

Does Trump Want to Remake America 'Morally'?

The animosity towards candidate Donald Trump before he was elected and the venom towards him afterwards on the part of both Hollywood and the media is revealing.

The media's resentment is understandable: Trump publicly denounced reporters at almost every opportunity, and his audiences responded with raucous approval. Trump's aggressiveness was not only because mainstream journalists were overwhelmingly supportive of Hillary Clinton's candidacy, but because they did not seem to grasp the economic and cultural resentment of many voters in rural America.

The fact that so many journalists were absolutely clueless about the extent of Trump's support and were blinded by wishful thinking about the upcoming election showed clearly that few reporters spent any time in the rural areas where Trump had numerous followers. Even fewer showed any interest in why these supported the candidate.

A revealing op-ed piece in *The New York Times* by the news director for two Iowa radio stations helps explain this bizarre cultural disconnect.

Robert Leonard, a native Iowan who described himself as "fairly liberal," dismissed the analysis of many commentators—and of course, Hillary Clinton herself—that supporters of Trump were guided by "ignorance, racism, sexism, nationalism, Islamophobia, economic disenfranchisement and the decline of the middle class."

Leonard said that he experienced "an epiphany" during the Republican primary campaign in Iowa and a conversation with Oklahoma Baptist pastor J.C. Watts, who also served in the House of Representatives from 1995-2003.

"The difference between Republicans and Democrats is that Republicans believe people are fundamentally bad, while Democrats see people as fundamentally good," Watts told Leonard. "Democrats believe that we are born good, that we create God, not that he created us."

But children, Watts told Leonard, "do not need to be taught to behave badly, "they are born knowing how to do that." Then Watts added, "We are born bad. We teach them how to be good. We become good by being reborn—born again."

There was very little about the Trump election campaign involving religion except when Trump criticized the Obama administration for not standing up for Christians being persecuted in the Middle East and elsewhere. In fact, many devout conservative Christians were offended by revelations of Trump's licentious conversations of earlier years. But if reporters who covered Trump had realized what a huge subterranean Christian prayer movement was undergirding the Trump campaign, even if the reporters themselves did not believe in God or the power of prayer they might have been less dumbfounded by the actual election result. An examination of the content of YouTube videos claiming to forecast in advance the election through "prophecy" would have revealed that videos claiming foreknowledge of a Trump victory vastly outnumbered those predicting a Clinton victory.

What this suggests is that many Americans who heard Trump saying he wanted to "make America great again," hoped that he was also saying that he wanted to make America "morally great again."

Many Americans who grew up in the 50s, or whose lives were formed at an early age by people from that era, look back on it as one not only of American prosperity but of American moral righteousness on a national level. They look back fondly to this period of their history as a time when there was no dispute about right and wrong, good and bad and when people

didn't overtly preach rebellion against the conventional moral code. The country seemed to have a civic religion, a basic Christian morality reinforced by the preaching of evangelists like Billy Graham. Trump himself was a product of this era and though there is no evidence that he had a religious side, it was not until much later in his life that he became morally libertarian on sexual matters such as homosexuality.

That American civic religion was largely eroded after the campus upheavals and the antiwar movement of the 1960s. The entire culture began to experience a shift that introduced new gatekeepers and new worldviews in Hollywood, academia and the media. Some of these worldviews, like Marxism, reemerged after years of unpopularity. Most of the new cultural paradigm rejected the view of a created world and of a deity who was still interested in human behavior. As of 2017, America has undergone seven decades during which the existence of God and even the very notion that there might be design behind the formation of the universe has been repeatedly mocked or utterly dismissed on college campuses and in public schools. It has been repeatedly ridiculed by Hollywood.

Trump himself has not said anything specific about wanting to change American culture. But the loud applause for his campaign attacks on "political correctness" and for his greetings of "Merry Christmas" to audiences on his tour after the election suggests that he might be favorable to any grassroots movement that sought to make America "morally" great once more. {eoa}

David Aikman is an award-winning print and broadcast journalist, a best-selling author, and a foreign affairs commentator. His wide-ranging professional achievements include teaching journalism at Patrick Henry University and a 23-year career at Time Magazine with reporting spanning the globe of nearly all the major historical events of the time. Since leaving Time, he has authored ten books. Aikman is now retired and living in Ireland.

