

6-1991

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Original Citation

Cultural Issues and Images in the 1988 Presidential Campaign: Why the Democrats Lost. Again! Joel Lieske PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), pp. 180-187

Repository Citation

Lieske, Joel A., "Cultural Issues and Images in the 1988 Presidential Campaign: Why the Democrats Lost - Again!" (1991). *Political Science Faculty Publications*. 29.

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), pp. 180-187

Published by: [American Political Science Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/419927>

Accessed: 16/03/2012 15:44

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Cultural Issues and Images in the 1988 Presidential Campaign: Why the Democrats Lost—Again!

Joel Lieske, *Cleveland State University*

The cultural issues and Dukakis not responding to them put a wall up between Dukakis and voters he could have gotten. The wall got so thick that people forgot about the economic issues.

Alan LaPierre, Executive Director
Alabama Democratic Party
New York Times, Nov. 10, 1988

How do you explain the outcomes of modern presidential elections? This is the central dilemma of American politics. Why, for instance, did the Democrats, the so-called majority party, lose again in 1988? And why have they gone down to defeat in five of the last six presidential elections? Curiously, there appears to be no dearth of answers to these questions.

Many pundits, such as neoconservative William Schneider (1988), have argued that the Democrats are too liberal to win a national election. Others maintain that presidential elections are retrospective referenda on the economy and peace issues. According to this view, the incumbent party never loses when times are prosperous and the nation is at peace. Still others argue that presidential elections are actually beauty contests in which voters select the candidate who demonstrates the most attractive combination of personality traits, leadership qualities, and political credentials (Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986). Yet others contend that most losing Democratic candidates have run notoriously inept campaigns. In the Yiddish vernacular, Dukakis was a "Putz." Finally, some analysts (Burns, Peltason, and Cronin 1989: 276-77) try to please everyone by advancing umbrella explanations that include all of these arguments.

Unfortunately, none of these explanations, taken individually, is particularly persuasive. And most appear to be little more than post hoc rationalizations. Of course, when something cannot be fully understood, we are prone to make fun of

our ignorance. Thus we are entertained and even amused by the tongue-in-cheek interpretations of 1988 by leading salon commentators (Erikson 1989; Sigelman 1989, 1990).¹ But we are still left with the uncomfortable feeling that, as a profession, we know much less than we think. So when we are challenged by yet another paradigm, one which contends that presidential campaigns are media horse races run on video and audio sound tracks, and by implication, that American voters are rootless consumers of political "sound bites," it is time to take intellectual stock (Joslyn 1984; Orren and Polsby 1980).

My position in this debate is as follows. While I agree that the media is playing a much greater role in presidential elections, I feel that its impact has been greatly exaggerated by journalistic hype. True, the electoral environment today is far different than it was 40 years ago at the dawn of television. Americans are generally more urbanized, educated, mobile, affluent, individualistic, and politically sophisticated. Consequently, they are also more independent than ever before—about one-third consider themselves independent—and therefore more receptive to the campaign appeals of individual candidates. But the medium only communicates the message. It is not the message itself.

In order to understand the growing role of the media and the changing character of presidential campaign politics, it is my thesis that political scientists must first understand the cultural realities of American politics and the kinds of issues that concern most voters. Thus I will argue that modern presidential elections are being increasingly decided, not by the socioeconomic issues traditionally emphasized by liberal Democrats, but by a new set of cultural issues, first identified by Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg in *The Real Major-*

ity. It is my contention that Bush won in 1988 because he was more successful in appealing to the cultural preferences (issues) and stereotypes (images) of those groups who constitute the real, cultural majority in American politics.

My case rests on the following contentions:

(1) *That the United States is a diverse, multicultural society composed of competing racial, ethnic, religious, and regional subcultures.*

This is a political axiom that many liberal Democrats seem to accept in theory but reject in practice. On the one hand, America's cultural pluralism is not denied. But on the other, it is often claimed that the nation's racial, ethnic, religious, and regional divisions are not that important now, are waning over time, and will ultimately become insignificant (Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin 1989). Yet, there is a growing mass of evidence which suggests that ethnocultural differences in American society are still persistent and consequential. And rather than decreasing, they may actually be on the rise. This evidence includes recent census data on the racial and ethnic identifications of Americans, survey data on church membership, subcultural studies of American government and politics, and cultural explanations of American political behavior.

As Legee, Lieske, and Wald (1989: 31) have observed, "Racial and ethnic diversity—and the group consciousness that accompanies them—have accelerated rapidly in recent years."² In 1960, they point out, the United States was 88.6% white, 10.5% black, and less than 1% Asian and other. By 1985, they note, the predominant group, white Anglos, had dropped in population share by 10% while blacks increased to 12%. Hispanics constituted another 7% while Asians and others grew to 2.7%. Based on census pro-

jections, they note that by the year 2000, whites will constitute less than 74% of the population; while blacks, Hispanics, and Asians will comprise another 13%, 9%, and 4%, respectively.

But race is not the only cultural cleavage that divides Americans. In 1980, the U.S. census also included a question on ethnic ancestry: “In addition to being American, what do you consider your main ethnic group or nationality group?” Based on responses to this question, over 118 million Americans (52.3%) classified themselves into a single ancestry group; some 69 million more (30.8%) designated a multiple ancestry group. Thus, of the 226 million Americans surveyed in the 1980 census, a surprising 83.1% identified with a nationality other than American.

Though they are declining as a proportion of the population, the two dominant ethnic groups in American politics are those who claim British (22.4%) and German (22.3%) ancestry. Along with Americans of Scandinavian (1.1%) ancestry, these so-called “mainline” groups constitute a cultural plurality, if not political majority, in American politics.³ Historically, these groups were among the “first effective settlers” in most states and regions of the country (Gastil 1975). In addition, they share a common Germanic tongue and cultural tradition in the family of Indo-European languages. And they also share common religious traditions in the Protestant wing of Christianity.

Moreover, contrary to the secular claims of some sociologists and futurists, religion and religious diversity continue to play a vital role in the life of the nation. Relative to other advanced industrial democracies, the United States stands out in the high proportion (58 percent versus middle teens to middle thirties for other countries) of its citizens who say that religion is still “very important” to them (Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin 1988). It also stands out in the high proportion of Americans who claim church membership (51 percent) and the large and growing number of church denominations (some 111) to which they belong (Wald 1987; Glenmary Research Center 1982).

Along with economic divisions, these cultural divisions have become intertwined with other dimensions of social stratification, producing what Legee et al. (1989: 34) describe as an “increasing segmentation of the American population by life-style choices.” As a growing number of scholars have documented, this segmentation is observable in the racial, ethnic, and social segregation of residential neighborhoods (Weiss 1988: xii; Robbins 1989), ethnocultural conflicts within the American states (Peirce and Hagstrom 1984), and the division of the U.S. into identifiable political subcultures and cultural regions (Elazar 1970; Gastil 1975; Garreau 1981).

Finally, historical studies of the American electorate suggest that partisan divisions and voting behavior are best understood in terms of the political preferences of subcultural groups operating within different regions and locales (Kleppner 1970; Kelley 1979). And rather than disappearing, subcultural differences are still crucial in understanding current party loyalties and voting in recent presidential elections (Lieske 1988a, 1988b). Moreover, their effects appear to be independent of socioeconomic differences and regionally specific. Using aggregate data for all 3,164 U.S. counties and a rigorous test for compositional effects, I have shown that there are significant subcultural differences in the 1980 U.S. presidential vote, and that the factors which shape the vote differ from one region of the country to the next (Lieske 1989). These factors include differences in racial origin, ethnic ancestry, religious affiliation, social life-style, and political partisanship. Consistent with cultural theory, I have shown that these factors can also predict the candidate preferences of individual voters in the 1988 presidential election.

(2) That the Democratic New Deal Coalition is now sharply divided on most domestic policy issues including a new set of racial and cultural life-style issues.

Forged by Franklin Roosevelt, the New Deal Coalition united white southerners, northern white ethnics, labor, liberals, and racial minorities around common economic interests following the Great Depression. In

recent presidential elections, however, these groups have become increasingly divided not only over longstanding social welfare issues that formerly united them but also over a new set of racial (commonly labeled as civil rights) and cultural life-style issues. The new issues include special federal aid programs for racial minorities, affirmative action, busing, drug abuse, urban crime, bilingual education, illegal immigration, capital punishment, school prayer, abortion, homosexual rights, and gun control. Though few are explicitly racial, ethnic, or religious, most have racial, ethnic, and religious overtones.

These new issues have emerged, in part, because of growing racial-ethnic, religious, and subcultural divisions in the American electorate; partly because of the declining importance of the social welfare and foreign policy issues in American politics;⁴ and partly because of cultural and life-style changes that have occurred in American society during the past quarter century. The social welfare issues, of course, were key to partisan divisions during the 1930s and early 1940s following the Great Depression. Foreign policy issues gained importance during the Cold War, circa the late 1940s and the 1950s. The civil rights issues came into prominence during the struggle for black equality around the late 1950s and early 1960s. And the cultural issues have steadily gained political saliency since the late 1960s.

Since Dukakis’s liberalism became a major issue in the 1988 campaign, it is important to understand what the terms “liberal” and “conservative” mean today within the context of these different issue domains. On social welfare issues, a liberal is someone who favors more government intervention in the economy; a conservative favors less. On foreign policy, a liberal is someone who believes in the “limits” of military power and favors bilateral and multilateral peace negotiations; a conservative is someone who emphasizes the “moral” obligations of military intervention to “keep the peace” and favors a policy of “peace through strength.” On civil rights issues, a liberal is someone who favors federal action on behalf of racial minorities;

a conservative favors benign neglect and “color-blind” racial policies. Finally, on the cultural issues, a liberal is someone who favors cultural pluralism and is considered more tolerant of social disorder; a conservative is someone who favors cultural orthodoxy and is more intolerant of social disorder.

In Table 1, I present the average liberal-conservative scores for each major constituency of the New Deal Coalition on well-known social welfare, foreign policy, civil rights, and cultural issues drawn from the 1988 National Election Study (Erikson et al. 1988: Appendix).⁵ In the final column, I also present the inter-correlations between each policy issue and the Bush vote.⁶ While the tabulated data permit only a partial test of policy polarization, they demonstrate sharp issue differences among the constituent groups. In general, white southerners, white ethnics, and even labor union members, many of whom claim ethnic origins, tend to favor policies that are moderate to conservative in orientation; while liberals and blacks tend to hold much more liberal positions.⁷ The greatest disparities, not surprisingly, are over compensatory civil rights policies, especially the racially explosive issue of affirmative action.

The challenge facing Dukakis and the Democrats in 1988 was to woo back into the presidential fold two key defecting groups from the New Deal Coalition—white southerners

and white ethnics. Unfortunately, the Massachusetts governor’s progressive positions on further extensions of the social welfare state (in the tradition of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy) and foreign policy did not count for much because the country was at peace and apparently prosperous. On the other hand, his positions on domestic spending, taxes, the defense budget, minority aid programs, affirmative action, and the crime issue were simply too liberal for these two groups. Overall, the policy disagreements between Bush and Dukakis appear to have produced a moderate polarization of the New Deal Coalition along conservative-liberal lines that worked to the advantage of the Republican candidate.

In the voting literature, policy disputes are generally viewed as “hard” political issues (Carmines and Stimpson 1980). From a cultural perspective, they are primarily concerned not with how Americans feel toward the *objects* (i.e., beneficiaries) of government action (the so-called “easy” issues) but how they feel toward the less completely understood *instruments* (i.e., programs) for carrying them out. Unfortunately, this useful distinction has been largely lost by the equivalent but more antiseptic social-psychological distinction between “symbolic” and “cognitive” issues (Conover and Feldman 1981).

(3) *That the 1988 Democratic Con-*

vention was an electoral and media disaster for the Democrats, comparable in effect to the 1968 and 1972 debacles.

Opinion polls show that Dukakis went from a 10 percent lead over Bush before the Democratic Convention to a 10 percent disadvantage after the Republican Convention (Opinion Roundup 1988: 36-7).⁸ The final election day breakdown of 54 percent for Bush to 46 percent for Dukakis thus represents a net shift of only two percentage points.

It can be argued that the Democratic Convention helped sow the seeds for Dukakis’s defeat because it resurrected negative racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes for the two groups, white ethnics and white Southerners, whom the Dukakis-Bentsen team was supposedly designed, at least in theory, to attract.

Stereotypic cues that may have negatively influenced these two groups include:

- The crude, boastful, and often vulgar behavior of the Texas Democratic “Bush Bashers,” whose language and demeanor was offensive not only to a large number of southern Bible Belt Christians but also to many southerners who have historically taken pride in their soft-spoken discourse and gracious manners (Reed 1974).⁹ The brash irreverence of the “Bush Bashers” may have also offended many white ethnics with strong religious ties to the Catholic and Orthodox faiths.
- The attention lavished on Jesse Jackson, a controversial civil rights leader, by liberal Democrats and the media during the first three days of the convention. As a champion of the black race and an exponent of racial confrontation, Jackson infuriates many white southerners and northern white ethnics. He also epitomizes what they detest: a “pushy” black who enjoys status and respect. This hostility can be seen, for example, in the low thermometer ratings he received from these two groups in the 1988 National Election Study, the lowest received by any Democratic candidate for President. By comparison, Bush

TABLE 1.
Liberal-Conservative Scores on Issue Domains, by New Deal Group

Issue Domain	New Deal Group					Bush (r)
	White Southerners	White Ethnics	Labor	Liberals	Blacks	
Social Welfare						
Domestic Spending	.02	-.07	-.09	-.23	-.32	.36
Standard of Living	.26	.16	.06	-.03	-.28	.34
Foreign Policy						
Defense Spending	.11	.03	-.04	-.24	-.15	.34
Soviet Union	.06	-.06	-.08	-.27	-.06	.15
Civil Rights						
Aid to Minorities	.31	.21	.16	-.10	-.35	.30
Affirmative Action	.66	.73	.69	.47	-.30	.23
Cultural						
Legal Abortion	-.10	-.26	-.23	-.40	-.10	.12
Homosexual Rights	.13	-.10	-.10	-.33	-.26	.18
Women’s Role	-.42	-.51	-.52	-.65	-.47	.09
School Prayer	.03	-.14	-.13	-.27	-.00	.06
Bush Percentage	60.6	53.0	40.7	17.1	8.0	

received ratings that rivaled his popular predecessor (see Table 2).

- The inadvertent communication of discordant and disturbing cultural images, such as Garrison Keillor's apology to school children for the lyrics in the Star Spangled Banner. Keillor said they really weren't "militaristic," a word that seems alien to the pro-defense attitudes of most white southerners (Joslyn 1980). And what were convention viewers to make of the police and medical convoys that escorted the candidates to the convention hall through Atlanta's dark and deserted streets? Did many subliminally ask themselves how safe, secure, and civilized America would be under the Democrats?

Finally, the musical celebration of Neil Diamond's "Coming to America," a paean to Ellis Island and the immigrant ethos, was certainly a source of pride and recognition for many white ethnics. However, it may also have raised negative cultural stereotypes for many white southerners and urban ethnics who have become increasingly concerned about the rising numbers of non-white aliens that have entered the United States both legally and illegally.

(4) *That the Bush campaign was brilliantly conceived and superbly executed to exploit the racial-ethnic, religious, and cultural divisions in American society.*

The strategy employed three classic cultural appeals: (a) reference group identifications, (b) religious beliefs, and (c) cultural dominance. These appeals were designed to remind "mainline" northern whites, evangelical southern whites, northern white ethnics, and conservatives that Republicans are the party of white dominance, religious morality, cultural orthodoxy, and social order. This strategy was made possible by proclaiming the successes of the Reagan-Bush economic recovery (the 25 percent tax cut, the 50 percent reduction in inflation, the cutting of interest rates from 21 to 10 percent, and the creation of 17 million new jobs) and the defense buildup, thereby neutralizing if not appropriating the prosperity and peace issues.

The cultural appeals employed subtle codewords and visual images

TABLE 2.
Candidate Thermometer Ratings, by New Deal Group

Thermometer Ratings	New Deal Group				
	White Southerners	White Ethnics	Labor	Liberals	Blacks
Reagan	69	63	56	45	37
Bush	66	62	57	46	46
Dukakis	54	55	60	67	69
Jackson	42	42	51	60	80

that protected Bush and the Republicans from charges of racism and demagoguery. These included pinning the "liberal" tail on the Democratic donkey; making Willie Horton a household word; portraying Dukakis as the "greasy Greek" who let Horton go; and depicting Bush as the defender and champion of God, country, motherhood, and the American way of life.¹⁰ Bush's strong stands on the pledge of allegiance, abortion, the ACLU, traditional values, and pragmatic anti-communism (peace through strength), as well as campaign pictures of him decked out in an Air Force flight jacket, also helped undermine and discredit the so-called "wimp" issue.

But how effective were the cultural appeals of the Bush campaign? Perhaps the most reliable source of data for assessing this issue is the 1988 American National Election Study. Unfortunately, the NES surveys, as currently structured, do not provide much useful information on the influence of religious beliefs (Leege et al. 1989). They do, however, provide a great deal of information on the effects of reference group feelings and some suggestive data on the political struggle in American politics for cultural dominance.

To estimate the influence of reference group feelings, I correlated the feeling thermometer ratings of selected groups in the 1988 NES with the Bush vote. Table 3 presents the intercorrelations for the entire nation as well as eight regional subsamples.¹¹ The reference groups are ranked in descending order of their national intercorrelations with the Bush vote. Those groups with significant positive correlations are classified as "positive" reference groups, those with very low positive to very low negative correlations are denoted as "neutral" reference groups, and

those with significant negative correlations are designated as "negative" reference groups.¹²

Nationally, as well as regionally, it is possible to see the potency of the conservative and liberal labels in the 1988 presidential election. As noted above, Bush worked assiduously to pin the liberal label on Dukakis, and based on the tabulated results, the strategy appears to have worked. Another strategy that bore fruit for the Republican candidate was his "negative" campaign. Thus, his vote seems to have been shaped more by voter attitudes toward "negative" than toward "positive" reference groups. These negative reference groups include welfare recipients, illegal aliens, gays and lesbians, blacks, feminists, labor unions, and civil rights leaders. All, of course, can be lumped under the liberal label.

The results of Table 3 also demonstrate a central thesis of subcultural theories (Elazar 1984), namely, that cultural conflicts are regionally specific. Thus, for Bush voters in the Pacific states, big business represents an important reference group; while civil rights leaders and gays and lesbians constitute critical negative reference groups. Similarly, feminists represent a critical negative reference group in the Rocky Mountain states, which encompass the traditional-family-oriented Mormon cultural region.¹³ As expected, blacks and civil rights leaders (like Jesse Jackson) are the political pariahs of Bush supporters in the Border and Deep South. In the Great Lakes states, the so-called foundry of the nation, labor unions constitute the most important negative reference group among Bush supporters. In the Mid-Atlantic states, civil rights leaders and Hispanics are viewed as the two most important cultural adversaries;

TABLE 3.
Intercorrelations of 1988 Bush Vote and Reference Group Thermometer Ratings, by State Grouping

Reference Groups	State Grouping								
	U.S.	New England	Mid-Atlantic	Great Lakes	Border South	Deep South	Great Plains	Rocky Mountain	Pacific
<i>Positive</i>									
Conservatives	.39*	.41*	.47*	.29*	.41*	.39*	.30*	.27*	.46*
Big Business	.19*	-.04	.33*	.08	.09	.11	.26*	.15	.35*
Federal Government	.17*	.13	.17*	.14*	.07	.21*	.15	.22	.26*
Military	.14*	.05	.05	.06	.06	.04	.14	-.11	.25*
Antiabortionists	.11*	-.06	.06	.17*	.05	.05	.20*	.34*	.17*
<i>Neutral</i>									
Supreme Court	.07*	.02	.20*	.00	-.04	-.10	.15	.18	.22*
Fundamentalists	.07*	-.06	-.02	.02	.06	.10	.05	.14	.19*
Political Evangelicals	.06*	-.19	.02	.07	-.01	-.01	.14	.37*	.18*
Whites	.04	.08	.17*	.00	-.05	.01	.03	-.33*	.15*
Jews	-.03	-.10	.01	-.04	.02	-.16*	.06	-.09	.03
Catholics	-.04	-.10	.00	-.22*	-.02	-.10	.08	-.20	.13*
Women	-.06*	-.07	.08	-.16*	-.19*	-.04	-.10	.02	.02
Congress	-.07*	-.15	.10	-.16*	-.03	-.05	-.11	-.07	-.10
Elderly	-.10*	.04	.04	-.16*	-.09	-.19*	.10	-.31*	-.14*
<i>Negative</i>									
Environmentalists	-.14*	-.22*	.04	-.14*	-.16*	-.21*	-.03	-.22	-.24*
Palestinians	-.14*	-.33*	-.10	-.09	-.24*	-.17*	-.10	.20	-.19*
Hispanics	-.16*	-.30*	-.43*	-.09	-.23*	-.28*	-.01	-.21	-.15*
Poor	-.18*	-.21*	-.17*	-.22*	-.16*	-.28*	-.08	-.20	-.09
Welfare	-.19*	-.37*	-.28*	-.19*	-.11	-.16*	.02	-.16	-.24*
Illegal Aliens	-.19*	-.34*	-.36*	-.12*	-.13	-.24*	-.10	-.05	-.19*
Gays and Lesbians	-.22*	-.16	-.31*	-.17*	-.14	-.26*	-.21*	-.07	-.34*
Blacks	-.24*	-.24*	-.26*	-.23*	-.35*	-.39*	-.04	-.16	-.16*
Feminists	-.30*	-.18	-.36*	-.31*	-.29*	-.34*	-.28*	-.41*	-.23*
Labor Unions	-.33*	-.28*	-.28*	-.40*	-.31*	-.37*	-.35*	-.26	-.27*
Civil Rights Leaders	-.37*	-.41*	-.40*	-.30*	-.37*	-.54*	-.23*	-.24	-.32*
Liberals	-.39*	-.38*	-.14*	-.34*	-.48*	-.35*	-.42*	-.32*	-.40*

* $p < .05$

while in New England they are welfare recipients, and once again, civil rights leaders.

Finally, it is clear from a comparison of the correlation coefficients in Tables 1 and 3 that if political reference groups are interpreted as the cultural "objects" of public policy, then at the national level cultural (symbolic) issues were at least as important as the so-called rational (cognitive) issues in structuring the presidential vote. At the disaggregated regional level, of course, cultural reference group theory appears to provide a superior predictive model to rational voting theory.

To estimate the impact of the cultural dominance issue in the 1988 campaign, it is necessary to make the following assumptions. According to cultural theory, racial origin and ethnic ancestry are the fountainheads of subcultural differences. Given this premise, it follows that in culturally pluralistic societies, electoral politics is, among other things, the struggle for racial and ethnic dominance. If

this thesis is true, then there should be a strong correlation between a ranking of the culturally dominant and subordinate groups in American society, on the one hand, and the presidential vote on the other.

Table 4 presents the results of crosstabulating the 1988 Bush vote with one hypothesized cultural pecking order. In this scheme, all respondents were classified into six major cultural groups on the basis of their responses to the ethnic ancestry question. In the presumed order of their cultural dominance, the six groups include mainline, American, ethnic, Asian, New World, and African.¹⁴ As predicted by dominance theory, the results show that support for Bush was strong among currently ascendant groups in the cultural spectrum, i.e., mainline, American, ethnic, and Asian voters, but that it tapered off sharply among New World and African voters.

(5) *That the dominant cleavages in the 1988 presidential election were not socioeconomic, but cultural; i.e.,*

divisions based on race-ethnicity, religion, and regional culture.

Support for this contention is readily available in the form of national exit poll results and state-by-state aggregate election returns. For instance, exit poll results from the *New York Times/CBS News Poll* (1988: 17) show that:

- 59 percent of whites voted for Bush while 86 percent of blacks voted for Dukakis;
- 81 percent of white fundamentalist or evangelical Christians, 66 percent of Protestants, and 52 percent of Catholics went for Bush; while 64 percent of Jews went for Dukakis; and
- 67 percent of whites in the South, the most Democratic region of the country, voted for Bush.

By comparison, class divisions are not nearly as pronounced. Thus, there is not much difference in the levels of reported support for Bush

among lower-middle (\$12,500-\$24,999), middle (\$25,000-\$34,999) and upper-middle (\$35,000-\$49,999) income families. The 20 percent of all voters who fell into the lower-middle group divided about evenly between Bush and Dukakis while the 40 percent of all voters who fell into the middle and upper-middle groups provided only a six percent margin for Bush. The only income groups exhibiting clear partisan preferences are the poor (under \$12,000) and the rich (over \$50,000). Both divide in a 62 to 37 percent ratio, with the poor, of course, tilting to Dukakis and the rich to Bush.

Aggregate state results, in turn, suggest that Bush enjoyed a solid, almost impregnable base of electoral support in the South, the Great Plains, and the Rocky Mountains. Collectively these states provide 204 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency, a virtual “lock” by most standards. In addition, he won support from states that were populated, in varying degrees, by southern settlers. These include the border states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Oklahoma with 28 electoral votes plus the lower Midwestern states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois with an additional 59 electoral votes.

By comparison, the only states that Dukakis carried are “northern” states which:

- have predominantly nonwhite populations (Hawaii and the District of Columbia);
- are strongly Democratic at the state level (Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, and West Virginia); or
- are known for their predominantly white and culturally homogeneous populations, “moralistic” subcultures, and “progressive” politics (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Oregon, Washington, and Iowa).

Perhaps a more definitive test of this contention, however, is provided by individual level data drawn from the 1988 NES study. Table 5 presents the results of correlating the 1988 Bush vote with five selected variables for the entire national sample and eight regional subsamples. The variables include measures of racial origin, ethnic ancestry, Protestant

church membership, family income, and Republican party identification. From a cultural perspective, the party identification variable may be construed as a supra-cultural variable that reflects individual differences in racial-ethnic background, religious affiliation, social structure, and regional subculture. And since it is so close to the actual vote decision, it appears to represent an overall propensity to vote for the endorsed candidate of one party over the other.

Therefore, if we set aside (ignore) the results for party identification, the tabulated data clearly show that the 1988 presidential vote was structured more in each region (and nationally) by cultural (i.e., racial, ethnic, or religious) than socioeconomic (i.e., family income) differences. In addition, it is clear that the distribution of the vote depends on the cultural mix in each region. Thus, race becomes an important cleavage in the vote wherever blacks are found in significant numbers, namely the Mid-Atlantic, Great

Lakes, Border South, Deep South, and Pacific (largely limited to California) regions. Ethnic cleavages, in turn, are most pronounced in the New England region, but largely disappear elsewhere except in the racially divided Border South where a significant number of ethnic whites apparently joined forces with mainline groups. Religious divisions, by comparison, are most pronounced in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain regions. Finally, the results of Table 5 suggest that race and social class are, to some extent, coalescing cleavages in American politics. And this may help account for some of the apparent differences in scholarly explanations of modern presidential elections (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Erikson 1988).

I rest my case.

Conclusion

In this article, I have offered a serious and systematic explanation

TABLE 4.
Breakdown of the 1988 Presidential Vote, by Racial and Ethnic Ancestry

Vote	Racial and Ethnic Ancestry					
	Mainline	American	Ethnic	Asian	New World	African
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Bush	62.7	59.3	53.0	54.5	31.0	6.1
Dukakis	36.0	40.3	45.5	45.5	69.0	90.8
Other	1.2	0.4	1.4	0.0	0.0	3.1

TABLE 5.
Intercorrelations of 1988 Bush Vote with Selected Variables, by Nation and State Cultural Groupings

Aggregation Level	N	Selected Variables				
		White ^a	Ethnic ^b	Protestant ^c	Income ^d	Repub. ^e
United States	1209	.32*	.01	.13*	.19*	.56*
State Grouping						
New England	70	.09	-.27	.19	-.03	.60*
Mid-Atlantic	179	.28*	.04	.11	.23*	.45*
Great Lakes	238	.37*	-.04	.12*	.28*	.59*
Border South	141	.44*	.18*	-.05	.28*	.55*
Deep South	204	.42*	.06	.14*	.19*	.52*
Great Plains	112	.14	-.01	.27*	.07	.57*
Mountain	47	.17	-.10	.33*	.17	.64*
Pacific	218	.26*	-.00	.20*	.14*	.62*

*p < .05

^aCoded as 1 for white respondents and 0 for nonwhite respondents.

^bCoded as 1 for all respondents who reported a “white ethnic” ancestry and 0 for everyone else.

^cCoded as 1 for all respondents who said they were Protestant and 0 for everyone else.

^dMeasured by a respondent’s estimated family income.

^eCoded as 1 for all Republican identifiers and 0 for everyone else.

for the Bush win in 1988. In particular, I have argued that there is an underlying logic and dynamic to modern presidential elections which is primarily, but not exclusively, cultural. Thus, Republican candidates have won more often in recent elections because they are more successful in appealing to the cultural preferences and prejudices of American voters. According to this perspective, the broadcast and printed media should be viewed not as the king-makers, but as the handmaidens of American politics. Finally, this logic may help explain not only the outcomes of presidential general elections but also the outcomes of presidential primaries. Perhaps the most interesting development in the 1988 campaign was the extent to which the major contenders in each party were dependent on culturally and regionally distinctive coalitions of political supporters.¹⁵

My final contention is simple and direct. If this interpretation of the 1988 presidential campaign and election is correct, then it follows that future Democratic presidential candidates who ignore the cultural realities of American politics do so at their electoral peril.

Notes

1. Bob Erikson (1989: 30), for instance, has mischievously argued that "it must be in the Democrats' electoral interest to lose presidential elections." In his first retrospective assessment, Lee Sigelman (1989: 38) waggishly attributes the outcome of the presidential primaries to momentum and "the constantly shifting and largely unforeseeable fortunes of the campaign"; in his second, he (Sigelman 1990) sardonically concludes that "Democrats are too stupid to calculate their self-interest" and Democratic presidential candidates are too ugly to win.

2. Perhaps one unobtrusive measure of this trend is the large number of parents in the 1980s (Williams 1990: 17) who chose names for their children "that reflected their heritage, ethnic origin and economic status."

3. Based on the 1988 National Election Study, about 71 percent of all self-identified "mainline" respondents reported voting as opposed to 64 percent of all self-identified "white ethnic" respondents, 55 percent of all self-identified "Asian-American" respondents, 46 percent of all self-identified "New World" respondents, 52 percent of all self-identified "African-American" respondents, and 49 percent of all self-identified "American" respondents. For definitional purposes, "mainline" respondents include those who

reported British, German, and Scandinavian ancestries as well as those who indicated Anglo-Canadian, Netherlander, Hollander, Dutch, Australian, New Zealander, Tasmanian, Protestant, and Mormon ancestries. "White ethnics" include all respondents who reported Irish, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean, and Balkan ancestries as well as those who indicated French-Canadian, Austrian, Belgian, French, Luxembourg, Swiss, Western European, European, white, Caucasian, Catholic, and Jewish ancestries. "African-Americans" include all respondents who reported black, Negro, American black, and Afro-American ancestries as well as those who said their forebears were from any African country except Egypt and South Africa. "New World" respondents include all those who reported American Indian, Mexican, Mexican-American, Central-American, West Indian, South American, Chicano, and Hispanic ancestries as well as those who indicated tribal affiliations. Finally, "American" respondents include all respondents who refused to report an ethnic ancestry other than American.

4. Social welfare issues appear to have declined because of the institutionalization of the social welfare state. In modern presidential elections this fact is reflected in the declining importance of social class as a voting cleavage. Foreign policy issues, of course, are generally esoteric (with the notable exception of defense spending and divisive conflicts such as the Vietnam War) and therefore do not generate strong policy preferences among most voters.

5. The liberal-conservative scores were estimated by computing the group averages of standardized scores. These standardized scores vary between -1 (an extremely liberal response) and +1 (an extremely conservative response). They were obtained by subtracting the midpoint score from the actual value and then dividing by one-half of the range.

6. The "Bush vote" was measured by a dichotomous variable that took on the values of 1 (voted for Bush) and 0 (did not vote for Bush) based on responses to the question: "Who did you vote for?"

7. On three of the four "cultural" issues in Table 1, blacks are virtually indistinguishable from white southerners and white ethnics. The uniformly liberal positions of all New Deal groups on the role of women are hardly surprising, given the loaded question wording of this item in the 1988 National Election Study.

8. Polls suggest Dukakis' lead temporarily increased to 17 percent in the brief afterglow of the convention. But this lead seems to have been ephemeral and quickly evaporated.

9. Though Texas was a part of the Old Confederacy, its political culture is quite different. As Neal Peirce and Jerry Hagstrom (1984: 618) observe, Texas has always been considered the big, brawling braggart in the family of American states, one which "inspires love and hate." In his insightful delineation of cultural regions in the U.S., Gastil (1975) divides the South into four different subregions: the Lowland South, the Upland South, the Mountain South, and finally, the Western South, which includes primarily Texas and Oklahoma.

10. These messages and images were com-

municated not only in paid television and radio ads but also in special election brochures circulated to millions of voters by state Republican party organizations. An Ohio edition juxtaposed on its front cover a smiling, all-American pose of Bush in a conservative dark blue suit with a supercilious snapshot of Dukakis in a garish pinstripe suit. Smaller prints of these pictures were laced throughout the brochure to provide visual reminders of the candidates when voters read their respective issue positions. Inside the cover, readers were introduced to a mug shot of a sullen-looking Horton, informed of his conviction and sentence to life in prison "WITHOUT PAROLE" for first degree murder in the stabbing of a 17-year-old boy during a robbery, alerted to Dukakis' role in paroling him under Massachusetts' "recreational weekend furlough" program, and then provided a blow-by-blow description of his brutalization of a young Maryland couple that culminated in the repeated rape of the young man's fiancée at knife point. On the next page readers are informed of the unsavory records of Massachusetts' prisoners released under the furlough program and then asked to compare the positions of the two candidates on the death penalty and mandatory sentencing as well as the political endorsements they received (police patrolmen associations for Bush, the ACLU for Dukakis). On subsequent pages, readers are informed about Massachusetts' high levels of taxation and spending under Dukakis, the state's present budget difficulties, Dukakis' positions on a number of defense issues that would allegedly insure "a weaker America" (next to a picture of a tall, dominant Bush looking down and shaking hands with a diminutive, docile Gorbachev), and the stands of the two candidates on education, the environment, and family values. Finally, on the back cover, readers are treated to a firm-and-resolute, full-page pose of Bush in a macho Air Force flight jacket.

11. The New England region includes the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; the Mid-Atlantic region includes the states of Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland plus the District of Columbia; the Great Lakes region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin; the Border South region includes the states of Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia; the Deep South region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas; the Great Plains region includes the states of Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota; the Mountain region includes the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; and the Pacific region includes the states of Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

12. This classification scheme assumes that what matters is *not* the average magnitude of a group's thermometer rating (which only establishes a benchmark score) but the extent to which attitudes toward a group provide a basis for partisan differentiation.

13. Across from Temple Square in the heart of Salt Lake City, the Mormons have erected a bronze statuary of a Mormon father, mother, and son. The son is eagerly running from the loving arms of his kneeling mother to the expectant arms of his standing father. On the base of the pedestal is an inscription that reads: "The nation is only as strong as the family."

14. The nationalities that comprise each group are identified in note 3. A seventh group, "Middle-Eastern," was found to include no respondents of middle-eastern ancestry who voted.

15. In the Democratic primaries, for instance, Jesse Jackson was the overwhelming favorite among black voters and generally did best in states with large black populations. Michael Dukakis was the preferred choice among urban, liberal, and Jewish voters and was usually the vote leader in states with significant concentrations of these groups. Finally, Missouri's Richard Gephardt and Tennessee's Albert Gore were largely regional, "favorite-son" candidates and did best in those states that were in close proximity to their home states. In the Republican primaries, Pat Robertson had a very narrow base among evangelical Christians and did well in those states where their intensity of support (the Iowa caucuses) or concentration was evident. Kansas's Bob Dole, a favorite son of the agrarian heartland, did well in the neighboring midwestern farm state of Iowa, but could not do much elsewhere. Bush, by comparison, seemed to attract broad-based support from traditional Republican groups, such as white mainline Protestants in the North, and white Protestants of British ancestry who have been defecting from the Democratic Party in the South.

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