

How Half Of America Lost Its F**king Mind

I'm going to explain the Donald Trump phenomenon in three movies. And then some text.



October 12, 2016, [Jason Pargin](#), [cracked.com](#)

There's this universal shorthand that epic adventure movies use to tell the good guys from the bad. The good guys are simple folk from the countryside ...



.. while the bad guys are decadent assholes who live in the city and wear stupid clothes:



In *Star Wars*, Luke is a farm boy ...



.. while the bad guys live in a shiny space station:



In *Braveheart*, the main character (Dennis Braveheart) is a simple farmer ...



... and the dastardly Prince Shithead lives in a luxurious castle and wears fancy, foppish clothes:



The theme expresses itself in several ways -- primitive vs. advanced, tough vs. delicate, masculine vs. feminine, poor vs. rich, pure vs. decadent, traditional vs. weird. **All of it is code for rural vs. urban.** That tense divide between the two doesn't exist because of these movies, obviously. These movies used it as shorthand because the divide already existed.

We country folk are programmed to hate the prissy elites. That brings us to Trump.

6. It's Not About Red And Blue States -- It's About The Country Vs. The City

I was born and raised in Trump country. My family are Trump people. If I hadn't moved away and gotten this ridiculous job, I'd be voting for him. I know I would.

See, political types talk about "red states" and "blue states" (where red = Republican/conservative and blue =

Democrat/progressive), but forget about states. If you want to understand the Trump phenomenon, dig up the much more detailed county map. Here's how the nation voted county by county in the 2012 election -- again, red is Republican:



Holy cockslops, that makes it look like Obama's blue party is some kind of fringe political faction that struggles to get 20 percent of the vote. The blue parts, however, are more densely populated -- they're the cities. In the upper left, you see the blue Seattle/Tacoma area, lower down is San Francisco and then L.A. The blue around the dick-shaped Lake Michigan is made of cities like Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago. In the northeast is, of course, New York and Boston, leading down into Philadelphia, which leads into a blue band which connects a bunch of southern cities like Charlotte and Atlanta.

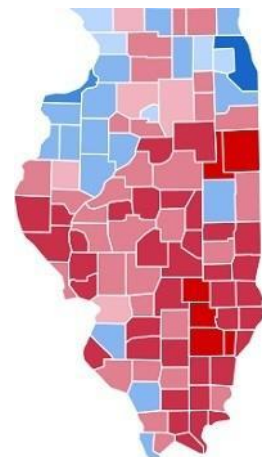
Blue islands in an ocean of red. The cities are [less than 4 percent of the land mass](#), but 62 percent of the population and easily 99 percent of the popular culture. Our movies, shows, songs, and news all radiate out from those blue islands.

And if you live in the red, that fucking sucks.

See, I'm from a "blue" state -- Illinois -- but the state isn't blue. Freaking *Chicago* is blue. I'm from a tiny town in one of the blood-red areas.

As a kid, visiting Chicago was like, well, Katniss visiting the capital. Or like Zoey visiting the city of the future in [this ridiculous book](#). "Their ways are *strange*."

And the whole goddamned world revolves around them.



Every TV show is about LA or New York, maybe with some Chicago or Baltimore thrown in. When they did make a show about us, we were jokes -- either wide-eyed, naive fluffballs (*Parks And Recreation*, and before that, *Newhart*) or filthy murderous mutants (*True Detective*, and before that, *Deliverance*). You could feel the arrogance from hundreds of miles away.



"Nothing that happens outside the city matters!" they say at their cocktail parties, blissfully unaware of where their food is grown. Hey, remember when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans? Kind of weird that a big hurricane hundreds of miles across managed to snipe one specific city and avoid everything else. To watch the news (or the multiple movies and TV shows about it), you'd barely hear about how the storm utterly steamrolled rural Mississippi, killing 238 people and doing an astounding [\\$125 billion in damage](#).

But who cares about those people, right? What's newsworthy about a bunch of toothless hillbillies crying over a flattened trailer? New Orleans is *culturally important*. It *matters*.

To those ignored, suffering people, Donald Trump is a brick chucked through the window of the elites. "Are you assholes listening *now*?"

5. City People Are From A Different Goddamned Planet



"But isn't this really about race? Aren't Trump supporters just a bunch of racists? Don't they hate cities because that's where the brown people live?"

Look, we're going to get actual Nazis in the comment section of this article. Not "calling them Nazis for argument points" Nazis, but actual "Swastikas in their avatars, rooted against *Indiana Jones*" Nazis. Those people exist.

But what I can say, from personal experience, is that the racism of my youth was always one step removed. I never saw a family member, friend, or classmate be mean to the actual black people we had in town. We worked with them, played video games with them, waved to them when they passed. What I did hear was several million comments about how if you ever ventured into the city, winding up in the "wrong neighborhood" meant you'd get dragged from your car, raped, and burned alive. Looking back, I think the idea was that the local minorities were fine ... *as long as they acted exactly like us*.



If you'd asked me at the time, I'd have said the fear and hatred wasn't of people with brown skin, but of that specific tribe they have in Chicago -- you know, the guys with the weird slang, music and clothes, the dope fiends who murder everyone they see. It was all part of the bizarro nature of the cities, as perceived from afar -- a combination of hyper-aggressive savages and frivolous white elites. *Their ways are strange*. And it wasn't like pop culture was trying to talk me out of it:

It's not just perception, either -- the stats back up the fact that these are parallel universes. People living in the countryside are twice as likely to own a gun and will probably get married younger. People in the urban "blue" areas talk faster and walk faster. They are more likely to be drug abusers but less likely to be alcoholics. The blues are less likely to own land and, most importantly, they're less likely to be Evangelical Christians.

In the small towns, this often gets expressed as "They don't share our values!" and my progressive friends love to scoff at that. "What, like *illiteracy and homophobia?!?!'*"

Nope. Everything.

4. Trends Always Start In The Cities -- And Not All Of Them Are Good



The cities are always living in the future. I remember when our little town got our first Chinese restaurant and, 20 years later, its first fancy coffee shop. All of this stuff had turned up in movies (set in L.A., of course) decades earlier. I remember watching '80s movies and mocking the "[Valley Girl](#)" stereotypes -- young girls from, like, California who would, like, say, "like" in between every third word. Twenty years later, you can hear me doing the same in every Cracked podcast. The cancer started in L.A. and spread to the rest of America.

Well, the perception back then was that those city folks were all turning atheist, abandoning church for their bisexual sex parties. That, we were told, was literally a sign of the Apocalypse. Not just due to the spiritual consequences (which were dire), but the devastation that would come to the culture. I couldn't imagine any rebuttal. In that place, at that time, the church was everything. Don't take my word for it -- [listen to the experts](#):

in smaller communities, churches are commonly among the only venues for large social gatherings. Churches may also act as the sole providers of counseling, aid to the poor, and social activities (even if those take the form of choir music and Christmas pageants) in rural communities.

via [Gallup](#)

Church was where you made friends, met girls, networked for jobs, got social support. The poor could get food and clothes there, couples could get advice on their marriages, addicts could try to get clean. But now we're seeing [a startling decline in Christianity](#) among the general population, the godless disease having spread alongside Valley Girl talk. So according to Fox News, what's the result of those decadent, atheist, amoral snobs in the cities having turned their noses up at God? Chaos.



The fabric has broken down, they say, just as predicted. And what rural Americans see on the news today is a sneak peek at their tomorrow.

The savages are coming.

Blacks riot, Muslims set bombs, gays spread AIDS, Mexican cartels behead children, atheists tear down Christmas trees. Meanwhile, those liberal Lena Dunhams in their \$5,000-a-month apartments sip wine and say, "But those white Christians are the *real* problem!" Terror victims scream in the street next to their own severed limbs, and the response from the elites is to cry about how men should be allowed to use women's restrooms and how it's cruel to keep chickens in cages.

Madness. Their heads are so far up their asses that they can't tell up from down. Basic, obvious truths that have gone unquestioned for thousands of years now get laughed at and shouted down -- the fact that hard work is better than dependence on government, that children do better with both parents in the picture, that peace is better than rioting, that a strict moral code is better than blithe hedonism, that humans tend to value things they've earned more than what they get for free, that not getting exploded by a bomb is better than getting exploded by a bomb.

Or as they say out in the country, "Don't piss on my leg and tell me it's raining."

The foundation upon which America was undeniably built -- family, faith, and hard work -- had been deemed unfashionable and small-minded. Those snooty elites up in their ivory tower laughed as they kicked away that foundation, and then wrote 10,000-word thinkpieces blaming the builders for the ensuing collapse.

3. The Rural Areas Have Been Beaten To Shit



Don't message me saying all those things I listed are wrong. I know they're wrong. Or rather, I think they're wrong, because I now live in a blue county and work for a blue industry. I know the Good Old Days of the past were built on slavery and segregation, I know that entire categories of humanity experienced religion only as a boot on their neck. I know that those "traditional families" involved millions of women trapped in kitchens and bad marriages. I know gays lived in fear and abortions were back-alley affairs.

I know the changes were for the best.

Try telling that to anybody who lives in Trump country.

They're getting the shit kicked out of them. I know, I was there. Step outside of the city, and the suicide rate among young people [fucking doubles](#). The recession pounded



rural communities, [but all the recovery went to the cities](#). The rate of new businesses opening in rural areas has utterly collapsed.

See, rural jobs used to be based around [one big local business](#) -- a factory, a coal mine, etc. When it dies, the town dies. Where I grew up, it was an oil refinery closing that did us in. I was raised in the hollowed-out shell of what the town had once been. The roof of our high school leaked when it rained. Cities can make up for the loss of manufacturing jobs with service jobs -- [small towns cannot](#). That model doesn't work below a certain population density.

If you don't live in one of these small towns, you can't understand the hopelessness. The vast majority of possible careers involve moving to the city, and around every city is now a hundred-foot wall called "Cost of Living." Let's say you're a smart kid making \$8 an hour at Walgreen's and aspire to greater things. Fine, get ready to move yourself and your new baby into a 700-square-foot apartment for \$1,200 a month, and to then pay double what you're paying now for utilities, groceries, and babysitters. Unless, of course, you're planning to move to one of "those" neighborhoods (hope you like being set on fire!).



That is, if they don't [replace](#) the only room you can afford with a [\\$3,300-per-month high-rise](#).

In a city, you can plausibly aspire to start a band, or become an actor, or get a medical degree. You can actually have dreams. In a small town, there may be no venues for performing arts aside from country music bars and churches. There may only be two doctors in town -- aspiring to that job means waiting for one of them to retire or die. You open the classifieds and all of the job listings will be for fast food or convenience stores. The "downtown" is just the corpses of mom and pop stores left shattered in Walmart's blast crater, the "suburbs" are trailer parks. There are parts of these towns that look post-apocalyptic.

I'm telling you, the hopelessness eats you alive.

And if you dare complain, some liberal elite will pull out their iPad and type up a rant about your

racist white privilege. Already, someone has replied to this with a comment saying, "You should try living in a ghetto as a minority!" Exactly. To them, it seems like the plight of poor minorities is only used as a club to bat away white cries for help. Meanwhile, [the rate of rural white suicides and overdoses skyrockets](#). Shit, at least politicians *act* like they care about the inner cities.

2. Everyone Lashes Out When They Don't Have A Voice



It really does feel like the worst of both worlds: all the ravages of poverty, but none of the sympathy. "Blacks burn police cars, and those liberal elites say it's not their fault because they're poor. My son gets jailed and fired over a baggie of meth, and those same elites make jokes about his missing teeth!" You're everyone's punching bag, one of society's last remaining safe comedy targets.

They take it hard. These are people who come from a long line of folks who took pride in looking after themselves. Where I'm from, you weren't a real man unless you could repair a car, patch a roof, hunt your own meat, and defend your home from an intruder. It was a source of shame to be dependent on anyone -- especially the government. You mowed your own lawn and fixed your own pipes when they leaked, you hauled your own firewood in your own pickup truck. (Mine was a 1994 Ford Ranger! The current owner says it still runs!)

Not like those hipsters in their tiny apartments, or "those people" in their public housing projects, waiting for the landlord any time something breaks, knowing if things get too bad they can just pick up and move. When you don't own anything, it's all somebody else's problem. "They probably don't pay taxes, either! Just treating America itself as a subsidized apartment they can trash!"

The rural folk with the Trump signs in their yards say their way of life is dying, and you smirk and say what they *really* mean is that blacks and gays are finally getting equal rights and they hate it. But I'm telling you, they say their way of life is dying *because their way of life is dying*. It's not their imagination. No movie about the future portrays it as being full of traditional families, hunters, and coal mines. Well, except for *Hunger Games*, and *that was depicted as an apocalypse*.



So yes, they vote for the guy promising to put things back the way they were, the guy who'd be a wake-up call to the blue islands. They voted for the brick through the window.

It was a vote of desperation.

1. Assholes Are Heroes



"But Trump is objectively a piece of shit!" you say. "He insults people, he objectifies women, and cheats whenever possible! And he's not an everyman; he's a smarmy, arrogant billionaire!"

Wait, are you talking about Donald Trump, or this guy:



You've never rooted for somebody like that? Someone powerful who gives your enemies the insults they deserve? Somebody with big fun appetites who screws up just enough to make them relatable? Like Dr. House or Walter White? Or any of the several million renegade cop characters who can break all the rules because they get shit done? Who only get shit done *because they don't care about the rules?*

"But those are fictional characters!" Okay, what about all those millionaire left-leaning talk show hosts? You think they keep their insults classy? Tune into any bit about Chris Christie and start [counting down the seconds until the fat joke](#). Google David Letterman's sex scandals. But it's okay, because they're on our side, and everybody wants an asshole on their team -- a spiked bat to smash their enemies with. That's all Trump is. The howls of elite outrage are like the sounds of bombs landing on the enemy's fortress. The louder the better.

Already some of you have gotten angry, feeling this gut-level revulsion at any attempt to excuse or even understand these people. After all, they're hardly people, right? Aren't they just a mass of ignorant, rageful, crude, cursing, spitting subhumans?

Gee, I hope not. I have to hug a bunch of them at Thanksgiving. And when I do, it will be with the knowledge that if I hadn't moved away, I'd be on the other side of the fence, leaving nasty comments on [this article the alternate universe version of me wrote](#).

It feels good to dismiss people, to mock them, to write them off as deplorables. But you might as well take time to try to understand them, because I'm telling you, they'll still be around long after Trump is gone.



By Jason "David Wong" Pargin <https://www.cracked.com/blog/6-reasons-trumps-rise-that-no-one-talks-about>