

Quite a deal for Boeing shareholders, and quite a curious move for a state government facing the worst budget shortfall in its history.¹³ But can we blame Kansas, or any state, for reacting as it did? Every free-trade agreement we have signed in recent years has been designed to make cities vulnerable in precisely this way. If you're a medium-sized city like Wichita, hosting some giant multinational's plant is less of an achievement today than it is a gun pointed at your head, a constant reminder that some executive has the power to turn your town into an instant Flint, to destroy your citizens' lives, your property values, your merchants, and all the rest of it should the whim overtake him while he sits in the audience at some motivational seminar.

Boeing eventually decided to produce the 7E7 in pretty much the same manner as it produces its other jetliners: part of the work will be done in Wichita, and the final assembly will be done in the Puget Sound region. The bonds and tax breaks voted by the people of Kansas and Washington changed nothing but the company's bottom line. Still, Kansas leaders were proud of the "signal" they had sent. Everyone in the corporate-relocation community was "familiar with the Boeing legislation," boasted the state's lieutenant governor. "They know [Kansas is] pro-business and pro-jobs." A little more than a month later, however, Kansas would learn the true measure of the corporate world's respect, and the lesson would make the state's blood freeze: According to a memo leaked to a Seattle newspaper, Boeing was considering *selling* the huge plant on which Wichita's prosperity depended.¹⁴ A decade's worth of legislative favors and florid pro-business declarations, it now appeared, were like so many valentines to a blackguard. Profit alone swelled Boeing's cold heart, and its fancy was now fixed on outsourcing. All that was left for Kansas to do was swoon in self-pity.

Chapter Five

Con Men and Mod Squad

The greatest and most consequential shift in Kansas has been within its Republican Party, where a civil war pitting moderates against conservatives has been raging for over a decade now. Republicanism has always been central to the state's identity: Kansas was founded by free-soil settlers who fought a running border war with slaveholding Missourians (that is, Democrats), and it has not sent a Democrat to the U.S. Senate since 1932. Republicanism here has not always been strictly conservative, however; those who represented the state on the national stage—William Allen White, Alf Landon, Dwight Eisenhower, even Bob Dole—were all from the party's "progressive" or "moderate" wing. And while the state was fiscally tight and banned what was quaintly called "liquor by the drink" until 1986, it also had some excellent public schools, some pretty good public services, and the slightly higher taxes that paid for them. It was much closer to Minnesota than it was to Alabama.

Most important, Kansas was traditionally ahead of the

crowd on women's rights. Women's suffrage was first proposed here in 1867 and achieved in full in 1912, and Kansas was one of the handful of states that had reformed its abortion laws even before the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973. In later years the state's largest city, Wichita, gained the dubious distinction of being the only place in the region where a woman could receive a late-term abortion, at a clinic operated by a doctor named George Tiller. As the *enragés* still like to say, Kansas was "the abortion capital of the nation."¹

Kansas has always been a religious place, but when I was growing up there in the seventies and eighties there was not much of a religious right to speak of. There were the occasional nuts, of course—when I was young, a gang of right-wing ne'er-do-wells calling themselves the Capitalist Revolutionary Army robbed a Johnson County bank and shot several policemen—but by and large Kansas was as average and as ordinary in its politics as it was in every other regard. David Adkins, a state senator who was raised a fundamentalist Baptist in the plains city of Salina (today he is a moderate Republican), says, "I . . . can't recall a political issue—abortion, homosexuality, any of the issues of convenience that now dominate Republican dialogue—ever being mentioned in the course of my religious training, or in the course of my faith." When Dan Glickman, a former U.S. representative from Wichita (he is one of that rare breed, a Kansas Democrat), served on the city school board in the seventies, he says, "issues of ideology never came up." In the early eighties I myself attended a hearing called by an angry parent who wished to remove a number of books from our high school library; as she ran through her list of accusations—prefab stuff that she had probably procured from the John Birch Society—the presiding administrators had trouble restraining their laughter.

In the late eighties, Kansas was basking complacently in its traditional pragmatic centrism. Two of its U.S. representatives were Democrats; two others (one of them a woman) were moderate Republicans. Its famous U.S. senator, Bob Dole, had been labeled a conservative when he ran for the vice presidency in 1976; by the time he got his party's nomination for the top job in 1996, he was solidly in the moderate camp. Kansas's other senator, Nancy Kassebaum, the daughter of Alf Landon, could be called a liberal Republican.

All through the eighties, the state legislature was dominated by traditional moderate Republicans, passing legislation like a well-oiled machine. The state was still sufficiently unpolarized that in 1990 voters could elect, for only the second time since World War II, a Democratic majority in the Kansas house. More important for our purposes, however, was the small band of right-wing cranks who amused the citizenry by pulling an occasional filibuster on tax legislation, suspending the rules, and otherwise tossing wrenches into the workings of government whenever the opportunities presented. In the late eighties, there were maybe ten of these characters in the statehouse, one of them a pest of such damnable persistence that his colleagues nominated him for "state reptile" in 1986.²

In 1991, though, began an uprising that would propel those reptilian Republicans from a tiny splinter group into the state's dominant political faction, that would reduce Kansas Democrats to third-party status, and that would wreck what remained of the state's progressive legacy. We are accustomed to thinking of the backlash as a phenomenon of the seventies (the busing riots, the tax revolt) or the eighties (the Reagan revolution); in Kansas the great move to the right was a story of the nineties, a story of the present.

The push that started Kansas hurtling down the crevasse of reaction was provided by Operation Rescue, the national pro-life

group famous for its aggressive tactics against abortion clinics. They called it the Summer of Mercy; the plan was to commit acts of civil disobedience all across the city of Wichita in July 1991, just as the organization's followers had done in Atlanta in 1988 and Los Angeles in 1990. Wichita was to be different, though. Here you had Tiller's clinic situated among a population that is world-famous for its spiritual enthusiasm. The protesters meant to make this contradiction manifest—to force one aspect of the Kansas identity to clash with another—to set up a conflict so unresolvable that everyone in the state would eventually have to choose up sides and join the fight.

What allowed Operation Rescue to succeed, and what made the summer of 1991 different from previous anti-abortion rallies, was the reaction of the city's clinics, which voluntarily closed up for a week when the protests began. Although this disastrous strategy had been undertaken on the advice of the Wichita police, to certain elements of the pro-life movement it represented a bona-fide miracle.³ For once they had completely stopped what they called "the abortion industry" in its tracks. In July and August they descended on Wichita by the thousands, spreading out over the city, chaining themselves to fences, lying down beneath cars, filling the jails, and picketing the residences of abortion doctors and others they deemed complicit in the culture of death.

The summer's climactic event was a mass meeting in the football stadium at Wichita State University. At first organizers expected seven thousand people; they reserved only half of the stadium. More than twenty-five thousand showed up. They filled the entire complex; they spilled over onto the end zones. Pat Robertson took to the podium and declared, "We will not rest until every baby . . . is safe in his mother's womb"; the fundamentalist media critic Donald Wildmon lashed out against liberal bias in the news; the pro-life activist Joe Scheidler called for

Wichita-style protests across the country; and Operation Rescue leaders phoned in speeches from jail. In one *Spartacus*-like moment, an event organizer asked those from out of town to stand up; according to press accounts, two-thirds of the audience did so. Then she called on Wichitans to stand, and the whole crowd got to its feet.⁴

Lawrence Goodwyn, the historian of nineteenth-century Populism, proposes that "movement culture" is critical to mass protest: "The people need to 'see themselves' experimenting in democratic forms," he has written.⁵ What Goodwyn no doubt had in mind were the Populists' huge "educational" gatherings and their day-long parades through tiny Kansas towns, but the observation applies just as accurately to that great inverted-populist frolic in Wichita one hundred years later.⁶ This was where the Kansas conservative movement got an idea of its own strength; this was where it achieved critical mass. Other aspects of that summer may be hazy now, but every anti-abortion activist I talked to remembers this massive gathering with burning clarity. Mary Kay Culp, the Johnson County director of the anti-abortion group Kansans for Life (KFL), recalled how she and others from suburban Kansas City traveled by bus to the event. Bud Hentzen, a Wichita contractor who served at that time as a Sedgwick County commissioner, described the moment in the stadium as a kind of awakening. "My thought," he said, was "bring on the vote."

And bring it on they did. Tim Golba, a former president of Kansans for Life, recounted how KFL's mailing list grew by ten thousand names in the six weeks after the rally. At anti-abortion gatherings Wichita conservative leaders signed up candidates for Republican precinct positions. "These people were laying down their bodies on the highway," remembered Mark Gietzen, a Christian activist who was soon to become the chairman of the Sedgwick County GOP. "We said, 'We admire you for your

courage, for your conviction, but we've got something a lot smarter for you to do than lying on the highway.'” By August 1992, Gietzen asserted, “we had 87 percent of our people in, identified, firm, Operation Rescue-type pro-lifers as precinct committeemen and women.”⁷

Moderate Kansas was horrified. Newspaper accounts of the summer emphasized the hostility of native Wichitans to the deluge of outsiders. Legislation was prepared to slap the protesters back into place by mandating stiff penalties for clinic blockers and codifying the pro-choice position as Kansas law. (In case *Roe v. Wade* was ever overturned, the legislation would have ensured that abortions would still be readily available in Kansas.) In March 1992 the abortion bill cleared the state house of representatives by a towering margin, but came to grief in the Kansas senate a few weeks later, much to the irritation of the state's editorial writers.

The push to lock in *Roe v. Wade* as state law coincided, ironically, with another great journalistic theme of that year, the celebration of popular disgust with what was called “politics as usual.” The *Wichita Eagle*, a leader in the “civic journalism” movement, ran endless stories marveling at the deteriorating popularity of the first president Bush, finding great significance in the defeat of various national politicians in primary elections, and conducting surveys and focus groups measuring the disaffection as Election Day drew near. Under the front-page headline “The People Are Fed Up,” the paper mustered its best imitation of populist outrage and declared of “the people” that “they said they were fed up with the problems, the politicians and the system that produces both. They said that the voters' revolt is on, that they want to take back control of the system.”⁸ What the paper meant by all its calls to rebellion, of course, was merely that it would be nice if we all registered and voted. Preferably for

nice moderate Republicans who would quit fooling around and pass the abortion bill.

The journalists were right about the coming “voters' revolt”; what they got wrong was the identity of the revolutionaries. This was no moderate affair. The ones who were actually poised to take back control of the system were the anti-abortion protesters. Theirs was a grassroots movement of the most genuine kind, born in protest, convinced of its righteousness, telling and retelling its stories of persecution at the hands of the cops, the judges, the state, and the comfortable classes. They had no newspaper they could call their own—the *Eagle*, for its part, ran story after story in which experts warned against the maniacal ambitions of the Bible-thumpers—but one of them did set up a “Godarchy hotline,” a telephone number you could call to hear recorded suggestions for action.

These nascent Kansas conservatives were also willing to work far harder than ordinary folks to achieve their political vision. This was (and still is) critical to their success, and the conservatives knew it. “The other side doesn't have an agenda,” said the Godarchy guy in 1992. “We have an agenda—the kingdom of God.” They had lain beneath cars to stop abortion, and now they were putting their bodies on the line for the right wing of the Republican Party.⁹ Most important of all, the conservative cadre were dedicated enough to show up in force for primary elections, which in Kansas are held in the distinctly unpleasant month of August. And in 1992 this populist conservative movement conquered the Kansas Republican Party from the ground up: in Johnson County, in Sedgwick County (Wichita), and in all the other heavily populated parts of the state, they swamped the GOP organizations with enthusiastic new activists and unceremoniously brushed the traditional Kansas moderates aside. In Sedgwick County, some 19 percent of the new precinct committee

people responsible for throwing out the old guard actually had arrest records from the Summer of Mercy.¹⁰ "I'm not here because I love politics," one of the activists declared on that momentous occasion. "I hate politics. I'm here because I love unborn babies. I've been to jail for the unborn."¹¹

That fall Bill Clinton won the presidency, but in Kansas the reenergized Republican Party reconquered the legislature. One conservative novice—a carpetlayer in private life—even defeated the fourteen-year incumbent Democrat who was then Speaker of the Kansas house.

The pro-life origins of the Kansas conservative movement present us with a striking historical irony. Historians often attribute the withering and disappearance of the nineteenth-century Populist movement to its failure to achieve material, real-world goals. It never managed to nationalize the railroads, or set up an agricultural price-support system, or remonetize silver, the argument goes, and eventually voters just got sick of its endless calls to take a stand against the "money power." Yet with the pro-life movement, the material goal of stopping abortion is, almost by definition, beyond achieving. Ask even the hardest-core activists, and they will admit that there is little that can be done to halt the practice without a fundamental shift on the Supreme Court. Their movement, however, just seems to grow and grow. The material goal doesn't seem to matter.

On the losing side of all this energetic growth were Kansas's traditional rulers, its pro-choice Republican moderates. Although plenty conservative in the pro-business sense of the word, the Republican Mods were now finding themselves under deadly, unrelenting fire from their right. Now it was they who were tasting the backlash, who were being called "soft" on this or that, who were charged with enabling the secular-humanist disease, who were facilitating the cultural rot. Now the state's traditional leaders—people who fancied themselves the most Republican in

America—even found themselves taunted as "RINOs": Republicans in Name Only. And they were furious. Candidates who had patiently worked their way up the party hierarchy for years were seeing the positions they had coveted filled instead by some holy-rolling nobody screeching against big government and interested only in doing away with abortion and taxation. The Cons were organizing at their fundamentalist churches on the edges of town; they were turning out for primaries in numbers that casual Republicans could never hope to match; they were trouncing Mods in races for everything from precinct committeeman to sheriff. Kansas Republicans were reaping the whirlwind: the backlash mentality that their party had encouraged so sedulously since 1968 and that had won them the presidency so many times was now howling outside their own door.

The moderates deplored and denounced. A Republican Party without themselves as its leaders was not Republican at all, they said. Why didn't the malcontents simply start a third party, they demanded, instead of ruining theirs? Besides, they suggested, the religious conservatives secretly harbored all manner of vile-ness. These Cons were determined to bring "segregation of a different kind," one Johnson County Mod declared. "And they hate," wrote a columnist for the *Wichita Eagle*. "They want women to return to a time . . . when white gloves were required attire at afternoon teas, and when women were kept in their place by being taught that the men in their lives always knew best."¹²

In 1993 the Reverend Robert Meneilly blasted the Cons from the pulpit of Village Presbyterian, a fashionable church nestled on the Mission Hills border, warning that their efforts to baptize government would one day backfire, discrediting Christianity and setting back its larger spiritual mission. For this reason, Meneilly declared, the zealous cadres then taking over the local Republican Party represented "a threat far greater than the old

threat of Communism.” Meneilly was probably the most respected church leader in greater Kansas City at the time, and his sermon against the Cons catalyzed moderate dread throughout suburbia. It led to the founding of the Mainstream Coalition, a group established to fight the religious right, and the sermon was even reprinted in *The New York Times*. But for the Cons, being denounced by this Johnson County elder had a tonic effect, confirming to them their pet belief that society's real victims were evangelical Christians. Indeed, Meneilly's words can still be found reprinted today, uprooted from their context, in countless conservative publications as evidence of the persecution to which true believers are subject.

The prairie fire burned on. Nineteen ninety-four was a Republican year everywhere, and in Kansas the Cons managed to cleanse the state's congressional delegation of Democrats altogether, with Todd Tiahr upsetting the pro-choice Democrat from Wichita, and Sam Brownback taking the seat of the state's other Democratic congressman, who left the U.S. House to run (unsuccessfully) for governor. Back in Topeka the Cons now made up the majority of the Republicans in the state legislature. They took all three leadership positions in the Kansas house and introduced what they called a “Contract with Kansas,” a solemn pledge to send more convicts to the chair while defending the fetus.

The moment of outright triumph for the Cons came in 1996. When Bob Dole resigned his Senate seat in order to pursue the presidency, moderate Republican governor Bill Graves appointed Sheila Frahm, his own lieutenant governor, to the position. The Cons, though, had other ideas, and she was promptly clobbered in the GOP primary by the pious Brownback, who had by then become a celebrity of the conservative movement nationwide for his humble but uncompromising style. Brownback's congressional post, in turn, went to Jim Ryun, the praying track star. Later that year the two remaining women in the state's congress-

sional delegation—both Mods, both pro-choice—also decided to call it quits. Abortion foes snapped up both positions, making the delegation 100 percent anti-abortion as well as 100 percent Republican. By the end of 1996, the conservatives had reason to celebrate: the state's pro-choice consensus, so haughty and cocksure back in 1991, had now been utterly routed.

The Cons partied jubilantly while Dole was crowned at the Republican convention in San Diego that year. They now controlled the state party apparatus so tightly that they kept Governor Graves out of the official Kansas delegation. The national media could not help but notice the revolution in the candidate's home state, and the Kansas Cons were the subjects of fawning write-ups in the *Weekly Standard* and the *American Spectator*. The admirable Brownback was profiled by George Will and Robert Novak. The Cons were the wave of the future.

By the late nineties, though, the Mods figured out how to push back, and the two sides settled in for years of electoral warfare, marked by constant escalations of verbal hostility. When the Mods took back the state party organization in 1999, the Cons simply set up their own parallel organization and pressed on.¹³ At Republican gatherings such as the annual Kansas Day festivity the Cons now hold competing events. (Is there anywhere else where the state holiday is a partisan affair?)

The bitterness persists today, poisoning political activity right down to the roots of the grass. Republican precinct committee positions, the lowliest offices in the political hierarchy, are often hotly contested in Kansas.¹⁴ Primary elections for state legislature seats and even school board positions often find the defeated Republican, whether Mod or Con, refusing to concede and instead battling on as a write-in candidate in the general election. There are squabbles over yard signs, and homemade slander campaigns startling in their barbarity: during the weeks leading up to the Republican primary of 2002, I saw hand-scrawled

placards reading, "Help Homosexuals/Vote *Candidate X*" planted along a busy street in the outer-ring Kansas City suburb of Olathe. The candidate thus impugned, a man who would be considered a stalwart conservative anywhere else in the country, explained to me that he had alienated the suburb's leading *Cons ten years previously* by supporting the availability of AIDS literature in the public library. A short while later, he caught up with the gentleman planting the DIY signs and discussed the matter with him over fisticuffs.¹⁵

All the fratricide has had a predictable effect. With the more motivated Con faction dominating the primary elections, the Mods have found it expedient to do the unthinkable. In Johnson County, one of the most Republican areas in the nation, some moderate Republican leaders grew so disenchanted with the ultra-conservative, pro-life congressman who had been foisted on them in 1996 that two years later they helped jettison him in favor of—a Democrat! And when a Con took the Republican gubernatorial nomination in 2002, much of the state's Mod leadership conspicuously failed to get behind him, effectively throwing the election to the Democrat Kathleen Sebelius. This last result was so embarrassing to the national party—in a Republican year, here was ultra-Republican Kansas going to a Democrat!—that it prompted the Republican guerrilla Grover Norquist to calumniate the Mods as "quislings and collaborators" that he would "deal with" when the opportunity presented.¹⁶

It is true that total victory has so far eluded the state's conservatives, but Norquist has no reason to be so upset. The same conservative uprising that displaced the Mods also wore down the Kansas Democrats, Governor Sebelius notwithstanding, reducing their hold on the state legislature from an outright majority in 1990–92 to a mere 36 percent of the seats in the house and a feeble 25 percent in the state senate. In 2000, nine years after the Summer of Mercy, George W. Bush carried the

state by a considerably greater margin than had his father in 1988 or even Bob Dole in 1996. The pro-choice bill that passed the state's lower house in 1992 would be unthinkable today. So utterly has the climate changed on this issue that the man who ran the Godarchy hotline back in 1992 is now—of all things—the head of the state's Consumer Protection Division.

The Cons have altered the state's political environment considerably, but their record as legislators is more mixed. Like their faction nationally, they have made virtually no headway in the culture wars. They have not halted abortion in Kansas or secured a voucher program or even managed to keep evolution out of the schools. Indeed, the issues the Cons emphasize seem all to have been chosen precisely because they are not capable of being resolved by the judicious application of state power. Senator Brownback, for example, is best known for stands that are purely symbolic: against cloning, against the persecution of Christians in distant lands, against sex slavery in the third world. Similarly, Phill Kline, the current attorney general of Kansas, has become famous in conservative Republican circles nationwide for intervening in cases having to do with the age of consent and homosexual rape. These are issues that touch the lives of almost nobody in Kansas; that function solely as rallying points for the Con followers. They stoke the anger, keep the pot simmering, but have little to do with the practical, day-to-day uses of government power. Thus they allow the politician in question to grandstand magnificently while avoiding any identification with the hated state.

In only one area have the Cons achieved a tangible, real-world victory. Their intractable hostility to taxes of all kinds has successfully brought disaster on the state government. After cutting taxes compulsively through the nineties—or by inducing frightened Mods to cut taxes in order to appease them—the Cons maneuvered the state into a position where any economic

downturn would have catastrophic effects on revenues. The train wreck has happened as scheduled: today Kansas, like many other states, is struggling with the worst fiscal crisis in recent history. Nor will the Cons allow taxes to be increased to get the state out of its hole. The only route remaining is the one conservatives have insisted we take all along, on the state as well as the national level: government, that hated entity, will simply have to wither away.¹⁷ For most people this may seem bad enough, but as hard times propel the state into the ditch, the fun for conservatives is only just beginning.

When national correspondents come to cover the Kansas revolution, they scratch their heads, mystified. They watch one group of Republican Kansans bombard another group of Republican Kansans, and they marvel at the strangeness and sadness of the spectacle. If pressed for a sociological explanation, they will attribute the conflict that roils the state to a squabble between fundamentalists and mainline Protestants, or a fight between the ignorant and the educated, or even to the Cons' relative newness to modern, big-city ways.¹⁸ But above all it is a class war.

Class animus has been a persistent theme in the Great Backlash since the beginning, when George Wallace railed against liberalism on behalf of the "average man on the street, this man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this barber, the beautician, the policeman on the beat."¹⁹ Class animus has just as persistently been ignored by mainstream observers of the ever-growing conservative movement. The subject of social class is always a disconcerting one for Americans, and most journalists find it simpler to blame the backlash on racism, sexism, or some unfathomable religious conviction than to broach this troubling topic.

The Mods are the worst offenders in this regard. As a rule, they do not admit the possibility that what separates them from the Cons is social class. They will acknowledge a geographic divide, however, separating the older, inner suburbs of Johnson County, where the Mods tend to live, from the newer, outer suburbs, where everyone seems to be pro-life, pro-gun, and anti-evolution. The line between these two suburbias is so stark and so broad that Steve Rose, editor of the *Johnson County Sun* and a de facto leader of the Mods, laments that there are today "two Johnson Counties."²⁰ One of them is the old familiar sprawl of my childhood, the one with the shady lawns and purring Porsches and schools with high test scores. This is the land of sensible, moderate Republicanism.

Ah, but the other Johnson County, personified by the outer, newer suburb of Olathe, perplexes Rose. This Johnson County is cantankerous and troublesome. It insists on being what he calls "a bastion of right-wing conservatism," and it consistently takes the most outrageous positions on the issues of the day. Rose is unable to use the standard blue-state/red-state narrative to describe the difference between the two Johnson Counties because, of course, both of them voted for Bush. So the source of the split remains a mystery.²¹

When you examine the two Johnson Counties with your own eyes, though, the mystery evaporates instantly. One Johnson County lives in landscaped cul-de-sac communities with statuary in the traffic islands and a swimming pool behind each house and a neighborhood golf course that you occasionally glimpse from between the three-car garages. In this Johnson County, all you see in election years are yard signs cheering for Team Mod. The other Johnson County is a place of peeling paint and cheap plywood construction and knee-high crabgrass and shrubbery dying in the intense heat and expired cars rotting by the curb.

Drive through this Johnson County, and you read nothing but the battle cries of the Cons. The difference between the two Johnson Counties is a class difference.

I mean this in the material, economic sense, not in the tastes-and-values way our punditry defines class. On demographic maps of Johnson County, the hard-core right-wing parts of Olathe and Shawnee stand out for their slightly lower real estate values and lower per capita incomes. Generally speaking, people who live in these neighborhoods are probably more likely to have blue-collar jobs; they are probably less likely to have college degrees; and they probably experience the ups and downs of the business cycle with a greater sense of dread and insecurity than do the lawyers and executives of Mission Hills. Whether people in Olathe and Shawnee have more of a taste for country music or snowmobiles or NASCAR than do the moderate Republicans of the more affluent suburbs, I cannot say.

This much is clear, though, from the elections of the last ten years: those parts of Johnson County with the lowest per capita income and lowest median housing values consistently generated the strongest support for the conservative faction. The areas with the highest income and highest real-estate values—Mission Hills and Leawood—were just as reliably loyal to the moderate machine.²² The more working-class an area is, the more likely it is to be conservative.

This situation is the opposite of what it was thirty years ago. And it is the complete and utter negation of the Kansas of a hundred years ago, when those in the hardest-hit areas were the most desperate—and the most radical. In Kansas, the political geography of social class has been turned upside down.

When I was a kid and politics was still partially concerned with material issues, Mission Hills was a solid redoubt of conservatism, whereas Shawnee and Olathe were the parts of John-

son County most likely to vote Democratic (admittedly, a rare occurrence under any circumstances).²³ Our neighbors in the seventies liked Ronald Reagan long before Reagan was cool. They were the kind of men who would ax half their workforce before lunch without a second thought. And they still are. If anything, they now preside over a system in which workers have even less power, in which corporate crime is even more brazen.

But the context of politics has changed. So far rightward has the spectrum moved that the people who live in the great mansions around the Frank teardown now find themselves closer to the center. Today they are the financial muscle behind the state's moderate Republican faction. They are not liberals, by any means; they are still far to the right on any issue having to do with taxation or the economy, and they still rally to the national Republican ticket regardless of who is at its head.* They are also the ones who stand to benefit the most when the Cons slash state taxes and agitate for the dismantling of federal regulatory agencies. But by and large the people of Mission Hills support gay rights; they are pro-choice; they accept the separation of church and state.

Moderate Republicanism has a distinct upper-class flavor to it. Mod candidates invariably raise far more in campaign contributions than their conservative rivals. The advisory board of the Mainstream Coalition, the region's foremost Mod organization, is thick with CEOs and other pillars of the community. Its offices are even located next to a golf course, and when I visited them one time, I kept looking up to see people cruising by in golf carts. So upscale is Mainstream's appeal that it once sent out a

*The people of Mission Hills chose Bush over Gore by a towering 71 percent to 25 percent. This, despite the fact that many of them drive Volvos and enjoy an occasional latte.

mailing encouraging Mods to “reach out to less-educated and lower-income voters.”²⁴ As it happens, the board of directors of the Community Foundation of Johnson County, the area’s leading charitable organization, is packed with prominent Mods. The two groups—Mod and millionaire—interlock on so many levels that for many Kansans they are indistinguishable. When my dad’s neighbor has returned from his weekly spin in the Ferrari, he will no doubt be happy to give you a lecture about the virtues of diversity.

The class divide manifests itself in hundreds of ways. Consider the following vignette, described in 1998 for readers of the *Washington Post* by the journalist Thomas Edsall. Bill Graves, the moderate Republican governor of Kansas, heir to a trucking fortune and a resident of Mission Hills, was facing a primary challenge from the leader of the party’s conservative faction. Graves was campaigning, if you can call it that, in the comfortable Johnson County offices of Lathrop & Gage, a well-connected Kansas City law firm. Satisfied Republican bonhomie was in the air as the partners gathered in a tenth-floor conference room of one of suburban Overland Park’s glass office towers. Then came the buzzkill. A woman stepped forward and announced, to Graves’s face, that she wanted him to know she would *not* be voting for him come Election Day. The brave individual who dared harsh the governor’s mellow: a secretary, one of the lowly worker-bees in the Johnson County hive. The reason for her decision: abortion. Graves was pro-choice and hence too liberal for her tastes.²⁵ And that is Kansas for you: a state where the working-class heroes are even more Republican than their bosses.

Dwight Sutherland, Jr., a deeply conservative Mission Hills lawyer and onetime member of the Republican National Committee, is refreshingly direct about all this. “It is a class struggle,” he

tells me. “The roles have been slightly reversed.” Sutherland is a caustic critic of the moderate Republicans. The way he tells the story, the Mods look out at a state where working-class people are flocking to the Republican banner, swarming out of low-caste churches and lying down under cars in front of abortion clinics, and they have reacted with pure shocked snobbishness. “We are the better people,” the Mods supposedly think, “and we are entitled to lead this community, and we don’t want uppity sorts getting in the way and interfering in the process to ratify our anointed guardians of the public.” Sutherland even relates to me several anecdotes of outrageous anti-Con prejudice he has encountered at the Kansas City Country Club, a notorious bastion of privilege.²⁶ His point is hard to miss: the halls of even the most rarefied enclaves of the plutocracy ring today with the sanctimonious bushwah of political correctness. The primary targets of upper-class bigotry are now blue-collar people, with their funny religions and conservative politics.

This is true across the country, Sutherland says. He gives me photocopies of several pages from one of those coffee-table books depicting the lives and possessions of very rich people in some posh corner of the world. This one is called *Brandywine*, and its object is to adulate the fox-hunting folks of “du Pont-Wyeth Country,” the region between Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware. The text oozes with a form of upper-class pretentiousness it would be impossible to invent: It introduces a couple who have known each other since childhood, when “they whipped in for the same pack of beagles.” Recently the wife became alarmed by some local Christian Coalition activism and decided to get into politics. Surprise: she is “a moderate Republican” who believes in gun control, “women’s rights,” and “the separation of church and state.” Her bland politics, as well as the euphemisms with which they are described,

Sutherland suggests, are as much a product of the family's social position as is their taste for riding to hounds.

The Kansas conservatives like to refer to moderate Republicans as "liberals," and in their struggle with the Mods for control of the Republican Party the Cons imagine that they are confronting a local arm of the fabled "establishment." For them the war is a set piece right out of the works of Ann Coulter or the monologues of Rush Limbaugh: the common people versus a haughty, know-it-all liberal power structure.

The Mods are plenty conservative in their economic views, as noted previously. But they also fulfill the liberal-elite stereotype, if all you consider are the cultural attributes of liberalism made famous by the good-natured loathing of commentators like David Brooks. There are moderate Kansas Republicans who drink chardonnay and who put Martha's Vineyard stickers on their Saabs. There are Mods who insist on European-style coffee and whole-grain breads and high-end chocolates. There are Mods who shop at Restoration Hardware and Whole Foods and who look down on those who shop at Wal-Mart. There are Mods who listen to NPR and who insist on speaking French to the waitress when at a French restaurant. There are Mods who go to gay-friendly, super-Waspy Episcopal churches and who disapprove of the Patriot Act and who rally in support of immigrant rights. And there are Mods who assume that all working-class whites are racist.

But such people aren't liberal. What they are is corporate. Their habits and opinions owe far more to the standards of courtesy and taste that prevail within the white-collar world than they do to Franklin Roosevelt and the United Mine Workers. We live in a time, after all, when hard-nosed bosses compose awestruck disquisitions on the nature of "change," punk rockers

dispense leadership secrets, shallow profundities about authenticity sell luxury cars, tech billionaires build rock 'n' roll museums, management theorists ponder the nature of coolness, and a former lyricist for the Grateful Dead hails the dawn of New Economy capitalism from the heights of Davos. Conservatives may not understand why, but business culture had melded with counterculture for reasons having a great deal to do with business culture's usual priority—profit.

And as corporate types, these Mods are the primary beneficiaries of the class war that rages against them. Although the Cons vituperate against the high and the mighty, the policies they help enact—deregulating, privatizing—only serve to make the Mods higher and mightier still. And while it may hurt the Mods' feelings to overhear their secretaries referring to them as RINOs, the many rounds of tax cuts the Cons have accomplished have surely made the sting subside. The Mods win even when they lose.

This situation may be paradoxical, but it is also universal. For decades Americans have experienced a populist uprising that only benefits the people it is supposed to be targeting. In Kansas we merely see an extreme version of this mysterious situation. The angry workers, mighty in their numbers, are marching irresistibly against the arrogant. They are shaking their fists at the sons of privilege. They are laughing at the dainty affectations of the Leawood toffs. They are massing at the gates of Mission Hills, hoisting the black flag, and while the millionaires tremble in their mansions, they are bellowing out their terrifying demands. "We are here," they scream, "to cut your taxes."