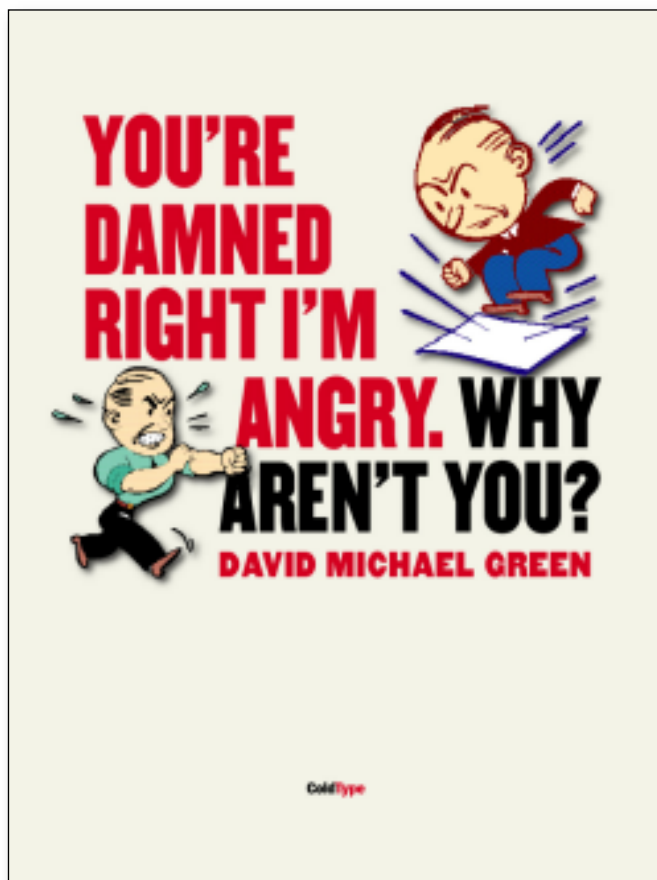


**YOU'RE
DAMNED
RIGHT I'M**



**ANGRY. WHY
AREN'T YOU?**

DAVID MICHAEL GREEN



David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. He is delighted to receive readers' reactions to his articles (mailto:dmg@regressiveantidote.net), but regrets that time constraints do not always allow him to respond.

More of his work can be found at his website, <http://regressiveantidote.net>

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YOU'RE DAMNED RIGHT I'M ANGRY . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN



I WRITE ARTICLES each week with titles like “Everything I Need to Know About the Regressive Right I Learned In Junior High”, or “Conservatism Is Politics For Kindergartners”, or “Schadenfreude Is My Middle Name”.

I regret doing so very much. Believe it or not, I really don't like spewing venom, sarcasm and rage all over my computer keyboard.

I particularly don't like it because I have friends who are conservative, and it's not my nature to trash-talk anybody, let alone friends.

Indeed, none of this is in my nature. I don't start fights and I don't go looking for them. I'm not an angry, bitter or mean-spirited person. But I can understand how I might be seen as such in the absence of the appropriate context, and it truly chagrins me that I might be so misperceived, and so negatively.

But I don't intend to change, and I don't intend to stop making the arguments contained in my rants. I'm angry for a very good set of reasons, and I'm angry because I care about my country just the way conservatives claim to. I'm angry, in short, because I'm a patriot and defender of the ideas that America is supposed to stand for. And what I really want to know is why those on the right aren't equally outraged?

I was a teenager when Nixon was being Nixon, destroying democracy at home, napalming civilians in Vietnam, conducting secret wars in Laos and Cambodia, employing racism to win elections. At that age I knew enough to dislike what I saw (and what I learned of what Nixon and McCarthy had done to innocent Americans even earlier, before I was born, in order to serve their political ambitions), but I didn't know enough yet to feel genuine rage at what regressives were doing to my country and to the world.

I began to experience those feelings in my twenties, first as truly sociopathically insane gun laws in this country helped to claim the life of John Lennon, and then as Ronald Reagan began to systematically turn his back on the poor and the middle-class in order to further enrich the country's already wealthy economic elites. I also felt deep shame and outrage that America – the country that had supported if not

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literally created every two-bit dictator in Latin America, 'our backyard', (and well beyond) for a century – began to murder Nicaraguan peasants in order to halt their struggle to free themselves from the economic and political tyranny of one of those Washington-run caudillo clients, the sickening Somoza regime.

Then I watched in disgust as Newt Gingrich and his merry band of infantile hypocrites impeached a president for lying about a consensual sexual affair, while they were themselves all doing worse, like dumping a wife while she was lying in her hospital bed recovering from cancer surgery, or fathering children with a mistress, or carrying on many years-long affairs.

All of this was truly noxious. Nothing to that point had prepared me, however, for the regressive politics of our time. And they have turned me very angry indeed.

Regressives like to call people like me Bush-haters, and so it is important to address that claim before proceeding, because the entire intent of hurling that label at the president's critics is to undermine their credibility. If you simply hate the man, they imply, you're not rational, and your critiques can be dismissed. But it isn't that simple – not by a long shot. First, it should be noted that the regressive right is far wider a phenomenon than just one person. It currently includes an entire executive branch administration, almost (and, just a year ago, more than) half of Congress, a majority of the Supreme Court and probably a majority of the lower federal courts, a biased-to-the-point-of-being-a-joke mainstream media, and tons of lobbyists, think tanks and profitable industries.

But as to George W. Bush, himself, I suspect it's quite fair to say that most Americans and even most progressives did not originally despise or loathe him. I didn't. I certainly didn't admire the guy, nor did I think he was remotely prepared to be president of the United States. (Nor, by the way, was I particularly impressed with Al Gore in 2000.) Bush campaigned as a center-right pragmatist (a "compassionate conservative", in his words), much as his father had been, and I expected that's how he would govern if elected. You know, more embarrassing most of the time than truly destructive.

I mention all this because it is important to note what has – and what has not – been responsible for my/our anger, and to make clear that attempts to dismiss that anger as some Bush-hating bias or predisposition are false, a ploy to destroy the messenger when one doesn't care for the message he's carrying. If Bush had governed like he campaigned I'm sure I would have disliked him, but neither hated him nor his policies, nor experienced the rage that I feel about what he's done to the country and the world. Frankly, my feelings toward another center-right Bush presidency would have likely been largely the same as my feelings toward the center-

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right Clinton presidency which preceded it.

But he hasn't governed anywhere near to how he campaigned, and he wasn't even elected properly, and I do in fact feel huge anger at the damage done. Moreover, I cannot for the life of me imagine how anyone – even conservatives – could feel differently. Even the wealthy, to whose interests this presidency is so wholly devoted, have to sleep at night. Even they have children who will inherit a broken country existing in an environmentally and politically hostile world, though no doubt they figure that big enough fences, mean enough private armies, and loads of central air conditioning will insulate them from the damage.

I don't mind that the Bush campaign fought hard to win the 2000 election. That was certainly a legitimate goal for them to pursue. But it nauseates me beyond belief that their agents in the Florida government disenfranchised tens of thousands of African Americans in order to keep them from voting Democratic. And it sickens me that they gathered up a bunch of congressional staffers pretending to be an angry local mob and stormed election canvassers, using pure Gestapo techniques to shut down the most fundamental act of democracy, counting the votes.

I don't mind that the Bush campaign took the election to the Supreme Court, even though they were simultaneously accusing the Gore folks of being litigious. What disgusts me beyond words is that a regressive majority of the Court anointed Bush president in a sheer act of partisan politics. And that they were so anxious to achieve that end that they repudiated all their own judicial politics previously espoused in case after case – from states' rights, to equal protection, to judicial restraint. And that they were so conscious of what they were actually doing that they took the unprecedented step of stating that no lasting principles were involved in the matter, that their decision would forever apply to this case and this case only.

Once in office, there was still the possibility that the administration would govern as it had campaigned, as a rather centrist, status quo-style government, perhaps especially tempered from arrogance and overstretch by the knowledge that the country was deeply divided and that Bush had in fact actually lost the popular vote. In fact, though, they did precisely the opposite.

The first order of business, certainly the top priority for the administration, and arguably the only thing they were ever completely seriously about, was their tax restructuring program. It was grim enough that the tax cuts, as under Reagan, were dramatically tilted in favor of the wealthy. But what made them especially disgusting was that – again, as under Reagan – these wholesale revenue reductions were not only not accompanied by expenditure cuts, but in fact were coupled with

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increased spending. Can you say “voodoo economics”? Bush’s father once had, before he treasonously changed his tune to win the vice presidency (leading to the presidency) for himself. But he was right the first time, before he put personal ambition and transparent insecurity ahead of the national interest. And thus we’ve witnessed the only possible result of the combination of massive revenue cuts and continuing spending increases: astronomical debt, now well over nine trillion dollars in total, and rapidly growing. What I want to know is how can we – especially so-called family-oriented, so-called fiscal conservatives – not be outraged, not be scandalized, not be boiling with anger at the debt we have transferred to our own children, all so that we could avoid paying our own way, like every generation before us has?

I am outraged as well at how the administration polarized the country in the wake of one of the greatest traumas it had ever experienced. Let us leave aside the ample evidence demonstrating that the Bush team was asleep at the wheel before 9/11 – or perhaps far, far worse – a set of facts which is noteworthy in part because progressives did not use them to attack the president and score cheap but easy political points. But the administration did precisely that. It is disgusting – and it fills me with anger – how they used a national security crisis to win partisan political contests. How they scheduled a vote on the Iraq war resolution right before the midterm elections of 2002, thus politicizing the gravest decision a country can make by forcing Democrats to choose between voting their conscience and campaign accusations of being soft on national security.

It boils my blood that these chickenhawks – almost none of whom showed up for duty in Vietnam when it was their turn – could dare to accuse Max Cleland of being weak on national security, a guy who gave three of his four limbs to that very cause on the battlefields of Southeast Asia. How could they run ads morphing his face into Saddam’s or bin Laden’s, when his opponent – of course – took Vietnam deferments, just like Cheney and Ashcroft and the rest? And how could they accuse him of being weak on national defense because he opposed the bureaucratic reshuffling to create the Homeland Security Department, when Bush himself had also opposed it? That is, before Rove politicized it by inserting union-busting language applying to tens of thousands of civil servants covered by the act.

It nauseates me beyond words that this president could use the tragedy of 9/11 to justify invading a country which had nothing to do with that attack whatsoever. It enrages me that those who had the courage to oppose this policy so transparently deceitful (and it truly was – from the proof of the Downing Street Memos, to Colin Powell’s charade at the UN, to the assurances that the US knew where the WMD were, to the rejection of the weapons inspectors’ request to have two more months

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to finish the job) were labeled as traitors and worse for telling the truth. And that 4,000 Americans and over a million Iraqis have died for these lies.

And speaking of treason, what sort of looking glass have we all fallen through when the government of the United States exposes its own CIA undercover agent in order to punish her spouse for revealing administration lies about the war? When did that cease to be a cause of outrage, especially among our super-patriotic friends on the right?

How is it possible not to be angry looking at the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, and the bungled response of the government before, during and after that tragedy? Indeed, even journalists who had spent so many years licking government boots that their tongues had long ago turned black were moved to outrage at the magnitude of that failure, with the president meanwhile on a stage in San Diego pretending to play guitar at a Republican fundraiser.

I am outraged, as well, by one of the most insane and avoidable tragedies of all human history, the slow-motion holocaust of global warming. How can anyone not be angry at a political movement and a government that puts the short-term profits of one or two industries ahead of the viability of the entire planet? How can anyone not be mortified as we one-twentieth of the world's population, who generate one-fourth of the greenhouse gases causing the problem, not only do nothing about the problem, but actively block the rest of the world from saving all of us from this folly?

I'm furious because the Bush administration and its ideological allies have shredded the Constitution at every turn, destroying the institutional gift of those they pretend to revere (but only when it's convenient to upholding their own depredations). This president, who has gotten virtually everything he has ever wanted throughout his life and his presidency, once privately exclaimed in frustration at not getting something he wanted when he wanted it, "It's just a goddam piece of paper!", and that is precisely how he has treated America's founding document. His signing statements – probably over a thousand in count now – completely obliterate the checks and balances principle of the Constitution, its most central idea. His admitted spying on Americans without warrant smashes the Fourth Amendment. His fiasco in Guantánamo and beyond mocks due process and habeas corpus guarantees. His invasion of Iraq against the international law codified in the UN Charter, to which the United States is a signatory, violates the Constitutional requirement to hold such treaties as the highest law of the land. Altogether, Americans have never seen a presidency with such imperial ambitions, and anyone who cares about the Constitution should be furious. A year from now, it is quite possible that Hillary Clinton will be president of the United States (ugh). Would our conservative friends silently coun-

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tenance, let alone viciously support, such a monarchy in the White House if it belonged to Queen Hillary rather than King George? I think not.

We could go on and on from here. This administration and the movement it fronts at least gets high marks for consistency. Everything they touch turns to stone. There's Pat Tillman and Terri Schiavo. There's the politicization of the US Attorneys and the corruption of DeLay and Abramoff. There's North Korea, Pakistan and the Middle East. There's the shame of torture and rendition. There's the wrecking of the American military and of the country's reputation abroad. There's Afghanistan and the failure to capture bin Laden. And much, much more. But above all, and driving all, there's the kleptocracy – the doing of everything in every way to facilitate the looting of the national fisc.

What an unbelievable record of deceit, destruction, hypocrisy, incompetence, treason and greed. What a tragic tale of debt, lost wars, stolen elections, environmental crises, Constitution shredding, national shame and diminished security.

All done by the very most pious amongst us, of course. Merry Christmas, eh? I guess those are our presents, all carefully wrapped in spin, contempt, and preemptive attacks on any of us impertinent enough to say “No thanks, Santa”.

So, yeah, you're goddam right I'm angry about what's been done to my country, and what's been done by my country in my name.

How could anyone who claims to care about America not be?





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