Fox Populism

*Fox Populism* offers fresh insights into why the Fox News Channel has been both commercially successful and politically effective. The book traces the historical development of Fox’s counter-elite news brand and reveals how its iconoclastic news style was crafted by fusing two class-based traditions of American public culture: one native to the politics in populism and one native to the news field in tabloid journalism. After investigating the origins of Fox News’ populist journalistic style, the book goes on to illustrate how it is deployed as a political tool for framing news events, using the network’s coverage of the economic crisis of the late 2000s as the book’s principal case study. Through close analysis of Fox News’s top-rated programs, this study shows how Fox hails its audience as “the real Americans” and effectively re-presents narrow, conservative political demands as popular and universal.

**Reece Peck** is Assistant Professor of Media Culture at College of Staten Island, City University of New York (CUNY). He provides commentary on media and politics to news organizations, including *New York* magazine and the AFP.
Communication, Society and Politics

Editors

W. Lance Bennett, University of Washington
Robert M. Entman, George Washington University

Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds – between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations. Communication, Society and Politics probes the political and social impacts of these new communication systems in national, comparative, and global perspective.

Other Books in the Series

Erik Albæk, Arjen van Dalen, Nael Jebril, and Claes de Vreese, Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective
Eva Anduiza, Michael James Jensen, and Laia Jorba, eds., Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide: A Comparative Study
C. Edwin Baker, Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters
C. Edwin Baker, Media, Markets, and Democracy
W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, eds., Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy
Rodney Benson, Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison
Bruce Bimber, Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power
Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl, Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change
Lynn S. Clark and Regina Marchi, Young People and the Future of News
Murray Edelman, The Politics of Misinformation
Frank Esser and Barbara Pfetsch, eds., Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges
Myra Marx Ferree, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht, Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States
Hernan Galperin, New Television, Old Politics: The Transition to Digital TV in the United States and Britain
Tim Groeling, When Politicians Attack: Party Cohesion in the Media

(continued after the Index)
Fox Populism

Branding Conservatism as Working Class

REECE PECK

College of Staten Island, CUNY
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Fox Populism in the Great Recession</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking Media Partisanship</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond “Fair and Balanced”: How Conservative Media</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism Heralded a New Journalistic Epistemology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent Conceptions of TV Populism: Organizational versus Aesthetic</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter-by-Chapter Compendium</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Channeling America’s “Tabloid Soul”: How Rupert Murdoch, Roger Ailes, and Bill O’Reilly Remade Television News</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rise of Partisan Narrowcasting: “Affective Economics”</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets “Affective Polarization”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabloid!: The Debate Over “Bad” Journalism and Its Class-Based Roots</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Aspirational” News Style: Anti-Tabloid Journalism in the Twentieth Century</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unmaking of Middlebrow News in America</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabloids for Television: A Current Affair, Inside Edition, and Bill O’Reilly before Bill O’Reilly</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Partisanship Needs to Be Produced”</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Populism on Cable News: A Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News versus MSNBC: “Logic of Equivalence” versus “Logic of Difference”</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Fox News Hermeneutics: Narrative and Performance</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Contents

1. **Fox News versus *The Daily Show*: Performing Sincerity versus Irony**  
   - The Cold Shoulder: No Place for Populists in Liberal Cable News  
   - Populism’s Race and Gender Problem  
   - The Feminine Populism of Conservative Women  
   - 99

2. **The Cold Shoulder: No Place for Populists in Liberal Cable News**  
   - Populism’s Race and Gender Problem  
   - The Feminine Populism of Conservative Women  
   - 104

3. **“I’m a Blue-Collar Guy”: How Fox News Hosts Imagine Themselves and Their Audience as Working Class**  
   - The Social Logic of Anti-Elitism  
   - The “Silent Majority” versus the “New Class”: How the Conservative Movement Redefined Class in America  
   - Is Fox News’ Audience Working Class?  
   - “I Eat at Red Lobster”: Performing Working-Class Taste  
   - “I'm Not an Expert, but I Am a Thinker”: Performing Working-Class Intellectuality  
   - Populist Journalism: An Enemy of Facts or of Cultural Elitism?  
   - 111

4. **Populism’s Race and Gender Problem**  
   - The Feminine Populism of Conservative Women  
   - 116

5. **The Feminine Populism of Conservative Women**  
   - 121

6. **The Social Logic of Anti-Elitism**  
   - 125

7. **The “Silent Majority” versus the “New Class”: How the Conservative Movement Redefined Class in America**  
   - 127

8. **Is Fox News’ Audience Working Class?**  
   - 133

9. **“I Eat at Red Lobster”: Performing Working-Class Taste**  
   - 140

10. **“I’m Not an Expert, but I Am a Thinker”: Performing Working-Class Intellectuality**  
    - 146

11. **Populist Journalism: An Enemy of Facts or of Cultural Elitism?**  
    - 151

12. **“The Makers and the Takers”: How Fox News Forges a Working-Class/Business-Class Political Alliance**  
    - From Traditional Producerism to Entrepreneurial Producerism  
    - “The Job Creators”: Fox News’ Reinterpretation of the Labor Theory of Value  
    - Racializing the Stimulus Act: The Producerist Narrative of Theft  
    - “Who Have We Turned Into?: The Stimulus Act as a Sign of Generational Transformation and Moral Decline  
    - Why Moral Discourses of Class Matter  
    - 155

13. **From Traditional Producerism to Entrepreneurial Producerism**  
    - 158

14. **“The Job Creators”: Fox News’ Reinterpretation of the Labor Theory of Value**  
    - 165

15. **Racializing the Stimulus Act: The Producerist Narrative of Theft**  
    - 173

16. **“Who Have We Turned Into?: The Stimulus Act as a Sign of Generational Transformation and Moral Decline**  
    - 178

17. **Why Moral Discourses of Class Matter**  
    - 182

    - Creating the “Counter-Intelligentsia”: Understanding the Right’s Close but Complicated Relationship with Intellectual Culture  
    - Amity Shlaes and the “Openness” of the Activist-Expert  
    - Translating Intellectual Knowledge into the Language of Cable News  
    - Policing the Intellectual Content of a Populist Show  
    - The “Invested” Populist and the “Disinvested” Expert  
    - Switching Roles: The Communicative Versatility of the Fox News Pundit  
    - Expertise Must Be Performed  
    - 185

19. **Creating the “Counter-Intelligentsia”: Understanding the Right’s Close but Complicated Relationship with Intellectual Culture**  
    - 189

20. **Amity Shlaes and the “Openness” of the Activist-Expert**  
    - 193

21. **Translating Intellectual Knowledge into the Language of Cable News**  
    - 198

22. **Policing the Intellectual Content of a Populist Show**  
    - 208

23. **The “Invested” Populist and the “Disinvested” Expert**  
    - 211

24. **Switching Roles: The Communicative Versatility of the Fox News Pundit**  
    - 215

25. **Expertise Must Be Performed**  
    - 218
Contents

Conclusion: Trumpian Populism: Fox News’ Respectable Future Clashes with Its Tabloid Past
A Defense of Populism
Learning from Fox News
Postscript: Fox News and the “Alt-Right”: Populism and Nationalism

Bibliography
Index
Preface

Being raised in Utah, one of the most conservative states in the country, I felt like I knew everything I needed to know about Fox News. It pervaded my landscape just like Mormonism and “Jazz” basketball. Most of my family watched Fox News simply because they were Republican. “What else is there to know?” I thought. In retrospect, my sense of “knowing” Fox News was largely unfounded. I had never actually watched its programs in full or with any regularity. What I had seen of Fox was mostly in passing or based on brief, edited clips presented on YouTube or by other news sources.

The economic crisis of the late 2000s changed my passing interest in Fox News into a long-term active one. The 2008 financial collapse and the Great Recession that followed had caused profound devastation, inflicting financial pain across both the US population and globally. Some even felt that this Great Recession could pose the gravest threat to capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Ever since the early 1990s, Democrats had been shouting, “It’s the economy, stupid!” However, in the political climate of the Great Recession, they didn’t have to shout anymore. The “Culture War” issues that had so frustrated the left (e.g., God, guns, and gays) during the George W. Bush era would no longer be the central topics of national debate. All eyes were now glued to the economy, finally giving Democrats the homefield advantage they had always longed for. With the social and political conditions of the Great Recession presenting such an intriguing case study, I wanted to know how the number one news source for conservative Americans would respond to such a clear crisis of legitimacy for the free-market economic tenets it so passionately endorsed (e.g., deregulation,
privatization, and tax cuts for the wealthy). The crisis indeed proved to be
a true test of strength for Fox News’ rhetorical skills.

In early 2009, I committed myself to watching Fox News closely and
systematically. I analyzed over 800 broadcast transcripts and used
UCLA’s cable television archive to watch hours upon hours of Fox News
programming, particularly the network’s three top-rated shows at the
time: The O’Reilly Factor, Hannity, and Glenn Beck. I did this for
roughly two years. The programming range I analyzed and coded ranged
from September 2008 – or the beginning of the financial collapse – to the
midterm elections at the end of 2010. It was during this period that Fox
News would experience one of the highest ratings surges in its twenty-
two-year history and would galvanize a street protest movement in the
Tea Party.

The benefit of my becoming so engrossed in the textual world of Fox
News is that it allowed me to become intimately familiar with the net-
work’s special vocabularies and catchphrases. From such sustained
viewing, I began to see how layered the political language of conservative
media could be; how its recurrent code words such as “job creators,” “the
liberal elite,” and “the forgotten man” could also carry “residual” (Wil-
liams, 1991) meanings from the political past that predated and ran
deeper than the partisan alignments and divisions they currently
expressed. Indeed, I discovered that this historical embeddedness is the
secret to their power.

In 2000, Bill O’Reilly famously said his program was the only televi-
sion show that presents news “from a working-class point of view.”1
Fox’s ability to advance conservative political narratives during the late-
2000s economic crisis—a moment when the issue of class inequality stood
at the fore of the nation’s collective consciousness—convinced me that
this claim needed to be taken seriously. Yet all too often the populist
rhetoric of Fox’s top pundits has been dismissed as a naked form of
charlatanism and a simpleminded gimmick. Fox Populism seeks to show
how the contrary is true. Not only does Fox’s populist journalistic style
make for clever marketing and dramatic entertainment, it also stands as
one of the most sophisticated and culturally astute forms of political
communication in recent American history.

While this study relies on literary-critical textual methods, in
the course of my research I sought to confirm my interpretations of Fox

News programming by investigating other important sites for the production of conservative political discourse. From 2009 through 2011, I conducted interviews with political activists and media industry figures and conducted participant observations at various Tea Party–affiliated events in Southern California and Nevada. The media training workshops I attended at various RightOnline conferences in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2010 and in San Diego, California, in 2011 were particularly elucidating. RightOnline is the conservative counterpoint to the liberal Netroots Nation conference. Like Netroots, the conference is dedicated to teaching activists how to use the Internet and digital platforms as political tools. It is hosted by the conservative political advocacy organization Americans for Prosperity, which gains most of its funding from Charles and David Koch of Koch Industries, better known as “the Koch Brothers.”

Attending these conferences was useful because many of the discussion panels were small, intimate settings directed by prominent talk radio hosts, Internet publishers, TV personalities and politicians. These included figures such as Judge Napolitano (a Fox News pundit), Herman Cain (conservative talk radio host and former Republican presidential candidate), Representative Michelle Bachman, current Vice-President Mike Pence, and Andrew Breitbart – the late founder of Breitbart News. Observing these figures in person informed and textured my evaluations of their media performances on Fox and elsewhere.

Panels such as “Basic Investigative Reporting Skills” (July 23, 2010) and “Old Media, New Media and The Role of Citizen Journalism” (July 23, 2010) taught activists how to use journalistic practices to investigate political corruption and wasteful spending. They also trained attendees in how to cultivate a compelling mode of address for podcasting, online publishing, and public speaking in general. In a panel entitled, “Speaking Right: Communicating the Message Effectively,” I listened to conservative media pioneer Richard Viguerie stress the need to maintain the conservative movement’s central themes, which he analogized to a “four legged stool.” The first two legs are the Old Right’s emphasis on strong national defense and anticommunism and other two legs are founded on the Religious Right’s social issues and the Tea Party’s anti-government, free-market message.

At the San Diego RightOnline conference, panels such as “Effective Online Radio and Podcasting” and “Using Humor for Effective Content” outlined key presentational priorities of conservative talk media that informed my interpretive framework for studying Fox News. These
included “being authentic” and “being likable,” establishing a clear media persona and story about oneself, having liberal guests on to create confrontation for entertainment value, and more. In these workshops, I found strong parallels between the verbal rhetoric of conference attendees and Fox News programming discourse. In one panel at the Las Vegas, Nevada conference entitled “Prosperity 101: Citizen Economic Education,” panelists Herman Cain, AFP executive director Linda Hansen, and The Wall Street Journal’s John Fund gave presentations and passed out DVDs and literature on how to teach friends, employees, and coworkers about the moral virtues of capitalism. Their political literature and verbal discourse were patently identical to the “producerist” rhetorical framing that Fox News utilized in its framing of the Great Recession (see Chapter 4).

“Cultural populist” (see Chapter 3) discourses were pervasive as well in these conferences, especially in the workshops devoted to citizen journalism and amateur news production practices. Audience members were repeatedly told by the panelists running the workshops that most mainstream journalists “look down on ordinary Americans” and question their ability to produce intelligent commentary. In essence, the speakers running these workshops framed the audience of grassroots activists as monadic versions of Fox News. As individuals wielding the tools of social media, the narrative they were told about their political and cultural role mirrored one of Fox News’ central institutional narratives about challenging the cultural elitism of the mainstream media.

The last sites of conservative discourse that I turned to in order to test and orient my interpretations of Fox News programming were Tea Party political events that I attended between 2009 and 2011. On April 15, 2009, the day the first nationally coordinated anti-tax Tea Party protest occurred, some colleagues and I went down to the San Diego County Regional US Post Office, where the largest Tea Party protest was being held in San Diego County. There we took notes on the protest signs and conducted numerous audio-recorded interviews with activists. The following year, on April 15, 2010, we attended the second nationally coordinated protest in the same location and again conducted audio-recorded interviews with participants and took notes. Notably, the discourses I observed at these protests in the signs, speeches, and in the interviews predominantly dealt with the issue of wealth distribution. Moreover, they closely resembled the “producerist” rhetoric that is centrally featured in this book. For example, at the April 15, 2009 protest, I noted a middle-aged man wearing work boots and jeans holding a sign
that read “spread my work ethic, not my wealth.” Another sign a protestor was carrying read, “socialism: trickle-up poverty,” again and again playing on the themes of unjust wealth distribution.

Throughout 2010 and 2011, I attended other Tea Party events in smaller towns in the broader San Diego area, such as El Cajon and Oceanside. As with the RightOnline conferences, these Tea Party events were promising locations for meeting Fox News viewers, especially ones that through their investment in activism were likely to be opinion leaders in their own interpersonal networks. Thanks to an older couple who sold “patriot t-shirts,” I was introduced to a wide range of rank-and-file participants and had long informal discussions with them about the state of the US news media and particularly about why they preferred Fox News over other news sources. At these events, I met congressional Tea Party candidates and local talk radio hosts who agreed to do extended recorded interviews at later dates.

I do not mention this fieldwork to suggest that it stands as proof of my interpretations of Fox News programming. Rather, I stress how this secondary research functioned as a guiding device and safeguard against allowing my analysis to veer toward idiosyncratic, overly impressionistic interpretations that have no or little recursive connection with other sources and forms of conservative political communication. Because the discourses and representational practices used at these events and mentioned interviews closely and consistently reflected what I observed on Fox News, this secondary research, at every step of the way, renewed my confidence in the core textual arguments of the study.

In addition to this fieldwork, this project relied on audience data from nonprofit research organizations like the Pew Research Center and National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES). Beyond publishing quarterly ratings indices that show who is winning and losing in the cable news ratings game, commercial ratings companies like Nielsen tend to guard the more fine-grained data they have on the cable news audience. In most cases, researchers must pay for access to Nielsen audience data. Future studies on Fox News would benefit immensely from having greater access to Nielsen’s audience data and also from more ethnographic research on the Fox News audience, something that is relatively scarce.

By capturing how Fox News programming operates as a complex “cultural system” (Norton, 2011) and by historically contextualizing the key political narratives and performance techniques Fox News hosts utilize to frame and dramatize news events, I believe this study
Preface

offers new insights into why Fox News has been both commercially successful and politically effective. Moreover, this book will provide future quantitative studies on Fox News with descriptive tools and analytical categories that more adequately account for the stylistic nuances and particularities of the conservative media sector and political television more broadly.
Acknowledgments

This book bears my name but it is the collective product of various communities both within and without the academy. I credit the peculiar city of Salt Lake and the two (very large) extended families that raised me there for giving me an early education in ideology critique. My family was divided along the lines of the religious and nonreligious, like Salt Lake City itself. My cheerier Latter-day Saints (LDS) side attuned me to the power of moral philosophy, while my grittier secular side gave me a healthy dose of skepticism. Both sides taught me how to see the humanity in people, regardless of their politics or religion.

I credit the various academic communities that enriched my thinking and expanded my political preoccupations. A doctoral student could not have asked for a more intellectually stimulating environment than the one I enjoyed at the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). The insights I gleaned from the versatile faculty at the “La Jolla School” are echoed throughout this book, but the fingerprints of my graduate advisor Chandra Mukerji mark its pages most evidently. Chandra always challenged me to listen to the text and fight against the tendency to impose my own categories and prejudices onto the media I studied. This discipline taught me respect for detail and for evidence. I hope to pass this on to the students I advise now that I am a professor.

From the dissertation to the book proposal to the final monograph, Daniel Hallin has guided this research project every step of the way. Thank you, Dan, for all the care and time you’ve devoted to this book. I count you as one of my strongest advocates. Robert Horwitz was another key mentor that steered me through graduate school. Robert
invited me to join UCSD’s Conservative Movement Workshop. This academic collective exposed me to a wide range of disciplinary approaches for studying the political right. I thank all its members, particularly Amy Binder, John Evans, and Isaac Martin. In addition to being an exceptional source of expertise on television, John McMurria affirmed the value of my research and gave me confidence to advance my ideas about class and elitism. Michael Schudson’s feedback during my defense proved invaluable, and this book emulates the “culturological” approach to journalism studies that he innovated. Other UCSD mentors that deserve thanks include David Serlin, Shelly Streeby and Natalia Roudakova.

I want to thank the eccentric graduate community at UCSD that challenged me intellectually and supported me emotionally. Many of the doctoral students that contributed the most to this book’s development were the people that comprised the parenting support system that enabled me to complete my dissertation. Thank you, Matt Dewey, Harry Simón, and Tara-Lynne Pixley. I am especially grateful to Andy Rice, who generously edited several drafts of this book, and to Muni Citrin, who was my main fieldwork collaborator and intellectual confidant. I owe equal thanks to their partners – Aurora Dewey, Adriana Jasso, Collin Chappelle, Carla Rice, and Naya Colkett – who unselfishly shared in the labor of raising our children. I wish to acknowledge Andrew Whitworth-Smith, Michaela Walsh, Antonieta Mercado, Erin Malone, Regina Marchi, Matt Stahl, Kate Levitt, Carl McKinney, Stephanie Martin, James Perez, and Lauren Berliner. I appreciated all the cover letters, syllabi and bibliographies we traded over the years, but it was your music and dirty jokes that I prized the most. Marisa Brandt, Kim De Wolff, and Jericho Burg were key friends and editors as well.

The empirical heart of this book lies in the programming content that I was able to review at the University of California, Los Angeles, (UCLA) Communication Studies Archive, UCLA Television & Film Archive and The Paley Center for Media. I am grateful to the faculty and staff who helped me navigate these archives over the years, namely Tim Groeling, David Deliema and Darin Hoyer. I also want to thank my trusty research assistant Dominic Provenzano and editor Kathleen Ryan. This project could not have happened without these resources and their assistance.

The transition from graduate student to assistant professor is jarring, especially when it involves moving your family three thousand miles across a continent. I was blessed with a supportive group of faculty mentors at the CUNY College of Staten Island to walk me through the
Acknowledgments

dual challenges of being a tenure-track professor and to life in New York City. This includes Ying Zhu, Edward Miller, Cindy Wong, Michael Mandiberg, Tara Mateik, Valerie Tevere, Jason Simon, Bang-Geul Han and Sherry Millner. A special thanks goes to Jillian Baez and Racquel Gates – the junior faculty members that preceded me at the Department of Media Culture. Our weekly office conversations have been an invaluable source of both camaraderie and knowledge. I thank David Gerstner, Bilge Yesil and Cynthia Chris for your close mentorship, editing help and for lending an open ear. I am grateful for Christopher Anderson who, in addition to offering incisive feedback on my writing, has actively promoted my research and broadened its visibility in the journalism studies field. The labor of writing a book can be very isolating, so I want to thank the small businesses and workers of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn who embraced me as a member of the community and allowed me to turn their restaurants into my office (LY and Rocco’s get special love).

I want to thank the Columbia School of Journalism and the Department of Television and Radio at Brooklyn College for inviting me to present earlier iterations of this book project. The comments from the faculty of these programs revealed blind spots in my analysis and helped me formalize the narrative arc of the book. I thank Fred Turner for reviewing my book proposal and for suggesting that the project focus more on Fox News’ prehistory. Geoffrey Baym’s book From Cronkite to Colbert (2009) and Victoria Johnson’s Heartland TV (2008) were go-to examples that I modeled this book after, and I thank both of them for their critical feedback and support. I owe a special debt to George Lipsitz, who served on my dissertation committee and who continued to advise me through the writing process. So many ideas in this book came from George’s scholarship and from the references to which he pointed.

The editors and staff at Cambridge University Press have been wonderful collaborators. I particularly want to thank Sara Doskow for believing in this project when it was only a proposal. The enthusiasm she continued to express throughout the revision process put wind in my sails. I am very appreciative of Lance Bennett and the anonymous readers. Their penetrating reviews and constructive criticism were absolutely pivotal to transforming this project from a dissertation into a book.

Other Cambridge assistants and editors I want to thank include Danielle Menz and Karen Weller.

Portions of this book, primarily Chapter 4, derive from two published articles: (1) Reece Peck, “‘You Say Rich, I Say Job Creator’: How Fox News Framed the Great Recession through the Moral Discourse of
xviii

Acknowledgments


I received generous funding for this project from the University of California President’s Dissertation Year Fellowship. I was also awarded various Research Grants from my union – Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York. This financial support was vital to funding archive trips to UCLA and editing services. Funding from the Provost Office and the Faculty Center for Professional Development at the College of Staten Island allowed me to attend key conferences that shaped the ideas of this book. I owe a big thanks to Distinguished Professor Sarah Schulman, who went through this manuscript with a fine toothcomb and gave me excellent advice on how to improve its organizational structure. I give a heartfelt thank you to my undergraduate mentors Mary Jo Hinsdale, Elree Harris and Jeff McCarthy.

Lastly, I want to thank members of my immediate family, starting with my mother, Linda Green. She has anchored me my entire life. Her fearlessness and optimism in the face of adversity continues to leave me in awe. My father, Don Peck, is easily the most hilarious, authentic person I have ever met. His phone calls from construction sites making fun of my “thinking job” added perspective and levity to the serious (but always air-conditioned) work of academic research. I thank my sister, Krista Bergeron, for being my first academic hero and for encouraging me to go to college. I thank my big brother, Donny Peck, a talented country singer, for inspiring me to explore the politics of country music (I still copy everything he likes). Most importantly, I thank my wife and co-parent, Mercedes Panah, who has been in my life through every facet of this long, arduous journey and who sacrificed the most so I could finish this project. Her practical, in-the-now mind-set has always grounded my thinking, but nothing inspires me more than witnessing the fierce, unabashed way she loves our two sons, Razi and Reece. These two wild, adorable boys deserve my gratitude as well. The adventures we had together on my days off fed my soul and sustained my spirits.