

each of these communities, to listen to more conversations and a wider range of people in each location to more thoroughly observe the manner in which the sense of place and the sense of politics interact. I would have been able to watch people live their lives in a manner infused with their rural consciousness, not just convey that perspective through their words. I also would have been able to provide much more detail about the nature of these places. But I balanced the desire to listen to a wide range of conversations with a desire to learn a great deal about each community and opted for many occasional visits to many places rather than extended visits to just a few communities.

Conclusion

The methods I used to do the research for this book are unusual for a scholar of public opinion. I hope this chapter has provided a clear picture of what this approach looked like in practice. And I hope the chapters to come that follow will demonstrate that the time required to take part in these conversations was fruitful for advancing our understanding of how people think about politics, and why we see a strong relationship between rural areas and support for small government and limited redistribution.

CHAPTER THREE

The Contours of Rural Consciousness

In May of 2008, I visited a group of men who gathered in a service station in the morning in a small town in central Wisconsin (Group 1). It had been difficult identifying a group of regulars in this town. After two months of phone tag with the university extension office and the local paper, I started calling members of the county board. Eventually one board member said, "Oh you need to go and talk to the guys at the service station—the 7–8 A.M. group."

And so I did. On a cold May morning, I pulled up to a vintage service station, parked my Jetta in the gravel lot in the row of pickup trucks, and walked inside.

There was a group of four middle-aged and retired men sitting in molded plastic lawn chairs in the front room of the station. The huge plate glass window provided a view of vintage gas pumps no longer in operation and a quaint but mostly boarded-up main street. The men were in jeans, sweatshirts, and baseball caps. On the walls and ledges were potted plants and lots of Milwaukee Brewers baseball memorabilia. A coffeemaker on a shelf on one side of the room seemed to be the lone source of heat.

I could hear the laughter even before I opened the door. When I went inside and quickly explained who I was, they welcomed me in and invited me to use the one empty chair. I was reluctant—it seemed like the kind of place where somebody owns each chair. But I sat down, and I am glad that I did. This group—"The Downtown Athletic Club" as they called themselves—opened my eyes to rural consciousness.

That first morning with them, I passed out my football schedules and

other tokens of gratitude and asked if it was OK to turn on my recorder. They said sure, I pushed the record button, and I bumbled out, "I'm interested—what are the big concerns for people living up here?"

I quickly learned that all four of those men were former public school teachers. One had been a principal. Right away, they voiced concerns about state legislators raiding tax dollars out of the highway fund (they wanted that to stop), the liquor tax (they wanted that higher), the price of gas (they wanted that lower), and the cost of health care (they wanted someone to do something about it). I asked them to dwell on that last one a bit.

KJC: Well that's a good question, what do you do about health care reform, you know? I visited a lot of places last summer and based on what we heard, we asked a question on the telephone poll [of voting-age Wisconsinites that I had been conducting with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center] that basically said, you know, "What should we do about health care?" and gave four options. Let me know if any of these are viable, or some combination of them—we ought to pursue. So one would be to expand the existing programs like Badger Care and Medicare, Medicaid. Another would be to mandate that everyone have health care, and those who can't pay it, then the government pitches in at that point. A third way would be to encourage people to have their own health savings accounts, and the final one would be to have a state-sponsored program, where the state government runs the health care and everybody has coverage that way. What do you think? Any of those options sound—

JOE: Explain the last option. Is that for everyone?

KJC: Yeah, I mean—

JOE: So they'd be in competition with an insurance company?

KJC: That's a great question. I mean, I think initially that's what would happen . . . it's partly what you all think ought to happen . . .

[. . .]¹

GARY: This doesn't really answer your question, but we were just talking about this issue today is that probably one of the biggest values of your insurance plan now is not necessarily the bill they pay, but the way they're able to negotiate the bill down. . . . But the person without that insurance now, they're billed the full amount. . . . I just got new glasses. I went in, and I have had eyeglass coverage in my life, but when I was teaching, WEA Insurance [the teacher's union insurance] always had a discount, so you

might get 30 percent off or something like that, and we always kind of appreciated that. . . .

LOU: Your fourth choice makes sense in some ways, but there's—if the state of Wisconsin was to insure everybody, you'd have a large, large pool. However, when I retired and I looked at insurances, the state of Wisconsin medical plan was three to four hundred dollars more than WEA. Now the reason for that is they don't have the expertise in that, so if they were to do the whole state they would bid it out to the insurance companies, the lowest bidder, which maybe would drive it down. The insurance company would have to administer it because they wouldn't have the bureaucracy. . . . But if you put everyone in it, maybe it would cheapen because you'd have an entire state. . . .

KJC: Yeah, OK.

JOE: I think the last option with the state-sponsored would be the best option out of all of them. And the one where you would put into a fund wouldn't fly very good because everybody's income is different, umm . . . I don't know what kind of an insurance plan someone could buy for, that's working on an eight- or nine-dollar-an-hour job, you know . . . basically nothing.

To this point, this conversation was not particular to any type of place. But then I heard a theme common in rural communities.

STU: Well, that's where it's affecting a lot of the little guys is with gas and food competing against insurance, and gas and food is going to have to win out because you gotta eat, and you gotta get to work.

JOE [*Joking, mimicking someone critical of driving a long way to work.*]: "You gotta quit driving! Don't drive as much." [*Rolls his eyes.*] You gotta drive twenty miles to work? How you gonna . . . you can't cut it in half!

[. . .]

STU: But [the cost of gas] was a rapid increase, it wasn't a gradual buildup, I mean, it was all of the sudden . . .

GARY: I mean, yeah, in the last ten years, what has it gone up? Eight hundred percent?

LOU: Four years ago it was under two dollars a gallon for gasoline, and look at it now. It's double that price. . . . The government jumped in and subsidized ethanol. It takes five hundred bushels of corn to make thirteen gallons of gas, uh, ethanol gas, so what does that tell you? We're not producing

as much gas, the price goes up. Look what the corn does now to everything else. It's just: one thing drives another.

Few people like rising gas prices, but to people in rural communities—who typically drive long distances to everything—they are a major source of concern. By the time I met this group, I had come to realize that there was something important about the way many people in small communities thought about their towns in relation to more urban places. So I nudged the conversation in that direction:

GARY: The other big issue I think for our whole nation is the discrepancy between . . . oh, the common economics and the CEOs of corporations, where the top of the corporations are taking off profits greater than ever before in history, when the companies may be challenged, or the product line may be challenged. There's still that huge amount of money for the people at the very top. And that's really driving a bigger separation between the richest in America . . . and the common belief is that we're losing the middle class.

KJC: Right. How do you see that in . . . Do you feel like the middle class in [this town] is disappearing?

GARY: Well the business element is—the town is dying. All the small towns in the area are having a hard time keeping grocery stores and gas stations, and everything, because of competition from people buying from the bigger chains, like the Walmart.

[. . .]

KJC: Do you feel like most people around here struggle to make ends meet? Or do people live comfortably?

GARY: The big thing that affects the rural areas in the last fifteen years is the change in the agriculture where you don't have the mom-and-pop farms anymore. They're all corporation farms. Where people used to make their livings on 8–140 acres of land, I mean it's . . . now, eighty acres of land is hobby land, it's not a living. I retired with my farm, and I have seventy-five to eighty cattle. Thirty cows, when I was a kid, could feed a family. Now thirty cows is a big hobby. I mean, the amount of income off of that versus expenses is not very great, so it just changes. Another confusion is if you look at the corn in some years were a \$1.90, now last I bought \$5.50 a bushel. And, uh, during this time of rising corn prices, hogs, sows are now ten cents a pound. And chickens have crashed, and it's kind of confusing for some of those ag products, and raw materials going in are four to five

times more expensive than the actual money available for the end product, which is reduced. And part of the problem with agriculture is we have perishable goods. It's not like a barrel of oil you can let sit there for ten years. The milk has to go, that cheese has to go, pretty much. The livestock has to be slaughtered, has a short lifespan. There's so many things where people can set the process, whether it be gasoline or whatever it is, but farmers are typically—somebody else is setting the price for the farmer.

As the conversation continued, their concerns about their local economy extended past farming to schools and property tax issues.

STU: I think two other major issues: one is schools, and the funding, and the funding coming from the state has dropped off dramatically, and that property taxes have specifically, I would say, the taxes on "rec" land, that would be one issue, as opposed to the taxes on ag land. And ag land, I'm guessing, is about 40 percent of what taxes are on "rec" land. There's too big a discrepancy. It's good for the farmers because they're getting by a lot cheaper, but, you know, the money's got to come from someplace . . . And in an area like this where you have nothing but ag land, basically, you know, they're not paying their fair share, you're short on money. Everybody's short on money, the state cuts back, and that compounds the issue with school. Every area would be different, but that tax issue I think is a big deal.

LOU: The schools, because the state's not living up to the law, what the law says, special education should be funded at 63 percent. When I retired ten years ago, it was down to 38 [percent]. It's probably less than 20 percent today, and that's a high cost. When you take two kids today in special ed, it can cost twenty thousand dollars a year, and you're only getting 20 percent?

GARY: And mandate how you manage that: individual teacher, separate transportation in some cases—all those things they have mandated. The style of education—right now, what are they saying is our shortfall with the budget?

LOU: Six hundred million.

[. . .]

GARY: As far as schools, the whole transition from [former Governor] Tommy Thompson forward was to take a . . . schools weren't handled uniformly, so tech schools versus private schools versus colleges and universities were all handled in different ways, and I know the political motivation of

Thompson when he did that, but it's really created a problem with funding formulas for schools, and we know that many areas in northern Wisconsin and central Wisconsin, there are schools that are going to be forced out of their communities, and the problem with that really in a small town like this is that the only identity this town has any more is the school. The school is the most important business in town, and if the school wasn't here, especially with the higher fuel costs, there's really no reason that all the people who live here would choose to live in a small place because many of them work in Stevens Point or [Wisconsin] Rapids or whatever it is, and . . . it's not the first time in history that small towns have been dried up and blown away, you know, in the boom days of the west, they did that all the time, but it's really going to change the fabric of rural America.²

As they talked, a lightbulb went on for me. People in groups in a variety of places—rural, suburban, urban—had expressed concerns about health care and education. But in this place, their concerns about those issues were rooted in their sense of themselves as members of a rural community. Health care is hard to afford. That's the case for many people in many places. But these folks were telling me that, in rural places, the escalating price of gas was crippling their ability to buy insurance. Why? Because in rural places people drive to work. Far. They drive far to many things, including to the store that provides their daily necessities.

Funding for education was an issue, too. Why? Because rural communities get the short end of the stick, they were saying. The Wisconsin "funding formula" meant that revenues are shared across school districts, but wealthier communities can spend more than the state allocation by using revenues gathered through local property taxes. As the population in rural places dwindles, the possibility of school consolidation increases, and the identity of a town—its schools—dry up and blow away.

In other words, health care and education mattered to folks in a lot of places. But in this community, as in many of the rural communities I visited, people viewed these issues through a rural lens. As I tried to understand why these men felt the way they did about health care and education, it helped to hear these things while looking out that big service station window onto the main street buildings that were now just brittle husks of their once lively past. It helped to know where these people were coming from.

When I turned my recorder off that morning, the conversation con-

tinued. As soon as I got back to my car, I left myself a note on my recorder describing as much as possible of those last comments. This is what I said: "Lou said that 'You know another thing is that they make all the rules in Madison with respect to schools and they don't really apply to us, because you know—because the governor's office and such—if first graders are not learning to read and the parents show up at the school board meeting and you know we fix it, it just doesn't work the same as in Milwaukee. Those rules don't apply here.' And I said in response, 'That's really interesting because you hear a lot of talk about the difference between Milwaukee and Madison and the rest of the state and usually it's in terms of resources, where all the resources get sucked down to that part of the state, but that's not—that's not what you're talking about. You're talking about the rules not necessarily applying in the right way.' And he said, 'Yeah, yeah that's what I mean.'"

"Lou also mentioned: 'Yeah well Madison is the most liberal area of the state.' And then he talked about how in that way things don't apply to other parts of the state as well. 'You know people in that environment make the laws and they don't necessarily—not necessarily what people need or want in other parts of the state.'"

When I got back to Madison and transcribed those notes, I added this: "Just very interesting getting the perspective of people in rural areas—something very important going on there." I wondered whether this rural perspective was unique to this group. They were former educators, and as they had told me, community identity and the schools are closely intertwined. Maybe as teachers they were especially likely to talk about public issues by referring to the place in which they lived.

So I looked back over my transcripts and notes from my other fieldwork sites. I kept doing more fieldwork. I presented my work to groups on my campus and elsewhere in the state and country and found increasing support for this conclusion: For many people in rural communities in Wisconsin, people understand public issues through a lens of rural consciousness. This is a perspective that encompasses a strong identity as a rural resident, resentment toward the cities, and a belief that rural communities are not given their fair share of resources or respect.

The next time I went back to this group, three years later in May of 2011, I brought this perspective up directly in our conversation. One man asked me, "What are the issues in other communities [that you've been visiting]? You know, we sit here jabbering, what do *they* jabber about?"

KJC: You know, kind of the same things. It's been really eye-opening to me. I mean, growing up in Grafton I always thought of myself as a small-town Wisconsin kid, but then you really spend time in the rest of Wisconsin you realize Grafton is kind of, I mean *this* is small town you know?

[Several voices]: Yeah, the smallest.

[Laughter]

KJC: I mean, the issues are the same, I mean, people wonder where the heck the money is going. They're struggling to make ends meet all over the state. Um, there's a sense that nobody's listening.

LOU: Yeah, I think that, um, I think that is an issue. That seems, bothers a lot of people in this neighborhood, is that people in Madison are just simply not listening to what the people have to say. You can tell your representative and they go down there and vote whatever the party tells 'em to vote, not what you said.

FRED: The state is considered Madison-Milwaukee.

LOU: Right.

FRED: It really is.

I returned one year later, in May of 2012. I spent the night before at a Super 8 Hotel twenty miles away. I drove to the station as the sun came up, and I was looking forward to the conversation, feeling a little bad that I could not bring them donuts because the grocery store near the Super 8 was not open yet.

But when I got there, the gravel lot around the service station was empty. There was no one there. I was stunned. The station was closed, and the owner had taped the following sign to the window:

FIRST I WANT TO SAY I'M SORRY TO ALL
MY CUSTOMERS FOR ABRUPTLY CLOSING
THE SHOP. AN OPPORTUNITY CAME
ALONG FOR ME TO WORK LESS HOURS
DOING WHAT I ENJOY WHILE ACTUALLY
GETTING A REAL PAYCHECK AGAIN. NOT
THAT I DIDN'T ENJOY WORKING, FOR THE
MOST PART, WITH ALL OF YOU. IT HAS
BEEN A STRUGGLE FOR THE PAST FEW
YEARS KEEPING THIS SHOP OPEN WITH
THE POOR ECONOMY AND A SMALL TOWN
WHERE EVERYONE DRIVES 25 MILES TO

WORK, SHOP AND ULTIMATELY GET WORK
DONE ON THEIR VEHICLES. I DID NOT
REGRET MY DECISION BACK IN 1993 TO
COME TO WORK HERE BUT AS TIME WENT
ON, OUR LITTLE VILLAGE KEPT GETTING
SMALLER AND SO DID THE PROFIT MARGIN
IN THE SHOP.

TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE
"DOWNTOWN ATHLETIC CLUB," I HOPE WE
CAN FIND A NEW HOME TO CONTINUE TO
MEET. MAYBE WE CAN MOVE TO [ONE OF THE MEMBERS'
BUSINESSES]. I WILL DONATE EVERYTHING I HAVE LEFT TO
KEEP THE COFFEE GOING IF A NEW
MEETING PLACE IS FOUND.
THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR THE 19 YEARS
I WAS ABLE TO PROVIDE YOU SERVICE.

The service station had closed and the Downtown Athletic Club was without a home. Ironically, by ceasing to exist, the Downtown Athletic Club convinced me that something important *was* going on in rural communities.

Republican and Rural: Not Just a Correlation

Scholars and political pundits have known for decades, over a century even, that there is a correlation between votes and rural-urban location in the United States. But as I puzzled through my field notes and the relevant literature, I realized that scholars knew very little about the way rural-versus-urban divides function *as a perspective* through which some people think about politics.

Since the mid-twentieth century, Wisconsin has looked pretty much like national electoral maps: blue cities and red rural places. In Wisconsin, the Democratic Party's success in the larger cities is due in part to stronger union organizing (Fowler 2008, 184) and the concentration of African Americans in those places. Also, some of the Republicanism in the rural areas may be a holdover from anti-Democratic Party attitudes that rose up during World War I and II. Many Wisconsinites have German relatives somewhere in their family—43 percent of residents

claimed German heritage in 2000 (Fowler 2008, 205). German American voters were strongly isolationist during World War I and II and, therefore, likely to vote against the Democrats, especially in rural areas, where unions had little influence (Fowler 2008).

Rural-urban divides have been an important part of Wisconsin's politics for at least a century. One of our famous quirks is that we were home to both Joe McCarthy and Bob La Follette, two decidedly different characters. McCarthy was the U.S. Senator who is responsible for "McCarthyism"—the post-World War II anticommunist scare that led to the interrogations of many Americans, particularly government employees, people in the entertainment industry, and those involved in labor unions. La Follette, in contrast, is the father of Progressivism. He served in the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate, and was governor of the state in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Some say that rural-urban tensions help explain how both of these folks were successful in the same state. Granted, the fact that La Follette and McCarthy were both from Wisconsin is a little less mysterious when you consider that they both started out as Republicans. Wisconsin was overwhelmingly Republican for much of the first half of the twentieth century (Epstein 1958). But the rural-urban divide helps solve part of the La Follette-McCarthy mystery, too. Both of them tapped into rural consciousness to win votes. When La Follette's Progressivism took hold, Wisconsin was mainly a nonmetropolitan state—as it is now. In that context, skepticism of party organizations among rural residents was a stronger force than was support of political machines among urban residents (Epstein 1958). Some scholars argue that McCarthy won his senate seat by exploiting the skepticism that small-town residents had of globalization and distant institutions.³ Even the breakthrough of the modern Democratic Party—the election of Democrat William Proxmire to the Senate in a special election after McCarthy's death—is commonly understood as the result of Proxmire's successful appeal to "rural discontent" (Fowler 2008, 173). Also, he is the senator who devised the monthly Golden Fleece Award, an award he bestowed on a public official who had made an excessive government expenditure. Although a member of the Democratic Party, the party typically associated with "big government," he was a champion of government frugality.

For some time, then, there has been a correlation in Wisconsin, as in most of the United States, between rural and Republican. But that correlation is not inevitable and is not simply the result of people voting the

same way their parents did. People have perspectives and understandings that make support for Republican candidates seem appropriate and natural.

The conversations among the people in the service station awoke me to one such perspective, the perspective I am calling rural consciousness. Its broad contours had three main elements. First, rural consciousness was about perceptions of power, or who makes decisions and who decides what to even discuss. Second, it showed up with respect to perceptions of values and lifestyles. Third and finally, it involved perceptions of resources or who gets what.

These are the outlines of the rural consciousness I encountered. Every expression of this perspective did not sound exactly the same. As with all identities, people in particular places put their own twist on who they are. In this chapter, I am going to show you in detail what this perspective looked like.

Where Is "Rural" in Wisconsin?

The Downtown Athletic Club met in central Wisconsin, north of the two main metropolitan areas of the state. (You can see what I mean by looking at the map in appendix A.) There is Madison, the state capitol and home to the flagship public university, and there is Milwaukee, the main industrial area of the state. They are both located in the southern part of Wisconsin. The places outside these metro areas are sometimes referred to as "Outstate" or "out-state Wisconsin" (though this name annoys some people who live in those areas of the state) and the northern tier of the state, largely a tourist area, is typically called "up north."

This division of the state into Madison and Milwaukee versus the rest of the state was common knowledge to the people I encountered outside of Madison and Milwaukee. When talking about the big issues of the day, many of the people I visited in small towns automatically referred to this geography. Sometime they did so with reference to highways that split the state into north and south. For example, a group of middle-aged and retired people meeting in a church basement for coffee, in one small, far northwestern community (Group 3) described it to me this way:

MARTHA: We were told many, many years ago that anything north of Highway 8 is all recreational land.

[Groups says "yep" and "yes" in agreement.]

MARK: No! People that are retired and on welfare!

[Laughter]

And in a northern logging community (Group 6), which was not far from that town:

JIM: You get north of Highway 29 and there's, we're in the end of the world.

KJC: That's what a lot of people say, I mean . . .

JIM: Wha—that's the way it is, that's the way it's always been.

CINDY [cashier, chiming in]: And then if you ever live south of there, they're glad it's like this up here.

JIM: Well yeah.

KJC: Yeah.

CINDY: I lived down there for (all my life . . .) [She had explained that her husband was from this northern community, and they had returned to live there together six years ago.]

KJC: Yeah.

JIM: We like our poverty. We enjoy it. Right?

On these mental maps, the places that get attention and resources are in the southcentral and southeast parts of the state.

There are cities in Wisconsin besides Madison and Milwaukee. Those places aren't exactly "rural" communities.⁴ They are residential and commercial centers in their own right. But they are distinctively less urban than the metropolitan centers in the southern part of the state.

The rural consciousness perspective I heard was most common in communities one would readily identify as rural—lots of green space, few stoplights, and far from an urban center. But it also emerged in areas best described as nonmetro: more populous areas but beyond the major metro centers of Madison and Milwaukee. Rural consciousness was a matter of degree. Sometimes, for convenience, I use the term "rural" to refer broadly to all areas outside the two major metro areas in the state.

① Power

The Downtown Athletic Club made me sit up and take notice of the place-based sense of injustice among rural residents, but they were not

the only ones to voice it. I heard it in many of the groups I spent time with outside the Madison and Milwaukee areas. Of the thirty-nine groups I spent time with, twenty-five met in places outside the major metro areas.⁵ Of these twenty-five nonmetro groups, nineteen called themselves "rural people," or people "out here," or "up here."⁶

The rural consciousness perspective I want to show you was more than just identity as a rural person. Besides place identity, it encompassed perceptions of power, values and lifestyles, and resources. So to show you what it looked like, I want to invite you into some of these conversations and explain what these three elements looked like as we go along. When I heard people talking about rural consciousness in these conversations, they were often talking about several of these central elements.

To show you what I mean, a good place to start is the issue that meant so much to the Downtown Athletic Group: education. Their complaint that Wisconsin's funding formula for education unfairly hurt rural communities was a common concern across groups meeting in rural places. For example, on my first visit to the dice game group in central west Wisconsin (Group 11b, May 2007), I started out with my "what are your big concerns here" question:

KJC: Anything—it can be any kind of concerns—I'll ask you more directly about the UW later on. What kind of issues? Partly the reason I want to know is that we do a phone survey at the UW and usually when we decide which topics to—

MARK: One thing we were bitching about yesterday is that you—is the state's penchant for unfunded mandates—what three times, two times they got a referendum in the community that was not wanted. And so now—they keep jamming the cost down to the county so they can avoid spending it on the state's nickel, that has to stop.

ERNIE: Things that are mandated should be paid for.

MARK: Yeah, the tax structure in this state is weird. I think that is a fundamental problem with the state is that they have to reorganize their tax structure. Local schools, local municipalities, and of course the state—what they're doing is they're just redirecting tax burden on the local taxes which ends up being more evident to the locals, so they more complain and then what ends up happening is they say it isn't their fault.

RICHARD: We don't have the economic base here to pay the kind of taxes that comes out of Madison. You know I mean down there if things go up 1 percent it doesn't—but 1 percent means a hell of a lot more here than it

does in Madison or what Henry calls south of the Mason Dixon Line, the line east and west going through Wausau.

DALE: Or Portage [a city about an hour's drive north of Madison].

RICHARD: Well—

MARK: But I mean you know, right down to the tax form or the support form for the schools—why is a kid worth fourteen thousand dollars in Mequon [a suburban Milwaukee city] and what is he up here, Henry? Seven?

HENRY: Oh yeah—the consistency in schools that we're spending money—ridiculous. . . . Why don't they give each school *X* number of dollars per kid? If they want to spend eleven thousand dollars on a kid, tax the school district for the difference.

ERNIE: Have it averaged.

HENRY: Yeah, have it averaged. Everybody gets eight thousand dollars and if you want to spend eleven, tax the local district for it. Comprehensive plan.

MARK: This goes with the schools, in terms of facilities—facilities are gorgeous because they have the money to spend on it.

HENRY: If you take the state of Wisconsin and take a ruler and start at Green Bay and diagonally and just go fifty miles north of Madison, right over to the corner of the state, all your money lies in the south end of the state, your votes weight there. You're never going to get nothing changed to the north.

DAVE: That is absolutely correct.

HENRY: That's it.

MARK: That's not just the schools.

HENRY: We listen to the—being on the school board, we went several times to testify to the legislature to tell you that the formula was wrong, but they don't change it, because we haven't—if anybody on the south end would say change the formula for the schools, they never would get elected another two years and that's why all they are is looking for their own job.

Somebody makes a comment about the University of Wisconsin—Madison, and then Henry offers up his thoughts.

HENRY: And another thing, every time the state has a program, where do they, where do they implement it? Madison, Lake Geneva, in Milwaukee. They give everything to Milwaukee. You know all the programs in education—they want to try a new program, where do they put it? Milwaukee. Dead at the start. Why don't they put it out here where we can do something with it? Dead at the start.

RICHARD: Far as I can—like with—kept their schools up, Milwaukee let theirs

fall down, and then they take our tax money to deal with the schools after we kept ours up. And they let theirs fall down.

HENRY: First of all, they oughta take that formula they give Milwaukee—they give Milwaukee a whole wad of money right off the top first and whatever is left, we divide by the other 425 schools in the state, which is wrong. Let Milwaukee do their own—get their fair—same share as we get, don't give a whole wad of it to them and then turn around and divide the rest among the rest of us.

In this conversation, the men complain about taxes and unfunded mandates—complaints that could come from someone in any type of municipality—but then they talk about this unfairness in terms of geography, namely, that a 1 percent tax increase “means a hell of a lot more here” than it does in the metro areas. They perceive that the decision making or the exercise of power in the major cities victimizes people in small towns by giving them less than their fair share of resources. In their eyes, decisions about funding for schools mean that small communities are the victims of distributive injustice.

Across the state, in a north-central tourist town, I asked a group of people at a diner counter early in the morning (Group 9, June 2007) if they “feel like you're paying your fair share up here? Or heck no?”

NELSON: Well we'd like to keep more of our money for our school districts up here instead of sending it down below.

HELLEN [*The only other woman at the counter at that moment who is somewhat a little apologetic that she is about to leave me alone with them*]: I'm going to leave you with them.

KJC: Nice to meet you.

HELLEN: Good luck with these guys.

KJC: Oh thank you. So I'm sorry [to interrupt]—the schools. . . .

NELSON: They're taking so much of our money away from us. Want to close our schools and that sort of stuff, and the schools in Milwaukee and Madison and everyplace south of us, they've got all the foreign languages and everything else, and they got their curriculum is so much better than what we can give—because the fact that the state is not allowing us to have our money to educate our kids the way we should.

TREVOR: Talking about state schools? I thought that money came from here.

NELSON: Yeah—all of our money goes to Madison gets distributed back down to us.

KJC: A chunk of it—I don't know what percent but a good chunk of it.

NELSON: Yeah—the bureaucracy gets bigger and bigger. Their secretaries have to have secretaries . . .

PETE: Gotta figure with all the out-of-staters here, pay a lot of taxes.

NELSON: Oh sure—exactly true. People come up here to retire, the taxes eat 'em up. They have to move off [the lakes], but that's been their dream to get up here.

KJC: Oh no kidding.

NELSON: You know, as far as I'm concerned, I pay it, I don't protest, but I would like it if the city, the state would get fairer with the money. Why can't we have a foreign languages and that sort of stuff? Prepare for life after high school. They [kids from our community] get down to the colleges [which are almost all located south of this town], they are behind. . . .

Conversations about school funding often echoed the view that the rural areas were not getting their fair share. In such comments, people conveyed their identity as rural folks as well as their sense of injustice over the distribution of power and resources. I heard the claim that people in rural communities are helpless to change these funding formulas because no one downstate is listening to their concerns. They perceived that politicians and government in general are tone deaf to people outside the major cities.

Resentment about a lack of power compared to city people came through on many topics besides education. A group of people meeting in a gas station in a gorgeous hamlet on the Wisconsin River in southwest Wisconsin were very critical of what they saw as the state government's concern for tourists from the major cities and the Chicago area rather than themselves (Group 8). On my first visit, in June 2007:

GLENN: Just like everything else in Wisconsin, the most important thing to politicians in Wisconsin and in the state government is getting the tourists in here and the people out of Illinois. . . . You go to a boat landing around here and hell you can't unload your boat because there will be a dozen Illinois people there and they are top priority to the state and anybody with a supposed tourist label on 'em.

LARRY: Be there with their canoes, bring their food with 'em, their water, all they leave on the sand bars is shit.

[Laughter]

Four years later, their animosity toward the state government's neglect of their community's concerns came out as a complaint against unfunded mandates (Group 8, April 2011).

GEORGE: And where I see a lot of wasted money is garbage that I receive in the mail that doesn't have . . . I've been on the town board for about thirty-five years already . . .

KJC: Oh bless your heart.

GEORGE: And all the garbage I get, mail that doesn't even have anything to do with this area here whatsoever.

KJC: Huh. What kind of stuff?

GEORGE: Oh, from the state. Mandating everything, you know, do this, do that and our township doesn't have any curbs and gutters, there's so much stuff that the rural area doesn't even have that, you know, people in Milwaukee and Madison think, you know, that it's a big deal, but out here it's nothing.

As far as this group was concerned, city folks sent little to their community but junk mail and poop.

Even in a left-leaning group of retired women in an artsy community in northern Wisconsin (Group 2, April 09), many of the members thought government paid no attention to their concerns.

KJC: OK, "How much attention do you feel the government pays to what the people think when it decides what to do? A good deal, some, or not much?"

[Long pause]

SUE: I think they're starting to get, that they're starting to listen with all this mess [the Great Recession].

KJC: Some. Yeah?

SUE: Before this I don't think. . . . I think it's changing.

DOROTHY: I think it's in the Beltway and out the Beltway. I mean Madison might listen to Madison people. Washington, DC, is a country unto itself. I know it; I spent time there. They haven't got a clue what the rest of the nation is up to, they're so absorbed studying their own belly button.

It is not a stretch to say that people in many places—not just rural areas—feel ignored by the government. But the complaints I heard

in rural areas were not simply distrust of government—people in rural areas often perceived that government was *particularly* dismissive of the concerns of people in rural communities. Half of the groups outside the major metro areas expressed that belief.⁷ These attitudes were antigovernment thoughts, but they were rooted in residents' place identities.

Let me show it yet another way. In a logging town in northwestern Wisconsin, during the run-up to the 2008 presidential election, I had this conversation with the two men remaining that morning out of a group that gathers in the back of the grocery store/gas station/liquor store/gift shop/hardware store (Group 6, April 2008):

KJC: Do you . . . what are your hopes for this presidential election? How would you like it to turn out in November?

Both of them laughed in response to the question before answering as follows:

SCOTT: Doesn't make any difference to me . . . Never has. I'm not a big political . . . I can't stand it because I've been around it for thirty-four years. County boards and stuff. I have no use for any of it. I'm sorry, I just—I'm sorry. That may be kind of a horseshit attitude, but I just, I'm sorry, I just don't.

KJC: A lot of people feel that way. The presidential candidates, you know, sometimes Wisconsin—

SCOTT: I can't see the difference it's gonna make up here anyway. We've been in a recession up here for thirty years, forty years. We don't know any different. People talk about recession, you oughta come up here.

KJC: Yeah?

SCOTT: Doesn't get any different.

Scott thought candidates did not care about his community and that his community, his place, had been ignored for decades. This was part of a widespread perception that small towns like his were generally overlooked. A group of women meeting for lunch in a central-west village on the day of the gubernatorial recall election in 2012 felt small communities like theirs had been "hung out to dry" (Group 11C, June 2011). I fumbled around with the question, but they ran with it.

KJC: Who do you think represents your concerns? I mean . . . do you . . . are there . . . does . . . do you feel like your state senator or state assembly person? Do you feel like anybody—

GLADYS: I think we are just hung out there to dry.

DOLORES: Great. I would agree with you. [*chuckles*]

KJC: That was the answer I feared, I mean—

DOLORES: There isn't anyone, I don't think, that really addresses the concerns of the smaller communities.

BEVERLY: No. I don't think so.

GLADYS: And being an agricultural dairy state, I understand that some of these farmers haven't got a lot more or maybe right in the same ballpark that they get for their milk that we got when we were farming twenty-three years ago and look at what else has gone up. The money it costs for the crops to go up . . . Nobody . . . We got the news. OK. "This big building burned in some area." It's all over the news. [But if] some farmer loses his barn, which is probably the same amount of money and the same catastrophe, it barely gets three seconds. It's not good.

Ignored by government and by the news media, these folks felt neglected by the powers that be. One way I noticed this was in the way they reacted to me. Several groups could not quite believe that I had made the effort to come "all the way from Madison" to talk with them. For example, in the town with the dice game in the central-west city, I spent time with a group that met up in the *early*, early morning at a gas station. At the end of my first visit, in May 2007, I had this exchange (Group 11A):

KJC: Nice to meet you. Here's a football schedule for you—would you like one? Football schedule? Good for three years. Convenient, yeah? You're welcome. I would love to come back like January or February to talk to you guys again, could I?

[*"Sure!"*]

MARK: I think we need more input out of Madison in your small areas. Even like your senators, and everything. I mean they've gotta get around to do things like this.

Even higher income people in places outside the Madison and Milwaukee metro areas expressed this kind of surprise. They saw themselves as less important than people in the metro areas in the eyes of

politicians and other decision makers. For example, one group of professionals meeting for coffee every morning in a diner in a central Wisconsin city (Group 16a) said they were surprised that I, a university employee from Madison, was taking the time to drive around the state to listen to people like them: "I think that we are impressed [that you come up here to visit with us]. Because most of us, particularly in a state like Wisconsin where politicians—none of the national ones come and see us—you know we only have ten electoral votes. I mean none of the politicians come to see us at all." The Downtown Athletic Club perceived that the focus of politicians on cities rather than rural areas was a fact of politics nationwide (Group 1, November 2012):

KJC: Well, what's your take on the presidential election?

JOHN: You don't even want to know.

[Fred laughs]

KJC: Yes, I do! Sure I do. I don't want to start any fights. I want to know what you think.

JOHN: I don't know. How's that?

KJC: Oh you, yes you do. Why don't you . . .

JOHN: You had the state of Ohio, what was it? No. Pennsylvania. Where four precincts voted nineteen thousand some odd to nothing. For Obama.⁸ That just doesn't make a lot of sense, does it?

FRED: I didn't hear that story.

KJC: A little fishy. I didn't either.

JOHN: There was like four or so precincts where Romney never got a vote. Not one. You would think that any precinct that there'd be one person contrary to the norm. And at least I would.

MATT: Yeah, makes you wonder there, don't it.

JOHN: But uh no, I don't know. The election? The president knew where to campaign. He campaigned in all the metropolitan areas. The cities and stuff. That's where all the vote was. If you looked at, I go back to Ohio cause that was the swing state they all talked about all the time, and if you look at it on the map, I'm going to say there's sixty-five counties and Romney—so characteristic throughout the whole nation won—the vast majority of territory, he did not win the cities. I mean that's . . . somebody was attacking—

FRED: By square miles he'd have won.

KJC: Here in Wisconsin, too, right?

JOHN: Easily. What the . . . what did they say? All you have to do is win eleven cities and you can win the election?

KJC: Really?

JOHN: Someone was just saying that. The populist . . . the vote is that manner [set up in a way] that if you win eleven cities, you can win the election. I don't know if that's true but. . .

To me, much of what is getting talked about here is power, and that power comes in several layers. The most obvious example of this power is the ability of governments to force rural places to abide by laws they dislike. This is the classic definition of power—the ability of A to get B to do something B otherwise would not do (Dahl 1961). "Unfunded mandates" is one example. But there is another dimension of power getting talked about here, too: control over which concerns even get recognized and discussed (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). I heard people in rural areas say many times that all of the major decisions are made in the urban areas, by urban people, and dictated outward. They complained that authority flowed out from Madison and Milwaukee but never in reverse. They felt that they did not have the power to get people to listen to their concerns.⁹

While the inability to get their concerns heard is a subtle instance of feeling powerless, it is nonetheless important. Power is partly about respect, recognition, and listening. People whose voices are never heard by decision makers have no power. When those in power listen to some group, they convey that they are worthy of attention and, implicitly, that they share their power.

Many of the people I spent time with in rural areas felt like their towns were drying up and blowing away because the spigot of resources had been turned off. In addition, though, there was also a sense that these more subtle forms of power had been denied them as well.

One member of a group of retired and working women meeting for breakfast in a rural, far northern resort community (Group 2) explained:

THERESA: As a former educator, I resented, highly, comments such as, "There is no education north of Highway 8 [a U.S. highway that runs East-West across the middle of the state.] These kids aren't—" and we send them such absolutely excellent and well-prepared students there that they—the attitude that the hick area of the state—was painful.

KJC: So who did you get that from? Recruiters?

THERESA: Professors.

KJC: Really? When they would visit?

THERESA: Yeah, or publish in newspaper articles or other, you know—and that was a little distressful because I think northern Wisconsin feels a little far away from Madison anyway. And we keep waving our hands and saying, “Yoo-hoo, there’s another half of a state up here! Up north is not Wausau [the main city in the central part of the state]!”

This is not just alienation, or a lack of trust, or low efficacy with respect to powerful institutions. These sentiments are tightly bound to a sense of place identity. Simply put, many folks I met in small places identified as rural people and equated membership in that category with being a person who is systematically ignored and left out of the exercise of power.

② Values and Lifestyles

When people talked about public affairs from a rural consciousness perspective they were telling me that city people have a lack of listening skills, exhibit a chronic lack of respect for the rural way of life, and regularly ignore rural communities. Many people talked about this as part and parcel of a fundamental aspect of the rural-versus-urban divide: city people just don’t seem to get it. They don’t understand rural life or pay attention to it.

Part of the reason people in rural areas felt misjudged by urbanites were the widely known stereotypes of rural folks. Many rural residents believed that city dwellers thought they were just “a bunch of rednecks,” for example. A third of groups ($N = 18$) in places with populations under ten thousand assumed that public decision makers in the major metro areas held common negative stereotypes of rural residents, such as “hicks,” “country bumpkins,” “rednecks,” and uneducated folks (Creed and Ching 1997; Jarosz and Lawson 2002).¹⁰ One group that I interviewed even went so far as to call themselves the “Mediocre Redneck Coffee Klatch” (Group 11a).

They were defensive, but they were also proud. And they had their own stereotypes of city folk. Slightly more than a third of these groups ridiculed urbanites’ lack of common sense. Many of them made a point of emphasizing that in contrast to city folk, they understood how to re-

ally hunt and fish and knew what it was like to really interact with nature. Also, many people took enormous pride in using their hands rather than what they saw as what most city folks did for work: sitting behind a desk all day.

This combination of pride in one’s group and sense that their group is deprived relative to other groups is characteristic of group consciousness in general. So notice that although many rural residents resented cities, they did not necessarily want to live in one. Conversations in eleven of the twenty-one groups located in places with populations of less than ten thousand included comments to the effect that, despite the hardships of rural life, they preferred their lifestyles to rootless, fast-paced city living. “Down in the cities, they don’t even know their neighbors most of ’em!” one man exclaimed to me (Group 6). People took pride in the face-to-face nature of their interactions, as opposed to the bureaucracy and technology they perceived to be typical of urban life. For example, one woman in a small town (Group 3) explained to me that, in her community, people do not do inspections when selling a house. “It’s seen as insulting,” she said. “If I give you my word that the house is in good shape, why would you need to inspect it?”

This perception of differing lifestyles for rural and urban residents fed the belief that city dwellers could not make decent decisions on behalf of rural communities. Such concerns were more focused on differences in ways of life and values than on differences in partisanship—that, say, city folks were Democrats and rural folks were Republican. In particular, many rural residents perceived a different pace of life in cities and were downright mad about attempts to appeal to tourists by urbanizing their own towns. For example, in the group of loggers in the northwestern village (Group 6), during my first visit, I asked a general anything-else-I-should-know question, and here’s what the group offered up (June 2007):

KJC: But is there something else I oughta know about—I don’t know—your lives in [this town] or what is going on up here? I know you can learn a whole lot in half an hour, but this is really helpful, actually.

[Long pause]

SAM: Well it’s a lot less rat race than Madison.

KJC: Yeah, really peaceful.

JOHNNY: Yeah it’s nice. I wouldn’t live anywhere else.

KJC: Yeah you want to stay here—I can see that.

SAM: Drives to work, his house within a mile you're in the country—I mean not that [far] even.

KJC: Aw, it's beautiful.

SAM: Yeah, it's a lot less hectic. When you grow up this way. I guess if you grow up in the city, people say they can't stand it here. But if you grow up here—

KJC: Well, I think even city people, when they come up here, it's just like, "Wow it's so relaxing!" or they'll say things like—

SAM: Then they want to change everything. Have you been to Minocqua [a popular northern tourist town]?

KJC: Yeah.

SAM: Or Hayward [another popular northern tourist town]?

KJC: Not in a long time.

SAM: Hayward was like [this town] twenty years ago, and now it's got Walmart.

KJC: Hayward has a Walmart?

SAM: McDonald's, Menards, Subway—you turn around, you make a little Madison. Just strip malls. Downtown turns into antique stores because everything is out at Walmart. Lost all your businesses. Like this was all stores [as he waves his arm at the boarded-up Main Street outside].

A few hours west of that group of loggers, I met up two times in the town hall with a handful of leaders from the local government and the public schools who would turn on the lights and the Mr. Coffee machine and huddle together there every morning (Group 4b). The men resented outsiders' desire to urbanize northern Wisconsin (January 2008).

DEAN: What generally happens is that one or the other likes it here, either the husband likes it here or the wife, and the other just hates it because they want to go downtown every day, and shop. But if they wanna go shopping they have to drive twenty miles. So eventually, we've got like two- or three-million-dollar homes built, and they were there like five years, and one or the other of 'em didn't like it, and they sold out and went back to Florida.

KJC: Wow, did somebody buy that home? I mean, who's gonna? . . .

JACK: Oh yeah.

KJC: Really.

JACK: They had, you know, snowmobiles, all kinds of equipment, fishing rods and boats and all that, but she hated it here. Well, just to be in that party

system in the city, and you come up here in the wintertime, there's nothing. I think that more spread between the very, very wealthy who move up here, and, it seems like to me, what we might call the middle class is shrinking, and the ones on the bottom. I don't have any facts, but that's the way I look at it.

Although most of the commentary about the contrast in urban and rural lifestyles was not overtly political, sometimes people did bring in politics directly. The men who gathered around the Mr. Coffee shared this (Group 4b, June 2008):

FRANK: Well, we're very conservative in the Northwoods and they're very, very, very, very, very, very left in those cities. Just think if Madison and Milwaukee and La Crosse did not vote in an election. What would've happened? I mean our votes mean nothing because of the population and the votes [the large number of votes coming from cities, as opposed to small towns]. That's how I look at it. Same reason [upper] Michigan years ago wanted to leave lower Michigan. Form their own state.

KJC: So you feel like the show is pretty much run by the people—

FRANK: Oh yes, oh yeah. Yeah. We don't have any say.

KJC: So how about with the DNR [state Department of Natural Resources]? When you were working with the DNR?

FRANK [*sarcastically*]: Fine group of men. [*laughs*]

KJC: No, because the reason I ask is because connected with the state government did you feel like in your job you still didn't have much of a say—it was pretty much the folks in Madison telling you what you—

DEAN: You work long enough you have something political—we had decent working conditions—

AL: And that was the end of it. Now the governor appoints all the big shots and they don't know, before a guy had to work from the bottom all the way up and then become the head of the DNR. Now they just pick some guy off the street.

JACK: Oh yeah.

AL: A buddy of the governor and . . . That's the way I think about it. The DNR's changed.

Most of the people in this group were themselves elected officials or vocal commentators on public affairs. Their resentment toward the decisions people made in the cities had a clear partisan tone.

But when people talked about the inability of city dwellers to adequately represent rural concerns, partisanship was not front and center. Even for the group around the Mr. Coffee, they referenced "conservatism" not "Republicanism." There was a sense that urban residents lived differently. They were carving up the world into "us" and "them," but partisanship was not the key divider.

In addition, when they talked as if city people lived by different values, they were not emphasizing abortion, or gay marriage, or the things that are typically pointed to as the cultural issues that divide lower-income whites from the Democratic Party. Instead, the values they talked about were intertwined with economic concerns. When they talked about city folks being unable to understand rural life, those conversations were typically about how they had no understanding of the economic realities of rural life and how hard people had to work to make ends meet in small towns.

Here is one example of rural residents talking about how they struggled harder to get by than did people in cities. This exchange took place among a group of women meeting for lunch in the central-west town where the dice game takes place. They brought up the topic of health care and complained about politicians making choices out of step with ordinary people like themselves (Group IIC, June 2012).

DOLORES: I have this feeling that—I don't know who mentioned this it might have been Bill Cosby—that if all of these senators and congressman and all of these people took a cut in their wages, you know, and their benefits . . . and took the benefits that we have to take—

GLADYS: Yeah!

DOLORES: Live on the kind of salary that we have to live on, you know. They have no idea what small, rural America is like . . . small towns, you know! They couldn't begin to fathom what's it like to live on the incomes that we live on.

KJC: Do you feel that way about the state politicians too?

DOLORES: Up to a point. Yeah. You know, their thing is to win . . .

In a tiny town in the northwestern part of the state I met with a group of people that gathers in the basement of the local church every Tuesday morning: stay-at-home moms and some kids, retirees, and people taking a break from work (Group 3). For a good chunk of time, the first time I

met them, they complained about how disrespectful one of their state legislative representatives was and about how clueless state inspectors are. One example they gave me was the time an inspector checked the temperature of food in a salad bar in a restaurant a few towns over by sticking her thermometer in the ice.

When I asked them what the University of Wisconsin–Madison does not do well, they stated bluntly that people in Madison and Milwaukee have qualitatively different lifestyles than do people in the rural parts of the state.

KJC: What do you think the University of Wisconsin–Madison does not do well? When you think about [it] . . .

MARTHA: Represents our area. I mean we are like, we're strange to Madison. They want us to do everything for Madison's laws and the way they do things, but we totally live differently than the city people live. So they need to think more rural instead of all this city area.

DONNA: We can't afford to educate our children like they can in the cities. Simple as that. Don't have the advantages.

ETHEL: All the things they do, based on Madison and Milwaukee, never us.

MARTHA: Yeah, we don't have the advantages that they give their local people there, I think a lot of times. And it is probably because they don't understand how rural people live and what we deal with and our problems.

KJC: I think that's right. I think there is a whole lot of distance between—especially this corner of the state.

MARTHA: Oh we're, like, we're lost up here!

ROSEMARY: They don't even understand how we live in [our community]! [Laughter]

MARTHA: Yeah that's right! It's very true. They won't even come and help us with our roads until you demand it.

In that conversation, in response to my question about the main concerns in their community, they had talked about their representative in Madison as someone unlike themselves, and about the state workers that regulated their livelihoods as oblivious to the basics of their businesses. The sense of being "strange to Madison" and living "differently than the city people live" was about fundamental difference in lived experience. And much of that difference was tied to economics: "We don't have the advantages that they give their local people there," Martha had said.

Conceptions of Hard Work

One key value that rural residents emphasized as they contrasted their communities with city life was the value of hard work. Many Americans value hard work (McClosky and Zaller 1984, chap. 4), and working-class Americans seem especially likely to emphasize hard work, compared to their upper-income counterparts (Lamont 2000). But when I talked with people in small-town Wisconsin, many of them told me that hard work was especially necessary in rural places. They said that, because their economic realities were perpetually tough, the people trying to make a living in those communities had to be tough as well.

Ideas about who works hard are important for the way people talk about public policy because they are closely tied to notions of who deserves taxpayer support. People we perceive as not working hard—as lazy—are undeserving. We tend to perceive hard workers, in contrast, as deserving our respect and our support (Feather 1999; Soss and Schram 2007).

I want to demonstrate how this worked in the conversations to emphasize again the way these perceptions went beyond partisanship. Republicans and Democrats talked about hard work differently.¹¹ But people viewing the world through the lens of rural consciousness had an understanding of hard work that was rooted in place identity as much as in partisanship.

Many Republicans I met, regardless of the type of place they lived in, linked ideas of hard work with opposition to social welfare programs. They would say that people do not work hard like they used to or that certain people worked less than others and thus were less deserving of taxpayer money. For example, at a breakfast meeting in a diner in a central Wisconsin city (Group 18c), when I asked whether the group favored one of the presidential primary candidates, one man said:

No, I don't like any of them. I'll take—I'll take somebody that will let me keep some of my money rather than have to, have to pay for everybody's free lunch. And what happened to this world where we all started out in a world where we had to work our ass off to, uh, to get where we are. Nowadays nobody wants to work their ass off and they just want to have [the money] handed to them. And I mean, that's—that's the scary part.

Likewise, a suburban Milwaukee breakfast group of retired men and women, all Republicans, argued that they were not supportive of Democrats because they believed that "Democrats take hard-working Americans' money away."

Rural Republicans, in contrast, would talk about the value of hard work by referring to rural life in general. They would claim that the demands of rural life simply required hard work. At times, they would use this sentiment to explain why young people in their communities often chose to move to a city after high school. When I asked the group of conservative men around the Mr. Coffee in the northern tourist town (Group 4b) about poverty in their area, they explained:

DEAN: There's lots of jobs, but everybody, the younger generation, they want twenty dollars an hour to rake leaves, you know? These retired people can't afford to pay some guy twenty dollars to come in. But everybody wants big money, and . . . the greed, everybody wants big money to come in and work. . . . Instead of like us guys; we had to work hard all our lives.

[laughter]

JACK: I was cutting pulp with an ax and a sweep-saw when I was thirteen, fourteen years old.

KJC: No kidding?

JACK: Put myself through college.

Democrats tended to have a different take on hard work. At the same time that they valued hard work, they would remark that working hard could only do so much—that sometimes people needed additional help to get ahead. For rural Democrats, living in a rural place meant that it was especially tough to make ends meet, even if you worked hard. For example, Democrats among the group of loggers in the northwest town (Group 6) talked about how much people in their community work and said that people in general should work for the benefits they receive. In that way they sounded just like the Republicans in other groups. But when I asked them a standard survey question to probe their ideas about income inequality, something else emerged:

KJC: "In America today, some people have better jobs and higher incomes than others do." Why do you think that is, that some Americans have better jobs and higher income than others do? There is a bunch of different

reasons people typically give—and you all tell me whether you think it is a bunch of bunk, or whether you think that is a good reason. One is, “because some people have more inborn ability to learn.” How important do you think that reason is for why some people have better jobs?

CHARLIE: Basically what it amounts to is who has more ambition than the next person.

KJC: More ambition? Yeah?

CHARLIE: Some people don’t have any ambition and they don’t wanna work.

SAM: That doesn’t mean you’re going to make more money. Mexicans got more ambition than anybody. They keep the wages low.

KJC: Yeah? So one of the standard reasons they give is because some people just don’t work as hard. Is that—is that kind of what you are talking about?

JIM: Yeah Sam kind of hit the nail on the head.

SAM: He goes to work every day, does the same thing, if they cut the price [of timber], you ain’t gonna make no money. Cut the price, work longer.

STU: Yeah—I worked all weekend.

KJC: So even working hard, that’s not what counts for earning a higher income?

JIM: Well no—what are you going to do? We’re in that industry—

SAM: You’re really not rewarded a lot as far as—

JIM: No you’re not.

SAM: And we’ll all fault unions but there is a lot of reasons why—because you keep bringing all the Mexicans in, it keeps the wages down.

KJC: So does that hurt you all in the end? The fact that Mexicans take the lower-paying jobs?

SAM: Well nobody’s going—

JIM: Well I’m not going to—

SAM: To do that work for eight dollars an hour. Especially—

JIM: I’m not going to go pick tomatoes, or go milk cows.

SAM: But if they gave you twenty dollars an hour you might.

JIM: Well yah! But I still don’t think I would go milk cows. *[laughter]* The paper mill has been shitting on us, I don’t want no cow shitting on us! I gotta go to work. *[Gets up and leaves.]*

Like the Republican rural groups, the Democrats in this group talked about the value of hard work by bringing in the fact that they lived in a rural area. They talked about their discomfort with the notion that hard work leads to success by referencing their distinctively rural industry, logging. They saw themselves as rural people: people who worked hard and

who are by definition of a place that is economically disadvantaged. To them, one could work extremely hard and still not earn enough to make ends meet. Their perception was that the deck was so stacked against communities like theirs that even hard work could not allow them to get ahead. In other words, people in many types of places brought in notions of hard work to talk about social welfare policy, but when rural residents did so, they often talked about hard work in terms of place.

A few years later, in this same group, the only people who had shown up the morning I visited called themselves conservatives, Republicans, and Scott Walker supporters (Group 6, May 2011). They also talked about themselves as rural folks but gave a very different picture of social welfare than had the Democratic-leaning loggers on my previous visit.

RON: I have no compassion for people that are lazy. We live in America, we’ve all got the way to make a good living. I’ve made a good living because I’ve worked hard all my life. I got, I mean I got a lot of stuff, I’m not. . . . But I worked for it, nobody gave it to me. I’ve been working since I was ten years old; I’ve never taken a sick day.

KJC: Oh my God.

RON: I’ve never missed a day of work because of being sick. And I’ve been sick, you know?

KJC: Sure.

RON: But I go to work. I got hurt a couple times where I missed some time, but to take a sick day, that’s what, all these people get all these sick days. Come on! What is, this whole country that, I mean that you gotta have twelve sick days a year?

KJC: Yeah?

RON: Then, I mean like the state employees, it ain’t all the, it’s not all of the deals in the state, but certain ones, if you’ve got one sick day when you retire at fifty-five, you’re gonna retire at fifty-five and you can use one sick day a month to pay for your health insurance. Now one sick day, is that worth that fifteen hundred dollars a month of health care coverage? One sick day is worth what you should make in a day. . . . I worked in the woods most of my life, I’ve never had an easy job. They want to raise, they want to raise the social security age, you know. I mean, can I work, doing my job till I’m seventy? Somebody sitting at a desk could probably do it, but that’s not manual labor. But, by the time, I’ll be sixty-two in October, I mean I’m gonna keep working till I’m sixty-five, but after sixty-five, you’re burned out, you know? If, like working construction, or, you know?

KJC: Sure. You've gotta give your body a break.

RON: Manual labor job. Yeah, yeah.

This man interpreted the hard life that he had had to live in his rural community as evidence that anyone can do it, and that those who can't are lazy. Was this sentiment what led him to support the Republican Party and Scott Walker's attempts to undercut public employee unions and make public employees contribute more to their pensions and health care insurance? Or was his support for the Republican Party what made him interpret the difficulty of his life as evidence that other folks ought to pull themselves up by their bootstraps rather than advocate for an increased safety net? I do not know, but from where I sat in these conversations, they seemed all of a piece.

When pundits look at low-income residents in Republican areas and exclaim that they are voting against their interests, they are often assuming that somehow the Republican Party has fooled people into not noticing that they are opposing the very kind of government programs that might help them out. But those kinds of claims neglect that a "safety net" may not translate as "help" to everyone. In rural areas, there is a great deal of pride in the idea that "help" is about letting people work hard enough so that they can make it on their own. The sense I got from these conversations is that help, for many, is about providing jobs, not welfare. When Ron told me he had never missed a day of work, and he did it "working in the woods," he said it with pride. To him, rural life is tough, but he drew a good deal of esteem from claiming that he was a person who was living that life.

③ Resources

When people in small towns claimed that they lived differently and had different values than city folks, they were often simultaneously claiming that they were people facing unique economic challenges. I want to hone in on their perceptions of economic injustice to show you the depth of these understandings. When people perceived that rural life was economically tough, this carried with it many complaints: about the injustice in the distribution of public dollars, unfair taxation, and more. Those complaints were intertwined with other aspects of rural consciousness,

in particular, with their sense of being ignored and disrespected and of having fundamentally different values and lifestyles than city dwellers.

Here is a common narrative for how people wove these perceptions together: Rural life was a source of pride for many because it was different from urban living—it involved different lifestyles and values, including a special emphasis on hard work. That rural hard work ethic was a point of pride, but for many, it was a problem because in order to work hard, you needed a job, and rural communities were on the short end of the stick in terms of jobs. Why? Because rural communities had no power. Politicians and others with the ability to make the decisions to bring good-paying jobs to their communities paid no attention to their places.

In the rural communities I visited, I often heard people stating, as though a matter of fact, that jobs, wealth, and taxpayer dollars are in the "the M&Ms," as people sometimes referred to Madison and Milwaukee. They complained that rural areas are being left on their own to fight a losing battle. Conversations in seventeen of the twenty-five groups outside the Madison and Milwaukee areas included statements conveying that their communities did not receive their fair share of resources and that metro residents did not understand this. Their comments conveyed that the rural-versus-urban distinction was *the* main way to characterize the distribution of taxation, wealth, and the cost of goods and services in the state. In short, many people in small towns perceived that their tax dollars are "sucked in" by Madison and spent on that city or Milwaukee, never to be seen again.

On this mapping, wealthy people live in the cities (cf. Bell 1992, 78). "Everybody in [the] northern [part of the state] makes money off of tourists . . . [the tourists] bring some of that fresh money up," one man in the diner group in the north-central tourist town told me (Group 9). On a different visit to the same group, another man said simply, "When you get down in the city, people are making more money."

Many people equated the cities with wealth because they perceived that the cities are where the good jobs are. One man in the group meeting in the small town on the Wisconsin River explained to me during my first visit (Group 8, June 2007), "Our salaries are less than what they are in Madison, by far, our hourly wages. And I would think salaried jobs as well. People here don't make as much, but there again, it's—that's why we don't have . . . that's why a lot of our young people have gone some-

place else." About four years later, I heard a similar conversation in that group (April 2011):

RANDY: I'd like to see, you know, I'd like to see a lot of new young families move into town. . . . That's one thing you do see is too many older, retired persons in your communities—to be real active it makes a difference . . .

GLENN: A lack of good-paying jobs for the younger people to live on. You know it takes money to live or play or anything else and you get into a town like this and the people who are on the boards and stuff are people who usually own their homes and have a job and their interests are more in the parks and the fire departments and different things like that where it takes jobs for these young people to keep 'em around. And, you got jobs, you get young people, you get homes being built, and you get things being done.

RANDY: That's the problem with rural America.

GLENN: Right.

RANDY: You start here, go down along the river or whatever, you pick any of these communities, we're fortunate in [this town]. . . . we're fortunate here that we got two or three good industries in town which we're very fortunate to have.

[. . .]

GLENN: In any of these towns. You go around Madison, thirty-, forty-mile radius, the majority of 'em are driving to Madison you know and it's, you know, they want to live in a small town but they gotta have a job, a decent paying job. With four-dollar gas, that's gonna make it tough.

Along with complaints about gas prices, I often heard concerns about utility bills in rural areas. For example, in the breakfast group of women in a rural tourist town (Group 2):

SALLY: The cost of the water and sewer here is outrageous compared to what they pay in Madison. So here is big rich Madison, with all the good high-paying jobs, getting the cheapest water, and we have people up here who have three months of employment [because of the short tourist season], what are they paying? And I feel like there should be more sharing—less taxes going to Madison to help offset—

DOROTHY: I just moved from [a city in the central part of the state]. A quarter of water in [that city] is seventy bucks . . . seventy dollars every *three* months for [that] water. Up here, which we constantly have been paying,

every second month, the bill—and sometimes we're not here—is seventy dollars every *second* month.

A bit later in the conversation, they continued on this theme.

SALLY: You've also got to look at Madison and the growth of Madison. There's new sewers going in in every single day, the result of the businesses. You go down there and you don't know where Madison starts and Mount Horeb—I mean it is just one big sewer. . . . Like Walmart, buy it in volume, get it cheaper. But I think we don't look at places here—I mean I was coming up here eighteen years ago with a business, and I was shocked at how little the people got for services here. You pay for your garbage collection here on top of paying high taxes. I mean Madison, I throw out sofas [and don't have to pay.] There should be more sharing with these communities that are really struggling with stuff like that.

SHIRLEY: But in Madison there are all these big businesses that are paying taxes that we don't have here.

SUE: Exactly, but it should be a shared thing. I mean, why can't we look at that? Or at least put a state office building up here, with all the communication.

[Agreement all around: "That would help."/ "That's a thought."/ "Great idea."/ "Absolutely."]

SALLY: We could. I've worked for the state of Wisconsin, in a lot of offices, and a lot of offices could be—

DOROTHY: Outsource it to northern Wisconsin!

LAURA [to me]: You could be here all the time!

[Laughter]

KJC: That would be delightful—I would love it.

In the rural consciousness perspective, not only were the cities wealthier but they were also advantaged in terms of gas prices, utility bills, and infrastructure like sewers. These perceptions of injustice burned so brightly because they carried perceptions of blame. It was not just that cities were advantaged, but also that decision makers in them were intentionally overlooking the smaller communities in the state.

A man in the northwest logging group (Group 6) lamented, "I mean, rightfully so, you know, population centers, that's where the majority of the stuff has eventually got to go. It just makes sense. But you can't ignore everything up here either, you know." Likewise, a group of men at a

diner in a rural northern-central tourist town (Group 9) almost laughed at the notion that the Obama administration stimulus proposal would help their community. They assumed none of the funds would focus on rural areas. One man said, "But the trickle down won't get to here because we don't have any business. So the trickle down will stop at Green Bay, Wausau [cities south of where they live] . . ."

Taxation was a seriously raw issue for many people in small communities. In general, the perception was that taxation hurt rural areas. At least one person in ten of the twenty-five groups outside the Milwaukee and Madison metro areas assumed that people in those cities are taxed at much lower rates than rural residents are.

Property taxes in particular were treated like an invasive species killing off native life forms. And people were sure it had come from the cities. Many rural folks blamed urbanites for driving up property values in their communities by purchasing expensive vacation homes. Some claimed this had driven locals out of their own communities or, at least, away from their lifetime dreams of finally buying a house on a local lake. They described these rising property values, driven by urbanites, as a threat to their personal and community identities (cf. Bell 1992, 76). For example, on the first morning that I met with the group of women in the rural northwest tourist town (Group 2), one member showed me a list she had written in a small notebook of sixty people who had been forced out of their homes by urbanites buying expensive vacation homes. "The old-time families have left or are leaving," she said. "The character of the town is changing, and it is just too bad."

In Door County, the "thumb" of Wisconsin, I heard a similar thing from a woman taking part in a conversation after a church service:

Having been raised and grown up here, it has gotten to the point that I think Door County is becoming very elitist. Thank God I have a home. I was lucky enough that my husband and I had worked for it and paid for it before he died. On my wages, I could not have bought a home by myself. The cost of all of the surrounding land has become so expensive because of all the people who don't live here more than six weeks out of the year, and build three-quarter-million-dollar homes, million-dollar homes, and basically visit, and so they've driven the property values so high that those people who have lived in a home their whole lives and were able to afford, can no longer afford because the tax rate has gone up so high. The wage scale is not that great in Door County. People say, "Well, you know, you make a good living." No. And

they somehow get the impression that we go to the gas station and we pay less for our gas, and pay less for our food because we live here. Ah, wrong! We pay the same price [laughter], but we don't make the wages, and we're paying for what has been driven up, and it's—I see it as a real hardship. I'm fortunate, but I look at my children and my grandchildren and I wonder will they be able to live here and own a home? Maybe they'll be able to rent, but to live here and own a home and take pride in that? That's scary. Really is scary.

The sentiment that city people were oblivious to the economic hardships that rural residents face was simmering on the back burner in many of these conversations. People living in tourist communities acknowledged the income that tourism generated but resented the perception that people living "up north" led leisurely lives. A woman in a northwest rural town (Group 2) said to me, "Just remember that up here many people have two and three part-time jobs to survive." Across the state, one man explained to me that, yes, he lived in a beautiful wilderness area, but when the weather got nice enough to be outside, he hardly had time to enjoy it. It was during those summer months that he and most of the people he knew had to work multiple jobs to get by throughout the rest of the year (Group 9, June 2011): "I live on a lake—lived there twenty-three years. I've fished it three times. Just not enough time. When we want to fish, we go to Canada or Minnesota to get away from it all."

Four years earlier, some people in his breakfast group expressed exasperation at how clueless city people were about the economic realities of tourist towns (Group 9, June 2007).

NELSON: Yeah—people in town here, they sell their home in Milwaukee or Madison or Illinois and they come up here and buy one of these small businesses. Christ!

PETE: Yeah—wake up!

NELSON: You won't make any money for twenty years, if you can stay in business for that long, pay your taxes and everything else.

KJC: Wow.

NELSON: It's a different world up here than it is in the southern part of the state.

PETE: Looks great in the summer time!

NELSON: Yeah looks great.

PETE: Nine months are winter, and three months are tough sledding.

In Door County, the “tough sledding” sounded like this (Group 5, June 2007):

PAM: What you make in six months has to stretch all year.

BECKY: And many of 'em are working two and three jobs during this period of time.

PAM: Exactly.

BECKY: Yeah, they're not doing just one job,

PAM: You don't really have a summer—it consists of working. When my kids were home, I worked two jobs, so you know—it goes by quickly.

SHELLY: People always say, “You are so lucky to live [here] in the summer-time!” Well, any of us who live here, live here and work here and never enjoy it. First of all we're irritated [*half-jokingly*] because we can't get to our job because of these tourists driving so slow.

KJC: I'm sorry! [*Apologizing for being a slow-driving tourist.*]

SHELLY: And then when we get there we work, leave that and go to another job and come home and then we are following another tourist to come home [*laughter*], and so we really don't get to enjoy what everybody else does, although I am so appreciative that I can live here, I really can't imagine—I just thank God every day that I am able to live here in [this town] where I was born.

DON [*sarcastically*]: You don't want to go to Milwaukee and live there?

SHELLY: No and I'm willing to give up a lot to do that, and I think a lot of us have done that.

The way they described it, making a living in a tourist community was a challenge, characterized by constant hardship and uncertainty. And they believed that urbanites just did not understand this.

People resented the economic hardships they faced, the fact that city people and those who held the reins of power did not seem to recognize these hardships, and, also, the unfulfilled promise of tourism. They did not necessarily like city people coming in to their communities but were willing to put up with it in order to make a living. In some places, however, people talked about city people infiltrating their communities, yet not helping the local economy in any way. Local residents would complain that tourists passed right through without spending any money. One example was the “all they leave on the sandbars is shit” comment noted earlier. Randall, from the group of loggers in the northwest cor-

ner of the state (Group 6, April 2008), also expressed this objection: “A lot of people tell me, well, if it wasn't for tourists, your taxes would be higher. Well, they don't spend much money here. They bring their own gas, they bring their own food, they might stay in a motel, you know. We're not really gaining anything from tourism.”

In these conversations, the distinctiveness of rural economies was obvious to people living in them. In one case, a woman gave this a label—“the rural class” (Group 2): “If you look at the *rural class* [*emphasis added*] . . . we've never had jobs here, it's not like this is part of the economy that there are no jobs, but I think one of our big concerns is the coming tourist season and the decrease in funding from the state for tourist-related activities, cause so many people here rely entirely on tourists coming so it's just a real uneasy feeling about what's gonna happen this year.”

Talk concerning rural economies ranged from this “uneasy feeling” to downright anger. Sometimes the resentment about the economic inequality between the major cities and small communities was so strong I wondered if I should end the conversation and get out. Other times it was downright comical. One group in west-central Wisconsin (Group 11b) actually imagined a geographic line that represented this unfairness. This was State Highway 29, which cuts east-west across the state through the central city of Wausau. This is what Henry and Richard referred to as “the Mason/Dixon Line” in a conversation I quoted earlier. In their eyes, communities to the south of this line got all of the resources, while those to the north were ignored. One man said simply, “I think you've forgotten rural America.”

This is the gang of men who played dice every morning before work. The first time I visited this group, when a local attorney led me through the curtain at the back of the diner to the group sitting at their L-shaped table, they stopped playing dice for a while and talked with me. At the end of our conversation, they asked me if I knew how to play Ship, Captain, and Crew. I said, proudly, “Why, yes I do.” My Wisconsinness came in handy here, as I had played this dice game many times with my family growing up.¹² They asked me to “turn off that machine [*my recorder*] and we'll shake for a buck” in their dollar round (before most of them left and went to work or their other tasks for the day), and I promptly lost. They asked me to “come back and shake dice” and “bring your quarters.” It was clear that I was welcome to come back, but I had better plan on playing dice when I did.

On my third visit (in April 2008), there was a horse auction going on in town, and the group members joked with me about buying a horse. This led to some colorful comments about Madison. When several of them asked me if I was going to check out the auction, I answered:

KJC: I think I will go up once, yeah, I went up—I looked through the fence yesterday evening.

HENRY: Why don't you buy one of them horses? I got a trailer.

KJC: Not sure where I'd keep him. [They knew by this point that I lived right in Madison, a mile from the football stadium at the time, where there was room for them to park next time they come down for a game. But there is certainly no room to keep a horse.]

HENRY: Huh?

KJC: I'm not sure where I'd keep him!

HENRY: Keep him in Madison. That's where they keep all the bullshit.

After everyone got a good laugh out of that one, Henry continued on:

HENRY: Well, basically all you gotta do is buy the front end of the horse, they got the back end in Madison!

The group laughed, and I almost snorted my coffee, but then I started to get uncomfortable—not because of the anti-Madison comments, but because I had been winning round after round in the dice game. Most of the members of the group thought this was funny, but at least one was visibly irritated. To try to soften the situation, I joked,

KJC: I come and ask for your thoughts and I take your money!

RICHARD: I'll tell you what, that's good though. Because we have so little of it.

KJC: And it all goes to Madison anyway [*joking along with them*].

HOWARD: We expect nothing less from Madison!

RICHARD: It won't cost any postage to get it down there now!

This resentment was good-natured, but it was ubiquitous across the rural communities I visited. It didn't seem temporary, either, and wasn't just a product of the Great Recession. People talked about economic injustice as a fact of rural life.

Isn't This Really Just about Race?

Many people in these small towns perceived that someone or something was responsible for the decline of their communities. Someone or something was siphoning off their money, they told me. They believed that wherever their tax dollars were going they sure were not going to their own towns.

Who or what was doing this? Who was getting their hard-earned money? "They" often had something to do with cities: decision makers, wealthy people, liberals, and the undeserving.

Cities represent a lot in American life. One thing they conjure up is race. In short, cities are often shorthand for people who are not white. When the dice game group in central Wisconsin (Group 11b) referred to the line dividing rural Wisconsin from the metropolitan centers in the southern part of the state as the Mason-Dixon line, the racial implications of that term were probably not accidental.

The urban-versus-rural divide is undoubtedly in part about race. Cities have perhaps always "been the places where we have first and most fully confronted the task of living alongside people who do not necessarily belong to our own tribe" (Conn 2014, 4). There is a widening policy conflict between urban and rural areas, and it is no secret that it is driven in part by racial mobilization (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003). Research on implicit racial priming tells us that the term "inner city" is racialized—that this term activates racial attitudes (Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). It is likely the term "urban" does so as well. This may be especially the case in Wisconsin, which is extremely racially segregated. Only 29 percent of the state's African American population lives outside the cities of Milwaukee and Madison, and most of the state has little experience to date with Latino immigration.¹³ Also, the Milwaukee metro area is extremely segregated with respect to African Americans and Latinos. According to a Brookings Institute analysis of 2005–9 data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the Milwaukee metro area is one of the most racially segregated in the country (Frey 2010).

So yes, it is highly likely that when people refer to "those people in Milwaukee" they are often referring to racial minorities. But notice how complex this is. The urbanites that rural folks were referring to were not predominantly racial minorities. When white outstaters (i.e., those liv-

ing outside the major metropolitan areas) complained of the laziness in the cities in these conversations, their comments were almost always directed at white people: government bureaucrats and faculty members at the flagship public university.

In that way, antiurban resentment is not simply resentment against people of color. At the same time, given the way arguments against government redistribution in the United States have historically been made by equating deservingness with whiteness, these conversations are about race even when race is not mentioned. Also, animosity toward public workers and wealthy folks in the city may be driven by conservative views on race. Since the cities, particularly Madison, are perceived as liberal and vote Democratic in elections, people who harbor racial resentment may indeed be equating city people with racial liberalism. Now, as in the past, racial animosity is directed toward groups of whites that help minorities, such as government employees and academics.

When rural folks did make openly racist comments, they did so about Native Americans, an overwhelmingly rural population in Wisconsin. There are eleven reservations in Wisconsin, located primarily in the northern third of the state. Hostility toward Native Americans did not arise often in these conversations, but it is no secret that relations between Native Americans and whites in Wisconsin have been tense historically and in recent history.¹⁴ Violent protests erupted in response to a series of federal court decisions in the 1980s, beginning in 1983. Those decisions affirmed spearfishing treaty rights to the Chippewa tribe and imposed no limits on how many fish tribal members could harvest (Bobo and Tuan 2006, chap. 2). White residents protested at boat landings, held demonstrations and rallies, and called for the end to treaty rights as well as the reservation system. Much of this opposition was rooted in racism, as social science research has documented (Bobo and Tuan 2006).

In recent years, these tensions have become salient to the broader population again, as the Walker administration has passed legislation that is facilitating the start of an iron ore mine in northwestern Wisconsin. To some, the mine signifies hundreds of jobs for people in the area who are sorely lacking them, but to others it means extensive disturbance to the way of life and natural environment and health of Native Americans on the adjacent Bad River Reservation (Seely 2011).

It is very possible that the lack of references to urban racial minorities in the conversations I observed is a manifestation of the threat hy-

pothesis, or the idea that racial prejudice is heightened when people of different racial backgrounds are in proximity to one another (Key 1949; Blalock 1967). Given the extreme racial segregation in Wisconsin, there is little interaction here between whites and people of color. Thus the immediate racial tensions in most rural areas are not between whites and African Americans and Latinos but, instead, with Native Americans and, in a few communities, with Hmong refugees, who were relocated to Wisconsin in the decades since the Vietnam War.

The point I want to make is this: race is a part of rural consciousness. However, I ask the reader to notice the complexity of these perspectives and not think of them as simply about race. If we boil rural consciousness down to race, we ignore the ways in which these perspectives comprise many things: identities with place, a sense of oneself as a person of a particular place in the class hierarchy, identities as people with particular values, and sometimes ideology. Resentment is operating because people perceive they are not getting their fair share. They are making sense of this injustice by resenting those whom they think are getting more than they deserve, and perceptions of who works hard and who is deserving are infected with racism (Winter 2006, 2008). But those notions of distributive justice are intertwined with race—neither separate from nor synonymous with a simple distinction of white versus other.

Finally, if we conclude that rural consciousness is just racism dressed up in social science jargon, it allows us to overlook the role of antigovernment attitudes and preferences for small government here. Tea Party messaging appeals to racism (Burghart and Zeskind 2010; Parker and Barreto 2013), but it also resonates with many of the perceptions of inequality and alienation from government observed in the conversations presented in this book. As I have argued, attitudes about redistribution rest on a long history of racial discrimination in the United States. But that long history has enabled an accretion of meaning around attitudes of injustice.

This is how the politics of resentment operates—it works through seemingly simple divisions of us versus them, but it has power because in these divisions are a multitude of fundamental understandings: who has power, who has what values and which of those values are right, who gets what, and perceptions of the basic fairness of all of this. It is opposition to other people, and the overlap of urban and racially “other” is a powerful combination.

This is part of the reason racism is so persistent. Because it is intertwined with other fundamental attitudes, it can be invoked and expressed in seemingly socially acceptable ways (Mendelberg 2001). In the conversations I observed, when people expressed racist sentiments, they did so while weaving them with values and allegiances of which they were sufficiently certain and proud that they were willing to express them in front of me, a relative stranger. Take for example these comments to me, by a man in the group of loggers in northwest Wisconsin, in May 2011:

RON: Yeah. You know. Well like him that just left, that was here before to get coffee?

KJC: Yeah.

RON: He's an American Indian. [One sentence deleted for confidentiality.]

KJC: Oh really?

RON: He's a good guy.

KJC: Yeah.

RON: Works hard. Yeah.

KJC: Well sure.

RON: But he won't live on the reservation where they get all the free housing and stuff, he's self-supporting, you know?

KJC: Yeah.

RON: And, there, there's too many programs down there for a bunch of people, you know to have it for them to want to go to work. You know? They got the casino down there shoving our money through 'em, they got the federal government shoving our money through 'em, and they wonder where they got drunken alcohol problems, they got nothing to do all day besides sitting around and do what they want to do. And they keep giving 'em money to do it, well how do you expect to get anything out of anybody? There's an old saying: A hungry dog hunts harder. Hey, you keep feeding a dog or a cat, they're not gonna hunt, they're not gonna look for food, they're gonna lay around and get fat.

If I said these comments in a classroom, I would expect to get accused of racism. But for Ron, this was about hard work and deservingness. To call this just plain racism misses the complexity of the sentiments involved here.

In chapters 6 and 7, I will dive further into the role of race in the work of rural consciousness.

Conclusion

"Rural consciousness" is the term I am using to describe a strong sense of identity as a rural person combined with a strong sense that rural areas are the victims of injustice: the sense that rural areas do not get their fair share of power, respect, or resources and that rural folks prefer lifestyles that differ fundamentally from those of city people. I have claimed at various moments in this chapter that this perspective is important for the way people make sense of public affairs. In chapters 5–7, I will show more specifically what I mean.

When I argue that rural consciousness structures the way people understand politics, I am suggesting that something other than partisanship is driving their political preferences. Support for the Republican Party is not what causes people to have these complex, intertwined understandings of economic injustice, place identity, class identity, race, and values. And the complexities of this understanding do not inevitably lead to support for the Republican Party. You may have noticed that some of these rural groups contain a good number of Democrats. In fact, the northwestern and southwestern corners of Wisconsin, although predominantly rural, lean Democratic. Booth Fowler, one of the wisest scholars of politics in Wisconsin, reasons that this is due in part to high levels of poverty in those areas, the influence of the city of Superior and of Great Lake shipping unions in the northwest corner, and the effect of commuters or out-migrants from Madison in the southwest (Fowler 2008). Whatever the reason, it is clear that the correlation between where people live and how they vote are not set in stone. They are the product of people actively trying to make sense of their lives.

In the following chapter, I take a pause from these conversations to consider whether the claims I heard in rural areas about their towns being the victims of injustice were legitimate. When people tried to make sense of their lives, were their understandings of where tax dollars go, tax rates, and relative wealth accurate? And, if not, where do these perceptions come from?

reinforce rural folks' perception that rural communities like their own are ignored.

In other words, it is likely that rural consciousness exists not because it is communicated via news media but because we teach these things to each other. News media content did not reflect rural consciousness, but my fieldwork and the survey data certainly did. That is cause for concern for public opinion scholars. We often use news content as an indicator of public opinion, especially historically, when survey data from the past are not available (Herbst 1998). We would do well to acknowledge that sometimes there is no substitute for sitting down with people and listening to their perspectives in order to measure what those perspectives are.²²

Conclusion

Suburbanites or urbanites might be surprised to have read here that rural citizens believe they face tougher lives than people living in cities. Those holding such beliefs might be perceived as being wrong, misinformed, or both. What I have tried to convey in this chapter is that there are solid and understandable empirical reasons that rural folks might think that they are the victims of distributive injustice. Furthermore, it appears that they are not sold these perceptions through local media but, instead, make these interpretations with each other in the course of their daily rural lives.

I do not mean, however, to privilege these interpretations over those of urban and suburban folks. Though I am drawing attention to the views of rural residents in this book, it is not my intention to claim that they are any more right or righteous than are people who live in more urban areas. My intention is to listen to and draw attention to these perceptions in order to better understand the political choices that they bring about.

CHAPTER FIVE

Attitudes toward Public Institutions and Public Employees

I want to spend some time demonstrating what attitudes toward public institutions and public employees looked like through the lens of rural consciousness. Often, when I was in rural areas, conversations about public institutions and employees would be rooted in a sense that rural areas are on the short end of the stick with respect to power, resources, and respect. One public institution and set of public employees I heard a lot about was the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the people who work there because I was specifically asking about UW–Madison. But I heard a lot about public institutions and employees generally. In this chapter I highlight conversations about the university and other public institutions. The conversations show how the lens of rural consciousness has structured the way many people think about government and government employees.

“Hi! I’m from the UW–Madison. . . .”

Doing research for this book was possible, in part, because administrators at the UW–Madison wanted me to probe attitudes about the university while I was visiting different communities across Wisconsin.¹ They gave me a research grant and approved my sabbatical time during the first year of this project on the condition that while I was out and about in the state, I ask about attitudes toward the university. So at some point in most of these conversations, I worked in three questions about UW–

Madison: What do we do well? What do we do not so well? And what should we be doing in your community?

My presence alone, though, brought the university into the conversations. The first thing I usually said to these groups, especially during my first visits in 2007 and 2008, was, "Hi! I'm Kathy. I'm from the UW-Madison." So I want to acknowledge up front that it is likely that these groups would not have talked about the university and higher education as much if I hadn't inserted myself into their conversations. But my focus was not how much they talked about the university or other aspects of government, but how they made sense of it when they did so. Their conversations about UW-Madison provide a window to their attitudes about government and public employees more generally.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is the flagship school of the University of Wisconsin System. This is a *big* public university system. There are thirteen four-year institutions and thirteen two-year colleges in it, scattered throughout the state. In addition, the system includes a vast and historic extension system. Each of the seventy-two counties have a University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension office, and the educators that work in them provide a variety of popular services, from agricultural outreach to 4-H clubs to master gardening classes. These educators (formerly "extension agents") are often pretty immersed in the communities they serve. Many residents know them by name if not also by appearance.

The people I encountered during these visits around Wisconsin had a lot to say about UW-Madison, and many of those comments were quite positive. Residents of Wisconsin are very proud of UW-Madison and of the UW System in general.² Over 260,000 state residents enroll in these colleges and universities in a given year.³ And Bucky Badger is everywhere. If you are not from Wisconsin, I am guessing you nevertheless know whom I am talking about. Bucky is the UW-Madison's mascot, one of the most beloved members of the weasel family on earth. It wasn't unusual for me to show up at a gas station or diner to do fieldwork and find at least one person wearing some kind of Wisconsin Badger gear. This was not for my benefit—those folks did not even know I would be showing up that day.

Many Wisconsinites are rabid Badger fans. In fact, when I asked my "what-do-we-do-well" question, the most popular response was Badger sports of some sort, particularly men's football, basketball, or hockey. People also love our marching band, a highlight of UW Badger sport-

ing events. That was the second most common thing they mentioned when I asked, "What do we do well." I know that some readers will roll your eyes at the thought that sports is what people value the most about UW-Madison. But this enthusiasm is a powerful connection for many people—and for many people I spoke with, it was their only connection. About 141,000 residents of Wisconsin are UW-Madison alumni.⁴ But there are over 5.6 million people in Wisconsin, and the vast majority have never set foot on the campus. One man, Tim, in the small community on the Wisconsin River said, "Really with the University of Wisconsin, our affiliation here is, all kidding aside, athletics. That's all we get" (Group 8, June 2007). There is a deep sense of ownership of the UW-Madison and the university system in Wisconsin, and it is cultivated in large part by Badger sports.

The people I spoke with loved other things about the university—the hospital, the extension system, research that had appeared in the news, and the university's overall reputation for providing a great education. But when I asked, "What do we do not so well?" there was no shortage of answers. I realized over time that what I was hearing was not just resentment toward the university but also resentment toward cities, government institutions, and public employees in general.

Distance from the University

Many rural residents perceived that their community was distant from the university, just as it was distant from a variety of powerful institutions and the government in general. The distance they talked about was not exclusively geographic but symbolic as well. They felt that UW-Madison did not really want rural students to attend. They also talked about its admissions and tuitions policies as completely out of touch with the financial reality of rural people. I found a wide variety of people expressing an attitude of ownership toward UW-Madison. They talked about it as their university, an institution that belonged to the people of their state. But they also wished it were more attentive to people like themselves—people who saw rural communities and rural kids as disadvantaged compared to suburban and urban kids in the state.

During my first visit to the tourist community in Door County (Group 5, June 2007), several people in the group were proud alumni and talked fondly of their time on the UW-Madison campus. But then I asked:

KJC: So here's the most important question about the UW. What do you think the UW should be doing here in [this town] or in Door County? And I leave that very broad, so in terms of doing for students, doing for residents, doing in general.

BECKY: They could probably do a better job of trying to recruit kids to the campus. I don't see—when you go through a list of graduates from say [a local high school], and you hear where they're going to school, you don't hear very many that are going to UW–Madison. There's a few that go to [UW–]Milwaukee and go to Marquette [University]. I think the private schools do a much better job of recruiting and getting students to their campuses. Then what—

KJC: OK so actually coming out here and saying—

BECKY: Yeah.

STEPHANIE: Recruiting to the rural areas—I don't think they do a big job of that.

PAUL: No they don't.

DON: They don't have to.

These folks, like many folks in rural places, perceived that the UW–Madison did not find it necessary to physically send someone out to their community to convey that “we want your kids in Madison.” The “they don't have to” comment at the end of this conversation referred to the fact that UW–Madison has no shortage of applications every year, and this group realized that perhaps recruitment was not a necessity. But the perception that UW–Madison does not actively recruit in rural areas fed a perception that UW–Madison does not care about rural areas and does not really care if rural students attend.

Many of the parents I encountered in small towns hoped to send their kids to UW–Madison, but they had two main worries about that prospect. They worried about (1) their kids falling flat on their faces in such a big campus in the big city of Madison and (2) their kids not getting admitted or not being able to afford tuition, given the economic disadvantages they perceived themselves to have as rural folks.

With respect to the first worry, that young people from small towns in the state would fall on their faces in big Madison, here are some examples of that topic coming up in my conversations. The group of women meeting once a week for breakfast in the northwest tourist town put it this way (Group 2, June 2007):

KAREN: And when you are as far as we are living up here, one of the problems of the kids going to Madison is that they haven't had the experience of going away and getting this—they can't go to Madison. It's too far away. [*“Yes” from several others.*] Emotional adjustment. Far better that we send them to Superior or even Eau Claire [cities with other UW System schools] but Madison—we lose kids when we send them down there. They self-destruct because the change is too traumatic.

DIANA: They don't have the home support.

When I went back to this group in April 2008, I heard the same concern from Sally:

I worked for [a retail supplier] when I was in Madison, and I had a store on the [State Capitol] Square, and I heard a lot students, and one thing I noticed were young kids coming in from small towns seem to come to . . . they came in from small towns in Wisconsin and fell flat on their faces. They were either out of school in the semester or they had gone from planning on being premed or engineering to art, I mean, it was strikingly sad to see it, and I wondered what they really do for these freshmen coming in from—because they're coming in and meeting up with these foreign students who are *so* dedicated to learning, I think the freshmen get lost in that big a school. And I know that you can go to a smaller school, you can go to Superior and maybe work your way down [to Madison], but I think a lot of kids, the freshmen, are still . . . I had at least four young women that were valedictorians that actually were just *gone* before the end of the semester, and I wonder what the ratio is. . . .

An hour or so south of this community, in the northwestern logging town, the loggers also worried about students from their town having a hard time fitting in (Group 6, April 2008).

RON: Well, it's not [UW–Madison's] fault, but they're so big, so a student goes to a school . . . [Our town has] probably got three hundred kids, K–12, and they go to Madison, they could be pretty well lost, and most of them go to the other state, the small state schools . . .

It isn't actually the case that the students from rural communities who do attend UW–Madison fall on their faces. They have similar levels

of success in their first years compared to students from more urban areas of the state (Huhn 2005). Nevertheless, the belief that small-town kids would not succeed there was common in the conversations I heard. It is possible that those attitudes may, in turn, have prevented many kids from rural areas from even applying to UW-Madison.⁵

People in small towns worried about their students making it once they got to Madison, but they also looked at UW-Madison as "distant" in terms of admissions and tuition. And those perceptions were rooted in their sense that rural folks were at a disadvantage.

The men in the dice game in the small town in central Wisconsin also talked about local kids being at a disadvantage (Group 11b). During my first visit, Mark told me that their district couldn't afford the college prep that the suburban schools could (May 2007).

In fact the UW, your program will only take the top-end students, straight As, 3.8s maybe, I don't know. I don't know what the average ACT is—30, 28? Well, it's obviously having an impact here where they are cutting and cutting and cutting where we can't afford programs, so instead of having two or three foreign languages we're lucky if we have one. That in itself is a negative incentive to students to really excel and thrive. I mean, if you want to go to the UW in Madison, you gotta have AP [advanced placement] everything, gotta have three or four years minimum of a language, you're going to have four years of all the curricular or academic subjects, well if that's all that's offered, it certainly is an indication to the students that it can't be that important. And I think that's gotta—you're losing bright kids who aren't filling or meeting the academic criteria—a portion or a reason of it is that we don't have the money to do that, and that impacts negatively on what they think is important because the state is telling them that you aren't important.

People saw the lack of resources in their communities as an indicator of neglect. Many believed kids in their communities were at a disadvantage because their communities were not given the resources they deserved. They also perceived that people from their kind of community did not make enough money to afford an education at UW-Madison. Here is an example from one father in the group of loggers in northwest Wisconsin (Group 6, June 2007):

SAM: I think one thing I think the UW can do is be a little less restrictive on in-state kids.

KJC: Yeah? Let more of them in you mean?

SAM: Like my oldest son Ben that is the helicopter pilot. Back then he coulda never got in to Madison and he's—those two kids [his two sons] are what the future of this country is. If they are not going to get in to a big university, then we are really losing out. Madison was so damn restrictive when Ben graduated, early nineties, he coulda never got in and he was towards the top of his class, top five anyhow, not a big class. Only twenty-two kids in his class. Pilot. He scored ninety-nine on his ASVAB or whatever you call it, that military test, but he couldn't have got into Madison. Makes sense that we are bringing kids in from India, but then telling Chris now you can't go to Madison. And he ended up going to Gogebic [Community College] in Michigan cause it was a two-year school and he could live at home and you know he didn't go in debt to go to school. [Gogebic is less than an hour from this town]. Matt's paying his way through the GI bill, and then Wisconsin had a—if you were in Iraq you had two years of free college. Iraq or Afghanistan. So I mean he's doing actually pretty darn good in college financially. Plus he has a full-time job, too.

KJC: And he's in the reserves?

SAM: And he's in the reserves.

KJC: Holy cow.

SAM: But he won't have much debt you know that's the other thing. Bankrupting the kids to go to college. Did you go to Madison?

KJC: I did yeah, I did as a kid.

SAM: Did you have to borrow tons and tons of money?

KJC: Yeah tuition was a lot cheaper then.⁶ And still you know, Wisconsin compared to Minnesota is even cheaper, but still.

SAM: I listen to Minnesota public radio a lot and the ex-governor was on, big hockey star in the sixties, but he mentioned his first year at the University of Minnesota was twenty-seven dollars.

KJC: No way!

SAM: Now can you imagine what it costs to go to school?

KJC: It's like six thousand dollars a semester or something, right? I mean I should know exactly what it is,⁷ but—

SAM: When I went to school it was cheap and they had all kinds of loans, and half the time [now] you can't get any kind of loans.

KJC: Lot of kids work while they go to school

SAM: Well they have to. Some of that's all right. But we're pricing college out of . . . How are you going to pay for that when you're working—[turns to Johnny] Piling lumber down there, what are they paying now?

JOHNNY: Like eight or nine if you've been there a few years.
 SAM: Yeah if you've been there fifty years, you get nine dollars an hour.
 KJC: Wow that's tough.
 SAM: You're not going to be able to send your kids to school.
 JOHNNY: Nope.
 SAM: How many people work there that got kids?! I don't know how they can, how they do it.
 KJC: So most people just don't go on to school, huh?
 JOHNNY: There's lots that don't, then like I said most that do just go to local technical school. Like outta my class there's probably maybe two kids that went to university, I think one of them went to Madison and—
 KJC: How many in your class?
 JOHNNY: Mine was a little bit bigger—closer to thirty—compared to most. Not huge by any means.
 KJC: OK, OK. Wow.
 SAM: Let's see when I went to school, almost half started college, I think maybe a quarter, but we had a superintendent that pushed college. Nothing wrong with vocational school, either.
 JOHNNY: No.
 KJC: No, you said it.
 JOHNNY: I think most everybody in my class did go to some sort of college, but—
 KJC: Yeah? Just depends what type? Yeah, OK.
 SAM: Well it's so much cheaper.
 KJC: And if you can live at home
 SAM: When Ben went to Gogebic—[talking to Johnny] you went to Gogebic too, huh? It wasn't much more than eight hundred dollars tuition, was it?
 JOHNNY: Yeah I think mine was just a little over a thousand.
 SAM: Yeah, probably. When Ben went it was eight hundred dollars.
 JOHNNY: I only went one semester.

In their tourist town in northern Wisconsin, the folks at the diner counter put it this way (Group 9, June 2007):

KJC: So let me ask you if I can a few questions about UW-Madison. You won't hurt my feelings. I have thick enough skin I think. So I want to know what you think the UW-Madison could be doing better, in terms of . . . in terms of anything. Whether it is sports teams, or you know, we don't have a whole lot of contact up here.

NELSON: I know they do a good job—one of the top schools in the country, it's one of those things where the programs are very good. Costs are getting up there. Live in northern Wisconsin? Not going to go to the University of Madison. You're going to take one of the smaller colleges they're going to. Can't afford it.
 PETE: James [local student] going there?
 NELSON: Yeah—Rhinelander.
 KJC: So most kids if they're thinking about going to college they go to, like, another UW system school?
 NELSON: Or going to tech schools and . . . not the tough courses, going through the easier ones to get out and get back to work as quick as they can because they can't afford it. I'd say the average income in this town is probably less than 20K a year. So trying to live on \$20K a year, go to the University of Madison? You ain't going to do it. There's no way. Borrow the money, then you get out of college, don't get the job you were trying to get, now you got fifteen years, can't even afford to pay for the God dang thing.

Notice how social class and attitudes toward education are intertwined in these comments. People in all kinds of places, from rural communities to wealthy suburbs, conveyed attitudes toward education and higher education that were related to social class. It tended to be the case that higher-income folks talked about education as a means toward self-actualization, networking, and professionalization and as an important element of a healthy democracy. But lower-income folks talked about it as a means toward a job. They wondered aloud why anyone would spend all that money on a degree from UW-Madison when a two-year degree would get the person into a job more quickly or when attending another decent UW system school would get the person a much cheaper degree.

So you might say then that the resentment I heard in rural places toward the university was not really about place but was, instead, about class. But rural consciousness is, as any identity rooted in class, not just about income, wealth, or occupation. Many people understood their disadvantage as a more general distance from power and lifestyles that were more closely connected to access to things like the flagship university. They believed that those in the cities had it better than they did. The believed that people in Madison and Milwaukee had more money and better-paying jobs and were privy to the game and how to play it.

For example, in the dice game, during my first visit, Mark explained to me:

The kids who end up—most of the kids—the ones who end up going to the UW, going to the top-tier schools outside the state, usually have parents [who] are educated and know what the game is to be played. We have a lot of kids—can't even talk to 'em, don't understand that getting into college is a game. You've gotta punch your tickets, you gotta do certain things if you want to get into a really good school. So if your parents aren't beating on you like they are down in Waukesha [a Milwaukee suburb] because all their parents are probably graduates and have probably really nice jobs, these are poor people up here. We have a great brain drain. Most of our kids leave. [Looking to a friend next to him.] Your kids all left. Mine left. There is nothing for them to do up here. So what we're left with is, people who are good folks but they are unsophisticated in the ways of what goes on in education.

This perception that there are people systematically left out of the game was tied to a sense of economic injustice. People interpreted the distance from powerful institutions such as UW-Madison as having concrete, palpable effects on their lives.

“UW and San Francisco Got about the Same Initials”

Intertwined with this sense of distance from the university was a degree of resentment: many expressed that they did not necessarily want to be closer to the university. At the same time that some people wanted access to the resources of UW-Madison and the metro areas, many lived where they did because they wanted the lifestyles and values of their rural communities. In some of these places, people told me they wanted to keep themselves and their kids as far away from Madison as possible.

In the group meeting at a gas station in small town on the Wisconsin River about an hour west of Madison, I asked about the UW-Madison on my first visit in 2007 (Group 8):

KJC: Why don't [students from here] go to Madison? I mean I have all kinds of guesses why, but why do you think?

TIM: Cost is the biggest thing.

DAN: Tuition is higher in Madison than it is in La Crosse or Platteville [cities with other UW System schools] for one thing.

TIM: And we have a lot who commute back and forth.

KJC: Do they?

TIM: Sure.

KJC: So when you think of the UW-Madison, what comes to mind about what they don't do well? Besides high tuition? [long pause] And don't—you're not going to hurt my feelings.

GLENN: Oh I think probably the whole Madison scene, including the UW is over-liberal. That's—

TIM: That's from a conservative speaking. [chuckles]

KJC: Yeah, sure.

DAN: How do they say that? “It's an island of—”

GLENN: You want the truth, or do you want to hear what you want to hear?

KJC: The truth!

GLENN: One of the two. Yeah?

KJC: Yeah!

GLENN: Well . . .

KJC: Absolutely.

RANDY: Professors are underpaid yet they pay the coaches a fabulous salary. Take some of that coach's salary and give it to the professors. After all, they go to school to get an education, not to play football or to play basketball. The education is more important to them, as far as I'm concerned.

I'm not sure whether Randy was joking with me or not, but Glenn had a different point to make:

GLENN: UW is the only place where you can be a hippie for forty years and not be out of place. [chuckles]

DAN: Sometimes you can't tell them from the professors, either. [laughs]

TIM: Well that's true, too.

KJC: Right, right.

GLENN: UW and San Francisco got about the same initials. [chuckles]

KJC: So what do you think the UW-Madison should be doing here in [this town]? And I mean that very broadly, like from students to ordinary folks who live here, you know beyond student age, are there things they should be doing?

TIM: I don't know what they could do—I guess I'm like Glenn and the rest of

'em as far as the liberal—I'm not a Madison person. There's a reason that I don't live in Madison, I like [this town]. I don't like Madison at all. It's big, it's . . . to me, I don't like to drive in the city—

GLENN: Best part about Madison is the fifty-five miles that it is away.

TIM: Yeah. You know it is the political hub, which every state has to have one, but I'm—I personally I think Madison is doing everything for me that I would like to have—

KJC: Just keep their distance?

TIM: Stay where they're at.

KJC: Alright.

Three hours north of there, a group of folks at a gas station in the town where the dice game met also worried about getting exposed to, or exposing their kids to, the overly liberal nature of Madison (Group 11a, May 2007).

DOUG: Very liberal—they've brainwashed all the kids that go down there.

KJC: Do you really think so?

HANK: He's a got a daughter down there!

[Laughter]

KJC: So tell me what happened with her?

[Laughter]

HANK: Lost common sense, right? [Makes sounds like she went loopy.]

[Laughter]

WARREN: Peace Corps! I mean, good God!!

KJC: She wants to go into the Peace Corps?

WARREN: She *didn't*. She *was* there.

KJC: Where did she go?

WARREN: Africa. It didn't go very well.

DOUG: Didn't it?

WARREN: No. She got robbed at knife point and back she came. But she was going to save the world.

But then again, in this group, as was the case at other times, someone with personal experience in Madison piped up that the place isn't all that bad.

ALEX: They say there are a lot of kooks down there, you know. But the first time I went to UW-Madison, driving on University Avenue, and I saw a

[mechanical] barn cleaner sticking out of a truck. They have a veterinarian hospital and all and I figured, "Oh, these people are OK!"

"Got That Book Learning"

I share these conversations to convey that people felt a sense of disadvantage with respect to the university compared to people in the urban centers in the state, but economic disadvantage was just one element in a broader sense of distance from this public institution. These perceptions of distance are very much about resources and economics, but they are about so much more: respect, acknowledgment, and understanding. All of these things together—not just resources—constitute peoples' perceptions of their relationship to power.

Let me try to convey this in one more way. Through the conversations, I heard about interactions with the rare UW-Madison employees who traveled out to do work in rural parts of the state. The issue people raised with me in these conversations was not that UW-Madison ignored their communities but that it ignored the knowledge and the norms of the people living in their communities.

The group of men meeting in the town hall early in the morning in north-central Wisconsin had a variety of stories along these lines. Toward the end of my first visit, we had this conversation (Group 4b, January 2008):

KJC: Wow, before I run out of time, I want to ask you: are there . . . well, first of all, when you think of the UW-Madison, are there things that come to mind about what it should be doing differently, or could be doing differently, if you think about UW-Madison at all. You know, it's probably not—

JACK: Winning the Big Ten!

[Laughter]

KJC: Yeah, really, what's with this Ohio State business?⁸

DEAN: What does the university do over here at Bass Lake?⁹ What is their big thing?

KJC: You know, I don't know for sure.

JACK: Well it's an experimental—

KJC: Is it a UW-Madison thing?

JACK: Yeah.

KJC: I'm not sure.

DEAN: They're in all our lakes.

JACK: Zoology, biology, zoology . . .

KJC: Are they taking samples of stuff?

DEAN: No, but what is it Field Lake or whatever it is, they filled out a whole bunch of trees in the water and tied them down with cement blocks and put tags on them, and they go around every year and check them. But now the water's low, so all those trees are on high ground!

[Laughter]

KJC: Oh I see, they were trying to watch how quick they deteriorate or something?

DEAN: That's what it is. You go to all the lakes around here, you'll see tags on the logs down there in the water. I don't know what the idea is, what—

JACK: They were taking core samples out of the deepest part of Bay Lake two years ago. They were dropping one of those weighted things down to see, you know, I don't know what they're looking for, whether it's acid rain, or, you know, I don't know.

DEAN: They do some of the funniest things. I go over there to Leaf Lake, and they put up, it must have been a mile of little plastic traps for some kind of mouse that's supposed to be in there so they could watch him all winter.

KJC: A mouse?

DEAN: Yeah, they had it all piped in . . . I don't know if it was for a deer mouse or one of those little, long-eared, what do you call it?

JACK: Kangaroo mouse.

DEAN: Kangaroo mouse.

KJC: How curious.

DEAN: They had these pipes and they had boxes like that where the mouse could go in there and they could somehow monitor what they were . . . I mean they spent days and days . . .

KJC: How funny!

DEAN: And then they take clothes baskets, and I don't know what they do, and they put them all the way around the lake . . .

JACK: Cut the bottom out of them.

KJC: You mean the plastic . . . ?

[Laughter]

JACK: Stake them in the shallow water.

DEAN: Another thing is that none of them seem to tell anybody what they're doing, you know?

JACK: That would be a good idea. They could do a little more publicity in the local papers, so people . . . like Night Lake years ago they had like garden hoses all the way around the lake with holes in it, and with weights and floats, so once you got in there, you had a tough time fishing because . . . then at the end of the year, I went back duck season and hunted there, and they must have just grabbed onto it with a long cable from the boat landing and dragged it up onto that bog and left it. And that irritated me. I wrote a letter to them.

KJC: Did you? Good for you.

JACK: They left it there, you know, just trash. I don't know whether anybody came and got it later or not, but I was—

DEAN: They have little birdhouses I see every thirty feet . . .

JACK [sarcastically]: Oh, that's, that's good.

[Laughter]

DEAN: Wiley Lake there has about a hundred and fifty of them. You know, why would you put one every hundred feet?

KJC: And there's no sign on it?

DEAN: It's a post in the ground, a metal post in the ground with a little bird-house on it. They must be trying to find what kinds of birds are there, or—

JACK: Now is it the DNR or the university that's putting up the little things to trap the gypsy moths?

DEAN: That's a private outfit. It's the DNR, but they hire people.

JACK: I didn't know who was in charge of that.

DEAN: Guys making big money doing that.

JACK: But again, it should get a little more publicity to tell people what that is and to leave them alone.

KJC: Yeah, it would be nice to have just a little sign up there even, if they're not going to do more publicity than that, just a little tag to tell you what it's . . . I would love to know what's with the laundry baskets . . . how funny!

JACK: Well they had the metal garbage cans in Albatross Lake years and years ago, too like that, staked in with holes drilled in the side. And I remember we looked in there and couldn't see anything, and so he said let's give them something, and he put a little northern and threw it in there, and wondered when they came by, you know, "How did *that* get in here?"

[Laughter]

On my next visit, I heard yet another story from this group, from a man named Al who had not been there on that previous January morning. He told me about his encounter with researchers on a remote lake

where he frequently goes to fish. He said that they had constructed a set of elaborate and expensive cribs for fish to spawn around.

I went looking along and they had, there were bass spawning and there was a little peg in the ground with a little red flag with a number on it. I seen these all over the lake. Well, they were there one day when I was fishing and I said, "What's with the red flags?" and [they] said, "Oh we're trying to determine if bass spawn in the same place every year." And I said, "Well if you'd have asked anybody who lives up here they could've tell ya 'yes' and just save yourself a whole bunch of trouble." [Laughter] They don't want anything to do with ya. They think they're smarter than ya. Got that book learning. People go to college they come out dumber than they went in. They got the books there, those books, it's not like the experience.

These comments conveyed a sense of lack of recognition but also a lack of respect. Just earlier in this conversation, Al had complained about UW researchers flagrantly ignoring laws that the locals abided by.

AL: Their image is tarnished because there are many lakes up here that are electric motors only and posted—prominently posted at the landing. Two years ago I was up here at my lake, a little lake, it was daylight, all state land. Absolutely gorgeous lake, electric motors only. . . . And here comes the University of Wisconsin one day with four young people in a boat with an outboard motor and they're going down the lake wide open and I hol-lered at them, waved and they shut the motor off and I said, "What're you doing?" "Well, I work for the University of Wisconsin. We're out here doing research on"—they're going to take core samples out in the deep part of the lake. And I said, "Well, did you see the sign at the landing? There's no electric, no gas motors." "Well yeah, but we're from . . ." I said, "I don't care if you're from Washington, DC!" Started the motor and away they went. And came back by me again and kind of waved at me like you know, "Hahaha!! We can run our motor, you can't!" I got home that night and I was fuming.

KJC: I don't blame you.

AL: And I mean it's a lake that loons are there, people kayak just to see the, you know, I called the local game warden. And he says, "I can't do a thing about it. We have word from the town, hands off, we cannot do anything, whatever they do, we can't do anything about." I says, "Well that's great."

This man was clearly resentful of what he perceived as a lack of respect for local knowledge and the standard ways of behaving in his town. In his view, even though university employees had traveled off of the campus into outstate Wisconsin, they did not care about behaving themselves, even with respect to the simplest things like no outboard motors on certain lakes. The experience of the men in this group was that there was plenty of UW-Madison activity going on in their neck of the woods, but it was for the benefit of the researchers, not the residents.

I want to remind my readers, especially those of you who work at an institution of higher education that puts considerable effort into serving the broader public, that these are perceptions. They are not necessarily accurate. Maybe the stories I just relayed were examples of miscommunication. I certainly encountered claims about UW-Madison activity that were false, such as claims that UW-Madison no longer runs "short courses" for farmers (Group 11b, May 2007).¹⁰ The important thing, however, is that these perceptions exist, and they structure the way people think about the university.

Rural Resentment toward Public Employees and Institutions in General

We could just chalk up the above conversations to a general perception that academics are elitist and aloof. But the comments of the folks in these rural groups about other public employees suggest that this is not simply about resentment toward academics as much as it is about government employees generally.

Notice, for example, the way Department of Natural Resources employees were lumped in with comments about UW-Madison employees above. The DNR was a frequent target of rural resentment. It, too, was widely perceived to be an urban entity that was out of touch with rural life.

When I visited with the group of loggers in northwest Wisconsin in April 2009, I asked them some standard survey questions about trust in government and the group lashed out at the DNR (Group 6).

KJC: Alright. [Question] three. Agree/disagree. People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you agree or disagree?

FRED: A hundred percent. They don't care what we think.

SAM: No.

FRED: You can go right with your DNR. They just have meetings around about, you know, the deer herd and everything else. You tell them, "There ain't no deer around." But they keep telling ya, "Well there's twelve thousand deer in Unit 6." Well we hunt in Unit 6. You know?

KJC: You don't see them?

FRED: There aren't that many deer there. We tell them that. Oh, no. "Well we're just gonna do what we wanna do."

The men in the town hall in northern Wisconsin said similar things (Group 4b, January 2008).

JACK: Now there's that fish virus loose in the state.

KJC: Yeah, has it gotten up around here?

JACK: Yeah, it's affecting us up here because . . . are you familiar with the new regulations from the DNR on this?

KJC: No.

JACK: I go to Joe's Minnow Stand, and I buy four dozen minnows, and I go to Lake A, and I fish there for two hours and nothing is biting, and I decide I'm gonna go from Lake A to Lake B, I gotta dump all those minnows and buy more. And now, where do I dump them because it's illegal for me to dump them on the shore, so . . .

KJC: What are you supposed to do with them?

JACK: Well we asked the warden the other day. "What . . . are you supposed to dump the water out of your bucket and then leave the minnows somewhere where it's legal to dispose of them, like on your own property?"

[Laughter]

KJC: Wow, who's gonna be doing that?

JACK: And the wardens are upset about it. The local warden, he says, "Nobody asked *us* about the rule, the legislatures went ahead and made it." He said, "It's unworkable, it's gonna be a nightmare." So he said, "I give it about a year, and they're probably gonna make some changes in it." So . . .

DEAN: The ice fishermen are furious about it, too. You have to dump your minnows out on the bank when you leave or do something with them.

JACK: You can't dump them in the ice. That's against the law, too.

DEAN: I think what a lot of them are doing is throwing them on the ice, and the eagles are eating them.

JACK: Yeah, but if you do it and you get caught, you're gonna get a citation, and so . . .

Many people perceived that the DNR—or the legislators making the decisions behind the DNR's action—had little actual understanding of the practicalities of everyday life in the Northwoods. Many people perceived that their own wisdom was not book learning, but it was far more valuable and realistic. And they felt like folks from Madison ignored that kind of knowledge, even when the locals made a point to communicate their concerns.

The DNR and UW-Madison employees were targets of these types of concerns, but they weren't the only ones. I heard similar complaints with respect to Department of Transportation employees, for example. On my first visit to the group at the diner in the northern tourist town, I asked those gathered to tell me what their concerns were in their town. The group was all male that day except for one woman, and she helped me get the conversation going (Group 9, June 2007).

KJC: Anything at all—the things that you normally shoot the breeze about.

HELLEN [laughs]: Race cars. [long pause] You had better start talking because she's running out of tape.

KJC: Don't worry. I won't run out—whatever is on your mind these days.

HELLEN: What's on your mind? He's a retired fireman.

KJC: My first response yesterday was, "Who's sleeping with whom."

[Laughter, followed by a long pause]

HELLEN: Better talk to her, she's going to get up and leave.

KJC: No, I won't leave. Take your time.

NELSON: Biggest issue around here right now is Armory Road.

KJC: What's going on with that?

NELSON: We want to improve the road and make it a little bit wider so that the trucks and cars don't run into each other and the school buses don't get in the way of the big trucks and stuff. And we have a group that don't want to have it fixed up. Cause they don't understand it. Business people that have equipment don't want to see it fixed either because of taxes, but also you want to get it wide enough so you don't kill somebody.

KJC: Have there been a lot of accidents?

NELSON: A lot of 'em.

KJC: Really.

NELSON: Then they say, there hasn't been a lot of deaths out there in the last few years. Well, there hasn't been. But some people that have been paralyzed and stuff like that.

KJC: Oh gosh.

NELSON: Hit by other vehicles—trees and posts and slippery roads—it's dangerous. So the local people want it but the southern part of the state don't want it.

KJC: They don't?

NELSON: A hundred feet of it is national forests and all the roads are in the national forests right around there, slow paced where there isn't anybody, and the trees are right up against the road.

KJC: Yeah I do—I know Armory Road real well.

NELSON: So it is kind of an important thing to the people around here because we're here in the winter, you know we stay here. It is very dangerous.

KJC: Wow.

When I returned in January 2008, I asked the folks at the counter if there were any updates on that road.

DAVE: The thing that upset a lot of us was that article [op-ed] that was in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* [against the widening of the road]. Well I thought, well, you know, OK, if you don't live there, it's a road to nowhere, but there's a lot of people who live there, and he was not there in the middle of winter when it's not nice and smooth [*sarcastically, referring to the very icy conditions on this road*]. It's nice and smooth today, right?

KJC: Sure.

DAVE: Sure, OK.

[*Laughter*]

KJC: I didn't know he [the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* columnist] wrote an article about it.

DAVE: Sure. Yeah, I wasn't happy with him at all. I quit reading him.

KJC: Did you tell him? You should write him a letter.

DAVE: Well, I guess all of the other articles I read were bullshit, too.

KJC: Well, it makes you wonder.

DAVE: You know, you know. I thought, well, he's really lopsided on a lot of these articles obviously, because this one he sure was.

In that conversation, Dave directed his anger at a journalist. But the broader issue was about the decisions of public officials on a part of this

man's everyday life that mattered a great deal to him and the people in his community: the safety of a road that he and others regularly used to meet their daily needs. I have driven that road many times, including the winter. And I have never noticed my city girl naïveté more so than on the icy April morning I spun out on a road near it, into a ditch.

To this point, I have been talking about public employees as urbanites, and that has been my intention. Because even when public employees were referenced who were actually residents of a rural community, people talked about them as if they were controlled by urban concerns and values. For example, people talked about the public school teachers in their town as outsiders, even if they had grown up just a few towns away.¹¹ People often assumed that public employees in their community were driven by urban regulations and incentives and had the same flaws as people from Madison and Milwaukee: a laziness and tendency to waste tax dollars. In other words, people did not claim that all public employees were themselves urbanites, but they treated them as if they exuded the values and priorities of people from urban places.¹²

People perceived that public employees were urban, but their resentment toward those people was more than a perception of difference and lack of respect. It was intertwined with a strong sense that public employees did not deserve the salaries and benefits they received. And many people in rural places perceived that public employees did not work nearly as hard as rural residents do.

Take, for example, university employees, especially professors. When people expressed animosity toward "university types," part of that was an aversion to elitism. Many rural individuals saw professors as urban and "them" and believed they looked down on local, rural folks. But part of it was an aversion to laziness and a sense that university types did not work hard for a living. Those talking through a rural consciousness lens saw professors as part of that broad class of urbanites who sit behind a desk all day. And they hardly appear in the classroom. ("They have teaching assistants, after all.") They "have the summer off." In one of the best summary statements I heard, "they shower before work, not afterwards."

To be honest, I felt sheepish explaining to people during my first year of fieldwork that I wasn't teaching any classes. In the midst of conversations about the wear and tear of common rural occupations on one's body, I had a difficult time thinking of my job driving around the state, inviting myself into coffee klatches as hard work. For example, here's a

conversation from the group meeting up early in the morning in a gas station on the Wisconsin River, about an hour west of Madison (Group 8, April 2011):

- DAN: Who teaches your classes then when you're out on the road like this?
 KJC: Nobody, I just zip in and out in between. I just stayed in [a nearby town] last night, just drove [there from Madison late last night] after dinner so I could come out here this morning.
 DAN: Give 'em an automatic passing grade since you aren't there?

It wasn't as if they thought public employees did not do anything. But whatever it was they were doing, people said, it did not seem to be making much of a difference. When I first visited the group of loggers in northwest Wisconsin in June 2007 (Group 6), I asked whether they thought they paid their fair share in taxes. That sure opened a can of worms. They launched into a conversation about state government expenditures on road projects.

- JIM: Too many studies.
 FRED: Not enough work.
 JIM: Too much bureaucracy in the system.
 FRED: They do waste a lot of money on surveying roads.
 SAM: All those state employees we look at 'em, and we don't think they do much.

Later in the conversation, I asked the group about hard work:

- KJC: Sometimes people say . . . survey researchers ask about different occupations and they ask people which one they think works the hardest. Tell me what you think—if you compare a professor, a public school teacher, a waitress, a farmer, and a construction worker, which ones do you think work the hardest?
 SAM: The last three.
 STEVE: Yeah.
 SAM: And for no benefits.
 KJC: Yeah? How about those first two—like—
 SAM: I think a school teacher—I know it can be hard. But they got great benefits. Tremendous benefits. And if you've been there for fifteen, twenty years, you're making fifty grand a year. There's nobody in town other than

them making fifty grand a year. The guys in the [local] mill make twenty thousand.

In a metropolitan area, it might seem crazy to claim that people working in the public sector make more money than those in the private sector. But in low-income areas, at least in Wisconsin, that appears to be the case. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey suggest that, in areas with lower average total income in Wisconsin, public employees make more than private employees.¹³ That is especially the case in the city of Milwaukee and in the northwest corner of the state, two of the most impoverished areas of Wisconsin. In wealthier areas, private worker incomes far outpace public worker incomes. There is more variability in private-sector salaries across the state, so in high-income areas, public workers are making relatively less, but in low-income areas, they are making relatively more.

Figure 5.1 displays the distributions of incomes for public and private workers in low-income areas (where the average total income was under \$30,000) and then also in higher-income areas (where the average exceeded \$33,500).¹⁴ What we see here is that in both low- and high-income areas, for low and middle ranges of incomes, public workers are making more than private workers. In low-income areas, only among the very highest income percentiles are private workers earning more than public employees. But in high-income areas, the top 15 percent of private workers are making a great deal more than the top 15 percent of public workers.

What accounts for the visibility of these differences would be a fascinating research project on its own (and one I did not undertake here), but several things are likely responsible. First, the salaries of public employees are a matter of public record and their jobs are often visible. That is not necessarily the case with private workers. Because public employees are by definition public servants, many people come into contact with them on a daily basis. Postal workers, public school teachers, and maintenance workers are just a few examples. Second, politicians, such as Walker, have found it advantageous to feed the perception that public workers are overpaid. For example, during the second 2010 gubernatorial general election debate, he said, "We can no longer have a society where the public-sector employees are the 'haves' and the people who foot the bill, the taxpayers, are the 'have-nots.'"¹⁵

To get why that kind of argument has an appeal, one has to remember

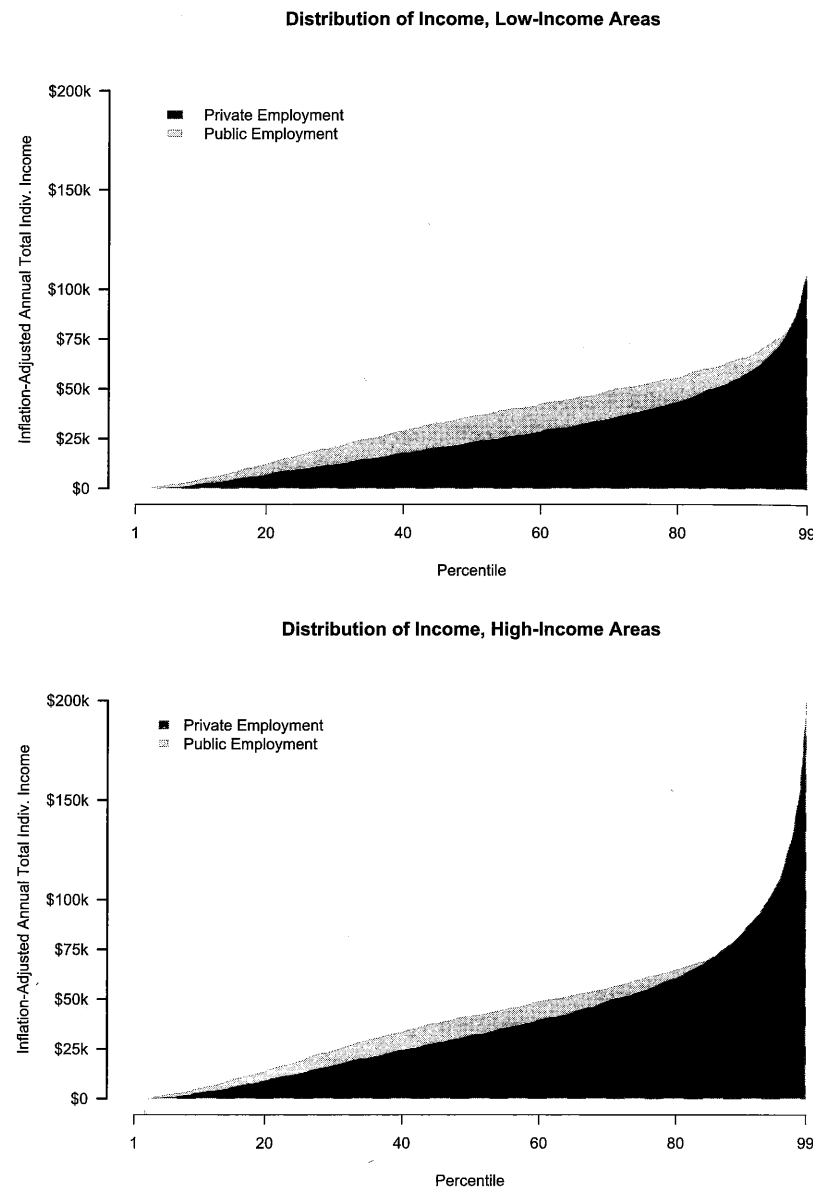


FIGURE 5.1. Comparison of public and private worker incomes across low- and high-income areas of Wisconsin. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "2006–2010 ACS 5-year PUMS," American Community Survey: PUMS Data, http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/pums_data/.

that, in many of these small towns, people perceived that their type of community—a small, rural community—faced especially difficult economic circumstances. Even before and during the Great Recession, many people perceived that rural areas had it especially bad. In the northwest logging town (Group 6), the men felt that, unlike the metro areas, their community's economy was not in a temporary downturn or recession but, rather, was in a permanent recession and enduring a long, slow death. During my first visit to their group in June 2007, they explained:

LOUIS: [It's a great place to live] if you like poverty.

FRANK: Yeah, it *is* poverty [describing their town]. [*The group chuckles*]

There ain't no businesses going in up here.

KJC: Yeah, a lot of folks leaving?

LOUIS: No, most of us can't afford to leave.

FRANK: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Well I stayed here all my life; I never made enough money to leave.

KJC: Gosh.

FRANK: No industry up here.

JIM: Only thing we have up here is lumbering, trees, or logs or what have you.

Every one of us here—

FRED: We're all a bunch of sawdust heads.

In April 2008, when I asked them what they thought about the presidential race, they said the outcome did not matter to people so far removed from the urban centers, as I noted in chapter 3 when I quoted Steve's claim that they had been in a recession already for decades. One woman who met for lunch once a week with her pals in the dice game town (Group 11c) explained to me (as the other women nodded and said, "Yes") in June 2012 that "we don't have the highs and lows here that so many places do. We may go along and dip down, but we don't reach those real high peaks that some of those places [do]. I think you all agree with that, right?"

This mattered for perceptions of public employees because many people in rural places perceived that the good life that public employees were enjoying was at their expense. They believed that public employees were enjoying extravagant salaries, health care benefits, and pensions paid for by ordinary taxpayers. And rural people were enduring a special burden in this respect because many of them were physically work-

ing very hard to earn relatively low salaries. They perceived that a large chunk of what they were able to earn went to pay for the benefits enjoyed by public employees—who they believed did not work as hard.

The group of loggers in northwest Wisconsin made it clear to me that government pensions were a luxury they resented (Group 6, April 2009):

SAM: If somebody can retire at fifty years old but then the government wants the rest of us to work till we're sixty-five or sixty-seven, I mean—

RANDALL: Yeah.

SAM: I'd have a better chance working till sixty-seven being a teacher and not doing any physical work than being out in the woods working. You know or somebody working at the mill or the lumber yard.

KJC: Right, right.

SAM: At sixty-five years old you're worn out. You should be able to retire.

Adding fire to their resentment was a perception that public employees did not realize how good they had it. One logger in the group I just quoted remarked, "The people that do have health insurance don't realize [how lucky they are]." A farmer in the central part of the state pointed out that public employees did not have to pay income tax on the benefits they receive and that they didn't realize how unfair it was that other folks were paying taxes on the income that they had to funnel into health insurance. And they looked at people in Madison as especially oblivious to these concerns. The men in the gas station across town from the dice game explained it this way during my first visit in May 2007 (Group 11a).

KJC: OK. So here's a question about financial security. Thinking about your overall situation here, do you . . . would you say that you kind of struggle to [make] ends meet, or that most people live pretty comfortably in [this town]? You've already given me a good sense of this—

KJC [*reading their nods*]: Struggle? OK.

HANK: Nowadays it's at least—it's a two-person—

WARREN: Gotta pay your health care!

HANK: Both parties in the family gotta work.

WARREN: Gotta work.

HANK: One job, at least one, and a lot of times two, so you are actually working three jobs for two people.

KJC: Do most people pay their own health care you think? Most jobs—

HANK: Well, I would say, just as many pay as don't.

KJC: Really?

HANK: I pay my own, you pay your own, you pay your own [*looking around at the guys in the room*], you pay your own, you pay your own, you pay your own, you pay your own . . .

KENT: One without.

HANK: Rest of 'em here, you got one, two, three, four, one doesn't have it, and one gets it paid. I get half of mine, a third of mine.

DAVE: Public—there's not a—unlike Madison, there's not a large public employee base, or a large union base. So a lot of people here, they don't have health insurance as a matter of their job description. That fringe benefit isn't there. That is because of the huge rise of the cost of health care, is one that drains the economy here more so than it would in a place like Madison.

HANK: Big issue here as far as insurance. As far as the care: we got good care—

KJC: I'll bet that's something that folks in Madison don't quite get. I don't know about the state legislature, but because so many people are employed by the state—the university or the state government, you know.

HANK: [They] forget benefits are 30 percent of your wages.

WARREN: Yeah—pay big for that.

KENT: By the time you're done—you know, now you got your health, you got your vacation, your 401(k).

ALEX: Boy, state employees, too, they get to keep their sick leave, and when they retire, they get to use that to pay their health care.

HANK: All that adds up.

DOUG: Big thing around here now, teachers that have retired, in a lot of your smaller school districts, you got teachers that are retired that get their health care paid after ten years up to sixty-five. That's something your school district—

ROLAND: Some they bought out too, for as long as they live, too, they have got their insurance.

People in small towns resented university employees and public employees in general because they received great benefits. And who paid for these benefits? Taxpayers, like themselves. They perceived that they worked harder than other people to make ends meet because they had to survive in a rural economy. Even though they were working hard, many of them could still not afford health care. But their hard-earned

money was going to pay for wages and benefits for people who they did not think were working very hard and whom they therefore perceived as undeserving.

Comparing to Conversations in Other Places

Rural consciousness is something best understood as a matter of a continuum. People did not either have it or not. What I am describing is a constellation of sentiments that taken together can be characterized as rural identity combined with a sense of distributive injustice. But identity varies across people. Particular people give it meaning in particular places.

There are many people who live in areas outside the Milwaukee and Madison metro areas that are not really living in rural communities. They live in small or medium-sized cities or even suburbs of those cities. And yet many of those folks exhibited something like a rural consciousness—they identified as residents of communities that were outside the orbit of power, resources, and respect of the main cities in the state.

I mention these folks to make the point that rural consciousness is not a fixed identity and also to argue that those farther along the continuum—with the strongest identity as rural people and the most intense sense of distributive injustice—seemed most likely to resent public employees. Strong rural consciousness provided an extra foothold for resentment toward public employees.

To show you what I mean, take, for example, the group of professionals in a central Wisconsin city (Group 16a). They, like many people in rural, urban, and suburban places also had many economic concerns and criticism of public employees. But unlike the conversations in the rural communities, they did not view tough economic conditions as inevitable for people living in their type of town.

The members of this group did not consider themselves rural. The city they lived in has almost forty thousand people in it. And yet this city was located several driving hours north of the Madison and Milwaukee metro areas. Many of them had personal relationships with state politicians, as well as close ties to local officials. Some of them spent a great deal of time in Madison doing business and engaged in long conversa-

tions with me about their favorite restaurants and shops there. When they complained about the government, they did not convey that their geographic and socioeconomic location meant it was inevitable that government ignores people like them (Cramer Walsh 2011). Instead, their complaints about economic policy were complaints about the people they considered the dolts in there right now. They talked as if *they* could hold state office themselves if only they would be crazy enough to run.

And yet they felt ignored and looked down on by people in the cities. In addition, although their comments, occupations, and neighborhoods suggested they did not struggle to make ends meet, they nevertheless talked about their community as a victim of distributive injustice and as being overlooked by decision makers. Part of this injustice was attributed to place. In short, this group exhibited some aspects of rural consciousness that we see in smaller communities—they identified as people geographically outside the Madison-Milwaukee orbit of power—but they neither identified as rural folks nor conceived of public employees as others because of geography. These professionals felt ignored by power holders in the state, but their social class as lawyers and wealthy business owners put them within the social networks of political and business leaders. They expected to be listened to.

A closer look at the professionals' comments will help illustrate their attitudes. During my first visit (June 2007), the members worried about a variety of economic concerns: the loss of manufacturing jobs in the community and the country, the low state bond ratings in Wisconsin compared to other states, an unbalanced state budget, and the fact that Wisconsin's economy seemed to be lagging behind neighboring Minnesota's.

They also complained about public employees' benefits. They teased me that as a state university employee, I would enjoy a luxurious retirement:

ED [*nodding at another man in the group*]: You and I would love to retire at 70 percent of our income.

KJC: I am very fortunate.

ED: You are one of the few that appreciate it. I'm just saying that the majority of 'em sit there and say it is an expectation, it's a right.

STANLEY: God given right.

ED: But I am saying, ask most people here if they are going to retire anywhere close to that. They won't be anywhere close to that.

Their sense of distributive injustice associated with their geographic location outside the major cities came up in two ways in other parts of this conversation. First, they complained about the high price of gas and high property taxes in their city compared to other parts of the state. Also, as they criticized public employees, they talked about how oblivious decision makers in Madison were to real economic concerns, exhibiting the same kind of people-in-power-are-out-of-touch-with-ordinary-Wisconsinites attitude that I had heard in many rural areas. One lawyer talked about the inability of UW-Madison to educate journalists properly, and others chimed in about professors at the university being ignorant of real economic concerns. And they talked about state employees in general as being out of touch. One summarized simply, "There is no reality in Madison."

What this group did not share with many of the people I spent time with in rural areas was socioeconomic status. They were professionals who were not manual laborers and therefore did not get into arguments about how they were breaking their backs to pay for health care and pensions of lazy public employees who never got their hands dirty. So their perspectives as outstaters did play into their comments about public employees, but they were not as intense as people who identified as people from communities who were so clearly less well off than the metro areas of the state.

Conclusion

I started out this chapter by explaining resentment toward UW-Madison and then showed how those sentiments were related to resentment toward public employees in general. Let me end this chapter by acknowledging that people of many walks of life feel distant from institutions of higher education and also public employees.

First, consider that public opinion surveys suggest that many people feel a sense of disconnection from institutions of higher education. For example, a December 9–13, 2009, Public Agenda poll of 1,031 U.S. adults found that 60 percent of the public perceives that "colleges today are like most businesses and mainly care about the bottom line," as opposed to "colleges today mainly care about education and making sure students have a good educational experience."¹⁶ Also, that same poll found that 33 percent "agree strongly" and 27 percent "agree somewhat"

that "colleges could take a lot more students without lowering quality or raising prices." And with respect to public higher education institutions in particular, that same poll found that 49 percent believed that "your state's public college and university system needs to be fundamentally overhauled" came closer to their own view than "your state's public college system should be basically left alone" (39 percent).

Second, resentment toward public employees is not new and is certainly not exclusive to rural areas.¹⁷ As early as 1936, public employees were referred to as "tax eaters."¹⁸ Until recently, Wisconsin was often looked to as one of the leaders in labor rights for public employees, but collective bargaining started in Wisconsin in 1959 only after a long struggle. There was a fear, or at least an argument, that collective bargaining for government workers would inhibit the provision of public services to citizens. The Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1947, made the existence of public unions seem less threatening by allowing employers to resist union activity. After Wisconsin allowed public-sector collective bargaining, President John Kennedy and the federal government followed suit, along with other levels of government.

When the postwar economy slowed and inflation and unemployment rose in the 1970s, the relatively warm attitudes toward unions changed, and it seems there has been an increasing resentment toward public employees ever since. Government budgets became tight, leading to more confrontations with public unions. As private workers felt the economic downturns in their own pocketbooks, resentment toward public workers grew. People revolted against taxes and political entrepreneurs parlayed such attitudes into antigovernment sentiment (as I explain in more detail in the next chapter). Arguments that public-sector unionization was a step toward socialism gained prominence (Petro 1974–75). When President Ronald Reagan broke the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization strike in 1981, it emboldened public union opponents and suggested that conservative politicians had much to gain by attempting to weaken public unions (McCartin 2011).

In other words, the contemporary resentment toward public employees is not just a fleeting sentiment. It has been brewing for some time.

And it is not exclusive to rural places. In my own fieldwork, I heard resentment toward public employees from people across a range of political leanings and in a range of places. The ordinariness of this resentment was striking to me. Opinion polls suggest it is indeed a common sentiment in the state. In a June–July 2011 Badger Poll, 27 percent of

respondents said that public employees had "too much influence." This is only roughly a quarter of the population—nowhere near a majority of the public—expressing anti-public employee attitudes, according to this measure. But it is a little striking that even at this time, a few months after Walker successfully passed Act 10, which undercut public employee unions, more than a quarter of the public still said they had too much influence.¹⁹ Also, this level of negative attitudes toward public employees is substantial compared to other leanings that we treat as politically important in the contemporary context. It is larger than the level of support for the Tea Party expressed in the same poll—18 percent—in a state in which a Tea Party-backed candidate for U.S. Senate had defeated a longtime and popular incumbent in 2010.

Even though this sentiment that public employees have too much influence is fairly widespread, it is worth noticing that almost two out of three Wisconsinites did not feel that way in 2011.²⁰ The people I listened to from this study came disproportionately from the other third. The manner in which I sampled communities and people for this study exposed me to the perspective of people who were resentful of public employees. A different study could have presented different attitudes toward people who are paid out of public funds.

You might also be wondering what I would have heard had more of the people I listened to been women. In the early stages of my fieldwork, most of the people I encountered were men. As my fieldwork progressed and I became increasingly aware of this, I made extra attempts to invite myself into groups of women because I expected they might sound quite different than those among men. I was especially concerned about this after I realized the pervasive resentment against public employees. Since most public union members are women, I thought groups of women might be more supportive of public employees (see Vargas-Cooper 2011). Also, in the course of my fieldwork after Walker came to power, several men told me about female relatives who had stopped talking to them because of their pro-Walker stances. Available poll data do not suggest that women were more supportive of public employees.²¹ But exit polls for the recall and the 2014 gubernatorial election show a clear gender gap in support for Walker. In the recall, Walker lost among women (52 percent of them voted for his opponent), although he won among men with 59 percent of their vote.²² In the 2014 gubernatorial election, Walker's Democratic opponent was a woman, Mary Burke, a business executive and Madison school board member. Again, Walker

lost among women (54 percent voted for Burke), but won among men (60 percent of men voted for Walker).²³

So after the 2011 protests, in several of my twenty-seven communities I sought out groups of women to try to broaden my understanding of resentment toward public employees and the way rural consciousness structured this resentment. These included the group of women (Group 11c) in the central-west village where the dice group met and a group in a central Wisconsin city (Group 16b). The sentiments toward public employees in these groups were not noticeably different from those among the predominantly male groups. This does not mean that women on average do not have different views toward public employees than do men. As I have noted before, the data I have collected do not tell us what views of the population as a whole look like. Instead, what it tells us is that, among the universe of people I encountered in small-town Wisconsin, gender was not a key component of the way they made sense of public employees.

Instead, what I have demonstrated in this chapter is that viewing the world through an identity as a rural person who lives in a place perceived to be the victim of distributive injustice provides an extra foothold for resentment against the university and against public employees generally. Looking across the conversations from all of the thirty-nine groups I observed across all of the twenty-seven communities I sampled in Wisconsin, there were several common elements about the resentment toward public employees that I heard. Public employees were perceived as (1) lazy and undeserving, (2) inefficient bureaucrats, (3) recipients of exorbitant benefits and salaries paid with hard-earned taxpayer money, (4) guilty by association with the government, and (5) often represented by greedy unions. But in rural areas, oftentimes the resentment of public workers had an additional layer: public employees were perceived as members of another out-group, urbanites. For many folks in rural areas, a rural-versus-urban distinction represented the distribution of political power, the distribution of wealth and resources, and the location of people who worked hard. They described urbanites as lazy bureaucrats who did not know how to work with their hands. Attitudes toward university employees provided examples of this general perspective.

I have focused in this chapter on resentment toward public employees, but the rural consciousness perspective is not reducible to attitudes toward just one social group. The category urban contained many groups—public employees but also liberals, academics, people of color,

wealthy people, and people with a different work ethic. The fact that the social divide of rural versus urban is so rich with meaning is perhaps the reason that it is an appealing perspective for politicians to tap into. Activating one component of this perspective can mobilize resentment against other aspects of it. For example, notice the things that "Madison" invoked for many people: state government, which ignores people like them; public employees, who are living high off the hog at their expense; liberal academics who are arrogant, overpaid, and challenging their way of life; city people, whose lifestyles and values just breed the mess we are in; and more.

These divisions, indicative of the politics of resentment, are not simple. They have roots in many things: place, power, and distributive justice. It is kind of ironic. Often when people try to explain why members of the white working class vote for Republicans, they explain it as a product of ignorance or, perhaps, a lack of sophistication. But there is another way to read these conversations. These understandings, whether or not one agrees with them, have roots and reasons behind them.

CHAPTER SIX

Support for Small Government

When I was traveling around Wisconsin, inviting myself into conversations in gas stations, diners, and other local hangouts, many times I got into conversations about health care reform with people who said they could not afford health insurance. They wished they could afford health care and dental care, too, for that matter. They talked about how people in general in their community could not afford health insurance. As the years went on, Barack Obama became president, and went about pursuing substantial health care reform.

But people in those groups, even the folks missing teeth, rarely supported government-sponsored health care reform. Why?

A common way to answer this question is to say that people are simply ignorant; they vote against their interests. But I would like to suggest the possibility that the issue is not about what facts they know. Instead, the issue has to do with the perspectives through which they encounter facts and conceive of possible solutions.

When we stop to notice the way rural consciousness undergirds resentment toward public employees, support for small-government policies and the conservatism of candidates in rural areas is not so surprising. In this chapter, I am going to make the bold claim that support for small government is more about identity than principle.

Why is this a bold claim? We can look back on "Obamacare" or the "Affordable Care Act" and note that which side people took is related to partisanship. And we can say that whether people side with Republicans or Democrats in general is related to their attitudes about the appropriate role of government (e.g., Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2006). But those correlations do not help us understand why someone without teeth would not support