

New York Times bestselling author

VAN JONES

**HOW WE
CAME APART
★
HOW WE COME
TOGETHER**

SIGNED
COPY

**BEYOND THE
MESSY TRUTH**

Beyond the Messy Truth is a work of nonfiction.

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Great Faiths to their worst elements, constituents, and crimes—and then dismissing all other facts and features. It is not just a stupid political strategy. At a moral level, it is a form of blindness and bigotry that is beneath all of us.

My great hope, my prayer, is that a critical mass of progressives can agree on two basic premises. Number one: Any progressive approach to “faith in politics” that ignores the awful crimes of religiously inspired people is dishonest, inauthentic, and can never liberate people. Number two: At the same time, any approach that fails to honor and embrace the positive contributions of religiously inspired people is also wrongheaded. Worse, it foolishly and needlessly shuts progressives off from our own history, achievements, and present sources of vital support.

3. RESPECT ALL AMERICANS

It is easy to point out the many ways that Trump disrespects huge sections of our country. The list of groups he has openly and unapologetically offended—from American POWs to Mexican immigrants to disabled people to women—is too long to reproduce here. But we progressives have done our share of offending, in ways that we sometimes don’t even realize are insulting. Indeed, it is easy for us to point fingers at the right, confident that we have cornered the market in knowing how to show sensitivity to experiences of diverse people. But our own brand of elitism blinds us to the fact that we have become notorious for saying the most outrageous, biased, and offensive things about the very people we criticize for intolerance: conservative voters in the red states. The contempt is so thick and omnipresent that we sometimes don’t even see it.

Here’s an example. Liberals often lament: “How can poor white people vote for Republicans? They get tricked every time into voting against their own economic self-interest. How can we better educate them?”

The implication is that voting against one's economic interest is stupid—and that only ignorant people would do something so dumb. What is wrong with “these people”?

But do you want to know the group of white people that most consistently votes against its own “economic self-interest”? Rich white liberals! They vote to pay higher taxes to fund social programs they don't need and will likely never use. They are choosing to literally lose money out of their own pockets, without getting any financial benefit in return. In other words, they are voting against their own economic self-interest.

Notice, however, that nobody thinks that kind of choice makes wealthy progressives stupid. To the contrary: We think it makes them awesome. Rich liberals say, “My values are more important than my money. There are things that matter to me for which I am willing to sacrifice my own wealth.”

And we applaud them for placing their moral values over their money.

Why, then, don't we apply the same standard when lower-income people make the same kind of choice?

For many conservative voters, the questions of taxes and social programs are not just financial issues but profoundly moral ones. They implicate deeply held values. My conservative blue-collar buddies tell me: “I don't want the government going over to some rich man's house, robbing that man, and then coming over to my house and offering me the money they just stole. That's not right. Let a man keep what he earns, and let me keep what I earn. Also, I don't want the government trying to bribe me or my family into being dependent on them or anybody. I'm trying to raise my kids right, and these government programs are out there undermining my parenting. What if my kids don't listen to me and they decide to go out there and get on drugs, or drop out of school, or have four kids they can't afford? I say: Let life teach them a good lesson. I don't want the government taking taxpayer money and bailing

them out if they make dumb choices. Let them struggle; let them learn; let them take responsibility. They need to figure out the importance of working hard, saving money, being smart. For God's sake, don't be a damned fool and then go begging the government to save you."

This is not a stupid argument. I come at the issues differently, of course, as someone who supports a strong social safety net. But this more conservative view represents a considered and consistent position, worthy of respect. Lower-income conservatives are making the same kind of argument that rich liberals are making. They are willing to make monetary sacrifices to answer the call of their fundamental values. For liberals, those values are more about the common good and enlightened self-interest. For conservatives, those values are more about the importance of independence and personal responsibility. But both sides rightfully see their voting behavior as needing to reflect more than just a vulgar calculation about their immediate pocketbook needs. If one side deserves respect, then so does the other.*

Of course, respecting our opponent's argument doesn't mean we have to just accept it and give in. It doesn't mean we shouldn't argue passionately about the best approach to taxes or spending especially in a society as complex as ours, with the stakes as high as they are. In fact, we should disagree and debate. Debate is the lifeblood of democracy, after all. Disagreement is a good thing—even heated disagreement. Only in a dictatorship does everybody

* I want to acknowledge that the truth is always messy. Some right-wingers are especially extreme in their opposition to social-welfare programs because they think "lazy, undeserving" nonwhites are mooching off the system. At the same time, some liberals are willing to pay higher taxes to help poor people in the abstract, but they would fight to keep lower-income people from moving in next door (as some wealthy liberals in California's Marin County are working to block affordable housing in their enclave). Issues are complicated; motives can be both mixed and multiple. My point here is that it is not fair or smart for progressives to always assume that a lower-income white person who supports the GOP agenda is doing it solely out of ignorance or malice. We need to continually remind ourselves that honest, intelligent people can disagree with us for reasons that are honorable.

have to agree. In a democracy, nobody has to agree. That's called *freedom*. It's the whole point of America. But at the base of too many of our public discussions sits the same destructive assumption: I'm *right*. And you're *wrong*. We proceed on both sides as if our side is grounded in "the Truth" and the other side is always insane and delusional. And some version of this flawed concept has become the default setting throughout American political discourse. It is one thing to say, "I disagree with you because we have different values and priorities." It's quite another to say, "I disagree with you because you are an uneducated idiot—a pawn—and a dupe." The prevalence of the latter set of arguments is why the Democratic Party stinks of elitism.

Here's another liberal favorite: "How can we argue with conservatives? They don't believe in facts anymore—only 'alternative facts.' At least, liberals believe in science. Right-wingers don't!"

I understand the source of liberal exasperation here. Even though any high school student can reproduce the greenhouse-gas effect in a laboratory beaker, the majority of U.S. conservatives reject the overwhelming scientific consensus that humans are disrupting the earth's climate. Conservative defiance on this issue jeopardizes the ability of future generations to live on this planet. It's infuriating to liberals, and it is alarming to everyone who wants to keep our only planetary home habitable by humans.

But let's be honest: All humans have a natural tendency to pick and choose information, anecdotes, and even scientific conclusions that fit with our interests and preferences. Liberals do it, too. For example, a conservative friend once asked me what I thought about "scientific studies" he had seen that purported to document "fetal pain"—or the extent to which a human fetus suffers when it is aborted. My blood pressure immediately shot through the roof. As a strong supporter of a woman's right to choose abortion, I immediately attacked those claims as junk science, cranked out for partisan purposes. But if I am going to be honest, I had not looked

were willing to turn a blind eye when President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched more than ten times the number of drone strikes as George W. Bush, resulting in the death of thousands of civilians, including children. The Iranian American poet Solmaz Sharif wrote her stunning poem “Drone,” a post-2016 favorite at resistance gatherings across the country, in response to Barack Obama’s drone strikes—not Trump’s.

I am not arguing that any of this is right, on either side. Nor am I trying to absolve conservatives of their sins against science or the earth. My only point is that we all suffer from biases and willful blind spots. Progressives like to pretend that our side is noble, wise, and Spock-like in our devotion to reason, whereas the other side is full of crazy, irrational people. This posture makes liberalism toxic to half of the country. While we should challenge conservatives for cherry-picking studies that affirm and confirm their own policy preferences, we need to acknowledge that such behavior is a universal human problem—not a special character flaw that afflicts only one side of the partisan divide.

It is elitist to crack jokes that imply that all Republicans are insane. Or uneducated. Or bigoted. It is elitist to assume that anyone who disagrees with us is either a bigot or a dummy or both. It is elitist to refer to the red states as Dumb-fuck-istan. Expressing pity, contempt, or disdain for red-state voters has to stop being the price of admission into the club of liberalism.

If we seriously want to solve any of the mounting problems we face—or even just be better partisans—we need some spaces where we listen to one another and show up humble enough to accept the fact that we might have something to learn. We need to have conversations that proceed according to a different set of operating instructions. The unspoken imperative should be this: I *want* to understand you. And I *want* you to understand me—whether or not we ever agree.

Big disagreements are fine. It’s *how* we disagree—with our big

egos, our big agendas, and our big attachments to smashing the other side to bits—that is ruining American politics.

We can disagree with conservatives. And we should. But we should stop disrespecting them.

4. FIX THE PARTY

Democrats spent a lot of time laughing at Republicans in 2016.

We saw the GOP as crippled by a three-way split between moderates, negative populists, and Tea Party extremists. We joked that their primary debates—with more than a dozen candidates—looked like reality-TV competitions or game shows. Trying to find the best language to describe their troubles, we threw around terms like “clown car” and “train wreck.”

Well, now it looks like we should’ve focused more on our own challenges. Hiding in plain sight was a very disturbing fact. Despite Barack Obama’s inspirational victories in 2008 and 2012, and even during his historic presidency, the Democratic Party had been dying a quiet death. Reflecting on the aftermath of Trump’s victory, the *Observer’s* Michael Sainato noted:

Since 2008, Democrats went from 58 seats in the Senate to 48 seats, 257 seats in the House to 194 seats, 29 governors to 16 governors, and 4,082 state legislative seats to 3,129. At the state level, Democrats are at their weakest point since 1920. Across the board, Democrats are at their weakest electoral position since the Civil War.

Nicole Narea and Alex Shephard wrote in *The New Republic*:

In November [2016], the party lost control of state legislatures in Iowa, Minnesota, and Kentucky. The state senate in Connecticut, which had been firmly blue, is now evenly split. Re-

nothing at all—the silence of indifference. Except for a few brave Mormon voices, I rarely hear conservative voices defending—and proudly identifying with—Muslim American families whose values align so closely with their own. Why is this the case?

This is an honest question. Families like the Yousseffs embody the American dream and model the virtues of the conservative American family. Why, then, do conservatives support a president who openly threatens their fundamental rights?

DEAR CONSERVATIVES, I'M NOT here to scold anyone but instead to spark a meaningful conversation. As I've said countless times, I believe that this country needs both liberals *and* conservatives. And we need both traditions at their best and highest expressions, especially now. We might have different ideas for how to approach a crisis, but of this I am sure: We need the best ideas from all sides to get to the best solution. Our constitution is a product of passionate disagreement among strong advocates for different positions and constituencies. Innovation does not come from insular agreement but from individuals with different ideas coming together to solve problems using all the tools and ideas at their disposal. As we tackle our country's most pressing problems, we need intelligent, dedicated people on both sides.

Of course, conservatism in America is as multifaceted as the millions of individuals who make it up. In a two-party system, Democrats and Republicans both struggle to find coherence and unity within our big tents. But conservatives in America share some important common values: a belief in a smaller role for centralized government and a larger role for local or individualized choice, an emphasis on religious liberty and protection for constitutional rights, a commitment to the nuclear family as a critical institution for encouraging the stability of our society and the growth of our young citizens, a concern with fiscal responsibility

and prudent budgeting, and a deep pride in our nation's great political institutions and cultural traditions.

These values are fundamental to America's past, present, and future. Liberals may not want to admit it, but we need the challenge and counterbalance of the conservative viewpoint. Conservatives view the role of government differently and prefer a different set of tools to solve problems. But the tension can be useful. For example, liberals want to root out injustice and discrimination against historically marginalized people, so we come up with legislation. Then conservatives warn us about the downsides and the dangers—the unanticipated consequences, the unexpected costs, and the bureaucratic inefficiencies that may make a mockery of any new social program. The resulting debate can lead to a better program—or no program at all, if the original proposal was ill-conceived. Liberals want a federal government strong enough to protect our nation's most vulnerable citizens, but sometimes we need reminders of the power and sometimes the primacy of local initiatives. Conservatives generally do a better job than do liberals of upholding the importance of community, churches, and families. Yes, even as liberals try to open doors to different ideas of what a family can look like, conservatives are most passionate in explaining why family matters so much in the first place. Liberals need conservatives to remind us that there may still be important differences between the way boys and girls learn, even while we work to make sure that gender no longer limits what any young person can accomplish. Conservatives ask important questions like, "How much does this cost? Who is going to pay for it? And why should the government be doing this in the first place?" Frustrating though these queries may be for liberals, principled conservative opposition can force progressives to improve programs or even to seek solutions outside the federal government—within states, towns, churches, businesses, neighborhoods, and even families. The fact that conservatives fight to withhold federal dol-

lars can sometimes force creative solutions that—over the long term—expand the menu of options for effective change. When advanced from a place of high principles, the challenge from conservatives actually helps keep the progressive cause more lean, honest, and innovative.

It may be hard to admit, but conservatives need liberals just as much. Conservatives want policies that bolster economic liberty and free-market enterprise, but America cannot be great if we do only things on which corporations can make a nice profit. You need liberals to point out key differences between private goods and the public good—and to raise questions about whether private companies are always in the best position to meet the needs of all citizens, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, who cannot pay. Conservatives want to limit the size of government, but you need liberals to remind you that clean air, clean water, safe products, inspected food, nonlethal workplaces, and smog-free cities are all products of government protection—which your constituents like quite a bit.

My point is: We need each other. I will keep working to beat you on Election Day. But I don't want you to stop being conservative. I'm not trying to convince you to come around to "my side" of things. What America needs in the age of Trump is not fewer of you but instead more and better conservatives with the conviction to stay true to your core values.

Where to begin? Let's stick with the same areas of work that I have suggested to my fellow liberals: by honoring your traditions, upholding religious liberty, respecting all Americans, fixing your party, and, finally, by turning your attention to solving real problems.

1. HONOR YOUR TRADITIONS

Conservatives have traditionally shown deep respect for our country's political institutions. You value and respect the vision laid out

but the broader knowledge of how racism has consistently infiltrated and distorted Christianity has been lost to time. Over and over, religious doctrine has been used to grant moral authority to shameful, immoral acts.

The lesson here is not, as some liberals are quick to assume, that organized religion is evil. Nor is any of this history meant as an attack on Christianity. For me to do so would be to attack my own faith and family. My point is to remind us of how any faith can be bent and twisted into a shadow of itself—a force used to exclude and dominate rather than to liberate, inspire, and lift people up. Let this history serve to remind us that religion has been used to dismiss demands for equality. Today, some believers use religion to justify withholding equal rights from women and members of the LGBTQ community. They make claims about what is natural and ordained by God that perfectly parallel the claims made by defenders of slavery and members of the KKK who advocated for racial segregation. It was shaky moral ground to stand on in the past, and it's the same shaky ground now. I can only hope that conservatives, with your deep and appropriate wariness about human fallibility, will remember this history.

If you decide that some religions deserve more freedom to thrive than others, you make an opponent of those you exclude—Muslims like the Yousseffs, who share your values and need people like you to stand up for their commitments to family, faith, and individual responsibility. It would be morally consistent and politically wise for conservatives to embrace and defend folks from across all faiths who believe in strong families, personal discipline, work ethic, entrepreneurship, and educational attainment.

3. RESPECT ALL AMERICANS

Sometimes it feels to me as if conservatism today has been distorted to focus primarily on one group of people. So much of what

now gets called “conservative” is really directed at helping straight white men, who are usually Christian. I have nothing against straight white Christian men—and indeed I reprimand liberals for their self-defeating demonization of this group. But if liberals unfairly condemn white men, conservatives disproportionately lionize them. Liberals can’t blame white guys for every problem in the world, but conservatives need to stop thinking that white guys’ problems are the only problems in the world.

Tribalism, in short, is at risk of taking down conservatism and perhaps America along with it. Millions of Americans of every race, ethnicity, income level, and gender might agree with your policies and proposals on paper; millions more hold personally conservative values. But a lot of right-wing rhetoric and actions chase away hordes of people who might otherwise resonate with most of your agenda. At best, you are leaving votes on the table; more often, you are driving them into the Democratic Party and energizing them against you. I don’t mind that dynamic in the short term, because mistakes like that help Democrats maintain our big, blue, multiracial coalition. But over the long term, this arrangement is terrible for everyone—especially groups like African Americans, who vote 90+ percent for Democrats. When Republicans decide to just write off or forfeit whole groups, it lets Democrats take those same groups for granted. Liberals can win votes with rhetoric rather than results. When there is no real competition for black votes, African Americans are left with two bad choices: get run over by the Republican bus or be stuck in the back of the Democrats’ bus, where we are expected to give massive support in exchange for pitiful outcomes. More competition might lead to better options.

Conversely, true conservatives should want to support citizens across communities, including socially conservative African Americans, LGBTQ individuals seeking legal marriage and adoption rights, women who hold down jobs while giving birth to and

helping to raise our kids, and hardworking immigrants who often fill jobs that no other Americans will perform.

This might surprise you, but a lot of black people would probably be Republicans if the party were not so hostile and toxic. Look at the two strongest institutions in the African American community: the black church and the hip-hop community. The African American community is strongly oriented toward religious worship. Many vital services—daycare, education, care for the sick, and service to the poor—are organized through church communities. If you can get past the often vulgar lyrics, you will discover that hip-hop music fundamentally celebrates hard work, wealth creation, and entrepreneurship. We have been hustling since day one—it's what hip-hop music is all about. Many black voters embrace community, family, and respect for tradition—showing leadership in our churches, schools, civic associations, and workplaces.

But the Republican Party routinely fails to recognize or respect these facts—instead portraying African Americans in conservative media and political messaging as a dysfunctional community of criminals seeking handouts. This is sad but not surprising: Going back to Richard Nixon, some GOP leaders have cynically tried to win white votes by going after programs seen as aiding African Americans. At a human level, our social circles in America remain largely segregated by race. Negative media portrayals of African Americans add to suspicion and hostility. These dynamics combine and create ample opportunity for negative stereotypes to infect people's beliefs. This tendency is well documented and widespread—I see it every day when I talk to liberals who cartoonishly characterize all conservatives as heartless robber barons sitting on a pile of gold or ignorant redneck evangelicals who have no capacity for independent thought. These impressions are distortions rooted in stereotypes, and they are false on both sides.

The Republican Party's worst elements often inflate stereotypes and caricatures that go back centuries. Media personalities

on the conservative network Fox News have time and again maligned African American elected officials and community leaders. Bill O'Reilly once deemed African Americans unfit for jobs because "they're ill-educated and have tattoos on their foreheads." Tucker Carlson referred to black civil-rights leaders Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson as "hustlers and pimps." Even my friend Eric Bolling once joked that Congresswoman Maxine Waters smokes crack. It is not terribly surprising, then, that there is a correlation between Fox News viewership and indicators of racial resentment on surveys.

African Americans have heard this ugly stuff all our lives. Too often, I hear right-wing pundits suggest that black folks vote Democrat because they are lazy and looking for a handout. They forget that the vast majority of African Americans get up every morning and go to work (unless they were on the overnight shift, in which case they might sleep in). Not only do tens of millions of African Americans work, we often do the worst jobs or hold down multiple jobs, with low pay and inadequate benefits.

Of course, there are cases where citizens go unemployed for long stretches of time because they lack skills or live in areas where jobs aren't available. This problem doesn't hurt just African Americans. Think back to Bryce Shoemaker, who has been out of work for more than four years and whose son is struggling with addiction issues. Commerce and jobs have dried up in his town, but he cannot afford to move elsewhere or go back to school to get trained in a trade that requires new skills. The same pattern holds in many African American neighborhoods. Obviously there are tough pockets of intergenerational poverty in both urban centers and rural communities. But Republicans give away millions of votes simply by repeatedly—overtly and subtly—portraying black people as the face of poverty, crime, and dysfunction. When it comes to the black vote, it seems the Republicans never miss an opportunity—to miss an opportunity.

African American working-class folks and white working-class folks have a tremendous amount in common. Both parties should do more to offer opportunities for education and employment in the blighted pockets of our nation. Democrats have too often failed on both fronts, taking the black vote for granted and ignoring the needs of the white working class. These failures contributed greatly to Hillary Clinton's defeat, and they are a wake-up call to many of us. Republicans should wake up, too. As long as race prejudice is allowed to highjack conservatism, the party of Lincoln will never be the party of color-blind meritocracy, which it claims every day that it wants to be.

Another conservative value is the belief that the nuclear family, with parents committed to each other through marriage, is the essential building block of American stability and success. Marriage rates have declined in recent decades, but the divorce rate has skyrocketed. This worries conservatives. Additionally, there are thousands of children born each year to parents who cannot provide for them. Many conservatives have adopted children, because they believe strongly in the sanctity of life and in providing care for all God's children, not merely their own biological offspring. Conservatives frequently invoke the need to preserve the institution of marriage and nuclear family, as well as the moral importance of adoption.

There is one group in America that has fought tooth and nail for the sacrament of marriage and the needs of adopted kids: the LGBTQ community. Too often, conservatives look at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans and see them as the opponent. Instead, you might see them as one of the few communities still willing to fight for the concept of marriage. They are the biggest champions of the right to adopt and start a family. Some of you see this and have shown up to advocate for LGBTQ allies. When I talk with you one-on-one, you tell me about your friend or relative who came out and how you love them and have embraced

them. Yet even in cases where you hold these personal convictions, you still stand behind candidates who openly condemn LGBTQ rights and work to discriminate against individuals fighting for the right to start a family. When you refuse to speak up in public, or when you vote for candidates who mock and threaten members of the LGBTQ community, you miss an opportunity to defend the institution of marriage and help kids in need get adopted.

Immigrants who come to this country to seek a better life believe more strongly in the American dream—in the promise of economic enterprise and hard work—than any group of citizens I know. Here are communities of people who, without complaint, do some of the hardest jobs in America. They serve with distinction in our military, putting their lives on the line to protect us. They pick fruit and vegetables for more than twelve hours per day in the hot sun and cold rain. They clean our businesses and restaurants while the rest of us are asleep. They care for our children, serving as role models, chefs, and educators for our kids while we are at work. They take care of our sick and elderly loved ones, patiently administering medication, carrying our aging parents to and from the bathroom, and making sure that they are getting the nourishment they need. They build buildings, fix homes, and repair cars. They bring irreplaceable knowledge and skills to our technology companies, filling roles that we cannot fill with our own citizens. Silicon Valley—and the computer I am using to write this book—would not exist without the zeal, ingenuity, and diligence of immigrant workers.

Most of the immigrants described above dream of a day when they can call themselves American citizens. In many cases, they have waited years and years to come here. In other cases, they are willing to risk their own lives—and the lives of their families—because they believe that America is the place where dreams come true and hard work is rewarded. If conservatives want allies

to foster a rebirth of American patriotism, you need look no further than the immigrant communities that you have long stigmatized. Again, common ground is there for the taking.

Hard work comes in so many forms: in long hours in a coal mine, in the CEO who wakes up at 5:00 A.M. to check the business alerts, and in the teacher who volunteers to coach the debate club or form a math team—just to make sure her students are getting the best possible education. But a great deal of hard work goes unseen or unrecognized—the work of parents, and in particular of mothers. Many mothers work to bring home paychecks to help their family survive and then pull a full second shift as household managers, taking care of their families and helping them thrive. Fathers and husbands need to do their fair share, but our society should give women more respect, and our laws should protect them, not punish their choice to become mothers. Conservatives recognize the value of a parent who is dedicated to her child's growth, health, education, and well-being. During the first months of a child's life, a baby is wholly dependent on a parent for food, diaper changes, physical contact, and emotional support. We know that babies who receive good care from their parents fare much better for the rest of their lives. Yet we have inadequate laws in place to help families, especially families with working moms, give this essential care to their children. In many cases, mothers are forced to choose between earning a living and raising a child. A pro-family party worthy of the name would immediately pass laws to give American mothers and families more options. Fortunately, Ivanka Trump understands this issue and has become a champion for solutions. When the rest of the GOP follows her lead, the economy, the conservative movement, and (most important) our families will all be better off.

It is essential that conservatives do everything they can to stand up for the basic rights of women. They comprise 50 percent of the population and still face serious challenges. The current

“The Student Code of Conduct is real important here at Martin,” he continued. “It’s one of our most sacred documents.”

Here it came. The ax.

“But the First Amendment is more important,” Ogg said. “And you are within your rights to publish anything you want in this country. You just need to do a better job of making it clear to your readers and your advertisers that this is not an official university publication.” Reaching for the phone, he said, “Let me see what I can do.”

Ogg worked with other professors to keep us from getting expelled. I kept my scholarship. And we continued to publish the paper, off and on, until the week I graduated.

YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED TO know that Dr. E. Jerald Ogg, Jr., is a white, conservative Republican. I am not. But he was my first mentor, and to this day he remains one of my most trusted advisers.

It might seem unlikely that someone like me—a young progressive entering into the hotheaded phase of my lefty-est years—would come to admire, love, and trust a GOP mentor. But then again, I am my father’s son. I often watched the evening news on the couch with my father, and listened intently to his explanations and opinions. He had a first-class bullshit detector and he interjected with perfectly timed, rapid-fire political critique throughout every broadcast. He would have made a hell of a pundit. In his eyes, a good man was a good man—and a no-good man was a no-good man—no matter what he looked like, where he prayed, or how he voted.