

Absence of Political Debate as a Surviving Skill or/and as Naïvete?: A Personal Observation of Tennessee in the Trump Era

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In November of 2016, the election of Donald Trump astonished many of us in academic arena. On the next day of the election, the Middle Tennessee State University was silent. While many professors and students were stunned, even shocked to cry, they kept silence and did not talk about politics on campus. In Nashville, numerous younger country musicians lamented due to their fear of the US moving into a wrong direction. But they kept playing and making music with those who they suspected to be Trump supporters and refrained from talking about politics in public.

When we compare these responses with those of the students and residents in the blue states, such as California and New York, who immediately took actions against the President-elect Trump, we often judge that Tennessee is just another politically conservative state in the US South. But when we put their silence in the context of their daily lives, I found deeper and complex meanings in their silence.

In this talk, I introduce the Middle Tennesseans' reactions to the election that I encountered. By doing so, I wish to address their delicate ways of bringing politics in their daily conversations and the political and cultural diversity in the US South, which Japanese scholars tend to judge as racist, backwards and uneducated.