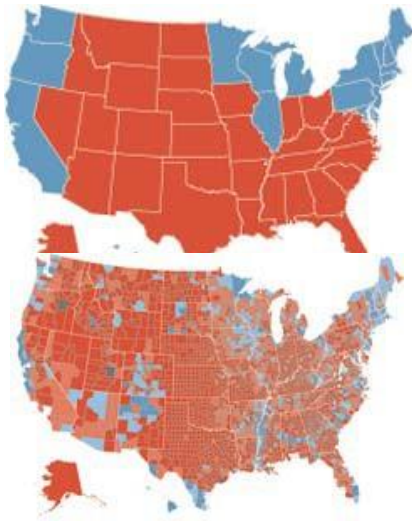


Guys: In the following article the authors imply that perhaps a better way to understand U.S. society today is not to look at social structural "borders" (e.g. race, class, etc.) but geographic-based ideological "borders" (specifically the rural/urban border). What do you think? Note: although this article was written a while ago, its basic thesis may be as relevant today as it was then.

THE URBAN ARCHIPELAGO

by [The Editors of The Stranger](http://www.thestranger.com)

It's the Cities, Stupid.



The one at the top should be familiar. It's one of those red-state/blue-state maps that have been tormenting Democrats, liberals, and progressives since November of 2000. Over the 36 days that George W. Bush and Al Gore fought for the White House in Florida, "red" and "blue" became metaphors for America's divided electorate. Red vs. Blue--Democrat vs. Republican; liberal vs. conservative; pro-life vs. pro-choice; gun-huggers vs. gun-haters; gay-huggers vs. gay-haters.

The red-state/blue-state map opposite shows the results of 2004's presidential election--red states won by George W. Bush, blue states won by John F. Kerry. But the red-state/blue-state map is misleading. If a Republican presidential candidate takes 50 percent of the vote plus 1 vote in any given state, the whole state is colored red (even worse, a mere plurality of voters can turn a state red when third parties are involved). The same goes for the Democratic candidate--corral the most votes, and the whole state is colored blue. But painting an entire state one color or the other creates a false impression, an impression that we

believe is hampering the Democratic Party's efforts to pull itself out of its tailspin.



Take a look at the second map on the opposite page. This map shows a county-by-county red/blue breakdown, and it provides a clearer picture of the bind the Democrats find themselves in. The majority of the blue states--Washington, Oregon, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware--are, geographically speaking, not blue states. They are blue cities.

Look at our famously blue West Coast. But for the cities--Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego--the West Coast would be a deep, dark red. The same is true for other nominally blue states. Illinois is almost entirely red--Chicago turns the state blue. Michigan is almost entirely red--Detroit, Lansing, Kalamazoo turn it blue. And on and on. What tips these states into the blue column? Their urban areas do, their big, populous counties.

It's time for the Democrats to face reality: They are the party of urban America. If the cities elected our president, if urban voters determined the outcome, John F. Kerry would have won by a landslide. Urban voters are the Democratic base.

The urban archipelago

It's time to state something that we've felt for a long time but have been too polite to say out loud: Liberals, progressives, and Democrats do not live in a country that stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to Mexico. We live on a chain of islands. We are citizens of the Urban Archipelago, the United Cities of America. We live on islands of sanity, liberalism, and compassion--New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, St. Louis, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and on and on. And we live on islands in red states too--a fact obscured by that state-by-state map. Denver and Boulder are our islands in Colorado; Austin is our island in Texas; Las Vegas is our island in Nevada; Miami and Fort Lauderdale are our islands in Florida. Citizens of the Urban Archipelago reject heartland "values" like xenophobia, sexism, racism, and homophobia, as well as the more intolerant strains of Christianity that have taken root in this country. And we are the real Americans. They--rural, red-state voters, the denizens of the exurbs--are not real Americans. They are rubes, fools, and hate-mongers. Red Virginia prohibits any contract between same-sex couples. Compassionate? Texas allows the death penalty to be applied to teenaged criminals and has historically executed the mentally retarded. (When the Supreme Court ruled executions of the mentally retarded unconstitutional in 2002, Texas officials, including Governor Rick Perry, responded by claiming that the state had no mentally retarded inmates on death row--a claim the state was able to make because it does not test inmates for mental retardation.) Dumb? The Sierra Club has reported that Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Alabama, and Tennessee squander over half of their federal transportation money on building new roads rather than public transit.

If Democrats and urban residents want to combat the rising tide of red that threatens to swamp and ruin this country, we need a new identity politics, an urban identity politics, one that argues for the cities, uses a rhetoric of urban values, and creates a tribal identity for liberals that's as powerful and attractive as the tribal identity Republicans have created for their constituents. John Kerry won among the highly educated, Jews, young people, gays and lesbians, and non-whites. What do all these groups have in common? They choose to live in cities. An overwhelming majority of the American population chooses to live in cities. And John Kerry won every city with a population above 500,000. He took half the cities with populations between 50,000 and 500,000. The future success of liberalism is tied to winning the cities. An urbanist agenda may not be a recipe for winning the next presidential election--but it may win the Democrats the presidential election in 2012 and create a new Democratic majority.

For Democrats, it's the cities, stupid--not the rural areas, not the prickly, hateful "heartland," but the sane, sensible cities--including the cities trapped in the heartland. Pandering to rural voters is a waste of time. Again, look at the second map. Look at the urban blue spots in red states like Iowa, Colorado, and New Mexico--there's almost as much blue in those states as there is in Washington, Oregon, and California. And the challenge for the Democrats is not just to organize in the blue areas but to grow them. And to do that, Democrats need to pursue policies that encourage urban growth (mass transit, affordable housing, city services), and Democrats need to openly and aggressively champion urban values. By focusing on the cities the Dems can create a tribal identity to combat the white, Christian, rural, and suburban identity that the Republicans have cornered. And it's sitting right there, on every electoral map, staring them in the face: The cities.

The urbanites. Howard Dean had it wrong when he tried to woo the "Pickup Truck with Confederate Flag" vote. In fact, while Kerry won urban areas by a whopping 60 percent--that actually represents a 15 percent drop in urban support from 2000 when Gore won the election. The lesson? Democrats have got to tend to their urban base and grow it.

In cities all over America, distressed liberals are talking about fleeing to Canada or, better yet, seceding from the Union. We can't literally secede and, let's admit it, we don't really want to live in Canada. It's too cold up there and in our heart-of-hearts we hate hockey. We can secede emotionally, however, by turning our backs on the heartland. We can focus on our issues, our urban issues, and promote our shared urban values. We can create a new identity politics, one that transcends class, race, sexual orientation, and religion, one that unites people living in cities with each other and with other urbanites in other cities. The Republicans have the federal government--for now. But we've got Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, New York City (Bloomberg is a

Republican in name only), and every college town in the country. We're everywhere any sane person wants to be. Let them have the shitholes, the Oklahomas, Wyomings, and Alabamas. We'll take Manhattan.

Embracing urban self-interest

To all those who live in cities--to all those depressed Kerry supporters out there--we say take heart. Clearly we can't control national politics right now--we can barely get a hearing. We can, however, stay engaged in our cities, and make our voices heard in the urban areas we dominate, and make each and every one, to quote Ronald Reagan (and John Winthrop, the 17th-century Puritan Reagan was parroting), "a city on a hill." This is not a retreat; it is a long-term strategy for the Democratic Party to cater to and build on its base.

To red-state voters, to the rural voters, residents of small, dying towns, and soulless sprawling exurbs, we say this: Fuck off. Your issues are no longer our issues. We're going to battle our bleeding-heart instincts and ignore pangs of misplaced empathy. We will no longer concern ourselves with a health care crisis that disproportionately impacts rural areas. Instead we will work toward winning health care one blue state at a time.

When it comes to the environment, our new policy is this: Let the heartland live with the consequences of handing the national government to the rape-and-pillage party. The only time urbanists should concern themselves with the environment is when we are impacted--directly, not spiritually (the depressing awareness that there is no unspoiled wilderness out there doesn't count). Air pollution, for instance: We should be aggressive. If coal is to be burned, it has to be burned as cleanly as possible so as not to foul the air we all have to breathe. But if West Virginia wants to elect politicians who allow mining companies to lop off the tops off mountains and dump the waste into valleys and streams, thus causing floods that destroy the homes of the yokels who vote for those politicians, it no longer matters to us. Fuck the mountains in West Virginia--send us the power generated by cleanly burned coal, you rubes, and be sure to wear lifejackets to bed.

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Wal-Mart is a rapacious corporation that pays sub-poverty-level wages, offers health benefits to its employees that are so expensive few can afford them, and destroys small towns and rural jobs. Liberals in big cities who have never seen the inside of a Wal-Mart spend a lot of time worrying about the impact Wal-Mart is having on the heartland. No more. We will do what we can to keep Wal-Mart out of our cities and, if at all possible, out of our states. We will pass laws mandating a living wage for full-time work, upping the minimum wage for part-time work, and requiring large corporations to either offer health benefits or pay into state- or city-run funds to provide health care for uninsured workers. That will reform Wal-Mart in our blue cities and states or, better yet, keep Wal-Mart out entirely. And when we see something on the front page of the national section of the *New York Times* about the damage Wal-Mart is doing to the heartland, we will turn the page. Wal-Mart is not an urban issue.

Neither is gun control. Our new position: We'll fight to keep guns off the streets of our cities, but the more guns lying around out there in the heartland, the better. Most cities have strong gun-control laws--laws that are, of course, undermined by the fact that our cities aren't walled. Yet. But why should liberals in cities fund organizations that attempt, to take one example, to get trigger locks onto the handguns of NRA members out there in red states?

If red-state dads aren't concerned enough about their own children to put trigger locks on their own guns, it's not our problem. If a kid in a red state finds his daddy's handgun and blows his head off, we'll feel terrible (we're like that), but we'll try to look on the bright side: At least he won't grow up to vote like his dad.

We won't demand that the federal government impose reasonable fuel-efficiency standards on all cars sold in the United States. We will, however, strive to pass state laws, as California has done, imposing fuel-efficiency standards on cars sold in our states.

We officially no longer give a shit when family farms fail. Fewer family farms equal fewer rural voters. We will, however, continue to support small faggy organic farms, as we are willing to pay more for free-range chicken and beef from non-cannibal cows.

We won't concern ourselves if red states restrict choice. We'll just make sure that abortion remains safe and legal in the cities where we live, and the states we control, and when your daughter or sister or mother dies in a botched abortion, we'll try not to feel too awful about it.

In short, we're through with you people. We're going to demand that the Democrats focus on building their party in the cities while at the same time advancing a smart urban-growth agenda that builds the cities themselves. The more attractive we make the cities--politically, aesthetically, socially--the more residents and voters cities will attract, gradually increasing the electoral clout of liberals and progressives. For Democrats, party building and city building is the same thing. We will strive to turn red states blue one city at a time.

From here on out, we're glad red-state rubes live in areas where guns are more powerful and more plentiful, cars are larger and faster, and people are fatter and slower and dumber. This is not a recipe for repopulating the Great Plains. And when you look for ways to revive your failing towns and dying rural counties, don't even think about tourism. Who wants to go to small-town America now? You people scare us. We'll island-hop from now on, thank you, spending our time and our money in blue cities. If an urbanite is dying to have a country experience, rural Vermont is lovely. Maple syrup, rolling hills, fly-fishing--everything you could want. Country bumpkins in red rural areas who depend on tourists from urban areas but vote Republican can forget our money.

You've made your choice, red America, and we urban Americans are going to make a different choice. We are going to make Seattle--and New York, Chicago, and the rest--a great place to live, a progressive place. Again, we'll quote Ronald Reagan: We will make each of our cities--each and every one--a shining city on a hill. You can have your shitholes.

"We are citizens of the Urban Archipelago, the United Cities of America. We live on islands of sanity, liberalism, and compassion--New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, St. Louis, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and on and on. And we live on islands in red states too--a fact obscured by that state-by-state map. Denver and Boulder are our islands in Colorado; Austin is our island in Texas; Las Vegas is our island in Nevada; Miami and Fort Lauderdale are our islands in Florida. Citizens of the Urban Archipelago reject heartland "values" like xenophobia, sexism, racism, and homophobia, as well as the more intolerant strains of Christianity that have taken root in this country. And we are the real Americans. They--rural, red-state voters, the denizens of the exurbs--are not real Americans. They are rubes, fools, and hate-mongers."

Urban vision

The first president Bush had a problem with the "vision thing," and he lost. Democrats had a problem with vision thing in 2004, and they lost. But they don't have to continue having this problem.

Above any other advantage, the new urban identity politics solves "the vision thing" for the Democratic Party. No longer are we a fractured aggregation of special interests or a spineless hydra of contingent alliances--we are a united front, with a clear, compelling image and an articulated system of values. Up until now, the Republicans have been winning the image war. When you think of "America," you imagine a single-family dwelling with a flag in the front yard and acres of corn waving in the background. It's an angry red fantasy. But propaganda is flexible, and audiences are pliant. Urban politics opens up a whole new visual vocabulary to be exploited by TV advertising, and it's a vocabulary rich in emotional content, particularly after September 11. This is the era of cityscapes, rapid transit, and crowds of people. Political advertising can no longer pander to nostalgia about the yeoman countryside--we must embrace our urban future.

With all the talk of the growth of exurbs and the hand-wringing over facile demographic categories like "security moms," you may be under the impression that an urban politics wouldn't speak to many people. But according to the 2000 Census, 226 million people reside inside metropolitan areas--a number that positively dwarfs the 55 million people who live outside metro areas. The 85 million people who live in strictly defined central city limits also outnumber those rural relics. When the number of city-dwellers in the United States is *quadruple* the number of rural people, we can put simple democratic majorities to work for our ideals.

Even people who don't live in cities look to urban centers for a certain image of America. The nation identified with New York City in such a visceral way on September 11 not just because Americans died there--Americans died in a Pennsylvania field and in Northern Virginia too--but because the New York skyline is a stirring image of American prosperity and achievement. It symbolizes the motivation and spirit of the American people, the wealth of our nation, the thrum of diverse cultures, and inexhaustible cultural creativity. Cities inspire us; they speak to our hopes and our passions. Small towns diminish us; they speak of lost history and downscaled dreams. The Democratic Party should compete on our own turf, change the terms of the debate, and give the American people heroes to believe in--as well as enemies to revile.

Conservatives have vilified liberals for decades, and the new urban identity politics gives the Democratic Party its own partisan villains. The truth is that rural states--the same red states that vote reflexively Republican in national elections--are welfare states. While red-state voters like to complain about "tax-and-spend liberals," red states are hopelessly dependent on the largess of the federal government to prop up their dwindling rural population. Red states like North Dakota, New Mexico, Mississippi, Alaska, West Virginia, Montana, Alabama, South Dakota, and Arkansas top the list of federal spending per dollar of federal taxes paid. And who's paying the most? Blue states. Cities--and states dominated by their cities. Welfare states, in contrast, demand federal money to fund wasteful roads to nowhere. Welfare states guzzle barrel upon barrel of oil so their rural residents can sputter along on ribbons of asphalt.

Take a state like Wyoming, the arid, under-populated home of our glowering vice president Dick Cheney. Wyoming receives the second-highest amount of federal aid in the nation per capita (Alaska, another red state, is number one), and it ranks second lowest in federal taxes paid (behind only South Dakota). Overall, the federal government spent about \$2,413 per capita in Wyoming for the fiscal year 2002 (the last year for which data is available), compared with almost exactly half that amount, or \$1,205 per capita, for Washington State. This ridiculous disparity extends even to Homeland Security funds, which ought to be targeted toward the most vulnerable areas--coastlines, big city landmarks, porous borders. But landlocked Wyoming, with exactly zero important strategic targets, merits \$38.31 per capita in Homeland Security funds. New York state residents get a measly \$5.47. An urban agenda would argue for kicking Wyoming off the federal dole. States should pay their own way, not come to cities begging for handouts.

A refusal to subsidize rural waste will inform other policy decisions as well. Farm subsidies, for example, are obsolete and they cause needless friction in international trade agreements. The agricultural complex in the United States is so concentrated that very few voters have a personal stake in the continued existence of farm subsidies. Rural voters aren't going to switch party affiliations no matter what we do, so let's jettison their issues when they fail to serve our core interests. Ethanol, a corn-derived alcohol, is another great example. Scientific consensus says that corn will never be a viable source for alternative fuel, since the very production of ethanol requires so much fossil fuel and the payoff is paltry. Ethanol is vanity research; the new urban politics should stand for real solutions.

In the same way, we need to claim legislation like the Clean Air Act as our own. It is urban residents, not rural residents, who suffer when air quality is poor, and coal mines in rural states cannot dictate what size airborne particulates we should be willing to breathe. Asthma is a growing problem across the nation, but it is particularly acute among African American and Latino children growing up in the inner cities--the death rate from asthma complications is three times as high for minority children as it is for whites. This is unacceptable, and it's just one example of an issue urban residents can and should rally behind.

Democrats are now emphatically the minority party. This doesn't mean we give up; it means we take a page from the Republican playbook, refining and relentlessly pushing a vision of our own. We must rededicate ourselves to the urban core.

Urban independence

The anti-urban vote does more than just overwhelm city voters in presidential elections. It also overruns city priorities on local policy debates. We should go our own way. After all, when a city like Seattle's fate is tied to that of a state like Washington, the city's interests are routinely routed. In 1993, for example, Washington voters limited state budget increases, hobbling education and transportation funding. The measure, which passed statewide by a 51 to 49 margin, tanked in Seattle, 46 to 54. A 1997 gay rights measure, meanwhile, suffered the converse fate, losing statewide while winning here. And Tim Eyman's two tax-slashing initiatives won in rural and suburban areas but went down in flames inside city limits.

Laws limiting taxes have a disproportionate impact on cities, which rely on local levies to pay for basic social and human services like domestic-violence programs, low-income housing, and tenant advocacy. If you're wondering why the city is suffering draconian budget cuts--\$24 million this year, \$20 million in 2005--you can thank rural voters who seem unable to grasp a basic Christian tenet; greed is bad, sharing is good.

The lesson is simple for urban residents: Seattle shouldn't cast its lot with the rest of the state. Rural and suburban voters have shown again and again that they aren't willing to fund urban infrastructure. Throughout Washington State, transportation taxes like 2002's Referendum 51 have tanked, while anti-transit measures like Tim Eyman's I-776 have passed overwhelmingly. While that might seem like grim news for cities like Seattle, there's a silver lining: When cities set their own transportation priorities, truly urban systems (like the monorail) get funded and built, while the suburban mega-highways that lard initiatives like R-51 go unfunded. We don't use suburban roads. We can let the suburbs figure out a way to pay for them.

Cities have the clout, and the imperative, to give people alternatives to driving solo, and to punish those who insist on clogging our city streets. In Seattle, we've done exactly that. We've built bike lanes, expanded the bus system, and banned new park-and-rides inside city limits. We've funded a South Seattle-to-downtown light rail system. And we've overwhelmingly supported the monorail, an inner-city mass-transit system that's paid for by one of the most progressive taxes available: an excise tax on the value of cars in the city. Want to buy a Hummer? Fine. But you're gonna pay for it--and help fund public transit. If you want to rely on environmentally friendly public transit, though, we'll make it affordable and easy to use. *That's* a truly urban value.

“The truth is that rural states--the same red states that vote reflexively Republican in national elections--are welfare states. While red-state voters like to complain about "tax-and-spend liberals," red states are hopelessly dependent on the largess of the federal government to prop up their dwindling rural population. Red states like North Dakota, New Mexico, Mississippi, Alaska, West Virginia, Montana, Alabama, South Dakota, and Arkansas top the list of federal spending per dollar of federal taxes paid. And who's paying the most? Blue states. Cities--and states dominated by their cities. Welfare states, in contrast, demand federal money to fund wasteful roads to nowhere. Welfare states guzzle barrel upon barrel of oil so their rural residents can sputter along on ribbons of asphalt. “

Transit like the monorail, in turn, promotes density in outlying areas (like Ballard and West Seattle), which leads to the creation of housing that's affordable to everyone--not just the proverbial penthouse-dwelling downtown urban elite. Cities like Seattle can further encourage dense urban housing by adopting policies that encourage developers to build dense low-income housing. And we've done it: Last year, Mayor Greg Nickels unveiled a new push to increase density outside downtown by increasing building heights and providing incentives to developers who build inner-city housing.

The more housing that is built in cities, the more people can afford to live there. And the more cities pass laws that make it easier to live in cities--laws like Washington State's inflation-indexed minimum wage, which passed overwhelmingly in Seattle--the more cities will attract the kind of culturally and economically diverse populations that make them attractive places to work and live. And, as counterintuitive as it may seem to composting, recycling self-righteous suburbanites, living in dense urban areas is actually better for the environment. The population of New York City is larger than that of 39 states. But because dense apartment housing is more energy efficient, New York City uses less energy than any state. Conversely, suburban living--with its cars, highways, and single-family houses flanked by pesticide-soaked lawns--saps energy and devastates the ecosystem.

Cities' freedom to go their own way extends, of course, beyond mere infrastructure. Urban dwellers are cultural libertarians--we don't just tolerate a diversity of lifestyles and attitudes, we embrace it. Seattle, for example, has over 1000 churches, mosques, and synagogues. From San Francisco to Ann Arbor to Seattle, cities have been the vanguard.

Drug reform is a prime example. Eight states have passed medical marijuana initiatives; none could have done so without the pro-pot clout of cities. Last year, Seattle voters overwhelmingly passed Initiative 75, which effectively decriminalizes marijuana possession by making it cops' lowest law enforcement priority. And just this month, Ann Arbor passed a law legalizing medical marijuana, the second city in Michigan to do so. There are countless other examples. But the bottom line is this: Cities, not the outlying suburbs, are leading the way on drug reform. And where cities go, the nation will inevitably follow.

Gay rights, another national issue, took a beating this November, as 11 states passed constitutional amendments banning gay marriage. But locally, Seattle has ensured that gays and lesbians enjoy the full protection of the law. Not only are Seattle city employees and employees of firms that contract with the city entitled to domestic partnership benefits, earlier this year, Mayor Nickels announced that the city would honor gay marriages from other progressive jurisdictions, such as Portland and San Francisco.

But there's still more to do that the Feds and the State are loath to deliver: Subsidized childcare; safe injection sites; expanding the monorail through the rest of the city; discouraging excessive auto use by taxing mileage (to pay for more public transit); and providing family planning for low-income families. An aggressive new urbanist movement will go its own way, making the cities, not the states, the true laboratories of democracy.

Urban states

In November 1960, a black 6-year-old girl named Ruby Bridges entered the newly desegregated William Frantz Public School in New Orleans. In reaction to her admission, white parents withdrew their kids from Ruby's class and she completed the first grade alone, with instruction from one teacher and support from a child psychiatrist. Ruby's walk to class on the first day of school inspired Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With*. In this painting (one of Rockwell's best, as far as we are concerned), a very black Ruby Bridges is escorted to school by four big white U.S. marshals. The image is powerful because it represents the federal government as an institution and enforcer of reason. The white bigots of New Orleans can complain, bitch, and threaten the lives of black boys and girls all they want, but in the end the federal government steps in to ensure that the rights of every American are protected.

This image of the federal government is now in a coma. The lawmaking bodies that are clustered in Washington, D.C. (the Senate, the House, the Justice Department, the Supreme Court, the White House), no longer form the enlightened center from which reason and justice emanate. During the civil rights era, the federal government could claim to at least aspire to this transcendental order (the Great Society, the War on Poverty, the Voting Rights Act of

1965), but not today. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Washington, D.C., has exerted a force that is not progressive (as epitomized by Rockwell's painting) but oppressive. This is not an exaggeration. For example, the sole reason why the state of California--or more accurately, the cities of California through the agency of the state--turned to its own citizens to establish funding for stem cell research is because the federal government, in the form of the reelected Bush administration, holds a profoundly backward position on the matter.

Under Bush, the federal government spent almost nothing (\$25 million) this year on stem cell research, a policy that's entirely informed by the bizarre belief in a God who has a white beard, lives in heaven, and hates the idea of stem cell research. The reality is this: There are over 100 million Americans (most of them Christian) whose lives would be improved or saved by therapies and treatments that could be developed through stem cell research. The federal government, however, holds the opinion that God should not be deprived of worship from the souls that are supposedly housed in the miniscule cells of five-day-old embryos. Realizing this is just plain stupid (or *country*, an archaic synonym for stupid that should be revived in our post-2004 election world), California's citizens--its urban citizens--passed Proposition 71, which would allocate for research nearly \$300 million a year over the next 10 years. This figure, \$300 million, is three times larger even than what John Kerry proposed, and promises to bring the benefits of this new science to all Americans before the close of this decade. Clearly the federal government is no longer the enforcer of reason, the cities are, we urbanites are.

Proposition 71 is just the beginning of a new, muscular urban politics. More and more decisions involving health, education, transportation, and law must be wrested away from our theocratic federal government by large humanistic cities. The federal government may give us its prayers but it will never give us even the most basic health care coverage. The State of Hawaii has what the rest of America doesn't have--universal health care coverage. Why can't other states do the same? Or, more to the point, why can't big cities compel the states they're located in to do the same? Again, it is not the State of Washington that is blue, it is the concentrated population of Seattle that is deep blue; and because Seattle is so damn big it has the power to dictate the politics of its generally hostile state. So, this is not about state rights--indeed, the counties in California that passed Proposition 71 by 60 percent or more were all urban (San Francisco with the highest percentage in the whole state, 71). It's about urban rights, about empowering the bastions of reason and rationality in a nation that is increasingly unreasonable and irrational. As a resident of the city, you should be proud to be an urbanite.

Urban values

It's no secret what the urban population is against--the Bush administration and its red armies have done us the favor of making it a cinch to identify: We oppose their sub-moronic, "faith-based" approach to life, and, as stated above, we hereby relinquish our liberal tendency to sympathize with their lack of, say, livable working conditions, a family wage, and a national health care program. We no longer have to concern ourselves with the survival of the family farm, nor do we have to concern ourselves with saving fragile suburban economies from collapse. They're against us; we're against them. This is a war.

But if liberals and progressives want to reach out past our urban bases, it might be helpful to identify some essential convictions, thereby allowing us to perhaps compete on "values." Identifying and articulating our core convictions, as opposed to compromising and downplaying them in search of some kind of non-urban appeal, might actually attract voters in exurbs and rural areas who understand the importance of cities to the national economy. But even if it doesn't, ours is a superior way of life. Wherever people choose to live in this country, they should want to live as we do.

So how do we live and what are we for? Look around you, urbanite, at the multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, and tribes that are smashed together in every urban center (yes, even Seattle): We're for *that*. We're for pluralism of thought, race, and identity. We're for a freedom of religion that includes the freedom from religion--not as some crazy aberration, but as an equally valid approach to life. We are for the right to choose one's own sexual and recreational behavior, to control one's own body and what one puts inside it. We are for life, liberty, and the pursuit

of happiness. The people who just elected George W. Bush to a second term are frankly against every single idea outlined above.

Unlike the people who flee from cities in search of a life free from disagreement and dark skin, we are for contentiousness, discourse, and the heightened understanding of life that grows from having to accommodate opposing viewpoints. We're for opposition. And just to be clear: The non-urban argument, the red state position, isn't oppositional, it's negational--they are in active denial of the existence of other places, other people, other ideas. It's reactionary utopianism, and it is a clear and present danger; urbanists should be upfront and unapologetic about our contempt for their politics and their negational values. Republicans have succeeded in making the word "liberal"--which literally means "free from bigotry... favoring proposals for reform, open to new ideas for progress, and tolerant of the ideas and behavior of others; broad-minded"--into an epithet. Urbanists should proclaim their liberalism from the highest rooftop (we have higher rooftops than they do); it's the only way we survive. And in our next breath, we should condemn their politics, exposing their conservatism as the anti-Americanism that it is, striving to make "conservative" into an epithet.

Let's see, what else are we for? How about education? Cities are beehives of intellectual energy; students and teachers are everywhere you look, studying, teaching, thinking. In Seattle, you can barely throw a rock without hitting a college. It's time to start celebrating that, because if the reds have their way, advanced degrees will one day be awarded based on the number of Bible verses a person can recite from memory. In the city, people ask you what you're reading. Outside the city, they ask you why you're reading. You do the math--and you'll have to, because non-urbanists can hardly even count their own children at this point. For too long now, we've caved to the non-urban wisdom that decries universities as bastions of elitism and snobbery. Guess what: That's why we should embrace them. Outside of the city, elitism and snobbery are code words for literacy and complexity. And when the oil dries up, we're not going to be turning to priests for answers--we'll be calling the scientists. And speaking of science: SCIENCE! That's another thing we're for. And reason. And history. All those things that non-urbanists have replaced with their idiotic faith. We're for those.

As part of our pro-reason platform, we're for paying taxes--taxes, after all, support the urban infrastructure on which we all rely, and as such, are a necessary part of the social contract we sign every day. We are for

density, and because we're for density, we're for programs that support it, like mass transit. If you ignore the selfish whimperings of the Kirkland contingent, it's not too hard to envision a time when the only vehicles allowed on the streets of Seattle are buses, trams, and shuttles. Utopian? Wrong: reality-based. It's a better, smarter way to live, and the urbanist is always in favor of that. People who commute to the city for their livelihood and then attack urban areas and people in the voting booth are the worst kind of hypocrites. Commuters, we neither want nor need you. We welcome, however, new residents, new urbanites, the continual influx of people from other places who come here to stay (are you listening, liberal residents of Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming?). These transplants help create the density we find so attractive, and they provide the plurality that makes cities thrive.

A city belongs to everyone in it, and expands to contain whoever desires to join its ranks. People migrate to cities and open independent businesses or work at established ones. They import cultural influences, thus enriching the urban arts and nightlife, which in turn enrich everything. Most importantly, they bring the indisputable fact of their own bodies and minds. We wait in line with them at QFC, we stand shoulder to shoulder with them at the bar, we cram ourselves next to them on the bus. We share our psychic and physical space, however limited it might be, because others share it with us. It's not a question of tolerance, nor even of personal freedom; it's a matter of

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recognizing the fundamental interdependence of all citizens--not just the ones who belong to the same church. Non-urbanites have chosen to burn the declaration of interdependence, opting instead for tyranny, isolationism, and "faith." They can have them.

These, of course, are broad strokes. We all know that not everyone who lives in the suburbs is a raving neo-Christian idiot. The raving neo-Christian idiots are winning, however, so we need to take the fight to them. In this case, the fight is largely spiritual; it consists of embracing the reality that urban life and urban values are the only sustainable response to the modern age of holy war, environmental degradation, and global conflict. More important, it consists of rejecting the impulse to apologize for living in a society that prizes values like liberalism, pluralism, education, and facts. It's time for the Democratic Party to stop pandering to bovine, non-urban America. You don't apologize for being right--especially when you're at war.
