

INTRODUCTION

A characterization of electoral politics in the United States as the triumph of image over ideology—of style over substance—can be found in the writings of numerous social scientists (see, for example, Burnham, 1970, 1982; Braungart, 1978; Crotty and Jacobson, 1980). Such a characterization summarizes a whole complex of elements in the contemporary political scene of which the trivializing impact of the mass media, especially television, is only the most obvious and familiar. The steep decline in the last hundred years of the proportion of the electorate who actually votes and the concomitant waning of the functions of political parties constitute more long-standing and possibly more important aspects of the situation. Walter Dean Burnham speaks of the "devolution" of American political life: despite extensions of the franchise and despite a more educated and presumably more sophisticated populace, the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a "dissociation from politics as such among a growing segment of the eligible electorate and an apparent deterioration of the bonds of party linkages between electorate and government" (Burnham, 1982:29).

The relationship between such political alienation, party deterioration, and the triumph of style over substance in elections is relatively straightforward. Non-voting is profoundly class linked; the alienated are also the dispossessed. By absenting themselves from the polling booth, Americans least well served by the system guarantee that their concerns will generally be ignored in the process of political agenda setting. One consequence of this is that the modern political culture is quite undeveloped: narrow in debate and constricted in vision (Kleppner, 1982:160-62). Electoral politics is further "depolticized" by the rather feeble functioning of party systems. To quote Burnham again:

All of the available evidence suggests that the American party systems, viewed comparatively, have exhibited an arrested development. . . . There are at least four broad functions which are performed by fully developed democratic parties. The first of these is a nation-building, integrative, or, in Lowi's term, "constituent" function. . . . Second, political parties carry out an office filling function. . . . Third, parties perform a function of political education or political socialization for their mass clienteles. . . . Fourth, major parties may perform a policy-making function. . . . Particularly in our own century, American political parties have been largely restricted in functional scope to the realm of the constituent and to the tasks of filling political offices. So far as the function of political education is concerned, indeed, there is evidence that during the nineteenth century the parties were engaged in propaganda and political-socialization activities on a scale which knows no parallel today (1982:93, emphasis added).

LIME POLITICS: THE SELECTIVELY PROGRESSIVE ETHOS OF DAVIS, CALIFORNIA

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to the supposedly widespread "devolution" of American political life testified to by Walter Dean Burnham and others, a number of progressive municipalities appear to possess quite sophisticated and well-developed political cultures. In order better to grasp this phenomenon, the 1984 council and district attorney elections in one of these cities—Davis, California—are dissected. What emerges is a distinctive and distinctively selective variety of local progressivism that we term, "lime politics." Such a politics contrasts with more traditional liberal "red" concerns and with the newly emerging "green" perspective, as well as with classic conservative "blue." Salient features of the lime orientation include its social-class, transcendent appeal and its lack of philosophical articulation relative to its red, green, and blue competitors.

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Thus, Burnham and others (Hays, 1981; Jensen, 1981) suggest, substance is further suppressed by the failure of the parties to educate the electorate about or to socialize it into even that anemic and diluted political culture which does exist.

What is true for electoral politics nationally seems even more so for politics at the local level.² As a heritage of the Progressive Era, with its belief that "city government is largely a matter of 'good business practice' or . . . 'municipal housekeeping' . . . [and that] the problems and issues that come before a city council [and other local bodies] are not really political" (Lee, 1960:28-29), many local elections in the United States are officially nonpartisan, and the governance of numerous (especially small to medium-sized) municipalities has been turned over to the administrative ministrations of city managers. Given the general state of American political culture, then, Eugene Lee's (1960:168) comment that local elections are probably even less "issue oriented than state or national contests" implies that when we reach this level, we have reached the epitome of ideological mindlessness.

Lee, however, was writing in 1960. During the past 25 years, developments in a small but potentially significant number of American cities would appear to belie such an easy generalization. We refer to those municipalities to which (ironically) the sobriquet "progressive" has come to be applied. In California, for example, Santa Monica, Santa Cruz, Berkeley, Chico, and Davis (among others) have been so labeled. These cities, in sharp contrast to those characterized by "normal politics," appear to possess rather well-developed political cultures (of a left-leaning sort) that allow for the articulation of the concerns of their citizenry within the context of larger issues, values, movements, organizations, and processes. In fact, in his recent plea for "radicals and progressives" to abandon the Democratic Party and to forge a new political vehicle, Stanley Aronowitz points specifically to these sorts of municipalities as demonstrating that, at least at the local level, such a tactic has met with some success.

Socialists and leftists have won city council seats in Santa Monica, Santa Cruz, and Berkeley, California; Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Burlington, Vermont; the mayors of Burlington and Berkeley are avowed socialists. Equally impressive was economics professor Richard Wolff's Green Party mayoral race in New Haven, Connecticut last year. Wolff and the Green Party gathered 10 percent of the vote in the general election after running in the New Haven Democratic primary (Aronowitz, 1986:21).

If, in actuality, in these localities ideology is triumphing over image—substance over style; if these cities are truly flying in the face of a century of political devolution in the United States, that is surely a phenomenon

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deserving of close exploration. At the outset, we will want to discover whether the political cultures of these various cities are as well developed and as similar as they appear from a distance. If they are not—and this seems highly probable—then it is important to begin the task of identifying diverse sub-patterns. The intention of this paper is to make a contribution to such concerns through the analysis of a single election in one purportedly progressive municipality: Davis, California.

In what follows, then, we will first review those aspects of the history and political activity of the city of Davis which have led to its identification as progressive. We shall then examine the June, 1984 city council election and the race for District Attorney (both officially nonpartisan) to see what they can tell us about the reality of Davis' political culture. And finally, we shall try to draw out some of the implications of what we have learned.

Before beginning, however, it will be useful to remind the reader of the "color vocabulary" used widely in discussions of political tendencies in the United States and Europe—a vocabulary upon which we will draw in subsequent sections. We refer to the differentiation of progressive thought into a "red" strand—involving such goals as civil rights and personal freedom and economic justice and a "green" strand, involving a strong concern for peace and for the environment, with a preference for local or decentralized control.⁴ To these hues, we will add "blue"—to denote the opposing tendency toward ideological conservatism.

DAVIS AS A PROGRESSIVE CITY

Davis is a city of over 36,000 people and is the home of the third largest campus in the University of California system (UCD). The city's current population size (actually somewhat larger than officially reported, as residents of the dormitories and other campus housing facilities are not counted) is a relatively recent accomplishment. In 1960, the population was less than 9,000; in the short period of a single decade, it grew to over 23,000. This quite radical change in the town was the direct consequence of what was happening to the "gown." In 1959, the former "University Farm" was designated one of the general campuses of the nine-campus system, and as the university added students and schools and colleges and divisions,³ the city added people. The university's current dominance in the community may be seen in the recent Census Bureau ranking of Davis as the third most educated city in the nation ("Local Brain Power Ranks Third in U.S.," *Daily Democrat*, June 11, 1984:1).

Located some 12 miles from the state capital, Davis sits on the floor of the fertile Sacramento Valley, surrounded by those huge and monotonous agricultural fields that are the hallmark of farms turned corporations.

The climate, like the flatness of the terrain, is typical of inland California: hot and dry in summer, wet but temperate in winter. Heavily treed and, in its core, laid out in a grid system, the city has a distinctly midwestern "feel."

Davis' reputation as a progressive city grows out of more than a dozen years of well-publicized municipal activities. In April of 1972, a coalition of university-oriented and self-consciously "progressive" political amateurs wrested control of the city council from the local business/agricultural interests that had traditionally dominated it (Dixon, 1972). Looked at in retrospect, this shift in political orientation is unsurprising, matching as it did, the changing demographics of both the campus and the town. But at the time, it felt "revolutionary." As one observer noted:

The solid piece of evidence that there was a change was when the new council members took over. They began the meeting with a table full of business-looking men, all clean shaven, wearing suits and ties, and one by one each was replaced by Dick [Holdstock] and Joan [Poulos] and Bob [Black]. . . . The men were bearded, one had long hair and both wore short-sleeve shirts, and there was a woman. For me it was a visual representation of the change . . . it was very potent and very charging (Mickey Tanner, quoted in Moreno, 1981:1-2).

Beginning, then, in April, 1972 and continuing to the present, the city government of Davis has been busy forging an array of pioneer laws and policies with regard to such key matters as growth control, prevention of sprawl, and maintenance of an economically healthy city center; environmental protection; and, most particularly, energy conservation. An article in the *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle* in September of 1979 summarized some of these accomplishments, as well as the perception of them by outsiders.

It lies out there, on the way to Sacramento, a pocket of progress, certified by no less than Rosalynn Carter on a bicycle, a tree-shaded paradise for idealized America. . . . Davis, of course, always has been regarded as a pretty town, home of the Aggies and the square, easily packaged tomato, a pleasant place to live with a minimum of poverty and crime. Squalor is out, barbecues are in. . . . But suddenly, people are beginning to take Davis a great deal more seriously. It is probably not overstating to say, as *Mother Jones* magazine and the *Los Angeles Times* have suggested, that Davis may be the City of the Future. If Davis can be replicated, some analysts believe, America has solved its energy problems (Wood, 1979:36; see also Marotto, 1986).

As the reference to Rosalynn Carter intimates, media attention to Davis has not resulted simply from what city government was doing. Perhaps as significantly, it has been produced by the interest of celebrities in what government was doing. The visits of, among others, Rosalynn Carter in March of 1979; U.S. Secretary of Energy, Charles Duncan in January of

In June of 1980, the ordinance was put before the electorate. It lost decisively (Medhurst, 1982, 1983). The issue emerged again when the council included sexual orientation among the protected categories under an umbrella civil rights ordinance which was passed in February of 1986. At this writing, an initiative drive by the First Amendment Coalition—the group responsible for the 1980 defeat—to delete the gay rights portions of the new law is underway and will undoubtedly succeed once again in bringing the issue before the electorate.

Economic justice issues have fared little better. Voters did pass a rent control ordinance. But in April of 1979, when it was declared unconstitutional in the Superior Court, the council decided not to appeal, and the matter was never raised again. Similarly, although planning goals mandate integration of low-cost housing with new single-family and condominium developments, in fact, most housing in Davis is within the reach of only the more affluent. The question of providing affordable housing to genuinely low-income groups has certainly been addressed, but never with the force or tenaciousness reserved for environmental issues. Jim Stevens, a former city councilman and an articulate conservative spokesman (also quoted above), has argued that the city has applied

. . . regularly for government [subsidized] houses. But we don't get very much. And that's fine. Bringing low income people into the city is not my idea at all. I don't care whether I homogenize [sic] with them or not. I just don't want to pay for them. It's the welfare income people who place such a strain on city services, and I don't see any obligation to provide them with anything. Let them stay in Sacramento (Nau-man, 1978:A20).

A good portion of the Davis citizenry would probably disavow—at least publicly—both Stevens' rhetoric and his message. But the fact that affordable housing has primarily been a "lip-service" issue suggests that Stevens, in fact, may be echoing the private thoughts of many of the city's residents.

Davis, we believe, easily fits into the broad label "progressive." It does so in a rather individualized manner, however, with an apparent commitment to green politics but with little evidence of a red orientation. It is our contention, further, as we will attempt to demonstrate below, that the city's green tendency is of a highly cautious and selective sort, better characterized as "lime."

In order better to understand this pattern of local politics, we will focus on two campaign races in the June, 1984 election—races that display with exceptional clarity what we consider to be Davis' highly selective progressive ethos. These are the contests for city council and for District Attorney of the county in which Davis is located.⁷

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1980; and French Premier, Francois Mitterrand in March of 1984, greatly enhanced the city's reputation as a progressive sort of place. That reputation has been further buttressed by the behavior of the electorate. The city's voting pattern in statewide and national elections also suggests a strong leftward bent, often in distinct contrast to overwhelming conservative voting in the rest of the state. In 1972, for example, Davis voted for McGovern over Nixon. In 1980 and 1984, Reagan lost there, as did Proposition 13 in 1978 and Governor Deukmejian in 1982. It is not surprising, then, that a county newspaper should characterize Davis as "ultra liberal" ("GOP as Party of the People?" *Daily Democrat*, July 3, 1984:6).

Recalling the red and green elements of the progressive pattern of politics we mentioned at the outset, it is certainly fair to say that the green strand is represented in "ultra liberal" Davis. *Peace* groups are very active and appear to garner widespread community support. For example, the Sanctuary movement is strong, receives favorable media coverage, and the city council voted Davis a sanctuary city in the spring of 1986. During the summer of 1984, a delegation of citizens, with the moral if not financial support of the city council, traveled to Nicaragua on a "fact-finding" mission and, upon return, reported their largely pro-Sandinista conclusions through a week-long series in the local press. Similarly, *local control* is a prized goal. Davis is the first city in the United States, for example, to establish a subscriber-owned cable TV cooperative. The city has also argued that a municipality has the right to determine its own size and character and has created and implemented the planning and design review procedures necessary—at least to date—to make that argument stick. And it is the city's concern with the *environment*—the high priority placed on the full-scale development of bicycle paths and lanes, the ordinances that require energy-efficient siting and design features on all new construction, the establishment of a recycling program integrated with refuse pickup, among many other efforts—that has attracted such personages as Rosalynn Carter and Francois Mitterrand as visitors and has given Davis a visibility far beyond its immediate boundaries.

A red strand, however, is less in evidence. Relative to *civil rights and personal freedoms*, the reception to gay rights, for example, has vacillated between hostility and ambivalence. On November 28, 1979, the council voted to draft a gay rights ordinance, but on December 4

. . . the proposal was withdrawn. . . . The initial gay rights hearing packed [the] council chambers. Councilman Jim Stevens was the most critical of the ordinance, claiming its approval would "give pervers and deviants a stamp of approval" (*Davis Enterprise*, December 31, 1979:1).

THE 1984 CITY COUNCIL CONTEST

Seven candidates stood for the three open seats on the five-person city council. For purposes of clarifying the thrust of Davis politics, this was an auspicious "field" or array of contenders. Virtually all major policy directions that would appeal to Davis voters were represented by at least one person. Moreover, each policy direction was ably represented in terms of the personal qualities of the respective candidates, the funds they raised, and the campaigns they ran. The three winners (Taggart, Rosenberg, and Adler), therefore, cannot be construed as having triumphed because other candidates were handicapped in such matters as personal ability, personality, financing, or organization. Especially as regards the critical matter of financing, Table 1 shows that six of the seven candidates raised funds sufficient to conduct a credible campaign in Davis. (The one candidate who did not—Gyorke—appears to have elected his minimalist approach rather than to have been forced to it.) City law limited individual donations to a single candidate to fifty dollars. Every campaign, therefore, was forced to solicit widely for contributions. Six of the seven contenders did so and were largely successful in finding reasonably widespread support, as shown in the "contributions" column of Table 1, which subtracts out money candidates gave to their own campaigns (on which the law sets no limits). Comparing the rank-order of vote getting with the rank order of money raised, we find, indeed, only a relatively modest correlation between the two.

The Candidates

Three of the seven candidates were to one or another degree to the political right of center: Adler, Holloway, and Gyorke.

A 52-year-old lawyer, Gerald Adler was the only incumbent in the race and ran a low-key campaign on his record of both support for growth control and repeated opposition to the three-person liberal coalition dominating the council. Questions of national and international politics—for example, the nuclear freeze and U.S. involvement in El Salvador—were brought before the council with some frequency, and Adler alone and unwaveringly opposed action on such matters, arguing that they were not "city issues." Professing himself desirous of reducing the "heavy hand of government within Davis," he was nonetheless something of a progressive, "enlightened" or flexible conservative on many issues. As a "blue" candidate in our color spectrum, he ran third in the race, as Table 1 shows, edging out the green candidate by nine votes.

Somewhere and ambiguously to Adler's political right was 32-year-old

Table 1. Votes, Spending, and Contributions by Council Candidates

Candidates	Votes ^a		Spending ^b		Contributions ^c		Usual Contributions to Self
	N	Rank ^d	\$	Rank	\$	Rank	
Taggart	6,650	1	6,480	4	5,250	5	1,230
Rosenberg	6,286	2	11,413	1	9,065	1	2,348
Adler	6,041	3	6,003	6	6,003	4	0
Corbett	6,032	4	10,184	2	8,749	2	1,435
Holmes	4,490	5	7,584	3	7,584	3	0
Holloway	3,402	6	6,074	5	4,349	6	1,725
Gyorke	2,309	7	545	7	195	7	350

Notes: ^aVoting data supplied by the Yolo County Elections Office. ^bSpending, contributions, and loan data from Campaign Disclosure Statements filed with the City of Davis, fiscal period June 1, 1984 through July 31, 1984. ^cTotal campaign spending minus a candidate's loans and contributions to his/her own campaign. ^dSpanman's rho = .50 between both votes and total spending and votes and contributions.

Alan Holloway, a pharmaceutical company representative, who mounted what one local paper in a background story termed a "carefully studied small-town candidacy" (Fies, 1984:1). Lacking any previous involvement in local political affairs (although president of the Davis Golf Club), he was the only candidate who had grown up in Davis. He centerpieced this fact and took Adler-like stances on issues. As the vote totals in Table 1 report and as *Daily Enterprise* columnist Bob Dunning foresaw in an article published two weeks before the election,

Davis is one of the few places in the world where being a native is considered a liability, not an asset, in a City Council race. . . . People who arrived here after the Age of Enlightenment—the day the first Volvo rolled down G Street—simply don't trust "life-long" Davisites (Dunning, 1984a:17).

Farthest to the right—in color range almost more purple than blue, or deep blue if you prefer—was 58-year-old Andrew Gyorko, a farmer, who many regarded as a nonserious candidate. He alone among the seven opposed all growth-control measures and espoused a "free enterprise" approach to the city's future. He frequently and caustically referred to the University of California campus as the "local trade school" and decried its influence in Davis. Perhaps appreciating the symbolic (as opposed to substantive) character of his candidacy, he campaigned little and (as noted above) raised and spent only token funds. Nonetheless, 16 percent of the electorate voted for him.

At the opposite end of the traditional political spectrum was 36-year-old Charles Holmes. While no further to the left than liberal Democrat, he was nonetheless the "reddest" of the seven candidates. More than

of numerous and large advisory groups in which he cultivated a wide spectrum of Davis constituencies. He tailored his printed materials and messages to the city's seven geographical districts and to specific social groupings, especially students. He was an active member of such diverse bodies as the Chamber of Commerce, the Sierra Club, the ACLU, NOW, the PTA, Little League, the "It's OK Not to Drink" campaign, the Democratic Club, and the local soccer organization, among many others. The campaign blitz he mounted itself became a topic of discussion, as in these observations by Davis columnist Bob Dunning:

It all reminds me of the guy who sends flowers and candy to his girlfriend every day and calls her every night to make sure she still loves him. . . . At times . . . it's hard to tell if he's running for City Council or homeroom monitor (Dunning, 1984b:19).

An apparently centrist Democrat, one of Rosenberg's key promises was to maintain the "small town character" and the "special character and qualities of life" in Davis, a character he feared would be attacked by "rampant development." One editorial endorsement of him by a local daily newspaper sought to assuage "some voters' fears of a liberal voting block developing on the council" by pointing out that Rosenberg "promises to be an independent voice" ("Adler, Rosenberg, Taggart for Council," *Davis Enterprise*, June 1, 1984:6).

The major surprise of the election was that the top vote getter was 39-year-old Debbie Taggart. An elementary school teacher and "single parent," she was the only woman in the race. Because she had almost no record of political or public service, many Davis pundits had not considered her a significant contender. Indeed, since she had entered the race just shortly before the deadline, had withdrawn and then re-entered at the very last minute, her own seriousness about her candidacy seemed in doubt. During the campaign, she demonstrated modest knowledge of current city debates and took very general stands on issues. Befitting a school teacher, her major slogan offered "The 3 R's of Effective Community Leadership: Represent, Respond, Respect." Another of her slogans informed voters that "Davis needs someone who cares." Ironically, her very lack of previous political experience seemed attractive to many voters, and she played on the possibility of this attractiveness by calling her campaign "grass roots," one that "comes out of the community at large." This latter phrase was an oblique reference to the fact that, since she had no record with which to assess her politics, few leaders of any political tendency supported her.

There was also a special twist associated with her candidacy. Early in the campaign, the local chapter of the National Organization for Women declined to endorse her, opting instead for Corbett (green), Holmes (red-

any of the others, he was concerned with social, economic, and racial inequity and with the lack of opportunity for the less advantaged. A black who grew up in South Carolina, in the 13 years he had lived in Davis he had served on numerous public bodies concerned with questions of equity and opportunity. As phrased in one news story, his liberal stand, especially favoring housing assistance for low-income people, "helps or handicaps him depending upon who he talks to" (Fies, 1984:1). At the time of the election, he was a housing development official in a nearby city and a member of the Davis Planning Commission, the second most powerful body in city government and sometimes a launching point for city council candidacies. Described in one newspaper analysis as a "quiet, subtle man with an insider's grasp of detail" (Fies, 1984:1), he had the support of the two incumbent liberal council members not up for election as well as of other progressive leaders. His candidacy was historic in the sense that he was the first member of a racial minority to mount a serious campaign for city council. To the surprise of many, who considered themselves politically astute and who thought he would run at worst a strong fourth, Holmes actually ran a weak fifth, receiving 31 percent of the overall vote.

As reported, Davis is perhaps best known for the green tendency of its politics. A key figure in fostering this tendency was Mike Corbett, the 43-year-old developer of a Far West Davis solar and energy-conscious neighborhood called Village Homes. It was his development as much as the city of Davis that Rosalynn Carter and Francois Mitterrand came to inspect. Perhaps one of the best known persons in the city, he was virtually "Mr. Green," for beyond building homes, he was an articulate spokesperson for the "appropriate technology" point of view—a view stressing "small is beautiful" and a politically and economically decentralized vision of the human good life. (A range of his views are set out in his 1981 book, *A Better Place to Live* [Corbett, 1981].) Slim, soft-spoken, and articulate, he had a winning personal "presence" that, combined with his well-funded campaign, prompted many Davis pundits to predict he would run a very strong first. He seemed clearly and quintessentially to "fit" the Davis progressive ethos. But it was not to be. He ran a strong fourth, nudged out of office—by nine votes—by the blue candidate, Adler.

Thus, it was against a field composed of two blue, one purple, one slightly red and one green candidate that the remaining two—the lime—contenders emerged as the top vote getters. The second strongest, 37-year-old attorney David Rosenberg, had been expected to run well, since he had finished a strong third in the 1982 election in which the two incumbent progressive members of the council had been elected. His campaign hallmark was a rapid-paced flurry of publicity-garnering plays, as reported in almost daily press releases on his activities and the appointment

dish), and Rosenberg (lime). As assessed—we feel, correctly—by Bob Dunning,

NOW, in a move tantamount to the NAACP endorsing Ronald Reagan and telling Jesse Jackson the time "just isn't right," unwittingly gave Debbie's campaign a needed shot in the arm by endorsing three men and telling Debbie they liked her, but to come back in two years when she has "more experience." . . . This had the effect of causing voters to suddenly take a hard look at Debbie's candidacy as an alternative to the 1-2-3 knee-jerk coalition being urged upon us by some (Dunning, 1984c:17).

Her very lack of experience made her, in the phrases used by one paper in its endorsement, "a fresh voice" who was not "beholden to any special interest" and who would be, therefore, an "independent thinker, accessible to all and not indebted to anyone" ("Adler, Rosenberg, Taggart for Council," *Davis Enterprise*, June 1, 1984:6).

Issues and Tendencies

Growth and growth control were the central preoccupations of the campaign. Aside from Gyorko, the candidates did not significantly disagree with the existing city plan to limit population to 50,000 by the year 2,000. With the exception of Gyorko again, the candidates were also all "protectionists," in the sense that they perceived Davis as having highly desirable residential and commercial features that needed to be husbanded. It was only within this framework that variations among them could be seen. Growth must be controlled and must be slow, but just how controlled and how slow? Both the blue and the reddish candidates were rather more favorable to flexible control and faster growth (although for different reasons) than the green candidate. Further, relative to the shape of the growth, to what degree was housing to be made available to lower-income people, and to what degree were new employment opportunities to be stimulated? The reddish candidate was distinctive in his concern to maximize both low-income housing and employment opportunities. The slowing of residential expansion in the city through stiff quotas on the construction of single-family homes had, it was asserted, caused house prices to rise faster in the city than in the surrounding area. Less affluent people were thus being both "pushed out" of, and deterred from moving to, Davis. Although few would say it publicly, there was some suspicion that, as we suggested earlier, significant private sentiment supported letting Davis become the "city of the privileged."⁹

The topics of growth control and of the degree and character of concern for the less advantaged provide the context for the observation that the more ambiguous, pale, or ideologically "low profile" candidates had a stronger appeal than the candidates with more articulate and defined

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approaches—whether blue, purple, red, or green. Phrases such as “a fresh voice,” “an independent thinker,” “a problem solver,” “someone who cares,” “someone not beholden to special interests,” which were used to describe the lime candidates, can be interpreted (translated) as describing persons without articulate points of view, persons with episodic, muddle-through dispositions who take account of but do not embrace blue, red, or green postures.

Their considerable political differences aside, Adler, Corbett, and Holmes were alike in having some sort of larger vision that they brought to local decision-making, one that informed their approaches to the issues. Their weak showing, relative to the lime progressives, suggests a wariness among the Davis electorate for the stronger toned “visionaries.” The preference—at least in this election and at least at the local level—it would appear, is for people who do not evince much consciousness of the deeper, philosophical, even existential issues that can be construed as at stake in city political decisions. Lime candidates implicitly say, “Let’s keep matters simple.” In the 1984 election, at least, Davis voters seemed to agree.¹⁹

However, this is the story only at first blush. The lime propensity may be the electorally triumphant propensity but, as the vote totals of Table 1 make clear, there is considerable blue, green, and red sentiment in Davis as well. In order to better understand the relative role of the four political postures, we want now to explore the question of where, in Davis’ population, each of these views was strongest and where weakest. We will do this by scrutinizing how voting varied by class levels of voting precincts.

Class-Precinct Voting Patterns

United States Census Block or related statistics have almost no geographical correspondence to the city’s 51 voting precincts. Therefore, in order to measure the precincts’ respective social-class levels, we visited each and profiled their manifest social characteristics. Especially important dimensions we chronicled were: (1) prevalence of apartment houses versus single-family homes; (2) lot and house size; (3) prevalence of custom versus tract housing; (4) lushness of landscaping; (5) level of maintenance of landscaping; and (6) degree of street and lawn clutter (e.g., disabled automobiles, recreational vehicles, litter, children’s toys, other machinery).

Proceeding inductively, the 47 of the 51 precincts homogenous enough to characterize appeared to us to cluster into five categories of class and life style that could be arranged in ascending order.

1. The lowest level of class-precinct, which we call “scruffy,” is made up of eight precincts. It is characterized by small tract and/or old houses situated on small lots with modest and unkept landscaping. There is an

abundance of street and yard clutter. The houses are interspersed with occasional small-to-medium-sized apartment buildings that are rather poorly maintained.

2. Twelve precincts are exclusively or almost exclusively composed of apartment houses or large apartment complexes. Inhabited mostly by UCD students, many of these houses and complexes are quite well maintained and their residents, apparently, from affluent families.

3. While only four in number, a set of Far East precincts constitutes a distinctive enclave of the affluent working class. The homes are tract-built but somewhat larger than in the “scruffy” class-precinct. The streets are cluttered, although less so than in the scruffy neighborhoods and the many recreational vehicles are better maintained.

These three levels of class precincts make up just over half of the 47 precincts we classified. The other half are “middle-class” areas dominated by larger and better maintained homes, more expensive landscaping, and less public clutter.

4. There is considerable range among the 23 precincts in the middle-class grouping, but we found it difficult to divide them any further than into a “lower” and an “upper” portion. Our use of the labels “lower-middle class” and “upper-middle class” is, therefore, not quite the standard usage in which there is also a “middle middle.” Our lower-middle class category (numbering 12 precincts) consists of areas dominated by smaller houses on smaller lots.

5. The 11 precincts in the upper range of the middle class contain the largest and most expensive custom-built homes in Davis. Many of these have exotic architecture with professionally crafted and maintained landscapes.

Despite these quite substantial variations, it must also be observed that, relative to the vast disparities of wealth and privilege found nationally and internationally, class differences in Davis are not great. From the perspective of the nation or the world, the city’s class range is quite narrow. There are neither strata nor districts of conspicuous wealth or grinding poverty. Within the American class scheme, the range is on the order of modest upper-middle-class at the top to marginal working-class at the bottom. And, when taken as a whole in global perspective, Davis has a relatively affluent population.

The question is, do differences in class-precinct levels affect voting response to blue, green, red, and lime candidates? The answer is both yes and no. As shown in Table 2, the answer is no for the lime candidates, especially for Taggart, who ran first or second—that is, won—all class-precinct levels (winning in this election, to recall, required being one of the top three vote getters). Rosenberg also carried all levels, although he

Table 2. Rank Order and Percent of Votes by Council Candidate and Class-Precinct

Candidates	Class-Precincts					
	City-wide	Scruffy	Apartments	Working Class	Lower-Middle Class	Upper-Middle Class
Taggart (Lime)	1(46)	1(46)	2(41)	1(51)	1(48)	2(46)
Rosenberg (Lime)	2(44)	3(41)	1(45)	3(40)	2(44)	3(46)
Adler (Blue)	3(43)	5(32)	4(37)	2(43)	3(43)	1(47)
Corbett (Green)	4(42)	2(44)	3(41)	4(38)	4(42)	4(43)
Holmes (Red)	5(31)	4(39)	5(36)	5(31)	5(28)	5(24)
Holloway (Blue)	6(24)	6(18)	6(18)	6(27)	6(26)	6(24)
Gyorke (Blue)	7(16)	7(15)	7(11)	7(20)	7(17)	7(15)
(Votes)	(14,397)*	(1,691)	(2,332)	(1,053)	(3,783)	(3,449)

Note: *Includes 844 absentee ballots. Four of the 51 precincts were too heterogeneous for classification by class-precinct, thereby excluding 1,241 votes.

showed significantly more strength than Taggart among apartment dwellers (the stratum to whom he alone made tailored appeals).

Conversely, among the candidates of stronger tones, the class-linked bases of their support is evident. Adler (blue) lost the two lowest class levels and ran first in the upper-middle class. The step-wise increase of his support as class-level rises is, of course, the classic progression that warms the heart of the quantitative researcher. The vote for Holmes (red) even more dramatically shows a class-based, step-wise relation, only in the opposite direction to that of Adler’s! Corbett (green) ran somewhat but not decidedly stronger among the less advantaged. Finally, we can see that while the absolute degree of support for both Holloway and Gyorke was not strong, there are definite class differentials. Both candidates drew their strongest support from the working- and lower-middle-class precincts.

This class-uniform versus class-differential response to lime versus blue, green, and red appears even more clearly when the votes are viewed in terms of the percentage of precincts carried by class-precinct level. In an analysis not shown here as a table, the lime candidates each carried 86 percent of precincts city-wide and 75–100 percent of each class level. In contrast, Adler (blue), who carried 57 percent city-wide, won 0, 25, 75,

75, and 91 percent at the respective, ascending class-precinct levels. For Holmes (reddish), who won 20 percent of precincts city-wide, the reverse progression was 62, 33, 25, 0, and 0 percent. The social location of Holmes’ support is particularly evident on this measure. Nine of the 10 precincts he carried were in the lowest 2 strata; he carried no precincts in the top 2 strata, the lower-middle and upper-middle class. Corbett’s (green) support also tended to an inverse relation to social class. Winning 55 percent of precincts city-wide, his comparative win series by class was 87, 75, 25, 50, and 27 percent.

The Deeper Division?

These five categories of class life style begin to tap a division in the city that is perhaps deeper than social class per se. Statistically, the residents of the three “higher” class-precincts tended to be homeowners. The residents of the “lower” class-precincts tended to be renters and, therefore, transients. Irrespective of their class standing, homeowners can be expected to be more sensitive than transients to city policies that might affect land and housing values. Transients, with less at stake in the local housing/growth arrangements and changes, can afford to be more open to innovative orientations and proposals such as those emanating from the green and red candidates.

We explored this possibility, in an analysis not presented here as a table, by combining the scruffy and student-apartment precincts as “transients” and the three higher class-precincts as “homeowners.” This simplification divides the vote 30 to 70 percent transients versus homeowners. Against this baseline division, only Holmes, who stressed affordable housing in both his public service career and in his campaign, ran ahead among transients with a 35–65 division. With a 30–70 division, Corbett ran only even and the lime candidates, receiving 28–73 and 29–71, ran slightly behind. The three blue candidates ran far behind—or stated the other way—far ahead among the homeowners: Adler, 24–76; Holloway, 23–77; Gyorke, 25–75. These three were, in this sense, the champions of the homeowners. We find, then, a remarkably stable tendency: lime candidates have a transcendent class appeal, and the more deeply toned candidates elicit class support tuned to the class-linked policies each advocates.

However, two other forms of social stratification complicate and compete with this reading of the election. Taggart (lime) is female and Holmes (reddish) is black. The “gender factor” and racism might account for the patterns as much or more than the social class and life style factors to which we have pointed. We acknowledge the likelihood that both may have played a role in the votes of some people. We doubt, though, that

either of these was an overriding factor because the same pattern of results is seen in another key race in the same election, a race in which both contenders were late-30s, middle-class, white, anglo-male attorneys.

THE 1984 DISTRICT ATTORNEY CONTEST

As reported at the outset, Yolo County supervisor and attorney, Bob Black, was a central figure in forging the liberal-progressive ethos of the city. President of the University of California, Davis student body in the late sixties and a subsequent graduate of the Davis law school, he was a leading participant in a circle of green-red activists who transformed Davis politics in the election of 1972. Elected to two four-year terms on the city council (serving part of the time as Mayor), he ran successfully for the Yolo County Board of Supervisors in 1978. In 1982, so strong did conservatives gauge his support within his Davis-based supervisory district, that he was reelected to the Board without opposition. Possessed of the same lean good looks as Corbett, local pundits thought it was only a matter of time before he became prominent in state-wide liberal Democratic politics. His decision to stand for county district attorney in 1984 was, in this sense, natural, albeit somewhat hazardous, for a politician of his political leanings.

Black's opponent was David Henderson, a deputy district attorney who had the backing of the more conservative sections of the county. The key question in the election was, therefore: Could Black win "big" enough in Davis to offset his expected losses elsewhere in the county? Not only did Black run behind Henderson as expected in the rest of Yolo County, he ran far behind him and did not even carry Davis, losing to Henderson 49 to 51 percent.

We ask: Did Black run lime in the eyes of Davis voters, or did he represent the stronger tones of green or red? That is, was his vote class-linked (associated with red/blue differentials), or did he run about the same among all class groupings? Table 3 provides an answer. Black ran far ahead of Henderson in the two lowest levels of class-precincts, but this reversed in the two highest levels. The same pattern obtained when the data were viewed in terms of the percentage of precincts carried and by the same transient-homeowner simplification applied to the Council race, just above.

The message would seem to be that when even such a popular figure as Bob Black moves outside or beyond green-lime politics and into areas of blue-red contention (law and order in this election), class politics are activated in which blue is numerically stronger.

Table 3. Percent of Votes by D.A. Candidate and Class-Precinct

Table with 7 columns: Candidates, City-wide, Scruffy, Apartments, Working Class, Lower-Middle Class, Upper-Middle Class. Rows for Black and Henderson with vote counts and percentages.

Note: *Four of the 51 precincts were too heterogeneous for classification by class-precinct, thereby excluding 1,155 votes.

CLASS-PRECINCT PROFILES

We have reported the way in which a certain variety of bland, centrist progressive of environmentalist leanings has class transcendent appeal in Davis and how candidates of more pronounced convictions polarize voters by social class. In order more comprehensively to gauge the strength of this polarization potential, we composited several key indicators of liberalism-conservatism into a single measure. Hopefully, this tells us the degree to which Davis' political leanings may or may not differ—in a more generalized fashion—by class. For each class-precinct, we dichotomously coded six strategic indicators of political behavior: (1) the precinct was above or below the mean-Republican voter registration percentage of 29 (below the mean = 1, above = 0); (2) Adler, the winning blue candidate, did or did not carry the precinct (carried = 0, did not carry = 1); (3) Black did or did not carry the precinct (carried = 1, did not carry = 0); (4) Holmes, the red candidate, did or did not carry the precinct (carried = 1, did not carry = 0); (5) the precinct was above or below the mean Democratic voter registration percentage of 56 (above the mean = 1, below = 0); and (6) Corbett, the green candidate, did or did not carry the precinct (carried = 1, did not carry = 0).

The degree-of-liberalism rankings created by summing the scores of each precinct are shown in the left-hand column of Table 4 where we see a considerable dispersion of political behavior by precinct. Of the precincts studied, 30 percent received the two most conservative scores (a 0 or 1), 30 percent were middling (a score of 2 or 3), and 40 percent were more liberal (a score of 4, 5, 6).

Looking across the other columns in the table, however, we do not find this city-wide pattern repeated at all. Instead, there are extremely pronounced class effects. As class rises, liberalism declines, and vice versa.

Table 4. Liberalism by Percentage of Class-Precincts

Table with 7 columns: Liberalism Index, City-wide, Scruffy, Apartments, Working Class, Lower-Middle Class, Upper-Middle Class. Rows for Liberal, Middle, Conservative, Totals, and X scores.

Despite what from a larger historical or comparative perspective appears to be class homogeneity in Davis—the absence of the very rich and the very poor—the city nonetheless has a very real and substantial class politics, albeit one overlaid with the trans-class appeal of lime.

THE PATTERN OF LIME POLITICS

As it expresses itself in the political life of the city of Davis, California, progressive political culture is composed almost exclusively of a green orientation. "Red" issues like civil rights and economic justice may find expression in the electorate's voting patterns at the state and national level, but in terms of local politics, such concerns are muted. In fact, as the Adler and Henderson victories suggest, in traditional left-right terms, Davis is a good deal more blue than red. And relative to the green orientation, given the historic and recurring tension in the West between the green and red strands of progressivism, it is perhaps not surprising that in an affluent, family-oriented, homeowner-dominated municipality, the former should eclipse the latter.¹¹ What is surprising is how pale that green strand appears to be.

The revealing facts of the 1984 city council election were the failure of the quintessentially green candidate to win and the widespread appeal of the two candidates who watered down the green ideology into lime. What is disclosed here, it seems to us, is that Davis' well-publicized progressivism is, at the level of local electoral politics at least, quite superficial. Lime politics is low ideology politics. There is, thus, little here to suggest

any significant counter to the general "devolution" of American political life. In fact, when looked at closely, the behavior of the Davis electorate appears very similar to that of Americans in general: class-consciousness is visible in the voting patterns but is rather easily overridden by candidates who eschew coherent world views while projecting broadly appealing personal styles (Braungart, 1978:268).¹² Given this isomorphism between local and national patterns, we are less willing than we might otherwise be to suspect that the 1984 election was merely the unique outcome of a particular time and set of candidates. If, as political consultant Ralph Whitehead argues, "the 'civil religion' of the baby boom generation is at least light Green" (Satia, 1986:2), Davis' political culture—undeveloped and limited—may well represent an emerging national norm: the same old story, essentially, only packaged now with a greenish cover.

CONCLUSION

In her Cities in a Race with Time, Jane Lowe (1967:10) observed that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, "Municipalities handed over their land and resources to private profit and exploitation and our cities became the abused by-product of national industrial development." In the late twentieth century, while the details of the linkage have certainly changed, the basic character of the relationship between localities and corporate interests has not. Localities continue more often to have consequences wrought upon them than to guide their own futures. It is hardly surprising, then, that modern attempts to understand the growth and patterning of American settlements have ignored the municipal polity as a relevant actor and have focused attention instead on national and international organized interests (see, for example, Molotch, 1976; Smith, 1979; Walton, 1981; Checkoway, 1984).

Without purporting to suggest exactly how it fits into the larger causal picture, we would argue that the barrenness of local political cultures is not irrelevant to the poverty of local power. If by ideology we connote a relatively cohesive understanding of the meaning and consequence of disparate elements in the social environment, then it is not difficult to see why the absence of any such understandings (or sets of conflicting understandings) among local electorates renders them impotent in the face of large-scale groupings who seem very well to know where their interests lie. The recent celebration of nonpartisanship and nonpoliticians in presumptively "progressive" Davis—echoing as it does a long-standing nationwide pattern—provides at least an intimation that in the foreseeable future, the relation noted by Jane Lowe will continue to reign. To move beyond intimation, however, we would need close analyses of voting be-

havior through time, not simply in Davis but in all the various cities whose political cultures—from a distance at least—appear to be important exceptions to electoral-politics-as-usual in the United States.

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NOTES

- 1. While not pertinent to the concerns of this paper, it is perhaps important to note that Burnham makes this assessment in the context of modern developments in voting behavior and party activity in the European democracies. What is particularly interesting about the American experience is its pronounced deviance.
2. There is some evidence to suggest that at the local level of politics, the American experience may not differ radically from that of Great Britain (Christensen, 1979) or Germany (Dolive, 1976).
3. Aronowitz might also have pointed to Boston's 1983 mayoral run-off between Mel King and the eventual winner, Ray Flynn. King (a black) forged a "Rainbow Coalition" among "the black community and its white allies . . . [including] Asians and Latinos . . . feminists, gays, and lesbians . . . and Boston area socialists." Such a coalition was possible, in part, because of King's "ability to connect issues of discrimination, economic exploitation, imperialism, and militarism" (Green, 1983:84:11).
4. Recent discussions of the contrasts, tensions, and possible fusions of "green" and "red" politics include Capra and Spretnak (1984) and the Ume Reader's special section on "Greening the Whole Earth" (1984).
5. The campus has a current enrollment of approximately 18,500 and is composed of Colleges of Letters and Science, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, and Engineering; a Graduate Division; a Graduate School of Administration; and Schools of Law, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.
6. Holdstock was an environmental health officer with the University; Poslos was an attorney whose spouse was on the law school faculty; and Black was a health food store owner, former student-body president, and soon-to-be law student.
7. In addition to the analysis of the election results themselves, this report is based upon visits to each of the city's 51 precincts for purposes of profiling their individual social characteristics (discussed below) and upon our "participant observation" of the Davis political scene. We have lived in the city since December, 1971, and over the years have been at least marginally active in a number of council campaigns. In 1984, however, we became more than marginally involved, serving on the steering committee of the Charles Holmes campaign. In this capacity we contributed many hours of the mundane labor on which a local campaign is built.

8. Some commentators on the election results suspected that Taggart's strength was an illusion, born of being, for many voters, the third of three choices. It is certainly true that all the candidates were to some extent the "third choice" with some voters, but we doubt this was a significant factor in the Taggart vote (or in the votes of any other candidates). Our doubt is based on the fact that the election witnessed a considerable degree of "bullet" voting; that is, of people casting less than the three votes allowed them. Multiplying the 14,397 people voting by three equals 43,191 possible votes. But only 35,310 were actually cast—85 percent of the possible total. Of course we cannot know the distribution of the almost 8,000 uncast votes, but it is conceivable that many people voted for only two candidates. Thus, it is mathematically possible that more than half the 14,000+ voters "bullet" voted. If something approaching that pattern actually occurred, then, "third choice" theories for any candidate are not tenable.

9. Beyond these framing concerns, there was a short laundry list of local problems on which the candidates did not disagree—for example, the need for new recreational facilities for teenagers and for better traffic circulation in the city's southern district.

10. It is important to emphasize that we are characterizing the two time candidates as they presented themselves to the voters. In fact, once elected, both proved to have strong streaks of green and red.

11. The conservative appeal of green politics is testified to by Democratic Party consultant Ralph Whitehead.

If you look at the public terms of the 1984 campaign, the Reaganites—if only through their media strategy, if only at the cosmetic level—practice New Age [read, green] politics. They pitted the values of life against the values of death, the symbols of vitality against the symbols of exhaustion. So, the Reaganites, even though they might not cast it in these terms themselves, pursued a New Age strategy. And though Reagan would have won without it, Reagan's landslide margin can be attributed to the New Age veneer, the New Age facade of the Reagan campaign (quoted in Sain, 1986:8).

Conversely, Gottdiener and Neiman (1981) argue that at least under some conditions, one element of green philosophy, the limitation of residential development, has very wide appeal, finding support among all socioeconomic levels.

12. Some commentators have pointed to a rise in ideological politics, especially among the younger segment of the voting population (reviewed in Braungart, 1978) as a significant new trend. We do not doubt the veracity of this assertion, but any such trend was certainly not visible in the 1982 election in Davis.

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