

## PROGRESSIVE REFORM AND THE CLINTON MOMENT

*The following is an edited transcript of a roundtable discussion held at the Institute for Policy Studies, June 1993. Roger Wilkins chaired the discussion, with Heather Booth, Stan Greenberg, Saul Landau, and Joel Rogers. Forthcoming in Richard Caplan and John Feffer, *State of the Union* (Boulder: Westview, 1993).*

**Wilkins:** We are going to talk today about the challenge of inserting progressive ideas into the U.S. policymaking process. I'd like to start by asking each of you what opportunities you see for progressive reform at the end of the Cold War and at the end of the Reagan-Bush era? And what are the prospects for progressive reform — in foreign policy, economic policy, health-care policy, etc. — under the Clinton administration?

**Booth:** There is opportunity now for progressive reform in all those areas because there is pent-up demand for reform. For most of the past twenty years progressive forces have been on the defensive, fighting largely to stop something bad from happening rather than promoting a vision of something good. We have had to concentrate on keeping bad justices off the Supreme Court rather than expand the notion of what justice is. We have had to focus on countering bad environmental regulations rather than develop the notion of an integrated, global, healthy environment. And we have had to resist growing inequality in the nation rather than conceptualize the kind of society that would bring healthy children into the world.

So there is now a new opening for change, but we have to learn or relearn how to engage a Democratic administration in order to achieve it. We need to engage this administration on the inside and mobilize on the outside to support and create the changes we hope to see.

**Wilkins:** Are we in fact beginning to see meaningful change?

**Booth:** We see a certain change in direction — movement forward instead of backward. We've gone from a government that considered ketchup a vegetable to one that makes childhood immunization, health care, and Head Start top priorities. We've gone from a president who skipped the Rio Earth Summit to one who signed the Rio Declaration, and from a vice-president who probably never read a book on the environment to one who wrote a landmark book on the subject. We've gone from a president who promoted so-called constructive engagement with South Africa to one who gave Nelson Mandela an award on the Fourth of July. We have a nominee for chairman of the National Labor Relations Board who has written about why unions are good, instead of a president who fires PATCO air-traffic controllers in an effort to bust unions.

For the first time in a generation we have seen taxes shifted to the wealthy — over the enormous protests of Wall Street. We have family and medical leave, motor-voter registration, and repeal of the gag rule that inhibited the exercise of a woman's right to choice. We have gone from the politics of Lee Atwater, former chairman of the

Republican National Committee, to those of David Wilhelm, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who worked for a citizen organization and wants to build a grassroots party.

These are only first steps, however, not the ultimate reform we need to win. Still, after more than a decade, the direction of change is very definitely forward.

**Rogers:** I see some of the opportunities Heather does, but not all. Maybe this is because we disagree about the nature of the Clinton administration, maybe because we disagree about what it will take to realize those opportunities. For the past twelve years the White House has been occupied by people who were true social reactionaries, in a deep and morally appalling sense. The Clinton people are clearly not that. They are going to be infinitely better on all sorts of social issues, and that's not trivial. But they are not going to contest corporate power in this country in any significant way, and unless you're prepared to do that most of the great opportunities of this moment will be lost.

Maybe the term "progressive" is hanging us up here. As Heather pointed out, the left has been in opposition and on the defensive for a very long time. Looking for any allies it could find in struggles against the truly horrible, during this period the left didn't feel much need to distinguish itself from corporate liberals — a term that I think better describes the Clintonians. Now there is that need.

**Wilkins:** I'd like to ask you to make that distinction between progressives and corporate liberals a little clearer.

**Rogers:** I take a progressive to be someone who actually believes in democracy, including the belief that people of ordinary means and intelligence, if properly organized, can run the country themselves. I take a liberal to be someone who shares some of the same egalitarian democratic convictions that mark progressives but who has much less confidence in the capacities of ordinary people. Liberals basically aspire more to the "kinder, gentler" administration of such people than to their organized empowerment. They are generally not, for example, big fans of trade unions, and worry about the lack of cosmopolitanism of these and other popular organizations.

Because liberals don't encourage or rely on popular organization, and because such organization is the only counterweight to corporate power, liberals cannot do much heavy lifting against corporations. And that severely limits what they can deliver by way of public policy.

I think that's especially true now, in this age of famously hard choices. Maybe thirty years ago — given the U.S. military position in the world, the strength of the U.S. economy, the character of popular expectations of racial and gender justice or about the environment — you could say that things would work out fine without limiting corporate power. Not

for those on the receiving end of U.S. military force, of course, or for those at home whom our politics has always tended to forget, but at least for the bulk of the dwindling voting population. You can't say that anymore, though. How are you going to defend domestic living standards, reduce inequality, make jobs safe for families, move on the legacy of 400 years of racism, keep our inner cities from turning into charnel houses, or green our economy, let alone address worldwide inequalities and environmental disasters, without putting some serious constraints on capital? You can't. But this is just what corporate liberals are unwilling and unable to do.

**Wilkins:** What sorts of measures are you referring to?

**Rogers:** To give you an example, we need some sort of credible labor-market intervention to raise wage floors — to close off the low-wage option on industrial restructuring that most U.S. firms are taking at present. As we all know, there has been an effective internationalization of large portions of the U.S. economy over the past twenty years, and that internationalization is troubling for wages and living standards here because the world is densely populated by firms paying a fraction of our wages. Unless you have some strategy for levelling-up those wages or protecting our economy from them, then what you're buying into is downward pressure. Firms will continue to find it profitable simply to sweat labor, inequality will increase, you'll get a sort of "Brazilianization" effect in the U.S. with some people doing fine and a much larger number doing much much worse than even at present.

If domestic labor market regulation would be a first step in preventing this, then, it also needs to be accompanied by a change in international trading rules. We need an international trade regime that does not, like the present one, punish countries for paying their workers a decent wage and for providing safe conditions of work. We need a regime that will permit (even encourage) trade, including trade with less developed nations, but that uses trade to promote a race to the top on worldwide living standards rather than the current race to the bottom. A "social tariff" regime that incorporates illegitimate producer cost advantages (like those derived from bashing labor or wrecking the environment) into consumer prices might be one way to do this.

To get a social base for these sorts of interventions, however, we need to give people the basic tools they require to practice democracy in the late twentieth century — organizing rights, access, information, means of communicating, and control over resources, starting with those they already purportedly own (public lands, airwaves, private pensions). And we need to encourage a variety of on-the-ground organizations — again, those of a reinvented labor movement come immediately to mind — that can help manage and improve the economy, provide political ballast for egalitarian values, and add competence and flexibility to the bureaucratic state.

All these moves I take to be pretty basic. But any of them would be vigorously resisted

by capital, as are their palest foreshadowings. Consider recent discussions of the minimum wage, the investment stimulus, NAFTA, campaign-finance reform, public lands use, and labor law reform. And this is why Clinton won't do the right thing on them, even when he more or less occasionally would like to. Clinton's problem is that he's got nothing on his left, so every time the right sneezes he's blown across the political spectrum. He can't do the heavy lifting against corporations that is now required.

**Wilkins:** How does that characterization of the problem strike you, Stan?

**Greenberg:** I don't think we have the context right here — that is, I think we have to put the problem in the context of the political change that has taken place recently. Now, we may have different views of what happened in 1992 but I think that virtually all of our prior political history was shattered in '92. There was not a realignment; there was no new Democratic majority or new progressive majority that emerged victorious. What happened in '92 is that the traditional political coalitions and visions that people have associated with the major parties were shattered.

There was a great Democratic era, basically a three-decade period from the Great Depression to Lyndon Johnson, in which the Democrats forged a notion of opportunity, an expanding governmental role, and a bottom-up coalition [please clarify] that was essentially over by 1964. The Great Society represented a failed attempt to renew that Democratic vision and there really has been no dominant vision since. Voters, particularly middle-class voters, suburban voters, who had to identify with that vision if it was going to have any durability, walked away in the period after 1964. And Democrats until '92, and maybe not even in '92, have not found a way of addressing those voters.

A similar fate befell the Republicans. You had a great Republican era from 1896 until the Coolidge presidency and the Great Depression — again, a three-decade period in which a business-led prosperity permitted a Republican ascendancy and a vision of a role for corporate American in assuring America's prosperity. Reagan represented a failed attempt to renew that vision — to once again give America a notion of a business-led prosperity. Maybe it had a couple of years of life to it but basically from '86 onward it was collapsing and, in '92, it was rejected boldly.

We are living in a political moment, then, in which all the major party alignments and major intellectual models have been repudiated. When we think about what role progressives, or what role Clinton, therefore, we should think about it in that context. In other words, you can't judge Clinton simply on his various specifics, on what he's done so far. Progressives have got to decide whether there is a vision represented by the Clinton presidency that they wish to shape or whether instead there is some alternative vision they wish to create. And in my mind Clinton's presidency represents a potentially new vision that centers around raising the living standards of middle-class America, the expansion of personal freedom, and a larger, more credible role for government,

particularly in the provision of health-care but other social-welfare services as well.

Progressives have got to decide whether that is a vision they're comfortable with and, just as important, whether they can make it work for them. What is the meaning of a middle-class centered Democratic party or Clinton coalition? Is it a bottom-up vision in which work values infuse it? Does reinventing government mean cutting waste and inefficiency and creating greater choice, or does it include a more activist role for government that ensures that there are healthy children and universal health-care services?

**Rogers:** I agree that after 1992 it's hard to tell many Democrats apart from Republicans. But I see that as part of the problem. At their leadership level, both the Democratic and Republican parties are almost wholly business-dominated. Both worship, pretty mindlessly, the gods of growth, consumerism, and free trade without attending to the kind of economy we really want or the sorts of public goods and nonmaterial things, relevant to the general welfare, that are needed. Neither party is particularly concerned about inequality. Both are pretty aggressive in their view on the appropriate role of U.S. force abroad. Neither is committed to popular organization — again, look at how little either party is willing to do for unions.

There is this business of activism, of course, but as Reagan's activism of the 1980s should remind us, it's the direction of activism that counts. Clinton has actively caved into Wall Street on his investment plan, to insurance companies on his health-care plan, to fat cats on campaign finance, to ranchers on land use, and, shamelessly, to his own shadow on Guinier. Now he's active in promoting a restrictive fiscal policy and NAFTA. Should we be excited about that?

Look at the core of Clinton's vision of how to achieve middle-class prosperity. The Clinton economic plan was not intended to regulate labor markets or trade directly but instead to invest in physical infrastructure and human capital. The hope was that roving multinationals might then be attracted to our shores and give us some of their better jobs. Now, after the deficit cave-in to Wall Street, this vision lacks even its core premise of government investment in infrastructural renewal and massive training. Instead it relies almost entirely on the idea that global competitive pressures will somehow force generalized private investment in more productive and better-compensated labor, thus benefitting general well-being. There is absolutely no evidence for this proposition, and overwhelming evidence for its opposite. I'm underwhelmed by this as good economics or good politics. If you want this economy to work again, you've got to get it under stronger, not weaker, social control. And you can't do that without using the state to set some limits on what is economically permitted, and encouraging popular organization as a middle path between government and corporate administration of the economy. This Clinton is not prepared to do.

**Booth:** You suggest a middle path between state bureaucracies, on the one hand, and

untutored markets, on the other. But we have to break through these dichotomies — to find ways of putting people back in control of government. Unless this is done, people won't have confidence that government can work in their interests and serve as a tool to bring about change. And unless progressives engage themselves, reform won't succeed because the forces of opposition are so great. The Clinton administration can't do it on its own. Without pressure from the street, there will not be demand for change.

Take health care. It is now on the national agenda primarily because of the actions people have taken around the country for four, five years and more and because President Clinton decided to engage this issue. It is now likely to be the single boldest new social policy introduced since the War on Poverty if not since the New Deal. But it will only be won if we all engage the struggle. And it is clear that there will and must be a struggle. This president received only a plurality, not a majority, of the vote, and while there is a nominal Democratic majority in Congress, on many of the issues that matter we do not have solid support.

**Rogers:** Okay, we both think the Clinton people can't do it on their own. I would say they need something on their left, independent of them but not determinedly unfriendly, to hold them accountable to some values they claim to share while providing critical support against the right. That's an appropriate role for progressives to play. At the moment, however, they're not doing that. They're so entranced by having a Democrat in the White House, and so worried about advantaging the right through any criticism of Clinton, that they're not doing that which would actually make having a Democrat in the White House really mean something.

**Greenberg:** Our problem here, in both analyses, is taking too seriously what's happening in the early moments of the administration. What's important is the political purpose of the administration because I think Bill Clinton is quite inventive and creative about achieving his goals. If you build a bottom-up coalition — which is what Bill Clinton forged both in the primary and in the general election, in contrast to a Democratic coalition, which had a suburban-elitist character to it — and if that coalition has, as this one does, a political purpose whose goal is rising living standards for middle-class America, you create a pressure within the administration, within Bill Clinton, for policies that work to achieve that end. The goals, in other words, become overriding. So we can analyze the specific policies of the administration's early moments in office; that's not uninteresting. But what's more interesting is how you create the pressures necessary to achieve policy goals over a four-year, eight-year or longer period.

**Wilkins:** There are two things that are not in this conversation that make it very unreal to me. The first is money. Can the goals, as articulated by any one of the three of you, be achieved as long as American politics is funded the way that it is?

**Booth:** No. Bennett Johnson [Dem.-LA], for example, now votes as if he were put in

office by the oil companies, when in fact he was elected by working and poor people who were repelled by David Duke. Clinton is sensitive to this problem, and the administration has taken a bold step toward campaign-finance reform. The administration's original proposal called for limiting campaign spending, curbing special-interest funding, ensuring all candidates greater access to television, and giving some real power to the Federal Elections Commission. The Democratic Party's support of these efforts, moreover, includes a willingness to sacrifice a third of its income, which comes from soft-money sources — contributions for so-called party-building activities that are exempt from the usual ceilings — to get the influence of big money out of the political process.

**Greenberg:** This, by the way, is where the president has been very clear. He has said that we will not be able to achieve critical reforms — health-care reform, for instance — if the special interests can organize themselves to finance campaigns and prevent one or another initiative from being adopted by Congress. And I think that what the president has proposed goes to the limits of what can be done in the current context, though many of us might want to see the reforms go further.

**Rogers:** I actually think he's gone nowhere near the limits of what might be done, if you're willing to get outside the Beltway. There is hunger out there for process reform, including campaign-finance reform, much more adventurous than what Clinton has produced or even proposed. That's a big part of the attraction for Perot — big enough, indeed, that I was surprised Clinton didn't exploit the reform question for tactical reasons, even if he wasn't led to it by moral ones. A lot of people out there, especially but not only the Perot people, think government is really corrupt. A "clean up government" campaign could be very helpful to Clinton politically. Indeed, he could blame all his current misfortunes — not entirely inaccurately — on current corruptions, if by "corruption" you mean something broader than bribes and more like the dissolution of democracy.

**Greenberg:** That could end up being counterproductive. If you persuade people that Washington is a fully corrupt set of institutions answerable only to special interests, you may mobilize support for throwing the rascals out but you may also create such disdain for government that people lose faith in the capacity of these institutions to effect needed policy changes and in the utility of their own collective efforts. This is a delicate question, because meaningful change requires popular mobilization, and that mobilization is not possible unless you get the citizenry to the point where it believes that public institutions have the capacity to make life better.

**Booth:** You once used a figure, Stan, that I found very powerful. You said that only 23 percent of the population now believes that government will work in their interest most of the time, whereas when Kennedy was president, that figure was 75 percent.

**Rogers:** I agree that lack of confidence in government is a huge obstacle to progressive reform, though citing that as a reason not to do something about campaign finance — one of the principal reasons for diminished confidence — strikes me as specious. Of course, in playing to popular concerns about government one has to be careful, but that's not a reason not to campaign for cleaning up Washington — as indeed you do already with all this reinventing government stuff. The more important issue, I think, is this: Progressives are identified with the state, since they've so often looked to the state as against other governance mechanisms to solve problems. And now that people suspect the state, progressives are hurt by association.

What to do? Well, we need to take the idea of reinventing government beyond privatizing garbage collection in Little Rock. We need to think about handing over more government functions to other sorts of democratic, popular organizations. For example, assign more power to community organizations in housing and economic development, to labor and business organizations in training, and so on. At the same time, because lots of organic solidarities and associations no longer exist, we need to explicitly nurture the associative supports needed for a working democracy. You can't run this economy anymore by simply calling out macro-economic aggregates. You need something more nimble, in the field, to get desired results. Often that can't be government, but it could be popular organization. Government should encourage organization of the right kind.

**Greenberg:** It's very hard to respond to the challenge you raise. There are forces at work that have led to a decline of organizational life in this country, and that decline certainly needs to be reversed. But we face, this year, a situation where you have a president who has come from the center-left, who has taken over a government that is bankrupt financially and is also seen to be bankrupt in the sense that it's thought to be run by people who are crooks. In the midst of this the administration is trying to introduce national health insurance, achieve a redistribution of wealth through a fairer tax system, impose fiscal order and implement a range of other policies that are going to be fought, at least in their first round, in the next few months.

**Rogers:** Stan, you were criticizing everyone earlier for focusing too much on the short term. Remember, you wanted us to engage the broader vision, not the early record of achievement. Now you're telling us to focus on yesterday's poll and the next three months. Which is it?

**Booth:** But that was in terms of making a final judgment.

**Greenberg:** I'll take Heather's support on this. The question of when we draw our judgments as to the success of this administration or whether it's in fact progressive seems to me a different question from the one under discussion now. People are feeling extraordinary pressures because of a national health-care crisis and a jobs crisis. These are issues that progressives have sought to put on the agenda for decades and have failed



to find a president who would advance them, from Roosevelt to Truman to Johnson. Now the opportunity presents itself and progressives have to figure out how to engage that debate, which is not to say that they should not also deal with the longer-term challenge to strengthen and build organizational life that can support this movement.

**Rogers:** Fine. I think progressives need to forsake their factional differences, come together around a few key issues — the forgotten peace dividend, genuine democratic reform, progressive economic policies (closing the low-wage option at home, changing the international rules on trade) — and declare their independence of the administration even as they provide it with selective support against the right. At the moment I think progressives are all-too-compromised organizationally by the mere fact of a Democratic administration. They are not speaking up, and their values are going to get slaughtered if they don't. I believe, moreover, that it's possible to provide critical support in a way that will not advantage the right, if progressives unite behind programs of broad economic appeal to the poor and working class.

**Wilkins:** I said earlier that there were two things about this conversation that made it seem unreal to me. The first was money. The second is race. It's a factor in American politics. It's a profound factor in American culture. It's a factor in Bill Clinton's reformation of the Democratic Party. And even when it's not in everybody's political conversation, it's usually on everybody's minds. How does race figure in the Clinton moment? What does it mean for the goals we are talking about here?

**Greenberg:** Let me speak to what I believe are the broad purposes of the Clinton political moment, which are also reflected in the administration. First, Clinton forged a multiracial coalition from the bottom-up in the primaries. He won 70 percent of the vote in the primaries, and obviously won overwhelmingly in the general election. He did it not with specific appeals but with a universal approach, which was to promote employment and income growth and social-welfare policies like health care that would be broadly available. The implicit argument was that the black community would be better served by a governing Democratic coalition that expanded services on a universal basis as opposed to a Democratic Party that's out of office and unable to deliver except in a symbolic way to its constituent groups.

Another thing: Clinton has been very conscious about the staffing of the administration as a diverse presidency. And against the tenor of criticism, which has been very sharp, on the effect of diversity on achieving his other goals, I think Clinton has stuck with that goal in impressive ways. This explains, in part, the broad support he enjoys in the African-American community now. There is also very broad support for his health-care policies and other policies that are seen, correctly, to be of benefit to the minority community. And this approach, let me say again, is better than a politics that is dominated by civil rights discussion, where you are talking about specific remedies for targeted groups. It doesn't mean those remedies aren't applied, and aren't applied with

vigor, but this is a different kind of discourse, which progressives need to address.

**Rogers:** I'll let Stan try to handle, and defend, what Clinton has done on race and race symbols. If I might, though, I'd like to say something about how progressive multi-racial politics has been complicated by what's happening inside the black community itself. The previous generation of African-Americans saw major changes in its lives and in its lifetime in part because of progress made in civil rights. As a consequence you have a much more fractured African-American community — fractured spatially, with blacks no longer living exclusively in racially defined areas; fractured in terms of class, because with new opportunities has come greater class stratification; and increasingly fractured by ethnic and cultural divisions within what only white progressives casually lump together as undifferentiated "people of color."

Under these conditions you get three very different impulses. One is a simple continuation of the civil rights strategy, but its very success tends to undermine its advance as a unifying theme, and it doesn't get at the class issues that that success has made more prominent. Another is toward a more or less nationalist, exclusivist politics, particularly among those who didn't reap the benefits of civil rights. This has a much deeper cultural appeal, but under current electoral rules, given the numbers and the class, spatial, and other fractioning just mentioned, it's ultimately a dead end as a viable politics. A third is some sort of race-conscious class strategy, directed toward broad economic benefit but insistent on the core prominence of racism in disabling the American working class from getting that. I think that this last approach is structurally most promising in the long run, and given the decline in white working class fortunes actually increasingly possible. But at present it doesn't have anywhere near the organizational bases and leadership of the other two.

**Wilkins:** I would say you answered my question exactly upside down because you went immediately to what is going on in the black communities. I don't think that's the issue about race. I think it's what's in white peoples' heads. If you're talking about race and you don't talk about what's in white peoples' heads, you are not talking reality. The reason we've never had a successful lower-class, class-based politics is the racism of white people. I don't think that has changed. And therefore I don't see this oppositional force to a corporate-based politics going very far.

**Booth:** But because circumstances have changed, so has the challenge. My involvement in politics began with the struggle for equal access in the early 1960s, when Woolworth wouldn't seat blacks at its lunch counters in the South. Since that time, with much sweat and even sacrifice of lives, the problem of equal access in many areas has opened up. Not in all areas, of course, such as banking practices, but in many. Now the problem is that a person can sit at the counter but cannot necessarily afford to eat; the problem is economic as well as racial. What compounds this problem is that the previous administration gave a wink and a nod, and sometimes even overt encouragement, to

efforts to sow racial division. Not surprisingly this has led to greater inequality. We're now just at the beginning of a new experiment to overcome the long legacy of racial division and inequality. The cues from leadership do matter here — as with the formation of a government that looks like America — as well as the substance of policy.

**Landau:** When President Clinton nominated a woman who I think was the first person I've ever seen begin to address the race and the class question together from a legal framework — the Voting Rights Act — she was not only abandoned; she was stabbed in the back. Whereas when President Bush nominated a candidate to the Supreme Court who was black, he backed that candidate to the hilt. Not only did Clarence Thomas have hand-holders and p.r. flacks, but Bush did advance work with the Senate, issued threats if people voted against him, and so on to make sure that his candidate got on the Supreme Court.

I don't think it's accidental, given Lani Guinier's opinions — on democracy; representation; voting; and access to wealth and power and to the resources that historically have built this country — that she was the one they wouldn't go to bat for. She terrified the liberals. And the reason, fundamentally, is because the Democratic Party is not really a party; it's a money-laundering operation. Otherwise I don't see how they can contain segregationists and integrationists, tenants and landlords, bosses and workers, and polluters and environmentalists, all in the same thing called a political party.

**Greenberg:** Are you saying the potential base of the Democratic Party is comfortable with the ideas of Lani Guinier? The reality is that if the Democratic coalition began with that assumption — and I recognize that we're dealing with perhaps a distorted notion of Lani Guinier's views but let's take the distortion of her views because it became the conventional wisdom — if that is the assumption behind progressive politics, then it does not understand the potential base for a governing coalition.

**Rogers:** Stan, the Clinton administration permitted, and then encouraged, the distortion you speak of, so I don't favor taking the fact of distortion as a premise in a defense of the administration's strategy. This aside, much of what Saul is saying is exactly what you were saying and Heather was saying and I was saying. Among the points of agreement I thought we had earlier was that the Democratic Party as it is currently constituted is really not much of a party. It's just a campaign machine for candidates. It doesn't show much discipline of its elites or linkage between them and its voting base. Without that internal discipline and connection to a base you're prepared to put in motion, it's hard to do much.

**Greenberg:** What I'm saying is that Clinton was able to resolve the potential conflicts within a majority, bottom-up coalition by working from the presumption of support for civil rights, personal freedoms, and so forth and moving to a position that transcended

these issues and sought to bring together diverse groups in a coalition that's trying to achieve rising living standards and not to center our politics around targeting benefits for specific groups. That I believe was what made it possible for Bill Clinton to win, and makes it possible to move to a broad, multiracial coalition. What Clinton was very clear about when he withdrew Guinier's nomination was that on some points, she was outside that presumption.

**Landau:** Well, I think you may be right, that she was outside that presumption, but what are you left with then? You get a party and now a government that works to eliminate discrimination in bank lending, which, don't get me wrong, is not a bad idea. But what it will mean is that a few percent of higher-income African-Americans will be able to get loans. The vast, vast majority of them, however, don't have a penny and couldn't get loans under any circumstances. If you want to pursue progressive politics, you have to pursue a politics that literally talks about the needs of the poor people, the working people, the lower-middle class. If you want to include some environmentalists, some women who have defected from the Republican Party, that's fine, but basically you are talking about minority groups and blue collar workers. That's the base of the Democratic Party.

**Greenberg:** And you want to patronize them with the presumption that you can deliver anything out of this kind of politics?

**Landau:** I'm not going to patronize them at all. I'm suggesting that we say this is what the Democratic Party is about and should be about. And to hell with the Borens, the McCurdys and the rest who stand around saying they're Democrats when in fact they're Republicans. I'm saying that if you want a progressive politics you can't have a coalition with people who are Republicans and who are wearing the Democratic hat.

**Greenberg:** I think the real test is whether the bargain that Clinton has talked about, which is a broad-based coalition and broad-based policies and initiatives, can deliver to the minority communities.

There is sort of a contract here. It says, we're not going to center our politics around targeted benefits; we're going to center it on the assumption that broad-based policies will lift all those in this coalition, from the bottom-up. And you've got an initial down payment on that if you look at the economic program, the budget program. You have the earned income tax credit, which provides for some redistribution within an overall package that is very redistributive. You have health-care initiatives, job training initiatives, college loans — a whole range of policies — and the question is: Are these policies in fact broad-based, are people in the position to take advantage of them, will all those who are part of this coalition benefit? Joel will probably argue that given the world economic forces at work, it will be hard to deliver on that promise.

**Rogers:** Although I think the programs as presently framed are wrongheaded, I agree that, at least in theory, policy could generate a rising tide that really did lift all boats. I also agree that some general measurable benefit — apart from the satisfaction of achieving racial justice — is probably necessary to win political support for targeted programs. But I don't think race and the effects of racism are reducible, analytically or practically, to class. And I don't think the Democratic Party, as presently constituted, is a natural vehicle for the race-conscious class politics necessary to realizing progressive ideals. The Democratic Party will need either to be fundamentally changed, or replaced, as the vehicle for such aspirations. Note though that both tactics (not just the second) recommend formation of an electorally competitive new party. Even those who only want to "reinvent the Democratic Party from within" need a credible threat of exit from it. Otherwise they won't be listened to, no matter how polite they are.

**Greenberg:** It's not a question of just reinventing something from within as if it were a closed system. The whole conception of building an inside-outside strategy — of external mobilization and leadership from above — is what's essential to moving from a period of retrenchment and reaction into a period that is a more progressive era. Every time there has been this kind of social progress it's when there's been mobilization and catalyzation from below, with leadership from above, that either initiated the leadership or responded to it and was forced into that position from the forces from below.

**Booth:** Think about earlier eras of liberal reform, whether it was Kennedy or Johnson. Kennedy came to power with little consciousness of civil rights and human rights issues. It was bold movements from below that forced him to change. But he responded and he and Johnson helped win passage of the civil rights bill. The presidencies that were more troubled — Carter, Ford, and Bush — were the ones where popular mobilization and political leadership were disconnected. Health care provides the next great opportunity in which there must be popular mobilization to counter conservative forces.

**Wilkins:** Stan's analysis of the Clinton campaign I think is accurate as far as it goes, but there's a giant reality problem that it ignores. And the reality problem is that the UN survey of world development this year puts the United States at the top of its list if you just count living standards for American white people. If you factor in black people, we fall to sixth place. And if you look only at black people, we're at thirty-third place, down around Trinidad. So the whole idea of avoiding targeting leaves that third of black Americans who are damaged and distressed exactly where they are and growing in numbers because of these world forces we've been talking about.

The guys at Anacostia cannot compete with children in sweatshops in Bangkok. So a larger and larger segment of the black population has become economically redundant — they are homeless or they're violent, they're tearing the country apart. And we have doubled our prison population in the last twenty years. This is not an attack on the president, but when a large segment of what is passing for new politics says we have to

abjure remedies that are targeted and that our civil rights policies, our racial policies, have to be conducted without divisiveness or conflict, we're talking about something that doesn't exist. We have never made progress in this country on race without conflict. We have never had remedies for black people that weren't controversial and that broad portions of white society didn't try to subvert, starting with the Thirteenth Amendment and going to the Voting Rights Act.

**Greenberg:** But there is a difference between "not targeted" and "not reached." If you look at the past data on when it is that incomes between blacks and whites narrow, it is essentially achieved during periods of fuller employment. So if we want to talk about effective policies to address the problems you're talking about, the most important thing we can do is to devise policies that move America toward full employment, complemented by broad-based training programs and health programs, which make it possible for people to take advantage of those opportunities.

I don't know whether it's going to work. I'm not innocent about the context in which these policies are taking place. There are tremendous pressures here that are producing greater inequality in America and greater inequality between nations against which these policies must try to succeed. I don't know whether these policies will succeed but I suspect they have a better chance of succeeding than targeted policies that don't make economic change the first priority.

And I don't believe that any coalition that separates out African-Americans for targeted systems is going to be in power to achieve those policies. It must find a way of achieving common ground between groups that can form a majority coalition, which takes a five-year plan. I don't think we're going to drive the racism out of peoples' souls but we may make it less important to them relative to other things that they focus on. I do believe that a majority of black and white Americans find themselves hard-pressed financially, unable to keep up with some very basic things like health-care and education, and therefore have a common reason for supporting a new Democratic coalition that offers the possibility of rising living standards. I think that's where you have to start.