

Let Them Eat War

By

Arlie Hochschild

[Social Psychology, University of California, Berkeley]

George W. Bush is sinking in the polls*, but a few beats on the war drum could reverse that trend and re-elect him in 2004. Ironically, the sector of American society now poised to keep him in the White House is the one which stands to lose the most from virtually all of his policies -- blue-collar men. A full 49 percent of them and 38 percent percent of blue-collar women told a January 2003 Roper poll they would vote for Bush in 2004.

In fact, blue-collar workers were more pro-Bush than professionals and managers among whom only 40 percent of men and 32 percent of women, when polled, favor him; that is, people who reported to Roper such occupations as painter, furniture mover, waitress, and sewer repairman were more likely to be for our pro-big business president than people with occupations like doctor, attorney, CPA or property manager. High-school graduates and dropouts were more pro-Bush (41 percent) than people with graduate degrees (36 percent). And people with family incomes of \$30,000 or less were no more opposed to Bush than those with incomes of \$75,000 or more.

We should think about this. The blue-collar vote is huge. Skilled and semi-skilled manual jobs are on the decline, of course, but if we count as blue-collar those workers without a college degree, as Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers do in their book *Why the White Working Class Still Matters*, then blue-collar voters represent 55 percent of all voters. They are, the authors note, the real swing vote in America. "Their loyalties shift the most from election to election and in so doing determine the winners in American politics."

This fact has not been lost on Republican strategists, who are now targeting right-leaning blue-collar men, or as they call them, "Nascar Dads." These are, reporter Liz Clarke of the Washington Post tells us, "lower or middle-class men who once voted Democratic but who now favor Republicans." Nascar Dads, commentator Bill Decker adds, are likely to be racing-car fans, live in rural areas, and have voted for Bush in 2000. Bush is giving special attention to steelworkers, autoworkers, carpenters and other building-trades workers, according to Richard Dunham and Aaron Bernstein of Business Week, and finding common cause on such issues as placing tariffs on imported steel and offering tax breaks on pensions.

We can certainly understand why Bush wants blue-collar voters. But why would a near majority of blue-collar voters still want Bush? Millionaires, billionaires for Bush, well, sure; he's their man. But why pipe fitters and cafeteria workers? Some are drawn to his pro-marriage, pro-church, pro-gun stands, but could those issues override a voter's economic self-interest?

Let's consider the situation. Since Bush took office in 2000, the U.S. has lost 4.9 million jobs, (2.5 million net), the vast majority of them in

manufacturing. While this cannot be blamed entirely on Bush, his bleed-'em-dry approach to the non-Pentagon parts of the government has led him to do nothing to help blue-collar workers learn new trades, find affordable housing, or help their children go to college. The loosening of Occupational Health and Safety Administration regulations has made plants less safe. Bush's agricultural policies favor agribusiness and have put many small and medium-sized farms into bankruptcy. His tax cuts are creating state budget shortfalls, which will hit the public schools blue-collar children go to, and erode what services they now get. He has put industrialists in his environmental posts, so that the air and water will grow dirtier. His administration's disregard for the severe understaffing of America's nursing homes means worse care for the elderly parents of the Nascar Dad as they live out their last days. His invasion of Iraq has sent blue-collar children and relatives to the front. Indeed, his entire tap-the-hornets'-nest foreign policy has made the U.S. arguably less secure than it was before he took office. Indeed, a recent series of polls revealed that most people around the world believe him to be a greater danger than Osama Bin Laden. Many blue-collar voters know at least some of this already. So why are so many of them pro-Bush anyway?

Wondering about the Nascar Dad

Among blue-collar voters, more men than women favor Bush, so we can ask what's going on with the men. It might seem that their pocketbooks say one thing, their votes another, but could it be that, by some good fortune, blue-collar men are actually better off than we imagine? No, that can't be it. About a fifth of them had household incomes of \$30,000 or less; 4 in 10 between \$30,000 and \$75,000; and 4 in 10 \$75,000 or more. Among the poorest blue-collar families (with household incomes of

\$30,000 or less) a full 44 percent were pro-Bush. Perhaps even more strikingly, \$75,000-plus Nascar Dads are more likely to favor Bush than their income-counterparts who hold professional and managerial jobs.

Even if poor blue-collar men were pro-Bush in general, we might at least assume that they would oppose Bush's massive program of tax cuts if they thought it favored the rich? If we did, then we'd be wrong again. "Do you think this tax plan benefits mainly the rich or benefits everyone?" Roper interviewers asked. Among blue-collar men who answered, "Yes, it benefits mainly the rich," 56 percent nonetheless favored the plan. Among blue-collar men with \$30,000 or less who answered "yes" and who believed that yes, this tax cut "benefits mainly the rich," a full 53 percent favored it. This far exceeds the 35 percent of people who make \$75,000 or more, knew the tax cut favored the rich, and still supported it.

So, what's going on? Should we throw out the classic Clinton-era explanation for how we all vote: "It's the economy, stupid"? Not right away. Maybe the blue-collar man who favors that tax cut is thinking "the economy stupid" but only in the short term. He badly needs even the small amounts of money he'll get from a tax cut to repair his car or contribute to the rent. But then many working-class men labor decade after decade at difficult jobs to secure a future for their children. So if they think long term as a way of life, why are they thinking short-term when it comes to their vote?

One possibility is that the Nascar Dad is not well informed; that indeed, like the rest of us, he's been duped. For example, he may have fallen for the Karl Rove-inspired bandwagon effect. "Bush is unbeatable," he hears, or "Bush has a \$200,000,000 re-election fund. Get with the winner." It

makes you a winner too, he feels. This might account for some blue-collar Bush support, but it doesn't explain why the Nascar Dad would be more likely to be taken in by the bandwagon effect than the professional or managerial dad. Anyway, most blue-collar men would seem to be no less likely than anyone else to vote their conscience, regardless of whom they think will win, and that's not even counting those who root for the underdog as a matter of principle.

But another kind of manipulation could be going on. A certain amount of crucial information has gone missing in the Bush years. As has recently become clear, information that would be of great interest to the Nascar Dad has been withheld. With jobs disappearing at a staggering rate, the Bureau of Labor Statistics ended its Mass Layoff Tracking Study on Christmas Eve of 2002, thanks to this administration. And although Congressional Democrats managed to get funding for the study restored in February of 2003, the loss of 614,167 jobs in those two months was unannounced.

Conveying the truth in a misleading manner is, of course, another way of manipulating people. As the linguist George Lakoff astutely observes, the term "tax relief" slyly invites us to imagine taxes as an affliction and those who propose them as villains. If we add in such distortions to the suppression of vital information, the Nascar Dad who listens to Rush Limbaugh on the commute home, turns on Fox News at dinner, and is too tired after working overtime to catch more than the headlines is perhaps a man being exposed to only one side of the political story.

But then Nascar Dad could always turn the radio dial. He could do a google search on job loss on his kid's computer. He could talk to his union buddies -- if he's one of the 12 percent who are still unionized -- or

to his slightly more liberal wife. It could be he knows perfectly well that he's being lied to, but believes people are usually being lied to, and that Bush is, in this respect, still the better of two evils. But how could that be?

Maybe it's because Bush fits an underlying recipe for the kind of confident, authoritative father figure such dads believe should run the ship of state as they believe a man should run a family. Republican rhetoric may appeal to the blue-collar man, Lakoff suggests, because we tend to match our view of good politics with our image of a good family. The appeal of any political leader, he believes, lies in the way he matches our images of the father in the ideal family. There are two main pictures of such an ideal American family, Lakoff argues. According to a "strict father family" model, dad should provide for the family, control mom, and use discipline to teach his children how to survive in a competitive and hostile world. Those who advocate the strict father model, Lakoff reasons, favor a "strict father" kind of government. If an administration fits this model, it supports the family (by maximizing overall wealth). It protects the family from harm (by building up the military). It raises the children to be self-reliant and obedient (by fostering citizens who ask for little and speak when spoken to). The match-up here is, of course, to Bush Republicans.

Then there is the "nurturing parent family" model in which parents don't simply control their children but encourage their development. The government equivalent would be offering services to the citizenry, funding education, health, and welfare, and emphasizing diplomacy on a global stage. The core values here are empathy and responsibility, not control and discipline, and the match up is to the pro-public sector Dean/Kucinich Democrats. Studies have shown that blue-collar ideals are

closer to the strict father than to the nurturing parent model. But that's been true for a very long time, while the blue-collar vote sometimes goes left as in the 1930s, and sometimes goes right as it's doing now. So we can't simply pin the pro-Bush Nascar Dad vote on a sudden change in blue-collar family ideals.

Appealing to the "forgotten American"

Maybe, however, something deeper is going on, which has so far permitted Bush's flag-waving and cowboy-boot-strutting to trump issues of job security, wages, safety, and health -- and even, in the case of Bush's threats of further war -- life itself. In an essay, "The White Man Unburdened," in a recent New York Review of Books, Norman Mailer recently argued that the war in Iraq returned to white males a lost sense of mastery, offering them a feeling of revenge for imagined wrongs, and a sense of psychic rejuvenation. In the last thirty years, white men have taken a drubbing, he notes, especially the three quarters of them who lack college degrees. Between 1979 and 1999, for example, real wages for male high-school graduates dropped 24 percent. In addition, Mailer notes, white working class men have lost white champs in football, basketball and boxing. (A lot of white men cheer black athletes, of course, whomever they vote for.) But the war in Iraq, Mailer notes, gave white men white heroes. By climbing into his jumpsuit, stepping out of an S-3B Viking jet onto the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, Bush posed as -- one could say impersonated -- such a hero.

Mailer is talking here about white men and support for the war in Iraq. But we're talking about something that cuts deeper into emotional life, and stretches farther back into the twin histories of American labor and Republican presidencies. For Republicans have been capturing blue-

collar hearts for some time now. In the summer of 1971, Jefferson Cowie tells us in a recent essay, Richard Nixon worked out a semi-clandestine "blue-collar strategy." Nixon instructed Jerome Rosow of the Department of Labor to draw up a confidential report, only 25 copies of which were circulated. One of them got into the hands of a Wall Street Journal reporter who exposed it under the banner, "Secret Report Tells Nixon How to Help White Workingmen and Win Their Votes."

As the article noted, "President Nixon has before him a confidential blueprint designed to help him capture the hearts and votes of the nation's white working men -- the traditionally Democratic 'forgotten Americans' that the Administration believes are ripe for political plucking." According to close advisor, H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's plan was to maintain an image as "a tough, courageous, masculine leader." The never-ending Nixon tapes actually catch Nixon talking with aides Haldeman and Ehrlichman about an episode in the popular television show "All in the Family" in which the working-class Archie Bunker confronts an old buddy, a former football player who has just come out of the closet as gay. Nixon then recounts on tape how civilizations decline when homosexuality rises, and concludes, "We have to stand up to this." Nixon sought to appeal to the blue-collar man's straightness (at least he still had that), his superiority over women (that, too), and his native-born whiteness (and that.). As Cowie sums it up, "It was neither the entire working class nor its material grievances on which the administration would focus; rather it was the 'feeling of being forgotten' among white male workers that Nixon and his advisors would seek to tap."

Until Nixon, Republicans had for a century written off the blue-collar voter. But turning Marx on his head, Nixon appealed not to a desire for

real economic change but to the distress caused by the absence of it. And it worked as it's doing again now. In the 1972 contest between Nixon and McGovern, 57 percent of the manual worker vote and 54 percent of the union vote went to Nixon. (This meant 22 and 25-point gains for Nixon over his 1968 presidential run.) After Nixon, other Republican presidents -- Ford, Reagan, and Bush Sr. -- followed in the same footsteps, although not always so cleverly.

Now George Bush Jr. is pursuing a sequel strategy by again appealing to the emotions of male blue-collar voters. Only he's adding a new element to the mix. Instead of appealing, as Nixon did, to anger at economic decline, Bush is appealing to fear of economic displacement, and offering the Nascar Dad a set of villains to blame, and a hero to thank -- George W. Bush.

Let's begin by re-imagining the blue-collar man, for we do not normally think of him as a fearful man. The very term "Nascar Dad" like the earlier term "Joe Six Pack" suggests, somewhat dismissively, an "I'm-alright-Jack" kind of guy. We imagine him with his son, some money in his pocket, in the stands with the other guys rooting for his favorite driver and car. The term doesn't call to mind a restless house-husband or a despondent divorcee living back in his parents' house and seeing his kids every other weekend. In other words, the very image we start with may lead us away from clues to his worldview, his feelings, his politics and the links between these.

Since the 1970s, the blue-collar man has taken a lot of economic hits. The buying power of his paycheck, the size of his benefits, the security of his job -- all these have diminished. As Ed Landry, a 62 year-old-machinist interviewed by Paul Solman on the Lehrer News Hour said,

"We went to lunch and our jobs went to China." He searched for another job and couldn't find one. He was even turned down for a job as a grocery bagger. "I was told that we'd get back to you." "Did they?" Solman asked. "No. I couldn't believe it myself. I couldn't get the job." In today's jobless recovery, the average jobless stint for a man like Landry is now 19 weeks, the longest since 1983. Jobs that don't even exist at present may eventually open up, experts reassure us, but they aren't opening up yet. In the meantime, three out of every four available jobs are low-level service jobs. A lot of workers like Ed Landry, cast out of one economic sector, have been unable to land a job even at the bottom of another.

For anyone who stakes his pride on earning an honest day's pay, this economic fall is, unsurprisingly enough, hard to bear. How, then, do these blue-collar men feel about it? Ed Landry said he felt "numb." Others are anxious, humiliated and, as who wouldn't be, fearful. But in cultural terms, Nascar Dad isn't supposed to feel afraid. What he can feel though is angry. As Susan Faludi has described so well in her book *Stiffed*, that is what many such men feel. As a friend who works in a Maine lumber mill among blue-collar Republicans explained about his co-workers, "They felt that everyone else -- women, kids, minorities -- were all moving up, and they felt like they were moving down. Even the spotted owl seemed like it was on its way up, while he and his job, were on the way down. And he's angry."

Strutting the political flight deck

But is that anger directed downward -- at "welfare cheats," women, gays, blacks, and immigrants -- or is it aimed up at job exporters and rich tax dodgers? Or out at alien enemies? The answer is likely to depend on the

political turn of the screw. The Republicans are clearly doing all they can to aim that anger down or out, but in any case away from the rich beneficiaries of Bush's tax cut. Unhinging the personal from the political, playing on identity politics, Republican strategists have offered the blue-collar voter a Faustian bargain: We'll lift your self-respect by putting down women, minorities, immigrants, even those spotted owls. We'll honor the manly fortitude you've shown in taking bad news. But (and this is implicit) don't ask us to do anything to change that bad news. Instead of Marie Antoinette's "let them eat cake," we have -- and this is Bush's twist on the old Nixonian strategy -- "let them eat war."

Paired with this is an aggressive right-wing attempt to mobilize blue-collar fear, resentment and a sense of being lost -- and attach it to the fear of American vulnerability, American loss. By doing so, Bush aims to win the blue-collar man's identification with big business, empire, and himself. The resentment anyone might feel at the personnel officer who didn't have the courtesy to call him back and tell him he didn't have the job, Bush now redirects toward the target of Osama bin Laden, and when we can't find him, Saddam Hussein and when we can't find him... And these enemies are now so intimate that we see them close up on the small screen in our bedrooms and call them by their first names.

Whether strutting across a flight deck or mocking the enemy, Bush with his seemingly fearless bravado -- ironically born of class entitlement -- offers an aura of confidence. And this confidence dampens, even if temporarily, the feelings of insecurity and fear exacerbated by virtually every major domestic and foreign policy initiative of the Bush administration. Maybe it comes down to this: George W. Bush is deregulating American global capitalism with one hand while regulating the feelings it produces with the other. Or, to put it another way, he is

doing nothing to change the causes of fear and everything to channel the feeling and expression of it. He speaks to a working man's lost pride and his fear of the future by offering an image of fearlessness. He poses here in his union jacket, there in his pilot's jumpsuit, taunting the Iraqis to "bring 'em on" - all of it meant to feed something in the heart of a frightened man. In this light, even Bush's "bad boy" past is a plus. He steals a wreath off a Macy's door for his Yale fraternity and careens around drunk in Daddy's car. But in the politics of anger and fear, the Republican politics of feelings, this is a plus.

There is a paradox here. While Nixon was born into a lower-middle-class family, his distrustful personality ensured that his embrace of the blue-collar voter would prove to be wary and distrustful. Paradoxically, Bush, who was born to wealth, seems really to like being the top gun talking to "regular guys." In this way, Bush adds to Nixon's strategy his lone-ranger machismo.

More important, Nixon came into power already saddled with an unpopular war. Bush has taken a single horrific set of attacks on September 11, 2001 and mobilized his supporters and their feelings around them. Unlike Nixon, Bush created his own war, declared it ongoing but triumphant, and fed it to his potential supporters. His policy -- and this his political advisor Karl Rove has carefully calibrated -- is something like the old bait-and-switch. He continues to take the steaks out of the blue-collar refrigerator and to declare instead, "let them eat war." He has been, in effect, strip-mining the emotional responses of blue-collar men to the problems his own administration is so intent on causing.

But there is a chance this won't work. For one thing, the war may turn out to have been a bad idea, Bush's equivalent of a runaway plant. For another thing, working men may smell a skunk. Many of them may resent those they think have emerged from the pack behind them and are now getting ahead, and they may fear for their future. But they may also come to question whether they've been offered Osama bin Laden as a stand-in for the many unfixed problems they face. They may wonder whether their own emotions aren't just one more natural resource the Republicans are exploiting for their profit. What we urgently need now, of course, is a presidential candidate who addresses the root causes of blue-collar anger and fear and who actually tackles the problems before us all, instead of pandering to the emotions bad times evoke.

Interview

BuzzFlash: You say that Bush -- and I quote -- "continues to take the steaks out of the blue-collar refrigerator and to declare instead, 'let them eat war.'" Can you explain how this bait-and-switch basically works?

Arlie Hochschild: Let me back up first before I answer that, though, so I can nail down some poll results. They came as a bit of a surprise to me. A full 49 percent of blue-collar men and 38 percent of blue-collar women indicated in a January '03 Roper poll that they would vote for Bush in 2004. We can now compare that to the smaller proportion of pro-Bush professionals and managers. 40 percent of male and 32 percent of female professionals and managers plan to vote for Bush.

So if we compare occupational groups, blue collar workers are more in favor of Bush than the white collar sector. If we compare educational groups, we find the same thing. High school graduates and dropouts are

more pro-Bush than people with graduate degrees. And if we compare income groups, we find people with family incomes of \$30,000 or less are no more opposed to Bush -- about the same -- as those with incomes of \$75,000 or more.

The surprise is that the people most hurt by Bush's policies are his strongest supporters. We know that there have been 2.5 million jobs lost in his presidency. He's kind of got a "bleed 'em dry" approach to the non-Pentagon part of government spending. He's not doing anything to help blue-collar workers learn new trades, or get a house, or help their kids go to college. He's loosening the Occupation Health and Safety regulations. The plants the guys work at are less safe. His agricultural policies are putting small farmers out of business. So we have to ask: why would they vote Republican?

Tax cuts are creating budget shortfalls for the schools the guy's kids go to. The library hours are shorter. And, given Bush putting the foxes in the henhouse in environmental posts, the air and water are going to get dirtier. Kids are more likely to get asthma. He's even loosening regulations for nursing homes, so the man's elderly parents are going to have worse care in their later days. All of Bush's military adventures -- the ones he's already done in Iraq, and perhaps Iran and Syria, impact the blue-collar guy more than anyone else. His kids are going to go, or his brother is going to go, or he's going to go and possibly be killed.

And yet this blue-collar guy's more likely to be for these wars. Do you think we should go into Syria? There was an item in a poll on that. A blue-collar guy is more likely to say "yes" than the professional or managerial guy who's less likely to go or see his kids go off to war.

So I'm looking at this data and it's a surprise that 50% of blue collar males don't seem to be voting in -- what we might think they would see as -- their self-interest.

BuzzFlash: Well, what is it? You identify a sort of an emotional trade-off, basically, that the blue collar support of Bush isn't based on facts; indeed, many of these blue-collar males are aware of the facts. But Bush is offering something else. He's offering them, as you say, confidence in reestablishing their role in the center of the patriarchal world.

Hochschild: Right. And this is a delicate point to try to get across. I think we all have feelings and they all can get appealed to. It doesn't mean a person is stupid if their feelings are getting appealed to. But I do think that this is going on, and that there's a kind of a dilemma here that the blue-collar guy, since the '70s on, has been suffering a giant economic downward slide. His paycheck is worth less. His job has become less secure. His benefits have been carved down. And all of this is bad, bad news for him. His wife's had to go to work, and now, 30 years later, the two of them earn what he alone would have earlier earned.

With this economic hit has come a cultural hit. Now I think it's a worldwide story, a kind of economic undermining of patriarchal customs and expectations. And so, with this economic decline may come marital instability -- a lot of hard things have hit this guy. And so how he feels psychologically becomes a really important question. And I think the story is that he believes -- whether it's true or not -- that a lot of people have come up from behind him. Women have come from behind. Minorities have come from behind and gotten ahead; immigrants, new arrivals, have come from behind and have gotten ahead. Even the spotted owl -- a lot of them are not environmentalists because they think

somebody's now putting animal rights over their human rights. As he's sliding down, he imagines all these groups moving up.

And a very understandable thing to do is to look at them and want them to go back where they came from. The feeling is one of frustration, fear, anger. What he's not doing is looking at Bush, the guy at the top, who's rigging the whole economic game, and who's not doing a thing to support him, and who's actually deflecting blame away from the top. So it comes down to this: those feelings that come with a kind of loss of position, income and status among blue collar males is being exploited instead of addressed.

BuzzFlash: In this age, when liberals are accused of being politically correct, the right-wing movement is probably even more of a practitioner of political correctness on many accounts. And Bush can't communicate directly to the white male about how he stands for the white male being on top, so there's a lot of coding going on, it seems. And much of this is subliminal, because Bush can't say, well, I keep Laura in her place, but --

Hochschild: You never see her. She's in a lockbox.

BuzzFlash: And she's always walking behind him and is carefully scripted to say as little as possible. If she says anything, it's once or twice a month, and it's a sentence or two, or maybe a highly controlled interview. In their relationship, she symbolizes the woman who is always deferential to the husband. And Bush himself, although he comes from entitlement, in many ways he shows that the more he fails, the more secure maybe white males feel who are feeling uncomfortable with their position, because he's still the President of the United States. It is a

reinforcement of all of the white males -- that no matter how much they screw up, they're still head of the family.

Hochschild: I think that's a really very perceptive remark. Bush is a kind of a Dagwood, you know? However awkward and wrong-headed, he's still the head of the family.

BuzzFlash: That may be reassuring to blue collar males. I won't be just thrown out of my family if I cheat, or if I spend my money drinking, because I'll come back and ultimately I'm the head of the family and I'll be forgiven. It's a patriarchal archetype that the male head of the household is always forgiven his failings.

Hochschild: Bush is the upper-class mess-up who ends up on top anyway. It is subliminal: If you mess up, don't worry. The reason that becomes important, I think, is that we live in a culture of individualism. And if you lose a job, it's your fault you lost the job. It's your credit if you do well, and your fault if you do badly. And so for him to be the mess-up that gets ahead anyway is sort of an end-run around this whole burdensome ideology of individualism.

BuzzFlash: So it's a triumph of white males through all this adversity of civil rights, "quota systems" for minorities and feminism. There's a man who's been a complete screw-up, and now he's President of the United States. I'm a blue-collar male and I don't care if he's wealthy. He's standing up for the white guy being the head of the household and the decision maker.

Hochschild: And that might become all the more important if he begins to feel it's all he's got left. And Bush represents it -- since it sure doesn't

look like he's earned his title. Look at Bush's adolescence and young adulthood -- it's really extended until he was 40. He was careening around in Daddy's car, getting tickets for drunken driving, stealing the wreath off the Macy's front door. He was dragging a garbage can from a neighbor's driveway down the street and careening around.

He's still careening around. That's what he's doing in Iraq -- careening around. We are the neighbor's garbage can; he's dragging us with him.

But how that gets to be an asset subliminally for this important swing vote group is that you can mess up and still end up on top. He's not providing any policies to help that happen. That is the sleight of hand. He's actually making the working man's life a thousand times harder.

BuzzFlash: That's the key to your commentary, "Let Them Eat War" -- whether or not a male blue-collar worker realizes it, on a conscious level or not, that he is trading off his individual well-being. Bush is hurting this guy's well-being on all number of fronts -- job loss, elimination of overtime pay, reduction in future Social Security, future Medicare costs, long-term care and support, et cetera. Bush is basically adopting a policy of taking as much as he can for the business cronies who support him by taking away income from the working man. Still, 50 percent support him because he's a white guy and he represents the triumph of the white guy in a world that's threatening to him.

Hochschild: If you just take what's happening to the blue-collar guy's kids with Bush's "Children Left Behind" policy, as I would call it, he's basically penalizing schools that have failing kids. If those schools have kids who continue to fail, they get even less funding than they now get. He's actually going to redistribute funds away from the very schools and

kids that need it the most, and a lot of those are blue-collar kids. So Bush is taking the future as well as the present away from these blue-collar men. And it's all to sell them a fairy tale.

BuzzFlash: To sell them a fairy tale of a lost world where the white male was king.

Hochschild: Where your personal bravado will win out despite declining times -- about which Bush does nothing.

BuzzFlash: He's picking their pockets but saying to them -- with a wink and a nod, in politically correct code words and symbols -- like that all-male signing of the late-term abortion bill, where only white males were present -- the white guys are in charge here. "Notice there's no women," Bush is coding to them. "We're reigning them in, but not officially -- we're going to say we're all for women."

And then a wink, a wink and a nod.

Hochschild: Sure.

BuzzFlash: And the white blue collar worker for Bush says that's fine, and 50 percent of the blue collar workers say I need psychological reassurance more than I need...

Hochschild: More than I need the home loans, more than I need my kids to have a good school, more than I need the library open for more than two hours a day, more than I need a safe neighborhood or a safe playground, more than I need better staff-patient ratios in the nursing home I send my parents to -- more than all that.

BuzzFlash: Let me quote from your commentary: "George W. Bush is deregulating American global capitalism with one hand while regulating the feelings it produces with the other. Or, to put it another way, he is doing nothing to change the causes of fear and everything to channel the feeling and expression of it. He speaks to a working man's lost pride and his fear of the future by offering an image of fearlessness."

The very feelings that are causing the anxiety among that 50 percent of the blue-collar males, Bush is only worsening, while at the same time, he's luring them to vote for him by offering them the emotional security of being a screw-up white-male who remains on top and gets to wear the trappings of a "real man," even though he avoided serving in Vietnam and went AWOL.

Hochschild: That's a very good summary of it. I think it's a giant hoax.

BuzzFlash: How does Rush Limbaugh play into this? He's an essential factor, his drug addiction aside.

Hochschild: Oh, he's huge. He's the push-from-behind guy for three hours a day, nationwide, often during commuter time. We are really subjected to a certain emotional tone of resentment -- a recounting of the latest political news in resentment-drenched language. Actually, my husband and I were in Maine this summer, and I did a lot of commuting back and forth and I listened to Rush Limbaugh a lot. And you know what's really interesting is where he puts his anger, and where he doesn't put it. He is the cheerleader for George Bush. In fact, George isn't right wing enough for Rush Limbaugh.

Here is what he will do: He let Halliburton go. Dick Cheney's company has, without any bidding, gotten multi-billion dollar contracts to rebuild Iraq. No bidding? A private contract? This really is kind of immoral cronyism. (In fact, the *New York Times* today reports that Halliburton is charging twice what other companies charge to truck Kuwaiti fuel into Iraq). Well, not a word from Rush Limbaugh about Halliburton. He's not angry about that. Nothing said about that contract. But when it comes to talk about Hillary Clinton's new book, he lambastes her up and down and around. He said, regarding Wellesley College -- I cannot even stand to go on that campus, not even close to that campus, because it produces women like Hillary Clinton.

So, what do we have? We have a benign pass and wink for Halliburton -- no anger there. And we have this fury at the campus surrounding the college that produced women like Hillary Clinton. We drop the bomb on Hillary Clinton and say nothing about top-level malfeasance.

That is part of the emotional climate that stirs up the understandably hurt feelings of downwardly mobile blue-collar men. And there's a whole hemorrhage in the economic sector which has provided them jobs. That is a structural reality. We really need a Marshall Plan response to it. The blue collar guy's upset; he has a right to be upset. We are with him on that. I'm upset too.

It's not his fault that industrial jobs are going to China and Indonesia. We need a structural answer to a structural problem. But instead of that, the blue-collar guy feels privately bad. And the worst side of his bad feelings are being appealed to by Bush.

BuzzFlash: As you pointed out, Rush Limbaugh is essential to this sort of strategy, because Rush Limbaugh is sort of the guy who works up the crowd to a frenzy. He does what Bush can't officially do, which is appeal to all the demagogic instincts one can do, and all the showmanship. He basically scapegoats intelligent women, to make Hillary Clinton the source of all the problems America faces. It's ludicrous.

Hochschild: Yes, Limbaugh is working up the crowd, inspiring anger, fixing blame on women -- especially working women and the very wives that are holding up the families these blue-collar guys are members of. And he's switching it to a kind of market evangelism. Everything about the market is good, so he's getting the blue-collar guy to escape his problems by focusing on the wonders and magic of the market. He's even said he's really hostile to environmentalism -- what do we care about spotted owls and butterflies, he asks. The only bird that matters is the Kentucky Fried Chicken, because we eat chickens and we buy chickens. Only those animals matter. So let's protect them and nothing else.

BuzzFlash: But he doesn't point out, of course, that the Bush Administration fixes the market so only its supporters get fat contracts. There is no free market, as we imagine it. The Bush Cartel is all crony contracts for campaign contributions. Entrepreneurialism and fair market practices don't get rewarded in the Bush model of pay-to-play fat cats.

Hochschild: Exactly. And Limbaugh doesn't point out that the very people who are outsourcing jobs to Third World countries and leaving high pools of unemployed in our country sing the praises of the free market.

BuzzFlash: Elimination of overtime required pay. He doesn't point any of this out.

Hochschild: Right. And a reduction in benefits, and job instability -- this whole flexible-ization -- "we'll give you a half-time job and I won't tell you exactly when it's going to be and how long it'll last. And the wages will be half of what they were five years ago, but you're lucky to have a job. We won't count you as unemployed." All of that is happening due to the so-called free market. And Rush Limbaugh is making it the God, the solution. He's getting the forgotten guy to identify with the CEO of Halliburton, and forgetting that this very market has been rigged to the disadvantage of the working person.

BuzzFlash: Limbaugh is kind of like the guy who's claiming he caught a mugger (who is just some poor sucker who accidentally was passing by and looked disheveled) and the crowd gathers around. While Limbaugh claims that "We've got to lynch the man who's been picking pockets in the neighborhood" -- as he latches on to some hapless soul by the scruff of the neck -- the Bush administration, meanwhile, is picking everyone's pocket in the audience.

Let me ask you one more question. I know you're a sociologist, and this may be too speculative, but in your commentary you use the term "Nascar Dad," which is a popular term in this campaign season. Let's assume that's what Howard Dean meant when he said the guy with the Confederate flag bumper sticker on the back of his pickup truck shouldn't be overlooked by Democrats.

It's probably almost certain if the Democrats can make significant inroads in this split-down-the-middle white male blue-collar vote, the

Democratic candidate would win the next election. How does a Democratic candidate stand up for universal rights -- including for women and minorities -- and for a secular society, and still be able to access at least some percentage of that blue-collar, white male vote that's going to Bush because of insecurities about those very issues?

Hochschild: By appealing to the blue-collar guy's better half, by appealing to his good side. And by exposing this hoax.

I think that the Democrats can appeal to the blue-collar man or the -- I won't call him a Nascar Dad, but the blue-collar voter, male voter -- by saying, "You've been exposed to a giant hoax, and here's what the hoax is. It is offering you a make-believe candied apple with one hand and picking your pocket with the other hand. And take your own feelings back. They're yours. And put them behind a vote for someone who's going to really solve your problems. Set about seriously setting up a domestic agenda that makes a difference to you."

This series of wars that's an imperial stretch into the Middle East -- how does that help the blue-collar man, except for killing his relatives? The Democrats can say that's Bush's war. That's not a U.S. war. It has nothing to do with U.S. security. In fact, it's a whole "tap the hornet's nest" approach to international relations which makes us all a great deal less safe. So tell the blue-collar guy that this is a giant ruse and a scapegoating.

BuzzFlash: And someone's picking your pocket and it's the Bush Administration.

Hochschild: It's the Bush Administration. I think Dean is plain-spoken. He can just say that.

BuzzFlash: I don't know. The Democrats have, for the past 20 years, it seems, been unable to call the Republicans' bluff. They tiptoe around this hoax without calling it on the carpet like it is.

Hochschild: There's been a whole hug-the-middle strategy of the Democratic Leadership Council, and that worked for Clinton. But it's not going to work for anybody after Clinton. I think the Democrats have got to go in the opposite direction -- stop hugging the middle. Get out there behind the issues we really believe in. And I guess along with that we have to enliven a vision of what life would be like if we weren't just privately rich, but rather, all publicly rich. If we really had great schools, and great playgrounds, and great public hospitals, and then there wouldn't be such a desperate scramble to be privately well off.

This is the ultimate thing -- not to be afraid to say there's another America that doesn't leave us hanging, each on our own, and then feeling bad about feeling bad, and that says we can structurally wire it so there aren't failures here. That's the problem we've got to fix -- by providing a vision of an alternative.

* <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/info-battleground04-an1006.html>