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America Needs A True Revolution Of Values Color of Law

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As you probably heard, the [Values Voters Summit](#) was recently held in Washington, DC. What exactly is a values voter, and who exactly decides on the definition of a values voter?

In the Orwellian world of conservative-Republican-Christian-fringe doublespeak, the goal is to confuse, obfuscate, distort and deceive. Concepts are intentionally misnamed to suggest a completely opposite meaning. So, universal healthcare is characterized as "fascism". Disdain for women's reproductive rights is called "pro-life". Denial of rights to same-sex couples becomes "the protection of marriage". And rejection of evolution and the teaching of creationism in public schools fall under "religious liberty". Given these twisted definitions of reality coming from the Far Right, it stands to reason that I am skeptical of their definition of values - presumably "family" values - or values voters for that matter.

The list of confirmed and invited guest speakers at the summit reads like a who's who of the usual tea partying suspects: opportunistic, empty-suit G.O.P. politicians, and washed-up and recycled "rising stars" holding their finger to the wind; secessionist sympathizers and bellicose, blowhard news entertainers; immigrant haters and Obama haters; homophobic ex-beauty pageant contestants and the Bible-thumping,

self-righteous moralizers and demonizers, and the like.

And who made Carrie Prejean and Mike Huckabee the experts on values? What can Sen. Jim DeMint, Bill O'Reilly or Rep. Michele Bachmann teach me on the subject of values, or anything of any importance for that matter? I'm not sure. I shall search elsewhere for my values, thank you very much.

One person I will consult is Martin Luther King. The angry mobs of his day labeled him a communist. He talked about the need for a revolution of values. Specifically, he said:

"...we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

In today's post-bubble reality called the Great Recession, Dr. King's words resonate more than ever. As a rabbi reminded me recently in her Rosh Hashanah sermon, these days we have been forced to live with less, to make our lives fuller with less. For many Americans, it was a summer of stay-at-home vacations. People now have to dig deep within, to give more of themselves to their communities and the institutions that matter to them.

Yet during the times of plenty, although many more people were happy, empty values were allowed to thrive. Before the recession hit, Gordon Gekko and his philosophy of "greed is good" were provided a safe haven. The people who could steal the most were hailed as heroes - the best and the brightest, standard-bearers of the American Dream, the people we wanted to become. And surely, someone out there believed that they needed a fifth mansion, yacht or car to make them even happier than their first four.

Yet, in those times of empty economic calories, of massive profits extracted through paper shuffling and smoke and mirrors, there were multitudes who did not share in the wealth. These silent suffering people had been rendered invisible. The prevailing values had dictated that the wealthy few should take all of the economic spoils. The poor are as they always have been - poor and becoming even poorer. And the middle class is, at best, like the proverbial hamster on the treadmill, spinning wheels yet gaining no ground. In a worst case scenario, the people in the middle are joining the ranks of the poor, and there is no middle left. In a society that values property rights over people, families are thrown into the streets for the sake of predatory corporate profit. Everyday people must choose between paying for food, rent and health care. The sick are allowed to die because they could not afford to get sick in the first place. Young people are saddled with obscene levels of college debt, yet cannot find jobs to pay off their mortgage-sized tuition loans.

Then there's the environment. After thousands of years of respecting the land and acting in concert with it, something has gone awry. A few weeks ago I was invited to attend the [International Energy Conference](#) at the United Nations. There was a lot of good values talk there - about green jobs, the need for sustainable sources of energy, and empowering poor communities and developing nations through renewable energy technologies. The production-consumption model of economic growth has run its

course. Taking, making and wasting for the needs of 1 billion people - at the expense of the remaining 5 billion - has damaged the Earth's ecosystems, depleted its natural resources, and fueled political instability around the globe. "Oh, mercy mercy me. Oh, things ain't what they used to be" as Marvin Gaye used to sing. "Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas. Fish full of mercury."

I can guarantee that the participants in the Values Voters Summit did not hold these family values in high regard-of social, economic or environmental justice - even though they claim to be religious and know God personally.

Apparently, there are many types of values out there, or at least they are packaged and promoted as such. To be sure, no one should claim a monopoly on them. But in the end, we must decide which values are meaningful to us, and which values should guide our government and our society. We can find values anywhere, including a down-and-dirty, anti-Obama tea party, or at the white-collar, business suit version that just took place in Washington. That does not mean we want to claim them as our own.

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