**American Environics:**
*Overview of the Environics Science and the Bridge Values Method*

American progressives today realize that they need a dramatically different approach to social change, one oriented toward vision and values, not single issues and technical policies. American Environics uses sophisticated research into social values, beliefs, mindsets and motivations as the basis for its method to shape and quantify the success of social change initiatives. This approach looks dramatically different from the conventional approaches to social change that have dominated progressive advocacy for the last 30 years.

The Environics research has been conducted every four years since 1992 in Canada and the U.S. The household survey – one of the last in the U.S. -- contains more than 600 questions, is taken by 2,500 individuals, and takes three hours to complete. It is considered the most reliable social values research available in North America. For decades Fortune 500 companies have used social values research to guide the creation and marketing of their brands according to changing values. Corporations have used social values research for everything from marketing beauty products to "metrosexual" men to selling SUVs to consumers of every demographic and psychographic category.

American Environics is today helping strategists, elected officials, philanthropists and thought-leaders use this powerful instrument to build new initiatives and institutions whose impact on the culture can be closely tracked and measured.

I. **Winning on Issues, Losing on Values**

Sometimes the noisiest and most visible spectacles of our time — wars, presidential elections, terrorist attacks and natural disasters — distract us from the tectonic changes happening just beneath the surface of American life. Such is the case today. The U.S. is in the midst of a major political realignment that cannot be conventionally measured or observed. While it's obvious that conservatives control all three branches of government and the terms of most political debates, it's not obvious why.

Traditional polling cannot explain the values environment that underlies conservative hegemony. Indeed, many progressive leaders are today pointing to post-election polling as evidence that there has not been a conservative realignment in America and that President Bush does not have a mandate for his agenda. They point to high support among Americans for the liberal position held on a range of issues, such as the environment, the economy, education, health care, and social security as proof that the traditional liberal coalition and moral-intellectual framework is strong.

What explains how progressives can simultaneously be "winning on the issues" and losing so badly politically? One popular explanation is that progressives lack “infrastructure” in comparison to conservatives. Another says single-issue identities and conflicting interests prevent existing progressive institutions from working well together. Both explanations contain an element of truth, but neither analysis points to clear conclusions about what kinds of new institutions, identities, or initiatives should be created.
American Environics offers significant new insights into our challenges and our opportunities. Our research shows that conservative values and alienation values have been growing dramatically since 1992. At a values level, the U.S. is looking more and more like the Deep South while Canada is looking increasingly like Western Europe. Of the more than 107 values that Environics tracks, perhaps no other value indicates as clearly the rightward shift in American life as the one labeled “Patriarchy.” In 1992, 42 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that, “The father of the family is the master of the house.” In 2004, 52 percent agreed. In contrast, today less than a third of Canadians agree with that statement, and only 20 percent of Europeans on average do.

Things are moving in a conservative direction even on such seemingly popular issues as the environment. The number of Americans who agree with the statement, “To preserve people’s jobs in this country, we must accept higher levels of pollution in the future,” increased from 17 percent in 1996 to 27 percent in 2004. The number of Americans who agreed that, “Most of the people actively involved in environmental groups are extremists, not reasonable people,” leapt from 32 percent in 1996 to 43 percent in 2004.

The full, complex picture presented by the research is simultaneously more hopeful and more disturbing than can be described in this brief summary. There are significant opportunities to strengthen shared, progressive values in the culture while achieving more traditional advocacy objectives. Doing so demands not only that progressives use a more sophisticated research tool but also that we challenge our most basic assumptions about what characterizes a successful social change initiative.

In spite of millions spent on polling, tactics and well-meaning philanthropic initiatives, progressives are failing to connect with the hearts and minds of the majority of Americans. Sometimes their tactics pay off but mostly they fall short. The reason is that progressives have lost their touch. They don’t understand the values of their fellow Americans and can only see them as demographic stereotypes. They no longer know the language of American politics.

The real story of American social change is much more complex as two books by American Environics partners will describe: Michael Adams’ forthcoming Back to the Future: The Untold Story of American Social Values (Fall, 2005) and Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus’ The Death of Environmentalism and the Birth of a New Aspirational Politics (Fall, 2006, by Houghton Mifflin, publisher of Walden Pond and Silent Spring).

II. The Bridge Values Method

The Bridge Values Method, grounded in the social values data and overlaid with the latest U.S. Census data, is actionable and quantifiable at an unprecedented level of demographic and psychographic detail. The 107 “social values” that the SVP tracks are, in fact, a mix of values, beliefs, mindsets and motivations. On average, each value is composed of two to four questions. The survey is updated every four years, and the values and the questions are drawn from the latest, peer-reviewed academic and corporate research. For 2004, we added several questions from the emergent field of positive psychology and happiness research, drawing on the work of former American Psychology Association President, Dr. Martin
Seligman. In addition, we worked with linguist George Lakoff to add several questions to test his theory of strict father and nurturing parent moralities.

The Bridge Values Methodology turns conventional progressive advocacy on its head (see Table A). Instead of starting with the question, “What problem do we want to solve?” the Method asks, "Which values do we want to strengthen in order to build a progressive values majority?" Then, the method crafts a set of strategic initiatives that will strengthen the “bridge values” held by both progressives and constituents of opportunity in a way that will create a progressive majority over time.

The SVP is using the social values research to do the following:

1) Define the progressive base.
2) Identify constituents of opportunity.
3) Identify bridge values that progressives share with constituents of opportunity.
4) Craft and implement strategic initiatives that activate and strengthen progressive values to build a progressive majority over time.

A. Strategic Initiative

We define a strategic initiative as an initiative that includes but is not limited to a policy proposal, an alliance, a new language and brand identity that 1) elevates new frames and strengthens bridge values in contested political space and 2) creates new alliances, divides opponents and puts them on the defensive. Having identified bridge values and constituents of opportunities, strategic initiative ideas would be brainstormed and framed by individuals with policy, research and communications expertise. To guarantee that the strategic initiative elevates the right frames and strengthens the right values, the Bridge Values Method tests the initiatives in focus groups with constituents of opportunity and polling that connects back to the Environics research.

Conservatives showed their savvy when they activated the bridge value called effort toward health to generate support for the ban on late-term abortion. They showed a similar sophistication in activating the value mysterious forces to generate support for teaching rebranded creationism (“intelligent design”) in schools. And by activating the bridge values of financial security and American dream, conservatives have for the last 30 years built popular support for tax cuts that, paradoxically, increase financial insecurity and increase social inequality. The consequence has been a vicious cycle: the ascendancy of survival values and an increasingly dog-eat-dog culture that has resulted in America’s conservative values majority.

The challenge for progressives is to link their initiatives to contested bridge values that are currently being activated and linked to conservative values by conservative initiatives. For example, the New Apollo Project initiative has the potential to activate and link the bridge values of American dream, financial security, ethical consumerism, and faith in science to the progressive values of ecological concern, and global consciousness. Actually doing so will require that the Apollo project enter contested political space.
Understanding that strategic initiatives work by activating and linking bridge values to base values (e.g., progressive or conservative), we can create concepts and use focus groups and polling to test whether the initiative concepts do in fact activate and elevate the values we expect them to. Through focus groups and polling, for example, we determined that Apollo has the potential to link the bridge value of *American dream* and *financial security* to the progressive value of *ecological concern*.

There is a great deal of framing and research needed to create a generation of new strategic initiatives. For example, we could explore a strategic initiative on motherhood that had at its center giving tax credits to allow a parent to stay home with his or her baby for the first year of the child’s life. Such an initiative might be constructed to activate the bridge values of *primacy of the family, duty, traditional gender identity, effort toward health, social intimacy, American dream, and meaningful moments* while elevating the progressive values of *personal control, flexible families and equal relationship with youth*.

We could also explore a strategic initiative to provide personal savings accounts to all Americans at birth that could be used when the young person turns 18 for proscribed purposes, such as starting a business, going to college, or buying a home. Such an initiative might constructed to activate bridge values such as *financial security, American dream, work ethic, and duty* and elevate progressive values such as *equal relationship with youth, rejection of authority, flexible families, personal control and adaptability to complexity*.

### B. Deconstructing Professional Progressive Expert Categories

At first glance the Bridge Values Method appears to put “policy development” in service to “communications” – a reversal of conventional social change methods, which seek to “sell” various technical policy proposals. A closer look reveals that this reversal is in fact just the first step in deconstructing conventional expert categories from policy development to communications in order to construct more useful concepts like framing and strategic initiatives.

Consider the work of anti-abortion activists. Their short-term goal in campaigning for, and eventually passing, a ban on late-term abortion (“partial-birth abortion”) was not to dramatically reduce the number of abortions. Rather, their short-term goals were to a) strengthen the frame that abortion is murder and b) strengthen anti-abortion values among constituents of opportunity (i.e., Americans who oppose a total abortion ban). Building on this victory, in 2005 anti-abortion advocates will introduce the “Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act” that would require that doctors tell women seeking abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy that the fetus feels pain and then offer pain-relieving medication for it.

At first glance, these moves seem to indicate that anti-abortion strategists are putting “communications” before “policy development”. In fact, the concept of “strategic initiative” makes useless the concepts of “policy development” and “communications.” The conceptual shift by anti-abortion strategists from simply yelling louder to speaking differently – from thinking of their work in terms of strategic initiatives, not selling policy ideas -- is responsible for the movement’s newfound strength and, disturbingly, its emerging political dominance.
The Bridge Values Method supplants the conventional language and thinking around “issues” and “issue advocacy” by demanding that practitioners decide who they are and what they stand for before they craft strategic initiatives. It is easy enough for progressives to call this or that policy proposal a “strategic initiative” without ever defining their base, constituents of opportunity and bridge values. As a tool, the Bridge Values Method demands that progressive philanthropists and strategists break from the past. The Method postpones the brainstorming of policy proposals until after strategists and philanthropists have gained clarity about the specific values they intend to strengthen among particular constituents of opportunity.

Table A: Bridge Values vs. Conventional Social Change Methods

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bridge Values Method</th>
<th>Conventional Social Change Method</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Identify constituents of opportunity.</td>
<td>Identify technical policy solutions to fix it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Identify shared “bridge values.”</td>
<td>Sell technical policy solutions to public and policymakers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Craft strategic initiative to strengthen bridge values to build progressive majority.</td>
<td>Implement technical policy solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Measure changes to bridge values over time.</td>
<td>Defend technical policy solutions.</td>
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Ted Nordhaus, Partner

Ted specializes in crafting strategic initiatives that reframe old debates in new ways and along new political fault lines.

In the fall of 2006, Houghton Mifflin will publish *The Death of Environmentalism and the Birth of a New Aspirational Politics*, to be co-authored by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus. In October 2004, Shellenberger and Nordhaus published an essay by the same name, creating an international debate over the future of environmental and progressive politics.

Ted got his start in politics with the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs), where he served as Campaign Director for California. Later, as Campaign Director for Share the Water, a coalition of environmentalists, fishermen, farmers, and urban water agencies, Ted oversaw campaigns to reform federal water policies in California.

For two years Ted served as Executive Director of the Headwaters Sanctuary Project where he played a critical role in securing landmark environmental protections for the Headwaters Redwood Forest in Northern California. Before turning to polling Ted was a political strategist for Next Generation where his clients included Environmental Defense, the California Futures Network and Clean Water Action. Ted worked as a pollster with Evans/McDonough Co. from 2000 to 2005.

Ted holds a BA in history from the University of California, Berkeley.
Michael Shellenberger, Partner

Michael Shellenberger specializes in synthesizing ideas from a wide range of fields in ways that create social change breakthroughs.

Michael's work has been featured in a variety of U.S. publications from the *New York Times* to *NPR* to *Salon.com*. Michael has written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Glamour Magazine*, the *American Prospect*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and many other publications. In 2003 he authored *Race to the Top*, a report on ethical business initiatives ([www.businessethicsnetwork.org](http://www.businessethicsnetwork.org)).

As Executive Director of the Breakthrough Institute ([www.thebreakthrough.org](http://www.thebreakthrough.org)) Michael co-founded the Apollo Alliance, referred to by the *New Yorker* as “an influential umbrella organization of Greens and trade unionists” that is advocating a New Apollo Project to create three million clean energy jobs, free America from foreign oil, and re-establish America's global economic leadership.

In 1996 Michael co-founded and grew Communication Works to be California's largest public interest communications firm. In 2001 he merged Communication Works with Fenton Communications, the country’s largest public interest communications agency.

Before starting Communication Works Michael was conducting fieldwork in Brazil. Michael is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese and holds a Masters Degree in Anthropology from University of California, Santa Cruz.

**Environics** is one of North America’s leading marketing and social survey research consultancies. Co-founded in 1970 by Environics’ president Michael Adams, the firm has evolved into a multi-disciplined international research and consulting group. Headquartered in Toronto, the firm has offices and affiliates in Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary and New York. Internationally, Environics’ clients include a number of the world’s largest consumer marketers. In Canada, most of the country’s governments, as well as leading firms in financial services, telecommunications, natural resources, print and broadcast media, and packaged goods industries use Environics’ services.

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