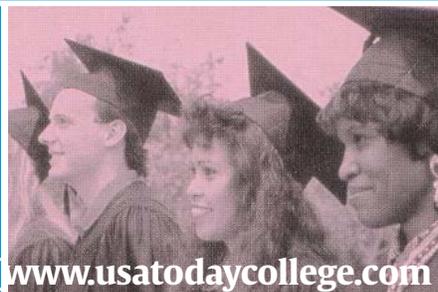


**Collegiate  
Case  
Study**



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**Behind its united front,  
nation divided as ever**

By Jill Lawrence

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**Values, votes, points of  
view separate towns –  
and nation**

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Andrew Kohut**

Director, The Pew Research Center

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# One nation, divided

Special report

## Part I: The “values gap”

One nation, united or divided? Americans are all over the map on important issues ranging from gun control to politics to religion. Yet, in spite of all the diverse opinions, we remain one nation. We have the ability to rally around the flag and the presidency and present a united front. What is it about the fabric of these United States that allows us to disagree, vigorously and sometimes even angrily, and still come together as a nation with a common purpose? What enables us to unite when other countries are violently torn apart by their differences?

Cover story

# Behind its united front, nation divided as ever

Terror attacks changed USA's mood, but not its attitudes

By Jill Lawrence  
USA TODAY

When George W. Bush took office, half the country cheered and the other half seethed. Now he enjoys

near-universal respect for his handling of the war against terrorism. But behind his high marks is a nation still profoundly divided by values, geography and politics.



By Web Bryant, USA TODAY  
2000 presidential election map

Next:  
**Religion**

An eight-month USA TODAY

examination of life on each side of the “values gap” has found that terrorism has changed America's mood but not its underlying attitudes. Early presidential candidates and contenders in this year's gubernatorial and congressional elections face the same contentious issues that split the

USA TODAY Snapshots®

**Will economic policy help  
USA fight terrorism?**

Americans are divided on whether economic policy will help the United States gain allies in the war on terrorism.

Economic policy will attract allies **46%**

Economic policy will not attract allies **41%**

Unsure **13%**

Source: RoperASW marketing research firm survey of 1,000 adults Feb. 15-17. Margin of error: ±3 percentage points.

By William Risser and Suzy Parker, USA TODAY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2002

nation in the 2000 election: religion, abortion, guns and the role of government.

USA TODAY looked at the national "values gap" through the prism of two towns, one on each side of the split. Extensive interviews and polling in Franklin, Tenn., and Montclair, N.J., found that democracy in all its chaotic diversity is in robust health. But they also illuminated the deep divides revealed by the last presidential race.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

**Montclair, N.J.:** Residents watch attack Sept. 11

Recent polls, including a new USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll, show the country remains evenly divided on politics and fractured on values issues:

- ▶ Percentages of people who say they plan to vote Republican or Democratic in the elections this fall are about equal: 44% for the GOP, 42% for Democrats.

- ▶ About half of Americans are satisfied and half are dissatisfied with the country's moral climate and policies on abortion and guns.

- ▶ Four in 10 say they favor letting gay people form civil unions, while half oppose.

"Below the veneer of unity is still a deeply divided nation," says analyst Stuart

Rothenberg, who publishes a non-partisan political newsletter. "You've got people who see the government as generally trampling on their liberties and values. You've got others who look to the government for social and economic justice and protection" from corporate abuses, pollution and gun violence.

In a new political world, upended by terrorism and recession, do these differences on values still matter? The answer, USA TODAY found, is yes. In extensive interviews and polls, most voters in Franklin and Montclair made it clear that they only trusted and listened to politicians who shared their values and their way of life.

"Voters don't go to the polls with issue checklists," Rothenberg agrees. "They're looking for somebody they can trust, somebody they're comfortable with."

Both parties expect the 2002 elections to be very tight,

and no one at this point is predicting a Bush landslide in 2004. The virtual stalemate means politicians must find a way to connect with voters on both sides of the values gap.

"Winning candidates at the presidential level and even at local and state levels have to draw the swing voters to their sides," says pollster Andrew Kohut, director of the non-partisan Pew Research Center. He says that means luring them away from their natural leanings on values and party preference, which now are "dead-even."

### The red and the blue

A color-keyed map of the 2000 presidential election results showed a vast red heartland, representing counties won by Republican Bush, and patches of blue indicating the largely urban and minority counties won by Democrat Al Gore. Franklin, 15 miles south of Nashville, was red. Montclair, 12 miles west of Manhattan, was blue. The towns are separated by 750 miles, a time zone and differences that the Sept. 11 attacks did not erase.

Some contrasts between these two sides of America are as obvious as what people eat and how their neighborhoods look. Others are as deep as their immutable views of sin, morality and the right to bear arms.

The terrorist attacks put almost all Americans in a compassionate frame of mind and reminded them of what they love about their country. In Franklin, people are feeling more kindly toward New Yorkers. Montclair is displaying an emotional, flag-waving patriotism more often associated with the South. But, like the nation, these two towns remain polarized on the bedrock beliefs that influence political choices.

Religion and guns are key predictors of those choices. Exit polls from the last presidential election found that those who go to church often and own guns tended to vote Republican; those who don't usually chose Democrats. The gap is also wide on moral issues stemming from religion. USA TODAY/Gallup Polls of Franklin and Montclair in June and November underscore those findings:



**Franklin, Tenn.:** Banners reflect town's history

# America shows a united face to the world, but divisions grow even deeper

► In Franklin, 64% say they attend church or religious activities once a week or more, compared with 36% in Montclair and 42% nationally. Nearly seven times as many people in Franklin as in Montclair own guns.

► Both before and after the attacks, the towns were at least 30 percentage points apart on how they felt about gay civil rights, the death penalty, illegitimacy and the role of government. After the attacks, they grew even further apart — up to 44 points — on abortion, the need for more gun control and how courts treat minorities.

► Top priorities in Montclair after the attacks included health care and environmental protection. Franklin's top concerns included declining moral values.

► Most in both towns called the country unified, but nearly half said Americans are "greatly divided" on values.

Religion is the wellspring of the culture gap. It's at the root of opposition to abortion and homosexuality in Bush country. It influences how people view government and judge the personal behavior of public figures. It's an engine of diversity in parts of America like Montclair, where religion is often a series of open-ended discussions among people who disagree on issues as basic as whether God exists, and of conformity in areas like Franklin, a town that nourishes people who share conservative religious and cultural views.

A 1999 study by the Pew Research Center found that states normally carried by Republicans in presidential elections and those normally carried by Democrats have grown further apart in the last 15 years on issues of religion, family roles and homosexuality.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

**In Montclair, N.J.:** Dorothy McGann, left, and other gun control supporters march in the Fourth of July parade. She founded a chapter of Ceasefire New Jersey after 4 people died in a shooting at a post office in 1995.



**In Franklin, Tenn.:** Pastors Tom Moucka, left, and Hewitt Spears, right, pray with Dan Pitts, manager of the Christian music group DC Talk, at a meeting of the Empty Hands Fellowship, an interracial minister's group.

Some analysts say the war against terrorism could spawn additional values issues that drive wedges between Americans. One debate simmering now is how much to restrict civil liberties in pursuit of terrorists. Another could develop over how long to fight the war and how far to expand it.

## Images and tendencies

Republican strategist Bill McInturff speculates, cheerfully, that a peace candidate will run in the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries. He

predicts both parties will revert to stereotypes they have been trying to temper in recent years — to use his words, the "kill-the-bad-guys" party (Republicans who tend to favor use of force) and the "root-cause" party (Democrats who tend to look for poverty or other underlying conditions to explain acts like terrorism).

Moderate Democrats, led by Bill Clinton, toiled for years to replace the party's nurturing "mommy" image with more swagger. They promoted tough crime and welfare reforms and a muscular military. Bush, the self-described compassionate conservative, highlighted education and tolerance in 2000 in trying to warm up the GOP's coldly authoritarian "daddy" image. Polls indicate Bush is succeeding, but Democrats are losing ground they gained during the Clinton era.

Democratic strategists Stan Greenberg, James Carville and Bob Shrum say the Sept. 11 attacks create "a moment of opportunity for Democrats." In a memo posted on the Internet, they hint that America's fundamentalist Christians may feel the same discomfort as Afghanistan's Taliban fundamentalists with "the life choices and gender roles at the center of American life."

Ed Goetas, a Republican pollster and strategist, calls that idea "Christian-bashing."

"They directly compare fundamentalist Christians, or conservative Christians, with fundamentalist Muslims," Goetas says. "The implication is very clear that there is a religious intolerance. They're attempting to demonize those people of faith that happen to be conservative. They're basically advocating restarting the culture wars."

Greenberg says "the Taliban have given a bad name to fundamentalism . . . in a political guise." He says he is not criticizing fundamentalist Christians but "political entrepreneurs who try to bring a religious fundamentalism into politics" and impose their beliefs.

This is the kind of conversation some Democrats desperately want to avoid. They are trying to make religious, socially conservative Americans in areas like Franklin feel more welcome in their party.

"We have to be more comfortable with the language of faith and values" and address "broad unease with the moral health of the country," Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., an Orthodox Jew and a 2004 presidential prospect, said at a party gathering last summer.

Democratic Party leaders have launched a rural outreach program that chairman Terry McAuliffe calls a top priority. The Republican Party, meanwhile, is intensively courting Hispanic voters, and some GOP candidates are trying to make inroads in the black community, which votes overwhelmingly Democratic.

Both parties know values issues can be critical in closely divided states. Many analysts say Gore narrowly lost West Virginia and his native Tennessee — and with them, the presidency — because he was perceived as anti-gun.

Democrats call guns a threshold or gatekeeper issue that determines whether voters listen to their

candidates talk about jobs, education and other subjects.

"Rural voters just shut us down if they don't agree with us on guns," says Joe Carmichael, chairman of the Missouri Democratic Party. "We lose them around the first turn of the corner."

In his race for Virginia governor last year, Democrat Mark Warner showed his party how to overcome cultural differences. Republicans reminded voters their candidate opposed abortion. They said Warner believed "people of faith" are "a threat to America." But Warner had courted rural Virginia with a bluegrass campaign jingle and support for gun-owner rights. He won trust, the chance to sell his economic plans, and the election.

### Lessons for 2004

In the 2000 presidential race, Bush and Gore each had trouble winning trust outside his own party base. Much of Middle America did not believe Gore shared its values, polls and interviews show, and urban America felt the same about Bush.

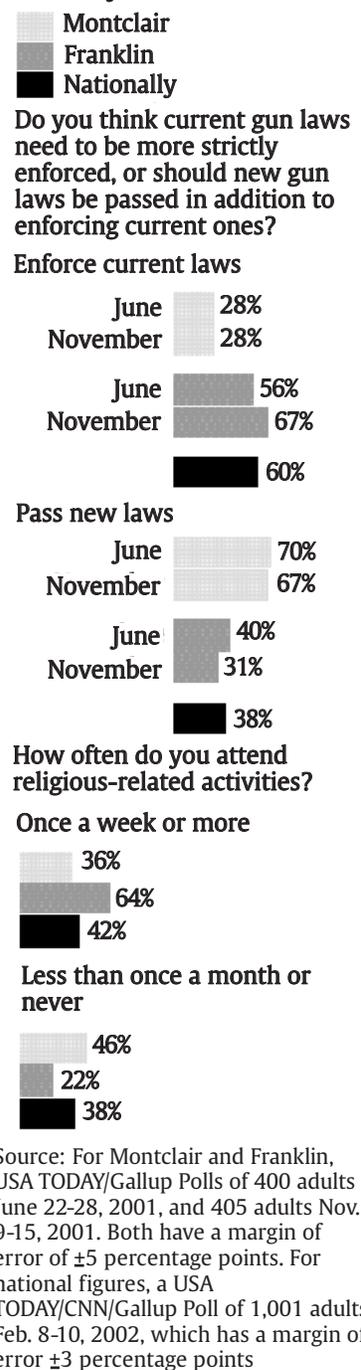
As recently as August, when Bush returned from a month at his Texas ranch, The Washington Post editorial board noted acerbically that he had spent his vacation "celebrating the values of the Heartland, in not so implicit contrast with our own. . . . Those values, he repeated this week, include 'family and faith,' 'neighborliness,' 'the willingness of people to help each other in need.' Which means that we Washingtonians stand for — what, exactly?"

Less than two weeks later, Washington and New York were attacked, and Bush abruptly became everyone's president.

The feel-good unity could sweep him to re-election in 2004, or it could splinter. Some Republicans are talking about turning out evangelical Christians to ensure that Bush wins the

## A 'values gap'

Polls of residents in Franklin, Tenn., and Montclair, N.J. show markedly different views:



popular vote. He lost it last time by a half-million votes as several million evangelicals stayed home. Bush could motivate them by stressing his faith and opposition to abortion. But that could undercut his attempts to win voters and states he lost last time.

For political leaders, there's always tension between stressing controversial values issues to fire up believers and defusing them in an attempt to win broader support. In his State of the Union address, watched on TV by millions, Bush dwelled on unifying themes and reached across the divide.

He talked at length about the war on terrorism that nearly all Americans support. He mentioned "my friend Ted Kennedy" and his work with the liberal Massachusetts senator on education, an issue the whole country holds dear. And Bush highlighted values championed by moderates and liberals, including respect for women and religious tolerance.

Democrats eyeing Bush's job are doing some outreach of their own.

Gore will tour the country with his wife this year to promote their books on American families -- demonstrating his own family values in the process. His 2000 running mate, Lieberman, is advancing ideas that reinforce his identity as a devout, hawkish politician who thinks Hollywood sometimes overdoes sex and violence. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt say their values are reflected in their push for expanded jobless benefits, a higher minimum wage

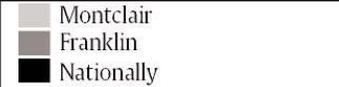
and prescription-drug aid for seniors on Medicare.

Third-term Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., has ready ammunition should anyone think he or his state is too liberal. Ronald Reagan carried Massachusetts twice, he notes, and its property tax revolt was the second in the country, right behind California's. Kerry is a decorated Vietnam veteran and a former prosecutor who describes his record as tough on crime, welfare and federal spending.

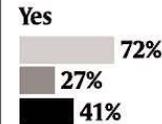
Another potential candidate, freshman Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., grew up around guns, religion and small-town Southern values. He says voters want their leaders to be good spouses and parents and "people of faith," and to show understanding of -- if not agreement with -- their views on guns, abortion and other values issues. "The way you talk about these things matters," Edwards says.

Even as polls show the public continuing to rally behind Bush and the war against terrorism, values issues are back on the campaign trail. Shifting candidate positions on abortion and gun control -- and the issues of trust that such shifts raise -- are front and center in contests for governor in California and senator in North Carolina.

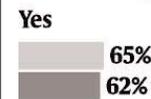
"If you think these values issues are unimportant, just watch the midterm races," says Democrat Will Marshall, head of the centrist Progressive Policy Institute. "Plenty of Republicans will try to make gun control an issue. Plenty of Democrats will try to make choice (on abortion) an issue. We're going to have the same kinds of divides."



**Would you favor a law that allows gay couples to form civil unions?**



**After last year's presidential election, did you think the USA was deeply divided?**

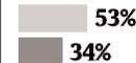


**How about now?**

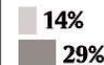


**How much is the USA responsible for the hatred that led to the terrorist attacks?**

**Moderate to large amount**

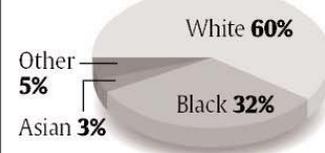


**Not at all**

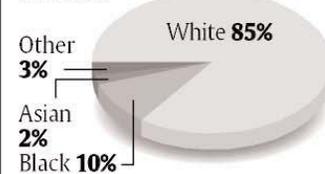


**Race**

**Montclair**



**Franklin**

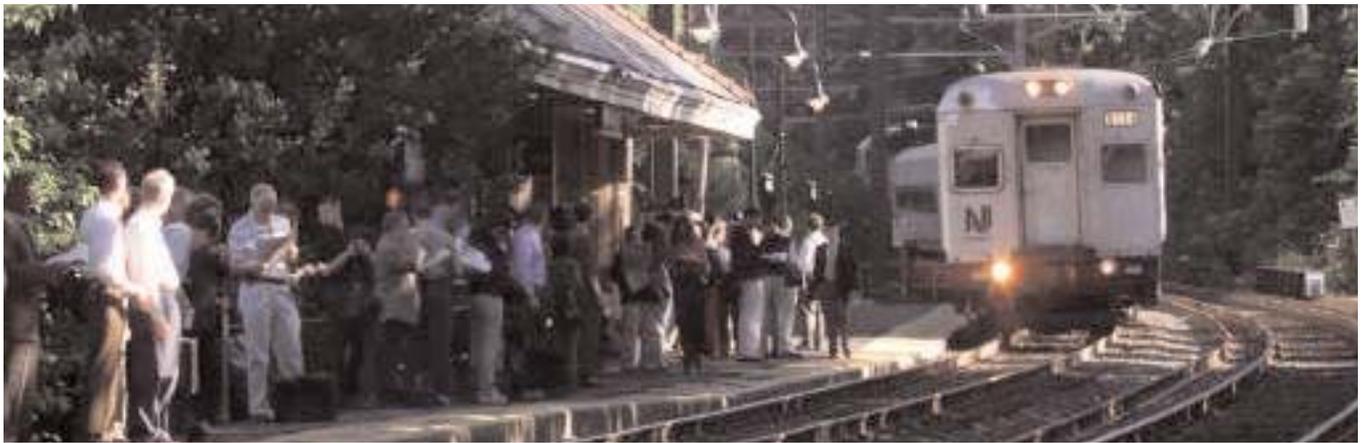


Source: Census Bureau

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all responses are from the November poll. Not all questions were asked nationally.

Source: USA TODAY/Gallup Polls of 400 adults June 22-28, 2001, and 405 adults Nov. 9-15, 2001. Both have a margin of error of ±5 percentage points; for national figures, a USA/TODAY/CNN/Gallup poll of 1,001 adults Feb. 8-10, 2002, which has a margin of error ±3 percentage points.

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2002



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

**Connected to the big-city lifestyle:** Commuters to Manhattan wait at one of the six train stations in Montclair, N.J., a suburb 12 miles west of New York City. Trees will be planted at all six Montclair stations – and at other stations in New Jersey – in honor of those who died in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. Seven Montclair residents were among the dead.

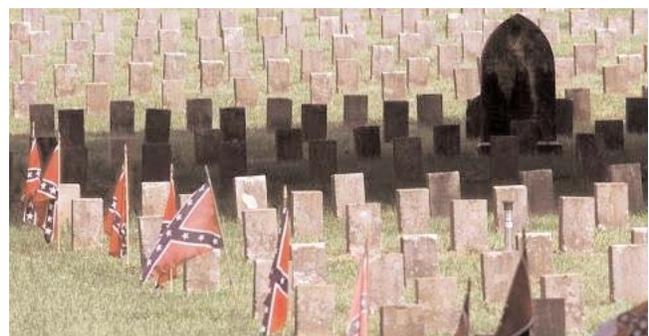
# Values, votes, points of view separate towns – and nation

By Jill Lawrence  
USA TODAY

If you voted for President Bush in 2000, you might well live in a place like Franklin, Tenn., a sprawling Sun Belt suburb with a distinct Bible Belt flavor. Its horse and dairy farms are giving way to subdivisions and strip malls, but its values remain rooted in tradition.

Donna Reed and Fred MacMurray would have seemed right at home in Montclair, N.J., where street after street is lined with big shade trees, well-tended gardens and perfectly painted Victorian and Tudor homes. But the 1950s look belies an urban sensibility that was the common denominator among people who voted for Al Gore in 2000.

Red zone meets blue zone.



**McGavock Confederate Cemetery:** The nation's largest private Confederate cemetery sits beside Historic Carnton Plantation in Franklin. Janet Booker-Davis, a black accountant, says she planned to act as a one-woman truth squad when her daughter visited the plantation on a field trip sponsored by her school. But the guide "gave a balanced view," Booker-Davis says. She adds: "I enjoyed it."

Post-election analysis revealed an America split by conflicting core beliefs on guns, abortion, the role of religion and the role of government. But it's not only heavy ideology that divides us.

How people deal with problems and with each other, what they eat, wear and listen to, how they conduct their public life, even how their towns look — all of it varies according to whether you live amid Republican red or Democratic blue on the political map.

Dip into the differences and it's easy to see why in 2000, with no overarching issue like war or recession, two-thirds of Franklin voted for Bush and three-quarters of Montclair voted for Gore. Like the two Americas they mirror, each felt comfortable about one man and uneasy about the other.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

**An urban smorgasbord:** Watchung Plaza, one of several small commercial strips in Montclair, offers bagels, takeout Chinese, upscale Italian, liquor, jewelry and gourmet coffee.

Bush was a reserved candidate whose watchwords were civility, compassion and honor. He embodied tradition in family and religion, ran with discipline, kept his private life private and pledged to be a good role model. Those are all paramount values in Franklin.

Gore was a talky candidate who believed in hashing things out, and he put his own family traumas on the record. He was brainy and intellectual and had a resume a mile long. He championed diversity and embodied competence. And those are paramount values in Montclair.

### Old meets new in Franklin

Franklin, south of Nashville, typifies the explosive growth of Republican-leaning suburbs across the South and West, even as it tries to preserve a 203-year past. Main Street is lined with historic brick buildings and shops with such names as Pigg & Peach and Heart and Hands. A

Confederate soldier towers 44 feet over the Public Square, a marble symbol of pride and loss. The 1864 Battle of Franklin devastated the town and sent it into a deep sleep for a century.

As recently as 1980, Franklin was "dead on the vine. The monetary powers that be had kept out change," says Hewitt Sawyers, a black pastor who grew up in the area, left for college and a career, then came home.

Since then, Franklin has more than made up for lost time. Its population doubled from 1980 to 1990 and again from 1990 to 2000. Latest official estimates: nearly 42,000 people and 32 square miles. Both numbers increase continually as newcomers arrive and the city annexes more land.

Along with farms, subdivisions and an upscale mall, Franklin boasts 100 health-care companies and headquarters or divisional operations for 14 major national corporations. The Christian music industry relocated from Nashville. The Gospel Music Association is looking for land.

The association's president, Frank Breeden, says Franklin is popular for good reason: "The lifestyle is at that stage where it's still idyllic. There's a small-town feel. It's almost a return to the social and civic values of life in the '50s."

Franklin is a magnet for people with conservative worldviews. It's home to the Middle Tennessee Home Education Association for home-schoolers and Christian World Broadcasting, which produces Christian programming in Russian and Chinese and beams it to those countries from a tower in Alaska.

The new Williamson Christian College is based there, as is the Tennessee League of the South.

David O. Jones founded and chairs the 400-member league, which demands "an end to federal tyranny" and "a return to Biblical morality."

An Illinois native, Jones says a Southerner is "one who holds religion as a significant factor in life; who considers family as the central unit in society, family and property as their personal domain and self-reliance as a basic principle of government." He could be describing his neighbors.

Franklin's hallmark is a veneer of Southern graciousness. Much is left unsaid, and privacy is prized. Families stick close to home in neighborhoods they compare to movie fantasies, complete with horse fences and soda shops. The line between personal and public life is clearly drawn. It's a town where gays remain in the closet, race relations go largely undiscussed and a PTA president declines to be interviewed about her school.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

**Embracing the small-town ways:** Bill Harlin, 77, with Coins in a Row, a champion Tennessee walking horse, at Harlinsdale Farm less than a mile from the town square in Franklin, Tenn. He'd like to keep his 200-acre farm out of developers' hands. "They see farmland as wasteland," he says.

Ginette Gallauresi, a Spanish translator for the school system, calls the town "one lovely place to live."

Nevertheless, she was surprised at the reserve she encountered when she moved there four years ago. "They have this wonderful Southern hospitality, but they are not very open to welcome you," she says. "There is a wall there. I think they need a little time to get to know you."

James-Ben Stockton, co-owner of the James-Ben Gallery, likes Franklin's mix of small-town neighborly and keep-to-yourself. When he had the flu, he says, nearby merchants offered to bring soup and buy groceries.

"There's an awareness of each other without being horribly intrusive," he says. "That's a magic combination to me."

### City life in Montclair

Just 6 square miles, Montclair fancies itself no ordinary suburb. It bustles with 12 movie theaters, three theater companies, two jazz clubs, an art museum, a state university and a museum honoring longtime resident Yogi Berra. Unique shops and restaurants greatly outnumber chain stores. This town of 39,000 people likes its coffee at the Bluestone Cafe, its Asian food at Taro, its Thai at Tuptim, its Italian to a backdrop of opera at Palazzo.

Diversity heightens Montclair's urban feel. It's one-third

black, welcoming to gay and interracial couples and home to thousands of artists, writers, actors and musicians. The typical path is: You're a hip sophisticate on Manhattan's Upper West Side, you move to Brooklyn for space, then you have kids and move to Montclair for the schools.

And it feels like the city, teeming with energy and interaction. People spill out of their homes for church, school, civic and political meetings, Scrabble, writing and book clubs, neighborhood stock investment clubs, concerts of mandolin or jazz bassoon.

Montclair has its own gun-control, abortion rights and anti-war groups, its own chapters of Amnesty International and the NAACP.

The Council for Secular Humanism recently opened a "faith-free" Center for Inquiry downtown, its fourth in the country. The group holds discussions on subjects you don't hear about much in Franklin, such as "Bible Relevancy: A Debate."

Sharing opinions is a civic duty. That makes for long debates and occasional rancor.

"Many people who come to Montclair want to be heard, known, flex a sense of who they are," says the Rev. Robert Schiesler of St. Luke's Episcopal Church.

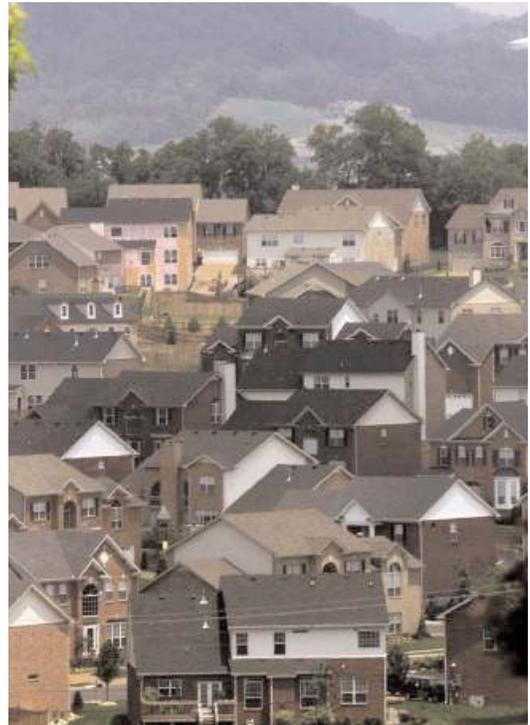
"That invites a clash," he says.

# Tenor tells much about towns

when word traveled that rich people there needed household help. Blacks made good livings but encountered prejudice. They were blocked from buying homes in tony "upper Montclair" until Fred Goode and his family crossed the color line in 1964. Black schools were shortchanged until state and local pressure forced integration in 1976.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY



**Development:** Subdivisions are spreading in Franklin, whose population doubled in the '90s.

**Diversity:** Ron and Carol Burton, right, watch the July Fourth parade in Montclair. With them are their son and daughter, Ron's sister and her husband, and his mother, a lifelong Montclair resident. Montclair runs a program that convenes groups to discuss racial issues.

Bob Russo says his job as supervisor of the state lemon-law office makes him perfect for his part-time job as mayor.

"I'm a professional complaint-handler," he says. "I think this is the town for me."

Complaints about curbs, trees and garbage will never stop, he says, but since Sept. 11, larger issues are foremost: protecting against anthrax and other threats, planning permanent memorials to the seven town residents who died in the attacks and setting up a Hometown Fund for the dozen children who lost their fathers.

## Race relations

Matters of race have preoccupied both Franklin and Montclair throughout their histories. And there is no more clear-cut example of their differences than the way they handle race.

Blacks have lived in Montclair since just after the Civil War,

Today, many of Montclair's black residents hold high-paying jobs in finance, law, business or the arts. Interracial marriages and adoptions are common. In a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll, 42% said their neighborhoods are half-white, half-black. The town has its own civil rights commission and affirmative action plan. Problems are aired in classic Montclair style.

Educators unleashed a raw, even racist dialogue nine years ago when they proposed a single ninth-grade English curriculum, rather than classes tracked according to ability. Some white parents suggested less prepared black students would hold back their kids.

"Every public meeting was an attack," Montclair High School Principal Elaine Davis recalls. "There was no trust. It was accusations. They would call each other names. It was difficult to see."

More often, Montclair's openness is constructive. For instance, the town runs an innovative "conversations on

race" program that convenes small interracial groups to talk about racial issues. More than 500 people have argued, learned and made new friends since the sessions began in 1998.

Parents of both races say they like the values their kids learn in Montclair. Alison Barnett, a former town council member, recalls her daughter's seventh-grade crush on a boy named Jason: "We picked him up to go to a dance, and he was black. I couldn't say 'Emma, you didn't tell me he was black.' It's been good for me."

As much as Montclair talks about race, Franklin buries the subject. The town had more blacks than whites at the time of the Civil War. They were plantation slaves. By 1990, Franklin was only 14% black, and in 2000, as whites flooded into the area, the black population was down to 10%.

Twice as many people in Franklin as in Montclair —58% vs. 29% —say minorities have equal job opportunities with whites, the USA TODAY poll found. But the poorest neighborhoods in Franklin are black and Hispanic. The black middle class is small, and black-owned businesses are nearly non-existent. Stereotyping is a problem.

Chris Williamson, a fundamentalist black pastor, is built like a football player. At restaurants and golf clubs, people often ask him whether he plays for the Tennessee Titans. "I'm a preacher," he tells them. Privately, he wishes they'd ask whether he is a doctor, lawyer or teacher.

Race relations have been mostly quiet, says county historian Rick Warwick, author of Williamson County in Black and White. "All business was controlled by a few families. Blacks couldn't afford to raise any protests because they wouldn't be able to work," he says.

Black students even gave money to build the Confederate statue in 1899. More than a century later, County Commissioner Mary Mills, a retired school principal who is black, says she deals with it by averting her eyes. "I look at the flowers," she says. "There's so much beauty on the

square. Why do I need to look up?"

Changes are coming. Blacks are slowly moving into elected and appointed jobs, including county schools director. Spanish-speaking students are flooding schools as their fathers fill jobs on landscape and construction crews. Williamson's Strong Tower Bible Church is integrated, as is dentist Felix Lawrence's practice.

The only routine "conversation on race" in Franklin is taking place among several dozen evangelical pastors. Usually they meet for prayers and presentations. But at the time of the 2000 election, the topic was politics. Why, the white pastors asked the black ones, do devout black Christians keep voting en masse for Democrats who support abortion and gay rights and in many cases aren't even born-again?

The black pastors were blunt. Some things are more important than gay rights and abortion, they said — such as being able to feed and educate your kids. Blacks believe the Republican Party is for the elite, they said, and will never care about the poor.

Bush tried harder than many Republicans to crack the black vote in 2000 but won less than 10% of it. The factors that predict whites' political choices — where people live, whether they attend church, their levels of income and education — often do not apply.

As Janet Booker-Davis, a black accountant in Franklin, put it: "It doesn't matter how much money you have. You're still black." That is, you're still concerned about practicalities: jobs, education and discrimination. If you're doing well, you worry about those who aren't.

Franklin's black pastors offered their white brethren a glimpse into a world in which conservative religious values do not dictate political choices. Scotty Smith, pastor of Christ Community Church, says he and his white colleagues emerged "redemptively humbled." The main casualty, he says, was their notion that "any thinking Christian is going to vote Republican."

## Behind the Story: A Reporter's Notebook



Jill Lawrence  
Politics reporter,  
USA TODAY

I got the idea for this series from the exit polls after the 2000 election. The country was divided equally between the two presidential candidates, and you could almost predict who voted for Bush and Gore by a few key characteristics — among them where they lived, what they thought about guns, and how often they went to church. I wondered how different people and communities would seem up close. I thought it would be interesting to get to know a community on each side of the divide and in effect introduce one half of America to the other.

Some of the hardest work came in the next couple of months as we looked for communities that reflected the two Americas. I spent a lot of time on the Internet, looking at Census and marketing data. I settled on Franklin, Tenn., as a Bush town because of its good mix of economic and religious conservatives and Montclair, N.J., as a Gore town —

a little slice of city in the suburbs.

I didn't know anyone in either place, but I was able to find natural networkers — real estate types, school publicists, pastors — to introduce me around. I went to all kinds of meetings and got to know lots of people. It was harder in Franklin than in Montclair, just because people are more reserved there. But in the end it worked out. We also polled each community to confirm the differences in attitudes.

I was in Montclair on my final day of research (on what by then was an eight-month project), when the photographer's pager went off. The World Trade Center had been hit by a plane. We raced up the mountain above Montclair to see the smoking skyline and watched both towers fall. I remember thinking, 'that's the end of a nation divided.'

But in the next couple of weeks, we realized we had the makings of a terrific revised project. Since we had baseline data, we could now go back to our communities and see if the Sept. 11 attacks had caused any fundamental changes in political and cultural attitudes. The result: the three-part series "One Nation, Divided."

One of the most interesting aspects of the project was its aftermath. The Franklin business community did not like the depiction of Franklin as a religious town with conservative attitudes on social issues and the racial issues linked to its Civil War heritage. There was a great hue and cry in the Franklin and Nashville newspapers, but many observers and analysts felt the town had been captured accurately. Montclair was depicted as a confrontational place where people think they're religious but they're actually not, and the town's collective preoccupation with race can sometimes turn ugly. But nobody in Montclair complained. In fact they recognized and approved of the way their town was portrayed.

Jill Lawrence is a political writer at USA TODAY. Prior to joining the paper in 1996, she was a columnist for The Associated Press and a free-lance magazine and newspaper writer. She has covered every presidential campaign since 1988. She won a National Headliner Award for her AP columns in 1995 and taught journalism at American University in 1997.

Jill received a music history degree from the University of Michigan in 1975 and a masters degree in journalism from New York University in 1976. She started her journalism career with UPI in Charleston, W.Va., where she covered coal, floods, politics, triple-A baseball and the state legislature. She joined AP in Harrisburg, Pa., in 1979 and became the primary reporter on the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. She moved to Washington with AP in 1982.

She lives in Washington, D.C., with her two sons and her husband, John Martin.

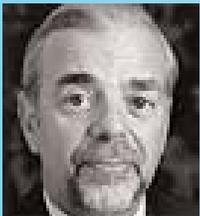
## For discussion

1. Think about the community you live in or the one you grew up in. Does it have more in common with Franklin, Tenn. or Montclair, N.J.? In what ways?
2. Jill Lawrence's article states that "Religion is the wellspring of the culture gap." The political map shows strong support for Gore in the northeast and west coast, while most of the "middle" of the country supported Bush. Are there other important factors besides religion that you think causes the map to look this way?
3. In a Pew Research Center poll conducted in March, most Americans said there is either the right amount (54%) or too little (24%) expression of religious faith and prayer by political leaders, while just 16% thought there is too much. What are your views on whether political leaders should refer to religion, faith and prayer when they are speaking to the American public?
4. According to these articles, many candidates from both the right and the left have found that expressing their own religious faith publicly is a good way to establish trust among voters. Can you think of a recent example of a political leader or candidate referring to their own religious faith or beliefs? What was your reaction?
5. Why do you think guns are such a divisive issue in American society and politics? Do you think, as a result of the terrorist attacks, this issue will become less of a dividing line or more of one? Why?
6. In describing the "Cultural Divide" in America, a lot of attention is paid to the differences between cities like Franklin, Tenn. and Montclair N.J. Are there other values which Americans tend to share, regardless of where they live? Are there views Americans hold that set them apart from citizens of most other countries?

## Future implications

1. Stuart Rothenberg says "Below the veneer of unity is still a deeply divided nation." Over the next twenty years, do you think America will remain largely unified, or will the cultural divide grow deeper over time? Explain.
2. Recent elections and polls suggest that there are about the same number of people on each side of the "Culture Divide," leading to closely contested presidential elections and a closely divided Congress. Over the next 20 years, do you think one side of this culture divide will become more dominant? If so, why?
3. Based on the actions and personal lives of recent political leaders, do you think that the values gap will have more or less of an impact on future presidential elections? Explain how future electoral maps will compare to the one from 2000.

## About The Expert



Andrew Kohut is Director of the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press in Washington, DC. Kohut was President of The Gallup Organization from 1979 to 1989. In 1989, he founded Princeton Survey Research Associates, an attitude and opinion research firm specializing in media, politics and public policy studies. Kohut is a press commentator on the meaning and interpretation of opinion poll results. In recent national elections he has served as a public opinion consultant and analyst for National Public Radio. Kohut has been a regular contributor to the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. He has written widely about public opinion for leading newspapers and magazines, as well as for scholarly journals. Kohut has co-authored three books: "The Diminishing Divide," "The People, The Press and Politics" and "Estranged Friends? The Transatlantic Consequences of Societal Change." Kohut received an A.B. degree from Seton Hall University and studied graduate sociology at Rutgers.

## Additional resources

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press  
<http://people-press.com>