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THE LAST WHITE ELECTION?

LAST SEPTEMBER, WHILE Bill Clinton was delighting the 2012 Democratic Convention in Charlotte with his folksy jibe at Mitt Romney for wanting to ‘double up on the trickle down’, a fanatical adherent of Ludwig von Mises, wearing a villainous black cowboy hat and accompanied by a gun-toting bodyguard, captured the national headquarters of the Tea Party movement in Washington, DC. The Jack Palance double in the Stetson was Dick Armeý. As House Majority Leader in 1997 he had participated in a botched plot, instigated by Republican Whip Tom DeLay and an obscure Ohio Congressman named John Boehner, to topple House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Now Armeý was attempting to wrest total control of FreedomWorks, the organization most responsible for repackaging rank-and-file Republican rage as the ‘Tea Party rebellion’ as well as training and coordinating its activists.¹ Tea Party Patriots—a national network with several hundred affiliates—is one of its direct offshoots. As FreedomWorks’ chairperson, Armeý symbolized an ideological continuity between the Republican congressional landslides of 1994 and 2010, the old ‘Contract with America’ and the new ‘Contract from America’. No one was better credentialed to inflict mortal damage on the myth of conservative solidarity.

Only in December did the lurid details of the coup leak to the press. According to the *Washington Post*, ‘the gun-wielding assistant escorted FreedomWorks’ top two employees off the premises, while Armeý suspended several others who broke down in sobs at the news.’² The chief target was Matt Kibbe, the organization’s president and co-author with Armeý of the best-selling *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto*. Although Kibbe, originally a protégé of Lee Atwater, is an equally devout Misesian (indeed, ‘distinguished senior fellow’ at the Austrian Economics Center in Vienna), he is a generation younger than 72-year-old Armeý or, for that matter, most of the Tea Party base. On the FreedomWorks website Kibbe describes himself as living ‘with Terry, his sublimely awesome

wife of 25 years' and spending his leisure time 'reading Hayek or Rand, watching *The Big Lebowski* or listening to a killer Grateful Dead show.' Yet as Armeý himself had put it, 'sometimes you're the windshield and sometimes you're the bug.'³

Although he had support from powerful backers, including former White House counsellor C. Boyden Gray, Armeý's delusional dictatorship over Tea Party Central lasted less than a week. In conference calls with staff and supporters he denounced Kibbe for using the organization for self-publicity and personal profit (especially in the publication of his new book *Hostile Takeover: Resisting Centralized Government's Stranglehold on America*) while keeping *him*—chairman and historical icon—out of the media limelight. Armeý was also critical of the million-dollar annual fee that FreedomWorks pays Glenn Beck for publicity and fundraising (Rush Limbaugh reportedly has a similar deal).⁴ In addition, Armeý accused Kibbe's team of failing to rally behind the doomed Senate campaign of Todd Akin, the Missouri ignoramus whose remarks about 'legitimate rape' had led Romney and other outraged party leaders to demand his withdrawal from the race. According to one staffer interviewed by the *Post*, 'It was clear that under Armeý's leadership, the organization as we knew it was going to be driven into the ground.'⁵

In the end, one of FreedomWorks' major donors, Richard J. Stephenson, an Ayn Rand fan who operates a controversial but hugely profitable chain of private cancer treatment centres, offered Armeý \$8 million in instalments to go back to his ranch in Texas. Kibbe resumed control over 400 North Capitol Street NW, but Armeý supporters continue to spread rumours about staff wrongdoing. Tea Party blogs, in turn, have accused

¹ FreedomWorks and FreedomWorks Foundation—a tax law duality—emerged from a split in Citizens for a Sound Economy, reputedly because Armeý refused to take orders from Charles and David Koch, the billionaire brothers who funded it. (See 'Funny Kochs News', LewRockwell.com, 16 April 2010.) Americans for Prosperity, whose board is chaired by David Koch, remains the family subsidiary, also heavily involved in selling Tea Party astroturf.

² Amy Gardner, 'FreedomWorks Tea Party Group Nearly Falls Apart in Fight between Old and New Guard', *Washington Post*, 25 December 2012.

³ Quoted in Sandy Hume, 'Armeý of One', *Texas Monthly*, September 1997.

⁴ Todd Gillman, 'Dick Armeý cites ethical lapses at FreedomWorks', *Dallas News*, 5 December 2012; Joe Strupp, 'Dick Armeý Dishes on FreedomWorks' Deals with Beck and Limbaugh', *Media Matters for America* blog, 4 January 2013.

⁵ Gardner, 'FreedomWorks Tea Party Group Nearly Falls Apart'.

Arney first of extortion, then of treason after he told his side of the story to *Mother Jones's* David Corn. In other circumstances this duel between the black hats and rightwing Deadheads would have been a 'tempest in a teapot', akin to the episodic defrocking of a famous televangelist or a Congressional adulterer. But Kibbe, a cool operator in a histrionic milieu, insisted that Arney and his backers were clumsily camouflaging the larger issues at stake. In an internal document he charged that the attempted takeover was just old-guard retaliation for FreedomWorks' sponsorship of Tea Party activists in primary campaigns against 'establishment Republicans' (a term which in Tea Party/Sarah Palin circles can encompass Rick Perry and Lindsey Graham as well as John McCain, Haley Barbour and John Boehner).⁶ As an example, Kibbe cited the controversial Arizona primary the previous spring where redistricting had pitted two incumbent Republican congressmen against each other: Ben Quayle, the son of Bush Senior's vice president, and David Schweikert, a prodigy of Arizona ultra-conservatism. While Boyden Gray and other wealthy trustees donated to Quayle, Kibbe lionized Schweikert for standing up to Boehner and other GOP grandees.⁷

It was inevitable that defeat in November 2012 would reopen every wound and rivalry amongst prominent Republicans, undoing all the hard work of Karl Rove and his billionaire friends in creating a beauty strip of party unity around the Romney campaign. Across the suburban steppes Republican factions started warring with each other. Since the last GOP 'moderates' have been driven into extinction and 1980s-vintage Reaganites are gone to pasture, the current Republican civil war (as illustrated by the events at FreedomWorks) has a distinctly Oedipal dimension: jaded Gingrich revolutionaries versus their own demon spawn. Seldom in the history of the House of Representatives has the majority party so brutally cleaved itself down the middle as did the Republicans on New

⁶ One of 2012's most embittering battles was the Texas Senatorial primary that pitted Ted Cruz, notorious for claiming that George Soros is the head of a worldwide environmentalist conspiracy to abolish golf courses, against Rick Perry's Lieutenant Governor, David Dewhurst. The entire galaxy of Tea Party celebrities—including Sarah Palin, Jim DeMint, Rand Paul, Glenn Beck and (ironically) Arney—flew into Houston to give Cruz the crucial boost that won both the primary and the seat. ('Tea Party Cavalry Rides into Texas to Support Cruz', *Fox News*, 25 July 2012.)

⁷ David Corn, 'FreedomWorks Feud', *Mother Jones*, 24 December 2012. Schweikert won, but was later booted off a key committee by Boehner when he denounced the so-called 'Plan B' fiscal compromise. Arney sided with Schweikert and the Tea Party, sending a stinging note to the Speaker.

Year's Day, when 151 members—including Majority Leader Eric Cantor, most of the freshmen and almost all of the Tea Party caucus—rejected the fiscal compromise ('Plan B') submitted by their own Speaker. Some prominent supporters of the rejectionist bloc immediately warned that the 85 Republicans, mainly from Northern and Western states, who had voted for the bill (along with 115 Democrats) could face capital punishment in the 2014 primaries.⁸ The rift in Congress continued to deepen a few weeks later—largely along a Mason–Dixon fault line—when an even larger majority of the Republican caucus (179 members) voted against emergency aid for victims of Hurricane Sandy that was eagerly sought by Republicans from Northeastern states. Boehner's dwindling band of conservative realists are discovering that the small-government fundamentalism of the Tea Party, originally heralded as the third wave of the Reagan Revolution, is actually the road to an elephant graveyard.

Canals on Mars

Democrats, for the most part, have been surprisingly wary in making world-historical claims about Obama's reelection or the escalating Republican fratricide. Conservatives, re-experiencing the trauma of 2008, have been more inclined to interpret the results with eschatological hyperbole. Pat Buchanan bluntly declared, for instance: 'At the presidential level, the Republican Party is at death's door.' Victor Davis Hanson, a former classics professor and farmer who fancies himself a Cato of the rightwing lecture circuit, declared Republicans were now living in the 'most foreboding times in my 59 years.' David Frum worried, 'Will the Obama coalition now forever outvote and pillage the makers of American wealth? Many conservative commentators say yes.' A hysterical Quin Hillyer at *American Spectator* warned that Republican 'failures on an epic scale' left conservatives at the mercy of 'a newly empowered, radical president—bent on leftist "revenge" and untethered by the Constitution.' *Commentary's* John Podhoretz excoriated the 'contentlessness of the Romney campaign' (proof of 'the vacuity of the centre-right') yet also conceded that 'the Republican Party is dominated by a set of ideas and issues that are catnip to its own base but repellent to everyone else.' Another *Commentary* contributor, Jonathan Tobin, judged that the dual blows of Romney's defeat and renewed 'civil war between establishment types and Tea Partiers' had rendered Republican opposition to

⁸ David Freedlander, 'Anger Over Fiscal-Cliff Deal Fires Up Tea Party', *The Daily Beast*, 3 January 2013.

Obama ‘useless’.⁹ Newt Gingrich, finally, sermonized that too many conservatives ‘underestimate the scale of the threat we face’ as cultural and demographic trends ‘turn America into a national version of Chicago or California’.

Unless Republicans profoundly and deeply rethink their assumptions and study what the Democrats have been doing the future could become very bleak and the Clinton–Obama majority could become as dominant as the Roosevelt majority was from 1932 to 1968 and from 1930 to 1994 in the House of Representatives.¹⁰

Such prognostics from the Right seemingly provide confirmation for the thesis—advanced by prominent Democratic political analysts like Ruy Teixeira, John Halpin and John Judis—that 2008 was the end of the age of Reagan and the advent of a new Democratic majority. In the lexicon of critical realignment theory, 2012, despite the slippage in the Obama vote, was the classic ‘confirming election’. Certainly exit-poll data, strengthened by belief in demographic determinism, supports a circumstantial case for Gingrich’s worst fears, but midterm elections, such as the huge Republican congressional backlash of 2010, have a nasty habit of controverting presidential-year paradigms. Paradoxically, as contested elections and swing states have become fewer, the turbulence on the margins has increased, and political forecasting becomes an adventure into what the quants like to call ‘volatility space’. Indeed broad patterns in contemporary American politics are like the canals on Mars in 1900: every expert claims to see them, but no one can completely prove that they exist.

My own fuzzy image of the next four years resembles another of Gingrich’s prolific scenarios: unrelenting conflict between Democratic power in the White House and Senate, and stubborn Republican control over the House and a majority of state legislatures and governors’ mansions. (The Supreme Court is the institutional wild card.) ‘We are

⁹ Buchanan, ‘Is the GOP Headed for the Boneyard?’, *Human Events*, 13 December 2012; Hanson, ‘2013: Welcome to very, very, scary times’, PJMedia.com, 2 January 2013; Frum in symposium, ‘What is the Future of Conservatism in the Wake of the 2012 Election?’, *Commentary*, January 2013; Hillyer, ‘Recovering from Electoral Disaster’, *American Spectator*, December 2012; Podhoretz, ‘The Way Forward’, *Commentary*, November 2012; Tobin, ‘The GOP Really Hits Bottom’, *Commentary*, 21 December 2012.

¹⁰ Newt Gingrich, ‘The Challenge Confronting Republicans’, *Human Events*, 1 January 2013.

in a period', Gingrich writes understatedly, 'where there could be an alliance between 30 Republican Governors and a Republican US House of Representatives which could highlight better solutions and also highlight the failures of the federal government.'¹¹

Since 2010, an alternative America has been taking shape in states where Tea Party Republicans dominate the legislatures. As always, legislators in Kansas or Alabama are eager to skirmish with the Federal government and even the Supreme Court over gay marriage, abortion, immigration and assault rifles. But this time around they are even more focused on implementing locally what was defeated nationally. Since the rise of the Tea Party wing, powerful if *ad hoc* coalitions of Republican leaders and local capitalists, closely linked to ultra-conservative policy centres with billionaire patrons, have turned toward the radical restructuring of their state economies. First of all, Republican governors sucker-punched Democrats by unleashing attacks on public and private collective bargaining with the obvious aim of transforming the industrial Midwest into a right-to-work utopia like the South. In Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, angry teachers and steelworkers repeatedly confronted Tea Party supporters in capitol skirmishes that reached epic scale in the 'Battle of Madison'. Meanwhile Republican governors in several traditional right-to-work states (Kansas, Nebraska and Louisiana), who don't have powerful unions to break up, are pushing for the abolition of (progressive) state income taxes with the aims of shrinking the public sector and shifting the tax burden from high-income constituents to poorer people, via sales taxes.

These legislative offensives, and the designs for Tea Party government that they are putting into action, have been compared to the tax revolts of the late 1970s. But in vehemence and intent, they more closely resemble 'Massive Resistance' in the 1950s and 1960s when the White South, led by its governors and legislators in coordination with its congressional delegations, defied all the rules of coalition-building, compromise and obedience to the Washington establishment in order to wage all-out war against black political empowerment. (The Tea Party reincarnates much of the bigotry and intransigence of the White Citizens' Councils, albeit with the moral salves of a few reactionary black celebrities like Herman Cain, Clarence Thomas and Tim Scott.) Further

¹¹ Gingrich, 'Challenge'.

'Southernization' in both the geographical and ideological sense, however, is beginning to terrify many Old School Republicans. Although they created and nursed the monstrosity, they are now coming to dread the electoral implications of a party of aging but militant white people dominated by Misesian ultras, extreme Christians, assault-rifle owners and diehard Confederates.

The domestic extremism of the GOP stands even more naked after so much of the party's foreign-policy and military agenda has been effectively co-opted by Obama. Romney was the first Republican candidate in memory who could offer no compelling vision of 'clear and present dangers' that Democrats were failing to confront. The attempt by Republican leaders, especially a bitter John McCain, to spin the Benghazi debacle into a 'second Watergate' only betrayed a lack of traction against a President who better fits the 'Jack Ryan' role of Tom Clancy's special-ops president than any of his Republican competition. Obama's enthusiasm for stealth war and murder by remote control, as well as his bipartisan appointments in the Pentagon and his ceaseless cultivation of the counter-insurgency lobby, have made his war-mongering flank almost invulnerable to traditional Republican attack, even with Netanyahu as Romney's shadow running mate. The Republican campaign, bereft of red scares or Osama Bin Laden, was left to stand or fall with the Ryan budget, the tax cuts for billionaires, and Romney's expertise in corporate takeovers.

The current choice before the GOP is stark. Can the party, led by a Marco Rubio, Bobby Jindal or Chris Christie, reinvent itself from the top down in order to encompass the minimal share of American ethnic and racial diversity that henceforth will be required to occupy the White House? Or will it entrench itself further behind a maximalist programme that celebrates the philosophy of the bunker, of massive resistance to providing New Deal safety nets for future generations of colour? If growth returns and some share of increasing productivity feeds through to wages (the wager that underlies Obama's willingness to gamble the most valuable heirlooms of the New Deal), neither option matters: the Republicans will probably go the way of the Whigs. On the other hand, if the economy stagnates or declines, then the 'brutish future' that Thomas Edsall predicts, where the 'two major parties are enmeshed in a death struggle to protect the benefits and goods that flow

to their respective bases', is already foreshadowed by the recent political class struggles in Red America.¹²

Powerful sectional forces, as evidenced by the bitter split over the relief bill for Hurricane Sandy, will also influence which of these scenarios will come true. Currently most of the embattled GOP leadership comes from the Great Lakes or border South, while the intransigent majority in the House hails either from Dixie or the Big Empty (low-population Plains and Western states). The nightmare of Northern conservatives is the transformation of a strong national party into a twenty-first-century version of the Confederate States of America. The struggle over Republican identity, moreover, has a profound bearing on the functional relationships between the GOP and the private sector. Tea Party Republicans and fiscal extremists (like their forgotten ancestors, the Taft wing of the 1940s and 1950s) lean toward the Club for Growth, even economic nationalism, not the Business Round Table or the G8.¹³ If their power increases and the GOP's centre of gravity continues to move deeper South, corporate boardrooms will undoubtedly reconsider their investment portfolios in a party that clearly measures second best to the Democrats in the management of the global and long-term interests of American capitalism.

The notes which follow sift through the exit polls, opinion pages and academic studies to better understand both the current Republican agony in presidential politics and counterpart Democratic frustrations in Congress and state politics. The US Federal political system is such an odd and complex orrery, with major electoral planets often moving in opposite directions or even around different ideological suns, that it is essential to consider not only the presidential race, but also briefly the elections for the House, the battles for control of state governments, and the new factional alignments inside the parties.¹⁴ Trends that already seem destiny at the presidential level may take years to arrive in

¹² Thomas Edsall, *The Age of Austerity: How Scarcity Will Remake American Politics*, New York 2012, p. 1.

¹³ The Club for Growth, denounced as the 'Club for Greed' by Arkansas Republican Mike Huckabee, advocates total freedom to accumulate and preserve personal wealth. One of the godparents of the Tea Party, the Club has crusaded since its founding in 1999 to destroy the moderate wing of the GOP represented by Olympia Snowe, Arlen Specter, Lincoln Chafee and Richard Lugar.

¹⁴ I neglect the 2012 Senate races, closely linked with some exceptions to the presidential campaign.

the mail at the congressional or state level. Electoral ‘data’, moreover, is always subject to multiple interpretations. Looking at social forces via poll sampling is like viewing Mars through a Victorian telescope: over-interpretation is almost inevitable.¹⁵

Dog on the roof

On election eve, Romney joked with reporters at the Boston Convention Center that as soon as he moved into the White House he would buy another Weimaraner. (No one had the nerve to ask where the new puppy would ride in the Presidential limousine.) Unlike John McCain in 2008, he was relaxed and supremely confident. His chief pollster, Neil Newhouse, had earlier assured him that the win was in the bag: all of the proprietary Republican surveys as well as the Gallup Poll were predicting low voter turnout for crucial Obama demographics and a strong rally toward Romney of independents in swing states like Ohio. The Romney war room, moreover, possessed an ‘unprecedented advantage’: the hugely expensive IT system known as ‘Project Orca’ which, with the help of 34,000 Republican volunteers, would monitor voting in real time to ensure ‘hyper-accuracy’ in the allocation of campaign resources to increase turnout in crucial precincts in swing states.¹⁶ It was signature Romney: Bain Capital was feared and renowned for employing massive data analysis before closing deals or sending companies to the breaking yard.

Before polls closed in Iowa, the champagne had already been uncorked and the Romney people were in a jolly mood. Officials at Logan International Airport told the *Boston Globe* that ‘their private aviation tarmac was crammed with corporate jets that ferried in campaign

¹⁵ The traditional ‘day-after’ wisdom about national elections has been based on polling in all 50 states conducted by the New Jersey firm Edison Research for a consortium of major media: ABC News, Associated Press, CBS, CNN, NBC and Fox. But the huge recent increase in early voting (almost 40 per cent in 2012) has necessitated parallel telephone polling—an expense that led the National Election Pool last year to restrict detailed exit questionnaires to 31 states. As a result, the analysis of voting behaviour in major states like Texas has to await the Voting and Registration Supplement. This US Census Bureau survey of 100,000 voters, taken a few weeks after every federal election, will be published in Spring 2013.

¹⁶ The name ‘Orca’ was chosen because killer whales eat ‘Narwhal’, the name of the Obama campaign’s IT system. Michael Falcone, ‘Romney Campaign Acknowledges High-Tech Election-Day Monitoring System “Had Its Challenges”’, *ABC News*, 10 November 2012.

supporters en route to the convention centre.’ A fireworks company had been hired to ignite the sky over Boston harbour with pyrotechnics as soon as Romney claimed victory. One reporter had already caught a glimpse of the transition website ready to go online.¹⁷ Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post*, who like other reporters had to pay \$1,000 to attend the gala, found the regal atmosphere and intense security an unsettling image of what a Romney presidency would be like. ‘The gleaming convention centre built with hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, is on a peninsula in the Boston harbour that was turned into an election-night fortress, with helicopters overhead, metal barricades and authorities searching vehicles. Only a few gawkers crossed the bridge from downtown to stand outside.’¹⁸

In the end the fireworks went off in Chicago, not Boston. Orca had crashed early in the day, and Democratic turnout in critical states rose toward 2008 levels. Obama’s support was not evincing the ‘motivation gap’ that underpinned Republican assumptions about the election. Indeed some trends were simply outside of the Romney campaign’s conceptual universe: for instance, the unprecedented urban turnout in Ohio that increased African-American participation from 11 per cent of the electorate in 2008 to 15 per cent in 2012. (Romney also performed worse than George Bush in 2004 in most of Ohio’s mainly white counties.)¹⁹ Except for North Carolina, where the Democratic Party has become internally dysfunctional, the President ultimately retained the rest of his 2008 swing states.²⁰

Romney, victory speech in hand, was reported to be ‘shell-shocked’ by his rapidly mounting losses so early on election eve, as were the expensive consultants who had assured him that First Tuesday’s voters would be older and whiter. (‘After Ohio went for Mr Obama’, CBS reported from

¹⁷ Glen Johnson, ‘Mitt Romney Planned Boston Harbour Fireworks Show that was Scotched by Election Loss’, *Boston Globe*, 8 November 2012.

¹⁸ Dana Milbank, ‘At Romney headquarters, the defeat of the 1 per cent’, *Washington Post*, 7 November 2012.

¹⁹ John Dickerson, ‘Why Romney Never Saw It Coming’, *Slate*, 9 November 2012.

²⁰ Indiana, which was the biggest surprise victory of Obama in 2008, was conceded by the Democrats this time around as a secure Red state. The president, as a result, never bothered to visit—an example of the cold-blooded triage that routinely sacrifices the Democratic base in hard-to-win constituencies. The Tea Party-dominated legislature had passed a right-to-work law in February, and Indiana’s embattled labour movement would have relished some national attention.

Boston, ‘it was over, but senior advisers say no one could process it.’²¹ The Republican Party, after all, had spent four years creating a minefield of legal obstacles to registration and voting by the 47 per cent, perhaps the most systematic attempt at voter disfranchisement since Jim Crow. Moreover the Roberts Supreme Court’s egregious ‘Citizens United’ ruling, which gave First Amendment rights to corporations and PACs, had opened the floodgates to negative advertising by the GOP’s super-wealthy supporters. The Romney camp outspent Obama in all but two of the swing states, and hundreds of millions of dollars of negativity—50 per cent more advertising than in 2008—super-saturated the television screens of the swing states for weeks on end.²²

The king of this shadow campaign world, of course, was the undicted felon Karl Rove. His court was the so-called ‘Weaver Terrace Group’ (named after his DC address), a coordinating committee of Republican mega-donors, super-PACs and traditional supporters like the US Chamber of Commerce, which has had a chronically fraught relationship with Tea Party groups and the Koch family. To conquer the House in 2010 and the White House and Senate in 2012, Rove and his allies created two parallel money machines—American Crossroads (a super-PAC which reports donors) and Crossroads GPS (a 501(c)(4) which does not)²³—sharing interlocking leaderships with Romney’s Restore Our Future, Jeb Bush’s American Action Network and Haley Barbour’s Republican Governors Association. Ensemble, this is *the* ‘Republican Establishment’ against which Kibbe, Palin and DeMint rail. The two Crossroads channelled \$270–300 million into the presidential campaign, much of it for ads targeted at disillusioned white Obama supporters in industrial states. Until the very end, Rove was still frantically shovelling coal into the campaign furnace, the last fifteen or

²¹ CBS News, 8 November 2012.

²² See ‘Mad Money’ at Campaign 2012 website of the *Washington Post*; and ‘2012 Money Race’ at the *New York Times* 2012 website.

²³ Super-PACs (political action committees) are officially ‘independent-expenditure only committees’ that can engage in unlimited campaign spending but must declare contributors, while a 501(c)(4) is formally a tax-exempt ‘social-welfare organization’ that can fundraise with no restrictions without any obligation to disclose its donors. Neither type is legally allowed to directly contribute to a candidate or ‘coordinate’ its efforts with a campaign—which, of course, they do, with brazen indecency. Such deceits thrive because national Democrats play the same game with equal gusto. Campaign-finance reform, as a consequence, has been *de facto* jettisoned by the Obama administration.

twenty million reportedly from Sheldon Adelson in Vegas and a group of Dallas developers and industrialists.

Rove's humiliation on 6th November was necessarily more profound than Romney's. After all, as he had bragged to *Time* magazine, 'I'm not a human being, I'm a myth.'²⁴ With ghoulish glee, Donald Trump congratulated Karl Rove for 'blowing \$400 million this cycle'. He claimed—correctly—that Republicans lost every race that Rove's Crossroads GPS had invested in. 'What a waste of money!'²⁵ As the *Economist* noted, the opposing hurricanes of negative advertising in late Fall simply blew each other out.²⁶ More effective—connoisseurs agreed—had been the Obama campaign's preemptive strike against the Romney image in the months before the Republican convention. Having no primary opponents to call you names and waste your campaign funds was a substantial Obama advantage.

So too was the decision to make doorbells the key technology of the campaign in swing states. 'The Obama campaign', John Ward writes, 'began placing organizers in key states in April 2011, a full year before Mitt Romney would even win the GOP nomination. Those organizers plugged themselves into the volunteer networks, known as neighbourhood teams, that were in some cases still operating after the 2008 election.' The coordinator of this swing-state volunteer strategy was Jeremy Bird, a student of the legendary Marshall Ganz, who convinced the campaign's general staff to aim for one organizer in the field for every fifty targeted voters. To achieve such saturation 2.2 million Democratic volunteers, almost twice the size of the 2008 field army, trawled neighbourhoods and ran phone banks. Romney's team, which began parachuting into the swing states only in summer 2012, never achieved more than one campaign worker per thousand voters.²⁷

²⁴ Michael Crowley, 'The New GOP Money Stampede', *Time*, 27 September 2010; Kenneth Vogel, 'Karl Rove's fight club', Politico.com, 27 March 2012; Wayne Slater, *Dallas News*, 7 December 2012.

²⁵ Julie Bykovicz and Alison Fitzgerald, 'Rove Biggest Super-PAC Loser, Trump Says Waste of Money', *Bloomberg*, 8 November 2012.

²⁶ 'The ads take aim', *Economist*, 27 October 2012.

²⁷ John Ward, 'Republican Party Path Back From 2012 Election Requires Shift in Culture, Not Just Tactics', *Huffington Post*, 10 January 2013; and Matea Gold, 'Obama activists urged to keep sleeves rolled up', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 2013.

Running out of white people

The news networks were able to call the key races and confirm Obama's reelection before bedtime. It was not a cliffhanger: the president's margin of victory was nearly 5 million votes (see Table 1, overleaf). Yet the late counts from Western states plus chaotic exit-poll statistics created the brief illusion that abstentionism was at a new high, with millions of missing blue-collar Republicans or Millennial generation Obama fans, depending on your point of view. In fact, turnout (59.4) was above the 1992–2008 presidential year average (57.2), although nearly three points lower than 2008.²⁸

Setting aside Hurricane Sandy and its local impacts on voting in New York and New Jersey, the obvious first-order cause of the decline from 2008 was the increased concentration of campaign resources and candidate appearances in the swing states. Only one-third of the electorate was heavily wooed; elsewhere participation depended upon the salience of local and state issues as much as who won the presidential debates. Thus in the high-profile swing states the average turnout was 62.7 per cent, and the absolute vote was slightly higher than in 2008, while in the safely Red or Blue states the turnout was only 54.8 per cent.²⁹ Many of the missing 2008 Obama supporters—some 3.6 million—stayed home in states like California or Texas where the electoral vote was incontestable. (The one unequivocal trend in turnout that cannot be attributed to the swing-state asymmetry was a sharp decline in the small city and rural vote, mostly at cost to Obama.)³⁰

The most impressive feat of the 2008 Obama campaign had been winning the big, traditionally Republican suburban counties on the edges of Philadelphia, Washington DC, Columbus, Cincinnati and Denver. Although the President's overall suburban vote (48 per cent) was smaller than four years earlier, he easily kept possession of such hard-won crown jewels as Prince William and Loudoun counties in Virginia; Montgomery

²⁸ Walter Dean Burnham, *Democracy in Peril: The American Turnout Problem and the Path to Plutocracy*, The Roosevelt Institute, Working Paper No. 5, December 2010, see tables pp. 7–8. Burnham exposes the important long-term trend of declining voter participation in the North and rising turnouts in the South.

²⁹ '2012 Election Turnout', Bipartisan Policy Center press release, 8 November 2012.

³⁰ Bill Bishop, 'Finding the "Flippers" in 2012 Vote', *Daily Yonder*, 1 January 2013.

TABLE I: *Obama 1 and 2 compared*

	2008	(2010)	2012
Voting-age population	230,872,000		240,927,000
Eligible voters	213,314,000		219,297,000*
Registered voters	153,100,000		153,271,000
Turnout	131,314,000	(89,000,000)	130,235,000
(non-voters)	82,000,000	(128,342,000)	90,613,000
% of eligible voters	62.2	(41.7)	59.4
12 swing states	44,659,370		44,784,651
Non-swing	86,654,450		84,282,299
Obama popular vote	69,499,000		65,900,000
<i>Difference 2008–2012</i>			–3,599,000
Opponent’s popular vote	59,948,000		60,932,000
<i>Difference 2008–2012</i>			+984,000
Margin of victory	9,551,000		4,968,000
Obama electoral college vote	365		332
<i>Congress</i>			
Senate	DP +7	RP +6	DP +2
House	DP +21	RP +63	DP +8

* 3,244,035 felons—majority non-white—do not have the right to vote under state laws.

Source: United States Election Project and 2012 National Popular Vote Tracker; Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012 *Voter Registration Report*, 5 November 2012.

and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania; Hamilton county in Ohio, Hillsborough county in Florida, and Arapahoe and Jefferson counties in Colorado. As a result, he slam-dunked Ohio and Nevada, squeezed through once again in Florida, nailed Virginia and Colorado by 4 and 5 per cent, and coasted home on comfortable margins in Michigan, Iowa and Wisconsin (Paul Ryan’s home state).

Romney’s team was initially incredulous that Obama was winning so easily while exit polls were indicating a white-voter landslide for Romney.

According to Ronald Brownstein, both sides had magic formulae for victory. Romney's was winning 61 per cent of the white vote, with whites constituting at least 74 per cent of the turnout and the Obama percentage of the minority vote holding at or below the 2008 level. Although Obama that year had won 43 per cent of white ballots—an impressive improvement upon John Kerry and Al Gore—the Democratic share of the white vote in the 2010 midterm election had dropped to an all-time low of 37 per cent. Thus the Romney campaign was convinced that they could win, if only for the last time in American history, with all their chips piled on the white square. Democrats, on the other side, were equally confident of victory if they could achieve an 80/40 split—that is, 80 per cent of the minority vote and 40 per cent of the white vote—with a minority turnout equivalent to the 26 per cent of 2008.³¹

TABLE 2. *White vote for Democratic candidate by age cohort (%)*

	2004	2008	2012
18–29	44	54	44
30–44	37	41	38
45–64	41	42	38
65 +	44	40	39
Total	41	43	39

Source: Pew Research Center data.

It was arguably the most racially polarized presidential election in American history. The Republicans depicted Obama as the redistributionist 'food-stamp president' pandering to the half of the country who were 'takers', parasites or public employees sponging off the hard work of white entrepreneurs and the minority of minorities who emulate them. Obama, sounding like a World War Two Victory Bond ad, appealed to better angels and inclusive patriotism, but just as Romney's handlers had hoped, his white vote dropped to 39 per cent (see Table 2). Compared to 2008, his vote amongst white men was down 9 points; white women, 4 per cent; and, most dramatically, white twenty-somethings by 10 per

³¹ Ronald Brownstein, 'The New Math', *National Journal*, 23 August 2012.

cent. He lost the white vote in such major states as California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Only in some of the New England states and Iowa did he win white majorities. Despite the unprecedented efforts of Benjamin Netanyahu and Sheldon Adelson to turn the election into a referendum on bombing Iran, he also retained the support of Jewish voters (about 2 per cent of the national electorate, but a crucial 5 per cent in Florida), although his tally was reduced to 69 per cent from the stunning 78 per cent of 2008.

Romney in contrast garnered the same (rounded off) 60 per cent share of the white electorate that had given George H. W. Bush 426 electoral votes in 1988, and allowed Bush Junior to beat Kerry by more than 3 million votes in 2004 (see Tables 3 and 4, opposite).³² But this old math is now obsolete. Thanks to the higher-than-expected minority turnout, the white share of the vote was 72 per cent, not the 74 per cent that the Republicans had banked on; as a result pro-Romney whites cast barely 48 per cent of the total vote.³³ Moreover, for the second presidential election in a row white turnout declined. Republican pollsters warned in the aftermath, 'trying to win a national election by gaining a larger and larger share of a smaller and smaller portion of the electorate is a losing political proposition'. The GOP had 'run out of persuadable white voters'.³⁴

Rainbow rebooted

The African-American turnout rate, in contrast, surpassed the white for the first time in history.³⁵ Record participation was galvanized not just by Obama, but also as a protest against the Republican strategy of

³² Curiously, Romney did worse amongst Mormons (78 per cent) than Bush (80 per cent) had done eight years previously. Walter Hickey, 'More Mormons Voted For George Bush', Pew Exit Polls, 9 November 2012.

³³ Brownstein, 'The New Math', and David Paul Kuhn, 'Exit Polls: Unprecedented White Flight from Democrats', *realclearpolitics.com*, 3 November 2010.

³⁴ Whit Ayres and Jennifer Korn, 'The Hispanic Challenge and Opportunity for Republicans', memo from Resurgent Republic and the Hispanic Leadership Network, 12 December 2012, p. 2. The non-Hispanic white population, now at 197.8 million, is projected to peak at 200 million in 2024, before entering a steady decline in absolute numbers as the massive baby-boomer generation enters its golden years. Hope Yen, 'Census: White Population Will Lose Majority in US by 2043', *Huffington Post*, 12 December 2012.

³⁵ Paul Taylor, 'The Growing Electoral Clout of Blacks is Driven by Turnout, Not Demographics', Pew Research Center, 26 December 2012.

TABLE 3. *Declining white vote (%)*

1976	88
1992	83
2000	81
2004	77
2008	74
2012	72

Source: United States Election Project and
2012 National Popular Vote Tracker.

TABLE 4. *US population (%)*

	1960	2011	2050
White	85	63	47
Latino	3.5	17	29
Black	11	12	13
Asian	0.6	5	9

Source: Paul Taylor and D'Vera Cohn, 'A Milestone En Route to a Majority Minority Nation', Pew Research Center, 7 November 2012.

voter suppression. Since the black political majority in New Orleans was toppled in the wake of Katrina and the demolition of undamaged public-housing projects, conservative strategists have been brazenly probing the defences of universal suffrage. As a result, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the cornerstone victory of the Civil Rights Movement, is now under the ominous scrutiny of the Supreme Court's reactionary majority. (In Alabama, white majority voters defeated a bill to remove the Jim Crow provisions from the state constitution, adopted in 1901.)

Although the Obama administration's record on civil liberties, from drone murders to internet surveillance, is appalling (an issue that only

the Ron Paul campaign raised), the President rekindled belief in his commitment to civil rights with his signature on equal-pay legislation in 2009, the abolition of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ in 2010, the executive order to defer deportations of young immigrants in 2012, and a continuing effort by the Justice Department to defend voting rights. Aside from guaranteeing his reelection, these belated initiatives reinforced the rights-based unity of minority voters who, in turn, have surprised pollsters with their increasingly positive perceptions of one another. African-Americans in recent polls, for instance, have become more supportive of immigrant rights and the growth of Latino and Asian populations.³⁶ A majority polled also endorse gay marriage despite opposition from many church leaders and the stereotype that blacks are a homophobic voting group. Indeed black voters were key to the success of gay marriage legislation in Maryland.³⁷ Likewise three-quarters of Latino voters, despite their reputation as social conservatives and extreme pressure from the pulpit, now support women’s right to choose.³⁸

Perhaps the biggest surprise in the exit polls, as well as the most eloquent evidence that a genuine ‘rainbow coalition’ is growing in the grassroots, was Obama’s 73 per cent share of the Asian vote: an 11 per cent (15 per cent in California) increase over 2008.³⁹ Although Asian voters have traditionally been the most geographically concentrated (Hawaii, California and New York), they are now voting in significant numbers in other nationally important areas. Asians, for example, now constitute about 15 per cent of the populations of Loudoun and Fairfax counties in Virginia—some of the most crucial swing turf in the country. A generation ago Republicans had high expectations of winning Asian-Pacific majorities outside of the Democratic citadel of Hawaii; but China-bashing, racist campaign ads, nativist immigration policies and

³⁶ Ronald Brownstein, ‘Though More Optimistic, Americans Are Still Sharply Divided’, *National Journal*, 7 December 2012.

³⁷ Anugrah Kumar, ‘Polls Show Sudden Increase in Black Support for Gay Marriage’, *The Christian Post*, 10 November 2012; and Aaron Blake, ‘African-Americans and Latinos spur gay marriage revolution’, *Washington Post*, 12 November 2012. Reports in the media that 70 per cent of African-American voters in California supported a ban on gay marriage (Proposition 8 in 2008) were based on erroneous exit poll data. The real figure was only 58 per cent. See John Wildermuth, ‘Black support for Prop 8 called exaggeration’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 January 2009.

³⁸ National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, *Poll: Latino Voters Hold Compassionate Views on Abortion*, 30 November 2011.

³⁹ National Exit Poll data.

a poor commitment to affordable public education have turned most younger voters, whether of South or East Asian origins, solidly against the GOP. Like Jewish-Americans, to whom they are often stereotypically compared, the currently small Asian share of the electorate (about 2 per cent in each case) is being leveraged by outsized achievement in health and physical sciences, engineering and increasingly public administration. But unlike Jews or whites in general, the eligible voting population (if not yet the participation rate) of Asians will dramatically increase.⁴⁰

Finally, as Karl Rove lamented, Obama improved his share of a larger Latino turnout by 4 per cent over 2008 (850,000 more votes in absolute terms; see Table 5, overleaf, for Latino turnout figures).⁴¹ In Florida, where exit-poll results are still being debated, Obama may have won a landmark 51 per cent of the Cuban vote, a result of generational turnover and the erosion of monolithic 'exile' identity.⁴² Likewise in Ohio, the early analysis of exit polls suggests that the decisive margin of Obama's victory was his 82 per cent share of the Latino vote (74 per cent nationally) plus a small but crucial increase over 2008 amongst white males.⁴³ Every year, 800,000 Latinos turn 18, providing an estimated 40 per cent of the growth of the electorate through 2030. In 2016 they will overtake African-Americans to become the largest minority voting bloc.⁴⁴ The writing on the wall is clear enough to most GOP leaders. As a recent internal memo epitomized the party's dilemma: 'If Republicans achieve 40 or more per cent of Hispanics nationally, they can elect conservative Republicans to national office. Settling for a quarter or less of the Hispanic vote nationally will relegate Republicans to a regional party with few national prospects.'⁴⁵

The GOP is being paid back with richly-deserved interest for border fences, anti-immigrant referenda outlawing bilingual education

⁴⁰ How US politics turns national backgrounds as different as Bengali, Japanese or Thai into a functional meta-ethnicity is addressed in Janelle Wong et al., *Asian American Political Participation*, New York 2011.

⁴¹ Rove, 'The Lessons of Defeat for the GOP', *Wall Street Journal*, 15 November 2012.

⁴² Juan Tamayo, 'Did Obama or Romney Win the Cuban-American Vote?', *Miami Herald*, 11 December 2012.

⁴³ Marcus Atkinson, 'How Obama Won Ohio, By the Numbers', *HispanicOhio.com*, 7 November 2012.

⁴⁴ Peter Grier, 'Election Results 2012', *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 November 2012.

⁴⁵ Ayres and Korn, 'Hispanic Challenge'.

TABLE 5. *Latino vote (millions)*

	<i>Eligible</i>	<i>Voted</i>	<i>Turnout (%)</i>
1988	7.7	3.7	48
1992	8.3	4.3	52
1996	11.2	4.9	44
2000	13.2	5.9	45
2004	16.1	7.6	47
2008	19.5	9.7	50
2012	23.7	12.5	53

Source: Paul Taylor et al., 'An Awakened Giant: Hispanic Electorate Likely to Double by 2030', Pew Research Hispanic Center, 14 November 2012.

in several states, SB1070 in Arizona (the state that has become the 'Mississippi' for Latino civil rights), Republican sabotage of the Dream Act, Romney's vicious advocacy of 'self-deportation', and much more. Of course, the actual reign of terror—mass deportations on a scale that exceed all Republican precedents—is being carried out by Obama's Department of Homeland Security. But even if the Minute Men were to wear sombreros and the GOP suddenly embrace amnesty and the Dream Act, it is unlikely that Latino voters would become the family-values 'natural Republicans' envisioned by Rove and other Bush strategists in the early 2000s. *National Review's* Ramesh Ponnuru is ruthlessly candid:

The perception that the Republican party serves the interests only of the rich underlies all the demographic weaknesses that get discussed in narrower terms. Hispanics do not vote for the Democrats solely because of immigration. Many of them are poor and lack health insurance, and they hear nothing from the Republicans but a lot from the Democrats about bettering their situation . . . Better 'communication skills', that perennial item on the wish list of losing parties, will achieve little if the party does not have an appealing agenda to communicate.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ponnuru, 'The Party's Problem', *National Review*, 3 December 2012, p. 19.

Mind the gaps

As demographic change in the American electorate accelerates, it would be foolish to assume that gender, marital status and age are necessarily interacting with race and class to reproduce the same kinds of group political identities as those in 2000, 1992 or 1978. For instance, the US Census now recognizes ‘mixed race’ because several million younger Americans regard this as their most accurate identity. The ‘religiously unaffiliated’, an unimportant category in electoral analysis a generation ago, now constitute 25 per cent of the 18-to-29 year old cohort and have become a hotly debated new variable in voting behaviour. Likewise the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community—a highly engaged 5 per cent of the national electorate who gave an estimated 78 per cent of their vote to Obama—are a permanent existential crisis for the GOP.⁴⁷

All the more reason, then, to pry open the traditional clichés of election analysis, including ‘gender gap’ and ‘youth vote’, to see what is actually inside. For example, it has been claimed that Obama was reelected by winning 55 per cent of a female vote which in turn comprised 53 per cent of the turnout.⁴⁸ This is indisputably true and registers, in some part, a backlash against Romney’s threat to defund Planned Parenthood as well as the idiotic remarks by two Tea-Party-endorsed Senate candidates on rape. But does the statistic itself actually prove that gender was the most important variable in determining the vote?

Since the ‘gender gap’ became famous in 1980 it has often been interpreted as evidence that women are becoming more liberal, or at least more Democratic in their voting preferences. But women voters don’t have to shift their opinions at all; the gap could be entirely the result of men moving rightward, or of different rates of change in preferences amongst the two sexes. In 2012, the gap between white men and women increased substantially, but so did the Republican vote in both sexes. White women simply defected from their 2008 preferences in smaller numbers than white men (see Table 6, overleaf). Much bigger gaps separated different categories of women voters: for example, the astonishing

⁴⁷ Cited in Chris Johnson, ‘Exit Poll: Gay Voters Made Up 5 per cent of 2012 Electorate’, *WashingtonBlade.com*, 7 November 2012. See also Mary McThomas and Robert Buchanan, ‘Obama and Gay Rights’, *PS*, July 2012.

⁴⁸ Margie Omero and Tara McGuinness, ‘How Women Changed the Outcome of the Election’, *CNN*, 12 December 2012.

TABLE 6. *The gender gap: votes for Democrats (%)*

	GAP ONE			GAP TWO	GAP THREE
	(a) White women	(b) Minus white men	(c) All women	(d) Minus all men	(e) c minus a
2004	44	7	51	7	7
2008	46	5	56	7	10
2012	42	10	55	10	13

Source: Pew Research Center and National Exit Poll, *Los Angeles Times*, 2004.

38-point difference between unmarried and married women; or the 54-point abyss between the presidential preferences of African-American and white women. In contrast, young white women were only 6 per cent more likely to vote for Obama than their older sisters or mothers. The gender mean, therefore, is an averaging of such different preferences and trends that it would be misleading to talk about ‘women’ in the election without putting a racial and a generational adjective in front.

Age is another category that needs to be unbundled. As Table 7 (opposite) vividly illustrates, in critical states where detailed exit polling was conducted, the generation gap in the Obama vote between Millennials (18–29) and Seniors (65 and over) was more than twice the size of the gender gap (21 versus 10 per cent).⁴⁹ In all ten swing states, including North Carolina, the President won the 45-or-younger vote and lost the over-45 electorate. A 20 per cent gap in presidential preference at the age outliers looks like generational warfare in the voting booth, as do the smaller but historically unusual differences in the recent voting patterns of seniors and of adults aged 30–64.⁵⁰ Indeed the *National*

⁴⁹ In most solidly Red states of the South or Great Plains, in contrast, the age differential dwindled almost to the margin of error; likewise in Iowa, where half or more of every age group (largely thanks to women) endorsed the President.

⁵⁰ Robert Binstock found evidence for a distinctive ‘senior issues’ voting bloc emerging in the 2010 election. ‘In the previous four decades, older Americans had voted very much like other age groups except for voters in their teens and 20s.’ Binstock, ‘Older Voters and the 2010 US Election: Implications for 2012 and Beyond?’, *The Gerontologist*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2012, p. 408.

TABLE 7. *Votes by age cohort compared to 18 states average (%)*

	(1) 18–29	(2) 30–44	(3) 45–64	(4) 65 plus	Obama (1) minus (4)
<i>18 states average</i>					
(a) Electorate	18	29	37	16	
(b) Obama	66	52	50	45	21
<i>Nevada</i>					
(a) Electorate	18	24	37	18	
(b) Obama	65	54	48	42	23
<i>Iowa</i>					
(a) Electorate	15	22	37	26	
(b) Obama	56	52	52	50	6
<i>Ohio</i>					
(a) Electorate	17	24	41	18	
(b) Obama	62	51	47	44	18
<i>Pennsylvania</i>					
(a) Electorate	19	25	39	17	
(b) Obama	63	55	48	43	20
<i>Virginia</i>					
(a) Electorate	19	27	41	14	
(b) Obama	61	54	47	46	15
<i>Florida</i>					
(a) Electorate	16	23	37	24	
(b) Obama	66	52	48	41	25
<i>N. Carolina</i>					
(a) Electorate	16	25	39	21	
(b) Obama	67	51	47	35	32
<i>California</i>					
(a) Electorate	28	28	32	12	
(b) Obama	69	59	52	46	23

Source: National Exit Poll, Fox News.

Journal's Ronald Brownstein proposes that the fundamental divide in American politics is becoming 'Brown versus Grey': the emergent minority-majority of young Latinos, Asians and African-Americans who need good schools and college loans, competing for scarce public resources against a grey tide of retiring and over-entitled Baby Boomers. Brownstein points out that the two cohorts have precisely inverted views of the national situation: three-fifths of Greys backed Romney and tell pollsters that the government is doing too much; three-fifths of Browns voted for Obama and believe that Washington should be spending more on education and job creation.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ronald Brownstein, 'Behind the Fiscal Cliff is a Demographic Struggle', *National Journal*, 20 December 2012.

The scarecrow of a zero-sum conflict between public investment and social security, on one hand, and private household affluence on the other goes back to the tax-revolt era of the 1970s and the election of Ronald Reagan, the first of three Republican presidents who engineered huge deficits by slashing taxes for the affluent while writing blank cheques to the Pentagon. The strategic goal was to make it structurally impossible for Democrats to introduce new spending programmes for social change without blowing up the budget. Similarly (and here Thatcherism was an interesting precedent), fiscal politics fomented generational and racial conflicts that splintered Democratic but advantaged Republican candidates.

Yet the 65-plus voting cohort, once upon a time the most reliable Democratic constituency, is not simply a group of relatively wealthy whites unwilling to pay for inner-city education, public television or universal healthcare—although this stratum exists, and its ranks have been enlarged by the provision, in both the Ryan budget and Romney platform, that exempts anyone 55 years or older from the proposed cuts or eligibility changes in Social Security and Medicare. But the elderly in far larger numbers are also the victims of incinerated home equity and the extinction of the ‘defined-benefit’ pension system. The percentage of private-sector workers covered by traditional pension plans declined from 62 per cent in 1975 to 7 per cent by 2009. The health and security of the old, in other words, depend as much as ever upon vigorous federal action and inter-generational transfers.

But Obama’s ‘grand bargain’—the trade-off between tax hikes and programme cuts that the White House pursued all last year with Speaker Boehner—proposed sacrifices from Social Security and Medicare, hitherto inviolable New Deal legacies. Geriatric voters at the same time have been alarmed by health-reform legislation that few understand and most misconstrue. In the absence of a White House campaign to explain the reforms, the lurid Republican misrepresentations of the Affordable Care Act that so damaged Democrats during the 2010 by-election still reign in public opinion. A Kaiser Poll conducted last October found that fully 60 per cent of older people believe in the existence of the Federal ‘death panels’ that Sarah Palin claimed would ration mortality to the terminally ill. In addition ‘two in three seniors say the law cuts benefits for people in the traditional Medicare programme’—a misconception that harmonizes with the core Tea Party doctrine that

Washington is redistributing the hard-earned wealth of older white America to the Democratic Party's grassroots, in this case from seniors to the previously uninsured.⁵²

The Republican targeting of Federal insurance and transfer programmes for the future elderly is immensely destabilizing, striking at the heart of the most successful anti-poverty policies in American history and opening huge breaches between the lowest quintile of the aged, who depend upon Social Security for 83 per cent of their income, and the upper quintile, for whom it constitutes only 18 per cent—as well as between current recipients of benefits and those 55-and-unders whom the Republicans propose to disinherit. As Baby Boomers swell and eventually double the cohort that they first officially began to enter in 2012, and as Millennials are forced to assume more of the burden of support for their elders, both the social meaning and politics of ageing will become increasingly contested.⁵³ The Obama administration, having conceded the priority of deficit reduction from the very beginning, then enshrining the Bush tax cuts for all but the very wealthiest, has undermined the Democrats' ability to make a case for social spending on education and public employment for younger Americans as the key to preserving New Deal entitlements for the elderly.

Millennial voters are easier to bring into focus than seniors. Thanks to CIRCLE, the Tufts University centre for research on youth voting and political participation, Edison Research exit-poll data for the 19 per cent of voters aged 18 to 29 was rapidly analysed and published (see Table 8, overleaf). When Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000, three-quarters of the youth cohort identified as non-Hispanic whites; this time around, the white component was only 58 per cent, and the Latino share for the first time exceeded the African-American. (By 2018 non-whites are predicted to be the majority of the youth electorate.)⁵⁴

⁵² Kaiser Public Poll, October 2012. 'The racial divide in health-care opinions was 20 percentage points greater in 2009–10 than it was over President Clinton's plan back in 1993–94.' Michael Tesler, 'The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 56, no. 3, July 2012, p. 690.

⁵³ Binstock, 'Older Voters'; Robert Kuttner, 'Greedy Geezers, Reconsidered', *American Prospect*, 3 December 2012.

⁵⁴ CIRCLE, Tufts University, 'Diverse Electorate: A deeper look into the Millennial Vote', Fact Sheet, 14 November 2012. See also 'Young Voters Supported Obama Less, But May Have Mattered More', Pew Research Center, 26 November 2012. Latino vote (63 per cent) is from ABC News rather than CIRCLE (66 per cent).

TABLE 8. *Race and gender differences within 18–29 age cohort*

	% voting for Obama	% identifying as 'liberal'
Black women	98	33
Latinas	82	45
Black men	80	25
Latinos	63	35
All 18–29	60	–
White women	48	33
White men	40	27

Source: CIRCLE, Tufts University, 'Diverse Electorate: A deeper look into the Millennial Vote', Fact Sheet, 14 November 2012.

Although the President's 60 per cent of the 18–29 age cohort was crucial to his victory, it was not a coherent 'youth vote' across racial and gender categories like that of 2008. Indeed Obama's advantage amongst younger white men (52 per cent in 2008) completely disappeared (40 per cent in 2012), a defection that conforms with polling which shows younger white males to be most pessimistic about the economy, the most disappointed with Obama's economic policies, and the least supportive of amnesty for undocumented immigrants. More startling were the considerable inroads made by the Romney campaign amongst young black men, whose support for Obama declined sharply from 94 per cent in 2008 to 80 per cent last November, probably for similar reasons. Economic anxiety amongst men, young and old, remains acute and politically volatile. In 2008 Obama received 70 per cent of the vote of those who told exit pollsters that their economic situation was 'worse than four years previously'. This time around he won barely 20 per cent. It will be interesting to see if future research makes any connection between voting behaviour and the persistence of an unprecedented male disadvantage or 'gender gap' in employment markets.⁵⁵ (Obama's share

⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the 2008 crash, 'non-farm payroll employment fell 5.1 million for men while it only dropped 1.8 million for women': Aşegül Şahin, Joseph Song and Bart Hobijn, 'The Unemployment Gender Gap during the Current Recession', Federal Reserve Bank of New York, *Current Issues*, vol. 16, no. 2, February 2010, p. 2.

of the young male Hispanic vote, however, remained virtually the same as in 2008: 63 versus 64 per cent.)⁵⁶

Young white women, the largest segment of the cohort, almost evenly split a vote that was weighted with an unusually high share of evangelical Christians (38 per cent) and thus may disguise a more pro-Democratic trend. Young women of colour, three times as likely as their white sisters to be working mothers, constitute the heart and soul of ‘Generation Obama’, even if more black women prefer to call themselves ‘moderate’ than ‘liberal’ Democrats. Young Latinas, on their side, are twice as likely as their mothers to identify as Democrats (65 per cent) and have become the most self-consciously and dynamically ‘liberal’ group (45 per cent) amongst active voters.⁵⁷

Republican cartography

Despite the turbulence within voter ranks and the perils of reifying categories like gender and age, all the demographic weather vanes—as Republicans fear—point toward a future with many Democratic presidents. Surely it follows, then, that the House of Representatives, as the Senate already has, will realign itself accordingly in the 2014 or 2016 elections? Surprisingly, that is not a safe bet; indeed the prospect of a Democratic straight flush is widely regarded by political analysts on both sides as highly dubious. *National Journal* writers understate the scale of the problem when they observe that ‘changing demography is reshaping the Congressional battlefield more slowly than the presidential landscape.’⁵⁸

Although the Senate is notoriously undemocratic because it distributes power according to states rather than population (284,000 Wyoming voters, for instance, have the same representation as 18,671,000 California voters), the net effect across the political spectrum is capricious, as demonstrated by the senior senator from tiny Vermont, a self-professed socialist.⁵⁹ In contrast, the House is reapportioned on the

⁵⁶ ABC News, 6 November 2012.

⁵⁷ CIRCLE data. Just 29 per cent of Latinas over 30 identify as liberals.

⁵⁸ Ronald Brownstein and Scott Bland, ‘Stairway to Nowhere’, *National Journal*, 12 January 2013.

⁵⁹ The main problem with the Senate is procedural not constitutional. Both parties have conspired to maintain rules allowing 41 senators to block debate, which the Republican minority now does routinely. This roadblock could be removed by majority vote, but neither Harry Reid nor Obama has found the necessary will.

basis of population after each new Census; but the process of redrawing districts in most states is shaped by partisan legislatures and governors, and can produce grotesque distortions of the 'one person, one vote' principle. Thus the Democrats won the national House vote in November 2012 by 1,363,148 ballots but gained only eight seats, while Republicans preserved their third largest majority of seats since World War Two.⁶⁰ In six key states that Obama decisively won (Florida, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan), Republicans nonetheless formed a majority of each state's congressional delegation: in total, the Democrats' statewide majorities earned only 30 House seats while the Republicans won 54.⁶¹ How do these Democratic popular majorities get lost in the translation? The answer, which is key to understanding how the Republicans have fortified their House majority, has three parts: the 'drop-off' effect in midterm elections, the gerrymander and the advantages of incumbency.

The 2010 midterm elections occurred under all the wrong astrological signs. One of the fiercest defenders of Obama's stimulus package, former *Washington Post* reporter Michael Grunwald, concedes that 'polls have found that most Americans see the stimulus as a giveaway to bankers, confusing it with the \$700 billion financial bailout that passed before Obama was elected.'⁶² Seniors, meanwhile, were outraged at what they perceived as a betrayal of Medicare; gays and immigrants were alienated by the President's failure to end 'Don't ask' or to push for amnesty; environmentalists felt betrayed by White House cuddling with the energy industry as well as its wretched performance in Copenhagen; the anti-war public was furious at the new 'surge' in Afghanistan; homeowners who were promised relief saw only foreclosure notices; and economic populists wrote off the administration as a lost cause when Obama wimped out in his White House meeting with bank CEOs, the authors of the new Depression.

The 2010 party primaries were a grim warning to the White House: Democratic turnout sunk to its lowest level in history while Republican

⁶⁰ David Wasserman, 2012 House Popular Vote Tracker, final result, 2 January 2012. See also Sean Trende, 'The Political Landscape after 2012', *RealClearPolitics*, 16 November 2012.

⁶¹ Nick Baumann, 'Why John Boehner Has Gerrymandering to Thank for His Majority', *Mother Jones* blog, 8 November 2012. Baumann provides a guide to the most brilliant Republican gerrymander of all: Pennsylvania.

⁶² Michael Grunwald, *The New New Deal*, New York 2012, p. 19.

participation was the highest since 1970.⁶³ As David Corn emphasizes in another otherwise admiring portrait of Obama's first biennium, the President 'did not tap into the anger of the voting public' or even campaign on the ground for endangered Democratic congressional candidates. One campaign strategist told Corn:

There was no jobs message. The voters, rightly or not, saw debt as a contributing factor to the bad economy, and we were talking about who was spending what money in politics. We had an election driven by the enemy. Their message was simple: the Dems are spending too much and it's hurting the economy. There was no economic narrative coming out of the White House.⁶⁴

As a result, 30 million Obama voters—nearly half of his 2008 support—stayed home in November 2010, and the Democrats were crushed. In 2006 the Democratic margin of victory in House elections had been 6.5 million votes; in 2008, more than 13 million; in 2010 the GOP cashed in a 5.7 million winning margin for 63 new House seats and 6 new Senate seats.⁶⁵ It was the biggest reshuffling of the House since 1948.

It was also an extreme example of the usual midterm drop-off of presidential-majority voters, which produces 'smaller voting populations that are older and less racially diverse than the population at-large'.⁶⁶ Almost 80 per cent of the 2010 voters were white, nearly two-thirds middle-aged or elderly, and two-fifths described themselves as supporters of the Tea Party protests.⁶⁷ This alternative demographic also powered the largest Republican victory in state governments of the last forty years. The GOP gained 680 legislative seats across the country, took over power in 22 additional state chambers, and unseated eleven Democratic governors. The immediate payoff was control over redistricting in states

⁶³ Curtis Gans and Maralee Csellar, 'GOP Nationwide Primary Vote Exceeds Democrats for First Time Since 1930', American University media release, 7 September 2010.

⁶⁴ David Corn, *Showdown: The Inside Story of How Obama Fought Back Against Boehner, Cantor and the Tea Party*, New York 2012, pp. 36 and 43–44.

⁶⁵ Patrick Martin, 'The dimensions of the Democratic Party collapse in the 2010 elections', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 November 2010.

⁶⁶ Lorraine Minnite, 'An Analysis of Who Voted (and Who Didn't Vote) in the 2010 Election', Project Vote Research Memo, November 2010.

⁶⁷ 'A Clear Rejection of the Status Quo, No Consensus about Future Policies', Pew Research Center, updated 17 November 2010; and Marjorie Connolly, 'Rightward, March: The Midterm Exit Polls', *New York Times*, 6 November 2010.

electing 40 per cent of the House, while the Democrats retained only 10 per cent; the remainder of seats were redrawn by divided state governments or commissions.⁶⁸

Redistricting is a power of great awe and, thanks to a friendly Supreme Court, the GOP governors and legislatures had scope for creative cartography. In the second of a stunning trilogy of biased partisan landmarks,⁶⁹ a majority of the Supremes in 2004 found in the case of *Vieth v Jubelirer* that a Republican legislature and governor in Pennsylvania had not violated the Constitution by an egregious gerrymander of the state's 19 congressional districts which, according to one of the petitioners, 'guaranteed itself [the Republican Party] a majority of the congressional seats for the rest of the decade—even if it did not win a majority of votes'.⁷⁰ Thanks to state-of-the-art computer modelling and an inherent bias in electoral geography (Democratic voters are more concentrated than the GOP's), the Republicans' new maps were masterpieces, giving the national party—according to a Brookings study—'a structural advantage estimated at 5 percentage points'.⁷¹ (This estimate has been challenged by another analysis that claims the Democrats actually require more than a 7 per cent margin in the popular vote to take back the House.)⁷² 'What the House success demonstrates', wrote the *National Review's* Ramesh Ponnuru, 'is that Republicans can do well when they choose the voters rather than vice versa.'⁷³

A good gerrymander is also an insurance policy on the partisan incumbency of a district, even if in the Republican case (thanks to the Tea Party) it now protects the party rather than the individual. When Bill Clinton was elected in 1992, according to Nate Silver, more than one hundred House members came from swing districts where the local

⁶⁸ Griff Palmer and Michael Cooper, 'How Maps Helped Party Keep Edge in the House', *New York Times*, 15 December 2012.

⁶⁹ The first was *Bush v Gore* in 2000 which ended the Florida recount; the second was last year's *Citizens United versus the Federal Election Commission* which recognized corporations' First Amendment 'rights' and thus opened the floodgates to unlimited campaign spending.

⁷⁰ The Brennan Center for Justice, '*Vieth v Jubelirer*', 28 April 2004.

⁷¹ William Galston, 'The 2012 Election: What Happened, What Changed, What it Means', Brookings Governance Studies, 4 January 2013, p. 14.

⁷² Dana Milbank, 'In the House, a deck stacked for Republicans', *Washington Post*, 6 January 2013.

⁷³ Ponnuru, 'The Party's Problem', p. 19.

margin of victory was within 5 per cent of the national vote, while 123 members were elected from 'landslide districts' protected by partisan advantages of 20 points or more. Today a considerable majority of the House (242 of 435 members) live within landslide-margin gated suburbs. A mere 35 members forage for survival within the narrow margins of a Presidential vote. And the once common postwar practice of ticket-splitting (Democrats voting for Eisenhower or Republicans for Clinton) has been supplanted by a Gilded Era allegiance to the party list. Fewer and fewer congressional districts vote against their 'presidential lean'.⁷⁴ Even November 2012's Democratic gains in the House confirmed the success of the Republicans in engineering maximum racial polarization in congressional geography. 'Despite their losses', report the authors of a *National Journal* survey,

Republicans increased their share of districts that are whiter than the national average; the Democratic gains came entirely from districts that lean toward minorities . . . After this reshuffling, the parties glare across a deep racial chasm in the House. That's evident most visibly in the composition of each party in the 113th Congress. White men will still constitute 88 per cent of House Republicans, while, for the first time ever, they will represent a minority of the House Democratic Caucus, in which women and minority members are now the majority.⁷⁵

Obama vs the Democrats

The last election cycle (2008–2010–2012) has left more than the usual number of dead canines on Southern roadways, as well as sending the Republican counterparts of the Girondists to the guillotine. Consider the fate of the once famous 'Blue Dogs'. Organized as a conservative Democratic caucus in 1994 to carry on the tradition of the so-called 'Boll Weevils' of the Reagan era, they became powerful thanks to then-Representative Rahm Emanuel (5th District of Illinois) who, as the chair of the 2005–07 Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, made his priority the recruitment of candidates willing to run as Democrats in majority white, Republican-leaning districts, regardless of their

⁷⁴ Nate Silver, 'As Swing Districts Dwindle, Can a Divided House Stand?', *FiveThirtyEight* blog, NYTimes.com, 27 December 2012.

⁷⁵ Ronald Brownstein and E. Scott Bland, 'It's not Just Partisanship that Divides Congress', *National Journal*, 10 January 2013. In states like Texas, however, where the strategy of the post-2000 redistricting has been diluting rather than super-concentrating Democratic voters, demographic revenge will come sooner rather than later.

conservative views. This promiscuous strategy was a short-run success, leading to a 31-seat Democratic House majority in the 2006 midterm election that was expanded by 21 additional seats in 2008. Arguably, Obama's Affordable Care Act would not have passed in 2009 without Blue Dog support; nor would it have been so far to the right of the original Hillary Clinton health plan of 1993. But the 54-member caucus was also a powerful lobby within the Democratic Party in favour of the Republican framing of national priorities as the reduction of deficits and taxation by slashing social spending.

In the 2010 election, however, the Blue Dogs were virtually annihilated in the Tea Party blitzkrieg. On the eve of the election, Democrats represented 77 districts with Republican presidential leanings; after the election, only 17. In 2012 only a single candidate endorsed by the caucus won, and the second-term Blue Dogs can barely muster 15 members. As a consequence the Progressive Caucus, with 76 members, including one Senator (Bernie Sanders), became the largest programmatic bloc in the House minority, followed by 54 or so members of the New Democrat Coalition—an off-shoot of the Democratic Leadership Council and the 'triangulated' centrism of the Clinton administration which focuses mainly on promotion of technology industries and their exports. The Progressive Caucus is the most robustly left-liberal group in Congress in more than sixty years, and its members have certainly 'talked the talk'. With the support of major unions and equal-rights groups, the Caucus has produced its own People's Budget, which would cure the deficit by reducing Pentagon spending, and on several occasions has made a stand against the President's pathological centrism. In 2009, for example, it threatened to vote against healthcare reform unless it included 'a robust public option'; last Fall, the Caucus chair, Rep. Keith Ellison of Minneapolis, vowed that its members would reject any deficit deal 'that cuts benefits for families and seniors who rely on Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security to put food on the table or cover their health costs'.⁷⁶

¡No Pasarán! Unfortunately, the Progressive Caucus always surrenders Madrid. As left Democrat Norman Solomon acidly observes, 'you can

⁷⁶ Alex Seitz-Wald, 'Liberals double down: No entitlement cuts', Salon.com, 29 November 2012. This echoed the 2011 promise of Steve Israel, Nancy Pelosi's protégé and current head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee: 'We will defend Medicare and go our way from the White House if we have to.' (Corn, *Showdown*, p. 309.)

almost hear the laughter from the West Wing when the Progressive Caucus vows to stand firm.' In 2009, every member 'wilted under pressure and voted for a healthcare bill with no public option at all'. Likewise at the New Year only seven Caucus members—not including Ellison—voted against the President's fiscal compromise with the Republicans in which he gave away the \$250,000 income threshold that he had vowed was non-negotiable. 'What we have witnessed so far', writes Solomon, 'is surrender in stages—a chronic confluence of conformity and undue party loyalty, with brave talk from caucus members habitually followed by contrary votes.'⁷⁷

The Progressives have been faced with the question of how to work with a President whose 'post-partisanship' keeps a warm spot for the aristocratic Senate, to which his administration is umbilically bound by Joe Biden, while often expressing a strange disdain toward liberal House Democrats and their supporters (because they are his guilty conscience?). Mutual distrust has existed since the 2008 nomination when, in order to avoid a messy battle with Hillary about credentials, Obama 'cast his lot with the Clinton crowd', asking John Podesta, President Clinton's former chief of staff, 'to lead a secret "shadow transition"'. As Michael Grunwald continues the story, 'Obama loyalists feared that while they were working around the clock to beat McCain, Podesta would be building the architecture for a new quasi-Clinton administration.'⁷⁸ But Obama's first four years may have been shaped as much by the Stockholm syndrome as by wily Clintonian tactical calculations. By all accounts he was stunned by congressional Republicans' decision to destroy his administration by fiscal blackmail, calumny and non-cooperation. According to a top advisor, Obama simply had no 'strategy to counteract [Republican] extremism'.⁷⁹ At the beginning of 2011, he brought in hostage negotiators: William Daley, Hizzoner's other son and Midwestern chair of JP Morgan Chase, as new chief of staff, along with General Electric CEO Jeff Immelt as chair of his Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. Congressional progressives were rightly appalled, not just by Obama's nominations,

⁷⁷ Norman Solomon, 'The Progressive Caucus: Enabling Obama's Rightward Moves?', *Huff Post Politics*, 8 January 2013. Steve Israel, meanwhile, became one of the most outspoken defenders of the New Year's compromise: Americans want 'a sense of compromise and solutions'—'falling off the cliff just isn't an option.' Anjali Sareen, 'Democrats Provided "Adult Supervision" in Fiscal Cliff Deal', *Mediate*, 2 January 2013.

⁷⁸ Grunwald, *The New New Deal*, p. 77.

⁷⁹ Jared Bernstein quoted in Corn, *Showdown*, p. 344.

but by his opening a second line of negotiations with big business via Immelt, while leaving much of his own base in the dark.

In early 2011 Obama offered the opposition \$1 trillion in budget cuts, much of it from lifeline Federal programmes, but Jeff Sessions, the senior Republican on the Senate Budget Committee, scoffed that it was ‘insignificant’. A few months later he proposed his ‘grand bargain’ of cutting federal expenditure by \$4 trillion over 12 years if Republicans would likewise bump high-bracket income taxes back to their 1999 level. Rebuffed again and with the fiscal ceiling collapsing on the economy’s head, the President made progressive nightmares vividly real in August by accepting \$2.4 trillion in future cuts simply to postpone the ‘fiscal cliff’ until after the election. As David Corn despaired, ‘the president had been forced to cut important programmes beyond what he believed prudent, yet he was now embracing what he had been opposing.’⁸⁰ In fact Obama was beginning to sound like a stunned and plaintive Rodney King: ‘why can’t we just get along?’

Despite its hypothetically greater influence in the wake of the great Blue Dog massacre, in 2012 the left wing of the Democratic Party had no influence on a campaign agenda that was so deliberately minimalist that it might be compared to a Frank Stella or John Cage masterpiece. Repealing Bush’s tax cuts for the rich (and thus leaving them still infinitely less taxed than during the socialist dictatorship of Dwight Eisenhower, when the top marginal rate was 92 per cent) served as the campaign’s populist trick pony while the President attempted to slip, but never to counter, Romney’s often well-aimed punches about a jobless recovery. Obama promised sunshine and fairness, but was seldom more specific than his ‘we’ll work that out later’ opponent. Poverty, hunger, urban decay, the defence of public education, union rights, corporate crimes, totalitarian surveillance, home foreclosures, amnesty for drug-war prisoners, Palestinian statehood and all the other issues that constitute a progressive agenda were buried deeper than in any election in memory. Although the Jersey shore was now Tuvalu and the Mississippi was turning into a bathtub ring, climate change was never mentioned in the presidential debates nor in the hundreds of thousands of campaign ads. And the ‘second stimulus’—the President’s 2011 jobs bill, including its crucial provision of \$35 billion in emergency aid to

⁸⁰ Corn, *Showdown*, p. 233.

save the jobs of school teachers and firefighters (defeated in the Senate, thanks to three renegade Democrats)—was left in the attic.

For obscure reasons, the rightwing media—including *Forbes*, the *Deseret News* (owned by the Mormon church) and the *Washington Times*—are beguiled with the image of Obama as a North American ‘Peron’ (Michelle, of course, is Evita), building power by showering benefits on shiftless peons and public employees.⁸¹ The comparison is not convincing, except to the extent that Obama’s obvious preference is to live outside the smoked-filled rooms of the party system in the clean air of his own charisma. He is predisposed to build and trust only proprietary networks—or, to put it more bluntly, he never offers rides to Democrats stuck in the rain. Wisconsin is the consummate example. Few elections in recent years have been more important to the American labour movement than the contest between Governor Scott Walker and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett last June. Walker, a Tea Party idol, provoked a statewide revolt in 2011 by stripping public-sector workers of their rights while simultaneously proposing tax breaks for the very rich. Democratic legislators, demonstrating a rare will to fight, fled the state to preclude a quorum on the vote while trade unionists, students and senior citizens laid siege to the state capitol. A million Wisconsinites signed petitions to recall Walker, and the issue was put to ballot in June as a choice between Walker and Barrett: construed by both sides as a referendum on the fate of public-sector unionism, not just in Wisconsin but in the entire country. Determined Republicans raised over \$45 million to defend Walker, an extraordinary war chest in a Midwestern election, while Democrats scraped together \$18 million on behalf of Barrett. All liberal eyes turned hopefully toward the White House: after a long wait, the President tweeted a short message of support to Barrett. That was it. Walker won resoundingly.

The President is also an awesome tightwad. Obama, Michael Barone points out, ‘attended more than 200 fundraisers for his presidential campaign, but he refrained from raising money for congressional Democrats.’⁸² When Pelosi and Reid begged the White House to share \$30 million out of its enormous war chest to help the Party regain control

⁸¹ Just google.

⁸² Michael Barone, ‘To Win, Obama Sacrificed House, State Legislatures’, *Examiner*, 13 November 2012. He adds: ‘The presidential election results looked a lot like 2008’s. But the farther down the ballot you go, the more the results look like 2010’s.’

of Congress, they were shown the door. Meanwhile his campaign was sucking money out of non-swing states like Texas (‘the only state in the union that is majority-minority but doesn’t have a Democratic statewide elected official’), where Obama had raised \$11 million by August, leaving ragged ‘Democratic candidates for Texas’s open US Senate seat \$500,000 in campaign contributions, compared to the \$45.9 million raised by Republicans.’ As one commentator noted early in 2012, ‘President Barack Obama has a bleak message for House and Senate Democrats this year when it comes to campaign cash: You’re on your own.’⁸³

Fears that the White House is coming to regard the Party in the same way that a vampire regards its lunch only increased with the surprise announcement after the 2012 election that the Obama campaign would not disband its ground operation, but instead transform it into a mass-membership non-profit called Organizing for Action, with the mission of supporting the President’s priorities. Although no Democrat accused the President of ‘Peronism’, the announcement caused widespread consternation at the Democratic National Committee: several members of the DNC ‘expressed fear’ that ‘the new outside group’ could ‘hurt the national party’s fundraising and drain its resources.’⁸⁴ Unlike the DNC, Organizing for Action will be able to operate in the same tax-free, unlimited-contribution environment as the Rove Crossroads PACs, but with the advantage of the most sophisticated mobilization technology in electoral history. If successful, it will rewire the power relations between the White House and local Democrats, and minimize the President’s dependence upon trade unions, equal-rights groups, and progressives to carry campaign messages door-to-door. What is heralded as an innovative strategy to get around the roadblock of the Republican House majority may simply provide the President with more road width (Avenida 9 de Julio, perhaps?) to bypass his own party.

The House of No

If Obama augurs a further shift, inspired by Clinton, towards a charismatic presidentialism, with captive congressional supporters and little

⁸³ Emily Ramshaw, ‘At DNC, Texas Dems Asking for a National Investment’, *The Texas Tribune*, 3 September 2012; John Bresnahan, ‘White House to Congress Dems: Expect No Money’, *Politico.com*, 5 March 2012.

⁸⁴ Cameron Joseph, ‘Rebranded Obama campaign group causes frustration for DNC’, *The Hill*, 22 January 2013.

internal debate, then the Republicans have moved in the opposite direction, operating more like a parliamentary party driven by ideological conflict rather than common allegiance to a hero figure like Nixon or Reagan. As Frank Rich characterized a talk that Grover Norquist gave last year to the Conservative Political Action Committee, ‘the GOP candidate’s only function as president would be “to sign the legislation that has already been prepared” by the Republican congressional caucus, starting with the government-slashing Ryan budget.’⁸⁵ Norquist, of course, invented the fiscal loyalty oath in the early 1990s, transforming the slogans of the late 1970s tax revolts into an unbending theology of opposition to government social spending and the taxation of wealth. More importantly, his major backers and congressional allies were willing to discipline and even unseat legislators who balked at signing the ‘Taxpayer Protection Pledge’.⁸⁶

Although eventually all but a handful of House Republicans signed, the unification of the party around intimidating fiscal ideology, briefly achieved by the 1994 congressional ‘revolution’, was undercut by Gingrich’s disgrace and resignation as Speaker, then overshadowed by the Bush administration’s absorption in the neoconservative project of creating a free-market utopia in Iraq. Obama’s ‘impossible victory’ in 2008, which discredited the remaining Republican establishment of elder senators, academic neoconservatives and Reagan *consiglieri*, conversely pumped huge energy into the dogmatic Republican constituencies who believe that first principles—whether unborn life, marginal tax rates or the gold standard—should be non-negotiable.

The Tea Party, even if largely created by FreedomWorks, the Koch brothers and Fox News, tapped into a deep well of conservative nostalgia for a white-majority America ruled by fathers and bosses. It also filled a vacuum left by the decline of Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition and earlier rightwing alliances. Although its populism, as several recent studies have shown, has mainly been confined to country clubs and mega-churches in middle-class congressional districts with lower than average unemployment, it has still been a lightning rod for the fear that

⁸⁵ Frank Rich, ‘The Election—II’, *New York Review of Books*, 8 November 2012.

⁸⁶ At the end of the day, even Norquist was panicked by Tea Party zealotry and gave Boehner a last-minute papal indulgence (since the Bush tax cuts had expired, there was no tax increase . . .) to escape the closing circle of those conservatives who favoured going over the cliff.

traditional white prosperity and stable family life were incompatible with the continuing advancement of minorities and immigrants. The Tea Party is Sinclair Lewis's Babbity looking into a mirror and seeing itself as a dying culture.⁸⁷

The 2010 primaries were among the most vicious in Republican history. Tea Party-backed candidates—that is to say, those supported by Armeý and/or the Kochs—challenged some of the biggest names in the GOP, including Bob Bennett, Trey Grayson, Mike Castle, Charlie Crist, Sue Lowden, Rick Lazio, Paul Thurmond (son of Strom) and Lisa Murkowski—although Murkowski ultimately won the general election with write-in votes. About a third of Tea Party-endorsed candidates for the House were successful. Most were first-timers, and Dick Armeý set up a workshop for the freshmen on ‘how not to be coopted’ by the Republican establishment. Fifty-five became members of the official Tea Party Caucus founded by Michelle Bachman, although their overlapping membership is dwarfed by the Republican Study Committee with 170 members. (The RSC, the largest ideological bloc in Congress for the last 30 years, is organized around the ‘Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights’, and until the 2010 elections considered itself the one true church of conservative Republicanism.)

The trauma of the 2010 primary fights, repeated in 2012, has transformed the calculus of incumbency and therefore the stability of leadership within the GOP. If Norquist was a difficulty, the Tea Party are dangerous theological police. According to David Wasserman, House Editor for the respected *Cook Political Report*, only 6 of 234 Republicans in the new House represent Democratic-leaning districts. Regardless of the party’s national dilemmas, the ‘overwhelming share of House Republicans will have more to fear from a 2014 primary than a 2014 general election. This political reality drives congressional behaviour.’⁸⁸ What gives the threat real teeth, of course, is the existence of groups like FreedomWorks and Americans for Responsible Government who are willing and able to outspend all but the most well-heeled incumbents.

⁸⁷ Paul supporters, initially depicted in some media as the ideologues of the Tea Party, have only a loose relationship to the cause. Moreover they are divided between reluctant Republicans and zealous supporters of the Libertarian Party, which received a bare 1 per cent of the national vote.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Paul West, ‘Tea party isn’t dead by any means’, LATimes.com, 7 December 2012.

‘The ideological shift from the 111th to the 112th Congress’, write Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, ‘was extraordinary—indeed, larger than in any previous shift from one House to the next, including the change that occurred in 1994.’ Using a new methodology developed by Stanford political scientist Adam Bonita to rank the ideologies of House members and other politicians, they were stunned by the temperature of extremism they found in the Republican class of 2010: 77 per cent of the newly arriving Republicans ‘are to the right of the typical Republican in the previous Congress—and many are to the right of *almost all* continuing Republicans.’ They argue, like Anthony DiMaggio in his book on the Tea Party, that this great Red shift was less the result of grassroots rebellion than of shrewd investments by anti-tax ‘plutocrats’ who essentially went out and bought themselves a new ‘ground game’.⁸⁹

But the plutocratic ‘investment model’ should not overshadow the degree to which the Republican electorate has been radicalized since 2008. Exit polling, for instance, has revealed a dramatic increase in the number of Republican voters who report ‘anger’ against Obama, from 17 per cent in 2008 to 45 per cent today. In a subculture where Rush Limbaugh is the emotional norm, Republicans relish sound and fury, no matter how demented. Thus a particular favourite of the Tea Party wing has been Florida politician Allen West, who narrowly lost his House seat last November. According to Michael Bender, ‘He’s labeled President Obama supporters “a threat to the gene pool”’, and ‘called 78 of his liberal colleagues in Congress communists’.⁹⁰ Meanwhile conspiracy theory retains its prominent traditional role in American rightwing politics. According to Public Policy Polling, 49 per cent of GOP voters nationally say they think that community organization ACORN ‘stole the [2012] election for President Obama . . . 52 per cent of Republicans thought that ACORN stole the 2008 election for Obama, so this is a modest decline, but perhaps smaller than might have been expected given that ACORN doesn’t exist anymore.’⁹¹

⁸⁹ Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, New York 2012, pp. 169–72. (Bonita’s work is not yet in print.) Anthony DiMaggio, *The Rise of the Tea Party*, New York 2011.

⁹⁰ Michael Bender, ‘The Dirtiest Campaign in America’, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 22–28 October 2012, p. 36.

⁹¹ This is not a line from Jon Stewart, but a report from a prestigious polling organization. ‘Republicans not handling election results well’, Public Policy Polling, 4 December 2012.

In historical perspective, of course, the modern Republican Party has always had a substantial minority of far-right true-believers like the John Birch Society (now active in the Tea Party) in the 1950–60s, or the sundry virulent anti-Roosevelt groups a decade earlier who saw subversion behind every New Deal mural and public-housing project. More significant are the broader trends, such as the collapse of support amongst Republicans for a minimal social-safety net (from 62 per cent in 1987 to 40 per cent today) or the growing generational indifference about the future of younger Americans. Formerly fringe ideas are also becoming mainstream within Tea Party Republicanism, like the bizarre ‘originalist’ interpretation of the Constitution advocated by far-right Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who believes that the original intentions of 18th-century Virginia slave-owners and New England merchants are the only constitutional interpretations permissible for American governments in the 21st century. For some evangelicals, indeed, the Constitution is now like the Bible: inerrant divine word that must be understood in the most anti-modern way possible.⁹²

Unfortunately political ‘polarization’ is unidirectional. Apart from the young Latinas mentioned earlier, no important segment of Democratic opinion has moved significantly leftward in the past twenty years. In contrast, Republican opinion—at least as measured by its representation in Congress—has moved rightward every year since 1976. As gauged on a widely used seven-point ideological scale, some social scientists believe that the Republicans are now further to the right than at any time in the past century.⁹³ What has driven this rightward shift? A trio of political scientists—McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal—whose book *Polarized America* was published in 2006, make a compelling argument that the current ideological polarization in Congress tracks income polarization: the beneficiaries of inequality steadily move further to the right. Moreover the effect is enhanced by positive feedback: income inequality increases polarization while political polarization increases income inequality.⁹⁴

To this argument might be appended the hypothesis that every move by Democrats toward centrist accommodation only encourages the

⁹² See Peter Smith and Robert Tuttle, ‘Biblical Literalism and Constitutional Originalism’, *Notre Dame Law Review*, vol. 86, no. 2, 2011.

⁹³ Frank James, ‘Political Scientist: Republicans Most Conservative They’ve Been in 100 Years’, *It’s All Politics*, NPR website, 13 April 2012.

⁹⁴ Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, Cambridge, MA 2006.

Republicans—and thus the movable ‘centre’—to shift further to the right. Social conservatism and its discontents with the 21st century are obviously still brick and mortar to Republicanism. But what actually drives the party rightward and constitutes the rational core of its apparent nihilism is the determination to preserve all of the upward redistribution of wealth and power achieved over three decades since the Reagan revolution. Thomas Edsall, who argues cogently in his new book that zero-sum conflicts over state resources are inevitable concomitants of economic stagnation, makes a strong case for the rational-actor logic of Republican intransigence:

Republican leaders see the window closing on the opportunity to dismantle the liberal state. The prospect looms that the GOP will be forced to accommodate changing demographics, as proponents of big government gain traction and as an ever-growing cohort of Americans become dependent on social-welfare initiatives. These stresses create an incentive for the conservative movement to pull hard right and to pursue increasingly high-risk strategies.⁹⁵

This hard pull to the right is unlikely to cease. In the first place, the Tea Party wing is taking over the major Republican think-tanks with invaluable help from the ubiquitous Koch brothers. Last March, for example, the Kochs ousted Cato Institute executive Ed Crane, who immediately charged that Charles Koch was conspiring to ‘transform Cato from an independent, nonpartisan research organization into a political entity that might better support his partisan agenda’. This was followed by Armeys failed coup at FreedomWorks, and then, in what Tea Party supporters deemed a ‘master stroke’, the surprise resignation of South Carolina’s Jim DeMint from the Senate in order to take charge of the Heritage Foundation, the premier centre of conservative policy-making. As one of the Cato directors told *Business Week*: ‘DeMint’s hiring is recognition by Heritage that the energy is not with the Republican establishment.’ The choice ‘shows they are moving more toward the Tea Party than the mainstream’.⁹⁶ Secondly, the Party’s base is adamantly opposed to bipartisan cooperation or a more centrist national leadership. On the contrary, Pew pollsters found that:

Republicans and Republican leaners remain of the view that the GOP leaders should move in a more conservative direction, not a more moderate

⁹⁵ Edsall, *Age of Austerity*, p. 10.

⁹⁶ Julie Bykowitz, ‘Tea Party Gains Control Over Republican Policy Incubators’, *Businessweek.com*, 7 December 2012.

one, by a 57 per cent to 35 per cent margin. Democrats and Democratic leaners, meanwhile, continue to support more moderation from their political leaders: nearly six in ten (57 per cent) want Democratic leaders to move in a moderate direction, while 33 per cent want them to move in a more liberal direction.⁹⁷

One-party states

A few weeks after the election, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow complained about the glaring contradiction between the national media's depiction of a sobered-up Republican Party attempting a major 'course correction' and local news accounts of unyielding Republican opposition to immigration amnesty, abortion and gay rights in states where they hold power:

All over the country, if you look at state newspapers and state news bureaus covering what it is that Republicans are planning to do, where they have governing authority in the states—the contrast between that reporting and the Beltway discussion about what Republicans theoretically ought to be doing, is like news from two totally different universes.⁹⁸

The second universe comprises the 24 Southern and Plains states where Republicans occupy the Governor's mansion and control both houses of the legislature. There are currently more Republican state legislators (3,814) than at any time since 1928 and more Republican-controlled chambers in the South (19) since the peak of Reconstruction in 1870. (As late as 1993, no Southern chamber had a GOP majority.) Since 1876, moreover, there have been only three periods where Republicans held a larger percentage of the nation's governorships: 1921–22, 1970 and 1997–99.⁹⁹ Romney may have lost the national election but the Republicans—who took over 22 chambers in the 2008 midterms—came out ahead again in the 2012 legislative elections, consolidating their earlier gains (see Tables 9 and 10, opposite).¹⁰⁰

State government is the most eccentric and veiled architectural component of the US Federal political system. Its daily operations—secluded

⁹⁷ 'Low Marks for the 2012 Election', Pew Research Center, 15 November 2012.

⁹⁸ Rachel Maddow, 'Republicans On National and State Levels are "Like Two Different Universes"', MSNBC, 27 November 2012.

⁹⁹ Trende, 'Political Landscape after 2012'.

¹⁰⁰ In 2010, the Democrats had fielded 50 fewer candidates than two years earlier while the Republicans challenged an additional 820 seats. Tim Storey, 'GOP Makes Historic State Legislative Gains in 2010', *Rasmussen Reports*, 10 December 2010.

TABLE 9. *Democratic share of state legislators (%)*

	2010 (<i>Before election</i>)	2012 (<i>After election</i>)
<i>National</i>		
Senate	53	46
Lower house	56	48
<i>The South</i>		
Senate	51	38
Lower house	51	40

Source: Michael Barone, 'To Win, Obama Sacrifices House, State Legislatures', *Washington Examiner*, 13 November 2012.

TABLE 10. *After the 2012 election*

<i>State legislators</i>	
Democrats	3,479
Republicans	3,814
<i>Governors</i>	
Democrats	19
Republicans	30
Independent	1
<i>Super-majorities</i>	
Democrats	14
Republicans	24

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures.

in places like Albany, Sacramento, Austin, Tallahassee, Harrisburg and Springfield (to name only the capitals of the most populous states)—are much more poorly reported than metropolitan or national politics, and followed intently by only an infinitesimal fraction of the ordinary electorate. Sometimes supremely controversial, state politics is also the most implacably mundane—focused on debates over crop subsidies,

highway improvement, amendments to crime bills, sites for new prisons, the naming of bridges and the granting of liquor licences. Some state legislatures, Texas and Nevada for example, continue the tradition of the frugal frontier and meet only every other year, leaving powerful governors and lobbyists to consummate deals and worry about elections.¹⁰¹

Over the last generation, however, conservative Republicans have created a series of unique and powerful linkages between state politics and national corporate lobbies. The most important is an extraordinary non-profit called the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which acts as a concierge service for conservative legislators. It saves its 2,000 legislative members the trouble of having to design bills and think through legalities by letting corporate lobbyists write the legislation for them, or simply pull it off a library shelf. As the *New York Times* and Common Cause discovered in a recent investigation: ‘The records offer a glimpse of how special interests effectively turn ALEC’s lawmaker members into stealth lobbyists, providing them with talking points, signalling how they should vote and collaborating on bills affecting hundreds of issues like school vouchers and tobacco taxes.’¹⁰²

Donations to ALEC are tax deductible and eagerly offered by companies like Reynolds America, Walmart, Bank of America, ExxonMobil, BP America and AT&T, as well as trade organizations like the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America—Bayer, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson are represented on ALEC’s 24-member Private Enterprise Board. A recent model bill from the US Chamber of Commerce proposed ‘requiring that all high-school students take a class in “free enterprise” as a condition of graduation.’ According to an earlier investigation by *Bloomberg Businessweek*: ‘About 1,000 times a year, according to ALEC, a state legislator introduces a bill from its library of more than 800 models. About 200 times a year, one of them becomes law. The Council, in essence, makes national policy, state by state.’ Not surprisingly, the investigators also found that ‘campaign contributions often followed’.¹⁰³ Indeed.

¹⁰¹ The 2010 platform of the Idaho Republican Party stated, ‘We oppose all legislation from any level of government.’ Quoted in Annika Werner and Onawa Laceywell, ‘Programmatic Supply and the Autonomy of US State Parties in 2008 and 2010’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5, December 2012, p. 533.

¹⁰² Mike McIntire, ‘Nonprofit Acts as Stealth Business Lobbyist’, *NYT*, 22 April 2012.

¹⁰³ *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 5–11 December 2011, pp. 68–72.

Republican state campaigns, to a much greater extent than the Democratic side, are also nourished by investments from national super-PACs. In 2009, Ed Gillespie—once Dick Arme’s senior advisor and more recently the campaign partner of Karl Rove—revived the decrepit Republican State Leadership Committee with huge injections of cash from American Crossroads. While the Obama campaign was looting the fundraising base of local Democrats, Gillespie was convincing major national donors like Las Vegas’s Sheldon Adelson and Dallas mega-developer Bob Perry to join with the Kochs and invest heavily in obscure campaigns by Tea Party candidates in Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. According to the *New York Times*, when state election laws got in the way of outside money, the Republican Governors Association accepted the contribution and immediately donated a like amount to the candidate.¹⁰⁴ The splendid result was the preservation of Republican power in the capitals of Midwestern states that, apart from Indiana, gave decisive majorities to Obama.

Gillespie’s success at insulating Republican majorities from presidential trends depended upon shrewd gerrymanders, the support of almost universally right-leaning local media, and—the third hallmark of a new age—ultra-conservative policy institutes and training centres focused on state politics. As Andy Kroll explained in April 2011:

Conceived by the same conservative ideologues who helped found the Heritage Foundation, the State Policy Network is a little-known umbrella group with deep ties to the national conservative movement. Its mission is simple: to back a constellation of state-level think tanks loosely modeled after Heritage that promote free-market principles and rail against unions, regulation and tax increases.¹⁰⁵

Financed by reactionary dynasties like the Coors, the Bradleys and the Peters, there is at least one ‘freedom centre’ in each of the fifty states, usually closely imbricated with Tea Party groups and their sponsors.

The conservative policy infrastructure, in other words, is fractal; the Democrats have nothing that remotely approaches such a network. In the Midwest especially there is a mini-Heritage and its rich sponsor

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Confessore and Monica Davey, ‘Michigan Effort Shows GOP Sway in State Contests’, *New York Times*, 17 December 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Andy Kroll, ‘The Right-Wing Network Behind the War on Unions’, *Mother Jones*, 24 April 2011.

behind each recent attack on collective bargaining. In Ohio, for instance, Governor John Kasich's attempt to take away public-sector bargaining rights depended heavily upon the Buckeye Institute, which in 2008 had filed a RICO action against ACORN, alleging that its voter-registration efforts amounted to 'organized crime'. In Indiana, where Governor Mitch Daniels ended recognition for public-sector unions by fiat and Republicans then outlawed the union shop, the Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics was an ideological cogwheel. In Wisconsin, where Scott Walker provoked a huge populist uprising by his attack on public employees, the Republicans are under the influence of two rightwing think tanks: the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute—closely tied to ALEC and the Bradley Foundation, original backers of the John Birch Society—and the MacIver Institute, allied with Americans for Prosperity.

Michigan, once home to pragmatic Republican leaders like George Romney and Gerald Ford, is a particularly ominous example of the entrenchment strategy at work. A month after Obama swept the state by 8 points, and following an unsuccessful attempt to enshrine collective bargaining in the state constitution, Governor Rick Snyder and a lame-duck Republican House majority passed a right-to-work law without legislative debate or forenotice to Democrats. Actually opposed by the big corporations represented in Business Leaders for Michigan, the initiative was forced by the West Michigan Policy Forum, representing smaller companies and family-owned firms, and a network of Tea Party groups linked to the Mackinac Center, another rightwing think tank. All are either subsidiaries or beneficiaries of the DeVos sons, Dick and Doug, heirs to the Amway fortune, headquartered in Ada, Michigan. Their father Richard DeVos was a member of the Dominionist movement that aims to end separation of church and state, in order to make the US into a Protestant theocracy.¹⁰⁶ Amway, which has 180,000 global sales associates who sell cosmetics and detergents door-to-door or from stores, has been accused for decades of being a sophisticated pyramid scheme as well as an evangelical Christian cult and private political army. Its distributors were once sued for spreading rumours that Proctor & Gamble, its larger corporate rival, was actually the Church of Satan. In any event, the huge profits generated by this bizarre company helped create the unusually dense network of conservative/Tea Party power in West

¹⁰⁶ DeVos wanted to replace the Pledge of Allegiance with the following: 'I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag, and to the Saviour for whose kingdom it stands.'

Michigan, a region of 1.4 million people around Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon, that plays a dominant role in state Republican politics.¹⁰⁷

Once upon a time, national Republican leaderships could keep such berserkers on the reservation, but no more. Too much Misesian DNA has been transplanted into state-level Republicanism, and it is now coalescing into a coherent design for building small-government societies state by state, behind the Red wall of gerrymandered supermajorities. Although opposition to reproductive choice and gay rights remain at the centre of conservative morality, Republican-dominated state governments from Kansas to North Carolina are urgently focused on implementing the core economics of the Tea Party: ending state income taxes, repealing collective-bargaining rights, privatizing education and deregulating the environment.

In his official rebuttal to Obama's second inaugural address, Louisiana's Bobby Jindal, the head of the Republican Governors Association, urged conservatives to leave Babylon to build Zion. The battle over spending in Congress, he argued, was 'a debate fought entirely on our opponents' terms', whereas in Baton Rouge, Oklahoma City or even in Lansing they could slash and privatize in pursuit of the low-tax, high-growth miracles that would inspire the next Republican majority: 'We believe in planting the seeds of growth in the fertile soil of your economy . . . not in the barren concrete of Washington.'¹⁰⁸

The Governor of Louisiana seemed to be impersonating William Jennings Bryan and John C. Calhoun at the same time: it was strange, in any event, for the official opposition orator to call upon his party to evacuate the Beltway. But Jindal (as eager to lick Pennsylvania Avenue's pavement as any other politician) was appealing to a real power that, confronted with national setbacks or defeats, only entrenches itself

¹⁰⁷ Chris Gaultz, 'Window of Opportunity', *Crain's Detroit Business*, 9 December 2012; and Jane Slaughter's articles at labornotes.org. See also Stephen Butterfield, *Amway: The Cult of Free Enterprise*, Boston 1999. West Michigan rated dead last in a comparative study of 26 regions with comparable populations. Hammered by industrial decline (Grand Rapids traditionally has been the office-furniture capital of America) and high unemployment like the rest of Michigan, the area is statistically striking for the huge gap between white and non-white incomes. (See West Michigan Strategic Alliance, *2010 West Michigan Vital Signs*, Grand Rapids 2011.)

¹⁰⁸ John McGinnis, 'Bobby Jindal's message is that DC is no place for the GOP', *The Times-Picayune*, 28 January 2013.

deeper in the school board, the city council and the general assembly. The new crusade to uproot unionism in the American Heartland, for example, doesn't originate in Detroit or Wall Street; it slouches to power from Grand Rapids and other mythical Main Streets. Strange billionaire oil men, casino owners and detergent salesmen reign over elections and mock the majorities of presidents thanks to pious Walmart managers, realtors, retired dentists and subcontractors in pickup trucks with their radios tuned to Rush Limbaugh.

Although Obama arguably saved Wall Street and General Motors, the eastern corporate establishment, as it was once called, has consistently depreciated its debt to the Presidency and overestimated its control over the GOP. Two of the major business sectors with huge debts to the current White House—the big investment and retail banks and Silicon Valley—either sat out the election, nursing their pique over Obama's scolding campaign rhetoric, or, like the monster egos at Goldman Sachs, knifed their saviour and supported Romney. Inured since Reagan to routine thunder and lightning from the Republican hinterlands, the globalized American ruling class has failed to grasp the Weimarian nature of the Tea Party politics. The destruction of \$19 trillion of personal wealth in the United States since 2008 coupled with the fears of economic stagnation and minority ascendancy have crazed the base of the Republican Party.¹⁰⁹ Something indeed has run amok when the merely wealthy stop obeying orders from the very rich or when the privileged 20 per cent mutinies against any concession by the peak 0.1 per cent. Tea Party Republicanism is not the future, not the majority, not even the conservative past. It's the gangrene of imperial decline.

¹⁰⁹ Christian Weller, 'The Consequences of Conservatism: Loss of Wealth Stunning During Great Recession', Center for American Progress, 25 March 2011.