

Depraved Cowards And The Collapse Of U.S. Civic Culture



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There is a clear pattern among entertainment and public figures in general in the United States, which is to make racist statements (ala Roseanne Barr) or employ vulgar and filthy language (ala Samantha Bee) and then apologize the day after when they feel the heat, professionally, and sense that their contemptible behavior may lead to a loss of job opportunities, income, and professional marginalization in general. Another very common pattern among people from all walks of life who have committed horrible acts is to try to excuse their behavior by attributing it to factors beyond their own control (drugs, alcohol, sexual disappointments (unfuckability), “the devil made me do it”, and so on).

Depraved is the only word to describe the behavior of people who do not think twice before insulting other human beings with the use of vulgar language. However, the reaction of these people to either real or perceived “corrections” that their depraved behavior may elicit by their employers also indicates that they lack a backbone. In other words, their depraved behavior is also accompanied by political cowardice.

Depraved cowardice among entertainment and public figures in the US (and a similar case can be made about many of the women in Hollywood who are coming out years later, when all is safe and secure, to declare their victimhood and demand justice for having experienced sexual assaults by men who had the power to promote or kill their acting careers) is a symptom of a capitalist culture in which the only things that really matter are money and professional advancement. But the sharp decline of civic culture in the US is also symptomatic of a society

that lacks institutions and political leaders that seek to advance a vision of a common good based on the principles of reason, human dignity, justice, equality, and democratic ethos.

The entertainment industry has played of course a significant role all of its own in the deterioration of civic values and civilized behavior in U.S. society through its constant glorification of violence, with its pathological tendency to delink the individual from the social whole, and the use of incessant cursing and bad language in movie dialogues and music lyrics. Rap music, in particular, seems to thrive on the use of profane and vulgar language, and thereby leading the way towards blurring, if not wiping out, the lines between human decency and depravity.

Under this type of cultural environment, it is of little surprise that a racist, misogynist, and megalomaniac leader can emerge and capture the hearts and minds of a significant segment of the citizenry in "the land of the free and the brave." In fact, such a culture is probably ripe for the emergence of an authentic authoritarian leader from the extreme Right. Apolitical citizens immune to depravity will follow like sheep such political figures because of their socially cultivated incapacity to distinguish good from evil on the political stage. In other words, they are prone to fall prey to extremist political rhetoric due to the paralysis of their intellectual, moral and political nerves brought about by the exerted and systematic pressure of a cultural setting where possessive individualism, crude materialism, and ignorance have become central aspects of the dominant culture and dictate the very meaning of human existence.

In this context, the problems and challenges facing progressive people and movements in the US are multidimensional and thus quite daunting. Challenging capitalism requires not merely sharp critique of U.S. economy and grassroots political activism, but also total rejection of most aspects of U.S. mainstream culture. The '60s experience, where all kinds of weird and in the end counterproductive ways of life surfaced, should be a good starting point for the Left of today to draw lessons about what needs to be done in the struggle of remaking the US political, socioeconomic, and cultural setting. Anti-capitalism is not a sufficient sentiment or standpoint of view on its own for guiding us towards an alternative future. What is needed is a new political discourse and the articulation of a vision as to how different life will be under a new, non-capitalist system. The modalities of multicultural politics and postmodernist discourses, for

example, are quite congruent with the logic and the needs of globalized capitalism and should, therefore, be subjected to severe scrutiny by those forces of the Left that continue to find socialism an attractive and even necessary alternative for the actual survival of our species, which is being directly threatened by the logic of capitalist power relations and the process of unlimited accumulation. Socialism may be the only way of rescuing the natural world and thus avoiding an ecological catastrophe of unprecedented and irreversible levels.

By extension, the issues of growth, job creation, and immigration, which are now dominated by the Right and populists of the like of Donald Trump in the US, the all-populist government of the Five Star Movement and the Northern League in Italy, must become essential foci of discussion and analyses in the politico-ideological repertoire of an anti-capitalist Left that still believes in the ideas of the Enlightenment and in the constancy of the principles of universal values, so frivolously discarded by the multicultural and postmodernist crowd.

The idea that a halt to growth should be part of a socialist Left vision of the future requires serious reassessment as it smacks of the sort of utopianism that defined socialism in the late 18th and early 19th century and made Marx feel obliged to set to scrutiny and critique. The world is not a static entity and technological and scientific advances will continue to take place in modern societies. The only question is over the use of the new tools of technology and forms of knowledge that will continue to develop and emerge. That is, whether they will be used to improve the human condition or to produce further accumulation of wealth for the corporations and the rich.

Likewise, the issue of immigration can no longer be left unchallenged and thus continue to belong exclusively to the political terrain of the extreme Right. The rise of populist leaders and movements in Europe and the U.S. alike cannot be rejected as being simply an irrational and inexplicable phenomenon. Immigration, economic insecurity, and loss of societal cohesion are directly related issues in the age of globalized capitalism and, as such, it does not help the cause of the anti-capitalist Left to ignore the very connections that are clearly behind the resurgence of the extreme Right in the western world.

Finally, an anti-capitalist Left must indeed come to terms with the cultural setting of "late capitalism" as it cannot hope to have its cake and eat it at the same time. Certain types of cultural reproduction, such as a specific type of rap music by

black artists, cannot be left unchallenged because they represent a mode of expression by a historically oppressed group in US society. The anti-capitalist Left must rediscover the forms of cultural expression that elevate the human spirit and celebrate universal values. In other words, it must not accept everything under the sun in the name of cultural relativism. If anything, an argument can be made that it is precisely the widespread emergence of such settings that have led to the collapse of civic culture in the U.S. and to the acceptance of depraved behavior and political cowardice as actual symbols of resistance.

About the author

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