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Theocracy Alert

American mythology: Kansas is the Land of Oz

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Online Journal Guest Writer

May 31, 2005 (tanosborn.com)—Despite Dorothy's intuition telling her that she wasn't in Kansas anymore, the truth, whether in Technicolor or not, is that she had not left Kansas at all. Oz and Kansas were, and continue to be, only separated by a dream . . . or a tornado's aftermath. At least that's what the Kansas State Board of Education seems to be telling all of us.

Click your magical red shoes, little Dorothy, and you will travel back and forth . . . from Oz to Kansas, and back to Oz. Simply click those heels and give Kansans the choice: the reality that is Kansas or the vision that is Oz. It's a matter of choice, with evolution and creationism just a click away.

Creationism, re-baptized as Intelligent Design (ID), has been now sprayed with a mist of science. Creationists have now evolved themselves, not through time and natural selection, but as an answer to a force majeure: the 1987 ruling by the US Supreme Court which de jure forbade states from requiring equal treatment of evolution and creationism in science textbooks. By late 1999, the Creation Science Association for Mid-America (CSA) had mutated to another theistic species ready to pose academically as a more credible alternative to the theory of evolution. A faith-based alternative.

But . . . in the science classroom, we ask? Yes . . . in the science classroom, we are told. After all, democracy is about choices, and even more important, the majority rule. A majority rule that in Kansas education is not just conservative, but preservative as well. Those never-say-die creationists are ready to do battle once again, this time with an apropos identification, ID . . . courtesy of John Calvert, Esquire, and self-proclaimed scientist by virtue of a geology degree.

What's with Kansas that keeps America searching for its conservative soul there? Perhaps one will never know the true nature of conservatism, that is, American conservatism, until one has lived there.

Eons ago, after my MBA-ordination, and just as Wichita was entering its Century II, I became a transplanted Californian in America's heartland. I was to be new young blood for the foreign operations of a high profile, and much-diversified, Kansas family firm. Although my stay there did not extend much beyond a second year, it was long enough tenure to provide me with a clear picture of what the see of dogma for conservatism was about. There was little need to decipher words or actions . . . not in fiscal, not in social, not in cultural, and certainly not in political terms. Had most of these folks been Catholic, they would have been characterized as more papist than the pope himself. Compassionate conservatism, a term not in existence then, would have received immediate attention for heretical treatment at a Topeka inquisitorial gathering.

Let's just say that anyone with even the slightest progressivism in his soul would have found most Kansans' conservatism beyond the pale . . . particularly outside the urban centers. Even in a town with the unlikely name of Liberal, it should come as no surprise that Bush more than tripled his opponent's vote. Conservatism seemed to have less to do with fiscal matters and more with everything else. Little wonder that my brand of conservatism did not find a good fit there, even if socially I had made many friends.

There are many great memories of those days in Kansas, even if as a non-native, they may lack nostalgia. The State Fair in Hutchinson, pure Americana-like no other in the land; those Sunday brunches after church, and a short drive, in El Dorado; the superlative open-air summer theater sponsored by Wichita State; the wind combing the never-ending mane of the wheat fields; the mile-long line of grain elevators (46 million bushels capacity) . . . empty, waiting for an improbable other use—perhaps an idea from me or my peers. And so many more!

Unfortunately, my fondness for Kansas and Kansans gets a rude awakening when some Paleolithic aspects of behavior take center stage, like that of the KSBE.

Whatever brand of politics, or religion, one follows, there are some things that by their nature should be left alone. Science is one of them.

In a science classroom, faith, whatever the context, should never be a choice . . . not in Kansas, not in Munchkin land . . . preferably, nowhere on this earth.

Kansas may find it appropriate to have a choice for state bird; the official western meadowlark, and the unofficial mythical jayhawk. Science, however, is not a matter for the birds.

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