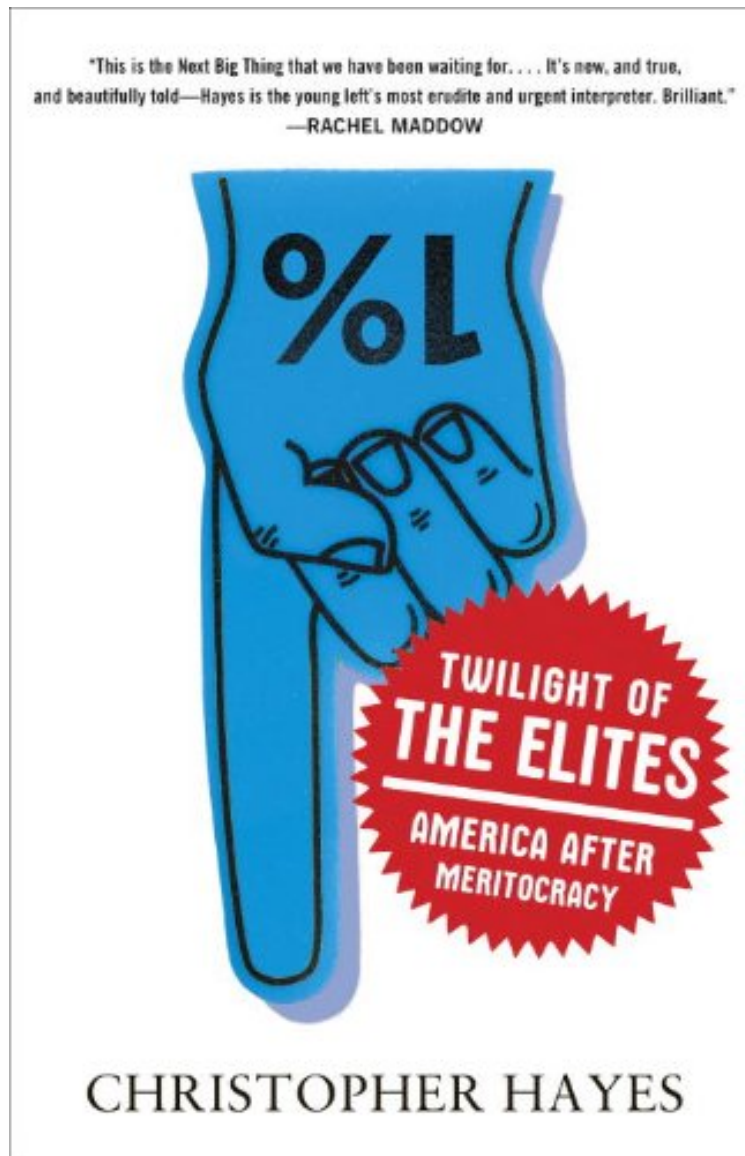


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Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy

Chris Hayes

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Chris Hayes : Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy:

30 of 32 people found the following review helpful. Important Book in the Trump (or any) EraBy J. FolkTwilight of the ElitesChristopher Hayes' book, Twilight of the Elites, documents the end of elites in America, from religious to sporting to political to news organizations as well as others. They are often considered the pillars upon which society has rested. But in many cases, they have squandered the mandates by which they lead, the credibility they assumed they could not loose. In several cases, such as that of the Catholic Church, they have been sexual transgressions

compounded by an emphasis on maintenance of their own power. In the case of sports, a win-at-any-cost mentality exemplified by the use of and tolerance of drugs. Winning above all else has led to a collapse of the credibility of institutions, therefore, the loss of their leadership. Politics is certainly not exempt. Regulators and legislators are guilty of the same sins. On page 173, Hays writes: And yet during our era of fractal inequality, the noncommercial sphere has shrunk, leaving noncommercial institutions increasingly dependent on commercial interests. What we're left with is a blurring of the boundaries between what Jane Jacobs described as the Guardian Syndrome on the one hand and Commercial Syndrome on the other. According to Jacobs, the Guardian Syndrome ("shun trading," "be loyal," "treasure honor") regulates the behavior of the soldier, the politician, and the policeman among others, while the Commercial Syndrome ("compete," "respect contracts," "promote comfort and convenience") guides the behavior of the banker, the baker, and the businessman. This basic division captures something essential about our expectations of many "authority" figures, particularly elite authority figures in positions of great social and financial esteem. We want them to be Guardians first; we don't think they should be for sale. Yet our current system of fractal inequality creates the conditions in which everything is inexorably drawn into the realm of commerce. The enormous differential in reward and power of the Commercial versus the Guardian role means that the former inevitably corrupts the latter. And it destroys the civil society we have created as a revolving door rewards today's regulators and government officials who move to the commercial side. "We can never be sure just which other business cards are in the pocket of pundit, politician, or professor." The book is important to document and verify what many of us may believe about Trump: he is corrupt and corrupting. And dangerous to our republic. We need to heed a writer who observed that influence on outcomes, and fight for right rather than power alone. Plutarch: An imbalance between rich and poor is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics. 23 of 24 people found the following review helpful. A Well-Informed Composition for the Political Junkie By ellis_architect Despite the writer's fame as a liberal pundit - the discourse within this book outlines the history of the fail decade in remarkable detail and in an exquisitely written prose that made this quite a page-turner. As a recently naturalized citizen, I love these books that eloquently talk about political and economic history and ties them to real-life issues of the American people. Furthermore, as a political pundit, I found his views not too pervasive as he presents a balanced account of affairs corroborated by other respectable figures whom I also enjoy reading about. If you want to learn more about politics and the main issues that affect everyday life, then read this book. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. The Unravelling of American Potential By Stephen C. Iman Chris has a very interesting read here. So many other reviewers have commented on his fine way with words - he surely writes well. Very powerful diagnostic fragments from my point of view, and he amply describes the cultural descent we're along as we migrate from a world of compromise back to some sort of win-lose culture. I think he is onto something. Our organizations are laden with libertarian high performance competitive norms with little if any commitment to consensus or collaboration. Social science has done a job of helping us understand what leadership would require, and we seem constantly to go in another direction - away from collaboration in a return always to rigged incentives of the sort which diminish intrinsic motivation. Reviewers are shorting the book for not solving the problem, and it would surely be nice to envision a way out of the hole we seem to insist upon working our way into. But the bias toward high performance and rewards does seem out of balance with a focus on equity and fairness or even reason and judgement as we nickel and dime authority of any sort. A thought provoking read.

A powerful and original argument that traces the roots of our present crisis of authority to an unlikely source: the meritocracy. Over the past decade, Americans watched in bafflement and rage as one institution after another - from Wall Street to Congress, the Catholic Church to corporate America, even Major League Baseball - imploded under the weight of corruption and incompetence. In the wake of the Fail Decade, Americans have historically low levels of trust in their institutions; the social contract between ordinary citizens and elites lies in tatters. How did we get here? With *Twilight of the Elites*, Christopher Hayes offers a radically novel answer. Since the 1960s, as the meritocracy elevated a more diverse group of men and women into power, they learned to embrace the accelerating inequality that had placed them near the very top. Their ascension heightened social distance and spawned a new American elite - one more prone to failure and corruption than any that came before it. Mixing deft political analysis, timely social commentary, and deep historical understanding, *Twilight of the Elites* describes how the society we have come to inhabit - utterly forgiving at the top and relentlessly punitive at the bottom - produces leaders who are out of touch with the people they have been trusted to govern. Hayes argues that the public's failure to trust the federal government, corporate America, and the media has led to a crisis of authority that threatens to engulf not just our politics but our day-to-day lives. Unpeeling well-worn ideological and partisan categories, Hayes entirely reorients our perspective on our times. *Twilight of the Elites* is the defining work of social criticism for the post-bailout age.

A Foreign Policy Favorite Read of 2012
A Mother Jones Staff Pick for Best Nonfiction of 2012
An Inc.com Top Five Business Book of 2012
A Kirkus's Best Nonfiction Book of 2012
An Excellent Read; Rolling

Stoneldquo;Hayes, an editor-at-large of The Nation and host of the MSNBC talk show Up With Chris Hayes, has written a perceptive and searching analysis of the problems of meritocracy.rdqquo; ndash; Foreign Affairsldquo;[A] stunning polemichellip;.Hayes' book is the rare tome that originates from a political home (the left) and yet actually challenges assumptions that undergird the dominant logic in both political parties. This is not mealy-mouthed centrism. It is a substantive critique of the underlying logic of both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney ndash; the logic of meritocracy.rdqquo; ndash; Ta-Nehisi Coates, Baltimore Sunldquo;In a very good new book titled Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy, Chris Hayes offers one of the most compelling assessments of how soaring inequality is changing American society.rdqquo; ndash; The Economist.comldquo;Let's just say that if you like politics and big ideas, you want to buy this book.nbsp; It's a lot more intellectually ambitious than your typical pundit book and offers a really great blend of writing chops and social theory synthesis.rdqquo;ndash; Matthew Yglesias, Slate.comldquo;In his new book, The Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy, Chris Hayes manages the impossible trifecta: the book is compellingly readable, impossibly erudite, andmdash;most stunningly of allmdash;correct.rdqquo; ndash; Aaron Swartz, Crookedtimber.orgldquo;Engrossinghellip; thoughtful critiques of what's gone wrong with America's ruling class.rdqquo; ndash; The Atlantic.comldquo;I was myself very impressed by the level of execution in this book.rdqquo;ndash; Tyler Cowen, Marginalrevolution.comldquo;Hayesrsquo;s book makes for a great readhellip;.Twilight uses a wide variety of academic and journalistic work, balancing a deep, systemic critique of society with detailed and empathetic reporting about those most affected by elite failure.rdqquo;ndash; Mike Konczal, Dissentldquo;Twilight of the Elites offers an elegant, original argument that will make both cynics and idealists reconsider their views of how, and whether, our society works. If Americans believe in anything, itrsquo;s our meritocracy. Hayes is brave to question it so forcefully.rdqquo; ndash; Commonweal ldquo;A potent articulation of a societysquo;s free-floating angst, Twilight of the Elites stakes its claim as the jeremiad by which these days will be remembered.rdqquo; ndash; Washington Monthly.comldquo;I read Chris Hayes' Twilight of the Elites last month and will suggest that you read it too ndash; it's an engaging read that addresses the question of whether a meritocratic elite can really stay meritocratic over extended periods of time.rdqquo; ndash; Daniel W. Drezner, Foreign Policy.comldquo;This was a book I found so stimulating and immersive that I cannot wait to be able to discuss it with a larger audiencehellip;.Even if you think you are aware of the depth of the rot plaguing the highest levels of our society, you will likely earn a new level of outrage by reading this book.rdqquo; ndash; Alexis Goldstein, Livetotry.comldquo;Make[s] you think in new ways about why we tolerate such vast and growing income inequalityhellip;.an extended meditation on why the great hope and change revolution of 2008 has so far left the inequitable status quo a little bit too intact.rdqquo; ndash; Salon.comldquo;Twilight of the Elitesnbsp;by Chris Hayes may change the way you look at the worldhellip;.[It] almost single-handily undermines virtually every precept wersquo;ve come to accept about life in the modern age.nbsp; It also may well turn out to be the seminal treatise for the so-called lsquo;FAILrsquo; generation, a term that loosely connotes everyone who graduated since the beginning of the 21st Century.rdqquo; ndash; Good Men Project.comldquo;Twilight of the Elites is a engaging, insightful book.nbsp; I finished it in less than 24 hours, and I encourage you to pick up a copy.rdqquo; ndash; Forbes.comldquo;You should really get yourself a copy of Twilight of the Elitesrdquo; ndash; Daily Kosldquo;A powerful critique of the meritocratic elite that has overseen one of the most disastrous periods of recent history.rdqquo; ndash; The American Conservativeldquo;In his new book, Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy, Hayes raises demanding questions about a nation that is both enamored with and troubled by its elites.rdqquo; ndash; Reasonldquo;[L]ively and well-informedhellip;.Offering feasible proposals for change, this cogent social commentary urges us to reconstruct our institutions so we can once again trust them.rdqquo; ndash; Publishers Weekly (starred)ldquo;[A] forcefully written debut....A provocative discussion of the deeper causes of our current discontent, written with verve and meriting wide interest.rdqquo;ndash; Kirkus s (starred)ldquo;This is the Next Big Thing that we have been waiting for.nbsp; Twilight of the Elites is the fully reported, detailed, true story of a 21st century America beyond the reach of authority.nbsp; Itrsquo;s new, and true, and beautifully told -- Hayes is the young leftrsquo;s most erudite and urgent interpreter. nbsp; Brilliant book.rdqquo; ndash; Rachel Maddow,nbsp;host of The Rachel Maddow Show and author of Drift ldquo;Here is the story of the lsquo;fail decadesquo; and how it made cynicism the inescapable flavor of our times. Along the way Chris Hayes delivers countless penetrating insights as well as passages of brilliant observation. If you want to understand the world you're living in, sooner or later you will have to read this book.rdqquo;ndash; Thomas Frank, author of Pity the Billionaireldquo;Chris Hayes is a brilliant chronicler of the central crisis of our time ndash; the failure of America's elites.nbsp; His humane, spirited reporting and analysis capture what millions of Americans already know in their gut ndash; the emperor has no clothes. Yet this is not a book defined by despair or cynicism.nbsp; Hayes seizes this moment of crisis to offer important and unconventional ideas as to how to reconstruct and reinvent our politics and society.nbsp; Twilight of the Elites is a must read book for those, across the political spectrum, who believe there is still time to cure the structural ills of our body politic.rdqquo; ndash; Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor and publisher, The Nationldquo;In Twilight of the Elites, Hayes shows us what links the bailout of investment bankers but not mortgage holders, the useless public conversation in the run-up to the Iraq war, and the Catholic Church's harboring of child rapists: our core institutions are no longer self-correcting, and have

become committed to protection of insiders at all costs. Read this and prepare to be enraged. Clay Shirky, author of *Here Comes Everybody* and *Cognitive Surplus* "A provocation; a challenge; and a major contribution to the great debate over how the American dream can be restored." David Frum, contributing editor, *Daily Beast/Newsweek*; Chris Hayes is a gift to this republic. The brilliance he shows us each week on MSNBC has now been complemented by this extraordinary book. Beautifully written, and powerfully argued, it will force you to rethink everything you take for granted about merit. And it will show us a way to a more perfect nation. Lawrence Lessig, Roy L. Furman Professor of Law and Leadership, Harvard Law School and author of *Republic, Lost*; Chris Hayes has given us the kind of book people don't write any more: a sweeping work of social criticism like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Michael Harrington's *The Other America* that take the failings of an entire society as their subject. Those books brought grand movements of reform in their wake. Would that history repeats itself with *Twilight of the Elites*; America ignores this prophet at their gravest peril. Rick Perlstein, author of *Nixonland* and *Before the Storm* About the Author Christopher Hayes is Editor at Large of *The Nation* and host of *Up w/ Chris Hayes* on MSNBC. From 2010 to 2011, he was a fellow at Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Foundation Center for Ethics. His essays, articles, and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Time*, *The American Prospect*, *The New Republic*, *The Washington Monthly*, and *The Guardian*. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Kate and daughter Ryan. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 The Naked Emperors Now see the sad fruits your faults produced, Feel the blows you have yourselves induced. -- Racine America feels broken. Over the last decade, a nation accustomed to greatness and progress has had to reconcile itself to an economy that seems to be lurching backward. From 1999 to 2010, median household income in real dollars fell by 7 percent. More Americans are downwardly mobile than at any time in recent memory. In poll after poll, overwhelming majorities of Americans say the country is "on the wrong track." And optimism that today's young people will have a better life than their parents is at the lowest level since pollsters started asking that question in the early 1980s. It is possible that by the time this book is in your hands, these trends will have reversed themselves. But given the arc of the past decade and the institutional dysfunction that underlies our current extended crisis, even a welcome bout of economic growth won't undo the deep unease that now grips the nation. The effects of our great disillusionment are typically measured within the cramped confines of the news cycle: how they impact the President's approval rating, which political party they benefit and which they hurt. Most of us come to see the nation's problems either as the result of the policies favored by those who occupy the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, or as an outgrowth of political dysfunction: of gridlock, "bickering," and the increasing polarization among both the electorate and the representatives it elects. But the core experience of the last decade isn't just political dysfunction. It's something much deeper and more existentially disruptive: the near total failure of each pillar institution of our society. The financial crisis and the grinding, prolonged economic immiseration it has precipitated are just the most recent instances of elite failure, the latest in an uninterrupted cascade of corruption and incompetence. If that sounds excessively bleak, take a moment to consider America's trajectory over the first decade of the twenty-first century. The Supreme Court--an institution that embodies an ideal of pure, dispassionate, elite cogitation--handed the presidency to the favored choice of a slim, five-person majority in a ruling whose legal logic was so tortured the court itself announced it could not be used as precedent. Then the American security apparatus, the largest in the world, failed to prevent nineteen men with knives and box cutters from pulling off the greatest mass murder in U.S. history. That single act inaugurated the longest period of war in the nation's history. Just a few months later Enron and Arthur Andersen imploded, done in by a termite infestation of deceit that gnawed through their very foundations. At the time, Enron was the largest corporate bankruptcy in the history of the nation, since eclipsed, of course, by the carnage of the financial crisis. What was once the hottest company in America was revealed to be an elaborate fraud, aided and abetted by one of the most trusted accounting firms in the entire world. And just as Enron was beginning to be sold off for scraps in bankruptcy court, and President Bush's close personal connection to the company's CEO, Ken Lay, was making headlines, the Iraq disaster began. Iraq would cost the lives of almost 4,500 Americans and 100,000-plus Iraqis, and \$800 billion, burned like oil fires in the desert. The steady stream of grisly images out of the Middle East was only interrupted, in 2005, by the shocking spectacle of a major American city drowning while the nation watched, helpless. As the decade of war dragged on, the housing bubble began to pop, ultimately bringing about the worst financial panic in eighty years. In the wake of the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, it seemed possible that the U.S. financial system as a whole would cease to operate: a financial blackout that would render paychecks, credit cards, and ATMs useless. In those frenzied days, I watched Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke and Treasury secretary Hank Paulson defend their three-page proposal for a Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in front of a packed and rowdy Senate hearing room. When pressed on the details by members of the Senate Banking Committee, Bernanke and Paulson were squirrely. They couldn't seem to explain how and why they'd arrived at the number they had (one Treasury staffer would tell a reporter it was plucked more or less at random because they needed "a really big number"). Watching them, I couldn't shake a feeling in the pit of my stomach that either these men had no idea what they were talking

about or they were intentionally obfuscating because they did not want their true purpose known. These were the guys in charge, the ones tasked with rescuing the entire global financial system, and nothing about their vague and contradictory answers to simple questions projected competence or good faith. I saw in an instant, with no small amount of fear, that the emperor truly had no clothes. Washington managed to pass the bailout for the financial sector, and while Wall Street would soon return to glory, wealth, and profitability, the rest of us would, come to learn in gruesome detail all the ways in which the source of its prosperity had, in fact, been the largest Ponzi scheme in the history of human civilization. The cumulative effect of these scandals and failures is an inescapable national mood of exhaustion, frustration, and betrayal. At the polls, we see it in the restless, serial discontent that defines the current political moment. The last three elections, beginning in 2006, have operated as sequential backlashes. In 2006 and 2008, Democrats were able to point to the horrifyingly inept response to Katrina, the bloody, costly quagmire in Iraq, and, finally, the teetering and collapsing economy. In 2010, Republicans could point to the worst unemployment rate in nearly thirty years--and long-term unemployment rates that rivaled those of the Great Depression--and present themselves as the solution. Surveying the results of the 2010 midterms on election night, Tom Brokaw alluded to the collapse of trust in institutions in the wake of a war based on lies and a financial bubble that went bust. "Almost nothing is going the way that most people have been told that it will. And every time they're told in Washington that they have it figured out, it turns out not to be true." At a press conference the day after Democrats faced a "shellacking" in the 2010 midterm elections, Barack Obama recounted the story of meeting a voter who asked him if there was hope of returning to a "healthy legislative process, so as I strap on the boots again tomorrow, I know that you guys got it under control? It's hard to have faith in that right now." And who could blame him? From the American intelligence apparatus to financial regulators, government failures make up one of the most dispiriting throughlines of the crisis decade. As citizens of the world's richest country, we expend little energy worrying about the millions of vital yet mundane functions our government undertakes. Roads are built, sewer systems maintained, mail delivered. We aren't preoccupied by the thought that skyscrapers will come crashing down because of unenforced building codes; we don't fret that our nuclear arsenal will fall into the wrong hands, or dread that the tax collector will hit us up for a bribe. It is precisely because of our expectation of routine competence that government failure is so destabilizing. "We've created this situation where we've created so much mistrust in government," Ivor van Heerden told me one night in a seafood restaurant in the coastal town of Houma, Louisiana. For years van Heerden was deputy director of the LSU Hurricane Center, which issued a series of dire warnings about the insufficiencies of the levee system in the run-up to Katrina. After the storm, van Heerden was fired by LSU, because, he suspects, he was so outspoken in his criticism of the Army Corps of Engineers. "You have these politicians that are selling this mistrust," he said in reference to the ceaseless rhetoric from conservatives about government's inevitable incompetence. "And the federal government sure as hell hasn't helped." And yet the private sector has fared no better: from the popping of the tech bubble, to Enron, WorldCom, and Global Crossing, to the Big Three automakers, to Lehman Brothers, subprime, credit default swaps, and Bernie Madoff, the overwhelming story of the private sector in the last decade has been perverse incentives, blinkered groupthink, deception, fraud, opacity, and disaster. So comprehensive and destructive are these failures that even those ideologically disposed to view big business in the best light have had to confront them. "I've always defended corporations," a Utah Tea Party organizer named Susan Southwick told me. "Of course they wouldn't do anything they knew was harming people; you guys are crazy. But maybe I'm the crazy one who didn't see it." The dysfunction revealed by the crisis decade extends even past the government and the Fortune 500. The Catholic Church was exposed for its systematic policy of protecting serial child rapists and enabling them to victimize children. Penn State University was forced to fire its beloved football coach--and the university president--after it was revealed that much of the school's sports and administrative hierarchy had looked the other way while former assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky allegedly raped and abused young boys on its own property. Even baseball, the national pastime, came to be viewed as little more than a corrupt racket, as each week brought a new revelation of a star who was taking performance-enhancing drugs while owners, players, and union leadership colluded in a cover-up. "I'm 31, an Iraq war veteran, a Penn State graduate, a Catholic, a native of State College, acquaintance of Sandusky's, and a product of his Second Mile foundation," wrote Thomas Day, days after the Penn State scandal broke. "And I have fully lost faith in the leadership of my parents' generation." The foundation of our shared life as Americans--where we worship, where we deposit our paychecks, the teams we root for, the people who do our business in Washington--seems to be cracking before our very eyes. In our idle panicked moments, we count down the seconds until it gives out. In the course of writing this book, I spoke to hundreds of Americans from all over the country. From Detroit to New Orleans, Washington to Wall Street. I traveled to those places where institutional failure was most acute, and spoke with those lonely prophets who'd seen the failures coming, those affected most directly by their fallout, and those with their hands on the wheel when things went disastrously off course. No one I talked to has escaped the fail decade with their previous faith intact. Sandy Rosenthal, a New Orleans housewife radicalized by the failure of the levees during Katrina founded Levees.org in order to hold the Army Corps of Engineers to account, and

she described her own disillusionment in a way that's stuck with me: "We saw how quickly the whole thing can fall apart. We saw how quickly the whole thing can literally crumble." The sense of living on a razor's edge is, not surprisingly, most palpable in those areas of the country where economic loss is most acute. On a freezing cold January night in 2008, I accompanied the John Edwards campaign bus on a manic, thirty-six-hour tour of New Hampshire, and in the wee hours of the morning on primary day we stopped in the small former mill town of Berlin, New Hampshire. Murray Rogers, the president of the local steelworkers union and himself a laid-off millworker, was one of those who came out to greet the campaign bus as it rolled into the Berlin fire station at 2 a.m. When I asked him why he was there, he told me it was because he felt like no one in government cared about the fate of the millworkers of New Hampshire . . . with the exception of Edwards. When his mill had closed, he'd written to all the Democratic primary candidates. Edwards, he said, "offered to come and help us; he wrote a letter to the CEO because of the poor severance package they gave us. None of the others even offered to come." When news of Edwards's appalling personal behavior hit the papers, I immediately thought of Murray Rogers. Who would be Rogers's champion now? In Detroit, the national capital of institutional collapse, the feeling of betrayal and alienation suffuses public life. "Just drive around," a local activist named Abayomi Azikiwe told me in 2010. "It's just block after block after block of abandoned homes, abandoned commercial structures." Officially unemployment was about 28 percent, he said, but the real figure was closer to 50 percent. "This is ground zero in terms of the economic crisis in this country. They say the stimulus package saved or created about two million jobs. We really don't see it." As hard hit as Detroit is, it's also probably the region of the country (with the exception of the tip of Lower Manhattan) that has most directly benefited from federal government intervention in wake of the crash. In many ways the bailout of the automakers was a stunning success, but like so many of the Obama administration's successes, it is one only understood counterfactually: things could be much worse. But if this is what success looks like, what hope do the rest of us have? "I can't remember when I last heard someone genuinely optimistic about the future of this country," former poet laureate Charles Simic wrote in the spring of 2011. "I know that when I get together with friends, we make a conscious effort to change the subject; from the state of the country and talk about grandchildren, reminisce about the past and the movies we've seen, though we can't manage it for very long. We end up disheartening and demoralizing each other and saying goodnight, embarrassed and annoyed with ourselves, as if being upset about what is being done to us is not a subject fit for polite society." That emotional disquiet plays in different registers on the right and the left, but across the ideological divide you find a deep sense of alienation, anger, and betrayal directed at the elites who run the country. "I'm an agent for angst," one Tea Party organizer told me, "and the whole Tea Party movement is an agent for angst." The progressive blogger Heather Parton, who goes by the screen name Digby, has dubbed the denizens of the Beltway who arrogate to themselves the role of telling Americans what to think the "Village," and it was Village mentality, a toxic combination of petty obsessions with status combined with access to power, that in her view produced the disaster in Iraq, and the financial crisis that followed. In Parton's telling, the Village is "a permanent D.C. ruling class who has managed to convince themselves that they are simple, puritanical, bourgeois burghers and farmers, even though they are actually celebrity millionaires influencing the most powerful government on earth."