

# pulse

CATCHING THE BUZZ FROM GLOBAL LEADERS,  
THINKERS, TEACHERS, AND MYSTICS

by Igal Moria and Ross Robertson



## America's Heartland Hosts a New Spiritual Politics

Perhaps you're tired of the current administration and would like to make a change. So where do you go to start a political revolution? How about Washington, DC, traditional seat of political power? Or San Francisco, historic hotbed of new social revolutions? Maybe you'd prefer New Orleans, poster child of government ineptitude

and inaction? **Jim Garrison**, cofounder of the State of the World Forum and current president of Oakland's Wisdom University, has a different idea—Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Tulsa? That's right. Garrison's plan is to host a massive "sacred activism" conference right in the heart of Middle America, the self-described

buckle of the Bible Belt. The conference will be called "Finding a New Political Compass for America," and its goal is to galvanize a new force in America's political culture, one that has been missed by political pundits overly fascinated with traditional ideas of left and right. Together with Wisdom University founder **Matthew Fox** and social scientist **Paul Ray**, Garrison is positioning this conference as the beginning of a larger effort to bring attention to a new voting bloc called the "new progressives."

Ray, who became well known in the nineties for identifying the "cultural creatives" (a socially aware, ecologically sensitive, spiritually interested sector of the American populace), is now taking his work further into the political world, identifying the political behaviors and preferences of the cultural-creative demographic. He claims that these new progressives—who tend to be ecologically minded, anti-big business, interested in personal growth, ambivalent about globalization, highly passionate about the future, and concerned about the legacy we leave the next generation—now represent fifty-five million voters, or forty-five percent of the electorate. In order to further study this new political subculture, Ray has accepted a chair at Wisdom University, where he plans to update and expand the social data on a group that some are calling "political north" (neither left nor right).

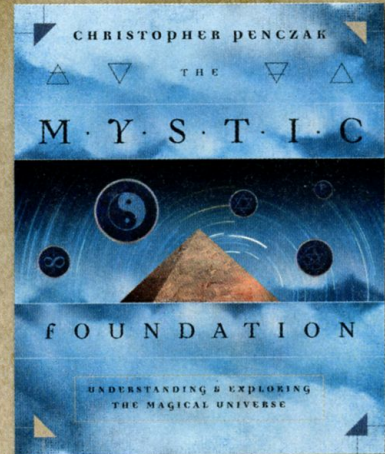
Now even if Ray's data is correct and cultural creatives really are mounting a challenge to conventional political wisdom, Tulsa doesn't exactly seem like the natural habitat of this new species of voter. But Garrison sees it differently. He feels that the Midwest might actually be more open to hearing a progressive message than urban centers on the coasts, which have grown accustomed—and perhaps more indifferent—to new social movements. And just to grease the wheels in this evangelical heartland, he has teamed up with minister **Carlton Pearson** of New Dimensions church in Tulsa. A former conservative evangelical preacher who underwent a personal transformation, Pearson became disillusioned with the religious exclusivism in evangelical ministries. He now teaches the "gospel of inclusion" and has written a book called *God Is Not a Christian*.

Through his alliance with Pearson, Garrison hopes he can tap the tremendous religious energy contained in Middle America but channel it toward a different kind of politics than those that brought **George Bush** to power in 2004. Interestingly enough, Tulsa's population demographic is more representative of America as a whole than that of any other city in the country, according to the 2000 census. Perhaps if he can succeed there, he can succeed anywhere.

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