



## A NEW MORAL COMPASS

How a third of the country is impacting politics...for good.

By Donna Mosher

Nearly a third of the eligible U.S. electorate did not vote in the last Presidential elections. Who were these people? Apathetic voters? Irresponsible citizens? Simply un-American? Maybe you were one. Maybe you didn't vote because the candidates did not adequately reflect your views. Maybe you didn't vote because you thought your vote would make no difference. Or maybe you voted, but left with a sense of futility and alienation.

If so, you're not alone. The two-party system in the United States is overlooking a growing plurality – approaching 40 percent – whose values are not adequately reflected in platforms or policy. Termed “New Progressives” or “Cultural Creatives” by sociologist Paul Ray and embraced by many, this emerging progressive bloc cannot be identified by traditional demographic means. Spanning age, income, geography, gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion, this growing cultural group significantly outnumbers the religious right and the classic liberals.

“It's not that we don't care,” says Jim Garrison, who is working with Ray to coalesce and activate this group distinguished by common values. “It's that we've been alienated.” No newcomer to political activism, Garrison is founder and president of the Gorbachev Foundation/USA, which in 1995 established the State of the World Forum, a global network of leaders dedicated to creating a more sustainable global civilization. He also serves as the president of Wisdom University in San Francisco, succeeding renowned theologian and founder Matthew Fox.

This growing cultural group of estranged citizens is not perched on the edge of political discourse, says Garrison, but permeating the mainstream. “We now constitute a virtual majority on the values in this country. We

examine our values and actions in a deeper way. And we're finding our institutions are no longer capable of offering solutions that work.”

Neither political party recognizes the New Progressives, Garrison says. “We're invisible. The filters of cognition are not arranged to see the obvious.”

The group may be invisible, but it is immense, comprising 36 percent of the population and 45 percent of the electorate. They are 56 percent of all swing voters, so they can potentially dominate any election outcome. This group now significantly outnumbers the religious right as well as the classic liberals, and is increasing in numbers each year. This makes them the largest untapped resource in the country.

The New Progressives hunger for authentic political leadership. They believe in ecological sustainability and personal growth; they have a world focus beyond nationalistic views; they support women's issues and peace; they are concerned with the legacy that is being left for future generations. And they are fed up with current politics and politicians.

Are there any political leaders now positioned or willing to pick up the banner representing the New Progressives? “Absolutely nobody,” Garrison says. “Either they are not aware of this group or they are not willing to stake their political future on this.” He attributes the demands of “big money” to this reluctance, saying politicians cannot afford to ally with the New Progressives.

Oppositional stances – left and right, liberal and conservative – are no longer relevant to American life today. Effective leadership demands working together for positive goals and effective programs.

“People are disengaging from larger groups,” Garrison says. “Where

do we go when our traditional institutions are breaking down and are no longer able to protect us?"

Garrison calls for a commitment to "sacred activism" – invigorating the values and actions that will regain a sense of community and higher purpose. Reflecting the Wisdom University curriculum that blends immersion in sacred practices with hands-on social activism, sacred activism expresses the hope and optimism for what motivated individuals can accomplish. Sacred activism can be a unifying force, catering not to dogmatic evangelicals but to those who recognize the need to disengage religion from politics.

Garrison and sociologist Ray are collaborating to build awareness and organize this group around discussions of sacred activism and the new moral compass that they say is emerging in America. They claim these Americans are willing to be mobilized around an agenda that is neither left nor right but which is spiritually tolerant, supportive of the free market and the use of technology, but which also protects the environment and sustains local communities, and which is holistic in its approach to problem solving.

"Our message is powerfully motivating and unifying," says Garrison. "This group is calling for solutions that work, aligned with our political values."

In May, Tulsa hosted the second Sacred Activism conference designed to identify and mobilize the New Progressives into an

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effective moral presence and political force. Yes, Tulsa. Oklahoma. Garrison and Ray conducted the first conference in Seattle, but it was like preaching to the choir, Garrison says. This year they wanted to reach mainstream progressives in the heartland of the country. Around 750 attendees came from Oklahoma and around the country to hear a host of distinguished leaders in the spiritual, political, and environmental movements and join in a conversation about the critical moral challenges facing the United States.

Ray and Garrison are not resting on the success of the Tulsa gathering, but are working to keep this important conversation alive.

And their goal is ambitious: In ten years they believe this electoral group can be as commonly recognized as Republicans and Democrats. Garrison predicts that by 2010 to 2012, leaders will recognize the electoral force

of the New Progressives and be compelled to embrace it.

Garrison says the New Progressives have been evolving as a culture for the last 50 years; they are just now becoming evident. He proclaims a sense of inevitability to the opportunity they bring to transform the American political culture. And he bases his argument on precedent.

"The pope never saw the Reformation coming until it was over."

(Donna Mosher is publisher of Authentic Living: Creating A Life You Love, at [www.AuthenticLiving.com](http://www.AuthenticLiving.com))

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