

United We Stand?

“One Nation, Slightly Divisible” by David Brooks, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 2001), P.O. Box 37585, Boone, Ia. 50037-0585.

On election night 2000, Americans were transfixed by two spectacles: one in Florida, the other on the electoral maps shown on the TV newscasts. The maps seemed to depict two Americas: The coasts were colored blue, indicating states that had voted for Al Gore; the heartland was almost entirely red, indicating support there for GOP candidate George Bush.

There are two main theories about what divides Americans, and both took shape long before the 2000 election, explains Brooks, a senior editor of the *Weekly Standard* and the author of *Bobos in Paradise* (2000). Liberals such as Gore pollster Stanley Greenberg tend to point to a “division along class lines, between the haves and have-nots.” Thus, Gore campaigned on the slogan “The People versus the Powerful.” Conservatives, such as historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, see America as “divided between two moral systems. Red America is traditional, religious, self-disciplined. Blue America is modern, secular, self-expressive.”

Shuttling between his home in Blue America, the upper-middle-class Washington suburb of Montgomery County, Maryland, and the Red America of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, about 25 miles west of Gettysburg, Brooks found little to support either theory of sharp division.

Franklin County is a rural, virtually all-white area where people work at modest jobs at banks and plants along the interstate, earning an average of \$51,872, just over half as much as folks in Montgomery County. It should be fertile ground for a Gore-like appeal to class resentment and feelings of powerlessness against big corporations and other distant forces. It isn't. (Ironically, Brooks observes, that appeal had much more resonance in affluent Montgomery

County.) Yes, local people said when pressed, there is a divide between the haves and have-nots, but “the people saying yes did not consider themselves to be among the have-nots.” And they aren't kidding themselves, Brooks adds. The inhabitants of Blue America don't realize that it costs a lot less to live comfortably in Red America. Few live lavishly, but there is “little obvious inequality.”

What about a moral divide? While Franklin County is full of churches and religiously oriented bumper stickers (WARNING: IN CASE OF RAPTURE THIS VEHICLE WILL BE UNMANNED), Brooks didn't find much evidence of a wide breach from the more cosmopolitan Blue America, except on issues such as abortion and homosexuality. It has most of the same problems, from teen pregnancy to heroin addiction. None of the local clergy he interviewed said they would condemn a parishioner for having an extramarital affair.

It's “sensitivity, not class or culture,” that separates the people of Franklin and Montgomery counties, Brooks says. They are divided by an “Ego Curtain.” “In Red America the self is small. People declare in a million ways, ‘I am normal. Nobody is better, nobody is worse. I am humble before God.’ In Blue America the self is more commonly large.” Blue America is the land of big résumés and big SUVs. To put it another way, each America embodies one of the two strands of the national character: egalitarianism and achievement.

These differences don't make for a fundamental divide, in Brooks's view. And the events of September 11 closed part of the gap between Red and Blue America. “America is in no mood for a class struggle or a culture war. . . . There may be cracks, but there is no chasm.”

Hazarding the Constitution

“Presidents, Congress, and Courts: Partisan Passions in Motion” by Joyce Appleby, in *The Journal of American History* (Sept. 2001), 112 N. Bryan Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47408-4199.

If the Framers encouraged one principle in the presidency, it was the independence of the office, even at the expense of a smooth transfer

of power. They were willing to require three elections to choose a president: one popular, one in the Electoral College, and, in case of a dead-