



By

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What is a 'cultural progressive'? Is that a good thing? What motivates them to be who they are and do what they do?

Those are some of the questions professors George Yancey and David Williamson answer in their book, *What Motivates Cultural Progressives? Understanding Opposition to the Political and Christian Right* (Baylor University Press, 2012).

The authors were professors of Sociology at North Texas University when they wrote this book. Even though it was published eight years ago, the information and observations about cultural progressives are still helpful to us today.

In fact, one of the reasons I enjoyed reading the book is that it was written eight years ago .. before so much of the cultural and political noise that often drowns out logical and civil discussion today.

Depending on your age you may remember the culture battles in the United States during the last half of the 20th century. They began soon after the end of World War II. That's when I was born, which gave me a front-row seat to what would lead to what we now experience in the 21st century. Much has happened in our country in the last 70+ years because of what the authors call a culture 'war'.

One of the primary aspects of any culture 'war' is the perception of injustice. Here's how the authors explained it:

“Just as the perception of injustice, more than actual injustice, is important to set up the norms to establish a group, the perceived reality of the group members, rather than their actual reality, is more important to develop the ideology necessary to maintain the social movement and to keep the members of the movement hopeful in obtaining their desired goals ... Emergent norms are important factors in the creation of social movements formed to deal with a perceived injustice.”

The authors' point is that once those norms are established, they take on a life of their own, "regardless of any attempt to rationally understand the social reality the members of the group face" (p 34). Might that help explain why people in our country are struggling to be heard today?

The Christian Right

It's important to remember the purpose of a book with the sub-title *Understanding Opposition to the Political and Christian Right*. The professors used sampling data for their book from surveys with a variety of national groups known for progressive positions. They also subscribed to a variety of different news and electronic letters and monitored them for up to a year to understand the perspective of progressives about the Christian Right. Their findings eight years ago may help us understand how progressives view conservative Christians today.

Here are some of the words progressives used to define and describe conservative Christians:

- evil
- stupid
- ignorant
- against science
- politically harmful
- intolerant

- bigoted
- crazy
- immoral
- extremist
- religious extremist
- hypocrite
- trying to take over
- violent
- backward
- claim victimhood
- proselytizers

Do you see any words in the list above that progressives continue to use to describe conservative Christians eight years after the initial survey? They should all be familiar to us. Will that change? The authors responded this way:

“For cultural progressive activists, losing the culture war is unthinkable. Story lines about theocracy and returning to Dark Ages have developed within this social movement and serve to create sufficient fear to motivate the members of

the movement into action ... there is little reason to believe that this activism will disappear in the near future.”

Reading their book from the perspective of eight years later, we can see that progressive activism against conservative Christians will not only ‘not disappear’ but will continue to grow stronger with every passing year.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in understanding how we ‘got here from there.’ Nothing we are seeing in culture today should surprise anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear.

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*“Although there are many about the Christian Right, there has been until now no good book that explores how opposition to that movement among cultural progressives helps to anchor the culture wars. *What Motivates Cultural Progressives?* should be widely read by political scientists, sociologists, and all who seek to understand cultural politics in the United States.”—Clyde Wilcox, Department of Government, Georgetown University*

*“George Yancey and David A. Williamson take the project of studying secularists to a whole new level.”—Hunter Baker, Associate Professor of Political Science, Union University, *Renewing Minds**

What Motivates Cultural Progressives? Understanding Opposition to the Political and Christian Right (Baylor University Press, 2012, 279 pages).