



TDS STRATEGY MEMO:

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AND “CLASS RESENTMENT”:

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IMPORTANT—PERSPECTIVE THAT IS
NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND WHY
MANY NON-RACIST WHITE WORKING
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By ANDREW LEVISON

A Democratic candidate running in a district with a significant number of white working class voters quickly learns that there are three major explanations for Trump’s popularity among these Americans.¹

1. Racism and bigotry
2. Anxiety and hostility over loss of status, role and position in a changing society
3. Legitimate and justified anger regarding difficult economic circumstances

Each of these explanations has important implications for how a Democratic candidate should run his or her campaign. The first, for example, clearly suggests that a candidate should simply abandon any attempt to gain support among these voters while the second and third explanations suggest two distinct approaches for winning their support.

Yet even the two more sympathetic interpretations above do not suggest any answer to two absolutely central questions that any proposed explanation for the behavior of white working class voters needs to answer: **(1) If difficult economic circumstances were actually the key issue for the non-racist sector of the white working class, why did they vote for a conservative rather than a progressive alternative and (2) why do so many of these voters still continue to support Trump despite his obvious betrayal of key populist campaign promises and flagrant personal corruption?**

None of the three explanations above seem to directly suggest answers to these critical questions. This indicates that there is some other factor involved that has not been properly understood.

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¹The term “white working class” is today defined as being men and women who have less than a college education. For a discussion of this definition, see appendix 1.

The Three Explanations

The first interpretation, that most white working class voters are simply racists (as well as homophobic and misogynistic) even if they verbally deny it, seemed most vividly demonstrated by the ugly behavior of the crowds at Trump's rallies during the campaign. Trump's attacks on Latinos, African-Americans and people of Middle Eastern descent were not coded "dog whistles" to racism but rather air raid sirens blaring at top volume. A number of widely reported public opinion poll analyses have also been published that similarly argue the view that white workers are basically motivated by racism or the slightly more sophisticated formulation of the same idea, *that white workers want to regain their previous status as the beneficiaries of "white privilege."*

This interpretation is particularly popular among Democrats who believe that it is a complete waste of time and resources to try to increase Democratic support among white working class voters and that absolutely all available resources should be dedicated to expanding the turnout of more pro-Democratic groups like people of color, college educated professionals and youth.

The problem with this "white workers are all basically racists" view is that it ignores the fact that almost one out of every three white working class voters still voted Democratic in 2016 and that between 36% and 40% voted Democratic in 2010 and 2008.²

The simple fact is that it is not necessary to win the votes of the very substantial group of racist white working class voters. As the recent "States of Change" demographic analysis has demonstrated, Democrats can win back both the White House and majority support in seven major swing states just by regaining the same share of the white working class vote that they received in 2012. [As the analysis noted:](#)³

"In a scenario where GOP white noncollege-educated voter margins return to 2012 levels, Democrats would enjoy a strong 5.6-point popular vote advantage in 2020 and garner a dominant 347-191 electoral vote win. Besides gaining back Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Iowa by healthy margins, the Democrats would also carry Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio.

And it is important to note that not a single one of the various opinion poll analyses that argue for the endemic racism of the white working class demonstrates that this is an impossible goal. On the contrary, there are enough non-racist white workers in America to defeat Trump and the GOP if Democrats can figure out how to win their support.

²As well as ignoring the substantial number of white working men and women who did not vote for Trump, this view also errs by trying to analyze "a typical worker" or "most workers" when in fact there are very distinct and important subgroups among less than college voters. Psychologically there is a sharp division between those who are relatively tolerant and those who are fiercely bigoted. There are also important differences between demographic groups: women are more pro-Democratic than men, the young more pro-Democratic than the old, and the urban more familiar and comfortable with diversity than those who live in rural and small towns. Any discussion of how to appeal to white working class voters that does not grapple with these and other important distinctions but rather bases its political strategy on the notion of "a typical white worker" will inevitably be simplistic.

³<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2015/02/24/107261/states-of-change/>

The other two interpretations noted above are obviously more sympathetic to white working people but they contain within them important limitations.

The view that white working class support for Trump reflects *“anxiety about cultural, demographic, and economic change”* was perhaps the most common theme in the many generally sympathetic journalistic reports from “Trump country” and particularly the Rust Belt during and after the 2016 campaign. White working people were described as feeling “left behind,” nostalgic for the past of good factory jobs and stable communities of the 1950’s and 60’s and the system of social and cultural values which that world sustained. In contrast, they felt alienated and bewildered by the modern digital age and unable to adjust themselves to the new kinds of jobs that required greater technical skills and the flexibility to relocate and retrain as conditions changed.

This perspective is indeed more sympathetic than the first, but it often verges on a rather ill-concealed degree of condescension. In a recent speech in India, Hillary Clinton provided a quite clear example. She said:

“I won the places that are optimistic, diverse, dynamic, moving forward. And [Trump’s] whole campaign—‘Make America Great Again’—was looking backward. You know, you didn’t like black people getting rights, you don’t like women, you know, getting jobs, you don’t want, you know, to see that Indian American succeeding more than you are.”

Other analyses did not echo Clinton’s embarrassingly tone-deaf elitism but nonetheless strongly suggested a similar view of the difference between the “successful, diverse and dynamic” highly educated areas and the “stagnant and backward looking” communities of the white working class.

The final perspective—that white workers genuinely faced difficult economic circumstances and were expressing a justified anger at the failure of both political parties to do anything about it—is widely held among progressive populists and leads to the recommendation that (as Ronald Brownstein summarized it). Democrats should aim to “discredit Trump’s argument that he’s championing working-class interests [and] highlight his attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, along with his support for a tax plan that mostly benefited the wealthy and corporations and will eventually increase pressure to cut Social Security and Medicare.”

A strategy combining an intense attack on the phony populism of Donald Trump with a genuine and deeply progressive economic agenda was, of course, the general approach that Bernie Sanders followed during his campaign and is the central tactic of all progressive populists. But the fact must be faced that the political effectiveness of this approach has by no means been demonstrated. On the contrary, again and again over the last 40 years many progressive Democratic candidates at every level of politics have argued the case that workers should refuse to be distracted by conservative appeals to “values issues” and vote for them as the politicians who will genuinely defend workers “kitchen table” economic interests. But at no point since the early 1970’s has this kind of appeal demonstrated widespread success among white working class voters. While opinion polls continually show strong support for an extensive range of populist economic proposals among white working class voters, again and again Democratic candidates who have put such measures at the center of their campaign have failed to win the support of working Americans. A wide range of explanations have been proposed for this failure over the last 45 years, but the basic fact itself cannot seriously be denied.

These three explanations for Trump's popularity—inherent racism, anxiety and hostility to social and cultural change and anger at the failure of the established parties to deal with legitimate economic problems—have up to now dominated the discussion of Democratic political strategy. But there is another perspective that is entirely absent from the discussion. It suggests answers to the two questions above and has profoundly important implications for the formulation of a successful Democratic strategy.

It is that Trump—vile and dishonest as he may be—very successfully tapped into a deep mental and emotional perspective in white working class life—a distinct kind of modern class consciousness, class resentment and class antagonism that is completely unacknowledged in current discussions regarding how to reach these voters but plays a critical role in their political thinking.

White Workers Perception of Social Class

There is, of course, tremendous resistance among social scientists and historians to the idea that American white workers can be said to have anything like a “class consciousness” at all. While it is considered acceptable to use the term to describe, for example, the attitudes of British working class voters and their support for the Labor Party after World War II, or British coal miners during the Thatcher era, it is almost never used in discussions of American workers. In most social commentators' minds, the term “class consciousness” can only refer to a radical mode of thought that sees society in Marxist terms as sharply and fundamentally divided between labor and capital.

But from the point of view of white working class Americans themselves, there is a quite different sense in which the terms class consciousness, class resentment and class antagonism are very deeply and powerfully meaningful. It is that from their perspective, society is indeed sharply divided between, on the one hand, “*people like them*” and on the other hand three distinct and separate elites who in different ways “*screw*” them. While this distinction does not have a clear terminology in American politics, in Mexican slang there has always been a distinct set of terms for this very specific type of class consciousness—it is between “*los chingones*”—“the people with power who screw others” and “*los chingados*”—“the ones who get screwed”.

This is a different form of class consciousness than the traditional radical conception but it meets the key characteristic of the term—a perception of society as sharply divided between ordinary people and elites and a sense of resentment those below feel at the treatment they receive from those above.

A key difference between the modern white working class conception and the traditional radical view is that white working people do not visualize a single dominant “ruling class” or “power elite” above them but rather see three different and distinct groups, none of which totally dominates society but each of which in one way or another mistreats them and holds them in contempt.

The first group is the political class and as anyone who has ever listened to focus groups or has actually spent time with white working class Americans can attest many working people do indeed see politicians as a *completely distinct, utterly corrupt and entirely parasitic* class that lives in complete isolation from ordinary people in a rarified environment of fancy ballrooms and expensive restaurants, big money contributions and backroom deals that invariably end up screwing ordinary Americans.

The second group is the “Wall Street” financial elite that makes decisions in faraway office towers that destroy local community jobs and mom and pop businesses. They reside in fancy gated communities filled with mega-mansions and send their children to private schools with country club entrance procedures that would never allow the children of ordinary workers admission even if those workers could afford the expensive tuition.⁴

The final group is the “liberal” elite—the heterogeneous group of college professors and students, Hollywood actors and producers, music and fashion producers and TV, newspaper and magazine columnists and commentators. They are not seen as a financial ruling class but rather as a social group that dominates and controls the culture—what one sees on TV and in the movies, what is taught in colleges and universities, what is written in editorial page commentaries and what is produced and sold in the fashion and music industries. They are perceived as affluent urban dwellers who live in expensive, gentrified urban communities or in charming college towns. They drive “sophisticated” costly cars, drink Latté’s, casually travel to Europe on vacations and wear Patagonia vests and Birkenstock shoes to subtly announce their discernment and sophistication. They are also seen to exercise substantial political power, using the Democratic Party as their vehicle. This power to impose their “liberal” agenda is obtained through a cynical alliance with minorities who are bribed to vote for Democrats by various kinds of “handouts,” special government programs or preferential treatment.

Working people have distinct feelings about these three different groups but see the members of all three as living in worlds that are economically and sociologically high “above” them and who resemble each other in their indifference to the needs of ordinary people and their contempt for them as human beings. All three groups are emphatically perceived as “them” and not “us”

This “class consciousness” and “class resentment” is a complex perspective that cannot be easily tracked by standard opinion polls and for this reason it is often overlooked in the discussion of Democratic political strategy. But it is vividly evident in focus groups with white working class Americans, in the discussions that occur during progressive campaigns of door to door canvassing in white working class neighborhoods and in the interviews conducted during ethnographic field studies. Its centrality is revealed in the very titles of the major sociological studies of white working class Americans that have appeared in the last several years: Katherine Cramer’s *The Politics of Resentment*, Arlie Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land*, Justin Gest’s *The New Minority*.

This perspective provides an answer to the two key questions noted above and has profoundly important implications for Democratic strategy.

Question 1. If the vote of the non-racist sector of the white working class was driven by legitimate economic concerns, why did they gravitate toward Trump rather than Bernie Sanders?

The easy answer is that Sanders was not given the opportunity to widely present his progressive economic platform because there were too few debates scheduled during the Democratic primaries. But it is difficult to consider this a complete explanation. During the early period before the

⁴This view of the economic elite does not extend to small businessmen and women. With the decline of mass industry, many workers – from construction to retail – today work in smaller businesses where they know and relate directly to the owner. Working people do not see the owners or managers of these small businesses as part of the elite but rather as people who are generally like them and who share their outlook and values.

primaries began and Trump leaped to the head of the Republican field, Sanders mass rallies in college towns and surprisingly strong challenge to Hillary Clinton received more TV and press attention than did Trump – and such coverage of Trump as did occur was at first heavily focused on his inflammatory racial views rather than his economic stances. But even in Rust Belt areas where unions conducted anti-Trump information campaigns, they constantly found white working class union members who had previously voted for Obama defecting to Trump but no comparable movement of Republican workers to Sanders.

A more plausible explanation is that Sanders and Trump were offering two very different narratives about the relationship of white working people to the elites above them.

Bernie Sanders did not present his view of social classes in the same terms as white workers themselves saw them—as three separate elites arrayed above them. Instead, his progressive populist approach argued that white workers needed to accept a different definition of class consciousness—one that portrays the “*wall street billionaire class*” as the “*real*” and hegemonic American ruling class – the one that ultimately controls and manipulates the economy, the politicians, the media, the schools and all the other major institutions in society to the detriment of everyone else. In this conception liberals are not an elite group socially above white workers but rather potential allies in the struggle against the billionaire class. This perspective implies that white working people need to recognize the benefit of joining in a broad coalition with liberals and minorities against the plutocratic “one percent.”

A white worker who examines the webpage of Bernie Sander’s organization, Our Revolution, sees this immediately. Along with an admirable range of solidly progressive economic planks in the groups’ platform, there are also separate planks devoted to “*Combating Climate Change to Save the Planet*,” “*Insuring Racial Justice*,” “*Fighting for Women’s Rights*,” “*Fighting for LGBT Equality*,” “*Ending the Humanitarian Crisis in Puerto Rico*,” and “*Empowering Tribal Nations*.”

For progressives, these are typical elements of a broad coalition platform that cannot be traded away or ignored without fracturing the coalition. But to an ordinary white working class voter, they unavoidably indicate that the progressive vision is that they should join this broad and diverse coalition rather than expect to find political representation that specifically embodies their distinct needs and outlook.

In sharp contrast, Donald Trump’s appeal to white working class Americans emphatically and specifically reaffirmed their basic class outlook and promised to represent them and them alone. He said, in effect, “Your point of view is absolutely right. You have been horribly mistreated by all three of the elites above you. They have never given a damn about you and have been screwing you for years.”

On the one hand, when describing the economy in his rallies, Trump used language that could have been directly taken from progressive speeches and publications:⁴

⁵The quotes that follow are taken from two valuable sources:

1. “Trump’s Electoral Speeches and His Appeal to the American White Working Class,” *The British Journal of Sociology* <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-4446.12315>

2. “The Emotional Politics of Making America Great Again: Trump’s Working Class Appeals,” *The Journal of Working Class Studies* <https://workingclassstudiesjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/jwcs-vol-2-issue-1-june-2017-schrock1.pdf>

Right now our economy isn't growing practically at all... Many workers are earning less today than they were 18 years ago. They're working harder, they're working longer, but they're making less and in some cases, they're working two and three jobs, but still taking home less money. It's ridiculous. [The economy is] the worst since the Great Depression.

'This is not a rising tide that lifts all boats. This is a wave of globalization that wipes out our middle class and our jobs. We need to reform our economic system so that, once again, we can all succeed together, and America can become rich again.'

In Trump's narrative, however, the villains included not only business but all three social elites. In fact, in his telling, the loss of jobs was not directly caused by the Wall Street Billionaire class but was rather more specifically the fault of the political class. He said:

'The political class in Washington has betrayed you. They have uprooted your jobs, your communities, and [t]hey put up new skyscrapers in Beijing while your factories in Michigan were crumbling. These are our politicians.' ...'The political establishment has brought about the destruction of our factories, and our jobs, as they flee to Mexico, China and other countries all around the world. Our just-announced job numbers are anemic... Take a look at what's going on. [politicians] stripped away these towns bare, and raided the wealth for themselves.'

In this revisionist narrative liberals were major villains as well:

We are living through the greatest jobs theft in the history of the world... What our politicians have allowed to happen to this area [and] all areas of our country, NAFTA, TPP, they want to approve. A disaster. Ohio has lost one in four manufacturing jobs since NAFTA—a deal signed by Bill Clinton and supported strongly by Hillary. Remember, every time you see a closed factory or wiped out community in Ohio, it was essentially caused by the Clintons... We've lost 70,000 factories since China entered the World Trade Organization. Another Bill and Hillary backed disaster.

Trump thus presented himself as an independent gadfly and the only real champion of the ignored working class in their struggle against all three of the interlocking social elites.

[My election] is going to be a victory for the people, a victory for the wage-earner, the factory worker. Remember this, a big, big victory for the factory worker. They haven't had those victories for a long time. A victory for every citizen and for all of the people whose voices have not been heard for many, many years. They're going to be heard again.

While my opponent slanders you as deplorable and irredeemable, I call you hard-working American patriots who love your country and want a better future for all of our people. You are mothers and fathers, soldiers and sailors, carpenters and welders.

He explicitly identified himself with the working class rather than the wealthy.

'I've spent my professional life among construction workers, bricklayers, electricians, and plumbers. I feel more comfortable around blue collar workers than Wall Street executives

...And that's why the steelworkers are with me, that's why the miners are with me, that's why the working people, electricians, the plumbers, the sheet-rockers, the concrete guys and gals, they're all—they're with us. And I like them better than the rich people that I know. I know a lot of rich people. It's true. [the working people] are better. I like them better .

The result was that white workers heard Trump reaffirming their own basic social perspective. *"None of the three elites give a damn about you"* Trump was saying *"and all of them hold you in contempt."*

For a huge number of white working Americans this was tremendously exciting and indeed profoundly cathartic. For the first time they were hearing someone in the political system saying what they had felt and thought very deeply for a long time but had never heard any major figure clearly express. It produced an enormous sense of vindication and relief—a feeling similar to that which gay men and women felt when they first heard it asserted that their sexuality was actually something normal and not a thing to be ashamed of.

This explains a key characteristic of white working class Trump supporters that progressives have always found utterly incomprehensible – why they would vehemently insist that Trump was *"telling the truth"*, *"telling it like it is"* or being more *"honest"* than other politicians when it was obvious that he was constantly and brazenly lying. The *"truth"* that white working Americans were referring to was not any specific fact, but a social outlook and perspective that they were deeply thrilled to finally hear expressed.

(Of course, white workers who are bigoted toward Latinos, immigrants and Muslims also perceived Trump's overt and bitter racist rhetoric as *"telling the truth"* and being *"honest."* But there were also many white workers who explicitly rejected with Trump's racial rhetoric while at the same time still describing him as being *"honest"* or *"telling the truth"* in other respects)

Question 2. Why do so many white working class voters continue to support Trump despite his obvious betrayal of key populist campaign promises and flagrant personal corruption?

Many political commentators continue to discuss and evaluate Trump using the traditional criteria that were always used in the past. Articles ask whether Trump's supporters will continue to support him now that it has become clear he has failed to pass any major legislation and has simply walked away from major campaign promises like improving health care or funding major infrastructure projects.

Equally commentators repeatedly ask at what point white working class voters will finally recoil against his blatant personal corruption or inability to manage even the most basic day to day responsibilities of a chief executive.

The implicit assumption behind these questions is that white working class voters voted for Trump with the expectation that he would follow these traditional standards and try to enact a legislative agenda and adopt normal standards of presidential behavior once in office.

But even during the campaign it was clear that many white workers had absolutely no such expectations. They fully recognized that many of Trump's promises were just "hot air" which would never come to pass and that he had no ethical standards at all. They voted for him with a different objective, one that they clearly expressed. They voted for him because he would "*shake things up*" and "*make them listen to us.*" They judged his effectiveness in large measure by the outrage and antagonism he generated among the smug, self-satisfied political and liberal elites. As sociologist Joan Williams wryly summarized the situation, "they voted with their middle finger."

In significant measure this was a product of white workers profound cynicism about politics in general. In their view the system was so corrupt that nothing positive would happen anyway so the most that could be hoped for was to toss a hand grenade into the bunker in order to disrupt and discomfort the elites who were blithely conducting "business as usual."

It was this attitude that explains one of the important "mysteries" of the 2016 election: why opinion surveys of white working class women during the campaign indicated a quite substantial and indeed growing hostility to Trump but which dissipated on Election Day when they went to the polls.

The most common (and condescending) explanation offered was that the women had meekly followed their husband's lead but there was virtually no evidence to support this view. What white working class women widely expressed instead was that, despite their dislike of Trump, they thought it was more important to "shake things up" and "send a message" just like their husbands. The most common quote was that they had "held their nose and voted"—that their desire to express their class sentiments outweighed their desire to repudiate Trump's repulsive attitudes toward women.

Three Implications of this analysis

The first implication is that the traditional progressive strategy which appeals to white workers primarily (and often exclusively) by offering a long list of progressive populist programs and policies will simply not be sufficient to win back the support of those who defected to Trump. Right now the major debate among Democrats is over what the proper degree of radicalism for such programs should be. The implicit assumption is that there is some optimal set of programs and policies that will win the support of white workers.

But the reality is that neither the package of cautiously progressive economic policies that Hillary Clinton offered in 2016 nor the more ambitious set of policies that Bernie Sanders offered can by themselves convince white workers to vote Democratic in 2018. The reason is simple. There is now such a complete degree of cynicism about the political system that many if not most white workers simply do not believe that any real reforms can possibly be enacted so long as the system remains the same. As a result the abstract debate between different national health care proposals or job guarantee plans will inevitably appear to them as essentially and indeed almost entirely irrelevant.

What is required instead are Democratic candidates who can convince white working people that they are genuinely "*on their side*" "*will fight for them*" "*understand their problems*" and "*share their values.*" These are characteristics working people say they consider important again and again on opinion polls. Specific programs and proposals are necessary but play an entirely subsidiary role.

In fact, the central difficulty progressive candidates face, unless they actually come from the communities where they are running for office, is how to genuinely learn about and then show real respect for the culture and community where they are campaigning and to see the world through the eyes of the people who live there.

Many urban, college educated people have great difficulty imagining white working class culture as something that working people can actually deeply value and even consider superior to the culture of those above them. From the outside, the urban fringes of major cities, the Rust Belt small towns and the rural areas across the country where white working class people live can easily appear to outsiders like sad, declining areas with stagnant economies, rampant drugs and little to recommend them. But the people who live in these communities deeply feel the importance and the value of their place, neighborhood, community and home. The value of white working class culture exists in the bond between bass anglers fishing on a lake at sunrise or sitting around a campfire in a state park; it is felt in the companionship of two friends rebuilding a car engine in the backyard of their home or hauling their motorcycles to a dirt biking race on a Saturday morning. To working people the tractor pulls and rodeos of the West and the country music bars, the church socials and state fairs that go on across the country are as valuable and meaningful to them as the art galleries, receptions, sushi bars and coffee shops of “hip” urban areas are to the educated and affluent.

And integrally connected to these physical aspects of community are shared working class social values—respect for hard work and common sense, a commitment to simple honesty rather than subtle wordplay and a belief that genuine friendship and personal integrity is more valuable than wealth or status.

The reality is simple: a candidate who plans to run a campaign with an elegantly detailed but bloodless agenda of issues and who has no personal contact or emotional identification with the culture of the voters he or she seeks to represent will simply not succeed.

A second implication of this analysis is that many white working people will continue to view Trump as a political hero even if he achieves almost nothing during his administration and remains mired in scandal. The reason is that in his campaign he successfully made himself into a symbolic figure—the first man who really “stood up for us” and challenged the three elites. Appalling as it may be, once acquired a reputation of this kind of is almost impossible to dislodge. Those familiar with history will remember the careers of Louisiana senator Huey Long in the 1930’s and Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa in the 1950’s. Although both were mired in scandal and increasingly exposed as failing to genuinely represent the needs and interests of their followers, for decades they continued to enjoy a wide reputation among working people as “men of the people” and “defenders of the common man.”

The good news, however, is that Trump’s reputation will not be transferrable to other Republican candidates. Many will try to copy Trump’s right wing racist message and anti-establishment persona but they will not be able to replicate the unique image he has created as a champion of the “common man” and challenger of the three elites. On the contrary most will follow a much more conventional right wing strategy of joining the GOP’s plutocratic economic agenda with racial and right wing extremism. This will insure them the racist vote that Democrats would never be able to get—and really do not even want. But it will leave room for a variety of Democratic campaigns and appeals aimed at the non-racist, more sensible sector of white working voters.

The 2018 campaigns will provide real-world tests of the appeal of both “common sense” candidates like Colin Lamb and Beto O’Rourke as well as more combative and radical contenders like the Wisconsin ironworker Randy Brice. It is fortunate that there are many campaigns this year because they will provide future campaigns a wide range of natural experiments about the effectiveness of different strategies for regaining support from white working class Americans.

Appendix 1.

In the period after World War II the definition of the term “working class” was based on occupation and generally referred to factory and other primarily male manual workers. With the decline in manufacturing and the massive entrance of women into the work force since that time, the term has gained a broader meaning and also now includes many male and female service workers and lower level clerical and sales workers. As it happens, there is a very substantial overlap between people who work in these kinds of occupations and those who have only a high school or less than a college education (close to 80% in the case of white males with only a high school education). Since it is vastly easier to ask poll respondents about their level of education than it is about their specific occupation, virtually all opinion poll analysts now use the level of education as the practical operational definition of “working class” (for a more detailed discussion of this issue, see *The White Working Class Today*, Chapter 3).

Also, although the white working class was traditionally visualized as factory workers in the industrial cities of the Midwest, with the decline of traditional manufacturing, men and women with a high school or less than college education are today disproportionately represented in small towns and rural areas. This makes the urban/rural and Blue State/Red State distinctions overlap the distinction between working class and higher level occupations.