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Hate Gets It Done: Why America is Now Far Scarier Than Trump



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In May 2018, evangelist Franklin Graham, the son of the legendary preacher, Billy Graham, embraced Pres. Donald Trump with the following words: “I appreciate that we have a president who understands prayer and solicits prayer. Our country is in trouble, the world is in trouble, and the perplexity of the problems that the president faces every day — at home and abroad — is just incredible.”

Trump is a man at the nexus of two contesting forces that define postmodern American life, market-driven hedonism and culturally-regressive morality. Over the last half-

century, he morphed, like a recovering alcoholic, from an up-market hedonist to a repentant moralist. Trump embodies a profound contradiction: he seems to love money as much as sex, both assertions of his masculine potency and power.

Trump is an immoral, if not an a-moral, man. His legacy of unethical abuse has long been demonstrated in his marriages, his business dealings and his politics. His extra-marital affairs have long been documented, his commercial engagements with Stephanie Clifford (aka Stormy Daniels), a former porn star, and Karen McDougal, the 1998 Playmate of the Year, just the latest; his abuse of women has morphed from a moral issue to a legal matter. The number of people he's ripped-off in business dealings runs equally as long but is far more numerous than his abuse of women.

In politics, one need only recall Trump's memorable lamentation in the wake of the infamous 1989 "Central Park Five" case. Having run ads in local New York newspapers calling for the death penalty for the five innocent male youths of color railroaded for the alleged rape of white jogger (and ultimately acquitted of the crime), he proposed to Larry King, "maybe hate is what we need if we're gonna get something done." These words have shaped his moral beliefs for the last three decades and underscore his presidency.

Yet, many of his followers are "God fearing" Christians. His immorality and their apparent virtue suggest a contradiction that seems difficult to reconcile. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, director of the School for Conversion in Durham, NC, recently wrote in *Time* magazine, "But to Trump's faithful, it is Providence at work in human history. They believe God is making America great again through an imperfect human agent. And like any true believers, they will not be moved."

The U.S. is an avowedly religious nation, more so than most postmodern Western countries. According to a November 2015 [Pew Research study](#), nearly nine-out-of-ten (89%) of Americans believe in God and nearly two-thirds (63%) are "absolutely certain" that God exists.

Pew research also found that [a large majority](#) of Americans — about seven-in-ten — consider themselves Christians. And Christians are a diverse group, including Protestants (Baptists, Evangelicals, Methodists), Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Orthodox Christians and others. However, it found that between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of Americans who consider themselves Christians declined from 78.4 percent to 70.6 percent, a significant decline.

In [another study](#), Pew found that four-out-of-five Americans (78%) still strongly believe in sin, which it defines as “actions or deeds that can be offensive to God.” And none more so than white evangelical Protestants. Among identified sins (and the level of belief) are: abortion (48%), homosexuality (45%), unmarried and living with a partner (36%), divorce (19%), use contraceptive (10%) and drinking alcohol (15%).

As has been much commented upon, white evangelicals overwhelmingly voted for Trump in the 2016 election, [80 to 16 percent](#); this was even greater than their support for George W. Bush in the 2004 election, 78 to 21 percent.

A [2017 Gallup poll](#) revealed deep schisms within the Protestant community. It found that more than two-thirds (68%) of white Protestants who consider themselves “highly religious” approved of Trump’s performance as president; among “moderately religious” white Protestants, his approval dropped to three-fifths (59%) and among “nonreligious” white Protestants, his approval was just slightly more than two-fifths (44%).

Another polling organization, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), reported in April 2018, “white evangelical support for President Trump is at an all-time high, with 75 percent holding a favorable view of the president and just 22 percent holding an unfavorable view.” It adds:

Trump’s support among white evangelicals at this stage of his presidency is strikingly solid. While there are modest differences by gender, Trump’s favorability among white evangelical women is still a robust 71 percent, compared to 81 percent among white evangelical men. And Trump’s favorability is still a strong 68 percent among college-educated white evangelicals, compared to 78 percent among those without a college degree.

This level of support is only about half of what it is among the general public, where Trump’s favorability is at [42 percent](#).

In 2017, PRRI released the results of its 2016 study, “[America’s Changing Religious Identity](#),” based on a sample of more than 101,000 Americans from all 50 states. It reports that white Christians, once the nation’s dominant religious group, now account for fewer than half of all adults. It found that only two-fifths (43%) of Americans identify as white and Christian, and less than one-third (30%) as white and Protestant. Going further, it reported “fewer than one in five (17%) Americans are white evangelical Protestant, but they accounted for nearly one-quarter (23%) in 2006.” Trump’s core constituency is shrinking.

As religious people have long insisted, their God moves in mysterious ways. Only months before the 2016 election, James Dobson, the founder of the group [Focus on the Family](#), proudly announced that Trump had recently “[accepted] a relationship with Christ.” He claimed that the prosperity-gospel televangelist Paula White converted the future president.

“I can absolutely tell you that Mr. Trump has a relationship with God. He is a Christian, he accepts Jesus as his Lord and savior,” White opined in a [Politico](#) interview. “If I was in town, [he’d say], ‘Hey Paula, come by, hang out with friends, family.’ He’d allow me to sit in his office, be a part of his life, his world.”

Trump demonstrated his Christian virtue when, walked along Fifth Avenue, he crossed the street to shake hands with construction workers and, on a California golf course, he got out of his golf cart to thank a Latino man who was taking care of his sand traps. As [Politico](#) notes, “White, who still owns a unit at a Trump property in New York, said his employees at his buildings were loyal to him.”

To strengthen his claim of religious conversion, Trump formed an evangelical advisory board that White services on, along with James Dobson and Jerry Falwell, Jr. When questioned about Trump’s immoral marital conduct, Falwell offered the typical moralist rationalization, “[All these things were years ago.](#)”

Many within the conservative Protestant religious community look to Trump’s presidency as an example of what is referred to as part of a “redemption narrative.” [Dan McAdams](#) recently wrote, “the redemptive self tells the story of a gifted protagonist who journeys forth into a dangerous world and who, equipped with deep conviction and moral steadfastness, transforms suffering into enhancement, aiming ultimately to leave a positive legacy of the self for future generations.” Does this apply to Trump?

Gregory Boyd, senior pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, MN, and a conservative evangelical, warned a decade ago in his book, [Myth of A Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church](#) (2007), that the religious right had “become intoxicated with the Constantinian, nationalistic, violent mindset of imperialistic Christendom.” Going further, he insisted, “the evidence is all around but nowhere clearer than in the simple, oft-repeated slogan that we Christians are going to ‘take America back for God.’”

A decade later, this slogan serves as the unspoken rallying cry for Trump's white conservative evangelical support. It underscores Trump's rants against former president Obama's alleged non-U.S. birth and supposed Muslim faith as well as Trump's outright anti-immigrant attacks on Mexicans, other Latin Americans and Muslims.

Trump seeks to "take America back for God" in innumerable statements and policies. He is opposed to a woman's right to the privacy of an abortion and nominated two staunch opponents of *Roe* to the Supreme Court. His tacit support for the 2017 nativist rioters in Charlottesville, NC, illustrates his wink-and-a-nod support for white nationalism.

Robert Jeffress, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas and an early Trump supporter, captured this spirit when he rallied his faithful. "I couldn't care less about a leader's temperament or his tone of his vocabulary. Frankly, I want the meanest, toughest son of a gun I can find. And I think that's the feeling of a lot of evangelicals. They don't want Casper Milquetoast as the leader of the free world."

The nation now has a far scarier – and immoral — man in the Oval Office.