

## **PUBLIC MORALITY IN THE DAYS OF TRUMP!**

My Grandmother Jarvis, who lived to 96, was born in 1895 as I recall being told, near the end of the official Victorian Era which ended with Queen Victoria's death in 1901. It was a time when even men's swimming costumes were modest and covered most of the body. Whether my kindly grandmother actually used soap to wash out the mouths of my mother and her 5 siblings if they dared to swear, I cannot verify. My mother who was born in 1925 threatened that occasionally and might have actually used toothpaste on my brother or me once long ago, but neither that nor the slap on the bottom was anywhere near as effective as the look of disappointment anyway. My mother believed, practiced, and expected us to use more interesting words than common curses to express whatever displeasure we might feel about anything. Cursing was not acceptable, nor was demeaning any person because of race, sex, or disability. I learned to be more creative in describing the moronic and sometimes Neanderthal words and behavior of persons who might benefit from a lobotomy or lengthy incarceration at appropriate penal or mental institutions. I fear that I have backslidden a bit over the years, but I still try to refrain from indiscriminate cursing.

I was born at the end of 1956 and grew up in the upheaval of the 1960s. I was in high school in the first half of the 1970s. Even during the angry divisions of the Vietnam War era, as beach attire had shrunken to bikinis and speedos, there were still some limits on public discourse. Flags may have been burning in War Protests and during Civil Rights demonstrations there may have been a lot of racial discord, but actual hate-crimes and lynchings had decreased significantly from earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and public discourse had become far more civilized.

The formality of appropriate address in Congress and in the political sector generally, modelled on Parliamentary patterns from the Old Country, always included references at least to the esteemed idiot from such and such. And of course, in the South, one always has to add Bless their Heart before referring to another in gossip. While such formalities add little enough recognition of the humanity of the other, they do accord a certain appreciation that seems lacking in the current level of public discourse.

The recent arrest of the owner of the Patriots on sex solicitation charges is more surprising for the announcement of charges than for whatever the reality behind them may be. We live in a time where different standards are routinely applied to groups defined by skin color, sexual orientation, power, and wealth. Equal justice has become as rare as equality in standards of public morality. Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the National Anthem as a protest to Police Brutality should have been as widely respected as other forms of protest, rather than recast as an attack on the Flag. Various groups have refused to stand or salute the Flag on various religious grounds throughout US history, but because he is black, he was targeted by the almost exclusively white male establishment of Football. Even though I believe celebrities & sports figures are overpaid, I really do hope the settlement he got was in the multi-millions!

Donald Trump is not the one responsible for the current lack of public morality, though he is the most prominent standard bearer. He continues to flout the Constitution, laws, any expectation of truth-telling, and any level of human respect that ought to be shown in general to women, persons of color, the differently abled, and LGBTQ persons. The Fox Network, the Tea-Party movement, and various proponents of a return to some imagined era when white men were in charge and others stayed in their proper places of subservience have lowered the standards of public morality for the sake of telling it how they see it. Without proof, without evidence, and of course without science, these advocates of return to some imagined era have shouted down Progressives, Moderates, and Centrists, effectively changing the tone as well as the content of discourse. And of course the benefits of their success have not accrued to common folks, but the result of their efforts has been almost entirely for corporations and the wealthy!

There have been many attempts to better the situation of common folks throughout US history, such as the institution of public schools, emancipation, suffrage, public health, Unions, Minimum Wages, Social Security, and Medicare. In recent years, the wealthy have attempted to dismantle public schools in order to provide Charter Schools that better fulfill their own needs. Republican millionaires and billionaires have been actively trying to dismantle Social Security and Medicare for decades. Had minimum wage levels stayed at their buying/value level they would be some \$21/hour now rather than \$7.25. Nationalized healthcare such as is available in every other civilized country has been fought ever since insurance companies turned health care into a profit center under Nixon. Public Morality is tied, perhaps inextricably, to matters of wealth and power. As long as the wealthy and corporations hold the keys to power, along with free reign to influence elections, it may be impossible to restore any kind of justice, balance, or equality in elections, the justice and penal systems, health insurance and care, the treatment of persons of color and LGBTQ persons and other minorities.

We live in a very challenging time for those who wish to see fairness, justice, and equality in our nation. There is not even much lip-service currently to doing things for the common good. Everything is based on the corporate bottom line. Tax cuts for the wealthy are promoted as bringing fairness for all, but corporate welfare far exceeds the amount being spent on public safety net spending. Corporations and the wealthy now frequently pay fewer actual dollars than those in the middle and lower classes because deductions for the wealthy far outweigh deductions for anyone else. The lower classes, and especially those unable to work are vilified as welfare cheats, freeloaders, drug and alcohol abusers, and welfare queens. The reality is that far more of those who receive food stamps and other assistance are the working poor, with the residue being persons who are mentally or physically challenged and largely unable to work.

The radically independent US ideal is used to classify those unable to work as malingerers no matter what their reality is. According to the myth, any good Americans should be able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps even if they don't have boots! But this myth has never told the whole truth.

People from the lower classes, who grow up in the projects attending poor schools only rarely succeed and almost never climb to the top levels of industry. They have too many things weighing against success. Children of wealth mostly remain wealthy, attending the best schools and easily finding jobs at levels that perpetuate the status quo. We like the myths of independence and growing up to do anything, but growing up in wealthy families is a much more likely path to wealth and power even in our supposedly classless society.

Over the past couple of years, I have been saddened and disgusted to watch Donald Trump display his ignorance of history, science, literature and grammar. Never in my lifetime has an American President exhibited such ignorance nor so often repeated obvious lies. Never have I seen a President work harder to benefit himself and his cronies while caring so little for most of the populace. Never have I seen such obvious nepotism being shown in White House staffing. Never have I seen such incompetence in choosing staff and running the country and in dealing with the rest of the world. I am disappointed to see the US fall so far in the eyes of the rest of the world. Even if Trump were not surrounded by mostly white male yes-men, he obviously listens to the Fox Network and probably Putin far more than to any advisors.

The Preamble to the US Constitution says: *We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

In recent days I have been concerned with a few of those purposes such as forming a more perfect Union, establishing Justice, insuring domestic Tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general Welfare, and securing the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

I guess I shouldn't have been surprised that Trump would lie about supporting and defending the Constitution since he lies about everything else, but I am disappointed to see him so readily flout the emoluments clause and to have so little interest in supporting the Constitution generally or working for the common good!

I am not sure whether we are in a cycle in which there are more people doing things to others that are either criminal or immoral, or whether there are just more people making it into the news. With a population growing ever larger, there are certainly more people who might be doing immoral things. There is also a case to be made that some immorality gathers more attention at certain times in history. Are we more aware of rapes, crimes against children, and racial crimes at this point? And there are more things going on in public that would not have been acceptable a few decades ago. With Google, it is also much easier to find out if people are lying, fact-checking made simple. Surprisingly few of Trump's followers apparently care whether he is lying, perhaps because they believe him when he talks about the media and everyone questioning him having fake news and fake facts.

There was a time when we could at least believe Walter Cronkite and a few other journalists, a time when lies were not so commonplace and public decency meant something. Yes, there have been lies by journalists, but some media outlets remain generally trustworthy, notwithstanding the accusations by Trump to the contrary.

I wish I could at least say with confidence that I believe that each person gets what they deserve in the end. I have seen that happen often, but I have also too often seen people in positions they don't deserve doing harm to others with no recompense. The immorality of this time seems to exceed the possibilities for justice, and the current justice system itself has too many flaws.

There was a time when political offices were seen as a public trust, an opportunity to serve the community for the common good. Today, it is rare that somebody is elected to state or national office without spending millions of dollars too often obtained from corporate sponsors. And of course, the bigger spender almost always wins. Once, there were issues that predominated in campaigns where today the better sound bites win out. There was also a time when issues were far more clear cut and not packaged together with so many other issues that it is hard to figure out what the issues are. No wonder people have a hard time choosing between candidates that merely obfuscate and those that downright lie!

We, the people, have allowed this to happen by not calling for more honesty, justice, and responsibility. Yes we have been conned by modern hucksters, but we have failed in our responsibility to be informed and educated on the issues. Trump may go down as the most effective conman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but he is hardly alone. He has had lots of help and he still has lots of company and his followers still think he's telling it like it is.

Change will come, not when we return to Victorian values, but when we make justice, fairness, and responsibility hallmarks of the new age. We need to establish a new Public Morality of honesty, fact-based decision making, responsible public service, fair treatment for all persons, healthcare for all, and a social safety-net that insures that all persons have enough to live at a decent level. We might have to cut back some corporate subsidies and perhaps tax the wealthy to afford some of this, but these are little things compared to the current lack of public morality. Democratic Socialism has saved our people before and it can again, because unfettered capitalism is destroying our country and we are ready for a big change!

So May it be! Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!