flip the results of elections. It is irresponsible for politicians, pundits, and political strategists to ignore cultural regions like Appalachia moving forward. In order to develop a strategy that can be employed to move the

voters back toward a voting position that is in line with their economic interests, it is important to understand why they decided to vote against their interests in the first place.

#### **Part IV: Appalachian Culture**

The Appalachian cultural region is a place where Thomas Frank's "backlash" culture thrives. The working class of rural Pennsylvania and Ohio feel forgotten and left behind by politics and the economy, and many felt resigned to stand by and watch as the only way of life they knew disappeared from the world. Frank understands the culture well, and he should—he grew up in it. But his book does more to tell us how and why elites manipulated the common folks' frustration than it does to explain the real motivations of rural citizens. He revels in the absurdity and hypocrisy of the backlash, but does little to show his readers how to deal with it. If we are to truly understand backlash culture, we need to understand its subscribers on the ground. As American intellectuals come to grips with the power that the backlash regions now wield, a number of works have come to the forefront as guides to understanding this confusing and sometimes paradoxical culture. *The Politics of Resentment*, while not specifically about Appalachia, provides the most direct academic insight into rural culture through interactions with the people themselves. Through Cramer's description of "rural consciousness," we can come to a reasonable, if limited, understanding of why rural citizens vote the way they do. In this framework, John Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness* provides an explanation for how power is structured within Appalachia, and how despair and frustration were able to take hold of the powerless. Similarly helpful, J.D. Vance's #1 bestseller *Hillbilly Elegy* provides the most direct view into the culture—Vance describes his life growing up in a low income family in Appalachia. By working through these analyses and stories, we can develop some kind of an understanding of the thinking of backlash culture.

Katherine Cramer's *The Politics of Resentment* seeks to answer a question similar to the one that I ask: why are low income voters voting against redistribution and their own economic interests?<sup>35</sup> She suggests that the reason is because of a resentment that is present in areas of Wisconsin where people see the world through a lens of "rural consciousness," which Cramer defines as

an identity as a rural person that includes much more than an attachment to place. It includes a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources, as well as a sense that rural folks are fundamentally different in terms of lifestyles, values, and work ethic. Rural consciousness signals an identification with rural people and denotes a multifaceted resentment against cities.<sup>36</sup>

In rural culture, the issues that people care about are tied much more to place than any other defining characteristic, such as class.<sup>37</sup> In order to understand the way that rural citizens vote, then, it is absolutely vital to understand their culture.

Cramer breaks rural consciousness down into three parts: power, values and lifestyles, and resources. To make sense of rural consciousness, one must grasp the way that rural citizens see each of these cultural cornerstones. This culture is not a simple one, nor is it one that is widely acknowledged by society at large. This analysis must be approached with the understanding that this is an insular culture that formed in its own geographical and historical context. For these reasons, it is necessary to dive deeply into the unique history and experiences of rural consciousness. This summary is by no means comprehensive, but I endeavor to make

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<sup>35</sup> Cramer, Katherine. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Illinois. 2016. Pg. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Cramer, 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> Cramer, 50.

rural culture intelligible to readers of any background. We begin our study of this culture by considering the power dynamics of rural America.

Cramer describes how people in rural areas feel that power works in their lives. There is a common feeling that the needs of rural communities are ignored or misunderstood in politics. Cramer's interviews reveal that rural citizens believe that their needs are specially underserved in the decision-making arena: "the complaints I heard in rural areas were not simply distrust of government—people in rural areas often perceived that government was *particularly* dismissive of the concerns of people in rural communities."<sup>38</sup> These communities feel totally left behind by the powers that run the country, and feel helpless to change their powerlessness.<sup>39</sup> This builds into a frustration and resentment of those power structures that are so unresponsive. This is not a new feeling in Appalachia, as some might suggest (especially liberal pundits who discount rural anger as thinly veiled racism), and we will look at the history of the region to see how deeply powerlessness is woven into the culture.

Gaventa frames Appalachia as a place in which the common citizens have consistently been taken advantage of by distant elites. He describes pre-industrial Appalachia as a place "founded upon a determination for independence, based upon a relationship to the nature and to the land," a place where "land resources were abundant and more or less equally divided," and where "there was little formal governmental organization, nor was there much desire for any."<sup>40</sup> When industrialization made the region valuable for its richness of natural resources, this freedom and natural equality disappeared. Corporations bought up land, and coal boomed, providing jobs for the region's residents and money for the capitalists. With their power and

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<sup>38</sup> Cramer, 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> Cramer, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Gaventa, 48-50.

money, the corporations shored up political power in Appalachia over the common folks whose families had lived there for years.<sup>41</sup> While this system provided prosperity and modernization initially, following the financial panic of 1893 and the bankruptcy of the coal company in charge, citizens were forced to challenge the power structures that had been put in place.<sup>42</sup> A similar rebellion against power happened when miners actually went on strike in Mingo, near Middlesboro, in 1894.<sup>43</sup> A third instance of the powerless attempting to win concessions from power happened in 1930, when a general protest strike, supported by the United Mine Workers of America, rose and fell rapidly in Appalachia.

All of these instances of revolt against power failed, as the coal companies were able to use their existing power to restructure the issues and demotivate the powerless, sending them back to the status quo with nothing to show for their efforts. For example, in 1930, because of communist backing for the unions that were supporting the strike, the elites refocused the ideology of Appalachia onto an anti-Communist patriotism, using the framework of the region's previous individualist-capitalist, work ethic heavy ideology as a building block.<sup>44</sup> The elites' strategies and the othering of the outsiders who came in to support the strike played into the power dynamics that were present at the time to effectively maintain the status quo in the region:

The northern liberal sought to allow freedom of expression for the miners by challenging the barriers to the exercise of his civil rights; yet the consequence was the transformation of the substance and arenas of the issues away from those originally expressed and felt by the miners. The radical sought to develop a revolutionary class consciousness, but he misunderstood the prior role of power in shaping the consciousness which he encountered. It was the local mountain elite, who knew best the uses of power for control

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<sup>41</sup> Gaventa, 53-60.

<sup>42</sup> Gaventa, 77-78.

<sup>43</sup> Gaventa, 79.

<sup>44</sup> Gaventa, 110.

within their culture, who effectively capitalized on the mistakes of others.<sup>45</sup>

Because the powerful understood how to effectively manipulate the issues, they were able to withstand instances of rebellion. The rural citizens' repeated failures to gain power eventually coalesced into a deeply felt powerlessness, that over time built into a resentment of unresponsive politicians. We will come back to this resentment later, but first we turn to rural values and lifestyles.

The values and lifestyles of rural citizens also contribute to rural culture. Those with rural consciousness believe that city dwellers do not respect and cannot understand the rural way of life.<sup>46</sup> Rural citizens believe that urbanites and policy makers hold negative stereotypes about them. It is commonly understood in rural areas that urban politicians see them as backwards hicks, who have no understanding of the way the world works.<sup>47</sup> Despite the negative perceptions that rural citizens believe outsiders hold about them, most rural people are proud of their unique culture anyway.<sup>48</sup> Many rural residents, despite feeling disrespected and misunderstood by urbanites, very much prefer to remain in rural areas. They derive a sense of pride from living far from the comforts of the city, and having to work hard to make their living. Those living in rural communities felt that urban citizens had no conception of the realities or difficulties that rural residents faced: "When they talked about city folks being unable to understand rural life, those conversations were typically about how they had no understanding of the economic realities of rural life and how hard people had to work to make ends meet in small towns."<sup>49</sup> The idea that urbanites have no understanding of how rural citizens live effectively

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<sup>45</sup> Gaventa, 116.

<sup>46</sup> Cramer, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Cramer, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Cramer, 69.

<sup>49</sup> Cramer, 70.



turns the discussion into one of “‘us’ and ‘them’,”<sup>50</sup> in which rural people believe that urban citizens are unjustly contemptuous of them, while at the same time they hold urban citizens in contempt.

Rural people feel that, although they may not have the same kind of education that urban elites have, they are the ones who have a better understanding of how the world works. In a later section when she discusses rural perceptions of universities, Cramer hears about this disconnect first hand from one of her interview subjects: “‘Got the book learning. People go to college they come out dumber than they went in. They got the books there, those books, it’s not like the experience.’”<sup>51</sup> In rural culture, there is a stark difference between learned knowledge and common sense, and greater value is placed on the latter. There is a certain level of scorn that accompanies rural citizens’ opinions of those who have received higher education, unless the educated can also demonstrate some level of common sense. I have seen this at work in my own life. In high school it was regularly suggested that I was “booksmart,” but that I had little common sense. The fact that I had been raised similarly to my peers and had the same practical knowledge that they did mattered little, because academic intelligence and common sense are seen as wholly incompatible. The value placed on common sense is rooted in a realist interpretation of the world, one that feeds into rural communities’ valuation of manual labor and hard work.

Rural citizens’ feeling that hard work is a part of their unique identity stems from the region’s history of blue collar work, and is both a point of pride for these people, as well as another dividing point that sets them apart from urban people: “When Ron told me he had never missed a day of work, and he did it ‘working in the woods,’ he said it with pride. To him, rural

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<sup>50</sup> Cramer, 70.

<sup>51</sup> Cramer, 126.

life is tough, but he drew a good deal of esteem from claiming that he was a person who was living that life.”<sup>52</sup> People in rural areas believe that, because their lives are economically difficult and because manual labor is more common in their communities, they work harder than urban people. Whether this conception of hard work is based in fact or not is certainly debatable, but what matters in terms of culture and political ideology is that the value of hard work is deeply rooted in these communities, and it is almost universally seen as a dividing factor between rural and urban citizens.

The point to be made when talking about the values and lifestyles of rural areas is that they are a dividing factor. In every way, rural values are different than urban values, and this is a good thing. Rural citizens better understand how the world works, so their values must be a better reflection of how to live in it. They work harder than people in cities, and they are therefore morally superior (a product of the Protestant ethic). The values and lifestyles of rural areas do the work of framing society’s problems as a struggle between rural and urban, not between poor and rich. We will see how this division feeds into politics, but first we explore how rural citizens believe resources are distributed.

Rural citizens feel that they are unfairly treated by urban elites. It is common knowledge in rural areas that the money that they pay into the government does not equal what they get back from it: “In the rural communities I visited, I often heard people stating, as though a matter of fact, that jobs, wealth, and taxpayer dollars are in ‘the M&Ms,’ as people sometimes referred to Madison and Milwaukee.”<sup>53</sup> This is simply the way of the world in rural areas, and urban political elites are too wrapped up in their urban lives to acknowledge the problems of rural communities and make a change. Rural citizens even see them as insidious at times, suggesting

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<sup>52</sup> Cramer, 76.

<sup>53</sup> Cramer, 77.

that cities have all the advantages and that politicians are in cahoots to keep the advantage there, away from the rural areas of the states. Because they feel that they are being treated unfairly, taxes are extremely unpopular among rural citizens—they see no material benefit provided by the government, and so see no legitimate reason to keep giving it money.<sup>54</sup>

While the facts do not actually support the idea that rural communities are not getting their fair share of government investment,<sup>55</sup> what is important politically is not the objective fact of the matter. Rural citizens perceive that they are getting the short end of the stick, and this perception is not unfair—they have seen little material economic growth since the end of the postwar boom and the economic downturn of the Carter years, and their communities are increasingly run down and decayed. We can get a sense of the feeling of the economic helplessness that these communities feel by exploring J.D. Vance’s childhood experiences living in Appalachia and the Rust Belt: “Today downtown Middletown is little more than a relic of American industrial glory. Abandoned shops line the heart of downtown, where Central Avenue and Main Street meet.”<sup>56</sup> The perceived lack of resources provided to their communities is a vital aspect of the resentment that rural citizens feel. With a more robust understanding of the way the rural citizens see the world, it is possible to take on the task of explaining this resentment.

The interactions between concepts of powerlessness, incompatible values, and unequal resources work together to fully form rural consciousness. It is not that power dynamics cause rural values which cause the belief that resources are unequal. It is *all of these at the same time*.

As Katherine Cramer puts it:

Rural life was a source of pride for many because it was different from urban living—it involved different lifestyles and values,

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<sup>54</sup> Cramer, 80.

<sup>55</sup> Cramer, 92-93.

<sup>56</sup> Vance, J.D. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. HarperCollins. New York, New York. 2016. Pg. 50.

including a special emphasis on hard work. That rural hard work ethic was a point of pride, but for many, it was a problem because in order to work hard, you needed a job, and rural communities were on the short end of the stick in terms of jobs. Why? Because rural communities had no power. Politicians and others with the ability to make decisions to bring good-paying jobs to their communities paid no attention to their places.<sup>57</sup>

Powerlessness feeds into the cultural disconnect, and powerlessness and the cultural disconnect lead to the perception of unfair treatment, which causes rural citizens to feel more powerless and isolated. The sense of hard work is deeply rooted in rural communities, even if it is not necessarily true. It is an important part of rural consciousness because it provides a sense of pride and even superiority for rural citizens to feel in comparison to urban citizens, despite their relative powerlessness. Rural citizens cherish their values and lifestyles because they can use them to remove the blame of powerlessness from themselves, and instead project it onto distant elites. What becomes clear from understanding rural consciousness is that, to rural citizens, there is a cultural divide between rural citizens and urban ones, urban citizens have all the power, and the cultural divide and lack of rural power cause rural citizens to be treated unfairly. It is from this conception of the world that resentment derives.

I must now confront the role that racism plays in rural consciousness. Cramer provides a useful framework from which we can consider how racial tensions effect the views of rural citizens. In rural communities, racial minorities and urban citizens are often conflated.<sup>58</sup> It is absolutely true that racial tensions play at least some role in the animosity that rural citizens feel towards urbanites. But this is not the whole story, and it is unproductive to suggest that it is. As Cramer says: “if we boil rural consciousness down to race, we ignore the ways in which these

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<sup>57</sup> Cramer, 77.

<sup>58</sup> Cramer, 85.

perspectives comprise many things... [the politics of resentment] works through seemingly simply divisions of us versus them, but it has power because in these divisions are a multitude of fundamental understandings.”<sup>59</sup> If we blame it all on racism, we miss the legitimate reasons that rural people feel the way that they do, and we ignore any opportunity to change their perspectives.

How did rural resentment get mobilized into a Republican-voting machine? We can begin by returning to the structures of power described by Gaventa. He begins by breaking power down into a three-dimensional framework. The one-dimensional conception of power defines power as one actor’s ability to make another actor do something that they would otherwise not do.<sup>60</sup> Gaventa argues that this idea of power is incomplete, because “within the one-dimensional approach... *nonparticipation* or *inaction* is not a political problem.”<sup>61</sup> Because this approach ignores the effect that power itself has on actors, it does not tell the whole story. In the second dimension of power, “power is exercised not just upon participants within the decision-making process but also towards the exclusion of certain participants and issues altogether.”<sup>62</sup> Cramer sees the first two dimensions of power as the whole story: rural citizens have been excluded from politics, and therefore feel forgotten. Gaventa accepts this argument more readily than the one-dimensional approach, but finds fault in its explanations for political inaction. The three-dimensional approach to power provides a plausible explanation for this inaction: “Not only might A exercise power over B by prevailing in the resolution of key issues or by preventing B from effectively raising those issues, but also through affecting B’s conceptions of the issues

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<sup>59</sup> Cramer, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Gaventa, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Gaventa, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Gaventa, 9.

altogether.”<sup>63</sup> This third dimension explains why we may see quiescence in the face of stunning inequality or political unfairness, because the group in power is able to structure issues so that conflict over them simply does not arise. Cramer suggests that the powerlessness of rural citizens is a legitimate part of their identities, but not the result of political strategy as Frank and Gaventa might suggest. In doing this, she misses the third, and most important, dimension of power, in which the Republican Party is at least partly to blame for the voting trends of rural citizens.<sup>64</sup>

Elites mobilize the third dimension of power to control the political debate using one or more of three possible mechanisms that Gaventa describes. In the first, “the conceptions of the powerless may alter as an adaptive response to continual defeat,”<sup>65</sup> meaning that the powerless either acquiesce to the unfavorable situation or adjust their demands. In the second, “those denied [political] participation... also might not develop political consciousness of their own situation or of broader political inequalities,” in essence developing a “culture of silence” in which they accept the status quo without question.<sup>66</sup> The third example describes a situation in which the powerless are duped by the powerful: “Through the invocation of myths or symbols, the use of threat or rumors, or other mechanisms of power, the powerful may be able to ensure that certain beliefs and actions emerge in one context while apparently contradictory grievances may be expressed in others.”<sup>67</sup> Gaventa then describes how the third-dimension of power approach causes powerlessness and quiescence in Appalachia: “Power serves to maintain prevailing order of inequality not only through institutional barriers but also through shaping of beliefs about the order’s legitimacy or immutability.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Gaventa, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Cramer, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Gaventa, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Gaventa, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Gaventa, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Gaventa, 42.

In the context of this third dimension of power, we can use recent history to see how rural voters may have been manipulated by the Republican Party. The transition of the rural working class to an intensely conservative voting bloc has taken decades. Starting with the division of the Democratic Party's northern liberal and southern conservative factions in the 1960s, the strategy of the Democratic Party changed. By creating a new coalition of low income racial minorities and wealthy liberals of all races, Democrats began to dominate urban areas, where populations were high enough to win state-level elections and Presidential races. The new wholly conservative Republicans were pushed into the suburbs and rural areas of the North and South—in the South they dominated in the suburbs and won elections, in the North, states were much more closely fought. What these new coalitions meant for rural voters was that the Democratic Party disappeared, preferring to focus on population centers where they had an advantage. This left a power vacuum in rural areas, and Republicans recognized the potential value of these votes. Their restructuring of issues (described by Frank) can be understood in terms of Gaventa's third dimension of power. The Republican Party used myths and symbols (religion and the rural sense of community) and threats and rumors (racial tensions and immigration/outourcing of jobs) to exploit the lens of rural consciousness that Cramer describes through which rural citizens interpret the issues. This allowed the political right to structure the political conversation in rural America to their benefit, and to foment the anger that underlies backlash culture.

Because the political left disappeared from rural politics, choosing instead to focus on an urban-centric strategy, it was simple for Republicans to cast the Democrats as the enemy of rural voters. Rural culture's natural other is urban elites. Because those with rural consciousness perceive the us vs them conflict as a struggle between urban and rural cultures, rather than between upper and lower income groups, the absence of the Democrats forced the group into the

“them” position. Republicans stuck around, and so they became part of the rural group. The Republicans then used their power to minimize the importance of their economic positions in the minds of the rural voters, while elevating issues on which they agreed, such as those of religion-based morality. Because the Democrats were no longer around to defend their policies, the Republicans were able to restructure the economic conversation in short order, pushing the narrative that taxes are bad, and that people should get to decide what to do with their money—a story that already fit well with rural values and lifestyles, regardless of its truth. Republican policy became rural ideology with little resistance from Democrats or from the rural citizens themselves.

## **Part V: Conclusion**

The question may now be: “Where do we go from here?” Now that we understand the voting trends of Appalachia and the basis of the culture that drives these trends, we can begin to deal with the voting paradox. Rural consciousness is a powerful lens through which to see the world, but it is not an unavoidable perspective to have. As Cramer says, “Rural consciousness is something best understood as a matter of a continuum. People did not either have it or not.”<sup>69</sup> The culture is the result of different levels of factors including parents’ ideology, education, familial connection to the region, and countless others. To create an amalgam of variables that make up rural consciousness is a project far greater than the scope of this essay, but, with the proper polling data, the relevant variables may be determinable. The spectrum of rural consciousness certainly feeds into voting behavior in different ways, and the spectrum of rural consciousness is undoubtedly related to the spectrum of political ideology. Because of the bipolar nature of American politics, it appears as though rural consciousness may only be present

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<sup>69</sup> Cramer, 138.



in Republican voters who are voting against their economic interests, but this is not the case. Cramer presents examples of Democrats who exhibit rural consciousness, including loggers from the northern part of Wisconsin.<sup>70</sup> This is informative both to the continuum idea of rural consciousness, and to political strategy. If rural consciousness does not necessarily equal Republicanism, then there must be something about the culture that Democrats can exploit. I would argue that this opening is clear when rural consciousness is understood. Rural people want to be represented by someone who understands their values, who will give them the power to change their circumstances, and who will procure the resources for this change to happen. Democrats have been absent from rural areas for years, and so Republicans have become the de facto solution, but if Democrats can show that they understand, they can begin to move these voters back toward an optimal political position. Any real strategy to win rural regions begins with understanding, caring, and trying.

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<sup>70</sup> Cramer, 73.

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<sup>i</sup> The counties selected for analysis in Appalachia are as follows (in variable form):

PA:

'Allegheny PA', 'Armstrong PA', 'Beaver PA', 'Bedford PA', 'Blair PA', 'Bradford PA', 'Butler PA', 'Cambria PA', 'Cameron PA', 'Carbon PA', 'Centre PA', 'Clarion PA', 'Clearfield PA', 'Clinton PA', 'Columbia PA', 'Crawford PA', 'Elk PA', 'Erie PA', 'Fayette PA', 'Forest PA', 'Fulton PA', 'Greene PA', 'Huntingdon PA', 'Indiana PA', 'Jefferson PA', 'Juniata PA', 'Lackawanna PA', 'Lawrence PA', 'Luzerne PA', 'Lycoming PA', 'McKean PA', 'Mercer PA', 'Mifflin PA', 'Monroe PA', 'Montour PA', 'Northumberland PA', 'Perry PA', 'Pike PA', 'Potter PA', 'Schuylkill PA', 'Snyder PA', 'Somerset PA', 'Sullivan PA', 'Susquehanna PA', 'Tioga PA', 'Union PA', 'Venango PA', 'Warren PA', 'Washington PA', 'Wayne PA', 'Westmoreland PA', 'Wyoming PA'

OH:

'Adams OH', 'Ashtabula OH', 'Athens OH', 'Belmont OH', 'Brown OH', 'Carroll OH', 'Clermont OH', 'Columbiana OH', 'Coshocton OH', 'Gallia OH', 'Guernsey OH', 'Harrison OH', 'Highland OH', 'Hocking OH', 'Holmes OH', 'Jackson OH', 'Jefferson OH', 'Lawrence OH', 'Mahoning OH', 'Meigs OH', 'Monroe OH', 'Morgan OH', 'Muskingum OH', 'Noble OH', 'Perry OH', 'Pike OH', 'Ross OH', 'Scioto OH', 'Trumbull OH', 'Tuscarawas OH', 'Vinton OH', 'Washington OH'

KY:

'Adair KY', 'Bath KY', 'Bell KY', 'Boyd KY', 'Breathitt KY', 'Carter KY', 'Casey KY', 'Clark KY', 'Clay KY', 'Clinton KY', 'Cumberland KY', 'Edmonson KY', 'Elliott KY', 'Estill KY', 'Fleming KY', 'Floyd KY', 'Garrard KY', 'Green KY', 'Greenup KY', 'Harlan KY', 'Hart KY', 'Jackson KY', 'Johnson KY', 'Knott KY', 'Knox KY', 'Laurel KY', 'Lawrence KY', 'Lee KY', 'Leslie KY', 'Letcher KY', 'Lewis KY', 'Lincoln KY', 'McCreary KY', 'Madison KY', 'Magoffin KY', 'Martin KY', 'Menifee KY', 'Metcalfe KY', 'Monroe KY', 'Montgomery KY', 'Morgan KY', 'Nicholas KY', 'Owsley KY', 'Perry KY', 'Pike KY', 'Powell KY', 'Pulaski KY', 'Robertson KY', 'Rockcastle KY', 'Rowan KY', 'Russell KY', 'Wayne KY', 'Whitley KY', 'Wolfe KY'

WV:

'Barbour WV', 'Berkeley WV', 'Boone WV', 'Braxton WV', 'Brooke WV', 'Cabell WV', 'Calhoun WV', 'Clay WV', 'Doddridge WV', 'Fayette WV', 'Gilmer WV', 'Grant WV', 'Greenbrier WV', 'Hampshire WV', 'Hancock WV', 'Hardy WV', 'Harrison WV', 'Jackson WV', 'Jefferson WV', 'Kanawha WV', 'Lewis WV', 'Lincoln WV', 'Logan WV', 'Marion WV', 'Marshall WV', 'Mason WV', 'McDowell WV', 'Mercer WV', 'Mineral WV', 'Mingo WV', 'Monongalia WV', 'Monroe WV', 'Morgan WV', 'Nicholas WV', 'Ohio WV', 'Pendleton WV', 'Pleasants WV', 'Pocahontas WV', 'Preston WV', 'Putnam WV', 'Raleigh WV', 'Randolph WV', 'Ritchie WV', 'Roane WV', 'Summers WV', 'Taylor WV', 'Tucker WV', 'Tyler WV', 'Upshur WV', 'Wayne WV', 'Webster WV', 'Wetzel WV', 'Wirt WV', 'Wood WV', 'Wyoming WV'

The income brackets were collapsed as follows for each election year:

2016:

Low = Less than \$10,000, \$10,000-\$19,999

Low-Mid = \$20,000-\$29,999, \$30,000-\$39,999

Mid = \$40,000-\$49,999, \$50,000-\$59,999, \$60,000-\$69,999

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Upper-Mid = \$70,000-\$79,999, \$80,000-\$99,999, \$100,000-\$119,999  
Upper = \$120,000+

2012:

Low = Less than \$10,000, \$10,000-\$19,999

Low-Mid = \$20,000-\$29,999, \$30,000-\$39,999

Mid = \$40,000-\$49,999, \$50,000-\$59,999

Upper-Mid = \$60,000-\$69,999, \$70,000-\$79,999, \$80,000-\$99,999

Upper = \$100,000+

2008:

Low = Less than \$10,000, \$10,000-\$14,999, \$15,000-\$19,999

Low-Mid = \$20,000-\$24,999, \$25,000-\$29,999, \$30,000-\$39,999

Mid = \$40,000-\$49,999, \$50,000-\$59,999

Upper-Mid = \$60,000-\$69,999, \$70,000-\$79,999, \$80,000-\$99,999

Upper = \$100,000+

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