

Modern Progressive Values: Realizing America's Potential

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COMMONWEAL INSTITUTE

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Executive Summary

Now is a time to assess, recalibrate, and reclaim the terms of American political dialogue. Over the past forty years, Americans have watched as a narrow but powerful coalition has taken over our country's government and conducted its business in ways that violate strong, deeply-held values that so many of us share. One of the most insidious aspects of the violence done to our values has been the Orwellian language that enveloped their misguided and malign policies in a deceptive, feel-good haze.

Today, the conservative political machine has run out of gas, and many of its theoretical underpinnings have proved bankrupt. A new coalition of voters is emerging in response. This can be a watershed moment for the progressive movement that has been fighting back for the last eight years. How will this new progressive coalition think and talk about the values that guide our policies, our way of government?

Over the past few years, many progressive thinkers have addressed this question, and the values conversation has grown robust. This report consolidates their work and performs a systematic analysis of the underlying conceptual frameworks. The results of this analysis distill the frameworks into three core pairs of values: Freedom / Security, Community / The Commons, and Truth / Justice. After detailing what each value pair addresses, this report connects these values to American mental constructs, community identities, and communication strategies.

Each value pair speaks to a different realm of political life: Freedom / Security defines the opportunities and protections the government gives individuals; Community / The Commons describes the relationships among groups and shared resources; and Truth / Justice refers to the formal structures of language and law that mediate between individual and communal concerns. Rather than separate values, each pair describes a dynamic relationship that motivates progressive morality and ethics.

Freedom/Security

Freedom. Progressives value Freedom of choice, speech, religion, and self-determination. They believe that all people should be able to speak, travel, worship, and marry without governmental interference. Freedom extends also to the collective self-determination upon which representative democracy is founded.

Security. Progressives value the Freedom to succeed and determine one's own life, but also Freedom from unjust imbalances and the vagaries of chance. Security is another form of liberty, but with an inverted focus: it includes Freedom from illness, hunger, violence, war, chance disasters, poverty, exploitation and ignorance. This is why progressives regularly promote policies that benefit emergency response infrastructure, public health, access to healthcare, and social security.

Community/The Commons

Community. Progressives value people, human bonds, social structures, and communities characterized by creativity, equality, diversity, and a strong sense of mutual interdependence. It is this “mutuality” more than any other concept that differentiates progressive Community from conservative Community; rather than a strict defense of traditional authority, progressives, motivated by empathy and responsibility, emphasize that “we’re all in it together.” In contrast to conservatives, progressives value communities in which rules are questioned - in which the practical material demands of the present trump traditional hierarchies.

The Commons. The Commons are what we share, what no one can claim as private property and what all of us need to live healthy, happy lives. They include the environment, transportation and power infrastructure, the healthcare system, communications media and the broadcast spectrum, education, language, cultural heritage, and our representative democracy. Progressives recognize that all humans hold The Commons in common. To the degree that some individuals exploit The Commons more than others, or devote less labor to its preservation for present and future generations, they violate the moral imperative that results from the progressive value of The Commons.

Truth/Justice

Truth. Truth includes not only facts but also more generally a stance of honesty and integrity, transparency in government, and a strong commitment to reason. Rather than interpreting data according to preconceived ideological positions, even if those positions might support other progressive values, this value of Truth dictates a strong progressive desire for objective and rational analysis. Reason and accuracy, far from being only ideological concepts, are vital to progressivism’s pragmatic character.

Justice. Justice operates in the realm of the world as it is legislated and lived. Progressives believe that everyone should play fair, and that the terms of fairness derive neither from birthright nor from mere convention or tradition. Progressives gauge the Justice of a law based not merely on its effectiveness at advancing progressive causes or its acceptability within existing legal frameworks, but also and more importantly on the degree to which it makes rational sense.

The three core value pairs in this report give progressives a way of talking about what unites the progressive movement, what progressives most essentially represent. As we move forward into the 2008 presidential election and beyond, progressives can communicate and instill these core values by framing the debate in these terms and telling powerful stories that unite people around a shared progressive identity.

It would be a mistake to reduce the value of values to votes. Each vote, even each election, is merely a means to make a freer, more equitable future. We must not confuse the ends and means. Political power is only worth something if we have a compelling vision to work toward. In this sense, the values listed here are not a tool but a statement of purpose, not a strategic initiative, but an image of the country progressives have said they want. These values, aggregated and distilled from the thoughtful hard work of so many devoted progressives, represent what we stand for, who we are, and what America can become.

Modern Progressive Values: Realizing America's Potential

What values underlie and unite the left?

Our political choices emerge from our sense of cultural identity and our emotional responses to stories and images.

Introduction

In recent years, influential political thinkers on the left have made a major strategic priority of articulating core progressive values. From George Lakoff's linguistic work on conceptual frameworks to a growing number of progressive blogs and think tanks with principle-based mission statements, the question of what values underlie and unite the left has become particularly urgent.

While this trend is by no means unprecedented - progressives ranging from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Martin Luther King, Jr., have famously invoked morality to effect social change - it runs counter to a notion still common among too much of the general electorate that values are strictly the domain of conservatives. The assumption goes something like this: conservatives unite their base around moral values (such as the sanctity of life, marriage, individual responsibility, and so on), while progressives appeal to reason, deriving their political principles from facts, logic, and rationally-based ethics.



Recent (failed) Democratic presidential campaigns, including those of Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, and John Kerry, have tended to emphasize issues over values, appealing to the commonsense idea that voters are rational and will therefore choose candidates whose policies benefit them. As a flurry of progressive thought has pointed out over the last decade, this notion is naïve, counterproductive, and even rather paradoxical.

As Drew Westen puts it from a scientific perspective, the left often exhibits an "irrational commitment to rationality." That is, progressives too often define their policies to the electorate in "rational" terms, even as rational, scientific investigations into cognitive science and neuroscience have demonstrated that reason has very little to do with how people identify with candidates, choose parties, or vote on issues. If we as progressives truly approach political discourse rationally, then we must recognize that, to a great degree, our political choices emerge from our sense of cultural identity and our emotional responses to stories and images, not from "rational" cost-benefit analyses.¹

In order to overcome the discrepancy between how the left talks about politics and how people actually make choices, Lakoff, Westen, and many others have called for progressives to articulate their core values. Instead of supplying endless laundry lists of issue positions (a la the Democratic Party Platform), Lakoff calls for progressive citizens to articulate and embody their values, embracing the metaphorical, cultural, and emotional quality of political thought.²

This report distills the efforts of others into the fewest and most inclusive set of core progressive values.

Three Value Pairs:

*Freedom/Security
Community/The Commons
Truth/Justice*

Today, dozens of think tanks have heeded this call in full force, including the Center for American Progress, the Democracy Alliance, the Commonweal Institute, and Lakoff's own Rockridge Institute, to name just a handful. Along with countless writers, pundits, and politicians, they have produced books, pamphlets, and websites; they have derived shared values through statistics, scientific experiments, linguistic patterns, and conceptual analyses; they have formed a rich but complicated intertextual web of discourse around the importance and reality of shared progressive values.

The purpose of this report is to aggregate and distill this substantial work into the fewest and most inclusive core progressive values possible. Just as each source we have consulted aims to unite progressives with disparate pet issues (environmental protection, trade unions, anti-war activism) around a shared set of values, this project seeks to consolidate the rigorous, thoughtful work of these many lists of values, arrived at through many different methodologies, into a single coherent report.

By aggregating the value statements of a wide array of thinkers and approaches, we hope to provide progressive activists, politicians, and individual citizens a highly comprehensive distillation of the values that we share. We aim to create a simple, clear, and inclusive list that both consolidates the considerable work performed to date and gives future work a single dependable source to consult.

While none of the writers and think tanks whose work we have consulted will find their lists of values repeated exactly here, what they will find is a set of core values that includes and categorizes their own work in the context of others. This is not because we have found any particular reports lacking, or because we have preferred some lists over others, but because we want to create the most inclusive (and yet most distilled) list possible. While part of this effort involves clearing up imprecision and placing big ideas into very few categories, we have based our work on what our colleagues' substantial contributions have in common.

After aggregating most of the major value reports and distilling values from a wide array of policy and principle statements, we have arrived at the three fundamental value pairs of Freedom/Security, Community/The Commons, and Truth/Justice. In what follows, we will explain what each of these values includes; we will clarify why these values matter and how they relate to issues, identity, and votes; we will detail how each of our core progressive values addresses a different realm of political action; and we will challenge progressives to create images and narratives that can communicate these core values to their friends, neighbors, and countrypersons.

The Value of Values

"Ronald Reagan offered many blue collar Americans an image of someone they could trust to do the thinking for them..."

Values and Issues

To begin with, why do values matter? Why emphasize values over issues? Ostensibly, issues are at the center of what politicians do: elected officials decide to take this position or that position, to build a dam, to protect a forest, to create economic incentives for desirable actions and punishments for harmful ones - in short, to pass laws that solve particular problems. In this sense, issues are the very stuff of politics.



The problem with centering political discourse on issues is not that they do not matter, but that there are too many of them to make coherent sense without a clear, united purpose. The DNC's party platform, for instance, can leave a potential voter confused and unsure about what progressives fundamentally stand for. Seen only as a massive list of policy statements, issues like environmental protection, universal health care, campaign finance reform, and a dozen other projects can seem to have little to do with one another.

Since the US is not a "pure" democracy in the sense of each citizen voting on each issue, we have to trust whomever we elect to make good decisions for us. How, then, are we to evaluate a candidate when we agree with her position on some issues, disagree on others, and know too little about most issues to have a firm opinion at all?



As Thomas Frank has demonstrated, politicians on the right have gotten very good at gaining trust from people who clearly do not benefit from their policies. Appealing to Middle America's religious values - which are fundamentally based in cultural identity more than policy - conservative candidates like Ronald Reagan offered many blue collar Americans an image of someone they could trust to do the thinking for them, someone who valued what they valued and therefore would take the country in a positive direction.³

Certainly, conservative success at the polls is not reason enough, in and of itself, to adopt the right's strategies, especially if, as Frank suggests, they are deceptive. We as progressives should not seek to trick people into voting for our candidates; that would violate our own value of Truth. But if our policies do in fact benefit people, and if those policies are based on what we value, then we owe it to America to share why we do what we do, or, to put it more fundamentally, to share openly who we are and what we stand for.

*... [C]ommunicating
core values gives...a...
sense of how...we will
envision and build the
future of the country*

Does value always = \$?

If we are honest with ourselves and with those we talk to, communicating core values gives potential progressives a much more complete sense of how our policies will impact their lives - not only how we will vote on the issues that are currently on the table, but how we will envision and build the future of the country.

Values and Well-Being

Values and issues are not unrelated. We take on issues of censorship because we value Freedom of speech. We take on issues of minimizing armed conflict because we value the common good of Security from harm. Both values and issues are tied deeply to well-being. Values are the why and wherefore, our way of defining well-being, while issues are merely different practical realms by which to create or protect what we value.

Importantly, the word "value" is both a noun and a verb. We value Freedom; Freedom is, consequently, a value. In a capitalist society, it seems natural to understand the act of valuing in economic terms. The value of the dollar or of a particular stock derives from the "invisible hand" that Adam Smith and other early proponents of free market capitalism noted and advocated. Value is active and dynamic, produced by the interaction between the intrinsic qualities and availability of things and our collective, overlapping desires for them - or, in Smith's terms, between supply and demand.

While we must not lose sight of the economics of value, it is also important to understand that economics provides only one, highly specialized medium through which to negotiate value (i.e., through which to assess and quantify well-being). Our monetary system is transportable, quantifiable, and therefore easily measurable; it is able to provide an efficient marketplace for things like manufactured products and services. But its very efficiency and quantitative nature makes for a poor measure of how much we value the environment, our cultural heritage, diversity, education, and other, more ineffable and qualitative values.



These qualitative values also derive from our sense of well-being - both the well-being of individuals and the well-being of our country and future generations. Our core values of Freedom/Security, Community/The Commons, and Truth/Justice do not lend themselves to a price tag, though, so it is very difficult to promote and protect them within a measurable economic mentality. These values are both more personal and more universal than things we can buy and sell; they are tantamount to valuing the very world we live in and the humanity we share.

Qualitative values...derive from our sense of well-being in a holistic sense.

Values only make sense in the context of how we see the world.

Values speak to who we are at the deepest levels of identity by activating our most deep-seated beliefs.

When progressives talk about well-being, they refer not primarily to stock portfolios but to quality of life. Progressives value that which brings well-being in a holistic sense: health, vitality, a sense of connection with others, intellectual engagement, pride and satisfaction in work, honesty, trust, and so on.

Values and Concepts

Are these values exclusive to progressives? Don't conservatives also care about future generations, the world we live in, and other people? Indeed, as Lakoff has pointed out, conservatives and progressives often use the same words to describe their values. Both conservatives and progressives agree on some "uncontested core" to each of these "contested concepts" (a term Lakoff borrows from the political scientist W. B. Gallie), but our very different worldviews create different evaluative interpretations of what we mean by the same words.⁴ Essentially, the contested portion of each word derives from a different sense of what counts as well-being; values cannot be separated from the conceptual frameworks that give them meaning.

Values only make sense in the context of how we see the world. For example, valuing biological diversity in the natural environment depends upon a conceptual understanding of civilization's interdependence with nature and the intrinsic value of life. The degree to which we value an object, idea, or force in the world depends on our understanding of the world and our place within it.



Lakoff attributes the value differences between conservatives and progressives to their different conceptual frameworks, specifically the family metaphors that they use to understand the role of government. In his influential book *Moral Politics*, Lakoff writes that progressives adhere to a "nurturant parent" morality, while conservatives see the world through a "strict father" model.⁵

Practically, this means that progressives interpret the values they superficially appear to share with conservatives through the filter of empathy and responsibility. The nurturant parent model posits the role of parents as encouraging growth, prosperity, and empathy in their children. The strict father model, in contrast, sees parenthood (and by metaphorical extension, government) as based on authority and control. Children in this model should be made strong and self-sufficient; at the same time, they should be punished for infractions so that they will be obedient.⁶

These divergent worldviews create the frames whereby we make sense

of reality. Value statements and political speeches are effective to the degree that they activate the “deep frames” that unconsciously structure and define our realities. Because these “deep frames” work largely on an unconscious level, they are more powerful than conscious reasoning about the comparative benefits of different policies. Values speak to who we are at the deepest levels of identity by activating our most deep-seated beliefs.

Values and Identity

When it comes right down to it, our values make us who we are. Our personal values shape us individually, and our shared values shape what communities we identify with. The cult of personality that has made poor farmers and laborers identify with ruggedly charismatic Republicans like Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush over “latte-sipping” liberals whose policies would actually benefit the working poor is not, in this sense, the product of a diabolical trick. It is rather the product of how human beings naturally identify with one another.



As Thomas Frank puts it, the conservative Kansan votes for Republicans because those candidates tend to embody a cultural identity that resonates with the image of the person the voter wants to be.⁷ In other words, the successful candidate presents the electorate with a hero. For conservatives, this hero is often (or is often packaged as) a strong, rugged individualist, a simple, plainspoken American who knows the value of a hard day’s work. This hero does not need anyone else, is able to protect and control those weaker or subordinate, and yet he (definitively masculine) also projects a sense of being in touch with common folks. He may live in a major metropolis, but he has little use for the big city’s elitism and cosmopolitan airs.

Believing that a politician like George W. Bush (the very definition of a Washington insider) represents the “common man” may seem to strain the limits of plausibility, but millions of Americans bought the act - twice. As Frank points out, the fact that Bush was not born in Texas, that he graduated from Yale, and that he had privileges of wealth and birthright that the working poor who voted for him did not have access to ultimately mattered less than the image he presented and the story he told. He captured the imagination of so many Americans by clearing brush in Crawford, replacing political jargon with folk wisdom, and activating foundational American narratives associated with cowboy movies and the pioneer spirit. Even though Gore and Kerry rightly noted that their policies would benefit the working poor, the identities they projected struck those very voters as dull, mechanical, and elitist.⁸



Even if politicians themselves do not possess the biographical details their images project, the communities that support them gather around values fundamentally defined by their shared identity. We are naturally drawn to “our people,” who are united less by facts and figures than by



values and stories. We eat with our people, we drink with them, we speak with them, and, come November, we usually vote with them.



As Paul Waldman and others have said, progressives who dismiss the “culture war” as an artificial ad campaign invented by the right do so at the peril of losing it. We have many good ideas, even perfectly viable and thrilling visions for America. What we need, in Waldman’s terms, is “to forge an identity the public understands and is attracted to.”⁹ An articulation of core progressive values is central to forging that identity.

Core Progressive Values

Based on our analysis of major value reports and policy and principle statements, the three Core Value Pairs for progressives are:

Three Core Value Pairs:

Freedom/Security Community/The Commons Truth/Justice

Like our three branches of government, each of these pairs accounts for a different realm of political life (which is to say, a different part of the interaction among individuals, the community, and the state). Progressives may well value other things that fall outside these three pairs of categories as well, but only values pertaining to how people relate to one another are relevant here.

Freedom/Security refers to individual rights and protections; Community/The Commons refers to group interactions and how they relate to shared resources; and Truth/Justice refers to the formal rules of discourse that mediate between individuals and groups.

Each of these core value pairs accounts for a broad spectrum of what

Freedom/Security

progressives value. Many progressive issues, policies, and principles may be motivated by more than one core value. These three pairs are not categories within which everything that progressives value fits, but rather three dimensions through which to understand the dynamics of values and how they relate to the world.

Freedom (Freedom to...)

Civil liberties (rights to speech, marriage, travel)

Religion (to worship or not, and how)

Self-determination in government

Minority rights

Security (Freedom from...)

Protection against illness

Protection from hunger

Protection against violence

Protection against chance disasters

Protection against exploitation

Protection from ignorance

The first core value pair (Freedom/Security) has to do with what the government gives or allows individuals. Both parts of this conceptual pair have to do with valuing individual liberty, but differ with regard to their point of view. When progressives say they value Freedom, they mean that they value the Freedom for individuals to do what they wish and to pursue desirable opportunities. When they say they value Security, they mean that they value Freedom from illness, hunger, violence, chance disasters, poverty, exploitation and ignorance.

Freedom

Many progressive think tanks and other organizations directly cite “Freedom” as a core progressive value, including the Center for American Progress, the Center for Policy Alternatives, Democracy Action, the Institute for Policy Studies, the Longview Institute, and the Unitarian Universalist Church, to name a few.¹⁰ A few organizations call this value “liberty” without significant conceptual deviation from what most sources mean by “freedom.”¹¹

Progressives believe that the government should give individuals Freedom of choice and speech and allow people to determine the course of their own

lives. Kim Paxson's "Why We Are Democrats" includes individual liberty as one of three category headings.¹² The American Values Alliance lists civil liberties as one of its primary value categories.¹³ These and many other articulations of core progressive values place a high premium on individual liberty. Progressives believe that people should be free to choose, to speak, to marry, and to pursue happiness without governmental restrictions on these pursuits (so long as they do not deprive others of their rights). Civil liberties embody these individual Freedoms.



The notion of personal liberty freed individuals from strict cultural mores that old European monarchies enforced with violence and oppression. The individual Freedom to worship as one wishes, to travel from place to place, and to marry whom one wishes established early Americans as the freest people in the world. Modern progressives extend these notions and believe that the government must respect individual autonomy in matters of political views, religion, and sexuality, even as these domains lose grounding in tradition.



Freedom extends also to the collective self-determination upon which representative democracy is founded. The principle of majority rule connects the individual to the Community; while self-governance is a collective Freedom Americans share, the "one man, one vote" aspect of our election process roots this collective power in individual choice. Several progressive organizations, including Demos, the Green Party, and the Progressive States Network, include "Democracy" as a core progressive value, by which they primarily mean the simultaneously collective and individual nature of self-determined government.¹⁴



Individual Freedom is arguably the most foundational value to the advent of the United States of America. Red State libertarians (who often characterize themselves as "classical liberals") share with Blue State civil libertarians a commitment to the concept of "Freedom." The differences between what progressives and conservatives mean by "Freedom" have to do with the role of empathy and responsibility, and the definition of who counts as an individual.

While progressives... respect the power of the free market, they consider protection from capitalism's excesses and exploitations crucial to being "free."

Since progressives believe that one of the essential roles of government is to provide security against the harm and the vicissitudes of fate, and such protection is not free, they support taxation for the purpose of providing Security against fate, even if taxation lessens individuals' right to do what they choose with their money.

For instance, libertarians and fiscal conservatives oppose progressive taxation and high amounts of regulation on the grounds that they believe individuals should be free to make money without interference or "punishment" for their success. From this perspective, the "free market" takes on an almost religious quality in its connection to liberty. But the fact that fiscal conservatives also extend free market liberties to multinational corporations makes for a hostile environment for individual laborers and small private businesses. In other words, adhering too strictly to principles of free market economics can backfire and undermine the ability of average Americans to participate in that very Freedom that ostensibly belongs to them.

Security

While progressives also respect the power of the free market, they consider protection from capitalism's excesses and exploitations crucial to being "free." Lakoff and many influenced by his family metaphor model of political thought ("nurturant parent" vs "strict father") view empathy and responsibility toward others as the motivating forces by which progressives understand Freedom (and other values).

Lakoff interprets the difference between progressive and conservative Freedom as a "contested concept" in which both sides agree on the "uncontested" core of what it means to be free but diverge sharply on the mitigating conceptual frameworks that give Freedom context and meaning. Whose Freedom? To do what? Where does it end?

Fiscal conservatives tend to believe that wealth should reward merit and hard work without any limits. Individual as well as corporate wealth are determined by market forces, talent, and effort, so from a conservative perspective, any governmental interference wrongly impedes financial Freedom.

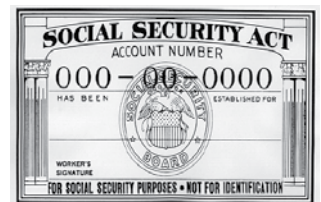
Progressives, whose values, according to Lakoff, are more motivated by a sense of empathy and responsibility toward others, also believe that individuals should have the Freedom to flourish and participate in the market. For progressives, however, this Freedom includes not only unrestricted access to opportunity but also a certain safety from exploitation and the vagaries of chance. Progressives believe that the talented and hard-working should be allowed to succeed, but do not believe that those less successful are thereby any less worthy of basic human Freedoms.

Similarly, progressives believe that any material prosperity arises not only from individual achievement but also from the dynamics of interdependent Community forces (see Community/The Commons below). If an individual succeeds financially within the dynamic system of the free market, he or she has the responsibility to give something back and to attend to those

who remain comparatively uncompensated for their participation in wealth-production. Progressives value the Freedom to succeed and determine one's own life, but also Freedom from systems that, left unchecked, create unjust imbalances in economic status. Moreover, since progressives believe that one of the essential roles of government is to provide security against the harm and the vicissitudes of fate, and such protection is not free, they support taxation for the purpose of providing Security against fate, even if taxation lessens individuals' right to do what they choose with their money.



This duality of Freedom and Security is perhaps most clearly visible in economic terms, but extends also to other forms of achievement and protection. In cases where other individuals, groups, or non-human forces impede upon individual Freedom, progressives value Security, by which they mean Freedom from harm and want. Progressives believe that the government should protect peaceful citizens from armed criminals, poor laborers from wealthy corporations, and all citizens from the ravages of job loss, war, hunger, ignorance, and poverty.



Security also extends to threats from non-human actors such as natural disasters, illness, and the like. This is why the left regularly promotes policies that benefit emergency response infrastructure, public health, universal healthcare, and social security. As Peter Phillips, the director of Project Censored, puts it, progressives "believe that human freedom includes the freedom from hunger, homelessness, unemployment, environmental pollution, discrimination based on physical attributes and long imprisonment for non-violent crimes."¹⁵

The core value of "The Commons" helps explain why progressives care about environmental protection, much as "Justice" helps explain our anti-discrimination policies. But these protections are also (independently) about increasing and protecting our values of the Freedom to flourish and Security from harm.

Community/The Commons

Community

Social bonds

Interdependence ("we're all in it together")

Family values

The Commons

The environment

Infrastructure

Language

Art

Culture

The second core value pair (Community/The Commons) pertains to how we relate to one another and to the resources that we share. For progressives, to value Community means to value people, human bonds, social structures, and healthy families. Progressives particularly value communities characterized by creativity, equality, diversity, and a strong sense of mutual interdependence. The Commons include those things that we share and must pass to our children: infrastructure, the environment, food and water, but also language, art, and culture. Generally speaking, our sense of Community shapes how we view The Commons, and vice versa. The Commons include not only the resources that Community requires in order to operate, but in fact constitutes the space within which Community comes into being.

Community



Community is particularly crucial to progressive thought. E Pluribus Unum ("from many, one") is as important to America's foundation as the notion of individual Freedom. Alan Jenkins puts this sense of Community in terms of interdependence, noting that E Pluribus Unum "symbolizes both the American resolve to form one nation from a collection of states, and our determination to forge one unified country from people of different backgrounds and beliefs."¹⁶

Diversity and equality are key features of progressive American Community; unlike what they found in their native homelands, early European immigrants found in the United States an unprecedented equality regardless of religious or ethnic identity. While other

For progressives, to value Community means to value people, human bonds, social structures, and healthy families.

Progressives particularly value communities characterized by creativity, equality, diversity, and a strong sense of mutual interdependence.

early Americans, most notably slaves kidnapped from the west coast of Africa, remained cultural and legal inferiors throughout our nation's early history, progressive movements over the past two centuries have increasingly sought equality for all citizens. Abolition, suffrage and desegregation movements have explicitly made Community more inclusive, diverse, and equal.



Certainly, the core progressive value of "Justice" accounts for part of the progressive pursuit of equality, as we will see below. But a compelling portion of "equality" remains beyond the logic and righteousness of Justice. Equality is not only right and just; it also functions to increase a certain kind of Community based upon a recognition of mutual interdependence. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "We are caught in an inescapable web of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."¹⁷ It is this "mutuality" more than any other concept that differentiates progressive Community from conservative Community. The progressive sense of Community arises from a recognition that "we're all in it together." For conservatives, as the Center for Policy Alternatives put it, "unemployment, hunger and discrimination are the individual's problem, not society's." Progressives, in contrast, "take responsibility for the well-being of our nation by crafting policies to extend freedom, opportunity and security to all."¹⁸



*Senator Paul Wellstone:
"We all do better when
we all do better."*

For Lakoff, as already noted, the motivations of empathy and responsibility characterize progressive Community. Progressives, he claims, adhere to a "nurturant parent" morality in which caring for one another and taking responsibility for the whole Community matters more than the conservative principle of "personal responsibility." Progressives also believe that individuals must be responsible, but not only for themselves. Society is responsible for every individual and every individual is responsible for society. Moreover, every individual is responsible for every other individual - it is not merely a bureaucratic or autocratic but more basically a human principle. While conservatives often depict this strong progressive notion of interdependence as a form of socialism, the key human feature derives from empathy and responsibility.

While Lakoff's family metaphors help us to understand the ways in which progressives view the relationship between governments and citizens, Frances Lappé has criticized his influential approach for making the citizenry seem like children. She argues that we should come up with more horizontal metaphors, ones that stress the democratic nature of living in a Community

Progressives are motivated by empathy and responsibility.



of peers.¹⁹ Lappé represents an important corrective to Lakoff especially significant to the next generation of progressives. This argument offers the left a way to refute conservative accusations that liberal governments coddle citizens and fail to promote personal accountability. It also emphasizes that we are not only responsible for society but more directly for one another as individuals.

It must be said, however, that certain aspects of Lakoff's family metaphors do accurately describe how Americans experience "democracy." We may theoretically be responsible for our elected representative's decisions by proxy, but the structure of our republic mediates our self-determination and indeed places a form of parental power in the hands of the president, congress, and courts (not to mention super-delegates). Certainly, by shifting the focus from how the government takes care of citizens to how citizens take care of one another, Lappé emphasizes that empathy and responsibility belong to every individual in a non-hierarchical fashion. But without acknowledging the role of family in shaping even these "non-hierarchical" or "horizontal" notions of Community, Lappé runs the risk of overlooking the family's motivating power.

In this sense, we need both Lakoff and Lappé to understand the simultaneously familial and "horizontal" structure of progressive Community. Even if Lappé brings our attention to the significance of citizens seeing themselves as adults, Lakoff quite rightly taps into the psychological underpinnings of our notions of Community: the family is the first model of Community we experience, and it has enormous power over how we build later communities, whether our own families or governmental structures. It is through our upbringing that we develop our motivating impulses of "empathy" and "responsibility."

What specific registers of morality do these motivating impulses of "empathy" and "responsibility" affect? In a sense, they are what anthropologists call "moral intuitions," and they operate on how we understand our moral foundations. Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham from the University of Virginia have researched the underlying psychological motivations behind liberal and conservative values, concluding that conservatives adhere to five moral foundations: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Haidt and Graham argue that "political liberals have moral intuitions primarily based upon the first two foundations, and therefore misunderstand the moral motivations of political conservatives, who generally rely upon all five foundations."²⁰

The traditional hierarchies and marital institutions that conservatives hold so sacred do not make sense to progressives, who...strive for changing society as needed to meet the demands of the present.

John Halpin:

"[P]rogressivism is a non-ideological, pragmatic system of thought grounded in solving problems."

For Haidt and Graham, the first two categories of moral intuitions have to do with individual, self-based concerns, while the last three have more to do with Community; their report argues that conservatives respond to loyalty, authority, and purity, and therefore morally value traditional communal structures that liberals do not.

While Haidt and Graham are astute to recognize that conservatives respond to moral intuitions that progressives and liberals have difficulty recognizing as morally-based, their broader conclusion that conservatives value Community while liberals value the self contradicts most progressive thought. While progressives may not as readily defend authority, they certainly place a high premium on mutuality and responsibility for the Community. Progressive Community is just as strong an intuitive pull, but it is not committed to traditional hierarchies in the same way as conservative Community.²¹



Haidt and Graham note that the traditional hierarchies and marital institutions that conservatives hold so sacred do not make sense to progressives, who by definition strive for changing society as needed to meet the demands of the present. This commitment to change is deeply pragmatic. Doug Muder has noted that the "just-say-no, rules-are-absolute model of

morality used to work well in real villages, where everyone believed more-or-less the same thing and the rules were never seriously questioned."²² Progressives, in contrast to this conservative point of view, value communities in which rules are questioned, where, in other words, the material demands of the present trump following traditional rules for the mere sake of tradition.

The progressive worldview may depend on conceptual frameworks, but it is distinct from both liberalism and conservatism in the sense that it attends more directly to concrete needs than to abstract concepts. When John Halpin writes that "progressivism is a non-ideological, pragmatic system of thought grounded in solving problems," he is taking it beyond the ideological divide of liberal-conservative.²³ Ideology, in his depiction, sublimates day-to-day problems to an inflexible worldview not necessarily connected to the problems of the day. Both the left and the right can be guilty of placing a greater emphasis on defending ideas than on solving problems.²⁴



The Commons are what we share, what no one can claim as private property and what all of us need to live healthy, happy lives.

The Commons

The pragmatic character of progressivism concretely links its Community values to The Commons. The Commons are what we share, what no one can claim as private property and what all of us need to live healthy, happy lives. We need The Commons as individuals and our communities need to use The Commons effectively in order to function and thrive. The Commons include the environment, transportation and power infrastructure, education, language, and cultural heritage.

While Community values primarily refer to how we ought to relate to one another, most of the relations thereby dictated derive their material resources from access to The Commons. To recognize mutuality means to recognize that - as Dr. King put it - "[w]hatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."²⁵ We depend upon one another. For what? For health, prosperity, food, safety, joy, love, self-expression - in other words, for those things we gain as individuals and as communities. While many of these are individual freedoms and securities, the degree to which they depend upon our cooperation brings them into the realm of The Commons.

Thom Hartmann argues that our relationship to The Commons is the most important component of progressive citizenship, and that the most important of these is our governmental democracy:

To be a citizen means to be part of, and a defender of, the commons of our nation. The water we drink, the air we breathe, the streets we drive on, the schools that we use, the departments that protect us - these are all the physical commons. And there are also the cultural commons - the stories we tell ourselves, our histories, our religions, and our notions of ourselves. And there are the commons of our power systems (in the majority of American communities), our health-care system... and the electronic commons of our radio and TV spectrum and the Internet. Most important for citizenship is the commons of government - the creation and the servant of We the People.²⁶



The government, the radio waves, education, power infrastructure, etc: all of these provide the material and space within which culture operates. The

Progressives recognize that all humans have The Commons in common.



environment is one of the most obvious examples of how The Commons provide the material resources for both individual and community needs. No one can claim to own the environment, yet we are all intimately dependent upon it. When our actions threaten the



environment (carbon emissions that accelerate climate change, pollution, nuclear waste) we are all threatened. The environment, among other things, provides us with the elements of survival: air, water, food, shelter. Although we each need these elements as individuals, the benefit of human civilization has transformed survival into a communal act. In modern societies, every part of our access to The Commons implies cooperation, coordination, and the recognition of our interdependence. We need each other to live in the environment most effectively, and without the environment we could not live at all.

A basic recognition of The Commons' importance to sustaining human civilization is not lost on conservatives. What differentiates the progressive value of The Commons is our proclivity to share - to recognize, for example, that not only our families, cities, or countries need access, but that all people do. It would not fit a progressive morality to pursue policies that secured resources for one group of people while forcing another group into starvation. Progressives recognize that all humans have The Commons in common. To the degree that some individuals exploit the environment more than others, or devote less labor to its preservation, they violate the moral imperative that results from the progressive value of The Commons.

On the one hand, the progressive value of "Justice" dictates that we share The Commons with other individuals. Yet, just as equality benefits Community in and of itself - not only as a result of Justice - The Commons is an important value in and of itself. It is not only fair but also materially desirable that The Commons be preserved, protected, and promoted.



Conservative policies that have plundered forests, starved educational infrastructure, and left us dependent upon fossil fuels have operated from a form of pragmatism. Conservatives value the free market to such a degree that they tend to view everything, even the earth, oceans, sky, language, and so on, as marketable, as property. Pragmatically, conservative policies have powerfully defended

Shakespeare: "O pardon me thou bleeding piece of earth, that I am meek and gentle with these butchers."

American access to resources. But conservative pragmatism differs from progressive pragmatism in the privilege it affords wealthy Americans over the domain of nature, art, culture, language, and everything else. Conservative pragmatism, compared to progressive pragmatism, is not merely pragmatic but also deeply utilitarian. That is, it reduces The Commons to use-value. This is why, to conservatives, it does not make sense to protect Alaskan tundra from oil drilling. It is also why many conservatives place a much higher value on professional training in college than in broad liberal arts based programs. Knowledge, like the environment, matters only insofar as it benefits profit.

Progressive pragmatism also dictates that we maximize how Community can benefit from The Commons. The difference lies in the size of the Community and the longevity of its benefits. For progressives, The Commons are an integral part of the Community, both the source of all its wealth and the space within which it operates. Commons like the environment, culture, and historical heritage cannot be reduced to use-value, because they are bigger than any particular individual or group that could benefit from them. Rather than the earth and our cultural heritage merely providing fuel for present profits, they constitute the larger Community of which our present generation and nation is only a small part. The Commons belong not to any one group or even country but to the progress of civilization and the world as a whole.



This progressive value has everything to do with future generations. Although conservatives have managed to claim that the Republican Party has a monopoly on "family values," many progressive thinkers have recently revealed the hypocrisy of that claim. Riane Eisler, for example, notes that "a Republican administration has consistently opposed and cut programs that help America's children. The administration has opposed school lunches, after-school programs for families of working mothers, preschool programs, and college loans." In addition, Bush and many other conservatives have pursued policies that limit the expansion of childhood healthcare as well as environmental protections.²⁷



Progressive policies, in contrast, place a much greater focus on providing a livable world for future generations. Conservatives may go to great lengths to defend their children from encountering homosexuality or having to pay steep inheritance taxes, but progressives inclusively see future generations as a much broader category than their own particular children. These two very different notions of



[P]rogressives inclusively see future generations as a much broader category than their own particular children.

Truth/Justice

family values, far from splitting hairs over policy minutia, reveal fundamentally distinct attitudes toward what constitutes a positive Community and how it relates to The Commons.

Truth

Reason

Objectivity

Honesty in politics

Transparency

Justice

Equal opportunity

Minority rights

Independent judicial branch

The final value pair, Truth/Justice, pertains to the formal structures that mediate the relationships between the other two value pairs. That is, if Freedom/Security describes personal rights, and Community/The Commons describes public relationships, then Truth/Justice most directly refers to the formal means of negotiating between the personal and the political.



Both Truth and Justice dictate a relationship not only between the personal and the political, but also between reality and discourse. Truth includes not only facts but also more generally a stance of honesty and integrity, transparency in government, and a strong commitment to reason. Justice has a firm basis in Truth, but reverses the relationship between reality and discourse. Rather than dictating that discourse accurately describe reality, Justice refers to the ways in which particular kinds of discourse (laws) dictate our interactions in reality.

Truth

Truth describes a free flow of internally consistent discourse that accurately describes reality. The progressive version of Truth places a distinct emphasis, as Barack Obama put it, on telling citizens what they need to hear rather

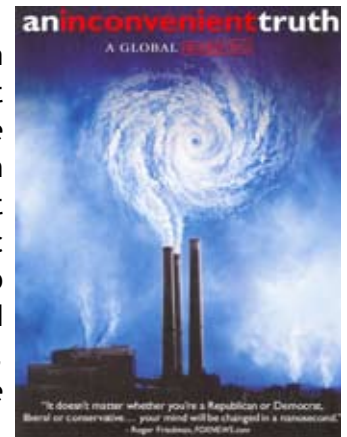
Progressives value telling the Truth because it is true.

than what they want to hear. While this function of Truth makes sense as a prerequisite for a strong sense of progressive Community, progressives also articulate Truth as an important value in-and-of itself. Part of this value is deeply pragmatic: a well-informed populace makes for a vibrant and functional democracy. An equally powerful portion, however, is self-evident and irreducible: progressives value telling the Truth because it is true. Discourse itself loses integrity without Truth.



Other core values both depend upon and encourage Truth. The individual civil liberties that progressives value are intimately tied to Truth-telling. Freedom of speech and Freedom of the press help to increase the free flow of accurate information. The progressive value of Freedom, though genuine and complete unto itself, both depends upon and supports the value of Truth. Freedoms of speech and the press are only free when what is said or written is true; lies fall under libel and slander laws.

Al Gore has helped to provide recent progressivism a firm basis in the value of Truth. His popular film *An Inconvenient Truth*, while ostensibly most directly defending the progressive value of The Commons, depends for its effectiveness entirely on the revelation of facts that are difficult to accept and on the clarity and honesty of the scientific method. Rather than interpreting data according to preconceived ideological positions, even if said positions might support other progressive values, this value of Truth dictates a strong progressive desire for objective and rational analysis.



[The] value of Truth dictates a strong progressive desire for objective and rational analysis.

Part of this value has to do not only with accuracy but also with reason. As Gore asserted in his book *The Assault on Reason*, progressives value rational thinking over, for example, appeals to spiritual authority or “patriotic” aphorisms. Much of the neoconservative turn since George W. Bush’s tenure in office has threatened the Enlightenment values that progressivism had inherited from the 18th century, by justifying policies and values in theological rather than logical terms. Although many progressive values align with the values of most major religions, progressives no more accept the dictates of Bush’s alleged conversations with God than they would Osama bin Laden’s. The “separation of church and state” on the one hand protects religious minorities from persecution, a function as important today as it was in the late 18th century. More importantly, though, this separation protects the government’s objectivity and the citizenry’s ability to access objective Truth.

[P]rogressives should recognize that emotion is an intrinsic component of human decision-making, and should learn how better to use evocative narratives and make appeals that resonate emotionally, not just to trust facts and rationality to carry an argument.



Reason and accuracy, far from ideological concepts, are vital to progressivism's pragmatic character. As Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer put it in "True Patriotism: A Manifesto," Truth is vital to the progressive quest to improve. This form of pragmatism is "a way of being that dispenses with fantasy and with orthodoxy and every other form of self-delusion." Freeing politics from

ideological coloring, this value has to do with "a commitment to a process: a faith that in a land of so many factions, relentlessly fair and pragmatic inquiry will bring us closer to Truth." Progressive patriotism, for Liu and Hanauer, "is found in the courage to face painful truths about the true costs of our actions and omissions."²⁸ Only in the process of Truth-seeking can progressives practically attend to the needs and possibilities of the nation. Both unflinchingly rigorous journalism and strong traditions of education are vital parts of instilling and maintaining a commitment to Truth.

As mentioned in the introduction, Drew Westen and others have argued that progressive candidates have over the past two decades displayed an "irrational commitment to rationality." In other words, these candidates and their campaign strategists have tended to play to the idea that people will make rational decisions based on issues that benefit them. While that negligence of the role of emotions and images has certainly posed a problem for the left in terms of political success, it behooves progressives to attempt to understand why this tendency exists rather than merely rejecting it.

Progressives like Gore speak of facts and appeal to reason because they value Truth. Westen's insightful analysis of how the political brain functions regarding emotions and images should not lead progressives to abandon their appeals to Truth but rather to frame Truth as a value - a value that, like other values, both practically benefits and emotionally moves people to protect the well-being of the nation. At the same time, progressives should recognize that emotion is an intrinsic component of human decision-making, and should learn how better to use evocative narratives and make appeals that resonate emotionally, not just to trust facts and rationality to carry an argument.

Justice



When we apply the rationality and clarity of Truth to the reality of public life - that is, when we move beyond how we represent reality to how we live it - we enter the realm of Justice. Progressives have traditionally championed Justice in the face of overwhelming odds. As mentioned above, civil rights and equality are valuable largely insofar as they increase progressive

values of Freedom and Community. But those aspects of their benefits do not exhaust progressive interest in defending rights to vote or even in defending the downtrodden from exploitation. Beyond the liberties and communal bonds that lawsuits and constitutional amendments have protected, progressives value the act of challenging injustice in and of itself.

The main reason that the left reacted so vociferously against the Bush administration's attempts to blur the line between the executive and judicial branches of government was ultimately that such attempts threatened to undermine the pure operations of the Justice system, to cloud its judgment with ideology. While it stands to reason that Democrats would object to Republican control in a wide range of political moves, a true progressive would object to a similar move even by a Democratic president, because without independence from political motivations, Justice threatens to descend into factional power.



Equality of opportunity has long been the cornerstone of the progressive sense of Justice. While having equal access to opportunities does indeed enhance Freedom and acknowledges and protects the type of interdependent Community that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., advocated, it also and independently plays on the progressive love of Justice and antipathy toward special privilege. Progressives believe that everyone should play fair, and that the terms of fairness derive neither from birthright nor from mere convention or tradition. The terms of fairness derive rather from a rational sense of Justice that lies beyond power, beyond privilege, and even beyond the traditions established by legal precedent.



In 1910, Theodore Roosevelt articulated this principle in terms of a progressive willingness to shape the law to defend Justice: "I stand for the square deal. But when I say that I am for the square deal, I mean not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the games, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity and of reward for equally good service."²⁹ Progressives gauge the fairness, or Justice, of a law based not merely on its effectiveness at advancing progressive causes or its acceptability within existing legal frameworks, but also and more importantly on the degree to which it makes rational sense, to which it is fair. Justice, then, is akin to Truth's formal consistency but operates in the realm of the world as it is legislated and lived.

Equality of opportunity [is] the cornerstone of the progressive sense of Justice.

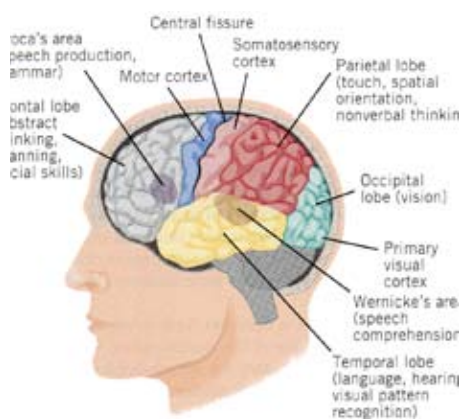
Communicating Progressive Values

Emotions move us to act; imagination sets forth a vision of the future; narratives help us to understand how we relate to one another and how we can affect change.

While both Truth and Justice have a firm basis in rational thought, framed as values they appeal directly to emotional responses in all Americans. In order to discuss issues in rational terms - a realm in which progressives have tended to excel - progressives first must establish emotional support for reason itself. Truth and Justice engender passionate feelings from progressives and appeal to the very core of progressive identity.

Values and Emotions

The core value pairs listed above distill progressive morality largely through a conceptual methodology. In Lakoff's terms, values derive their power from the conceptual frameworks that define our sense of the world. However, Lakoff's understanding of metaphors remains in the rational, intellectual sphere. His family metaphors of "nurturant parent" and "strict father" activate how we think. Drew Westen's important book, *The Political Brain*, suggests that we make political decisions based far more directly on how we feel. Which is not to say that we feel instead of thinking, but rather that every thought we have orchestrates and is orchestrated by a complex series of emotional responses.³⁰



Emotion, as Westen points out, is based in the Latin *movere*, and is related directly to action, to *moving*. We decide to do this or do that, to choose this or that candidate, based on how we are moved by a complex set of interrelated thoughts and feelings. Failed presidential candidates like John Kerry have missed the crucial emotional aspect of how people identify with one another. The image of someone you trust evokes a sense of warmth and confidence, while the image of someone you don't may evoke a sense of fear, disgust, or

unease. Certainly, reasonable arguments matter, but only insofar as they make us feel something. As Westen puts it: "Behind every reasoned decision there is a reason for deciding. We do not pay attention to arguments unless they engender our interest, enthusiasm, fear, anger, or contempt. We are not moved by leaders with whom we do not feel an emotional resonance. We do not find policies worth debating if they don't touch on the emotional implications for ourselves, our families, or things we hold dear."³¹ In other words, we respond to that which affects what we value.



[W]e respond to that which affects what we value.

[I]mages communicate directly to parts of our brain not activated by words alone.

A truthful image is not a masking but an unmasking, a tangible, distilled portrait of what we stand for in the language our brains most directly apprehend.

Values and Images

Images largely define how we understand the modern world: bodies piled up in Baghdad, embarrassing snapshots of celebrities, presidential candidates standing next to Christmas trees. The old adage that “a picture’s worth a thousand words” is so consistently useful to Madison Avenue ad agencies and political campaigns alike because images communicate directly to parts of our brain not activated by words alone.



By the end of the twentieth century, images had become so ubiquitous that they largely replaced the spoken and written word as the primary mode of public discourse. Many scholars and philosophers have rightly articulated anxiety about this ubiquity, suggesting (as philosophers have since Plato) that images lead us away from the truth. Following in a line of thought initiated by Walter Benjamin, contemporary philosophers of images from John Berger to Jean Baudrillard have cautioned against the overwhelming power of the “spectacle” to manipulate opinions, manufacture desire, and commodify people as well as things.



Images are indeed powerful ways of invoking emotional responses, and in that power lies both danger and opportunity. It is important to keep in mind that images do not inherently deceive, although they have been used that way in propaganda and political campaigns. As long as progressives dismiss the power of images as merely a mask that hides and prettifies, we will not be able to embrace the true power of the imagination. A truthful image is not a masking but an unmasking, a tangible, distilled portrait of what we stand for in the language our brains most directly apprehend.

The word “image” is the basis of the word “imagination.” As recent cognitive science has demonstrated, our imaginations provide the medium by which we negotiate and interact with the world. For example, when you want to pick up a cup of coffee to take a drink of it, your brain sends thousands of signals to different muscles involved. The mechanical process of reaching to the cup, lifting it, balancing its weight, bringing it to the lips, and so on is unbelievably complex. But you do not consciously think of the micro-operations required to make it happen. Rather, you imagine lifting the cup and drinking from it. The image you have in your head then activates a series of networks and signals that effectively make the image real.

Rather than seeing images as the vehicle for values, see values as verbal attempts to describe the images we wish to realize.



Images, like values, can offer an overarching conception, or vision, of the desirable. When we imagine what we want as individuals, we unconsciously set into motion a series of actions that help to realize our images. When we imagine what we want as a nation with equal clarity, we can also set into motion a series of issue positions that politically help to bring about what we envision. The key for the public arena is to get everyone to imagine collaboratively. At the city level, we might communicate an image of smoothly flowing light rails, effective schools, or a vibrant art scene. The values associated with civic cooperation, education, and cultural heritage are embodied in the image of how we want the world to be.



It is not quite complete, however, to say that images communicate values, although they certainly can. The problem with this articulation is that it makes values seem like the irreducible real that artificial images carry, whereas images are so fundamental to cognition that they are closer to the real and closer to the world we want than any verbal sign can deliver. The image, unlike the concept, has an indexical relationship to reality. Words are arbitrary relative to the things they signify. Images, in contrast, deliver the sensory content of the things they express. They connect our individual and collective minds in a direct and emotional way. Rather than seeing images as the vehicle for values, we might better see values as verbal attempts to describe the images we wish to realize.

To find people who are fluent in the language of images and who understand the power of images to tell the truth, we need to look to artists, not ad agencies. An image that makes you feel desire for a particular brand of cigarette is manipulative. An image that makes you feel connected to the values a candidate stands for or that holds forth a legitimate possibility for a brighter future is true and necessary.

Values and Narratives



Stories, like images, speak deeply to who we are and are fundamental to how we form communities. Many aspects of narratives make them important for forging and communicating identity, among them the fact that stories move people, invent worlds, and happen over time. Stories can deliver morals without preaching or lecturing; they can attach every value, concept,

Stories make values tangible.

[F]ictional stories offer a uniquely experiential way to access and live values at a safe remove from the "real" world.

emotion, belief, and message to concrete actions, characters, and scenes. People can interpolate themselves into stories and can extrapolate stories to fit new circumstances. Stories make values tangible.



At the same time, stories allow us to imagine a version of the possible. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle influentially made a case for tragedy rooted in potentiality. He said that while history showed what did happen and philosophy what should happen, "poetry" showed what might happen. It is in this suspension from real facts as well as from dogmatic tirades that stories can offer the left a way of exploring possible versions of the future. Certainly, histories, documentaries, and highly polemical tirades can communicate values, but fictional stories offer a uniquely experiential way to access and live values at a safe remove from the "real" world.

The stories by which we understand ourselves as individuals and communities carry our values and activate what Lakoff calls the "deep frames" that structure identity. For all its failures and contradictions, there is no denying that the right knows how to tell a good story. So how can the left use narratives to communicate values and package an attractive identity?

Conservative hero narratives often center around an individual pulling himself up by his own bootstraps and conquering overwhelming odds through a combination of daring risks, hard work, and the sheer force of will. This common story has the benefit of appealing simultaneously to an historic, quasi-mythological sense of America's founding and to everyday individual lives of people who have to struggle for personal gain.



A progressive story might draw on a similarly powerful mythos: for example, the communal aspect of pioneers, who, far from making it on their own, were forced to trust one another and to improvise new social structures. The Clint Eastwood musical *Circle Your Wagons* tells a story like this; although the characters are rugged and self-reliant, they have to cooperate to build a society. The story of American democracy is all about the common folk and their self-governance. The pioneer myth is properly progressive; we need to tell the story through the sense of the common good rather than the sense of every man for himself. This

version of the story has the benefit of appealing to national and individual identity, with the added benefit of being true.



There are many other familiar films we can see as creating progressive imagery and stories. *It's A Wonderful Life* shows how interconnected we are and how valuable Community is. *The Cradle will Rock* shows how we must protect our artistic Commons in order to speak truth to power. *Good Night and Good Luck* instills values of Freedom, Truth, and Justice. In each of these films, there are heroes, but those heroes embody key aspects of progressivism: instead of vanquishing all their opponents, they are leaders who both unify and depend upon the work of others; they speak truth to power; they fight for the good of all.

But a story need not so obviously carry a progressive message in order to instill progressive values. In fact, some of the most effective stories for instilling progressive values may not carry a message at all - the very form of telling can interact with individual imaginations in a much more powerful way than mere messages delivered in the form of stories. Inherent in storytelling is the experiential power of exploring what it means to be human.



As the Russian Formalist critic Victor Schklovsky noted in 1917, narratives have the power to make the familiar seem strange, and thereby to reveal truths ordinarily repressed by utilitarianism and daily habit. Art, Schklovsky argued, gains its effectiveness through defamiliarization, through making us see the "stoniness" of the stone, or the chaotic qualities

of war, or the often dehumanizing effects of ownership. By making us recognize things, forces, or processes as if for the first time, art can provoke us to question and alter our relationship to the world.³²

It follows that the most powerful tool for instilling progressive values is not merely stuffing conventional forms with progressive messages, but rather exploring how new formal elements of storytelling might interact with identity. We are living in an exciting time technologically. Stories are no longer confined to oration, the page, the stage, the television screen, and the cinema - each a very different medium but all still organized around narratives that are created by storytellers and then later heard, read, or seen by audiences. High-speed computing has made possible highly interactive video games, online multiplayer worlds like Second Life, and a whole new approach to narrative.

As narrative scholar Larry Friedlander notes, these new media still operate through narrative functions, but fuse the "reader" with the "author" and give her a space through which to make choices and propel her own story.³³



As a much more elaborated version of the highly limited “choose your own adventure” stories in books, this kind of narrative has the potential to instill values in a far more active way. Considering the unprecedented power of these new media, it is crucial that we look at what values these games generate.

Unfortunately, most video games literally teach the young people who play them to value killing, destruction, and looking out for number one. The player shoots, and if a fictional enemy dies, the player earns points. The most infamously violent games, such as Doom, Wolfenstein, and Grand Theft Auto, have been demonstrated to increase aggression and violent feelings in those who play them - even more than television as a result of their interactive nature.³⁴ Even much less gory games instill values of destroying others and protecting oneself. Games as innocuous as Super Mario Brothers literally value conquest and vanquishing enemies. Conservative values dominate mainstream gaming. So what form would progressive narratives take in this arena?

[T]he massive multiplayer games made possible by the Internet are formally perfect for instilling progressive values.

Fortunately, the massive multiplayer games made possible by the Internet are formally perfect for instilling progressive values. Second Life and similar online worlds allow different players to build communities together, develop society in microcosm, and see their actions as part of a larger field of interactive individuals. Since each player knows that each other player is a real person and a co-creator of the digital world around her, this online universe values empathy and responsibility. Since the world becomes more beautiful and interesting the more different people work together, it values cooperation. Since the player actively co-creates the narrative as opposed to consuming it passively, the game values free thinking and creativity.



Online games developed from a similarly creative and cooperative perspective have an enormous potential to foster progressive values of Freedom/Security, Community/The Commons, and Truth/Justice. Perhaps most importantly, games are played by the youngest Americans - the citizens who know the least about issues and yet are the most open to absorbing values.

Values and Action

If we value what brings well-being through an emotional connection based on who we are and how we imagine the future, then it is clear that our actions, political and otherwise, must flow from our values. Emotions move

[O]ur actions, political and otherwise, must flow from our values.

[T]he ways in which an audience reads, hears, sees, or otherwise experiences a message has a more direct impact on how that audience sees itself, its relationship to the message, and its own habits of perception than does the message itself.

The difference between communicating values and embodying them...is both fundamental to being progressive and fundamental to how people perceive stories.

Skilled communicators... understand the ways in which their audiences will most readily understand the communicator's vision and values.

us to act; imagination sets forth a vision of the future; narratives help us to understand how we relate to one another and how we can affect change.

Everyone votes on values. You may say that you vote on issues, but why do you identify with one position over another? Because it speaks to something you value. If progressives want to be elected, they must embrace and articulate their values; they must paint a picture of what the future can be.

To instill our core values, progressives must embrace the power of stories and images not only to carry but also, and more importantly, to embody those values. Rather than merely representing a truth that remains only arbitrarily related to the medium that bears it, effective images and stories make the medium itself play a role. Images and stories are not only powerful because they pertain to the real world, but also because they physically occupy it. That is, the ways in which an audience reads, hears, sees, or otherwise experiences a message has a more direct impact on how that audience sees itself, its relationship to the message, and its own habits of perception than does the message itself.

The difference between communicating values and embodying them may seem subtle or merely semantic, but it gets to the heart of something that is both fundamental to being progressive and fundamental to how people perceive stories. Put simply, progressive thought rarely puts things simply. In other words, we do not speak in "sound bites," a fact that has arguably contributed to some campaign failures. Well-reasoned, nuanced positions seldom translate to bumper stickers.

Our appreciation of the geographic, demographic, and cultural diversity of America offers progressives a basis for understanding why we have found it so hard to come up with simplistic "sound bites" that express progressive values. Instead, while all of us may accept the value of Freedom or of Truth, we each have our individual ways of expressing these core values: different words, images, metaphors, and narratives. Skilled communicators are those who understand the ways in which their audiences will most readily understand the communicator's vision and values. If a value as complex and multifaceted as Community could be reduced to a single sentence, it would hardly be worth articulating. Values are valuable because they pertain to our lives, which are likewise irreducible to single statements, commands, or declarations.

The value of a good story (or image) is in part that it can be both universal and particular. A poignant parable may tap into fundamental human morality while wearing the very local costume of its particular telling. In this way, broad themes of progressive thought can take many forms, much as a jazz musician may "riff" on an old standard. The differences between particular iterations allow for infinite variation, localized concern, and concrete detail, while the essence of the story transcends specifics and unites progressives everywhere.

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Freedom/Security describes what progressives value for individuals, including what the state allows its citizens to do and what it protects its citizens from.

Community/The Commons refers to how citizens relate to one another as groups, and how those groups relate to the resources we all share.

Truth/Justice pertains to the formal structures of language and law, rooted in a commitment to reason, transparency, and fairness.

If these three value pairs (Freedom/Security, Community/The Commons, and Truth/Justice) distill the essence of progressive morality, then each image we create, each story we tell, should riff on this structure in order to incarnate these abstract concepts through concrete, local circumstances.

It would be a mistake to reduce the value of values to votes. Each vote, even each election, is merely a means to make a freer, more equitable future. We must not confuse the ends and means. Political power is only worth something if we have a compelling vision to work toward. In this sense, the values listed here are not a tool but a statement of purpose, not a strategic initiative but an image of the country progressives have said they want. These values, aggregated and distilled from the thoughtful hard work of so many devoted progressives, represent what we stand for, who we are, and what America can become.

Values and the Progressive Movement

We have derived the three value pairs described above through a combination of aggregating the substantial work done by other think tanks, books, and value statements, and conceptually distilling them down to the categories that most succinctly capture what progressives value. Freedom/Security describes what progressives value for individuals, including what the state allows its citizens to do (speak, marry, travel, etc) and what it protects its citizens from (violence, exploitation, illness, and so on). Community/The Commons refers to how citizens relate to one another as groups, and how those groups relate to the resources we all share. Finally, Truth/Justice pertains to the formal structures of language and law, rooted in a commitment to reason, transparency, and fairness.

Each value pair relies upon a dynamic relationship. For instance, the relationship between Community and The Commons is as important to defining progressive morality as either value is on its own. We define what it is we value as a Community largely through how we define the way the Community uses, engages, and protects The Commons. Several moral intuitions or tendencies mark these relationships as different for progressives than for conservatives, including empathy and responsibility, a proclivity for non-hierarchical patterns, pragmatic attention to real-world problems, acceptance of diversity, and recognition of interdependence. These attitudes color and distinguish these values and ground them in human emotion and behavior.

We deeply appreciate the substantial work done by a wide range of think tanks, authors, bloggers, pundits, social scientists, and theorists. We have not come up with six core values but have rather pulled them together from this substantial body of work. It is particularly useful that our sources have derived their values from a broad array of methodologies. Statistical,

The three core value pairs...give progressives a way of talking about what unites the progressive movement, what progressives most essentially represent... The progressive movement is poised to tell the story and paint the picture of what America can become.

NOTES

conceptual, linguistic, and analytical reports each cover a different realm of truth. Separately, they provide keen insights into particular patterns. Aggregated together, they provide a highly comprehensive and reliable base for future work.

The three core value pairs in this report should give progressives a way of talking about what unites the progressive movement, what progressives most essentially represent. As we move forward into the 2008 presidential election and beyond, progressives can communicate and instill these core values through framing the debate in these terms and telling powerful stories that unite people around a shared progressive identity. The progressive movement is poised to tell the story and paint the picture of what America can become.

Endnotes

1. See Drew Westen, *The Political Brain*
2. See George Lakoff, *Thinking Points*
3. See Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*
4. Lakoff 2006, 82.
5. See Lakoff, *Moral Politics*
6. *ibid*
7. Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*
8. *ibid*
9. Paul Waldman, "The Progressive Identity Complex" http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/05/03/the_progressive_identity_complex.php
10. <http://progressivespirit.com/Projects/OrganizationsValues/Table.htm>
11. Others, including Campaign for America's Future and several of the think tanks listed above, include "opportunity" as a core value. Rather than considering "opportunity" an autonomous value here, we have subsumed it beneath the category of "Freedom." Opportunities are inherently valuable, but comparable to the way that value is inherently valuable; listing it as one of several values creates a tautology. In many ways, every value has to do with increasing positive opportunities for individual success and social relations. What progressives particularly value about the relationship to opportunity is free access. Other aspects of progressives' specific relationship to opportunity will be covered under Community / The Commons.

12. Kim Paxson, *"The Power of a Long-term Vision Statement to Change the Direction of Our Country: A Comparison Between How Conservatives and Progressives Communicate,"* February 19, 2008
13. See www.valuesalliance.org
14. <http://progressivespirit.com/Projects/OrganizationsValues>
15. Peter Phillips, *"Progressive Ideals: Rooted in American Values"* at http://www.putnampit.com/opinion/Peter_op-ed_2005_10_14.htm
16. Alan Jenkins, *"A Real Values Debate"* at http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2007/11/20/a_real_values_debate.php
17. Martin Luther King, Jr., quoted in Jenkins 2007
18. Bernie Horn, *"Progressive Values 101,"* *The Nation* (June 26, 2006). This article is reproduced on the Center for Policy Alternatives website: www.cfpa.org/progressivevalues/values101.cfm
19. Frances Moore Lappé, *"Time for Progressives to Grow Up"* at <http://www.guerrillanews.com/articles/article.php?id=1010> Thu, 23 Dec 2004
20. Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham, *"When morality opposes justice: Conservatives have moral intuitions that liberals may not recognize,"* Third draft of invited submission to special issue of *Social Justice Research* (October 18, 2006), p. 1
21. Similarly, progressives do not tend to feel disgust at the idea of gay marriage (in a way that Haidt and Graham claim conservatives do - a function, they write, of the purity/sanctity category, which evolved to help humans avoid disease-spreading agents like rotting food or leprous neighbors). While not disgusted by the same things, left wing vegans often speak of being disgusted at the horrors of the meat industry, and many Green Party environmental activists feel genuine disgust at the sight of an oil spill destroying an ecosystem. We could see similar cases on the left in regard to ingroup/loyalty. Progressives, like conservatives, respond to these basic human motivations; where they differ is on what they find impure, disloyal, or disrespectful toward the Community. In other words, progressives are more likely to respond to purity, loyalty, and respect in ways shaped by a progressive worldview.
22. Doug Muder, *"Liberal Morality: It's Not Hypocrisy"* at <http://www.gurus.com/dougdeb/politics/hypocrisy.html> February 2005
23. John Halpin, *"Progressivism in 2004: Transcending the Liberal-Conservative Divide"* at <http://www.americanprogress.org/site/pp.asp?c=biJRJ8OVF&b=18188>, January 5, 2004
24. Ideology still remains a powerful force in political thought, despite a strong anti-ideological strain within post-World War II progressivism. As John Jost has argued, the "end-of-ideologists" following in the wake of Giorgio Agamben who argue that ideology no longer has potency as a way of describing political thought or voting

behavior have in many ways semantically “defined away” the concept of ideology by narrowing the criteria for its definition. Ideology, Jost argues, still plays an important and interpretable role in how we make political decisions. Jost is right that is not entirely true that progressivism can move leftist politics beyond ideology, as Halpin and others have suggested. Rather, progressives make ideology more flexible and open, tied not to a rigid conceptual system but to the world as it is. This pragmatic point of view moves the role of political thought closer to the realm of political action. See John Jost, “The End of the End of Ideology,” American Psychologist Vol. 61, No. 7, 65 (October 2006)

25. Martin Luther King Jr quoted in Jenkins 2007
26. Thom Hartman, “The Founders Confront Judge Moore” at <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/1120-10.htm> (Nov 20, 2003)
27. Riane Eisler, “The Ignored Issue that Can Get Progressives Elected” at <http://www.alternet.org/story/60596/> (Sept 13, 2007)
28. Liu and Hanauer, “True Patriotism,: A Manifesto,” *The True Patriot: A Pamphlet* (Seattle: True Patriot Network, 2007), p 41-2.
29. Theodore Roosevelt, “The New Nationalism, ” *The True Patriot* 46
30. Westen, *The Political Brain*
31. *ibid* 16
32. Victor Shklosvsky, “Art as Technique” translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis in 1965, and is reprinted in David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longmans, 1988), pp. 16-30.
33. Larry Friedlander, *personal communication*
34. Craig Anderson and Karen Dill, “Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 78, No. 4.