

# Donald and Stormy in the United States of Entertainment

If there was any doubt that we live in the United States of Entertainment just check out the 60 Minutes ratings for its Stormy Daniels interview. They were the highest in almost 10 years. Twenty-two million people tuned in to get the lowdown on what happened – or at least what allegedly happened – behind closed doors in a hotel room between the porn star and the man who one day would be president.

If 60 Minutes had done a show on social security reform it would wind up being a cure for insomnia. But sex is interesting and social security reform isn't, so it all makes sense.

What doesn't make sense is the hypocrisy on both the Right and the Left regarding Donald Trump and Ms. Daniels.

When America learned that the president was involved with a much younger woman – I'm referring to Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky – what was the reaction from Clinton's ardent supporters? Who cares, they said, if the president was involved in consensual sex? Only prudes are obsessed with the president's sex life. It's none of our business. And MoveOn.org famously advised us all to ... Move On.

Conservatives, of course, thought it was a big deal, that it revealed something deficient in the president's character, that it showed he was a liar and on and on.

Now we have Donald Trump and Stormy Daniels. And now it's liberals who think Mr. Trump's association with a porn star is sleazy and un-presidential and that his denials are proof that he's a liar – and it's Trump loyalists who are saying, what's

the big deal, let's move on?

For the record, I don't care what Donald Trump did or didn't do with Stormy Daniels. As far as I'm concerned, that's between Mr. Trump and Mrs. Trump. But what *is* so troubling is that our principles apparently depend on who's in the crosshairs – which means they're not really principles we're hanging on to; they're something else, something akin to ammunition in the war between the Right and the Left.

Evangelical leaders who have made careers (and often a pretty good living) condemning immoral behavior suddenly have lost their voice – and their moral indignation – when it comes to Donald Trump. In the battle between principles and power, they've opted for power. He may not be the most moral president we've ever had, they say, but so what? He's pro-life and defends Christian values. Case closed!

Ok, but is it really so difficult for them to condemn Mr. Trump's behavior – including his hot mic admission that he can grab women in a sexual way because he's a star – and still stand by him on taxes and his judicial appointments and his desire to build a wall on the southern border?

Why can't they do both? Here's a theory from Jonah Goldberg:

“It seems to me there are just two reasons why so many former professional finger-waggers refuse to do the minimal work necessary to protect their credibility. First, the president is incredibly thin-skinned and demands not only loyalty but flattery. Any criticism is seen as a betrayal. Second, the Trump base largely sees it the same way. It's a right-wing version of virtue signaling, or really, MAGA-signaling. If you're on board with Trump, you need to be all in.”

So what we have here is the latest evidence that principles are either dead or on their last breath in our divided states of America, a place where many liberals suddenly care about a president's extracurricular sex life and many conservatives

suddenly don't.

Forgive me and anyone else who has a hard time taking evangelical leaders seriously; if we change the channel when they get pious. And while we're at it, progressives shouldn't wonder why a lot of ordinary Americans – the kind who watch the Roseanne show on TV and like it – think they're unserious people who have squandered what was left of their liberal credibility.

Before we all move on, let's at least acknowledge that it wasn't always this way. Conservatives and liberals have disagreed in the past, of course, but their disagreements were based on deeply held principles. Now disagreements are based on who's talking. If it's a liberal, conservatives have to disagree; if it's a conservative, liberals have to disagree.

As the late Italian author and journalist Oriana Fallaci so depressingly put it: "The moment you give up your principles, and your values, you are dead, your culture is dead, your civilization is dead. Period."

The good news is that we're not there yet. The bad news is that we're well on the way.