

Cultural Imperialism - How it's changing the world. *(It's what made America "The Great Satan")*

How did America become "the Great Satan?" It had nothing to do with guns, religion or George W. Bush. The real culprit is *cultural imperialism*. It's the term used for the effect of all the American movies, TV and magazines that seep into other cultures.

We've all heard news stories about it. Here's how they go: somebody spots a Bruce Willis, or Madonna, or Denzel Washington walking down a street somewhere in New Guinea, Albania, or Chad, and suddenly the star is mobbed and asked for autographs.

All around the world, people recognize Yogi Bear, Michael Jordan, Venus Williams, Robin Williams, Vanessa Williams, James Bond, Barry Bonds, Bon Jovi, Tom Cruise, Tom & Jerry, Sonny & Cher, Sanford & Son, Laurel & Hardy, Lauren Bacall, Bill Gates, Martha Stewart, and the Donalds, Trump, Rumsfeld, and Duck.

Their faces are known everywhere, and local voice dubbing makes them even more familiar. They speak Swahili in Africa, Farsi in Iran; and in Agra, they sound like they were raised in the shadow of the Taj Mahal. But everyone knows who they really are and where they come from. Our movies and TV shows are peeks into American life. That may seem innocuous to you, but to an old Islamic fundamentalist, it is nothing short of terrifying.

These images bring our homes, our marriages, our games, and our values to life. The effect is dazzling. It's a kind of fairy dust that lights up minds with a blizzard of tiny flashing lights. And every twinkle carries meaning. The ideas and views are at first interesting, then fascinating, and then, *haunting*. Inevitably, they become a basis for comparison—and after that, ambitions that set hearts and minds on fire.

The process is so familiar, so common with so many cultures around the world that we take it for granted. At the end of WWII, street photos of Japanese people showed sandals and kimonos, women walking obediently behind

men, and primitive vehicles. Today, a street shot of downtown Tokyo, Osaka or Yokohama is indistinguishable from one taken in Washington, Chicago or Cleveland. Except for the faces-- the hair-dos, clothes, cars and buildings are virtually the same. And when you flip on the radio in Berlin, Brisbane or Bangladesh, you're as likely to hear American top 40 as local oldies. In China, people are accustomed to posters with Asian cowboys smoking Marlboros. Argentine women who want to have more fun are fully aware of how Clairol might help. And it's all due to the messages carried in movies, TV and magazines. The seductive signals have quietly told them, *"This is the way to live ... these are the things you want ... this is the beauty standard.... here is how to walk; this is how to look cool.... these are what to eat, to drink, to wear, to feel."*

Spielberg does Damascus

Eventually, everybody sees our stuff; which means they see American kitchens, supermarkets, schools, restaurants, fashions, workplaces, and shopping conditions from garage sales to Rodeo Drive. And eventually, the people of the world project themselves into the scenes. When Mary Richards challenges Mr. Grant, they see themselves mouthing off to their bosses. They see *their* women on the beach, *their* young daredevils in rockets to Mars. And after they witness women getting boob jobs, old baldies growing hair, and men kissing men, they know that anything is possible.

These media icons aren't just show business and sound bites; they're ambassadors of a way of life. They're persuaders without portfolio. They reach behind doors, come through rooftops, and penetrate the darkest corners with piercing, awakening light. They show the world an open society, trial by jury, cops who laugh, clergymen in Easter Bunny suits, families who make dad the butt of their jokes, and people of all colors working together, doing the wave, and making love.

No matter how stringent reactionary regimes may be, these sights and sounds ooze through. No laws, censors or religious decrees can keep them out. They come from satellites, ships at sea, smuggled recordings, Internet connections, and old newspapers used as packing fodder.

There is no way the flow can be suppressed. When the Taliban pulled the plug on TV in Afghanistan, it wasn't dark for long. American media seem to seep through firewalls, iron curtains, mountain ranges, and dictators' directives. And that scared the elders of Arabia to the bottoms of their feet.

They cowered to think what would happen when the kids and women in the most remote regions of Islam would see that it's not a disgrace for a woman to take a swim; and that people under arrest have the right to remain silent, and if they do not have an attorney one will be provided; and the world is round; and Americans love puppies.

The open, unashamed society that we Westerners enjoy is a terrifying force to those who control restrictive societies. American media jump-start natural human processes that will eventually free women and replace outdated customs.

Whether we plan it or not, our normal images are packed with the lures of civil rights, frozen food, free speech and air conditioning. Our movies and TV shows beam revolution into sheltered lives by simply showing scenes like man-to-man talks with Ward and the Beaver, or Cagney and Lacy running down a perp, our CEOs on trial, and Seiji Ozawa conducting the Boston Symphony while Leon Bates plays Gershwin.

Who can resist such treasures? No one. So, in the long run, no restrictive government, no rigid religious doctrine, no tyrannical regime can remain insulated from the effects of our most powerful weapon - pictures of us.

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Portions of the above were excerpted from "THE FIRST LIBERAL -- a secular look at Jesus' socio- political ideas, how they became the basis of modern Liberalism"

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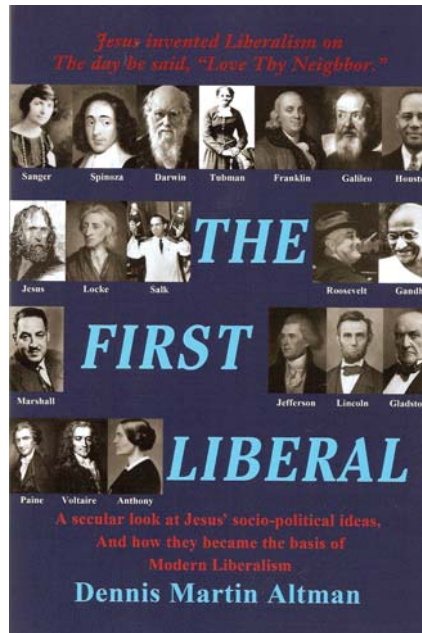
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He is the author of "The First Liberal -- -- a Secular look at Jesus' socio-political ideas, and how they became the basis of modern Liberalism." The book traces the development of the Liberal tradition that began with Jesus' "Love Thy Neighbor" and grew as it went to John Locke, to Thomas Jefferson, to Benjamin Franklin, to Voltaire, to Gladstone, to FDR!

Altman is no stranger to the political scene. During the election year of 1976, he was a media advisor to President Gerald R. Ford, and part of "Campaign 76", the committee to re-elect the President. That gave him a good look at the inside workings of the Republican mindset, and he's been a super Liberal ever since.



*Altman, with President Ford
at Camp David, 1976*



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