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Mitchell's "American awakening: Identity politics and other afflictions of our time" (book review)

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Book Review



Mitchell, Joshua. (2020). *American awakening: Identity politics and other afflictions of our time*. New York: Encounter Books. 296 pp. \$28.99. ISBN 9781641771306

Written by a professor of political science at Georgetown University, this academic text is a thought-provoking analysis of identity politics, bipolarity, and addiction ills, claiming that Americans have transferred their religion to politics. Transgression and innocence have become the invisible economy, with guilt assigned to the white, heterosexual man as the new scapegoat (rather than Jesus) for every visible transgression. While the doctrine of original sin and forgiveness takes place in Christianity, neither are found in this new American Awakening where there is no God who will judge or forgive. While Jesus can take away humanity's guilt, the white, heterosexual man's sins are irredeemable according to identity politics.

Many groups are declared innocent, which drives their political legitimacy, as they record their wounds publicly not realizing that identity politics will eventually turn against everyone who employs it. This alters who is allowed to speak up, only producing more anxiety. The identity politics of innocence declares the state must allocate their resources to the innocent victims, warring with the liberal politics of competence that requires labor in building community together. Yet, nothing in this world can redeem itself, and any scapegoating of a group becomes a cheap imitation of true unity. Free thought and speech are being stifled by academic institutions who have assigned themselves as thought police.

Bipolarity inhibits a return to liberal competence due to the selfie man promoted by social media and management society. This keeps men who think they are greater than they are from being able to handle dissent with their fellow man due to their isolation that inhibits liberty. Addiction is fed when man looks for shortcuts, which turn into substitutes. For example, social media substitutes for the crisis of loneliness. The opioid epidemic promotes a literal drug-like fix. We are addicts in an ill country which identity politics cannot fulfill because religious longings still abide, which can only be satisfied one way. Outward condemnation cannot do the work that demands an inward conscience willing to ask for forgiveness and forgive others. Mitchell believes renewal can come through strengthening the middle-class commercial republic, sustaining an adequate foreign policy, and healing the wounds of slavery. This can be achieved through active labor, prayer, and a goodwill towards humanity.

The author has seemingly been inspired by Tocqueville and Locke pertaining to his political philosophizing yet acts as a commentator on the current times we are living. He connects the public problem of identity politics to the private ones of bipolarity and addiction being faced, achieving his purpose of highlighting the unique existential, social, political, and theological issues he has observed, admitting he is not an expert in psychology or physiology.

Footnotes and an index are included. I would recommend this scholarly work for any academic library.

Reviewer

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