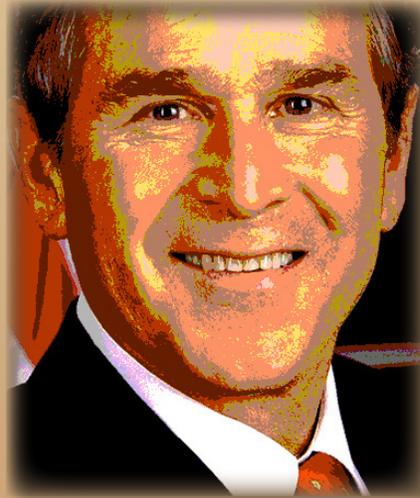
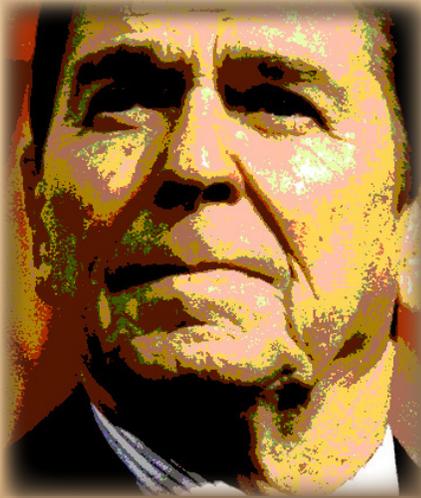
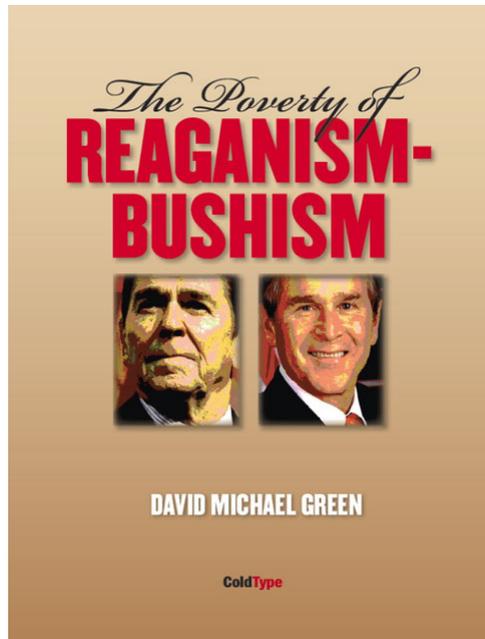


*The Poverty of*  
**REAGANISM-  
BUSHISM**



**DAVID MICHAEL GREEN**

**ColdType**



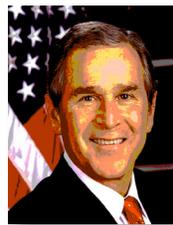
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## DAVID MICHAEL GREEN – THE POVERTY OF REAGANISM-BUSHISM



**BACK** in the day when communism was a politically viable economic program, its capitalist enemies used to love to rail against the evils of “Marxism-Leninism”.

Interestingly, they almost always attacked it for all the wrong reasons, citing, for example, the lack of political freedom in societies where it was being practiced, the aggressive tendencies of national leaders in those countries seeking to conquer their neighbors, or the ideology’s hostility to religion. That last one in particular was always a good one for getting Americans to rise out of their pews in disgust and anger. Those commies don’t even have Jesus!

The fact that none of these critiques had anything at all to do with the economic system that communism actually is was always telling. It’s not so easy to attack the idea of sharing and community, is it? Better to wrap it up instead inside the godless thugs – sometimes real, sometimes not – who embraced it abroad. What could be more un-American?

This was chiefly a marketing ploy, and probably an unnecessary one at that, as communist experiments – again, in the form of economic systems – had limited successes and some spectacular failures. The Soviet Union did rapidly grow from an agrarian economy into a superpower (albeit not an economic one) in very short time, in part through a planned economy. However, that same system later became so ossified that the country ultimately collapsed around it.

Toward the end, workers used to joke about the sham command economy in which they were stuck, saying, “We pretend to work, and the government pretends to pay us”. Often that wasn’t so far from the truth. Likewise, it would be hard to make a real compelling argument for Mao’s Great Leap Forward – a collectivization program that wiped out twenty or thirty million Chinese peasants – over Deng Xiaoping’s turn to the market, which has made the Chinese economy a gale force storm for three decades now, with political and military pow-

## DAVID MICHAEL GREEN – THE POVERTY OF REAGANISM-BUSHISM

er following closely in its wake.

We in the US are now being treated to a similar experiment in economic ideology, though it is neither new nor, at the end of the day, actually ideological. More on that later. For now, though, in the spirit of my good friends on the right, I propose that we give this program the name it properly deserves: Reaganism-Bushism.

While China has been growing into an economic powerhouse these last thirty years, America, under the sway of Reaganism-Bushism, has become the economic equivalent of a Midwestern town decimated by a crystal meth epidemic. Nor are the two likely unrelated, particularly when dealing devastating drugs is the sole economic opportunity on the landscape, and doing those drugs is the sole escape from that personal blight.

In any case, that's our national story. We're the country that is losing its teeth, blasting its brain cells, rotting its body, and stealing everything not bolted down in order to feed its greed habit. Now, as credit crises explode around us and our housing bubble pops and we've run out of foreigners and domestics to exploit and the future and the past from which we've borrowed so heavily are both calling in their chits – now we are the crystal meth country. Survey the economic, social, political and moral landscape and cringe. Look what Reaganism-Bushism has wrought.

Reaganism-Bushism markets itself as a real economic ideology with real principles, but the truth is all that's just for the consumption of the hoi polloi. As a Madison

Avenue – or P.T. Barnum – scheme it's rather more complex than that. As a set of economic principles, it's far less so.

Because your education in self-destructive political foolishness is not yet complete, it remains necessary to pretend that this is a real ideology with real economic principles that are actually adhered to. You know, stuff like 'market discipline' and the 'invisible hand', which only ever seem to apply to the already vulnerable, not to the friendly rich people forever espousing these ideas. In truth, there actually are a set of operating principles here. Just not the ones that are advertised.

Principle Number One is that only a fool believes that the government is an instrument whose purpose is to insure the safety and welfare of the people living within the country's borders. In actuality, the government is a giant cash cow – in fact, the biggest of them all. Yes, its purpose is in fact redistribution of wealth, just not in the southerly direction favored during the more quaint times of our youth. Now it's all about aggregating what's left of meager middle-class earnings through tax collections and then redistributing it to the already fabulously wealthy folks of the richest one percent of the population. (Actually, even many of those are pikers compared to the real money in this country, the top one-tenth of a percent who have their fingers really deep into the pie.)

But, of course, since this is fundamentally

## DAVID MICHAEL GREEN – THE POVERTY OF REAGANISM-BUSHISM

an exercise in wanton societal destruction, the cash cow is probably the wrong mammalian metaphor for the crisis in question. What we're actually talking about here is geese, as in the kind that lay golden eggs. Or, at least, do so until you slit open their bellies.

But even steering fat, no-bid, no supervision, secret contracts to favored corporations in order to pay for military hardware we don't need, or services in Iraq that aren't actually provided, is not enough. (Did you see the New York Times cover story about American soldiers being electrocuted because of shoddy contractor work? Or the one about the Army employee who got reassigned when he questioned Kellogg, Brown and Root's non-performance there?) So Principle Number Two is to never let economic realities that would deter mere mortals prevent you from maximum possible aggrandizement. In short, steal from your own kids.

The only thing more amazing about regressive-created deficits to finance bloated and unnecessary government spending is the fact that conservatives have until very recently somehow still prevailed in the political marketing wars sufficiently that Americans saw them as the folks who are most fiscally responsible. Considering the record of our most conservative presidents (and the ideological namesakes in question), this is truly an astonishing feat.

Ronald Reagan, who castigated Jimmy Carter in 1980 for economic mismanagement, including excessive deficits, proceeded to quadruple the national debt when he

came to office. Anyone could see it coming, too. In fact, George Herbert Walker Bush, when he was fighting Reagan for the nomination that year, called the latter's patently unbalanced economic agenda of military build-up, massive tax cuts and a balanced budget, "voodoo economics". In one of the greatest sell-outs of all history, however, Poppy Bush put his personal interest over our national interest, and become strangely silent on the matter after Reagan put him on the ticket as vice-presidential nominee, opening the way for him to ultimately win the presidency.

Meanwhile, not to be outdone by his daddy or Saint Ron, Lil' Bush has turned the greatest budget surplus in American history into the greatest deficit ever. His pals in Congress, always railing about Democratic fiscal irresponsibility, broke every imaginable record for doling out the self-serving pork once they got control of the national piggy bank. The national debt is now well over nine trillion bucks, and fast rising. If Bush's tax cuts (actually tax burden transfers, from the wealthy to the middle class, and from this generation to the next) are renewed, it will be far worse still. If the alternate minimum tax is properly adjusted, even worse yet.

And we know about the time-bomb of entitlement benefits for retiring Baby Boomers that will soon hit us. What most Americans don't know is that regressives have spent the last decades using their voodoo eco-

## DAVID MICHAEL GREEN – THE POVERTY OF REAGANISM-BUSHISM

nomics to raid those funds, in order to help keep the general budget deficits from being even worse, thus turning a time-bomb into a nuclear stockpile, about to explode.

So Reaganism-Bushism Principle Number One is use the people's government to steal everything you can from them. Principle Number Two is to use deficit spending to steal from their children as well. (Can't you just see the commercial: "Why wait, when you can bilk it now?!") Principle Number Three is to destroy as much of the social safety net as you possibly can. After all, some Honest John knuckleheads out there are still going to be fiscally responsible enough to want to pay for what we spend, and if they go looking around for potential tax revenue, guess where they might see a whole lot of it lurking about, untouched?

So, welfare programs gotta go. Social Security? Gotta go, though of course you can't just kill middle class programs like you can for the poor, so you have to pretend your privatization plan is a reform to make the program solvent. National healthcare? Yeah, right. And, if you do have to add a prescription drug benefit because of the need to pander to seniors, make sure it's written to line the pockets of Big Pharma and Big Insurance so heavily that their pants fall down around their ankles. Don't worry, they have plenty of servants they can get to pull them back up.

The fourth precept of Reaganism-Bushism is an extension of the first three. Once you've

exhausted your exploitation of the folks at home and their children, why stop? Americans are only five percent of the world's population. That leaves a whole world of nice vulnerable people to exploit economically!! And politically. And physically. Can you say "Pinochet"? "The Shah"? "Apartheid"? "Contras"? "Marcos"? And lots more where those good old boys came from. Regressives didn't prop up those bloody dictators because they were great lovers of democracy, or even because of some concern about communist incursions into the 'free' world.

They did it because all you had to do was enrich these tinhorns and stroke their egos in order guarantee their assistance in the pillaging of their own people. In Grant's era, or even Hoover's, all plunder was local – or at least mostly. Reagan and Bush have taken the hunt for spoils truly global.

But why stop with people, even 6.5 billion of them? There's an entire landscape to be raped! Doing so with wanton disregard for the consequences is Principle Number Five. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, one of the surprises for people in the West, not to mention many in the East, was the degree of environmental annihilation that had taken place.

In the race to seek industrial parity with the West, the cheapest way for the Soviets and their allies to get the job done was to ignore environmental impacts of any sort. So that's just what they did, to devastating consequences. The rest of the world is likely to be having a similar experience pretty soon. Whether it's mountain level-

## DAVID MICHAEL GREEN – THE POVERTY OF REAGANISM-BUSHISM

ing, or rainforest obliteration, or gargantuan industrialized outdoor cattle toilets, or sticking the planet in the pot and leaving it there on a low boil, the world is beginning to find out what happens when the captains of industry exploit the planet's resources while leaving the 'externalities' for the rest of us to clean up. And what happens when right-wing politicians who are supposed to be regulating them in the public interest instead serve the special interests. Hint: It ain't pretty. When it comes to regressive politics in America today, nothing is sacred, not even the ground you walk upon, the water you drink or the air you breathe.

Finally, Reaganism-Bushism Principle Number Six is that war is not healthy for children and other living things, except rich people getting even richer from it. So be sure to have lots of war. Or, at the very least, lots of spending on war goodies. Right now, the US not only spends more on 'defense' than any other country, it spends more – and it's not even close – than every other country in the world, combined! And there are 195 of them or so, if you're keeping score. And our great national threat is...? Nazi Germany? Nah. Stalin's Soviet Union? Nope. It's a guy with a beard holed up in the mountains of Pakistan, and a few other folks like him. (Or, at least it used to be a few, until we had the bright idea of launching the Al Qaeda Hyperdrive Recruitment Program, aka the Iraq War.)

Meanwhile, gee, I don't know. Is it just

me, or does this seem like a grossly disproportionate amount of money to spend on privately produced military hardware, especially when our medical, education and infrastructural systems are crumbling at home? I guess it's just all a big coincidence that we spend so much on military hardware while the fat-cats bankrolling regressive politicians are getting rich from the war toys the latter then turn around and purchase from the former.

All that said, the above itemization of Reaganism-Bushism's key ideological principles absolutely gives the creed far too much credit. That's because this is no ideology at all, even a bad one. In actuality, it is a prescription for pillaging and kleptocracy, wrapped in an ideological cloak to give it legitimacy.

They need to market it that way because it's a little early yet in the Dumbification of America campaign for them to come right out and tell you that war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength. Only Republican voters are quite so intoxicated to believe that already, and lots of them have been falling off the wagon lately. So, instead, they have to give you this looting of your own wallet and the tattering of your moral map all gussied up as a real, bona fide economic ideology.

You know: Free trade raises prosperity for everyone! Tax cuts benefit the country and even raise governmental revenues! Government regulation is evil! A skyrocketing wealth gap is just the natural product of entrepreneurial dynamism! And social programs to assist the poor, elderly and

## DAVID MICHAEL GREEN – THE POVERTY OF REAGANISM-BUSHISM

the middle class sap the moral strength of the country! Then they go find some loopy economist like Arthur Laffer to legitimate completely counter-intuitive ideas by publishing some fancy graphs in some backward academic journal. Never mind that your wallet gets lighter every year – you’ve got to stick with this economic program because it’s the American Way, and anything else is some commie plot.

Marxism-Leninism may be a dead ideology (or it may not), relegated to the ash heap of history, but at least it sprang from

an altruistic motivation. Marx wasn’t sitting in the British Museum all day long figuring out how he could get rich by exploiting the masses. Reaganism-Bushism was always just the opposite – it’s just as non-altruistic a program as thievery always was, whatever fancy label you want to paste on it, however much lipstick you slather on the pig. Just as evil as slavery, colonialism, worker exploitation and environmental depredation ever were.

And just as much a real ideology as any emperor’s fine set of new clothes. **CT**

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