held in Washington, and the secretary of agriculture was publicly berated for allowing hunger to fester in a country with such agricultural riches.

Wright Austin's book is an attempt to find out what has happened in the Delta since that time. With the Voting Rights Act and the creation of various economic development programs, one might have hoped for political empowerment and economic advancement by blacks in this heavily African American area of Mississippi. In depressing detail, the author proves that neither has emerged since the 1960s. There have been slight advances, politically and economically, but blacks in the Delta remain justifiably frustrated at the lack of progress.

The Transformation of Plantation Politics is an eloquent and powerful book. Wright Austin has amassed a great deal of data on income, education, and elections in 11 core and seven peripheral Delta counties. She also interviewed political elites in the area and her historical research appears surefooted. Her most important finding is that a sharp rise in the number of black officeholders has done little to help African Americans in the Delta. On the surface, African American candidates have done well since the Voting Rights Act enfranchised a population largely prevented from voting. There were only 57 black elected officials in Mississippi in 1970; by 2000 the number had risen to 897.

Wright Austin determines that this success at the ballot box is a false prosperity. She notes that "[e]ven in counties with black voting-age populations of 40% and above, African American contenders have won few county and countywide elections" (p. 105). The local offices that blacks have won, such as seats on the city council, have brought them limited influence. Since they could no longer keep blacks from voting, the "plantation bloc practiced ingenious methods" to dilute black voting strength (p. 102). These tactics included instituting more at-large elections, gerrymandering districts, and changing elected offices to appointed ones. In the Delta today, power lies at the county level and African Americans have fared poorly in winning county supervisory elections. In the small towns that dot the Delta, African Americans may hold office but those offices possess little authority.

Two theoretical frameworks guide Wright Austin. The first is community power, and she asks which of four theories (pluralist, elitist, regime, and incorporation) best explain political development in the Mississippi Delta. Not surprisingly, she finds elitist theory to be an apt guide to the power structure of the area, but she also finds incorporation theory to be useful. Drawing on Rufus P. Browning, Dale R. Marshall, and David H. Tabb's *Protest Is Not Enough* (1984), Wright Austin offers her most interesting analysis on the theoretical side. Unlike the 10 northern California cities in *Protest Is Not Enough,* where the elections of minorities to city councils catalyzed minority–white coalitions, the election of African Americans to city councils in the Delta has done little to generate biracial coalitions. Wright Austin makes it clear that incorporation is a complicated process, not yet fully mapped out, and that tipping points in local politics may prove illusory.

The author's second theoretical framework is social capital theory. She argues that "bridging" social capital—linkages between blacks and whites—is sorely missing in the Delta and that this has contributed significantly to the problems that African Americans have experienced in trying to move forward in the political and economic realms. Her views are certainly logical and make a great deal of sense but, that said, her data are not ideally suited to allow her to go beyond broad generalizations. Most social capital research has utilized surveys of attitudes and behavior and measurements of organizational populations, memberships, and interaction. Lacking such data, Wright Austin draws instead on her interviews with local leaders and on small case studies of politics in the Delta.

There are some glimmers of hope. Wright Austin finds that race relations are improving and that the need for economic development in the Delta may nurture more cooperation in the future. African Americans have become more successful in organizing community groups, and a handful of community development corporations have scored some small victories. At the same time, her sobering analysis suggests that progress will continue to be slow. *The Transformation of Plantation Politics* has much to teach us, and scholars of the politics of the South, race relations, and urban politics will find this excellent work to be particularly valuable.

America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception.
By Wayne E. Baker. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 328p. $18.95.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707070983

— Philip A. Klinkner, *Hamilton College*

Wayne Baker's *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception* offers a recent addition to a growing literature in political science that examines the perception and, perhaps, reality of the polarization of American politics around cultural and moral issues. In this book, Baker sets out to provide an empirical examination of three aspects of America's perceived crisis of values. The first of these is the trend hypothesis: In recent decades, America has experienced a significant decline in its commitment to traditional moral values. The second is the comparison hypothesis: Moral values in the United States have declined relative to most other nations. Third and finally is the distribution hypothesis: Americans have become increasingly polarized in their commitment to traditional moral values.

To test these hypotheses, Baker relies on survey data from the World Values Survey, a large, cross-national survey conducted in various waves between 1981 and 2000.

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These surveys measure respondent attitudes on numerous questions regarding social and cultural values. Baker has arrayed these results along two dimensions. The first scales respondents along a continuum between traditional values and secular-rational values. The second dimension provides a continuum between values of self-expression versus survival values. It is along these dimensions that Baker plots the United States along with other nations in the survey. Because the surveys were conducted in multiple waves, he can also track changes over time along these dimensions.

Regarding the trend hypothesis, Baker finds that between 1981 and 2000, the United States exhibited almost no change on the traditional versus secular values scale. As a result, Baker argues that there is little evidence of a decline in America's commitment to traditional moral values. On the other hand, the United States did during this time move significantly toward the self-expression pole of the survival versus self-expression dimension. Thus it seems that Americans have not changed their own values, though they have become more tolerant of the expression of values different than their own.

Baker similarly finds little support for the comparison hypothesis. If anything, America's relative adherence to traditional moral values has become even stronger as a result of the shift of most other industrialized nations toward secular-rational values. Finally, Baker's analysis of the survey data leads him to conclude that the distribution hypothesis is largely false. Americans may perceive that they are polarizing into warring cultural and moral camps, but there is no evidence to suggest that they actually are. He writes, "The social attitudes, cultural values, and religious beliefs of Americans are not polarized; Americans have a lot in common and tend to share the same attitudes, cultural values, and religious beliefs" (p. 108).

In addition to his reporting of these empirical findings, Baker also attempts to answer two analytical questions. First, why the perceived crisis of American values when there is little or no empirical evidence of such a crisis? Baker's analysis suggests that such crises are a periodic feature of American history as technological and economic changes pose challenges to traditional values. Such crises are most acute at the midpoints of these cycles as newer values increasingly compete with tradition ones, but are not yet dominant. This analysis is similar in some ways to cycles of "creedal passion" set out years ago by Samuel Huntington.

The second of Baker's questions asks why is it that the United States is such a global outlier when it comes to moral values. As Baker shows, the United States occupies a relatively unique global position, with a very strong commitment to traditional moral values compared to other industrialized democracies. In fact, on this dimension the United States looks more like some developing nations. Baker attributes this unique position to the peculiarities of American political culture. As a nation founded on certain ideals, to move away from those ideals would entail a loss of national identity. In contrast, nations founded on birthright status can alter their moral values with no threat to their national identity. Was the United States founded upon a consistent set of ideals? Rogers Smith has argued persuasively that American political culture is the result of the interplay of multiple political traditions, some, as Baker claims, based on certain ideological tenets, but others based on such attributes of birth as sex, race, and ethnicity.

Baker also wants to argue that America's founding values are not the typical Lockean liberal values of democracy, liberty, and equality, but traditional religious values. According to him, "America's traditional values—strong belief in religion and God, family values, absolute moral authority, national pride, and so on—are fundamental to what it means to be American" (p. 54). Such values have played an extremely important role in American political thought and culture, but they are hardly the only ones. Moreover, one can readily argue that certain traditional moral values run contrary to American founding principles. For example, believing that individuals should have the right to control their own bodies and reproductive choices is arguably more in line with the notions of liberty in the American creed than religiously based antiabortion views.

Though his analysis of American political culture is largely unconvincing, Baker's book is nonetheless a useful addition to the literature on political polarization. Like Morris Fiorina, Alan Abramowitz, Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, he succeeds in bringing empirical rigor to bear on a complex topic that is too often reduced to something as simplistic as a red and blue map of state-level 2004 election results. In particular, Baker's use of the Global Values Survey provides a much needed global context to this important topic.

Lessons of Disaster: Policy Change after Catastrophic Events. By Thomas A. Birkland. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. 240p. $44.95 cloth, $26.95 paper.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071010

— Derek S. Reiners, *University of Florida*

Lessons of Disaster is a natural follow-up to the author's previous book, *After Disaster* (1997), which examined the extent to which disasters and accidents influence policy agendas within relevant domains. *Lessons of Disaster* is built on this previous work but focuses specifically on whether or not disasters, as focusing events, induce policy learning. The author differentiates between simple policy change and actual policy learning by defining learning as a process by which policy actors incorporate new information and insights revealed by a disaster and purposefully apply it to the design of more appropriate or effective policies. The author also differentiates between three distinct types

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