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Editorial

At no other time has the cultural and ethical relativism been more eminent in the USA than since the beginning of the new millennium. The deflation of the stock market that began with the bursting of the do.com businesses, followed quickly by events such as the 9/11 incident, the collapse of the housing industry, the U.S. Supreme Court's handing over the presidency to George Bush to the election of Donald Trump—a most unlikely non-politician to win the White House—who did so by dividing the people based on protectionism, faith, race, and ethnicity rather than uniting the people of the United States.

These developments have caused many in the U.S. to redefine right and wrong, good and evil, fairness and equality, pluralism, and integration. The dividing lines between the rich and poor, educated and the left behind, the mainstream white majority and the ethnic minorities have become bolder and thicker. The promise of the American Dream, Free Speech, and Equal Justice Under Law are becoming faint memories of a bygone era. It is perhaps no longer fiction that there are no nations or countries only mega corporations such as AT&T, General Dynamics, Sony, Samsung, Tata and Pfizer capable of bringing down great nations to their knees.

It has been theorized that nations collapse when their important institutions fail; the institutions fail when people running them lose sight of their ethical values and civic responsibilities.

The essays in this collection challenge or examine the above assumptions.

John Cook, a communication scholar and a regular speaker at his church, asserts that the Americans, in general, have abandoned the moral values in pursuit of personal and material gains. Cook posits that it is not just the average person that has deviated from his moral obligations, the large corporations (food processing industry and pharmaceuticals) have corrupted the systems that were to scrutinize their doings. The big businesses have lobbied and bribed the government agencies into turning a blind eye or looking the other way. He foresees a total collapse of the ethical practices among the public, the leaders, and the businesses.

Jennifer Lemanski, an advertising and public relations scholar, takes Cook's work a step further by analyzing the communication strategies of the multinational corporations in the U.S. She points to the unethical practices in selling specific products, i.e., through advertising, and putting positive spins on the corporations' irresponsible behavior to sell the image of a company—as in the public relations practices. While advertising and PR aim to sell products and the images of the corporations, one can hardly expect them to conduct their work objectively.

The third image industry—the news media—is the focus of Sharaf Rehman's essay. Rehman, who has taught print and broadcast journalism on three continents, argues that it is next to impossible for a reporter or a photojournalist to remain objective in reporting or recording a news event. Rehman argues that since a newsperson can only present a slice of the overall story, it is unreasonable to claim objectivity. Photojournalists and reporters are steered by their personal beliefs, values, and attitudes. Their texts and images are colored by their own biases. The best that a reporter can do is to admit that their report is tainted by their own opinions, i.e., subjective.

While objectivity and fairness are important in news reporting, these are of prime importance when it comes to the institution that is the guard and guarantee of “justice for fall”—the Supreme Court. Carlos Figueroa, a political scientist with a keen interest in the functions and workings of the Supreme Court tests the educative function of the institution as well as the concerns of equality, bias, and partiality. The American public is mistrustful of the judicial system and doubts the integrity of the law enforcement in the legal system. Since the Justices are not elected but appointed by the presidents of the United States, their ideological alignment and affiliations are not impartial, it is unrealistic to expect parity and fairmindedness from individuals who are granted these positions based on their ideological leaning rather than their record on equality, fairness, and ethical responsibility.

Terence Garrett, a scholar of public policy, describes the implications of protectionism and nationalism at their most extremes. He narrates the politically charged arguments for building a wall between USA and Mexico to keep the illegal immigration in check. In doing this, the lawmakers have conveniently forgotten that the United States of American was built by immigrants and that the Statue of Liberty proclaimed,

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

The greatgrandchildren of the immigrants insist on closing the borders to keep America for the Americans only. In the recent rhetoric, it has come to mean: America for the white Americans and not the black or brown or any other color or race. The rationale for the border wall, in this case, puts patriotism against humanitarianism. While Garrett offers us specific narratives of individuals trying to cross the border to escape poverty and deprivation, the final essay focuses on a case study.

Lyon Rathbun, a professor of Comparative Literature and Writing, moves the discussion from a macro level to a micro level by focusing on one individual who became a victim of the organized crime. Javier Sicilia was a Mexican writer and a journalist who was also known as a civic activist in his country. In the year, 2011, Javier Sicilia's son was killed by the cartel assassins. Not unlike the United States, Mexico too claims to have embraced the democratic ideals. And not unlike the United States that has accepted the organized crime as a part of her economic fiber, the Mexican society has accepted the drug cartel and human trafficking as a part of her system. Sicilia, in raising voice against the gang wars and the law enforcement authorities' indifference, gathered thousands of others who had lost their loved ones to the cartel thugs. The *Time* magazine named Sicilia the protesters as its Man of the Year in 2011. The cartel leaders are driven by their lust for power and money. As consequentialists, these individuals justify their means (actions) if these help them to reach their goal. For them, taking a life is not a personal act against the victim but a business necessity. When a society accepts organized crime as a part of its civic system and the ethical standards are replaced by greed—the right and wrong are blurred; good and evil become inseparable.

On the one hand, the essays in this collection point to the deterioration of the values in the American culture, on the other hand the contributors to this issue send a message of reassurance that (at least) some people are not only aware of the problem but also have their finger on the pulse of the society and are capable of making recommendations for resolving the issues. The role of the members of the academy is not only to point fingers and criticize but also to redirect the society back on track.

Sharaf Rehman
Guest Editor