



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning (www.soundlearning.org)

Sound Learning Feature for May 2005

From [Minnesota Public Radio's newsroom](#).

<http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org>

This month we visit the MPR newsroom, and their feature after the 2004 election, *A Mirror on Morality*.

Since the November, 2004 election, much has been said about moral values. Many people say their beliefs don't just play an important role in their life, but also in how they vote. Conservative Christians voted in large numbers, helping to re-elect President Bush. MPR held a series of conversations with parishioners from around the region about how their moral values play into their political decisions.

Click on these links to find instructional ideas and study guides for the material on the Mirror on Morality Web site.

[Segment 1: Beth Jacob congregation, Mendota Heights](#)

[Listen](#) (8:25)

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[Segment 2: "Decoding 'Moral Values'"](#)

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Segment 1

Listening Comprehension

Listen to the piece on the [Beth Jacob congregation in Mendota Heights](#).

http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/news/features/2004/12/09_olsond_bethjacob

Answer the following questions:

1. How does Rabbi Allen remember his religion's involvement in politics?
2. What does Earl Schwartz say are the two themes of Lincoln's Gettysburg address?
3. How does the story of the stranger influence the political and moral values and outlook of the Jewish people according to Rabbi Allen?
4. Why did acting as an election judge help Holly Brod Farber feel good about the election process?
5. What are the main worries of Gila Drazen when asked if the country is going in the right direction?

Critical Thinking





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Based on the audio from the Beth Jacob congregation, answer the following questions:

1. What's the relationship between morality and religion? Do you agree with the speaker that said nonreligious people could be as moral as religious people? Why or why not?
2. For American citizens, which should be their top priority, the constitution or their religious beliefs? Why? How about for politicians? Why? If your answers were different, why?
3. How do you think the founders of our country would feel about the separation of church and state and the relationship between religion and politics today? Are we doing a good job of honoring their vision? Is their idea about what was best for this country still relevant? Why or why not?
4. Why would the statement that God had chosen the last president be troubling to some?

Research Challenges

Read the following poems on the Writer's Almanac Web site. After you have read them, answer the questions below.

Answer the following questions:

1. Go to www.tocqueville.org. Who was Alexis de Tocqueville? Describe two other observations he made about America and/or American democracy. Do you agree or disagree with his assessments? Why?
2. Explore the role of religious figures in the political history of the United States. Study the lives and impact of someone on the list or find someone on your own. How did this person's religious and moral beliefs affect their politics?





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- Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.
 - Reverend Ralph Abernathy
 - Minister Malcolm X
 - Minister Louis Farrakhan
 - Carrie Nation
 - Frances Willard
 - Emma Willard
 - Wovoka
 - William Lloyd Garrison
 - Frederick Douglass
 - Lucretia Mott
 - Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
 - Reverend Billy Graham
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton
 - John Winthrop
 - Jonathan Edwards
 - Roger Williams
 - Pat Robertson
 - Walter Rauschenbusch
 - Aimee Semple McPherson
 - Father Charles Coughlin
 - Jerry Falwell
 - Louis Brandeis
 - Phyllis Schlafly
 - Madalyn Murray O'Hair
3. Interview people from local houses of worship in your community to see if values issues affect their political beliefs.
 4. Research the three major branches of Judaism mentioned in this article: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Outline their major differences and similarities.
 5. Listen to other recordings on the [Mirror on Morality](http://www.mirroronmorality.org) site. How do the views of members of other religious congregations compare with those of Beth Jacob?





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Key Terms and Topics

Terms

The following words can be found in the audio of the Beth Jacob congregation. Please define each word or phrase.

- Disservice
- Abdicated
- Articulate (adj.)
- Empowerment
- Litmus Test
- On the Margin

Segment 2

Reading Comprehension

Read the article "[Decoding 'Moral Values'](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_print.asp?id=74255)" by Aly Colón.

http://www.poynter.org/content/content_print.asp?id=74255

Answer the following questions:

1. What issues, according to this article, do reporters associate with "moral values" voters?
2. What terms do reporters use interchangeably to describe these voters?
3. Who are the leaders commonly heard in reports on this movement?





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4. What did Baptist minister Tony Campolo mean when he said "evangelical Christianity had been hijacked?"
5. What issues does Campolo think evangelicals need to emphasize?

Critical Thinking

Answer the following questions:

1. Do you think that the author is correct about "moral issues" being a way to explain the 2004 election results? Why or why not?
2. How would relate a "moral issues" discussion to questions of the environment? Of poverty? Of war?
3. Why do you think Campolo says that it's important to "demonstrate that we are a body of individuals, each of whom can think for himself or herself?"

Research Challenges

Answer the following questions:

1. Go to www.BeliefNet.com, www.theRevealer.org, www.GetReligion.org, or www.ReligionLink.org websites. Find articles that discuss the interplay between religion and politics.
2. Research the stories of Supreme Court cases such as *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, or *Oregon v. Smith*, to see where religious values can collide with political and legal norms.

Key Terms and Topics

Terms

The following words can be found in the poems referred to in the previous sections.





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- Appropriating
- Credible
- Evangelical
- Religious Affiliation
- Spectrum
- Stem Cell research
- Watergate scandal

Segment 3

Reading Comprehension

Read the article "["Moral Values' Myth" by Charles Krauthammer](http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A44082-2004Nov11?language=printer).

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A44082-2004Nov11?language=printer>

Answer the following questions:

1. Which group does Charles Krauthammer say the democrats blamed for their defeat in 1994? 2004?
2. What evidence does Krauthammer use to support his argument that more than the Christian Right elected President Bush?
3. What evidence does Krauthammer say the media used to support their claims that religion and morality determined people's votes in the last election?
4. How does Krauthammer counter this evidence?
5. According to Krauthammer, what is the link between President Bush's victory and the gay marriage referendums in 11 states?





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Critical Thinking

Answer the following questions:

1. Why do political parties tend to lump all their opponents together in terms of interests and issues?
2. Do you think exit polls in particular and polls in general affect how people think about issues or are they only a reflection of public opinion?
3. Mark Twain once said, "There are three types of lies—lies, damn lies, and statistics". Based on his dissection of the 2004 election exit polls, Krauthammer might agree. What makes a poll reliable? Are there results always subject to interpretation? Why or why not?
4. After reading both articles, "Decoding 'Moral Values'" and "'Moral Values' Myth," how do you imagine Charles Krauthammer and Aly Colón might agree or disagree on the following question: In what ways do people's moral convictions drive their votes?
5. If you were hired as a consultant to the Republican Party, what advice would you give them for appealing to devoutly religious voters while maintaining their own identity as a party? How about if you were hired by the Democrats?

Research Challenges

1. Learn about the Gingrich Revolution in 1994. What were the main goals of this movement? Have they been met? Compare the current goals of the Republican Party to those in 1994.

Related links:

[Republican National Committee](http://www.rnc.org/) <http://www.rnc.org/>





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2. Investigate how polls are created. What are some of the variables the creators must consider as they design a poll? What are some of the factors that determine their margin for error?
3. Select a religiously divisive issue. See how the two major parties address the issue.

Related links:

[Republican National Committee](http://www.rnc.org/) <http://www.rnc.org/>

[Democratic National Committee](http://www.democrats.org) <http://www.democrats.org>

Key Terms and Topics

Terms

The following words can be found in the article. Please define them.

- Gingrich
- Hegemony
- Inversion
- Conventional wisdom
- Scintilla
- Delegitimize
- Sclerotic
- Retrograde
- Bigoted
- Baser
- Medieval primitivism
- Pandering
- Isolationism





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- Nativism
- Chauvinism
- Puritanism
- Homophobic
- Evangelical
- Disproportionately
- Plurality
- Preemptive war
- Referendums
- Blue-state

