

## Bush loses his base.

# White Flight

BY JOHN B. JUDIS AND RUY TEIXEIRA

MARTINSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA

**S**WEAT STREAMS DOWN Terry's face as he pushes a lawnmower up the street toward his home in Martinsburg, a small town in West Virginia's eastern panhandle. Middle-aged, balding, and paunchy, Terry used to work in a local factory but is now on disability because of an accident. Asked his opinion of President George W. Bush and the Iraq war, he says he used to like Bush and, at first, he thought it was a "good idea" to invade Iraq. But he has now changed his mind. "They shouldn't have gone over there," he says. "They are killing a whole lot of innocent people. It isn't worth it. They already caught the guy. They should have gotten the troops out then."

Christine, who works for a government agency, is sitting in her front yard, overseeing a garage sale. Like others on her block, she has a PRIDE IN THE UNITED STATES flag prominently displayed. But her support for the troops in Iraq doesn't extend to the war itself. "I don't think it's been worth it," she says. "I don't know why we blow someplace up and then spend so much to rebuild it when we have our own issues over here. I did support it when we went over. But now I don't think we had any reason to go over there." She says she hasn't decided who to vote for but is leaning toward John Kerry.

Terry and Christine are members of the white working class—comprising people, ranging from clerks to factory workers to technicians, without four-year college degrees. Since 1968, Republican presidential candidates have relied heavily on these voters to win elections. In 2004, Bush will need to win them decisively to carry battleground states like West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, or Missouri. But he may not, thanks in large measure to growing dissatisfaction with the Iraq war. Perhaps no other group's views have changed so dramatically since the U.S. invasion, and perhaps no other group's mounting opposition to the war is as ominous for Bush's reelection hopes.

**A**LIENTATED BY THE civil rights movement, and later by antiwar protesters and feminists, white, working-class voters began transferring their loyalty from New Deal Democrats to conservative Republicans in the 1960s. They gave large majorities to Richard Nixon in 1972, Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, and George H.W. Bush in 1988—more than making up for rising Democratic support among professionals and minorities. Bill Clinton, with his mix of economic populism, New

Democrat social philosophy, and folksiness, narrowly carried these voters in 1992 and 1996, but Al Gore lost them by 17 percent in 2000. That's a big reason Gore failed to carry Ohio, Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas, and West Virginia—all states Clinton had won. The shift to the GOP was even more dramatic among what one might call the working-class elite—skilled, white workers who had some specialized training after high school. Gore lost these voters by 20 percent in 2000, and Democratic congressional candidates lost them by a whopping 24 percent in 2002.

White, working-class voters make up the bulk of voters in many battleground states. In West Virginia, for example, they comprise 74 percent of the electorate; in Missouri, 64 percent; in Ohio and Pennsylvania, just over 60 percent. If Bush wins white, working-class voters in the battleground states by more than ten points, he should carry most of them. But, if his advantage falls below this margin, he will be in trouble. And that's what seems to be happening.

In late May and early June, Gallup polls showed white, working-class voters, who had favored Bush over Gore by 17 percent in 2000, favoring him over Kerry by an average of only 50 to 42 percent. Moreover, Bush led among workers with some college by only 49 to 44 percent—a difference of 15 points from the 2000 election. Since these are national figures and since white workers in battleground states are substantially more Democratic than white workers elsewhere, one has to assume Bush's margins are even smaller—and perhaps nonexistent—in West Virginia and other Midwestern battlegrounds.

There are many reasons for this shift, but one stands out: a change in white, working-class perceptions of the Iraq war. These voters usually favor Democrats on economics, health care, and Social Security but strongly favor Republicans on national security and cultural issues. As they have grown disillusioned with the war in Iraq, however, they have lost their confidence in Bush and the GOP.

In June 2003, according to Gallup, 65 percent of white, working-class voters thought it was "worth going to war" in Iraq, while only 33 percent disagreed. By late May 2004, only 52 percent thought the war was worth fighting, and 46 percent thought it was not. The change among workers with some college was even more dramatic. They went from 70 to 30 percent in favor of the war to only 52 to 46 percent, a 34-point swing.

Other groups, including senior citizens, minorities, young voters, and voters with postgraduate education, have also become disillusioned with the war, but they were not as supportive to begin with. White, working-class voters were the bastion of pro-war sentiment. And, unlike minority voters or postgrads, they were also thoroughly supportive of Bush's presidency. So, while the war probably hasn't reduced Bush's already slim support among minority voters,

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it is undermining his support among the white working class, perhaps his most crucial voting bloc.

**I**N 1968, SOME white, working-class voters deserted Democratic presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey over their opposition to the Vietnam War. But their reasons for opposing the war were different from those of the antiwar protesters. They didn't object to the war's immorality, but to its futility, the waste of lives and resources on a battle that could not be won, at least not in the manner in which it was being fought.

The same distinction prevails today. Many voters in Martinsburg don't object to the invasion but to the occupation. Like Terry, they think the military should have gone in, captured Saddam Hussein, then left. They don't like the idea of sending troops and funds to rebuild Iraq. Don, a construction worker wearing a Chicago Bears cap, says, "I don't think it is helping us at all. We are sending all our resources and money out there."

But, as these West Virginians have learned that the Iraqis didn't possess weapons of mass destruction and were not allied with Al Qaeda, they have also begun to wonder whether the war was necessary at all. That has created a special kind of resentment in a state that has the third-highest percentage of National Guard troops mobilized for the war and where almost everyone knows someone serving in Iraq. Asked about Bush and the war, Shirley, a housewife holding a garage sale in front of the Moose Lodge, responds, "I have just one thing to say: Bring my son home."

Still, Bush is not getting routed in Martinsburg. In a Saturday walk around the town's blue-collar neighborhoods, about one-third of those interviewed expressed support for the president and the war. Their support seemed to hinge on the belief that, by invading Iraq, the military was also fighting Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Richard, a landscaper, says, "They are all tied to the same string. That's why the Iraqis are fighting us."

One person was critical of the war but still supportive of Bush. "I think we have another Vietnam getting started," says Jim, who runs a lawnmower repair business out of his yard. "We should have done it and gotten out of there." But he still prefers Bush to Kerry. "At least I know where George stands," he says. "You listen to Kerry, and you don't know which side of the fence he stands on."

For the most part, however, people in Martinsburg seem to reflect the national polls, which show a close correlation between support or opposition to the war and support or opposition to Bush's presidency. Says Brenda, who, as a hair stylist at J.C. Penney, hears political arguments all day and who opposes the war herself, "Nobody is in the middle on this issue." This division among white, working-class voters is bad news for Bush. With the rest of the nation closely divided, Bush needs to win big with this demographic. If support for the war among the white working class continues to erode, so will Bush's chances of reelection. ■

## The Confederacy's new face. Lost Cause

BY JASON ZENGERLE

FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

**O**N A SATURDAY afternoon not long ago, Walt Hilderman was standing in a soggy horse pasture here—a .75-caliber musket in one hand, a Confederate flag in the other. He was participating in a reenactment of an 1865 Civil War battle called the Skirmish at Gamble's Hotel.

A retired police captain with bowed legs and a drooping silver moustache, Hilderman wore the rebel-gray uniform well. In fact, if you forgot he had been swigging from a bottle of Coke shortly before the battle, it wasn't hard to picture Hilderman fighting some 140 years earlier. As he and his fellow Confederate reenactors repulsed a Union charge—just as the real Confederate forces had done in Florence in 1865—Hilderman fired his gun, waved his flag, and let out the occasional rebel yell. After the Union reenactors surrendered, Hilderman fell in with the other men of his North Carolina infantry regiment and marched to the company's camp. "Who are we? Tarheels!" they shouted as they went. "What do we do? Kill Yankees!"

Hilderman, who grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina, was raised on tales of his great-great-grandfather's service in the Confederate Army. "Ever since I was a young boy, I've identified with the Confederate soldier," he says. In 1963, when Hilderman was only 14, he participated in his first Civil War reenactment. Now, in his fifties and recovering from cancer, Hilderman still manages to kill Yankees at reenactments eight weekends per year.

But, in the real world, Hilderman spends most of his time these days battling his fellow Confederates. A member of the nation's leading Confederate heritage group, the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), Hilderman is running to be the organization's commander-in-chief on the platform that the SCV's current leadership is rife with racists and right-wing extremists. As Hilderman sees it, the SCV is supposed to honor and preserve the memory of the Confederate soldier through activities like reenactments and cleaning Confederate gravestones. But lately, Hilderman says, the leadership of the 31,000-member organization has taken the SCV in a more political direction, aligning it with extremist groups like the neo-secessionist League of the South and the white supremacist Council of Conservative Citizens (CofCC). Now, according to Hilderman, local SCV camp meetings are more likely to feature anti-government diatribes and odes to the unique "Anglo-Celtic" nature of the South than plans to commemorate Robert E. Lee Day. "We start carrying a lot of extra

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