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The Shadow Strikes Back: Trump, Trumpism and America's Moral Panic

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Abstract

Since announcing his candidacy for president of the United States in June 2015, and after his election in November 2016, Donald Trump has become focus of much public and media revulsion. He was seen as not only an unfit candidate, but also a dark and dangerous one, whose election marked the beginning of a moral, economic, and social decline. My talk will use Carl Jung and Erich Neumann's depth psychology to discuss how Donald Trump emerged to win the 2016 presidential elections, and why the responses to his election and personality were characterized by moral panic. Relying on the dialectic between the "shadow" archetype, which refers to the dark and repressed parts of the personality, and the "persona," the illusory mask with which we go out into the world, I will argue that the election of Trump and the extreme reactions to it are an expression of the violent social energy released in the dismantling of the clean and spotless "persona" represented by former President Barack Obama, and the erupting of the "shadowy", politically incorrect emotions that were repressed during his tenure. Additionally, I hypothesize that the primal American archetype of the "Old Western hero" representing an adored character whose "shadow" is unrepressed, provided Trump with a strong tailwind; his rhetorical power is explained in that he offered his voters liberating identifications and open expression for their aggressive emotions, those that have no legitimacy within the liberal and politically correct discourse of the leading media, but that do have echoes of legitimacy in the myth of the "Old West". Finally, I will address the reasons why Trump failed to be reelected and why there is a very good chance, assuming he is not convicted in his new trial, that he will be elected again.

Keywords: Donald Trump; Carl Jung; The Shadow; Psychoanalysis