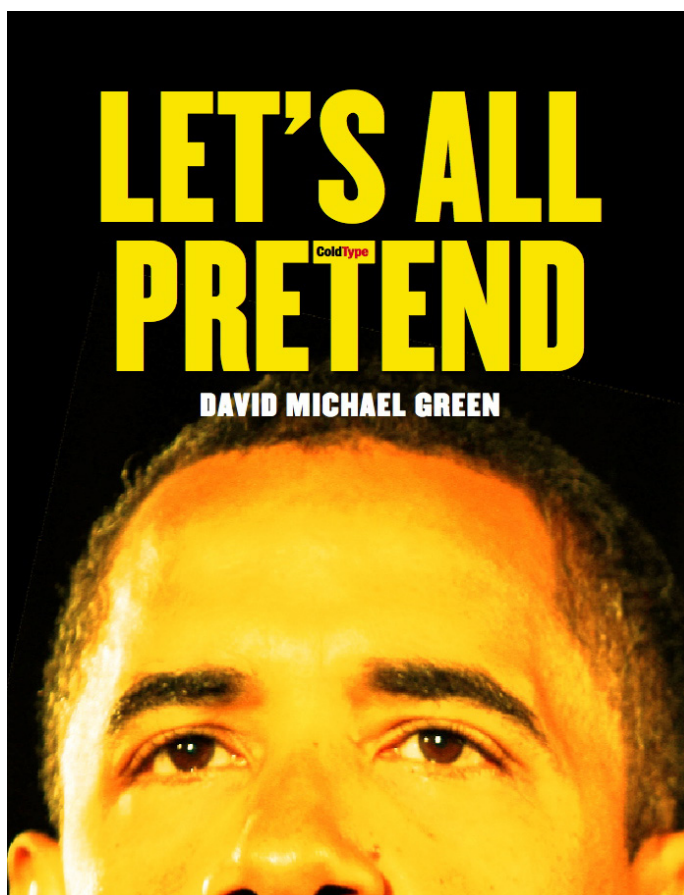


LET'S ALL PRETEND

ColdType

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,
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Barack Obama did it again! He told the truth. Jesus Christ, when is somebody gonna get to this guy and teach him the rules of American politics?

Dude, it goes like this: We're bringing democracy to the Middle East. Tax cuts for the obscenely wealthy are to stimulate the economy. George Bush is more patriotic than Al Gore. Our government is there to serve the people. America is always a force for good in the world. There is a god, he is a nice fatherly-looking Caucasian fellow with a big snowy beard (if the resemblance to the god of American children – Santa Claus – doesn't by itself tell you everything you need to know about religion, you're still not paying attention!). And he's quite angry at Muslims and other people who didn't get the memo on who to worship.

You have to say these things – and a whole lot more sheer nonsense – in American politics if you want to have any hope of winning. When a Milquetoast punk like John Kerry defines the port-side limit to what American voters are willing to hear, while any lunatic freak gone way to starboard – like Coulter or Falwell – can blurt out the most outrageous defamations, and any two-bit thief named Bush can actually be handed the nuclear trigger, you know how ridiculously deluded we are. By the time you get done thinking about what can't be said in this country, you have to wonder what the fuss concerning the First Amendment is all about. Who cares about freedom of speech if you're not going to actually use it?

Mind you, Barack Obama could be a lot more honest in his discussions of our many national maladies. And he could be a lot more vociferous in expressing the outrage which they all deserve. But he's running for president, and it ain't some quixotic Nader campaign, either. He aims to win – and let's be honest – you can't be honest and do that. I cut the guy some slack there, because I'm more interested in him winning than I am in him making me feel good and finally vindicated. That guy

LET'S ALL PRETEND . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

– the feel-good guy – was on the ballot. His name is Kucinich. Bless him, indeed, for what he does, but take note of where it got him.

Moreover, Obama pretty much does get it right when he talks about Iraq. Or when he calls out the special interest vampires who are draining the life-blood from the commonwealth. I've heard him preach sometimes, such as in the following example, where I'm not sure I would change two words of what he said, even if it weren't a speech from the campaign trail:

We can't keep playing the same Washington game with the same Washington players and somehow expect a different result, because it's a game that ordinary Americans are losing. We are going to put this game to an end.

It's a game where lobbyists write check after check and Exxon turns record profits, while you pay the price at the pump and our planet is put at risk. That's what happens when lobbyists set the agenda, and that's why they won't drown out your voices anymore when I am president of the United States of America.

It's a game where trade deals, like NAFTA, ship jobs overseas and force parents to compete with their teenagers to work for minimum wages at the local fast-food joint or at Wal-Mart.

...

It's a game where Democrats and Republicans fail to come together year after year after year, while another mother goes without health care for her sick child. That's why we have to put an end to the divisions and distractions in Washington so that we can unite this nation around a common purpose, around a higher purpose.

It's a game where the only way for Democrats to look tough on national security is by talking, and acting, and voting like Bush-McCain Republicans, while our troops are sent to fight tour after tour of duty in a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged.

That's what happens when we use 9/11 to scare up votes instead of bringing together the people around a common purpose. And that's why we need to do more than end the war; we need to end the mindset that got us into war.

Seriously, where does one go to the left of this without sounding like Lenin?

LET'S ALL PRETEND . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

Seriously, even if we weren't living in the Age of Bush, do we progressives really feel the need to demand more from a candidate than this before we will support him?

And then, of course, there was his speech on race, perhaps the highpoint of American politics in a full generation's time. Admittedly, that's not necessarily saying much in this era of Clintons, Bushes, Reagans, Daschles and Reids. I don't mean to damn the speech with faint praise. It was an astonishing piece of work – because of its content, because of its honesty, and yes, because most everything else on the landscape pales by comparison. But mostly, because of the sophistication which it demanded from its listeners. For once, there was a politician not talking down to us, not portraying the world as some two-dimensional cartoon.

Of course, that turned the right absolutely apoplectic. You can argue with them about tax cuts (which were really tax transfers) and they'll just call you stupid. You can dispute with them about the faux war on terror, and they'll merely label you naive. You can point out the breathtaking stupidity of Iraq, and they'll only question your patriotism. But undermine the whole stupidity-industrial-complex upon which they're fully dependent, and watch them shake with fear and storm in desperation. They know full well that – were Americans ever to elevate their political discourse above a level that wouldn't embarrass your fifth-grader's civics class – the entire premise of the regressive agenda would unravel faster than a yarn store staffed by cats. You'd be able to count the entire national vote for the GOP presidential nominee on two hands and maybe a couple of toes. You could fill Guantánamo sixteen times over with all the criminals in and around the Republican Party. And you'd be happy to do it, too.

The idea of an honest discourse in American politics means the unraveling of the entire premise of the regressive movement, and it must be fought with a ferocity that makes Stalingrad look like a dispute over seating arrangements at a dinner party. That is why Obama must be muzzled, and hammered, and especially mocked. Once we breach the wall and start taking an honest political analysis seriously, the tellers of the Big Lies are finished, hated and destroyed.

Obama's big crime was to tell the truth. Here's what he said:

You go into some of these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them. And they fell through the Clinton Administration, and the Bush Administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are gonna regenerate and they have not. And it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.

LET'S ALL PRETEND . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

So, silly me, I'm reading that, and reading that, and waiting to come to the controversial part! Still waiting, as a matter of fact. I'm sorry, but anyone who thinks that the right hasn't been using race and immigrants (actually, race again) and foreigner workers (actually... well, you know) and religion and guns and gays (who somehow fell off Obama's list) to win elections, hasn't been paying attention. For decades. More likely though, since even the intentionally deaf, dumb and blind could hardly miss this crap, it would require a willful denial, just like the cavemen (and a certain cavewoman) now falling all over themselves to trash Obama as an elitist snob. The irony of this is as profound as it is disgusting. The stink of plutocratic Republican/Clintonist contempt for American voters could overwhelm an abattoir. These multi-millionaire elitists and their Madison Avenue image-crafting machines have been successfully manufacturing an absurd 'Ah-shucks-we're-just-one-of-the-people' image for their candidates for decades now. "Oh look, he eats pork rinds!" "Wow, she bowls!" "Hey, he'd be more fun to have a beer with!" That turned out real well, didn't it?

Anyhow, is this some sort of a bad joke to suggest that race and the rest haven't consistently been used as conservative cudgels in American politics? Anyone remember George Wallace? Believe it or not, he was actually once a bit of a progressive in his early years, and toward the end of his life he also apologized for the damage he had wrought as governor of Alabama and, subsequently, as a presidential candidate. In between, though, this bombastic foe of civil rights was among the ugliest of American politicians. He had learned quickly what sells in America. Having lost his first race for governor in 1958 to a candidate who outflanked him to the racist right, he explained to his friend Seymore Trammell what happened, and what he intended to do about it. "Seymore," he said, "you know why I lost that governor's race? I was outniggered by John Patterson. And I'll tell you here and now, I will never be outniggered again." Nor was he.

Republicans figured that one out about a decade later, if not even earlier, as Nixon's 1968 Southern Strategy successfully peeled disaffected conservative whites away from the Democratic Party. Then, in 1980, you had Ronald Reagan signaling his racist sympathies to white voters by opening his campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi – a town whose one claim to historical fame is that it hosted the murder of three civil rights workers. And there he was, the soon-to-be president of the United States, talking about "states' rights". Subtle, eh? Not to be outdone, ol' Poppy Bush won in 1988 on the back of the truly noxious Willie Horton ad showing footage of a black rapist-murderer going through the parole turnstile over and over. Even Billbo got into the act in '92 with his Sister Souljah routine, and he's not even a Republican. He isn't, is he?

LET'S ALL PRETEND . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

So no one ever used race in this country to win elections, eh? Shame on Barack Obama for promulgating such a transparent lie.

Among the things you're not ever supposed to admit in American politics is that the inherent appeal of racism for the overclass is to soothe the shame of inferiority and domination felt by economically struggling and socio-politically lorded-over working-class whites – without, of course, actually having to share any power or wealth with them. You don't need a PhD in psychology to figure out that giving them someone else to dominate and feel superior toward is a cheap remedy readily available to economic elites and their political minions, most of whom – like Wallace – were probably always pretty indifferent to the race question, if truth be told, except where their fortunes are concerned. If they could have gotten rich and powerful by fomenting anti-Semitism instead, well then, they would have just foment... Okay, well, if they could have done it by drumming up some foreign bogeyman like Noriega or Saddam, then they would have just drummed, er... Okay, okay – uh, if they could have gained wealth and won elections by gay-bashing instead, then they, um... Hey!

This is why Obama's breach of the political firewall keeping the ugly truth out, and the stinking bullshit in, had to be vilified, and he who uttered it annihilated. Here's George Will, among many rich examples, demonstrating the regressive right's standard issue desperate mocking and muzzling routine when anybody in politics even approaches reality. He argues that, for modern liberalism,

The tactic is to dismiss rather than refute those with whom you disagree. Obama's dismissal is: Americans, especially working-class conservatives, are unable, because of their false consciousness, to deconstruct their social context and embrace the liberal program. Today that program is to elect Obama, thereby making his wife at long last proud of America.

Cute, huh? Hah-hah. And so goes the rest of the right-wing chattering classes, all wound up in outrage, undies all twisted into a tight bundle.

We've been here before, most recently and notably with the attempt to Swiftboat Obama (see <http://www.coldtype.net/green.html>) into The Black Candidate with a threatening agenda of racial preference. (We certainly can't have that, can we, given what a sweet deal African Americans have gotten these last several centuries.) If anything, that ploy boomeranged on the right with Obama's killer speech, so today it's the elitist snob card they're playing.

Americans are being tested now. They know they're dissatisfied with the crappy cards they've been dealt these last three decades. They know that Bush is a disaster. They know that he's such a loser that even his parents told him so when he was

LET'S ALL PRETEND . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

growing up. (Nowadays Poppy and Bar just try to pretend the kid doesn't exist at all. Who can blame them? On top of your own weak and forgotten presidency, how'd you like to know that you fathered the worst president in the entire history of the republic? Ouch.) Unfortunately, because they've been rigorously dumbed down and subjected to relentless conservative propaganda and highly successful reframing efforts, Americans haven't yet put together that the source of their malady is itself the regressive right, who of course always claim to be the greatest of patriots.

Look, Obama's not the greatest candidate from the perspective of the few remaining progressives in America who haven't blown town or given up entirely. I seriously fear that, even if he manages to win, he could be another centrist, do-nothing, corporate shill, punching-bag for the right, just like the last Democrat in the White House. Alternatively, there's a lot of evidence to suggest that he's a very, very smart candidate with a real progressive agenda. And a smart candidate understands that the first order of business is to win the election. Have you noticed how many bills Howard Dean signed into law these last four years? Have you seen how many wars John Kerry managed to keep this country from fighting? Can you count the major pieces of environmental legislation Al Gore was able to push through Congress before having the pleasure of signing them into law? Maybe Barack Obama took one look at the last presidential election and decided that as things now stand this hopeless electorate is a better candidate for anaesthesia and anti-depressants than for straight talk about socialized medicine or global warming solutions. All that can come after you get the gavel in your hand. None of it comes if you don't.

And what the faux uproars about the good Reverend Wright and the "bitter" speech have in common is making sure he never gets that gavel. Yet again, like a perpetual golden-oldies jukebox stuck in a time-warp with no off switch, Americans are being treated to the stifling distractions and shameful distortions designed to keep us frightened and stupid. All that's missing so far is a nice little national security emergency in October to slam home the point, even to those occasional remaining Winston Smiths out there who inadvertently continue to make the unpardonable mistake of thinking for themselves.

Will it work? Now we'll find out if angry Americans can see through the clutter sufficiently to avoid four more years of self-inflicted disaster.

I'm not making any bets.



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