

“Peter”
OSLEP
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In-Class Assignment

Plight of the Redneck

Introduction

In my town, most people live around the poverty line. It is not uncommon for people to not have high-school educations. We all live out in the wilderness, either in the middle of a forest or on a farm. Some people cannot leave their home during times of unfortunate weather. Many still dry clothes by hanging them on wires with clothespins outside. A lot of them are already on some sort of welfare, usually social security disability or food stamps. These people are nowhere near the top, or even the middle, of any hierarchy. These people are scraping the bottom of the barrel, and they, seemingly, have nothing to benefit from maintaining the system of order that keeps them at the bottom. So, if conservatism is defined by an inner-strive to retain power, keep inferior classes down, and as a reaction to loss, then why would the inferior class with no power and nothing to lose subscribe to ideas and principles of conservatism?

It has been suggested that poor people in the South had their racial position to maintain, and that was part of their appeal to conservatism. In Oklahoma, besides Native Americans, there has been traditionally been very few minorities. Few blacks have ever lived near the town that I am from. There was never a racial culture because there were no other races. Even in my generation, despite there being a little more diversity, there was no racism, nor was there a reason for racism to exist. Without race and racial status as a hierarchical position to lose, then what is left to convince these people to be conservative?

When it comes to jobs and the economy, we have discussed that unions can help workers free themselves of the abuses of their employers, and that welfare safety nets can help people

from falling into a financial black hole, and that even deficit spending can fuel the economy by keeping money flowing freely through the market. This all sounds great! So why is it that the people of my hometown hate unions, hate deficits, and hate welfare, despite the fact that many of them are on it? I think it is because they have seen their jobs disappear as a result of these same ideas.

History

Once upon a time there were more factories and mills in Oklahoma. Many people worked in these industries and had jobs from them. Maybe they still suffered financially, so they supported union policies or more liberal Democratic policies to help better their situation. In exchange for some benefits, they lost an important portion of their paycheck in taxes... their situation did not really change. Still, they persisted! Maybe they got along because they could hunt deer, catch fish, or fry their chickens for supper and they canceled their Cable-TV subscription, if they even had one.

After a few accidents and unexpected events occur, they were in desperate need of money. Everyone around was poor, including the churches, and charities were nowhere near (this wasn't a city, after all), so more people had to use some sort of government assistance. Taxes go up or the help became more widespread (remember that the population of Oklahoma is small and poor, so the Government of Oklahoma is also poor). In order to provide for those things, taxes had to go up on everyone, including businesses and companies. On top of State decisions, the Federal Government also continued to be heavily involved in the process of helping poor people. After several years, companies pack up and leave Oklahoma, and hundreds (or thousands) of jobs are eliminated.

Eventually a place like [the larger town near ours] became nearly devoid of businesses. Sure, there were small businesses around, but they only employed a few people. Finally, a Walmart came to town! Now there was enough jobs, even part-time jobs, to somewhat offset the effect of a TDK factory downsizing years before. But Walmart constantly got attacked by unions nationally and was hit with Federal Regulations; someone lost their job, or their job became part-time. With every effort to supposedly better the average worker, someone lost a job or a business relocated to a state (or country) that was cheaper to work with. Regulations made it harder to run small businesses, so many started shutting down or laying off. Next thing you know, half of downtown became vacant storefront. Also, due to Oklahoma's small population and tiny electoral vote significance, there is next to nothing that Oklahomans can do to change their situation in government – many have better chances making arrangements with their managers, which fosters a sort of Libertarianism.

Hopeless & No, We Can't

After years of a dangerous cycle, most people's largest problem is health insurance. Many cannot afford it, but they need it. They either have to sacrifice money for insurance and often still end up in debt, or they just wind up in large amounts of debt due to emergencies without insurance coverage. Then the President, rightly, argues that Americans need affordable health insurance... Oklahomans give a sigh of desperation "Oh please, God, don't..." Nevertheless, the President gets his way. Some people (like me) lose their Family-Doctor due to the complex rules and regulations surrounding the Affordable Health-Care Act, then have to get in line to go to a hospital or go to large medical offices and wait in line for months to see a doctor. Some businesses have to give up full-time positions because of the increased benefit costs of full-time employees. At the same time, the government insurance program did not work out like it was

planned; the penalty for not having insurance is now cheaper than the government insurance, and some very poor people need all the money they can get now and they cannot afford to give more away in taxes or insurance. As a result, there are people (like one of my friends) who works two part-time jobs for about 60 hours per week. (If the insurance system gets corrected, he will need to take it, but right now he has to save the few dollars he spares by paying the penalty to pay other bills.)

With every legislation to expand government benefits, people become more dependent on government aid. If someone is not doing too well, government aid takes more money away and people lose jobs, so they need to rely on the aid more than before. It creates a cycle that seems to only continue and continue. The majority of the people in the area do not blame the business or the company for their loss because they realize that businesses are in the business of making money, and that if they had a business of their own, they would do the same things. Some small businesses (like my grandfather's construction business) already tried to provide some sort of health and life insurance to its' employees in order to try to take care of them and incentivize them to stay, but it was done within the confines of what the company could afford, not what the government dictated.

Frustration

If you have made it this far, maybe you can imagine how someone might be upset with the entire system of government and welfare at the moment. In the name of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," the government taxes away your means of happiness, takes away your liberty to spend your own money as you please, and the benefits, that were supposed to help you, ruin your life. Maybe the government is helping someone, but it's only hurting you. Then you realize that you haven't been voting for these actions. You and your State have opposed this sort

of action for years and years. Maybe if the Federal Government just backed out, things would be better. Washington doesn't know my town.

After continually losing on the economic side, one of the few things that you can retain is your identity. What it means, to you, to be an American, your somewhat self-sufficient and isolated way of life, and your Christian faith and values. Your identity and heritage is the very last thing that you can cling to.

Barry Goldwater mentioned that he opposed the Civil Rights Amendment on the grounds that when the Federal Government forces something into law, it has negative impacts across the country. It forces people to change something that they do not want to change and assaults their beliefs by telling them that they are wrong for what they believe. Usually, the impact of this is more prevalent in social issues than in economic policies. Abortion laws and gay marriage are the two most recent upsets. The vast majority of the State of Oklahoma has opposed both of these issues, and social values cannot be forced by the government. One need only look to the Civil War and the lasting legacies of Reconstruction through to today's current Southern poverty, racism, and race issues to see what happens when the Federal Government forces its morals on dissenting parts of the country.

The people of Oklahoma want to be left alone by the Federal Government. I think this partly, historically, originates from a mixture of Southern immigration to self-sufficient farming and domestic production in Oklahoma and the mistrust of the Federal Government that is shared by the Native Americans. As I have mentioned before, Oklahomans saw the need for some Government Aid, and Democrats were elected to office consistently all the way to the 2000s, but, with few exceptions since Eisenhower, Oklahoma has voted conservatively for President. Federal intrusion has been the agitator.

The “war against religion” and assaults to religious liberty are all too real for many Oklahomans. Gay marriage was forced on us without a vote. Abortion and Planned Parenthood are legal without a vote. Satanists try to take away the Ten Commandments Monument from the Capitol. Prayer is banned in schools. Even Hobby Lobby and nuns have to challenge the Supreme Court over the provision of contraception as a mandate of Obamacare.

As Ronald Reagan might say: “If we lose Freedom here, there is no place to escape to. This is the last stand on Earth” ... or Oklahoma. The Government has attacked everything, and now it’s attacking the last thing that Oklahomans can cling to: God.

O Captain, My Captain!

Enter, Donald Trump. After years of job loss, part-time labor, factory shut-downs, increasing taxes, federal overreach, and an assault on your moral values, a wealthy businessman appears and steals the show. To hell with political correctness, rednecks call it like it is, and so does Trump. Trump hits illegal immigration harder than the problem is and it appeals to you, at least, if for no other reason, because it is funny to watch. Trump is loud and obnoxious – just the sort of wrecking ball you want to hit Washington. The media says that Trump has outsourced jobs overseas and hired immigrants at the expense of Americans, but Trump says he had to because it was good business, and you are not bothered by it because you know it’s because of the same Federal Regulations that caused these things to happen to you. Despite his business practices, he says that does not like to see America hurting so bad and that he would like to do business in America and hire Americans, and you like to hear this because it restores a little bit of your hope that real jobs and companies could come back to your town. Then the media reports that Trump might have evaded taxes for decades, and while they shame him, you are impressed and jealous! By golly, he must be pretty smart to catch every loophole; if only you could manage

to do that too! Even if he manages to not accomplish any of the things he says he wants to, at least you can send Washington the message that you are sick of their crap.

Conclusion

In our class talks, we have discussed that power, hierarchy, and structure are very important pieces of conservatism. The effort to preserve power and position combined with the grief of loss are the motivating elements that lead to a reactionary response to contemporary issues. The idea that conservatism is entirely reactionary does not conflict completely with what I have lived my life around, but, to me, many of the reasons that are given, like preservation of power and hierarchy, seem vastly removed from my homeland.

The prompt for Robin's book asked us what evidence was given as to why he thought conservatism was about preserving power rather than liberty and maintaining traditional values. The impression I have from him is that he believes it has nothing to do with liberty and values, other than those being used as tools to justify preserving power. I was raised, and tend to see it, in the opposite way. Conservatives favor the stability that comes from individual liberties and traditional values. All of us have an idea of what it means to be an American, and we all have an identity. In the backwoods of Oklahoma, we live isolated and secluded. For us, it is unnatural and unwelcome for the government to intrude on our business, especially when we don't ask for it or vote for it. It has been a tough balance between seeing the need for some aid and the pain it results in. I think that for years this was leveraged somewhat by the State Government, but in recent years the Federal Government has begun to overshadow the State in its' level of influence.

It is not wrong to say that conservatism is reactionary. Oklahoma has turned extremely conservative as a reaction to a growing Federal Government. But, it is hard for me to follow the argument that this reaction is in favor of maintaining power or hierarchy in the terms that Robin

uses. He speaks largely of classes of people. It is always the upper class pushing down the lesser classes. In the case of modern America, I would argue that if conservatism is about maintaining power, it is not power for the wealthy elite, but rather power for State Governments. If conservatism is about hierarchy, it is about conserving the hierarchy of a pyramid of power, where the Federal Government is at the top and has the least amount of influence over individuals.

When someone with “traditional” values stands up to oppose the Federal Government, it is now an heroic, religious effort. For many conservatives today, I think it is hard to distinguish the line from where Liberalism ends and where Socialism begins, and the success of Bernie Sanders has only made that problem worse. The blurring of that line only lends its’ hand to conspiracy theories. How much government interference is too much? Where will they ever draw the line? The final straw always comes when religion is attacked. An example of the way many Oklahomans see it today, people are shamed for having anxiety about Muslims over terrorism and the hoopla in the Middle-East, but we should be even more ashamed for thinking that it is okay to have prayer in school; it is one-sided and against us. Suddenly Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity & Rush Limbaugh’s conspiracy theories don’t always seem so far-fetched. If the government can seemingly attack you for your religious beliefs, which already feels like a violation of the First Amendment, then what is to stop them from attacking any of your other rights? Where does it all stop?

These government assaults interfere with the way people live their lives and it causes instability. It disrupts the order of things, and that rarely causes damage to wealthy Americans or to a non-existing lordship. Rather, it hurts the people at the bottom of the chain who not only want stability because they like their way of life, but also need that stability in order to stay

afloat. For those people, who have no political voice and come from states that don't matter, the best thing that they can do is try to send in a wrecking ball to disrupt the system.

Post-Election Reflection

Over the past few days, I have seen "end of the country/world" feelings and statements on CNN, MSNBC, and my phone's news feed. There have also been riots and protests across the country, with the first ones I heard about being at UCLA and then later in almost every major city in the US. That is exactly how we felt about Obama getting elected eight years ago. Suddenly the country was doomed, our guns were going to go away, he was a Kenyan Muslim who usurped the Presidency with his anti-military and communist ways, and our country's moral fiber would rot away, all of which became the Gospel of the Tea Party. Now the shoe is on the other foot; Trump, especially because he did not get the popular vote, is seen as an illegitimate, racist monster that has, seemingly, caused most women and people of color across the country to fear for their rights and jobs, he'll start World War III, and he too will destroy our moral values. I could be wrong on this, but I think that many of the protesters, especially the young ones, are from Bernie Sanders' base group. I would guess that his Democratic-Socialist movement will grow and become the far-out group that starts dominating the Democratic Party, just like the Tea Party did to the Republican Party back around 2010. My wishful hope is that my compatriots will have their tempers settled by Trump's election, and that maybe both sides can learn from the Obama and Trump Administrations in order to understand the sentiments on both sides and understand how both sides feel. Then maybe we can start electing more moderate people, like John Kasich and Jim Webb, who can find reasonable commonality on both sides and make government work. Maybe now each side knows the feeling of fear and sheer terror about their

rights and their future. Whether its urban minorities or rednecks, we both know the feeling of our worst political nightmare coming true.

In the coming years as the Democratic Party rethinks its' strategy and begins the hard work of trying to regain seats in Congress at both the State and Federal levels, regain Governorships, and eventually regain the White House, there will surely be efforts to sway members of the "working, white males" who voted Trump into office. My only request is that in your effort to redeem the Proletariat, don't forget the Peasants.