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Review of *Welcome to the Homeland: A Journey to the Rural Heart of America's Conservative Revolution* By Brian Mann

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Welcome to the Homeland: A Journey to the Rural Heart of America's Conservative Revolution. By Brian Mann. Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2006. 288 pp. \$24.95.

Brian Mann's *Welcome to the Homeland* weaves together astute observations of the American political system with a personalized journey into the conservative base of American politics. Mann's thesis is that the political divisions in America can be best characterized by an urban versus rural divide that has evolved over the past eighty or so years. Mann refers to rural voters as homelander who have increasingly turned to the Republican Party in pursuit of their version of an America with nineteenth-century traditional values. City folk, meanwhile, are dubbed metros, and their increasingly cosmopolitan, multiethnic, and secular worldview has led them to turn to the Democratic Party.

Unlike Thomas Frank in *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, Mann does not argue that the Republican Party is duping homelander voters by paying homage to traditional values. Instead, he outlines how the Republican Party strategy of building a rural base takes full advantage of the rural biases inherent in the design of American political institutions, including the Electoral College and the U.S. Senate, which disproportionately provide more relative political influence to low population states.

Historically, the biased design advantaging small states mattered little, but the development of a two-party system with bases divided among rural versus urban voters has contributed to a divided polis. Mann also clearly outlines that homelander do not maintain a "false consciousness" about economic issues, and they do hold Republican feet to the fire when their values are not pursued. Thus, Mann conceives of a homelander movement that seeks to take back American politics, largely through controlling the Republican Party, but also Democrats with the right stripes. Indeed, major players in the Democratic Party have and still do depend on homelander support (e.g., Senate leaders Tom Daschle and Harry Reid).

Mann outlines his thesis in chapters that draw from his personal journey with his brother and their two sons through the American heartland. Through this journey, and Mann's conversations with locals and his brother, we learn of the central differences in the worldviews of metros and homelander. But Mann juxtaposes these personalized chapters with chapters that highlight historical voting trends, shifts in public opinion, and the basic design of the American political system. The combination of storytelling and empirical evidence provides a compelling case for his thesis.

Mann has all the skills of a well-honed journalist, but is also able to present social science evidence and concepts in a manner that is highly accessible to the layperson. He's produced a great book for casual as well as serious observers of American politics, and perhaps a must-read for his so-called metros.

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