

The Potential for a New, Emerging Culture in the U.S.

Report on the 2008 American Values Survey

By Paul H. Ray, Ph.D.

Research Director, Institute for the Emerging Wisdom Culture, Wisdom University
and Research Director, State of the World Forum

Chapter 2. The Cultural Creatives

The American Cultural Creatives Research, 1986-2008

Our American research on values, worldviews and lifestyles from 1986 to 1994 was focused on specific consumer groups, by region or by kind of market, or on specific constituencies, such as the environmental movement. The research reported here covers 22 years, in numerous studies on a wide variety of topics. Only in 1994 were we finally able to get funding for the first national baseline study, and then again in 1999 and in 2008.* In addition we have much qualitative data from focus groups and depth interviews that show a major values change in America.

This kind of survey works well because values are excellent predictors of what people actually want to do and buy, what good causes they support, how they vote, and what messages to them are most believable. What we found very early on was that the values that predict well do not depend on personal psychology, but rather that they differ by three subcultures: Traditional, Modern and Trans-Modern. The latter are the Cultural Creative population, and this was the first research to show that ecology values and spiritual-psychological values made a difference to people's lifestyles, and to their stance as voters. Because they are cultural, the values we measured are slow to change, unlike attitudes and opinions, and the business cycle has very little effect on them (though it affects people's ability to pay for what they want).

What are values?

If we want to deal with what's important in people's lives, and use it to make positive change, we have to study values. *Values are people's most important life priorities, the bases for what they actually do, what they want to accomplish, and how they want to be.* When we live out our values, we commit our actions to the important matters of our lives, not the trivial. Ideas like "individual character" are built around deeply held values, and the meanings and worldviews associated with them. When we talk about good societies and democratic politics, we're always

talking about culturally held, and shared, values and worldviews. Worldviews are sets of beliefs about 'how things work,' 'how life is,' and 'what's objectively important in life.' When we talk about cultural differences across nations (or subculture differences within a country), the core of those differences often grows out of particular values and worldviews held in common within a people, or an ethnic group, not just the way they dress and talk, or quaint customs.

Values are the deepest and slowest-changing indicators we can measure with surveys, and worldviews are almost as deep, while attitudes and opinions are closer to the social surface of life, more superficial, labile and faster to change. Values and worldviews are said to be 'deeper' when they are part of who we think we are, are more strongly held, matter more to how we live our lives, and are more a part of our personal 'systems of meaning and important life priorities'. The more we believe that our ideas, beliefs and opinions are 'who I am,' the more tightly we hold onto them. Not only are they slower to change, but when change comes, it is rather like a 'conversion experience.' After a time of gradual accumulation of beliefs and experiences, then big chunks of things in our psyche all have to change together. A view that's easy to change is what we don't hold onto very tightly, because it doesn't mean as much to us, or because we know it's a changeable fact, like today's sports scores and the weather, or because it's a news factoid disconnected from the rest of what's important to our lives. Attitudes and opinions that change easily are rightly seen as superficial.

Values are deeper and slower changing than attitudes and opinions, which change rather fluidly as new information, new experiences, new social status, new group membership or social connections come into people's lives. (So the opinion pollster and news reporter prefer attitude and opinion data because there's always something new to talk about, even though it is shallow.) Many aspects of attitudes and opinions are psychological: emotional or cognitive, but they too may be filtered through a heavy cultural framing. The ones that stick become incorporated in worldviews. Values changes seem to occur only at a very few times in life, when deep meanings are invoked, or deep learning occurs, or important life priorities are reassessed: going to college, the birth of a first child, or grandchild, the death of a loved one, getting involved in a social movement, entering a deep psychological or spiritual training, enduring a financial calamity or a threat to one's way of life, such as a depression or global warming...

What is values research?

Most values research is done in large surveys, or in depth interviews, usually by social scientists, occasionally by market researchers. When you do research on values, the acid test is whether you're able to use that values information to predict people's actual behavior. Of the very large number of values we might measure, only a few will tell us about what people will strongly take as their life priorities, and be strongly correlated to what they do. Our research has identified the kinds of values that matter to the way people live, and predict things like how they will vote, the symbolically important products and services they will buy (food, houses, cars, vacations), how they want to live, and what kind of future they want for themselves and for their children.

Two kinds of values had to be found and discarded: lip-service values and universal values. Lip-service values are not related to people's life choices. They're what 'sounds good,' what people think they should say about themselves if asked. So, saying that they hold 'giving to charity' as a value only predicts weakly to actually giving—and it fell out of the list of values statements in our research. Universal values, principles that nearly everyone espouses, do not predict either, for they don't differ significantly across people, like 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay,' or 'honesty,' and 'fairness.' You can only make a prediction if there are differences in the causes related to differences in the resulting behaviors. If we all value the same principle, like saving the planet from total ecological destruction, then even if the meaning that value expresses is really important, having that value is a constant, not a variable. So what the survey asks is, 'what is it about this that you think is important?' and 'what are you willing to do about it?' Those value and worldview statements will actually predict to different actions and degrees of concern. Then you can see a range of views, from total denial to a demand for strong, immediate action.

So what kinds of values predict best? You've probably been assuming that the best predicting values are psychological. Most people do. Actually the best-predicting values are not psychological, and not found in individual differences, but in cultural differences. These are important life priorities common within a group, ones that often turn out to be precisely what make that group different from others. Cultural values grow out of our discussions with others, as well as reading or seeing the same media, but also from making the same kinds of life

interpretations and commitments, and from exposure to the same events and dangers. We're used to talking about ethnic subcultures which usually come from the same language group, region or racial group. But the values, worldviews and lifestyle subcultures that are now important to our lives, the ones we measured in this research, have gone beyond those old tribal identities.

Interestingly, there are three distinct subcultures within the US, Western Europe, and Japan, that are similar across national, racial and linguistic lines. These are Traditional, Modern, and Culturally Creative subcultures. Each subculture's values and their worldviews are strongly intertwined. The results of this are that our lifestyles and politics can be very well predicted by our combination of culturally held values and worldviews. That's why I do this kind of research.

When we started doing this research in 1986, the first thing we did was look at personality and other psychological variables, and they had a nearly zero correlation with values that predict well to differences in actual behavior. The point to this effort was to improve on demographic variables like age, income, occupation, education, gender, race, region, or ethnicity. Those are notoriously ineffective (if cheap to use). The most surprising result was that demographics are nearly uncorrelated with values. (The partial exception is that older uneducated people tend to be social and religious conservatives, but little more than that.) Another way of seeing this is not the negative result of 'no correlation,' but rather that looking at values, and doing it through a lens of culture, adds a really new dimension to what social surveys can tell you about people.

It's not helpful to ask people directly about which values they have, because what they tell you comes from social norms that say "how I'm supposed to answer," not what they do. So, even though researchers can rate which values people tell them are important, it is almost useless information. That bias is a big problem with many values studies. Values have to be inferred from sets of highly correlated questionnaire items that are used to make a measurement scale for each value. The key questions in our surveys start with, "What's most important in my life is..." and then state various things like, "making a lot of money" or "living in harmony with nature" or "having time for my church work." These three items belong to three different measurement scales: financial materialism, ecological concerns, and religious conservatism. And those are strongly related to worldview items that show how their culture construes reality.

It's the way cultures construe reality that matters. Thus, a financial materialism measure is part of what identifies the Modernist subculture, and an ecological measure is part of what identifies the emerging culture of the planet, and the Cultural Creatives. When we put them into a context of politics, they are at the opposite ends of a larger dimension, the tense opposition between a powerful, but recently wounded, business conservatism, versus a large and growing group of new ecological and planetary concerns, which grew out of all the new social movement values and beliefs. The surprise that then emerges across all cultural creatives studies is that this takes on the flavor of something very consequential. These are the values behind the opposition of the very exclusive meetings of the global financial elite in Davos, versus the huge World Social Forum in Brazil. The media framing of these opposed meetings as rich vs. poor is a weak reflection of the actual values concerns of an emerging planet. In fact, contrary to the interpretation of the Modernist-culture media, this is not only about socialism vs. capitalism, or big money vs. social justice, though that is certainly present. It's about the future of the planet.

*The American Cultural Creatives survey of 2008 was a nationally representative sample of 2000 persons who had pre-agreed to respond to a lengthy mail questionnaire. It was designed and analyzed by Paul Ray, and fielded for him by the world's largest contract survey research firm, TNS, in late March and early April, 2008. The survey was sponsored by Wisdom University and State of the World Forum. The completion rate was 64%. The error of estimation for percents based on the whole sample is $\pm 3\%$, while the sample error for measures within the Cultural Creative subgroup is $\pm 5\%$. The representative sample of this survey was normed to the demographics of the US Census' Current Population Survey, 2007.

The survey questionnaire was 10 pages long. Half of it replicated earlier Cultural Creatives surveys, focusing upon changes in values, changes in views about ecology and the climate crisis but in much more detail than earlier surveys.

The other half of the questionnaire was devoted to a new model of American voters based on political values, the New Political Compass. The latter showed that politics is actually two-dimensional, and that what is beyond left and right is at right angles to it, like a compass with four directions. Political North reflects the emerging culture and the effects of all the new social movements of the last 50 years. Political South is the neo-liberal economic conservatism typical of big business. Political West is conventional left, while Political East is the traditionalist and militarist right. Cultural Creatives are centered in the Political Northwest, and so is President Obama's political base. The political questions and analyses are not comparable to earlier Cultural Creatives surveys in Europe and Japan.

Three Competing Subcultures

Americans who see themselves as *'Traditional'* actually favor a 19th century worldview and values, nothing more ancient than that, and they are largely in reaction against the culture of today's world, usually from a rural, small town or religiously conservative stance. This includes a large proportion of working class and elderly people. In the US context, this nostalgia for a small town past and strong churches is based on a mythic image of an America that never existed in history. Since about 1950, Traditionals seem to have shrunk from roughly 50% of the US adults to roughly 25%, but even those have split into traditional conservatives (15%) and greens with strong traditional leanings (10%). Despite all the triumphalist rhetoric of the Religious Right in the US, their base population is dying off, and not being replaced by a younger generation. Their hatred partly reflects their fear of being on the losing side of history.

Most Hispanic migrants to the US are also quite traditional, reflecting Latin American rural culture, but are typically not surveyed because of their poor English and lack of acculturation to American ways; yet they are there in the background, clouding all our survey estimates.

'Moderns' tend to see the world through a filter of personal success and financial gain, with an acceptance of 'things as they are' in big cities, big organizations, the latest technologies, mass media, and a 'modern' life rewarded by material consumption. Moderns cover the gamut from politically progressive to conservative. It's important that despite all the claims of American media, corporations and governments, there seems never to have been a time when the population was more than half Moderns! The official culture of the US has two kinds of dissenters from Modern values: Traditionals as the cultural laggards, and Cultural Creatives as the cultural vanguard. From the 1950s to 2000 it appears that Moderns were just about half the US adult population. Since about 1950, Moderns continued to recruit the more ambitious, successful Traditionals, but after the 1960s Moderns started losing many of their own children to the Cultural Creatives. Now as Cultural Creatives continue to draw people, Moderns are down to about 40% of US adults. The 20th century was the Moderns' century, but now that culture is breaking down as it fails to solve the problems that its past successes left unsolved in their wake, especially the global climate crisis and ecological devastation that has accompanied it.

About 10% of the US is now *'In Transition'* to being Cultural Creatives—largely under the threat of the growing climate crisis—accepting values they once rejected, yet still clinging to traditional values. They are heavily working class men who are splitting off from the Traditional

culture. Compared to surveys 10-15 years ago, there is a “hole” in the Traditionals’ numbers, values and demographics by their departure. The US has a history of working class conservatism about social and religious values, combined with participation in the modern economy. They have now taken on green values, and a desire for green-collar jobs in new clean-green industries to replace their vanishing jobs in manufacturing. The deep recession started much earlier for them, over 2005 to 2007, and that was the last straw that broke the camel’s back in resisting change. Suddenly they switched in the 2008 election from supporting militaristic social and religious conservatives in politics to supporting Obama’s practical action for green economic development to get out of the recession. They are cross-pressured politically, wanting to hold both traditional values and post-modern views. They are probably lost to the Republican party for a generation. This is precisely what one might expect in a time of rapid cultural change.

Cultural Creatives need to be contrasted to Traditionals and Moderns, because they often describe themselves as ‘bridge people’ between the other two contending cultures who are busy having a culture war. They are trying to make a cultural synthesis, and also transcend the others. Their most important values include: ecological sustainability and concern for the planet (not just environmentalism); liking what is foreign and exotic in other cultures; what are often called ‘women’s issues’ by politicians and the media (i.e., concern about the condition of women and children both at home and around the world, concern for better health care and education, desire to rebuild neighborhoods and community, desire to improve caring relationships and family life); social conscience, a demand for authenticity in social life and a guarded social optimism; and giving importance to altruism, self-actualization and spirituality as a single complex of values.

In the 1995 national study of Cultural Creatives they were 23.6% of US adults, 44 million of them. By 1999 they had increased to 26%, or 50 million adults. By 2008, they had increased to 35% or 80 million adults. It appears that before the 1960s Cultural Creatives would simply have been too few to measure in surveys (i.e., less than 4%), but they’ve been increasing in numbers at an annual growth rate of a little over 3% per year since then. In the 2008 election, their numbers were enough to make the difference for President Obama’s victory. He’s rewarding that support with his Green programs: a synergy of political realism and civilization’s utter necessity.

The major influence on their growth has been that new values and worldviews grew out of their involvement in all the new social movements, from civil rights, to women’s, to social justice, to environmental, to concerns for hunger and third world peoples, to new spiritualities

and psychotherapies, to bio-foods, and finally to ecology and the growing climate crisis of the planet. The other major influence on their growth has been the growing information saturation of the world since the 1950s. In fact the Cultural Creatives are simply the best informed people. They take in more of every kind of information through all the media, and are more discriminating about it as a result. Many successfully blend their personal experience with new views about how the world works, and why—their new values and commitments have rather organically grown out of their synthesis of all the information. By contrast, Traditionals tend to fend off new information that Cultural Creatives absorb, while Moderns leave media information quite fragmented and undigested that Cultural Creatives are determined to make sense of. Cultural Creatives are also mainstays of middle class support for the arts and good causes in America, for they are America's practical idealists.

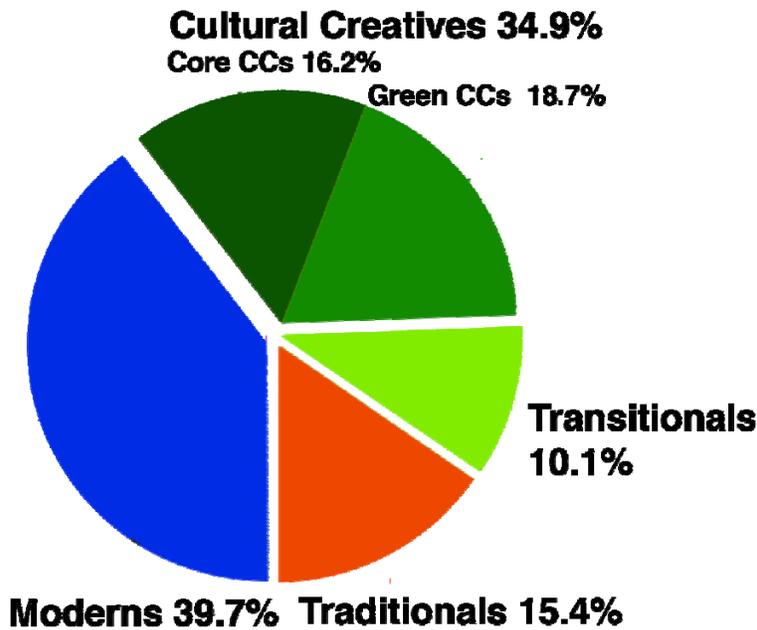
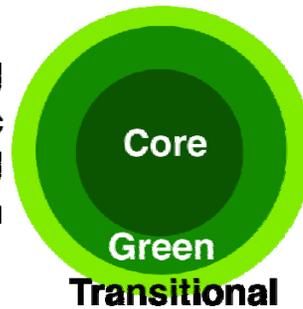
The survey data is designed for analysis into five dimensions, for clustering people into similar profiles of values, worldviews and lifestyle: *Two key dimensions of values are more important to Cultural Creatives than to others: 1) having green and socially responsible values, and 2) personal development values, including spirituality and new lifestyles.* The other two values dimensions are more important to the rest of the population: 3) a combination of personal success and financial materialism, and 4) a combination of social and religious conservatism. These four dimensions are independent of each other, so every person can be on the positive or negative ends of each different dimension. The fifth dimension is social class, or socio-economic status. Social class is important not only for people's ability to live well or not, but their ability to take in information about a changing world; it shapes friendship networks that affect how they form their worldview; and it strongly affects their life chances and the risks they are exposed to.

Cultural Creatives cover a very wide range of social class positions from working class to the elite. They may be middle class on average, but the range is so wide that it is almost meaningless to describe them in terms of occupation, education or income. The key identifiers are values, worldview and lifestyle, not demographics. People with identical values can be of very different social classes, and people of the same social class can live in totally different cultural worlds.

In some ways Cultural Creatives may seem like a shapeless population, because they have no special places to meet; no official clubs, organizations, churches or political groups that symbolize them; no TV shows, films or other media designed exclusively for their tastes; no institutional affiliations or badges of belonging to a large culture. They are more like a cultural

movement in the population, who are evident by the results they produce: the constituencies for all the green businesses, of all the bio-foods, of all the ‘alternative and complementary medicine’ and of all the new forms of spirituality and psychotherapies. None of those would exist without them. They lead the general social reaction that something must be done about the climate crisis that scientists describe, no matter how inconvenient or unprofitable the political and business authorities find it. And they lead the growing realization that this is indeed ‘one world’ after all, and we must now act on that realization. Planetary integration into a global cultural supersystem is a big cultural change that they are helping emerge. They are movers in the trend of our time.

**Cultural Creatives and
Transitionals as concentric
rings of activity levels and
network connection**



Core Cultural Creatives are at center and Green Cultural Creatives are at the periphery.

Like most cultural and social movements, there is an avant garde center. But their center has 16.2% of all American adults: *Core Cultural Creatives* are ‘opinion leaders’ who are a large set of linked informal networks who do the actual creation, writing and speaking of the new ideas and perceptions of the emerging culture. They are stronger on all the values that can describe Cultural Creatives. Around them is a larger moral public of 18.7% of all adults, the *Green Cultural Creatives*, who primarily emphasize ecological sustainability and social responsibility, with only average interest in personal development. They form a less active follower group, a ring at the periphery. They receive those ideas from the center of their networks, and nod approvingly at what they see and hear. Indeed, informal social networks are the key to this kind of cultural change, and this seems to be enhanced by the Internet. Over the years, values surveys have let us describe the difference between the active, influential, Core Cultural Creatives and the more peripheral Green Cultural Creatives who follow their lead, and now we have yet another ring one step farther out, who are that working class Transitional group. Most values measures describing Cultural Creatives show the Core group’s greater intensity than the outer rings. That they combine an inner life with their outer concerns makes them more effective.

Sidebar

A steadily growing population:

In 1995, Cultural Creatives were 23.6% of the US adult population, or 44 million adults.

In 1999, Cultural Creatives were 26% of US adult population, or 50 million adults.

In 2008, Cultural Creatives were 34.9% of US adult population, or 80 million adults

[US Adults 18+ years in 2008 = approximately 230 million]

175% growth in 13 years is a little over a 3% per year constant annual population growth rate.

However we have to factor in that the US adult population is growing too. So, the Cultural Creatives’ share of US population went from 23.6% to 33.6%. That is a 42.4% increase in share—about a 2.5% annual growth rate as an increasing share of the US population.

Detailed Comparison of Values Measures

Table 1, Important Defining Values of the Subcultures, 2008, makes a number of comparisons possible, as the values are ordered from the most preferred ones to the least, for each of the three subcultures. Each value named in the first column is a measurement scale that

combined from 4 to 12 questionnaire items. Such constructed scales are far more reliable than the questionnaire items taken alone. This is an important difference from opinion polling.*

* The original values questionnaire items were 5-point bipolar Likert scales, i.e., with an “indifferent” position in the middle and opposite poles at either end, either the contrast of ‘important / unimportant’ or ‘agree / disagree.’ There were over 200 such values questions in general areas, in ecological sustainability — and in political values for the US, which were linked to conventional political issues.

For the percents of this table, these constructed values scales were recoded from continuous variables, as used in the multivariate analysis, into 3-point scales, +1, 0 and -1. The zero term is value-neutrality and is one standard deviation wide. Thus a positive score +1, simply favoring the value position, is greater than .5; and -1, simply opposing the value position, is less than -.5 on the original scales, which tended to range from +3 to -3. The measurement scales were constructed to have a standard deviation of 1 with positive and negative poles around a value-neutral point of zero. However, zero corresponded to the neutral point of the items (not zero equal to the mean as would be true for z scores) to allow for the important fact that many of the measurement scales were overall very positive (as with ecological sustainability items) or overall rather negative (as with opinions of big business). All scales used are reliable and reproducible, with Cronbach’s alpha in the .55 to .85 range.

There are 17 values measured by this survey that are distinctive to Cultural Creatives and 5 more that share importance with both Moderns and Cultural Creatives. At the top of the list are stunningly high numbers for the whole population, and even higher numbers for Cultural Creatives, and truly remarkable numbers for the Core Cultural Creatives, showing their leadership on this. Those are the values concerned with ecological sustainability, dealing with the climate crisis, and identifying with the whole planet and wanting to be involved in the life of the whole planet. We will go into the significance of this in the next section. The key thing is that this has all emerged in a developed way in the last 10 years. Ecological sustainability concerns going well beyond everyday environmentalism have characterized Cultural Creatives since about 1990. They have been way out in front of the rest of the American population, who are only now catching up to them on this. But the planetary and climate crisis values are something new emerging that is truly transformational. By contrast, the common values for Moderns and Cultural Creatives have to do with a shared desire for a social safety net at a level taken for granted across most of Europe. This is a conflict between average Americans and conservatives.

In most preferred values, we also see the Transitional population resembles Cultural Creatives, just as it also resembled the Traditionals in the most preferred values for them.

The Core Cultural Creatives are also shown in the next to last column of the table. The first and most striking thing is that they are stronger on Modern social concerns than the Moderns. But then we see that all ecology and personal development concerns are very high numbers too. The intensity with which they feel their values, and act upon them, has been a characteristic of

the Core group since the first surveys in the 1980s. The Core group lead in *rejecting* some of the Traditional values as well: preferring the environment over big business, and rejecting political big business conservatism, and rejecting the ‘America first’ super-patriotism of the right. They lead in socially responsible values, such as altruism, idealism, wanting to contribute time and money to saving the planet, and demand for authenticity from business, government and nonprofit organizations. One might suspect this is only talk, but previous surveys showed that the Core group give twice as much time and money as other Americans. And they lead in rejecting the intolerance of the Religious Right, and lead the minority of Americans valuing spirituality.

Table 1 Important Defining Values of the Values Subcultures, 2008

	Traditionals	Moderns	Transitional	All CCs	Core CCs	Total Sample
Traditional Values						
Living a traditional life	85	57	73	39	40	38
Militarism	79	40	61	34	27	46
Religious Conservatism	62	40	30	26	33	38
Anti-immigration	61	40	46	35	35	42
Against civil liberties	59	34	55	22	17	36
Still favor the Iraq War	49	5	15	5	2	13
Modernist Values						
For national education	35	78	66	69	84	67
Anti-big-business	63	78	96	72	88	76
For national healthcare	27	70	72	62	82	61
Want social safety net	32	66	73	56	81	58
Protect civil liberties	7	38	25	27	45	28
Being a success in life	28	36	23	30	32	31

Table continued below

Important Defining Values of the Values Subcultures, 2008 (Cont.)

Table 1 (cont.)	Traditionals	Moderns	Transitional	All CCs	Core CCs	Total Sample
Cultural Creative Values						
Be wise planetary citizen	46	58	86	86	98	69
See Nature as sacred	76	71	92	85	89	79
Concern over global warming and eco-crisis	29	58	82	78	92	63
Preserve environment not big business	24	55	77	70	85	57
Wisdom is important	68	55	39	73	87	61
Leave a legacy of eco-sustainability for future generations	54	50	55	67	83	57
<i>Reject big business to preserve environment</i>	-21	-25	-63	-64	-86	-42
<i>Reject 'America first' super-patriotism</i>	-27	-21	-43	-60	-78	-38
<i>Reject big business conservatism in politics</i>	-29	-23	-71	-56	-83	-41
Altruism, helping others	71	46	24	60	75	52
Idealism, want to make social contribution	47	34	16	50	72	40
Will contribute to saving the planet & ecology	4	18	20	46	64	26
Demand for Authenticity	48	34	29	44	63	39
Self-actualization	31	33	15	43	62	34
<i>Reject Libertarianism, (neo-liberal economics)</i>	-27	-26	-47	-38	-61	-32
<i>Reject Religious Right</i>	-6	-25	-29	-35	-43	-26
For spirituality	23	21	4	27	46	21

Table 2 . Values Subcultures and Their Demographics, 2008

[Selected demographic characteristics of values subcultures compared to US Total in sample, April, 2008]

Demographics	Traditionals	Moderns	Transitional	All CCs	Core CCs	Total Sample
Male: Female	48:52	47:53	61:39	46:54	44:56	48:52
Median Age	46 Years	44 Years	48 Years	43 YRS	44 Years	45 Years
Age 18 - 29	17.5%	21.6%	12.4%	27.3%	27.2%	22.0%
Age 60+	20.8%	21.8%	30.7%	21.8%	23.8%	22.6%
Median Income	\$52,500	\$46,250	\$41,250	\$46,250	\$46,250	\$46,250
Income>\$75,000	51.3%	35.8%	23.3%	39.0%	33.1%	38.1%
No college	10.2%	31.5%	42.5%	21.4%	21.8%	26.0%
College Grad+	53.6%	25.0%	16.5%	43.8%	39.8%	40.0%
Managrs/Profnlis	33.6%	24.7%	4.1%	26.7%	19.9%	24.7%
Not working*	23.6%	33.9%	36.7%	36.3%	41.2%	33.4%
AfricanAmerican	5.7%	18.2%	7.1	11.0%	13.6%	12.7%
Hispanic	6.6%	12.2%	9.9%	12.0%	13.8%	11.1%
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	=====	N = 2000
Total in Sample	15.40%	39.65%	10.10%	34.85%	16.15%	100.0%
Note: Row pct.	All others =	Column pct.				

*Not working includes unemployed and not in labor force: student, housewife, retired, disabled, etc.

The Emergence of Ecological Sustainability Values and a Planetary Climate Crisis

One key role of Cultural Creatives in American life is as opinion leaders on ecological sustainability and creating a positive response to the planetary climate crisis. This is not about sentimentally saving baby seals, or preserving pretty places. It's asking what legacy we are leaving for our children and grandchildren—and they've shifted the dialogue in this direction. The effect of this constant push by Cultural Creatives on ecology is actually quite strong at the level of cultural beliefs in America, though it is not obvious in what people say about their urgent political priorities in the face of a global financial crisis and a painful recession. The urgent has temporarily pushed aside the important, but that's mostly about 'single issues dominating public

discourse' because of the difficulty that the media have in holding two ideas in mind at once. Unfortunately, when that's true, many voters also have the same difficulty, because the issue of climate crisis is just complex and threatening enough to make it hard for people to process.

Nevertheless, here are dramatic new results from our 2008 survey. Similar statements got 40% support a few years earlier. You can see the result of Cultural Creatives leading these important shifts in American values and beliefs by comparing the percents in the table:

Table 3. The Remarkable New Numbers on Climate Change.	
Cultural Creatives	Whole US – on key global warming concerns
94.2%	82.5% agree We must stop the destruction of the globe's farmlands, forests and oceans
93.5%	82.5% agree Humans need to have more respect and reverence for Nature
82.3%	63.0% agree Too many people refuse to accept the seriousness of global warming
79.5%	62.0% agree The earth is headed for an environmental catastrophe unless we change
Cultural Creatives	Whole US – on the need for action on global warming
93.6%	81.3% agree Corporations must take more responsibility for their impact on global warming
93.0%	80.2% agree We should change the way we live now so future generations have decent lives
83.9%	67.8% agree The media should do more to educate people about environmental problems
83.2%	73.4% agree We have a moral duty to protect all God's creatures from extinction
82.6%	60.4% agree America needs to take the lead on global warming, not drag its feet
77.6%	51.0% agree I'm willing to do volunteer work as part of a commitment to help save the planet
75.5%	71.8% agree It is our sacred obligation to care for God's creation
71.5%	55.4% agree We need solar and wind power for global warming, not coal and nuclear
Cultural Creatives	Whole US – on our relationship to the planet
96.5%	87.1% agree We need to treat the planet as a living system
90.9%	75.4% agree People need to work for the good of the planet, for it is our only home
86.1%	70.5% agree I see myself as a citizen of Planet Earth as well as an American
85.9%	68.1% agree At this time in history we need to see this is all one planet and one humanity
85.2%	67.8% agree I agree with those ecologists who see Earth as a giant living organism

Why are these results so different than standard opinion polls? Simply that the survey was designed to ask people something more than the superficial factoids of top of the mind questions, and go deeper into what is really important in their lives. The context was more than "what have I been thinking about lately?" Rather, they saw a whole range of statements from climate change

denial to strong advocacy for climate action, all side by side. When people get questions in a coherent, meaningful way, not in isolated polling statements that lack much context, they see an issue in more fullness and can consider what its significance is to them. Sure enough, their values came to the fore. So, the response was huge—and quite unprecedented. By contrast, all the climate change denial statements using the arguments in corporate-funded right wing media got agreement down at the 10-20% levels. Climate crisis is in the background of what people know is important, but they do not yet see it as urgent. It's rather like the subject of life insurance: If the issue is not currently biting them, they'll put off the hard thinking until another day.

Though Cultural Creatives are one-third of Americans they are half of the opinion leaders on social and political issues like these. They are both better informed, and very involved in social movements and good causes. This shows the effect of their growing influence for thirty years.

Right here I want to counter a false stereotype conveyed by the US media: the idea that that such activists have no inner life, and spiritual people are dropouts. For the last 20 years values research shows that there are strong positive correlations between social and environmental concerns on the one hand and spiritual and personal growth concerns on the other—and also acting on any of them. The Cultural Creatives lead this pattern. The stereotype is about Modern conservative cynicism, and leftist secularism, not about reality. The single issue people are Moderns, not Cultural Creatives. The new values long for integration, and life as a whole person.

In general, our impressions of the world are formed by a mainstream media that speaks for Modern culture as its advocate. For mass media are the ideological gatekeepers of Modernist worldviews, from neo-liberal right to neo-marxian left. Only with the appearance of the Internet and the ability to get news and interpretation from the bottom up, and from other countries, is it finally obvious that the Modernist worldview is breaking up, and alternatives are already here. The climate crisis and ecological sustainability are a powerful case in point, for they mean that the Modernist paradigm of unending economic growth cannot continue on a finite planet. If we pursue that we will go the way of every unsustainable species in evolutionary history—extinct. So the point to the emerging culture is simply that it is steadily growing as a culturally creative wave of change that responds to failures in Modern culture.

The practical importance of this values research

Values research is the best way to predict who will lead (and how many will follow) on creating the new ways of life for an ecologically sustainable civilization. It's asking what new kinds of house-car-or-vacation people would be willing to buy if they change to greener lifestyles, who uses organic food or alternative health care, who will agree to such things as various forms of energy or carbon tax, or who will vote for a new kind of political figure like Obama. The way to do this is to use values in combination with lifestyle data that shows styles of actual use of products and services, and what each means to them. What works best is to segment the population into kinds of consumers or voters, and do it twice: The first part is values groupings by values subcultures: 'values as life priorities.' The second part is lifestyle groupings for each kind of product or service, including: what that kind of product or service should be able to do in the life of a household (e.g., the style and use of their house, what they need from transportation, food tastes and needs); what a life change means and how to do it in a practical sense; what they are willing to do for the larger good/for their country/for the planet; or what it means to them to vote for a darker-skinned, eloquent, new style of leader.

Values predict well to any choices that are symbolically loaded, that strongly affect your family and your life, or are very complex, so that they are things you are likely to discuss with friends or ask their opinions about. And all of those are also affected by culture. So the kinds of houses, cars, vacation travel, ethnic or organic food, and 'green' products people buy all are best predicted by that combination of values, and the very particular way you use your house, car, etc. This kind of analysis gives a huge improvement in our ability to say how much each kind of household will change over to a more ecologically sustainable way of life. These all differ by subculture—Traditionals, Moderns and Cultural Creatives—so you can convince most of the people of each subculture to change their behavior to by a different values-based appeal. And that's why it pays to do this research on values and lifestyles.

The planetary importance of this values research

Over the past few years, in the US and across Western Europe and Japan, a set of independent surveys by different research teams, has found that Cultural Creatives are 33-37% of adults, averaging 35%. What goes with that research finding is a parallel realization: This is an emerging planetary culture. The values and worldviews of Cultural Creatives all around the planet are much more similar to each other than they are to other people of their own particular countries. The emerging planetary values and worldviews are converging across nations to create a 'trans-modern' culture. That is, it can cut across the rancorous conflicts and divisions among peoples and religions to integrate modern and traditional values with something new that's still in process, still emerging. It's a wiser culture, one that supports the people more than elites. It's a surprising new basis for planetary integration, and for creating a sustainable world.

We are getting a surprising picture of convergence that cuts right across the nationalisms that we grew up with, and which still dominate the news, and international confrontations of today. But this picture is how a leading edge of the people see matters, not how the dominant culture of Modernity pictures them, for those governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations often reflect a dying era. The new picture is based on the robust rhetoric of numbers based on data, not the hollow rhetoric of obsolete political philosophies and self-serving ideologies. New numbers placed into a better picture help make better rhetoric than we've been getting lately. For completely contrary to what the mainstream media says, these numbers establish that most Americans are catching up to the Europeans and Japanese, and losing their myopia at the same time that they face up to bigger issues. A large majority of Americans already 'get' the problem of climate catastrophe, even if conservative politicians and business leaders don't (or refuse to acknowledge it). And they are emotionally ready to take up the issue of a larger planetary perspective. The data doesn't say they have practical ideas on what to do yet, but rather that it is okay to put such things on the national agenda—and to have a planetary agenda.

Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* describes the global climate crisis as an unprecedented threat to our civilization. And Americans are responding to the huge advertising campaign that accompanied Gore's work, as well as a drumbeat of bad climate change news. The most important values concerns they expressed, apart from jobs and the recession, and the need for

national health care, are for ecological sustainability. They are worrying about, and longing for, a positive response to the looming planetary climate crisis. In complete contrast to opinion polls, where these longer term issues don't normally break through into conscious concerns, the American concerns about ecology and the planet were in the 70-80% range in March of 2008.

It's also important to notice that our survey also showed that 71% of Americans now see themselves as citizens of planet Earth as well as Americans. There is movement in the collective consciousness toward planetary awareness, planetary concerns, and not just globalization of an economic kind, but planetary integration, at precisely the same moment in history when the whole planet is threatened by climate crisis.

Afternote: One year later 5 different national opinion polls caught up to the climate change opinions shown in this survey. All they had to do was ask the questions differently...

- Paul H. Ray –