

**EXPLAINING SARAH PALIN:  
CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN AMERICA**

by

Janet Routledge  
BA, York University, 1976

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In  
Graduate Liberal Studies

© Janet Routledge 2009  
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
Fall 2009

All rights reserved. However, in accordance with the *Copyright Act of Canada*, this work may be reproduced, without authorization, under the conditions for *Fair Dealing*. Therefore, limited reproduction of this work for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, review and news reporting is likely to be in accordance with the law, particularly if cited appropriately.

# APPROVAL

**Name:** Janet Routledge  
**Degree:** Master of Arts in Liberal Studies  
**Title of Thesis:** Explaining Sarah Palin: Cultural Hegemony in America

**Examining Committee:**

**Chair:** Dr. Michael Kenny, Professor of Anthropology

---

**Dr. Stephen Duguid, Professor of Humanities**  
Senior Supervisor

---

**Dr. Patrick Smith, Professor of Political Science**  
Supervisor

---

**Dr. Jerry Zaslove, Professor Emeritus, English and Humanities**  
External Examiner

**Date Defended/Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_ Nov 25, 2009 \_\_\_\_\_



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

## Declaration of Partial Copyright Licence

The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the right to lend this thesis, project or extended essay to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users.

The author has further granted permission to Simon Fraser University to keep or make a digital copy for use in its circulating collection (currently available to the public at the "Institutional Repository" link of the SFU Library website <[www.lib.sfu.ca](http://www.lib.sfu.ca)> at: <<http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/handle/1892/112>>) and, without changing the content, to translate the thesis/project or extended essays, if technically possible, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation of the digital work.

The author has further agreed that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by either the author or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

Permission for public performance, or limited permission for private scholarly use, of any multimedia materials forming part of this work, may have been granted by the author. This information may be found on the separately catalogued multimedia material and in the signed Partial Copyright Licence.

While licensing SFU to permit the above uses, the author retains copyright in the thesis, project or extended essays, including the right to change the work for subsequent purposes, including editing and publishing the work in whole or in part, and licensing other parties, as the author may desire.

The original Partial Copyright Licence attesting to these terms, and signed by this author, may be found in the original bound copy of this work, retained in the Simon Fraser University Archive.

Simon Fraser University Library  
Burnaby, BC, Canada

## **ABSTRACT**

I argue that 2008 U.S. vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's massive popularity among white working class voters was a product of what Antonio Gramsci would have called consensual control. Just as Gramsci took notice of the unique ensemble of forces that he dubbed Americanism, this paper argues that American liberalism has perpetuated a myth of classlessness that tends to mystify the lived reality of working class Americans and deceives them into embracing a system of values and belief that serves the interests of the ruling class at the expense of their own. I demonstrate that the so-called culture war, re-activated by Sarah Palin in the 2008 election, is significant terrain upon which American hegemony is negotiated. Finally, I make the case that during a period of hegemonic crisis Sarah Palin's role was to intensify hegemonic activity by personifying the American Dream and reinforcing it in white working class voters.

**Keywords:** Gramsci; Sarah Palin; 2008 U.S. Election; culture war; working class; American Liberalism; cultural hegemony

For Bill, my working class hero.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude to Stephen Duguid of the Graduate Liberal Studies Program for his enthusiastic support and guidance throughout this project. I would also like to thank my examining committee for their insightful feedback and stimulating exchange of ideas. I am also grateful to the administrative staff of the GLS program for their patient assistance.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Why Gramsci.....	7
The Sarah Palin Phenomenon.....	25
American Liberalism and the Working Class.....	74
Conclusion.....	89
References.....	95





## INTRODUCTION

A self-styled lipstick wearing pit bull from Alaska almost tripped Barack Obama in his historic race to the White House. At least that's the way it was looking in the fall of 2008. For a few weeks after Vice Presidential nominee, Sarah Palin addressed the Republican National Convention, and for the first time in the election, her party pulled ahead in the polls. According to pollsters, Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press, 60% of white voters, with high school education or less, were favouring Palin. What was going on? If she'd been elected, she would have starved the very programs that would sustain them in hard times, continued to send their kids to die in an unpopular war, reversed hard won reproductive freedoms, and unrepentantly destroyed the planet. Why would so many working class Americans vote Republican in 2008, especially when there was a Democratic ticket that seemed to so closely articulate their interests? To what degree and why was the candidacy of Sarah Palin a factor in those choices and what contributions can the work of Antonio Gramsci make in explaining them?

Those are the central questions this thesis seeks to answer. It will do so by examining Sarah Palin's popularity as a vice presidential candidate in the 2008 U.S. Election through the lens of what Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci would have called *consensual control*.

These are important questions for a number of reasons. For one thing, this was an historic election. The presidency of the last remaining superpower was up for grabs. Due to constitutional term limits George W. Bush couldn't run again thereby removing the advantage of incumbency from the already faltering Republican Party. Bush's plunging popularity and the growing criticism of the war in Iraq made the likelihood of a Republican re-election all the more uncertain. The selection of Barack Obama as the Democratic presidential nominee made the contest all the more exciting. Not only were American voters being presented with clearer choices than at any other time in recent memory, Obama's race, stated values, personal history, communication style, and political track record had captured international attention. Progressives the world over were beginning to think that their worldview might once again come into ascendancy and the course of history would be diverted.

Yet, Barack Obama's credentials also presented a tempting polarizing opportunity for the Republican campaign, a temptation they chose not to resist. With 66 days remaining in the campaign, Sarah Palin had burst out of nowhere onto the national stage at the Republican National Convention to accept the nomination for Vice President. She was a woman, good-looking, deeply conservative and aggressively combative. She immediately attracted intense media attention. "Could Sarah Palin be the antidote to Obama's charisma? Could she revitalize John McCain's bid for the presidency?" were the questions on the minds of observers at both ends of the political spectrum. That she could have been the last minute spoiler in what was looking like a Democratic upset is

reason enough to look closely at the nature or her popularity. That she continues to be a national public figure, still rallying the right wing, reinforces the urgency of doing so.

But there are underlying issues that make the investigation all the more relevant. Americans have been locked in a so-called culture war at least since the 1920's (E. J. Dionne 2008). In ascendancy since the 1980's, the conservative faction has had a relatively free hand to restructure the economy through de-regulation and tax cuts. Thirty years of so-called trickledown Reaganomics has produced an unprecedented and growing income disparity. Even Janet Yellen, President of the San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank, has observed that the widening chasm between rich and poor is "impairing social cohesion and could, ultimately, undermine American democracy" (USA Today 2006). While the shift to the right in America has been well documented, far too little attention has been paid to the mechanisms by which the right gains and keeps power. The right's winning strategy needs to be understood if it is to be countered. To get to the bottom of Sarah Palin's appeal is to better understand how the right wing functions in liberal democracies.

In this age of globalization, the influence of the American right, and therefore Sarah Palin, exceeds national boundaries. We should all be paying attention because the actions of the American right touch everyone. We've already seen how the de-regulation of the U.S. financial market sparked a worldwide recession. When in government, the American right uses its economic and military power to limit the choices open to foreign governments. Even out of

office, their reach is long. Kansas-based virulently anti-abortion organizations such as Operation Rescue harass women in front of clinics in Vancouver. Culture warrior Fox News beams the images of rightwing spokesmodels into living rooms across the border and homegrown conservatives get inspired. An explanation of why, until recently, the Republicans kept winning U.S. elections and the Democrats kept losing them, can provide valuable insights into the failures of progressive parties in other countries and suggest ways to improve their outlook.

Interestingly enough, these were the same kinds of questions that were occupying Antonio Gramsci in early twentieth century Italy. He wanted to know why the Italian workers and peasants would support the fascist government of Benito Mussolini. And, he asked the question with the same sense of incredulity. The answers he came up with were original and even surprising. Despite the deep social changes that have taken place, many of which he anticipated, since Gramsci wrote The Prison Notebooks, his perspective and analytical tools remain useful today.

I will begin this paper by introducing Antonio Gramsci. I situate his novel contributions to social theory within the context of the personal experiences and historical conditions that shaped his thinking. I will explain in some detail the uniquely Gramscian concepts that help to pull back the curtain on how the right wing exercises power and that assist us to understand why so many American working class voters were taken with Sarah Palin.

Having established the relevance of Gramscian theory to explaining Sarah Palin's popularity, the candidate herself will be introduced in the next chapter,

“The Sarah Palin Phenomenon”. I will survey a range of popular media sources to re-create a snapshot of the Sarah Palin that was being presented to the American public in the fall of 2008. In this chapter, I will also describe how her candidacy was meant to fit into the Republican electoral strategy and explore some of the controversy surrounding her nomination. I will then move on to the public’s reaction to her candidacy, specifically concentrating on the dimension of her popularity that I am calling “Sarah-mania”. To be clear, the protagonist in this study is the American working class not Sarah Palin. I have chosen to concentrate on her candidacy because the phenomenon of Sarah Palin provides so rich a source of insight into the challenges of working class agency in advanced capitalist society. To understand the relationship of working class voters to Sarah Palin, one needs to get inside their political minds and that is the main objective of this chapter. I will devote significant space to the examination of the so-called culture wars, of which I will contend Sarah Palin’s appeal is a product. I will investigate the specific strategies used by the right wing to successfully attract working class voters and re-position the political debate. I will also examine the historical circumstances that over time have served to alienate the white working class from the Democratic Party and left them susceptible to right wing blandishments. It should be noted that this is a phenomenon that is particular to the white working class and does not for various socio-economic reasons apply to working class Black Americans as a group. This chapter will also explore in detail the concept of social class and develop a workable definition of the modern American working class. Throughout this chapter, I will

be introducing some of the contemporary theories, echoes of Gramsci if you will, that help to bridge the gap between Gramsci, who was drawing on his experience of the Italian working class in the early twentieth century, and the realities of twenty-first century American life. For reasons that will shortly become clear, many of these authorities do not explicitly situate their work within the context of Gramscian theory. I will be making those links myself. I will conclude this chapter by summarizing how Sarah Palin's role in the election served to intensify consensual control during a period of hegemonic crisis.

The next chapter, "American Liberalism and the Working Class", will explore the hegemonic worldview that dominates American society. I will discuss more directly the American exceptionalism that makes up the uniquely American form of liberalism and how it has shaped the working class's image of itself. I will also explain the lack of class-consciousness in the United States and how its absence has made working class people vulnerable to consensual control.

Having explored the structural and conjunctural conditions, in place at the moment of the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election, I will conclude by exploring some of the socializing agents in force today that teach working people to accept a particular version of reality, concentrating on the ones that are most present in electoral politics.

## **1: WHY GRAMSCI?**

To study the popularity of Sarah Palin is to take seriously a social phenomenon that many observers dismiss as trivial. This social phenomenon might best be described as the cult of celebrity whereby in this case, a segment of the voting public is transformed into a fan club. The 'cult of celebrity' can equally be applied to the dynamic surrounding sports fanatics, royal watchers, and groupies. For Morris Berman it signals cultural decline (Berman 2000). Christopher Lasch views it as a symptom of collective narcissism (Lasch 1979). Most commentary in support of Palin's candidacy contributes to the air of cultishness by concentrating on the symbols of American society that they say she represents. Her detractors pitch in by drawing attention almost exclusively to what they see as her shallowness. Independent observation focuses on the indicators of her popularity. All told, her wardrobe seemed to receive more attention during the election than did the substance of her political views. For many, following the fortunes of Sarah Palin throughout the fall of 2008 became a form of entertainment.

To analyze Sarah Palin's political stardom through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is to look for meaning in the trivial. It is to make conscious the many unconscious ways one absorbs the dominant ideology, even when one thinks one is resisting it. Gramsci was one of the first Marxists to face up to the realities of modern capitalism in the twentieth century.

His break with orthodoxy allowed him to pay closer attention to what was happening in the 'superstructure'. For Marx and Engels, the superstructure represented the legal, educational, artistic, and political institutions that served to justify and reinforce the economic base, capitalism. Hence, they saw the superstructure as a reflection of the base and believed that changes in the superstructure could not in themselves lead to revolutionary social change. Gramsci disagreed. He developed an original Marxist theory of social change that was based on what he actually saw happening in the early twentieth century as opposed to what was supposed to happen according to a theory developed in an earlier stage of capitalism. For Gramsci, Marxism was as much about political change as it was about transforming the economic system. He was writing about the role of journalism, language, art, folklore and education in his own time and he foresaw that "hegemonic values and behaviour patterns (would) extend throughout every sphere of civil society – schools, the media, culture, trade unions, the family, as well as the workplace – and become interwoven into the structural and ideological totality of capitalism." (Boggs 1976:121)

Antonio Gramsci is not a household name. He was politically active during a rapidly transformative period in history and was writing about world-changing events, such as the creation of the first workers' state in Russia and the rise of fascism, while they were unfolding. In 1927, Gramsci was put in prison by Mussolini's fascist government and he died still a prisoner ten years later. He was 47. His most innovative work was produced in prison, where he was cut off from the affairs of the world, writing in code to circumvent prison censors, and



experiencing physical hardship. It is only because his sister-in-law smuggled his notebooks out of prison, from where they secretly found their way into the Soviet Union, that they are at all available to us today. It was not until the 1970's that his notebooks were translated into English. Made more challenging by the fragmentary and ambiguous nature of his later writing, the project of bringing to light Gramsci's contributions to knowledge might be considered unfinished. It is not surprising then that, while the role of Sarah Palin in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election so calls for a Gramscian analysis, little work in this area has yet come to light. Some of the more convincing explications are decidedly Gramscian in that they seek to expose or justify the contradictions of her white working class support base. Yet, they stop short of explicitly bringing his theories in play.

Perhaps it was in response to the contradiction he witnessed between Marxism's theoretical confidence in the imminent overthrow of capitalism and the very real defeat of working class movements all over Europe, that Gramsci incorporated into his thinking an urgency to study actions and ideas, including one's own, within their historical context. Therefore, it would be very much in keeping with his own advice to place "Gramsci's thought within an historical framework, mapping out the "infinity of traces" that led to its formation."(Jones 2006: 13) In this way, one can better discern the roots and branches of his creativity.

Antonio Gramsci was Italian. He was born in 1891 in what Eric Hobsbawm called, in his 1987 lecture to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gramsci's

death, “ an extremely backward almost third world corner of Sardinia” and of all the leading communist leaders he was the one born with “the opposite of a silver spoon in his mouth.” He grew up in extreme poverty and suffered from debilitating physical illnesses. Only with the assistance of a scholarship, was he able to attend university in Turin and it was there that he became increasingly involved in socialist politics. Chronic ill health and lack of funds prevented him from completing his studies. As Hobsbawm points out, living in Turin offered two advantages. First, Turin, with its Fiat works and militant working class, provided him with an industrial experience that would have been hard to get anywhere else in Italy let alone Europe. It also brought him into contact with a circle of intellectuals at the university who influenced his thinking and encouraged his activism. Gramsci went on to become a leader of the Turin socialist movement and the Italian Communist Party. He spent more than a year in Moscow as the representative of the PCI on the Communist International’s executive committee. In the meantime, the Fascists had taken power in Italy. Upon his return, Gramsci was soon arrested; although as an elected member of parliament he was to have enjoyed political immunity. He was charged with provoking class hatred and civil war and sentenced to 20 years in prison. His friend from university, Cambridge economist Piero Sraffa set up an account for him at a Milan bookstore so he was able to read, but he was not allowed to write for another two years. He read and wrote “feverously” between 1929 and 1934, during the same period that, as Hobsbawm points out, capitalism was in crisis and international fascism was gaining power throughout Europe. It was these Prison Notebooks, upon which

his reputation is based. But, as Hobsbawm also points out, Gramsci was even unlucky in jail. His ideas were out of favour with the Comintern at that time so the “loyal comrades” who were with him in jail felt that they had to isolate him in order to preserve the “official position”. He was too ill to write in the last two or three years of his life and he died in 1937.

Hobsbawm draws attention to a number of aspects of Gramsci’s biography that account for the originality of his thinking. First, the fact that he came from a “desperately poor background” in one of the “lost corners of a lost island” gave him a “lived sense of the problems of poverty” that few other Marxist intellectuals shared. Carl Boggs goes even further to suggest that Gramsci’s “humble social background and the close contact he maintained with working-class politics and culture throughout his adult life” imbued his thinking with a groundbreaking confidence in the human agency of the masses. Gramsci’s Marxism was at its core a democratic theory that “embraced an active, participatory, and popular spirit.”(Boggs, 1984: pp. 13-15) It may have been Gramsci’s interactions with the poor that motivated him to refine the Marxist notion of “false consciousness” into his more nuanced conception of “common sense.”

Second, Hobsbawm points out that Gramsci was one of the few Marxist theorists who was also the leader of a mass political party. It was an experience that Marx and Engels couldn’t have had and that “the Russians” had only had, before the revolution, by leading small illegal sects. Furthermore, it had been the tradition of the Second International to separate thinking and organizing into

different functions. After the revolution, implies Hobsbawm, theory became ossified into dogma. Gramsci was the rare theorist who understood firsthand the practical problems of running a party and making tactical decisions. It follows that his unique combination of skills may have helped to place the concept of “praxis”, the dialectical unity of theory and practise, at the centre of his thinking.

A third formative factor emphasized by Hobsbawm is that, unfortunately, Gramsci was one of the few party leaders who had had the leisure to think and write and this because he was in jail and not caught up in the daily grind of running a party. He could, as Hobsbawm reminds us, “look at things in a slightly longer perspective”.

Fourth, Hobsbawm tell us that Gramsci was “not formed in the classic mould of Marxism as it was developed in the Second International, a mould in which “even the Bolsheviks were formed.” In fact, Hobsbawm tells us that Gramsci “came to Marxism via the Russian Revolution.” Prior to the revolution Gramsci would not have described himself as a Marxist: he thought Marxism was too economically deterministic and “didn’t allow enough room for human action.” A barricades militant, Gramsci thought the Russian Revolution confirmed the revolutionary aspect of Marxism, which he thought had been too social democratic. As a result, his own approach to Marxism didn’t have to “dismantle a large amount of Kautsky’s excretions before he could start thinking.” Hobsbawm tells us that regardless of what some Gramscians may have come to believe, Gramsci thought himself to be a Leninist. Hobsbawm asserts that while Lenin was an “enormously original Marxist” he still believed he had to make his

innovations compatible with the literal truth of Marxist texts. Gramsci didn't believe he had to do that and, besides, when he was in prison he could only recall those texts from memory. Gramsci insisted that Marx "was not a messiah who left a file of parables pregnant with categorical imperatives, of absolute indisputable norms independent of time and space." (Gramsci as cited in Boggs 1989: 41) Therefore, he "could let his originality show". One might also add that his engagement with the ideas of other thinkers such as Machiavelli, and Italian idealist Benedetto Croce contributed to the originality of his Marxism.

Fifth, Hobsbawm stresses that Gramsci came from a country that was a microcosm of world capitalism in that it united, within its borders, the problems of the modern industrial world, as in Turin, and the modern third world, as in Sardinia. "In other words, an intelligent Italian Marxist was in an unusually good position to grasp the nature both of the developed capitalist world and the "Third World" and their interactions." (Hobsbawm, 1977: 206) And, one might add that investigating the interactions between the industrial north and the feudal society of southern Italy, especially during the Risorgimento, the process of Italian nation-building in the nineteenth century, may have contributed to Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as "both a process that occurs before power is institutionalized as well as an outcome of that process of institutionalization." (Lyons, in Howson and Smith, 2007:ix) Similarly, as an Italian Marxist, he was disposed to notice that "the relatively weak form of democratic capitalism that had emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century Italy had combined with the uniquely Italian dominance of the Catholic church to create the conditions that gave rise to

authoritarian tendencies that were ultimately expressed in fascism” (Jones 2008: p. 26) From these observations may have emerged the theory of “passive revolution”.

And, finally, according to Hobsbawm, Gramsci came from a country where communists faced the failure of revolution more dramatically than in any other country after 1917. For, as Hobsbawm points out, in the case of Italy the objective conditions for revolution had been in place more than anywhere else. Yet, two uprisings had failed and the majority of the working class has refused to follow the leadership of the Italian Communist Party. Within a few years, capitalism was “plunged into the only crisis that has ever threatened it as a system and it led not to an upsurge of revolution but to the triumph of International Fascism.” Thus, Hobsbawm tells us, Italian communists were faced with the questions, what do revolutionaries do when the revolution, they’d hoped to make, hasn’t happen? What happens when the Soviet Union, the only workers’ state in existence is left isolated, what effect does isolation have on it and on the rest of the world? Why did the revolutions in Europe fail? What next and what is the outlook? These were the questions that occupied Gramsci for the rest of his life. (Hobsbawm 1987) He seized upon the term “hegemony” and built it into an explication of why it is so difficult overthrow capitalism. Today, The Prison Notebooks stands as both a theory of enduring power of the status quo and a theory of change.

A number of key concepts make up Gramscian thinking. First and foremost, Antonio Gramsci accepted the basic premises of Marxism. He believed

that capitalism does not work in the long run. He believed that it would inevitably lead to inequalities that would become impossible to accommodate. Furthermore, he believed that class struggle was the driving force that moved history forward and would ultimately lead to the defeat of capitalism. Yet, he rejected the Marxist orthodoxy that economic crises in themselves would automatically produce the conditions for systemic change. Rather, he believed that they were but the terrain upon which social change took place. He disagreed with accepted Marxist thinking that activities in the superstructure could be deduced from economics. He was already suspicious of the certainty of scientific Marxism and rejected the notion that "history would take care of itself". (Femia 1981) He believed strongly that change is created through historically situated purposeful human action. It is in this sense that Gramsci can be called a political Marxist. In the wake of failed revolutions, he became convinced that capitalism was more adaptable than orthodox Marxism had anticipated and concluded that it was entering into a more advanced stage of development.

Free from the constraints of economic determinism, Gramsci was able to pay closer attention to the ways in which the ruling class exercised power. He discovered that, contrary to traditional Marxist teachings; the dominance of the ruling class was based on more than force and coercion. He observed that in the liberal democracies of mature capitalist countries the ruling class was inhibited from exercising brute force. Thus Gramsci identified two distinct forms of political control, *coercion* and *consent*. Coercion referred to the direct physical force, or threat of it, exerted by the police or military. Consent referred to the population's

voluntary assimilation of the dominant group's ideology. *Ideology* in this sense refers to the "shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups" (Giddens, cited in Burke 2005) and legitimize the differential power that groups hold and as such distorts the real situation in which people find themselves. (Burke, 2005) In Gramsci's more nuanced understanding of power, consensual control can also be understood as leadership. Liberal democracies might use coercion and domination during periods of crisis, when they were also likely to intensify ideological activity, but Gramsci believed that in the long run, even oppressive authoritarian regimes needed popular support and legitimacy to maintain stability. Thus, Gramsci became the first Marxist to recognize that bourgeois values could be a site for class struggle. This realization opened up a whole new area of study, the study of cultural or ideological hegemony, which has become synonymous with his name.

Gramsci elevated ideology to a new level of importance in Marxist theory. He observed a dialectical relationship developing between the economy and the superstructure that he called an *ensemble of relations*. (Boggs 1976) He even took the base/superstructure analysis a step further than Marx by dividing the superstructure into two. What he considered to be overtly coercive institutions such as government, police, armed forces, and the legal system he called "political society" or the public realm. Institutions he regarded as non-coercive such as churches, schools, trade unions, political parties, cultural associations, clubs and the family he called "civil society" and saw them as constituting private life. While Gramsci predicted that civil society would become increasingly



complex in advanced capitalist countries, he could not have anticipated the specific blurring that would take place between civil and political society and between the base and superstructure through the growth of the welfare state, crown corporations, public broadcasting, regulatory bodies, public interest groups, etc. However, he did predict that the specific relationship of forces were subject to change and dubbed those in place at any particular point in history an *historical bloc*.

Gramsci viewed civil society as the sphere in which a dominant social group primarily organizes consent and hegemony, thus for Gramsci this was the sphere that bore closer scrutiny. His choice of study was further validated by the realization that in the liberal democracies, governments were ideologically prevented from running the economy directly: they had to do it indirectly through civil society. (Hobsbawm 1987) The hand may be invisible but it isn't insubstantial. Gramsci defined hegemony as

the permeation throughout civil society – including a whole of range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches and the family - of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality, etc., that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organising principle', or world-view (or combination of such world-views) that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the broad masses it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense': as all ruling elites seek to perpetuate their power, wealth and status, they necessarily attempt to popularize their own

philosophy, culture and morality, etc., and render them unchallengeable, part of the natural order of things. (Boggs 1976:39)

Gramsci was perhaps the first social theorist to see that the “personal is political”. He was interested in the little habits, customs, amusements, and idioms that make up popular culture. Gramsci’s notion of civil society overlapped with his understanding of *common sense*. Gramsci did not use the term in the conventional manner that conceives of common sense as “practical wisdom that contradicts theorizing or dogma” (Jones 2008:54). Rather, Gramsci was referring to thought that is shared in common. He also referred to it as folklore. For Gramsci, “common sense is a confused formation, in part drawn from “official” conceptions of the world circulated by the ruling bloc, in part formed out of people’s practical experiences of social life.” (Jones 2008:9) In part it is inherited from the past and is expressed as customs and traditions. Despite the contradictions, “it offers a deeply held guide to life, directing people to act in certain ways and ruling out other modes of behaviour as unthinkable.” (Jones 2008:9) For example, in The Hegemony of Common Sense: Wisdom and Mystification in Everyday Life, Dean Wolfe Manders offers an extensive study of popular sayings such as “time is money” and “make the most of yourself” to demonstrate how a consensual commitment to capitalist relations is achieved in modern society through the “lived-operational nature of common sense”. (Manders 2008: 9) Sayings such as “grin and bear it”, “don’t rock the boat” and “win some lose some” reinforce a sense that one’s current situation is inevitable. He also suggests that because they are uttered unthinkingly, idioms “do grave

injury” to the “potentiality for critical thought.” (Manders 2008:90) Yet, Manders also found idioms, such as “working stiff” and “labouring under false pretences” that suggest a subterranean resistance to the dominant ideology. Gramsci in fact insisted that while “many elements in popular common sense contribute to people’s subordination... common sense must not be thought of as false consciousness or as ideology in a merely negative sense”. (Forgacs 1988:421) Gramsci empathically did not view the people as mere dupes of the powerful. He observed that common sense contains elements of truth; otherwise people would not be able to function. Gramsci believed that the truth in folklore could be used as leverage to create critical mass consciousness and thereby recruited into the struggle for political hegemony. As a theorist of social change, Gramsci’s project was to make explicit the tensions and contradictions within common sense.

Gramsci did not believe that hegemony was immutable and this is critical to understanding his theory in action. Hegemony “is necessarily rooted in an economically dominant, or potentially dominant, mode of production and in one of the “fundamental” social classes (bourgeoisie or proletariat), but it is defined precisely by an expansion beyond economic class interest into the sphere of political direction through a system of class alliances.” (Forgacs 1988: 423) This implies that hegemony must be negotiated, not only among the hegemonic groups but also with the subaltern groups. “The fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised.” (Gramsci 1988:211) “In other words, it presupposes an active and practical involvement of the hegemonized groups,

quite unlike the static, totalizing and passive subordination implied by the dominant ideology concept.” (Forgacs 1988: 424). Hobsbawm uses the analogy of apartheid to demonstrate the difference. Under apartheid black South Africans in no way benefited from their domination. But class rule offers something to the subaltern groups even if it is only stability. He tells us that Franco maintained support in Spain in part because people feared a relapse into civil war.

(Hobsbawm 1987) Gramsci foresaw that the dominant group would make *superficial compromises* that “break off the sharp points of discontent” but don’t alter the fundamental power relationship. Gramsci clearly viewed Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal as a superficial compromise. In modern society an example of a superficial compromise might include a nominal tax on the consumption of carbon while continuing to heavily subsidize large oil companies so they can continue to pump more oil. In order to preserve consent, the ruling class must make itself acceptable to the hegemonized groups, who continue to give their consent only because they get something in return. But, in no way did Gramsci view civil society as a level playing field: the rulers and the ruled did not come to the table with equal bargaining power. Furthermore, Gramsci believed that groups in civil society could be corrupted. For example, trade unions and centre left political parties who sought to hegemonize multi-national corporations and middle class conservatism could find themselves hegemonized instead.

(Jones 2008) In fact, Gramsci viewed trade unions and political parties as “necessarily bound to the logic of capitalism” (Boggs 1984: 75). But in the final analysis hegemony is not imposed: subaltern groups “reach up to claim” the

dominant ideology and through a common sense understanding of the world reflexively alter the shape of the hegemonic bloc itself. (Jones 2008) Gramsci saw that hegemony was constantly under negotiation. And in his enduringly dialectical analysis he saw that while the subaltern classes' complicity in hegemony created an ideological bond between the ruler and the ruled, it also created opportunities to expose the contradictions in that relationship.

Antonio Gramsci unquestionably offered some innovative and compelling answers to the question, why is capitalism so resilient? The Prison Notebooks are above all a detailed explanation of how the liberal democratic state functions. But one is also reminded that at its heart the purpose of his investigations was to find a way to overthrow capitalism. Therefore, a summary of Gramsci's thinking would be incomplete without at least a brief explanation of his theory of revolution. Gramsci's discovery of cultural hegemony led him to conclude that the frontal overthrow of liberal democracies, or what he called the *war of manoeuvre*, could only succeed if it was preceded by a protracted *war of position*. This *prefigurative insurrection* was not yet a battle for power and would not be fought with guns and bombs. It was a contest for the hearts and minds of the people and it would be fought with words and ideas. Gramsci understood that hegemony could not be transferred to the victors; it had to be won. He also understood that it could be lost. He was himself a combatant in a hegemonic war that had been lost to the fascists and as Marxist/Freudian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich later commented, "While we presented the masses with superb historical analyses

and economic treatises on the contradictions of imperialism, Hitler stirred the deepest roots of their emotional being.” (Cited in Boggs, 1984:202)

Gramsci envisioned an organic process of popular struggle that would gradually extend the domain of egalitarian social and authority relations. (Boggs 1984) This counter hegemonic project would be informed by the *philosophy of praxis*, his code word in prison for Marxism. Gramsci believed Marxism to be “powerfully transformative” and the first truly collective or popular philosophy. The Prison Notebooks was his effort to rehabilitate a philosophy that he believed to have lost its critical edge and transformative content, “its very identity as an emancipatory philosophy”, when it slipped into determinism. (Boggs 1984: 131) A central tenet of the philosophy of praxis, strongly asserted by Gramsci, was that human knowledge was simultaneously a product of objective structural forces and a creative transforming agent capable of reshaping those forces. (Boggs 1984:138) He believed that while intellectual activity serves to reproduce the status quo, it also has the power to undermine it. (Boggs 1984:220) Therefore the role of revolutionary intellectuals during the war of position was to break the ideological hold of the ruling bloc by facilitating the creation of *counter hegemony*. They were to find openings in the popular culture and common sense of the day through which the people might see the truth of their situation and to turn common sense into good sense. Counter hegemonic intellectuals were to encourage the subaltern classes to develop a new critical consciousness out of which they would begin to question their masters and start thinking for themselves. Central to Gramsci’s theory of revolution was the conviction that the

counter hegemonic process had to be intensely democratic. Gramsci believed that the transition to socialism could only be achieved through the conscious and deliberate participation of the majority of the people. It was not something a vanguard could accomplish in the long run on behalf of the subaltern classes. He believed that all people were philosophers because through human interaction everyone contributes to sustain or modify a conception of the world. (Boggs 1984:220) Birthing a notion that would become the guiding premise of Paulo Freire's popular education movement, Gramsci contended that the subaltern classes could produce their own intellectuals. The new counter hegemonic intellectuals would be political organizers who actively facilitated the unity of theory and action, into *praxis*.

Gramsci's emphasis on the centrality of human agency paralleled his conviction that the struggle for hegemony could never be programmed nor its outcome controlled.

In reality, one can "scientifically" predict only the struggle, but not its concrete unfolding, which can only be the result of forces in opposition and in continuous change, forces that in no case can be reduced to fixed quantities, because in them, quantity is constantly changing into quality. In reality, one foresees to the degree that one acts, that one applies a conscious effort and one thus contributes concretely to create the "foreseen" result. The act of foreseeing, therefore, shows itself to be not an act of scientific knowing but the abstract expression of the effort one makes, the practical way of creating a collective will. (Gramsci as cited in Mandel, 2009)

Gramsci's theory of revolution was emphatically historicist. He probably would have agreed with Morris Berman that "the road to truth is always under construction." (Berman 2000:138) One of Gramsci's most practical bequests is an analytical tool called *conjunctural analysis*. It is derived from the awareness that while "certain social structures were *organic* or relatively permanent such as the economic relations between the landowners and the peasants, other relations were more temporary, appearing almost accidental." (Barndt 1989) Thus, to think like Gramsci is to ask probing questions about the specific relationship of forces operating at any particular point in time, the goal of which are to de-mystify the liberal/capitalist state, its ethos, and its claim to universality. To think like Gramsci is look for the political in daily life and to question the wisdom of common sense. When one observes the working class behaving in an apparently counterintuitive manner, one could do worse than to turn to Gramsci for help in understanding what is happening. To think like Gramsci is to view ordinary people as social agents who may participate in their own exploitation and for reasons with which we may disagree but are no less rational. To think like Gramsci is look to his theory of the modern state to help us identify the important questions but not to find the answers. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, Gramsci "does not do our thinking for us." (Hobsbawm 1987)



## **2: THE SARAH PALIN PHENOMENON**

It is important to get a picture of the Sarah Palin that was being presented to the American public during the election of 2008, not the one that has been brought into sharper focus by subsequent events. Before August 29 when John McCain introduced her at a rally in Dayton Ohio, Sarah Palin was virtually unknown outside Republican circles. Democratic vice presidential candidate Joe Biden hadn't heard of her and, the day after the announcement, the official website of the Government of Alaska was getting so many hits it crashed. (Balz and Johnson, 2008: 337-338) Not only did the Republicans have a blank canvass on which to paint her portrait, the rush to fill in the details in the last two months of the campaign created its own excitement. This Fox News story aired the day she was unveiled to the world:

Sarah Palin, John McCain's vice presidential pick, became the first female governor of Alaska in 2006, as well as its youngest. A 44-year-old mother of five, her anti-abortion stance is certain to appeal to evangelicals, while her views on the threats of climate change mirror McCain's.

"Palin is becoming a star in the conservative movement, a fiscal conservative in a state that is looking like a boondoggle for pork-barrel spending," Republican pollster Kellyanne Conway has said. "She's young, vibrant, fresh and now, a new mother of five. She should be in the top tier. If the Republican Party wants to wrestle itself free from the perception that it is royalist and not open to putting new talent on the bench, this would be the real opportunity."

Democrats will point out that she has no foreign policy credentials or experience, but her presence adds youth to a McCain ticket and her gender could help sway women, especially the "security moms" who helped President Bush win re-election in 2004, to vote GOP.

Born in Sandpoint, Idaho, on Feb. 11, 1964, Palin moved with her family at the age of three months to Wasilla, Alaska, according to the Almanac of American Politics' Web site. She returned to her birth state to attend the University of Idaho, where she studied journalism and graduated in 1987 with a bachelor's degree.

Palin is the mother of five children — Bristol, 17; Willow, 13; Piper, 7; Track, 18; and Trig, who was born in April with Down syndrome. Her husband is Todd. The governor is a lifetime member of the National Rifle Association and a strong anti-abortion advocate.

"She grew up in Wasilla, just outside of Anchorage, played on Wasilla's state championship girls basketball team in 1982, wore the crown of Miss Wasilla in 1984 and competed in the Miss Alaska contest," the Almanac of American Politics says.

She began her professional career as a television sports reporter, but after she married she helped run her husband's family's commercial fishing business, the almanac says. Other professional endeavors included the ownership of a snow machine, watercraft and all-terrain-vehicle business.

She ran for Wasilla City Council in 1992, winning her seat by opposing tax increases, according to the almanac. Four years later, at age 32, she defeated a three-term incumbent to become mayor of Wasilla.

The almanac reports tension between Palin and city staff members aligned with her predecessor, earning the nickname "Sarah Barracuda" from her opponents.

"At the end of her second term, party leaders encouraged her to enter the 2002 race for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor," the Almanac of American Politics says. "Against veteran legislators with

far more experience, Palin finished second by fewer than 2,000 votes, making a name for herself in statewide politics."

Frank Murkowski, elected governor in 2002, "suffered politically from his decision to appoint his daughter as his Senate successor and for purchasing a state jet for his travel," the almanac says. "He also faced criticism that the natural gas pipeline deal that he had negotiated was a sweetheart deal with oil producers."

In 2006 Palin defeated Murkowski in the Republican primary running on a platform of ethics reform, and she easily beat former Gov. Tony Knowles, in the general election.

In office, her agenda included reduction in government spending, a 1,715-mile natural gas pipeline and government accountability, according to the Anchorage Daily News.

She won high approval ratings, but she also is now caught up in a probe of the firing of a state trooper who was married to Palin's sister until their divorce. (Fox News, Aug. 29, 2008)

All the major news outlets were sounding the same note. Various descriptions of her as young, pretty, popular, tough, socially conservative, mother of five, and an unspoiled outsider, Sarah Palin was quickly becoming a celebrity. The British tabloid press compared her to Princess Diana and made much of the fact that she had been a beauty queen. The Los Angeles Times declared that, in naming her as his running mate, McCain had "pulled a fast one on his Democratic opponents." McCain himself, when introducing her for the first time, played up the idea that she was going to "shake up Washington."

Her biggest vulnerability at this point was her perceived lack of experience. The Obama campaign reacted predictably. Said national press secretary, Bill Burton,

Today, John McCain put the former mayor of a town of 9,000 with zero foreign policy experience a heartbeat away from the presidency. Governor Palin shares John McCain's commitment to overturning Roe v. Wade, the agenda of Big Oil and continuing George Bush's failed economic policies -- that's not the change we need, it's just more of the same. (Huffington Post, Aug. 29, 2008)

In her much forwarded September 4 electronic essay, "Wrong Woman, Wrong Message", iconic feminist writer Gloria Steinem declared that "this isn't the first time a boss has picked an unqualified woman just because she agrees with him and opposes everything that most other women want and need." She went on to accused Senator McCain of "change-envy". Eve Ensler called the Sarah Palin choice insidious and cynical.

Palin hit back at her critics in her much anticipated and widely watched acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention. She spoke directly to small town working class America and, through her folksy speech patterns and down home stories, she intimated that she was one of them. The conservative press moved quickly and aggressively to reinforce her message and turn her inexperience into a virtue. In the frequently referenced "Mrs. Palin Goes to Washington", American Thinker reporter, Clarice Feldman, evoked the image of a James Stewartesque figure who takes on the Washington establishment on behalf of plain folk. She called Sarah Palin a "fine, brave, and likeable candidate" and concluded by declaring "I love Sarah Palin". (Feldman 2008) William Kristol, threw down the gauntlet with these words in the September 8 issue of the Weekly Standard:

A spectre is haunting the liberal elites of New York and Washington--the spectre of a young, attractive, unapologetic conservatism, rising out of the American countryside, free of the taint (fair or unfair) of the Bush administration and the recent Republican Congress, able to invigorate a McCain administration and to govern beyond it.

That spectre has a name--Sarah Palin, the 44-year-old governor of Alaska chosen by John McCain on Friday to be his running mate. There she is: a working woman who's a proud wife and mother; a traditionalist in important matters who's broken through all kinds of barriers; a reformer who's a Republican; a challenger of a corrupt good-old-boy establishment who's a conservative; a successful woman whose life is unapologetically grounded in religious belief; a lady who's a leader.

So what we will see in the next days and weeks--what we have already seen in the hours after her nomination--is an effort by all the powers of the old liberalism, both in the Democratic party and the mainstream media, to exorcise this spectre. They will ridicule her and patronize her. They will distort her words and caricature her biography. They will appeal, sometimes explicitly, to anti-small town and anti-religious prejudice. All of this will be in the cause of trying to prevent the American people from arriving at their own judgment of Sarah Palin. (Kristol 2008)

Kathleen Parker, who would later recant her endorsement, also tried to turn the criticism back onto the Democrats in her September 10 National Review article entitled, "Rednecks vs. Elites" in which she referred to Sarah Palin as "the perfect storm of God, mom and apple pie." Said Parker, "she hunts, fishes, loves driving four-wheelers, making babies, and beating up the boys. She gets small-town America because she is small-town America. (Parker September 10, 2008) Palin herself repeatedly reinforced the "gun-clinging, God-toting" cowgirl image on the campaign trail and continued to profess to speak for "Joe Six Pack American."

Her grasp of national issues became disputed territory and the controversy only added to her allure.

Pundits both pro and con agreed that tapping Palin for vice-president was a gamble. So, what did she bring to John McCain's campaign? Until Palin appeared on the scene, McCain had been trailing in the polls. To stay in the race, he needed to solidify support in contested or vulnerable constituencies and that was the time honoured role of the vice presidential candidate. Clearly, her presence on the ticket was meant to attract women voters who were disappointed that Hilary Clinton had lost the Democratic nomination. Speaking in Dayton Ohio for the first time as the vice presidential nominee, she made a point of honoring both Clinton and former Vice Presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro. She talked about "shattering the glass ceiling once and for all." For added measure, her dramatic persona and photogenic good looks were sure to pass the "People Magazine" test and earn her some of the massive entertainment media exposure that, up to that point, had been monopolized by the Obamas. She brought "wow" to what had been a lackluster Republican campaign. Young male columnists began writing about whether or not it was acceptable to lust after vice presidential candidates old enough to be their mothers. (Joel Stein LA Times, September 12, 2008)

But her place on the Republican ticket was also meant to firm up the conservative base. One could go so far as to describe John McCain's relationship with the religious right as hostile. During his campaign for the Republican nomination in 2000 he had denounced popular evangelical leaders,

Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, as “agents of intolerance” and referred to the political tactics of the religious right as “corrupting influences on religion and politics, and those who practice them in the name of religion or in the name of the Republican Party or in the name of America shame our faith, our party and our country.” (CNN, February 8, 2000) Going into the 2008 campaign, evangelical support for John McCain remained lukewarm. Back in February, influential social conservative, James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, gave what the Boston Globe called an anti-endorsement to Republican primary frontrunner John McCain on conservative talk radio. He stated, "I am convinced Sen. McCain is not a conservative, and in fact, has gone out of his way to stick his thumb in the eyes of those who are. He has at times sounded more like a member of the other party." He went on to say he that he could not and would not vote for John McCain as a matter of conscience. (Boston Globe February 2008) And, as time went by the problem wasn't going away. As David Domke, author of the book, [The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America](#), wrote in the Seattle Times July 16, 2008, “John McCain was no George W. Bush.” He supported embryonic stem cell research, opposed amending the constitution to ban gay marriage, and supported exceptions to an all out ban on abortions. According to Domke, McCain had a dilemma and couldn't win without the support of the evangelicals.

The appearance of Sarah Palin at McCain's side instantly appeased the religious right. Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council, told CNN's John Roberts on September 8, 2008, “John McCain made an incredible

selection. He has turned around the campaign that I think was moving south, and there's enthusiasm, excitement and hope among social conservative voters.”

James Dobson called her God's answer to a lot of people's prayers. Mat Staver, Phyllis Schlafly, Rev. Jonathan Falwell, Jerry Falwell, Jr. and a long list of other prominent social conservatives endorsed her candidacy with similar delight.

(Rightwing Watch, Sept. 2, 2008))

In the September 9 issue of the Washington Post, staff writers, Jon Cohen and Dan Balz credited her with having done the job to deliver white women voters:

Sen. John McCain has wiped away many of Sen. Barack Obama's pre-convention advantages, and the race for the White House is now basically deadlocked at 47 percent for Obama and 46 percent for McCain among registered voters, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll. Much of the shift toward McCain stems from gains among white women, voters his team hoped to sway with the pick of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his vice presidential candidate. White women shifted from an eight-point pre-convention edge for Obama to a 12-point McCain advantage now. (Cohen and Balz, September 9, 2008)

That same poll had her clocking in at an unusually high 59% favourability rating.

But there was a Sarah-mania building in early September that can only partially be captured by the polls. There were other indicators like the fact that she was quadrupling the crowds at McCain's rallies or that kids were skipping school to stand in line with 23,000 others to wait hours to see her. According to Yahoo Canada, "Palin was the most searched-for politician among internet-surfing Canadians for the week ending September 25, getting almost 10 times



the searches of Prime Minister Stephen Harper”. (Alberts, Canwest News Service, Oct. 2, 2008) And, this was in the middle of a Canadian federal election. One UK-based Daily Mail reporter, covering the story from Washington observed, “Not since Princess Diana's death can I recall ever walking into a newsagent and seeing just one woman's face staring out from every cover”. (Platell, Sept. 20, 2008) By the end of September, KMBC TV in Kansas City was reporting that retailers across the country couldn't keep up with demand for her trademark \$800 Kazuo Kawasaki #704 eyeglasses. (Inside Look at Palin's Specks, YouTube, Oct. 22, 2008) Fashion news was describing the “Naughty Monkey Double Dare” red pumps she wore to her first rally in Ohio and again at the vice presidential debate as “flying off the shelves”. Suite 101 reported that

The spike in sales initially took retailers by surprise. The brand is generally geared to 20-something women who go clubbing, and not generally favored by 40-something politicians. Naughty Monkey considers itself as an edgy and hip brand, with celebrities like Paris Hilton being photographed wearing its shoes. (Suite 101, Oct. 4, 2008)

According to Yahoo.com searches for Sarah Palin Halloween costumes made the top ten for 30 straight days. “Never before have American voters met a national politician quite like Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin”. (Peter Wallsten, LA Times, Oct. 4, 2008)

When she winked, wrinkled her nose, dropped her g's, and peppered her speeches with “you betcha's” and “dogone it's”, Sarah Palin was following in the

time-honoured tradition that had worked so well for Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. She was courting the working class vote by casting herself as one of them. Her speech patterns were a constant reminder of what she'd told them at the convention: she was "just your average hockey mom" and she 'got them'. "I pledge to you that if we are elected, you will have a friend and advocate in the White House", she told her enthralled listeners. She was also contrasting her image to that of the so-called liberal elite in the Democratic Party. That her target audience heard her is captured in this quote attributed to a woman in the crowd at one of her rallies.

She justifies what we do every day. She does what we do, she lives like we do. She's just as flawed as we are. There are more American parents with unwed pregnant teenage children than American parents with Harvard graduates. She's real. (Platell, Sept. 20, 2008)

And, on Election Day, in the 'only poll that counts', Sarah Palin's personal narrative helped to deliver the majority of white working class votes to John McCain. Exit interviews conducted for CNN indicate that 53% of white women voted for the McCain/Palin ticket and 58% of white voters with less than a college education voted for them. (CNN, Election 2008). That Palin helped the Republican ticket more than she hurt it was confirmed by exit polls conducted for the New York Times. More voters stated that Palin's presence on the ticket was one of the reasons they voted for the Republicans than voters who indicated it was a reason they voted against them. (NYT, Election 2008)

There is a lot to be said about the significance of Sarah Palin's personal narrative, the fact that so many white working class voters identify with it, and the possibility that identity motivated them to vote for her. But, I'd like to set that aside for the moment and concentrate on Republican political positioning over a longer period of time. Sarah Palin's party is widely recognized as the one that represents the interests of Big Business. So how is it that a Republican, even one of humble background, gets away with claiming common cause with "The People"? Indeed, why is it that she, a small town 'gal' and wife of a union member, became a Republican in the first place?

In What's the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America, Thomas Frank confirms that it would be reasonable for an observer of American politics to conclude that it is "the Democrats (that) are the party of the workers, the poor and the victimized". (Frank 2004: 1) The fact that there are poor communities that voted overwhelmingly for George W. Bush he calls a "derangement". He as much as calls it a class betrayal. Tongue-in-cheek, he advises anyone making more than \$300,000 a year to raise a glass to the indigent Republicans whose "self-denying votes" relieved them of the burden of estate taxes, labour unions, and bank regulations. Most of the book stands as a record of this unnatural alliance, between workers and bosses, Wall St. and Main St., in his home state of Kansas, where one of the early victories in the conservative revolution took place. Presented in the spirited tones of a battle cry and with all the passion of a repatriated soldier, Frank reveals the enemy's battle plan, uncovers the secrets of their culture war weapons, describes some of the

battle scenes, profiles some of their field commanders, and documents the devastation left behind. The tragedy that Frank wants us to appreciate is that for working people this is the wrong war. An army of prairie farmers, public school teachers, and factory workers have been mobilized into a war against liberalism. They were recruited from under our noses during what he calls “The Great Backlash”, the conservative reaction to the social gains made by women and other disadvantaged groups in the 1960’s and 70’s. He elaborates on the definition in a subsequent In These Times interview

What I mean by that term is populist conservatism. It’s this angry right-wing sensibility that speaks in—or pretends to speak in—the voice of the working class. It got its start, more or less, in 1968, with the candidacy of George Wallace. The issues that the Backlash has embraced have changed a lot over the years. In the early days it was pretty much racist. Today, you have the same angry, hard-done-by sensibility, but it’s attached to different issues – the most famous being abortion, and, in this latest election, gay marriage. (Frank 12/01/05)

Social conservatives were able to exploit people’s initial confusion and fear of the magnitude of social change that was happening in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. According to a theory that will be explained more fully later in this paper, cognitive linguist, George Lakoff would have said that people did not have the cognitive frames to comprehend the paradigmatic shifts in values and morals that was occurring. Naomi Klein, author of The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism (2007) would have said that the right wing took advantage of the public’s disorientation in a time of crisis to re-frame “normal”. Frank lays a lot

of the blame at the feet of liberals for not staking out their turf and engaging sooner in the battle for hearts and minds. Rather, he says, the rightwing were left with a fairly unimpeded opportunity to redefine the terms of engagement. They were able to transform what Frank sees as a left populism based on social classes, the little guy against big business interests, into everyone against the liberal elite. In the new polarity, according to Frank, battle lines are drawn between the god-fearing, hard-working, patriotic, honest, humble, and decent salts of the earth on one side and the arrogant, pretentious, over-educated, parasitic, weak, effete, “latte liberals” on the other side. The liberal elite is to be condemned for their un-American taste in clothing, food, and cars, their fancy professional titles, and their condescending tones. These transgressions have come to matter as much as their defence of social justice and equality. Conservatives have managed to repackage class. It’s no longer about money, birth or occupation. Now it’s about “authenticity” – what one drives, where one shops, and how one prays. (Frank 2004:113) And, if this definition of the enemy is too vague, there is a host of rightwing radio and television personalities such as Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, G. Gordon Liddy, and Bill O’Reilly to identify their markings for us. These drill sergeants in the culture war can also be counted on to rally the troops with what Frank calls “plen-T-plaints”.

Everything seems to piss conservatives off, and they react by documenting and cataloguing their disgust. The result is what we will call the plen-t-plaint, a curious amassing of petty, unrelated beefs with the world. Its purpose is not really to evaluate the hated liberal culture that surrounds us; the plen-t-plaint is a horizontal rather than a vertical mode of criticism, aiming instead to infuriate us with dozens, hundreds,

thousands of stories of the many tiny ways the world around us assaults family values, uses obscenities, disrespects parents, foments revolution, and so on. The plen-t-plaint winds us up. It offers no resolution, simply reminds us that we can never win. (Frank 2004:123)

The consequence of The Great Backlash, Frank tells us, is that the working class has become cannon fodder in a culture war they are never meant to win. "Abortion is never halted. Affirmative action is never abolished. The culture industry is never forced to clean up its act." Then why do the generals want them to take this particular hill? One can deduce from Frank that it is a war game designed to distract them from the primary target and keep them from abandoning the field. "The leaders of the backlash may talk Christ, but they walk corporate." The culture warriors stir up an anger in the 'flyover states' that propels their citizens into the polling booth to

*Vote* to stop abortion; receive a rollback in capital gains tax. *Vote* to make our country strong again; receive deindustrialization. *Vote* to screw those politically correct college professors; receive electricity deregulation. *Vote* to get government off our backs; receive conglomeration and monopoly everywhere from media to meatpacking. *Vote* to stand tall against terrorism; receive Social Security privatization. *Vote* to strike a blow against elitism; receive a social order in which wealth is more concentrated than ever before in our lifetimes, in which workers have been stripped of power and CEOs are rewarded in a manner beyond imagining. (Frank 2004:7)

It was Sarah Palin who re-ignited the culture war in the fall of 2008. By choosing to give birth to a baby she knew would have Downs Syndrome she established herself as a kindred spirit to the anti-abortionists. Her passion for

hunting and gun freedom endeared her to the owners of firearms. She was born in Idaho in the very heartland of Red State America and grew up in small town Alaska, a point she stressed to define herself at the Republican Convention. Her son was being deployed to Iraq on September 11, of all days. She was a fundamentalist Christian. But her role was to be more than a symbolic reminder of conservative social values. She was an active combatant in the culture war and while she rarely spoke directly about wedge issues she did go out of her way to stir up antagonism against what she called “the permanent political establishment”, of which she implied Barack Obama was a part. While she referred to him by name only once in her convention speech, she managed to sneeringly turn his accomplishments, including the fact that he was a published author, into evidence of his liberal elitism. Belittling his experience as a community organizer reminded her audience that Obama was a city slicker. She tagged him with what right wing populists would view as one of the scariest features of the liberal elite, big government and high taxes.

Frank calls the culture war a “French Revolution in reverse – one in which the sans culottes pour down the streets demanding more power for the aristocrats.” (Frank 2004:8) Frank’s analysis reminds us that the senior partners in this class alliance are not fooled by the sophistry that politics is only about social issues. They have always known that the real prize is economic and for them the spoils of war have been unprecedented. In his more recent book, The Wrecking Crew (2008), Frank documents how profitable the Republican Administration has been for big business. In his Rolling Stone article, “The Great

Wealth Transfer”, economist Paul Krugman tells us that the income gap between the rich and everyone else is ten times greater than it was in the last generation. Fifty per cent of Bush’s 2001 tax cuts went to the richest 5% of the population and the richest 1% saw a tax savings of \$44,000 on average. Not only did most American save only a few hundred dollars on their tax bill, the “starve the beast” strategy made deep cuts to Social Security and other public programs to pay for the tax cuts. (Krugman 2006)

Writing just after the 2004 election and George W. Bush’s second victory, Frank suggests that Democrats and liberals are partially to blame for their own defeat. He calls the Clinton Administration’s attempts to accommodate the right, dubbed the policy of “triangulation”, a stroke of “purest folly”. He notes that while the “Cons” were “busily polarizing the electorate, the Dems were meekly seeking the centre” and the left was stranded without an organizing base. Once the economic policies of the Republicans and Democrats had become virtually indistinguishable, all that remained to tell them apart was their stand on abortion and guns. (Frank 2004:176-177) In a February 5, 2009 interview on the Alcove, Frank applies his analysis to the 2008 election. It is his contention that Obama had been heading down the same path of moderation taken by previous Democratic candidates but “made a sharp turn to the left at the convention”. It is Frank’s contention that voters who had once been persuaded by conservative populism came back to the fold when the stock market crashed in September and Obama began campaigning on the economy.



Prolific social commentator, Barbara Ehrenreich would agree with Thomas Frank that working class voters have become susceptible to right wing rhetoric. She would also agree with him that the right wing didn't just steal the working class; the liberals gave them away. But while one can turn to Frank for an analysis of what American social conservatism was doing to win the culture war, Ehrenreich offers some illuminating insights into why liberalism was losing it.

In Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class, Barbara Ehrenreich suggests that the roots of the retreat from liberalism can be found in what she calls "the dogma of American classlessness". An economic boom characterized the decades following World War II and "affluence had come to encase American society like a middle-aged girth." Blue-collar workers were sharing in the abundance. They were buying houses in the suburbs and sending their kids to college. It looked to many as if the United States had risen above the social injustice and inequality that still plagued other parts of the world and everyone was "happily joining the universal middle class." (Ehrenreich 1989:19)

Not only was the middle becoming bloated by having absorbed the working class, the post war economy was creating an explosion of new middle class occupations. Engineers, scientists, managers, designers, marketers, and planners were just some of the new jobs that emerged in great numbers to feed the growing corporate machine. An also expanding government sector was creating more professions in health, education, and public service. Not having accepted the myth of American classlessness, Harry Braverman goes to great lengths in Labour and Monopoly Capitalism to differentiate the jobs that make up

the classes in the mid twentieth century. Although, he is more likely to conclude that, under monopoly capitalism, it was the new professionals who joined the working class rather than the other way around. (Braverman 1974:403) The magnitude of his project is made even more impressive by the realization that he was working with data provided in an era when official sources didn't readily acknowledge social class as a useful distinction. Braverman defines the working class as "the class which, possessing nothing but its power to labor, sells that power to capital in return for its subsistence."(Braverman 1974:378) He acknowledges that that definition, like all definitions, is limited by being static. But he calls it a good starting point from which to visualize the working class. He reminds us that, as Marx himself understood, the class structure is a relationship, subject to change, rather than a fixed entity. (Braverman 1974:409) Using U.S. census and Department of Labour data, he identifies the jobs that are unmistakably working class and, because they are getting a lot more than subsistence in exchange for their labour, he excludes foremen, agents, and brokers. He suspects that chefs have been included among the ranks of food services workers and would exclude them for their executive powers if he could find them in the statistics. He wonders whether or not to include the police in the working class. In the final analysis he concludes that their numbers are too small to affect the overall picture of the degradation of work it is his aim to bring into focus. Next, he turns to the "middle layer". He is challenged by it, because unlike the old middle class that was defined by being outside of the labour-capital

relationship, the new middle class is part of the system. It exists to service capital. He distinguishes them from senior corporate executives who

by virtue of their high managerial positions, personal investment portfolios, independent power of decision, place in the hierarchy of the labor process, position in the community of capitalists at large, etc. etc., are the rulers of industry, act professionally for capital, and are themselves part of the class that personifies capital and employs labor. (Braverman 1974:405)

Because so many of the professional middle class exercise some degree of authority delegated from above, they help to control, command and organize the mass of labour beneath them. Furthermore, their pay is usually significant enough to be seen as a share in the surplus rather than simply as an exchange for their labour power. But, observes Braverman, the new middle class not only possesses attributes of the capitalist, it exhibits some of the characteristics of the working class as well. Their share in the “prerogatives and rewards of capital” is after all “petty” and, especially those who work in mass employment, such as nurses and teachers, are vulnerable to being rationalized. (Braverman 1974:407) He cautiously anticipates the proletarianization of at least the lower ranks of the new middle class.

And if union formation is an indicator of proletarianization then Braverman predicted accurately. Today, the largest union in the United States is the National Education Association, representing college instructors, teachers and other staff in the school system. The American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), representing public sector and healthcare workers, is

among the top four largest unions. At the same time, the sector most readily identifiable as working class has been shrinking dramatically. In the ten-year period between 1981 and 1991, 1.5 million manufacturing jobs disappeared in the United States. Some were exported to the subsistence wage zones of the Third World but most were eliminated by technology. (Rifkin 1995) Today, the goods producing sector has been reduced to a mere 13% of the American workforce and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics expects another 1.5 million manufacturing jobs to disappear before 2016. Referring to the “high wages and various social benefits” enjoyed by American workers in the early twentieth century, Gramsci may have written that “hegemony here is born in the factory,” (Forgas 1988: 278) but his theory of historical bloc formation is particularly suited to an era like today when the blue collar working class no longer makes up the majority of the workforce.

Ehrenreich makes a profound observation about the middle class, one around which an alliance with blue-collar workers could be formed:

Located well below the ultimate elite of wealth and power, its only “capital” is knowledge and skill or at least the credentials imputing skill and knowledge. And unlike real capital, these cannot be hoarded against hard times, preserved beyond the lifetime of an individual, or, of course, bequeathed. (Ehrenreich 1989:15)

Yet, while the fact that they rely on their labour power for subsistence is a condition the middle class share with the working class, as Ehrenreich also points out, their relationship to their labour creates another useful way to tell the

classes apart. “The working class must work – often at uncomfortable or repetitive tasks – for money and find its pleasures elsewhere.” (Ehrenreich 1989:261) One doesn’t usually think about waitressing as one’s calling or mechanics taking their work home with them. The middle class, on the other hand, expects to find pleasure and fulfillment in their work, usually, for which they have undergone an extensive, expensive, and intensive period of training. It’s not unusual for the middle class to view their jobs as arenas for personal growth. Yet, as Ehrenreich also reminds us, one could grow up in the middle class in the mid-twentieth century “without the vaguest suspicion that human beings might be lumped, quite involuntarily, into a few large groupings defined by income, opportunity, and lifestyle.” (Ehrenreich 1989:24)

The new trappings of affluence that were being displayed by the working class who now moved among them in the suburbs were shielding the middle class from this awareness. As well, points out Ehrenreich, there was a concerted effort in the McCarthy era to erase the working class.

The anticommunism of the fifties had thrown an embarrassing light on the sociological fascination with inequality, or “stratification” as it was more genteelly termed. The full-blooded, old-fashioned notion “class” – as in *class struggle* – was now suspect and un-American, part of a left-wing heritage that mainstream intellectuals were fast repudiating.

Classlessness had become part of America’s official ideology, and those who believed otherwise risked being driven from their teaching posts and rejected by publishers. (Ehrenreich 1989:25)

If the new socializing medium of the 1950's was the television, then the self-image being beamed back to Americans who could afford televisions was distinctly middle class, as represented by *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver*. It wasn't until *All in the Family* hit the screen in 1970 that the working class was rediscovered, and only then with mixed messages. Thinking like Gramsci, one recognizes popular culture, of which television is a powerful medium, as an arena in which ideology is shaped, but also challenged.

But, just because class was hidden didn't mean it no longer existed. While the language for talking about class may have been taken away from them, the lived experience of class distinction remained. Americans found new ways to tell each other apart. "In fact, the era of official classlessness was also an era of intense preoccupation with the innumerable little clues distinguishing one layer of taste and achievement from another." (Ehrenreich 1989:24) The middle class began to make careful consumer choices to signal their existence to each other and establish their status, especially in relation to the working class. The middle class sipped martinis while the working class drank rye and ginger; the middle class vacationed in Europe and the working class went camping; the middle class dined on coq au vin but the working class ate roast chicken. The working class might have moved out to the suburbs but they filled their houses with the wrong furniture.

Even today, it's not fashionable to talk about the working class but most of us are familiar with the stereotypes. They are not very flattering. In an article that earned her a flood of death threats and for which the CBC later apologized, left-

leaning Canadian columnist, Heather Mallick, categorized Sarah Palin supporters as “white trash”. She defined them as “rural, loud, unlettered, suspicious of the urban, frankly disbelieving of the foreign, and a fan of the American clique of authenticity.” She went even further to single out Sarah Palin as representative of the type:

... sturdy body, clothes that are clinging yet boxy and a voice that could peel the plastic seal off your new microwave. Palin has a toned-downed version of the porn actress look favoured by this decade’s women, the overtreated hair, puffy lips, and permanently alarmed expression.” (Mallick Sept. 9/08)

In The Hidden Injuries of Class, sociologists Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, analyze the results of their extensive interviews with working people from Boston in the early 1970’s. Their conclusions are both revealing and heartbreaking. They log countless examples of hurt, some intentional, some systemic and some self-inflicted, and in them they discover some instructive patterns. Once they had untangled the confusion of feelings, they discovered that many of the interviewees believed, at least sub-consciously, that people of a higher class had the right to judge them because they were internally more developed as human beings. Furthermore, they were afraid they themselves deserved to be disrespected because they were less developed as humans. This was complicated, when they were not comparing themselves to their image of the higher class, by a belief that while the upper class are better people, the work they do has less dignity than manual labour. (Sennett and Cobb 1972: 25) The interviews also revealed that well-paid skilled trades people derived no self-

esteem from their money power because it came to them collectively rather than from their individual inner strength. They also found evidence that, in a so-called classless society, the rituals of interclass communication are missing and the lower classes can suffer indignities they would be spared in a society where class is acknowledged. Finally, working class breadwinners felt a tremendous pressure to provide their families with the means to get out of the working class. Their choices were shaped and constricted by that pressure and they expressed fear that they would lose respect, especially from their children, if they could not provide them with the means of escape.

If Sennett and Cobb were correct in their analysis, then working people would have known intuitively, before the “discovery” of the working class in 1968 (Ehrenreich 1989) which Sennett and Cobb may have helped us to find, that switching to martinis would not gain them entry into the middle class. Knowing that the martini was a superior beverage, the sign of a more highly developed human, had to come from within. Setting aside working class consciousness and pride for a moment, this may explain why many working class people hang on to their own way of life; they don't believe they have it in themselves to pull off the middle class lifestyle without being exposed as a fraud and therefore losing even more dignity.

According to Sennett and Cobb, the need to rank ourselves in society came as an “unintended consequence of Enlightenment humanism”. Their argument is that, while most Enlightenment humanists never intended to preach such a doctrine, the modern belief in social equality is the direct result of the



union of two Enlightenment ideas, that all humans deserve respect and that all humans have the potential within themselves to reason and understand. But, according to Sennett and Cobb, there is a flaw in this humanism. For, while we all may be born equal, we do not all bring forth our potential in equal measure. If one's station in life is no longer determined by God, but by the enactment of one's inner potential, then respect and dignity must be allotted by degrees according to the amount of individual potential developed. The very belief in basic equality implants a "secret self-accusation" because one suspects that the greater privileges of rank displayed by another are earned by the power within that person, the character, to realize themselves. "In other words, social differences can now appear as questions of character, of moral resolve, will and competence."

The lesson of this historic flaw is that once respect is made the reward for human ability, no matter if the ability is seen potentially in all, the stage is set for all the dangers of individualism: loneliness for those who are called the possessors, a feeling of individual guilt for those who do not come off as well. (Sennett and Cobb 1972:256)

The dangers are all the more acute under American capitalism where one's level of development is seen to be reflected in one's work and yet where the symbols of development are constantly changing. "The striving to become a developed, and therefore respect-able, person is an incentive that keeps men [*sic*] consuming and working hard." (Sennett and Cobb 1989:258)

Robert W. Fuller would go further. In Somebodies and Nobodies (2003), he argues that “rankism” is the “mother of all isms” and is an attitude that sits at the root of other more outwardly dangerous forms such as racism, sexism and homophobia.

Rankism erodes the will to learn, distorts personal relationships, taxes economic productivity, and stokes ethnic hatred. It is the cause of dysfunctionality, and sometimes even violence in families, schools, and the workplace. (Fuller 2003:3)

Where does the “flaw of Enlightenment humanism” leave the extremely poor? As Ehrenreich points out in Fear of Falling, in the absence of a class analysis, post-war society viewed poverty as a condition. “It was not poverty that had to be cured, only the culture of poverty. Before the poor could be made affluent, they had to be made ‘human beings.’ ” (Ehrenreich 1989:53) This meant curing them of their “present-orientedness” and shiftlessness. Thus, in 1964, the Democrats embarked on the War On Poverty, which, of course, concentrated on Black Americans because they made up a disproportionate percentage of the poor. Thus carved out from rest of the working class, Black Americans became targets for a complex mixture of white working class resentment. Not only would the white working class have been exhibiting a tendency to judge those poorer than themselves, as Sennett and Cobb suggest, they would have resented their own invisibility. Their frustration, expressed in the working class vernacular, showed itself as bigotry. Ehrenreich seems to think the white working class has gotten a bad rap. No one had asked them for their opinions. It was the middle class liberal who came up with desegregation and affirmative action but it was

the working class family that was on the front line in the neighbourhood and the workplace. It was not the middle class liberal who would become “less human” by being displaced in the pecking order.

That these resentments persist today is captured in Alexandra Pelosi’s HBO documentary, *Right America Feeling Wronged: Some Voices from the Campaign Trail*. Says one interviewee, “We’re the backbone of this country. We’re hardworkin’, blue-collared workers that keep this country runnin’. He (Obama) talks like he knows us. He doesn’t know us.” Says another with tears in his eyes, “We used to be top dog. Now we’re nothin’. The immigrants have everything. Try asking the government for help. This used to be a hell of good country. I don’t know what happened.”

While The Hidden Injuries of Class exposes the impact on working class people of having come up short on the human dignity scale, Fear of Falling zeros in on what happens to middle class people, when they try to hold on to their place in the hierarchy. In the process of documenting the middle class retreat from liberalism, Ehrenreich illuminates a dynamic that may have later helped to drive a wedge between the Democrats and their working class base. Writing in 1989, she still sees a strong bond but is already detecting signs of the New Right’s strategy to woo them away. According to Ehrenreich the working class were “discovered” in 1968 when a poll showed that 56% of Americans sympathized with the police during their confrontation with protesters at the Democratic convention in Chicago. She quotes news commentators expressing their shock at having overlooked such a large segment of the public. Richard

Nixon dubbed them the Silent Majority and what followed was a concerted effort to find out who they were. She reports gross distortions on the part of the media, Hollywood, and academia, all of whom she would categorize as being in the professional middle class, that not only misattributed bigoted statements to workers, but stereotyped the working class as being male, racist, white and brutish, in short, as being Archie Bunker.

Blue-collar support for the segregationist Presidential candidate, George Wallace, is often offered as proof of working class conservatism, but Ehrenreich argues that the level of that support was overstated. (Ehrenreich 1989: 126) She also reminds us that he campaigned on a platform of expanded social welfare programs and labour rights. She does acknowledge that “he appealed to the resentments rather than the hopes of ordinary folks” but goes on to argue that those resentments sprang from class anger rather than race hatred. She cites a detailed survey of blue-collar supporters in Gary, Indiana that showed that, while they were strongly resentful of what they perceived as black gains, their strongest resentments were reserved for the white-collar middle class. (Ehrenreich 1989:128)

Why were they so angry with the middle class? Ehrenreich rejects the notion that it was “part of the old American problem of anti-intellectualism”. Rather, she suggests that there were “solid and immediate reasons for working-class hostility.” (Ehrenreich 1989:129) She cites the Vietnam War as one example. Poor working class kids had to fight while middle class kids were exempted from service by their student deferments and the much-televised

student protests acted as constant reminders. They also reminded workers that they themselves couldn't afford college educations. Furthermore, as the post-war boom was coming to an end, an income gap was growing and working people were beginning to feel vulnerable. But even these grievances were constructed on what Ehrenreich calls an "ancient antagonism", one that was rooted in the class structure and is "as old as the professional class itself." Historically, the professional middle class emerged between 1870 and 1920 during a period of intense class conflict between workers and the bosses.

The emerging professional middle class stepped into the fray in the role of peacemakers. Their message to the capitalists was that nonviolent social control would in the long run be more effective than bullets and billy clubs. Mines and mills did not have to be hotbeds of working class sedition; they could be run more smoothly by trained, "scientific" managers. Working class families did not have to be perpetual antagonists to capitalist society; they could be "Americanized" by teachers and social workers and eventually seduced by ad men and marketing experts. Almost every profession or would-be profession, from sociology to home economics, had something to offer in the great task of "taming" the American working class. (Ehrenreich 1989:134)

Even today, many working people experience workplace professionals as agents of the boss, on site to keep them in line either directly as supervisors or indirectly as, for example, company nurses or organizational planners. And as Sennett and Cobb found out in their Boston study, workers often translate this resentment into the common perception that middle class professionals don't do anything; they just stand around while the workers work. It's captured in the aphorism, "Those

who can't, teach." But perhaps Ehrenreich's most telling observation is that "for working class people, relations with the middle class are usually a one-way dialogue". (Ehrenreich 1989:139) At work they tell them how to do their jobs and rate their abilities, and outside of work their physician pronounces on their habits and lifestyle, the teacher at the local school assesses their children's learning disabilities, or maybe the bank manager makes judgements about their credit worthiness. Then, when they turn on the television, experts are telling them what is going on in the world. It's a top down communication that commands, instructs, diagnoses, judges, interprets and defines.

It was perhaps this sensitivity that sparked the famously angry reaction to Obama's comments about the working class during the primaries. He was explaining to a privileged crowd at a San Francisco fundraiser why working class voters in Pennsylvania were not more responsive to his campaign. He observed that over the last 25 years they had lost their jobs, their pensions, and their health care. "It's not surprising then that they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations." For that, he was accused of displaying an "affluent, educated, Ivy League sense of self-righteousness and entitlement". (Walsh 2008) Months later, Palin resurrected the controversy at the Republican convention, implying that he had insulted working people behind their backs. Some of Pelosi's interviewees remembered it as Obama having laughed at them. Thinking like Gramsci, one suspects that Obama's real transgression was that he tried to de-mystify American common

sense. The incident should stand as a reminder that it is through common sense that individuals are reconciled to a world that is irrational and out of control and participate in their own exploitation.

But not far below the surface of the apparently shared American experience one can discover a profound class divide. Ehrenreich suggests that it is exacerbated by language. She contends that the middle class and the working class have difficulty understanding each other because they don't speak the same language. The middle class is more likely to speak the impersonal and abstract language of critical discourse. Ehrenreich says it hides the speaker in a "gauze of impersonal rhetoric" that makes the idea and the speaker seem grander. (Ehrenreich 1989:259) John, a Polish American machinist, summarizes the impact this has on the working class listener:

I turn on that television station we've got, and it's better than a comedy show. The way they speak on those talk shows! The announcer, with his phony English accent! And the things they say, it makes you want to go and smash the damn set! They're full of long lectures and they're always "reconsidering" something... There are times when I completely agree with them, but it's their *attitude* that gets you. They're conceited. (Ehrenreich 1989:142)

On the other hand, the working class speak in a vernacular, which according to Ehrenreich, the middle class finds unintelligible, inarticulate, and unworthy. If one thinks this judgement is too harsh, witness Huffington Post's slide show of the funniest posters seen at anti-health care reform rallies during the summer of 2009. Many are deemed to be funny because of misspelling or incomprehensibility. Or, chuckle at Vanity Fair's July 20, 2009, edited version of

Sarah Palin's resignation speech. "There is simply no way for the working class or poor person to capture the attention of middle class personnel without seeming rude or insubordinate." (Ehrenreich 1989:139) Today, she might add "crazy". A significant factor in Sarah Palin's appeal during the election was that she spoke working class. What many of them heard when she spoke in the vernacular was that she valued and respected them.

Ehrenreich leaves us with a picture of a working class who have been ignored, neglected, patronized, and ridiculed by their privileged relatives. She goes on to recount how the New Right methodically took advantage of a troubled relationship to alienate working class affections. The New Right was a movement created in 1974 when several conservative organizations began to coordinate their work. Funded by wealthy right-wingers, it established its own think tanks and expanded throughout the 1970's to include an assortment of anti-abortion, anti-gun control, pro-business, and law and order affiliates. By 1979 it had established its right-wing religious member organization, The Moral Majority.

But the men who created the New Right recognized that traditional conservatism, especially on economic issues, has an inherently limited appeal. If the right was to move beyond its blue-blood constituency and tuxedoed image, it would have to follow the trail Wallace had blazed into America's smokestack cities and blue-collar suburbs. It would need new issues, and, if it was to successfully mobilize the resentments of Middle America, it would need a new enemy. (Ehrenreich 1989:162)

The New Right began cultivating scattered constituencies of angry Middle America that started with opposition to school bussing, moved on to feminist



backlash issues such as abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, and finally found expression in religious opposition to gay rights, opposition to teaching evolution and sex education in schools, and the restoration of prayers in public schools. Quoting one of the authors of the New Right, Richard Viguerie, she draws attention to the grafted nature of their agenda. “We talk about issues that people care about, like gun control, abortion, taxes, and crime. Yes, they’re emotional issues, but that’s better than talking about capital formation.” According to Ehrenreich, “social issues were the only hope for winning the working class and Middle Americans over to an economic agenda that was unabashedly old right- anti-labor and pro-business.” (Ehrenreich 1989:163)

But, as Ehrenreich also points out, the New Right needed to define an enemy. Knowing that racialized scapegoating would no longer fly, they found a safer target in what Wallace had, with some success, called the “pointy-headed professors”. These were the liberal elite, or New Class, as Irving Kristol, godfather of neo-conservatism and the actual father of Sarah Palin patron, William Kristol, called them. (Kristol 1978) The label was a right wing construction that was meant to describe a vast range of professionals who worked in the expanding public sector, media and education. They could be teachers, scientists, journalists, psychologists, social workers, city planners, lawyers, judges, or physicians. They were characterized as self-serving advocates of the welfare state, upon which their careers depended. They were said to oppose capitalism and their belief in equality was impugned as a front behind which they pursued power. Today, the liberal elite is more familiar as “latte liberals”, also

known as limousine liberals, Lexus liberals, or Lear jet liberals. These are all pejorative terms meant to expose the hypocrisy of wealthy people who support progressive causes from which they themselves are shielded. Edward Kennedy's support for school bussing even though his children attended private schools earned him that title. Advocates of the more expensive options of organic agriculture or electric cars have been called latte liberals. Hollywood celebrities who speak out on social issues are vulnerable to this label. They are portrayed as being out-of-touch with the daily grind of ordinary people. This characterization was used successfully against Democratic presidential candidate, Michael Dukakis, in 1988, Al Gore in 2000, and John Kerry in 2004. (Kornacki 2007) Sarah Palin tried to use it against Barack Obama when she sneered at him for having been a community organizer and misrepresented his comments about Pennsylvania workers. Regardless of the incarnation, the modus operandi of the liberal elite was seen to be the same: they wanted to take something away from hard working Americans, usually to give it to the undeserving poor and always to enhance their own power.

Having so labelled the liberal elite, the conditions were in place to re-draft the "social map of the electorate (into something) which seemed to offer the right a clear path to power." Building on the clean slate of American classlessness, the right now created the idea that there were four classes. There were the owners and CEO's of big business at the top. Just below them was the liberal elite. They stood above the working class whom the right had expanded to include small business. At the very bottom were the poor "who were already

being recast by the right as an immutable, hereditary underclass.” (Ehrenreich 1989:164) From these four classes they constructed two strategic blocs, the “producers” and the “non-producers.” The producers were the blue-collar workers who made things and the capitalists who paid them to do so. The non-producers were the New Class and the poor, both of whom parasitically relied on the labour of the other two classes. As Ehrenreich tells us, New Right strategist, William A. Rusher spelt all this out in his 1975 book, The Making of a New Majority Party. One can see how that characterization would resonate with some in the working class. They were already pre-disposed to the notion that the middle class professional didn’t do any real work and the idea that the poor were getting a free ride has never been very far below the surface in our society.

The stage had been set for the culture war. University of California cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, explains scientifically how the Right took and kept the offensive. In Thinking Points: Communicating Our American Values and Vision, (2006) Lakoff argues that “American values are inherently progressive but that progressives have lost their way...progressives have so taken these values for granted that we no longer have the ability to articulate a progressive vision.” (Lakoff 2006: xi) The language of American values has been ceded to the right and it has allowed them to define what such ideals as “freedom” and “liberty” actually mean. Lakoff argues that the right has seized power by dominating and controlling the terms of political debate. He writes to teach progressives how to get back in the game.

Lakoff contends that liberals and progressives have accepted the old, Enlightenment, view of reason that it is conscious, logical, unemotional, disembodied, based on perceived self-interest and open to rational discussion. Lakoff believes this view of reason to be scientifically false. His analysis is informed by recent developments in cognitive science. He accepts neurologist, Antonio Damasio's argument that Descartes's dualistic conception of reason and emotion was wrong, that, in fact, reason and emotion are dependent upon one another. Thus progressives and liberals leave unexamined the feelings of voters at their peril. People don't always make decisions based on "surface" rationality. Barbara Ehrenreich found this out when she went to live among the working poor for a year in 1998 and tried to survive on a series of waitressing and cleaning jobs. As she describes in Nickel and Dimed, On (Not) Getting By in America (2001), workers have social and emotional reasons for staying in bad jobs, some of which have to do with being too tired to look for another job and others that have to do with fears about starting over in a new peer group. The left's commitment to fact, truth, and logic has them endlessly trying to inform and teach the public whose capacity to learn, they mistakenly believe, is based on rational self-interest. They rely too much on hard fact to appeal to its audience, thinking that statistics and evidence will persuade voters. Rationalism, says Lakoff, is also what produces the long laundry list of unconnected issues that tend to make up progressive political platforms. So while Democrats are losing voters in a barrage of words and numbers, Republicans are pulling at their heartstrings.

Lakoff is calling for a new Enlightenment, a new conception of reason, a new understanding of what it means to be a human being, and therefore a new philosophy, that takes current scientific knowledge into consideration. In The Political Mind (2008), Lakoff states that to change minds one must change brains.

Lakoff points out that up to 98% of thought is unconscious, not so much because it is repressed as Freud would have concluded but because it happens so fast. While conscious thought is reflective, the “cognitive unconscious” is reflexive. That is, it is automatic and uncontrolled. Further, Lakoff explains, morality and politics are embodied ideas that function mostly in the cognitive unconscious. They are embodied in that they depend on our anatomy and physiological interaction with our environment. In other words, we are urged to remember that the primary role of a brain is to run a body.

Lakoff tells us that “our brains and minds work to impose a specific understanding of reality”. (Lakoff 2008:14) Since language is used to communicate thought, that is, externalize what is in the brain and mind, then language needs to be viewed in a new light as well. Language is a means of expressing, communicating, accessing, and even shaping thought. Words are defined relative to “frames” or the cognitive structures with which we think. In fact, it is in terms of small frames that we reason. We can’t hear the facts if we don’t have the frame that lets us understand them. Furthermore, there is no separation between facts and values in people’s brains. It’s our values that give meaning to facts. “Language fits reality to the extent it fits our body-and-brain

based understanding of reality.” In other words, there is a physiological explanation for the fact that the same words don’t always conjure up the same picture of reality for everyone.

One of the observations that is central to Lakoff’s theory of the political mind is that our brains are not structured to allow us to think just any thought. We lack the free will to do so. Our brains are tuned to activate certain thoughts when certain words are used. Hence the title of his book, Don’t Think of an Elephant (2004), in which he points out that when we are told not to think of an elephant we can’t stop ourselves from thinking of an elephant. The political implication of this phenomenon is that politicians can inadvertently reinforce their opponents’ messages when they try to refute them. He argues that the Democrats have a habit of activating the Republican’s frames.

Lakoff explains that frames are cognitive structures that are created with the brain’s neural circuitry. A simple frame might be “knife, fork, spoon” or “doctor, sick, hospital”. We learn simple frames as children, indeed, we are taught them in primary school. All words are defined in relationship to a conceptual frame. Simple frames can be combined to form more complex ones. This is made possible through neural binding whereby downstream neural signals nearer the muscles and sensory organs integrate with upstream signals in “convergence zones”. Binding circuitry creates new experiences. Neural binding also contributes to the time sense of a frame that turns it into an “executing schema”, more commonly known as an event. Frames can also be like scenarios or narratives that come with players, relationships and storylines.

Neural binding is what makes specific or new frames or narratives familiar enough to make sense. Lakoff also suggests that one of the reasons politicians continue to disappoint is because they are being compared to one's ideal narrative, which is "tidier". Neural binding also creates emotional experiences. The dopamine circuit carries positive emotions and the norepinephrine circuit carries negative ones. "Somatic markers" neurally bind emotions to the appropriate narrative located in a different part of the brain. There are many simple cultural narratives or frames that come with ready-made emotions. These include, for example, Rags to Riches, Reinvention of Self, or Woman's Lot in Life. As Lakoff also points there are no classical American narratives for some common experiences such as Cheap Labour Trap because it does not fit America's image of itself. He does point out that the feminist movement has been working on creating new narratives for women. Some narratives are mutually exclusive, like Innocent Ingenue or Calculating Bitch and when one picks one, the other becomes hidden. "Narratives have a powerful effect in hiding reality." (Lakoff 2008:37) As modern personality theory suggests, we live our narratives and the role we assume in our narratives give meaning to our lives.

The fact that we recognize these cultural narratives and frames mean that they are instantiated physically in our brains. We are not born with them but we start growing them soon, and as we acquire the deep narratives, our synapses change and become fixed. A large number of deep narratives can be activated together. We cannot understand other people without such cultural narratives. But more important, we cannot understand ourselves – who we are, who we have been, and where we want to go –

without recognising and seeing how we fit into cultural narratives.” (Lakoff 2008:33)

Lakoff also points out that we understand public figures, including politicians, through frames that are “activated and function unconsciously, automatically, and as a matter of reflex.”(Lakoff 2008:34)

It is also due to the way frames function that history often repeats itself. “Deep narratives are fixed in the brain; the synapses of the neural circuits characterizing them have been so strengthened that the highly general, deep narratives are permanently part of our brains. Neural binding allows these permanent general narrative structures to be applied to ever new special cases. “ (Lakoff 2008:38)

Lakoff introduces two further properties of the brain that explain why people feel attached to public events and identify with particular politicians and celebrities. Firstly, one uses the same part of the brain to see or move that one uses to imagine, remember, dream about, or understand language about seeing and moving. It is called “mental simulation” and it links imaginative stories to lived narratives. Another property is “mirror neuron circuitry”. It serves to integrate action and perception and controls empathy.

In short, some of the same neural structure in the brain that is used when we live out a narrative is also used when we see someone else living out that narrative, in real life or on TV, or if we imagine it when reading a book. This is what makes literature and art meaningful. (Lakoff 2008:40)



And, as Lakoff points out, “the fact that imagining and acting use much of the same neural structure has enormous political consequences”. For example, the Bush Administration was able to use people’s ability to imagine what it was like to experience a terrorist attack to cultivate support for a war and legitimate torture. Following this logic, one can see how a woman whose personal narrative is deeply tied up with Hockey Mom would identify with Sarah Palin. Conversely, a voter whose personal narrative is more along the lines of I Am My Brother’s Keeper would not.

Another concept from cognitive science that Lakoff uses to explain American politics today is the “conceptual metaphor” which is a device by which we link separate concepts. “Primary metaphors arise when two different kinds of experiences regularly occur together and activate two different brain areas at the same time, over and over.” (Lakoff 2008:94) If we commonly feel fear in the dark as children then darkness comes to be associated with “bad” or “wrong”. Similarly, because we are erect when we are healthy and prone when we are sick, “up” is associated with good and “down” with bad. These primary metaphors become metaphors for morality. More complex metaphors are built upon primary ones. One of the deep frames that Lakoff discovered empirically is the metaphor “government as family” and, as he points out, it is a universal one. The Fatherland and Mother Russia sound right. Founding Fathers sounds right: Founding Apples doesn’t. Lakoff suggests that our first experience of governance as children is the family and from that experience we structure an entire worldview. He proposes that for Americans there a two opposing metaphors

based on the idealized family, one is the strict father and the other is the nurturant parent. The right wing in America has successfully activated the strict father metaphor in those voters for whom that is the dominant model.

The strict father assumes that the world is and always will be dangerous and difficult, and that children are born bad and must be made good. The strict father is the moral authority who has to support and defend the family, tell the wife what to do, and teach his kids right from wrong. The only way to do that is through painful punishment – physical discipline that by adulthood will develop into internal discipline. Morality and survival jointly arise from such discipline – discipline to follow moral precepts and discipline to pursue your self-interest to become self-reliant. The good people are the disciplined people. Once grown, the self-reliant, disciplined children are on their own, and the father is not to meddle in their lives. Those children who remain dependent (who are spoiled, overly wilful, or recalcitrant) should be forced to undergo further discipline or should be cut free with no support to face the discipline of the outer world. (Lakoff 2004:)

As Lakoff points out, once you project this model onto to the nation you can see it in radical right wing politics. One can recognize the genesis of the notion that social programs spoil people, take away their self-discipline, and compensate them for their weak characters. Tax cuts on the other hand reward the best people who have demonstrated self-discipline. Gay marriage and abortion must be opposed because it undermines the strict father's authority, undermines his ability to teach discipline, and therefore ultimately puts the family at risk. An aggressive foreign policy is about defending the family in a dangerous world. To someone who identifies with the strict father model these policies would *feel* right. For, as cognitive science explains, the association of politics to the deep

frame is mostly unconscious. However, Lakoff suggests that while the voter may be making the connection unconsciously, conservatives have been deliberately establishing the Strict Father frame in people's brains, repeating it until it seems like common sense. One of his most dramatic examples of how this works is in reference to James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family. A quick trip to the Focus on the Family webpage, <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>, reveals a well-integrated resource system. It includes books, podcasts, radio and television programs and web links where parents can learn how to raise their families according to this model. The Focus on the Family webpage also has a section for lobbying legislators on such family-related issues as "the pro-gay agenda in your child's school". Dobson's book, Dare to Discipline, has sold more than 2 million copies since it was published in 1976, according to Indigo Books, and his 30 minute daily radio broadcast is carried by more than 1000 radio stations and reach "millions of Americans." Focus on the Family claims to reach more than 220 million people in 117 countries around the world.

Lakoff tells us that since Ronald Reagan came to power in 1980, the right has spent between 2 to 3 billion dollars to fund 43 think tanks but he is in no way suggesting that the right's strategy to influence voters is a sinister or underhanded plot. Rather, he repeatedly stresses that their tactics are simply taking into consideration the way the brain works. Part of his project is to teach the voter how the brain works so that unconscious political decisions become conscious. Further, he wants Democrats to be more deliberate about activating the opposing moral frame, nurturant family, which is more compatible with liberal

values that he defines as protection, fulfilment in life, freedom, opportunity, fairness, equality, prosperity, and community. While details of his re-framing program go beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that he contends that Barack Obama was the first Democratic presidential candidate to follow it.

A final aspect of Lakoff's theory that helps to explain the choices American voters make is that we all have both moral frames in our brains. Otherwise, a progressive wouldn't understand the strict father model enough to oppose it and vice versa. In fact, Lakoff goes so far as to say that Americans are biconceptual. By that he means that

Terms like "conservative," "liberal," and "progressive" do not, and cannot, do justice to the complex reality of our politics and our experience as humans. There are indeed two worldviews in use, general progressivism and general conservatism...but they do not exist in separate spheres. Though many self-identified "conservatives" use the general conservative worldview in areas that matter for them, they may use the general progressive worldview in other areas. The converse is true about self-identified "liberals" and "progressives". (Lakoff, 2008, p. 69)

For Lakoff the difference between the biconceptual liberal and conservative is identity. The liberal identifies with the nurturant parent model while the conservative identifies with the strict father model. What is significant about this notion is that Lakoff rejects the idea that there exists a political middle. He agrees with Frank that it is a mistake for liberals to try to capture the so-called "moderate" voter. But in Lakoff's terminology, trying to appeal to the centre is to

activate frames which right now are passive. Rather, he thinks liberals need to learn how to frame the debate in order to activate the nurturant parent model.

Interestingly enough, Lakoff has himself applied his theories to Sarah Palin's role in the 2008 presidential campaign. On September 1 of that year, he wrote in the Huffington Post that

The Republicans have long known (that candidates and external realities or issues are cognitively framed in voters minds from the perspective of a worldview), and the choice of Sarah Palin as their vice presidential candidate reflects their expert understanding of the political mind and political marketing. Democrats who simply belittle the Palin choice are courting disaster.

He goes on to say that her track record on issues may be irrelevant because her nomination is not basically about external realities but about the "symbolic mechanisms of the political mind". "Her job is to speak the language of conservatism, activate the conservative view of the world, and use the advantages that conservatives have in dominating political discourse." Lakoff describes Palin as the mom in the strict family in which John McCain is the dad.

Palin is tough: she shoots, skins, and eats caribou. She is disciplined: raising five kids with a major career. She lives her values: she has a Downs-syndrome baby that she refused to abort. She has the image of the ideal conservative mom: pretty, perky, feminine, Bible-toting, and fitting into the ideal conservative family. And she fits the stereotype of America as small-town America. It is Reagan's morning-in-America image. Where Obama thought of capturing the West, she is running for Sweetheart of the West.

He calls Palin

masterful at the Republican game of taking the Democrats' language and reframing it -- putting conservative frames to progressive words: Reform, prosperity, peace. She is also masterful at using the progressive narratives: she's from the working class, working her way up from hockey mom and the PTA to mayor, governor, and VP candidate. Her husband is a union member. She can say to the conservative populists that she is one of them - - all the things that Obama and Biden have been saying. Bottom-up, not top-down.

His analysis is that "the McCain-Palin ticket is weak on the major realities. But it is strong on the symbolic dimension of politics that Republicans are so good at marketing." He believes that a great many working-class people are "bi-conceptual" in that they are split between conservative and progressive modes of thought. He sees them as "conservative on patriotism and certain social and family issues, which they have been led to see as "moral," progressive in loving the land, living in communities of care, and practical kitchen table issues like mortgages, health care, wages, retirement, and so on. (Lakoff Sept.1/08)

George Lakoff's analysis is more Gramscian than any of the other observers of modern American society so far cited in this paper. Like Gramsci he doesn't expect voters to be rational in the Enlightenment tradition, he recognizes that common sense is subjective and contradictory, and he knows that consensual control is cultivated in the crucible of everyday life. His discovery of the Strict Father frame exposes a potent hegemonic tool, a breakthrough Gramsci would have undoubtedly found exciting. But Lakoff's stated goal is to revitalize liberalism and one suspects that Gramsci would have thought that he

was wasting the power of the nururant parent counter-frame on too inadequate an objective.

In one of the scenes from *Right America Feeling Wronged*, Alexandra Pelosi asks a woman why she is chanting “Obama No-Bama”. The reply is an astonished “Oh my god! You’re kidding, right?” and that pretty well sums up what Antonio Gramsci can tell us about Sarah Palin’s role in the election. The United States has cultivated an image of itself that is so embedded in the American consciousness that many of its citizens cannot even conceive of an alternative vision. Sarah Palin is the very embodiment of that self-image and her job in the election was to reinforce the national consensus in the face self-doubt.

Gramsci observed that regardless of the “powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” in civil society that reinforce the authority of the ruling social group, there comes a time when they are overcome by contingent events that create a hegemonic crisis. The mask slips and the subordinate groups catch a glimpse of the real face of power. One could argue that the American self-image has been confronted by a series of crises since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The massive recession sparked by the stock market meltdown in 2008 would be another. And, finally, the possibility of electing a black President symbolized for many a fundamental shift in the American identity. When hegemony is threatened the ruling social group may revert to coercive tactics to shore up its authority, like the Bush Administration did after 9/11. However, Gramsci suggests, there are risks involved for those in power of so blatantly tipping their hand to the public. Another tactic they have available to them for

restoring hegemony is what Gramsci called, *caesarism*, or the emergence of a charismatic “man of destiny” who will forge a new consensus through the force of his personality. (Forgacs 1988:246)

Caesarist figures are likely to be populist leaders who make direct, personal appeals to the people. Such populism should not be confused with democracy, since it does not involve building up the infrastructure through which people could genuinely participate in decision-making. As a consequence, Gramsci argues that in the modern world, a Caesarist solution does not demand a Caesar, since a political party can fulfill the same functions of spouting populist slogans which maintaining a monopoly over the mechanisms of power. It so happens, however, that many Caesarist episodes *do* involve heroic or ‘maverick’ individuals. (Jones 2006:100)

Jones suggests that Diana, Princess of Wales was just such a modern Caesar in that she provided “magical resolution” to a variety of Britain’s social ills.

According to Gramsci, Caesars can emerge to break a political stalemate and that certainly describes how tight the races were in both the 2000 and 2004 U.S. elections. Gramsci also observed that, during periods of crisis, the dominant social group intensifies hegemonic activity.

Sarah Palin fulfilled both these roles in 2008. Her personal story – small town hockey mom who rose to become the Governor of Alaska to protect decent families from the big oil companies and other good ol’ boys – was a dramatic living testimony to the American Dream that promised a richer and happier life for all citizens of every rank. When the Palins stood on a stage together it was pure Norman Rockwell. The hint of a rugged yet wholesome frontiersman lifestyle



promised a return to a lost golden age. Having teased them, by her presence, with what the American Dream looked like, she taunted them with its loss when she opened her mouth. A skilled orator, she conjured up fears of terrorism, big government and Barack Obama then she reassured them with stirrings of courage and patriotism. Sarah-mania was caesarist theatre, designed to shore up faith in the national image and re-establish consensus. Gramsci's observation that consensus is voluntary and must be negotiated with subaltern groups is also apparent in the phenomenon. That a woman could reach so high for the American Dream was a significant variant from its original conception. Secondly, as bogus as the hegemonic liberal worldview may be for so many Americans, its one that makes them feel good and they won't give up it without a struggle.

### **3: AMERICAN LIBERALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS**

Frank, Ehrenreich and Lakoff all paint pretty grim pictures of global capitalism run amok in the United States. What's missing from each of their analyses is the sense that rapaciousness is an inescapable feature of capitalism. In fact, up to this point, this paper has been silent about the uniquely American liberalism that frames the commentary about Sarah Palin and the social forces, some historical, that have facilitated her rise to the top. To an outsider, the American usage of the term "liberal" can be confusing. In Canada and other large democracies, the liberal party firmly occupies the centre of the political spectrum, bracketed on each side by parties of the left and right. In some countries the field to the left is even shared with blatantly communist parties. Not so in the two party system of the United States. There, the political landscape is carved up between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats and even then the boundaries are fluid when politicians are voting in the legislature. Despite the heated rhetoric of the culture wars, American liberals, conservatives, and even progressives are variations on the same ideology, liberalism. But, then again, the United States did create the first liberal democracy in history. Or, as Richard Hofstadter said of the United States, "It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one." (As cited in Lipset and Marks, 2000: 29) Even Gramsci wrote about American exceptionalism.

He saw in America such a new form of interpenetration between the economy, politics and civil society that he called this ensemble of forces, “Americanism”. He was most interested in Fordism, or the system of mass production pioneered by Henry Ford. He believed that it was made possible by factors that were unique to American history. He thought of the United States, as a new nation, being constructed on a clean slate and not having to accommodate anachronistic social classes from the past.

America does not have ‘great historical and cultural traditions’; but neither does it have this leaden burden to support. This is one of the main reasons (and certainly more important than its so-called natural wealth) for its formidable accumulation of capital which has taken place in spite of the superior living standard enjoyed by the popular classes compared with Europe. The non-existence of viscous parasitic sedimentations left behind by past phases of history has allowed industry, and commerce in particular, to develop on a sound basis...since these preliminary conditions existed, already rendered rational by historical evolution, it was relatively easy to rationalize production and labour by a skilful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production. Hegemony here was born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries. (Gramsci 1988:278)

He also thought that the rationalization of production and work was particularly high in the United States due to its “recent tradition of the pioneers”, strong individual personalities who had engaged directly with nature and won. Gramsci saw Americans as “working people”, including the millionaires. Yet, he saw

evidence that the ruling class in this vigorous young society was already developing the parasitic ways of Old Europe. (Gramsci 1988:293) He noted that the Great Depression was creating a crisis for the old parties of the capitalist class, out of which a new order could emerge, but only if a “new party is created that can organize the Common Man on a permanent basis.” (Gramsci 1988:299) He was looking at the Progressive Party to play this role but noted that the “economic-corporate” classes had always out-manoeuvred it.

It is curious that he would have put his faith in the Progressive Party instead of the populist People’s Party. The Progressives were upper class intellectuals who wanted to lead democratic reform from above. It had been the agrarian Populist Party, based in the Mid West and The South, who “believed in reform arising from the lower classes.” (Lukacs, 2005) It was a movement that grew out of the unrest created by falling grain prices and rising debt. It mobilized farming communities to oppose the interests of Eastern bankers, brokers, and railway owners. This was a perspective that is more in keeping with Gramsci’s orientation.

One would be remiss not to mention the role played by populism in the shaping of American politics and ideology. The culture wars that have so dominated recent American elections are deeply rooted in the populist tradition. Populism can be defined as the conviction that governments should concern themselves with providing the conditions for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Hence it is a concept deeply connected to the notion of democracy. Populism juxtaposes the interests of “the people” against those of

the “elite”. Populists share a distrust of large, unresponsive, unaccountable bureaucratic institutions. Left wing populists oppose big business while right wing populists are more concerned about big government. Tom Brass calls populism a “mobilizing ideology, operating at the level of consciousness where it serves to deflect discourse from class to non-class identity.” (Brass 1997) In Just How Stupid Are We, Facing the Truth about American Voters, Rick Shenkman suggests that the American brand of populism was set in motion by the Founding Fathers when they drafted the constitution. “Even though the Constitution was promulgated in the name of “We, the People,” the construct was a fiction of the drafters’ imagination” deliberately designed to undermine state authority and safeguard the emerging concept of democracy. (Shenkman 2008:64-65) He calls the roll of a long list through the ages of politicians who have campaigned on behalf of The People against powerful interests. He calls The People a myth. Yet it is a potent one that seems to be woven into the very identity of America. The powerful forces opposed by populists may change over time, yet the essence of American politics remains us vs. them, the little guy against the elite. The current culture war may be erected atop a fundamental duality that goes far deeper into the American psyche than even Thomas Frank is suggesting. When right wing populists like Sarah Palin plant code words like “Big Government”, “Establishment” and “Washington” in their speeches they may be activating a visceral populist frame. Thinking like Gramsci, one wonders if populism forms an essential part of American common sense. Are Americans socialized to resist those they perceive to be in control? Conversely, can Americans’ propensity for

populism be called into play to foster a critical mass consciousness that challenges the real status quo?

In Anti-Intellectualism in American Life, Richard Hofstadter suggests that populism by its very nature breeds distrust of the critical mind. The people/elite, little/big, rural/urban, tradition/modern dual framing of American society prompts the “common man” to conclude that his “plain sense”, “especially if tested by success in some demanding line of practical work, is an altogether adequate substitute for, in not actually much superior to, formal knowledge and expertise acquired in the schools.” “The discipline of the heart, and the old-fashioned principles of religion and morality, are more reliable guides to life than an education which aims to produce minds responsive to new trends in thought and art.” (Hofstadter 1962:19) He also suggests that “the overwhelming demands of the task of winning a continent and establishing its industries” created a “masculine legend that men are not concerned with the events of the intellectual and cultural world” (Hofstadter 1962: 50) Thus, relegated to the women, culture in America had become emasculated and therefore suspect. Anti-intellectualism has only gotten worse since Hofstadter was analyzing the phenomenon. It fosters conformity, discredits dissonant voices and robs people of their willingness and ability to think critically about the ideological soup in which they live their lives. Thinking like Gramsci, one can see in anti-intellectualism some of the corruption in civil society that he wrote about.

Socialism never did take hold in the United States. In The Liberal Tradition in America (1955) Louis Hartz argues that class consciousness did not get a

chance to develop because, without a feudal past, there was no aristocracy to struggle against. The original settlers represented only a narrow middle-class slice of European society thus freezing in place the liberal values they brought with them. Furthermore, vast resources and an abundance of cheap available land relieved social pressure by creating the sense that people had options besides wage labour. As American socialist leader, Michael Harrington put it

Americanism, the official ideology of the society, became a kind of “substitutive socialism.” The European ruling classes ...were open in their contempt for the proletariat. But in the United States equality, and even classlessness, the creation of wealth for all and political liberty were extolled in the public schools. It is, of course, true that this was sincere verbiage which concealed an ugly reality, but nonetheless it had a profound impact upon the national consciousness. “The idea that everyone can be a capitalist,” Samson wrote in a perceptive insight, “is an American concept of capitalism. It is a socialist concept of capitalism.” And that, Marx had understood in 1846, was why socialism would first appear in this country in a capitalist disguise. What he could not possibly anticipate was that this dialectical irony would still be in force over one hundred years later... (T)he country’s image of itself contained so many socialist elements that one did not have to go to a separate movement opposed to the status quo in order to give vent to socialist emotions. (Cited in Lipset 1996: 88)

But “socialist” emotion is one thing; “socialist” measures that meaningfully alter social power imbalances and improve the prospects for poor Americans are another. In The Agony of the American Left (1969) Christopher Lasch traces the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century American radicalism. He notes that early movements such as the agrarian People’s Party, the Knights of Labor, first wave feminism, and the

civil rights movement under Booker T. Washington resolved themselves into interest groups. It wasn't that they had won the objectives for which they had been working. "What happened in all of these cases ...was that the objectives themselves were redefined in such a way as to make their realization possible without any basic modification of American institutions." (Lasch 1969:22)

Organizations representing disadvantaged groups won toleration. It allowed them to exist and it brought some material and symbolic concessions, particularly to farmers and workers. But their gains came at the expense of democratic values and restricted their organizing base. "The constituted leaders of social, cultural and ethnic minorities had ceased to function as critics of American society."

(Lasch 1969:28) Lasch argues that the drying up of traditional sources of dissent has robbed democratic values of their vitality and led to political rigidity under which the reasons for dissent remain unaddressed. This was the very kind of "corruption of civil society" that Gramsci wrote about. He contended that it was the weakness of institutions in Italian civil society in the 1930's that made it possible for Fascism to get a toehold. (Buttigieg 1995)

Lasch also comments on the self-inflicted wounds that destroyed the socialist movement in the United States. They too were exacted in battles with which Gramsci was painfully familiar as a leader of the faction-prone Italian Communist Party. Lasch writes that "in the years immediately preceding the First World War, the socialist movement laid down deep roots in the United States." (Lasch 1969: 35) And, unlike the later radical organizations, it was broad-based and inclusive. It was, according to Lasch, the disagreements arising out of the



Bolshevik Revolution that killed it. Socialist immigrants brought with them their sectarian quarrels and projected them onto the Socialist Party in their new home. Furthermore, the prestige of the Russian Revolution and supremacy of the Comintern crowded out an independent investigation of American conditions. Thus, for example, an analysis of Black experience was missing from socialist critique.

The destruction of socialism in the United States had enduring consequences for American radicalism. The most important, perhaps, was the isolation of intellectuals from the rest of society. Marxian theory, no longer joined to a mass movement, became almost entirely a preoccupation of the literary intellectuals. (Lasch 1969: 43)

There was, argues Lasch, “a wholesale defection of intellectuals from social criticism” and, not only had this “contributed to the cold war”, it created a vacuum where should have been a significant body of social thought that applies directly to American society and culture. (Lasch 1969:58) Marxism is marginalized in the United States and without it social criticism is cramped within the liberal paradigm and produced as a form of individual expression. A Gramscian perspective would argue that such a situation serves more to support the current hegemonic arrangement than it does to challenge it and reinforces his call for the creation of organic working class intellectuals.

How would one define American liberalism today? Just as Gramsci noticed the adaptability of capitalism in the early twentieth century, one observes that liberalism has evolved as well. At its core liberalism is the belief that the aim of politics and economics is to preserve individual rights and maximize choices. It

is also characterized by a faith in the possibility of improvement through progress. In its early history liberalism defined itself against the absolute power of monarchs to make arbitrary decisions. Having emerged along side capitalism, liberalism is also defined by its faith in the self-regulatory market. Therefore liberalism emphasizes the need to limit the power of government in both politics and the economy. But, liberalism also came to define itself against communism upon the emergence of that competing ideology in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In order to neutralize the appeal of communism, it had to develop a response to the inequalities and social problems that emerged during the Industrial Revolution and Great Depression. Therefore, liberalism came to modify its strict opposition to government intervention. But not all liberals wanted to move away from their core principles and the next destabilizing systemic crisis, which occurred in the 1970's, created an opportunity for a conservative faction to gain power. Hence, the Republican Party has come to embody right wing liberalism and the Democratic Party has come to personify left wing liberalism. And in the absence of a socialist party in the United States today, the Democrats have inaccurately inherited that mantle as well.

Whether it is a fear-mongering epithet hurled by the right or an unidentifiable sense of something missing felt by the left, socialism's place in American politics today is illusionary. The so-called culture war that was being played out in the 2008 Presidential Election was no more than a liberal factional fight. It made it appear as if the social structure is flexible but in reality capitalism was never really called into question. Gramsci called power shifts within the

dominant classes that did not fundamentally alter social relations “passive revolutions”. (Forgacs 1988:428) As a Marxist, he would not have been distracted by the culture war from looking for the structural problems hidden within in the ensemble of forces characterizing the United States today.

To return to the original question, why would the American working class vote for Sarah Palin? When one thinks like Gramsci, the answer is that the liberal-capitalist hegemony is almost uncontested in the United States and what passes for struggles for ideological supremacy are really rearrangements within the existing historic bloc. This is because there are aspects of American society that powerfully reinforce the status quo and make it extremely difficult to create counter hegemony. The American working class has been robbed of the best weapon they would have had to defend themselves against consensual control, their working class consciousness. In the absence of working class consciousness, Sarah Palin seems like a reasonable option because she so strongly, almost stereotypically, personifies the dominant ideology, a belief system which the subordinate classes have with, insignificant exceptions, unquestioningly accepted as their own.

What is working class consciousness and how is it created? According to its simplest, least nuanced definition, it starts with the premise that capitalist society is divided into two great classes, the owners and the workers, between whom there is an intrinsic opposition of interests. Owners are trying to get as much labour as possible out of the workers for the least amount pay so they can increase their own profits, and workers are trying to resist the devaluation of their

labour. Under capitalism, owners have the advantage in their relationship with workers. What constitutes workers as a category or a class is that they are exploited. Class-consciousness occurs when workers become aware of their “common life-situation, their structural position in class society, and the common interests this entails.” At this point, according to Marx, they become a *class in itself*. When they start expressing that consciousness by creating organizations to further their collective interests they become a *class for itself*. (Worsley 1982: 44-46) Organized mass action such as a strike is the fastest and usual route to class consciousness but it can also lead to defeat. Gramsci proposed that consciousness could be created through the longer but safer method of education. While Marx was able to define the classes according to their relation to the means of production, under global capitalism one’s relationship to the means of production is more complicated. That’s why Gramsci started talking about *blocs*, which imply a combination of classes that share similar interests. Today, it makes more sense to think of class in terms of distinguishing those groups who benefit from capitalism and those who are being disadvantaged to further its ends. In that sense, working class consciousness is recognizing that you are, or will be, on the losing side. Or, as it says on the poster, “class consciousness is knowing what side of the fence you are on, class analysis is knowing who else is there with you.”

In “Visions of Class, Visions Beyond Class’, Ingo Schmidt, Academic Coordinator of Labour Studies at Athabasca University, discusses the marginalization of radical politics in Canada, from which one can draw parallels

to the situation in the United States. He notes that “currently the Canadian left largely consists of small groups that focus on specific issues” and occasionally come together to mobilize “against corporate globalization or imperialist wars”. He argues that in “the absence of a concept of working class” attempts to unite the left have failed.

To be more precise, socialist circles, and a few academics it might be added, talk about class in an abstract manner that doesn’t resonate among other activists, let alone the people who are theoretically predestined to be members of that class. Actually-existing workers rarely identify themselves as members of the working class and would much rather see themselves as part of imagined communities such as nations, members of religious communities or sports clubs. Work enters their self-identification mostly through professional associations and unions. (Schmidt 2008)

As he puts it, “the classes have become invisible behind a veil of civil society and individual market exchange” and as a result, activists organize around specific issues or fragmented aspects of their target group. In other words, issue-specific movements are so focused on putting out little brush fires that they ignore the big forest fire that is raging on behind them. (Barndt 1989) To take the analogy a step further, the townspeople are throwing gasoline on the fire in the distorted and self-destructive belief that forest fires are normal.

The reason for this is the lack of a common culture that would allow workers and activists to engage in the exchange of ideas and the exploration of alternatives beyond particular issues and the organizational confines of union and party apparatuses or the more informal, but usually very hierarchical, NGO structures. Whenever there were powerful labour movements in the past, they developed around

working class cultures that transcended particular concerns, disseminated feelings of solidarity between activist core groups and less involved outsiders and included visions of a better world. (Schmidt 2008)

Schmidt calls for the development of a working class culture

understood as a collective communication process that helps its participants to identify as a group and also to define and articulate their interests. In this process symbols and languages, such as songs, film and texts, serve as means of communication. However, it's neither the genius of working class artists or intellectuals that provide those means to the ordinary worker. What artists and intellectuals can do, though, is to pick up ideas that are floating around in communication processes and express them in a concentrated form. Poems, songs, films and texts that are produced this way may in turn enrich further communication and eventually lead to commonly shared working class politics, which transcends particular concerns without subordinating them to abstract notions of class. (Schmidt 2008)

There are historical factors that have worked against the development of a working class consciousness in the United States. As has already been noted in this paper, the socio-economic conditions that were in place at the founding of the United States inhibited class formation and the emergent national identity demanded an independent individualistic self-image. The recurring waves of immigration from diverse backgrounds that followed in the subsequent centuries tended to divide workers along lines of ethnic identity instead of uniting them in a shared class one. (Sennett and Cobbs 1972) By the 1950's, working class affluence, national class blindness, and red-baiting had combined to keep the

working class hidden. Cold War persecution made working class organizations cautious about developing the language that would encourage workers to talk about themselves as a class or the critical analysis to recognize competing interests in American society. Today, the American people stand alone and isolated, sinking further into poverty, and blaming everyone but the real cause of their misfortune.

## CONCLUSION

American individualism leaves the working class ill-equipped to handle the range of sophisticated hegemonic tools that the capitalist bloc has at its disposal in modern society and Boggs reminds us that they are “nowhere more fully realized than in the United States”.

Modern bourgeois society includes just about everything Gramsci had in mind and more: diversification of the proletariat, the technological revolution, and with it the rapidly expanding role of science and education in production, the penetration throughout civil society of the bureaucratic norms of authority and work, the rise of mass media and communications and the diffusion of popular culture, the breakdown of the distinction between public and private realms of existence.

(Boggs1976: 121)

One might add: the transformation of entertainment into an industry and the subsequent blurring between entertainment and news, education, religion, and politics. And today we can carry our entertainment with us everywhere, keep up with our soap operas in the dentist chair, and follow Sarah Palin’s latest adventures on computer screens at the airport. Seventy million Americans tuned into the 2008 Vice Presidential Debate, the second largest audience in televised election debate history. (Only the Reagan-Carter debate in 1980 attracted more viewers.)



Everyone knew who was the chief draw. It was Palin. People were fascinated with her. Who was she? Did she know what she was talking about? Would she take charge or falter under the klieg lights? Most important of all was this simple question: Would she fall flat on her ass? (Shenkman 2008:204-205)

Thinking like Gramsci, one notices how high tech and professionalized elections have become in the United States and wonders how that has influenced the working class's sense of itself. High pressure ad campaigns and aggressive political punditry have become inescapable features of modern politics that relentlessly reach into peoples' very homes to shape their thinking. Behind the scenes, voting patterns are scientifically dissected. Political parties engage specialists to manage their image and craft their "messaging", the voters' reactions to which are tracked daily by professional pollsters. And politics is an industry: between elections, political consultants from both parties meet at conferences to network, exchange strategies, and flog their wares. Today, in the United States, white working class voters have become a valuable target audience to be courted or neutralized. This is probably no better exemplified than in the "Joe the Plumber" media sensation that dominated the news for the last few weeks of the 2008 campaign. He was a white working class voter who was captured on tape by ABC News telling Barack Obama that he thought his tax plan didn't jive with the American Dream. John McCain picked up on it and repeatedly referred to him in the final televised presidential debate three days later. "Joe the Plumber" was interviewed on a number of national news programs where he opined that Obama's plan to redistribute wealth was socialist. The Republicans exploited "Joe the Plumber" as a metaphor for the fears of average

working Americans. In actual fact, the Plumbers and Pipefitters' Union had been the first international union to endorse Obama.

In his Salon.com article, "Liberalism Without Labour Unions?" Michael Lind suggests that the Democrats have crunched the numbers and decided they don't need white working class voters to stay in power. And, he tells us this is dangerous.

A political coalition that doesn't need Joe the – fake – Plumber (John McCain's mascot of the white working class) can also afford to ignore the real Joes, Josés, and Josephines of the working middle class, the ones who earn \$16 an hour, not \$250,000 a year. It can afford to be unconcerned about the collapse of manufacturing jobs, casually reassuring us that more education is the answer to all economic woes. A party of professionals and young voters risks becoming a party that overlooks the core economic crisis – not the recession but the 40-year crisis – that is wiping out the American dream for millions of workers and communities that are never going to become meccas for foodies and Web designers. (Lind, August 25, 2009)

If the Democrats won't speak for the white working class, the Republicans will, but only to deny and confuse their class identity.

In his notes on American workers, Gramsci wrote that he hoped that technological advancements would free up workers to do more thinking, even on the job. (Forgas 1988:294) In The Age of American Unreason (2008), Susan Jacoby demonstrates that the opposite has in fact happened. She talks about the "dumbing down" of America, picking up where Richard Hofstadter left off when he was writing about it in that 1960's. She reports that the average American now

watches 7 hours of television a day and that 43% watch anything that happens to be on. Fifty percent of Americans under the age of 45 have not read a book in the last year. She contends that to say computers are making us smarter is like saying forks made us better eaters. (Jacoby 2008) She lays a lot of the blame for American anti-intellectualism at the doorstep of fundamentalist religion, as did Hofstadter before her. What's new today, she says, is that because every word in the bible is considered by fundamentalists to be literally true, it has created a dissonance between belief and the current state of scientific knowledge. It has made possible what she calls "junk thought" which she defines as being impervious to evidence: something is true because one believes it to be true. So, during the 2008 Presidential Election when Sarah Palin accused Barack Obama "of palling around with terrorists who would target their own country" she was sharing her junk thoughts. Twenty-three percent, almost one quarter, of those who voted in that election self-identified as white evangelical Christians, 74% of whom voted Republican. (PEW Research, Nov. 7, 2008) The power of junk thought was again evident during the summer of 2009 when an NBC/WSJ poll conducted in August showed that 45% of Americans believed that the healthcare reform bill contained a "death panel" provision. (HuffPo August 19, 2009) Jacoby calls George W. Bush a symptom of the "dumbing down" of America rather than the cause of it, and presumably she would say the same of Sarah Palin. Jacoby thinks the problem lies in the public's willingness to be deceived and calls on "one family at a time" to fight the culture of distraction. (Jacoby 2008:) One wonders if her solution is perhaps too liberal in its individualism and does not

sufficiently address the underlying structural problems that contribute to distraction. Just as Barbara Ehrenreich discovered that the working poor may have sound reasons for staying in bad jobs, working parents may plunk their children in front of the television for hours at a time because, for example, they lack adequate childcare and they are exhausted from their multiple lousy jobs. A Gramscian analysis would argue that a solution that does not break down individual isolation and cultivate a collective critical analysis is no solution at all.

Gramsci didn't discuss the role of religion in the creation of Americanism but thinking like Gramsci may lead one to wonder if religion has been for many working class Americans a surrogate for self-organizing. Craig Calhoun, President of the Social Sciences Research Council and professor of social sciences at New York University, describes what is unique about religion in American politics. He points out that there is a strong tradition of religious public expression in the United States compared to Europe and a higher level of religious participation. He reminds us that religious political expression is not just a right-wing phenomenon; even the anti-slavery and civil rights movements had strong religious attachments. He tells us that the separation of church and state has meant something different in the United States than it did in Europe, where there was an officially state-sanctioned church that was prohibited from playing a role in politics. Therefore, religion in Europe came to be seen as something private. In the United States the separation of church and state meant that there was to be no government-sanctioned church, resulting in a guaranteed diversity of religions. Churches became very much part of American democracy and

informal social life. Calhoun stresses that most religions in the United States were self-organized and that “change came as much from the pew as it did from the pulpit.” (Calhoun, “God Bless American Politics”, Societas podcast, February 19, 2008) Democratic churches that practice liberation theology may contribute to a counter hegemonic process but a Gramscian analysis would argue that they are no substitute for class-based self-organizing.

Perhaps Gramsci’s greatest legacy is his insight about creating critical mass consciousness that has come down to us through Paulo Freire. In Freire’s hands, Gramsci’s ideas about grassroots democracy, praxis, organic intellectuals, and questioning common sense have come together in the methodology of popular education. It has been practiced most widely in the oppressed communities of Latin America. It teaches people to make the links for themselves between their personal situations and the ensemble of forces operating the world. It empowers them to work together to make changes in their lives and communities and it is highly counter hegemonic. Barack Obama would have encountered it when he was a community organizer in Chicago but it’s not likely to be practiced in the organizations where Sarah Palin’s fans tend to congregate.

Gramsci understood that hegemonic crisis such as the American state is experiencing in the early twenty-first century creates counter hegemonic openings. After all, his “driving political motivation was to elucidate the imperatives and tasks” that would facilitate the “realization of a classless society rooted in democratic self-management”, a “transformation that would occur, not

through the mechanical breakdown of the capitalist mode of production, but as part of a sharpening crisis of ruling-class legitimacy.”(Boggs, 1984:243) Central to Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony is the understanding that it is always a work-in-progress. It is a “reflexive process in which the values of the power bloc, subalterns, and counter-hegemonic forces are in a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change.” (Jones, 2006: 79) Therefore, the fact that Sarah Palin’s popularity waned significantly after the first couple of weeks of September 2008 and the fact that the Barack Obama did eventually win the election in no way diminish the relevance of Sarah Palin as an emblem of ideological hegemony. The struggle for hegemony in America has already shifted to a new arena and the question of whether and how a liberal/capitalist state can provide healthcare for all.

Gramsci knew that the odds are stacked in favour of the status quo. Hence, his adage, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will ” which I take to mean that we can either predict the worse – that no real change is possible – and do nothing. Or we can act on the assumption that real change is possible, even in the face of great odds, and in so doing create the possibility for real change. A Gramscian perspective prompts one to look past the surface to find out how the systems and structures of power operate. That in itself is cause for hope. Because, if one can understand the structural forces that produce injustice then one can imagine what the world would look like without those structural forces and imagine the ideas and actions it will take to remove them.

## Reference List

www.theory.org.uk Resources:Antonio Gramsci

Alberts, S. (2008) Defiant palin cites elitist snobbery ahead of vice-president debate. *Vancouver Sun*.

*The alcove with mark molaro* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from <http://www.markmolaro.com/>

Allman, P. (1988). Gramsci, freire, and illich: Their contributions to education for socialism. In T. Lovett (Ed.), *Radical approaches to adult education: A reader* (pp. 85). London and New York: Routledge.

Balz, D., & Johnson, H. (2008). *The battle for america 2008*. New York: Viking.

Barndt, D. (1989). *Naming the moment: Political analysis for action*. Toronto: Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice.

Berman, M. (2000). *The twilight of american culture*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

Boggs, C. (1976). *Gramsci's marxism*. London: Pluto Press Limited.

Boggs, C. (1984). *The two revolutions:Gramsci and the dilemmas of western marxism*. Boston: South End Press.

Brass, T. The agrarian myth, the 'new' populism and the 'new' right. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32(4) (Jan.25-31, 1997), pp. PE27-PE42.

Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and monopoly capitalism:The degradation of work in the twentieth century*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press.

Burke, B. *Antonio gramsci, schooling and education*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gram.htm>

Burke, B., Geronimo, J., Martin, D., Thomas, B., & Wall, C. (2002). *Education for changing unions*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Buttigieg, J. Gramsci and civil society. *Boundary 2*, 22(3 (Autumn, 1995))

*CNN transcript - special event: Sen. john McCain attacks pat robertson, jerry falwell, republican establishment as harming GOP ideals - february 28, 2000* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0002/28/se.01.html>

- Calhoun, Craig, *president » blog archive » episode #2: God bless american politics* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://www.ssrc.org/calhoun/2008/02/19/episode-2-god-bless-american-politics/>
- Day, R. J. F. (2005). *Gramsci is dead: Anarchist currents in the newest social movements*
- Dionne, E. J. *RealClearPolitics - articles - culture wars? how 2004*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/03/reclaiming\\_faith\\_and\\_politics.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/03/reclaiming_faith_and_politics.html)
- Dobson whacks McCain, says he can't vote for him - 2008 presidential campaign blog - political intelligence - boston.com* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2008/02/dobson\\_w\\_hacks\\_m.html](http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2008/02/dobson_w_hacks_m.html)
- Domke, D. *Seattle times political caucus | john McCain's social conservative dilemma | seattle times newspaper blog*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://blog.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/politicalcaucus/2008/07/by\\_david\\_domke\\_in\\_1992.html](http://blog.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/politicalcaucus/2008/07/by_david_domke_in_1992.html)
- Ehrenreich, B. (1989). *Fear of falling: The inner life of the middle class*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in america*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2008). *This land is their land*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.
- Eve Ensler: Drill, drill, drill* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eve-ensler/drill-drill-drill\\_b\\_124829.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eve-ensler/drill-drill-drill_b_124829.html)
- Exit polls - election results 2008 - the new york times* Retrieved 10/12/2009, 2009, from <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/exit-polls.html>
- Feldman, C. *American thinker: Mrs. palin goes to washington*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/09/mrs\\_palin\\_goes\\_to\\_washington.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/09/mrs_palin_goes_to_washington.html)
- Femia, J. V. (1981). *Gramsci's political thought: Hegemony, consciousness, and the revolutionary process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.



- Femia, J. V. (1982). *The Journal of Modern History*, 54(1), 72-77.
- Finocchiaro, M. A. Rethinking gramsci's political philosophy. Paper presented at the Retrieved from [www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Poli/PoliFino.htm](http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Poli/PoliFino.htm)
- Fischman, G., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical pedagogy and the gramscian and freirean legacies. *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies*, 5(4) Retrieved from [amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/2005%2C+McLaren+and+Fischman%2C+Gram](http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/2005%2C+McLaren+and+Fischman%2C+Gram)
- Frank, T. (2004). *What's the matter with kansas? how conservatives won the hear of america*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.
- Frank, T. (2008). *The wrecking crew: How conservatives rule*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.
- Fuller, R. W. (2003). *Somebodies and nobodies:Overcoming the abuse of rank*. Gabriola Island: New Society.
- The funniest signs from town hall protests (PICS)* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/17/the-funniest-signs-from-t\\_n\\_260838.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/17/the-funniest-signs-from-t_n_260838.html)
- George lakoff: Don't think of a maverick! could the obama campaign be improved?* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/dont-think-of-a-maverick\\_b\\_125850.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/dont-think-of-a-maverick_b_125850.html)
- George lakoff: The obama code* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-obama-code\\_b\\_169580.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-obama-code_b_169580.html)
- George lakoff: The palin choice and the reality of the political mind* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-palin-choice-and-the\\_b\\_123012.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-palin-choice-and-the_b_123012.html)
- Gitlin, T. (1994). Prime time ideology: The hegemonic process in television entertainment. In H. Newcomb (Ed.), *Television: The critical view* (Fifth ed., ). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goodwin, J., & Jasper, J. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Rethinking social movements: Structure, meaning, and emotion*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

*Gramsci and political theory by E. J. hobsbawm* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11550951/Gramsci-and-Political-Theory-by-E-J-Hobsbawm>

Gramsci, A. (1988). In Forgacs D. (Ed.), *An antonio gramsci reader* (Q. Hoare, G. Nowell-Smith Trans.). New York: Schocken Books Inc.

Gramsci, A. (1971). In Hoare Q., Newcomb H. (Eds.), *Selections from the prison notebook* (Q. Hoare, H. Newcomb Trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Gramsci, A., & Forgacs, D. (1999). *A gramsci reader : Selected writings, 1916-1935* [Selections.]. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hartz, L. (1955). *The liberal tradition in america:An interpretation of american political thought since the revolution*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

*Hegemony: Studies in consensus and coercion*(2007). In Howson R., Smith K. (Eds.), New York and London: Routledge.

Hobsbawm, E. *Gramsci and political theory by E. J. hobsbawm*. Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11550951/Gramsci-and-Political-Theory-by-E-J-Hobsbawm>

Hobsbawm, E. *IGS audio and video*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/audio-video/index.html>

Hofstadter, R. (1962). *Anti-intellectualism in american life*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc.

*In poll, McCain closes the gap with obama - washingtonpost.com* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/08/AR2008090801825.html>

*Inside obama's sweeping victory - pew research center* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1023/exit-poll-analysis-2008>

Jacoby, S. (2008). *The age of american unreason*. New York: Pantheon Books.

*Jim hightower: Sarah palin's faux populism* Retrieved 10/12/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-hightower/sarah-palins-faux-populis\\_b\\_125767.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-hightower/sarah-palins-faux-populis_b_125767.html)

*John McCain picks alaska's gov. sarah palin as his VP | top of the ticket | los angeles times* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/08/mccain-palin-vp.html>

Jones, S. (2006). *Antonio gramsci*. New York: Routledge.

Katie couric interviews sarah palin. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/thedishrag/2008/09/sarah-palin-tel.html>

Kirchhoff, S. *Fed's yell: Income gap poses risk - USATODAY.com*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/fed/2006-11-07-income-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/fed/2006-11-07-income-usat_x.htm)

Klein, N. (2007). *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc. Canada.

Kornacki, S. *Is edwards an easy mark? | the new york observer*. Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://www.observer.com/2007/edwards-easy-mark>

Kristol, W. *Let palin be palin*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/015/500wrhj\\_q.asp?pg=1](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/015/500wrhj_q.asp?pg=1)

Kristol, I. (1978). *Two cheers for capitalism*. New York: Basic Books. Retrieved from Books

Lakoff, G. (1996). *Moral politics: What conservatives know that liberals don't*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't think of an elephant: Know your values and frame the debate*. White River Junction VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Lakoff, G. (2006). *Thinking points: Communicating our american values and vision*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Lakoff, G. (2008). *The political mind*. New York: Viking.

Lakoff, G., & Johnston, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago.

Lasch, C. (1968). *The culture of narcissism, american life in an age of diminishing expectations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

Lasch, C. (1979). *The agony of the american left*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc.

Lind, M. *Liberalism without labor unions? | salon* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from <http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2009/08/25/labor/index.html>

- Lipset, S. M. (1996). *American exceptionalism: A double-edged sword*. New York: W.W. Norton. Retrieved from Books
- Lipset, S. M., & Marks, G. (2000). *It didn't happen here: Why socialism failed in the united states*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.
- Local exit polls - election center 2008 - elections & politics from CNN.com*  
Retrieved 10/12/2009, 2009, from <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USP00p1>
- Lukacs, J. (2005). *Democracy and populism: Fear and hatred*. New Haven and New York: Yale University Press.
- Mallick, H. (2008). A mighty wind. *Canadian Broadcasting Company*,
- Mandel, D. *New socialist: QUEBEC: UQAM's professors' strike*. Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://www.newsocialist.org/index.php?id=1884>
- Manders, D. W. (2006). *The hegemony of common sense: Wisdom and mystification in everyday life*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Marx, K. (1867). In Engels F. (Ed.), *Capital: A critique of political economy, vol. I. the process of capitalist production*. (S. Moore, E. Aveling Trans.). (4th ed.). Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co, 1906.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1961). The manifesto of the communist party. *The essential left* (). New York: Barnes and Noble.
- Mayo, P. Antonio gramsci and his relevance for the education of adults. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(3), 418-435.
- McCain gains on issues, but stalls as candidate of change: Section 3: The vice-presidential candidates - pew research center for the people & the press*  
Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=1375>
- McCain's capitulation to the religious right now complete | right wing watch*  
Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/mccains-capitulation-religious-right-now-complete>
- McMath, R. C., Jr. (1995). Populism in two countries: Agrarian protest in the great plains and prairie provinces. *Agricultural History*, 69(4), 517-546. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/stable/3744429>

- Mistry, R. (2008). *Can gramsci's theory of hegemony help us to understand the representation of ethnic minorities in western television and cinema?* Retrieved 09/22, 2008, from [www.theory.org.uk/ctr-ro16.htm](http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-ro16.htm)
- Morton, A. D. (2007). *Unravelling gramsci: Hegemony and passive revolution in the global economy*. London. Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press Limited.
- Palin's resignation: The edited version* | *vanityfair.com* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2009/07/palin-speech-edit-200907>
- Palin's style sparks buying frenzy, and fashion firms rush to cash in - WSJ.com* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122116644864624975.html>
- Paul krugman on the great wealth transfer : Rolling stone* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from [http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/12699486/paul\\_krugman\\_on\\_the\\_great\\_wealth\\_transfer](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/12699486/paul_krugman_on_the_great_wealth_transfer)
- Right america feeling wronged: Some voices from the campaign trail*. Pelosi, A. (Director). (2009).[Motion Picture] HBO.
- Platell, A. *Sarah palin is as popular as diana in the hearts of the american public* | *mail online*. Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1058602/Sarah-Palin-popular-Diana-hearts-American-public.html>
- Poll: Nearly half of americans believe "death panel" falsehood* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/19/poll-nearly-half-of-ameri\\_n\\_263065.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/19/poll-nearly-half-of-ameri_n_263065.html)
- Pollock, N. Populism, authoritarianism, and the historian. *Agricultural History*, 39(2 (Apr., 1965), pp. 59-67)
- Ransome, P. (1992). *Antonio garmsci: A new introduction*. Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Recapturing kansas -- in these times* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/1866/>
- Rednecks vs. elites by kathleen parker on national review online* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=ZTk1NTJmODYwOTQ0NmNjOTYzZGUzN2UwNWY2MjRkODQ>

- Rethinking the american dream* | *vanityfair.com* Retrieved 10/25/2009, 2009, from <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2009/04/american-dream200904?currentPage=1>
- Rifkin, J. (1995). *The end of work: The decline of the global labor force and the dawn of the post-market era*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Rosengarten, F. An introduction to gramsci's life and thought. Retrieved from [www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/intro.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/intro.htm)
- Sarah palin and the "Culture wars"* | *project for excellence in journalism (PEJ)* Retrieved 10/20/2009, 2009, from <http://www.journalism.org/node/13796>
- Sarah palin RNC convention speech (VIDEO) (TEXT)* Retrieved 10/20/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/03/sarah-palin-rnc-convention\\_n\\_123703.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/03/sarah-palin-rnc-convention_n_123703.html)
- Sarah palin seen as GOP rising star - political news - FOXNews.com* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2008/08/29/sarah-palin-seen-as-gop-rising-star/>
- Sarah palin: Dems pounce on McCain pick* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/08/29/sarah-palin-obama-respons\\_n\\_122392.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/08/29/sarah-palin-obama-respons_n_122392.html)
- Sarah palin's naughty monkey shoes boost sales: Governor Palin's passion for peep-toe pumps help U.S. shoe designer* | *Suite101.com* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from [http://shoesaccessories.suite101.com/article.cfm/sarah\\_palins\\_naughty\\_monkey\\_shoes#ixzz0ON1OrqSI](http://shoesaccessories.suite101.com/article.cfm/sarah_palins_naughty_monkey_shoes#ixzz0ON1OrqSI)
- Schmidt, I. (2008). Visions of class, visions beyond class. *Relay, July - September*(23), 11.
- Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1972). *The hidden injuries of class*. New York: Vintage.
- Shenkman, R. (2008). *Just how stupid are we? facing the truth about american voters*. New York: Basic Books.
- Simon, R. (1991). *Gramsci's political thought: An introduction*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Stein, J. *Real vice presidents can have curves -- latimes.com*. Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-stein12-2008sep12,0,6642277.column>

Steinem, G. (Sept. 4, 2008, Wrong woman wrong message.

Strinati, D. (1995). *An introduction to theories of popular culture*. London: Routledge.

*Team sarah*. (2008). Retrieved 10/22, 2008, from <http://www.teamsarah.org/>

Urbinati , N. (1998). Periphery of modernity: Antonio gramsci's theory of subordination and hegemony. *Political Theory*, 26(3 (Jun., 1998)370-391), 370-391.

*Voting religiously - pew research center* Retrieved 9/29/2009, 2009, from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1022/exit-poll-analysis-religion>

Wallsten, P. (2008, October 4). The politics of a spunky hockey mom. *Vancouver Sun*, pp. B9.

Walsh, J. *Obama and the white working class*. Retrieved 10/22/2009, 2009, from [http://www.salon.com/opinion/walsh/election\\_2008/2008/04/11/pavoters/](http://www.salon.com/opinion/walsh/election_2008/2008/04/11/pavoters/)

*Welcome to focus on the family* Retrieved 9/8/2009, 2009, from <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

Wise, T. (2008). This is your nation on white privilege. *Z Magazine*, Sept. 13 Retrieved from [www.zcommunications.org/zspace](http://www.zcommunications.org/zspace)

Worsley, P. (1982). *Marx and marxism*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood Ltd.

*YouTube - inside look at palin's speck style* Retrieved 9/7/2009, 2009, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlvW6FnAyRk>