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Religion, Politics and Gender Equality

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Introduction

Since at least 1980, the United States has been dominated by a political coalition in which conservative evangelical Protestants have played a major role.¹ This coalition has typically operated within the framework of the Republican political party and has supported Republican dominance in electoral politics, leading to a vociferous conservatism in U.S. policy on issues of both gender and sexuality: using U.S. aid so as to promote worldwide restrictions on women's reproductive freedoms, promoting the male-headed nuclear family as the optimal model for personal life, and dismantling government offices and programs that had been dedicated to ending gender discrimination in economic sectors. In conjunction with neoliberal imperatives to privatize government programs and devolve responsibility onto individual households, this conservatism has had significant negative effects on gender equality, particularly for poor women and women of color, in the United States and around the world. As a result, it is easy to think that the removal of religion from the American political process would also directly further gender equality. As we explore in detail below, however, American secular politics includes gender and sexual conservatism that, while better than the intense conservatism promoted by actors on the religious right within the Republican coalition, has oftentimes combined a Christian secularism with neoliberal imperatives in support of policies that are punitive toward women and that undercut possibilities for gender equality.

The most recent Presidential election in 2008 fractured the Republican religious coalition and opened the door to a new alliance between the Democratic Party and "new evangelical" Christians who identify as politically moderate or progressive. While this alliance between Democrats and Christians might also be assumed to usher in a model of religious political engagement in a far more progressive guise, on questions of gender and sexuality the result is by no means obvious. While both progressive evangelicals and the Democratic Party nominee and eventual victor, Barack Obama moved to shift the focus of public debate from questions of gender and sexuality to economic issues, this move runs the risk of leaving existing political visions of gender and sexuality largely in tact. The individual states that voted for more progressive political leadership in Obama and continued conservatism on the issue of same-sex marriage (California and Florida) demonstrated the danger in Obama's strategy of shifting away from cultural issues to economics. An analysis of exit polling in conjunction with contributions to the campaign for the successful Proposition 8 anti-gay-marriage amendment in California shows a coalition of religious funders led by the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) operating somewhat independently of the Republican Party, a coalition that connected with voters from the more conservative Christian elements of the Obama coalition (Public Policy Institute of California 2008, Carlton 2008).²

Overall, the 2008 elections made visible a shifting landscape both within and among politically organized Christian groups and in alliances between Christian and secular activists within political parties. For the past few years, new alliances driven specifically by political allegiances around gender and sexuality have formed among

¹ We would like to thank Lucy Trainor, Suzanna Dennison, and Meryl Lodge for their truly invaluable research assistance on this project, as well as Alison Bilderback for her work on the coding of the 1996 "welfare reform" debate.

² The Republican Governor of the California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, opposed the measure after having vetoed legislative efforts to allow same-sex marriage on two separate occasions (Rothfeld and Barboza 2008, Tucker 2007).

religious groups that were previously divided, including conservative Catholics and Mormons in the campaign for California's Proposition 8 against gay marriage, as well as in international policy circles among conservative Protestants, Catholics and Muslims. As these specifically religious connections have grown the connections between Protestant evangelicals and the Republican Party have frayed. The massive unpopularity of President Bush, who personally embodied the conservative evangelical Protestant-Republican Party alliance, undercut the political power of the coalition by 2008 and also emboldened new groups who identified themselves as progressive evangelicals to organize politically and to ally with the Obama campaign, if not the Democratic Party as a whole. These shifts were met by changes within the Democratic Party as it took up more openly Christian rhetoric. None of these shifts challenged the dominance of Christianity in American politics, however. His supporters roundly denied the rumor that Obama was a Muslim; they did not question why it should be a problem for a Muslim to run for President of the United States. Thus, with all the change wrought by the 2008 election, the Christian presumption of American politics remained intact and with it the visions of gender and sexuality implied by American Christianity and Christian secularism.

The Status of Religion in the Political Context

The difficulty of effectively responding to the problem of gender inequalities in the United States is, in part, based on the historical intertwining of religion and political life in the United States, despite official pronouncements to the contrary. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution officially mandates the disestablishment of religion from government and protection for the free exercise of religion, stating simply, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." However, these mandates have not been realized historically. There is a great deal of debate about the meaning of both the "disestablishment" principle and the "free exercise" principle, as well as about the relationship between the two. Until the 1940s the U.S. Supreme Court did not treat the First Amendment as applying to any level of government below the federal level (Feldman 2000). As a result, Protestant religious practice in the public schools was a regular part of American life. In 1947 Justice Hugo Black provided the following definition of disestablishment as applying to state governments in *Everson v. Board of Education*: disestablishment means "at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion" (Eastland 1993). Since that time, the Supreme Court has developed a number of different tests to determine the basic standard of religious disestablishment. The most stable of these tests was developed in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) and required that laws pass a three-pronged test: that they have a secular purpose, do not support or inhibit religion, and do not excessively entangle the government in religion. But, more recent cases, such as *Lynch v. Donnelly* (1984) and *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union* (1989) have suggested other standards by which to determine if government action violates the principle of disestablishment. None of these have resolved ongoing controversies between those who believe that Christianity is a central part of "the American way of life," (Feldman 2000), including American law and politics, and those who support a stronger "separation between church and state." Even among those who support the "separation of church and state" the meaning of this dividing line is hotly debated. Is the separation an impenetrable wall or does it require "a few doors" (Carter 1993)?

Similarly, with regard to free exercise the standard established by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1963 has been subject to controversy, as well as revision by the court and the legislature. The 1963 standard, established in *Sherbert v. Verner* required that a law must be based on “a compelling state interest” if it contravened an individual’s free exercise of religion. Yet, despite the apparent strictness of this test, between 1973 and 1990, the Supreme Court ruled against the government only three times in defense of free exercise and never for a non-Protestant religion (Feldman 2000, Geddicks 1995). In a 1990 case, *Employment Division, Department of Human Resources v. Smith*, a case involving the question of whether two Native Americans who were fired for the religious use of peyote were eligible for unemployment benefits, the Court ruled that the *Sherbert* standard did not apply. The legislative process has been somewhat more open to non-Protestant religions (e.g., there is an exemption for religious peyote use in federal drug laws) and Congress responded to the *Smith* decision with the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, to return to the “strict scrutiny” standard of a compelling state interest. This law was ruled unconstitutional insofar as it applied to state governments in 1997, but left the Act intact with regard to federal law. In 2006 the Court appealed to this law when ruling against the government in *Gonzales v. O Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal* 126 S.Ct. 1211, another case involving the ritual use of (otherwise) illegal substances, this time in the setting of a Brazilian religion, but this use of the strict scrutiny standard only applies when federal laws are involved. Moreover, the question of whether the “restoration” of religious freedom is intended to restore a proliferation of Christian expression in the public sphere or a more diverse freedom remains a subject of debate.

These problems in interpretation reflect not just fundamental disagreements about the role of religion in American political life, but also serious questions about the meaning of religion itself, as well as about the relation between religion and secularism. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (2005) has made a strong argument that the idea of religion put into use by the Courts is based on a Protestant model; such that non-Protestant practices simply do not register as religion. Sullivan supports this argument with her own experience as an expert witness in a court case in Florida, where the Court would not recognize folk funerary practices as religious and thus as worthy of the Court’s protection. She summarizes her position by pointing out that: “Almost everyone in this debate is working with a model of religion that is historically and culturally bound in ways that are rarely fully acknowledged” (Sullivan 2000). Even those participants in debates over free exercise who “are sincerely committed to pluralism” are also trapped by the fact that “the diverse American religions they celebrate all look a lot like evangelical Protestantism” (2000, 42).

A second problem for religious freedom has been the Court’s interpretation of public Christianity as secular rather than religious. In *Lynch v. Donnelly* (1984) and again in *Allegheny County v. ACLU* (1989), the Court ruled that the display of religious symbols at public expense or on public property at Christmastime was an essentially secular act. For the Court, Christmas had become a secular, commercial holiday and the religious effects of the display of Christian symbols were, in the case of *Lynch*, “indirect, remote, and incidental.” While no one can deny that the Christmas has become a highly commercial holiday in the United States, the reasoning that this commercialism makes it effectively non-Christian for public purposes has been vigorously disputed (Feldman 1997, Sullivan 2000). The implications of this reasoning, taken as common sense by the Court, are important to understanding the role of religion in politics in the U.S. Not only is Christianity the dominant religion in the United States, such that when the Courts and legislatures draw on religious claims, these claims are almost always Christian, but also secular culture can be taken as presumptively Christian.

As a result, even if official free exercise and disestablishment were to be achieved the problem of the secular Christian hegemony in American culture would remain. Even when shorn of its explicitly religious aspects, secular American law continues to depend on a Christian, and explicitly Protestant, history and to ensure that Protestant presumptions undergird the political process (Campbell 2007, Green 2007, Layman 2001, Newcomb 2008, Smith 2006). For example, Philip Hamburger argues that even the idea of the “separation of church and state,” which is usually traced to eighteenth century founders Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, developed as it is used in contemporary American political discourse mainly in the nineteenth century as part of Protestant efforts to ensure that state funds would not go to Catholic projects, organizations, and schools (Hamburger 2004). Steven Newcomb (2008) argues that the very claim to dominion over the United States is based “on Old Testament narratives of the chosen people and the promised land, as exemplified in the 1823 Supreme Court ruling *Johnson v. McIntosh*, that the first ‘Christian people’ to ‘discover’ lands inhabited by ‘natives, who were heathens,’ have an ultimate title to and dominion over these lands and peoples.” Tracy Fessenden (2007) has traced the development of this presumption in American culture from Puritan ideas of God-given dominion over the Native Americans as foundational to the United States to a larger project of “equating American Protestantism with American culture,” such that “those religious sensibilities that do not shade invisibly into ‘American sensibilities’ fail to command our attention as foundational to our national culture, while those that *do* shade imperceptibly into American sensibilities fail to command our attention as religious” (33).

As we shall examine in detail below, this combination of direct Christian influence on American political life and Protestant secular presumption has had profound implications for issues related to gender and sexuality. All three branches of government—judicial, legislative and executive—have depended on both direct claims about Christian norms regarding gender and sexuality and secular norms that reflect Protestant influence in promoting imperial subordination and heterosexual familialism, particularly in the form of the nuclear family.

Indicators of Democratic Pluralism

The United States has a political system that is officially free and fully democratic as indicated by most indices of political freedom: elections, free expression, and freedom of the press. There are also indicators that there are limits imposed on some of these freedoms. These limits are produced by a failure to fully realize the claims of American democracy, as indicated by low voter turnout in comparison to other democracies. The U.S. ranks 139 out of 172 countries with free elections (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) and persistently disenfranchises minorities. Over 65% of eligible whites vote versus 60% of eligible Blacks, 44% of Asians and 47% of Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau 2005a). In addition, democracy in the United States exists in concert with a penal system that is more extensive than that of any other nation and that depends on high rates of executions. As of 2006, the U.S. has less than 5% of the world’s population, but over 23% of the world’s incarcerated people (National Council on Crime and Delinquency 2006). Both the rate of incarceration and the rate of execution are demonstrably biased on the basis of both race and class. African Americans are incarcerated at nearly 6 times the rate of whites and Latinos at nearly double the rate (The Sentencing Project 2006, Hartney 2006, Mauer 2003, Walmsley 2003). This racial bias in incarceration intensifies voter exclusion because in many states any person who has been convicted of a felony is barred for life from voting.

Limitations on freedom are also produced by corporate consolidation of media outlets and the difficulty of achieving citizen access to mainstream media, a problem that is shifting but not solved by the rise of the internet (Curtis 2004, DellaVigna 2007, Giles 2003, Morris 2007, Perlmutter 2008, Salter 2004, Shapiro 2006). While in 1983, there were over 50 major media corporations in the United States; twenty years later only 5 major corporations controlled the vast majority of the mainstream media. These corporations also have interlocking boards of directors, with more than 45 people serving on the board of more than one of these corporations (Bagdikian, 2004). In addition to this diminishment of freedom of the press, other freedoms have been curtailed in recent years due to the “war on terrorism.” As the Freedom House report on the United States notes, over the past six years there has been “political friction and litigation” over perceived violations of civil liberties and international standards by the Bush Administration’s counterterrorism policies (Galloway 2002, Cavoukian 2006). There has, for example, been considerable controversy over the Administration’s stance on the use of torture in interrogation, the judicial status of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, whether the U.S. participates in extraordinary rendition, and the policy of warrantless wiretapping. The Obama Administration is expected to reverse the worst of these abuses of power and has committed to closing the Guantanamo Bay facility, but it is unclear what restrictions on freedom might remain as part of the new Administration’s “counterterrorism” measures.

The Status of Women

While the United States government promotes a national vision of the freedoms experienced by women in the United States, data on gender differentials among elected officials, the gender wage gap, reproductive rights and gender-based violence indicate that the United States still has a serious differential in social status based on gender. Furthermore, in terms of some indicators, such as the percentage of women in government, the U.S. lags far behind other countries (Hausman, Tyson, and Zahidi 2007, Blau and Kahn 2003, United Nations 2007, Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005, Garcia-Moreno et.al. 2005). For example, while there have been some notable strides for women in elective office in the past few years, the percentage of women as elected officials in the U.S. remains woefully low. For the first time in history a woman is serving as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one of the most powerful positions in the Congress. In addition, for the first time a woman has been a viable candidate for the nomination of one of the two major political parties to be their candidate for President. Hillary Clinton garnered over 18 million votes in the Democratic primaries, the most ever for a woman candidate. Despite these gains, of the 535 current members of Congress, a mere 87 (or 16.3%) are women; 16 of these are in the U.S. Senate and 71 are in the House of Representatives. The proportion of women in state legislatures is 23.5% (“Women in Elective Office 2007” <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu>). The World Economic Forum ranked the US 19 out of 58 countries on a scale of women’s “political empowerment,” based on data on the number of female ministers, seats in parliament held by women, women holding senior, legislative and managerial positions, and the number of years a female has been head of state (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005). In a 2007 World Economic Forum report on the global gender gap, the U.S. ranked 27th out of 130 countries (well behind countries such as Lesotho (no. 16), Mozambique (no. 18), and Moldova (no. 20), based on assessment of jobs, education, politics, and health as a measure of gender parity (Hausman, Tyson, and Zahidi 2007, Pickert 2008, Kirdashy 2008).

Labor markets in the United States remain segregated by both gender and race, and it continues to be difficult for individuals to shift class position despite the preva-

lence of the narrative of class mobility in the United States. These factors come together to create what Leslie McCall has termed, “complex inequality” (McCall 2001). The statistics on gender difference alone are striking. The National Committee on Pay Equity reports that in 2006 the wage gap in the United States was such that on average women earned 76.9 cents for every dollar earned by men (<http://www.pay-equity.org>). According to current statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor, the gendered pay gap has widened – not narrowed – since 2005 (Kaufman and Hymowitz 2008). At the highest levels of employment, the “glass ceiling” remains widely intact. According to the research group Catalyst, women make up only 15.4% of corporate officers and 6.7% of those earning the highest pay. The National Association for Law Placement notes that at U.S. law firms, women accounted for only 17.9% of partners in 2006, despite that fact that they received 48% of law degrees that year and 43.5% of law degrees in 1996 (Kaufman and Hymowitz 2008). Data from within the professions including law, business, medicine, engineering, and academe consistently demonstrates slower rates of professional advancement for women as compared with men, as well as significant gendered pay gaps which are already substantial in entry-level positions and which expand still further in the upper professional tiers (Valian 2005). For women who are working at or close to the poverty line, the burdens on their labor force participation are increasing. Childcare costs have consistently risen over the past few decades. According to data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1990, the average weekly cost of childcare was \$60 (approximately \$90 when adjusted to 2005 inflation). By 1997, weekly costs had increased to \$75, or \$91 at 2005 rates. In 2005, the weekly average cost of childcare was \$107” (US Census Bureau 2005). For poor families this increase in costs has contributed to an increase in the percentage of their income going to childcare. The U.S. Census Bureau also reports that in Spring 2005, families living below the poverty line paid an average of 29.2% of their monthly income on childcare, compared with 6.1% for families living above the poverty line. This was up from Winter 2002, when families below the poverty line paid 25.7% of their monthly income on childcare (US Census Bureau 2005b).

When it comes to reproductive rights and freedoms, women’s access varies greatly depending on their access to economic resources and medical care and the particular state within the country in which they reside. Since the legalization of abortion in 1973, the U.S. Congress, the courts and many state legislatures have created increasing restrictions on access to abortion. These restrictions include a refusal for federal Medicaid to pay for abortions for women who are covered by Medicaid health insurance, except in cases of rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother (Luker 1984). The federal government also refuses to provide funding through the health insurance program for federal employees, for military personnel and their dependents, through the Bureau of Indian Health Services, for women in federal prisons, or for Peace Corps volunteers (Alrich and Boonstra 2007). In 2003 the Federal Government also passed “The Partial-Birth Abortion Act,” placing yet another restriction on late-term abortions. Individual states have enacted required waiting periods and parental notification acts that make abortion more difficult to obtain. These difficulties are increased by the fact that fewer and fewer medical services provide abortions, meaning that even when legal, abortion services may not be available (Ginsburg 1998, Saletan 2004). Forty-six out of fifty states allow medical providers to directly refuse abortion services. In addition, eight states allow medical providers to refuse to provide contraception and four states allow pharmacists to refuse to dispense contraception to women who have prescriptions from their doctors (Guttmacher Institute 2007).

The emphasis on a politics organized around a “right to life” that is indicated by all of these restrictions on reproductive freedom has to date not been accompanied by a

parallel emphasis on either maternal or infant health. The U.S. lags behind other developed nations in rates of prenatal care, leading to increased rates of mortality for women during childbirth, along with higher rates of premature births and infant mortality. For example, the U.S. rate of infant mortality is 6.37 deaths in the first year per 1,000 births. The European Union has a rate of 4.80 per 1,000 (CIA, 2007). Similarly, the United States has a maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 11 deaths per 100,000 live births, while the average MMR of developed countries is 9 deaths per 100,000 live births (World Health Organization 2007).

Finally, the U.S. faces an epidemic of violence against women. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network reports that 17.6% of women in the U.S., or more than 1 in 6 women, have been the victims of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetimes (U.S. Department of Justice 2006). Most women who are murdered in the United States are killed by someone they know in situations of domestic abuse. Women are also more likely to be victimized in a private home (their own or that of a neighbor, friend, or relative) than in any other place (Craven 1997). Seventy percent of women who are victims of a violent crime know their offender, and 21% of these women are victimized by an intimate partner or relative (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2007). A nationally representative survey found that women were more likely to be raped by intimate partners or family members than were men. Rates of child sexual abuse, particularly of girl children by their male relatives or mothers' boyfriends living in their homes are also quite high. In the first rape experience of female victims, perpetrators were reported to be intimate partners 30.4% of the time and family members 23.7% of the time (in the first rape experience of male victims, perpetrators were intimate partners in 15.9% of cases and family members in 17.7% of cases). Survey research has also found that 60.4% of female and 69.2% of male victims are first raped before age 18, while 25.5% of females and 41.0% of males are first raped before age 12 (Basile et. al. 2007). A 2005 survey of high school students found that 10.8% of girls and 4.2% of boys in grades 9-12 had been forced to have sexual intercourse at some point in their lives (CDC 2006). Finally, the murder of women in the U.S. occurs at much higher rates than in other industrialized countries. In 1998, 3.1% of deaths of American women were by homicide. In the years from 1997-1999, homicide was the cause of death for only 0.4% of women in the United Kingdom, 0.7% of women in Germany, 0.4% of women in Japan, 1% of women in Canada, and 0.5% of women in France (WHO 2002).

There is a strong national rhetoric about reversing these trends, but as our cases will show these efforts tend to focus on incarceration as the major means of both remedy and prevention, and political attention has increasingly shifted from domestic violence within the family to forms of violence such as human trafficking which definitionally occur outside of it. While the federal government did reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act in 2005, in 2000 the U.S. Supreme Court had struck down a provision of the Act that would provide for civil as well as criminal remedies.

In short, we must conclude that women in the United States live in a situation of gender inequality. Not only does the U.S. fall short of an ideal standard of gender equality by several measures, but the U.S. also fails by several measures when compared with other countries. The U.S. is also not a world leader on international policies related to gender equality. At the international level, the U.S. government has acted to prevent the promotion of women's rights through restrictions on the uses of U.S. funds and through positions taken at international meetings.³ Moreover, the U.S. is not a sig-

³ These restrictions on women's access to reproductive freedom and services are intensified in current U.S. foreign policy, although there are indications that they are being relaxed by the Obama Administration. The U.S. has instituted a "global gag rule" on information about abortion for organizations that re-

natory to the major international agreement on gender equality, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Intertwining of Religion and Politics: Effects on Gender Equality

Despite the official separation of church and state, religion and politics are greatly intertwined in the United States. This intertwining comes from two sources: 1) the direct influence on American politics of religious groups and organizations, particularly in the last quarter-century of lobby-groups and political action committees identified with conservative evangelical Christianity; and 2) the secular political and cultural institutions of American public life that have developed historically out of Protestantism and predominantly operate by presuming Protestant norms and values.

This Protestant secular hegemony has at different points in U.S. history both excluded other religious groups and variously sutured them into hegemonic understandings. For example, with regard to the public school system, Protestant secular hegemony clearly excluded Catholic practice and led to the development of a separate Catholic system of education. With regard to issues of gender and sexuality, the relation between Protestant secularism and Catholicism has been much more complicated. This relationship has also been historically variable. Protestant evangelicals were both influenced by Catholic objections to abortion and some prominent Catholics, notably Phyllis Schlafly, participated in the formation of the “new right” in the 1970s (Boyer 2008), but the Republican Party and many of the Protestant organizations, like the Christian Coalition, also failed to make political alliances with Catholic organizations through the 1990s (Steinfels 1995). In the Administration of George W. Bush, however, Catholics were much more actively integrated into the Republican circles of power and gained much more extensive access to the Administration than they had had in the Administrations of either George H.W. Bush or Ronald Reagan. Importantly, however, this suturing of conservative Catholics into the Bush Administration was focused on those issues on which evangelical Protestants and Catholics had come to agree—opposition to abortion and to gay marriage—even when this agreement was based on different reasoning.⁴ There was no movement, however, on the part of the Bush Administration on those issues, like the death penalty, where conservative evangelicals predominantly disagreed with Catholic positions. Moreover, the focus on gender and sexuality, particularly on opposition to abortion, as the defining issue of Catholicism represents a significant narrowing of the American Catholic approach to social issues, which through the 1980s focused on war and peace, including opposition to nuclear war, and economic justice. The Bush Administration also failed to make significant progress in drawing the rapidly increasing demographic group of Latino Catholics into the Republican Coalition. His party’s opposition to immigration reform did not help these efforts, nor did immigration opponents’ use of rhetoric about the size of immigrant families (drawing implicit distinctions between smaller white Protestant families and presumably larger Catholic and Muslim immigrant families). President Obama by contrast, in his commencement ad-

ceive any aid monies from the United States. Similarly, the U.S. requires that a certain percentage of all funds U.S. funds for the prevention of HIV-AIDS overseas should go to abstinence programs, rather than to methods of direct prevention like condom distribution (Kaplan 2004, Butler 2006).

⁴ See McGreevy (2003) on support for the “common good” in opposition to Protestant individualism as the basis for a stance against granting individual women the right to abortion. McGreevy traces both the tensions and the “occasional alliances” between Catholics and dominant American society.

dress at Notre Dame in May 2009, worked to shift the context of Catholic social discourse back toward a broader agenda of which opposition to abortion was only one part. While he might disagree with Catholics on abortion, Obama said, there were many realms of agreement, like fighting poverty and nuclear arms (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Notre-Dame-Commencement/). Similarly Obama made a major move to address Latinos with the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court. Given the ways in which dominant Protestant discourses have both incorporated and shaped minority influences, we argue that the best analytic frame through which to understand these complexities and variations is that of hegemony in which it is not Protestant secularism *alone* that determines possibility but the suturing of various, potentially contradictory, actors and forces into an overall fabric.

As a result of the relationship between direct religious influence and the effects of Protestant secular hegemony, the question of the effect of religion on gender equality cannot be treated separately from the secular context. Although the influence of evangelical Christianity on American politics is certainly a problem for gender equality, particularly as it was expressed during the Administration of George W. Bush, it is not the case that previous Administrations with more secular—or at least less avowedly Christian—outlooks have not put to use similar assumptions and rhetoric in promoting policies that restrict or harm the possibility of gender equality. The extent to which such assumptions and rhetoric will shift within the more progressive Christian coalition that helped to catapult the Obama presidential campaign to victory remains to be seen.

Even in the Bush Administration, however, the power of evangelical Protestantism is dependent on the connection between conservative Christian and secular actors who form the alliance that makes up the power base of the Republican Party. According to John C. Green of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, evangelical Christians make up on about a quarter of the U.S. population, and only about half of these evangelicals, or twelve percent of the population, consider themselves “traditionalist” evangelicals (Green 2007, as quoted in Goodstein 2007b). Without the connections provided by their alliance with secular conservatives, conservative Christians would be yet one more disenfranchised minority in a polity that has a historical record of being slow at enfranchising minorities, except when in alliance with more powerful actors.

Our overall argument, then, is that the problem for gender equality in the United States is not the influence of religion alone, but Protestant hegemony in terms of both religious influence and secular presumption combined with the alliance of socially prominent religious groups with neoliberal economic and political interests. In terms of the former, this means that simply removing religion from a position of political influence will not necessarily undo many of the problems for the realization of gender and sexual equality in American politics, because secular presumptions support many of the same policies.⁵ We argue further that the incorporation of more “progressive” religious voices in the public debate will not fundamentally alter patterns of gender inequality so long as Protestantism’s structuring assumptions about the family and sexuality are not actively interrogated alongside models of economic and criminal justice and foreign and domestic policy.

⁵ As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (2001) has argued is the case in India, where a Uniform Civil Code raises the paradoxical prospect of further institutionalizing Hindu dominance in the form of a Hindu-dominated secularism, the U.S. government in its secular form continues Protestant dominance in ways that are problematic for gender equality both within the United States and in U.S. actions at the transnational level.

The most obvious example in which secular positions are no better than religious ones is “gay marriage,” which all candidates for President, both Democratic and Republican and across the spectrum of religious influence, have unanimously opposed (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004). Moreover, they all claimed to base their opposition to “gay marriage” on religious principals. Even supporters of civil unions, like Democratic party Chairman Howard Dean (who is arguably one of the most secular politicians in his public persona in recent times) claimed that the reason to support civil unions instead of marriage was religious, and no major politician has articulated a stance in favor of the separation of church and state on this issue.⁶ This presumption that secular marriage and religious marriage, particularly modern Christian marriage, are one and the same also carries over into other issues affecting gender and sexual equality. As we argue in detail below, religious presumptions about appropriate marriage and family structure were central to the realization of neoliberal welfare reform under the Democratic Clinton Administration in the 1990s. With welfare reform, an issue that is at one level utterly secular—that of the structure of the welfare state—is effected through appeals to religious presumptions about gender and sexuality—even though many religious groups actually tried to use their influence to prevent the passage of welfare reform legislation in 1996. In other words, the strength of the religious presumption within secular political discourse about marriage and family is on some issues more effective than direct religious influence.

The issue where secular positions are clearly better in terms of gender equality than those that are religiously influenced is that of abortion rights. Since 1980, those Administrations most influenced by conservative Christians (Reagan and both Bush Administrations) have been the most restrictive on abortion rights. For example, the Reagan Administration instituted the global “gag rule” on U.S. funding for any organization providing abortion services or even information. The rule was maintained by George H.W. Bush, repealed by Clinton and reinstated by George W. Bush. Similarly, on AIDS it is clear that conservative Christian influence had a dramatic effect on the approach used by the Bush Administration in fighting the disease, although the Bush Administration also provided the highest levels of funding to date for the global fight against AIDS.

Our claim is not that the secular Protestant dominance of U.S. politics is uniquely patriarchal, but that patriarchy has developed a particular form within Protestantism, one that emphasizes the autonomous individual in relation to an economic calling and the family. This emphasis on individualism, specifically on individualism defined through marriage, develops from the earliest influences of the Protestant Reformation and takes on renewed intensity in relation to neoliberalism’s focus on the individual and the population as the aggregation of individuals. Moreover, for the Protestant Reformers it was absolutely critical that the individual be situated in marriage—as opposed to Catholic celibacy. Once again, the neoliberal emphasis upon the primacy of “family values” allies closely with this Protestant presumption, whether in its directly religious or secular form. Finally, the Reformers connect the individual householder and “his” family to the need for a “calling” that focuses the individual’s efforts on economic production. For example, the crucial point that John Calvin makes in his critique of celibacy is that the discipline of marriage taken on by the devout householder makes him free—free from greed, ambition and other lusts of the flesh—and this freedom can be connected to the freedom to pursue one’s calling in the market (Jakobsen 2005). For Calvin the calling connects the individual’s activity to God’s will, and enables him to

⁶ In one sense, this is not surprising, given that when it comes to performing marriages clergy act directly as agents of the state, thus repeatedly embodying religious influence over state-based marriage.

pursue economic activity, including economic gain, with the knowledge that he is also doing what is good and right in the eyes of God. It is this idea of the calling that sociologist Max Weber makes so much of in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), but Weber is utterly unconcerned with the fact that Calvin very clearly ties the economic activity of the calling to the sexual activity of marriage. The structure of the household matters as much to Calvin as does the calling itself. And these two terms, marriage and a calling, bound together in the person of the devout householder are definitive of a certain brand of Protestant freedom.

These two terms are also definitive of a certain brand of secular freedom as expressed in neoliberalism. For example, in his 2005 inaugural address, George W. Bush mentioned “freedom” even more frequently than he mentioned God and in so doing, he was able to connect the two parts of the alliance that forms his base of power—conservative Christians who hear in the word “freedom” a form of religious freedom that supports the public role of Christianity in American public life (in which Christians are “free” to promote their policies as necessary to the U.S. state) and secular actors who identify with his economic policies and hear in the word “freedom” a reference to the spread of free trade.

The connection between neoliberalism in its American form and Protestant values should not surprise us because neoliberalism is, in part, a reassertion of *laissez faire* capitalism and the originary proponents of this type of capitalism were actively Protestant (Smith [1759, Smith 1776]). Neoliberalism is itself a secular formation, but within the U.S. it draws upon the Protestant assumptions and particularly the values of these originary philosophies (Friedman 1962). The particular form of secularism which forms the basis of neoliberalism in U.S. policy thereby allows for and facilitates a “working alliance” between secular actors and religious actors who might otherwise not share either interests or the common sense conceptual framework necessary to work together.

One of the most important features of the US political landscape that must be explained is the way in which working alliances allow for political power. For the 50 years from the 1930s to the 1980s, the Democratic Party maintained itself as the majority party and held a majority in both houses of Congress until 1994 through a working alliance between Southern Democrats (who were fundamentally opposed to all things associated with the Republican Party because the Republicans prosecuted the Civil War against the South) and a Northern urban populace. This alliance was maintained in part along class lines but it still had significant contradictions, particularly along the lines of racial division, which were eventually exploited by the Republican Party in their move to the so-called “southern strategy,” so-named by a strategist to Richard Nixon. By the 1970s, whites who took issue with the desegregation of American public schools could find allies with conservative Christians who opposed liberal Supreme Court decisions on school prayer (Crespino 2008). As they broke down the old Democratic alliance, Republicans formed a new working alliance that has been ascendant since at least 1980. This is the alliance between predominantly religious “social conservatives” and predominantly secular “fiscal conservatives” in the Republican Party.⁷ The “New Right,” as it was initially called, was characterized by the emergence of culturally and politically powerful organizations such as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, the Heritage Foundation, Concerned Women for America, and Focus on the Family, whose influence would burgeon over the course of subsequent decades (Hardisty 1999).

⁷ We use the common terms “fiscal” and “social” conservative, although we would argue that neither group is particularly conservative. Rather than working to conserve existing institutions, each group works to remake part of the social field—either economic policy or social policy—in its own image, often in ways that are quite radical.

This alliance calls out for analytic explanation because, as many commentators have noted, the class interests between these two groups are often at odds as are the meanings of the two forms of conservatism. Fiscal conservatives are most often understood as free-marketeters who resist government regulation (even while encouraging forms of regulation that meet their own interests) while social conservatives, whose class position suggests that they might stand to benefit from a more economically interventionist welfare state, embrace the free market and urge government regulation in private life and in areas like broadcasting (Frank 2005, Lo and Schwartz 1998). One way to explain the effectiveness of this alliance — to understand why and how it works — is by looking at the point of contact between Protestant secularism, particularly in its neo-liberal form, which is that most often adopted by the fiscal conservatives, and the avowed Protestantism of the dominant social conservatives. The underlying values of Protestantism appear to secularists as simply the values of modernity or neoliberalism. It is not that there are no rifts in this alliance, but rather that the alliance facilitates both groups' embrace of political power. The rifts sometimes actually contribute to the working of the alliance because they allow conservative Christians to claim to be both a minority oppressed by a dominant secular culture and the bearers of what is truly American in politics (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2000, Fessenden 2007).

At the current moment the alliance is showing some strain and is also shifting in accordance with contemporary evangelical politics. Amongst evangelicals, liberal voices are becoming more prominent and even some self-described conservatives are moving away from a direct focus on gender and sexuality (via staunch opposition to gay marriage and reproductive rights) and toward supposedly more progressive issues such as trafficking, the environment and AIDS. Fiscal conservatives are also more wary of the alliance, particularly as the U.S. appears to be moving into a recession (Cooper and Luo 2008, Kirkpatrick 2007b). One of the reasons that the Bush Presidency has proven so disastrous for the Republican Party is that George W. Bush is the President who embodied this alliance most directly in his person (Goodstein 2007b). The failure of Bush's presidency has made it much more difficult to sustain the alliance that produced political power for both sides, and the 2008 Republican presidential primaries demonstrated this splitting among parties to the coalition. The contest among Republican candidates John McCain, Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee, none of whom perfectly embodied the combination of evangelical Christian and fiscal conservatism indicates some of the difficulties in maintaining the alliance, and Senator McCain became the Republican nominee by splitting the votes of fiscal and social conservatives between Romney and Huckabee. With the addition of Alaska governor Sarah Palin to the Republican ticket, Senator McCain attempted to consolidate the socially conservative base of the Republican Party. While Governor Palin's campaign did energize many in this group, it also alienated a good number of fiscal conservatives, thus further splintering the fiscal-social conservative alliance and failing to retain Republican control of the Executive branch of government. In the months immediately following the election, the Republicans have split between those who would continue the far-right policies of the Bush Administration and support Governor Palin as a new leader of the Party and those who argue that the Party must build a new and more inclusive conservative coalition (Douthat and Salam 2008).

An analysis of working alliances is also helpful in explaining why the focus on gender and sexual regulation has been so politically effective in the United States since 1980 in the midst of a discourse that is focused on decreasing government regulation and increasing freedom in nearly all fields except those related to gender and sexuality. For Protestantism, the patriarchal household in marriage is the basis of the autonomous individual who can participate in the market and so it implicitly makes sense to even

free marketeers that the one site for appropriate regulation is around marriage and the production of the individual. This also helps to explain how a modern sexual ethic of monogamous marriage is projected backward in U.S. political discourse over the entirety of Christian history, erasing both the pre-Reformation Catholic emphasis on celibacy over marriage and the “Old Testament” practice of polygamy.⁸

Protestantism is not the only source for either patriarchy or an intense focus on individualism (Prakash 1999), but in the U.S. it is the dominant source. Just as gender and sexuality are key sites for the alliance between religious and secular conservatives, gender and sexuality provide central conduits for the formation of these alliances across religious lines. In fact, as our case studies show, one of the important new developments in U.S. politics is the extension of the conservative alliance to social conservatives who are not Protestant. Since at least the papacy of John Paul II, sexual politics have come to the fore of Catholic life in a way that has been connected to the social conservatism of evangelical Protestants. As a result, previous emphases in U.S. Catholic life on social justice, the eradication of poverty and debt relief, suspension of the death penalty and support for immigration reform (all subjects of statements by the U.S. Catholic Bishops) have been diminished in the public presence of Catholicism in favor of a predominant focus on gender and sexuality alone (United States Conference on Catholic Bishops 2006, 2005, 2002, 2000, 1999, 1995). While the Catholic Church has long been conservative on these issues, this new focus has played particularly well with the rise of evangelical “family values.”

It is only in the past decade, however, that these lines have become strong enough to form an alliance. For example, the Christian Coalition attempted to form both Catholic and Jewish auxiliaries, an effort that was generally unsuccessful. In fact, the Catholic Alliance, auxiliary to the Christian Coalition took up positions with which the Catholic Bishops actually disagree on a number of issues (Steinfels 1995). Now, however, prominent Catholics, like former Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, have played important roles in the Bush Administration and Catholic Bishops have stepped into Presidential politics in favor of socially conservative policies on gender and sexuality. The Obama campaign worked hard to regain the traditional Democratic advantage with Catholic voters. The nomination of the Joe Biden, who is Catholic, as the Vice Presidential Candidate was part of a successful effort to return Catholic voters to the Democratic fold. Exit polls indicated that Obama won 54% of the Catholic vote, reversing Mr. Bush’s 52% margin among Catholics in 2004. Most of these gains were among Catholics who do not go to Mass weekly. Importantly for questions of gender equality, another part of the strategy to win Catholics along with Protestant evangelicals was to talk about “abortion reduction,” rather than focusing only on “abortion rights” (Waldman 2008).

Similarly, the Bush Administration has made an important alliance with conservative Jews, primarily around policies regarding the state of Israel, but also with regard to issues of gender and sexuality. Although Jewish neoconservatism had earlier assumed a secular guise and eschewed the overtly sex- and gender- based “morality issues” that have animated Christian conservatives, following the *Lawrence v. Texas* Su-

⁸ See, for example, Robert Byrd’s speech on behalf of the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. Byrd is a Democrat and is not a member of the identified “religious right,” and yet when it comes to this legislation directly regarding sexuality, Byrd reads from his family Bible on the floor of the Senate and then concludes, “Woe betide that society, Mr. President, that fails to honor that [Biblical] heritage and begins to blur that tradition which was laid down by the Creator in the beginning.” *Congressional Record – Senate*, Vol. 142, No. 123, Tuesday, September 10, 1996.

preme Court decision in 2003 (which decriminalized consensual sodomy) conservative Jews have also become more vocal advocates on such questions, an engagement which is consistent with their support for welfare reform, an incrementalist approach to the dismantling of women's reproductive rights, and their endorsement of the so-called "culture wars" during the 1990s (Friedman 2005, Heilbrunn 2008). Neoconservative Jews' efforts to meld conservative and overt forms of "Judeo-Christian" religiosity into US politics and culture have been most starkly realized in the human rights field through advocacy around religious persecution and—as we will describe in more detail below—policies pertaining to human trafficking (Castelli 2005, Hertzke 2004, Aikman 2007).

Most recently, conservative advocates like Dinseh D'Souza have argued that U.S. foreign policy should promote an alliance with Muslims who are specifically conservative on issues of gender and sexuality (D'Souza 2007, Butler 2006, Herman and Buss 2003). Some newer conservative family organizations are also broadening beyond their predominantly Protestant base to build a "pan-Christian" alliance, among conservative Protestants, Catholics and Mormons, that also sometimes links to conservative Muslims and Orthodox Jews. These groups include the Family First Foundation and the World Congress of Families, which work on issues ranging from opposition to abortion and gay rights to promotion of the "natural family," a patriarchal family in which women are valued as "prolific mothers." In addition to working in the United States, these groups are increasingly doing transnational work. For example, Richard Wilkins, co-founder of the World Congress of Families has also worked with Qatar with Muslim conservatives to start the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development (Joyce 2008).

All of these alliances serve to articulate religious values in such a way that religious positions that depart from a hegemonic Protestant vision of appropriate gender and sexuality become invisible. Even the newly visible evangelicals associated with Barack Obama's campaign and often called "progressive" tend to ally with their conservative counterparts on issues of gender and sexuality. The range of religious positions on these issues is rarely mentioned in political debate, and the very meaning of "religion" effectively comes to be conservative vis-à-vis questions of gender and sexuality. This perception also allows secular politicians to invoke "religion" as a source of conservative positions on gender and sexuality without appearing to necessarily favor a particular religious position. For example, in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1983), the Supreme Court decision on sodomy laws that was overturned by *Lawrence*, the majority invoked a pan-religious opposition to sodomy that was, in fact, specifically Christian (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003). One would never know from current debates over religion in American politics that there is any religious diversity on questions of gender and sexuality. Even within Protestantism, a number of Protestant denominations actively support gender equality as well as the rights of sexual minorities. Some denominations perform same-sex commitment ceremonies, even though the state does not recognize those ceremonies as legal marriages. Significantly, President-elect Barack Obama has found it to be politically imperative to repeatedly voice his own opposition to gay marriage on religious grounds, despite the fact that his denomination of many years, the United Church of Christ, is a liberal denomination that supports it. This political necessity left him in a somewhat contradictory position with regard to the California ballot initiative against gay marriage, which he opposed. His stated opposition to gay marriage was used in advertising by the proponents of Proposition 8, although Obama's opposition to the Proposition was invoked belatedly and unsuccessfully by advocates against the Proposition.

In order to develop further the argument that Protestant dominance in both its religious and allied secular forms is a key to the formation of policy on gender and sexuality, we will trace in the following sections of this report a number of specific policies that demonstrate the workings of Protestant dominance in the U.S. at several distinct levels. We argue that to understand fully the intertwining of religion and politics in the U.S. we must look at the level of the state in both its domestic policies and importantly in its actions in the global arena—in transnational policy arenas like the World Bank, IMF and United Nations and in direct transnational interventions through both monetary aid and military force. At the political level, we will consider the effects of the long-standing alliance between explicitly religious social conservatives and fiscal conservatives within the Republican Party. We further observe that both major parties in the two-party system in the U.S. are remarkably consistent in terms of the effects of Protestant dominance in the United States, a point that we will make by briefly comparing the policies of the Bush Administration, which is both Republican and open to explicit religious influences, with the previous Clinton Administration (which was Democratic and more secular in outlook), as well as with the likely configuration of the incoming Obama Administration (which represents a new melding of the Democratic party with prominent religious constituencies).

Civil society in the U.S. is an especially important sphere of analysis because it provides the opportunity to look at the intertwining of religion and politics for domestic social movement groups and NGOs that often work both domestically and transnationally. U.S.-based NGOs are a particularly important site for transnational influence and so are also sites of much controversy in the academic literature (Ho 2008, Ferree and Tripp 2006). As Ann Phillips (2002) points out, civil society is an ambiguous terrain for feminists, providing spaces for contestation and for the development of progressive alternatives, but also spaces for conservative groups with agendas that are sometimes highly problematic for questions of equality (see also Ho 2008). Furthermore, inequalities of power, time, money, etc. make a difference in terms of who has voice and presence and who doesn't in civil society. This notion helps to explain the failure of sex-workers rights advocates to constitute a sufficient public presence to alter the framework of the trafficking debates, as we describe in more detail below (see also Weitzer 2007). In accordance with larger political shifts, however, this unequal distribution of resources and access to power may find itself altered as well, as during the last several years when some progressive religious voices have been able to secure much greater access to material resources and to funding (Butler 2008).

The customary sphere in the United States is less influential than it has been in the past. The breakdown of ethnic demographic enclaves in major cities like Chicago and New York means that while some neighborhoods still exert intensive cultural force, most peoples' lives are organized by a variety of cultural forces, from schools and colleges to the major media and technologies of communication that mitigate the influence of ascriptive identities. In addition, individual denominations have lost influence over the last half-century both in relation to the behavior of individual members and in relation to national politics (Olson 2004). So, for example, studies show that most American Catholics pick and choose among the dictates of the Vatican that they follow (Swicord 2008).⁹ Internal debates over gender and sexuality within religious denominations, like the current conflicts over homosexuality within the Episcopal Church (Good-

⁹ Swicord (2008) reports that: "The views of many American Catholic women on sexual issues seem clear. The National Survey of Family Growth says 97 percent of them have used modern contraception. The National Catholic Reporter shows that 58 percent believe they do not have to follow the teachings of their bishop on abortion."

stein 2007a, La Franiere and Goodstein 2007, Radin 2006), are often quite vociferous in the United States, but the stances of particular mainline Protestant denominations often have much less influence on the political process than do explicitly religious lobby groups and NGOs. This is due, in part, to the fact that membership in the once dominant mainline denominations has declined while the membership of evangelical congregations has grown, along with the efficacy of evangelical political advocacy since the 1970s (Balmer and Winner 2002; Jacquet 1973, 1980, 1985, 1990; Bedell 1995; Lindner 2000, 2007). Religiously-based NGOs, like Focus on the Family or the Family Research Council also have extended their influence over individual behavior, often through major media, like radio and television shows and Christian subcultural production through books and visual media (*see, e.g.*, Einstein 2008, Hendershot 2004, Hardisty 1999).

What are the social and political effects, especially from a gender perspective of this blending of religion and politics? When is it likely to pose a danger for gender equality and democracy?

Overall, the influence of religion on U.S. politics must be weighted toward inequality. Although, religiously influenced social movements have historically been progressive as well as conservative—whether abolition in the nineteenth century or movements like civil rights and the United Farmworkers struggle in the twentieth century—most of these religiously influenced social movements did not focus on gender equality as their major concern. Moreover, although women’s movements grew out of these religiously based progressive movements in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these women’s movements tended to develop strong criticisms of patriarchal religious ideologies (like the production of *The Woman’s Bible* (Stanton 1993 (1895)) in the nineteenth century suffrage movement) and have tended to move away from the religious influences at their origins. Feminist movements within religious traditions have remained a central strand of women’s organizing and have won a number of changes in women’s status, particularly in mainline Christian and Jewish organizations, but these movements have remained controversial and gender equality has not been taken up by even these denominations as their major focus in public policy work. Religious feminists in the United States have also done strong work through NGOs and social movement organizations to promote feminism in terms that are recognizably religious—most often Christian. But, as Kathleen Sands (2008) has documented, these efforts can have contradictory effects in that they often work to reinforce Protestant dominance even as they support feminist projects.

In the latter part of the twentieth century conservative religious movements have made their mark in civil society and developed extensive policy influence often through articulating religious beliefs with conservatism on issues of gender and sexuality. Some historians argue that backlash to feminism was the specific route for the return to political life of conservative Christian movements that had eschewed engagement with politics for much of the twentieth century (Critchlow 2007, Erzen 2006, Watt 1991, Spruill 2008). Though feminists had experienced overwhelming bipartisan support for *Roe vs. Wade* as well as the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1970s (including from such well-known conservatives as Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, George Wallace, and Strom Thurmond) they were unprepared for the highly efficacious organizational and grassroots countermovements which would emerge by the latter part of the decade (Spruill 2008). By the late 1970s, the women’s movement had become an important catalyst for a “pro-family” counter-movement, one which allied with economic conservatives to put Ronald Reagan in the White House and which was deliberately embraced and cultivated by Republican strategists. By the 1980s, a rival set of conservative women’s groups

existed to advocate for an alternative model of “women’s interests.” Since that time, the political effects of these movements on issues of gender equality have been directed at both the national and transnational levels: cutbacks on reproductive rights, including rollbacks of state support for sex education, family planning services and abortion provision (Kaplan 2004). These cutbacks have occurred at the legislative level through the passage of laws like the Hyde Amendment, which refused government funded health care to women seeking abortions through Medicare insurance and also at the level of court appointments and decisions, which have placed increasing restrictions on reproductive freedoms (Luker 1984, Kaplan 2004, Saletan 2003). One important vehicle for accomplishing these rollbacks has actually been the embrace of a rhetoric of privacy by dominant sectors of the feminist movement such as NARAL throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a framework which has also been adapted by pro-choice economic conservatives to make the abortion issue their own (Saletan 2003)

Conservative religious movements have also promoted a renewed focus on government regulation of sexuality, particularly through the passage through ballot initiatives at the level of individual states, which have often amended state constitutions to prohibit the acceptance of same-sex marriage by either the courts or the legislatures (Frank 2004). Although, as we shall elaborate upon below, the commitment of religious groups to combat violence against women in the form of international sex trafficking and the domestic sex trade has been prominent, these movements have often argued strongly against federal and state level legislation directed at redressing intra-familial violence against women and hate crimes (Buss and Herman 2003, Butler 2006). They have also blocked U.S. support for transnational efforts to promote women’s rights (Halberstam 1997, Holt 1991).

In addition to a direct focus on the regulation of gender and sexuality, the alliance between religiously conservative movements and fiscal conservatives has promoted a number of economic issues that have either halted the advance of women on civil rights and economic empowerment or rolled back previous gains. These combined forces have promoted policies that include rollbacks on racial equity, civil rights and affirmative action that have significantly affected the possibilities for job advancement and equal pay for women and men of color; regressive tax policies that have increased the tax burden on people with lower incomes and intensified the likelihood that female-headed households will be trapped in poverty; blocks to the availability of affordable health care; and rollbacks on environmental protections, leaving many households and neighborhoods as essentially toxic environments.

Recently, the reemergence of a so-called evangelical “religious left” and of more moderate varieties of religious conservatism in the national political arena has been part of the process that has fractured the alliance between the Republican Party and conservative evangelicals. Both the “religious left” and the more moderate conservatives sought to articulate a more progressive religious voice within the terrain of the Democratic Party over the course of the 2008 election cycle. Backgrounding the key policy issues that have dominated the agenda of the religious right since the 2004 presidential elections (i.e., same sex marriage and abortion) they have increasingly foregrounded questions of poverty and inequality and sought to shift evangelical focus to more “common denominator” and globally oriented social issues such as poverty, global warming, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and the humanitarian crisis in Darfur (Steinfelds 2008, Wallis 2008, Cizik 2008). A key impetus for the recent mobilization of progressive religious voices, as Jennifer Butler, Executive Director of the recently founded organization Faith in Public life, has noted, was the poor performance of the Democratic party in the 2004 elections, partially resulting from its perceived “tone deafness” to questions of religion (Butler 2008; see also McLaren 2008). Mara Vanderslice, who

was the religious outreach coordinator for John Kerry's unsuccessful presidential bid four years ago, was instrumental to the founding of the Mathew 25 network in the current election cycle, a coalition of evangelical Christians dedicated to the election of Barack Obama and to the elevation of progressive religious voices more generally within the public square (McLaren 2008).

This shift has been identified by various commentators as contributing to the declining influence of the religious right in U.S. electoral and cultural politics, as well as the failure of U.S. evangelicals to unite as a block behind a single presidential candidate in the 2008 election cycle (see e.g., Steinfels 2008, Kirkpatrick 2007a). Although Barack Obama's electoral gains amongst white evangelicals overall were modest (a jump of 3% compared with John Kerry in 2004), his gains amongst white evangelicals under the age of 30 were significant, doubling the percentage of votes that Kerry received in this demographic group (from 16 to 32%) (Goodstein 2008). Notably, a poll conducted by *Relevant*, a popular magazine amongst evangelical youth, identified Democratic candidate Barack Obama as the person "who Jesus would most likely vote for," ahead of the entire Republican field during the presidential primaries. Respondents to the poll furthermore identified immigration as the most important, and gay rights as the least important issues for presidential policy (*Relevant Magazine* 2008). In September of 2007, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life similarly noted a significant drift in young white evangelicals' political support away from allegiance to the Republican Party (Cox 2007).

In his recent book, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post-Religious Right America*, Jim Wallis, editor-in-chief of the liberal-leaning *Sojourners* magazine and one of the most outspoken commentators on evangelicals' new political trajectory, has hailed the new "broader and deeper" evangelical social agenda with its focus upon questions of economic and social justice. Like Tony Campolo (another prominent liberal evangelical author), Wallis has called for a new "middle ground" position on questions of gay marriage and abortion, and celebrates burgeoning evangelical engagement with questions of sex trafficking and HIV/AIDS (Wallis 2008, Campolo 2006). We explore the gendered implications and political nuances of some of these interventions in more detail below, but here it should be noted that many of these efforts still typically hew closely to a neoliberal agenda, foregrounding business-friendly, militaristic, and carceral remedies--rather than structural solutions--to pervasive gender, racial, and economic inequalities (Bernstein 2007, Jakobsen 2008).

Although the evangelical center and left have recently united on many issues in an attempt to offer a politically prominent religious alternative to the Christian right (McCallister 2008), this alliance may also obscure key differences amongst the various parties which comprise the new coalition. While some actors are seeking to refocus the evangelical political agenda because of a longstanding commitment to questions of poverty and social justice (as for example in the case of *Sojourners* magazine and the organization Evangelicals for Social Action), in other instances the shift in emphasis may be more reflective of a shift in strategy rather than substantive commitments. According to Richard Cizik, the former Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals (an organization representing 27 million members and 43,000 churches), the goal of the evangelical movement must be to reach centrist voters and political independents, to develop "a whole new strategy relative to religion, politics, and sexuality." During an interview conducted just prior to the 2008 elections, Cizik commented that "maybe the evangelicals will understand after this McCain-Palin ticket goes down in thunderous defeat that there is a better way." Cizik, a self-described conservative Republican, has not only taken a high profile position in advancing the cause of global warming and "creation care," much to the consternation of an earlier

generation of conservative Christian leaders, but has argued for partnering with Democrats and even Planned Parenthood around a strategy of “abortion reduction” (something we discuss in more detail below) and for enlisting the Black Church in the domestic struggle against HIV/AIDs (Cizik 2008).¹⁰

Because nearly all of this religious influence on politics is Christian it is impossible at this time to produce an analysis of whether “religion” as a whole is “dangerous” to gender equality and democracy, because we cannot know how these issues might play out if there were more widespread religious participation in public life.¹¹ It is likely, however, that given the current structure of Protestant dominance the entry of additional players into the field of public religious activity in the near future will be those that are recognizable in relation to the theological and/or religious conservatism of the currently dominant Protestantism. So, for example, several debates over the Bush Administration’s financial support for “faith-based initiatives” centered on which religious groups might participate in such initiatives (Edsall 2001, Pressley 2001). Beyond initial debates over whether groups like the Hare Krishnas might be funded through this government program, the record of funding shows that the monies go almost exclusively to Protestant or conservative Catholic groups. President Obama has maintained the office, making it the Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and giving it an expanded role in developing policy. The initial advisory council for this new office included almost exclusively representatives of Christian and Christian secular organizations (like Big Brothers, Big Sisters) although the Administration expanded the council to increase its diversity in April of 2009 (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Announces-Additional-Members-of-Advisory-Council-on-Faith-Based-and-Neighborhood-Partnerships/). Under the Obama Administration, the newly empowered religious left is made up primarily of groups like the Mathew 25 Project, Evangelicals for Social Action, and Sojourners that are theologically conservative but politically more progressive, thus maintaining a recognizable position on what it means to be “religious” in political culture. This particular “religious left” does not mark the return to dominance of theologically liberal Protestants, nor does it open political culture to religious voices that exist across a spectrum of religions that are neither theologically nor politically conservative. Few of those voices have been the focus of either media attention or the attention of the major parties.

The political ascendancy of Jewish neo-conservatives on the national scene has been enabled not only by their most longstanding and prominent point of convergence with conservative Protestants--robust military and political support for Israel--but also by the two groups’ alliance around a broadening array of foreign and domestic policy issues, ranging from U.S. military intervention in Iraq to affirmative action to welfare reform to sex trafficking (Butler 2006, Lerner 2007, Hertzke 2004). While the conservative Christian/Jewish neo-conservative partnership was initially fostered by shared

¹⁰ The significance of new-evangelical sexual politics was well evidenced on December 11, 2008, when Cizik was asked to resign his position at the National Association of Evangelicals after publicly endorsing civil unions for gay and lesbian couples. Cizik is currently employed at the United Nations Foundation and has committed himself to founding a new organization dedicated to “new agenda” evangelical commitments (Salmon 2009).

¹¹ According to Jennifer Butler, Faith in Public Life was instrumental in organizing and initially slated to participate in the groundbreaking January 2008 “values forum” with Presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain at Saddleback Church. The organization withdrew its participation when it became clear that Rick Warren, the evangelical pastor who conducted the candidate interviews, would not be soliciting the feedback or participation of members of non-evangelical Protestant faith communities (Butler 2008).

opposition to communism and has been further facilitated by many evangelical Christians' dispensationalist belief that support for Israel is a prerequisite to Christ's second coming, the two groups have become increasingly united not only ideologically but institutionally to pursue the global-local links of the "culture war" against so-called modern secularism and moral relativism (Butler 2006). Michael Horowitz, a prominent Jewish neoconservative in the Reagan administration who is currently a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, has described his own "providential" engagement with evangelical issues such as Christian persecution and sex trafficking, and his own personal commitment to "helping the evangelical faith remain robust." In 1997, Michael Horowitz was awarded the William Wilberforce award for Christian leadership, the only non-Christian since the award's inception to be so-designated (Horowitz 2008).

The relatively direct connections between contemporary Protestant influence on the U.S. political process and the maintenance of gender inequality across such a wide range of issues makes quite alluring the idea that the prevention of religious influence is the best strategy for promoting gender equality. However, because secular public culture in the United States is also articulated with Protestant dominance, dependence on secularism will not necessarily promote either increased possibilities for the realization of gender equality or increased possibilities for democratic participation (Asad 2003, Connolly 2000, Feldman 1998, Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003, Jakobsen 2005, Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008, Sullivan 2005, Wuthnow and Evans 2002). By tracing the development and effects of a variety of federal policies in the next section, we will show that the combination of a secular Protestant presumption of ideal sexual and familial forms and a neoliberal economic agenda has its own deleterious effects on gender equality. This situation produces a difficult situation for activists who hope to promote gender equality, both within the U.S. and globally. Promoting secularism is not a sure route toward these objectives. As a result, it is necessary to always keep in mind the relationship between the possibilities for gender equality and the limits on the extent of political participation in the U.S., including the limits on religious pluralism (Sarna 1998).

Case Studies Documenting the Intertwining of Religion and Politics Along with Effects on Gender Equality and Possibilities for Democratic Participation

Our argument for the effects on gender equality of direct religious influence in U.S. politics is based upon primary research tracing the development of policies related to gender and sexuality. In the following sections, we look at the implications of these policies in terms of both their implications for gender equality and for democratic inclusion and participation both within the U.S. and in terms of the effects of U.S. policy globally. We focus on the federal level of the state and its actions in the global arena, as well as on the actions of actors from both the levels of political and civil society. We provide examples from the last two Administrations—Bush and Clinton—as well as some analysis of the statements and positions offered by incoming President Barack Obama. Each of these Administrations has a different position vis-à-vis religious influences: Clinton is an enactment of a more secular version of the Democratic Party; Bush was deeply influenced by conservative evangelicals in the Republican Party; and Obama has built an alliance with more progressive evangelicals. Although the material on Obama is necessarily speculative, his Administration potentially presents an important contrasting case to the two prior in that the influences on his Administration are more religious than Clinton's and his policies are more progressive than Bush's. As we shall see with the various cases below, the level of religious influence alone is not a suf-

ficient predictor of how progressive and Administration will be overall, and vis-a-vis specific policy issues is only somewhat predictive.

Our most extensive case study is the genesis and transformation of anti-trafficking policies between 2000 and the present, with a focus upon the role that evangelical Christian activists and NGOs have played in shaping prevailing political frameworks. In Section A) below, we develop this case through face-to-face interviews and extensive ethnographic work, including an analysis of policy documents and participant-observation with a diverse spectrum of faith-based and secular anti-trafficking activists and U.S. government officials.

A) The Intertwining of Religion, Politics, and Gender in U.S. Campaigns to Combat Human Trafficking

We chose this case because trafficking has been identified by the Bush Administration as its major focus for gender policy (Miller 2004, Soderlund 2005). Although many expect President-elect Barack Obama to bring religious voices into his Administration to an extent that is unprecedented for the Democratic party, the current Administration is arguably the most directly influenced by religious activists and NGOs of any since at least the middle of the twentieth century, when theologian Reinhold Niebuhr had significant policy-influence, and so it is particularly important to look at the issue that the Administration has most closely identified with gender policy.¹²

A number of additional aspects of anti-trafficking policy also make it particularly useful for a study on the influence of religion on the politics of gender equality. The focus on trafficking specifically as a *gender* issue has not always been the framework for advocacy or policy. During the early 1990s, for example, a major focus of many secular NGO-led anti-trafficking efforts was on all forms of labor trafficking, rather than just the trafficking of women into sexual labor (Wijers and Lap Chew 1999, Human Rights Watch 1996). While reliable statistics on this type of underground activity are difficult to produce, it is still the case that estimated cases of labor trafficking show that the majority of workers are not forced into sexual labor but into various other types of activities (Feingold 2005, Kempadoo 2005). During the span of the last decade, however, a remarkable alliance of evangelical Christian groups in conjunction with secular feminist activists has redefined the issue as primarily one of sexual labor and in the process catapulted the issue of human trafficking to a position of political prominence at local, national, and transnational levels. Thus, tracing the development of this policy allows us to ask important questions about the social and political effects of shifting the definition of this issue toward a singular focus on gender and sexuality.

While in the early and mid 1990s, the struggle for sex workers' rights as materialized through fair working conditions and an end to state harassment for women and men engaged in sexual labor was politically and culturally ascendant, in more recent years this framework has been undercut by a bevy of federal- and state-level anti-trafficking laws that equate all forms of prostitution—both migrant and domestic—with the crime of human trafficking and that rhetorically capture both of these activities under the rubric of “modern slavery.” This shift has been accomplished through the workings of several distinct political and cultural trends that that have been developing since

¹² It should be noted that sex trafficking was also identified by Republican presidential candidate John McCain as the key focus of his platform for women's issues. On the Democratic side, sex trafficking was identified by Hillary Clinton as a primary focus of her leadership on women's issues, but the nature and extent of Barack Obama's embrace of this issue remains to be determined.

the early 1990s. These include the embrace of human rights discourse by mainstream feminist groups, a tactic that resulted in a singular emphasis upon women's sexual harm to the exclusion of other gendered issues such as economics. As one anti-trafficking advocate in the human rights field has noted, by the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, for feminists seeking to articulate the specificity of "women's rights" in terms of "human rights," the frameworks around both trafficking and prostitution had irrevocably shifted: "Beijing is where trafficking as a labor issue was first transformed into a violence and slavery issue" (Miller 2004). This shift, while still focused on individual rights, fit well with the evangelical Protestant emphasis on women's rights as located in the protection of women, particularly through their enclosure in familial sexuality. In other words, the shift in the meaning of "rights" was one that fit well with the Bush Administration's version of Protestantism. From the perspective of abolitionist feminist organizations such as Equality Now, the shift to the human rights field was important for relocating a set of internecine feminist debates about prostitution and pornography (one which had divided the U.S. feminist movement throughout the 1980s and early 1990s) to a terrain in which the abolitionist constituency was more likely to emerge triumphant (Neuwirth 2008).

Although competing feminist and labor constituencies struggled vehemently over the definition of trafficking during the drafting of the 2000 U.N. Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons and the U.S. Trafficking Victims' Protection Act, with both constituencies achieving some concessions, in the aftermath of the negotiations, few commentators would disagree that the abolitionist segment of the feminist movement was the one that emerged triumphant.¹³ A simultaneous and similarly profound activist shift occurred during the same years within the U.S. evangelical movement. If in the early 1990s, most evangelicals had little to do with the international field, by 1996 revised UN norms about participation would empower many newly formed evangelical NGOs to enter the international political fray.¹⁴ This, in combination with evangelicals' growing interest in and organization around the issues of international religious freedom and Christian persecution would serve to propel new sets of religious actors into the trafficking debates, and to become more prominent voices in the human rights field more generally (Miller 2008, Hertzke 2004).

Thus, a political transformation that was begun during the Clinton years would subsequently find its full expression in the Bush White House. During his two-and-a-half year tenure in the U.S. State Department's Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons from July 2004 through December 2006, Ambassador John Miller (an orthodox Jew who was previously employed by the neo-conservative Discovery Institute) argued that the ongoing use of the term "sex worker" by certain NGOs, activists, and feminist aca-

¹³ Although activists struggled passionately over both the U.N. Protocol and the TVPA, as will be discussed below, the TVPA has played a more determinative role in shaping U.S. foreign and domestic policy.

¹⁴ Most commentators hail 1994 as the year that evangelical Christians—and the more specifically, the Christian right—began to establish a more permanent presence at the UN (see eg Buss and Herman 2003). Buss and Herman attribute this in part to the proliferation of UN-hosted conferences in the 1990s that facilitated the expansion and further institutionalization of NGO involvement in international law and policy making. The 1994 Cairo Conference on Population has been deemed the "birthplace" of conservative Christian global politics (Interview with Austin Ruse, quoted in Buss and Herman 2003: 44). Cairo was characterized by the involvement of an unprecedented number of NGOs, the majority of which, in the initial planning stages, were feminist in bent and favored reproductive rights. After the draft Programme of Action was released, right-to-life groups worked in tandem with the Vatican to organize a vigorous campaign in opposition to the draft programme. According to Buss and Herman, "The resulting publicity did much to inform and ultimately motivate a conservative Catholic and Protestant interest in international developments (2003: 61).

demics served “to justify modern-day slavery, [and] to dignify the perpetrators and the industries who enslave” (Miller 2006, Hertzke 2004, Shapiro 2004). A spate of U.S. anti-trafficking laws has emerged to create an enforcement apparatus for Miller’s view that “sex work” should be treated as “slavery. These laws create stepped-up criminal penalties for pimps and sexual clients (who are considered, within this framework, to be literal slaveholders), impose financial sanctions upon nations deemed to be taking insufficient steps to stem prostitution (here understood to be self-identical with trafficking and with slavery), and stipulate that internationally based NGOs that do not explicitly denounce prostitution as a violation of women’s human rights are to be disqualified from federal funding (U.S. Congress 2003, U.S. Congress 2005, Blumenfeld 2005, Saunders 2004). Although the U.S. Trafficking Victims’ Protection Act (TVPA) officially defines the crime of human trafficking to include forced labor as well as forced sex, and the legislation is broad enough that it could conceivably be deployed to combat the widespread and egregious labor violations that are routinely committed by companies such as Verizon, Walmart, and Tyson Foods (Chacón 2006), in terms of current U.S. enforcement priorities, media attention, and NGO practice, the forced prostitution of women and girls constitutes the paradigmatic instance of what “trafficking” is assumed to be.

As a result of the coordinated efforts of evangelical Christians, abolitionist feminists, and bipartisan government officials, prostitution (something previously of concern only to local law enforcement and to relatively small numbers of committed feminists and sex-worker activists) has come to occupy the center of an ever-spiraling array of faith-based and secular activist agendas, human rights initiatives and legal instruments. Of the three intertwined and increasingly overlapping constituencies, evangelical Christians have arguably been the group that is most responsible for advancing this issue on the world stage. Evangelical advocacy on human trafficking achieved particular prominence after the Bush Administration’s “charitable choice” initiative declared avowedly faith-based organizations to be eligible for federal funding; since 2001, the year of its implementation, evangelical Christian groups have secured a growing proportion of federal monies for both international and domestic anti-trafficking work as well as funds for the prevention of HIV/AIDs (Mink 2001, Butler 2006, Stockman et al. 2006).

There are powerful historical resonances between the current U.S. anti-trafficking campaign and the Meese Commission anti-pornography hearings that took place during the 1980s, in which evangelical Christians and secular feminists similarly joined forces for the sake of sexual reform (Duggan and Hunter 1995, Vance 1997). As some commentators have observed, the feminist embrace of sexual moralism is particularly apt to surface during periods of political retrenchment such as the Reagan years (Brown 1995, Walkowitz 1983), and the resurgence of moralist feminism has been fostered by the Bush White House. Notably, in a February 2004 article in the *Washington Post*, co-authored by iconic second-wave feminist Phyllis Chesler and Donna Hughes (who holds the Eleanor M. Carlson Endowed Chair in Women’s Studies at the University of Rhode Island), the authors provided a vigorous defense not only of the Bush Administration’s anti-trafficking policies but also of its recent military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. They declared that contemporary conservatives and faith-based organizations have been more reliable advocates of democracy and women’s rights across the globe than the liberal left has ever been (Chesler and Hughes 2004).

Given that the question of feminist political influence around the issue of human trafficking has been enabled by a partnership with conservative Christians as well as with neoconservative state actors, it is important to consider the expanding range of ideological commitments that these various groups have come to share. No doubt, the globalization, expansion, and diversification of sexual commerce in recent decades have

been one relevant factor in fostering these groups' consensus. Indeed, the initial sentences of the 2000 *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (TVPA), the first and most significant piece of recent federal anti-trafficking legislation to emerge, explicitly state that the explosion of the sex industry during the last decade was an important impetus for the law. Nevertheless, the position of cultural and political prominence that has been granted to prostitution in contemporary anti-trafficking interventions remains curious given the actual working conditions of most sex-workers. Although it would be foolish to deny that situations of force and coercion can and do occur in sex-work (as they do in other informal and unregulated labor sectors) and are no doubt exacerbated by the compounded inequalities of race, class, gender, and nation that prevail in many instances, reputable accounts by sex worker activists as well as by empirical researchers, including those based in the third world, suggest that the scenarios of overt abduction, treachery and coercion that abolitionists depict are the exception rather than the norm (*see, e.g.* Agustín 2007, Bernstein 2007, Kempadoo 2005, Brennan 2004). Many sex worker activists, in fact, regard the legal framework of "trafficking" as of more harm than benefit to sex-workers (*see e.g.* Saunders 2004, Agustín 2007, Doezema 1998). Given the distance of forced prostitution from the experiences of the majority of individuals who engage in sexual labor—both migrant and domestic—we must summon other explanations to comprehend the tenor and significance of the anti-trafficking campaigns which are spreading through church pews, college campuses, activist communities and federal and state legislatures. At the time of this writing, there has been widespread activism from both evangelical and secular feminist groups on behalf of incorporating the 1910 Mann Act (which, hailing from the nation's first systematic campaign against "white slavery," includes a wholesale prohibition of the transport of women across state lines for "immoral purposes") into the pending reauthorization of the TVPA (Neuwirth 2008).

Various commentators have noted the similarities between the moral panic surrounding sex trafficking as "modern-day slavery" in the current moment and that of the White Slavery scare in postbellum years of the last century, which engaged a similar coalition of "new abolitionist" feminists and evangelical Christians (Hobson 1990, Smith-Rosenberg 1986, Rosen 1982). Cultural critics have also observed the extent to which the tropes that animated the moral panic around white slavery in the last century have been recycled in campaigns against "modern-day slavery" in the current one, including those of violated femininity, shattered innocence, and the victimization of "women and children" (*see, e.g.,* Agustín 2007, Saunders 2005, Berman 2006, Soderlund 2005). Saunders thus notes that it is precisely such shared ideological constructions that have served to unite the diverse constituencies that comprise today's modern-day abolitionist cause, where for both conservative Christians and for many feminists, "violated visions of femininity and sexuality...tap into widely held beliefs about the harms women face due to their sexual vulnerability"(355). The roster of prominent non-governmental organizations that have catapulted the fight against sexual slavery to the top of their agendas does suggest that a sexual politics premised upon the reinstatement of traditional sex and gender roles might indeed underlie the attention that many conservative Christians have granted to the issue. Alongside established and expected feminist constituencies like the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Equality Now, and the Feminist Majority stand such well-known Christian-right groups as Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, and Concerned Women for America, an extraordinary left-right alliance that political scientist Alan Hertzke has described as "the most significant human rights movement of our time" (2004: 6).

Yet our own empirical research reveals that this analysis is only apt in describing one particular segment of the evangelical "new abolitionist" movement, particularly as some of the most prominent anti-trafficking activists in question do not identify with

the Christian right at all, but rather describe themselves as Christian “moderates,” and in some cases, even as Christian progressives. A new group of highly educated and relatively affluent evangelicals have pursued some of the most active and passionate campaigning around sexual slavery and human trafficking. These evangelicals not only embrace the languages of women’s rights and social justice, but have also taken deliberate steps to distinguish their work from the sexual politics of other conservative Christians. Richard Cizik, former Vice President of the National Association of Evangelicals, has described the efforts of this organization to reorient conservative Christians away from issues such as homosexuality and abortion, and towards more “common denominator” concerns such as global warming, prison reform, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDs (Cizik 2006). David Batstone, an executive editor at the liberal-evangelical *Sojourners* magazine and the author of *Not for Sale* (a book about activists in the contemporary anti-trafficking movement) is also spearheading his own *Not for Sale* social campaign, which aims to unite churches, universities, businesses, and individuals who take a pledge to fight slavery (Batstone 2007). And the officially non-partisan International Justice Mission (IJM), the largest and most established Christian anti-trafficking organization in the U.S., with upwards of eighty full-time paid staff members and operations in fourteen countries, boasts the endorsements not only of Chuck Colson from the far-right Wilberforce Forum, but also of noted “left” evangelicals such as Tony Campolo and Jim Wallis. According to an interview conducted with one IJM staff member, members of the organization--who are required to endorse a Christian statement of faith as a condition for their employment, and who spend the initial hours of each work day engaged in collective prayer---have even debated abandoning the term “evangelical” entirely because of its troubling associations with the right wing.

The fact that contemporary anti-trafficking campaigns have been vigorously embraced by Christian moderates and liberals does not, however, mean that they are linked to a sexual agenda that most sex-workers’ rights activists (or others with a critical feminist perspective) would likely find progressive. In contrast to Christian-right evangelicals -- who have embraced the trafficking issue in order to lend a humanitarian face to longstanding cultural battles around gender and sexuality, the more moderate varieties of evangelical new-abolitionist politics can best be situated in terms of a neoliberal (rather than a traditionalist) sexual agenda, one that locates social problems in deviant individuals rather than mainstream institutions, that seeks social remedies through criminal justice interventions rather than through a redistributive welfare state, and that advocates for the beneficence of the privileged rather than the empowerment of the oppressed. As such, this approach leaves intact the social structures that drive low-income women (and many men) into patterns of risky migration and exploitative informal sector employment, including those relatively rare but very real situations which would rightly qualify as “trafficking” or “slavery.”¹⁵ A closer examination of government-funded evangelical and secular feminist anti-trafficking efforts, and both groups’ pursuit of avowedly pro-business social remedies, reveals the neoliberal underpinnings (and po-

¹⁵ An exception to this tendency was provided in the commentary that was offered by Brian McLaren, a prominent progressive evangelical pastor and author who is affiliated with the Mathew 25 network and the “emerging church” movement, which some have described as hailing a “postmodern turn” within evangelical Christianity (McLaren 2008; see also McLaren 2004, Kimball 2003). During an interview, McLaren stated that his three biggest political priorities were “planet, poverty, and peace,” arguing explicitly for greater attention to the economic dimensions of trafficking. As McLaren explained, “It’s disturbing that non-profits can raise money to fight sex trafficking in Cambodia, but its much harder to raise awareness about bad trade policies in the U.S. that keep Cambodia poor so that it *needs* sex trafficking.” However, McLaren’s perspective thus far remains a marginal one within the more general context of evangelical engagement with this issue.

litical limitations) of secular, as well as faith-based variants of the modern-abolitionist cause.

For example, the International Justice Mission has been at the forefront of recent media-friendly, government-funded evangelical anti-trafficking interventions, patenting an approach that might be termed “militarized humanitarianism.” This framework for action has characterized the faith-based response to human trafficking since the late 1990s, having risen to prominence through IJM’s spectacular rescues of women and children from South Asian brothels (often conducted in partnership with press outlets such as Dateline, CNN, and FOX News). In the “rescue and restore” model of activism that the organization has patented, male employees of the organization go undercover as potential clients to investigate brothels, partnering with local law enforcement to rescue underage and supposedly unwilling brothel occupants and to deliver them to state-sponsored or faith-based rehabilitation facilities. Although the organization’s operations have attracted some controversy (as in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where the rescued women escaped through the windows by knotting bedsheets together in order to run back to the brothels from which they had been “liberated”) the undercover and mass-mediated model of activism that IJM propounds has become the emulated standard for evangelical Christian and even some secular feminist organizations (Soderlund 2004, “Private Groups” 2007). As with some of its cultural predecessors such as groups like the Promise Keepers, through IJM’s rescue missions evangelical Christian men are coaxed into participating in women’s and other humanitarian issues by being granted the role of heroic rescuers and saviors (*see, e.g.* Kintz 1997, Bartkowski 2004). Unlike other Christian men’s groups, however, here it is not “headship” in the domestic enclave of the nuclear family that draws men in, but rather the assumption of a moral leadership role in the battle against the global brothel system.

Yet significantly, many new-abolitionist evangelical anti-trafficking activists reveal a set of political commitments that both encompasses and transcends prior depictions of conservative Christians’ sexual worldviews. In the succinct words of one IJM staff member who described IJM’s successful transformation of Cambodia’s Svay Pak (a district formerly known for child prostitution) into “a nice tourist town,” “Our real goal is to bring people out of slavery into the free market.” This view is also manifest via the practices of a growing number of Christian humanitarian organizations that orient former prostitutes towards entry-level jobs in the service economy, teaching women to bake muffins for Starbucks and to prepare Western-style drinks and food (Jewell 2007). Evangelical as well as secular feminist groups have increasingly committed themselves to this approach, no longer framing the problem of human trafficking in terms of broader dynamics of globalization, gendered labor, and migration (the prevailing framework amongst many secular anti-trafficking NGOs in the 1990s), but rather as a humanitarian issue that global capitalists can help combat (*see, e.g.*, Baue 2006, Vital Voices 2007). At a recent presentation at Columbia University, Somali Mom, a well-known trafficking survivor and activist from Cambodia was joined by a representative from Lexis Nexis, who discussed the virtues of “public-private partnerships” as well as his company’s aims to retrain former trafficking victims for hairstyling, seamstress work, and entry level positions in manufacturing. Whereas an earlier wave of anti-globalization activists had argued that the daily practices of capitalism created sweatshop conditions of labor that were unacceptable (*see, e.g.* Ross 1997, Klein 2002), “new internationalist” evangelicals as well as their secular champions identify such practices with the very definition of “freedom” (Kristof 2004a, 2004b).

Thus, the shift away from a broad definition of trafficking as inclusive of all forms of labor and toward a definition that focuses primarily upon sexual labor is intertwined with a move toward a neoliberal framework for understanding both the problem

and its potential solutions. This neoliberal model is especially evident in the newly defined federal crime of “domestic” trafficking, which was written into law as a result of activism by both evangelical Christian and secular feminist anti-trafficking groups. The 2005 reauthorization of the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (TVPRA) contained within it a provision that established the crime of domestic trafficking on a moral and legal par with previous cross-border understandings of the crime. In the TVPRA 2005, “domestic trafficking” is taken to be synonymous with the crime of “sex trafficking,” and the provision makes no mention of trafficking for other forms of labor. With the aim of shifting enforcement priorities towards the policing of street prostitution in urban areas, the TVPRA establishes \$5,000,000 in federal grants to local law enforcement agencies to “investigate and prosecute acts of severe forms of trafficking in persons...within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.” This shift in definitions has proven to be highly consequential, not only for the various vice squads that have benefited from federal anti-trafficking monies and have been able to elevate the status of their weekly prostitution patrols by linking them to the specter of “organized, sophisticated, criminal syndicates” (U.S. Congress 2000), but also for the individuals who engage in the most visible and policed tiers of street-based sexual commerce. As was described at an October 2006 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Survivors of Sex Trafficking conference, as well as two separate police training sessions on TVPRA enforcement (one in Las Vegas and the other in New York), pimps can now be charged with the federal crime of sex trafficking and given upwards of 99-year prison sentences; prostitutes can be apprehended by law enforcement as a means of securing their testimony in their “traffickers” prosecutions; and clients (whose demand for the services of prostitutes is declared by the TVPRA to be the underlying cause of trafficking) can be arrested and their cars apprehended as a means of financing “anti-trafficking” activities (*see also* Jeralyn 2006; McShan 2006; “Man Convicted” 2006; Meltzer 2005). These new provisions became federal law through the intimate collaborations of devoted evangelical and feminist anti-trafficking activists and neo-conservative Washington think tanks, and reflect a convergence of evangelicals’ militarized humanitarianism with what might be termed “carceral feminism”: the commitment of abolitionist feminist activists to a law and order agenda. As the political scientist Marie Gottschalk has similarly described within the context of the U.S. anti-rape and battered women’s movements, this commitment most often includes a drift from the welfare state to the carceral state as the apparatus for effecting feminist goals (Gottschalk 2006).

For modern-day abolitionists, contemporary campaigns against sex trafficking offer a way to a way to address the ravages of neoliberalism that effectively locates all social harm *outside of* the institutions of corporate capitalism, the state apparatus, and the nuclear family. In this way, the masculinist institutions of big business, the state, and the police are reconfigured as allies and saviors, rather than enemies of unskilled migrant workers, and the responsibility for “modern day slavery” is shifted from structural factors and dominant institutions onto individual, deviant men: foreign brown men (as in the White Slave trade of centuries past) or African American men living in the inner city. What is perhaps most surprising about the sexual politics of the new abolitionism is that it has emerged not only from the simultaneous rightward migration of some feminists and secular liberals towards neoconservatism and the politics of incarceration, but also from a *leftward* sweep of some evangelical Christians away from the isolationist issues of abortion and gay marriage and towards a “new internationalist,” social justice-oriented theology.

There are several key ways in which the alliance between Christian conservatives and secular feminists in this arena complicates commonplace presuppositions

about the relation between religious influence and gender equality. Given that some of the same Christian groups who are active in the anti-trafficking movement (such as Concerned Women America and Focus on the Family) have also advocated for policies that are generally understood to restrict progress toward gender equality, their current alliance with many politically prominent feminists suggests that the various criteria for assessing the components of what “gender equality” might be said to consist of are by no means uniform. Yet tracing the development of anti-trafficking policies also allows us to look at what the participants in this alliance share: a constellation that includes a sexual politics that is premised upon amative, egalitarian heterosexual relations between women and men and enhanced male participation in the domestic sphere, coupled with strong advocacy for a “masculinist” model of state intervention that is premised upon militarized humanitarianism and carceral paradigms of justice (Bernstein 2007, Soderlund 2005). Examining the common premises that unite the faith/feminist alliance in the U.S. also allows us to raise the question of whether the particular model of sexual and gender justice that is encapsulated in current anti-trafficking efforts is an adequate arbiter of gender equality for women from different age groups, classes, and ethnic and religious backgrounds. And finally, a consideration of the faith-feminist alliance that has guided current anti-trafficking efforts allows us to raise questions about the best means of accomplishing gender equality: Is reliance upon the criminal justice system and police or military interventions the best way to address the multivalent social causes of “trafficking” as a social problem and gendered issue?

These questions are particularly important because they enlarge the focus of analysis from the single question of whether religious influence is dangerous to gender equality or democratic possibility to a focus on questions about both the specific frameworks promoted by religious groups and the broad and often contradictory effects of such influence. These effects include, on the one hand, enhanced evangelical engagement with a broad array of social justice issues in a way that serves to elevate these issues to greater political and cultural prominence, as well as the rescue of at least some individuals who are grateful for these groups’ efforts and concerns. On the other hand, given the shape that both activist and policy interventions have taken thus far, it is important to recognize that the effects of these interventions have also included the increased criminalization of domestic sex workers and other members of the street-based economy who work consensually, the deportation (and often subsequent arrest) of migrant sex workers who are apprehended in anti-trafficking raids, and, even for officially certified trafficking victims who manage to avoid arrest, the funneling of survivors into dead-end, minimum wage jobs which increases the likelihood that they will pursue similarly risky employment strategies in the future in order to improve their earning capacity (Bernstein 2007a, 2007b; Brennan 2009). At an international level, one particularly devastating result of the Bush-era anti-trafficking agenda has been the defunding of peer-based sex-worker projects who have refused to sign the TVPA’s required “anti-prostitution pledge,” groups that had previously played a pivotal role in disseminating harm reduction strategies to other sex workers and in using their own intimate knowledge of sexual labor and locale to identify potential trafficking victims (CHANGE 2008).

In the following sections, we further pursue these questions by placing the case study of anti-trafficking policy in relation to some related cases of religious influence. In section “B” below, we look at two additional cases, both of which have internal and transnational implications for U.S. policy: engagement with questions of reproductive rights and interventions around HIV/AIDS.

B) Reproductive Rights and AIDS

These cases are important to consider because the Bush Administration's policies on reproductive rights are generally understood to be regressive, while its AIDS policy is often lauded by progressives in the mainstream press. When examined in detail, however, each of these cases is based on conservative Protestant assumptions about the meaning of sexuality and its place in relation to marriage and reproduction (Jakobsen 2007, Kaplan 2004). Particularly at the transnational level, U.S. policy on both reproductive rights and on AIDS is directed toward remaking the world in the image of the Protestant male-headed nuclear family household, whether through restrictions of women's reproductive autonomy or an AIDS policy that posits marriage as protection against the spread of HIV (Saunders 2004, Buss and Herman 2003, Butler 2006). President Bush has also explicitly placed his AIDS policy in the context of the "war on terror," thereby connecting U.S. policy on gender and sexuality to U.S. military objectives (Jakobsen 2007). These two ancillary cases, thus, further complicate questions of religious influence on policy.

As many commentators have noted, the roots of the contemporary religious right reside to a significant extent in its staunch opposition to *Roe vs. Wade*, the groundbreaking 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision which expanded the doctrine of privacy to cast abortion as a personal decision between a woman and her doctor (*see, e.g.*, Kaplan 2004, McGirr 2001, Luker 1984, Ginsburg 1998). As Esther Kaplan (2004) has argued, the ruling was cataclysmic to evangelical Christians as well as to Catholic conservatives, and immediately spawned the National Right to Life Committee as well as a host of other right-wing organizations (including Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America, and the Eagle Forum), organizations which continue to occupy a powerful position in the national political landscape. Since their emergence more than thirty years ago, these groups have constituted an increasingly influential interest bloc within the Republican Party, "scoring" members of congress on their pro-life credentials, lobbying elected officials, and seeking through a series of incremental steps to dismantle *Roe vs. Wade* (Kaplan 2004, Frank 2004, Saletan 2003).

The Bush Administration has offered the pro-life movement a particularly warm embrace. The Administration's allegiance and support have been demonstrated by a succession of actions and policies that date from the initial days of President Bush's accession to office, beginning with the immediate reinstatement of the "Mexico City policy" on January 22 of 2001. Also known as the "global gag rule," the policy prohibits federal monies from going to any family planning organization that offers access to abortion services or promotes abortion as an option for women, even if it uses non-governmental funds to do so. The Administration's strong support for the "pro-life" position has also been evidenced by its advance of the notion of "fetal personhood" via a 2002 executive order mandating that SCHIP, the federal health insurance program for low-income children, provide coverage to fetuses (though not their pregnant mothers), as well as its endorsement of the 2004 "Unborn Victims of Violence Protection Act" (which creates a distinct federal crime for harm to an embryo or fetus). Additional examples of the Administration's strong endorsement of religious right positions on reproductive issues include a string of judicial appointments at both the Supreme Court and federal appellate court levels; its successful efforts during a three year period to stall women's over-the-counter access to the "morning after" contraceptive pill; and vigorous enforcement of an "abstinence only" sex education policy, both domestically and abroad (Kaplan 2004, Saletan 2003; NARAL 2008).

Yet sociological research has demonstrated that the gendered meanings and effects of such policies—or of the religious right's positions on reproductive issues more generally—are by no means simple to discern (*see, e.g.* Luker 1984, Ginsburg 1989).

As with shifts in the debate over trafficking, much of the recent battle over reproductive issues has been over the meaning of women's rights. While pro-choice activists have historically argued in terms of women's individual rights in terms that could fit with American Protestant hegemony, this individualism could also violate Protestant understandings when individualism was removed from its context in marriage and family. The Supreme Court precedent on contraception on which *Roe v. Wade* was based, were specifically focused on the privacy of sexuality within the confines of marriage (*Griswold v. Connecticut*, [381 U.S. 479](#) (1965)). More recently, as with trafficking, the limits of this version of individualism in combination with a range of shifting social factors have meant that "women's rights" can now be invoked as the basis for opposing abortion as much as for supporting access to abortion (see also Siegel 2008).

The fact that current secular pro-choice prescriptions for reproductive rights do not always neatly align with women's diverse gender and class interests is made evident by the existence of activist groups such as Feminists for Life, which argues that by not granting women better access to housing, health insurance, and daycare, current social policies have effectively eliminated the choice of motherhood for many women in the workforce (Feminists for Life 2008). Indeed, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, an evangelical Christian who in 2008 became the first woman to join the Republican ticket as a vice presidential candidate, did so with a social conservative record and agenda that were so far to the right (including, most notably, her opposition to abortion even in cases of rape and incest) that Richard Cizik, then the head of the National Association of Evangelicals, described her positions as beyond the bounds of mainstream evangelical opinion (Cizik 2008). Yet what is more striking is that Palin herself frequently embraced the label of "feminist" to describe herself during the 2008 campaign (something even Hillary Clinton was reluctant to do during the primaries) and is in fact a former member of Feminists for Life.

The multiple interpretations of where "women's interests" reside *vis-a-vis* reproductive policies, and in particular, the idea that "women's interests" might be better served through the denial of access to abortion was taken up in the 2007 Supreme Court decisions *Gonzales v. Carhart* and *Gonzales v. Planned Parenthood Federation of America*, which together upheld the so-called "Partial Birth" Abortion Act of 2003--an act remarkable for providing no exceptions to the abortion ban even in instances where the pregnant woman's health was endangered. Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy argued that "respect for human life finds an ultimate expression in the bond of love the mother has for her child," and asserted that "it seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort the infant life they once created and sustained." A similar logic of protecting women's interests was employed in a 2006 South Dakota law criminalizing all abortions (again, making no exceptions for rape, incest, or protecting the life of the mother), which stated explicitly that "to fully protect the rights, interests, and health of the pregnant mother, the rights, interest, and life of her unborn child, and the mother's fundamental natural intrinsic right to a relationship with her child, abortions in South Dakota should be prohibited" (South Dakota 2006). Although the law has since been overturned (Gray 2006), it illustrates, along with the 2007 Supreme Court decisions, the growing extent to which the religious right and its supporters have been able to cast opposition to abortion not only in terms of "fetal rights," but also within the framework of "the rights of women" (*see also* Butler, 2006).

In his recent book, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War*, William Saletan makes the argument that by advocating for reproductive rights in terms of privacy doctrine rather than women's rights, the pro-choice movement ceded its own political ground to its opponents. At a practical level, "pro-life pragmatism" (which

seeks to chip away at *Roe vs. Wade*, rather than overturning it outright) and “pro-choice conservatism” (which has compromised with religious conservatives on questions ranging from parental notification to public funding for abortions) have become virtually indistinguishable, effectively making abortions inaccessible to the young and to the poor (Saletan 2003). Most recently, secular pro-choice advocates have joined forces with religious liberals in an attempt to forge a new consensus position, one which focuses on reducing rather than criminalizing abortions, while granting the conservative claim that the choice to abort is often one which is traumatic for women (Sojourners 2007, Wallis 2008, Lerner 2007). Ironically, while religious conservatives now increasingly cast pro-life politics in terms of women’s interests and are more apt than ever to use explicitly feminist language to shape their claims (Butler 2006), the discourse of “women’s right to choose” continues to decline amongst secular and liberal advocates of reproductive rights. Barack Obama took up this framing of “abortion reduction” as a reasonable compromise (using the language of “surely we can all agree” on abortion reduction in his speech accepting the Democratic nomination) that also helped him to woo Christian voters (Waldman 2008).

As with the appropriation of the language of “women’s interests” in anti-abortion rhetoric, the Bush Administration’s AIDS policy has taken up the once clearly liberal (even radical) rhetoric of fighting AIDS and turned it to very different ends. In his State of the Union address in January 2003, the President announced the formation of the President’s Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) with significant new levels of funding for AIDS prevention and treatment around the world. The Administration then agreed to support generic drug distribution in Africa through PEPFAR, a move that was initially seen by many activists as a breakthrough. But, as the course of the Administration moved forward over the years, it became apparent that all of this money was not necessarily going, as the President stated, to “defeat the plague of HIV-AIDS” (“President Addresses United Nations High-Level Plenary Meeting,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/09/20050914.html>). Rather, the funding structure includes requirements that a percentage of the funds go to abstinence-only work. This requirement has been accompanied by a reduction in the distribution and use of condoms (Girard 2006). As a result, places like Uganda, which had extensive programs for the distribution of condoms and which had seriously cut rates of HIV infection over the course of the 1990s, have made extensive cutbacks in such efforts. There is now intense controversy over whether such a shift in policy will lead once again to increasing rates of infection (Cynn 2007, Human Rights Watch 2005, Ross 2005; *see also* <http://www.avert.org/aidsuganda.htm>). There has also been a great deal of focus on the success of prevention in Brazil, which has been able to fund its AIDS program without financial assistance from the U.S. and which, therefore, has not had to submit to U.S. restrictions (Jordan 2001, Monte Reel 2006, Phillips and Moffett 2005, Jones 2000). Even with these problems, the U.S. press generally lauds the President’s funding for AIDS as one of his best achievements. For example, the usually critical Frank Rich found one (and only one) positive thing about the Bush Administration policies on sex: its efforts around AIDS, arguing that for all of its gay-bashing, “the effort to eradicate AIDS [ironically] led by a number of openly gay appointees like Dr. [Mark] Dybul, may prove to be the single most beneficent achievement of this beleaguered Administration” (Rich 2006).

When examined in detail, the Bush Administration’s AIDS policy actually shares a number of features with the more recognizably conservative policy on reproductive rights. Both are based on conservative Christian assumptions about the meaning of sexuality and its place in relation to marriage and reproduction and on the restriction of both health information and health services that do not align with these assump-

tions. As the journalist Esther Kaplan has documented, particularly at the transnational level, U.S. policy on AIDS is directed toward remaking the world in the image of the male-headed nuclear family household. For example, she quotes evangelist Franklin Graham's testimony before the U.S. Senate in 2000, where he argues that U.S. AIDS policy should promote a fundamental "lifestyle change" in Africa that will bring familial forms into line with Protestant norms: "Education is inadequate without the teaching that the only reliable way to avoid contracting AIDS through sexual contact is by maintaining a lifelong monogamous relationship. But just as important, we must recognize that the ability to adopt such dramatic lifestyle changes is almost impossible without the moral conviction that sex outside of a marriage between a man and a woman is contrary to God's law. This crisis will be curbed only when the moral teachings of God's Word permeate African society" (Kaplan 2004, 218).

President Bush has connected these policies, focused as they are on life-style change across the world, to the aims of the U.S. "war on terror." In the 2005 edition of his annual address to the United Nations, the President argued for winning the "war on terrorism" not just on the battlefield, but also in "the battle of ideas." Here he highlighted the need to prevent countries from becoming "havens for terrorists." The methods that he enumerated by which to prevent such an occurrence were U.S. aid to fight AIDS and malaria, to relieve the burden of highly indebted nations and to eliminate trade barriers and open free markets ("President Addresses United Nations High-Level Plenary Meeting," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/09/20050914.html>).

Fighting AIDS and malaria are, thus, twinned with an economic agenda that includes reducing the burden of debt, but that also crucially involves the lynchpin of economic globalization, reducing "barriers to the free flow of goods and services." Given the Bush Administration's focus on sexual "lifestyle" changes as key to ending the spread of HIV, we must conclude that current U.S. policy effectively connects the interests of the "war on terrorism" and neo-liberal globalization with conservative policies on gender and sexuality.

Although each of these policies promoted by the Bush Administration raises concerns, albeit for different reasons, about the influence of explicitly Christian NGOs and activist groups on government policy in the United States, an exploration of policy from the previous, more secular Clinton Administration raises additional issues about the relationship between a secular framework for policy and the values that undergird policies around gender and sexuality. The Clinton Administration presents a particularly interesting analytic problem because while President Clinton himself was generally regarded to be a sexual liberal (if not libertine), and while his Administration was most certainly more liberal than the one that followed, it is still the case that when it comes to policy, the Clinton Administration supported conservative initiatives which have had a major negative impact on the prospects for gender equality in the United States. In section C below, we document this point by looking at a major policy initiative on the part of the previous U.S. administration, led by President Bill Clinton: "welfare reform."

C) The Case of Welfare Reform

Compared with the Bush administration, the Clinton Administration was less directly influenced by religious social movements (either avowedly conservative or progressive) and the Administration's main policies were directed toward the realization of a secular, neoliberal economic agenda. The policies of the Clinton Administration present an important contrast to those of the Bush Administration (and possibly also to the forthcoming Obama Administration). In particular, the role that secular Christian discourse on

gender and sexuality plays in welfare reform demonstrates the importance of an analysis of the discursive environment for policy-making. Welfare reform activated a longstanding discourse on gender, sexuality and race in relation to poverty in the United States to powerful effect and despite the opposition to welfare reform as economic policy by many of the progenitors of the discourse, including Daniel Patrick Moynihan and the Catholic Bishops conference.

The positions of the Clinton Administration were better on some issues related to gender equality, like the defense of abortion access and support for AIDS research and prevention, including the use of condoms as a major means of prevention. One of Clinton's first acts in office was to his powers of executive order to lift the Reagan-era "global gag rule" on U.S. international aid funds for groups that provided or supported abortions. (George W. Bush then reinstated this rule through the same means immediately upon taking office and Barack Obama repealed the rule once again a few weeks into his term in office). Both of Clinton's appointees to the U.S. Supreme Court, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, vote consistently in favor of abortion rights. George W. Bush's two appointments, John Roberts and Samuel Alito have yet to participate in a major abortion decision, but both are expected to vote in support of further restrictions on abortion if not the outright overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Similarly, although the Bush Administration dedicated significantly more money to fighting AIDS than had the Clinton Administration, the religiously-inspired aspects of the Bush AIDS policy such as the dependence on abstinence before condoms as a measure of prevention significantly undercut the value of that spending in terms of effectiveness in fighting AIDS. There can be little question that the religious influences on the Bush Administration vis-à-vis sexuality contributed to this more deadly approach to the fight against AIDS as compared to the more secular, scientific approach of the Clinton Administration, and that despite the lower levels of funding, Clinton's was the more progressive approach to AIDS. One could argue that the fact that rates of transmission of HIV went down during the Clinton era through the early years of the Bush Administration, but have since begun to rise again, particularly among young people – those most likely to be subjected to abstinence-only education – supports this view that Clinton was the more progressive of the two President's on AIDS. Although we must also ask whether the fact that the level of funding to fight AIDS provided by the Clinton Administration was lower than that provided by the religiously influenced and deeply conservative Bush Administration is an indicator of a reticence even for a more secular Administration to address sexual issues.¹⁶

The Clinton Administration also supported policies like "welfare reform" and the Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage as the union between "one man and one woman" in federal law (Public Law 104-199, 110 Stat. 2419), that had serious consequences for the possibility of gender and sexual equality. The ramifications of these policies were not just in the policies themselves, although particularly with welfare reform, the consequences for women's lives could be serious, but also in their contribution to the discourse of gender and sexual conservatism in the U.S. as crucial to the health of the nation and commonsensical with regard to personal responsibility. These discourses continued to be used by the George W. Bush Administration with regard to

¹⁶ Even aside from the increase brought about by the Bush Administration's global AIDS initiative, PEPFAR, domestic spending on AIDS was increased by the Bush Administration for a total of \$4.6 billion in 2000 when President Clinton left office to \$13.2 billion in 2007 (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation 2006), US Federal Funding for HIV/AIDS: The FY 2007 Budget Request. February 2006.

AIDS policy and reproductive rights.¹⁷ In short, the policies themselves are difficult to separate from their discursive context.

We pursue the particular case of “welfare reform” because Clinton had made changing welfare central to his first campaign for President in 1992, even before he had to face the right-wing backlash that defined so much of his Administration. Welfare reform is not always considered a “gender issue,” and could rather be read simply as a gender-neutral economic policy – a response to worldwide neoliberal economic conditions and the specific expression of neoliberal policies in favor of privatization and smaller government. The issue was particularly important in its effects on women; sociologists have documented that approximately 90% of welfare recipients are women (Parvez 2002). In addition, while welfare reform may have been prompted by responses within the U.S. to the conditions of global neoliberal economics, this embrace of neoliberal policy had to be realized discursively in order to be accomplished in this particular form, and it had to be realized in a form that was politically viable in specifically American terms.¹⁸ In addition to the effects of welfare reform on women, the use of gender and sexuality as the means of materializing neoliberalism is crucial to the ongoing relation between neoliberal economics and gender inequality.

Clinton pursued welfare reform as part of a broader strategy to unburden the Democratic Party from the national perception that tied the Party to a policy that was unpopular with the middle-classes as well as the elite and he placed it in the framework of his broader neoliberal agenda (Bounds, Brubaker and Hobgood 1999). In so doing, he sought to distance the Democratic Party from association with undue support for the poor, thus leaving already actively disenfranchised populations with few electoral options in the U.S. two-party system. And yet, he also used the very same conservative language around gender and sexuality as did the conservative Christian critics of his Administration, stating repeatedly, for example, in forums from his weekly radio address to his 1995 State of the Union speech that teenage mothers represented the most pressing threat to the health of the nation (Sands 2000, West 2000).

Tracing the development of this policy shows that while it is ostensibly a gender-neutral economic policy, in fact, nearly all of the rhetoric leading up to the passage of the 1996 “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act” (Public Law 104-93) and most of its effects, are both highly gendered as well as raced, as were its effects. While the proportion of white welfare recipients declined significantly following welfare reform, from 33.6% to 23.8%, the proportion of Hispanic recipients in fact increased, from 20.5% to 29.9%. The proportion of black recipients remained constant (at about 43%), but the proportion of low-income non-welfare recipients who were

¹⁷ In the 2006 State of the Union Address, for example, President Bush connected personal responsibility and welfare reform to some of his most conservative gender policies, including abstinence education: “In recent years, America has become a more hopeful nation. Violent crime rates have fallen to their lowest levels since the 1970s. Welfare cases have dropped by more than half over the past decade. Drug use among youth is down 19 percent since 2001. There are fewer abortions in America than at any point in the last three decades, and the number of children born to teenage mothers has been falling for a dozen years now. These gains are evidence of a quiet transformation – a revolution of conscience, in which a rising generation is finding that a life of personal responsibility is a life of fulfillment. Government has played a role. Wise policies, such as welfare reform and drug education and support for abstinence and adoption have made a difference in the character of our country. And everyone here tonight, Democrat and Republican, has a right to be proud of this record” (The White House 2006).

¹⁸ As Ann Shola Orloff (2002) argues, the “welfare to work” ideology was central to social policy rethinking reform across a number of nations in this period. The question that we address here is how the United States, which has not followed the European model on a wide range of social policy questions, came to adopt a similar (although peculiarly American) policy in this instance.

black increased following welfare reform (from 28.9% to 33.8%) while the proportion of other racial groups remained the same, suggesting that blacks who leave welfare fare worse than others (IWPR 2003). By 2002, 40% of women who had been former welfare recipients were unemployed (Edelman 2002).

Much of the rhetoric used by proponents of the legislation focused on “teenage” or “single” mothers, easily recognized code for young, poor women of color. The rhetoric surrounding “welfare reform” followed on a long history that connected public policy regarding poverty to a conservative agenda with respect to gender, sexuality and race (Abromovitz 1996, Mink 1999, O’Connor 2001). In the Congressional debate, both Democrats and Republicans used rhetoric about illegitimacy and teenage motherhood repeatedly in support of the bill. Democrat Joseph Lieberman argued that a focus on both teenage motherhood and statutory rape (sex between men who are of age and teenage girls) was a primary site of bipartisan support for the bill. Lieberman went on to state directly that “teenage out-of-wedlock pregnancy is a primary cause of long-term welfare dependency” (Congressional Record, July 22, 1996 S8419), even though at an earlier point in the debate he had claimed that welfare dependency was a causal factor in the growth of teen pregnancy (CR July 19, 1996 S8366). Similarly, Republican Senator Faircloth argued that “the root cause of welfare dependency is illegitimacy” (Congressional Record, August 1, 1996, S9366). In his statement in support of the conference report, combining the House and Senate versions of the legislation (and entered into the record by Senator Exon), President Clinton reiterated the themes of “work, responsibility, and family,” and highlighted “requiring teen mothers to stay in school” as the first relevant policy already accomplished by his Administration (Congressional Record, August 1, 1996, S9360).

The question of the discursive environment created by linking non-normative sexuality and teenage motherhood to questions of the structure of the welfare state is not just powerful for this single issue. As Democratic Senator Bill Bradley from New Jersey pointed out in the debate, “Welfare reform is a politician’s dream [and] a poor person’s nightmare....AFDC, \$15 billion out of a \$1.5 trillion budget has been a political football in this country for generations; in some cases, a racialized political football, as politician after politician created in the mind of the public the idea that black women had children so that they could collect \$64 per month for that third child in New Jersey” (Congressional Record August 1, 1996 S9366). He later noted that the entire debate on welfare reform was “built on generations of using this issue as a code word for a lot of other things in American politics,” (S9367) including illegitimacy, poverty, unemployment and violence.

The power of a discursive environment to shape political possibility was demonstrated perhaps most poignantly in the statement of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan from New York. Moynihan opposed the bill in powerful terms because of the seriousness of the change to the structure of the welfare state that it represented. He began with a quotation from Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* about the moment in which “all hope has died” (CR July 18, 1996 S8074) and went on to make the point that “something fundamental” was about to happen with the passage of the bill: “What is about to happen is we are going to repeal title IV-A of the Social Security Act, the provision established in 1935 to that act, aid to families with dependent children.” Moynihan was one of the few participants in the debate to hark back to the origins of AFDC or to raise the magnitude of the bill in terms of its change in the structure of the state and in basic economic policy. It is clear from this opening that Moynihan was very seriously opposed to the welfare reform bill. And yet, Moynihan was also one of the original architects of the discourse that has enabled the simplicity of the connection between non-normative family structure and “social problems.” Moynihan ac-

knowledged the strong connection that both legislators and the Clinton Administration made between out-of-wedlock births and welfare, and could not deny that these linkages were relevant. His only tempering intervention was to argue that we do not know enough about the causal relations involved (“The basic model of this problem in the minds of most legislators, and most persons in the administration, is that since we first had welfare and then got illegitimacy, it must be that welfare caused illegitimacy. And they may be right. I do not know. But neither do they”). The disjunction between Moynihan’s position on this particular policy and his contribution to the surrounding discourse illustrates the ways in which contributions to a broader discourse have power well beyond the intentions or control of those who initially produce them.

This rhetorical genealogy tying together gender, sexuality, race, and poverty has been appropriated and extended by Democrats as well as Republicans. Thus, Clinton’s appropriation of its terms was in no way unusual. The most famous articulation of this rhetoric has likely been its circulation in the form of the “Moynihan Report,” (Office of Policy Planning and Research 1965) produced by the office of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who later became a Democratic Senator. The basic tenets of the narrative developed in this report were that poverty in the United States, particularly in African American communities, was attributable to a breakdown in family structure, which failed to match that of the middle-class nuclear family. Thus, this narrative restricted the image of appropriate family relations to the supposedly traditional but historically specific (even unusual) post-war American nuclear family (Coontz 2000), making family relations the marker for middle-class propriety to which all Americans should aspire. This narrative has been repeatedly re-circulated despite equally repeated interventions on the part of activists, particularly African American women activists, which demonstrate its problems (see e.g. Cade 1970). Two decades later Bill Moyers (1986), who had worked on the original report, reiterated its thesis in a television special, “The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America,” which once again produced a spate of refutations from feminist scholars and activists (Hill Collins 1989). The Moynihan Report was explicitly invoked once again in 1995 in testimony before the House Subcommittee considering the “welfare reform” act former George H.W. Bush Administration official, William Bennett and Harvard economics professor Glenn C. Loury (West 2000). This narrative in all of its various invocations once again ties a set of values about gender, sexuality and race to a capitalist understanding of work ethic and class mobility, particularly movement out of poverty.¹⁹

In the Clinton Administration, this narrative was welded to an expressly Christian rhetoric about sexual morality and a secular neoliberal economic agenda regarding economic independence and autonomy. Importantly, for our purposes, Moynihan also noted that some of the strongest opponents of the bill were religious groups, including the U.S. Catholic Bishops: “[T]here is one unified voice [in opposition to the legislation]: that of every national religious group and faith-based charity. But we seem unable or unwilling to listen. They all oppose ending the entitlement. Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic bishops, especially the National Council of Churches, Bread for the World, have persisted in this matter. Other [nonreligious] organizations are once again silent” (S8074). For these groups at least, apparently the connection between sexual morality as conventionally defined and ending the welfare state was not convinc-

¹⁹ Moyers, himself, represents a clear instance of the alliance between Christian and secular values. He is an ordained Baptist minister and acknowledges the importance of his Christianity to this life and work, but he emphasizes the secular nature of his principles. For example, in a 2006 interview in response to the question of whether his Christian faith fuels his political commitments, he says, “I don’t see it that way. At an Emmy Awards recently, I said I want to thank the First Amendment. Faith in the First Amendment, not a theological belief system, keeps me going as a journalist” (Blume 2006).

ing. This coalition between a mainline Protestant (National Council of Churches) organization, a poverty-focused evangelical organization (Bread for the World), and Catholic organizations stands in striking contrast to the alliance that the Clinton Administration forged between conservative and evangelical Christianity and secular Christianity.

In his testimony in favor of the legislation, for example, Loury promoted the codification of an alliance between religious morality and neoliberal economics by including in the legislation measures that would provide support directly to churches to develop and maintain programs against illegitimacy. Similarly, in 1995, Clinton made these connections between religion, sexual morality and neoliberal economics in a speech to the Progressive National Baptists (a black Protestant denomination). He argued that it would be possible to cut the poverty rate by over fifty percent, stating that a crucial component of realizing this possibility is if “teenagers who are unmarried didn’t have babies” (West 2000). Thus, when Clinton said that “welfare reform” would help to inculcate “structure and order and discipline” in the American family, he promoted all three prongs of the allied discourse—appropriate family structure, values, and the capitalist discipline of the Protestant ethic. Importantly, by drawing on this well-established and extensive discursive field Clinton was able to use expressly secular language to invoke the rhetorical chain of Protestant morality (see also Clinton Foundation, “Remarks by the President” 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999).

It is true that Clinton faced pressures from the Christian right wing throughout his Administration, but his main agenda was always the secular initiative of developing neoliberal economic policies. From his first Presidential campaign, organized around the idea that “it’s the economy, stupid,” to his support for NAFTA at the end of his Presidency, Clinton placed neoliberal economics at the center of his policy agenda.

This case raises a set of questions about whether secular politics is better for either gender equality or democratic pluralism. This case also reframes a set of questions for the cases regarding the Bush Administration, demonstrating that the impact of religious influence on questions of gender equality cannot be considered apart from the imperatives of neoliberal economics.

D) The Proposed Policies of the Obama Administration

As of this writing we can only trace the potential policies of the new Obama Administration through the proposals of his campaign, the Democratic Party Platform, the indications of post-election statements and political appointments, and the earliest of actions on policy. One of the questions about Obama’s Administration is whether he will sacrifice progressive positions on gender and sexuality in order to promote the Democratic agenda on other issues. This strategy was openly adopted by the Democratic Party in the 2006 midterm elections in their support of anti-choice Congressional candidates thought to have a chance to win and thus contribute to the return of the Democratic majority in Congress. It is also possible that Obama will present an even more complex strategy in which he compromises on some issues of gender and sexuality (as in his stance in favor of abortion reduction and opposition to gay marriage; *see below*) while he is progressive on others (like the lifting of the “global gag” order on information about abortion). His policies may present a more complex patchwork vis-à-vis gender and sexual equality than have previous Administrations. Similarly, on the economy he may combine liberal and neoliberal approaches in new ways. From the appointment of his economic advisors, many of whom had been architects of Clinton-era neoliberalism, in relation to his stated support for a job-creation economic stimulus package, it appears

that the Administration will pursue a modified neoliberalism in combination with aspects of New Deal stimulus, a type of “neo new deal” (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, forthcoming). Rather than a wholesale dismantling of neoliberal policies, it appears instead that new fiscal initiatives will be added to the ongoing attempts to address the 2008 economic crisis through bailouts of the financial sector. But, of course, all of this could change if the initial policy endeavors are not successful in ending the crisis, just as the Bush Administration moved in unexpected ways in trying to respond to the crisis.

Despite these uncertainties, it is important to briefly consider the indicated directions that might be taken by the Obama Administration because his campaign represented another permutation on religious influence in American politics. From the time of his 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention, during which he declared that “we worship an awesome God in the blue states,” Obama has directly embraced religious (and often specifically Christian) rhetoric and openly sought to bring religious voters, including Christian evangelicals, into his coalition (Prothero 2008). In June 2006, at a Sojourners/Call to Renewal-sponsored Pentecost conference, Obama embraced religious rhetoric even more powerfully, arguing explicitly that secularists need to make room in their political discussions for faith and morality (Obama 2006). Obama has not only partnered with progressive evangelicals such as those from *Sojourners* and from the Matthew 25 Network; he has also reached out to renowned center-right religious figures such as evangelical megachurch pastor Joel Hunter and Richard Cizik of the NAE—an embrace perceived by some evangelical leaders as more active and more authentic than that which was extended to evangelicals from the McCain-Palin campaign (Cizik 2008). This approach to Christianity marked a profound change for the Democratic Party, and has led some commentators like Stephen Prothero (2008) to predict that the value of religion as a wedge issue for the right wing will decrease over the course of the Obama Administration. Importantly for our purposes, in the case of Obama, at least, an increase in religiosity and greater progressivism in policy go hand in hand, meaning that the extent of religious influence itself is not predictive of political outcome.

Obama’s most visible religious supporters self-identified as theologically conservative but politically moderate or progressive evangelicals. These supporters were not necessarily the most numerous of his various advocacy groups, yet the progressive evangelicals were given the most focus by the press because they represented a break with the conservatism of the Republican evangelical coalition and because evangelicals have become recognized as the paradigm of Christianity in American politics. Obama’s political positions are in line with those of moderate and progressive evangelicals on many but not all issues. The most striking disjunction is on abortion. Obama has long been a supporter of a woman’s right to choose, and most moderate and even progressive evangelicals strongly oppose abortion. As a compromise, in the second half of the campaign Obama took up the language of “abortion reduction” as a means of recognizing the right to an abortion while trying to find ways to minimize the instances of women exercising that right.

In terms of Obama’s stated positions on a number of issues related to gender and sexuality, what we see is a mixture of stances some of which are more progressive (as in his declared intentions to secure full federal rights for same-sex civil unions and to overturn the Clinton-era “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy prohibiting gays and lesbians from serving in the military), some of which reframe major issues like abortion, and some of which are a continuation of the conservative positions that have prevailed across party lines in recent decades. Obama has clearly hoped to participate in the move away from gender and sexuality as central issues for political campaigns, making it likely that these issues will also not be the major focus of policy. As such, unlike his major competitors,

Hillary Clinton and John McCain, he did not list human trafficking as a “women’s issue,” and does not, in fact, listing trafficking as a major issue at all.²⁰ The issues listed under women begin with fixing the health care system and a series of proposals on women’s health and stem cell research, followed by reproductive rights and measures to end violence against women in the U.S. and abroad, specifically in the Sudan, followed by economic issues, national security (ending the war in Iraq and supporting women veterans), poverty, and education. The issues listed on the “Women for Obama” portion of his campaign website were primarily economic and related to health care. In the resources section the link to the “women and families blueprint” actually leads to a pamphlet, “Barack Obama’s Support for Working Women and Families,” emphasizing the economic needs of women in the work force, the need for paid leave and provision for caring labor, and health care. Only in a single paragraph at the end of the document is a “woman’s right to choose” mentioned (in the new White House web page, reproductive choice moves up above violence against women but remains below economic issues as a “guiding principle” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/women/>). In other words, for Obama “women’s issues” mainly have been the general issues of “all Americans,” sometimes with a particular focus on working Americans; then, within those issues the specific concerns of women (e.g. research into women’s health) are articulated. Interestingly, this move matches both the moves of moderate to progressive evangelicals and of those streams of the feminist movement, particularly women of color and working class women’s movements that have long argued that all issues are women’s issues. Thus, the move away from gender, specifically gender as sexuality, may help Obama to manage and possibly even connect different sides of his supporting alliance.

There are dangers to this approach, however, most clearly indicated by the case of Proposition 8 in California, described in our Introduction, in which voters supported Obama’s brand of progressivism, but also sanctioned a position against gay marriage. While the alliance that successfully promoted Proposition 8, was complex, and the question of which constituency “made the difference” has been a matter of great debate, the significant presence of both traditionally conservative elements like, the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, and Christians who are progressive on a range of political issues except for gender and sexuality, like significant portions of the Black Church, also exposes the risks for feminism of a full embrace of moderate or even progressive evangelicals as part of a political alliance. Their progressivism only rarely extends to questions of gender and sexuality.

Both Obama’s campaign and the early months of his Administration presented a mixed bag of more progressive and continued conservative policies. On HIV/AIDS Obama’s campaign material pointedly moves back toward a focus on science, rather than family structure or morality as the basis for treatment. His Administration declares that it will pursue a prevention strategy that “is based on science and builds on what works” (Obama-Biden Campaign Website). On reproductive rights, despite the lifting of the “global gag rule,” questions remain as to what Obama’s support for abortion reduction might mean (Zeleny 2008; Connolly and Smith 2008). It could mean either significant programs to support motherhood, including better support for the protection of unwanted pregnancy, as well as expanded healthcare and childcare, which would give women more actual choice in responding to unexpected pregnancies. Or, it could

²⁰On this point, it is perhaps significant that Vice President-elect Joseph Biden was the chief sponsor of the Senate’s version of the 2007 Trafficking Victim’s Protection Reauthorization Act, which unlike the House version of the Bill does not incorporate the Mann Act into the definition of trafficking and slavery. Biden’s version of the bill is currently stalled in the Senate, and has been strongly critiqued by the abolitionist feminist-conservative Christian coalition for failing to equate all instances of prostitution with the federal crime of human trafficking.

mean continuing reductions on access to abortion that we have witnessed over the past several decades.

“Welfare reform” is now a fully accomplished policy; although the economic crisis may allow for broader support to address poverty and income inequality, there is no conceivable scenario in which these initiatives would take up the banner of still-toxic “welfare.” Nonetheless, it is significant that in many of his speeches, including some to audiences in the Black community, Obama emphasized the language of personal and familial responsibility, particularly with regard to African American fathers. These speeches positioned Obama as different from older liberals, particularly in the African American community. The Reverend Jim Wallis, who in addition to his work at *Sojourners* has been an informal advisor to Obama, argues that Obama’s use of the “bully pulpit” in this regard can constitute an important piece of progressive and genuinely effective pro-family policy, combating what he terms “heterosexual dysfunction” and demonstrating (as the African American television personality Bill Cosby did two decades earlier) “why it’s important to be a father” (Wallis 2008b). Yet Obama’s statements also reposition him as in line with much of the patriarchal rhetoric of the Black family that Clinton drew upon and that has circulated since the 1960s. The influences here are both a certain religious conservatism and the secular language of neoliberal personal responsibility.

Overall, what we see with Obama is an embrace of religion that is definitely more progressive than that of the Bush Administration on issues such as poverty, global warming, torture, and immigration, and one which could be more progressive than intended by his Christian allies vis-a-vis gender and sexuality policy. His version of “abortion reduction” might actually turn out to have radical potential by providing material provisions for low-income women who cannot currently afford to carry a child— or it might be deeply conservative, focused primarily upon the assertion of “sexual morality” — it is too soon to tell. Obama is likely to spend more on AIDS prevention, research and treatment and to be more active on the reduction of poverty and income inequality, although he has embraced language on “personal responsibility” used by Clinton among others, to accomplish welfare reform. He has stated his support for ending the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on gays in the military but has presented an ambivalent stance on gay marriage that is similar to the ambivalence of Clinton’s policy on “gays in the military” (Saul 2008). There are dangers lurking around the edges — gay marriage and patriarchal responsibility most notable amongst them — but again we will have to wait and see how these policies play out. Will he go with support for gay marriage in the states despite his personal opposition? A stronger separation of church and state? There is reason for hope, and also for caution when it comes to gender and sexuality over the course of the Obama Administration.

Conclusion

These case studies allow us to compare three different approaches to the intertwining of religion and American politics, demonstrating that the sources of policies that promote gender and sexual inequality in the United States are both secular and religious. A political embrace of religiosity, like Bush’s and Obama’s, can produce both extremely conservative policies as well as more liberal policies. Thus, we cannot assume that religious influence in politics is necessarily conservative or that more secular politics will necessarily be more progressive than the religious varieties. The challenge for feminists in addressing the question of religion and politics is not so much whether to promote religious or secular advocacy as it is to challenge Protestant dominance in American politics in both its religious and secular forms. The genius of the Republican Party

since the Presidency of Ronald Reagan was not to accept religious advocacy but to effectively incorporate that advocacy into a religious and secular alliance. Bill Clinton, along with many Democrats in Congress, was able to realize a secular politics of neoliberalism through appeal to a religious language of gender and sexual conservatism that is often taken for granted as common sense in the United States. For George W. Bush, the fact that the secular notion of American freedom depends on a genealogy that is deeply infused with Protestant values allowed him to use “freedom” rather than direct reference to God as the lynchpin of his secular-religious alliance. Our analysis suggests that a feminist approach to the Obama Administration might include encouraging a wider embrace of religious positions that includes a critique of the religious basis of Obama’s position on gay marriage and also of the intertwining of church and state in all marriage law; encouragement of input from more religious constituencies and from a wider range of liberal Christian perspectives; and a critique of the patriarchal aspects of both the religious and secular rhetoric to which Obama has appealed.

In other words, a critical consideration of questions such as these leads us to advocate for modes of activism around issues pertaining to gender equality that diverge sharply from both the evangelical-led efforts of the Bush Administration and their leading secular alternatives. For example, in terms of policies pertaining to human trafficking, we have seen that conservative Christian constituencies (along with some feminist allies) have pushed the Administration to focus upon a narrow band of cases involving trafficking for sexual labor, giving scant attention to the human rights violations occurring within other labor sectors that were the focus of many secular-led anti-trafficking efforts in the 1990s. Yet we have also seen that underlying what has often been highlighted as the key point of difference between anti-trafficking constituencies—the question of whether to focus solely upon sex or to focus upon labor in the broadest sense—resides a rarely acknowledged consensus about the best means to *politically address* cases of human trafficking after they have been identified. In fact, there is broad agreement amongst all major parties—secular and religious—that the best means of address trafficking is through the criminal justice system and the expansion of the carceral state apparatus.

“Religion,” in the sense of conservative Christian influence, is thus not in and of itself determinative of the response to human trafficking that the Bush Administration has forged, even if it has indeed played a crucial role in shaping language and definitions. Overall, evangelical engagement with anti-trafficking politics has not diverged from the reluctance displayed by *all* significant political constituencies to look beyond the imperatives of neoliberal globalization in forging effective policy remedies. An alternative approach to human trafficking would shift the focus from the criminal justice system to the structural conditions that propel people of all genders to engage in risky patterns of migration and diverse forms of exploitative employment. Of necessity, it would also entail a critical interrogation of the trademark policies of neoliberal globalization—such as linkages between international debt and lending guidelines, price fluctuations in global commodity markets, and economic development policies—which encourage indebted nations to respond to economic crises and to enhance local cash flow through migrant workers’ remittances.

We have argued similarly that when it comes to questions of women’s reproductive rights, the twin reigning positions in the U.S. of secular “pro-choice conservatism” and religiously driven “pro-life pragmatism” both fail to adequately address the diverse range of concerns that cluster under the banner of “women’s interests.” Bracketing questions of class and race, both advocates and opponents of reproductive rights have coalesced around policies that make abortion available to only the dwindling sector of adult women who by virtue of combined economic and geographic privileges are able to

secure access to services. An alternative approach to questions of reproductive rights—one which we share—has been articulated by various women of color activists who are engaged in a struggle for reproductive justice which seeks to transcend the market-focused language of “choice” and which grounds women’s capacity to make meaningful reproductive decisions within a broader social context. Activists from groups such as the National Black Women’s Health Project, Asian and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health, Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Center, and the National Latina Health Organization have argued for women’s access to abortion and contraception as part of a set of concerns which prioritizes granting all women access to services and to insurance coverage; advocating for an intertwined conception of civil, economic, and gender justice; combating violence; and pursuing safer and healthier communities (Silliman, Fried, Ross, and Guttierrez 2004). Some of the recent advocacy around abortion reduction, the product of new alliances between progressive religious voices and the Democratic party, seeks to keep abortion legal but to enhance the notion of “women’s choice” by augmenting programs for pre- and post-natal health care, parenting skills, income support, and adoption (Democratic Party Platform 2008). As with the question of “women’s interests” the language of “abortion reduction” could have variable effects depending on how it is implemented. It could serve for an agenda of reduction through the further reduction of access to abortion. Or, if realized in the form of the multiple programs promoted by the Democratic Platform, these measures could be a useful starting point for an even more encompassing agenda, one that also provides material and social support for women to live their lives in a variety of different family structures and to choose to remain childless.

The complexities presented by the first two cases are compounded by both U.S. AIDS policy and “welfare reform.” In both cases, policy has been formulated to center the male-headed nuclear family as the solution to problems ranging from poverty to the spread of HIV. In the case of “welfare reform” this particular policy focus was supported by both conservative evangelicals and by more secular advocates and politicians from the Democratic as well as the Republican Party. And in both cases, the policies have yoked male-dominant, heterofamilialist visions of gender and sexuality to questions of neoliberal economics (and in the case of HIV/AIDS to the U.S. “war on terrorism”). Thus, as with our first two cases the major policy alternatives are those that raise the issue not just of religious influence on policies affecting gender equality, but also question neoliberalism and its impact on gender relations and women’s lives. Organizations like Health Global Access Project (Health GAP), for example, are working to connect the need for prevention campaigns that distribute condoms to economic questions like those of debt relief and budget ceilings imposed by the International Monetary Fund that do not allow countries who receive IMF loans to adequately fund health care (See www.healthgap.org). The Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa has connected the distribution of condoms to questions of education, school access, and a “life skills” curriculum (See <http://www.tac.org.za>). As Richard Kim has noted, in a major shift, this type of activism that connects sexual politics to questions of economic justice has also been adopted by some U.S. queer-identified AIDS organizations like ACT UP (Kim 2001).

Finally, because alliances play such an important role in U.S. politics, we suggest that a crucial question for progress toward gender equality will be the effectiveness and form of alliances formed by feminist advocates. Clearly, alliances between some secular feminists and conservative Christians have been particularly effective in the case of anti-trafficking campaigns. We would also raise the question of alliances between secular feminists and a broader array of progressive religious actors including religious feminists. Our analysis suggests that it is important to break down the idea, popular in

mainstream public discourse that all religious positions are necessarily anti-feminist and that secularism and feminism are necessarily synonymous. It is necessary to recognize that both a feminism that only supports a modern, secularist view and a feminism that overtly embraces Christian interests can become trapped in U.S. imperialism (Fessenden 2008, Sands 2008). The idea that “other” religions are more conservative than is the U.S. government on issues of gender and sexuality can be invoked to promote U.S. global interventions, even as the U.S. also promotes its conservatism through foreign policy. In hoping to promote gender equality, feminist alliance politics would need to challenge Protestant dominance in both its religious and secular guises, while promoting religious diversity both among and within religious traditions, including Protestantism.

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