



**JOE
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NUTS? AND,
IF SO, DOES
IT MATTER?**

ColdType

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IS THE PRESIDENT NUTS? **AND, IF SO, DOES IT MATTER?**

Supposedly, if you put live frogs in a kettle of cold water on the stove, then raise the temperature very slowly, the frogs will eventually boil to death without trying to escape. I don't know if that is true, but it does seem the perfect, if sometimes over-used, analogy for what we see going on around us in America. My guess is that we frogs are about medium done for. Having neither cooked frogs nor lived in a fascist state, I am not a practiced judge of these things, but I'm quite sure the end result of either is in no way desirable for frogs or human beings.

I do notice, however, that some frogs are turning quite red. Here in the States there is now a trend of wearing red on Fridays in silent protest of the Bush junta. Reportedly, this is modeled after a 1940 practice by citizens of Nazi-occupied Norway, though it is hard to imagine why oppressed Norwegians would do anything that might make them stand out to their oppressors. Still, urban legend or not, it's all over the Internet and one would suppose quite a few people on the "left-coast" are sporting red. By now, it's probably old hat out there.

Not so here in the Washington D.C. area, where we have always thought twice before expressing dissent with any administration, given that the government dominates employment and many other aspects of our lives, either directly or indirectly. If your employer does not sell something to the government, your

spouse may well work in a federal agency, etc. Political views do affect things at work, and it is usually best to keep them to yourself. But these days many of us feel something stranger than normal Washington politics going on – an unseen, mostly unspoken, but surely-felt atmosphere of spooky fear.

IS IT CHILLY IN HERE, OR IS THAT THE LEER OF A MAD MAN?

Still though, the Eastern Seaboard has always been more repressed than the West. So if you mention in polite company how spooky our current political regime seems, most people will look at you like you are crazy, or perhaps even explode into a fanatical defense of George W. Bush, in which case you know you have pressed a neo-con's button. Only a minority here will openly discuss the chilling parallels that informed people see in the Bush junta with the rise of Nazi Germany. This is partly because the more hysterical liberals have abused that analogy to death since the beginning of the administration, before there was much evidence; so it has been considered off limits in moderate, intelligent circles.

This is slowly changing I believe, because it is now becoming obvious that George W. Bush is not merely dumb – he may well be nuts. Every day his actions look more like a genuinely disordered and dangerous mind at work. Not exactly news to those of us who long ago read the same observation on the Internet, or in recently published books to that effect. But what is news is that ordinary nonpolitical white collar working puds, the dreary commuter tribes, in the suburbs and outlying towns are starting to whisper it among themselves. People are beginning to more openly address the question of whether our commander in chief is a certifiable loopjob – and if he is, just what kind of nuts he may be – and to do so in language average literate folks can understand without covering the entire Jungian cosmology or diving into Freud's turgid depths. In calling numerous psychiatrist friends, I learned it is considered unethical for licensed psychiatrists to comment publicly on the mental state of an American president, and I can't say I disagree with that. But the mind of the guy who now has one finger on the red nuclear button and the other up his nose is a matter that should be talked about and is

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being talked about and I'll be damned if I'm going to avoid it. So we will have to punt and hope for the best.

Let's keep it simple: Stupidity alone cannot account for George Bush's behavior – especially when his behavior so well matches known pathologies. For example, if an ordinary citizen believed he was being directed by God to attack “the governments where the Bible happened,” as he once described the Middle East, or thought that ordering the execution of a criminal was funny as hell, or saw everyone who disagreed with him as an agent of the Devil, he or she would be put on some heavy meds at the very least. Hell, I've been medicated for a lot less.

A fellow named Paul Levy in Florida has circulated an email calling Bush's condition “malignant narcissism.” As an off-again-on-again enthusiast of Jung and Freud, I was naturally interested in this, and after dredging up what I remember from psychology classes, a few books (and yes, a long stint in therapy myself) his observations seem at least a little insightful. If nothing else, he has given us some terms and contexts in which to consider what is going on. Contexts we will certainly never hear or see in the media.

According to Levy, Bush's behavior would be normal behavior for a malignant narcissist who finds himself with the kind of power a US president has. The narcissist would conclude that he is divinely inspired by God and see his command of the world's mightiest army and its wealthiest nation as proof God blesses his efforts. In some ways that makes him an average American. Thanks to our Puritan beginnings, we have long believed that power and wealth are manifestations of God's preference for an individual or a nation, and unfortunately tend to act on this mystical assumption. Whether we are saving the world from communism by killing Southeast Asians or covertly assassinating the democratically-elected leftist president of a Latin American nation, it is viewed as liberating the planet from the evil boogers Americans see everywhere, but which emanate from our own national psyche. The world being imperfect, America's quest to make it perfect it by destroying all it considers impure can only lead to much world destruction, of course. It also bears a nasty resemblance to the Nazi obsession with purification.

Another characteristic of malign narcissism is said to be a near or absolute lack of com-

passion. So when George Bush laughed and mocked the last-minute pleading of Carla Faye Tucker, whom he sent to the death chamber in Texas, (“Ohhh, pleeeeee don’t kill me!” he mimicked in a scornful whine on a conservative talk show) he had no idea saner people do not find this funny. I am told it is characteristic of malignant narcissists not to feel any remorse whatsoever. We might also assume that the deaths of American GIs have little effect on him either, though he must pretend so on camera.

ASS-SCRATCHERS + GOD = STRANGE TIMES INDEED

Bush doesn’t fit our image of the hysterical madman exhorting a nation down a megalomaniacal path toward horror. In fact, most Americans, quite understandably, would rather have a beer and watch a game with George Bush than, say, with Al Gore. Meaning that George Bush has what campaign strategists call “ass-scratcher appeal” with the average guy. He also seems to have a mesmerizing effect on conservative Americans that is totally inexplicable to the rest of us. He can lie, then lie about the lie, then all but admit he lied and they still come running and falling like wheat before the sickle.

Personally, I think it is the power of delusion (having deluded some ex-wives, bosses and the IRS a few times myself), Bush’s own and our national one. In his personal delusion, Bush is so convinced of his own words that he comes off as very convincing to others. He is very seductive to most Americans’ concept of themselves as a nation. To them he looks like the first president in a long time to assert what is “right about America,” and especially so following a president who was deemed “slick” and kept a woman under his desk (Which strikes some of us coarser types as pretty damned slick if you can get away with it.) Bush has charisma to those who believe the world is a mean place and that subtler considerations only get in the way. Especially fearful conservatives, always operating from the politics of scarcity, fearful of losing what they have gained materially, those being the core operating values of standard conservatism. Neo-conservatives, of course, are willing to kill you to get it in the first place.

If Bush has given conservatives cause for joy, he has given fundamentalist Christians

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an absolute hard-on. With tears of joy and praise, they have embraced him as their long-awaited national savior, and if the concept of malign narcissism is right, about the only thing a narcissist finds more appealing than being president is being the Messiah. So, hand-in-hand Bush and these Christian soldiers, clothed in the infallible rightness of their agenda – an ultra-fundamentalist Christian America with dominion over a world hammered (bombed if need be) into a likeness of itself, they stomp forward in close hoplite ranks. Bush poses against backdrops that make halos of the presidential seal, appearing as Christ-like as possible. The adoring throng does not fail to be properly inspired, despite his congenital close-eyed squint. Even without psychological theories of narcissism, the whole idea of ecstatic Christian masses spotting a halo around Bush's head in Newsweek seems a little nuts at face value, though it must make Karl Rove pee his pants with glee in that campaign headquarters known as the White House.

Now comes the Hitler analogy, and I'll be damned if I am going to apologize for it: Just as Hitler struck a chord deep in the German unconscious, Bush is touching something within the American unconscious. Whether he is a manifestation of our national mental state, or whether we are unwitting agents of his could be argued. It certainly seems symbiotic. We did elect him for a reason, and history will probably record that reason as not being a very pretty one, the similarities in our national behavior being unnervingly similar to those of pre-war Germany. Why do so many assumedly decent, normal Americans support insane actions such as the Iraq War, strange off-shore wire cage prisons in Cuba, the government's own admission of a dozen secret prisons around the world, or stubborn opposition to the world tribunal for war criminals and ethnic cleansers? Doesn't anyone find these things strange? In fact, doesn't anyone find it strange that two Bushes were elected president so closely together, the father being less than gifted, and the son as useless as tits on a boar hog? (Except at escaping his many failed businesses with loads of cash, rather like the gambler who shoots out the lights and grabs the pot.) If that's not strange I don't know what is. When Fidel Castro offered to monitor the 2000 presidential election count in Florida, we probably could not have done any worse by taking him up on it. Yet most Americans, including their media, did not seem to find all this one bit odd, and pretended that the Brownshirts torching black

votes on down in Florida (despite the Brownshirts being orchestrated by yet a third Bush!) was just another zany little election fracas. Since then, the ACLU has won a lawsuit proving that it was indeed a mugging going on in Florida, and the courts have ordered those tens of thousands of black voters restored to the rolls. The Republican dominated state's reply has been an unspoken but clear as hell, "fuck you!" Those black voters are still off the rolls as I write.

I do not have to go as far as the Sunshine State to feel the chill of suspicious eyes upon me. Right here in Northern Virginia, the northernmost point of the American South, I get little moments of fear that make me wonder if I am being singled out. Maybe I'm just paranoid. The other day when the mailman delivered my subscriber copy of Socialist Worker, he felt perfectly comfortable questioning me rudely as to my national loyalty, as if I were some sort of fair game and not deserving of normal privacy or courtesy. A local rightwing politico, pissed about my liberal activism in housing, tells me she has friends in a government agency from which she retired, and has collected some pretty ugly facts about my past (none of which can be anything close to the alleged horrors in my divorce files.) I received an anonymous phone call regarding the same activism threatening a trumped-up lawsuit: "We'll break you, you liberal sonofabitch. Don't make us own your house, boy!" In fact, last week the owner of a local Internet forum announced he had turned me in to the Homeland Security Administration due to the unpatriotic nature of my postings. Small things to be sure, but they add up. If nothing else, they say something about the political climate these days.

WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

Someday historians may be tracking the spread of this malign political virus just as we now trace the rise of earlier fascist movements. And I think they will conclude that it began here in the American Sout – breeding ground of all things politically dark and deep-fried in hate – which gave us slavery, the Civil War, Orville Faubus, the Klan, Trent Lott, the fanatical Christian right; it's the same sweat-soaked crooked venal South that that had no qualms about fixing a Florida election for George Bush. As a matter of fact, George W. Bush's political career started in the South when he was organizing Christian support for his daddy. And it is through deal-making with some of its most scheming

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slimeballs (i.e., Pat Robertson delivering millions of holy-roller votes in exchange for government concessions worth tens of millions) that he helped get daddy elected. I believe that, like so many of our national carcinomas, the present one began in the South, too. It is as if yet another American congenital defect manifests itself from down in that unconscious realm of the national psyche, from the land of the tobacco-chewing sheriffs and snake-handling churches, to infect our entire political organism. But that's another story.

Meanwhile, it is hard not to notice that the administration polarized around Bush displays the same meanness. They see the same spooks, enemies and demons to be eliminated in every corner of the world and at home. The whole crew gives international law, the Geneva Conventions and civil liberties the same sneer. Are they as sick as he is? Or are they just one big happy dysfunctional family in which they play the role of enablers? Or did they simply end up there because of the twisted trajectory of their own career passage through the bowels of the military-industrial-political monolith? But when you stand back, and look at where they all came from, look at the entire interconnected apparatus of the military industrial war machine, the gutless complicity of big corporate media, our numbed, engorged culture of destruction and consumption and it all becomes too much to bear.

Too much to bear. Well, if push comes to shove and shove comes to worse, some of us seem not about to bear it at all. One can get a dual passport as a safety precaution, as an escape option. Scarcely a week goes by that I do not meet a person who confides that he or she is considering just that, because of our present political condition (let's be honest here in these lefty communications masquerading as Internet essays. How many readers have considered the idea?). I cannot verify it with immigration application figures, but I would suspect there is at least some increase in the number of Americans seeking to emigrate to places such as Great Britain or New Zealand or Canada. A New Zealand newspaper recently ran an editorial welcoming liberal Americans, called them asylum seekers and opining that New Zealand should ease its strict immigration standards for them because those fleeing tend to be educated, creative people with high ideals. They must be observing something from down there. Speaking for myself, I cannot decide about emigrating. Is it best to agree with Greg Palast and Gore Vidal that it

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is safer to shoot at the bastards from across the waters? Fighting from within is beginning to look like a lesser option every day. Or should one take the stance of Marine Corps hero Chesty Puller, who said: “The enemy is in front of us. The enemy is behind us. He is to our right and to our left. We can’t miss ‘em now, boys!” That sounds good, but one person never beats a mob.

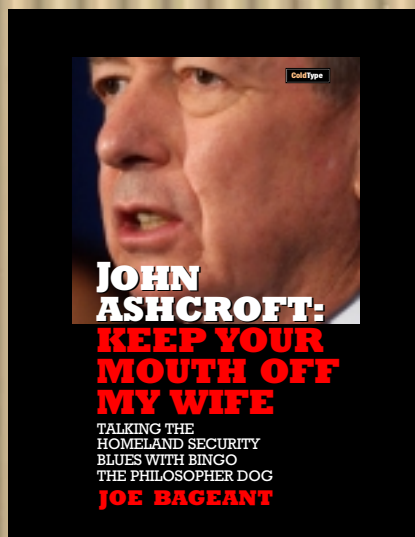
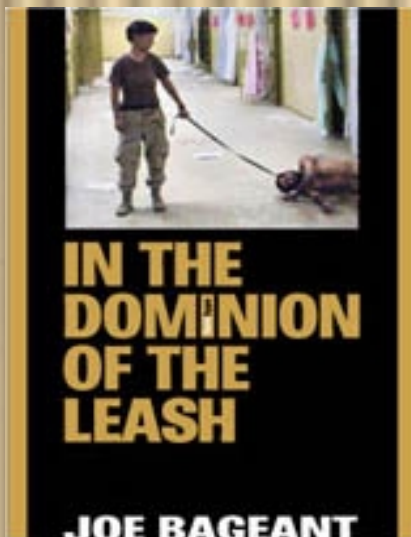
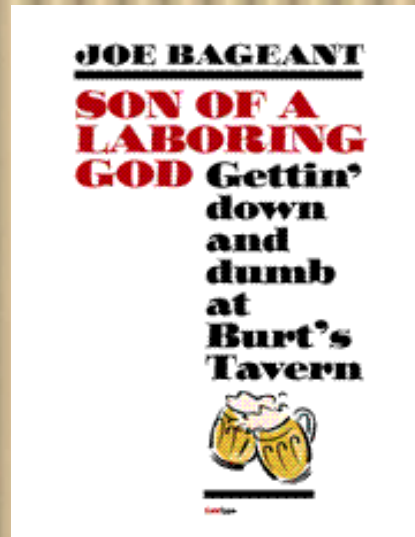
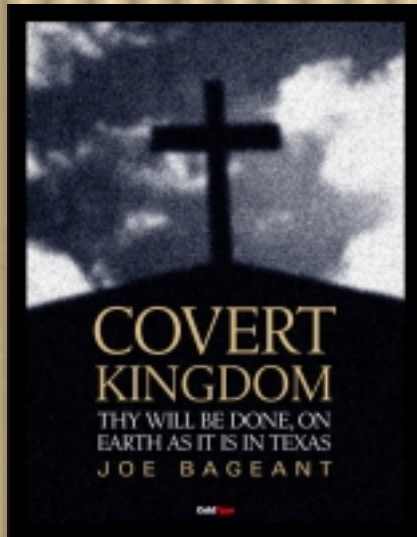
A whiff of hopelessness hangs in the air. After all, we live in a country in which nearly a million citizens marched for women’s lives last April in Washington D.C., yet barely made the local news, and then only because of the traffic congestion, not the issue. We are talking about a country whose non-elected leader called the largest global demonstrations in human history – the worldwide demonstrations against the then-impending war in Iraq – a “focus group.” Most Americans do not even know that it took place. Is it truly possible to be heard in such a nation? If it is impossible for sane dissent, (real dissent, not just the corporate-sponsored stage-prop Democratic Party opposition), to have a national voice, then all our frogs are already cooked. In which case it has ceased to matter that we may have another of history’s full blown wackjobs as our leader.

As you can see, at the moment I am in a grim quandary. So are many others, I am sure. But given the vicissitudes of the human spirit, we can take comfort in that tomorrow is yet another summer day, one that can be traversed on the smooth plank of gin and tonic.

Pour’em!

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