

Creepy Christianity and September 11¹

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I begin with a quotation about the United States in 2004:

[H]airy-backed swamp developers and corporate shills, faith-based economists, fundamentalist bullies with Bibles, Christians of convenience, freelance racists, misanthropic frat boys, shrieking midgets of AM radio, tax cheats, nihilists in golf pants, brownshirts in pinstripes, sweatshop tycoons, hacks, fakirs, aggressive dorks, Lamborghini libertarians, people who believe Neil Armstrong's moonwalk was filmed in Roswell, New Mexico, little honkers out to diminish the rest of us...

Is this the irritated rant of an urban hipster, mercilessly mocking those beyond the world of downtown lofts and polymorphous pleasure; words dropped from a laptop while hurtling across the so-called fly-over states? No. The quotation comes from a true son of the Midwest, Garrison Keillor (2004). One must ponder hard a nation where the vast majority attests to the existence of a devil and individuated angels; 45% of people think aliens have visited Earth; three times more people think there are ghosts than was the case a quarter of a century ago; and 84% say there is posthumous survival of the soul, up 24% on 1972 (Hutton, 2003a; Mann 2003: 103; Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2004; Gallup, 2002-03; O'Connor 2005: 8).

The population's embrace of such beliefs places it alone among nations with advanced economies and educational systems. Ninety-six per cent of citizens believe in a higher power, and 59% state that religion is crucial to their life. This is more than twice the proportion for Japan, South Korea, Western Europe, and the former Soviet bloc (Luhmann 2004: 520; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2002). Seventy-nine per cent of US citizens identify as Christian, with 41% converts to fundamentalist evangelism, and 18% aligned with the religious right. Evangelicals speak of an almost physical transformation, from a faith based in ideas to something that resembles transubstantiation—a trance-like condition of intimacy (Newport and Carroll, 2003; Luhmann, 2004).

This is not quite what social science predicted—neither right-wing modernization theory nor Marxist developmentalism. And for many

people, a trend in the direction of faith is regarded as a sign of spiritual renewal and even moral superiority. This religious turn dates from President Jimmy Carter's decision to roll back special privileges accorded to Christian academies that exempted them from Federal taxes. The end to that outrageous subsidy pushed creepy Christians into the political domain (Rieder 2003: 30). And since Richard Nixon had scored zero on *political* morality, post-Watergate Republicans proceeded to stress *personal* morality, targeting the left and social movements in areas of symbolic power. Campaigns for civil rights, feminism, and gay liberation provoked a counter-offensive by fundamentalists (anti-obscenity and anti-abortion) nationalists (anti-flag-burners and English-Only advocates) and political conservatives (anti-affirmative action and anti-civil rights) (Schmidt, 2000). Time-series analysis demonstrates that the last three decades have seen activist Democrats become more secular and modern, and activist Republicans more religious and anti-modern. Since 1972 and George McGovern's candidacy for the Presidency, through quasi-evangelical presidents in Carter and Bill Clinton, Democratic partisans have favored abortion, queer rights, and women's issues, and Republicans have been vehemently opposed, from the moment they ably alliterated McGovern's Democrats as the party of "Acid, Amnesty, and Abortion" (quoted in Rieder 2003: 23). Migrating "southward down the Twisting Tail of Rhetoric," Republicans focused on "the misty-eyed flag-waving of Ronald Reagan who, while George McGovern flew bombers in World War II, took a pass and made training films in Long Beach" (Keillor, 2004).

But it would be wrong to regard this as an organic movement from the ground up. Corporations were major supporters of right-wing think tanks from the 1970s, as complaints from the magazine *Commentary* and other periodicals about a left élite in and around government grew in appeal. Coors brewers, the Scaife family, and the Hearst Foundation funded anti-arts groups, and "Defund the Left" appeared on the letterhead of the Republican Conservative Caucus. These reactionary forces believed that progressive politics was using public money to challenge conventional morality and inequality. The audience for their grandstanding came to comprise a network stretching across the National Right to Life Committee, the American Family Association, the Liberty Alliance, the Eagle Forum, the Family Research Council, the Christian Action Network, and the Christian Coalition (which was eventually 175,000-strong) (Jensen, 1996). Needless to say, this nihilistic anti-statism subsided once the Republicans had control of all levels of the Federal Government, in 2002. A previous hostility to the state transformed into

a warm embrace. Nowadays, 69% of party members hold that government functions for the good of all (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2003d: 2, 8). Grover Norquist, a key Republican zealot, summed up the times with his tasteless statement that “Bipartisanship is another form of date rape” (quoted in Keillor, 2004), while for its part, the *McLaughlin Group* TV show dedicated much discussion to the notion that Clinton was Satan (Alterman 2003: 145). No wonder the distinguished former President of Argentina, Raúl Alfonsín, worried that the US was headed for neofascism because of the far-right forces unleashed by neoliberalism and creepy Christianity (Anguita and Colectivo Prometeo 2003: 43).

Right-wing cultural citizens, especially creepy Christians, have not been averse to learning from those they detest. Blacks and other minorities had protested anti-defamation with great impact, so why shouldn't the right protest the defamation of *its* values—fundamentalism, homophobia, and nationalism? Such tactics parroted civil-rights legislation and the rhetoric of subject positions around which contemporary social movements waged their struggles. The National Rifle Association, which had been a rather mild-mannered, Clark-Kentish advocate for field sports, had an internal *coup* in the mid-1970s. It left New York City for the wilds, elected to campaign for people owning guns as a Constitutional right/responsibility—and overtly borrowed tactics from the civil-rights movement. The same period marked the advent of the Moral Majority, again drawing on the rhetoric and methods of civil rights. Ten years later, this indebtedness to the example of African-American activism was carried forward by the United Shareholders Association, whose consumerist politics disempowered workers and turned corporations into ventures of speculation rather than generators of infrastructure. Then evangelical Christians modeled their marriage movement on anti-tobacco activism (Hutton 2003b: 85, 104; Coltrane 2001: 395). Today, both Stanford and UCLA feature organizations dedicated to undoing “institutional racism”—a concept long-derided by the white right, but now perversely embraced, as a sign of how the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, formed at the height of creative Chicano cultural politics in the 1970s has become so powerful on campus that it must be stopped for fear of its impact on whites. In 2004, the Sierra Club fended off a take-over by anti-Latino/as who positioned their anti-immigration candidacy as environmental. All these groups were underwritten by far-right think tanks and foundations, artful practitioners of a mode of identity address they professed to despise, rearticulated through the supposedly benign and unquestionable form of faith (Lovato, 2004).

Having learned from the new social movements that the personal and the cultural were political, the right declared itself the ideological foe not only of subaltern groups seeking enfranchisement, but also of liberal, humanistic expressions of universality and the secular. Earlier battles that had been won by the left through the use of spectacle were waged anew, this time with spectacle as much the possession of reactionaries as radicals. The term "culture war" originated toward the end of Reagan's presidency. It became media orthodoxy in the first half of the 1990s, immediately prior to Clinton's *arrivisme*, when Republican Congressman Henry Hyde sought to condemn flag-burning as "one front in a larger culture war" in 1990 (quoted in DiMaggio 2003: 80). (A decade on, after his service as Chair of the Congressional Committee that recommended Clinton's impeachment, Hyde further distinguished himself by writing to George Bush Minor upon the election of the leftist Luiz Inacio to the Presidency of Brazil in 2002 that this meant a new nation had joined the "axis of evil" purportedly formed by Iraq, North Korea, and Iran [quoted in Youngers, 2003]).

As the data quoted above indicate, the tendency for right-wing religious rapture and irrationality certainly predates September 11, 2001. But think back to that day and all its sense of horror coming from the sky; of unseen, unknown assailants; of the loss of everyday life. And think of the subsequent phase as a search for meaning and stability through revenge. Clearly, the event was fertile terrain for religion, even as it drew on centuries of US claims to spirituality. These claims in turn derive from the history of migration from elsewhere. Religion has historically provided several social roles to the US population. It offers a means of maintaining ethnic solidarity in a new environment, leavens the population's lack of class bearings, gives solace to the horrors of slavery, and, most of all, delivers social services away from the brutality of capital and the plutocracy of the state. So this godliness derives from a long history, even as, in its incarnation in evangelical Protestantism, it has new fire to throw at others in the post-September 11 world.

In this article, I use survey data to suggest that the US public subscribes to reactionary views in part because of their adherence to right-wing evangelical Protestantism, individualism, and nationalism, which are of increasing importance as US society becomes radically marked by economic exploitation. Over the past four decades, successive waves of population have fled our inner cities, such that the US has recently become the first country in world history to have more than half its people living in suburbia. As this historic demographic shift continues, from a rural, to an urban, to a suburban nation, people are

more and more articulated to sameness; and *disarticulated* from difference. It comes as no surprise that the foreign-policy unilateralism of most US voters is directly linked to fear, and a fortress life-design. They are terrified of other countries and peoples, terrified of difference (“Centrifugal,” 2005; Brewer *et al.*, 2005). This is a nation of low-density suburban living domestically, and high-altitude military control overseas.

Economy, Politics, Religion

How *is* life in suburbanality and elsewhere across the nation? By contrast with European welfare systems, the capacity to exit poverty for good in the US has diminished over the last three decades of neoliberalism and suburbanization, thanks to a gigantic clumping of wealth at the apex of the nation, atop a poor, unskilled, and unhealthy base. Even those bastions of *bourgeois* comfort and onanism, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, run repeated, sizeable stories on the new Gilded Age of the 21st century and its reorganized class relations (Lexington, 2005). Frankly, this is not a First-World country for one fifth of its inhabitants. Forty-six million residents are indigent, 52 million are functionally analphabetic, and 44 million lack health insurance. Access to money and net worth is massively stratified by race and gender. In 2003, black men earned 73% of the hourly wage rate for white people, for instance. And the gaps are widening. In the two decades from 1979, the highest-paid 1% of the population doubled their share of national pre-tax income, to 18%. *Their* incomes increased by 194%; the top 20% by 70%—and the bottom 20% by just 6.4%. In 1967, chief executive officers of corporations were paid 24 times the average wage of employees. Thirty years later, they received 300 times that amount. The Congressional Budget Office reports that across the late 1990s, the wealthiest 1% of US households had a greater combined income than the poorest 40%. Over Bush Minor’s first term, profits rose by 60%, but wages by just 10%. In 2004, after-tax profits for corporations grew to their highest proportion of Gross Domestic Product since the Depression (Skocpol, 2004; Thelen 2000: 552; Freeman, 2004; “Ever Higher,” 2004; “Breaking,” 2005; Yates, 2005; Hutton 2003b: 133, 148; Taibo 2003: 24).

This bizarre re-concentration of wealth in the hands of the *bourgeoisie* is unprecedented in world history since the advent of working-class electoral franchises. No wonder the *Economist* captioned a photo of the Queen of England greeting Bush Minor and his “Desperate Housewife,” Laura, as “Liz, meet the royals” (“Ever Higher,” 2004). Those with the *highest* levels of income and education are most likely to participate in lobby groups and vote in Presidential elections; while those with the

lowest are *least* likely to do so. This is in accordance with the positive salience of the state in their lives. The domestic role of government has been redefined, at least rhetorically, from a sometimes feisty agent stabilizing labor and capital via redistribution, to a mendicant servant of capital with residual duties of care to the citizenry (American Political Science Association Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy 2004: 3-5; Jencks 2004: A2; Crouch 2004: 23, 40).

Yet despite the fact that the nation fails them abysmally, most of its residents embrace the US ideologically. Why? Because the right orchestrates political culture via superstition and money. The left and the center focus on public-policy logics, researching problems and coming up with rational analyses to feed into public discussion and the policy process. The right, on the other hand, leaves policy proposals to its corporate masters, and does not undertake rational analyses aimed at technocratic outcomes. Instead, it works via a blend of grass-roots religious superstition and public outreach that stresses column inches and shouted seconds, not professional expertise. Size *does* make a difference to these people. Funded by some of the wealthiest US foundations and families, such as Olin, Scaife, Koch, Castle Rock, and Smith Richardson, there are over 300 right-wing “coin-operated” think-tanks in Washington, dealing with topics from sexuality to foreign policy. They hire ghost-writers to make their resident intellectuals’ prose attractive, as part of a project that is concerned more with marketing opinion than conducting research—for each “study” they fund is essentially the alibi for an op-ed piece. The corollary numbers for media coverage are striking. Progressive think-tanks had just a sixth share of media quotation compared to reactionary institutions during the 1990s. In the decade to 2005, the right averaged 51% of citations, progressives 14%. The people who appear on the three major television networks’ newscasts as policy wonks are indices of this success: 92% of such mavens are white, 85% are male, and 75% are Republican. In all, 90% of news interviewees on the major networks are white men born between 1945 and 1960. A study conducted through the life of the 2003 Iraq invasion revealed that US broadcast and cable news virtually excluded anti-war or internationalist points of view: 64% of all pundits were pro-war, while 71% of US “experts” favored the war. This new bias might expose us to the cohort that is responsible for our troubles, but not to disinterested critique, or even simple information (Kallick, 2002; Karr, 2005; Alterman 2003: 85; Dolny, 2003 and 2005; Hart 2005: 52; Claussen 2004: 56; Love 2003: 246; Cohen, 2005; Rendall and Broughel, 2003).

These numbers bespeak the right's success at culture capture. That capture extends beyond the airwaves and into the truly effective cultural politics of our time, evangelical Protestantism and consumption. The largest technocracy in history has re-enchanted its world, turning capitalism and statecraft into magic. The New Protestantism is a key participant in debates about social values, because of vigorous links between the religious right and Republicans. And the latest Great Awakening (which we might date from the 1980s) is also a consumerist one—with selfishness and chauvinism characterizing a revocation of traditional Christianity, as if the latter were the embodiment of Great-Society liberalism. There is an organic link today between apparent logocentric opposites—church and market. Perhaps these creepy Christians hear ringing in their ears the famous tag line from San Diego televangelism: “prosperity is your divine right” (quoted in Murdock 1997: 96).

For religion has become central to much US public policy, news and current affairs, Congressional debate, and judicial review in the last twenty years, despite the separation of church and state supposedly guaranteed by the amended Constitution. In the 1960s, 53% of the population favored no role for religion in politics. Today, 54% favor direct participation by religious organizations in government (“Therapy” 2003: 13). Unlike any other First World country, most US residents connect belief in God to morality and wealth. Unlike their fellow anti-secularists in much of the Third World, they reject state intervention to assuage social ills, so forbiddingly individual is their account of person and deity (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2003a). Their organizations generally intervene in sex, not economics, where following the teachings of several major churches would produce adequate welfare and pro-worker policies (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003: 3-5).

In the same 2003 session that saw the US Supreme Court strike down statutes prohibiting consensual adult sex in private, it upheld new rules severely restricting family visits to prisoners. Only one of these decisions (anal and oral sex) drew the wrath of so-called family-oriented religious think tanks and lobby groups. They showed no interest in the 1.3 million children whose fathers are incarcerated (DiIulio, Jr. 2003: 219). For these protestors are cultural citizens animated by identity, not the material wellbeing of the groups in whose name they speak. There was no call to strengthen families rent asunder by incarceration. The idea of following progressive examples elsewhere, such as in Norway where men must meet paternity payments to custodial parents in order to maintain their citizenship, would of course be anathematic (Pollard 2003: 70). Needless

to say, the states of the Union that are dominated by this unremitting, unforgiving censoriousness produce the highest proportions of teenage pregnancy, bastardry, murder, and divorce, even as bastions of morality like convicted Watergator Chuck Colson, the Concerned Women of America, the *American Spectator*, Linda Chavez, and the Heritage Foundation blame the torture at Abu Ghraib in 2003 on pornography, gay culture, feminism, and Hollywood (“Us” 2003: 12; Rich, 2004; Douglas, 2004). In the late 1990s, 94% of US citizens aged between 15 and 24 equated citizenship with assisting other people individually. Don’t bother yourself with social justice, political representation, or inequality. Just help the next person across the street, and all will be well (Westheimer and Kahne 2004: 6). What’s going on here—is this some kind of grotesque national smackdown, where Albert Camus meets Norman Vincent Peale on pay-per-view?

Even those who abjure the brutalities of hyper-individualism are in the ring. Prayer-and-care communitarians ally themselves with anti-media zealots in calling for an end to *Bowling Alone*. They hail the rise of social capital as theory, analysis, policy, and desire (Putnam, 2000). The mid-20th century British Labor politicians Nye Bevan and Richard Crossman abhorred “patch-quilt[s] of local paternalisms” as “an odious expression of social oligarchy and churchy bourgeois attitudes” (quoted in “Subsidising,” 2005). Such sentiments are thinly spread in a moment that regards civil society as inspired by a kind of divine right. Moral paragons rail against rampant individualism, secular selfishness, and civic irresponsibility in the name of a white-picket-fence fantasy. This holy dispensation understands “real” citizenship to be civic and electoral, exemplified by volunteering and voting. There is no room for acknowledging new modalities of political involvement, where the media are sites of social action, not symptoms of decline, and identities are transitional rather than eternal (Keeter *et al.*, 2002; Lechner 2003: 55). Activities that prayer-and-care communitarians count as civic include walking for charity or going to church. Talking about romantic frustration with reference to soap opera, or protesting racism through hip-hop, are not part of the calculus. Citizenship is a quasi-spiritual endeavor, opposed to cynicism, apathy, and—a personal favorite of mine—unwholesome fun. The latter can never be rational responses to a corrupt and inefficient system. Instead, they are the failings of the critically wounded (Burchell 2002: 67).

A high priest of contemporary anti-sectarianism and secularism, the lavishly-promoted political sociologist Robert Putnam, pronounced himself well-pleased by the patriotic unity in evidence after September

11 2001. His pleas for church membership and meddling in other people's lives favored "volunteerism and kindness" over "politics and policy" (Westheimer and Kahne 2004: 241). In a notorious *New York Times* op-ed piece, Putnam reminisced about the reaction to Pearl Harbor sixty years earlier, rhapsodizing "victory gardens in nearly everyone's backyard, Boy Scouts at filling stations collecting floor mats for scrap rubber, affordable war bonds, and giving rides to hitchhiking soldiers and war workers." All these practices supposedly taught "the greatest generation" an enduring lesson in civic involvement that was evident from the "sacrifice" on view in that era's "popular culture from radio shows to comic strips" (2001). He was delighted by increases in religious attendance and blood donations following September 11 (most of the latter wasted, a failure that led in part to the departure of the Red Cross director) and encouraged by Bush Minor's call for US youth to rake gardens and wash cars to raise funds for Afghan children after US planes had bombed much of what remained of their country.

A few negative people disputed Putnam's version of history, drawing attention to 100,000 Japanese Americans interned during World War II, abundant racist stereotypes in wartime US popular culture, fire bombs and atomic attacks by the government, and hyper-masculinist, anti-immigrant sentiments among "the greatest generation," let alone its profit-making role for latter-day US anchormen-turned-historians (Sanbonmatsu, 2001). Journalist Katha Pollitt had the bad taste to inquire whether he was referring to "certified heterosexual, Supreme-Being-believing Scouts ... and certified harmless and chivalrous hitchhiking GIs, too—not some weirdo in uniform who cuts you to bits on a dark road" (2001). But the Federal Government heeded Putnam more than his critics, establishing the USA Freedom Corps and the Corporation for National and Community Service to tie patriotism and homeland defense to volunteerism (Westheimer and Kahne 2004: 244).

John J. DiIulio, Jr., Minor's first Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, offers this perspective:

True conservatism flows from a singular unifying belief: God. In private life and in the public square good liberals can take Him or leave Him, but true conservatives must always seek Him and strive to heed Him. In the conservative creed human beings are moral and spiritual beings. Each of us has God-given personal rights and God-given social duties, God-given individual liberties and God-given moral responsibilities. (2003: 218)

The Homeland Security Act (House of Representatives 5005, 2002) mandates bankrolling "faith-based" groups to further "civic engagement

and integration.” Needless to say, during Minor’s first term, all such support went to Christians, and not a brass razoo to Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, or Buddhists (Kaplan 2004: 22). For example, MentorKids USA received funding, until protests came from Constitutional watchdogs because the organization required volunteers to sign a pledge avowing that “the Bible is God’s authoritative and inspired word that is without error ... including creation, history, its originals and salvation” (quoted in Freedom From Religion, 2004). All this despite the fact that the US Constitution does not mention God, and the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli specifies that the country “is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion” (quoted in Allen, 2005). Yet that history seems lost. *Newsweek’s* alarming 2003 cover story entitled “Bush and God” sought to uncover the history of Minor’s alcohol-addiction and business-failure-fueled conversion to evangelical Protestantism—its implications for his policies, and its use as electoral appeal. Republicans were overwhelmingly supported across class lines by white Protestants during the 2003 Iraq crisis and the 2004 Presidential election (Newport and Carroll, 2003; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2004).

Conclusion

The market may have torn many of these people’s lives apart, but the very capitalistic basis to the latest Great Awakening gave them ideological backing (and a choice of their superstition) in a way that formal monetary markets did not. They had identified so wholeheartedly with culturalism that the illogic of supporting various economic policies seemed of little import. As they looked at the Manhattan sky projected on their television screens, hovering ahead was a form of thought primed for retribution.

The New Protestantism sometimes seems like a very Old Testament form, so lacking is it in the socialist principles of love offered by Christ’s teachings. Judgment, harsh and unbending, is its basis. As such, of course, it makes two bizarre alliances—with pro-Zionist Jews, who might be unacceptable as neighbors, financiers, attorneys, philanthropists, progressives, or intellectuals in the US, but a good fit as custodians of Palestine until they are rightly destroyed by the Rapture; and with big business, which supports craven objects of consumption that articulate to sexual pleasure, science, and medicine in ways that depart from true teachings, but is a good fit as a brutal form that does not forgive failure and is opposed to secular collectives such as unions.

This in turn links to the complex alliance that animated the success of the Republican Party from the mid-1990s, bringing together corporate

capital and grassroots ideology, for all their manifold and manifest differences. That moment indexes the right taking over the terrain of cultural debate. Bush the Elder referred disparagingly to the idea of “political correctness” in a 1991 speech, associating it with speech codes policed by the left on campus. His inanity was taken up by a rabid press corps, which used the term more than 5000 times a year across the mid-1990s (Glassner 1999: 14-15). But far from political correctness being a domain of the left, it has been taken over as a site of cultural spectacle by the right, from the moment of the obsession with Clinton’s sex life through to a series of retributive cultural maneuvers by Republicans against those opposed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003: renaming “French Fries” as “Freedom Fries,” curtaining over the tapestry of Picasso’s *Guernica* in the Security Council’s anteroom because it was not “an appropriate backdrop” for announcements about the pending invasion of Iraq, canceling celebrations of *Cinco de Mayo* in reaction to Mexican concerns about Washington’s adventurist bellicosity, and issuing scarcely veiled governmental warnings and corporate boycotts of TV host Bill Maher for questioning the heroism of high-altitude bombing on *Politically Incorrect* (Youngers, 2003; Retort 2004: 5; DerDerian, 2002). In 2003, Minor’s *apparatchiks* required that men seated behind him during a speech on proposed tax cuts remove their ties, the better to show that the changes would benefit the poor. At another event, box-stickers reading “Made in China” were replaced by “Made in U. S. A.” (Bumiller, 2003). And let us not forget John Ashcroft buying curtains to cover nude statues in the Department of Justice dedicated to the “Majesty of Law” and the “Spirit of Justice,” or Paul Wolfowitz insisting on the recall of 600,000 berets made for the military because they had been manufactured in China (“Faith” 2004: 27; “Profile,” 2005).

Such instances of political correctness are trivial in themselves, but they signify a broader tendency; for while these outrages were reported, they did not result in major inquiries into publicly-subsidized mendacity, just as the Administration’s ties to business and Minor’s own past personal and professional infractions were not deemed newsworthy. These tactics are right-wing cultural citizenship at work, as per the oleaginous George Will’s Olympian identification of Clinton as a “vulgarian” (quoted in Jones, 2001). I fear that the sociologist Lauren Langman is wrong to view Clinton’s impeachment as “the last stand of a distinctively American Puritanism” seeking to defeat socio-cultural change via appeals to traditional morality (2002: 504) and that reactionaries like Paul Weyrich were pessimistic when they decided that the impeachment trial signaled an end to the culture wars and creepy

Christianity's assault on the public realm (Rosen 2003: 48). Of course there have been embarrassing investigations of their malfeasance by the Federal Election Commission and the Internal Revenue Service. But post-Clinton, creepy Christianity was effectively ceded control of domestic and foreign policy on birth control and judicial nominations and given vast state handouts over better-qualified secular non-governmental organizations (Kaplan, 2004). Minor was able to mobilize a logic of rebirth from decadence to violence from the ruins of his defense of the country.

After the attacks of 2001, he avowed that:

As a result of evil, there's some amazing things that are taking place in America. People have begun to challenge the culture of the past that said, "If it feels good, do it." This great nation has a chance to help change the culture. (quoted in "A Nation" 2003: 4)

September 11 provided an opportunity to blend a foreign-policy project of apparent pragmatism (securing resources and national defense) and apparent idealism (spreading the word) with a domestic-policy project of religiosity. It was a long time coming, but the tragedy of that day brought these tendencies together.

But while some in the US experience the contemporary crisis as a moment of divine calling versus secular decadence, others see it very differently. Keillor finds that "the rest of the world thinks we're deaf, dumb and dangerous"; Kurt Vonnegut (2004) considered himself "a man without a country, except the librarians"; and Howard Zinn wakes each morning feeling as though "we are an occupied country, that some alien group has taken over" (2004: 89). We are not all content in the face of this triumph of bellicose religiosity. And the towering example of these three true public intellectuals should inspire all of us to speak out against the superstitious and their dread projects.

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Note

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