**Assignment #4 - Essay**

**The Problem of Moral Failing in American Culture and Society**

SR 953 Research for 21st Century Scholarship

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Professor

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**Assignment #4: Essay**

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Continuation of the SR953 Research for 21st Century paper that you began for Assignment #2.

1. Write a summary for each of your resources (see Assignment #2 instructions for specifications). Use a Level 1 heading at the beginning of each summary. Level 2 and Level 3 headings are optional.

a. Include the following for each book from Assignment #2 (A minimum of two books (minimum of one published in the last five years) relevant to your chosen topic.)

• a short biography of the author and his or her credentials, and

• your assessment of each book’s (a) readability, (b) presentation of the subject, and (c) relevance to your chosen topic.

b. Include the following for each journal article from Assignment #2 (A minimum of five primary research journal articles relevant to your chosen topic; four articles must be less than five years old.)

• the title, year, and author(s) of the research;

• the basic categories in the literature review section;

• a brief description of the research type and methods;

• a brief description of the population being studied and how the participants were selected for the research; and

• a brief description of the findings and conclusions.

**The Problem of Moral Failing in American Culture and Society**

1. **Introduction**

In American society there seems to be a major problem that is affecting us as individuals and communities in our choices and decisions, whether we speak about certain behaviors in public spaces such as in the public media or at the mall or in public view, or even private decisions of individuals concerning dressing and other aspects of life. We see people behaving in ‘shameful’ ways that in the past were highly unlikely and designated as ‘immoral behaviors.’ However, what meany once scuffed at have now become behaviors exhibited in public such as lying, making false claims, demeaning others for personal benefits, and the like. There seems to be little to no strong condemnation of such behaviors, but rather rewards in terms of attention and popularity. This lack of moral accountability and responsibility has even made itself to the highest and most noble office in this nation: The Presidency of the United States as evident from the constant lies and behaviors displayed by Donald J. Trump who was elected in 2016 as the 45th President of the United States, and who is running for the Presidency for the November 2024 election, even despite several apparent moral failings. It is not just the highest office in the land that moral failure has been reflected, but this is reflected in the behaviors of ordinary citizens and famous personalities from both the sports arena and Hollywood. What is really causing this problem of continued moral failing in American culture and society, and is there a solution? In order to address this question, this essay looks into three major themes below.

* The Causes of Moral Failure in Culture and Society
* Consequences of Moral Failure in Culture and Society
* Solutions to Moral Failure in Culture and Society
1. **Search Terms**

The search terms related to this topic are as follows:

* Moral decline in America
* Moral Education
* Declining values in American Culture
* Morality and Leadership
1. **Book Sources:**

**Butler, A. (2021). *White evangelical racism: The politics of morality in America*. UNC Press Books.**

The author of this book, “White evangelical racism: The politics of morality in America” is Dr. Anthea Butler is the Geraldine R. Segal Professor in American Social Thought, and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania’s College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Butler is a historian of African American and American religion, and holds a Ph.D. in Religion from Vanderbilt University.

This book conveys the history of the evangelical movement in the United States. This is such a powerful book because of its boldness in deeming racism as the underlying powerful factor driving many White evangelicals to oppose immigration and disregard the value, dignity, humanity and contributions of Latinos, African Americans, and non-Whites to the United States. As Butler notes: “the racist and racial elements that imbue its beliefs, practices, and social and political activism [White evangelicalism]” (Butler, 2021, p. 1). The book is well written, and the presentation of the subject is quite clear. The author is straightforward and unapologetic in writing reality as she sees it regarding the racial underpinnings of White evangelical racism:

It is racism that binds and blinds many white American evangelicals to the vilification of Muslims, Latinos, and African Americans. It is racism that impels many evangelicals to oppose immigration and turn a blind eye to children in cages at the border. It is racism that fuels evangelical Islamophobia. It was evangelical acceptance of biblically sanctioned racism that motivated believers to separate and sell families during slavery (Butler, 2021, p. 1). The book is an easy read, and the topic is extraordinarily important given the crises and conflicts that America is currently experiencing in religion, governance, politics and the topic of immigration.

**Greene, J. (2021). *How rights went wrong: Why our obsession with rights is tearing America apart*. Houghton Mifflin.**

The author of this book, “How rights went wrong: Why our obsession with rights is tearing America apart” is Jamal Greene, who is an American Legal Scholar and the Dwight Professor of Law at Columbia Law School. He holds a J.D. from Yale Law School and an A.B. from Harvard College. He is known as a Constitutional Law expert.

In this book, Greene (2021) conveys from a constitutional perspective how important rights are to the American nation, people, and democracy. At the same time, Green points to these rights as a constant source of conflict in a society with diverse views and disagreements. Greene (2021) argues in this book that we need to look back at rights and change the perspective we have toward rights that their legitimacy is based on legal enforcement by judges rather than by the very Constitution itself. Green argues that the Founding Fathers preferred that rights are left to juries rather than judges, and he argues that political dysfunction has created many rights challenges. This book is very timely and important given the last few years of increasing rights challenges. It is an easy read despite the complex issues being written about. Professor Greene has been able to break down the challenge into a comprehensive presentation and the book is useful to both scholars and those seeking knowledge on our rights conflicts.

**Inglehart, R.F. (2020). *Religion's sudden decline: What's causing it, and what comes next?*. Oxford University Press.**

This book on religion’s decline is written by the late Robert Inglehart who was an American Political Scientist and was director of the World Values Survey. Dr. Inglehart earned his PhD from the University of Chicago and was Fellow of The American Academy of Political and Social Science, as well as Fellow of The American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In his book, *Religion’s Sudden Decline: What's Causing it, and What Comes Next?* Dr. Inglehart discusses secularization and the rapid decline of religion in America from 2007 to 2020, noting that the majority of Americans have become less religious. One of Inglehart’s major concern is expressed in this very relevant and timely book as follows: “People need coherent belief systems, but religion is declining. What comes next?” (Iglehart, 2021). In this book, Inglehart does not just look at America’s problem with religious decline, but also on other countries for comparison as to why they have not experienced this drastic religious decline as America has. This book is well-written, and it offers very rich global information comparing the status of religion in the United States and Nordic countries. Th author is very versed on the subject, and the book is a good and informative read. The chapters are also well organized.

**Marsden, G.M. (2022). *Fundamentalism and American culture*. Oxford University Press.**

George M. Marsden, the author of the book, “Fundamentalism and American Culture” is an American historian whose work focuses mostly on the intersection of Christianity and American History. Dr. Marsden earned his Ph.D. in American History from Yale University. He served as Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame.

In this book, Marsden (2022) takes a look at the evolution, history and development of the fundamentalist movement in the United States. He also discusses how the dynamics of social, political, and intellectual characteristics of Protestant fundamentalism have come to affect the fundamentalist movement in American society. The book is very engagement and Marsden (2022) does a good job of organizing the content in this book. The author chases the movement from its beginning in the 1920s. In this work, Marsden explains Dispensational Premillennialism concerning history and modern times and describes the role of Holiness teachings, especially what is known as Keswick Holiness as fundamental factors shaping today’s fundamentalism in American culture. Overall, the author makes his case very well, and the work is relevant to both historical and theological discourses, as well as general knowledge on fundamentalism as a movement. The book is very engaging, and is an interesting read.

**Nye, J.S. (2020). *Do morals matter?: Presidents and foreign policy from FDR to Trump*. Oxford University Press, USA.**

In this book, author Joseph S. Nye Jr. communicates the ethical and moral failures of American presidents when it comes to foreign policy. Dr. Nye is University Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus and former Dean of the Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. He earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from Harvard University and has held several national government positions in the United States such as being Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Chair of the National Intelligence Council, and Deputy Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology.

In this book, Nye (2020) analyzes the work of all presidents from FDR to Trump and evaluates and assess their foreign policy on three important ethical dimensions: (1) the intentions of the presidents, (2) the means these presidents have used, and (3) the consequences of the decisions of these presidents. Nye (2020) evaluates the leadership qualities of each president. He argues that even though presidents are constrained by the structure of the system, this does not prevent from making ethical choices. This book is a very good book for understanding the leadership and achievements of the presidents of the United States. The book is more than this, it is a commentary on ethical leadership of presidents, which Nye (2020) argues, is lacking. The book is organized and Nye’s evaluation on the three ethical dimensions makes sense. The book is always relevant when it comes to the presidency of the United States because it points to expectations of this central leadership.

**Stivers, R. (2023). *The culture of cynicism: American morality in decline*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.**

Richard Stivers, the author of “The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline,” explores the intellectual history of American morality from its European origins in the Middle Ages to the 1990s. Richard Strivers is Distinguished Professor of Sociology Emeritus at Illinois State University. Dr. Stivers earned his Ph.D. degree at Southern Illinois University.

In his book, Stivers (2023) argues that American culture is one of cynicism where individuals are highly focused on the mystical values of success, survival, happiness, and health has produced a corrosive and pervasive morality which is actually an anti-morality. This anti-morally, he argues creates a world where existing norms lack meaning, and everyday life is reduced to an empty struggle for power and satisfaction among citizens of the United States. Among the factors exhibited from this anti-morality are boredom, unhappiness, anxiety, depression, addiction, susceptibility to religious cults, bizarre psychotherapies, widespread divorce, and damaged personal relationships. This is a good book, and it speaks to the challenge of morality in American culture and society. The author carefully lays out and organizes his work, and he presents very good examples throughout the book. It is an easy read and extends the debate about moral decay in America.

1. **Journal Articles:**

**Blanton, R.E., Feinman, G.M., Kowalewski, S.A., & Fargher, L.F. (2020). Moral collapse and state failure: A view from the past. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *2*, 568704.**

**Title, year, and author(s) of the research**: “Moral collapse and state failure: A view from the past” (2020) by Richard E. Blanton, Gary M. Feinman, Gary M. Feinman, Stephen A. Kowalewski, Lane F. Fargher.

**The basic categories in the literature review section**: Political Science and Political Theory

**Brief description of the research type and methods**: This study uses in-depth, cross-cultural comparative studies of premodern states to propose a novel perspective on the causes of state collapse (Blanton, Feinman, Kowalewski & Fargher, 2020). The authors use collective action theory as the framework for the research and analyze several regimes for comparison. This is a descriptive comparative study.

**Brief description of the population being studied and selection of participants**: The population being studied is a group of regimes. The author does not describe any basis on selecting the regimes.

**Brief description of the findings and conclusions**: Brief description of the findings and conclusions: (1) the authors found that collective action theory which was developed by Margaret Levi and her colleagues, provides a new direction for the study of growth and decline of premodern states, and (2) the study revealed that while states providing good government policies and practices were highly regarded by citizens and brought benefits to them, these regimes were not always enduring over time and regime decline was frequently followed by serious demographic and economic consequences (Blanton, Feinman, Kowalewski & Fargher, 2020).

**Deflem, M. (2020). Popular culture and social control: The moral panic on music labeling. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *45*, 2-24.**

**Title, year, and author(s) of the research**: “Popular culture and social control: The moral panic on music labeling” (2020), by Mathieu Deflem.

**The basic categories in the literature review section**: Culture and Morality

**Brief description of the research type and methods**: This study uses a historical case study approach (qualitative method) to analyze the music labeling debate in the United States from the mid-1980s until the early 1990s (Deflem, 2020). The researcher examines the value of a historical approach to what he calls “moral panic.”

**Brief description of the population being studied and selection of participants**: There is no population for the subject. The researcher is studying reactions to music or moral panic on music labeling.

**Brief description of the findings and conclusions**: The researchers conclude that the historical approach to moral panics, conceived as cultural struggles, has important analytical advantages because of its relative detachment from the immediacy of an intensely debated social concern (Deflem, 2020).

**Kydd, A. H. (2021). Decline, radicalization and the attack on the US Capitol. *Violence: An International Journal*, *2*(1), 3-23.**

**Title, year, and author(s) of the research**: “Decline, radicalization and the attack on the US Capitol” (2020), by Andrew H. Kydd.

**The basic categories in the literature review section**: Government and Politics

**Brief description of the research type and methods**: This is a descriptive article examines the causes of radicalization and violence by using a case study approach where the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

**Brief description of the population being studied and selection of participants**: There is no population for the subject. The researcher simply uses a descriptive approach to examine the causes and consequences of radicalization in the United States.

**Brief description of the findings and conclusions**: After examining the January 6 attach on the U.S. Capitol and exploring the descriptive literature on radicalization, the researcher found that, “Conservative radicalization was driven by partisan polarization, media polarization, the emergence of social media and associated conspiracy theories, and the formation of armed right-wing groups” (Kydd, 2021, p. 23).

**Killen, M., & Dahl, A. (2021). Moral reasoning enables developmental and societal change. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *16*(6), 1209-1225.**

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**Mastroianni, A.M., & Gilbert, D.T. (2023). The illusion of moral decline. *Nature*, *618*(7966), 782-789.**

**Title, year, and author(s) of the research**: “The illusion of moral decline” (2023), by Adam M. Mastroianni and Daniel T. Gilbert.

**The basic categories in the literature review section**: Politics and Moral Philosophy

**Brief description of the research type and methods**: The researchers use a quantitative descriptive approach to study perceptions of moral decline around the world.

**Brief description of the population being studied and selection of participants**: The researchers use archival data and original data, where n = 12,492,983 to that people in at least 60 nations around the world believe that morality is declining (Mastroianni & Gilbert, 2023). The researchers state that people have for 70 years attributed this decline to the decreasing morality of individuals as they age and to the decreasing morality of successive generations. (Mastroianni & Gilbert, 2023).

**Brief description of the findings and conclusions**: Based on their research, Mastroianni and Gilbert (2023) found that the perception of moral decline is pervasive, perdurable, unfounded and easily produced.

**Works Cited**

Blanton, R.E., Feinman, G.M., Kowalewski, S.A., & Fargher, L.F. (2020). Moral collapse and state failure: A view from the past. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *2*, 568704.

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