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The Political Psychology of Crossroads

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Title: The Political Psychology of Crossroads

Author: Editor

The 20th century African-American bluesman Robert Johnson wrote and recorded 'Cross Road Blues' around 1936. Most simply, it's interpreted as expression of bad feelings for not getting picked up while hitchhiking at a crossroads—the intersection of two or more roads. But there are other interpretations. Given the crossroads is often a much more sight of success for hitchhiking than an individual road, lack of success can suggest that all is not right with the world. And when all is not right, one beseeches a higher Power; thus the lyrics "I went to the crossroad/fell down on my knees/...Asked the Lord above 'Have mercy, now save poor Bob, if you please'". But we don't find out whether the Lord will answer the call for mercy.

Another interpretation relates to the racism of Robert Johnson's Mississippi Delta, where there were signs commonly situated at crossroads and elsewhere expressing "N_____, don't let the sun set on you here". He better get picked up before the sun sets, and, thus, the lyrics "Standin' at the crossroad, baby/...risin' sun goin' down/ I believe to my soul, now, poor Bob is sinkin' down". We don't find out where Johnson ends up, when the sun does go down.

Deliverance by the Lord. Deliverance from racist violence. How about deliverance through solace from a loving woman? Thus, the lyrics "And I went to the crossroad/ mama/I looked east and west...Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman/ooh well, babe, in my distress". Whether her very presence brings success or at least analgesic for the pain of failure, she's not there.

The signification of the crossroads has featured in the best of world literature. In *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles (first performed around 429 BCE), Oedipus finds himself at a crossroads while fleeing prophecy that he will murder his father and marry and father children with his mother. At the crossroads, he murders a handful of people during an argument about who shall pass first. Later he learns that the parents whom he left while fleeing the prophecy, are adoptive, and that one of the murder victims was his biological father, Laius. He also solves the riddle of the Sphinx and as a reward marries Jocasta, queen of the city that has been terrorized by the Sphinx. This queen has previously lost her husband via a violent altercation at a crossroads. You can figure out the rest.

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (written in installments during 1866), Sonia—prostitute and sole means of support for her mother and siblings—serves as confessor to the double murderer Raskolnikov. For Raskolnikov's absolution? "Go at once, this very minute, stand at the cross-roads, bow down, first kiss the earth which you have desecrated and then bow down to the whole world and say to all men aloud, 'I am a murderer!'" This crossroads also serves as a Russian Orthodox cross which can bring life from death literally, figuratively, transfiguratively.

In a world of political psychology wherein there are infinite need and finite resources, we are faced with multiple crossroads. As the American poet Robert Frost wrote in "The

Road Not Taken” (1916), “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood/And sorry I could not travel both/...I took the one less traveled by/And that has made all the difference. But what difference and when? Those laboring to understand, explain, influence, predict, and control still labor. And concurrent with this, even with many methodological problems—e.g., overabundance of scientific literature, some incorrect dates and categories—the Google Ngram Viewer suggests with the beginning of the Modern era, there’s been an explosion of *crossroads* within the human text of public discourse. Let’s close with Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act III, Scene ii, My fairy lord, this must be done with haste/For night’s swift dragons cut the clouds full fast/...And...ghosts wand’ring here and there/Troop home to churchyards/Damned spirits all/That in crossways [roads] and floods have burial.

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Keywords: Crime, Crossroads, Dostoevsky, Frost, Oedipus, Political, Psychology, Punishment, Sophocles.

Abstract/Description: This article elaborates on how the construct of *crossroads* has situated within political psychological discourse.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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