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Introduction to Law, Morality, and Popular Culture in the Public Sphere Symposium

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY
Maurer School of Law
Bloomington

Law, Politics, Morality, and Popular Culture

Introduction

LAUREN K. ROBEL*

The essays in this symposium all concern aspects of the interrelationships among the spheres of law, politics, and morality. The first panel (Professors Woodward¹, Conkle,² and Williams³) looks at invocations of religion and compassion in recent elections and policy initiatives, to analyze the legality of such discourse, to examine the shared, and not-so-shared, popular assumptions underlying it, and to evaluate the frames through which public religious claims are made. The second panel (Professors Roof⁴ and Malti-Douglas⁵) takes as its focus the particular drama of the Clinton presidency, and explores the cultural meaning of the Independent Counsel law and the way in which popular representations of Hillary Clinton's life blurred and reinterpreted the distinction between public and private. The final panel (Professors Sarat⁶ and Jeffords⁷) reaches beyond the recent news to examine conceptions of justice in popular culture, in one case through a sustained and nuanced examination of a single film, in the other through a comment on outsider narratives, such as those of various militia movements.

All of these essays share as a theme an exploration of how the relationships among law, politics, and morality are imagined, created, and represented through and in popular culture. They bear witness to the many locations for legal discourse and the fluidity of influence among those locations, and between them and the formal legal system. They demonstrate the difficulty with defining law as a discourse of specialists, especially in a democratic society founded on a notion of popular sovereignty. And they make lively reading, for these are lively interstices—where Hillary Clinton's breakfast conversation can become a morality play about the role of women in politics, George H. Bush's bewilderment about a homely question can unleash an entire political strategy, and Steven Seagal and the Montana Militia can make common, if metaphoric, cause.

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1. Kathleen Woodward, *Calculating Compassion*, 77 IND. L.J. 223 (2002).

2. Daniel O. Conkle, *Religion, Politics, and the 2000 Presidential Election: A Selective Survey and Tentative Appraisal*, 77 IND. L.J. 247 (2002).

3. Susan H. Williams, *Religion, Politics, and Feminist Epistemology: A Comment on the Uses and Abuses of Morality in Public Discourse*, 77 IND. L.J. 267 (2002).

4. Judith Roof, *Investigating the Special: The Symbolic Function of the Independent Counsel*, 77 IND. L.J. 277 (2002).

5. Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Law Meets Food: Breakfast at Hillary's*, 77 IND. L.J. 295 (2002).

6. Austin Sarat, *When Memory Speaks: Remembrance and Revenge in Unforgiven*, 77 IND. L.J. 307 (2002).

7. Susan Jeffords, *Popular Culture: "Above the Law,"* 77 IND. L.J. 331 (2002).

