



**LESSONS FROM THE RIGHT:  
SAVING THE SOUL OF THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**

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## Lessons from the Right: Saving the Soul of the Environmental Movement

### *Introduction*

*There is no teacher but the enemy. No one but the enemy will ever tell you what the enemy is going to do. No one but the enemy will ever teach you how to destroy and conquer. Only the enemy shows you where you are weak. Only the enemy tells you where he is strong. And the rules of the game are what you can do to him and what you can stop him from doing to you. I am your enemy from now on. From now on, I am your teacher. - Orson Scott Card, Ender's Game<sup>1</sup>*

Three days after we learned that the man who has been labeled the worst environmental president in American history would serve another term, we, along with 150 of our fellow students and professors, gathered in the cathedral-like auditorium of the oldest professional environmental school in the country, trying to imagine the future. Our Dean, the eloquent and respected James Gustave Speth, a founder of the modern environmental movement, had called the students and faculty of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies together to address the overwhelming sense of loss that had infused the campus since the election. The air was heavy with the somber weight of mourning, and the words we spoke into our institutional PA system echoed off the heavy stonewalls like a eulogy. We all knew we had lost something great; something of great promise had died while we were not looking. A majority of Americans had rejected our sense of ethical righteousness, the notion that *ours* was the path of moral values, and they had voted instead for someone who stood against nearly everything in which we believed. Polls told us we had lost a battle of faith and morality, but we did not know why.

One thing was clear. Our old methods, the strategies that had won us many battles in the past, were no longer sufficient to help us get our message into the public dialogue. We had been out-spoken, out-maneuvered, and out-foxed. As we sat in that cavernous

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<sup>1</sup> Card, O. S. (1991). Ender's game. New York, T. Doherty Associates.

space, we realized that someone would have to look at this problem with new eyes, and we were just the generation to do it.

In the weeks following the election, we found that we were not alone in our desire to reevaluate our entire strategy. At approximately the same time, a scathing critique of the modern environmental movement called “The Death of Environmentalism,” written by environmental professionals Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, was beginning to create serious waves in the environmental community. (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2004) The authors seemed to voice what we were beginning to realize, that,

By failing to question their most basic assumptions about the problem and the solution, environmental leaders are like generals still fighting the last war – in this case, the war they fought and won for basic environmental protections more than 30 years ago...Environmentalists are in a culture war, whether we like it or not. It's a war over our core values as Americans and over our vision for the future... (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2004)

Yet, as reluctant as we have been to admit it, we are not without models of how to mount a successful attack in this reawakened culture war in America. We need only turn to our victorious opponents to identify and correct our weaknesses. As Ovid recommended, "You can learn from anyone, even your enemy."

Like the British Redcoats trying to use traditional and outdated tactics to defeat a new guerrilla army, the environmental movement, alongside the larger progressive network, has failed to recognize the incredibly effective strategies that have allowed the Right to get their hands on the hearts of America. Over the past three decades, the Right has adopted a powerful strategy for taking over the political systems of this country. Their success has largely resulted from their utilization of a set of ingenious institutional techniques - primarily, a strategic framing of their message coupled with the construction of a holistic meta-structure for delivering it - rather than their engagement in democratic discourse over the true content of their policies. Our movement can learn something by studying the methods that have allowed the Right to become so powerful, and if we are smart, we will figure out how to apply these lessons to our own national aspirations.

What follows is a collection of ten lessons that we believe environmentalists and progressives more broadly<sup>2</sup> must master in order to elevate our cause to a position of influence equal to that of the Right in today’s culture war. These are techniques that the Right<sup>3</sup> has used, with great success, to place itself in the powerful position it now occupies in American politics. In each lesson, we will examine how the Right has used a particular strategy to its advantage, and we will offer examples of how this technique has played itself out in the real world.

It is important to note, however, that although all of the methods mentioned here have proven impressively effective in helping the Right reach its goals, we do not wish to encourage our progressive counterparts to adopt them all. We believe that some of the lessons described below represent abuses of both religion and the media, both of which pose a significant threat to the health of American democracy. For this reason, we include in this piece a discussion about those strategies that we find particularly destructive or dangerous, and we explain why these techniques have or have not been incorporated into our recommendations.

Finally, we provide some preliminary suggestions for how progressive politics should move ahead. Though we attempt to offer some solutions, this paper is primarily intended to inspire a new wave of discussion and collaboration – one that will bring a wide-spectrum of progressive leadership together to chart our future path. In the final section, we examine some examples of how progressives may learn from the lessons the Right has taught us, and we offer some signs of hope that this vital restructuring has already begun. We hope that

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<sup>2</sup> Although we intended to strictly structure this paper around what the *environmental movement* could learn from the Right, we quickly realized that in order to present a realistic alternative to the Right’s monolithic worldview, we would have to consider a field much larger than that which would traditionally fit into the narrowly defined rubric of “environmental issues.” Thus, in this paper, the term “progressive” has been adopted to represent a values-system that includes both environmental issues and other social viewpoints that we believe to be morally consistent with those of the environmental movement.

<sup>3</sup> Initially interested in investigating the sources of the *Religious Right*’s recent rise in power, we quickly found it difficult to differentiate between the “Right” as represented by the Bush administration and the conservative Religious Right. In fact, the Bush administration seems to have effectively and subtly replaced many traditional Republican policy stances with those belonging more specifically to the Religious Right. Though the Bush administration has managed to maintain much of its traditional Republican Rightist support, it more accurately reflects the interests of the Religious Right. Thus, in this paper, the terms “Right” and “Religious Right” are often used interchangeably.

this paper will serve as a spark to rekindle the fire that burns in the collective progressive heart. Our wish is that it will lead to enhanced cooperation and strategizing among progressive groups, which we believe will prove vital in the struggle to define and defend our values in the ongoing culture war. If we are right, this may be our only hope for saving the soul of our environmental movement.

### *Part One: Lessons from the Right*

#### *Lesson One: Welcome to the Matrix*

How do issues ranging from national defense spending, to school vouchers, to gay marriage, to income tax, to social security all fit under the umbrella of the Right? How have those claiming faith in the “blessed are the meek” teachings of Jesus come into alliance with the corporate powerbrokers of America, apparently seeking to preserve their own wealth? How has the conservative reach been extended so far, shifting the media dialog to the right and securing heavy representation in every branch of government?

These victories did not happen overnight, nor did they happen by accident. Over the last several decades, the Right has been busy engineering a powerful institutional meta-structure, through which they develop, reinforce, and broadcast their message. Over years, they have slowly pieced together a powerful presence that is only now coming of age. They have built an authority that is as relevant to local politics as it is to national politics, one that allows them to spread their resources strategically across issue lines. In contrast to issue-based progressive and environmental groups, which are forced to compete for the same limited pool of funding, to constantly differentiate themselves from each other, and to justify their fundraising by funneling it directly into programs to solve the specific, short-term problems at hand, the Right has crafted a large-scale strategy focused specifically on promoting its cause at the meta-structural level. Foundations, think tanks, media conglomerates, politicians, and local activists are all integrated into this meta-movement structure, and they all have benefited from being part of such a long term, big picture project.

The Right’s meta-structure provides the means by which it can feed information from its think tanks to its media representatives, train its local grassroots organizations to fit into its larger strategy, and funnel funding strategically from its upper-level supporters across its various branches. The importance of this meta-strategy must not be underestimated. By creating a comprehensive structure with arms reaching into all arenas of American culture, the Right has ensured that its message will permeate our society.

Though we are not privy to the inner workings of the Right and its leadership, our research has led us to the conclusion that their meta-structural model is laid out as depicted the following diagram (the specific organizations and individuals listed in each category serve as examples of the players we include in that category; these lists are not intended to be comprehensive):

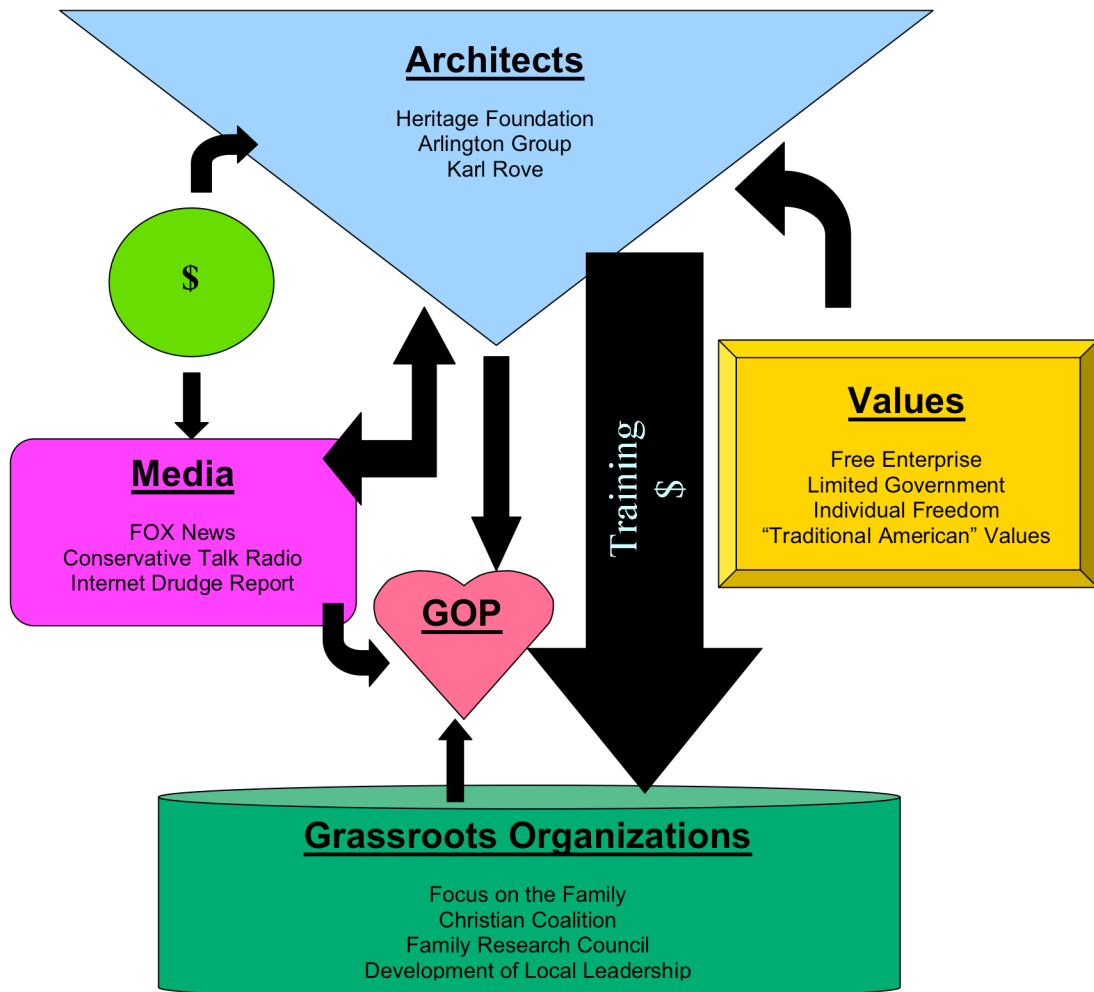


Figure 1- The Conservative Meta-Structure

While this diagram is only our personal understanding of the conservative meta-structure, we feel that it clearly illustrates some of the Right’s strategic accomplishments.

The meta-structure is fueled by both money and values-based ideas, as indicated by the orange “values” box and the green “money” circle. To cite Lakoff,

Conservative think tanks [have] been planning the details of a massive conservative takeover of the federal government and a corresponding cultural shift for years....Because of the way conservative think tanks are funded – through large general block grants and virtually guaranteed long-term funding – conservative intellectuals can work on long-term, high-level strategies that cover the whole spectrum of issues. (Lakoff 2002)

Lakoff is absolutely correct to point out importance of block grants to the overall functioning of the model, because it allows the “Architects” the freedom to develop complex long-term strategies. The “Architects,” the Right’s message generators such as the Heritage Foundation and the senior strategists like Karl Rove, serve as the backbone of the meta-structure. It is the Architects who oversee the distribution of monetary contributions from major donors and package the Right’s values into polished messages, trained activists, and training programs to be disseminated to grassroots leaders and media outlets. One of the key benefits of this meta-structure is its centralization – it constitutes a cradle-to-grave process in which key decision-makers are able to shape and control the Right’s resources and messages due to the availability of block grant funding.

The combination of these strategic funding benefits and the sense of a unified identity have provided a foundation from which the Right has been able to permeate our culture with its message. The Right’s message is everywhere, distributed at all levels of the meta-structure represented in Figure One. Each level of distribution reinforces the next. Talking points, churned out by groups like the Heritage Foundation, are espoused in churches and then echoed on conservative syndicated radio programs and on Fox News. Political materials, although not explicitly partisan, are distributed at local mega-churches. A BBC story from last September examining the intersection of religion and American politics described one example where, “...thousands of congregants sang soft-rock hymns to lyrics projected on huge TV screens at New Life Church, [during] a discussion entitled *Your Faith*,

*Your Vote.*” (Greene 2004) At the first Congregational Church in Colorado Springs, Pastor Ted Haggard frequently inserts his political message into his sermons, telling his 11,000 congregants, for example, that stem cell research is “no different from Hitler making lampshades out of skin.” (Ibid)

Through the meta-structure they have built, the Right’s messages, introduced by the Architects, repeated on Christian talk radio and television news, taken up by the GOP, and echoed once again by grassroots leaders, begin to appear justified and normal. Each phase of messaging reinforces the other phases. In this way, the Right is not only able to transform the media, but change the public’s notion of truth and reality. By taking full advantage of its masterfully orchestrated meta-structure, the Right has been able to dominate a large segment of the media, co-opt the notion of American “values,” envelope religion, and actively engage a grassroots constituency.

In the years during which the Right was incubating its grand strategy, progressive groups continued to work on an issue-by-issue basis, relying on funding sources that offered no promise of long-term and continuous support. Based on their need to justify their work to their financiers, progressives have been effectively prevented from investing in the development of a large-scale strategic infrastructure to match that of the Right. They never realized the need to compromise with each other, unify across issue lines, and build a cohesive progressive strategy. As a result, the plethora of progressive issues has continued to appear largely unrelated and, at times, conflicting. Even within the environmental movement itself, a sense of infighting and competition fragments and confuses our message. Our issue-specific strategy suited us well for several decades, but times have changed. Facing the formidable meta-foe of the Right’s messaging matrix, we can no longer hope to succeed in American politics if we remain fragmented, disparate, and unorganized. The modern Rightist movement has transformed the way that Americans think about issues like the environment, and our movement must evolve to adapt to these changes.

### *Lesson Two: Who’s Your Daddy?*

The Right’s meta-structure provides the matrix through which its values can be effectively disseminated. However, this structure did not develop on its own. Though there

may not be any single organization or individual responsible for crafting the Right’s meta-strategy, there have certainly been a series of high-level masterminds who have aided in its creation. We are calling these organizations and individuals that hold top-level positions in the Right’s hierarchical meta-structure the “Architects.” They are the Daddies of the whole ingenious endeavor. They are multi-million dollar foundations and financiers, like the Olin Foundation and Richard Scaife; think tanks, like the Heritage Foundation; and political strategy gurus, like Karl Rove. This is by no means an exhaustive list. We do not know who all of these groups are, nor do we know how tightly they control the meta-strategy, but we do know that they are aware of the meta-structure, they have deep faith that it will succeed, and they are willing to support it in addition to, *and perhaps even above and beyond*, the individual issues it represents.

To some extent, every major organization in the Right’s political family bows before the “Big Daddy” architects of its movement. Unfortunately, progressive leaders are only just beginning to conceive of a progressive meta-structure to answer that of the Right. For the most part, we have not even begun to identify (or agree on) who our “Daddies” are. If we ever hope to construct a meta-strategy that can offer an effective response to the one offered by the Right, we must begin to seek out an answer this question.

### *Lesson Three: You’ve Gotta Have Heart*

The Religious Right has successfully won the hearts and minds of its constituency and an important portion of the public. By recognizing the influence of “heart” in motivating people, the architects of the Right’s meta-strategy have built a constituency that is deeply committed to their cause and will fight passionately to promote it. Conservative leaders have recognized that most people are not motivated primarily by scientific facts, complex arguments, or even self-interest, but rather by emotional pleas, invocations of morality, and personal beliefs. So highly have they valued the powerful influence of heart-based appeals, that they have built their public face out of these principles. Values such as free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, “traditional American” social values, and a strong national defense, have become the unifying themes of the Right’s broader identity. By uniting themselves under these emotionally powerful principles, the Architects

have successfully grouped all of the Right’s issue-level postures under one values-based umbrella in the mind of the public. As a result, they have been able to identify their agenda with a certain lifestyle, an overarching morality, a clean package into which all of their issues are neatly wrapped. Under this morality tent, the conservative strategy lacks much of the sense of fragmentation that has plagued progressives, and the environmental movement in particular, for years.

To be more specific, the Religious Right has offered a set of principles that protects the “moral majority,” fights for strong “family values,” and promotes of a “culture of life.” Though the individual items on the Religious Right’s agenda are as disparate, if not more so, than those supported by progressives, they have convinced a large portion of the American public that their policies are all inextricably linked to the pursuit of a moral, religious, deeply American lifestyle. Anti-abortion activists, death penalty supporters, opponents of gay marriage, libertarians, school voucher supporters, welfare detractors, those who wish to drill for oil on public lands, and proponents of increased military spending are not seen as contradictory competitors, but as individual Rightists working towards the same cause. These issues have each been portrayed as the branches of a larger worldview, a larger meta-structural morality, which makes them appear complementary and united.

However, not all of the Right’s policy objectives fit easily into their stated values system. To deal with those irritating issues that are not neatly contained within their heart-based rhetoric, the Right has become expert in the Orwellian habit of framing them in values-laden language. This is where we get terms like “Clear Skies” for policies that actually diminish air quality standards and “No Child Left Behind” for a standardized testing regimen that decimates public education. The importance of issue framing has become particularly salient since the 2004 election. Though social psychologists, public relations specialists, and conservative campaign advisors have long recognized the power of framing, progressives have been slow in employing these types of strategies. The Right has taken advantage of this progressive failure. By inserting their rhetoric into the mainstream dialogue, they have unilaterally defined both positions, creating a set of surprisingly believable false choices on a wide range of issues. Examples of this are not hard to find. They include the transformation of abortion from a personal medical procedure to a choice of life or death; the conversion of the estate tax into a “death tax;” and the description of Republican attempts to lower taxes as “tax relief.” (Lakoff 2004) Though subtle, the act of

reframing can transform the way these policies are viewed by the public and transform the debate into one over values, matters of the heart, which cannot simply be disproved through reason or rational debate.

One spectacular illustration of this technique is in the linguistic usurpation of “family values” and “faith” by the Right. As former Secretary of State Madeline Albright noted during a recent visit to Yale, the Right has “stolen God and the family and patriotism.” (Albright 2005) Few progressive Americans would care to attack the notion that families need to be protected and nurtured as important building blocks within society, and given America’s role as one of the most religious nations in the industrialized world, it is doubtful that a majority would proffer to be against faith. However, as liberals grudgingly acknowledge, the Right has repeatedly beaten them to the punch in the race to define the paradigm through which political issues are debated. Progressives are quick to point out that they too support “family values” and “faith,” but they have already given up the opportunity to define the political meanings of these terms.

The Right has proven ingenious at defining the terms of political debate and couching issues in a language that touches the hearts of its supporters. When one considers how distant the conservatives’ policies often are from their rhetoric, their skills at verbal maneuvering are evident. The Right’s superficial arguments to speak in the interests of families, for example, are easily exposed. A critical observer would note that the Right’s supposed family values actually support a reduction in welfare support for poor children and single mothers, a stance that could easily force mothers to spend more time at work and away from their children, and drive them deeper into poverty. They assume positions of opposition to gay marriage, which has never been proven to have negative effects on children or families. (Benokraitis 2000; Robinson 2004) They support only a Christian or religious lifestyle, denying financial assistance to families who do not otherwise comply with their version of an acceptable lifestyle. Of course, the Right is not necessarily lying when it employs these values framing tactics. Rather, it has simply chosen to stress the heart-based *component* of its message, and in doing so, it has tapped into a far stronger source of motivation than objective fact alone could ever offer.

The Religious Right’s claim to represent people of “faith” is another demonstration of this tactic. While many progressive faith communities have expressed frustration and outrage at being unwillingly included in this category, the distinction has proven very

powerful. In the most recent attempt to connect themselves with religious Americans, Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist, recently made the bold claim that the attempts of Democrats to block a few highly conservative federal judicial nominees identified them clearly as being anti-faith. (Kirkpatrick) As described in a letter by Tony Perkins, President of FRC Action, “the legislative action arm of the Family Research Council,”

We now have a President who is committed to nominate judicial candidates who are not activists, but strict constructionists -- judges who will simply interpret the Constitution as it was written. We now have a majority in the U.S. Senate that will confirm these nominees. However, there is a radical minority that has launched an unprecedented filibuster against these outstanding men and women. Many of these nominees to the all-important appellate court level are being blocked, not because they haven't paid their taxes or because they have used drugs or because they have criminal records or for any other reason that would disqualify them from public service; rather, they are being blocked because they are people of faith and moral conviction... The Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist of Tennessee, is committed to returning Constitutional order to the Senate by requiring an up-or-down vote on these nominees. To do this, he urgently needs the help of every "values voter." (2005)

The claims that Democrats are interested in preventing people of faith from being court justices are inaccurate and malicious. In a recent debate at Yale’s Battell Chapel, Jim Wallis called Frist’s “Justice Sunday,” “one of the worst abuses of faith I have ever seen.” (Wallis 2005) Numerous individuals within the Republican Party and within the faith community have expressed outrage at this manipulative use of religion, yet the strategy was clear. Frist and the FRC were counting on the fact that, as over a million viewers braced for an attack on their faith, *their hearts would be opened* to the Right’s political message.

A final example of the Religious Right’s mastery of appealing to American hearts can be found in the recent debate over the life of Terri Schiavo, the Florida woman whose husband’s battle to remove her feeding tubes brought the phrase “persistent vegetative state” into the national vocabulary. Essentially a family dispute over the future of an individual medically identified as unresponsive and unthinking, the Right portrayed Schiavo as an alert, conscious, and appreciative woman, desperate for the protection of someone who could speak on her behalf. The ordeal quickly elevated to the level of national debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate, as conservative Christian members of Congress, bolstered by

their almighty claims of religious justification, refused to allow the judges deciding the case to have the last word.

The Religious Right has strategically played to the hearts of its supporters by framing pro-war positions as being pro-soldier, timber-friendly forest policies as plans for “Healthy Forests,” and anti-abortion activities as “pro-life.” Examples of this tactic abound, and it has given the Right a strong advantage over a progressive movement that still focuses on facts, information, and scientific objectivity. Progressives have long fallen victim to the illusion that as rational agents, the majority of the public will be powerfully swayed by academic arguments. This belief has been particularly disastrous to the environmental movement, as we have chosen to accentuate our scientific rationale over our equally present values-based motivation. By failing to address people on a level that motivates them, the progressives have proven strategically ineffectual, and they have developed a reputation for being elitist and overly intellectual, traits that have worked strongly against us in mainstream culture.

By publicly tying all of their positions to values and morality, the Architects of the Right have successfully built a passionate constituency – one that fights with tireless commitment to protect and promote its agenda. Their constituents are led to believe that by supporting the Right, they are doing “good;” they are living moral lives. As religious scholar Edward Gray told us, “People want to learn what it means to be both a good person as well as a just citizen.” (Gray 2005) As a result, the Right’s supporters are willing to stand outside of abortion clinics for countless hours every week, to attend public hearings on school textbooks, and to boycott businesses that do not align with their values – all motivated by a sense of moral duty.

By framing its policies in moral and values-based language, the Right has mobilized a passionate and committed group of supporters and activists for its cause. Though believing themselves to be acting morally as well, environmentalists have focused on providing scientific and nuanced information, which does not inspire people as effectively as personal, emotional, values-based appeals. Our movement cannot catch fire with reason alone – progressives have gotta learn how to have heart too.

*Lesson Four: Hold the Presses!*

One of the Religious Right’s most powerful strategies has been their command of the media. Employing an extremely well organized, multi-pronged approach, the conservatives have successfully shifted the overall media dialogue to the Right. By propagating a vast myth that the American mainstream media is liberally biased, the Right has been able to fuel an unfounded demand for more “balanced” (conservative) coverage, while simultaneously supplying the desperate networks with inaccurate and ideologically-inspired facts to support its agenda. This powerful one-two punch, paired with a simultaneous effort to deregulate the Federal Communications Commission, has elevated the influence of the Right in the public arena and allowed network presentations of “the news” to become conservative soapboxes.

The first step in the Right’s media infiltration was its ruthless promotion of the liberal media bias myth. This idea has been so well disseminated over the past thirty years that it is now more or less accepted as fact by a majority of Americans, including about half of all Democrats. (Brock 2004) Despite having never been proven, this charge has allowed the Right to exert incredible pressure on the media to be more “fair and balanced,” forcing them to pair pundits from the extreme Right with more moderate opponents, often journalists, who were assumed to represent the liberal stance based on their inherent “liberal bias.” By consistently repeating and invoking the liberal media myth, the Right reinforced its message and created an artificial informational void that it was eager and prepared to fill with its own talking points. This is the avenue through which the conservatives have been able to incorporate a sizable swath of the mainstream media into their meta-structure.

With the sudden need to offer the Right a larger share of airtime in the name of balance, the media was quick to accept prepackaged news stories in support of the conservative point of view. The conservative media machine was ready, prepared with a supply of these prepackaged facts, manufactured and legitimized by conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation. By presenting these unabashedly conservative perspectives as fair counterparts to those seeking to be objective, the mainstream media has traded its pursuit of accuracy for “balance,” misinforming the public and unintentionally skewing their reporting to the Right. (Brock 2004)

Furthermore, the Right’s think tanks play an important role in supplying the media with facts and background material to support its agenda. Receiving funding from traditional GOP donors, such as major corporate interests, think tanks have helped the Right build an empire on a foundation of biased information. The meta-structure ties all of these pieces together, offering funding, creating the demand and pressure for conservative information, feeding the networks with think tank derived “facts” that support their conservative cause, and providing well-groomed spokespeople to deliver their message.

Repetition is another key element in the conservative messaging strategy. According to Lakoff,

It has long been right wing strategy to repeat over and over phrases that invoke their frames and define issues their way. Such repetition makes their language normal, everyday language and their frames normal, everyday ways to think about issues. (Lakoff 2004)

Utilizing the meta-structure, the Right coordinates its messaging such that radio talk shows, studies produced by the Heritage Foundation, political speeches, and church sermons all use the same vocabulary to talk about the same set of issues. Even Stephen Carter recognizes the power of the strategy of repetition. As he writes,

There is among traditionalist Christians what is sometimes called the ‘electronic church,’ self-described Christian radio stations that carry much of the same syndicated programming; a good deal of it political (if not specifically electoral) in nature, so that even Protestants who are unchurched, or who attend services at a mainline denomination, may, if they so choose, listen to the message all day long. Some estimates place the daily listener-ship in the tens of millions. (Carter 2000)

By the time these same words come out of the mouths of television news reporters, they seem to be well supported, widely acknowledged, and objective.

Probably the most infamous example of a news network presenting persistent conservative messaging is found in the Fox News Network. Roger Ailes, who was hired by Rupert Murdoch to run the Fox News Channel, intentionally set out to blur the distinction between news, entertainment, and opinion. One of his primary advisors, Chet Collier, was known for advocating “looks over experience” in hiring practices and for operating on the

principle that “people don’t want to be informed; they only want the illusion of being informed.” (Brock 2004)

In addition to the propagation of the liberal bias myth, one of the most significant changes to occur in American electoral politics over the past twenty years has come through media deregulation, a strategy promoted by the Right and critical to furthering their cause. In particular, the Reagan Administration’s repeal of the “Fairness Doctrine,” has changed the face of network and cable television, allowing conservative voices to dominate the airwaves and causing a rightward shift in broadcast journalism. Before its repeal, the Fairness Doctrine mandated that contrasting opinions got equal time on the airwaves, and it was accompanied by a set of regulations adopted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1949 to maximize “the public interest and to encourage a diversity of voices so as to promote a vibrant democracy.” Its aim was to ensure that the press upheld a certain level of integrity and accuracy. Although Nixon was known for bullying the FCC, the Right wasn’t able to crush the Fairness Doctrine until well into the Reagan Administration.

The chief engineer of Reagan’s media deregulation agenda was Mark Fowler, head of the FCC. Funded by the communications, tobacco, and beer industries, his successful 1987 regulatory repeals won him a reputation as “perhaps the most successful Reagan appointee,” according to Fox’s Rupert Murdoch. One of the outcomes of de-regulation was the explosion of right-wing radio, allowing hosts to “misrepresent, distort, and lie without challenge or rebuttal.” (Brock 2004) These radio programs often do not attempt to represent current events accurately, but rather in a manner that supports the political ends of their hosts.

In addition to the end of the Fairness Doctrine, media deregulation created a whole suite of other problems for smaller radio and independent television stations across the country. In an effort to raise their ratings and stay in business, stations were forced to carve out niche markets, bringing in divisive hosts and broadcasting stories that were attention grabbing and controversial, rather than educational and informative. Somewhere along the way, journalism became an entertainment business rather than an informative service for the public. As the bottom line shifted from seeking out the truth to generating ratings and revenue, the news stopped being about the facts and started being about action, drama, and

controversy. This development fit nicely into the Right’s meta-structural strategy. As Lakoff describes,

Over a period of forty years, the radical right and its rich patrons had invested many hundreds of millions of dollars in think tanks, young talent, spokespeople, and communications capacity that had essentially transformed the language of American politics. And when you control the language, you control the message, and the corporate media does the rest. (Lakoff 2004)

Examples of this phenomenon abound. Take a look at Rush Limbaugh, who, incidentally, provides a whopping 22% of Americans with their primary source of news. (Brock 2004) Notice the rising influence of Fox News. Work being done to expose this strategy includes David Brock’s *Republican Noise Machine*, written from his point of view as a former Republican insider during the media takeover, and Robert Greenwald’s popular documentary, “Outfoxed,” specifically focusing on Fox News and Rupert Murdoch’s “war on journalism.” According to a recent Wall Street Journal article,

Conservatives established their first beachhead in the early 1990s with talk radio. Then FOX conquered cable news and finally a virtual Mongol horde of conservative-to-libertarian bloggers swept across the Internet. (Henninger 2005)

The progressive movement has found no way to stand up to the powerful media strategies just described. The closest thing to Fox News that environmentalists and other progressives have to offer is Jon Stewart’s *Daily Show* – a late-night, left-slanted spoof on traditional network news. Maintaining a large viewership in the American public, the Daily Show (which airs four nights a week on Comedy Central) was actually honored with one of this year’s prestigious Peabody Awards for broadcast journalism for its coverage of the 2004 election. Although we applaud the efforts of the *Daily Show* to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the Bush Administration, progressives need to realize that this is not enough to combat the cradle-to-grave Right-wing messaging and media strategy.

*Lesson Five: Praise the Lord*

The effects of invoking religion in the service of a social cause are uniquely powerful and have become very popular as a result. As Wallis describes, “Movements do change history, and the strongest ones are those with a spiritual foundation.” (Wallis 2005) Or in the words of Yale Law Professor Stephen Carter, “Most Americans want to talk about God...Everybody who wants to change America, and everybody who wants not to, understands the nation’s love affair with God’s name, which is why everybody invokes it.” (Carter 2000)

The religious argument has been invoked throughout American history, both for and against slavery, in favor of prohibition, as fuel for the labor movement, and as justification for women’s suffrage. The most frequently cited use of religion to promote social change has been the influential work of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his faith-based arguments for Civil Rights in America. As constitutional historian and author Michael Kramnick remarked in our recent interview, “Of course he [King] could have...given chapter and verse of Gandhi, but he was no fool...and he recognized...that citing Christian text would be more useful...” (Kramnick 2005) Writer Bill McKibben echoed this idea in another interview, recognizing King’s brilliant choice to use religious rather than theological language.

The great genius of Martin Luther King, in the civil rights movement, [was that] he was, obviously, an accomplished theologian. I mean, he’d been through B.U., he’d done his thesis on Tillich...*But* when he talked about civil rights, he was talking about Exodus. *That’s* why it was important and without that, it would have lacked its power. (McKibben 2005)

The potency of the religious argument is clear, and the Bush administration has become expert at using it, making “The Right” nearly entirely synonymous to “The Religious Right.” However, when viewed critically, many of the policies for which the Right now stand, have little resemblance to what is described in the Bible. As evangelical minister and founder of Sojourners, Jim Wallis, writes, “How did the faith of Jesus come to be known as pro-rich, pro-war, and only pro-American?” (Wallis 2005)

Part of the answer to this question surely resides in the demographic breakdown of the Right. According to research reported in *The Diminishing Divide*, a book published in 2000 by the Brookings Institution,

...the political impact of faith and religious commitment is more potent among white evangelical Protestants, who now represent 24 percent of registered voters (up from 19 percent in 1987) and who have been overwhelmingly loyal to the Republican Party...the conservatism of white evangelical Protestants is the most powerful religious force in politics today. (Kohut, Green et al. 2000)

Though it is not purely the fact that they are evangelical that has led to this trend, (evidence shows that, “For nearly all the major religious traditions, committed members are more likely to describe themselves as conservative.” (Kohut, Green et al. 2000)), *Divide* argues that,

It is the combination of strong conservative opinion and high salience – a strong sense that social, sexual, and cultural issues are important in comparison with other issues – that makes committed evangelicals a powerful political force in the realm of social, sexual, and cultural policy. (Kohut, Green et al. 2000)

Many members of the Right have been convinced by its religious arm that the morality of our nation depends on the proper control of American social, sexual, and cultural policy. Furthermore, many conservatives have been led to believe that secularists are trying to convert their children to atheism through public education and the entertainment industry, thereby corrupting America, which in their minds, was founded as a Christian nation. If members of the Right truly believe that America is facing significant moral threats from the unreligious, it makes sense that they align politically with a group they trust to protect their morality. As suspected, polls reveal a general consensus that “Republicans are...better able to promote morality” than Democrats. (Kohut, Green et al. 2000) By fostering this impression, the Right offers something that its constituency wants, securing its popularity with conservative evangelicals and self-identified values voters. As writer Bill McKibben noted in our interview,

The sort of obvious overwhelming trend in my lifetime has been the shift from a kind of progressive, religious outlook about the world manifested in the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement, to a conservative, to some degree fundamentalist, and in other ways just sort of straight ahead conservative take on the world, manifested in the strong link between the Republican party and the Christian community. (McKibben 2005)

The focus placed on social, sexual, and cultural issues by the Right has been solidified by a variety of influential leaders. Popular televangelists, radio talk show hosts, and in-pew personalities have spread and strengthened the notion that these issues lie at the center of Christianity. The success of prioritizing these issues in the name of religion can be closely linked with the success of political institutions that seek to respond to them.

But if the connections between religion, morality, and conservative politics are really just constructs of smart politicians and preachers, then why haven't progressive and environmental groups been as successful at invoking them? Many critics suggest that we have simply been afraid to do so. George Lakoff offers a different answer to this question by arguing that the reasons for resonance between fundamentalist Christians and conservative politics lie deep in the moral frameworks through which they see the world. According to Lakoff, the apparent link between the teachings of the Bible and conservative politics lies in an overarching moral structure based on the metaphor of the nation as a family. Though fundamentalists claim to interpret the Bible literally, Lakoff stresses that, “There is no such thing as a literal interpretation of the Bible...family-based morality *precedes* morality based on religion...”(Lakoff 2002) When people believe in a different functioning metaphor, he argues, their interpretation of the Bible changes. If they believe that families and nations should nurture their members, they will interpret a more progressive message in the Bible, thus creating an opening for progressive groups to use the religious argument as effectively as the Religious Right.

Unfortunately, progressives, including environmentalists, have been somewhat hesitant to identify with faith communities at all. While the Right ties its large-scale identity to notions of Biblical literalism, the progressives shy away from religion out of fear of abusing it or threatening democracy. Using religion in the wrong way could encourage bad theology, as argued by Jim Wallis. It could corrupt democracy by overwhelming reason, as Thomas Jefferson feared. It could also corrupt religion by infusing it with inappropriately

worldly matters, as Stephen Carter has argued. This debate is complex and long-standing in this country and will be discussed at greater length later in this article. For now it will suffice to say that progressives are right to recognize the potential dangers to Democracy of using the religious argument; however, we must find a way to welcome the participation of faith communities in our work, while still preserving the delicate balance of church and state. To quote Jim Wallis,

The Democrats should be much more willing to use moral and religious language in defense of economic fairness and justice. But they shouldn't make the same mistake the Republicans have made in trying to co-opt religious leaders and communities for their political agenda. (Wallis 2005)

#### *Lesson Six: Sleep Around*

They say that politics makes strange bedfellows, but the Right has recognized the importance of identifying *many* bedfellows. By remaining larger than any single issue, and stressing its large-scale identity, the Right has enhanced its ability to forge strategic alliances. As described in William Martin's history of the Religious Right, *With God on Our Side*, the movement has long adopted a strategy of “cobelligerency,” “aligning themselves with people who might differ with them theologically or on certain key issues, but who were willing to fight on the same side in pursuit of specific goals.” In the words of evangelical theologian and philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, “Listen, God used pagans to do his work in the Old Testament, so why don't you use pagans to do your work now?” (Martin 1996)

The Religious Right has fostered ties with a tremendous variety of interest groups including big business, the oil and mineral extraction industries, libertarians, the NRA, home schoolers, military hawks, and highly committed members of non-Christian religions. Like the community of scholars, activists, and citizens that comprise the environmental movement, the Right is not a homogeneous group of people. Unlike the environmental community's recent and prolonged history of infighting over donor support and message creation, the Christian Right has been able to overcome this hurdle over time.

The strange alliances that the Right has built have been nurtured very carefully and strategically. A prime example of this effort lies in the Arlington Group, a small, quasi-secretive group of very powerful people within the Right, who convene monthly at an undisclosed location in Washington DC. (They have been named after their initial meeting place, a condominium complex in Arlington, Virginia – just across the Key Bridge from Georgetown.) According to their website,

The Arlington Group has adopted the coalition style of operations, which was pioneered by the Free Congress Foundation more than thirty years ago. There is no formal structure. The Meeting is by invitation only. Participants must represent something larger than themselves. The Chairman, with the assistance of the fulltime staff, sets the agenda. But any member can have a matter considered by the group. The meetings are not secret but they are off the record. (Weyrich 2004)

The Arlington Group exists to iron out differences within the Right’s political coalition and to strike deals in house (and often behind closed doors) in order to charge forward with a unified public persona and a set of agreed-upon talking points. Although there will never be universal agreement within any political coalition, the Right has mastered the art of uniting for a larger cause.

In addition to the formal work of the Arlington Group, the Right has been impressively successful at satisfying conservatives of all breeds, despite its religious moniker. In *Onward Christian Soldiers*, Wilcox divides right-leaning Americans into three categories, identifying them as either “social conservatives,” “economic conservatives,” or “values conservatives.” (Wilcox 2000) Social conservatives are conservative on issues such as gay rights, abortion, and women’s roles in the family. Economic conservatives, he, says, are “generally moderate on all issues except economics, where they favor deep cuts in social welfare spending, cuts in taxes, and efforts to balance the budget.” Values conservatives “take conservative positions on basic values and support a moment of silence on school prayer, but are otherwise moderate to liberal on social, economic, foreign policy and defense, and race issues.” Though on the surface, religiously inspired policy might only seem to relate to social conservatives and values conservatives, the modern Right has brilliantly

managed to incorporate all of them, whether or not they are in agreement across the board. (Wilcox 2000)

According to Kramnick, this relatively new partnership between the culturally conservative agenda of the Religious Right and the conservative economic agenda of the Republican Party is precisely the thing that has allowed them to secure so much power in modern politics. In our interview he said,

I would argue, as a historian of politics, [that] what is unique [about the modern Religious Right] is the coming together of religion and laissez-faire politics...Presided over by William Simon, Regan's Secretary of the Treasury...That's all fairly recent, the alliance between religious politics and laissez faire liberal politics... They feed on each other, and that's the basis of the incredible strength of religion now in America. It wouldn't have gotten there without the alliance, without the Christian Right's alliance with what we call conservative economic views... When you listen to...Pat Robertson's 700 Club, he's just as likely to talk about tax relief and 'government off our back' as he is to talk about spiritual values. *That's* what made possible the legitimization of their turning into politics. (Kramnick 2005)

Bill McKibben shares similar sentiments. In our interview he explained,

The kind of marriage of convenience between corporate Republican and social conservative has been a very powerful one, and each side has agreed to overlook things about the other. The fact that all of the sort of corporate republicans think that the Baptists are a bunch of, you know, lunatic hicks, and the fact that the Baptists, who in fact aren't lunatic hicks, are willing to overlook the fact that advanced consumer society has proven the ideal spawning ground for every kind of subversion of the gospel message. Each side willing to overlook those things, they've been able to forge a very powerful force. That somehow...Jesus can be used as the sort of front man for a program of like tax cuts for the rich, is one of the most insane and unlikely developments that one can imagine, but it's been spectacularly effective, and partly its been spectacularly effective because no one calls them on it... so I think that explains to my satisfaction why the right has come where it has. (McKibben 2005)

The alliances built by the Right have allowed it to garner support from across the social spectrum, making it a very powerful political force. The Right's willingness to

overlook areas of disagreement and seek out areas of concordance could serve as a model for an environmental movement plagued with division and isolation.

*Lesson Seven: All Politics is Local*

While maintaining a large-scale national identity, the Religious Right has adopted a powerful strategy of building a local presence for itself one school board at a time. It works at a variety of different levels, seeking to keep its policies relevant to local people, while remaining deeply linked with the larger, national movement. This gives the Right the ability to appear to be everything to everyone, and to win support from the bottom up. As described in Clyde Wilcox’s *Onward Christian Soldiers?*,

Although the Christian Right movements of the 1920s, 1950s, and 1980s all sought to influence public policy, the contemporary Christian Right is a far more sophisticated movement that pursues a variety of strategies to achieve a variety of goals. The Christian Right seeks to influence Republican nominations and to influence or control the party apparatus, to help the Republicans control the White House and Congress, to achieve legislative victories in Congress and state legislatures, to influence decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court, to win control of school boards in order to influence school curricula, and to win referenda in states and counties to implement parts of its agenda. Movement leaders are very ambitious, and their multi-front initiative is clearly the most sweeping in the history of American Christian conservatism. (Wilcox 2000)

This strategy is very important, encouraging grassroots involvement in local issues, and thus building a committed constituency that transfers up to its national level campaigns.

It has taken years to build this structure. According to a 1992 New York Times report, the process began, “After the 1988 Presidential primary campaign of the television evangelist Pat Robertson, [when] his organization turned its focus from fielding Presidential candidates to creating the underpinnings of a nationwide political machine.” (Mydans 1992) According to Ralph Reed, cofounder of the Christian Coalition, the strategy was initiated as a conscious effort to redirect the movement. Reed was quoted in the Times article, saying, “We tried to change Washington when we should have been focusing on the states... The

real battles of concern to Christians are in the neighborhoods, school boards, city councils and state legislatures.”

The foresight of the Religious Right in adopting this kind of strategy has paid off. Not only did it foster new local leadership, but the meta-structural funding machines helped provide training programs and resources to propel their candidates to victory in these smaller campaigns. As explained by Morton Blackwell, Republican organizer in the Goldwater era, the Religious Right recognized early on that,

If you can identify some segment of the population which is not active and can be activated, or some segment that is miscast in their current party affiliation and can be switched over to your side, you're going to change things dramatically... We set about quite systematically to identify leaders, to teach them how to become effective, how to organize, how to communicate, how to raise funds, how to use direct mail technology – skills that would make them more effective. (Martin 1996)

Ralph Reed used similar techniques with the Christian Coalition, adding new chapters across the country following a “cookbook-style” approach, which focused on recruiting and training aspiring, local leaders. By activating local citizens who have not been previously mobilized for political action, the Religious Right has had remarkable success at gaining control of local school boards, local and state governments, and all three branches of the federal government – all while growing a membership of over 2 million Americans.

The Religious Right's approach to developing candidates, however, has not always been completely transparent. The Right became somewhat infamous, after the 1990 conservative takeover of San Diego County government, for its cultivation and support of “stealth candidates.” This tactic became legendary when a series of newly elected, local officials were discovered to have covertly hidden their strong ties to the Christian Coalition during their campaigns. As reported in *With God on Our Side*, in the 1990 San Diego County elections, “candidates associated with the Religious Right won sixty-eight races to capture a wide range of positions in local government, including school boards, hospital boards, and city councils... So stunning was this accomplishment that supporters, critics, and professional observers of the Religious Right began speaking of ‘the San Diego Model,’ as

something likely to be replicated all over America.” (Martin 1996) As The San Francisco Chronicle noted,

Throughout California, Christian Right leaders and their liberal watchdogs are talking about the "San Diego model," a 1990 campaign strategy that ran a secretive slate of about 90 candidates for school boards, city councils, even irrigation districts. Sixty of those candidates were elected, many of whom played down their religious agenda, shunned established "candidate night" forums and focused their campaigns on registering members of fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches and making sure that they voted. "They hid their agenda and took advantage of voter apathy and the anti-incumbency mood," said Kathy Frasca, a founder of the Mainstream Voter Project in San Diego, a watchdog group organized in response to the new campaign. "They have taken over most of the Republican Central Committees in California." (Lattin 1992)

Though no longer expressly supported by leaders of the Religious Right, this strategy was apparently very consciously applied at one time, allowing the Christian Coalition candidates to win a number of victories upon which they have built their current domination. As Ralph Reed boasted in 1994, "I do guerilla warfare. I paint my face and travel at night. You don't know it's over until election night." (Wilcox 2000)

By focusing on winning local victories while maintaining their meta-structure priorities, the Right has, over years, succeeded in placing an army of conservative activists in positions of power – both within the party establishment and at various levels of government.

### *Lesson Eight: Capture the Flag*

Another puzzling trick the Right has played on the Left has been their ability to link their rhetoric with patriotism, while identifying environmentalists and other progressives as anti-American extremists. The connection between a love of America and religiously conservative political views is an illusion, and yet it is an image that has been widely accepted by the American public. How has this happened? Well, as McKibben speculates, it is at

least partially the responsibility of the progressives themselves for giving the flag away. As he argues,

Partly its because the rest of us have abandoned that political space without much of a fight, just in the same way that people on the left were willing to give up the flag as a symbol. I mean, I grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts...[in] my boyhood, in the summer, I earned my money giving tours of the battle green, wearing my tri-horn hat. It never occurred to me that there was anything odd about being both politically radical and a patriot. In fact, it seemed almost synonymous in my mind. That’s certainly the way they were in Lexington two hundred years ago. (McKibben 2005)

However, the Right has also been very conscious in identifying itself with American pride. Part of it undoubtedly comes back to the idea that America is at heart a Christian country, a “city on a hill,” and thus, that it stands for the same Christian values claimed by the Religious Right. As reported in *Onward Christian Soldiers?*, “researchers have found that many children and adults alike agree with statements such as ‘America is God’s chosen people today,’ ‘I consider holidays like the Fourth of July religious as well as patriotic,’ and ‘We should respect the president’s authority since his authority is from God.’” (Wilcox 2000) This sense of America as representing the will of God has a long history in this country. It explains the inclusion of the disputed phrase “under God” in the pledge of allegiance, the statement “In God We Trust” on our currency, and the longstanding effort to include a statement about the Christianity of the nation as an amendment to the Constitution.

The Right has been quick to promote this perception, integrating it ubiquitously into its messaging. According to historian Kenneth Wald, conservatives have “stressed that God’s blessing on the United States is contingent on the country’s adherence to biblical morality.” (Wald 2003) This idea has seen an upsurge in the last several years; for example, such arguments were clearly articulated in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. As Wald describes,

The [September 11<sup>th</sup>] attacks produced a spontaneous outburst of religious language invoking the blessings of God on the American people. From packed churches to the ubiquitous ‘God Bless America’ slogans, the sense of religious legitimation was palpable...A few voices also raised the question of divine judgment on the United

States. In the most arresting such comment, the Reverends Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson represented the attacks as God’s show of anger against an America guilty of ‘throwing God out of the public square.’ More specifically, Falwell asserted, ‘the abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], People for the American Way – all of them who have tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say, ‘You helped this happen.’ (Wald 2003)

This pattern continues in the mission statements of a number of the organizations tied to the Right. The motto of the Moral Majority claimed that it was, “Pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, pro-American.” (Martin 1996) The Christian Coalition claims to be, “America’s leading grassroots organization defending our Godly heritage... re-emphasizing the spiritual foundations that have made Christian Coalition and, indeed, the United States of America, so successful...and leading American citizens in a prayer of thanksgiving to the One who has brought us this far...” (Christian Coalition Website 2005) The conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, boasts, “We draw solutions to contemporary problems from the ideas, principles and traditions that make America great.” (Heritage Foundation Website 2005) And the web-based organization, RightMarch.com, formed in 2003 “to lead the ‘Virtual March from the Right’,” underscores their name with the motto “patriotism in action.” (Rightmarch.com Website 2005) American flag bumper stickers on car fenders, “Support our troops and President Bush” decals, and the common appearance of phrases like “God Bless the USA” to support conservative causes, only further represent the cooption by the Right of American patriotism.

However, this connection between religion and politics is neither founded in the US Constitution, nor in the Bible. Scholars of Constitutional history point out that our nation’s founding document was very consciously written as a “Godless” text and carefully crafted by strict separationists, much to the frustration of a number of prominent American colonists. In fact, the president of Yale College, Reverend Timothy Dwight, gave a Fourth of July speech in 1798 in which he asked, whether

“religious people [should] support ‘the philosophers, the atheists, and the deists’ like Jefferson?” (Kramnick and Moore 1997)

Nor is America’s divine status found in Christian texts. As Jim Wallis argues, “‘God bless America’ is found nowhere in the Bible...God is not partisan; God is not a Republican or a Democrat.” (Wallis 2005) The clever trick the Right has played, in adopting the language and symbolism of patriotism, and the foolishness progressives have displayed, in allowing them to do so, have combined to give the Right a significant advantage in American political debate. Capturing the flag and aligning their cause with patriotism was an absolutely brilliant tactical move on the part of the conservative right and one that progressives must recognize and immediately begin to address.

#### *Lesson Nine: Be Who You’re Talking To*

We’re all familiar with the old adage “know your audience,” but few movements have *become* their audience as successfully as the Right. With deft adaptability, the Right has produced candidates that look and talk like the people to whom they are reaching out. This strategy has been so well developed that it has allowed the Right to perform some impressive tricks, such as turning a privileged, Ivy-league-educated, New Englander into a straight-talkin’, average Joe Texan.

The Right learned long ago that people do not like to be spoken down to or lectured. They don’t like big, confusing words or leaders who employ a vocabulary they don’t understand. They don’t like to feel stupid or ignorant. People don’t like to be intimidated or patronized. Rather, they like to feel respected. They like to feel included. They like to be inspired. They like to feel like they are understood. It all seems relatively obvious, a lesson that most people learned on the playground in grade school, but the Right figured out how to effectively apply it to their electoral politics.

The Right consciously chose this communications strategy, and their candidates have long been taught how to use it. As explained by Christian Activist Michael Farris,

Evangelical Christians need to find ways to communicate effectively with different people. They can't just interact among themselves. Many are learning that as they interact in the Republican party, not everyone understands or accepts the lingo that evangelicals use when talking to each other...I've got to understand the other person if I want to be persuasive. Understanding that person means respecting the other person if I want to be persuasive. I've got to get around other people's mental roadblocks. That means respecting where that person is coming from. That's the way that evangelical Christians can be more effective. It's a growing up thing. That is, being able to disagree with others but still be respectful of their values. That's the trick. (Wilcox 2000)

A classic story of this phenomenon at work can be told in the story of Karl Rove's shaping of George W. Bush for his first presidential campaign. As Bush admitted in 1989, "You know, I could run for governor but I'm basically a media creation. I've never done anything. I've worked for my dad. I worked in the oil business. But that's not the kind of profile you have to have to get elected to public office." (Hatfield 2002) There is substantial evidence that Rove created the George W. Bush in order to fit the mold of an ideal candidate; crafting him to fit the emerging specifications of the Right. (Mealey and Shoob 2004)

The Right has learned to *be* who it's talking to. It has taken the time to familiarize itself with the people it hopes to reach, to understand their worldviews, and speak their languages. As described by Wilcox,

...the Christian Right has encouraged its activists and candidates to couch their arguments differently for religious and nonreligious audiences. Activists are told to 'mainstream the message' by avoiding explicitly religious language in public speeches and by emphasizing positions on taxes, crime, abortion, and gay rights. (Wilcox 2000)

In this way, the Right has learned how to talk economics to businessmen, religion to evangelicals, and patriotism to rural America, and they are rarely accused of putting on a show. They do not *pretend* to be all these things; somehow, they actually are. The Right has overcome this communications problem with flying colors and, in the process, has convinced a large number of Americans to believe in their policies.

*Lesson Ten: There's No Need to Fear, Underdog is Here!*

One of the interesting tactics we've observed from studying the strategies of the Right is its keen utilization of the American tendency to root for the underdog. Although polling data and conventional wisdom support the idea that undecided voters tend to break for candidates or issues which poll higher on the *eve* of elections (everyone wants to be on the winning side), the same does not hold with regard to determining base support. Rather, it appears that certain key base voters often prefer to support the candidate marketed as the underdog (think New Hampshire primaries). Knowing this, the Right has become keen on presenting itself as the victim. According to Wilcox,

...many Christian Right activists and candidates have adopted the language of victimization. Although conservatives have long decried efforts by African Americans, women, and gays and lesbians to portray themselves as victims of discrimination, Christian conservatives now use this same language. (Wilcox 2000)

Examples of this strategy are easy to find. For instance, in the mission statement of the Family Research Council (FRC), perhaps the most well known right-wing organization dealing with “family values” issues, reads, “Defending family, faith, and freedom.” (Family Research Council Website 2005) It follows that if family, faith, and freedom must be defended, then they must be under attack, and it is strongly implied that the Left not only constitutes the primary threat, but that it has the power and intention to overwhelm the Rightist minority.

By portraying itself as being under attack and in danger of losing its voice, the Right has been liberated to present and garner support for arguments that otherwise might not sit well with the American public. As Washington Post reporter E.J. Dionne wrote,

As long as the Religious Right is a movement of people saying, ‘Hey, religious America deserves attention. We shouldn’t be ignored. We shouldn’t be made fun of,’ then it can be very strong. But as soon as it moves to making the stronger claim that ‘God’s policies should be national policies,’ an awful lot of people, including religious people say, ‘No, that’s not how I look at the political process. (Martin 1996)

Even now, when, as Karl Rove described in a 2005 address to the Conservative Political Action Conference, “Republicans and conservatives control the White House, the Senate, the House, the majority of governorships and more state legislative seats than they’ve had in the last 80 years,” there are still right-wing supporters making the claim that there is a systematic liberal bias in federal court decisions and that “liberal activist judges” threaten to destroy their way of life. Up against a force they claim to be far more powerful than them, the Right presents itself as battling the odds for survival – a classic case of using the Underdog tactic. (Rove 2005) The Right is currently using this strategy to mount an aggressive campaign to pack America’s federal courts with like-minded conservative judges, such as Idaho lawyer William Myers III. Myers, who is a federal nominee for the Ninth Circuit, has compared federal environmental regulations to the tyranny of King George III over the American colonies. (IndependentJudiciary.com 2005)

As described in *With God on Our Side*, “Although Christian Right leaders use different rhetorical appeals to different groups, they frequently argue that theirs is a defensive movement – one designed to protect their moral values and especially their ability to impart those values to their children.” (Wilcox 2000) By playing the underdog, even when it exercises extreme control, the Right has learned that it can win the support of the American people, who, above all, seem to want nothing more than a fair fight. In their current unfavorable position, clearly entering politics as *true* underdogs, it would do the progressives a lot of good to begin pointing this out. Otherwise, we may have a great deal to fear indeed.

### ***Part Two: You Can’t Teach a Good Dog Bad Tricks***

Learning the ten strategic lessons described above could help make the environmental movement as successful at reshaping American society as the Right has been. However, there are some strategies here that, though effective, may actually be destructive to democracy and highly unethical. It is not our hope to turn the environmental movement into a new version of the Religious Right, and therefore we would like to spend a little time discussing those tactics that we cannot bring ourselves to employ.

*Playing God*

The Right has been very smart about using the religious argument to sell their policies to the American people. As discussed above, they have linked modern political debates with the Biblical truths they claim govern moral behavior. However, we offer this lesson to progressives with caution. While we believe it will be necessary for progressives to open our arms to those communities of faith that share our values, we wish to warn against using religious rhetoric to the detriment of American democracy. Once again, the Religious Right can serve as an example; however this time, it is not one we wish to emulate. We believe that in bonding itself to the Republican Party, the Religious Right has hurt democracy, breeding exclusivity, intolerance, and a rejection of reason.

The differences between using religion reasonably, to inform and assess opinions on policy options, and using religion unethically, toward direct political ends, are only obvious at the extremes. For example, recent attempts by Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist, to misrepresent the attempts of Democrats to block a few highly conservative judicial nominees as being anti-faith, fits easily into the unethical category. (Kirkpatrick and Hulse 2005) However, as with many difficult distinctions, the line gets fuzzy in the middle. So when is it acceptable to bring religion into the public dialogue?

We would be foolish to try to answer this question flippantly. Since the Constitution was written (and even as it was drafted), legal scholars have debated the proper role of religion in American politics. Ostensibly a nation dedicated to preserving the separation of church and state, it is difficult to assess what the Founding Fathers of our country had in mind, regarding the role of religion in public life. However, it seems clear that in framing the Constitution, the founders were very conscious about leaving all mention of God and Christianity out of the document. It was designed to be a Godless document, mentioning religion in only two places, Article 6 and the First Amendment. All of the ensuing debates over the proper role of religion in America have been based on these two statements: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States,” and “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” (Kramnick and Moore 1997) From these meager definitions, vastly different interpretations have been spawned, and these statements give us

very little clarity in how the founders intended us to regulate the role of religion in public debate.

Looking into the arguments that were being made at the time the Constitution was written, we find a little more direction. The decision to create a separation of church and state in America was based on two notions: the idea that involvement of the church in politics would lead to the corruption of the state, and the idea that it would be destructive for the church. Today, these same concerns apply.

Coming down on the side of protecting the state, John Locke, whose words were highly influential on the shaping of our government, once said, “I affirm that the magistrate’s power extends not to the establishing of any articles of faith, or form of worship, by the force of his laws.” (Kramnick and Moore 1997) Thomas Jefferson, who was particularly influenced by Locke, had similar concerns, writing in his “Reply to the Danbury Baptist Association,” on January 1, 1802,

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative power of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between church and State. (Segers and Jelen 1998)

And in his “Notes on the State of Virginia,” he wrote the famous lines,

The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither breaks my leg, nor picks my pocket. (Segers and Jelen 1998)

James Madison shared similar views, writing in his 1784 “A Memorial and Remonstrance on the Religious Rights of Man,” “The religion, then, of every man, must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate.” (Segers and Jelen 1998) The primary concerns of these two important founders rested in the ill effects religion could have on the *State*, if it was brought into direct contact with politics.

Supporting the idea of separation for the good of religion, stood a variety of ministers and religious individuals, who argued that when religion becomes tied to mundane and worldly matters like those governed by the state, the “prophetic” role of religion would be lost. In Jefferson’s time, this view was voiced by John Leland, a Baptist minister who argued for separation under the rationale, “God did not need Congress. He had authorized no man or society or government to carry out business for Him.” (Kramnick and Moore 1997) Today, this view is still voiced by many, including Yale Law Professor, Stephen Carter, and Baptist Minister, Jim Wallis. As Carter wrote in his book, *God’s Name in Vain*,

More than likely, for too many people with causes to push and desires to fulfill, the name of God will collapse into a mere rhetorical device...If history has taught us anything it is that religions that fall too deeply in love with the art of politics lose their souls – very fast.” (Carter 2000)

Sharing these concerns, Wallis argues that when religion gets tied to a single political party, it loses its true prophetic role, “to speak truth to power.” In fact, Wallis argues along with Carter that it is in precisely this prophetic role that religion *should* be an essential part of the public dialogue. As Wallis writes,

The separation of church and state does not require banishing moral and religious values from the public square. In fact, America’s social fabric depends on such values and vision to shape our politics – a dependence the founders recognized. It is indeed possible (and necessary) to express one’s faith and convictions about public policy while still respecting the pluralism of American democracy. (Wallis 2005)

Carter echoes similar thoughts, writing, “...a politics without religion is empty of religion is empty of meaning.” (Carter 2000)

A democracy that lacks the moral force of religious understanding is likely to be a democracy without purpose, in which politicians promise to allow citizens simply to satisfy their own wants, whether for money, power, or sex, with little regard for the needs of others; in which the measure of success in war is how small a sacrifice the nation’s citizens are called upon to make, as the enemies dead, including civilians, pile up, un-mourned, at least by Americans – they

are, after all, merely the enemy; in which the worst off are allowed to languish and die in their segregated urban prisons, while the elite live in safe high-rises and safer suburbs. (Carter 2000)

In fact, it does make sense that, in their attempts to make moral decisions and support moral policies, people will turn to their faith for guidance. While religion need not be the only source of moral wisdom, it is certain to remain an important one. Furthermore, religion has made important contributions in this country, as religious rationale has been invoked for everything from the extension of moral standing to minority groups and women, to poverty reduction and environmental protection. Religion does have an important role to play in the public arena, but it must be invoked with extreme care.

The Right has not been careful enough. By becoming the foot-soldiers of a particular political party, suggesting that in order to be a good Christian, one must also be a voting Republican and share conservative views on issues like defense spending, we believe the Religious Right has hurt democracy. Wallis agrees, saying,

The Religious Right went wrong by forgetting its religious and moral roots and going for political power; the Civil Rights movement was proven right in operating out of its spiritual strength and letting its political influence flow from its moral influence. (Wallis 2005)

That said, progressives *must* begin to reach out to those faith communities that share our values. By failing to adequately do so in the past, we have neglected an important voice in our democracy, and forced many potential supporters to look to more faith-friendly groups like those affiliated with the Right. As Wallis half-joked on his recent speaking tour, “It’s easier to come out as gay in Boston, than religious in the Democratic Party.” (Wallis 2005) Bill McKibben echoes this concern. In his mind, in order to truly represent the will of the people, democracy depends on participation by members of all different groups, including the religious community. He said,

...none of us has sworn a sort of oath to the constitution. Our job as citizens is to express democratically our own view of the world, you know...I think progressive religious people are generally worried about making other people feel bad, somehow, by talking about religion...They neglect all the sort of power that’s possible there. (McKibben 2005)

The importance of preserving religion’s role as a moral measuring stick for political policy has led Carter, Wallis, McKibben, Kramnick, and many others to encourage us not to ignore the influence of religion in the public sphere. Though these thinkers don’t all agree politically or on matters of faith, the theme of their comments is clear. Religion can play an important role in American politics, but it walks a dangerously fine line. Though we can no longer neglect the religious voice out of fear of being unethical or un-American, we must be very careful not to involve it to the extent that it is destructive to both democracy and religion itself.

### *What’s News?*

The strategies that have been utilized by the Right to gain influence over the media are, without a doubt, ethically questionable. Although there are certainly lessons that the environmental movement can garner from the media and messaging techniques carried out by the Right, there are potential moral hazards that need to be addressed and carefully considered. What ethical questions does the progressive community need to ask before borrowing media tactics from the Right? What obligation does the movement have to the First Amendment rights of the public, to a free and unabridged press?

Democracy rests on the assumption that American citizens will make rational, informed choices in their leaders and representatives. As Brock writes,

Democracy depends on an informed citizenry. The conscious effort by the right wing to misinform the American citizenry – to collapse the distinction between journalism and propaganda – is thus an assault on democracy itself. (Brock 2004)

The media tactics of the Right appear to consciously mislead the public. While publicly declaring themselves fair and balanced, many conservative-slanted news and radio networks admit that they do not seek out truth at all, once the doors are closed. Rather, they are fully aware that the public assumes them to be offering up truth and unbiased fact, and they are simultaneously aware of how biased the facts they present actually are. Debates and

discussions by pundits associated with the Right use the strategy of repetition and exposure to make lies and other inventions of the imagination take on the air of objective fact. One obvious example of this strategy was exposed after the 2004 Vice Presidential debate, when Vice President Dick Cheney voiced numerous “lies and half-truths,” which would later be refuted. Though the inaccuracy of his claims was demonstrated by numerous news sources, the damage had already been done. The Right counted on the fact that more people would hear the lie than would hear the correction.

The conscious misleading of American voters by the Right is damaging to democracy and it is also highly unethical. Presenting propaganda and calling it fact is dangerous and irresponsible. It acknowledges that the truth would lead voters to make a different choice than that desired by the Right, and thus, it knowingly cheats the democratic system. As Brock writes,

...unchecked right-wing media power means that in the United States today, no issue can be honestly debated and no election can be fairly decided. If California voters recall their governor in the belief that the state budget deficit is four times higher than it actually is, if Americans think Saddam Hussein was behind September 11 before hearing any evidence, if 19 percent of the public thinks it is in the top 1 percent tax bracket, if Americans view criticism of the government’s national security policies as tantamount to treason – thank the right-wing media and those who abet it. (Brock 2004)

The focus on preventing news sources from presenting accurate information, falsely accusing the media of left-leaning bias, and pressuring the media into shifting right, are all behaviors that, though effective, we do not believe we can stomach. Rather, from this lesson, we hope environmentalists and other progressives will learn to expose the dangerous tactics of the Right and focus on returning the media to a position of fair and accurate reporting. In Lakoff’s words,

Reporters have an obligation to notice when they are being taken for a ride and they should refuse to go along. It is a duty of reporters not to accept this situation and simply use those right-wing frames that have come to seem natural. And it is the special duty of reporters to study framing and to learn to see through politically motivated frames, even if they have come to be accepted at everyday and commonplace. (Lakoff 2004)

Though we must be aware of this strategy, we must not give in to using it.

*Part Three: If You Build It, They Will Come*

Though we do not wish to morph the environmental movement into one exactly mirroring the Religious Right, there is a lot we can learn from the Right’s strategies. In fact, there is a surprising degree of structural similarity between the Religious Right, as it appeared fifteen years ago, and the environmental movement, as it appears today. It was with stunning irony that we realized, for example, that after the election of Bill Clinton, it was the *conservative* punditry who were declaring that the Christian Coalition was effectively dead. Then came Newt Gingrich, the “Contract with America,” and the ’94 congressional sweeps. Now, the environmental movement is at its own crossroads; it has the unique potential to position itself as a progressive alternative to the Religious Right – a powerful moral and guiding voice within the progressive community. By merging with other members of the progressive family, on issues that supercede traditional interest group boundaries, the environmental movement can help strengthen its own campaigns, while furthering the overall progressive agenda. Important issues like public education, health care, and social security, coupled with emerging issues like climate change and environmental justice, are interconnected, and they demand that we work together – across traditional interest group lines. As Ted Nordhaus told us, “You need to create a kind of coherent, values-based politics that knows that you can’t take this thing called environmentalism, separate it out, and build a compelling movement.” (Nordhaus 2005)

In addition to combining our efforts on a wide array of issues in order to construct an overall progressive narrative, we should also consider how to begin describing our ideas in terms of “values.” Though we do not claim to have solidified a list of values under which our new, united movement can move forward, we hope this paper will inspire the leaders of the progressive movement to begin defining its ideals in terms of morals, values, and ethics. In conjunction with our construction of an organizational meta-structure, we believe that a heartfelt and values-based environmentalism, taken beyond its technical policy jargon, could become a critical component of this effort. An environmentalism built on heart *will* appeal

to the morality of the American public, just as the Religious Right has so skillfully appealed to the morality of its constituents. It is our duty to show that the shared values of environmentalism and other progressive causes are not only as American as those touted by the Right, but that the future of our country, and even our world, requires that we adopt them. If the environmental movement ever wants to claim its well-deserved place within American politics as a first-tier issue, it will have to identify a set of core values for which it stands and situate itself under this umbrella alongside those progressive groups that share them. Environmental groups will have to show people how to *live* in a multi-dimensional world. Our values will cross outside traditional “environmental” boundaries, and we will find ourselves aligned with other progressive groups. As Ted Nordhaus told us, in the end, an environmentalism that does not bleed across traditional lines to influence other aspects of people’s lives will be “an environmentalism without meaning.”(Nordhaus 2005) Rather, the environmental movement should be ready to dissolve the lines and embrace its unique vantage as both a moral compass and a fierce watchdog of greed and excess.

The suggestion that environmentalists must begin to integrate themselves into a larger progressive movement is not always accepted without challenge. Many environmentalists fear that by linking ourselves with a grand progressive cause and more general progressive values, we place ourselves in danger of destroying the very fragile alliances we have begun to build with a number of economic conservatives and traditional Republicans. They worry that the future of the movement will rely on the strengthening and maintenance of these connections, rather than identification with a unified progressive goals, and that we cannot afford to alienate these allies in the name of other social and economic disagreements. While this is absolutely a possibility worthy of careful consideration, we have two responses that we believe support our recommendations.

First, in keeping with the aim of this work, we believe it can be enlightening to take a look back at the strategies of the Right. As outlined in a previous section of this paper, the Right has been able to both identify itself under a general set of “conservative values,” while maintaining powerful alliances with constituent groups that do not share all of these values. In fact, in the case of the Right, their commitment to their values has apparently done a great deal to make them even more powerful in forging these alliances, despite the disagreements their values may very well spawn. In this way, the Right can serve as a model of a group that

has used the umbrella of conservative values to unify rather than alienate a large spectrum of divergent interest groups.

Second, like the authors of “The Death of Environmentalism,” we very strongly believe that the current challenge facing humans on this planet requires deeper, more comprehensive solutions than past environmental problems ever have. In this new struggle, we believe we are forced to offer Americans a new way to live in the world, a lifestyle guided by a set of ethics that extend beyond the environment. Many of the values that lay at the foundation of environmental stances also prescribe a set of social and economic stances. For example, the same set of ethical duties that inspire environmental work - responsibilities to be nurturing toward other creatures, to consider the long-term effects of human actions, and to ground our actions in a scientifically-derived understanding of the world - should relate to debates over welfare, education, and military spending, as well. To promote socially and environmentally sustainable lifestyles that stand on equal footing with those now presented by the Right, we will have to identify a larger worldview with which our recommended actions align. We believe that effective and just solutions to such large-scale problems as climate change will depend on the identification of a comprehensive set of values that apply equally to all aspects of life.

So how do we begin to do this? How can we learn the lessons of the Religious Right without compromising our own ideals? The solution is twofold: **first, we must begin to speak our hearts, and second, we must begin to construct a meta-structure of cohesive political institutions to spread our message.**

### *Speaking our Heart*

One of the most ironic things about the environmental movement has been its inability to inspire the American public. Experience shows that we capture the hearts of the citizenry best when we talk about things like preserving a relatively inconsequential, yet particularly cute, type of rare mammal, but we lose them when we talk about more critical but abstract issues like climate change. This is a recurring complaint in the current debate over the future of environmentalism, and it deserves some discussion here. The Left in general, and the environmental movement in particular, must learn to frame our issues in a way that captures the hearts of the public – a lesson that Tom Delay and his cohorts in the

Religious Right have mastered over the last decade. This is a lesson that our forbearer Martin Luther King, Jr. understood, effectively inserting it into the civil rights dialog, but one that has since been lost or conceded to our opponents.

According to former Sierra Club President Adam Werbach, while the Right was building an empire on values, “we told no common story about our past and created no progressive image of our future.” (Werbach 2004) The authors of the “Death of Environmentalism” made this same point – sparking a debate that has been sweeping through the environmental community since the November elections. We agree with this underlying notion that the conservatives, through the Religious Right, have understood something that the environmental movement and the progressives have missed – the absolute importance of *inspiring* people. It figured out how to speak to their hearts, not just with obvious faith-based issues like abortion, but also with essentially unrelated issues like taxes and defense spending. We have learned (the hard way) that we simply cannot go up against a seemingly heartfelt moral argument with an intellectually nuanced technical response on the floor of the House and expect to win the debate or inspire the public sentiment in our favor. We need to recognize the Right’s tactics and speak our hearts as well. According to Nordhaus and Shellenberger,

Few environmental leaders ask whether their legislative proposals will provide them with the muscle we need to win in a political environment that is dominated by apocalyptically fundamentalist right-wingers at the beck and call of polluting industries... Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the 1990s is that, in the end, the environmental community had still not come up with an inspiring vision, much less a legislative proposal, that a majority of Americans could get excited about... If environmentalists hope to become more than a special interest we must start framing our proposals around core American values. We must start seeing our own values as central to what motivates and guides our politics. (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2004)

We could not agree more with this appraisal. In order to become more successful, the environmental movement needs to offer a compelling vision for the future, rather than a laundry list of fears. We must inspire people to act and then equip them with the tools and the training to effectively spread our message. We must craft an overarching values structure narrative. This is, perhaps, the most important lesson to take away from the Religious Right,

but as we recognized in our analysis, this strategy alone is not enough. We must also engineer a meta-structure to help us get our message out to the American public.

*The Progressive Matrix*

While the religiosity<sup>4</sup> of Americans hasn't drastically changed over the past thirty years, the Right has become incredibly effective at wielding its niche powers for specific political ends by operating through the conservative meta-structure. (Putnam 2000) We can learn a lot from this model. To put it bluntly, the environmental movement, like the rest of the progressive family, is made up of a rather haphazard group of people and ideas, offering little in terms of a unified message or theme. We have no central clearinghouse to which candidates or NGOs can go for impeccably researched, systemically integrated, and well-tested talking points on a particular issue. There is no single entity that provides well-paid jobs or comprehensive training for progressive grassroots activists – for, say, the local group trying to launch an anti-sprawl campaign or win a county commission seat.<sup>5</sup> We provide no readily available set of experts groomed for television appearances – instead, we have scientists that use complex language and activists that look nothing like the audience watching the 6 o'clock news. Until this last Presidential election, there was no organizational entity responsible for coordinating the activities between groups working on the same issues – let alone across progressive interest groups as a whole.<sup>6</sup> In essence, we have a lot of catching up to do.

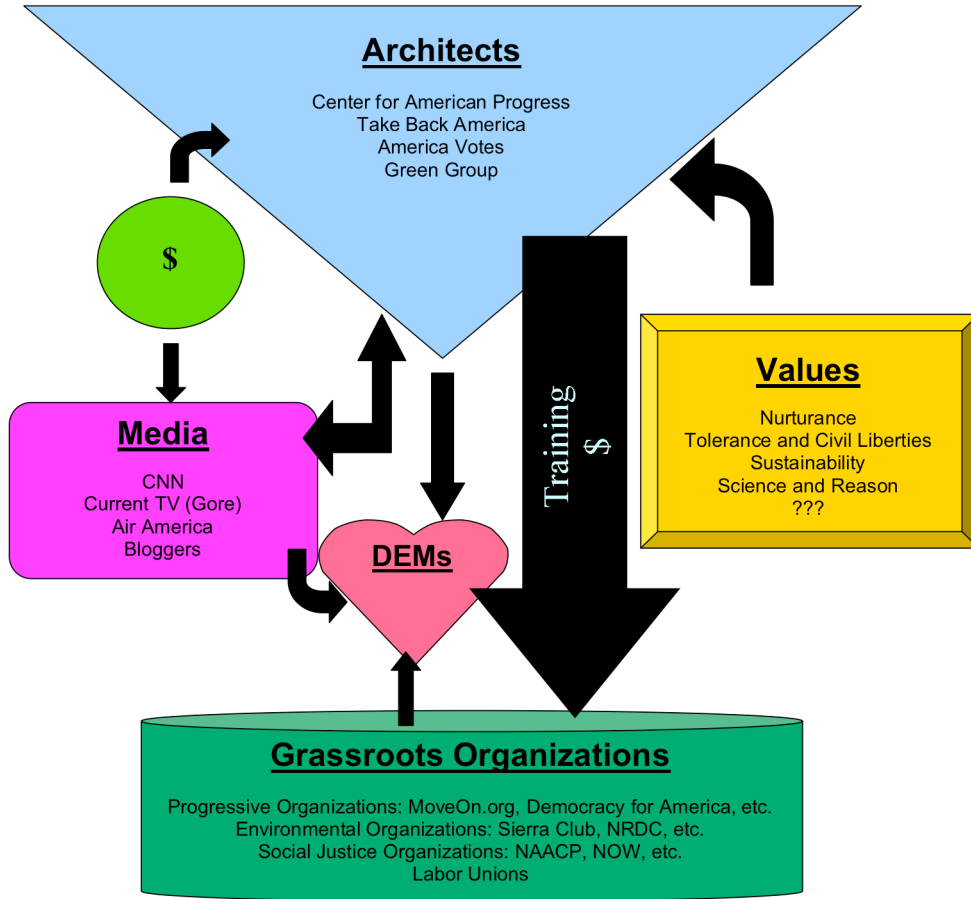
As a rough first step, we encourage the progressives to adopt a similar meta-structural model to that used by the Right.

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<sup>4</sup> By “religiosity,” we simply mean level of religious participation.

<sup>5</sup> Our closest equivalents are selective training programs like Green Corps or 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democrats, but these groups are geared towards bright young graduates coming out of elite colleges, who have the luxury of earning \$20,000 a year salaries, because they don't have kids to feed.

<sup>6</sup> This changed in 2004, with the mobilization of groups through the “America Votes” organization, which brought together over 30 progressive organizations to coordinate election activities.



**Figure 2: Proposal for a Progressive Meta-Structure**

Our research indicates that such a progressive model is currently under construction, though it is still in an infantile stage of development. Some indications of its foundation are listed below.

*Signs of Hope*

An earthquake is starting to rattle the progressive landscape. Both leaders and activists have begun to recognize how deeply we need a meta-structure of our own, and there are rumblings throughout the movement of how we should begin to build one. Although we have a lot of catching up to do, it shouldn't take us as long to set up our meta-

structure as it took the conservatives, because the Right has provided us with a pretty good roadmap.

In fact, it should hearten us to realize that a few “Architect”-level organizations are already beginning to form, setting the early groundwork of a future progressive meta-structure. In the “Center for American Progress,” we have the beginnings of a counterweight to the Right’s almighty Heritage Foundation. In the run-up to the 2004 election, a new collaborative group called “America Votes” brought a variety of different progressive groups to the same table for the first time in history – labor, women, gun control, and the environment were just some of the constituencies represented and sharing the same voter file. The Green Group may be the environmental equivalent of the Right’s Arlington Group, and the Take Back America conference seeks to bring together progressive leaders from across the country to develop shared goals and a shared vocabulary and to unify American progressives.

Progressives have started to recognize the Right’s dominating force in the American media, and we are beginning to form our own answers to FOX News and Rush Limbaugh. In August, Al Gore’s new hipster television network, Current TV, will begin broadcasting to a youthful 18-30 year-old demographic with claims that it will set about “rethinking the way TV is produced, programmed, and presented.” (Current TV Website, 2005) A watchdog organization called FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting)<sup>7</sup>, has been fighting for reinstatement of the media regulations lost under Reagan, and it continues its push to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine. Air America Radio<sup>8</sup> has offered progressives their first talk radio network, in response to the Right’s popular and influential conservative counterparts. Blogging is transforming journalism on the Left and the Right, maybe even democratizing it – thus diffusing corporate influence in media programming.

There is increasing recognition that many religious communities share our progressive values, and that they too must be welcomed into our movement. Numerous progressive religious groups are beginning to stand up and raise their voices above the dogmatic chorus coming from the Right. The National Religious Partnership for the

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.fair.org/index.php>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.airamericaradio.com>

Environment (NRPE)<sup>9</sup> brings together the Evangelical Environmental Network<sup>10</sup>, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life<sup>11</sup>, the United States Catholic Conference<sup>12</sup>, and the National Council of Churches of Christ<sup>13</sup> to work on environmental issues. Jim Wallis has started Sojourners<sup>14</sup>, a progressive Christian organization seeking to explore the links between faith, politics and culture. Calvin DeWitt has founded the Au Sable Institute<sup>15</sup> to provide university level training in “creation care.”

We have begun to develop new ways to reach out to our grassroots leaders, while linking this work to our emerging meta-structure. MoveOn.org<sup>16</sup>, headed by an ingenious 24 year-old, has begun to encourage “individuals, who normally have little political power, to aggregate their contributions with others to gain a greater voice in the political process.”<sup>17</sup> Howard Dean and his 2004 primary campaign of nationwide meet-ups reawakened our base from their 30-year slumber, while earning unprecedented financial support through small, online donations. In addition, in 2004, progressive groups operating through the America Votes<sup>18</sup> coalition began to offer the kind of grassroots training the Right has long provided for its activists, recognizing the importance of building a base of qualified, local-level leaders who can remain permanently connected to our emerging meta-structure.

However, much more can be done. We need to consciously begin identifying a core set of values for which progressives stand, and we must construct a narrative through which to express them. While we suggest that this may include such values as nurturance, tolerance, effective government, respect for science and reason, civil liberties, and social responsibility, we encourage the formation of an inclusive working group to refine this list

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nrpe.org>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.creationcare.org>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.coejl.org>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp/index.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nccecojustice.org>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sojo.net>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ausable.org>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.moveon.org>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.moveonpac.org/whoweare.html#statement>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.americavotes.org>

and better define these terms. At the same time, we must begin aligning our various progressive, issue-based organizations under a united language of values; working together on cross-fertile issues like climate change. We must seek to spread a unified identity, built on heart and bolstered by science. This will demand development of greater tolerance and, at times, difficult compromise, but it is absolutely crucial.

We must continue to fight for true fairness and accuracy in the media, and to offer alternatives to what seems to be a conservative domination of large segments of the American airwaves. We must financially support the re-regulation of the nation’s communications infrastructure. We must continue to build relationships with the faith communities who share our values. We must enhance our grassroots training efforts and use our meta-structure to support and retain local leadership. We must appeal to patriotism, we must present ourselves as the underdog, we must know our audience, and we must become who we’re talking to. By learning from the lessons of the Right, we can build upon their strategic strengths while maintaining our moral high ground. This is not just something we should do; it is something we *must* do if we hope to give progressive values equal influence in America’s intensifying culture war.

### *Conclusions*

The environmental movement is emerging from one of its most significant losses in American history. With two branches of government in the hands of the Right, and one more on its way, it is time for the progressives to reassess where we went wrong. How has the environment become so marginalized as an issue, when so many Americans claim to care about its protection? How has the Religious Right been able to co-opt faith, values, and morality?

This paper has attempted to answer these questions. Although we are well aware that we do not have all the answers, we do believe that this paper presents some very useful observations. The Right has gained the power it now wields by working for the last several decades to undertake a set of unprecedented, creative, and carefully developed strategies to turn their minority movement into a political powerhouse. The success of these strategies has become painfully apparent to all of the progressive groups who have seen their values

trampled by a President who crafts dangerous policies under the auspices of a moral mandate. It is time to fight back.

The Right has spent the last several decades building the groundwork for the cultural overthrow we are now experiencing. It is unlikely, at this point, that we will be able to prevent many of our immediate, issue-specific battles from being lost, and this is precisely why we must start working at the meta-structure level. Real progress will begin when we fully recognize the importance of maintaining a meta-structure strategy, when we successfully unite under a set of common progressive values, and when we speak our hearts. Though the Right has been ingenious at pulling together a lot of loose ends and tying them into a single, unified identity, there are still fringes of disagreement at its edges. The same will be true of progressives. Nonetheless, we must begin to acknowledge the absolute centrality of the Right’s overarching meta-strategy in its successes, and we must begin learning the lessons the Right has to teach us about heart, if we hope to save the soul of our movement.

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