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The Women Feminism Forgot: Rural and Working-Class White Women in the Era of Trump

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

THE WOMEN FEMINISM FORGOT:
RURAL AND WORKING-CLASS WHITE WOMEN
IN THE ERA OF TRUMP

Lisa R. Pruitt*

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In October, 2016—just a few weeks before the election—news broke of a 2005 video of Donald Trump bragging about grabbing women “by the pussy.”¹ I had not viewed Trump’s candidacy as particularly strong up to that point, but I was sure this video would be the final nail in the coffin of his run for the American presidency. What self-respecting woman would vote for a man who admitted not just to objectifying women, but to assaulting them? Further, Trump’s bragging about inappropriate interactions from his own mouth only enhanced the credibility of allegations many women had already made public against him.² Donald Trump was nevertheless elected president. Exit polls showed that 52% of white women voted for Donald Trump, and 41% of all women did so.³

* * *

On March 8, 2018, the guerrilla feminism account on Instagram posted this message: “happy international women’s day except to the 53% of white women who voted for trump.”⁴

* * *

When I initially received the kind invitation to deliver this keynote at the University of Toledo College of Law, the organizers prompted me to give a talk on the theme of intersectionality. I immediately thought about rural women because rural populations, broadly speaking, are the folks to whom I’ve devoted the lion’s share of my scholarly energy for more than a decade. But I also thought about women in the white working class, the other demographic cluster about which I’ve been writing since 2011.⁵ I’ll come back to that latter group momentarily, but let me ponder rural women specifically for a bit.


⁴. Screenshot on file with author.

Regarding rural women, I thought about how spatiality and other features of geography intersect with gender to create and aggravate issues like domestic violence\(^6\) and abortion access,\(^7\) and how they influence the ways in which legal actors assess parental fitness.\(^8\) I recalled Judith Baer’s imperative that we must attend to women’s situation more than we attend to their character—that we need more “situation jurisprudence” and less “character jurisprudence.”\(^9\) So, for this talk-cum-article, I would focus on how the rural socio-spatial lawscape constrains and shapes rural women’s opportunities and choices, how it renders them economically and physically vulnerable, how the entrenched form of patriarchy that tends to characterize rurality limits their options\(^10\) and—too often, I fear—squelches their dreams.

But wait, I thought. Been there, done that. I’ve done it in half a dozen articles and more book chapters in the past decade, publications that did address the plight of rural women, what Baer calls their “situation.” Here is a summarizing quote from my 2007 article, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the Rural*:

The vulnerability and hardship with which rural women live have been discounted as the state has taken away their children and faulted them for their acts of self-preservation. The fundamental right to abortion has been denied to many of them as restrictions on that right have been upheld as inconsequential, even as evidence has shown how heavily the restrictions weigh upon them. To the extent the law has recognized the difficulty inherent in their situations, it has often blamed the women for their circumstances.

Judges … may not understand that rural women generally have less economic, social, cultural, and political power than both urban residents and rural men. They may not understand that spatial isolation and lack of anonymity limit these women.\(^11\)

It is now abundantly clear that not only do many judges not understand these aspects of rural women’s lives, neither do most urban dwellers. Neither do political pundits, least of all those on the left. Neither do most national politicians, for that matter. I continued:

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Rural women do not play on the same field as urban women. We understand that laws do not operate in a social or cultural vacuum. Just as we have become sensitive to place and culture on an international level, we must recognize its variance domestically. We must become sensitive to rurality, which we can only begin to do by acknowledging its very existence, by first seeing it.12

In spite of insistent, plentiful, and—if I do say so myself—eloquent advocacy, few other feminist scholars have picked up on the rural, at least among those in the legal academy.13

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, however, rural women have gone from being overlooked to being ridiculed and disdained. Rural women—like rural and white working-class folks more generally—have become downright toxic in my world, the world of progressive elites, the realm of lefty chattering classes, those Thomas Piketty has called the “Brahmin left.”14 I often see rural and working-class whites ridiculed on my Twitter feed.15 The very worst is assumed of them, all painted with the broad brush of ignorance and—far more damning—racism.16

While rural folks and working-class white folks are not synonymous, they do overlap dramatically in the national imaginary,17 and also somewhat in reality.18 That is, many rural women are working-class whites and some working-class

12. Id. at 485 (citations omitted). See also generally Shannon Bell & Richard York, Community Economic Identity: The Coal Industry and Ideology Construction in West Virginia, 75 RURAL SOC. 111 (2010) (discussing cultural icons that exploit the hegemonic masculinity of West Virginia).

13. See infra notes 43-54 and accompanying text.


16. See infra Part VII. See also Adam Kirk Edgerton, Commentary, What’s Wrong with Being from the South? Just Ask an Academic from the North, CHRON. HIGHER ED. (June 22, 2018), https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-s-Wrong-With-Being-From/243510 (discussing the presumption among northern academics that all southerners are racist).


whites live in rural places. I generally refer to rural and working-class whites interchangeably in the discussion that follows, with no particular effort to distinguish the two except where a distinction seems helpful or significant. Some of what I say applies to both groups, to that part of the Venn diagram where they overlap. Some is salient to only one of these populations.

The primary aim of this article is to begin to theorize gendered aspects of the current chasm between progressive elites on one hand and rural and working-class whites on the other. I also want to offer some thoughts that cultivate empathy with the aim of tempering elite derision toward these populations. Further, I hope to lay the ground work for answering the question whether “Big feminism failed [these] women, big time.” Perhaps most importantly, I begin to think practically about what we progressive feminists will have to do to bridge this divide and, in so doing, cultivate a broad, inclusive sisterhood that better transcends spatial, racial, and socioeconomic differences.

Of course, I am in delicate territory here because I am writing not only about class (which is quite delicate enough), I am writing about race. Specifically, I am writing about whiteness. Given that all race is relational, I am thus implicitly writing about all races and ethnicities. It is therefore necessary to attempt clarification of a few matters at the outset. First, I am in no way asserting that we are living in a post-racial world. I am not endorsing colorblindness. I am, however, suggesting we are going to need to listen empathically and respectfully to people who embrace colorblindness, to those who see themselves as colorblind and who see that colorblindness as virtuous.

19. I have written many pages in prior work defining “rural,” mostly with references to so-called ecological definitions. See, e.g., Pruitt, Gender, Geography and Rural Justice, supra note 10, at 344; Lisa R. Pruitt, Spatial Inequality as Constitutional Infirmity: Equal Protection, Child Poverty and Place, 71 MONT. L. REV. 1, 9 (2010); Lisa R. Pruitt, Rural Rhetoric, 39 CONN. L. REV. 159, 179-84 (2006). Some 19% of our nation’s residents live in “rural” places as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau defines urban areas as encompassing “at least 2,500 people, at least 1,500 of which reside outside institutional group quarters.” The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as “all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area” (i.e., fewer than 2,500 residents). See 2010 Census Urban Area FAQs, UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU, https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/uafaq.html (last visited May 14, 2018).

In this article, however, I am referring to rurality not in relation to any of myriad quantitative frames that governments use but rather as a source of identity. Some people in small cities would consider themselves “rural,” perhaps because they do not live in major metropolitan areas and/or perhaps because they recently migrated to the city or the city has sprawled to encompass what was once rural. Those in the latter category may be viewed as cultural carriers of what some consider “rural” values. They may see themselves as rural. On this phenomenon and a general blurring of the line between rural and urban, see Daniel T. Lichter & James P. Ziliak, The Rural-Urban Interface: New Patterns of Spatial Interdependence and Inequality in America, 672 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 6, 12-14 (2017).

I believe that an enormous share of the animus directed at Barack Obama as president was racially motivated, though not always consciously.21 I believe that many elites (e.g., politicians, Donald Trump and others who pushed the birther movement) who resisted Obama’s authority in a way no other president has ever experienced were galled at having a Black president. I believe their response was aggravated by the fact Obama was such an extraordinarily dignified individual and exemplary family man. As such, many wanted to see him fail, and they worked tirelessly—and sometimes unethically—to make that happen.22 They may have opposed his political agenda and even been jealous of him as an individual,23 but the resentment that festered from that opposition and jealousy turned malignant among some because Obama is Black. As Ta-Nehisi Coates has opined, in the eyes of many, the only thing worse than bad Black government is good Black government.24

Yet many in the white working class did vote for Obama,25 and we should give them credit for doing so.26 Many of those same white working-class voters then supported Trump in 2016.27 Instead of writing these voters off as incorrigible


22. As just one example, consider Mitch McConnell’s denial of even hearings on Obama’s nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, Merrick Garland.


24. Robin Young & Ta-Nehisi Coates, Ta-Nehisi Coates Looks Back at 8 Years of Writing in the Obama Era, WBUR (Sept. 28, 2017), http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/09/28/ta-nehisi-coates-eight-years-in-power. Coates was speaking about his new book, WE WERE EIGHT YEARS IN POWER: AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY (2017), and said, comparing post-bellum South Carolina government to the Obama administration: “[T]he only thing white South Carolina feared more than bad negro government was good negro government. That in fact the accomplishments were actually the problem, because the accomplishments—the presentation of black people as normal in their sort of bourgeois, every day, easily integratable manner into America—actually was an attack on whiteness and white supremacy in and of itself.” Id.

25. See infra notes 26-29 and accompanying text. See also Alec MacGillis, Revenge of the Forgotten Class, PROPUBLICA (Nov. 10, 2016), https://www.propublica.org/article/revenge-of-the-forgotten-class/ (interviewing one such voter) [hereinafter MacGillis, Revenge].

26. I must acknowledge here the joke from the 2017 film “Get Out,” in which a white character told his daughter’s Black boyfriend that he had voted for Obama twice—and would have voted for him a third time given the opportunity—as if this proved the white man was not a racist. I realize that a voting for Obama does not prove one is not a racist, but then I am problematizing the word “racist” in the sense of calling attention to the many differing definitions and understandings we have of the word. See infra Part VII.

racists—which is what I tend to see in the academy and in much mainstream media—we should want to know how they came to choose such wildly different candidates just four years apart.28 We can do this without pandering to them, without over-correcting the Democrats’ relative neglect of them in 2016.29

* * *

This article proceeds by outlining evidence of our nation’s burgeoning metro-centricity and our ongoing denial of and inattention to issues of class. I offer these observations with special attention to the context of the legal academy and legal scholarship. In Part II, I discuss how this neglect of white working-class and rural populations evolved into disdain during the election of 2016 and has hardened into contempt in the wake of Trump’s election. In Part III, I provide a brief overview of economic and public health trends among these increasingly vulnerable populations, with a particular focus on what has been happening to rural and working-class white women since I began writing about them more than a decade ago. Part IV summarizes what we know about the female vote in election 2016, with some attention to gendered voting patterns in the special election for the Alabama senate seat in 2017. In Part V, I dig into media profiles of female Trump voters, which reveal some themes I have addressed in prior work, including the under-studied tension among various strata within what is broadly perceived as a monolithic white working class. Before concluding with thoughts on how to bridge the divide between elites and the white working class, I use a personal story (à la Hillbilly Elegy) in an effort to humanize female Trump voters. I then offer a postscript that draws on the successful West Virginia teachers’ strike of 2018 as a model for coalition building.

I. FORGOTTEN, INVISIBLE, HIDDEN

A. Rural Americans

Rural people and places have been (and largely remain) awfully easy to overlook as we rush pell-mell through the second decade of a highly urban-centric 21st century. Ditto the white working class, who are sometimes referred to as the white “middle class”30 and who seem to draw media attention primarily during election season.31 The chattering classes’ widespread obliviousness to rural

28. Some have speculated that the common denominator was change—both Obama and Trump represented change, talked about change. Both were relative outsiders.


America is referred to in book and article titles like *Hidden America*[^32] and *The Forgotten Fifth*.[^33]

The media have increasingly recognized this neglect. The *Washington Post*, for example, reported in late 2016 on Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack’s “lonely fight for a ‘forgotten’ rural America,”[^34] and a January 2018 story in that paper queried what should be done for “America’s forgotten towns.”[^35] National Public Radio recently referred to rural places (in relation to the physician shortage there) as “Forgotten America.”[^36] One journalist has even referred to the rural Ohio River Valley region in Southern Illinois as “forsaken.”[^37] At least she didn’t say “God forsaken.”

Fifty years ago, the President’s National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty published *The People Left Behind*.[^38] In 2018, Robert Wuthnow, a Princeton sociologist published *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America*.[^39] In other words, we’re still leaving them behind—and some of them are angry about it.

These uses of “forgotten” and “hidden” call to mind the occasional emails I get from law students, professors across the disciplines with students who grew up rural, or just rural residents who have come across my Legal Ruralism Blog (10


years old in 2017). 40 Here’s a typical one, received a few years ago from a law student at the University of Missouri:

Your work interests me so much because of your focus on rural communities—because you care. Even though you are a professor at one of the most prestigious law schools in the country, you still care about, and I hate this term, “fly over country.” Thank you so much for your passion and dedication to rural America. 41

Emails like this one speak to the sense many rural folks have of knowing that they are rarely seen, that their experiences are not well understood. Even when they are seen, their concerns may not be taken seriously and are rarely prioritized. 42

Certainly, this has been my experience as a self-proclaimed (nearly full-time) ruralist in the legal academy. In spite of my voluminous writings about rural women, no feminist legal theory text book has included an excerpt of my work. I have published three articles dedicated to the topic of rural abortion access and other works that discuss the issue more peripherally, yet neither of two recent germinal legal texts on the topic of reproductive rights 43 says a word about rural women. Indeed, these tomes mention only in passing distance and/or travel, a defining aspect of rural women’s “undue burden” in the abortion context. 44

Id. 42


44. Cf. Rachel Rebouché, Reproducing Rights: The Intersection of Reproductive Justice and Human Rights, 7 U.C. IRVINE L. REV. 579 (2017); Hannah Haksgaard, Rural Women and Developments in the Undue Burden Analysis: The Effect of Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt, 65 DRAKE L. REV. 663 (2017); Jonathan M. Bearak et al., Disparities and Change Over Time in Distance Women Would Need to Travel to Have an Abortion in the USA: A Spatial Analysis, 2 LANCET PUB. HEALTH 493 (2017), and to attention given to distance in Hellerstedt v. Whole Woman’s Health, discussed in Michele Statz & Lisa R. Pruitt, To Recognize the Tyranny of Distance: A Spatial Reading of Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt, ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING A: ECONOMY AND
not take these omissions personally. Two of the three authors have told me over the years that they have read and admire my work about rural women. The issue, then, must be rurality itself. Rural women just don’t make the cut in a comprehensive account of a contemporary issue that so fundamentally shapes their lives. This is sadly consistent with what the Fifth Circuit decided in Whole Woman’s Health v. Lakey: 900,000 Texas women—those who were situated more than 150 miles from an abortion provider after the state’s new abortion regulations shut down half of the state’s abortion providers—were constitutionally irrelevant.45 Thankfully, that decision was subsequently overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court46 in an opinion that did expressly note the burden of travel on rural women, a first for a majority of the Court in an abortion case.47

In a similar vein, the manuscript for the latest poverty law textbook, Poverty Law: Policy and Practice48 made no mention whatsoever of rural poverty until shortly before it went to press. That’s when I asked my long-time friend Ezra Rosser, one of the authors, what the book would include about rural poverty. After all, rural poverty rates have long been higher than urban ones,49 and Rosser himself spent much of his childhood in the rural Southwest and had written about rural housing codes.50 My query was met with a pregnant pause, but Rosser and his co-authors did then scramble to remedy the oversight. Their mention of rural poverty resisted—if only barely—the urban juggernaut, what I have called out as law’s urbanormativity51 and the burgeoning metrocentricity of U.S. society and politics.

Lest I be seen as suggesting that I am above reproach on the inclusivity front, let me acknowledge at least one of my oversights. While urban America forgets rural America, my equivalent lapse as a ruralist involves American Indians. They are my “guilty footnote,” if you will.52 I have occasionally given “meta” talks about rural populations and law’s neglect of them only to have American Indian scholars approach me afterwards to tell (or remind) me that I was also talking about

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47. Statz & Pruitt, supra note 44.


49. RURAL AMERICA AT A GLANCE 2017, supra note 18.


51. Pruitt & Vanegas, supra note 45, at 77.

52. See Angela P. Harris, Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory, 42 STAN. L. REV. 581, 603 (1990) (writing of mainstream feminist legal scholars: “Black women are entirely absent from [Robin] West’s work, in contrast to [Catharine] MacKinnon’s; issues of race do not appear even in guilty footnotes. However, just as in MacKinnon’s work, the bracketing of issues of race leads to the installation of white women on the throne of essential womanhood.”).
American Indian/Native American populations, although I had not explicitly acknowledged them.53

I could provide more illustrations of how we overlook rural people and places in legal scholarship, as well as how I have overlooked the American Indian experience. I’m sure this extends to our teaching, too.54 After all, could we realistically expect those teaching poverty law, reproductive rights, feminist legal theory and/or family law—just to name a few—to cover rural difference when their textbooks do not?

I do not wish to make my career a referendum on rural America or to treat my career as the canary in the coal mine that is rural America (sometimes literally as well figuratively). Sometimes, however, it feels that way. I do not see personal failure in my anemic citation count as a ruralist, though I have often joked that I am writing my way into the very obscurity that marks rural America. I guess I can now say something slightly more optimistic: as interest in rural America goes, so goes my career. Recently, that’s resulted in a serious uptick in invitations and calls from journalists.55

B. Working-Class Whites

Working-class whites, too, have often been obscured from the view of (or should I say, by) the chattering classes. Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers asserted nearly two decades ago in The Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters that this group is often ignored, though they then made up 55% of the electorate.56 bell hooks’ 2000 book, Where We Stand: Class Matters, featured a


54. The fact that few of us acknowledge the rural in our teaching, that we do not hold rural practice out as a legitimate career option, is no doubt aggravating our rural lawyer shortage. See Lisa R. Pruitt et al., Legal Deserts: A Multi-State Assessment of Rural Access to Justice, 12 HARV. L. & POL’Y REV. (forthcoming 2018); Amanda L. Kool & Lisa R. Pruitt, Opinion: It’s Time to Heed the Call of Rural America, NAT’L L.J. (May 5, 2017), https://www.law.com/nationallawjournal/almID/1202785103651/?slreturn=20180109135943.


56. RUY TEIXEIRA & JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS, AMERICA’S FORGOTTEN MAJORITY: WHY THE WHITE WORKING CLASS STILL MATTERS, at x (2000). See also Joel Rogers & Ruy Teixeira, America’s Forgotten Majority, THE ATLANTIC (June 2000), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/06/americas-forgotten-majority/378242/. See generally NICHOLAS CARNES, WHITE-COLLAR GOVERNMENT: THE HIDDEN ROLE OF CLASS IN ECONOMIC POLICY MAKING (2013) (asserting that the issues taken up by government bodies are influenced by the fact that few lawmakers are from working-class origins, thus revealing another way in which class gets obscured by and from elite decision-makers).
chapter titled “White Poverty: The Politics of Invisibility.” Arlie Hochschild’s most recent monograph, Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right, offers a metaphor for how socioeconomically disadvantaged whites view their situation in relation to others. They see themselves standing in line, working hard, waiting for their turn, for some socioeconomic security, for the opportunity to get ahead. Yet it isn’t happening. Their time has not yet come. They feel invisible, and they perceive themselves as losing ground, as falling behind other groups, other constituencies they perceive to be cutting in line. These others include immigrants, racial minorities and even the brown pelican, which is protected by environmental laws that undermine their employment opportunities.

Notably, the “others” perceived to be cutting in line also include women—presumably even white women. Thus, this phenomenon of feeling slighted and left behind is about gender as well as race, immigration, and the environment. A key aspect of the dynamic, albeit one easily lost in the current political moment, is that men feel they are losing ground to women. This frustrating pecking order that low- and middle-income whites perceive, which is constantly being re-ordered, is also gendered. And if white working-class women perceive this is a problem in the way white working-class men do—that is, if (some) women believe their socioeconomic opportunity should play second fiddle to men’s—that is a profound insight. This is an issue I return to in Part V.A.

Journalists have also taken up the forgotten theme. Alec MacGillis’s Revenge of the Forgotten Class, a ProPublica feature published a few days after the 2016 election, was based on MacGillis’s return to an Ohio community he had previously visited to hear voter reflections on Trump’s victory. One blue-collar woman, a union member MacGillis interviewed, commented on her perceived invisibility and that of her milieu in recent years: “I wanted people like me to be cared about. People don’t realize there’s nothing without a blue-collar worker."

A female factory worker interviewed for a pre-election New York Times story said that when she saw Trump talking about her factory on the news, “all she could do

59. Id. at 137-39.
60. Id. at 137-39. See also JENNIFER SHERMAN, THOSE WHO WORK, THOSE WHO DON’T: POVERTY, MORALITY AND FAMILY IN RURAL AMERICA 31-36 (2009) (explaining that jobs in the timber industry had been lost due to environmental protection of the spotted owl).
63. Id.
was shout ‘Yessss!’ at the TV. ‘I loved it,’ she said. ‘I was so happy Trump noticed us.”

Another poignant exemplar from this genre was a story featuring a Boston-area woman named Dianna Ploss on WBUR’s “Here and Now.” Ploss talked of her economic insecurity, which had been aggravated by the need to care for her aging and ailing father. Though she held herself out as a life-long Democrat, Ploss was so taken with Trump and his rhetoric—rhetoric she believed would translate into better circumstances for her—that she had left her job to work full time on Trump’s campaign. At the end of the interview, Ploss’s voice quavered as she said:

What about Dianna’s father, who has a name? His name is Richard. Doesn’t his life matter? That’s why I’m supporting Trump, because I really feel like, why doesn’t Dianna’s life matter anymore? Why does somebody else’s life matter more than mine? Or my father’s? … honestly I’m trying hard not to cry because it’s crippling me. I’m crippled. I really am. So there you go.

In short, Dianna felt invisible, like her life and that of her father didn’t matter to the powers that be. She didn’t say they had been rendered invisible by diverted attention to other populations, by refugees or non-whites or LGBTQ folks. Nevertheless, that connection was arguably implicit.

It would be easy to write these folks off as whiners, nutcases and racists. That’s how I see them maligned in much mainstream media commentary, and even more commonly in my Twitter feed. After all, they’re white, and everyone knows whites have all the power and money, that the world sees and cares about whites, that whites are not burdened by racial animus directed at them. Nor are whites’ life prospects undermined by structural racism. Progressive elites know well the spiel of white privilege, which often presents whiteness as a sort of “magic bullet”—or at least a very powerful shield.

My point is here is not to dispute the existence of white privilege, nor the existence and persistence of racism. Our country’s racial history includes at least

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65. Maghna Chakrabarti & Kassandra Sundt, Local Trump Supporter Says She’s Not ‘Smug’ About Election Results, WBUR (Nov. 16, 2016), http://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2016/11/16/local-trump-supporter. The Ploss interview was also infuriating for reasons outlined at infra note 230.

66. Id.

67. Id.

68. Id.


70. See generally Cheryl I. Harris, Whiteness as Property, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1707 (1993); Devon W. Carbado & Mitu Gulati, The Fifth Black Woman, 11 J. CONTEMP. LEGAL ISSUES 701 (2001); McIntosh, supra note 69.
two genocides—one against American Indians and a second against African-Americans. The consequences of white people’s wrongs against these peoples continue to this day, and, indeed, the wrongs themselves also continue, albeit often in altered form and/or context. For Blacks, these wrongs persist in, among other forms, the “new Jim Crow” and the carceral state. For American Indians, they persist in our ongoing failure to prosecute crimes in which American Indians are victims, as well as in myriad other manifestations. The economic consequences of these wrongs against other races, other peoples, are shared by all whites, but the “benefits” are enjoyed to dramatically varying degrees based largely on class.

Yet when I have sought to introduce the plight of poor and working-class whites in the legal academy—when I have advocated for low-income whites with regard to college admissions and what we view as diversity in higher education—the efforts have been met with fear, resistance or silence. The fear response was once articulated by an academic conference attendee as “concern about the nefarious purposes to which the data could be put.” The resistance is often expressed as a ranking of oppression: “but non-whites always have it worse.”

To raise the issue of socioeconomic disadvantage when it is not conflated with racial disadvantage is to be off message in 21st century America. It is to risk being accused of “all lives matter” thinking. Yet surely we must find a way to talk about low-income whites—a way to acknowledge and take seriously their struggles—without always lapsing into a contest of whose lot in life is worse? For when we persist in that debate, we are distracted by a question that is often counterproductive and divisive. Yes, Blacks face discrimination and struggles of types and magnitudes that poor whites do not, but if we let that reality become a justification for ignoring the plight of white workers and rural residents, we are playing into the hands of the wealthy, of those who are making off like bandits while different groups of have-nots continue to be pitted against each other. Martin Luther King, Jr. would not be impressed.

In fact, the primary points I make in this article about low-status, low-education whites are points I have made in prior publications: (1) Class is cultural as well as material and we should stop ridiculing rural and working-class whites. We may be in our respective media and social media echo chambers, but we know that social media has become a tool to foment polarization. In other words, “they” know what “we” are saying about them; (2) What the chattering classes perceive to be a monolithic white working class is much more complicated, highly stratified within. Intra-racial resentment is a powerful force to be reckoned with, and we


73. See Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, https://poorpeoplescampaign.org/demands (last visited May 14, 2018). The Poor People’s Campaign seeks to build cross-racial coalitions among the economically vulnerable, while still highlighting the problem of structural racism.
must attend to both race and class as we seek to understand the resentments that are tearing our nation apart; (3) We need not choose between attention to class and race; (4) The struggle just to tread water socioeconomically—not to slip backwards or downwards—let alone to achieve upward mobility, is becoming more onerous by the day. We are foolish to diminish the psychological potency of this phenomenon; (5) “White privilege” is a seriously limited asset for low-education, low-income whites.

But these are not messages the academy—including the legal academy—wants to hear, any more than they want to hear about rural Americans. Nevertheless, I persist with the argument that we need to complicate whiteness; we need to think more critically about “white privilege” and the familiar adage that if “you’re white, you’ll be alright.” Are we really seeing the lived realities of those whites, many of whom are what Camille Gear Rich calls “marginal” whites.75 Low-income, low-education whites are not feeling the love, and they are living precious little of the privilege. In short, they don’t qualify for, don’t have access to, many of the oft-touted perks of “whiteness.”76 They are not actually “in the club” any more than Jews, Irish-Americans, or Italian Americans were at one time.77 When we say “white privilege” to them—or hurl it at them, sometimes as a verbal slap, as if their privilege should be self-evident and their industry is irrelevant—it is really no wonder many roll their eyes.

When people are as angry as these populations are—angry and frustrated enough to vote for a candidate as profoundly problematic as Donald Trump—we might do more than roll our eyes back at them. (I say this even as I admit that frequently my own knee-jerk instinct is to do just that.) We might ask why they are so angry.78 We might listen to them with as much empathy as we can possibly muster in hopes of understanding how they—and we—got to this profoundly polarized place and time.

We might also ask why we didn’t see this coming. We might inquire how and why we lost sight of rural and working-class whites as populations other than


76. Ruth Frankenberg defines whiteness as the cumulative way that race shapes the lives of white people. See RUTH FRANKENBERG, WHITE WOMEN, RACE MATTERS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS 1 (1993).


as reality TV fodder, a phenomenon one scholar has called “redneckploitation.” 79
What hides them from us? Is it socio-spatiality, the increasing social and geographical distance across class, what Bill Bishop has called “the big sort.” 80
Or is the chasm as much a consequence of time as of space? Some of us, particularly those of us who are white, once knew some working-class white folks.81 From our lofty perches amidst the chattering classes, we like to reminisce about the father or grandfather who went to college on the GI Bill after World War II.82 But most in the world where I now abide are at least second- or third-generation college graduates who take for granted that status to one degree or another. Most progressive elites are also now removed from the rural. Even the grandparents (or great grandparents) that we or our parents might reminisce about visiting on the old family homestead are now nothing more than photos in the family album. In the 21st century, most now encounter rurality only as tourists, consuming it.83 In short, most Americans are primed to overlook, to forget the nation’s rural reaches.

II. FROM NEGLECT TO CONTEMPT

The election of 2016 has made these problematic populations—whom we’ve been studiously ignoring, like embarrassing relatives distant enough to hide from our social circle—more relevant to us because it has reminded us of their electoral potential, indeed, their electoral threat. The election has also made it harder to

81. Indeed, black authors of a certain age have also written of knowing poor white folks, especially having grown up around them. Some have expressed considerable comparison for theirs. See, e.g., MAYA ANGELOU, I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS 28-33 (1969); hooks, supra note 57.
82. See Pruitt, Who’s Afraid of White Class Migrants?, supra note 5, at 204.
83. See Daniel T. Lichter et al., Rural Children and Youth at Risk, in CHALLENGES FOR RURAL AMERICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY 97-98 (2003) (arguing that because fewer Americans interact with rural regions, the problems of those regions go unsolved or unnoticed). See also Lichter & Ziliak, supra note 19, at 8.
overlook them given media attention to rural and white working-class support for Donald Trump. In my world, this has proved a double-edged sword. Rural and white working-class folks are now more “seen,” but also the objects of greater, more widespread disdain. And they are arguably no better understood. If anything, the 2016 election has heightened elite contempt for these folks presumed to have voted for Trump, whether or not they actually did.87

By way of illustration, in early 2017, I gave a workshop on a paper at the institution that employs me. The paper was about environmental degradation by...
an industrial hog farm in my home community, a persistent poverty, all-white county in the Arkansas Ozarks. In response, one of my colleagues asked why s/he should care about these poor, white people whose health will be compromised by the massive hog operation and whose economic wellbeing is threatened, too. It was not the question I was expecting, and I don’t recall what I said, though I was probably conflict avoidant. Later, my colleague apologized and clarified in an email:

I apologize for asking an aggressive question in your talk. It occurred to me that some of these people were quite powerful in some domains, even exercising electoral power over California (and me) in the last election. But, power is complicated, and the situations are complicated; as you outlined, there is more than one model of economic injustice.

At least my colleague was honest about his/her visceral reaction, though in a further exchange s/he opined that the white working class were “trying to have it both ways,” and that rich whites were honest about their motivations. Presumably s/he was referring to rich whites’ desire for lower tax rates, less regulation, and therefore a greater opportunity to accumulate wealth. That is, presumably my colleague was referring to the greed of affluent white Trump voters, or perhaps their religious convictions. But that is not the same as an assignment of racism or racist motives to these more affluent voters, an assumption the left tends to make summarily and collectively about low-income, whites who voted for Trump in 2016.

For the record, I don’t agree that the white working class is trying to “have it both ways.” I think what they would like is pretty straight-forward: economic opportunity, a fair shake, a modicum of respect from others that would in turn foster greater self-respect and dignity. They do not necessarily want what we (academics/cultural elites/the chattering classes) have. Many don’t aspire to college degrees, but when they do, we should not exclude them because they are “rubes”—or because we presume they are conservative or racist.

What my colleague seemed to overlook or discount is the disproportionate power of rich whites, those with far greater opportunities and resources to effect change. In my experience, that’s a shockingly common oversight. We are anxious to cast responsibility for the current political moment on low-income, low-

89. Email to author (Feb. 1, 2017, 6:24 PM) (on file with author).
90. Id.
91. See infra Part VII.
education whites, without reflecting on the blame that rightly rests on our own shoulders, the shoulders of elites. As Ta-Nehisi Coates has written, Trump is “made more dangerous still by the fact that those charged with analyzing him cannot name his essential nature, because they are too implicated in it.” 93 The wealthy, too, are implicated in the rise of Trump, including wealthy Democrats. 94

Even in the run up to Trump’s election, I saw hateful attitudes expressed on social media, a desire to push aside “Rust Belt” voters as a salient part of the electorate and the economy. I noticed a powerful resentment that these voters were sometimes framed as “real Americans.” One Tweet from the night Hillary Clinton won the Nevada Caucuses, bolstered by service workers union members in Las Vegas, was to the effect: never say again that Rust Belt workers are the real Americans.

The theme of displacing, pushing aside, or otherwise rendering irrelevant the traditional white working class was fueled by the outcome of the 2016 election. In March, 2017, Peter Daou, a former advisor to Hillary Clinton, Tweeted, “ENOUGH with the trope that a lower income white person in Ohio is somehow more ‘American’ than a non-white person in NYC or L.A.” 95 Fair enough, but responding to this, Douglas Moran chimed in with a commentary on his re-Tweet of Daou: “This. So much this. This times a b’zillion. SICK of the arrogance in insisting rural dwellers are ‘real’ Americans.” 96 You get the picture. Progressive Twitter is shockingly judgmental. 97 Destructively so. Indeed, progressives sometimes seem as keen to exclude and limit as are those at the other end of the political spectrum.

My response is that we don’t have to choose between the Latinx service worker in Las Vegas and steel workers in Akron. Joe Kennedy eloquently called out this false choice in his response to Trump’s 2018 State of the Union address:

Coal miners or single moms. Rural communities or inner cities. The coast or the heartland.

As if the mechanic in Pittsburgh and the teacher in Tulsa and the daycare worker in Birmingham are somehow bitter rivals, rather than mutual casualties of a system forcefully rigged for those at the top.


94. See Edsall, Democrats’ Gentrification Problem, supra note 14.

95. Peter Daou (@peterdaou), TWITTER (Mar. 12, 2017). Screenshot on file with author. Peter Daou is a Democratic strategist and an advisor to political figures (former advisees include Hillary Clinton, Arlen Specter, and John Kerry). His Twitter bio reads: “Seeking truth.”


97. See supra note 15, infra notes 331-336 and accompanying text.
As if the parent who lies awake terrified that their transgender son will be beaten and bullied at school is any more or less legitimate than the parent whose heart is shattered by a daughter in the grip of opioid addiction.98

Kennedy concludes that we can choose both, and I agree. But you sure wouldn’t know that was a possibility from looking at my Twitter feed.

My impressions are consistent with those of R.R. Reno, who observed in early 2016:

Does the intelligentsia of the Democratic Party let a moment pass without reminding us of the demographic eclipse of white middle class voters? Sometimes, they’re described as racists, or derided as dull suburbanites who lack the élan of the new urban ‘creative class.’ The message: White middle class Americans aren’t just irrelevant to America’s political future, they’re in the way.

Conservatives are no less harsh. Editorials ominously predict that the ‘innovators’ are about to be overwhelmed by a locust blight of ‘takers.’99

Indeed, in the aftermath of the election, elites have a new complaint: the fact that the mainstream media are paying too much attention to those annoying populations.100 My Twitter feed is awash with protest every time a mainstream media outlet engages in Trump country journalistic tourism. “Full Frontal” with Samantha Bee even did a January, 2018 segment satirizing the phenomenon.101

Critical race scholars lament this re-centering of whiteness. While I truly appreciate their position, I nevertheless believe the enterprise of understanding these groups is worthwhile, indeed, imperative. In spite of hateful rhetoric from the left, I hope that we really don’t want to leave anyone behind, that we are not writing off anyone (except white supremacists and those at that end of what we might call a continuum of racism, recognizing that different people use the word “racist” to describe dramatically different behaviors102)—not even rural and working-class whites.103

102. See, e.g., Editorial Board, Reason as Racism: An Immigration Debate Gets Derailed, PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE (Jan. 15, 2018, 12:00 AM), http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/editorials/2018/01/15/Reason-as-racism-An-immigration-debate-gets-derailed/stories/201801150024 (criticizing those who use the term “racist” liberally, including to refer to those who oppose illegal immigration; arguing that the term “racist” as become what “communist” was in the 1950s and that “racist” should be reserved to refer to people like Bull Connor and Dylann Roof). See also infra Part VII.
103. This is a theme of my 2011 article, Pruitt, The Geography of the Class Culture Wars, supra note 5, at 768-69.
III. SO WHAT’S BEEN GOING ON WITH “THOSE WOMEN”
WHILE WE WEREN’T LOOKING?

In this section, I want to provide a very brief update on a few things that have been happening to rural and white working-class women since I first began writing about them a dozen years ago. In the background of this discussion is an overarching reality of widening income inequality in America. While the wealthy have seen steady growth in their incomes over the last 40 years, poor-, lower- and middle-class workers, those at the bottom half of the economy, have experienced nearly flat wage stagnation. For some populations, inflation-adjusted wages have been in decline for decades. While the Great Recession affected workers across the economy, recovery from that economic slump has been uneven. This persistent economic inequality frames many of the issues facing rural America, which has been slower to recover from the Great Recession.

Regarding rural women in particular, I will begin here with a brief profile of recent socioeconomic conditions and then highlight just two trends: violence against rural women, including—provocatively—rural porn, and deaths of despair.

A. The Gendered Rural Socioeconomic Milieu

Socioeconomically, little has changed for rural women since I began writing about them more than a decade ago. When compared to their urban counterparts, rural women have lower employment rates, lower rates of pursuit in higher education, and lower returns on investments in human capital overall. What has changed has generally changed for the worse.

104. We are increasingly seeing this sort of “othering” language used to refer to rural and working-class whites, which is why I use quotation marks around the term. See, e.g., Sean Illing, A Princeton Sociologist Spent 8 Years Asking Rural Americans Why They’re so Pissed Off, Vox (Mar. 13, 2018), https://www.vox.com/2018/3/13/17053886/trump-rural-america-populism-racial-resentment.


106. See generally MISHEL ET AL., supra note 105.


Rural women’s employment peaked at 74% in 2001, and it was down to 68% in 2013, partly a consequence of the Great Recession.\textsuperscript{110} Indeed, rural America has recovered more slowly than the rest of the nation from that economic contraction.\textsuperscript{111} The trend in rural employment for the past several decades has been away from manufacturing jobs and goods production and toward the service sector.\textsuperscript{112} Rural women were paid about 75 cents for every dollar rural men were paid for full-time work in 2008, which is slightly worse than the differential between men and women in urban areas.\textsuperscript{113} At the same time, women in rural areas are paid about 17% less per hour than their urban counterparts.\textsuperscript{114}

Rural women who are parents face even greater hurdles. Given the proliferation of contingent work associated with service jobs in rural places, it is not surprising that rural mothers are less likely than their urban counterparts to have benefits such as health insurance, parental leave, flextime, paid vacation, and sick leave days.\textsuperscript{115} A third of rural single mothers lived in poverty as of 2013, a slight increase since 2000.\textsuperscript{116} Indeed, the poverty rate for rural single mothers is nearly five times that of “married couples living in the same areas.”\textsuperscript{117} A persistent

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item[111] \textit{Rural America At a Glance 2017, supra} note 18, at 2. \textit{See also Econ. Innovation Grp., supra} note 108, at 37 (stating of rural areas that “[p]erhaps most troubling, the prime years of the national economic recovery bypassed many of America’s most vulnerable places altogether”).
\item[116] Smith, \textit{supra} note 110, at 118 (citing Jessica Carson & Marybeth Mattingly, \textit{Rural Families and Households and the Decline of Traditional Structure, in Rural America in a Globalizing World: Problems and Prospects for the 2010s, at 347-64 (Connor Bailey et al. eds., 2014)).
\item[117] Cynthia B. Struthers, \textit{The Past Is the Present: Gender and the Status of Rural Women, in Rural America in a Globalizing World: Problems and Prospects for the 2010s, at 489, 496}} (Connor Bailey et al. eds., 2014).
\end{thebibliography}
dearth of rural childcare providers\textsuperscript{118} and transportation deficits\textsuperscript{119} are common challenges facing rural parents.

Rural women also enjoy lower returns on their investments in human capital.\textsuperscript{120} In 2008, the spatial wage gap between rural and urban women was only 5\% for women with a college degree, but 26\% for women with advanced degrees.\textsuperscript{121} This is surely one reason rural women pursue higher education at a much lower rate than urban women. While rural and urban women are both increasingly better educated than their male counterparts,\textsuperscript{122} the higher education gap between rural and urban women has also been increasing, with rural women falling further behind. Between 2000 and 2015, urban women have almost doubled their lead over rural women in the rate at which they earn a bachelor’s degree or higher.\textsuperscript{123} Meanwhile, the rate of enrollment in colleges and universities for women aged 18-24 has been increasing for urban women while remaining stagnant for rural women.\textsuperscript{124}

Much of this bad news is summed up by Elizabeth Catte in her 2018 book \textit{What You’re Getting Wrong About Appalachia}, a response to \textit{Hillbilly Elegy}:

The “real” forgotten working-class citizens of Appalachia, much like the rest of the nation, are home health workers and Dollar General employees. They’re more likely to be women, and their exemption from the stability offered by middle-class employment is not a recent phenomenon.\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Nicole D. Forry & Susan K. Walker, \textit{Child Care in Rural America}, in \textit{ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND FAMILY WELL-BEING IN RURAL AMERICA}, supra note 112, at 256, 260.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Id. (citing Monica G. Fisher & Bruce A. Weber, \textit{The Importance of Place in Welfare Reform: Common Challenges for Central Cities and Remote Rural Areas}, in \textit{BROOKINGS INSTITUTION CENTER ON URBAN AND METROPOLITAN POLICY AND RURAL POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE RESEARCH BRIEF} 1 (2002)).
\item \textsuperscript{120} Smith, supra note 110, at 131 (citing Diane K. McLaughlin & Lauri Perman, \textit{Returns vs. Endowments in the Earnings Attainment Process for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Men and Women}, 56 RURAL SOC. 339-65 (1991)).
\item \textsuperscript{121} Id. at 123 (citing Kristin E. Smith & Rebecca Glauber, \textit{Exploring the Spatial Wage Penalty for Women: Does It Matter Where You Live?}, 42 SOC. SCI. RES. 1390 (2013)).
\item \textsuperscript{122} See generally \textit{RURAL EDUCATION AT A GLANCE} 2017, supra note 18.
\item \textsuperscript{123} In 2000, 24\% of urban women held a bachelor’s degree or higher, 4\% percent behind urban men, compared to 15\% for rural women. However, by 2015, the percentage of urban females with at least a bachelor’s degree increased to 33\%, one percent higher than urban males, with the percentage of rural women with bachelor’s degrees increasing to only 20\% in comparison. \textit{RURAL EDUCATION AT A GLANCE} 2017, supra note 18, at 3 (Note: Data from U.S. Census Bureau. 2015 metropolitan area definitions from the Office of Management and Budget apply).
\item \textsuperscript{124} \textit{INST. OF EDUC. SCI., U.S. DEP’T OF EDUC., NCES 2007-040, STATUS OF EDUCATION IN RURAL AMERICA} 64 (2007), https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007040.pdf (Note: Data from U.S. Census Bureau. New urban-centric classification system applies). \textit{Compare INST. OF EDUC. SCI., supra} (showing that, in 2004, 31\% of rural women aged 18-24 were enrolled in colleges or universities, 6\% behind the national level), \textit{with INST. OF EDUC. SCI., U.S. DEP’T OF EDUC., RURAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA tbl.B.3.b.-1} (2015), https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/tables/b.3.b.-1.asp (showing in the most recent data that only 34.6\% college-aged rural women enrolled, 10\% behind national level) (noting the new urban-centric classification system applies).
\item \textsuperscript{125} \textit{ELIZABETH CATTE, WHAT YOU’RE GETTING WRONG ABOUT APPALACHIA} 12 (2018).
\end{itemize}
Catte thus offers a devastating description of (some of) the downtrodden, the presumptive Trump voters whom so many liberal elites hold in such contempt. And she notes the gendered edge of this demographic.

B. Violence Against Women and Rural Porn

The same rural restructuring that has put more rural women into the paid workforce in recent decades has also created marital instability for many, as men are increasingly unable to live up to the traditional bread-winner ideal.126 Critical criminologist Walter DeKeseredy explains that “a sizeable portion of unemployed rural men who strongly adhere to the ideology of familial patriarchy compensate for their lack of economic power by exerting more control over their wives.”127 Such precarious masculinity among many rural men may aggravate their aggression against women, and their intimate partners are often the victims.128

While violence against women involving intimate partners occurs at similar rates in both rural and urban settings,129 intimate partner violence in rural settings is more likely than in urban ones to result in death or serious injury.130 Additionally, rural women who are separated from their partners are victimized at rates significantly higher than their urban counterparts.131 One study found that rural men rely on friends, including those who are police officers, to support violent patriarchal norms by turning a blind eye to intimate violence.132 Other studies suggest that widespread acceptance of woman abuse deters victims from talking publicly about their experiences.133 Perceived lack of support from local agencies undermines rural reporting rates.134 Significantly more rural women (45%) than urban women (16%) opined that local politics would play a role in

127. Id.
128. Id.
130. Pruitt, Place Matters: Domestic Violence and Rural Difference, supra note 6, at 1351-52.
131. See Rennison et al., supra note 129, at 1321 (finding 82.6 per 1,000 separated women are victimized by an intimate partner in a rural area, compared with 46.9 per 1,000 in urban areas).
132. DeKeseredy et al., supra note 126, at 300. See also Rennison et al., supra note 129, at 1313 (finding men in rural areas likely to be supported by an “ol’ boys’ network”).
133. DeKeseredy et al., supra note 126, at 300. See also TK Logan & Robert Walker, Civil Protective Orders Effective in Stopping or Reducing Partner Violence: Challenges Remain in Rural Areas with Access and Enforcement, CARSEY INST., Spring 2011, at 1-3, http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1130&context=carsey (finding that rural women have more difficulty accessing civil protective orders and feel less secure when the protective orders are granted).
prosecution.\textsuperscript{135} Rural women also feared future harm, both before and after obtaining a protective order, at higher rates than their urban counterparts.\textsuperscript{136}

A 2016 study provides very preliminary support for a “linkage between male pornography consumption and violence against women ... in rural communities.”\textsuperscript{137} States with the highest pornographic subscription rates have large rural populations,\textsuperscript{138} and the majority of the porn consumed by rural men is highly aggressive.\textsuperscript{139} Pornography with rural motifs tends to be “‘rural gonzo porn,’”\textsuperscript{140} a variety that “‘depicts hard-core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased.’”\textsuperscript{141}

DeKeseredy argues that this heightened consumption of aggressive pornography contributes to violence against women. In a 2009 qualitative study of sexual assault in the context of separation and divorce in rural Ohio, he found that “[s]ixty-five percent of the male estranged partners of the 43 women they interviewed used pornography, and” nearly a third “of the women stated that pornography was involved in sexually abusive events they experienced.”\textsuperscript{142} DeKeseredy thus links what he calls the “pornification” of rural areas to violence against rural women.\textsuperscript{143} As with regard to other geographies, further research into a possible link between porn and violence against women is needed.\textsuperscript{144}

C. Deaths of Despair

To the extent that rural and working-class white women attracted mainstream media attention prior to the 2016 campaign season, they did so in relation to so-called deaths of despair: suicides, drug overdoses, and alcohol-related deaths among low-education (typically defined as high school diploma or less), middle-aged white women.\textsuperscript{145} The life expectancy of this demographic segment has been

\textsuperscript{135} Logan & Walker, supra note 133, at 4.
\textsuperscript{136} Id. at 3.
\textsuperscript{137} Walter S. DeKeseredy & Amanda Hall-Sanchez, Adult Pornography and Violence Against Women in the Heartland: Results from a Rural Southeast Ohio Study, 23 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 830, 831 (2016).
\textsuperscript{139} See generally id. at 188-89.
\textsuperscript{140} Id. at 187.
\textsuperscript{141} Id. at 185-86.
\textsuperscript{142} Id. at 187.
\textsuperscript{143} See generally id.
\textsuperscript{144} DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, supra note 137, at 852 (stating that “[t]he study of contemporary pornography and how it negatively affects rural gender relations and other parts of social life is in a state of infancy”).
falling, whereas the life expectancy of their African-American and Latina counterparts is on the rise. 146 So we see these groups crossing trajectories, one in decline, the other on the rise, albeit at a glacial pace. We began to hear about this phenomenon as early as 2012 when the New York Times published a story headlined, “Life Spans Shrink for Least-Educated Whites in the U.S.” 147 This was only the beginning of the bad news, as other sobering headlines soon followed, including a series by the Washington Post focusing on the trend’s disproportionate impact on rural and white women. 148 That series focused on middle-aged, low-

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146. Generally speaking, the life expectancy for whites is still generally higher than for blacks. As Bridget Catlin, a senior scientist at the University of Wisconsin stated, “The truth is that white death rates are still much, much lower than they are for African Americans…… My concern is that people will think, ‘Oh, it’s whites that need to be helped.’” Joel Achenbach & Dan Keating, A New Divide in American Death, WASH. POST (Apr. 10, 2016), http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2016/04/10/a-new-divide-in-american-death/?utm_term=.f505b02334e [hereinafter Achenbach & Keating, New Divide]. These points reflect the tendency I noted above: the instinct to rank oppressions—and to assume that white people are invulnerable or should not be discussed because they are still doing better than people of color. In a talk I gave in fall 2016 at a symposium on pain management at the UC Davis Medical School, I indicated I was talking about working-class whites because they are (or at least were then) disproportionately suffering deaths of despair. During the Q & A, a white male audience member spoke up, saying he felt the need to clarify that Blacks are the people who have harder lives, the ones who actually suffer “discrimination.” The commenter appeared annoyed that I would call attention to any manifestation of white disadvantage, and he felt the need to set the record straight. I understood him to imply that talking about problems suffered by low-income whites, even in this context, was misleading, and perhaps inappropriate. Yet, according to Achenbach and Keating, supra, “[I]n at least 30 counties in the South, black women in midlife now have a lower mortality rate than middle-aged white women, The [Washington] Post found. That’s up from a single such county in 1999.” Id.


education white women, mostly in rural-ish places. One story out of Southwest Colorado featured several white women who had committed suicide.\textsuperscript{149} That story was especially jarring for me, not least because the women were all about my age, all in their 50s.\textsuperscript{150} I could have been one of them had my life taken a different course, one bereft of educational opportunity and the socioeconomic security it has afforded me.

The data indicate that the situation, “decaying health for all white women since 2000,” is “most dramatic” in rural areas\textsuperscript{151}:

There, for every 100,000 women in their late 40s, 228 died at the turn of this century. Today, 296 are dying. And in rural areas, the uptick in mortality was noticeable even earlier, as far back as 1990. Since then, death rates for rural white women in midlife have risen by nearly 50 percent.

In the hardest-hit places—21 counties arrayed across the South and Midwest—the death rate has doubled, or worse, since the turn of the century for white women in midlife.\textsuperscript{152}

In the fall of 2015, after Angus Deaton won the Nobel Prize in Economics, he and his collaborator spouse, Anne Case, took the opportunity of his heightened media profile to draw renewed attention to these deaths of despair, a phenomenon they had been studying.\textsuperscript{153} Most recently, Deaton and Case have speculated that a significant reason for this upward trend in deaths of despair is the psychology of expectations.\textsuperscript{154} White workers, partly because of white privilege,\textsuperscript{155} for decades enjoyed an upward trajectory. They have been able to anticipate that each successive generation will be more successful, more affluent than the prior one, if only marginally so.\textsuperscript{156} But for many working-class whites, perhaps most, that is no longer happening.

\textsuperscript{149} See generally Nutt, supra note 148.

\textsuperscript{150} Indeed, more recently, Deaton and Case have identified white women aged 50-55 as the most at risk. Jason Bellini & Moving Upstream, Why ‘Deaths of Despair’ May Be a Warning Sign for America—Moving Upstream, WALL ST. J. (Feb. 27, 2018, 10:00 AM), https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-deaths-of-despair-may-be-a-warning-sign-for-america-moving-upstream-1519743601.

\textsuperscript{151} Achenbach & Keating, New Divide, supra note 146.

\textsuperscript{152} Id.

\textsuperscript{153} See Achenbach & Keating, Sea of Despair, supra note 145.

\textsuperscript{154} Id. See also Jonathan Auerbach & Andrew Gelman, Stop Saying White Mortality Is Rising, SLATE (Mar. 28, 2017, 9:00 AM), http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2017/03/is_white_mortality_rising_not_really.html.

\textsuperscript{155} See generally DARIA ROITHMAYR, REPRODUCING RACISM: HOW EVERYDAY CHOICES LOCK IN WHITE ADVANTAGE (2014); DEIRDRE ROYSTER, RACE AND THE INVISIBLE HAND: HOW WHITE NETWORKS EXCLUDE BLACK MEN FROM BLUE-COLLAR JOBS (2003).

Some have referred to this as the “dashed expectations’ hypothesis.”\(^{157}\)

Johns Hopkins sociologist Andrew Cherlin has opined that “whites today are more pessimistic than their forbearers about their opportunities to advance in life.”\(^{158}\) While “[w]hites had a privileged place in the blue-collar economy’” at one time, that advantage has disappeared as the “middle of the labor market disappeared.”\(^{159}\)

Case and Deaton explain:

We think of this as part of the decline of the white working class. If you go back to the early ’70s when you had the so-called blue-collar aristocrats, those jobs have slowly crumbled away and many more men are finding themselves in a much more hostile labor market with lower wages, lower quality and less permanent jobs. That’s made it harder for them to get married. They don’t get to know their own kids. There’s a lot of social dysfunction building up over time. There’s a sense that these people have lost this sense of status and belonging. And these are classic preconditions for suicide.\(^{160}\)

Indeed, Shannon Monnat and David Brown identified a correlation between incidence of deaths of despair and voting patterns in the 2016 election. That is, places with high rates of these deaths tended to vote Republican by much higher margins in 2016 than they had in 2012.\(^{161}\) This supports the thesis that lack of economic opportunity fueled working-class voter migration toward Trump.\(^{162}\)

One of the most poignant statements I have seen regarding whiteness and deaths of despair comes from the brother of a woman who succumbed to such a fate: “There is an expectation for [white people] to keep it together. People think, ‘Hey, you are white. You are privileged. So why do you have so many problems? Maybe you are the problem.’ … ‘There isn’t a lot of space for them to be vulnerable.’\(^{163}\)

\(^{157}\) Achenbach & Keating, *New Divide*, supra note 146.

\(^{158}\) Id.

\(^{159}\) Id.


\(^{163}\) Kindy & Keating, supra note 145.  See also MONICA MCDERMOTT, *WORKING-CLASS WHITE: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF RACE RELATIONS* 149 (2006) (discussing perceptions of white failure).  Indeed, this is one context in which I am seeing references to whiteness as a burden.  Another is in Hochschild’s *STRANGERS IN THEIR OWN LAND*, where she writes that if Obama, “the bi-racial son of a low-income single mother becomes president … what kind of slouch does his rise make you feel like, you who are supposed to be so much more privileged.”  HOCHSCHILD, supra note 58, at 137-39.  Cf. NPR/TED Staff, Nikki Webber Allen: *How Can We Dismantle the Stigma of Mental
Anne Case has also referenced white privilege in discussing the phenomenon. Indeed, she has done so in a way reminiscent of Camille Gear Rich’s “marginal whiteness” frame: “‘They may be privileged by the color of their skin,’ … ‘but that is the only way in their lives they’ve ever been privileged.’”\(^\text{164}\)

This has me wondering who in the legal academy is writing about middle-aged women. Not many folks, I gather.\(^\text{165}\) When we do write about them, we write about the ones like me—the ones who prioritized career over family in their 20s and 30s, typically late to marry, late to have children. We tend to write about those who have pursued lives more akin to Sheryl Sandberg than those at risk for deaths of despair.\(^\text{166}\) We write about the ones hitting glass ceilings as they reach for the C-suite, not the ones on the assembly line,\(^\text{167}\) the ones cleaning motel and hotel rooms, the ones eking out a living as a waitress. And isn’t this neglect of older women a bit peculiar?\(^\text{168}\) A glaring oversight given that we know ageism is a powerful force in today’s society, and even as we saw what happened and is still happening to the baby boomer female who had the chutzpah to run for President of the United States.\(^\text{169}\)

IV. THE 2016 ELECTION: REVEALING A FRACTURED (OR NON EXISTENT) SISTERHOOD

Having complained about the blame—or credit, depending on your perspective—the media have given rural and working-class white voters for the Trump presidency, let me turn next to what we know about who voted for whom

\(^{164}\) Achenbach & Keating, New Divide, supra note 146.


\(^{166}\) See generally NANCY KNAUER, Introduction, GAY AND LESBIAN ELDERS: HISTORY, LAW, AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES (2011).


\(^{168}\) On the other hand, many germinal early gender parity cases did involve non-elite, even working-class women. See generally MARTHA CHAMALLAS, INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST LEGAL THEORY ch. 3 (3d ed. 2012).

in the 2016 presidential election. Before I get to the matter of how rural and white working-class women voted, however, let me offer a few data points that suggest that the media’s focus on what has been widely referred to as Trumplandia\textsuperscript{170} has been misplaced: For those earning more than $250K, the wealthiest band of folks pundits have analyzed, support for Trump and Clinton was even at 46% each.\textsuperscript{171} For those in the next lower income bracket, 47% of those earning $200K to $249K voted for Trump, compared to 49% for Clinton.\textsuperscript{172} Those with incomes between $100K and $199K gave the nod to Trump, 48% to Clinton’s 47%.\textsuperscript{173}

These data illustrate the upper-income tolerance of Trump—even preference for him; yet that phenomenon has garnered little media attention.\textsuperscript{174} What if the wealthiest Trump voters—not the lowest-income Trump voters—are, in fact, the most racist? We seem to see it as logical—and therefore unworthy of commentary—that wealthy people will vote Republican, even when the candidate defies widespread norms regarding how we talk about race, sex, and disability. We implicitly treat rich people as rational when they vote for a candidate who has no grasp of government or public affairs, one who is flouting long-standing norms around government ethics.

These wealthier voters were perhaps motivated by the prospect of a lower marginal tax rate, but they also should have a better understanding of the complexity of the range of issues at stake, e.g., what the U.S. State Department does, why career diplomats are valuable,\textsuperscript{175} and why giving North Korea “a bloody nose” would likely have big-time geopolitical consequences.\textsuperscript{176} At the risk of sounding condescending to low-income voters, we might expect those with more formal education to better grasp the enormous responsibility and complexity of being (what once was) the leader of the free world.\textsuperscript{177}

Yet even as the media neglect high-income voters’ support for Trump, they and the chattering classes ogle low-income white and rural Trump voters,

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{174} See infra notes 213-214 and accompanying text (quoting Tracie St. Martin, a working-class white woman who voted for Trump, acknowledging her lack of grasp of political issues because work keeps her too busy).
\end{thebibliography}
incredulously contemplating how they could vote against their own interests.  In fact, those with incomes from $50K to $99K, folks we might consider middle class, are the band who voted for Trump by the greatest margin, 49% for Trump to 46% for Hillary Clinton.  Those with incomes between $30K and $49K actually favored Clinton, 52% to 41%, and those earning less than $30K favored her by the widest margin of all: 53% Clinton to 40% Trump.  Sadly, low-income people vote at much lower rates than other income bands.

Pew Research summarized the role of working-class white and rural voters who have so preoccupied the media since the 2016 election:

Trump won comfortable majorities of both rural white men and women .... While Trump held a 10-percentage-point advantage over Clinton among white women nationally (53% to 43%), his victory margin nearly triples to 28 points among rural white women (62% to 34%). Trump led Clinton by 32 points among all white men nationally (63% to 31%), but he beat the Democrat by 48 points among white men living in rural areas (72% to 24%).

More detail is available from the full exit poll data. Looking at race alone, 57% of whites voted for Trump, and 37% voted for Clinton, while 74% of non-whites voted for Clinton, compared to 21% for Trump.

Returning to the class variable in isolation, when you divide voters into just two income categories and draw the line between them at $50K/year, you see that the lower income voters (not differentiated by race) preferred Clinton significantly over Trump, 53% to 41%, while those with incomes over $50K/year (“middle class” by some accounts, working class by others) preferred Trump by only a slight margin, 48% to 47%.

When you draw that income line at $100K, 49% of the relative “have nots” voted for Clinton compared to 45% for Trump.

Far more striking than the income data alone, however, are the data showing voter race and gender in combination with education level. White women with college degrees preferred Clinton 51% to 44% for Trump, a sharp contrast to women without college degrees, who preferred Trump by a dramatic margin of

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178. See Exit Polls 2016, supra note 3.
179. Id.
182. Morin, supra note 181.
183. Id.
184. See Exit Polls 2016, supra note 3.
White women with little education preferred Trump to a greater degree than most other demographic segments, the big exception being white men without college degrees who went for Trump 71% to 23%.185 Recall Trump’s boast during the campaign that “poorly educated” voters love him.186 Working-class voters are by definition less-educated, and I have already highlighted the education gap between rural and urban residents.187

Extraordinarily, these voting patterns were somewhat repeated in the special election to replace Jeff Sessions as the U.S. Senator from Alabama. In the December, 2017 election, Democrat Doug Jones won the female vote by 16 percentage points, but he lost the white female vote to Roy Moore by 29 points.188 Moore won the votes of white women without college degrees 73% to 25%.189 Among all college graduates, Jones won 54% to Moore’s 43%, but among white college graduates, Moore outpaced Jones 57% to 40%.190 Among all whites, Moore won 68% of the vote to Jones’s 30%.191 These Alabama election data are arguably more telling—and shocking—than those regarding Trump because credible allegations that Moore had preyed on teenage girls dogged Moore’s campaign for several weeks in the run up to the election.192 While a number of women accused Trump of sexual impropriety and he even admitted to some bad behavior with women, he was not accused of such assaults with respect to minors.

Stanley Greenberg, the Democratic pollster, provides broader context on these and other recent elections, as well as on our nation’s shifting electorate. First, white working-class women are now a majority of the white working class.193 Second, unmarried women have been moving away from voting Democratic, and

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185. See generally Chira, Focus on the Good, supra note 27.
186. Id. (noting white men with college degrees preferred Trump 53% to Clinton’s 39%).
188. See supra notes 122-124 and accompanying text. See also Morin, supra note 181 (discussing gender differences among rural white voters regarding attitudes toward the appropriate role of the federal government in relation to education).
190. Id. See also Ronald Brownstein, These Are the Women Who Could Elect Roy Moore, CNN (Dec. 5, 2017), http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/05/politics/white-women-class-divide-gender-divide/index.html (comparing the female vote in the Alabama Senate race to the female vote in the 2016 Presidential election and in the November 2017 gubernatorial race in Virginia). This spread in the Alabama Senate race is roughly the same spread by which Trump carried white men without college degrees. See supra note 245.
191. See Clement & Guskin, supra note 189.
192. Id.
193. Stephanie McCrummen, Woman Says Roy Moore Initiated Sexual Encounter When She Was 14, He Was 32, WASH. POST (Nov. 9, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/woman-says-roy-moore-initiated-sexual-encounter-when-she-was-14-he-was-32/2017/11/09/1f495878-c293-11e7-afe9-4f60b5a6c4a0_story.html?utm_term=a1eb2c821408. Other issues—some implicating gender and women—also loomed large in the campaign, e.g., abortion rights, and religious freedom.
194. Greenberg, supra note 29.
the Democrats lost white unmarried women by two points in 2016. Greenberg thus connects these two groups based on parallel voting trends and hypothesizes:

[Both white working-class women and white unmarried women] see only a precarious path to the middle class. Both believe jobs don’t pay enough to live on and that the middle class pays a lot of taxes. Both groups, more than other voters in the Rising American Electorate (RAE) [minorities, unmarried women and millennials], expressed concern about welfare-spending and getting control of the border.

This suggests the sort of concerns raised by white working-class voters regarding work and what they view not as a safety net, but as “entitlement” spending, an issue I take up more fully in Part V. It may also suggest a “hoarding” mentality—a sense that when people are struggling to take care of themselves and meet their own families’ needs, they do not want others coming into the country to compete for jobs and, potentially, also draw on entitlement programs. In short, they perceive jobs and economic well-being as zero-sum games. If jobs and economic well-being are in fact not zero-sum games, progressives need to explain that.

Greenberg thus concludes:

The Democrats don’t have a “white working-class problem.” They have a “working-class problem,” which progressives have been reluctant to address honestly or boldly. The fact is that Democrats have lost support with all working-class voters across the electorate, including … minorities, unmarried women, and millennials.

195. Id. (observing also that unmarried women’s “vote for Democrats dropped 7 points from 2012”).

After the 2014 debacle and in advance of the 2016 presidential cycle, the Women’s Voices Women’s Vote Action Fund, with which Democracy Corps partners, produced a frank report on disappointing results in our base. They highlighted the unmarried women whose vote for Democrats dropped 7 points from 2012, and the fact that Democrats lost white unmarried women by 2 points. That is when we made the connection between white unmarried women and the white working-class women who are now a majority of the white working class.

…When we tested a bold Democratic economic agenda against the Republican agenda, white unmarried women embraced the Democratic offer with great enthusiasm, and this agenda trailed the Republican offer by only 8 points among all white working-class women. The results were so promising, we proposed at the outset of the 2016 cycle that progressives adopt an “RAE+” strategy to reach the working class more broadly.

Id.

196. Id. (non-GOP working-class white swing voters—including female ones—would struggle to handle an unexpected $500 expense).


198. A terrific example of such an “explainer” is found on This American Life’s podcast: This American Life: Our Town, PUB. RADIO EXCHANGE (Dec. 8, 2017), https://www.thisamericanlife.org/632/our-town-part-one.

199. Greenberg, supra note 29 (emphasis added).
The data thus suggest that “culture and class mattered more than gender” for many female voters. Indeed, one pundit concluded that “Clinton’s gender gave her no particular advantage among women.” Her margin among “female voters was about the same as Obama’s in 2008 and 2012.”

This might leave us wondering what on earth has happened to sisterhood? Where is these women’s loyalty to each other—and to “us”? By which I mean, to the feminist movement, to some notion of affinity based on sex or gender. Just as critically, is the patriarchy so strong within rural and working-class white milieu that they do not even feel loyalty to each other? Indeed, might the patriarchy be so powerful that they are not loyal even to themselves? And what would it look like exactly for them to be loyal to themselves? I scratch the surface of this issue in the next part, and I re-visit it in my post-script.

This line of thinking raises the complementary question: What loyalty have “we” shown “them”? What has the feminist movement done lately for rural and working-class women? Where have our energies and loyalties been? And isn’t the greater burden on us, given our relative power and resource margins? I have already suggested that academic and other professional feminists have paid little attention to the concerns of rural and white working-class women. I shall return to this matter in my concluding comments. First, however, I look at rural and working-class white women not as quantitative data points, but from the more textured view afforded by journalistic forays into what has become known as Trump country.

V. WHO ARE THOSE WOMEN, ANYWAY?

A. The View from Trumplandia: Rationalizing Bad Behavior, My Boyfriend’s Job, and Fake News

So what do we actually know, beyond the exit poll data, about rural and working-class white women who voted for Trump? In the run up to the election, we saw many images of “adorable deplorables.” This was the moniker claimed by women who took Hillary Clinton’s campaign gaffe—“you could put half of

201. Id.
202. See Anne Helen Petersen, Women Explain Why They’re Standing by Trump, BUZZFEED (Oct. 14, 2016), https://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelepetersen/trump-women-vow-were-with-him?utm_term=.ac2Y83Y39#.gc2BmZBZx (telling of a “middle-aged woman [seeking her] out so she could declare her message on camera. ‘No I’m not a feminist!’ she declared. ‘I’m a strong, totally independent person!’”).
203. See infra notes 288-291 (discussing comments of Billie Jean King and Michelle Obama).
205. See supra Part II. (From Neglect to Contempt).
Trump’s supporters into what I call a basket of deplorables—and embraced and morphed the label defiantly, claiming it as a badge of pride.

Media journeys into Trump country have provided more intimate introductions to a number of female Trump supporters. Indeed, journalists were profiling these women well before the election, even before the Access Hollywood tape was released. Among them was Cindy Hedges, the owner of a boot store in Paris, Kentucky (population 8,553). Roger Cohen of the New York Times brought us Hedges, about whom he wrote:

Straight talk, the way the people of this particular Paris like it, is the kind of talk they recognize in Donald J. Trump. Hedges is a garrulous woman who says she’s “never met a stranger.” But recent times have tried her affability. Her business has been slow. Her husband, Mitch, lost his job as the coal business collapsed, she has been withdrawing money from savings, and the couple are struggling to afford health insurance. All of which has led her to the conviction that the country is off track and needs “somebody spectacular to get us halfway straight.”

My own favorite emissary to Trumplandia, Alec MacGillis of ProPublica, brought us Tracie St. Martin of Miamisburg, Ohio, population 20,181. Pardon the long excerpt, but you need the full vignette because it touches on so many issues of the day, and so many factors that apparently influenced the election’s outcome. I’m also including it because I would like the chattering classes to read it unabridged. I wish more people in my world had to confront St. Martin’s reality; I wish every progressive who derisively rolls her eyes at St. Martin and her milieu would endeavor to hear her a bit more empathically, to imagine what it is like to be her.

St. Martin stepped out onto the porch, a 54-year-old woman with a sturdy, thick-muscled build and sun-weathered face, both of them products of her 26 years as a heavy-construction worker. St. Martin greeted the women warmly, and when they told her what they were there for she said, sure, she was considering Trump—even though she usually voted Democratic. And when they got talking, in the disjointed way of canvassers making a quick pitch, about how Trump was going to bring back the good jobs, St. Martin was visibly affected. She interrupted them, wanting to tell them about how she had, not long ago, worked a job that consisted of demolishing a
big local GM plant. Her eyes welled up as she told the story and she had trouble continuing.

The canvassers gave her some materials and bade her farewell. But I doubled back a little later and visited with St. Martin in her kitchen, which she was in the midst of tidying up, with daytime TV playing in the background. Space in the kitchen was tight due to the treadmill she recently bought to help her get into better shape, which she hoped might make her less dependent on the painkillers for the severe aches she got from her physically demanding job, pills that had gotten a lot harder to obtain from her doctor amid the clampdown on prescription opioids.

St. Martin apologized, unnecessarily, for her emotions on the porch and expanded on what she had told the women from Buffalo: She was a proud member of Local 18 of the operating engineers’ union, which had been urging its members to support Hillary Clinton. The union provided her health insurance and decent pay levels, and trained her for demanding work….

She came from a staunch Democratic family and had voted for Barack Obama in 2008, before not voting in 2012 because, she said, she was away on one of her long-term jobs.213 She was a single mother with three grown daughters. She had experienced all manner of sexual discrimination and harassment on very male-heavy worksites over the years.

... And yet St. Martin was leaning toward Trump.

Her explanation for this was halting but vehement, spoken with pauses and in bursts. She was disappointed in Obama after having voted for him. “I don’t like the Obama persona, his public appearance and demeanor,” she said. “I wanted people like me to be cared about. People don’t realize there’s nothing without a blue-collar worker.” She regretted that she did not have a deeper grasp of public affairs. “No one that’s voting knows all the facts,” she said. “It’s a shame. They keep us so fucking busy and poor that we don’t have the time.”214

I find St. Martin’s acknowledgement that she wasn’t up to speed on all the issues particularly poignant. Indeed, St. Martin is a living manifestation of what Joe Bageant has referred to as an absence of the “life of the mind,” a life in which having time to consider the issues of the day is a luxury not afforded to those who

213. This echoes a trend we saw in post-election 2016 coverage: the white working-class voter who had gone for Obama in 2008 and perhaps even 2012, but which voted for Trump in 2016. See McElwee et al., supra note 27. See, e.g., Salena Zito, The Populist Midwest Wave the Beltway Didn’t See Coming, WASH. EXAMINER (Nov. 12, 2016), https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/the-populist-midwest-wave-beltway-didnt-see-coming (featuring a 27-year-old mechanic and his 28-year-old wife, a home healthcare nurse, who voted for Obama twice but turned to Trump in 2016). See also supra note 27 (discussing phenomenon of Obama voters turning to Trump).

214. MacGillis, Revenge, supra note 25 (emphasis added).
must devote all their resources and energy to making ends meet, to survival.\textsuperscript{215} Remember Maslow’s hierarchy of needs\textsuperscript{216}.

MacGillis’s depiction of St. Martin proceeds:

When she addressed Clinton herself, it was in a stream that seemed to refer to, but not explicitly name, several of the charges thrown against Clinton by that point in time, including her handling of the deadly 2012 attack by Islamic militants on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya; the potential conflicts of interest at the Clinton Foundation; and her use of a private email server while serving as Secretary of State, mixing national security business with emails to her daughter, Chelsea.

“To have lives be sacrificed because of corporate greed and warmongering, it’s too much for me—and I realize I don’t have all the facts—that there’s just too much sidestepping on her. I don’t trust her. I don’t think that—I know there’s casualties of war in conflict, I’m a big girl, I know that. But I lived my life with no secrets. There’s no shame in the truth. There’s mistakes made. We all grow. She’s a mature woman and she should know that. You don’t email your fucking daughter when you’re a leader. Leaders need to make decisions, they need to be focused. You don’t hide stuff.”\textsuperscript{217}

Another theme evident in St. Martin’s comments is the apparent influence of fake news. St. Martin “seemed to refer to, but not explicitly name, several of the charges thrown against Clinton.”\textsuperscript{218} And St. Martin was vague on the details, perhaps not fully grasping the import—or lack thereof—of the various charges now seen as part and parcel of a fake news campaign run by the far right, aided and abetted by Russia.\textsuperscript{219} The right’s framing of Clinton’s actions, along with the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{215} J. O. E. BAGEANT, DEER HUNTING WITH JESUS: DISPATCHES FROM AMERICA’S CLASS WAR 10 (2007). \textit{See also infra} note 328. This is consistent with the conclusions of political scientists Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels:

\begin{quote}
Most voters, we argue, are busy with their lives in the best, and doubly so when they are under great economic pressure in recessions and depressions. Politics is full of complexities and uncertainties, even for those who can devote full time to it. The voters, not knowing what the best policies are, content themselves with asking at election time whether events have gone well or bad lately. Then they vote that myopic judgement.
\end{quote}

ACHEN & BARTELS, \textit{supra} note 180, at 211. This is also reminiscent of the part of Obama’s memoir, \textit{DREAMS FROM MY FATHER}, where he talks about his mother’s decision to get him out of Indonesia because the focus there had to be on survival, leaving too little room for all else. BARACK OBAMA, \textit{DREAMS FROM MY FATHER: A STORY OF RACE AND INHERITANCE} 45-49 (2007). \textit{See also generally} LILLIAN RUBIN, WORLDS OF PAIN: LIFE IN THE WORKING-CLASS FAMILY (1976) (detailing the day-to-day stresses within working-class families).


\bibitem{217} MacGillis, \textit{Revenge, supra} note 25 (emphasis added).

\bibitem{218} \textit{Id.}

fake news machine’s outright lies about Clinton and her staff, e.g., the child sex ring that Clinton and John Podesta purportedly ran out of a Washington, D.C. pizza parlor.\textsuperscript{220} may also be at play in St. Martin’s garbled comments about Clinton’s email use. Combined with St. Martin’s own admission that she doesn’t have adequate time to “know all the facts,” this anger directed at Clinton seems grounded in the sort of half-truths, drivel, and bias associated with Fox News, fake news,\textsuperscript{221} and Russian interference with the election.\textsuperscript{222}

Indeed, I could not help wonder if St. Martin was jealous of Clinton, jealous of a woman who had a desk job that afforded her the opportunity to e-mail her daughter from work, a job that gave her the flexibility to help plan her daughter’s wedding. This was no doubt a luxury St. Martin had never enjoyed—and perhaps never even dreamed of until she learned Clinton had done so. St. Martin also had grown daughters, and it seems unlikely that she would have had the opportunity to help plan their weddings while at work—if, indeed, her daughters had married or been able to celebrate formal weddings at all.\textsuperscript{223} A job so beyond St. Martin’s

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\textsuperscript{221} See Michelle Goldberg, \textit{Why Did Planned Parenthood Supporters Vote Trump?}, \textit{SLATE} (Dec. 22, 2016), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2016/12/planned_parenthood_focus_groups_reveal_clinton_s_big_blunder.html. Susan Chira also brought us profiles of a number of female Trump voters in a pre-inauguration story. See Chira, \textit{Focus on the Good}, supra note 27. Chira’s is one of many stories that quoted women who made vague but hyperbolic negative comments about Hillary Clinton, stories that had a tone suggesting fake news—or at least Fox News—had influenced them. One woman featured in the Chira story, Rebecca Gregory, a 46-year-old nurse from Roseville, Michigan, said she had voted for Obama in 2008 and 2012, but felt the country had become more racially divided during his presidency. She stated:

I didn’t like the way the economy is going and I didn’t like the stance he took on police. My husband is a court officer and volunteers in the police force. [President Obama] didn’t support law enforcement the way he did the community that felt they were being unjustly treated. I think he could have done a better job of pointing blame. Instead of saying we need to educate people on how to behave when they’re being pulled over by the police.

\textit{Id.} Having pondered Ms. Gregory’s advocacy for police officers, I was struck by a story in the \textit{Wall Street Journal} which revealed:

\[\text{[Russian-placed ads on Facebook]}\text{ targeted groups on opposite sides of an issue, a move that lawmakers said was designed to amplify social divisions. One of the Russia-backed pages, “Back the Badge,” for example, ran an ad in October 2016 meant to reach the wives of police officers, sheriffs and pages memorializing killed officers that was seen more than 1.3 million times.}\]

Wells & Seetharaman, supra note 219. \textit{See also} MacGillis, \textit{Revenge}, supra note 25 (interviewing a woman who said she thought it “was wrong that if her brother [in the military] got deployed, he got only two meals per day, while people in prison get three”).

\textsuperscript{222} Apuzzo & LaFraniere, supra note 219.

\textsuperscript{223} See Kim Parker & Renee Stepler, \textit{As U.S. Marriage Rate Hovers at 50%, Education Gap in Marital Status Widens}, \textit{PEW RES. CTR.} (Sept. 14, 2017), http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-
reach—or even her imagination—thus became necessarily problematic, even criminal, “mixing national security business with emails to her daughter.” Yet people fortunate enough to be in the professional or managerial class mix personal tasks with work day in and day out from our desks. Doing so is not the least bit unusual for “us.”

St. Martin concluded: “That’s why I like Trump. He’s not perfect. He’s a human being. We all make mistakes. We can all change our mind. We get educated, but once you have the knowledge, you still have to go with your gut.”

What St. Martin meant by the last sentence is unclear. What is clear is that St. Martin was willing to forgive a serial liar and womanizer while clinging to her harshest judgments of a fellow woman. Indeed, one thing that stands out in many of these interviews is a powerful, visceral dislike of Hillary Clinton—essentially an “anyone but Clinton” or “never Clinton” attitude. Many voters’ comments evinced an undisputable double standard between Trump and Clinton, yet one they did not recognize even as they articulated it.

Like many we heard about in the post-election period, St. Martin voted for Obama in 2008 but at some point soured on him. Some would quickly conclude that St. Martin is racist for saying she doesn’t like Obama’s “persona, his public appearance and demeanor.” But I don’t believe it’s that simple, that St. Martin’s response is only about race. Her comments remind me of J.D. Vance’s assessment of working-class whites’ views of Obama, as articulated in *Hillbilly Elegy*:

Many of my new friends blame racism for this perception of the president. But the president feels like an alien to many [in Middletown, Ohio, Vance’s hometown, which is actually near St. Martin’s hometown] for reasons that have nothing to do with skin color. Recall that not a single one of my high school classmates attended an Ivy League school. Barack Obama attended two of them and excelled at both. He is brilliant, wealthy, and speaks like a constitutional law professor—which, of course, he is. Nothing about him bears any resemblance to the people I admired growing up: His accent—clean, perfect, neutral—is foreign; his credentials are so impressive that they’re frightening; he made his life in Chicago, a dense metropolis; and he conducts

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225. Id.

226. Id.; Letters to the Editor, ‘Vision, Chutzpah and Some Testosterone’, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 17, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/opinion/trump-voters-supporters.html?smid=tw-share. I also hear something like that from people in my own world who say they didn’t vote for Trump but also could never have voted for Clinton. Why? Because they just couldn’t; because she was “crooked Hillary.” Even amongst the well-educated, the taint of malfeasance—though never proved—stuck to the female candidate. Remarkably, a “lock her up” chant broke out at the campaign rally of a Republican candidate for U.S. House of Representatives in February 2018 in Sarasota County, Florida. See Zac Anderson, Corey Lewandowski Rallies GOP Base in Closing Stretch of Sarasota State House Race, HERALD-TRIB. (Feb. 11, 2018), http://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20180211/corey-lewandowski-rallies-gop-base-in-closing-stretch-of-sarasota-state-house-race. Yet the mainstream media has paid so little attention to this phenomenon. Once again, we scrutinize low-education women but not the (potential) misogyny and self-loathing of those in our own class.

himself with a confidence that comes from knowing that the modern American meritocracy was built for him. Of course, Obama overcame adversity in his own right—adversity familiar to many of us—but that was long before any of us knew him.

President Obama came on the scene right as so many people in my community began to believe that the modern American meritocracy was not built for them.\(^{228}\) This is a rare point on which I agree, at least partially, with Vance.\(^{229}\) This is not to say that visceral negative reactions to Obama have nothing to do with race, but St. Martin did overcome any racist impulses sufficiently to vote for Obama the first time, which is more than can be said for many whites of higher socioeconomic strata. In my book, she gets some credit for that. Race permeates everything, as does gender. I have already acknowledged that many whites no doubt responded to Obama negatively because he is Black.\(^{230}\) But the left’s tendency is to slap the


One peculiar phenomenon observed in features out of Trumplandia was low- to middle-class white voters blaming Obama for their perception that race relations had suffered during his presidency. See, e.g., Chakrabarti & Sundt, *supra* note 65 (quoting Dianna Ploss as blaming President Obama, rather than then-candidate Donald Trump, for the resurgence of wildly hateful incidents during the latter months of the presidential campaign); Chira, *Focus on the Good,* *supra* note 27 (discussing Roseville, Michigan woman whose husband was a police volunteer, who felt Obama should have been more supportive of police in the face of the Black Lives Matter movement). One of the most stunning vignettes of this sort came from a story by Jamelle Bouie:

“I think he’s divided this country in many ways,” said Lori, an older white woman, of Obama. “I know in a lot of places in America there’s a divide in color … like, when I walk up to someone in the stores”—she looked at me to emphasize what she means—“I feel that they’re wondering if I like them…. I didn’t feel that before. I was accepting of everyone, and I hate that he brought that.”


label “racist” or “racism” on folks like St. Martin without interrogating other factors at play, and also without unpacking what those terms mean. As a consequence, class differences and class-based animus are often neglected. Vance is hardly the first person to point out that class has cultural components, not only material ones. Many who are scholars (and not merely memoirists) have made this point, too. And note that St. Martin’s very next thought after her comments about Obama reflects the forgotten theme: “I wanted people like me to be cared about.” That juxtaposition may be telling.

MacGillis also introduced us to Tiffany Chesser, a young woman representative of a trend I noticed among female Trump supporters: the woman who was voting for Trump out of concern for her husband’s or boyfriend’s job. Chesser explained:

[H]er boyfriend worked at a General Electric light-bulb plant nearby that was seeing more of its production lines being moved to Mexico. She saw voting for Trump as a straightforward transaction to save his job. “If he loses that job we’re screwed—I’ll lose my house,” she said. “There used to be a full parking lot there—now you go by, there are just three trucks in the lot.”

MacGillis also asked Chesser and her peers whether they weren’t “equally bothered by the many women’s accusations against Trump.” Chesser responded: “It’s locker-room talk ... I know girls talk like that, and I know guys do.” Regarding the accusations of assault, Chesser replied, “Why are they just coming forward now?... If he did it to me before, I’d have come forward then. I wouldn’t wait until now.”

MacGillis also interviewed 49-year-old Tammy Nuth, who similarly questioned the accusers’ integrity, suggesting they were “getting paid off.” Nuth further excused Trump’s bad behavior with, “men are men.”

231. See generally JOAN C. WILLIAMS, WHITE WORKING CLASS: OVERCOMING CLASS CLUELESSNESS IN AMERICA (2017); JOAN C. WILLIAMS, RESHAPING THE WORK-FAMILY DEBATE: WHY MEN AND CLASS MATTER (2012); BAGEANT, supra note 215; SHERMAN, supra note 60.
232. MacGillis, Revenge, supra note 25.
233. Id.
234. Id. Regarding Clinton, Chesser opined, “If she’s being investigated by the FBI, there’s a reason for it.” Id. See also David Greene & Ashley Westerman, Where Coal Was King, Pa. Voters Hope Trump Rejuvenates Their Economy, NAT’L PUB. RADIO (Nov. 18, 2016), https://www.npr.org/2016/11/18/502539469/where-coal-was-king-pa-voters-hope-trump-rejuvenates-their-economy (quoting Tina Allen, a life-long Democrat commenting about her husband, “If he’s unemployed, where is he going to go? He’s almost 60 years old.”). See also Jeff Brady, A Trump Swing Voter Looks Ahead, NAT’L PUB. RADIO (Jan. 14, 2017), https://www.npr.org/2017/01/14/509497278/a-trump-swing-voter-looks-ahead.
235. MacGillis, Revenge, supra note 25.
236. Id.
237. Id.
238. Id.
239. Id.
Women interviewed by other journalists similarly rationalized Trump’s behavior toward women. One said, “I’d have been flattered if he did it to me.” Another commented, “If I turned down every candidate who objectified women, I’d vote for no one.” Yet another opined, “Trump says the things that other men think.” That woman further agreed with Trump’s blaming Miss Universe for gaining weight and pointed out that Trump is “an equal opportunity offender” because he also mocked Marco Rubio as “Little Marco.” Another woman was completely unfazed by any past bad behavior toward women, commenting, “I don’t care one iota about him offending women in the past. I don’t even want Donald Trump focused on it. I just want him to stay on message: economy, jobs, America first.”

These attitudes are sadly consistent with a sobering data point out of the Alabama special election in December, 2017: All told, just 33% of white women—but 41% of all women—said they believed the allegations of sexual misconduct against Roy Moore were true. The sisterhood looks weak indeed.

B. Division within the White Working Class

MacGillis is also among journalists whose reporting has revealed significant tension within the white working class. Although scholars have written about this intra-racial dynamic, it has gained little traction among academics or in the elite consciousness. Outsiders tend to see as a monolithic white working class, but in reality, within this broader block, the so-called “settled” working class are trying desperately to differentiate themselves from the so-called “hard-living” (a/k/a white trash) in a context where race doesn’t do the delineating for them. What

240. Petersen, supra note 202. Another woman interviewed by Petersen said, “What’s the difference? Fifty percent of the United States is immoral …. These women come out and say, ‘Oh my god, you can’t treat people like that.’ But [Trump] will screw anything that walks! I’m telling it like it is. That’s why I like Donald Trump.” Id. Regarding Hillary Clinton, the same woman focused on a meme widely circulated and discredited but picked up on Fox News that said that when Clinton was representing a man accused of raping a child, Clinton had shamed the child in the courtroom and laughed at her. The woman interviewed by Petersen said, “You listen to that compelling story … and, I mean, anyone who would vote for Hillary Clinton, shame on them.” Id.

241. Chira, Focus on the Good, supra note 27. This was several months before the #MeToo movement took off.


243. Id.

244. Id.


248. See generally MATT WRAY, NOT QUITE WHITE: WHITE TRASH AND THE LIMITS OF WHITENESS (2006); Pruitt, Geography of the Class Culture Wars, supra note 5.
often differentiates between those in the different strata is a job: it is the distinction between those who work and those who don’t. This tension has significant implications for safety net support, and thus in elections, as illustrated in the following vignettes.

In a 2015 op-ed in the New York Times, Alec MacGillis brought us 43-year-old Pamela Dougherty from Marshalltown, Iowa. Even though Dougherty had benefited from “taxpayer funded tuition breaks to attend community college” and become a nurse—this after having her first child as a teenager, marrying young and divorcing—Dougherty didn’t support safety net programs. In fact, she became a staunch opponent of them.

She was reacting, she said, against the sense of entitlement she saw on display at the dialysis center [where she worked]. The federal government has for years covered kidney dialysis treatment in outpatient centers through Medicare, regardless of patients’ age, partly on the logic that treatment allows people with kidney disease to remain productive. But, Ms. Dougherty said, only a small fraction of the 54 people getting dialysis at the center had regular jobs.

“People waltz in here when they want to,” she said, explaining that, in her opinion, there was too little asked of patients. There was nothing that said, “You’re getting a great benefit here, why not put in a little bit yourself.” At least when she got tuition help, she said, she had to keep up her grades. “When you’re getting assistance, there should be hoops to jump through so that you’re paying a price for your behavior,” she said. “What’s wrong with that?”

Note how consistent this attitude is with the exit poll data: Dougherty is probably in the $50K to $99.9K income category, which supported Trump by the widest margin. MacGillis also provides scholarly context for Dougherty’s attitude:

[R]esearchers such as Kathryn Edin, of Johns Hopkins University, found a tendency by many Americans in the second lowest quintile of the income ladder—the working or lower-middle class—to dissociate themselves from those at the bottom, where many once resided. “There’s this virulent social distancing—suddenly, you’re a

252. Id.
253. Id.
254. This is somewhat like the phenomenon gender scholars observe—the woman who arrives at her career goal but then, rather than helping the women rising behind her, pulls up the ladder. Ditto regarding racial minorities support or lack thereof for each other once they’ve made it. But we don’t talk about the phenomenon within whiteness, or more specifically within what we view as a monolithic white working class.
worker and anyone who is not a worker is a bad person,” said Professor Edin. “They’re playing to the middle fifth and saying, ‘I’m not those people.'”

Note the centrality of work—which is not synonymous with race—to Edin’s explanation of this tendency of low-ish income workers to pull up the safety net ladder behind them. Indeed, they often do this even when they have gotten where they are through some reliance on the safety net.

Public health scholar Atul Gawande discovered a similar dynamic when he visited his home town, Athens, Ohio, to explore attitudes about health care and health insurance for his October, 2017 New Yorker article, “Is Health Care a Right?” Among those he interviewed was Monna, who was earning $16.50/hour after 22 years on the job as a librarian. Once taxes and health insurance contributions were deducted, her take-home pay was less than a thousand dollars a month. The annual deductible on her health insurance is $3000, the equivalent of three months’ take-home pay. Monna’s husband was retired, and his “pension, military benefits, and Medicare helped keep them afloat.”

Monna considered herself a conservative. The notion of health care as a right struck her as another way of undermining work and responsibility: “Would I love to have health insurance provided to me and be able to stay home?” Of course, she said. “But I guess I’m going to be honest and tell you that I’m old school, and I’m not really good at accepting anything I don’t work for.”

She could quit her job and get Medicaid free, she pointed out, just as some of her neighbors had. “They have a card that comes in the mail, and they get everything they need!” she said. “Where does it end? I mean, how much responsibility do tax-paying people like me have? How much is too much?” She went on, “I understand that there’s going to be a percentage of the population that we are going to have to provide for.” When she was a young mother with two children and no home, she’d had to fall back

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255. MacGillis, Who Turned My Blue State Red?, supra note 180. See also Pruitt & Williams, infra note 286; Monica Prasad et al., Walking the Line: The White Working Class and the Economic Consequences of Morality, 44 POL. & SOC’y 281 (2016).


For all her struggles, though, Monna is the kind of person who is always ready to offer a helping hand. When I visited her, there were stacks of posters on her porch, printed for a fund-raiser she was organizing for her daughter’s high-school marching band. She raised money for her township’s volunteer fire brigade. She was the vice-president of her local union, one of the largest in the county, which represents school-bus drivers, clerical staff, custodians, and other non-certified workers. She’d been deeply involved in contract negotiations to try to hold on to their wages and health benefits in the face of cutbacks.

Id.

257. Id.

258. Id.

259. Id.

260. Id.
on welfare and Medicaid for three months. Her stepson, Eric, had been on Medicaid and Social Security Disability Insurance before he died. Her eighty-three-year-old mother, who has dementia and requires twenty-four-hour care, was also on Medicaid. “If you’re disabled, if you’re mentally ill, fine, I get it,” Monna said. “But I know so many folks on Medicaid that just don’t work. They’re lazy.” … [S]he felt that those people didn’t deserve what they were getting.261

Athens, Ohio is 91% White.262

This brings us to the issue of Obamacare and its structure. Recall that some states expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act,263 thus providing larger swaths of low-income populations with free medical insurance. In addition, the next income tier up got subsidies to help them afford the mandated purchase of health insurance.264 At some income level, however, the subsidies disappeared and people were forced to purchase insurance in a marketplace. For many, the rates in that marketplace have proved unaffordable.265 It is thus important to acknowledge that, for some, Obamacare has been a burden, at least in the short term. When those burdened by Obamacare see folks whose incomes are not much lower than their own getting Medicaid or subsidies, they are resentful.

Remember that Cindy Hedges, in Roger Cohen’s pre-election story out of Kentucky, talked about her family’s struggle to afford health insurance.266 This theme was echoed in a July, 2017, story in USA Today that introduced us to Debbie

261. Id. Gawande also discussed Medicare with Monna, including what made it different:

But then we talked about Medicare, which provided much of her husband’s health care and would one day provide hers. That was different, Monna told me. Liberals often say that conservative voters who oppose government-guaranteed health care and yet support Medicare are either hypocrites or dunces. But Monna, like almost everyone I spoke to, understood perfectly well what Medicare was and was glad to have it.

I asked her what made it different.

“We all pay in for that,” she pointed out, “and we all benefit.…”

…

Understanding this seems key to breaking the current political impasse.

Id.

262. American FactFinder, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml (enter “Athens County, Ohio” in search bar) (last visited June 27, 2018). Only 2.7% of the population identifies as Black or African American, and another 2.7% as Asian. In addition, only 1.5% identifies as Hispanic or Latino, and roughly a quarter of a percent identify as American Indian and Alaska Native. The population of Athens, Ohio as of the 2010 census is 64,757. Id.


266. Cohen, supra note 211.
Mitchell of Waynesboro, Tennessee. Mitchell said it’s “tough to care about Russian collusion when your husband needs new knees.” Her husband, a motorcycle mechanic, “voted for Trump because Obama’s changes to health care didn’t help him.” He suggested that he “might support someone else in the next election if Trump can’t deliver on health care.” His wife made the closing point:

“We’ve lost everything, pretty much,” said Debbie Mitchell. We can’t afford health care, period. We didn’t qualify for Obamacare, we didn’t qualify for (Medicaid), and we can’t afford to buy health insurance. We’re the ones that fall through the cracks. Asked if the situation made her nervous, she laughed.

“Nervous? We’ve been doing it for years. We passed nervous awhile back.”

Tina Allen of Uniontown, Pennsylvania also spoke of the burden of Obamacare in a late 2017 interview with National Public Radio. Allen noted that “her main concern is the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the high cost of health insurance … [e]veryone I talked to that’s on Obamacare, it has almost doubled,” Allen says. “So something needs done.” Allen mentioned that her daughter’s premiums had risen, though she wasn’t sure if the daughter’s insurance was through the ACA. Indeed, in most of these interviews a lack of clarity and precision about the Affordable Care Act is evident, e.g., “we don’t qualify for Obamacare.” That’s technically not correct because everyone qualifies to buy insurance under the Affordable Care Act. Such statements thus further illustrate how poorly understood Obamacare has been.


268. Boucher, supra note 267.

269. Id.

270. Id.

271. Id.


273. Id.

274. Id.


276. This last comment reflects another recurring theme about the Affordable Care Act in relation to Trump’s election: Many who voted for Trump—who pledged to repeal the ACA—did not know that their opportunity to purchase healthcare was through the ACA. And many of these were voters who wanted to keep their health insurance. See Kyle Dropp & Brendan Nyhan, One-Third Don’t Know Obamacare and Affordable Care Act Are the Same, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 7, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/upshot/one-third-dont-know-obamacare-and-affordable-care-act-are-the-same.html; Sarah Kliff, Why Obamacare Enrollleees Voted for Trump, Vox (Dec. 13, 2016), https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2016/12/13/13848794/kentucky-obamacare-trump; Sarah Kliff, They’re on Obamacare, They Voted for Trump, and They’re Already Disappointed, Vox (June 7, 2017, 7:00 AM), https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/7/15674380/obamacare-kentucky-trump-aha; Trip Gabriel, Machinic Counts on Health Care to Stave Off Republican Tide
The vignettes about Hedges, Mitchell and Allen raise an issue with which few mainstream journalists have grappled with any nuance.\footnote{277}{Goodnough, supra note 265.} Obamacare did not alleviate the healthcare or health insurance crises for those who now must purchase insurance but who do not have the resources to do so; these are folks who do not qualify for Medicaid or the subsidies afforded those in lower income bands.\footnote{278}{Id.} What is often on offer are high-premium, high deductible plans. This can be a particular problem in rural areas, where competition is less robust. These voters are not focused on the long-term benefit of not being rejected for coverage based on pre-existing conditions because they cannot currently afford the coverage that is on offer to them. This situation enhances the resentment these residents feel toward lower-income folks, those who get either Medicaid or subsidies.\footnote{279}{See infra notes 282-284 and accompanying text.}

In a similar vein, Atul Gawande has observed:

> The deal we each get on health care has a profound impact on our lives—on our savings, on our well-being, on our life expectancy. In the American health-care system, however, different people get astonishingly different deals. That disparity is having a corrosive effect on how we view our country, our government, and one another.\footnote{280}{Gawande, supra note 256.}

As I have already noted, this tension between different strata within the white working class is nothing new.\footnote{281}{See generally Sherman, supra note 60; Williams, Reshaping the Work-Family Debate, supra note 231; Pruitt, The Geography of the Class Culture Wars, supra note 5.} Yet many legal scholars overlook it, perhaps resisting the significance of class because they fear it will detract from attention to race, another zero-sum game that leads scholars, along with many commentators and politicians, to dismiss this powerful intra-racial tension. As a related matter, many progressives have concluded that working- to middle-class white animus toward recipients of public benefits is animated solely by inter-racial tension, often expressed in relation to the “welfare queen” stereotype.\footnote{282}{See generally Lisa R. Pruitt, Welfare Queens and White Trash, 25 S. Cal. Interdisc. L.J. 289 (2016). See also Kat Chow, Why More White Americans Are Opposing Government Welfare Programs, NAT’L PUB. RADIO (June 8, 2018, 6:51 AM), https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/06/08/616684259/why-more-white-americans-are-opposing-government-welfare-programs (discussing study by Robb Willer and Rachel Watts).} And they are not open to a complimentary explanation. In short, the “settled” working class resent government that does more for the “hard living” than for them.\footnote{283}{See generally MacGillis, Revenge, supra note 25; Sherman, supra note 60; Williams, Reshaping the Work-Family Debate, supra note 231; Pruitt, The Geography of the Class Culture Wars, supra note 5.} They resent working hard and seeing others get ahead, especially when those others are not
working, when those others are—to use Monna’s word—“lazy.” They also resent having their tax dollars pay for others’ benefits.

Dougherty expressed a related view, “when you’re getting assistance, there should be hoops to jump through.” Indeed, a rampant trend among states since Trump’s election is to put in place just such hoops in the form of work requirements as a condition of SNAP receipt. Since the beginning of 2018, the Trump administration has signaled its openness to states imposing work requirements for Medicaid, and as of March, 2018, three states’ applications to do so had been approved.

C. Some Feminist Ruminations on These Trends

Some women who are decidedly outside the white working class have criticized these female Trump voters, and that criticism has sometimes been framed in gender terms, as a statement about sisterhood or lack thereof. Billie Jean King, for example, commented, “I’m really upset with women, actually … I’m upset with the white women that voted for Mr. Trump. I think they really don’t like themselves ... I think a lot of women don’t like themselves.” Michele Obama also got in on the action: “Any woman who voted against Hillary Clinton voted against their own voice,” she said. Mrs. Obama “went on to suggest female voters for Trump were just going with the pack.”

It doesn’t say much about Hillary, and everybody’s trying to worry about what it means for Hillary and no, no, no what does this [the fact so many white women voted for Trump] mean for us as women? ... That we look at those two candidates, as women, and many of us said, “He’s better for me. His voice is more true to me.” To me that just says, you don’t like your voice. You just like the thing you’re told to like.

284. See supra note 261.
285. See supra note 254.
287. Williams & Pruitt, supra note 286.
288. Id.
289. Id.
290. Id.
291. Id.
I’ve floated the same hypothesis myself, that a certain self-loathing, or at least a deficit of self-respect, is at play among these women. And/or maybe they are oblivious to the patriarchy that encompasses them.

Such analyses would suggest that we need to run some consciousness raising into rural and white working-class communities. But how could we accomplish that? Most of us liberal elites don’t even know any of “those women,” and we don’t have the cultural competency to communicate with them.

The counter-argument, of course, is that I am articulating a false consciousness. (At least I’m in good company, with Billie Jean and Michelle.) A few thoughtful, empathic commentators have pointed out that the joke is on us when we assert that these women are voting against their own interests because from their perspective, they are very much voting in favor of their own interests. Whether it is their husband’s job down at the coal mine or their desperation for a living wage on their own behalf, is it possible these women know better than we do what’s good for them? When it comes to the likes of Donald Trump and Roy Moore, that’s a tough pill to swallow. I am, however, willing to acknowledge and respect that their priorities are different from elite priorities, and the most obvious priority is putting a roof over their family’s heads and food on the table. They are desperate for economic opportunity, and they trust Trump to deliver it—in part because recent presidents with standard elite profiles and credentials have not risen to that challenge.

Sarah Smarsh, writing for The Guardian, has suggested that the very use of the term “feminist” reflects a “privilege of education and culture” that working-class white women—those who almost by definition are without “words, time and money”—do not enjoy. Regarding poor women (who, I would argue, are synonymous with working-class ones for these purposes, in this age of precarity),
Smarsh opines that they do not have sufficient cultural capital to resist patriarchal situations, so they merely walk away. 295

Thinking of these women’s limited cultural capital may help explain why so many working-class white women vote with their husbands, why they don’t prioritize what we might see as their own dignity and, indeed, their own physical safety. You don’t bite the hand that feeds you (literally). 296 Further, when you have so little social, cultural, and economic capital—arguably the state of play within entrenched rural and/or white working-class patriarchy—you don’t have even a toehold for rocking any boats. Your value is in compliance. 297 Further, rural women are without the privilege afforded by anonymity; they must contend with a more constraining group think that dominates their often homogeneous communities. In a sense, then, poor and working-class white women walk away from what we might see as opportunities to resist the public patriarchy of Trump because they are trapped in and perversely dependent upon their own private patriarchy. And that is consistent with the patriarchy I theorized with regard to rural women more than a decade ago. 298

In short, working-class and rural white women would logically be focused on short-term survival, taking it more seriously than the benefits they might garner from supporting women’s rights or other identity issues. The only pay off these women are likely to see from prioritizing “women’s rights” over their more immediate (anticipated) economic gain from a Trump presidency is long-term at best. They don’t feel they have the luxury of prioritizing “gender issues,” 299 and they can’t see what feminists have done to enhance their economic security. Again, recall Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

* * *

So have these women been forgotten by feminism? Probably, yes. Mostly, yes. But have they not also been forgotten by our metro-centric nation and our metro-centric discipline (law) and our metro-centric institutions (e.g., law schools)? Certainly not all feminists have forgotten working-class women. Even

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295. Smarth, supra note 294.


297. Interestingly, compliance is also a value the white working class inculcate in their children. See generally ANNETTE LAREAU, UNEQUAL CHILDHOODS: CLASS, RACE, AND FAMILY LIFE (2011); WILLIAMS, RESHAPING WORK-FAMILY DEBATE, supra note 231.

298. See Pruitt, Gender, Geography and Rural Justice, supra note 10.

299. See Smarth, supra note 294. I was struck by an anecdote shared by a gay man at the Appalachian Justice symposium at the University of West Virginia College of Law in February 2018. He reported on an oral history project he had conducted in his home region, eastern Kentucky. He told of gay people in that region torn between voting against Trump because of his intolerance for the LGBT community, but then feeling they should vote for him because his presidency would be good for the regional economy.
apart from her more explicit work about class, Joan Williams often refers to women who are “one sick child away from being fired.”

Lots of scholars have written about women of color, who are often presumed to be low income. The left is well aware of these women. Yet somehow, white working-class women—like white working-class populations generally—are rarely acknowledged in legal scholarship except when they are cast as part of the problem. We don’t view them as vulnerable and in need of our solicitude, blinded as we are by what must look like their desecration of whiteness.

Even when we see white vulnerability, we may express that vulnerability in a ham-handed, condescending way that undermines the possibility of mutual respect. As I wrote this, the left was excoriating Paul Ryan for re-Tweeting a message from a school secretary who was celebrating saving $1.50/week “thanks” to the Republican tax plan passed in December 2017. She was apparently genuine in celebrating that this will add up to enough to pay for her annual Costco membership. Liberals ridiculed Ryan, who I do believe deserves obloquy for his long-standing war on the social safety net. But has it occurred to liberals that they are also, in a sense, ridiculing the woman who is excited to be able to pay for her Costco membership with her tax savings?

300. WILLIAMS, RESHAPING THE WORK-FAMILY DEBATE, supra note 231; WILLIAMS, WHITE WORKING CLASS, supra note 231.


303. See generally Pruitt, Welfare Queens and White Trash, supra note 282.

304. See Pruitt, False Choice, supra note 5, at 982.

305. See generally EMORY UNIVERSITY: VULNERABILITY AND THE HUMAN CONDITION INITIATIVE, http://web.gs.emory.edu/vulnerability/ (last visited May 15, 2018). This initiative was founded by Martha Fineman.


307. Cochrane, supra note 306; Podnar, supra note 306. See also Congressional Leadership Fund SuperPAC, Mary Beth, YOUTUBE (Feb. 21, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzwYHYXre8 (ad implicitly supporting Rick Saccone for the 18th congressional district in Pennsylvania, featuring a widow saying every dollar counts and blasting Conor Lamb and Nancy Pelosi for not understanding that recent tax reform efforts truly help people like her).
This response suggests that liberal elites do not grasp how valuable $1.50/week is to many working-class Americans. Yet they clearly do understand the value of such amounts when highlighted by a liberal for a progressive cause. Just witness the praise (justifiably) heaped on California Supreme Court Justice Goodwin Liu for his language in a 2018 wage theft case in which a majority of the court disputed the notion of de minimis wage theft.\(^{308}\) Liu observed that “[a] few extra minutes of work each day can add up” to “enough to pay a utility bill, buy a week of groceries, or cover a month of bus fares. What [defendant] Starbucks calls ‘de minimis’ is not de minimis at all to many ordinary people who work for hourly wages.”\(^{309}\)

Justice Thurgood Marshall similarly opined in 1973: “It may be easy for some people to think that weekly savings of less than $2 are no burden. But no one who has had close contact with poor people can fail to understand how close to the margin of survival many of them are.”\(^{310}\) Ryan’s constituent, a member of the 21st century “middle class” precariat, might be seen as a descendent of those about whom Justice Marshall wrote more than four decades ago, and she probably has a lot in common with the workers Justice Liu championed in his wage theft opinion. Liberal elites need to grasp those similarities.

VI. A PERSONAL JOURNEY: WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY MOTHER?

All of this brings me to my mother, who does amazing things with $1.50. Hers is a story I might not have shared before the nation became enthralled with J.D. Vance and *Hillbilly Elegy*, before it became vogue to talk about one’s hillbilly origins.\(^{311}\) Under the circumstances, I’ll jump on the “memoir” bandwagon and take a chance. Perhaps I can elicit as much sympathy (though I really wish it were empathy) for my mother by virtue of her strivings and successes as the nation seems to feel for J.D. Vance by virtue of his mother’s failings.\(^{312}\)

My mother is a 74-year-old who is both working-class white and rural. Her life has been a major inspiration for my scholarship on rural women; she has lived many of the experiences about which I have written. Her choices have been limited by rural socio-spatiality (including lack of anonymity) and the rural socioeconomic landscape. Her agency has been severely limited by rural patriarchy.

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309. Id.


311. [*See generally Pruitt, What Hillbilly Elegy Teaches Us About Race*, supra note 23. I suggest it is vogue to do so, but I’m not sure it really is. Vogue for a limited population, perhaps? Like white men with Yale Law degrees? Will it be OK for me to do this? A white woman who has not laundered her hillbilly-ness with an elite education.]

312. Vance is, of course, the “hillbilly”-cum-Yale Law graduate-cum-venture capitalist-cum-philanthropist-cum-would-be U.S. Senator who was catapulted to notoriety with the publication of his memoir in 2016.
My mother married my father the day she finished high school, in 1962, a year after he finished high school. She gave birth to her first child—my sister—10 months later. I followed 18 months after that. My brother—the male child my father wanted so badly—was born nine years later. My mother turned 45 the month I finished law school. When I was 45, I had a 5-year-old child.

My mom earned an associate’s degree in early childhood development when I was in elementary school, an opportunity afforded her by a grant that aimed to develop sufficient human capital so that a HeadStart program could be opened in our persistent poverty county in the Ozarks. And so my mom became a HeadStart teacher, looking after children quite a bit less fortunate than her own. In the sink of the HeadStart restroom, she bathed children who had no running water at home, and she fed hungry kids what passed for three meals a day back before we adopted the euphemism “food insecurity.”

This opportunity to work at HeadStart was a good one in the context of a job market that leaves many commuting to neighboring counties. It was a gateway to a job as a teacher’s aide (now “instructional assistant”) that still pays her about $20,000/year. That’s “high cotton” where she lives. Believe it or not, people are hovering, just waiting for my mom to retire because jobs like hers are so coveted in such communities. She lives in a government dependent county, which means the lion’s share of jobs are at the school, as one of a handful of elected county officials, or as an employee of some state or federal agency with a modest presence in such a sparsely populated place.

Yes, my mother is still working into her mid-70s, mostly for economic reasons, though I would not deny the social and emotional benefits she also derives from getting out of the house. She will receive a small pension from the state of Arkansas for her years with the public school system but will live primarily off Social Security when she retires. In addition to her modest house, built the year I was born and worth perhaps $50,000 (hard to say in a market not penetrated by Zillow), she has two manufactured buildings on her property, one a trailer home and the other a large metal building; she rents both to local folks looking for a place to live in a crummy housing market. Thank God for Medicare. Two well-educated, professional/managerial class daughters may prove to be her most effective safety net in old age, especially if the current Republican administration has its way.

My mother grew up on a small, subsistence hill farm about 10 miles from the county seat where she now lives. My maternal grandparents got the benefits of rural electrification in the 1950s, but they continued for decades to draw their water by hand from a well just off the front porch. They used outhouses until they got indoor plumbing in the early 1990s, about the time I finished law school. When I conducted an oral history interview of my mom several years ago, I learned that

313. Description and Maps: Federal/State Government-Dependent (2015 ed.), U.S. DEP’T AGRIC., https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-typology-codes/descriptions-and-maps.aspx#government (last updated May 31, 2017) (defining government-dependent counties as “those where 14 percent or more of the county’s average annual labor and proprietors’ earnings were derived from Federal/State government, or 9 percent or more jobs were in Federal/State government as measured by 2010-12 Bureau of Economic Analysis, Local Area Personal Income and Employment data”).
she first had access to menstrual pads after she married my father. She told my father she was having her period, and he drove her to the little general store on the courthouse square where she bought Kotex for the first time in her life. She was 18.

My father was a long-distance truck driver. He earned good money for a working-class grunt, but it was a hard life. He succumbed to alcoholism and drug use, “uppers” while on the road. He was troubled, abusive, a living embodiment of The Hidden Injuries of Class. But he worked seven days a week until he had his first heart attack at age 46. He died at 61, having lived 15 years with chronic heart disease and COPD. Today, we might consider his a death of despair. My parents had managed to stay married 42 years.

My mother was—and is—a victim of domestic violence. This was at the hands of my father when he was living. Now she endures elder abuse at the hands of my adult brother. A few years ago I helped her get a restraining order against him, but it did not stick. Long story.

My mother knows I am a rape survivor, and she has never blamed me for that. I believe she is truly proud of the advocacy I have done regarding sexual assault. Maybe she is simply loyal to her daughter, or maybe she has at least that much of a feminist consciousness.

I do recall growing up that my mom wanted nothing so much as to get her daughters college educated so that they would have choices she had not had. She specifically wanted us to have the choice not to be at the mercy of a man—indeed, not to be with a man at all. She often told me that a career could be much more fulfilling than a marriage. Sadly, she only knew about the latter but speculated about the former.

My mother raised me in church and taught me most of the values by which I still live. The Golden Rule. I don’t recall her ever saying anything openly racist, but we were admittedly not in a place (and, relatively speaking, a time) very sensitive to racism. Those of my generation who have been able to partake in higher education now understand that our primary and secondary education occurred during a period when public school curriculum didn’t exactly hit us in the face with the harsh realities of slavery, never mind their enduring consequences. This oversight was presumably more acute in the South. I don’t recall being taught about Jim Crow during my K-12 education, and my mother surely was not either, two decades before me and in an even smaller, more remote, less adequate school.

What I am sure of is that I never heard my mom use the “N word,” and when my father did use it, she would slip around behind his back to ensure that her

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See also Lucille Jewel, On Merit and Mobility: A Progressive View of Class, Culture and the Law, 43 U. MEM. L. Rev. 239, 263-72, 276-77 (2012) (discussing the work of Annette Lareau, Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, John Ogbu regarding the “oppositional attitudes” of working-class whites, which are self-defeating in many settings, including higher education).

children knew this was wrong. (She could not say this in front of him because, well, you know, that domestic violence thing. She could not defy him openly. She has described having to hide her “night school” books when he came home for the weekend, so as to not trigger a patriarchal tirade—“patriarchal” being my word, not hers.) To be very clear, I know that not saying the “N word” is a very low bar for determining whether or not someone is racist, just as a past vote for Obama is. My point here is to tell things like they were and are. I must save for another day a full account of our myriad definitions of “racist” and “racism.”

My mom was chairman of the county Democratic Party for a few years in the 1990s or early 2000s. She even ran unsuccessfully for county office as a Democrat several decades ago. Mom taught me that the Democrats were the party that looked out for working people and that the Republicans were the party of elites. We were working people so we were Democrats.

My mother told me she voted for Barack Obama in 2008, but the summer before his 2012 re-election, when I casually asked her what she thought about the race—trying to make conversation, to bridge the gap between our worlds—she replied with great emotion that she didn’t know who she would vote for but she wouldn’t be voting for Obama because “he just doesn’t get it.” She referenced Obama’s comment, “If you’ve got a business, you didn’t build that,” which attracted a great deal of media attention that summer. Of course, the Romney campaign took the quote out of context. In its entirety, Obama had said:

If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you’ve got a business, you didn’t build that. Somebody else made that happen.

I provided this context, explaining to my mom what I thought Obama meant. I did so by reference to the small trucking company she and my father had run for about a decade, the trucking company that, in partnership with Pell Grants, work study and scholarships put my sister and me through college. I told her that the trucking company would not have been possible without the network of interstate highways that permit the transport of goods by truck. I talked about the teachers who equip us with knowledge to survive (and possibly flourish) in the modern world. I referenced the commonwealth of which we are all a part. Yet my explanation seemed to fall on deaf ears.

During her annual summer visit in 2016, I again casually initiated a conversation about the presidential race. I assumed Mom would be loyal to Hillary Clinton in the way she and my father had always been loyal to Bill Clinton, as governor and later during his presidential campaigns. I soon regretted the query

316. I do, however, start to address this issue at infra Part VII.
318. Id.
because my mom launched into a heated spiel: all she knew was that she had to
work, had always worked and that she didn’t understand how the people protesting
as part of the Black Lives Matter movement had time to protest. She, after all, had
to work. “Don’t they have to work?” she said.

My mother was “colorblind,” she continued, seeing no black and no white,
just people who worked and those who didn’t. She reserved her most scathing
criticism for those around her—remember that she lives in an all-white county—
who were not willing to work or those who spent unexpected windfalls or their tax
refund (we’re talking maybe a couple hundred dollars) on things like a trip to an
amusement park instead of necessary automobile or household repairs, instead of
saving it.

My mother didn’t reference any particular candidates, but I thought she was
sounding like a Trump voter. She was also sounding like Monna in Atul
Gawande’s story, Pamela Dougherty in Alec MacGillis’s 2015 op-ed, and
Debbie Mitchell in the USA Today story. She was sounding like the folks
Hochschild met in Louisiana.

But my mother was also sounding like herself in the sense that her life has
always been about work. She has always looked down on those who do not work,
considering the latter—including a number in her extended family—to be white
trash as a consequence of that failure. In my mother’s world, work saves. Work
is dignity. The same was true of my father. I never knew him to take an entire day
off, not on the weekend, not even on Christmas Day. Relaxation was not in his
repertoire.

I remembered something I had learned about my mother only a few years
earlier. When my father’s health failed him in his late 40s, he and my mother at
one point sought public benefits and were told they would have to sell assets (their
modest home and their vehicles) in order to qualify. Needless to say, this did not
sit well with them. It did not make sense, and it bred an even deeper resentment
against those who do get public benefits, especially those who live off public
benefits on an ongoing basis and not simply to pull themselves out of poverty
spells.

As I listened to my mother’s rant in the summer of 2016, I attempted to
formulate and articulate some counter-points in a way that would meet her where
she was, which was clearly not where I wanted to be. I realized that my mother
had never had the opportunity to learn some of the things I have learned and now
take for granted. I have been living the “life of the mind” for more than three

319. My mother has since told me she did not vote for Trump.
320. See Gawande, supra note 256.
322. See Boucher, supra note 267.
323. See generally HOCHSCHILD, supra note 58. See also Prasad et al., supra note 255, at 295-97
    (sharing attitudes of working-class women who focused on the value of work and judged harshly
even their own family members for making bad choices, with greater attention to individual choices
than to structural constraints on labor markets); Paige M. Kelly & Linda M. Lobao, The Social Bases
of Rural-Urban Political Divides: Social Status, Work, and Sociocultural Beliefs, RURAL SOC.
    (forthcoming 2018).
324. BAGEANT, supra note 215, at 10.
decades, and I’ve been very open with her about my politics, my positions. I thus
assumed I had brought her along with me. She was, after all, a Democrat.

But I also had to confront the reality that my mother has never been taught
about structural racism. She’s never taken the online test to reveal implicit bias.
So it’s not that crazy that she thinks she is colorblind, or that she wears her
(professed) colorblindness as a badge of virtue. In my mother’s world, racism is a
conscious act of bias, an intentional, festering animus, if you will. In her world,
racism is the KKK, and she’s certainly not that.325

My mother’s whole life has been framed and limited by structural deficits
associated with place, with living amidst entrenched, intergenerational poverty:
crummy schools, crummy health care, crummy job market, crummy infrastructure.
So she’s not primed to be very sympathetic to arguments about structural racism—
unless it acknowledges her as a victim, too. And would it be “racism” in relation
to her because whites have race, too? Is it racism because outsiders (those
unfamiliar with how complex and stratified the white working class is) might see
her circumstances and assume she is white trash?326 Or is structural racism limited
to structural inequality that disproportionately affects non-whites?

Even if her structural disadvantage were acknowledged as being merely
about class, my mom would resist seeing herself as a victim.327 She would
appreciate more and better services if they were on offer. She would probably not,
however, think to ask for them.

My mom’s first priority is survival: paying her bills, keeping a roof over her
head, feeding herself and my brother. It may be too late, now, to get her interested
in “the life of the mind.”328 Fighting sexual harassment, taking a stand against
sexual assault, or even asking for higher wages, these are luxuries my mom—like
many working-class women—feel they do not have. She has fretted some in recent
years about just hanging on to her job, as the administrative personnel of the school
district has changed, “outsiders” coming in and shaking things up. Not long ago,
she was irked by the altered expectations of a new superintendent; she struggled to
tow the new line, lest she be fired. She struggled to hold her tongue, to be
compliant. To stand up for herself, rock the boat, is to risk termination. It’s not
something a working-class white woman in her 70s—one with a “good job” in a
crummy job market and no retirement plan—is going to do.

325. See supra note 102 and infra Part VII.
326. I have often said to students in my Law and Rural Livelihoods course that if they saw the
house in which I grew up, they might assume I was white trash. My point is that outsiders—those
unfamiliar with the divide between “settled” working class and “hard-living,” between red necks and
white trash, might mistake my upbringing for a white trash upbringing. They would be wrong, but
how can outsiders know when the line between rednecks and white trash is such a broad and fuzzy
one, especially when many don’t even know there is such a line.
327. See Prasad et al., supra note 255, at 297 (observing that working-class whites downplayed
the role of structural forces like deindustrialization, instead focusing on individual choices in the
wake of those greater forces).
328. BAGEANT, supra note 215, at 10. I have noticed that mother enjoys the newspaper crossword
when she visits. She also seems to enjoy reading the New York Times and the Sacramento Bee, to
which we subscribe. I wonder if, back home, she has the time or psychic space to read any news,
other than the weekly county newspaper, though she does have access to the Arkansas Democrat-
Gazette when school is in session.
I was not raised with a feminist consciousness; that came in law school. I was raised to survive, to work hard, to expect (or was it merely hope?) to succeed (and with a very different sense then of what it meant to succeed). I only learned much later to think critically. My mom is still in full-on survival mode. Tragically, she doesn’t have the energy to be outraged by Trump’s sexism or his racism or his mocking of the disabled. But she would really like to feel she is respected, and she is always stressed about money. She’s always looking out for that $1.50.

VII. WHO’S CALLING WHOM A RACIST?

This brings me to those who, upon reading what I have written of my mother, will label her a racist. That, after all, is liberal elites’ favored conclusion about folks like her, especially in the era of Trump. If you are not as fully evolved in your understanding of race as an academic on the left, if you are not perfectly politically correct (a constantly moving target, I might add), you are a racist.

This labeling is consistent with the oft-drawn conclusion that racism was the primary or even sole motivation of Trump voters. Since the 2016 election, mainstream media outlets have run numerous stories and opinion pieces debating this question: was it racism or was it the economy? Things get even worse on social media. As just one illustration, in the wake of the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, my Twitter feed was awash with memes asserting that the event established that all Trump voters were racist. One that came across my Twitter feed as re-Tweeted by Steve Marmel had also been re-Tweeted by 3.6

thousand others by the time I captured my screen shot. It was a meme consisting of a photo of white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, tiki torches in hand, with these words superimposed: “LOOK AT ALL THE ECONOMIC ANXIETY.”331 Similarly, Amy Siskind, Tweeted “I don’t want to read one more about the white people who voted for Trump because of jobs. The truth is marching in Charlottesville tonight.”332 Siskind’s Twitter bio states: “President of the New Agenda. Advocate for women’s LGBTQ rights and equality. Fmr Wall Street exec. POLITICO 50. Author of THE LIST.”333

Willie Garson, whose Twitter profile reads, “Try Kindness. Actor? Dad,”334 re-Tweeted Siskind’s Tweet with the addition of “Agreed. Jobs my ass.”335 Keith Boykin, a commentator for CNN who teaches politics at Columbia University, Tweeted, “Every pundit who proclaimed Trump’s election was about ‘economic anxiety’ instead of racism should hang their head in shame.”336

These pundits must not realize that they have set up a false choice and that when they choose “racism” over “jobs” they are denying the economic distress felt by at least some—probably many—Trump voters, especially the low-income ones. When they accuse these voters of racism without also acknowledging these voters’ economic distress, aren’t they saying that this economic distress doesn’t matter? Are they not, in a sense, continuing to ignore a core ailment of these voters?

And can this really be what liberal elites intend to communicate? Are progressives really so completely lacking in nuance? Are they truly so politically inept? Is everything truly so cut and dried, right and wrong, black and white (no pun intended)?

Which brings me back to the query: Is my mother a racist? Depends on how you define the term, I suppose. She is not a white supremacist, contrary to what popular memes on “progressive” Twitter might suggest. Does she regard the members of a racial or ethnic group with hatred or intolerance? Not consciously.

331. Screenshot of Tweet by Steve Marmel (@Marmel), TWITTER (Aug. 12, 2017) (on file with author). His Twitter bio reads: “Not a journalist. Focussed [sic] on Midterms: Registration, IDs, beating suppression w/massive turnout. #Indivisible #SwingLeft #BlueWave #MuteMorons, #BlockMonsters.” (Screenshot of bio also on file with author.).
334. Screenshot of Willie Garson Twitter bio on file with author (Mar. 26, 2018). Garson’s Twitter profile also includes his Instagram and Facebook links.
335. Screenshot on file with author. Garson is an actor, director and producer.
One could say she is intolerant of Black Lives Matter protesters because they are Black. Or one could say she is intolerant of them because they somehow have the time to protest while she does not believe she has that luxury. Progressive elites would reflexively assume the former. Maybe when she looks at Black Lives Matter, she sees someone cutting in line ahead of her (to use Hochschild’s metaphor) simply because they don’t prioritize work in the way she does. She’s not any more put off by BLM protesters than she is by white people around her who do not work. When people are economically insecure, are they not more likely to turn on one another? To lapse into tribal behavior? To succumb to the divisive rhetoric of the likes of Donald Trump? And if they are not educated about these phenomena, they will not know of the imperative to check those impulses.

I see my mother as fundamentally a person of goodwill, but she is terribly worn down by the struggle to survive. So is it helpful to us the “r-word” on my mother and folks like her? Without laying a lot of groundwork with them for how we are defining the term, doing so will only further alienate them, and I’m not convinced anti-Trump forces can afford to alienate swing voters unless we’re willing to take another four years of Trump as president.

In this regard, consider the comments of a 39-year-old white woman from Gulf Shores, Alabama, whom Susan Chira interviewed for her New York Times feature on female Trump supporters.

Somebody called me a racist because I did vote for Trump. Hold on, you don’t know me. Doesn’t that make you a racist by calling me a racist when you don’t know me? I’m looking for a brighter future for me and my children, and honestly I felt like our country was kind of at risk if we did elect Hillary.337

Another, this one interviewed for a Buzzfeed story, referred to a sign calling Trump voters racists:

It says we’re racist, but I don’t see how …. I coach teams, and I’m like the United Nations with my teams, because their parents are mostly locked up, they live with their grandparents, and I can’t tell you what we all do for these children. We do more than their parents do. So I’m not racist, we’re very giving, and I’m also a Catholic.338

It is easy for liberal elites to ridicule these women for being “clueless” or whatever term the chattering classes might choose. We should realize and acknowledge, however, that their understanding of racism is not our understanding of racism. We should furthermore be up front about the fact that when we call them “racist,” we are not using that term in its broadest sense—that everyone is racist.339 In fact,
we are casting aspersions on them that we are not owning for ourselves: We are implicitly differentiating ourselves from them by not owning up to our own roles in racism, structural and otherwise. In short, we are doing what Martha Mahoney wrote about more than two decades ago. We are projecting society’s racism—indeed, “our racism”—onto working-class whites: “For white Americans of middle-class and elite status—the people who write the books and do the social analysis—racism is something that working-class whites (particularly Southerners) do to blacks and other people of color.”

This double standard is well illustrated by the national furor that erupted in the wake of Barbara Bush’s death in April, 2018, when a Fresno State University professor called Bush a “racist” on social media. A tenured professor got in a heap of trouble for calling an elite white a racist. Yet we regularly cheer—and eagerly re-Tweet—those who use that term in relation to working-class whites voters.

If we are going to run around calling so many people “racist,” we really must define our terms. And even that is very complicated because the chasm between the chattering classes and the working classes is so great. An enormous foundation of shared knowledge will first have to be laid if we are to come closer to a similar understanding of race and racism.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The 2016 election has made progressive elites more aware of rural and working-class white folks. But whether getting low-income white and rural voters on the radar screen of progressives will prove a net gain remains to be seen. Is it possible that being condescended to and held in contempt is preferable to invisibility, to being studiously ignored?

In a sense, rural and white working-class folks who voted for Trump—especially the 9% who previously voted for Obama—are like the pesky child who misbehaves to get her parents’ attention. How will progressives respond to the miscreants? Punish them for their misbehavior? Extract our pound of flesh


343. McElwee et al., supra note 27.

344. A common message on my Twitter feed in 2017 was to the effect that if Trump voters lose their health care coverage or get shafted by Trump’s “tax reform,” they deserve it. They asked for it. Another example is from March 17, 2017, when Nathaniel C. Tensen, Tweeted: “Pretty sad that working-class Appalachians who just earnestly wanted to harm immigrants, blacks, and Muslims wound up screwing themselves.” Screenshot on file with author. Tensen has since changed his Twitter handle to Stable Genius Nate, @NathanCHudson, and he self identifies as “Registered Democrat interested in politics, economics, film, music, evolutionary science, cosmology, and arguing. Occasional jokes and pics but no hashtags.” Screenshot on file with author.
if progressives ever regain sufficient political power to do so? Bear in mind that working-class white and rural America are already running pretty lean. They don’t have a lot more to lose.

Or will we listen to them—listen empathically—in order to learn what challenges they are facing? Will we be willing to do what it takes to invest in their futures, or will we continue to invest primarily in our own? Will we continue to prioritize our sanctimonious politically correct positions above all else? We say we wish to help vulnerable populations, but will we become cognizant of and acknowledge the vulnerability of poor and working-class whites? Or will we listen to them—listen empathically—in order to learn what challenges they are facing? Will we be willing to do what it takes to invest in their futures, or will we continue to invest primarily in our own? Will we continue to prioritize our sanctimonious politically correct positions above all else? We say we wish to help vulnerable populations, but will we become cognizant of and acknowledge the vulnerability of poor and working-class whites?345 Of rural folks?346 Will we be able to assess them as anything more than defilements of whiteness, a great national embarrassment?

I see signs that we are willing to take chances—as the Democrats did in 2016—that non-whites will become sufficient in number and political power to put and keep progressives in office in future elections.347 I see signs that we are willing to write off the white working-class and rural voters, to let them walk away from the Democratic coalition of which they have long been a cornerstone. Our way or the highway. In short, to quote that old bit of marital advice, “do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?” Progressives seem to prioritize being “right” over the need to build broad progressive coalitions.

I hope I’m wrong. Abandoning efforts to draw working-class whites into a progressive coalition is not only a risk I think we should not take, it would not be the right thing to do. Do we really want to leave anyone out—excepting, of course, white supremacists and their ilk. David Leonhardt of the New York Times offered this caution in November, 2017, following Ralph Northam’s victory in the Virginia gubernatorial race:

[G]iving up on the white working class would be a terrible mistake. Whites without four-year college degrees make up fully half of the adult population, and they tend to be dispersed, rather than packed in small geographic areas, which increases their political power.

Without the white working class, Democrats will need everything else to go spectacularly well to retake the House of Representatives [in 2018].348

345. I was struck by the comment of Mark Partridge, offered at the close of a conference on rural poverty, a comment he suggested summarizes our nation’s poverty policy: “being poor is not bad enough.” Mark Partridge, Professor, The Ohio State Univ. Dep’t Agric., Env’t & Dev., Remarks at Rural Research Poverty Conf., RUPRI, Rural Poverty: Fifty Years After the People Left Behind (Mar, 23, 2018). The PowerPoint of the Partridge presentation is available at www.rupri.org/wp-content/uploads/Partridge_Poverty_Mar_18_upd.pptx.


More recent analysis suggests that exit polls underestimated the number of working-class white voters in the 2018 election. The Pew Research Center and the Center for American Progress now estimate that 44% of 2016 votes were cast by whites without college degrees—one standard definition for the white working class. In short, “the white working class is the largest bloc of Democratic voters and substantially larger than the bloc of white college-educated Democratic voters.” In other words, there are strategic reasons not to write off the working-class and rural whites. More importantly, I believe, there are ethical ones.

How, then, do we go forward? Could we agree that no one group is right all the time and that it is not appropriate for one faction always to get its way? Could we agree that some compromise is necessary if we are to build a larger, more inclusive progressive coalition? As Roger Cohen wrote in a January, 2017 editorial in the New York Times:

Getting America out of its mess begins with the acknowledgment that New York and California do not have a stranglehold on truth, any more than Kansas and Missouri do. Out there in God-fearing gun country there are plenty of smart, upstanding Americans who, as Mark Lilla of Columbia University put it, paraphrasing Bernie Sanders, are “sick and tired of hearing about liberals’ damn bathrooms.”

This brings me to words of wisdom from, appropriately, a few Black feminists. First, from my colleague Angela Harris’s brilliant, germinal, and oft-cited law review article: “wholeness and commonality are acts of will and creativity, rather than passive discovery.” These words are as resonant in the context of intra-racial bridge building as they are for the inter-racial context in which they were initially offered. In short, we’re going to have to work at finding “wholeness and commonality” with female Trump voters, especially swing voters. Shared concerns will not simply emerge as “passive discovery.” At some point we are going to have to talk to them, and not only about them.

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350. Id.

351. Roger Cohen, Streep v. Trump for America, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 10, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/10/opinion/streep-vs-trump-for-america.html?_r=0. I rarely agree with J.D. Vance, but I did agree with a Tweet he launched the night of Streep’s speech in which he commented that her reference to “mixed martial arts” not being the arts seemed gratuitous. More specifically, I might add, it was unhelpful.

Camille Gear Rich admonishes us in her 2010 *Marginal Whiteness*: “[W]hen scholars talk about white privilege in the abstract, without discussing the host of competing identity variables that complicate white privilege, they risk increasing the salience of whiteness for less race-identified whites in a context that gives whites an incentive to cling to a white identity.” Rich follows up with what I take to be advice for how to engage marginal whites: “The marginal whiteness framework avoids this problem by encouraging whites to maintain a context-specific definition of whiteness in privilege discussions, one that encourages them to think critically about whether contemporary ‘privilege’ arrangements actually serve their individual interests.”

But this phenomenon I am grappling with is not only about gender. Nor is it solely about race, nor solely about class. The rise of Trump implicates what bell hooks has referred to as “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” a phrase she uses to describe “the power structure underlying the social order,” how “things are all linked—an interlocking system.” Race, class, and gender are indeed linked, and the chattering classes would do well to check our instincts to isolate race and racism as the sole culprits of this profoundly polarized moment. Indeed, progressives would be wise to think intersectionally about the racism v. economy question that has so preoccupied them. Is it not highly likely that the ways in which racism *is* manifest among the white working-class and rural voters is related to those voters’ economic vulnerability? Remember historians’ assessments that the Weimar Republic citizenry were vulnerable to Hitler’s racist message because so many were so impoverished, degraded, humiliated after World War I? The white working class is now humiliated and desperate, as are many rural folks. But progressive elites are struggling to see that state of affairs, blinded in part by their fury at these populations.

Where are women in all of this? Playing second-class citizens to one degree or another to the males within their respective classes, races, geographies. Is it

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354. Id.
356. See Justin Gest, *The Two Types of Trump Voters*, POLITICO MAG. (Feb. 8, 2017), https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/02/trump-voters-white-working-class-214754; David Atkins, *It Was Prejudice. It Was Economics. It Was Both.*, AM. PROSPECT (July 7, 2017), http://prospect.org/article/it-was-prejudice-it-was-economics-it-was-both.
possible that the “haves”/the wealthy/the “dream hoarders” have co-opted just enough feminists—or those who claim the label “feminist”—to suck the radicalism out of feminism? We need to identify what connects working-class women across race, as well as that which connects all women across class. Surely a more robust and inclusive sisterhood is possible. The next question is how we will forge those bonds of sisterhood. First, however, we have to muster the political will to do so.

bell hooks has opined that feminism is the movement “that has been most honest with itself.” That’s a high compliment, indeed. I hope it is one that feminists can live up to in this most fractured of eras.

IX. POSTSCRIPT: REASON FOR HOPE? SALVAGING SOME SISTERHOOD.

Having shared in this article many vignettes of female Trump supporters, let me offer up an alternative female denizen of Trumplandia, one who may shed light on a path forward. An excellent role model, to my thinking, can be found in a very different rural, white woman, JoAnn Barr. Rather than present us with another standard issue “adorable deplorable,” Terrence McCoy of the Washington Post introduced us to a white Trump naysayer. Barr, a 54-year-old from Cogan Station in “mountainous central” Pennsylvania (population 1,478 per the 2010 census), is a lifelong Republican who manages a hardware store where all of the other workers are men. She is also a divorced mother of three and a victim of domestic


360. Yancy & hooks, supra note 355.


362. McCoy, She’s 54, White, Rural and a Lifelong Republican, supra note 361.
abuse at the hands of her former husband, who was addicted to opioids. Barr’s son has also struggled with addiction.

For Barr, these life experiences led her to resist the patriarchy (though I don’t know that she would call it that) rather than fall into line with it. McCoy writes:

But the campaign stirred so many questions, not only about her community but also about herself. How, when her son had struggled with mental illness, could people support someone who mocked a disabled man? How, when she had often felt small in her life, could people cheer someone who demeaned women? Was it Williamsport that had changed? Or was it her? So a few months ago, she took an I’m With Her mug into the hardware store and put up a sign saying “No Sexism” after hearing customers say degrading things about Hillary Clinton. She argued with her boyfriend, who called Barr a “radical feminist.” She switched her registration from Republican to Democrat and got a tattoo, her first, saying, “Rewrite an ending or two for the girl that I knew.”

What—I couldn’t help wonder—gave Barr the courage to resist the Trump train when so many others of her demographic profile could not/would not/did not? Was it the pain and self-awareness that came from wrenching life experiences like having an addicted child and one struggling with mental illness? From having survived domestic abuse? Maybe Barr’s job in a managerial role endowed her with enough confidence, not to mention economic and social capital, to buck the trend, to stand up to those around her. Whatever it was, I found myself wishing we could bottle it. What raised Barr’s consciousness, what I would call her feminist consciousness? And how could that sense of self-worth and dignity be conveyed to others with whom she shared commonalities?

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Many have given women credit for leading what has become known as “the resistance.” It was, after all, women who organized the Women’s March the day after Trump’s inauguration, and it was women who returned a year later for a reprise. Recent political commentary suggests that it is women who will bring Trump down—and I’m not talking about the ones with whom Trump has had extramarital affairs. Ross Douthat, conservative commentator for the New York

363. Id.
364. Id.
365. Id.
366. Id.
367. Id.
368. Id.
Times, has argued that, in the early days of the Trump era, “sex Trumped race.”370 Douthat suggests “that divisions and anxieties around sex and gender are where the essential cultural action of the Trump era really lies,” contrary to all that has been written about race.371 Other stories and commentators are following suit, though I notice that most of the stories focus on suburban white women372 and generally do not mention working-class and/or rural white women.373

The implication of these stories is arguably that divides among women along class and/or race lines persist—at least when it comes to support for Trump. I read only one indication that blue-collar female loyalty to Trump may be waning, too. A January, 2018, Gallup poll indicated that Trump’s approval had fallen among “blue-collar white women in the Rustbelt”374 to as great a degree as it had anywhere—by “18 percentage points in Ohio and 19 in Wisconsin and Minnesota.”375 As we watch the female vote, we should keep our eye on this demographic—those whom journalistic emissaries to Trump landia have held out as the true believers—and not only on more affluent, white suburban women.

More hopeful than these polls, to my mind, is the 2018 teachers strike in West Virginia. In February, 2018, public school teachers across the state’s 55 counties were on strike for nine days until their demands regarding salary and health insurance premiums were met.376 They even overrode the calls of union leaders to accept a lesser offer; they stuck to their guns and stood up for themselves. Though 68% of West Virginia voters supported Trump, the pro-educator, pro-labor activism of several teachers interviewed by the New York Times appeared to have been catalyzed by his election.377 One said “You have women now taking


371. Id.


374. Brownstein, White Women in the Rustbelt Are Turning on Trump, supra note 373.

375. Id. (attributing that decline in support largely to Trump’s efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act).

376. Michelle Goldberg, Opinion, The Teachers Revolt in West Virginia, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 5, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/05/opinion/west-virginia-teachers-strike.html. Note the role of health insurance costs in this labor dispute, which is consistent with my discussion at supra notes 256 and 265 and accompanying text.

377. Goldberg, supra note 376. See also Jeremy W. Peters, As Critics Assail Trump, His Supporters Dig in Deeper, N.Y. TIMES (June 23, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/
leadership roles in unionizing, in standing up, in leading initiatives for fairness and equality and justice for everyone." 378 Another commented, "There are a bunch of men sitting in an office right now telling us that we don’t deserve anything better." 379 Now there’s a feminist consciousness! Even though the women quoted probably voted against Trump, they were clearly in a coalition with many who had voted for him. 380

Liberal elites cheered these teachers, as well as the educators in Kentucky and Oklahoma who followed suit. These educators—somewhere between working class and middle class in today’s economy 381—are showing us how to rise above the political divide over Trumpism to form a winning coalition, one that is achieving socioeconomic justice. We amongst the chattering classes would be wise not to miss the lesson.

2018/06/23/us/politics/republican-voters-trump.html (interviewing several middle-class, well-educated white Trump supporters who were depicted as his base).

378. Goldberg, supra note 376.

379. Id.
