

Revisiting American and Global Culture Wars  
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George Will recently wrote a column about \342\200\234When liberals became scolds.\342\200\235 He was certainly right about that, when considering such liberals as Amy Goodman and Media Benjamin (the notorious Code Pink). I have never heard either of these women say anything positive about our country. If one were to ask them, I am certain that they would say that they love this country so much that they want it to be better than it is. They seem to think of all their carping as loyal opposition.

Will was actually tracing the origin of this carping to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Nobody wanted to think that a stupid sad sack such as Oswald could have single-handedly changed the course of history. It just didn\342\200\231 t feel right. To the Liberals, it seemed unlikely that any true liberal would want to kill this popular president. It had to be a much larger conspiracy, one in which the evil right-wingers in Texas had detested this president and publicly said so were behind this assassination. And these right-wingers could not believe that Oswald was not an agent of the Soviet Union itself. Because of the incredibility of this assassination, conspiracy theories were much easier to swallow.

With this assassination, any pretense of a consensus society largely bit the dust. Replacing consensus was a culture of resentment. Young people resented their elders (\342\200\234trust nobody over 30\342\200\235). Women resented their second-class status (Simone de Beauvoir\342\200\231s The Second Sex). Black and Brown citizens resented their second class status also, especially since they had fought so bravely in World War II and believed that their standing as citizens should be a given. Homosexuals resented the closet they were living in because of laws that put them there. This was the cultural revolt of the left.

The assassination also pushed conservatives into a defensive mode. They believed that American values were under threat by some very foreign ideas. For women to be first class citizens, they needed control over their fertility and access to all careers and administrative positions. However, the former values of women as wives, mothers, and nurturers were being threatened by this sort of feminist equality. The conservatives were right that the older values were threatened, but like King Canute, they tried to hold back the tide. Diehards, moreover, were prepared to resort to violence to prevent abortion and in some cases birth control (clasp a quarter with your knees instead).

The youth revolt that seemed so sweet and charming at first (look what the young people are doing!) soon became more sinister. Out of it came terrorism in the name of ideology (Black Panthers) and an irresponsible sexuality along with drug use that gave medics the nightmare of diseases that had not been seen since Chaucer\342\200\231s t ime. Sexual license, it seems, neither makes young men nor young women happy. And the vulgarization of language and public behavior in our society is their contribution too.

Behind most of the societal conflicts, not only in the US but also around the world, has to do with social values, especially the value of tolerance. Tolerance is not the same thing as endorsement, which neither side understands today. We see these struggles primarily in the Muslim world, centered around the status of women and family. Militant Muslims are willing to kill rather than permit women equality.

This is why a militant thug saw fit to try to assassinate a teen-age girl who spoke up about wanting to go to school. The cultural attitude toward women as property rather than human beings is behind the rampant crime of honor killing \342\200\234disobedient\342\200\235 girls, happening wherever Muslims are living around the world today. Muslim-majority governments say nothing, but we must care and prosecute these killers.

The culture wars will continue because these values are so important to the participants. The only thing that will end culture wars is genuine, common-core education. Freedom requires responsibility and a certain level of tolerance. This is the opposite of ideological (or religious) certainty that only one way, their way, is

right.

677 words

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