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 **Politics and Pleasure at the Iowa Straw Poll: A Participant Observation**

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**Politics and Pleasure at the Iowa Straw Poll
A Participant Observation**

Zachary Michael Jack (bio)

We arrive at the famous Iowa Straw Poll SPF and UV protected, slipping into one of the last few dozen spots in lot S3, the remote tarmac usually reserved for freshmen at Iowa State University who draw the short stick in the annual parking lottery. Pam—let’s call her, to protect the innocent—my saintly friend and erstwhile University of Iowa political science major, has agreed to accompany me. Together we disembark on foot, heading in the general direction of a school bus painted red, white, and blue parked near the south edge of the Hilton Coliseum, the rendezvous point for most of the chartered coaches the candidates have commissioned to chariot their most ardent supporters to the polls.

The mammoth Chevy turns out to be the star spangled *Constitution Coach* driven here and parked by a home-school family of nine, the Keables, who have created their own URL for the occasion. They’ve merrily painted “Google Us!” on the driver’s side panel, just below the retractable octagonal stop sign requisite of any true school bus, though in this case the caution reads not simply *Stop*, but *Stop the IRS!* Additionally, the Keable clan has window-painted *Vote Ron Paul, Straw Poll* and, on the side panel, splashed Paul’s conservative credentials, beginning with “pro-home school” and “pro-life” and ending with “No Amnesty” and “No NAFTA.”

Ron Paul is clearly today’s bus meister, his chartered coaches outnumbering the competition’s by far, among them Tim Pawlenty’s caravan, which for a mere schlep to cast one’s lot in today’s nonbinding vote required a signed pledge of support for the sponsoring candidate and a **[End Page 63]** photo ID. Not surprisingly, the freedom-loving Paul bused here just about anyone with the necessary state-issued ID and mischief in their eyes. Marcus Bachmann, on the other hand, used the bus stop as a public relations opp, reminding supporters as they stepped down onto the sizzling pavement that he had “married the right woman” and they were “voting for the right person.” As of 6:50 a.m. *Politico* had couched the day’s Bachmann vs. Pawlenty subplot as a grudge match: “It’s his organization ... complete with the ... innovation of shuttle buses

...versus her energy, and neither will rest until the other is destroyed.”

The Ultimate Fighter-styled rhetoric of Politico and its ilk seems calculated to light fires under the young and politically apathetic—those that have already prejudged the straw poll as either hokey anachronism or big yawn—picnic populism for the white, old, male, relatively well-to-do, socially conservative evangelicals who political scientists claim attend such things. Two rural Iowans in their thirties, one of whose incomes falls below the poverty line, Pam and I are clearly *not* the sort political pundits would expect to take a weekend out of their busy lives to ensure they are spoken *to*—not at, or around, or through—in order to decide who will earn our vote come caucus night.

The notion of the Midwest as a sort of strategic reserve for the kind of artful and active citizenship seen as depleted elsewhere in the country is not, as wonks are wont to assume, a merely subjective or folkloric notion. My native Hawkeye State, for instance, in addition to being America’s first presidential proving ground for two generations running, perennially ranks in the top ten in citizenship. In fact, congressionally funded statistics substantiate the deeply held American belief in the Midwest as a kind of living laboratory for civility and political engagement. Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota dominate the top five spots in rates of volunteerism, while humble Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota often occupy the top three spots nationally in percentage of voter turnout. Midwesterners rule the Census roost, too, with regional cities like Livonia, Michigan (eighty-eight percent return rate), Rochester, Minnesota (eighty-three percent), and Madison, Wisconsin (eighty-two percent), besting cosmopolitan New York City by a country mile where participation rates are concerned. The depth of this disparity prompted...

ZACHARY MICHAEL JACK

Politics and Pleasure at the Iowa Straw Poll

A Participant Observation

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NEWSWIRE, comparing the two formulas, we come to the following conclusion: the reconstructive approach heats the course.

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