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THEY SAID IT

George W. Bush's presidency appears headed for colossal historical disgrace. Barring a cataclysmic event on the order of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, after which the public might rally around the White House once again, there seems to be little the administration can do to avoid being ranked on the lowest tier of U.S. presidents. And that may be the best-case scenario. Many historians are now wondering whether Bush, in fact, will be remembered as the very worst president in all of American history.

Sean Wilentz, "The Worst President in History," *Rolling Stone*, April 21, 2006.

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GEORGE W'S LEGACY.

Okay, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, how can these idiots write about President Bush's legacy when he's got almost three years left on his second term and there is no end in sight to the war in Iraq, which any fool knows is the key to his entire presidency? The answer to this question is a variation on Gracie Allen's famous comment on La Pucelle. "They laughed at Joan of Arc, but she went right ahead and built it." Well, you can laugh at us, but we're gonna go right ahead and write about it . . . with an important stipulation, of course.

This stipulation is that we really do know that it is far too soon to address this topic. As the Good Book says, there is a time for every purpose, and the time for this particular purpose isn't now. Indeed, any historian worth his salt would know this. And this brings us to the real purpose of this piece, which is to provide a rational perspective on the Bush presidency in response to the kind of twaddle that was recently peddled on the front-page of *Rolling Stone* by Princeton historian Sean Wilentz in an article entitled "The Worst President in History?"

This is a clownish work, not unlike some of Spielberg's left-wing propaganda films for the canaille. Nevertheless, the many liberal fabrications it contains provide an excellent springboard for speculative piece on the Bush legacy. So here goes.

For starters, Wilentz's contention that President Bush's presidency is headed for failure relies heavily on the President's low standing in the public opinion polls at present time. Yet, as he certainly must know, there is no solid correlation between the popularity of any prior president and his later standing in the history books. Some great presidents, like George Washington, were broadly popular during their lifetime. Other great ones, such as Lincoln, were not.

Wilentz also seems to assume that President Bush's legacy is going to be heavily influenced by the "scandals" that have occurred within his administration, including, he notes, the indictment of Scooter Libby, the "major security breach in the Valerie Plame matter," "the unprecedented scandal involving Larry Franklin," "the arrest and indictment" of David Safavian," and the "continuing investigations into . . . the disgraced Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff." It seems extremely unlikely to us that secondary and even tertiary characters such as these will make the history books at all, much less figure in the legacy of George Bush. Scandals tend to be important to presidential legacies only if they directly involve the president, members of his family, or his close friends. They are made worse if they have an affect on events.

For example, the scandals in Warren Harding's administration involved his close associates. Indeed, he himself is said to have once remarked: "I can take care of my enemies all right. But my damn friends, my goddamn friends. They're the ones that keep me walking the floor at night." Nixon and Clinton were directly involved in the scandals that led to their impeachments. Moreover, their scandals had an impact on their ability to lead, on the fortunes of their parties, and on some of the executive decisions they made. There is no evidence whatsoever that this is the case with any of the so-called "scandals" involving the Bush administration.

In contrast to Wilentz's approach, we are going to try to tune out the contemporary political noise. We are going to make an effort to view President Bush from the perspective of a conventional historian looking back on his presidency without the prejudices and biases that naturally cloud the views of people living during this period.

We're not going to try to anticipate what any one particular school of historians might conclude and we're not going to grind this axe or that one. We are going to assume that our "conventional historian" is not intellectually adventurous, meaning that he does not seek new interpretations of history or new

perspectives from which to view the past; that he is not ideologically driven, meaning that he does not judge past events from the extreme bias of a liberal, a conservative, a socialist, a libertarian, a believer, or an atheist; and that he is not at all interested in whether a president was popular at any given moment during his presidency.

We are going to assume that our "conventional historian" is a conservative, with a small "c," meaning, for example, that his views on what constitutes character are in keeping with those that have been passed down largely unchanged for thousands of years and involve the use of such words as wisdom, courage, prudence, perseverance, honesty, honor, and loyalty. This is in contrast to the post-modern view of character, which Bill Clinton once described in an interview with Tom Brokaw as being demonstrated "most effectively" not by what one does in his or her personal life but by "what you fight for and for whom you fight." In the case of politicians, this is another way of saying that character is measured by one's enthusiasm for governmentally ordered wealth redistribution.

Finally, we are going to assume that our conventional historian measures success and failure conventionally, by considering the challenges faced and the measures taken to meet these challenges, while keeping in mind the options that were available at the time, both practically and politically.

From this perspective, we think that President Bush is likely to be viewed by "conventional historians" of the future as a very good president, possibly even as one of the best. We know that this is difficult to believe given his current low public approval ratings and the still messy situation in Iraq. But as we said earlier, we think there is little if any correlation between current popularity and future popularity. As for Iraq, we think it is quite conceivable that even if things fall apart there, which we don't believe will be the case, the effort will be judged retrospectively as an improvement over what would have happened had Saddam Hussein been left in power.

We believe that three overwhelmingly important factors will be the starting point for any and all honest future assessments of the Bush presidency. The first is the fact that he assumed the job at the dawn of a new global era that had no widely accepted formal name at the time but which was a deeply unsettled period in which the nations of the world began the messy and dangerous process of establishing an all new, post-Cold War political, military, and economic pecking order in the midst of monumental changes in technology, communications, and trade.

The second is the fact that the opening of this new global era also happened to be the time in which Islam entered a violent, globally disturbing, decades long period of doctrinal turmoil not unlike the violent reformation period that Christianity experienced in the 16th century.

And finally there is the fact that at the opening of this era the United States had achieved the role of a historically unprecedented global colossus, a nation whose cultural, military, and economic influence was unrivalled around the world and unrivalled in the history of the world, including by that of Rome at the height of its powers.

It was an era that was pregnant with marvelous possibilities for the advancement of human comfort and civilized relations between nations as well as with terrifying prospects for mayhem, mass murder, worldwide epidemics, economically stifling global corruption, and massive, demographically related social unrest.

Into this world came a man named George W. Bush, assuming the role not of the most powerful man in the world, but the most powerful man that the world had ever seen. As with all prior presidents, his principle charge was to promote the prosperity of the nation's citizens, to assure their security, and to do both with an eye on making it possible to maintain security and prosperity well into the future.

While this was a seemingly simple task for the leader of the most powerful economic and military nation in the world, this challenge was complicated enormously

by several factors. The first was that America's economic health and prosperity had become highly dependent on steadily increasing economic growth. Like a shark that must keep moving through the water in order to stay alive, the U.S. economy required continuing growth in order to meet the demands of a citizenry that had become grossly materialistic and self absorbed as a direct result of historically unprecedented prosperity and security. In addition, continued growth was required to keep up the payments on the huge cankers of debt that existed in both the private and public sectors, much of which had been accumulated largely as a means of keeping the shark moving through the water.

Second, this economic growth could no longer be assured by a healthy domestic economy, but was absolutely dependent on a vast network of global trade, the maintenance of which was dependent on friendly relations with the large, consuming nations of the world, as well as on continued access to imported fossil fuels. Further complicating this picture was the fact that, because of America's overwhelming global economic dominance, any economic slowdown in America would most assuredly prompt a worldwide economic slowdown, which would make the American slowdown worse and make the task of recovering from it more difficult.

And finally, this president won the leadership of a society that had become deeply divided both politically and culturally, which assured that his political opposition would heatedly challenge any and all decisions that he would make, even those involving national defense, which had theretofore been off limits to name-calling partisanship.

Professor Wilentz wrongly suggests that President Bush himself divided the nation. In fact, he offers this as one of the reasons that he thinks future historians will give extremely low marks to President Bush. But this is more partisan nonsense. The extreme bifurcation of American society began in the late 1960s, when, as we said last week, "the uniquely American, Christianity-based, 'happy warrior' brand of Democratic politics, as exemplified by Hubert Humphrey, was replaced by an angry, anti-Christian, Gramscian variety,

as epitomized by the Chicago Seven.” And this split has grown wider and angrier ever since the Clinton years, when the fight moved from the realm of political ideas to the moral battleground.

Finally, the challenge of securing the nation, both in the short and long term, was greatly complicated for President Bush by the that above-mentioned turmoil that had suddenly gripped the Islamic world, along with the fact that globalization and advances in technology had enabled small numbers of individuals to cause the kind of death and destruction that had once required large armies to accomplish and against which large armies were not particularly useful.

And then one day, less than one year into the Bush presidency, militant Muslims crashed commercial jets filled with passengers into the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing some 3,000 people. This set off a nationwide demand that the President do something immediately to assure that no further terrorist attacks would occur and that those who perpetrated these attacks be punished.

The fear that these attacks engendered was heightened by a number of factors, including the realization that an open society like America’s was extremely vulnerable to such attacks and that terrorists might use what came to be called “weapons of mass destruction,” including nuclear, biological, and chemical agents.

President Bush’s reaction was decisive. Among other things, he made sweeping changes in the nation’s law enforcement agencies and other homeland security operations, which included the establishment of a cabinet-level department to oversee all aspects of the task and the enactment of important new laws to facilitate the prevention of terrorism and the capture of terrorists. No historian will ever be able to say what might have happened had these measures not been taken or if alternative approaches had been pursued. On the other hand, all fair historians will have to measure success against contemporary statements by virtually all of the experts at the time that further attacks were inevitable and that it would be virtually impossible to stop all such attempts.

On the international front, the President ordered an invasion of Afghanistan and successfully installed a new government there in place of the old one, which had offered Osama bin Laden a safe haven from which to plan terrorist attacks against the United States.

Once again, future historians will have to consider this move in light of the circumstances. It is worth keeping in mind when considering this that historians will often measure presidential actions against other options that were being put forth at the time. But they rarely if ever measure an outcome against an option that no one at the time had even suggested. An example might be to criticize FDR for going to war against Japan after Pearl Harbor instead of entering negotiations with that nation. As such, it seems unlikely that Bush will be penalized for the invasion of Afghanistan.

And finally, of course, there was the invasion of Iraq. As I said earlier, Bush’s legacy depends heavily on how this action eventually turns out and any discussion of his legacy in advance of this is kind of silly. But the eminent scholar Wilentz felt no compunction about do so, so we will plow ahead.

His section on Iraq is filled with boilerplate denunciations of the President and his actions lifted from the speeches of Bush’s most partisan critics. He employs bombastic phrases to provide cover for what can only be seen as deliberately falsified interpretations of events and actions. Examples include “stampeded the Congress and a traumatized citizenry into the Iraq” and “the ‘Bush Doctrine’ of unprovoked, preventive warfare, based on speculative threats and embracing principles previously abjured by every previous generation of U.S. foreign policy-makers.”

Certainly, any future historian is going to seriously consider the proposition that Bush made a mistake by going into Iraq. But a conventional historian will also look at the counter arguments, which, whether Wilentz knows it or not, do a very credible job of acquitting the president of having acted out of mendacity. Indeed, I suspect that a reasonable review of the events leading up to the invasion of Iraq by an unbiased, professional historian will refute all of

outlandish charges made by the likes of Wilentz and reduce the issue to a question of whether the invasion was a good move in the grand scheme of things.

Time will tell, but, as I said earlier, my guess is that President Bush will come out all right on this question, regardless of the outcome of the war in Iraq. Why? Well, given the obligations that Bush assumed when he entered the White House and the state of the world as it was then, it seems to me that his response to the attacks of September 11 had to go beyond immediate acts of defense and vengeance.

He had to consider America's immediate and future role in the world; its obligation to its citizens and to the citizens of friendly nations to remain strong both economically and militarily; its dependence on foreign oil; the extreme vulnerability of its economy and society to acts of terrorism; and the fact that America's best interests, over the long and the short term, are served by a world that is peaceful and democratic.

As such, I believe that a "conventional historian," with no axe to grind, will find it perfectly logical that President Bush would have concluded that the United States had no choice but to "take the fight to the enemy," given that the home of the enemy was in the oil rich Middle East. I think a "conventional historian" will also find it perfectly logical for President Bush to have concluded that if the United States was going to go to war with militant Islam, Saddam Hussein's Iraq had to be neutralized.

And finally, given the inarguable fact that the long-term, future health and safety of the United States would be enhanced by the spread of democratic institutions across the Islamic world, then a conventional historian is unlikely to fault the President for doing what he could to achieve this transition.

In support of this final point, we will close by rerunning a rather lengthy quote from Karl Popper, which we cited in article we wrote in May of last year, entitled "Four Years Later." Our explanation then, which is the same as it is today, is that this quote makes a good case for not being too harsh on

President Bush's democracy initiative. Not only do these thought from Popper go a long way to explain why the Bush plan is intellectually sound, but they demonstrate that this period in American history is likely to be regarded favorably by future historians, because it is a period in which a good fight is being fought by good people for a good cause.

The theory I have in mind is one which does not proceed, as it were, from a doctrine of the intrinsic goodness or righteousness of a majority rule, but rather from the baseness of tyranny; or more precisely, it rests upon the decision, or upon the adoption of the proposal, to avoid and to resist tyranny . . . If we make use of the two labels as suggested, then we can now describe, as the principle of a democratic policy, the proposal to create, develop, and protect, political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny. This principle does not imply that we can ever develop institutions of this kind which are faultless or foolproof, or which ensure that the policies adopted by a democratic government will be right or good or wise-or even necessarily better or wiser than the policies adopted by a benevolent tyrant. (Since no such assertions are made, the paradox of democracy is avoided.) What may be said, however, to be implied in the adoption of the democratic principle is the conviction that the acceptance of even a bad policy in a democracy (as long as we can work for a peaceful change) is preferable to the submission to a tyranny, however wise or benevolent.

Seen in this light, the theory of democracy is not based upon the principle that the majority should rule; rather, the various equalitarian methods of democratic control, such as general elections and representative government, are to be considered as no more than well-tried and, in the presence of a widespread traditional distrust of tyranny, reasonably effective institutional

safe guards against tyranny, always open to improvement, and even providing methods for their own improvement.

He who accepts the principle of democracy in this sense is therefore not bound to look upon the result of a democratic vote as an authoritative expression of what is right. Although he will accept a decision of the majority, for the sake of making the democratic institutions work, he will feel free to combat it by democratic means, and to work for its revision. And should he live to see the day when the majority vote destroys the democratic institutions, then this sad experience will tell him only that there does not exist a foolproof method of avoiding tyranny. But it need not weaken his decision to fight tyranny, nor will it expose his theory as inconsistent.

WE BLAME BUSH.

You'd never know it by looking at them, but apparently George W. Bush and Karl Rove are the two most alluring people in 21st century America. One is a nice enough looking, 60-year-old urban cowboy, but a cowboy who smirks and stammers interminably. And the other is a bookish, portly, 50-something bald man who rarely sees the light of day and looks it. And to the best of our knowledge, neither one can carry a tune in a bucket. Yet the two together are the modern equivalent of Homer's Sirens, singing their song, casting their spell, and causing foes to take leave of their senses and rush headlong to their own destruction.

Or at least that's the only explanation we can offer for the effect that this president and his chief advisor have on their political adversaries.

Over the last few years, we have spent many hours and spilled much ink discussing and attempting to explain the Democrats' "descent into madness." But we've expended precious little effort trying to explain the specific role that the President himself plays in that

descent. Sure, we all know that modern liberalism lacks a coherent governing strategy; that liberals have become incensed at their loss of power and the sense of helplessness that flows from that loss; that many on the left are still haunted by Watergate and Vietnam and have been unable to process the two as discreet events, rather than recurring ones; and that the "pacifism" and leftism of the Democratic Party have led it on occasion to sympathize with the wrong global players and to ignore transcendent truths.

But as notable as all of these emotional/ideological failings are, even they can't explain how the Democrats have repeatedly misplayed their political hand and squandered opportunity after opportunity to make headway with the electorate. In normal times, the left's collective psychoses would be damaging, but not crippling; meaning that the flawed Democratic Party would still have a chance at modest electoral success, as long as the Republican Party appeared equally flawed, which right now is the case. But, as we have written far too many times to count, these are not normal times.

And it would appear, based on the anecdotal evidence, that President Bush is one of the key components in this lack of normalcy. His effect on the political left is quite debilitating, causing its denizens to lose all sense of proportion and perspective and flail about in rage and despair. The \$64 question is whether Bush is truly the cause of this foolishness. If so, it would suggest that his departure from the public stage will presage a return to normalcy. If instead he is merely the most obvious target for the sublimation of greater and more systemic liberal angst, that would mean that when Bush is gone the left will have to create a new scapegoat. In the meantime, the President will continue to serve as the proximate cause for all sorts of obsessive ranting and raving on the part of his political opponents.

Indeed, in the past couple of weeks, the ongoing effects of this strange and toxic fixation with the President – an obsession that columnist Charles Krauthammer has labeled "Bush Derangement Syndrome" – have been on full public display.

For example, in the above piece, we note that Princeton historian Sean Wilentz wrote a recent cover story for *Rolling Stone* magazine in which he concluded that President Bush may well be the worst president in the history of the country. Even ignoring the absurdity of attempting to place Bush in a historical context only 2/3rd of the way the way through his presidency, Wilentz's piece is one that should, at least in theory, be an embarrassment to him. You see, Wilentz is a serious and well-respected historian, generally admired for his probity, diligence, and intelligence. But this piece is a mess. While Wilentz bills his "analysis" as that of the serious scholar he is, what he produced for *Rolling Stone* is a cheap, pop-media hit piece that is, in terms of actual "scholarship," a methodological disaster. As columnist Jay Cost notes: "Wilentz has wrapped the piece in the dress of the academy – the use of the first person plural as in 'we historians,' the talk of the consensus among scholars, the late-night chat sessions in the department's faculty lounge, the provision of historical minutiae – but the article, behind this guise, is completely unscholarly."

Why, one wonders, would a historian of Wilentz's reputation pen such a thing and risk damage to that reputation, perhaps even earning the label of "partisan hack?" We can't say for sure, but it seems likely to us that he did so because he actually believes President Bush to be the worst president of all time and felt an irresistible need to share that belief with as broad an audience as possible, irrespective of how unserious and amateurish it made him look. As Cost put it, "the fact that Wilentz has concluded that Bush is the worst really only indicates that Wilentz does not like him." Wilentz actually "proves" nothing about the Bush presidency, even in the flexible denotation of that word reserved exclusively for social science. All he really manages to do is vent a little bit.

And while unburdening himself thusly might provide Wilentz with some fleeting satisfaction, we suspect that he will, at some point, regret having done so. There is no question that by attacking Bush so unashamedly and so defectively, he risks long-term damage to his reputation as a serious historian and a

scholar motivated by something other than ideological axe-grinding. In our estimation, the risk he took was great. But apparently the temptation was even greater.

Of course, Wilentz is hardly alone in his inability to resist the sirens' call. In fact, he is fortunate in that his case of "Bush Derangement Syndrome" is, in a relative sense, exceptionally mild, since the damage done to his reputation is, at this point, merely hypothetical. Other victims are unlikely to be so lucky.

Among members of the media, "Bush Derangement Syndrome" runs rampant. The loathing of the President that permeates the mainstream press is undeniable, but it pales in comparison to the visceral hatred that exists in the alternative press that has, not coincidentally, become an important and influential part of the Democratic base.

Last week, blogger Radley Balko linked to a transcript provided by the *Knoxville (Tennessee) News Sentinel* of a brutal beating and torture inflicted on an accused small-time drug dealer by five sheriff's deputies in Campbell County, Tennessee. While the transcript is horrifying, and the audiotape even worse, what was truly amazing was the reaction that several left-leaning bloggers – including onetime conservative and current Bush basher extraordinaire Andrew Sullivan – had to the incident.

Rather than simply acknowledging the ghastly sins occasionally carried out by overzealous law enforcement agents, or condemning the violence of rural southern sheriffs' departments, the left-wing bloggers used the torture of a drug dealer in Tennessee to bash President Bush and to suggest that his administration's policy on the treatment of terrorist suspects in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere is somehow the root cause of police brutality everywhere in the United States. As blogger/journalist David Schraub put it, "From Abu Gharib to Guantanamo to Black Sites to the American south. If you don't stop inhumanity at the start, it spreads inexorably like the cancer it is. And now it's right in our backyard."

You got that? The Bush administration has determined that terrorist suspects are not necessarily entitled to Geneva Code protections. And that, by extension, means that when cops in Tennessee hook an illiterate man up to electrodes in order to get him to sign a search consent that he can't even read, it must be Bush's fault.

After being caught making such stupid accusations, both Sullivan and Schraub tried to explain away their swipes at the President as mere commentary on the moral tone and the example the nation's leaders set. But the fact remains that their instinctive reaction, and that of a great many others who are politically active and opposed to the Bush administration, was to see something bad and blame Bush reflexively. Schraub tried to explain himself by noting that "When one does not condemn/tacitly consents to X immoral action, it does send a message to the world and to particular persons that X is condoned, even if that message is not intended." He could just as easily have put it, "I don't like X. Therefore X is George Bush's fault." Not only would that have been simpler, it would have had been more honest as well.

Again, even for all of their immoderation, journalists, bloggers and other media types like Sullivan and Schraub are fortunate in that their reflexive anti-Bushism merely compromises their credibility. Though they may sacrifice reputation and rationality, they likely won't have to sacrifice their readership. The composition of that readership may change, but there is certainly a market for such knee-jerk tirades.

Those who will suffer loss of market share, though, are the liberal politicians, who take their cue from the likes of Sullivan and Schraub and make such anti-Bush blather the core theme of their campaigns. The ABB (Anybody But Bush) strategy failed to win John Kerry the presidency in 2004, and the wild, blame-Bush-for-everything strategy employed by some prominent Democrats this time around is one of the only reasons for Republicans to hope that this election will turn out not to be a complete disaster.

As bad as Congressional Republicans are, the Democrats can still make themselves look worse by abandoning any semblance of positive campaigning and railing wildly against George Bush. And last week, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi did just that and thus reminded voters that though the current House Majority may be pathetic, the House under her leadership would be both pathetic and unbalanced. The following rant may read like a parody, but it was, in fact, the Democratic House Leader's reaction to rising gas prices.

We have two oilmen in the White House. The logical follow-up from that is \$3-a-gallon gasoline. It is no accident. It is a cause and effect. A cause and effect.

How dare the president of the United States make a speech today in April – many, many, many months after the American people have had to undergo the cost of home heating oil? A woman told me she almost fainted when she received her home heating bill over this winter. And when so many people making the minimum wage, which hasn't been raised in eight years, which has a very low purchasing power, have to go out and buy gasoline at these prices?

Where have you been, Mr. President? The middle-class squeeze is on, competition in our country is affected by the price of energy and of oil, and all of a sudden you take a trip outside of Washington, see the fact that the public is outraged about this, come home and make a speech?

Let's see that matched in your budget; let's see that matched in your policy; let's see that matched in your separating yourself from your patron, big oil. Cut yourself off from that anvil that is holding your party down and this country down – instead of coming to Washington and throwing your Republican colleagues under the wheels of the train, which they mightily deserve for

being a rubber stamp for your obscene, corrupt policy of ripping off the American people.

Pelosi may believe that she is doing herself and her party some good, riling up the base, firing up the activists. But with speeches like that one, she is far more likely to convince undecided voters that she is a raving lunatic. Over the course of the campaign, such antics are likely not only to disgust independent and undecided voters, possibly convincing them to sit this election out, but to agitate an otherwise demoralized and apathetic conservative base.

The Democratic Party's obsession with George Bush has been disastrous. By blaming Bush for all problems great and small, Pelosi, Dean, and the rest of the Democratic leaders have merely accentuated their lack of ideas and governing principles and alienated voters who are searching for responsible and reasonable representation. Yet they can't seem to help themselves.

The good news for rank-and-file Democrats is that the Twenty-Second amendment ensures that this will be the last election that their leaders can screw-up by relying too heavily on an anti-Bush strategy. The bad news is that, in our opinion, this is unlikely to change things too dramatically in the near future. While it would seem that Bush is the object of all leftist animosity, we suspect that he is not the left's real problem. They may bash him mercilessly and insist that he is the source of evil in the world. But he is not the first such source of all evil, and he won't be the last.

It seems to us that the root of the anti-Bush hostility can likely be found in the left's politicization of all aspects of life. As we noted last week, the late 1960s marked a change in American liberalism, and the

emergent form was one that fostered a new morality that stipulated that the "personal is political" and therefore the measure of behavior can be found exclusively in political action. One's value, one's contribution, one's morality is tied up in politics, meaning that political disagreements are not mere disagreements, but personal affronts and moral abominations. Differences in opinion over policy issues – taxes, foreign affairs, environmental regulation – become much more to those on the left, providing them a gauge of moral worth.

And while the tax-cutting, war-mongering, environment-despoiling, gay-baiting, oil tycoon in the White House is the current personification of all that the left finds evil, he will, out of necessity, be replaced. In 2008, 2010, 2012, there will be a new nemesis who is the source of all the world's ills and who can be blamed for all the nation's problems. For a variety of reasons beyond anyone's control, Bush is probably the most reviled Republican in memory, but except for the intensity of hatred directed at him, he's not much different than Newt Gingrich or Ronald Reagan before him.

We guess that's why George W. Bush is such a successful if somewhat surprising Siren. He may serve as the proximate object of the left's derision today, but what they are really railing against is an idealized vision of conservatism, which they see as a morally inadequate governing philosophy. It's not Bush *per se* that makes them behave so ridiculously; it's the ideas that they believe he embraces. And when Bush and Rove and Cheney are gone, we strongly suspect that the left will find new Sirens to drive them crazy and force them to dash their political aspirations against the jagged rocks.

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