

From the Chair
Robert Wuthnow, Princeton

In an election year, one is likely to hear more critical discussions in academic corridors than is usually the case. Colleagues complain about the misunderstandings of politicians and journalists, analyze the rhetoric being used in campaigns, and raise questions about how proposed programs will affect various constituencies. Much of this talk is personal rather than professional. But it also reflects the fact that practitioners in the social sciences are supposed to know something about these issues.

Cultural sociologists are sometimes accused of having precious little to say on matters of national importance, especially compared to colleagues who understand the intricacies of poverty programs, crime, or the legislative process. But in recent years a growing number of national problems have been framed as cultural issues. Topics such as culture wars and multiculturalism are examples.

How should cultural sociologists address such issues? I want to consider two options that are practiced widely enough that they are likely to be familiar, pointing out difficulties in each, and then propose a third alternative. I shall leave aside the question of whether or not cultural sociologists should be distracted by such issues at all, except to say that it is a significant question; I will return to it at the end.

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Rocking the Vote: The Music Industry and the Mobilization of Young Voters¹
Timothy J. Dowd, Emory

A casual perusal of college campuses and MTV reveals two facts. First, election time is drawing nigh. Second, record companies and MTV want young people to vote in this election. The latter fact raises (at least) two questions. First, how did these two facets of the music industry develop a concern for young voters? Second, what are the implications of this new concern?

In this article I offer brief answers to both questions. First I provide an historical account of the record industry's *Rock the Vote* and MTV's *Choose or Lose*. Of course, any re-telling of history entails some emphases on the part of the writer, so let me state mine. The *Rock the Vote* program was created so that the record industry could deflect criticism, particularly the criticism that emanated from government officials. Indeed, the founders of *Rock the Vote* explicitly acknowledged that it was founded to fight the threat of government censorship (Hall 1992; *Rock the Vote* 1996). The *Choose or Lose* program was established after *Rock the Vote* and, hence, adopted many aspects of its predecessor. While criticism was not the initial impetus for its founding, *Choose or Lose* personnel (and others) acknowledged that this program had enhanced the image of MTV and, thus, had muted criticisms about its more controversial content (Granger 1993; Multichannel News 1993).

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The Myth of Culture Wars
Chris Smith, UNC-Chapel Hill; with Michael Emerson, Bethel; Sally Gallagher, Oregon State; and Paul Kennedy, Gordon

Culture wars is a myth. The conventional wisdom that Americans are divided into two warring camps slugging it out over abortion, prayer in schools, and homosexuality is greatly exaggerated. Growing empirical evidence suggests it just is not true. In fact, most Americans have not taken up oppositional sides with warring "traditionalist" and "progressive" forces to wage their local and national battles. The vast majority of Americans are much more interested in whether their kids learn to read well, whether they can walk their streets safely at night, and whether the government can get the deficit under control than they are in protesting obscene art and gays marching in parades. The important issues for the mass of Americans, in other words, remain economic and social, not culture-wars issues.

The actual culture wars that we do see on television are being waged by a fairly small group of noisy, entrepreneurial

activists, whose interests are served by the impression that all of America has taken up arms to join their fight. And too many in the academy and the media have cooperated in fostering this perception. But it is a misperception. The Pat Buchanans and Kate Michaelmans of the airwaves have declared war, but very few Americans have shown up for the fight.

The first clue that should cause us to suspect the culture wars story is evidence from opinion surveys. When pollsters ask the question, "What do you think is the biggest problem facing America today?," most Americans consistently say things like the federal deficit, crime, unemployment, health care, poverty, and racism. Somewhere down the list you find a few people saying moral decline. People almost never mention abortion, multiculturalism, prayer in schools, secular humanism, the imposition of the Christian right agenda, pornography, or homosexuality.

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The first approach takes its cue from what has often been termed identity politics. Although it is sometimes criticized as a kind of tribalism, identity politics is an important feature of the multicultural world in which we live. It combats majoritarian thinking in the name of greater respect for differences, including formal recognition of these differences. It understands that individual members of minority groups must band together if they are going to combat racism, sexism, homophobia, and other prejudices. Up to a point, identity politics helps to broaden civil society by giving new speakers a place at the table. If it has seemed wearisome to some, it is not because the rights of minorities should be disregarded, but because many of the remedies that it has advocated have had unforeseen repercussions or been effective at the expense of rights and privileges enjoyed by other groups.

Cultural sociology has been deeply influenced by identity politics. Much of the best work among students of culture has focused on such topics as racial and ethnic identities, gender, and gay and lesbian issues. Some of it has examined issues such as abortion rights or changing conceptions of fairness that bear heavily on the interests of particular groups. Work has also been initiated on the responses of other groups (the religious right, for example) that practice a kind of identity politics of their own.

The stance taken by scholars toward the study of identity politics varies from dispassionate efforts to remain neutral and objective, to implicitly partisan studies that attempt to clarify the ideas of certain movements or challenge the views of other groups, to more explicitly partisan discussions. Academic freedom encourages openness with respect to these diverse approaches, and studies have collectively made a positive contribution as forms of cultural criticism. But they are only one approach. At least one weakness may be a tendency to increase the fragmentation that many observers of the wider society have come to decry.

The second approach is to adopt a kind of pragmatic positivism toward cultural issues. In the name of scientific objectivity, this approach tries hard not to take a partisan stance but simply to examine the facts. Which facts? A preferred option is to focus on facts that have been of interest to other practitioners within the academy—facts that reflect favorably on a particular methodological style or theoretical perspective. That option has left some scholars feeling like they are preaching to the choir, rather than having a broader impact on social problems. An alternative option is to examine facts that clarify larger debates.

When this approach aims to be cultural criticism it sometimes results in a kind of superior outlook from which all cultural controversies appear to be flawed. In this view, everybody may appear to be caught up in ideologies except the heroic academic. Or in less vaunted versions, it assumes that complete tolerance of every conceivable view is best or that there is an attainable level of unbiased empirical objectivity.

In various guises, this second approach may be the one deemed most desirable by many cultural sociologists, at least if it curbs partisan views and privileges efforts to be true to the facts that matter most to fellow practitioners. However, it has also been criticized in recent years as the work of a hegemonic culture that is now faced with serious epistemological challenges.

As cultural criticism, this approach may generate work that is too sponge-like to make much of a difference in matters of public debate. Some argue that it reinforces a kind of cultural esperanto, devoid of meaningful idioms and insensitive to the realities of diverse groups. Others worry that it provides no grounds (other than perhaps a norm of complete tolerance) for assessing whether some cultural forms are better than others. A cultural sociologist would thus be in a position to examine fundamentalist or neo-nazi groups, but would be compelled to leave any criticisms of these groups to people in other disciplines.

A starting point for considering a third alternative is supplied by Joseph Raz's recent effort to outline an approach to multiculturalism that is consistent with a tradition of liberal democratic thought. Raz defines multiculturalism as "the belief that individual freedom and prosperity depend on full and unimpeded membership in a respected and flourishing cultural group [and] belief in value pluralism, and in particular in the validity of the diverse values embodied in the practices of different [groups]." What he is saying is that one's freedom depends on being part of a cultural group, and that one's group must respect the validity of every other group's values. Raz chastises academic liberals (with whom he identifies) for looking down their noses at people with different values. He says multiculturalists should reject: "the superiority of secular, democratic, European culture, and a reluctance to admit equal rights to inferior oppressive religious cultures, or ones whose cultural values are seen as limited and less developed."

But multiculturalism is also about diversity, and it is more than a polite nod toward pluralism. Raz distinguishes the new view by calling it value pluralism: "Value pluralism is the view that many different activities and incompatible forms of life are valuable." Or, put negatively, it "rejects the belief in the reducibility of all values to one value that serves as a common denominator to all the valuable ways of life."

One implication of multiculturalism, if Raz's view is the right one, is that relativism must always be part of the deal, but that it also must be kept within bounds. This is the part that comes from realizing that one must live within a tradition, a community, in order to realize one's identity most fully. For academics, this is an important concession to identity politics, but it is also a note of caution about reinforcing total relativism in the implicit stance taken toward one's empirical topics.

John A. Hall writes in a similar vein, although his focus is civil society rather than academic disciplines. He distinguishes what he calls "mild relativism" from "blanket relativism," preferring the former because it doubts that a single set of universal rules can be found but recognizes a minimal consensus, such as respect for law and avoidance of violence. Mild relativism is thus similar to what Michael Walzer describes as a consensus of few, but intensely held principles. In other words, mild relativism is tolerant of differences, but it does not embrace all values as equally right or good, and it rejects a wishy-washy stance toward one's own values, asserting that some of them are of supreme importance.

It follows from such arguments that diverse views deriving from different schools of thought, professional experiences, and personal backgrounds are inevitably a part of academic discourse. Their inevitability does not mean that they should be accepted uncritically. But it does follow from Raz's view of multiculturalism that academics may do better work by taking seriously the values inherent in their own life situations rather

than presuming to bring complete value relativism to their work. It also follows that academic subfields are likely to be places of contestation, not simply about the merits of good work but also about the values served in that work.

The question, then, is how to protect academic debates from devolving into the same kinds of self-interested, tribalistic, free-for-alls that so often characterize discourse in the political arena. Institutionalists provide one answer, of course, pointing to rewards and sanctions that can be levied against people in academic disciplines who stray too far from accepted norms. That answer, however, fails to address the question of how a field such as cultural sociology may contribute to the broader elevation of public discourse—that is, how it may serve as cultural criticism.

Hall suggests that in the civil arena it is important to deal with differences in a sophisticated manner. Sophistication can mean little more than pretension, pomposity, a sham; but in the best sense, it implies a trait or style that is rooted in sufficient knowledge and skill that it is respected for its capacity to provide leadership or to serve as a model in dealing with complex situations. It seems to me that this is what serious academic work strives to do (among other things). It adds sophistication by bringing knowledge to bear on concrete problems and by providing training in how to generate and evaluate such knowledge. At the simplest level, training in how to understand opinion surveys or writing a book about a social movement contributes in this way.

But there is a dimension of cultural criticism that this kind of ordinary scholarship does not quite address. That is the apparent gulf between academic work in an area like cultural sociology and the more public forms of cultural criticism that increasingly appear to be played by journalists and political commentators. Is it enough for academics to turn over this public variety of cultural criticism to people outside the academy? Or is there a role to be played?

Some help in thinking about these questions comes from Wesley Shrum's recent book on the role played by critics in the arts. He suggests that the way in which people judge art to be sophisticated is by its willingness to be subjected to criticism, which in turn is taken seriously, even if it is known to have flaws. The role of the critic as mediator must especially be kept in mind. If values are neither clearly understood by everyone as being more or less conducive to a good society, and if they are not built into social interests, they must be mediated. The critic in music and art worlds plays an important function by comparing performances, opening up discussions about them, and bringing evaluative criteria specifically to bear on them.

As Shrum observes, Matthew Arnold defined the critic's role very much in this way: "Simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of fresh and true ideas." In other words, the critic helps people to know whether or not something is worthy, an artistic expression that stands above its competitors, and the critic extends our understanding and appreciation of what we have observed.

But critics cannot function effectively in a vacuum. Audiences and producers must recognize them as playing a legitimate role. Audiences must be trained, and critics must have some institutional base, such as periodicals, awards, and rating schemes. Critics enhance the status of some performers and diminish that of others. Audiences and performers alike

accord them respect, granting them the right to make judgments. Criticism is thus more than the occasional notice in the newspaper of an upcoming event and it is more than the casual "two thumbs up" pronouncement that so often passes for a serious review. Criticism is not negation or an alternative point of view, of the kind institutionalized in two-party politics or the American system of trial by jury. Criticism is a searching examination of an artistic or cultural performance that includes understanding it, scrutinizing it from one or more alternative perspectives, and then suggesting new directions for thought and exploration.

The critic is a role that peers who are competent as producers themselves may play, but it is a different role from artistic performance, Shrum argues, one that must be recognized as a legitimate and independent contribution to the cultural enterprise. When performers grant such critics the right to make a difference in how they are viewed and in how rewards are allocated, their performances take on the characteristics of high or civilized culture. When performances are not judged in this manner, but are evaluated strictly in terms of mass market appeal, they are generally considered to be popular or low-brow culture. A mark of sophistication is thus the capacity to withstand the scrutiny of knowledgeable critics.

It follows that the boundaries that insulate work in cultural sociology from generalized discourse about public issues are essential to maintaining the standards that define it as a "sophisticated" cultural performance. The work of journals, of sections, and of awards committees is to ensure that internal standards of excellence are maintained.

But it may also follow that cultural sociologists (some at least) would want to consider playing a role comparable to that of the art or literary critic. These critics often contribute to broader public debates by examining the values that are expressed in works of art. By the same token, sociologists with expertise in the study of culture can provide evaluations of the performances of public figures, of journalists, and of social movements, including criticism of the empirical bases of their claims, how their arguments are shaped by implicit cultural assumptions, and what the implications may be for various segments of the society.

Individual scholars often play this role, and yet Shrum is right when he argues that criticism is effective because it is institutionalized. Cultural sociologists are well institutionalized in their own discipline, but they may be less ably positioned to serve in a wider capacity as cultural critics. But it is unnecessary to fantasize about setting up rating schemes to evaluate the pronouncements of public figures.

As it happens, mechanisms through which scholars serve as cultural critics are becoming increasingly common. Specialty journals that attempt to bridge academic and public discourse are one example. The work of private foundations and of policy institutes is another. Still another is the formation in recent years of a number of national commissions focusing on such topics as cultural conflicts, multiculturalism, racial and ethnic diversity, and democratic values.

These mechanisms are calling on cultural sociologists and academics in related fields to serve as critics. The role of mediator is an important part of this activity. Cultural sociologists are increasingly being asked to interact with moral and political philosophers, with religionists, with practitioners in the arts, and with community leaders. They are also being asked to write from a deliberately evaluative stance, raising

critical questions about the kinds of scholarship that are needed and examining the strengths and weaknesses of studies on which policy recommendations have been made.

In asking scholars to play such roles, these mechanisms for cultural criticism pose both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is for academics to play a more influential role in the public debates that are shaping national policy. Playing this role responsibly can be a way of bringing sociological expertise to bear on important issues. The challenge is that criticism of this kind also sets in motion different considerations (and different criteria of merit) than those that may pertain within academic disciplines themselves. Some consideration of the relationships between cultural sociology as a discipline and cultural sociology as criticism may well be worthy of further attention. I invite such reflections.

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Dowd on Music & Voting

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Regarding the second question, I briefly address what the popular press has found significant about *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*. I then discuss an issue that is significant but is not commonly addressed in the popular press. Simply put, *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* are mechanisms by which the music industry has managed the political realm. Because this paper represents my first foray into the present topic, the comments in the second section highlight empirical questions that I will pursue later.

Recorded Music and the Political Realm

While discussing *Choose or Lose*, Anne Gowen (1992) noted that recorded music had become "political" where it had once been "popular." That is, the lyrics of recordings were now scrutinized by politicians and judges. A careful reading of history, however, reveals that recorded lyrics (and music) have drawn political fire for many decades (see below). Moreover, the concern with content is just one of many ways in which the political has penetrated the music industry. Understanding this larger political context helps us see that *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* are but the latest attempt of the music industry to manage the political realm.

Since the inception of the U.S. recording industry in 1878, U.S. policy has stipulated how recording firms can make money (Dowd 1996). Copyright law, for example, holds that a record firm cannot charge radio stations for the broadcasting of its records: while these stations are legally required to pay the recording's composer and publisher, they are not required to pay the record firm. Not surprisingly, record firms have tried for decades to change this feature of copyright law, but they have yet to attain any success (Newmark 1992; RIAA 1995). U.S. policy

has also shaped how record firms transact with non-record firms (Dowd 1996). A record firm, for example, cannot covertly pay radio stations to play its recordings (Segrave 1994).

Because such policies define the very nature of the record industry, record firms have tried to sway policy in their favor, often using the Recording Industry Association of American (RIAA) to act in their collective interest (Sanjek 1988; see RIAA 1995).

In 1950, the RIAA faced an issue that had affected other media: the regulation of content (see Beisel 1992). Congress was concerned with the "dirty disks" that were being shipped across state borders. They entertained a bill that, if implemented, would have allowed the Justice Department to inspect interstate shipments of recordings. The burgeoning number of small record firms that dealt in rhythm and blues (R&B) complained that this legislation was targeted specifically at them. The RIAA reacted by demanding hearings on the matter. Eventually, the legislation fell by the wayside (*Billboard* 1950; Simon 1950).

The possibility of content regulation continued after 1950, particularly as critics attacked the quality of music and those who provided it. In the mid-1950s, the record firms that made R&B and rock and roll recordings were accused of "'infiltrating' southern white teenagers with rock and roll" (Denisoff 1986:380). The same firms were later scrutinized for using questionable business tactics (U.S. Congress 1960); a major antitrust case charged that the vapid music of rock and roll had illegally displaced that popular music which had aesthetic integrity (U.S. Congress 1958). The concern with content continued into the late 1960s, when the government exerted pressure on radio stations that broadcast "pro-drug" songs (McDonald 1988). While these (and other) instances generated much sound and fury, they did not lead to the regulation of recording content.

A new phase in the criticism of recorded content began in 1985. At this time, Tipper Gore and the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC) appeared before a Senate subcommittee to detail the dangers of obscene and violent lyrics. Supported by additional (but questionable) testimony, PMRC members made several proposals regarding recording content. The president of the RIAA and several performers testified against the PMRC proposals, but their words had little effect. The RIAA eventually accepted a PMRC proposal that was also endorsed by the subcommittee: record firms would voluntarily label those records whose lyrics explicitly dealt with violence, sex, or substance use. A form of content regulation, then, had become a reality for record firms. This regulation, in turn, could affect the sales of albums, particularly when certain stores were reticent about stocking those that were labeled as being explicit (Binder 1993; McDonald 1988; see Zappa 1989).

The Impetus For Rock The Vote

The PMRC hearing signaled a new political climate for record firms and the RIAA. Three developments in 1990 further substantiated this new climate. First, a Florida judge ruled that a 2 Live Crew album was obscene, which eventually led to the arrest of a record store owner who continued to sell the album. Second, the Louisiana legislature considered a bill that would make lyric-labeling mandatory, though it was never enacted. Finally, the curator of a Robert Mapplethorpe ex-

hibit faced obscenity charges in Cincinnati. Although the Mapplethorpe case did not directly involve the recording industry, a number of record executives saw it as a further assault on artistic freedom (*Rock the Vote* 1996; Star 1993).

Jeff Ayeroff of Virgin Records was concerned about the events of 1990. However, he felt that the RIAA lacked the necessary grass-roots support to address these recent events (Hall 1992). Consequently, Ayeroff and other record personnel established *Rock the Vote*. This non-profit organization received generous financial support from the major record firms and from the RIAA. Its generous funding was matched by a well-connected board of directors that included performers, record firm executives, and officers in the RIAA and the National Association of Recording Merchandisers (DiMartino 1991a; *Rock the Vote* 1996).

Rock the Vote pursued two tasks in its early days: fighting censorship and mobilizing grass-roots support via voter registration of people aged 18 to 24 years (Fine 1992). Its televised public service announcements (PSAs) initially emphasized First Amendment issues. *Rock the Vote* augmented this emphasis by selling t-shirts that proclaimed “Censorship is Un-American” and by creating a 1-800 line that gave information on states with pending lyric-labeling bills (DiMartino 1991b; Newman 1992). Subsequent PSAs, however, emphasized voter registration more than censorship. The most notorious voter PSA featured Madonna draped in a flag while proclaiming, “If you don’t vote, you’re going to get a spankie” (Colborn 1990).

Rock the Vote aimed its voter PSAs at viewers aged 18 to 24 because the voter turnout for this group had declined from 42% in 1972—the first election after the voting age was lowered to 18 years—to 36% in 1988 (Siricia and Williams 1992; Weinstein 1992; Wilson 1996). *Rock the Vote* bolstered its PSAs with other promotional techniques. It printed material on voter registration that was available in numerous record stores. Likewise, *Rock the Vote* registered young voters on campuses and at various concerts, including the Lollapalooza concerts (DiMartino 1991b; Nunziata 1992; Weinstein 1992).

Rock the Vote’s ability to register voters, however, was hampered by regulations that varied from state to state. Consequently, its leaders lobbied for the “Motor Voter” bill that would automatically provide an opportunity to register when people obtained driver’s licenses. This bill would also standardize registration procedures across the states. To help lobby for the bill, record firms printed a “Dear Senator” or “Dear President” postcard on the (now-defunct) cardboard boxes in which compact discs were sold. Despite the flood of some 50,000 postcards, President Bush vetoed Motor Voter legislation in 1992 (Holland 1992).

The Related Emergence of Choose or Lose

Rock the Vote allied with a number of organizations as it pursued voter registration, including People for the American Way, the League of Women Voters, and the National Association of Secretaries of State (Newman 1992; *Rock the Vote* 1996). Yet MTV soon proved to be its most significant ally. For if the PSAs of *Rock the Vote* were the message, then MTV was the medium (Ryan 1992). Moreover, MTV was a willing medium. Between 1990 and 1992, it donated an estimated twenty million dollars worth of air time for free and repeated airing of PSAs (Hall 1992).

The airing of the *Rock the Vote* PSAs came at an opportune moment for the Music Television Network. This net-

work—like the record industry—had come under fire for its provocative and explicit content. These critiques emanated from a number of quarters, including conservative Christians groups (Denisoff 1986, 1988). Furthermore, the eventual passage of the Children’s Television Act of 1990 signaled that government officials were willing, once again, to scrutinize and regulate television content (Brand 1992; FCC 1995). The *Rock the Vote* PSAs, therefore, offered MTV the chance to enhance its image.

The PSAs also complemented the efforts of MTV executives who sought to develop a legitimate news program. Kurt Loder was hired from *Rolling Stone*, for example, to give some credibility to MTV’s entertainment news. The credibility of the news further increased when MTV won a Peabody Award for its special report, *The Decade in Rock*. The airing of the PSAs in 1990 and beyond, thus, allowed MTV to continue its emphasis on social issues. As the 1992 Presidential Election drew near, MTV executives initiated the *Choose or Lose* program, which encouraged voter registration and entailed Tabitha Soren’s full-time coverage of the election (Simpson 1992).

Given the youth of its viewing audience, MTV personnel focused on those issues that apparently mattered to young voters: abortion, affirmative action, AIDS, the economy, education, and the environment. While pursuing the “3 A’s and 3 E’s,” *Choose or Lose* gained notoriety for questions about the candidate’s boxer shorts and for its irreverent coverage of the conventions (which included reports by Megadeath’s guitarist). Nevertheless, the 90-minute forum with Governor Clinton and a tense interview with President Bush helped established the legitimacy of MTV’s coverage. Its winning of MTV’s second Peabody Award demonstrated that *Choose or Lose* was now an established force in political coverage (Ciolli 1994; Eilperin 1996; Gowen 1992; Herlinger 1992; Martin 1993; Rochlin 1993; Simpson 1992; Weinstein 1992).

The Expansion of Organizational Activities

The 1992 election brought a new-found status to both *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*. Many extolled *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* for registering some 750,000 new voters. In fact, a record number of young people—more than 11 million—voted in 1992, representing a 7% increase over 1988 (Jaegger 1993). Consequently, the newly-elected president made known his appreciation of both groups. Clinton’s praise of *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* surfaced at an inaugural party, a fund raiser, and the signing of Motor Voter legislation in 1993 (Atwood 1996; *Choose or Lose* 1996; Howard 1994; Martin 1993; Redbord 1996; *Rock the Vote* 1996).

Rock the Vote continued its focus on censorship and voter registration. Regarding censorship, the executive director testified before a 1994 Senate committee on lyric content. True to form, he argued that lyrics should not be censored; instead, the objectionable must be tolerated so that the good may thrive. The recent activity of *Rock the Vote* provided a handy rhetorical device for demonstrating the “good” that existed in the record business. Likewise, *Rock the Vote* continued its voter registration drive (U.S. Congress 1994). The newly-passed Motor Voter Act permitted registration by mail. This, in turn, enabled *Rock the Vote* to explore the options of registration via the phone and via the Internet. The “Net-Vote ’96” webpage, which was co-sponsored by *Rock the Vote* and MCI, registered some 20,000 new voters in a matter of days (MCI 1996; *Rock the Vote* 1996).

Rock the Vote also pursued a direction not emphasized in its 1992 campaign: voter education (Hall 1992). The most notable example was its publication of *Rock the System: A Guide to Health Care Reform for Young Americans*. It launched a massive campaign to disseminate this document. One million copies were relayed to music retailers and concert sites; subscribers to magazines such as *Rolling Stone* also received a free copy, as did all 150,000 members of *Rock the Vote*. This effort was made possible by a \$2.4 million grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (American Political Network 1994; Russell 1994).

MTV's *Choose or Lose* continued to pursue its past goals of voter registration and news coverage, but in an expanded fashion. The news crew of 10 that covered the 1992 conventions gave way to a crew of 100 in 1996. Moreover, the coverage of 1996 conventions also included those of the Taxpayer and Green parties. Meanwhile, voter registration was now done in an oversized yet stylish bus (designed, in part, by Todd Oldham) that toured across the country. Like *Rock the Vote*, *Choose or Lose* also delved into a new area. In 1996, it offered a number of special news programs on timely topics, including programs on race relations and education (*Choose or Lose* 1996; Martin 1993; Walker 1996). Given that President Clinton was pressuring television networks to develop educational programs (see CNN 1996), these news programs were a boon to the reputation of MTV.

The Implications of Rock the Vote & Choose or Lose?

In the popular press, most discuss the implications of the voter movements by referring either to the actual registration numbers or to the issue of liberal bias. I briefly address these before turning to what I find significant about *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*: the management of the political realm.

Numbers and Motivation. If *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* were successful in their efforts, then we should have seen an increase in young voters. As the figures given above demonstrate, the 1992 Presidential Election yielded a record number of young voters. Nevertheless, only 42% of those aged 18 to 24 were registered to vote in 1992 and only about 25% of these actually voted (MCI 1996). It remains to be seen, then, if 1996 will bring an increase in the number of young voters and in the proportion of young, registered voters who actually go to the polls (see also *Choose or Lose* 1996; Gowen 1992; *Rock the Vote* 1996).

Many view this increase in a positive light (see Sheehan 1996; *Choose or Lose* 1996). Democracy depends on the participation of its citizens; the more citizens that participate, the more that democracy will thrive (see Wolfe 1992:309). The music industry efforts are especially valuable, some argue, because of current situations: high schools no longer instruct students in civic responsibility, and there are high levels of apathy among high school seniors and college students (Huerta 1996; Simpson 1992; Star 1993; Weinstein 1992; Wilson 1996).

Certain commentators are not pleased by the mere increase in the number of young voters. They argue that democracy is best served when its citizens are motivated and well-informed. Motivated citizens would not find it difficult to register at a central location, such as a library. The present situation wherein *Choose or Lose* and *Rock the Vote* register voters by phone or e-mail runs the risk of pampering these unmotivated citizens, they argue. In addition, unmotivated voters are most likely

uninformed. If all their election knowledge comes only from MTV, then they lack an adequate preparation for responsible voting. Thus, these critics prefer more of an emphasis on the quality of voters rather than the sheer numbers (see Feder 1996; Redbord 1996). The extent to which new voters are unmotivated and uninformed, however, is better addressed by empirical study than by the speculation of these critics.

Partisan and Liberal Bias. Certain critics argue that *Choose or Lose* and *Rock the Vote* are marked by a pro-Democratic Party orientation. This argument is particularly relevant for *Rock the Vote* because its non-profit status requires that it remain non-partisan (Redbord 1996). Representatives of the music industry and a number of analysts counter such a charge by describing the political orientation of young voters. First, they argue young voters tend to be liberal on lifestyle issues and conservative on economic issues. Second, the proportion of young voters identifying themselves as Republicans is nearly equal to the proportion identifying as Democrats. Finally, they argue that Clinton did not gain an undue proportion of the youth vote in the 1992 election, especially because Perot had commanded a fair share of the new voters (Eilperin 1996; Kot 1993; Star 1993; Wilson 1996).

Another camp worries that *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* purvey a left-leaning agenda, one that is more aligned with liberal Democrats than with conservative Republicans. While officials at both programs assert their non-partisan stance, critics cite a number of factors to strengthen their charge of liberalism. First, several critics mention that a number of *Rock the Vote* officials were formally employed in Democratic campaigns or administrations—including those of Ann Richards, Edward Kennedy, and Bill Clinton. Likewise, a few cite that Sumner Redstone—the CEO of MTV's parent company—is an “unabashed” liberal (Feder 1996; Hall 1992; Redbord 1996). Finally, commentators and politicians argue that the environmental focus of both programs—including their concerns with global warming and nuclear power—lies beyond the pale of the mainstream (Gowen 1992; Weinstein 1992; Wilson 1996).

My initial inspection of the *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* material suggests that both groups convey a non-partisan stance on a variety of issues. However, their reports seem to favor government intervention in a variety of realms (e.g., student loans). This pro-intervention stance is more in keeping with current Democratic rather than Republican sensibilities. The positive view of government intervention disappears, however, when the topic turns to media content. I also find that the material of both groups tends more towards liberalism than conservatism because it entertains *multiple* opinions and solutions on such issues as AIDS, abortion, and same-sex marriage (see Hunter 1990; Luker 1984). Of course, a systematic content analysis would illuminate the extent to which Democratic versus Republican or liberal versus conservative themes mark the material of both *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*.

The Management of the Political Realm

Concerns with partisanship and liberalism gloss over a particular type of conservatism found in the material of *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*. I found no report that called into question either the nature of capitalism or the ethical and political implications of large corporations. Furthermore, I found no discussion concerning the possible benefits of industry (e.g., media) regulation. While these two projects may

tend towards the position of liberal Democrats on some issues (e.g., the environment), they appear to favor the status quo and a *laissez-faire* government when dealing with issues that affect *their* corporate sponsors and owners. Consequently, I find the industry concerns of *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* to be as intriguing as the issue of liberal bias.

To reiterate, the record industry and MTV faced a number of criticisms regarding content in the late 1980s and 1990s. On some occasions, these challenges were directly confronted, as with the anti-censorship t-shirts. But to a large extent, both the record industry and MTV retreated from direct confrontation. Witness, for example, Time Warner's quick abandonment of "gangsta rap" in 1992 (Landler 1996; Terry 1992). Instead, the record industry and MTV responded to criticism by stressing such politically positive activities as voter registration.

The stressing of the politically positive occurred as government officials had begun, once again, to target controversial media content. The incumbent Democratic President has implemented both the V-chip and rating of television programming and he has required that networks create programming for children (Chong 1995; CNN 1996; FCC 1995). Moreover, Tipper Gore, now the second lady, has championed the monitoring and rating of recorded lyrics (Binder 1993; Kot 1993). The current Republican candidate and his allies have attacked the motion picture and recording industries for the immorality of their products. They have also held parent firms (e.g., Time Warner, Disney) accountable for the controversial content of their subsidiaries (e.g., Interscope and Death Row, Miramax) (see Fleming 1995; Schoemer and Samuels 1995).

Given the recent actions of both candidates, it might be more appropriate to characterize *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* as anti-content regulation rather than as pro-Democratic or pro-Republican. As one pundit cleverly noted, these groups are ultimately more concerned with Time Warner's freedom of speech than with the free speech of 20 year olds (Star 1993).

These voter programs may ultimately undermine the current challenge of content regulation, especially if their activities continue to expand. Consider that recording artists become political figures when they assist the registration efforts of *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*. As a result, the regulation of their content becomes problematic when explicit lyrics are *also* the words of a known political figure (see U.S. Congress 1994). Simply put, content regulation is less likely in the mid-1990s than it was in 1985, for although members of Congress still critique controversial lyrics, they have also begun lauding the civic efforts of performers and the music industry (see Squires 1994).

The music industry's voter registration programs may outlive their usefulness, because a host of corporations have followed in the footsteps of *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose*. These imitators have seized on the marketing and advertising advantages of voter registration. The ranks of these imitators include such firms as The Body Shop, Chrysler, Coors, Esprit, McDonalds, Pepsi, and 7-UP (Miller 1992; Rubel 1996). The unique goodwill that *Rock the Vote* and *Choose or Lose* both enjoy could be diluted by an onslaught of corporate "activists" that are also pursuing voter registration. After all, rocking the vote may have produced benefits for the music industry, but it did not put an end to the long tradition in which it has grappled with the political realm.

NOTES

¹I owe a double debt of gratitude to Stephen Hart. I thank him for the invitation to write this piece and I especially thank him for his patience and suggestions.

REFERENCES will be found at the Culture Section website, pantheon.cis.yale.edu/~rmelende/culture.online.html; key URLs mentioned above are *Choose or Lose* at www.mtv.com/chooseorlose, NetVote at NetVote96.mci.com; *Rock the Vote* at www.rockthevote.org

The Myth of Culture Wars

(continued from page 1)

Ironically, some of the most outspoken culture-wars activists are coming to this realization. Take, for example, a 1993 article in *Policy Review* by Ralph Reed (1993), leader of the Christian Coalition, entitled, "Casting a Wider Net: Religious Conservatives Move Beyond Abortion and Homosexuality." In it, Reed argues that conservative Christian activists need to recognize that the abortion and homosexuality issues simply don't animate most Americans, and that, therefore, "the most urgent challenge for pro-family conservatives is to develop a broader issue agenda." Reed notes that in 1992 election exit polls, only 12 percent of voters, and only 22 percent even among self-identified, born-again evangelicals, listed abortion as an important voting issue. Likewise, only 16 percent of all voters mentioned family values as an issue affecting their vote. He also cites a survey showing that, besides the economy, "the chief concern of voters who attend church four times a month was not abortion, pornography, or prayer in school, but cutting waste in government and reducing the deficit." Reed concludes, "There is growing evidence to suggest that evangelicals and their Roman Catholic allies are concerned about the same issues as the broader electorate, but with a pro-family twist. Their primary interest is not to legislate against the sins of others, but to protect the health, welfare, and financial security of their own families."

Survey data can be deceiving, however. For they can fail to reveal the cultural *meanings* that respondents attach to "issues." To get at how people really make sense of their world, to really understand which issues concern them and why, one has to get out and actually converse with them, to sit down in their living rooms for a few hours and let them talk about themselves. This is what we have done. As the first phase of a collaborative, 3-year study of American evangelicals, in the summer of 1995, we conducted 128 open-ended, in-depth interviews with a random sample of churchgoing Protestants in Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, Birmingham, and Durham, North Carolina. Our interviews lasted two hours each, and involved Protestants from every major tradition and denomination, sampled in proportion to their actual numbers in the American population. We surveyed the full spectrum of Protestantism, from liberals to fundamentalists, from the marginally committed to the fervent believer, from black Episcopalians to white pentecostals.¹

We began by asking all of our 128 interviewees a series of open-ended questions about how their own sense of religious identity relates to other religious and secular groups, their experiences living as Christians in American society, and their perceptions of how American society is changing. After lengthy discussions on these questions, we then asked our interviewees to name the three specific issues or problems that they thought

should be of greatest concern to Christians today. We continued by asking a variety of questions about Protestant cultural disestablishment and status decline, what should make Christians distinctive, Christian involvement in politics, the separation of church and state, and attitudes about the family, the media, morality, and cultural pluralism. If ever a study could detect Protestants' investment in culture wars, this was it.

In fact, we didn't detect much of it. To the contrary, through our in-depth interviews we made three interesting and mind-changing observations.

First, we were startled by so many people's obliviousness to culture wars. Not uneducated people, but college educated people. Young and old. Men and women. Many we interviewed, for example, were unaware of the existence of any important Christian political organizations. Many had either never heard of or knew very little about Jerry Falwell or the Moral Majority. Even fewer had heard of Ralph Reed or the Christian Coalition. Some confused the two. Others confused one or the other with an entirely unrelated person or organization. Many had not heard of Operation Rescue, and many more who had heard were not familiar with its goals and tactics. Furthermore, most interviewees confessed that they had either never heard of or did not really understand much about multiculturalism, school choice, tuition vouchers, New Age religion, or issues surrounding federal funding for the arts or alternative definitions of the family.

This observation confirms the growing suspicion among pollsters that most Americans do not even seem to know if they belong to the Religious Right or not. In a July 1994 CBS News/*New York Times* poll, 9 percent of Americans said they thought of themselves "as a member of the religious right movement." Two months later, 17 percent responded affirmatively to the same question. That same month, a Gallup poll using the identical question found that 11 percent of Americans identified with the Religious Right. Then Gallup polls in October showed 16 percent affirming, in November, 22 percent affirming, and in December, 14 percent affirming their membership in the Religious Right (see American Enterprise 1994; Princeton Religious Research Center 1995). Well, which is it? Nine percent or 22 percent?

Second, we were startled by the distaste among many of our interviewees, who *were* aware of culture wars, for culture wars. Our interviews, for example, revealed an almost universal distrust of Christian leaders associated with television or politics. It was clear that the fallout from the Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart televangelist scandals of the 1980s has not dissipated, but have tainted every other Christian television figure but Billy Graham. As to Ralph Reed, because he seemed to many people to be "just old enough to attend the prom," many were willing to give him a chance. But most were quite pessimistic about his ability to remain clean, given the money and power at his disposal. Another target of universal antipathy among the people we interviewed who had heard about it was Randall Terry's pro-life organization, Operation Rescue. Not one of our interviewees spoke positively about him or it. Even the most committed pro-lifers were turned off by Operation Rescue's confrontation, shouting, and perceived negativity. Very many associated the shootings of abortion doctors and receptionists with Operation Rescue. And they wanted no part of it.

Third, more than a few of our interviewees thought that many specific culture wars issues were unimportant or foolish.

Some, but certainly not all, thought that the fight for prayer in public schools, for example, was silly. Similarly, one Mennonite woman who called herself traditional and evangelical, confided, "Don't tell anyone I said this, but I really don't care about abortion. It's just not an issue for me. I think it's just as much a sin to bring a child into the world and not take care of him than it is to have an abortion. But I don't say that in public."

Far more interesting and important, however, than the unaware, the disinterested, and the antagonistic that we interviewed (of which there will always be some in any group), are those who were aware of and apparently friendly toward culture wars issues. They are the ones who we need most to understand, who most matter for our purposes.

When we asked interviewees open-ended questions about their Christian experience in and perceptions of the direction of American society, the vast majority of interviewees were united in voicing grave concerns about two issues: the breakdown of the American family and the decline in American education. On the surface, widespread troubles among Protestants about the state of the American family and educational system would seem to be a reservoir of emotional and cognitive fuel to inflame the culture wars. But, in fact, the vast majority of people we talked with, including those more tuned-in to culture wars issues, simply did not manifest a crusading spirit or tell stories of their engagement in culture wars battles. Why not?

A careful reading of interviewee's stories reveals two factors that counteract any serious involvement in culture wars.

The first was that many of those who are deeply concerned about family and education interpret problems in these areas in such a way as to negate most culture-wars impulses. When people reported to us that the breakdown of the American family was their primary concern, we asked them what they thought was causing this breakdown and what should be done in response. With few exceptions, they did not claim that the family was under attack by liberal elites, secular humanism, feminism, the federal government, or an immoral mass media. Even when we fished about for such answers, we did not hear them often. Instead, we sometimes heard stories about irresponsible parents, the decline of community, and poverty. However, far and away our interviewees' most common explanation for the breakdown of the American family—and this is true of conservative and liberal Protestants alike—was economic pressures that are pulling families apart, the disintegrating demands of the changing U.S. economy. One Southern Baptist man, well-informed about culture wars, observed:

The backbone of every country has got to be the family, but our family unit has broken down. The divorce rate is so high. And families are not raising their children with Christian ideals anymore. Parents are so involved in their careers that they are putting their children in daycare. They have to, in order to live in today's society, with the economy like it is, they just have to.

Many, such as this Baptist man, believe both parents bringing home two paychecks is a basic necessity today:

Look at kids of mothers who don't work and you can tell a difference in the way they're brought up. Still, mothers and fathers both have to work just to keep up, just to pay their bills and feed the kids. Fifteen years ago, both worked for a nice middle-class lifestyle. Nowadays it's a matter of survival.

We found the same kind of dynamic at work regarding education. Very few faulted the spread of secular humanism, liberal influences, New Agers, or multiculturalists for the perceived educational breakdown. Rather, they mentioned prob-

lems like under-funded schools; oversized classes; under-qualified, overworked, or uncommitted teachers; irresponsible parents; top-heavy educational administrations; teachers unions; and, for a few, busing and racial integration. The lack of discipline in the classroom was also a major concern. But, returning to their deepest concern, many of those we interviewed traced education's woes back to the breakdown of the family, and traced that in turn to economic pressures that are pulling families apart. One man from a Holiness church remarked:

Schools are a microcosm of society. Society's families have broken down, and schools have become a repository for watching children. With the hectic world of both parents working, schools are becoming expensive day-care centers. Teachers are now supposed to be therapists, baby-sitters, and playmates first, educators last. I really believe it's a mess.

We were amazed to hear many religious conservatives sounding as much or more like the liberals we interviewed in indicting economic pressures more than moral decline as the primary cause of these social problems.

But what about practical education policy? Interestingly, precisely because of their recognized inability or lack of desire to achieve a Christian domination of the public schools, most respondents—including culturally aware conservatives—eschewed the crusading mentality of culture-wars activists. Take, for example, this Southern Baptist man, who is very much tuned in to the anxieties and programs of conservative Christian political organizations. After hearing him lament in detail the declining quality of education, we asked whether he was concerned about morality in school. He responded:

I don't really care about teachers teaching my kids morals. If they can teach them how to read and calculate and have good English and grammar, that's what I'm looking for from schools. I'm not looking for them to teach my kids ethics. I'll do that at home.

Similarly, for many (whether or not they could or could not control public schools), concerns such as the moral content of curriculum and textbooks, sex education, and school prayer are simply not burning issues. The attitude of this Pentecostal man was typical of many others:

Return prayer to schools? I'd just like to see prayer returned to Christian homes. Some are out there picketing. I say Christians should worry about their own righteousness and standing before God, and start living right themselves. They ought to worry about bring prayer back into their own homes and churches, their own lives. No, I'm not for crusades for prayer in public schools.

We also observed a second major factor that appeared to neutralize culture warring among some who otherwise seem ideologically sympathetic to culture wars. That is a widespread commitment to certain theological and political beliefs that inhibit an all-out, bare-knuckled struggle to establish Christian values and morals over all Americans. It became clear in our interviews that very many Protestants are beset by a very deep and difficult quandary that we call the "pluralism-versus-Christendom" dilemma. In short, many Protestants think that Christian morality should be the primary authority for American culture and society, and simultaneously think that everyone should be free to live as they see fit, even if that means rejecting Christianity. Because they firmly believe both simultaneously, the logic of each restrains the tendencies of the other from being carried too far.

On the Christendom side, most churchgoing American Protestants have inherited and more-or-less embrace the theological notion that there is a transcendent God who estab-

lishes absolute and universal standards of morality for individuals and societies; and that obedience to God's ways ultimately produces abundant life, while the rejection of God's ways produces individual and social degeneration and, finally, death. Most American Protestants, too, are heirs of a faith that for centuries enjoyed the status of *de facto* religious establishment. This Christendom legacy—which mixes essential elements of Christian doctrine with aspects of the historical Protestant experience in America, particularly Puritanism—makes Protestants want *their* morality and standards to be normative for American society. The Christendom impulse is illustrated in this exchange with a Baptist woman:

Q: Would you support a law to recognize homosexual marriages? A: Well, no. The Christian laws shouldn't do that. I'm totally against gay marriages and lesbians and them wanting to raise kids. Q: And if they say you're imposing your religious values and morals on them? A: Well, I'm just telling you what the Word of God says. Q: But if they said they don't believe in God or the Bible, then you would say? A: You can't change me, my beliefs. Q: So you're comfortable using laws to maintain Christian morals? A: Well, yes.

At the same time, the *very same* Protestants are committed to another belief that is inherently in tension with the idea of Christendom: individual volunteerism. This belief reflects other age-old Christian doctrines colored by the American Protestant experience of frontier revivalism, and by less religious aspects of American culture. Inherent in Protestant faith is the idea that individuals must ultimately decide for themselves to follow God or not; that truly meaningful moral actions cannot be forced, but must come voluntarily from the heart; and that Christians ultimately can't make people who do not want to be Christians to act as if they were. As one Pentecostal man said, "I am opposed to shoving anything down people's throats and I think God is too. He gives every person a right to choose. And we should also."

Furthermore, good old American individualism—of which most Protestants, conservatives and liberals alike, have imbibed deeply—prescribes that individuals should not be coerced by social institutions, especially by the government, and particularly not on personal matters; that freedom to pursue individual happiness is a paramount good; that people shouldn't meddle too deeply in other people's business; and that government usually provides poor solutions to social and cultural problems. This belief in individual volunteerism naturally eschews the domineering spirit of Christendom, and instead accepts, if not embraces, social and cultural tolerance and pluralism. So, in the very same discussion, the very same Baptist woman also affirmed the individual-volunteerism impulse:

Q: How do you feel about using laws to set social standards about family life or sexual morality? A: Well, I don't think the law can do that because that's not the law's responsibility. The Bible says it's people's own responsibility, not the law's. I think that's what has American in trouble now: we try to make the law take care of everything. I don't agree with using laws for that kind of thing. Q: You would rather have people live morally voluntarily, and not have the government trying to tell people how to live? A: Yes, that's right.

Notice, it is generally not that some Protestants embrace Christendom and others embrace individual volunteerism. Most of the people we interviewed, just like this Baptist woman, fully embrace both, even if they are not aware of it in these precise terms. And being caught on the horns of this dilemma creates within them a powerful self-restraining ambivalence

about Christian social and political activism. Their volunteeristic thinking evokes the concerns of Christendom—God’s laws are not optional, but binding on all people and nations, for their own good. At the same time, however, mental steps toward Christendom automatically rouse the opposition of volunteerism—you shouldn’t force people to live like Christians. In the end, neither gets very far.

Historically, this pluralism-versus-Christendom dilemma was fairly easily resolved by the fact that Protestantism, although officially disestablished, in fact for centuries dominated America’s public discourse and its major institutions. By failing to see the degree to which theirs was an imposed domination, the Protestant establishment had its cake and ate it too: it enjoyed a “Christian America” that it believed was voluntarily chosen by the American people. But since the Protestant establishment has increasingly lost control of public discourse and major institutions since the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of Protestants who want to affirm both Christendom and individual volunteerism face an increasingly uncomfortable cognitive dissonance. In the end, the ultimate practical consequence we saw in most of those we talked with was that any potential culture warring that Christendom tended to encourage was consistently reigned in and subdued by the tolerance and pluralism inherent in individual volunteerism. Battling to Christianize America just didn’t sit right.

Between those who are oblivious to culture wars, those disdainful of culture wars, those who interpret America’s problems in a way that neutralizes activism in culture wars, and those who hold beliefs about individual volunteerism that tend to counteract engagement in culture wars, there are not a lot of churchgoing Protestants left over to fight culture wars. And that helps to explain why even the Christian Coalition’s relatively large number of member activists, impressive by standards of most social movements, still only amount to about *one-half of one percent* of the total population. Not quite a moral majority.

David Moore (1995) gives us another perspective in his April/May 1995 article in *The Public Perspective*, which uses survey data to identify the magnitude of the “Religious Right.” According to Moore, if you define the Religious Right as politically conservative Independent or Republican Christians who say that religion is very important in their lives, who attend church services regularly, and who oppose abortion in all circumstances, then the Religious Right makes up only 4 percent of the American population, and only 9 percent of Republicans. Not exactly half of a nation torn in two. In fact, for most Americans, the brouhaha over culture wars is fairly distant and trivial.

NOTES

¹Admittedly, a complete study of culture wars also needs to research Roman Catholic and non-religious Americans. But if personal investment in culture wars is ever to be found, according to conventional wisdom, it surely should be found among Protestant Christians, particularly among the most conservative and liberal Protestant Christians. That is where we looked.

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 Moore, David. 1995. “The ‘Religious Right’: Definition and Measurement.” *The Public Perspective*. April/May.
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 Reed, Ralph. 1993. “Casting a Wider Net.” *Policy Review*. Summer.

Best Book (chair: Steven Brint): Dual Winners

Viviana A. Zelizer (Princeton), *The Social Meaning of Money* (Basic, 1994). Viviana Zelizer’s book requires us to re-think everything we learned from Simmel about the socially colorless and levelling quality of money. She shows that several distinct currencies exist, each marking and reinforcing a social relationship. She shows how earmarking tends to take place in “the most vulnerable areas of social life” and points us to a critical period of change between the Gilded Age and the Great Depression. After reading this book, no one will ever again blandly accept Balzac’s famous remark about the rise of capitalism: “There is no kin but the 100 franc note,” because we now know that some 100 franc notes are held apart to support the ties of kinship. If culture is, in large part, about the marking of special understandings and special relationships, then this lucid and elegantly-argued book represents an outstanding recent contribution to the sociology of culture.

Karen A. Cerulo (Rutgers), *Identity Designs* (Rutgers, 1995). Karen Cerulo’s book extends the Durkheim/Swanson tradition of explaining cultural symbols from social structural arrangements. She shows that both national flags and national anthems can be described along a continuum of

“basic” to “embellished” syntax. She then shows that variance in the design choices on this continuum can be explained by features of the countries’ political and historical circumstances. The book is perhaps especially noteworthy for its methodological innovations. Cerulo’s work gives cultural researchers confidence that artifacts, even those as complex as graphic design and musical composition, can for some purposes be understood quantitatively as well as qualitatively. She is one of the most imaginative of our contemporary measurers of meaning.

Honorable mention: Richard Biernacki for *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914* (California, 1995).

Best Student Paper (chair: Anne Kane)

Ronald Jacobs (Annenberg School, Penn.), “Civil Society and Crisis: Culture, Discourse, and the Rodney King Beating.” *AJS*, March 1996. Jacobs’ paper validates in an empirically impressive way the argument that “civil society” is constituted of multiple public spheres. By demonstrating the differences in the construction of two “communities” of discourse around the Rodney King beating, Jacobs not only shows that we can not assume that events are understood similarly by different communities; he also makes a strong case for the centrality of narrative in meaning construction. His paper is theoretically, methodologically and substantively timely and important.

Honorable mentions: Marshall Battani, David Hall, and Rosemary Powers (UC-Davis), “Culture(s) Structure(s): Making Meaning in the Public Sphere;” Colleen Larrimore (UC-Berkeley),

"When Worlds Collide: Native American Students Navigating Dominant Culture Classrooms."

Best Article (chair: George Thomas)

John W. Mohr (UC–Santa Barbara), "Soldiers, mothers, tramps and others: Discourse roles in the 1907 New York City charity directory," *Poetics* 22:327–357, 1994. This is a breakthrough piece in which John Mohr applies relational methodologies to a problem of genuine theoretical significance: mapping the structure of a moral order. Mohr's makes an elegant and parsimonious argument that operates at several different levels. At one level, he independently tests theories asserting that soldiers and mothers are related in the building of the welfare state in the U.S. At another level, he "measures" meaningful structures by mapping the contours of moral discourse. Viewing categories of people as occupants of discursive roles within a moral order, he uses the relational methodologies of structural equivalence theory to empirically map the moral discourse. At a third level, his inventive use of methodological techniques suggests a technique for exploration and verification in many areas of theory construction beyond his own project.

Honorable mention: Paul Lichterman (UW–Madison), "Beyond the seesaw model: Public commitment in a culture of self-fulfillment," *Sociological Theory* 13(3):275–300, 1995.

Other Culture Section News

Stay Tuned . . . Books of Note Will Be Right Back

Pete Peterson has been hospitalized with heart problems but has a defibrillator installed now and is out of the hospital and doing well. He asks me to say that *BON* will be back.

And the Winner Is . . .—Election Results

The elections went well: there was a high turnout and the results were very close. Nicola Beisel is our new chair-elect, Lyn Spillman was elected secretary-treasurer; Cynthia Fuchs Epstein (CUNY) and Craig Calhoun (NYU) are joining the council, replacing the retiring Wendy Griswold and Michael Schudson.

Possibilities for Exposure in the Newsletter . . . and One Member Courageous (Foolish?) Enough to Take Advantage

Note: This is a new feature on news of section members. Has your book just made the *New York Times* bestseller list? Have you appeared with Geraldo? Successfully sued Harvard? Published in *The National Inquirer*? Or perhaps ascended to a chair at the Collège de France? All this and more will cheer your friends, mortify your competitors, and fascinate the rest of us. Send it in (sahart@acsu.buffalo.edu) and we may print it. (Freedom from censorship is not guaranteed in this feature.)

Here is the first item to come in, from Howard Becker:

On April 2, 1996, I was awarded the degree of Docteur Honoris Causa by the Université de Paris 8 in Saint-Denis. The degree ceremony was preceded by a round table in which a number of students reported on work which had some relation to mine, and was followed (and I think this is unusual) by me playing the piano, thus satisfying the curiosity a lot of French sociologists had as to whether I really could or not.

The Mighty Culture Section—Paper Pulp Industry Complex

Editor's note: This is a new, irregular, feature by which we in the Culture Section can advertise our prolific book-production accomplishments. We will, on request from section members, briefly note book contracts received, new releases, paperback reissues, and prizes. Send information by e-mail, in the format of the listings below, to the newsletter editor (no faxes or hardcopy). Only events in the past six months or so will be covered. For this debut, books about which the authors recently contacted the editor, plus the section's prize winners, are included.

Cerulo, Karen. *Identity Designs: The Sights and Sounds of a Nation*. Rutgers, 1995. Co-winner of 1996 Culture Section Best Book Prize.

d'Anjou, Leo. *Social Movements and Cultural Change: The First Abolition Campaign Revisited*. Aldine de Gruyter, 1996. Recently released.

Fischer, Claude, Michael Hout, Martin Jankowski, Samuel Lucas, Ann Swidler, and Kim Voss. *Inequality By Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Princeton, 1996. Published August (paper & cloth); t-shirts may also be available.

Friedland, Roger and Richard Hecht. *To Rule Jerusalem*. Cambridge, 1996. Recently released.

Hart, Stephen. *What Does the Lord Require? How American Christians Think About Economic Justice*. Rutgers, 1996. Reissued May in expanded paper edition (original edition: Oxford, 1992).

Kleinman, Sherryl. *Opposing Ambitions: Gender and identity in an Alternative Organization*. Chicago, 1996. Recently issued in cloth and paper.

Kniss, Fred. *Disquiet in the Land: Cultural Conflict in American Mennonite Communities*. Rutgers, projected 1997. Contract recently issued.

Long, Elizabeth, ed. *Engaging Sociology and Cultural Studies*. Blackwell, 1997. The second in the series of Culture Section-sponsored books. Soon to appear (and hopefully fill our coffers the way the volume edited by Diana Crane has).

McCarthy, E. Doyle. *Knowledge as Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge*. Routledge, 1996. Just released in paper and cloth (contrary to publisher's materials, which list only the cloth edition).

Zelizer, Viviana. *The Social Meaning of Money*. Basic, 1994. Co-winner of 1996 Culture Section Best Book Prize.

Section Communications & Leaders

Culture is the official newsletter for the Sociology of Culture Section of the American Sociological Association. All articles and columns are copyrighted by their authors. *Culture* is indexed in *Sociological Abstracts*; submission constitutes permission for indexing. *Deadline for Winter 1997 issue:* December 15. Address inquiries to Stephen Hart; Sociology; SUNY–Buffalo; Buffalo, NY 14260-4140; e-mail: sahart@acsu.buffalo.edu; phone and fax: 716/886-5592.

The section website is located at pantheon.cis.yale.edu/~rmelende/culture.online.html. The section also publishes *Culture Online* via e-mail. For these contact Rita.Melendez or William.Holt@yale.edu.

Officers: *chair* Robert Wuthnow, Princeton, wuthnow@princeton.edu; *past chair* Ann Swidler, UC–Berkeley, swidler@uclink2.berkeley.edu; *chair elect* Nicola Beisel, Northwestern, nbeisel@nwu.edu; *secretary-treasurer* Lyn Spillman, Lynette.P.Spillman.1@nd.edu; *newsletter editor:* Stephen Hart. The *council* consists of Craig Calhoun, NYU; Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, CUNY, cepstein@email.gc.cuny.edu; Andrea Press, UI–Urbana (Communications), press@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu; Magali Sarfatti-Larson, Temple, magalisl@temple.ocis.edu; Barry Schwartz, Georgia; and William Sewell, Chicago (Political Science).

Call for Papers
Culture Sessions in Toronto, 1997
Program Chair: Nicola Beisel, Northwestern

At the 1997 ASA meetings in Toronto, the Culture Section will sponsor five open-submission sessions, as well as an invitational session organized by the program chair and entitled "The Return to Culture in American Sociology." In addition, there are regular sessions on cultural topics (listed below) to which section members are encouraged to submit.

The Sociology of Art

Papers on the sociology of art—established, popular, or marginal—are invited. Of particular interest are papers exploring the various intersections of art and power whether this takes the form of an analysis of cultural representations of difference, or the social uses of art in the production, reproduction, and/or reconstruction of systems of stratification and social control. *Send papers to* Anne Bowler, Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of Delaware, 322 Edward Laurence Smith Hall, Newark, DE 19716; phone: (302) 427-0434; fax: (302) 831-2607; email: abowler@brahms.udel.edu

Culture, Power, and Public Policy

Much of the recent public debate over social policy has involved a transformation of the symbolic categories used to depict the meaning of social inequality. For example, in the United States, illegitimacy, dependency, entitlement and other keywords have been used to contest the social knowledge of inequality dating from the New Deal and the Great Society. The purpose of this session is to explore the imbrication of culture and power in the formation of policy choices. Papers addressing historical and contemporary cases, as well as theoretical issues, are welcome. *Send papers to* Orville Lee, Dept. of Sociology, Northwestern Univ., 1810 Chicago Ave., Evanston, IL 60208-1330; phone: (847) 467-4139; fax (847) 491-9907; email: oil120@nwu.edu.

Culture, Politics, and Cultural Policy: Whither Culture Wars in a World of Open Borders?

This session will deal with questions of multiculturalism, the problem of "difference," the meaning of "the public," the changing nature of the divide between high culture and cultural industries, and the place of cultural conflict in national and local politics. *Send papers to* Vera Zolberg, Dept. of Sociology, New School for Social Research, 65 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10003; phone: (212) 229-5782; fax: (212) 229-5595; email: zolbergv@newschool.edu *and* to Judith Balfe, 94 Mt. Hebron Rd., Mont Clair, NJ 07043; phone: (718) 390-7978, email: balfe@postbox.csi.cuny.edu

Culture and History

The "cultural turn" in historical analysis has ushered in a wave of new insights, new problems, and new methods of understanding cultural formations and processes as well as an enormously rich collection of new historical studies. In the process, cultural explanations of historical change are beginning to rival and even supplant more traditional structural explanations. Sociologists have much to contribute to these developments. From a vibrant new body of empirical research on topics such as "collective memory" and "cultural boundaries" to the development of new types of "content analysis" and other "data oriented" research projects, sociological approaches to the role of culture and history are moving in a number of exciting new directions. This session will provide a showcase for these new and innovative empirical studies of culture and history. *Send papers to* John Mohr, Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of California at Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9430; phone: (805) 893-7169; fax (805) 893-3324; email: mohr@sscf.ucsb.edu

Culture Section Refereed Roundtables

Send papers to Mitchell Stevens, Dept. of Sociology, Hamilton College, 198 College Hill Rd., Clinton, NY 13323; phone: (315) 859-4039; email: mstevens@hamilton.edu

Regular Sessions on Cultural Topics, and Their Organizers

Sociology of the Body (John Simpson, Toronto). Collective Memory (Suzanne Vromen, Bard). Sociology of Culture (Bonnie Erickson, Toronto). Culture and Identity (Steven Seidman, SUNY-Albany). Culture and Drinking Behavior (Tanya Cassidy, who is in Ireland, and Pertti Alasuutari, University of Tampere, Finland). Sociology of Knowledge and Intellectuals (Charles Camic, UW-Madison). Mass Media (Elihu Katz, Annenberg School, Penn.). Religion (Lynn Davidman, Brown). Sociology of Science (Lowell Hargins, Ohio State). Theories of Social and Cultural Capital (Paul DiMaggio, Princeton).

**The Cultural Turn:
Cultural Sociology and Cultural Studies**

A conference at UC-Santa Barbara; February 14-16, 1997; organizers: Roger Friedland and John Mohr.

On Santa Barbara's jasmine and sage-scented shores, we are organizing a conference centered on the problematic and potentially productive relation between cultural sociology and cultural studies. Over the last several years, cultural sociologists have increasingly drawn or withdrawn from new interpretive approaches in the humanities which have sought sites of representation and discourse far from canonical works of art. Some have sought insights in deconstruction as well as myriad poststructural approaches. Some of the most exciting work has come from feminist scholars working in a variety of fields. In turn, many humanists have looked for concepts and problematics in divergent social theoretical approaches. Some of us are excited, other perplexed or indifferent, and still others hostile to these transgressions and transpositions. Anti-foundational thinking has been particularly vexing. Our conference is intended, in part, to be a site where cultural sociologists can consider some of these issues, can see how some of our best practitioners and some of theirs have considered the stakes involved, have made their choices and with what consequences for their actual work.

The conference will be organized around three formats—panels, book seminars and informal seminars. The *panels* will feature not only sociologists but also people from other fields such as Nancy Fraser (philosopher), Constance Penley (film theorist), Mayfair Yang (anthropologist), and Richard Hecht (historian). The *book seminars* will include the authors, such as Sherry Ortner, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Avery Gordon, Janice Radway, Magali Sarfatti-Larson, Paul DiMaggio, Jeffrey Alexander, John Hall, and Jon Cruz. The *informal seminars* will consider themes including: Agency and the Self, The Cultural Construction of Organizational Fields, Social Movements and Ideology, The History of Classification, Consumption and Lifestyle, Meaning and Measurement, and Symbolic Boundaries and the Issue of Identity. Participants can write brief essays on these subjects; copies will be distributed in advance by e-mail; all who participate will be listed as presenters on the conference program.

Attendance is limited to 152. To register or inquire, e-mail or write Rachel Luft at 6500rel@ucsbuxa.ucsb.edu; Sociology, UCSB, Santa Barbara, CA 93106. Fee \$25 (grad students \$15). Indicate which book and informal seminars you desire. Also send your address, telephone number, e-mail address. We are in the process of booking hotel rooms. We will try to arrange free accommodation for graduate students. We're going to provide great burritos, some interesting conversation and a chance to be in California in February. Please come and join us.