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8-8-2019

August 8, 2019: America Needs a Substitute for God

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2019). August 8, 2019: America Needs a Substitute for God. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1255>

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Title: America Needs a Substitute for God

Date: 2019-08-08T05:12:00.004-04:00

8/8/2019—The genre that is needed today is an answer to the question, *What Has Gone Wrong and What Can We Do About It?* This was the subtitle of the book, *Democracy in America*, by Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens. But it is the question lots of people have been asking since Donald Trump was elected President. But it's obvious that whatever went wrong predated Trump and in fact paved the way for such a person to be nominated in the first place. Furthermore, if we can imagine a world without Donald Trump, it is not clear that the hatred in American politics will be healed by voting him out of office. So, if what went wrong was not Trump and if what we can do is not just get rid of him, what did go wrong and what can we do? What went wrong is that God died. People, especially on the American Left, have a very hard time accepting that diagnosis. But if we think of the pathologies of American life, from baseless hatred, to the death of truth, to the deaths of despair in the opioid epidemic, to distrust of science—and on and on and on, we can see that they are mostly what you could call spiritual matters. If nihilism is the lack of a story that answers the question, what is this all about?, we have fallen into nihilism. Anyway, grant me that for the moment. Grant me that there is no longer a culturally shared, beneficent and reliable universe that works for our good. When there was, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., could remind us that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, we could hope to one day to join with our opponents to jointly serve truth. As he did. If this is the problem, what is the solution? You can't go home again. The God who could deliver all that is gone for many people—too many for that story to serve as the foundation for our civilization. And many of the people for whom He is gone still go to church. That is why so many churchgoers are angry at the world, rather than grateful for Christ. But just because God is dead, it does not follow that the beneficent universe of right and wrong died with Him. All we need are new sources for meaningful human life. Meaningful here means "meaning filled." It used to be said, if you want peace, work for justice. Now we can say, if you want healthy politics, work to ground meaning. Those sources are available. More on that.