

~ EDITED TRANSCRIPT ~

THE 2006 BRADLEY SYMPOSIUM

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

TRUE BLUE VS. DEEP RED:
THE IDEAS THAT MOVE AMERICAN POLITICS

May 25, 2006
Washington, DC

For more information on this event or Hudson Institute's Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal, contact the Bradley Center's Krista Shaffer at (202) 974-2424 or krista@hudson.org.

About this Event

. . . In the run up to the elections of 2006, we have heard a great deal about this yawning chasm within America's politics and culture. Most pundits and analysts speak about the division's statistical dimensions. But few are prepared to discuss its substance—that is, the larger political ideas or principles that lie behind it. The 2006 Bradley Symposium, “What's the Big Idea? True Blue vs. Deep Red: The Ideas that Move American Politics,” proposed to do just that.

A “framing essay” prepared by University of Virginia political scientist James Ceaser argued that we are indeed deeply divided as a nation today into “True Blue” and “Deep Red.” But these divisions go beyond partisanship or culture, he maintains. Rather, they reflect profoundly different understandings of human character and politics, rooted in contrasting “foundational ideas” about nature, history, and religion that have long pedigrees in American public life.

On May 25, 2006 in Washington, DC, a panel of distinguished commentators brought together by Hudson Institute's Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal tackled these questions:

- Are our political divisions indeed significant and based on such grand themes? Or can they be explained by more superficial social and economic divisions?
- Is a politics driven and divided by large and contrasting ideas dangerous and volatile? Or is it healthy and vigorous—the source of American renewal?

- How are these larger intellectual divisions played out in specific policy debates over the size of government, immigration, foreign affairs, economic inequality, higher education, and other questions?
- Clearly, if American politics is driven by “big ideas,” think tanks and foundations are key players. Should such institutions seek to sharpen and enrich those ideas, or should they rather attempt to moderate and bridge major intellectual divides?

An edited transcript of the discussion follows.

Featuring

Michael Barone, *U.S. News and World Report*

Karlyn Bowman, American Enterprise Institute

David Brooks, *The New York Times*

Tammy Bruce, *The Tammy Bruce Show*

Allan Carlson, The Howard Center (Rockford, IL)

James Ceaser, University of Virginia

Francis Fukuyama, The Johns Hopkins University

Robert George, Princeton University

Hugh Hewitt, host, *The Hugh Hewitt Show*

Tamar Jacoby, Manhattan Institute

William Kristol, *Weekly Standard*

Brink Lindsey, Cato Institute

Wilfred McClay, University of Tennessee/Ethics and Public Policy Center

Charles Murray, American Enterprise Institute

Matthew Spalding, Heritage Foundation

Shelby Steele, Hoover Institution

Amy Kass, Moderator, Hudson Institute/University of Chicago

PROCEEDINGS

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Related Documents (online at <http://pcr.hudson.org>, the Bradley Center’s web page)

1. Panelist Biographies
2. “True Blue vs. Deep Red: The Ideas that Move American Politics,” a discussion paper for the 2006 Bradley Symposium prepared by James Ceaser
3. “American Politics: How Divided?” a summary of poll data prepared by Karlyn Bowman for the 2006 Bradley Symposium

First Session, 8:30 to 10:15 a.m.

WILLIAM SCHAMBRA: My name is Bill Schambra, and I’m director of the Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal at Hudson Institute. It’s my privilege to welcome you to the second annual Bradley Symposium. The Bradley Center is a proud grantee of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, located in Milwaukee, and we’re honored to have with us today so many of the foundation’s board members and spouses as well as staff members.

I’m particularly grateful to vice president Dan Schmidt for the advice and assistance that he provided throughout the preparation for this session, although none of us logged the hours or expended the energy on this project that Hudson research associate Krista Shaffer did—so thank you very much, Krista.

We join in celebrating the winners of the 2006 Bradley Prize—Fouad Ajami, Clint Bolick, and Hernando de Soto, as well as Shelby Steele, who will be participating in today’s symposium.

Last year’s Bradley Symposium, the proceedings of which are available in the lobby, raised this question: Is a single, unified vision—one grand idea, funded and amplified by foundations and think tanks—the key to conservatism’s political prosperity in recent decades?

This year, we decided to push that question a bit further. Let’s leave aside for a moment the question of conservative political success, an exercise of imagination that may become somewhat easier after November. Just what are the big ideas that have moved American political life? How have they shaped today’s apparent dramatic division into “Red America” and “Blue America”? And what role should foundations and think tanks play in sharpening or softening that divide?

Not everyone agrees that big ideas are such a good idea for American political life; Democratic advisor James Carville recently noted to *Newsweek* that “the American people are . . . ready for an era of realism. They’ve seen the consequences of having too many big ideas.” (Howard Fineman, “Test-Marketing Hillary,” May 3, 2006) Certainly we often see the unhappy encounter between big ideas and reality in the field of philanthropy. That’s the storyline of a new book from the Bradley Center I’m proud to introduce to you today—hot off the press, quite literally: Martin Morse Wooster’s *Great Philanthropic Mistakes*. Please be sure to pick up your complimentary copy in the lobby.

To discuss the problem of big ideas, one of course needs a panel of big thinkers. I suspect you’ll agree with me today that we’ve assembled just that, representing a considerable variety of points of view and institutional affiliations. Since our panelists’ full biographies are available in the packets, I introduce them to you now very quickly:

- Bill McClay of the University of Tennessee/Chattanooga
- Hugh Hewitt of HughHewitt.com and a nationally syndicated radio show host
- Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute
- Michael Barone of *U.S. News and World Report*
- Brink Lindsey of the Cato Institute
- Allan Carlson of the Howard Center for Family, Religion, & Society in Rockford, IL
- David Brooks of *The New York Times*
- Frank Fukuyama of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Study at The Johns Hopkins University
- James Ceaser of the University of Virginia—who is, of course, the author of the framing essay for today’s session
- Shelby Steele of the Hoover Institution
- Tamar Jacoby of the Manhattan Institute
- Bill Kristol of *The Weekly Standard*
- Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute
- Tammy Bruce of *FrontPage Magazine* and KABC Radio in Los Angeles
- Matt Spalding of the Heritage Foundation, and
- Robby George of Princeton’s James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions and a Bradley Prize winner last year

No fewer than seven of our panelists—Hugh Hewitt, Allan Carlson, Tammy Bruce, Frank Fukuyama, Jim Ceaser, Charles Murray, and Shelby Steele—have books on the new releases shelves at your local bookstore. Some of those books, order forms for the others, bookplates suitable for author inscription, and so forth are available at the Politics & Prose Bookstore table out in the lobby (or online at <http://www.politics-prose.com/>).

Today we follow the Bob Goldwin commandment for seminars: Cut out the long and boring presentations. Leave only the lively discussion. We did ask University of Virginia political scientist Jim Ceaser to prepare that framing essay for the session, and we made it available to the public several weeks ago. And we asked AEI’s Karlyn Bowman to put together some data

bearing on this red-blue divide, which is available in your packets. But our panel will use these only as a point of departure for the sort of vigorous conversation I hope they provoke.

To guide us through that conversation, we are pleased to have as moderator once again this year Amy Kass. Amy is a senior fellow at Hudson Institute and a senior lecturer at the University of Chicago, where she and her husband Leon are this semester teaching the novel *War and Peace*. With that as an eminently suitable preparation for today's panel, it is time for us to turn to Amy to get our symposium underway.

AMY KASS: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here. Before I begin, let me just thank all the panelists for coming, and especially Jim Ceaser for the fine essay.

In his essay, Jim Ceaser, citing the work of James Q. Wilson and Morris Fiorina, acknowledges the difference in opinion about how far or how deeply we as a nation are divided. But taking his bearings from the political class, he suggests that the point of how large or how deep the popular divisions are is somewhat beside the point. For it is the case, for better or worse, Ceaser asserts, that the political class structures much of the nation's political life; it is not going away any time soon; and it is a stark fact of life that the political class is polarized.

Ceaser then asks himself this: If the political class structures political life, what structures or informs the political class? What justifies the political orientation of our political leaders, and hence, our political life? Rather than pursue the "how much" question, then, Ceaser takes up the far more difficult and more substantive "what is" question. What is polarization about, or what is the basis of polarization?

But instead of turning to specific positions on current political issues, instead of looking to political practice as a guide, Ceaser looks to political theory. As you are all well aware, especially our panelists, the heart of his inquiry is about the various and conflicting "big ideas," the first principles or foundational concepts that inform political leadership, and the specific applications of foundational concepts on the Left and on the Right.

On the Right, Ceaser contends, foundational ideas are alive and well. He discusses at length four very different and competing ideas that inform today's conservative movement. On the Left, however, foundational ideas are in serious decline, the major theoretical position being what he calls "idealistic non-foundationalism." In this difference, he suggests, lies an important key to polarization. In its attachment to fundamental ideas, today's Right embodies the worst nightmare of today's Left.

So, unless you, Jim, want to correct any misimpression I may have given, or say a bit more about your paper, I think we should just begin the discussion. And I suggest beginning by examining Jim's major premise, namely, that large foundational ideas drive American politics, or at least our political class. Is Ceaser right in thinking that big fundamental ideas or foundational concepts are of critical importance for our political life?

I've asked three people to start our discussion: Bill McClay, Bill Kristol, and Robby George. Let's proceed in that order.

WILFRED MCCLAY: Amy asked me to restrict my remarks to four minutes, so let me race through a few comments. My first comment is that polarization—if it exists, and I think that others will probably want to take on that issue, whether in fact the assumption that the political class is polarized is correct—but if it exists, I think it clearly is a bad thing because it would mean that our Madisonian model for managing faction, the tradition of subdividing and cross-cutting conflicts in ways that are precisely designed to avoid polarization, was not working. So I think it is a serious issue that in many ways goes to the heart of our political system.

Jim's question, of course, is what polarization is about, and he draws this very interesting distinction between the non-foundational thinking of the Left, and the foundationalist tendencies of the Right. I think there is clearly something to this, and there are those in the Democratic Party who see the same thing. Brad Carson, the former representative from Oklahoma, has written some rather interesting things on this very point—on the need for Democrats to connect their political ideas with an understanding of human nature, which they have abandoned.

But there are two main questions, in my mind, that are elicited by Jim's paper and that I'd like to raise. The first one is: Is it the case that liberals, Democrats, are really all that non-foundational in their thinking? I'd point to the example of Al Gore, who has been on our television screens and everywhere we look lately, standing as a kind of apostle of science. Certainly, the liberal Left sees itself as standing for science, as standing for scientific rationality—in cases relating to the environment, in stem-cell research and other medical and biotechnological interventions—and standing against the kind of obscurantism of the Right, which is opposed to progress, to everything that has happened since Galileo.

That question leads to a second and, I think, more foundational question—and that is: Is it right to understand political ideas primarily in the positive way that Jim does? I would say, on the contrary, that political ideas, to be really effective and powerful, also have to contain a critique of the opposition—that political ideas are formed in opposition. They're formed polemically. Henry Adams had one of my favorite descriptions of politics—not a very exalted one, but I think an accurate one—that politics is the systematic organization of hatreds. It's a very useful definition in that it, I think, brings to the foreground the extent to which what political scientists call “negative reference points” play a key role in the formation of political movements and political ideas.

Jim himself points this out beautifully in his essay when he says that the thing that holds the conservative coalition together is two words, “Hillary” “Clinton.” John Podhoretz' new book *Can She Be Stopped* is a rather over-the-top effort to draw on that particular bank account, although I sometimes think the Democrats are more likely to be asking that question at the moment than the Republicans.

Polarization is a kind of system of political hatreds, but it's a system that is not merely characterized by sharp disagreements, but by the way in which the disagreements *all line up*, like all the partners of a great Virginia Reel lining up across the same line—what Jim calls a binary model of conflict. If this is the case, if this has happened, then the question that Jim is asking is, why and why now?

My four minutes are probably up, but I would aver—quickly—to some of the usual suspects, here, that I think are more structural than ideological or intellectual in character. One of the big ones is the nationalization of political conflict in American life, with the decline of federalism, broadly speaking. All issues now are national issues. All issues have a gradient in the direction of Washington, perhaps even more specifically, the Supreme Court. There is an apprehension among all Americans, Left and Right, that some decision of the Supreme Court is going to alter American life forever, so there is a need to be constantly mobilized on a national level with organizations that are expressions of that constant mobilization, and there is a need for those organizations to use the most extreme forms of rhetoric to conjure the worst kinds of fears in order to raise funds and keep their troops at the ready. This is not a new analysis, but it seems to me to be an accurate one as to one of the reasons why, if we are polarized, we are.

One final point would be to ask: Do these issues need to be nationalized? That, I think, is a more troubling point, because it may be the case that, yes, they do need to be nationalized. In the 1850s and 1860s, the country confronted an issue that could not be dealt with in any other way, other than nationally. It may be that the status of marriage, foreign policy, the question of the role of courts, and the role of the Constitution in American life are all issues that need to be addressed nationally. So maybe the polarization is inevitable.

WILLIAM KRISTOL: Let me just say a word about two questions that Amy raised. First, are we as polarized as people think—and as Jim concludes we are? And secondly, are ideas as important as Jim suggests?

On the first point, polarization of the political class is a little nebulous. I would say it is indisputably the case, just empirically, that the two parties are more distinct than they have been for probably a century. That's a political science fact. They vote together more often in Congress than they used to. At the political level, the parties' voters are more unified and more ideological. There are very few Southern conservative Democrats. There aren't many Northeastern liberal Republicans. There is greater party unity in Congress. There's greater party voting among voters.

In a classic example of what is one of the few real truths about politics—which is that whenever political scientists agree on anything, the thing on which they have agreed is about to be falsified—there was a huge consensus in the '70s and '80s that modern education, the media, and the individualism of modern life were going to lead to a decline of the parties and much more independent voting, split-ticket voting. But there has been a rapid decline in split-ticket voting in the last twenty years, and basically you have a partisan electorate and a partisan Congress. So in that respect, there is—just empirically—more polarization than there was thirty or forty years ago, at least by party organization. And that is an important fact.

I don't know if it's a good fact or a bad fact. The American Political Science Association I believe produced the famous study in—when was it, 1950?—complaining bitterly about the indistinctness of two political parties, their lack of ideological cohesion. There should be responsible party government. Now you have extremely responsible and coherent parties, and every political scientist in the country is complaining about polarization. So be careful what you wish for!

Having said that, it is also the case that some of the major pieces of legislation passed in the last five years in a time of—allegedly—such bitter polarization haven't been that partisan. You could make a case, if you step back and get behind the rhetoric and the heatedness of the political discourse, that on the fundamental issues of the day, it's not clear there is that much polarization. Are we really that polarized on economic policy—on a 38 percent versus 35 percent top tax rate? The Senate is about to pass today an immigration bill with a genuinely bipartisan majority, and I think may even get such a bill through conference and signed by the President—with more Democratic support, probably, than Republican support. So probably the most consequential piece of domestic policy legislation passed in this decade will have been bipartisan and will cut against the theme that everything is polarized and purely ideological.

The prescription drug benefit, which I guess is the largest piece of legislation in terms of dollars passed in the last several years, ended up being passed on a partisan vote but is not, I would say, a classically conservative piece of legislation. If a few things in it had changed, it could have easily been passed with as many Democratic votes as Republican. The education bill was passed in a bipartisan way in 2001.

And the war, the great object of polarization, is another example. The first Gulf War, which in retrospect was the “good war” that everyone agreed upon and was so responsibly conducted, was of course authorized by a partisan vote—in the Senate especially, with a huge number of Democrats voting against it. And for all the rhetoric, there was a much more bipartisan vote authorizing this Iraq war, and for all of the difficulties and heated rhetoric of the last three years, there have been very little in the way of serious legislative efforts to stop the war, defund the war, cut the defense budget, do all of the things that we remember from Vietnam, when there really were partisan—mostly partisan—and in any case highly ideological fights during the conduct of a war. There hasn't been that. Many of the leading Democratic presidential candidates have yet to say that they would pursue a policy in Iraq that is fundamentally different from what the President is pursuing. Very few of them have said that they would fundamentally change NSA wiretapping and other aspects of the War on Terror.

So, I think on the one hand, the party structure—the way the parties work—is different from thirty or forty years ago, but I think the polarization, when you really look at some of the fundamental issues, may be overstated.

Secondly, and more briefly, on the question of whether ideas matter, obviously, they do. I like teaching political theory, and once studied it a little bit—and so I don't want to get in the business of debunking the importance of ideas. But I would say that while ideas have consequences, not all ideas have consequences, and not all consequences have ideas. And it's an interesting empirical question, how much some of these ideas matter to reality. Reality matters a lot. Crises matter a lot. Crises give an opportunity for some ideas to matter.

But I think one should be careful about drawing a straight line from highly theoretical ideas and intellectual developments to actual political movements and political practice. It's revealing in Bill Schambra's note to us panelists outlining what we're going to talk about today, that Bill asked: Are political divisions indeed significant and based on such grand themes, or can they be

explained by more superficial social and economic divisions? We shouldn't accept it as given that economic and social divisions are more superficial than divisions based on ideas. A lot of serious political philosophers—not just Marx, but I would say Aristotle, for example—thought that social and economic divisions are pretty fundamental. It's not derogatory to say that politics is shaped, highly, by fundamental economic—or I think maybe more now social/cultural—divisions. How much those are based on ideas and how much they are based on different, lived experiences of people which then generate an attachment to certain ideas is, I think, an interesting question.

ROBERT GEORGE: Let me take the first twenty-five seconds of my four minutes to thank Bradley and Hudson for putting together this very timely panel, and thank Amy for her leadership and Jim for his terrific paper. I've been learning from Jim Ceaser since I entered this game about twenty years ago, and I continue to learn from everything he writes.

The prima facie argument that we are not fundamentally polarized—at least, the people—would take note of the fact that virtually all Americans believe in two political ideals, liberty and equality. Always have—we hope, always will. But of course, that shared, formal commitment to these political ideals masks a rather deep division that is obvious to anybody who thinks about it very much, and that is that liberals and conservatives have very different conceptions of “liberty” and “equality.”

Now, some people think that that isn't quite right. Some people think that liberals and conservatives differ as to how to handle conflicts or tensions between liberty and equality. One story sometimes told is that liberty and equality necessarily come into conflict—or tension, at least—and that conservatives tend to favor liberty over equality in those situations, and liberals tend to favor equality over liberty. I actually don't think that is right, but I don't have the time to go into it in great detail. I would insist that in fact there are fundamentally different conceptions of “liberty” and “equality,” not a shared conception of liberty, a shared conception of equality, and then a debate about how to resolve the tensions between the two.

Since I don't have a lot of time to offer analysis here, let me just observe that we are a nation constructed on what Lincoln called a proposition—the proposition that all men are created equal, and in fact, the proposition that there is a Creator, and that that Creator has endowed each of us human beings with certain fundamental rights, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness being among them—an expressly non-exhaustive list.

Now, if you consider that proposition, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” I think it's fair to say—I hope it's not polemical; it's what I think—that substantial elements of the liberal movement don't believe that. Substantial elements of the conservative movement do believe that. Now, it's not to say that all liberals deny it. It's not to say that all conservatives believe it. It's simply that very substantial elements of the liberal community do not believe it, and very substantial elements of the conservative movement do believe it.

And, I think, embedded in the belief or its denial are certain understandings that bear on what you will take “liberty” to mean and what you will take “equality” to mean. If the human person is simply a material reality, ultimately reducible to molecules in motion, lacking anything that could, in the classic sense, be regarded as freedom of the will, free choice—not subject in the classic or Aristotelian sense to moral norms, as norms governing the free choice of how we will conduct ourselves—then that is going to shape a certain understanding of “liberty” and a certain understanding of “equality” just inevitably.

So I think we have differences that run very, very deep today, and differences that we didn’t always have.

Now, among people who do not accept the basic proposition of the Declaration, there are serious people who nevertheless recognize that we cannot get along—we cannot be responsible, political actors without at least the effort to identify some principles of justice. In academic political theory, there are frivolous views going under various descriptions, but among serious liberal political theorists, there is a serious effort—even in the absence of classical conceptions like those that would follow from or are embodied in the ideas of the Declaration—to identify principles of justice for a pluralistic, democratic society. In the United States, the name John Rawls will mean something to people who have studied political theory. In Europe, Juergen Habermas has done something like what Rawls has tried to do, which is to identify secular, non-religiously based ideas about justice that would be suitable for governing a society like ours or like contemporary European, pluralistic, democratic societies.

And I think the serious challenge to conservative political thinkers, at least—I’ll leave the political class aside and just talk about people who are in the business I’m in—is to address in a serious and responsible way the proposals of people like Rawls here or Habermas in Europe for governing a society according to principles that would be neutral with respect to questions of what makes for a morally valuable and worthy way of life—principles that would justify, as people like Habermas and Rawls try to justify, what’s at least putatively a libertarian set of policies with respect to issues such as abortion, pornography, assisted suicide and euthanasia, marriage and family life, on the one side; and interventionist policies, when it comes to regulating the economy, the environment, and so forth, on the other side.

Just a final point to tie this up. It’s probably the case that we could get along fine as a society without agreement on fundamental questions of justice and their foundations, if the practical issues facing us were issues on which most of us agreed as to the ends, and disagreed only as to the means. For example, if we all agreed that economic growth was the goal, we might disagree as to how to achieve economic growth, but that disagreement wouldn’t implicate any really, truly fundamental differences. They would be about means. If we agreed about the need for national security but just disagreed about which set of policies would most likely achieve the security goals we are interested in, then fundamental issues of course wouldn’t be implicated.

But we don’t have the luxury of living in that kind of society. We live in a society where we have disagreement even on the level of practical politics about issues that really quite quickly and directly implicate fundamental questions of justice, including questions of the nature of the human being and the moral norms that are applicable to creatures like ourselves. We do face

issues such as who is a member of the human community—who is a member of the community and deserves the protection of the law? This is the issue at stake in abortion; it's the issue at stake in a question like the Terri Schiavo debate that divided us so badly a year ago; it's at the heart of the debate over euthanasia and assisted suicide. It will increasingly become a question as biotechnology rolls forward.

Similarly, where you have issues about family structure, childrearing, and the nature of marriage, they are not simply issues about means; they are issues about ends. There is no way to resolve them without implicating deep, moral, and even metaphysical ideas about the nature, dignity, and destiny of the human person.

AMY KASS: We have—obviously—a variety of opinions on this subject. Let me begin by mentioning that after our break in about forty-five minutes, Karlyn Bowman will give us some empirical, statistical facts about where we are today with respect to polarization, so I am hoping, in this part of the session, that we will think more about the ideas in the paper.

Let me also repeat the big question: Is Ceaser right in thinking that big, fundamental ideas or foundational concepts are really of critical importance? We have heard a variety of views so far on this. Where do you stand?

ALLAN CARLSON: I agree. I think it's a profoundly important paper. I do want to suggest, though, that there may be more coherence to the ideas driving the contemporary Left than this paper gives credit. Certainly, if one looks at the philosophy of Hillary Rodham Clinton, for example, one finds deep down inside something very closely resembling Scandinavian social democracy—or, better put, today, European Union social democracy: strongly secular, with a strong emphasis on gender equality and moral liberty. Key agenda items include deconstructing rival institutions that threaten the central direction of the state—particularly the family, the home, and marriage—and transfer of former family functions to state entities of one sort or another through early child care in the form of state day care.

Indeed, there's a fair amount of cross-fertilization between the American Progressive Left and modern European social democracy, which really began as early as the 1920s and continues very much today. This is why, during the Clinton regime, United States foreign policy was closely aligned with the social policy of the European social democrats at the United Nations, for example.

One of the great achievements of the Bush administration has been to break that American-European alliance on reshaping the world in line with social-democratic principles of family deconstruction.

Again, I think Hillary Rodham Clinton is a perfect example of someone who has a coherent worldview, based on ideas. I would suggest, again, that they are probably more European than American.

AMY KASS: Do you want to say one thing about the ideas behind what she says?

ALLAN CARLSON: She is in some ways a disciple of Alva Myrdal, a great Swedish social thinker, active since the 1920s and in many ways the architect of the Swedish model of collective child care. Alva Myrdal actually picked up her ideas—talk about cross-fertilization—when she was in America in the 1920s as a Rockefeller Fellow. This is an example of philanthropy gone bad. She took American ideas from the progressive preschools she visited back to Sweden, formulated a comprehensive system and ideology of collective child care—one that displaced the home as the central unit of the society—and the rest, as they say, is history.

AMY KASS: Jim, would that constitute a foundational idea?

JAMES CEASER: I use the term in the paper “idealistic non-foundationalism” to indicate that there are lots of ideals on the Left—in fact, there is a surfeit of ideals on the Left. The Left is usually more idealistic than the Right in how it presents itself.

So, the question would be, from the point of view of the paper, whether there is any ground to those ideals, other than just having them, or having some hope that they will evolve in the direction that the Left wants to go. And that’s what I found wanting, on the Left—deliberately so. There is no such thing that you can point to—as Robby George pointed to, say, belief in a Creator or belief in natural right or belief in an idea of spontaneous order. What is it that grounds these things on the Left?

Now, they have a good reason, some of them, for saying that there shouldn’t be such a grounding; there’s a case for that. But what that principle of grounding is is what I can’t find—and the question with which I conclude the paper is this: Are there consequences of imagining a political system existing without such a grounding—no matter whether you’re on the Left or Right today?

What is the consequence of a people that has no such foundation? Can this work to hold together a political system? After all, the United States won’t always be governed by the Republican Party—so this is not a question that I raise simply from the point of view of conservatism, but from the point of view of liberals and conservatives. Ultimately, when it gets down to it, we all are on the same team.

So, that’s the issue, and the things that Allan mentioned constitute for me a set of ideals but not a foundation. I’d be interested in finding out what the Democratic foundation is, if there is one.

SHELBY STEELE: I want to just quickly respond to that. In many ways, I certainly agree that we are polarized in American society today. I’m not sure how profound it is, but we certainly are.

I want to just add something as a kind of larger way to look at it, and maybe answer the question a little bit about the ideals on the Left—what is behind them.

Again, one of the most interesting things to me—I’ve just come out with a book talking about it—is the collapse of white supremacy that happened around the globe in the latter part of the twentieth century. It is to me an astonishing and profound event, the effects of which have gone

almost completely unexamined. I think one of the effects is that it has caused a crisis in moral authority in the West. And in many ways, I think that the political Left that emerged almost immediately after and clearly in response to this event is a Left wing that has been almost obsessed with reclaiming moral authority after the sins of the Western past, which were so glaring and so terrible.

And so the ideals that seem to have no foundation in principle have their foundation in dissociating the Left from the sins of the past. All of the ideals are about race and about imperialism and about colonialism and about sexism and so forth. And again, there's no principled foundation behind them, but they are dissociational—they dissociate, or they try to dissociate Western societies from their past to the point where just the manner of dissociation itself has become a virtue, a kind of ersatz virtue, not one grounded in principle but in this larger struggle to reclaim lost authority.

Along those lines, foundational ideas, I think, have a hard swim in today's world because they are so easily stigmatized with the past. Let's take a difficult principle like merit—competition by merit—which at one point in America we simply took for granted. Now that principle is associated with oppression, and disparities between groups, and discrimination. The universities have assaulted that idea and diminished it and diffused it.

And so I think this underlying struggle to reclaim moral authority has a good deal to do with the ideals that we see on the Left not having a foundational basis.

MATTHEW SPALDING: In James Ceaser's new book, from which his essay for today draws, he notes that ideas often have a fuzzy relationship to the political order, largely because ideas are laundered by think tanks and packaged by speechwriters. As someone who has done both, I guess I'm a launderer and a packager. Jim, it's a wonderful essay.

One of the points to consider here is the extent to which America, by its own nature as a regime, is a foundational thing, inherently. The whole idea of *founding* a nation as opposed to having one develop out of the misty past is, I think, a foundational idea. And I think that that's still true today, and we can't get around that.

But having said that, the one thing we have to remember is that from their perspective, the Founders saw the foundations they left combining two things, namely a set of principles found in the Declaration, associated with natural right and abstract ideas, but also this thing called the US Constitution—that is, *constitutionalism*. In many ways, I would suggest that a foundational concept for America, inherently intertwined in its very being, is a combination of those two things, namely the foundational documents, and the idea of balancing, if you will, those ideas of rights, but also the constitutional structure by which they would play out politically.

From their point of view, if you read Madison and the other writers, they really saw a fundamental fusion, if you will, of these ideas and the practice. And I would argue that modern conservatism—despite its learning curve, I would say, in the '60s, when it didn't quite grasp that, early conservatism having been influenced to a high degree by progressive historians themselves—is largely trying to recover that.

The problem, as Professor Ceaser wonderfully illustrates and writes about, is that this foundationalism inherent in America was attacked fundamentally by the Progressives intellectually. But also I think we need to point out that that was fundamentally connected to the beginning of the Progressives' attack on American constitutionalism. They saw those things as inherently tied together—their attack on natural right, when you read Croly and other writers—it was up front philosophically, but it was inherently connected to attacking American constitutionalism.

And that, as it plays out—very quickly, from the Progressives to the New Deal and the Great Society to today—is I think what brings us to the point where we have essentially a foundational argument inherently tied into a practical fusionism in the American regime itself, which conservatism is trying to revive, and a profound anti-foundational argument, which essentially is liberalism dealing with the playing out of its own inherent premises laid in its own history.

So in that sense, I think we are seeing a profound debate over foundational issues, especially when you realize the fact that by their own theory, this culminates in the Left's focus on the Supreme Court, which is the fundamental place where you combine abstract ideas and constitutionalism. As the Court becomes more and more involved in these crucial, fundamental questions—like marriage, the key definition of a social institution—we are inherently in the place we are today.

TAMAR JACOBY: I'd like to address the topic of how much ideas matter in American politics. I work on immigration, and there are few more polarized issues in American life today. It's a polarized universe. It's a polarizing issue. Emotions could hardly run higher on either side. It's polarized in the media—I spend a lot of time out there on talk radio and elsewhere. I would even argue that, in contrast to the conventional wisdom that the political class is polarized and the public is not—I spend a lot of time behind the two-way mirror observing focus groups—it's certainly a polarized and polarizing issue with the public.

Nevertheless, I would argue that, rich and interesting as this paper is and as much as I learned from it, it's not a map of the world that I live in as I travel in polarized America talking about immigration. I'm in the Bill Kristol camp on this; I would actually argue that ideas have much less to do with the way people understand my issue, certainly, than fears, emotion, culture, and interests.

Ultimately, I think, people work through their fears, emotions, and sense of interest as they think about immigration, and they come to a practical understanding of how to manage it, which also doesn't have much to do with ideology. The experience of sitting in on one of these focus groups, listening to people talk about immigration, is very interesting because [the conversation] follows a very distinct pattern—and I've been in many, and they all play out this way.

People come in and they're pounding on the table, and they're either saying, "Send these people home; close the borders; we can't have any more immigrants; we need more control; we need more legality," or they're saying, "Immigrants are great; we love immigrants." Usually it's the former. And they pound on the table, and they say, "If only the [immigrants] were working!

They're only here for the free food." And then the moderator of the focus group asks, "Well, what would you do about immigration?" And they start to think about it. First they say, "Let's send them all home." And then, amongst themselves, they think for a little while about whether or not they could actually send them all home. And someone in the group comes up with [the question], "Well, would it be good for us if they all went home? What would happen to the economy?" And they talk about that for a little while.

You get to the forty-five minute point—it's universal in these focus groups, you can almost time it and wait for it on your watch—and they get to the realization that it's a more complicated issue than that. "We do need control, but it's also pretty good that we have the immigrants. We do need security, but there are all these economic issues. . ." And they get to a pragmatism—even the people who come in the angriest, pounding on the table in the most polarized way—they come to ask how the problems of immigration can be solved pragmatically.

As I read this paper, and thought about these focus groups and asked myself, Were some of these ideas playing out under there in ways that I wasn't aware of? Certainly people come in with stereotypes. They think of people jumping the border and scamming welfare—but a stereotype is not an idea.

They come with very deep values; work, as you listen to these focus groups, is such a deep value for Americans. Once they get that these people are here working, they have such a different idea about them.

They come with ideas about law, and how much law should bend to reality, and how much law should regulate reality, and how much law needs to take account of reality. That's the closest, I think, they're getting to a political idea.

And they come with a lot of fears.

But thinking about what the basis of their values should be, you don't hear too much about that. At the heart, immigration is about the question, Who are we as a nation? And while you could say that there's a natural rights argument that a community can decide who should come and who shouldn't, and not everybody has those natural rights, you could also have a human rights perspective that says that everyone should get to come. So it seems to me that you could argue natural rights on both sides of the issue—but no one does, really, seriously. That's not what's driving the argument.

I think, on [the issue of immigration], there's a superficial polarization out there. It's not about these ideas. Ultimately, what's driving policy—and what I believe the debate is going to resolve into—is a deep pragmatism.

It is a deep question about who are we, but it's not a question about who are we as a political community. It's more a question about who are we as a nation—which is, I don't think, described in this paper.

And I would argue that ultimately, it is an issue where, to go back to Robby George's formulation, we do have more of a shared conception of the end, and the argument is about means. I think the shared conception of the end on [the issue of immigration] is that we think we should be a nation of immigrants, but we also think we should be a nation of laws. And I think it's true what Robby George says—that on issues like abortion and perhaps marriage, we don't share a sense of the ends, and so we are arguing about ends rather than means, but I would argue that on most issues in American life, in American politics, we do share a conception about ends, and we are arguing about means.

For example, I don't think anybody thinks it's a good idea that there are millions of people uninsured in this country; what we're debating about is who, exactly, should pay for the insurance. Even on issues as polarized as Iraq, I think there is a shared conception, and the question is about how and exactly where we should play the kind of role we play in the world. I think many more of the issues are debates about how, than they are debates about ends. Fiorello La Guardia said there is no Democratic or Republican way to clean the streets. As much as we'd like to think that our politics are about deep questions of values, I think they are very often questions about how to manage things. So I have some questions about the universe described in Jim's paper.

WILFRED MCCLAY: Matt Spalding's comments stimulated me to want to say a few more things about ideas, because he and Jim both, I think, present the ideas of the Progressives as sort of initiating change when in fact those ideas came at the tail end and were responsive to social conditions of the time. Although I'm fundamentally in agreement with their critique of these ideas, I think it's important to give the Progressives their due.

They were responding first and foremost to the conditions of industrial America—to unprecedented conditions of habitation in American cities; bossism and corruption in the conduct of politics; an impoverished and highly dependent laboring class; urban poverty; child labor; all sorts of issues that they wanted to address in practical ways, and in the process of doing that, concluded—wrongly, I think—that the Constitutional structure of American government as the Founders had conceived it was no longer adequate to the needs of modern America. This is the standard refrain I think you see all the time in the historians' defense or apologia for the Progressives.

So one could read Jim's paper and come away with the idea that Charles Beard got up one morning and said, I'm tired of this Constitution. Let's do something else, just for fun. It was, in fact, a response to real conditions—and arguably, I think, a wrong response, a response that underestimated the flexibility, the mutability, the genius of the American Constitution and the Constitutional system.

It's an example, I think, of the ways that ideas can lead us astray. Ideas can be formulated in response to particular conditions but codified in a way that wrongly extrapolates from those conditions to other things. I think Shelby Steele touched on some of these things in thinking about the way that the Civil Rights movement—I think a fairly unarguably good thing—leads to assumptions about the proper role of courts in initiating social change, and initiatives taken by

the non-representative branches of government, that I think are false and also fail to do justice to our Constitutional system.

So these are both examples of bad ideas—or, at least, inadequate ideas—that are extrapolated from a real response to real conditions.

MATTHEW SPALDING: I think we are in agreement. You're correct in pointing out that Progressivism was a response to the conditions at the time. But having said that, there were some profound intellectual arguments going on, some of which played out later; some of which began before the Progressive era, with Croly, Burgess, and Wilson.

They launched a profound attack on the whole American system, both in its ideas and its practice. These guys as a generation had gone over and studied in Germany and learned that critique, as Jim points out.

And so the question is, How do these abstract ideas—which were translated and laundered and packaged through magazines and other things, into the public argument—how do those abstract ideas play out, over time, in politics? That's what I think is the interesting question—not merely the abstract discussion, but the fact that these guys then became advisors, became presidents, became the key people in policy, such that after those conditions had changed, you still had those ideas. Liberalism, in many ways, and conservatism, which is a response to that, grappled with this fundamental argument—for which they laid the premise—over the course of the twentieth century.

TAMMY BRUCE: I noticed that the two talk show hosts have been placed strategically at opposite ends of the panel! It takes me about an hour and a half to say “Hello,” so since I already have three pages of notes, I'll get started.

I think that Bill [Kristol] and I have had the experience of being limited to about two minutes on FOX News. He has never been interrupted with a news alert about someone being arrested in Aruba. I don't think that will happen here—am I right?

For those of you who don't know my full background, I was the president of the National Organization for Women in Los Angeles for seven years and also sat on their national board. I am a pro-choice, lesbian, feminist, and today considered conservative—which tells you something about the level of the polarization in the nation. And I think that I'm here also as an indication of that.

I resigned my position in NOW ten years ago for a variety of reasons, a number of compromises I had made over the years. But what I want to add to this argument is some of my personal experience and the sense of what I've seen happen certainly as an activist; as a grassroots organizer; and as someone who has sat in very late-night meetings with Eleanor Smeal drawing diagrams and pasting them up on the wall with the six degrees of separation, showing us how everyone on the Right is out to get us—us being the feminists of the world.

I've written three books, the second of which is *The Death of Right and Wrong*, which talks about malignant narcissism, and when we talk about big ideas and politics, I think there are two things that happen. One, conservatives and people on the Right—people of faith who are conservatives—project your presumption that your opponent is working within the same logic and reason that you are, that there are in fact ideas on the other side as there are ideas with you.

The Left also projects—and that's why they think you're sexist, racist, and homophobic.

So with Mr. Ceaser's paper, his concern is seeing ideas in motion, but then thinking, where does this lead, if anywhere? All political science presumes that everyone involved is a reasonable man, whether in war games or political activity, and it presumes that you're not dealing with the human condition, which Tamar touched on. I do think that there's a polarization, but that it is less between parties and it is more within the framework of the Left versus almost everyone else. And I think that's why you see also a secondary polarization between the average citizen and the Establishment. You have polls now with approval ratings in the low 30s and even 20s for both the President and Congress. This is an indication that the citizenry in general does not like what it is seeing from the Establishment.

Partly what I wanted to address is, I think, the significant difference that was brought to us by September 11th. You have a political elite who set the structure, as Mr. Ceaser argues, and a lack of recognition that the average American changed after September 11th. My generation and several generations, certainly since World War II, had never conceived of the idea that tomorrow was not guaranteed, that tomorrow was not promised to us.

Whether it be Vietnam or Korea or—the Cold War was maybe the closest we could get to it—we never thought that we might walk into an office at eight in the morning and be dead in ten minutes. Americans responded to that. And the shift that occurred is the realization that we're not going to just trust political elites to make the decisions and grapple with the big ideas. Finally, now, we're saying, Okay, we want to be a part of this; we can; our ideas, whether they manifest themselves in immigration or politics, matter as well; we're tired of the shell games. I don't think the political elites have recognized—which explains to some degree the polls—that the average American also has a sensibility of what this nation is and should be. It's very much like the national media not realizing or wanting to admit the influence and power of the Internet, of blogs—as Hugh Hewitt knows and as I know with my blog, which I will promote, at www.tammybruce.com, cleverly named that by me—or even, of course, of talk radio, to say the least.

I think there are almost two separate tracks along which we're moving politically in this nation, as the citizenry is having one conversation, and then the brilliant minds at a table like this are having another one. And you're going to see it soon—there was a race in Pennsylvania just a few weeks ago, I think in Chester County, a very conservative county where the Republican always wins, and the Democrat won by thirteen points. There's no real reason for this, except what we hear, or at least what I hear on talk radio: that Americans are sick and tired of what seems to be being taken for a ride, and Republicans are saying, "They're not going to vote for Democrats; they're just not going to go out and vote," which changes the perspective significantly.

Lastly, what's happening politically on the Left, the other big idea there besides malignant narcissism, is existentialist nihilism. It's the idea that nothing really does matter; that humanity is in and of itself a problem. It's why the argument on the Left is that global warming is humanity's fault as opposed to a cyclical issue; it is the idea in every argument that if it were not for us—either humanity or Americans specifically—none of the bad things in the world would be happening. It is a nihilism and an existentialism that says, all of this is hopeless; there is nothing worth fighting for; and the bad things that happen are because we exist.

Narcissism isn't the belief that you're terrific. Narcissism is belief that everything that happens, happens because of you. It's rooted in a negative, starting with childhood. That's why, if you've got global warming or war or poverty or inequality, narcissism is the automatic framework on the Left blaming it all on humanity, as the result of deliberate actions reflecting the fact that humanity is bad and evil.

In the case of politicians, the issue is also that everything must revolve around them. Hillary Clinton is an example. Even though the work of the Left has been described progressively—or, at least, idealistically—the Left has no ideals, really, except to change or eliminate the problem that exists, which is the influence of humanity. You can't have faith or religion, either—because if you're a narcissist, the very concept that there is something beyond you directing things—like God—can't be. Everything is about the state or about you. Everything must revolve around the function of the personality at the heart of it. If you can believe in God, if you have faith, it automatically removes you to some degree from a narcissistic framework because you've agreed that there's something beyond you more powerful than yourself.

Socialized health care and the idea that everything would be better if the state ran your lives is because, of course, humanity can't be trusted. The average person can't be trusted.

When it comes to polarization between the citizenry and the elite, since people grow up and vote based pretty much on how their family raises them, and American families tend to be moderate to moderate-conservative and certainly people of faith, then to remove that influence from each voting generation it's necessary to remove the child from the home, to remove the influence of the family, and to say that it “takes a village.” It doesn't take just you, it takes everyone else. And when you set that child in a framework where their political and general social education is in the hands of the state, of course you eliminate faith; you shape them into Leftists, essentially; and you take away the control and influence of the family in general—which in America, again, tends to a center-right perspective.

So that is why you see that direction. It is a distrust of the American family; it's a distrust of Americans; it is a rejection of God; it's malignant narcissism; and the American citizenry after September 11th has finally realized that the decisions we make matter—they count and need to be taken seriously. We're no longer going to just think that Hillary Clinton really means well. In fact, the ideas on the Left are big, just like needing or desiring to wipe Israel off the map is a very big idea. The fact that it leads to one thing and one thing only, I think, is finally recognized.

Not that I have an opinion.

CHARLES MURRAY: I basically am a convert to Jim's paper. I think his fundamental ideas, especially the contrast between foundational ideas and idealistic non-foundationalism, is just right. And some of the things that Robby George elaborated on also struck home.

It's not that the Left does not have ideals, for all of the reasons that people have pointed out. There are ideals. But if you would take, for example, the biggest of all foundational questions—What is the meaning of a human life? and What does it mean to have a life well lived?—and I'm now talking specifically about the political class, the answer to those questions on the Left increasingly is the European answer, or what I see as the European answer: The purpose of life is to while away the time as pleasantly as possible until you die. And I don't mean that flippantly. One of the aspects of the European experience that I think is migrating to the United States in the political class and is the source of polarization could be expressed as: The American Left no longer believes in American exceptionalism. I'm now echoing what Robby George said.

But the Left also buys into the European dream, which is idealistic in the ways that we've talked about, and has all sorts of ramifications for the way the culture actually plays out. So if there is no transcendental purpose to life, if the purpose of life is to while away the time as pleasantly as possible, there are a number of symptoms that we ought to observe. I think we are observing them in Europe. And I think, in looking ahead in the United States, we ought to ask to what extent they apply, in the future, insofar as the American political class of the Left gets its way.

One of those symptoms is that vocation in Europe is no longer the central measure of a man's or a woman's life—it's not a central expression of who you are. A job is supposed to be something you can work at for as few hours as possible. Long vacations become very important. That's one kind of implication.

Another kind of implication is the precautionary principle that is so widely applied now. Don't do anything that involves risk, or leaps into the dark. One of the most obvious symptoms of this is the plummeting birth rates—far below replacement. And what makes that more interesting is that when you read interviews with European young people on why they aren't having babies, they make statements such as, "Well, what good is a baby, really? They're so much trouble!" or "If we had the baby, we couldn't have the vacation home in Majorca." This is the actual calculus whereby having a child is no longer the central expression of a marriage, and it's once again consistent with whiling away the time as pleasantly as possible.

In all of these ways, there is a fundamental conflict with American exceptionalism. There is a constellation of foundational ideas that we call American exceptionalism, and these ideas have to do with liberty, as classically construed, and they have very much to do with the idea of individualism and becoming all you can be and the rest of that. And all of those are in decline on the political Left in the United States, among the intellectuals, as they are in Europe.

And that brings me finally to the topic of faith. The founders were not, many of them, religious in the fundamentalist sense. But the concept that virtue was absolutely essential to the operation of the Constitution, of democracy—in Madison's words, that you couldn't make this work without the virtue of the people—seems to me to imply something that has been true from the foundation and one of the great foundational ideas, which is: If it's not literally religion that we

usually think of, it is the idea that there is a transcendental backdrop to the functioning of America. The secularization of Europe is unprecedented in the history of any advanced society.

So what I'm trying to say in all of this is that I'm on the side of thinking that the political class is important for America's future. It's a self-interested statement, but in fact I do believe it. I believe that ideas have consequences that pervade the culture—and that in this regard, Europe is the canary in the coalmine. We are looking at what lies in the future to the extent that the United States goes the European route. Second, the great polarization in the political class is between those who still hold to American exceptionalism, traditionally construed, and those within academia and Left think tanks, and for that matter Left socio-economic elites, who say that Europe should be our model.

HUGH HEWITT: I'm aware of the feeling I used to have in certain political theory classes, thirty years ago—that this just might be a setting in which it's best just to remain silent.

But for the people in the audience who have not read Professor Ceaser's paper, I do want to go to his conclusion, which is why I found it so compelling and also troubling, after precisely and, I think, accurately summarizing the non-foundationalist position.

The problem is that when you are non-foundationalist, you cannot extract—which is the word that he used—from your population resolve when resolve is necessary. And what's the consequence of that?

I went back to the greatest statement of political resolve *ever* in American history—and it's not about bearing any burdens, or paying any price, it's Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. Lincoln said,

Yet, if God wills [this war] continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Now it's extraordinary, if you think about it, at the end of four years of war to say, we will go on doing this for two hundred and fifty more years if necessary. So, on what foundational principle did he make that claim to extract resolve, as Professor Ceaser is afraid we won't any longer be able to do? I think it was the Union. The foundational principle was the preservation of the Union. But not just any union; rather, a Union in which constitutionally mediated majorities would not be overruled by the Supreme Court, as *Dred Scott* had done, and one in which no existential threat would be posed.

Today, we have both of those problems again. We have constitutionally mediated majorities seeing their decisions, made through the legislative process of checks and balances, being struck down or voided, whether it is with *Roe* or with the Massachusetts Supreme Court. We see as well an existential threat. I carry around with me now the letter from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, since it's in English now on the Council on Foreign Relations web site (online at

<http://www.cfr.org/publication/10633/>). It's an existential threat to the West. It denies the legitimacy of the regime—and not just Israel's legitimacy, but our own. All liberal democracies. If you haven't read it, I would recommend it.

And at the same time, Lincoln, in his Second Inaugural Address, was not just talking about a constitutionally mediated majority regime. His language is the language of the Bible—without any parallel in American history. It is so explicit that our constitutionally mediated majority's functioning as a union will be embedded in those virtues that he holds up.

Peter Berger's famous phrase—it travels well in any audience and is instantly understood to be true—applies nicely here: “If India is the most religious nation in the world and Sweden is the least, America is a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes.”

I spent a lot of this week with a client out West, a big church, and they are being denied the use of a baseball field because they teach Bible to their baseball players. The city attorney just yesterday told me, “Hugh, you can't do that!” Well, (a) the man is constitutionally illiterate. You can and you must, in fact, do that. But (b), how did it come to pass that we would think it a bad thing to teach Bible in the middle of a Little League game, that it would be considered a constitutional affront?

So on the one hand, we have an existentialist threat from Iran; and on the other hand, we have no common understanding of the role of faith, and we are so far removed from being able to extract resolve that even though this regime in Iran is threatening us, we are talking about cutting and running in a serious way from the one place from which we cannot cut and run.

So I think Professor Ceaser is right that unless we get back to foundationalism quickly, we will not be able to extract that resolve, and so I recommend Ceaser's paper to you because it really is very troubling, I think, and very apt.

BRINK LINDSEY: I want to discuss the issue of polarization, but to talk about political polarization and what it means, I think you first have to start with social polarization. Are we as a people, beyond the political classes, fundamentally divided into red and blue camps? On the fundamental questions, I would say “no.” I would side with people like Morris Fiorina and others who certainly see a great deal of division, diversity, and conflict in American society, but it doesn't line up neatly into a red-versus-blue cleavage. In other words, the distribution of opinions and values isn't bimodal—two big humps—but rather bell-curve shaped, and there's a big central hump that dominates the tails on the left and the right.

And I think that that central hump is located in a rather different place than it was a generation ago, and in fact it is not torturing the language too much to say that it is a kind of libertarian, centrist consensus that prevails. On the one hand, there is a very deep attachment to traditional, middle-American values like patriotism, law and order, the work ethic, and family life; on the other hand, there are very heavily counter-culture-influenced attitudes on race, sex, on authority in general, and on the kind of fervent, almost absolutist embrace of relativism, of which tolerance is the key and cardinal virtue. There is a kind of aversion to preachiness or absolutist truth claims of any kind.

So if that is where the center of American cultural opinion is, I think that the red-versus-blue political polarization, which I do agree exists, is out of kilter with underlying social realities. And so, rather than depicting the conflict in the political class between all kinds of different attempts to provide foundationalism on the Right versus this effort to live without a net on the non-foundationalist Left, I would say that ideologues on both the Left and the Right aren't doing a very good job of providing a foundation for the American social consensus that exists today. The center isn't really represented by the prevailing political categories or by the red-versus-blue distinctions. Therefore I imagine that the specifically red-versus-blue political polarization that we've been talking about for the past few years is unstable because it does not line up with underlying social reality very well. I expect that, if not in the 2008 electoral cycle, than further, going down the line, we are going to see someone attempting to reclaim the center, because what we have now are two opposing camps, both of which are fairly deeply disaffected from American life as is lived by the vast majority of Americans today.

On the one hand, on the Left, you have people who think that American society is basically wicked and money-hungry, and on the Right you have a good chunk of people who think that American society is basically wicked and sex-crazed. And so there isn't really a public philosophy that gives voice to those who think that American society is actually okay.

AMY KASS: Do I understand you to be saying that there is polarization in the political class, but the polarization in the political class does not reflect the reality of the polarization in society?

BRINK LINDSEY: I think that what Bill Kristol said is correct, that the parties have clearly become ideologically consistent, and also it is true that economic divisions have become less salient, and therefore cultural divisions have risen to the fore. But the political contest is being defined by the people on the cultural tails. And so, therefore, the political polarization is out of step with a lack of deeper, social polarization.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: Well, actually, I agree with both Tamar and with Brink that the situation is much more complicated and that the polarization is overstated. I think the organizers of this symposium have to define what they mean by "foundational idea," because on the one hand it is used as simply an abstract idea, and on the other hand, there's a suggestion that it's a very sophisticated abstract idea that rises to the level of philosophy, and I'm not quite sure which one of those Jim meant. But I think if it's the latter, which I think is the way most people have been using it, I'm not at all persuaded that all the foundational ideas are on the Right and that they don't exist on the Left. In fact, I think there is a very powerful set of anti-foundational ideas that have been animating the Right, which basically come out of neoclassical economics.

I actually think that ideas are pretty important, and one of the most important ideas coming out of the United States over the last two generations is the rise of orthodox, free-market, intellectually respectable, neoclassical economics. Jim refers to Hayek and spontaneous order; that Austrian school is sort of a deviant offshoot. I think that most neoclassical thinkers don't necessarily believe in Hayek's view of emergent collective wisdom arising out of decentralized decision-making. But the general perspective is enormously important. If you think about why the French cannot liberalize their labor markets, it's because most French twenty-year-olds do not take

Economics 101; they take a course in administrative science, and they have these weird ideas that if you cut the workweek back to thirty-five hours, you're going to actually increase the supply of jobs in the economy. A lot of Europe's problem, really, comes from this basic conceptual misunderstanding.

Now if you look at the philosophical ideas underlying modern neoclassical economics, it is basically a kind of anti-foundationalism. The whole tradition that begins with Alfred Marshall's marginalism takes individual preferences as essentially sovereign; the job of the government is not to shape individual preferences, it's simply to aggregate and maximize them. And, in a way, it leads to a kind of simple utilitarianism in the recommendations on how to organize an economy. I think, actually, we're doing much better than the Europeans because those ideas have really been quite dominant.

And so, in a sense, neoclassical economics is a kind of procedural liberalism that does not take substantive positions on deep underlying value questions, but I think it is an important set of ideas that have come from the Right.

On the other hand, I do think that there is on the Left a set of foundational ideas that aspires to a greater kind of philosophical seriousness, and that underlies a lot of the relativist positions taken by people on the Left. You could describe it as a kind of neo-Kantianism that comes from people like Rawls or Bruce Ackerman or Ronald Dworkin. This came up particularly in our discussions on the President's Council on Bioethics, where there is a formidable strand of people who believe that autonomy is the single human characteristic that basically trumps human nature or other kinds of human goods. For that there is, I think, a fairly deep philosophical, or at least a long philosophical grounding. It then becomes the principled basis for arguing, again, in favor of a kind of procedural liberalism in which the role of the state is basically not to tell people what kinds of lifestyles they ought to be leading, but rather simply to create a framework in which everybody can make that choice.

So, as Brink was saying, in a sense, both of these sets of ideas lead to a belief in a procedural liberalism that is freed from deeper understandings of underlying values, and leaves that up to the individual. Except the interest of the Right has more to do with property and protecting property, and the Left is more interested in sex. I agree with that basic dichotomy.

But, again, the overall framework is really not that different.

TAMMY BRUCE: On Frank's last point—my being on the Right for some time, I haven't found them any less interested in sex than the Left, I have to say.

But within the human-condition framework, with French students looking at theory and believing that thirty-five hours a week is going to get them more jobs—when you don't get the fruits of your labor, why make that effort in the first place? It is that simple. So you have the political elite or the structural deciders in Europe afraid of pushing the population into doing anything, with that population not wanting anything taken away from them. And that's the clash. Here in America, that clash is mediated at least to some degree—though President Bush continues to spend like a drunken sailor—because we still get the fruits of our labor. So the

[reform] ideas can be there within the political structure and political elite. But if the population knows that it is not going to get the fruits of its labor, then that's going to be the driving force via the burning of cars and the riots in the streets and the burning down of boutiques and the threats of strikes. Why do more when you know you're not going to get anything for it? You have an economic system that is on the verge of collapse, with the retreat of French leadership [from recent economic reforms]. But that is the only position they could take unless they were willing to endure another violent revolt and a complete collapse of the system. That ultimately drives what the political elite want to do—whether or not people are going to go into the street when they're asked to do more for less. That is what Europe is facing.

AMY KASS: Okay, there are two issues that should be addressed. The first is, is there really this clear disjunction between the political class and social reality—what people, average Americans, are really saying? Is it really not the case, as Charles Murray has suggested, that political thought pervades the culture?

And the second and probably more fundamental is, what do we mean by a “foundational idea,” or why privilege the particular foundational ideas that you did—Jim?

JAMES CEASER: The kinds of foundational ideas, when you examine them, you see that they're not perfectly of a piece. If we didn't have non-foundationalism, we would be arguing today about which foundation! They don't form a coherent party, which is why what one calls the Right is profoundly divided on many questions, and frequently you find the Right on many questions siding with parts of the Left—often for foundational reasons. We have large parts of the Right that are at odds with the rest of the Right on national security and the war. We have large parts of the Right, certainly, that are at odds with other parts of the Right on immigration. So the last thing I wanted to suggest is that there is a Right which is always together. What one has to do is look at these different foundational ideas.

Now, what kind are they? They're not of a piece because they include different sorts of things. They include an idea that comes first of all from theology or faith—which is one source; and others that come from natural right; and others which could come from an understanding of history. These have been, you could say, the classic elements that people have fought about in politics. It's not the case that one says “foundation” and imagines everyone holding hands together and singing “Kumbaya.”

Normally, in political life, I think that the sources of conflicts have been among foundations. What's new about political life today—and here I do agree exactly with Charles Murray—what's new is an additional theoretical point of view that political life can be organized completely and entirely without foundations of any kind, or what Frank called, maybe, a procedural view. That is the new kid on the block. And when all is said and done, I think that is the tissue dominating Europe—or parts of Europe. It is taken very seriously by a large part of the American Left. That is the conflict, you could say, which supersedes those among foundations. But can we live without a foundation?

I was happy that Hugh Hewitt did mention Lincoln, because that was the idea that I had in mind—Lincoln's Second Inaugural and others. It raises this question of extraction of resolve.

Ultimately, non-foundationalism—one hasn't seen it here, so it's hard to make a guess without an empirical basis—would have the consequence of listlessness. Every time someone has to organize around something and be willing to sacrifice for something, I think it's going to require some notion of a truth, or at least the moral energy that derives from thinking that's what's involved.

The absence of that would be a consequence of non-foundationalism. Look: People would be willing to sacrifice for a truth or a foundation. They don't seem to be that willing to sacrifice for a "narrative."

SHELBY STEELE: I think one of the problems with foundationalism has to do, again, with the fact that since the '60s, foundationalism itself has been stigmatized as one of the things that contributed to all of the Western sins of the past. America was always a foundationalist nation, but we were hypocritical. The foundational principles applied to some people; they didn't apply to others. And so that detracted from their moral authority. And not only that, but many people argued—I used to be on the Left, that's why I know this so well—that these principles were really a pretext for evil. They were the pretext out of which came this darker, evil West that dominated the world and oppressed people and so forth and so on. And so, it seems in many ways the non-foundationalism of the Left today is a moral high ground. They're saying, We're not partaking of that hypocrisy, and so forth. And so we've got new things like diversity and tolerance that don't have any foundational basis and aren't grounded in principle. They're just grounded in wonderfulness. It's so seductive. But again, I think that foundationalism itself has become stigmatized.

TAMAR JACOBY: I have a persistent, nagging question here today. Why aren't there some people on the Left on this panel to defend themselves? I can't channel that because I'm not of the Left, but let's call it the devil's advocate. Let's talk about the European Left, which has perhaps been the most demonized today. Surely they have a sense of a driving argument about social equality; the need for a social safety net; a kind of communitarian ethos that people fit into the nation in a different way, and that nation is responsible to take care of the people. That is a big idea. Now, we might not like it—we can argue with it—and it might lead to bad things. But it's certainly different from the postmodern kind of nihilistic Left that, in a way, Jim Ceaser is taking on. There's certainly an argument there that goes to values and deep beliefs. Again, I can't really channel it. I just want to ask the question, Where can we put that? I'll just leave it as a question.

The other question that does keep coming back to me—and I am obviously strongly of the school that says that the political class is more polarized than the social reality, but to put a devil's-advocate question to those of us who argue that—if that's true, why is there so much anger in American politics now? American politics certainly is driven by a very polarizing anger. Maybe it's the narcissism of small differences. But it's an interesting question.

AMY KASS: I would remind you of something that Jim reminded us of: Although we see in the political class the clearest polarization, the issue itself is non-political, or trans-political. The question of foundations or non-foundations is a question for all of us as Americans. And I take it that that was the force of what he was saying, in the wonderful conclusion to his paper: What we

need are foundational remedies to the problem most incident to foundational thinking. He is for *more* foundational thinking on Right and Left.

As to the question of the lack of representation of the Left on the panel, there is representation in the audience, and in the second half, we will take questions and comments from them. But let's take a short break now.

Second Session, 10:40 to 11:05 a.m.

AMY KASS: We are going to start the second session with some remarks by Karlyn Bowman, on our panel, and then we will have a few more comments by people on the panel who have not yet spoken, and then we will be asking the audience for questions. Let's proceed.

KARLYN BOWMAN: Thank you very much, Amy. And I'd also like to thank the Bradley Foundation and the Hudson Institute for providing the forum for this very stimulating debate. I'd also like to congratulate Bill Schambra for choosing this title. I think it was about a week to ten days after I received an invitation from him to participate that Robin Toner of the *New York Times* wrote a front-page piece about these debates that are occurring on the Left ("Optimistic, Democrats Debate the Party's Vision," May 9, 2006). And in particular, she cited an article by Michael Tomasky called "What's the Big Idea?" ("What's the Big Idea: Party in Search of a Notion," cover story, *American Prospect*, May 2006, online at <http://www.prospect.org/>) which is, of course, the title of this seminar. So there is something that unites the political classes—and that is, interest in talking about the big idea.

I'm one of those people, as I think all of you know, who is more involved in the business of measuring polarization than investigating its substance. I brought a handout, a very short one that shows how depressing a business this is these days. It's in the packet (and on the Bradley Center web page at <http://pcr.hudson.org>).

In his Tanner Lecture last year and then later in his *Commentary* article ("How Divided Are We," February 2006), James Q. Wilson said that using polls to measure polarization isn't very useful because they can't usually capture the intensity of feelings on many issues. I think that's true, but I think they still can be a valuable tool to understand what makes our complex and heterogeneous public tick.

I also think that the polls themselves are contributing to the polarization in society today. The pollsters and their media partners relentlessly emphasize scandal over substance, and conflict over concord. So I think the polls are contributing to the deep divisions that we see today.

Let me talk a bit about what those divisions are. Clearly, anything that touches politics reveals great differences between Democrats and Republicans. And this starts with the President himself. Strong presidents usually produce strong approval or strong opposition, and I think that explains some of the anger that we see today. But if you look at the career average polarizations for recent presidents, you get a sense of the idea that strong presidents do produce deeper polarization. Ronald Reagan's career average, the difference between Republicans and Democrats in terms of

his approval over the course of his presidency, was 50 percentage points. For George Herbert Walker Bush, it was only 35 over the course of his presidency. For Bill Clinton, 52. And for this President through last year, 54 percentage points. That difference has certainly grown larger in the last few years. Last year, it was almost impossible to find more than 15 percent of Democrats approving of the job that George Bush was doing as president, and almost impossible to find fewer than 80 percent of Republicans approving of the job he was doing. That's a partisan chasm that reveals, I think, very, very deep differences overall.

What's interesting about that is, Americans don't expect it to change. If you look at the numbers on Hillary Clinton today, the polarization is just as deep as it is about George W. Bush. And I think that's one of the explanations, when you listen to her speak these days, why she rarely mentions George W. Bush. She talks about her programs, trying to deal with a very serious problem that she will have in the months ahead.

People, as I said, think the country is clearly divided, and I think that is dangerous. But as for the social reality, I find myself in agreement with Brink and Tamar that in many areas of ordinary life, there are not significant differences between Democrats and Republicans. Unfortunately, the pollsters don't investigate those as often as they investigate the areas where there are very profound differences. And looking at the handout that I brought, you find that, for example, 29 percent of Democrats know someone who is home-schooling a child. It's 40 percent of Republicans. I don't know how large a gap that is. It's a gap, but I'm still not sure how big that is compared to other gaps we might have had on busing a couple of decades ago.

Asked whether or not they personally own a gun, 23 percent of Democrats; 41 percent of Republicans. Do women consider themselves feminists? 8 percent of Republican women; 39 percent of Democratic women.

So in some social areas, I don't think the differences are particularly large or that much different from what we've seen in the past. What's interesting to me in thinking about the Tomasky article is that the same debate about big ideas is going on in Democratic circles today. In addition to Tomasky, Ruy Teixeira and John Halpin have written a paper called "The Politics of Definition" (on the web site of the *American Prospect* at <http://www.prospect.org/>, published in four parts), and have been looking at some of these same problems on the Democratic side. I want to conclude with just a very brief quote from Teixeira in "The Politics of Definition," in which he talks about some of the things that I think relate back to Jim Ceaser's point. (The excerpt is taken from Part I.) He—and he being a liberal Democrat—says:

A majority of Americans do not believe progressives or Democrats stand for anything. Despite difficult times for the GOP in early 2006, Republicans continue to hold double-digit advantages over Democrats on the key attribute of "know[ing] what they stand for" and fewer than four in 10 voters believe the Democratic Party has "a clear set of policies for the country."

Teixeira calls this the "identity gap," and he says this about it:

What is not understood is the extent to which this gap continues to drag down progressives and Democrats and depress their support in myriad ways. “No identity” translates into no character. No personal integrity. No vision worth fighting for. No domestic agenda. No national-security agenda. No basic understanding of the problems facing everyday citizens. No contrast with the other side. No reason to vote for progressive [or Democratic] candidates.

He might have said, “No foundations.” And I think that’s where I’ll leave my comments about the degree of polarization today.

DAVID BROOKS: I’m mostly in agreement with what Karlyn said. There’s an odd polarization on the panel between those who have to deal with left-wing academics and those of us who don’t. Those of us who deal with Democrats are a lot happier than those who deal with the academy. I’m tempted to leave it at that!

But first, let me just draw a few distinctions. There’s a big difference between partisanship and polarization. I’m basically with Brink and Tamar and Karlyn and Bill [Kristol] and all us Washingtonian types that there is a bell curve in this country on issues, but partisanship is important—and in my sense, more important than philosophy.

How do most people form their political views? Almost nobody forms their political views by looking at the two parties and deciding which has the best philosophy. They form their political views usually by inheriting them from their parents. Or in their early 20s, they look at the party that is filled with people like themselves. It’s social identity that comes first. Once you find the party that’s filled with people like yourself, then the ideas come. Political scientists have measured this through surveys and studies: Philosophy comes after the social identity.

That doesn’t mean the philosophy is unimportant. Once people come up with their philosophy, it shapes them and helps determine what they believe in. But that doesn’t mean it’s primary. What’s primary, especially today, is the partisanship, which is a team-spirit tribalism. You can get vicious attacks based on very small political differences, but which reflect differences of social identity about which virtues you think a leader should have. The thing that polarizes the country primarily, is individuals. Half the country looks at George Bush and sees the virtues—well, this was about three years ago, so now a *third* of the country looks at George Bush and sees the virtues—they want in a leader, and two-thirds see the virtues they don’t want. But primarily, it’s partisanship more than big, philosophical differences, which is one of the reasons I’m with the Washington crowd in thinking the polarization is fundamentally unstable.

Another thing that has been weaving through the conversation is Eurocentrism and Europe. Conservatives are accused of being Eurocentric. But you’d never know it, because we’re Europhobic, it turns out. Here the interesting issue is: Is the Left becoming more European, as Charles and some of the others have suggested?

Here, again, the crucial distinction is between the people who have to deal with left-wing academics and those who don’t. I think, in some circles, you do see European modes of behavior. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Berkeley. If you look at rising secularism in these areas, if you look

at very low fertility rates in these areas, you do see sort of European patterns of behavior. If you look across the Democratic mainstream, you see very few signs of European actual behavior. If you look at “Red America” and “Blue America,” at how people actually live—if you look at work patterns, divorce rates, drug use, mobility—it’s very hard to tell the difference. On indicator after indicator, it’s very hard to tell “Red America” apart from “Blue America.” Americans are still basically behaving the same whether they’re red or blue. To me, the difference is that the Democratic politicians basically understand that, and they represent the mainstream of the Democratic Party more than the more Europeanized academics.

So if you look at Hillary Clinton, for example, I differ with the view that she is an exemplar of continental European philosophy. I think she’s an exemplar of Blairism, which is a reaction against continental philosophy. It’s more liberal than I would like, but it is not Gunnar Myrdal. It’s a reaction against Gunnar Myrdal. So when I look at the Democrats that I meet every day covering politics, they are much more centrist, much more American, and much more in-their-bones American exceptionalist than some of the left-wing academics whom I meet from time to time. The power of America just did not vanish overnight. So, to me, that’s an important distinction.

The final thing I’ll say—and this should be raised by somebody at a moment when the Republican Party is on the verge of splitting apart into a million different pieces, talking about polarization—what’s interesting at this moment is, at one end of the polarization is a Republican Party in the midst of a fundamental change. I think the stresses, first of the 1995 government shutdown, and now the stresses of the last two years, are not just a passing moment which we will grow out of and return to the way conservatism or Republicanism was two years ago. I think something fundamental will change. My bet is that we will have a campaign [in 2008]—and this is the accident of history—between John McCain and Hillary Clinton, who sit on the Armed Services Committee together, and who—as far as I know—have never disagreed on any single vote. If that happens, then talk about polarization will look a little weird!

AMY KASS: Jim, do you want to respond directly to the claim that philosophy comes after social identity and its being relegated to secondary importance?

JAMES CEASER: Well, I’m not completely opposed to that. I’m not selling philosophical ideas for their own sake. I’m not even particularly interested in philosophy occupying the same space in politics that should be occupied by political debate. That would be a misinterpretation—maybe not of the paper, but of the book I wrote—which is mostly about how, on occasions, political leaders try and use these philosophic ideas. They’re usually, in fact, quite in the background. So I’m not opposed to that.

On the other hand, I would say this: Something which is not immediately a cause of behavior can become a cause afterwards. I think this may be in line with what David was saying. You don’t have to say that the philosophic ideas are the cause of people’s initial views. But once they become the framework by which the leadership elements begin to talk about politics, then they do become a cause. It’s not a cause initially; it’s a cause later on.

And I would say this: If you trace back any parts of what we sometimes call “culture” or “cultural identity,” you’ll find a long time ago some philosophical idea or religious-philosophical idea at the root of cultural identity. The idea that cultural identity springs from the head of Minerva full-blown is usually wrong. After all, a cultural identity could be a religious belief. Is a religious belief something which came from nowhere, just from people living around, without faith behind it?

One speaks of views of Middle Americans about equality or liberty. Those also will be traced back to something. So the easy division between cultural identity and ideas as if they are polar opposites, I think, probably would not bear sustained analysis.

MICHAEL BARONE: Jim Ceaser said during one of his presentations this morning, “After all, we are all on the same team.” Are we! I’m not sure I necessarily agree, and I think I disagree at least somewhat with what David Brooks just said. I do think there is a substantial polarization, and it’s polarization along the lines of what Charles Murray was referring to when he talked about American exceptionalism. In reading Jim Ceaser’s paper, I was struck by his reference to Lionel Trilling’s mid-century remark that there are only liberal ideas; there are no conservative ideas. I thought of Louis Hartz’s book, which was published in the 1950s and basically said that America has only a liberal tradition—that this formed a consensus, about which everybody pretty much agrees. Those were the dominant books when I arrived at college in the 1960s.

It struck me that a lot of liberals are, or would like to be, frozen at that point in mid-century, when there was a liberal consensus, and when Bill Buckley was still an undergraduate and founded *National Review*.

Liberals then embodied the idea of American-ness really much better than conservatives did. After all, conservatives were the ones, mostly, who had qualms about U.S. entry into World War II. They were against the tide of what became our policy. They were the ones who were interested in European high culture when it was the liberals who backed mass-media entertainment and W.P.A. socialist-realist murals and things of that sort—the sort of popular art, as it were, of mid-century.

And they had a faith—they understood history. History moves left. History is a progress from less government to more government, from markets to security guaranteed to you; this was the way history not only should move but the way that history *would* move. You could be confident of it. Whereas Buckley, when he formed the *National Review*, said that he would want to get on the horse of history and yell, Stop! He shared that same basic assumption, it seems, in 1955.

Well, as we’ve learned since then, history doesn’t necessarily move left. Sometimes history moves around. And liberalism has lost, as Jim Ceaser says, its monopoly on ideas, and indeed sometimes seems in danger of losing all ideas whatever. Or so it can be argued. I think one of the things that liberalism has lost is its identity with America, the belief in American exceptionalism, that this is a special and especially good country. It would not have occurred to Franklin Roosevelt to suppose that the United States was somehow morally inferior to France, or that the United States would not have moral standing in the world if it did not have the approval of France to do what we needed to do. In fact, he had quite a few problems with France.

Roosevelt, Truman, and John Kennedy in his inaugural speech and other utterances were definitely American exceptionalists—perhaps arguably more than some of the Republicans of their day. Obviously that has changed in the period after the Vietnam War and the objections to it. You have John F. Kerry—I should give his full name, John Francois Kerry—testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1971 that Americans are the bad guys, in his view. That’s a view he has returned to more recently in what is now a political career that has spanned more than a third of a century.

I think you can see in some of the public opinion polls what has happened. Basically, we are a split country, now, on the question of American exceptionalism—but it’s the Democratic constituency that is split. In the 2004 election cycle, pollster Scott Rasmussen asked two questions that go to American exceptionalism:

- Do you believe that this is basically a fair and decent country, or not?
- Do you believe that the world would be better off if more countries were more like America, or not?

What he found was that about two-thirds of voters answered Yes to both questions. Among Republicans, about 90 percent answered Yes to both questions. Among Democrats, the response was of the order of magnitude of 47 to 39. Not a ringing endorsement of American exceptionalism. It reminds me of the time a Teamsters union business agent was in the hospital, and he received a bouquet of flowers with a card that said, “The executive board wishes you a speedy recovery by a vote of 9 to 6.” It is not a wholehearted endorsement of American exceptionalism.

So while I think David Brooks is correct to say that Hillary Rodham Clinton is certainly not going to show her “Euro” side as she is going on, she is trying to lead a party which has a substantial contingent that basically believes they do things better in Europe than here—they’ve gone farther towards the welfare state; they’ve done this and that. We see that Justice Ginsberg and Justice Breyer, the two Democratic nominees on the Supreme Court, have both explicitly made speeches about why it’s good to use foreign law to interpret the American Constitution. You know—they may have better ideas than we do. As Justice Scalia points out, they don’t use foreign law on abortion since foreign laws in every other country in the world are more restrictive on abortion than in the United States. It’s used selectively. We’re not going to adopt the Saudi criminal code. I think we can be pretty sure Justice Ginsberg and Justice Breyer are not going to refer to that.

But there is this idea that people in Europe have it better. Do you remember that Michael Dukakis was portrayed as kind of a policy wonk because on vacation he took along a book on Swedish land use planning? Ah, Sweden, again.

I would conclude that this is ultimately a problem for Democrats. It’s a problem for our foreign policy that our leaders believe in American exceptionalism and a lot of other people in the world actually don’t believe in American exceptionalism—although indeed half of the people immigrating from one country to another in the world come to this country. But it’s also a

problem, I think, for the Democratic Party that it wants to lead America while half its constituency doesn't believe this is really a special country, and in fact, believe in a lot of ways that it's worse than all the others. They're ready to believe—eager to believe—the worst about America. And of course, that attitude is rampant in the press, in the old media.

So, I think that's a continuing problem for the Left—liberals, the Democratic Party—and it's a continuing problem for the United States. My only consolation is that the Swedish import that most Americans have the most contact with is probably not the kind of government-run child care centers that Walter Mondale—Norwegian decent—was sponsoring in the 1970s, but the private enterprise product of IKEA. Thank you.

BRINK LINDSEY: Tamar, you raised a question before the break that has been hanging out there since then, and I think it is incumbent on those of us who are the happy, consensual centrists here—what an odd position for a libertarian to be in—to answer, and that is: If indeed there is this sort of fundamental unity in the country at large, why is politics so angry?

I don't have an answer. I have some theories—just three, briefly—two procedural, one substantive. First, as it been mentioned, the parties today are much more ideologically consistent than they ever were in the past. As a result, you now have a superimposition of ideological conflict on top of normal partisanship, and I think that ramps up the nastiness of rhetoric. Secondly, conflict sells. We have a very bottom-up and participatory politics now compared to what we had in decades past. There are no party bosses or old bulls who are gatekeepers, deciding who gets to play and who gets to set the agenda. Anybody who can raise money and can get on television can help to set the agenda—and the best way to do that, the best way to get those good direct-mail yields, the best way to get on the tube is to have a bright, clear distinction between you and the other guy. And so, conflict sells.

Finally, I think a good deal of the nastiness on the ideological Left and Right today comes out of frustration. Both of these red and blue movements, I think, can be traced back to big, cultural upheavals of the '60s: the counterculture on the Left, and the evangelical revival and the religious Right on the Right. And both, I think, are very frustrated with their inability to shift the country fundamentally in their direction. The Left is terribly upset that the '80s happened, and isn't going away, and the Right is terribly unhappy about the '60s and the fact that big chunks of it aren't going away. So born out of this frustration I think you have a tendency towards intemperate rhetoric and demonizing the other side.

ALLAN CARLSON: Just a couple of comments on Hillary Clinton: I do recommend you look at her early essays on children's rights that she wrote right out of law school. I attended her 1997 White House conference on child care. I think I was the only conservative there. I managed to somehow get a ticket. Same ideas: children's rights; collectivization as a universal goal; all children have a right to collective child care. So I'm not sure if much has changed except that she has become a better politician in the last few years.

Also, there are some differences between red and blue states that do show up. One that has been noted is fertility. Fertility is 11 percent higher in red states than in blue states. If you break it

down by county, the difference almost doubles—up to a little over 20 percent. Different views of marriage are very clear on red-state, blue-state survey polls.

And finally, I think the genius of America, which is something Europe doesn't really seem to have, is this endless ability to invent new institutions. Tocqueville was right about this—and just one example, one that Karlyn mentioned, is home-schooling. It came out of nowhere. A popular movement, a folk movement that grew in the last three decades in reaction to some bad things going on in the public schools. But also out of a desire to renew families and renew family life.

Something like that as a spontaneous development simply has not happened and could not happen in Europe for a long, long time.

Question and Answer Session

AMY KASS: Comments or questions from the audience? Please identify yourself.

ALICE POOLE: My name is Alice Poole, and I'm a Georgetown public policy Master's student. And I feel compelled to say a few things because I'm clearly British—that means European. I'm center-left; I'm feminist; and I'm pro-choice. So I have a couple of things to say, and it has been fascinating for me to hear you all.

Principally, I want to reject Charles Murray's depiction of Europe, because it's just not the Europe I know; it doesn't reflect the reality that I've seen from friends, my colleagues, and my many visits throughout Europe.

Well, maybe except for the French.

No, that's a joke.

I'd argue very strongly that vocation does matter, especially from the Left, if you look at people like nurses and social workers and teachers who take low pay to do things that they believe in. I'd also argue strongly that it's not all about whiling away your life. The fact that we don't work as long hours as Americans does not mean it's all about leisure. In fact, I'd argue it's strongly about things like families—the fact that we have more time for children, for parents, and for volunteering is especially important.

I also think that many in Europe would argue that America is not exceptional and I would agree with that. There are things, of course, which America does better than Europe—and I'm not arguing that. And there are clearly things in Europe—particularly as you've argued, the flexibility of the labor model—which are problematic.

But clearly America has numerous problems, too, which I don't think you're acknowledging clearly enough. You've talked briefly about the health care system. But I've never seen in Britain, when I walk past a Planned Parenthood clinic, a scene where you have people praying on

one side and people having to protect people going in. I've never seen such a thing, and I think it's horrendous. You have your problems.

I'd also question whether you really want to be exceptional. British people thought we did for a very, very long time. And I think we're now coming to realize that that comes with a lot of problems. It comes with hubris. It brings war. It brings envy. The European project, which you all seem to be so disdainful of, is, as far as I'm concerned, a fantastic success.

There are just two more things I would say. One is, I would pose a question about what you're measuring. There is a debate about what constitutes happiness and how you measure it, about what is actually success, which none of you have addressed.

I'd also argue very strongly that you're portraying historicism as an extreme. But you can have a middle ground. As a Christian and as a humanist, I believe that there's right and wrong. On the other hand, you talk here about men all being created equal, but yet blacks counted as three-fifths a person, and women didn't have the vote. I'm not quite sure how that works.

This is my final point—you can have a sense of identity that is linked to nationalism. In Britain, Catholics burning Protestants and vice versa was a huge problem, and we actually saved the nation by declaring that we would not look into the windows of people's souls. So the fact that you're questioning some foundationalism does not mean that you don't have a sense of pride, identity, or community. In 1940, when Britain fought united against Hitler, there was a huge sense of what Britishness was, and I don't think that has entirely gone away. Last year, in July 2005, when we were bombed, there was a huge sense of right, and that this was not right; it was not acceptable. But at the same time, it was about not changing our lives—and that's a not hysterical, a determined, united, and a passionate response.

Thank you for allowing me to make my comments.

MARC PLATTNER: Marc Plattner, *Journal of Democracy*. I think that Jim has written an extraordinarily good paper, and this was a very interesting discussion. It seems to me, however, that there was one element that was left out in both the paper and the discussion. Perhaps I see it from the work that I do every day, but it does seem to me to have wider application, which is the extraordinary public consensus in this country behind the idea of human rights and democracy.

In many ways, this is an idea that was animated by the Left, but it now has strong supporters both on Left and Right. And for all the disagreements about other aspects of foreign policy—about the war and so on—there remains a remarkable consensus on this. That National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute almost never disagree about whom they should be supporting in various countries despite their deep partisan divisions at home, and even the Europeans are often on board. They tend to agree who the “good guys” and the “bad guys” are in the Ukraine, or Belarus, or Zimbabwe.

Are these foundational ideas? Well, I'm not sure what to say about that. Many people appeal to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If one asked people what the foundations are of that, one would get very different answers—but nonetheless, it is meant to be a universal declaration,

and the people who support these ideas constantly have to defend themselves against the charge that what they're supporting is somehow culturally bound, that these universal values are contrary to Asian or Islamic values. And they do so. And sometimes, particularly in developing countries, they'll even appeal to ideas of natural right or religious bases.

I wonder if anyone might want to respond to that.

JAMES CEASER: Yes. The Universal Declaration—it was Jacques Maritain, I think, in talks for the Convention [for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950], who said that we all agree on human rights, as long as we don't ask why. And that's, I think, essentially correct. Many people came together and agreed on this principle without having a foundation for it. This was commonly acknowledged; different people can do this; and this frequently happens in politics.

It does concern me, though, how without a foundation this concept might be able to drift in some very strange directions. I want to call attention to the recent case in Holland of Hirsi Ali, who was evicted from her apartment. The judge, in that case, evicted her on the grounds that her presence was a violation of the human rights of the other people who were living in the apartment building. This is a kind of Hobbesian version of human rights; you have a right to your life! But acceptance of this claim by a court—though we know that court may not be representative of all courts—seems to me to show the difficulty that you can get into. I have nothing against human rights and its utility. But it does show that without a grounding or foundation, a concept like this can evolve in some very strange directions.

ROBERT GEORGE: Just very quickly on that, Jim. Mary Ann Glendon's terrific book on the UN Declaration (*A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 2001) makes the point that it's not that the Declaration was without foundations; it was that it was without a common foundation. In other words, each of the representatives who in the end lent his name had a foundational basis for it. It's just that the foundations differed. So I wouldn't put it forward as an example of a non-foundationalist expression of human rights.

LOGAN GAGE: Logan Gage with the Discovery Institute. Professor George, I wonder if you thought the dichotomy was fair between natural law and faith, and if so, as someone who spans those things, how do you deal with that—is that a fair division along with the others, or not?

ROBERT GEORGE: It's an important point, and I'm glad you brought it up. There is a mistake that's very easy to make, which Jim Ceaser carefully avoided making, when you're talking about foundational ideas of justice and the common good in political thought, and that is to suppose that the options of faith, nature or reason, and history, are mutually exclusive options. It's a mistake to suppose either you are a fideist—someone who believes that faith and faith alone is the only basis for political ideas about justice and the common good; or that you are a rationalist in the bad sense, or at least the pejorative sense; or you are a historicist. Most people who are foundationalists actually believe that elements of all of those are relevant to and help to construct the foundations of political thought.

Now, people who are not foundationalists are out of this whole game. But among foundationalists, it is actually the exception to find people who are strictly within one camp or another, and we usually label them in order to indicate they are making a mistake—fideism, rationalism, historicism.

ROBERT STACY MCCAIN: My question is for Mr. Brooks. I'm Robert Stacy McCain, *Washington Times*. Ten years ago, twelve years ago, fifteen years ago, there was talk of a liberal elite in America that was out of touch with the people. Is it not true today that there is a conservative elite that is out of touch with the people? In your book, the Bobo book, for want of a better name (*Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*, 2000), you described how you go from a beginner to being at the table. Is there something wrong with the process of the construction of the American elite that puts it at odds with the people?

DAVID BROOKS: I just think today there are multiple elites. Maybe once there was one cohesive elite. But in Washington we certainly have multiple elites who don't seem to agree on anything. And then, if you look at the country, the people who claim to be against the elites are invariably sitting on Wall Street or in Washington or in Berkeley. We have a corporate elite; we have a cultural elite.

So I guess I would say just a few things. Temperamentally, I think the heart of America is in middle-class suburbia. And neither elitism nor populism rings very powerfully in this area, I think.

And secondly, I would say that if you're just trying to gauge, impressionistically, the popular mood, I would say that the odd thing about this moment is that while there is great disillusionment with people who are running the country, as measured by right track/wrong track and all the other things, there is no hunger for angry outsiders, in my view. I think there is a hunger for some sort of boring, wise-men stability. And so you get anger, but also exhaustion. And therefore there is not the populism you would expect to see when people are sick of the two parties. That's paradoxical.

So I don't think we've got an out-of-touch elite. We've got a confused country.

HILLEL FRADKIN: Hillel Fradkin of Hudson Institute. I want to address a question to Jim Ceaser, whose paper I found really wonderful, but it flows from the remark of Shelby Steele and relates to what Michael Barone said. The problem, it seems to me, with some of the response to your paper is that it doesn't account for the fact that we do actually change our minds, or a substantial portion of people do change their minds, and that has to be somehow explained.

One of the explanations is not just general social change, but real political crises. Speaking only for myself, the real political crisis, during the time I've been alive, was the Civil Rights Movement—I mean, a crisis for the country.

In this regard, it seems to me that the general point that Shelby Steele makes is very apt. There has been this real revolution in the way that people look at things, and it has had very much to do with the race problem and the Civil Rights Movement. So I was wondering how you see that

playing a role in what you describe as the overall development of these two different approaches to ideas.

JAMES CEASER: Just briefly, though these ideas have a philosophical origin, they linger in the background, and are sometimes put in motion by political leaders. They are not usually invented by political leaders—Jefferson being the exception, perhaps. But by and large, they're put in motion by political leaders in moments of crisis. After all, I don't think Lincoln ever was very much a partisan of natural rights until the 1850s. Similarly with the current president—his attachment to certain ideas seems to have come out of a certain crisis.

So while the ideas linger in the background, I don't think most political leaders are terribly interested in them until they see that they need them, and by saying that they need them, this isn't in a calculated sense. They need them to deal with a huge issue or crisis facing the world. That would be the case also with civil rights. There may have been people who were thinking or dealing with these things before. But when it became a major political issue and a response had to be articulated by King and others, it's at that point that the ideas were given life.

Therefore, even though you can speak of foundational ideas in a paper like mine by giving them different names, when they come into being politically, they are always going to be expressed in relationship to some particular crisis, some particular challenge to the United States. Doing that is the job of the political class. I don't think that political leaders can, finally, operate in any large human undertaking to mobilize people without something like this. And I think they will inevitably—at least in this country—come back to some combination at those moments.

TAMMY BRUCE: In regards to David's comments, it would be a great mistake to presume that a rebellion, socially, at the grassroots level is going to manifest, as it always has, in a reform party, in Ross Perot or in Pat Buchanan. It is happening now—it is manifesting, quietly and not so quietly, necessarily. As an example, the immigration debate is probably more prominent now because of the Minute Men, and the nature of what's happening there. This coming weekend, they break ground on the building of their own wall in various plots of private property along the border.

It's manifesting not in marches, necessarily, as it used to, but through the internet, in blogs and talk radio, phone calls in the usual, standard framework, quietly, with citizens calling their representatives and making demands like they've never made before, and more passionately.

So I think what's going to be important for the elite—and I can't say I'm not part of it, because I'm sitting up here, but I hear from hundreds of people every week from every state in the union and around the world—is that there is a quiet revolution underway. It is different and doesn't fit the old model, but you're going to see it. You're going to see changes, but you're not going to know how they happened unless you tap into the new media framework, as opposed to thinking that something is not happening because it doesn't look like it used to.

ROGER REAM: Roger Ream, the Fund for American Studies. I think the European dissent we heard brings to my mind a great book written by a previous Bradley Prize winner, Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions* (1987). Really, what separates Left and Right, American

exceptionalism and European-minded Americans, is the idea of constrained and unconstrained visions. The idea of Constitutionalism and human nature, which constrain public policy, versus the unconstrained view that defines “right” as privilege or as entitlement.

Closing Remarks

AMY KASS: Does anyone on the panel want to make one brief, last comment?

SHELBY STEELE: Sometimes bad ideas have moral authority, and sometimes good ideas don't have moral authority or lose their moral authority. I would just add that.

HUGH HEWITT: I would add just a brief response to our British dissent. Perhaps the embodiment of non-foundationalism would be Stanley Baldwin, and it issued in crisis. They even abandoned the principle that not one power on the European continent should be allowed to dominate. And that's what happens.

AMY KASS: Jim, one closing remark?

JAMES CEASER: Well, thank you to you and everyone here for your attention this morning.

AMY KASS: I ditto that. Thank you all very much for coming!