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## THEY SAID IT

The whole panoply of nutty things liberals believe flows from their belief that man is just another animal....Only their core rejection of God can explain the bewildering array of liberal positions: We must save [murderer] Tookie Williams while slaughtering the unborn, eat natural foods while acquiring disease from casual hookups, halt human development so that the Furbish lousewort can be fruitful and multiply, but humans are multiplying too much and threatening the biosphere of the Furbish lousewort. Women are no different from men, but we need a library of laws and codes to protect women from sexual harassment....Usually zealots can't make money doing insane things. But liberals have the entire taxpayer-funded "education" apparatus to support them. Public schools are what columnist Joe Sobran calls "liberalism's reproductive system." In lieu of teaching Biblical truth, which – are you sitting down? – used to be the purpose of education, the government schools teach an "amalgam of liberalism, feminism, Darwinsim, and the Playboy philosophy." No longer content to ruin their own children, liberals insist on being subsidized by the taxpayer to ruin everyone else's children, too.

Ann Coulter, *Godless, The Church of Liberalism*, 2006.

## THIS TIME . . . IT'S PERSONAL.

Roughly a month ago, we told you that John McCain would be the Republican nominee for President. And with Super Tuesday likely to seal the deal, it looks like we will be right. Conservative big shots throughout the country are, it seems, unhappy about this, to put it mildly. It's not that they care if we're right. It turns out that they object to John McCain. You might want to sit down for this one, but it appears – at least from listening to and reading the likes of Rush Limbaugh, Mark Levin, Sean Hannity, Mark Steyn, and even the lovely Ann Coulter – that McCain is not – horror of horrors – a conservative. And he can therefore not be trusted with the reins of the Republican Party.

Now, we certainly won't argue with any of these people about McCain's ideology, about his temperament, or about his fitness to carry the banner of the House of Reagan, as every Republican nominee these days believes he must. They are right. John McCain is no conservative. He supports using the federal judicial apparatuses to punish a legal industry (tobacco manufacturers) for conducting legal business. He believes that the First Amendment, while perhaps applicable to pornographers, has no place in political discussions, at least within 90 days of an election. He believes the Global Warming hysteria and is determined to use the power of the federal government to stop the problem, whatever it may be. He opposed the Bush tax cuts. Etc., etc., etc., *ad infinitum*. McCain relishes his "maverick" political persona and, indeed, actively cultivates it by loudly

### In this Issue

This Time...It's Personal.

Say It Isn't So, Ann.

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and proudly dissenting from conservative orthodoxy. The guy professes to have been a “foot-soldier in the Reagan Revolution,” but a Ronald Reagan he is not.

But so what? Who is a Ronald Reagan, these days? We get that McCain is no conservative. And that’s fine. But can any of the big fish who are unhappy about his pending nomination name a single candidate who is? Or can they name a single Republican politician anywhere who is familiar to more than, say, a quarter of GOP activists who is? Can they name a well known Republican politician in the last decade who was?

As best we can recall, the last “conservative” to run for president in this country ran twelve years ago. And that man, then-Senator Phil Gramm of Texas, got smacked around good by Bob Dole, of all people. It is unquestionably true that John McCain is wrong – stubbornly, unbendingly, aggressively, and proudly wrong – on a whole host of “conservative” issues. But that hardly makes him a “maverick” among Republicans. That makes him just another guy.

For purposes of comparison, we think it is reasonable to take a look at John McCain’s conservative credentials as opposed to those of the last GOP presidential nominee, a man who, by the way, the party nominated twice. For the record, we have a great deal of admiration for the last Republican nominee. We think that he has been incredibly and surprisingly strong and steadfast in his commitment to the defense of this nation from repeat terrorist attacks and to maintaining an offensive posture in the war on terror. We have some quibbles with him on foreign policy, mind you, and a great deal more on domestic policy. But generally speaking, we like the guy. And we suspect that Limbaugh, Hannity, Coulter, and Levin probably do to. Still, here’s what we had to say about him eight years ago, as he was running for president for the first time:

For starters, it seems clear...that the GOP under “W” is becoming what can only be described as the nation’s “new progressive” party. This is, of course, the

term that the so-called “New Democrats” use to describe themselves and the agenda that their organization, the Democratic Leadership Council, has developed. The idea is to differentiate themselves from the party’s old-line liberals as well as from the loony left, which has appropriated the term “progressive” for itself. They have had little success in convincing people that they are indeed “new progressives,” however, largely because the Democratic Party’s core constituency, the people who finance it and do the grass roots work, is made up of old-line, unabashed liberals from the labor wing of the party and from the leadership of the black community, as well as single issue advocates of radical social change, none of whom have any interest whatsoever in a “new progressive” agenda.

Bill, a founder of the “New Democrat” movement learned first hand how difficult it is for a “progressive” Democrat to become a “new progressive” when Mrs. Clinton refused to give up her liberal and radical agendas upon coming to Washington and fought tooth and nail to keep him from giving up his. She now defines herself as a “New Democrat,” in deference to New York voters, but I don’t think even her strongest supporters believe it for a minute.

The irony of all this is that while “W” prefers the term “compassionate conservative” to the term “new progressive,” he has, for all practical purposes, adopted the bulk of the New Democrats’ “new progressive” agenda. And he hasn’t been particularly subtle about it. Even *the Washington Post’s* political reporters, who are generally as thick as the earth’s crust, picked up on it, and put it this way in a June 6 [2000], front page piece by Dan Balz entitled “Bush takes Clinton Cue,” and headlined on the inside continuation, “Bush Initiatives Resemble New Democrats’.”

We cited Balz's piece thusly:

Many of the policy initiatives Bush has outlined this spring, from education and health care to Social Security and arms control, bear striking similarity to the world of the New Democrats. Bush's advocacy of these policies has guided his shift back toward the center this spring, and the New Democrats movement's leaders, who have close ties to Gore, don't know whether to be flattered or alarmed....

Bush's initiatives have overlapped with New Democrat proposals in a number of areas. His emphasis on educational accountability echoes ideas advanced by the New Democrats. His call for partial privatization of Social Security and his embrace of Medicare reforms that emphasize more choices for senior citizens mirror ideas the DLC or the PPI [the think tank associated with the DLC] have advanced.

Even his recent proposal for a missile defense system coupled with sharp cuts in U.S. nuclear weapons stocks enjoys support from the DLC. "It is another case of a framework developed by Democrats," one centrist Democrat complained. "Democrats develop the idea, and Bush embraces it. It's one that had been urged on the Gore folks without success" . . .

"George Bush is trying to steal the mantle of reform and innovation from the New Democrats, and we can't let him get away with it," said Will Marshall, who heads the Progressive Policy Institute.

Did this get all of the big shot Republicans foaming at the mouth? Did it cause them to lose their minds and promise not simply to vote for but actually to campaign for the Democratic nominee? Of course not. Bush was a bit squishy on a whole host of issues,

but he promised tax cuts and if nothing else, he was certainly a better choice for conservatives than Al Gore.

By the time Bush ran for re-election in 2004, though, he had gone even further off the conservative reservation. He had crossed the free traders on steel tariffs. He had both signed and aggressively supported a huge, bloated new farm bill. He had inexplicably declared that "when people hurt, government must be on the move." And perhaps most horrifically of all, he signed the campaign finance reform bill that John McCain championed and for which he continues to be pilloried by the conservative commentariat.

But did the Hannitys and Coulters of the world revolt? Did Rush declare himself willing to campaign for the Democratic challenger, John Forbes Kerry? Did Mark Levin become apoplectic on the pages of *National Review* about the death of the conservative movement and the need for all good conservatives to rally against Bush's candidacy? Of course not. Conservatives grumbled and groaned a bit. But in the end, there was never any real question about it. Bush was their guy and even if he weren't, Kerry had to be defeated. That's just the way it had to be.

So why doesn't it have to be that way now? Why does McCain come in for all the aggressive and unremitting vitriol? Why is Bush beloved and McCain hated?

Good answers to those questions are difficult to come by and, we suspect, have little or nothing to do with ideology or policy. One can rather easily make a strong and credible argument that McCain, though not a real, bona fide Coolidge-esque conservative, is nonetheless more conservative than Bush. McCain and Bush alike think that government belongs in all sorts of businesses in which real conservatives know it does not. But at the very least, McCain has a vague conception that when it comes to government, bigger is not better. Yes, Bush cut taxes while McCain remained skeptical. But McCain claims to have seen the light on the Bush tax cuts. And more important, unlike Bush, he understands that one of the most important goals of tax cutting should be to "starve the beast."

It's easy to forget now, with so many years and so many other historic events having intervened, but there was a time, prior to his election, when we referred to George W. Bush as a "tax-cut-and-spend Republican." Bush shows no fear of big government and never has. Shouldn't McCain's opposition to Bush-style government expense count for something with conservatives?

Now, we're not here to make the case for McCain's candidacy or to pretend that the guy is a conservative. As we've noted repeatedly, we have our own problems with him, some policy-related and others related to his personality (or his temperament, if you will). Moreover, we have no desire whatsoever to knock President Bush. He's pretty much irrelevant to this debate.

Nonetheless, we can't help but think that by any objective measure, McCain is, in fact, more "conservative" than Bush. Or, at the very least, he is no more liberal than Bush. Neither one of them would cause Ronnie to sit up in his grave and cheer "atta' boy!" But neither one is Hillary Clinton either.

So again, why then do the conservative talkers and writers hate McCain so much? Why do they run down his conservative credentials? Why do they hold him to standards they never held Bush to, even before 9/11?

We think it's personal. John McCain may well have been the guy everyone wanted to know and to be like back at the Naval Academy. And he may be a good buddy and a man's man. But he's also kind of a jerk. We witnessed McCain's temper in person at a dinner meeting we held for clients roughly ten years ago. And the standard line from those in the know has it that what we saw was but a taste of his rage.

More to the point, McCain actually appears to take pleasure in "sticking it to" the talking heads and critics who tell him that he can't do something or that he is screwing over the GOP in some way. Ask any of his friends from the Academy or from his service in the Navy, and they will all but surely tell you that John McCain has always taken a certain amount of pleasure

in challenging and standing up to authority. And when Hannity, Rush and the rest declare themselves the arbiters of conservative authority, it only makes sense that McCain will target them for his indignation.

And now they're targeting him back. They don't like John McCain. That much is clear. And turnabout is fair play, we suppose. But the idea of couching this personal dislike in ideological or policy terms and selling it as a defense of conservatism is both disingenuous and a little childish. It's personal. How else does one explain their support for H.W. Bush, for Dole, and for W. Bush, yet their hatred of McCain?

So, what does all of this mean? And what does it portend for McCain's candidacy?

To be perfectly honest with you, we don't really know. More than one conservative pundit has suggested that now that he has likely secured the nomination, Senator McCain should set his sights on mending fences with his critics. He should, they argue, appear on Rush's show, be effusive with the praise, and try to enlist him and others as allies rather than critics.

That all sounds swell. But we doubt that it would work. For starters, it is not clear that the fences can be mended. This is not about policy differences. It's about personal differences. And personal differences are not so easy to fix. Second, it's not all that clear that McCain even has any interest in fixing these relationships. Sure, he wants to be president, but that doesn't mean that he's willing therefore to grovel in front of the talking heads. McCain is nothing if not stubbornly proud. And it remains to be seen whether his ambition or his pride is stronger.

McCain's best bet, we think, is to take his case directly to the voters and to party representatives and to trust that they will fall in line, regardless of what their favorite radio hosts tell them to do. To this end, we think McCain has already taken some interesting steps. One of these is the enlistment in his campaign of his friend and former fellow-Senator, none other than Phil Gramm of Texas. The fact that McCain has seen it as important and beneficial to get guys like

Gramm to support and advise him suggests that he is willing to alter some of his past policy positions in hopes of making his candidacy more palatable to some of the unhappier elements within the party. The presumption might be that if the party machine and the voters can get behind McCain, then the talkers and writers will at least find less and less point to making the case against him.

The other thing that McCain should do is hope that Hillary Clinton wins the nomination. Ann Coulter may say that she'll campaign for Hillary before voting for McCain, but she's likely the only one among conservatives. And the outrageousness of her attacks on McCain's record by contrast to Hillary's can only work in McCain's favor.

Will it be enough? That depends on what you mean. Will it be enough to put McCain over the top and get him elected? We still believe so. Will it be enough to get him to change his ways and embrace conservative positions on a greater number of issues? Are you kidding? We have resolved ourselves to the fact that President McCain will almost certainly make a big production of doing something grand and monumental to stick it to conservatives as soon as he can after inauguration. That's who he is. That's what he does. But that doesn't necessarily mean he's any less conservative than any other guy out there.

## **SAY IT ISN'T SO, ANN.**

These may not be times that try men's souls, but they are clearly putting a little strain on the souls of some men, and on those of some women too, especially, it appears, on the souls of folks of a conservative persuasion. From Rush Limbaugh to Ann Coulter to scores of other, highly visible and vocal conservative malcontents, anger squirts like ink from a squid at just the mention of Senator John McCain's chances of becoming the Republican Party's candidate to succeed George W. Bush

Indeed, as the mainstream press has widely trumpeted, the attractive, smart, tart, articulate, humorous, ultra conservative, liberal nemesis, Ms. Coulter is so stressed

about the whole thing that she recently allowed as how she would vote for Mrs. Clinton if Mr. McCain is at the top of the GOP ticket in November. Now, as can be seen from the "They Said It" section above, given some of things that Ms. Coulter has said and written about liberals, this has to be regarded as an extreme, even shocking statement of intent. It would be like Barney Frank announcing his intentions to wed David Duke.

Now far be it from us to question the political acumen, judgment, and intentions of Ann Coulter. Indeed, it could probably be said about her what Otter said about Bluto's plan to strike back at Dean Wormer, i.e., "he's right, psychotic but right."

Nevertheless, we have decided this week to offer a slightly less feverish approach to the possibility of a McCain victory in the primaries, if for no other reason than possibly to prevent some poor, impressionable conservative fan of Ms. Coulter's from sinking into a pit of such despair that he or she, once again to borrow a phrase from "Animal House," makes some "really futile and stupid gesture," like voting for Mrs. Clinton.

We will begin this effort by briefly repeating something that we have said over and over in these pages for nigh onto ten years, namely that conservatism is not doing well in the United State right now and hasn't done well for a very long time. In fact, when seriously considering the state of conservatism today in America, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, the word comatose comes readily to mind. Hence, wonder of wonders, there is no demand for a conservative presidential candidate right now, no matter how annoying that fact is to Ms. Coulter, Rush Limbaugh, or anyone else for that matter,

As we said in these pages several weeks ago, the American electorate would not embrace a conservative candidate at this time if there were one, which there isn't. And there isn't a chance in the world that one is likely to appear. You can bet on it. Why? Because there is no demand, no market for such a person. That's why. None. Zero. Zilch. If John McCain

were a conservative, he wouldn't even be on the program. The same goes for Mitt and Huck. If these guys were conservatives, they'd be home watching it all on television. If Mickey Mouse had wings, he'd be Donald Duck.

In our opinion, as things stand right now, conservatives like Rush and Ann should be pleased that a great many of the nation's leading Republican politicians, including John McCain, hold some conservative views on a handful of important issues, and are willing to fake it on a few others for the sake of gaining a few conservative votes. As Merle Haggard once famously sang, "It ain't love, but it ain't bad."

We have offered many reasons over the years for the failure of traditional conservatism to thrive in America today, so we will not go over them one by one again this week. We will simply point out that we are living during a time of extraordinary change. Big change. Mega change. Change at the speed of a mouse click, cultural, economic, social, technological, and political change unlike anything anyone who is alive today has ever witnessed, the kind of change that makes the industrial revolution and the great migration from farm to city look like a simple exercise in preference adjustment.

The Internet, terrorism on U.S. soil, rampant anti-Americanism, the emergence of China as a global economic force, instant person to person communications across the globe, gene manipulation, nanotechnology, the rise of militant Islam, the rise of celebrity sluts and crack heads to the top of the social register, a Fed that hates the sight of an idle printing press, and a president who has aberrant sex with a teenager in the Oval Office, lies about it under oath, then campaigns to great hosannas for his wife's bid to occupy the same office. The only thing missing is a modern day Nero promoting his horse for the job of senator, although...oh well, enough already.

Conservatism generally does well during the early part of such a period. People become concerned about the pace of change and look to their traditions, customs, mores, religious beliefs, and cultural values for a safe

port in the storm. People come to the conclusion reached by Gonzalo when the tempest was destroying the ship he was on: "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground: long heath, broom, furze, anything. The will above be done, but I would fain die a dry death."

But eventually the storm of change becomes exciting, exhilarating, fun, and yes, lucrative. And conservatism wanes in the face of a plethora of sensate and financial opportunities. In fact, one of the ironies of the decline in conservatism, of the loss of reverence for traditional ways and traditional values, of respect for the wisdom of the past, is that it is very often aided and abetted by those who consider themselves the staunchest of conservatives, the capitalists, the businessmen, the captains of industry. You see, like it or not, there's money to be made in change. In fact, change is the lifeblood of capitalism.

Great and enduring works of art may be proof of God's love for man. But except for the tourist trade and maybe a small market in Hallmark Cards, there is not much money to be made from these masterpieces. Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Iktinos and Kallikrates's Parthenon, Michelangelo's David. Yes, these are truly great works of art. But kitsch is the engine of wealth. The giant, energetic, brilliant bear of an anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, was likely correct when he told a friend who was playing the piano for him at his bedside shortly before he died, "Everything will pass and the world will perish, but the Ninth Symphony will remain." But if it does, it will have to compete – and likely lose badly – with the artistic merit of some five and dime rapper's new bit of doggerel describing violent sex between a "ho" and a coke bottle. That's where the money is made.

Conservatism has an uphill fight during times such as these. How could it be otherwise? But the appropriate response to John McCain's popularity among Republicans is not to vote for Mrs. Clinton out of pique. Not only is this counterproductive, but the anger and frustration that drive it blinds one to the true nature of the battle that is going on for the soul of America.

Yes, it is natural for conservatives to feel strongly about who sits in the Oval Office. Yes, it would be a welcome development to have a true conservative in that position. Yes, conservatives should do all they can to advance the political causes in which they believe. But they should never forget that the battle for the sanctity of life, for a safe and secure nation, for fiscal responsibility, for an educational system that teaches and encourages traditional principles and values, such as civility, justice, trust, chastity and fidelity, and for ethical behavior in the business community will not be won or lost in Washington. Nor will it be won or lost in the upcoming presidential election, regardless of who runs or who wins.

As we've said before in these pages, Washington is where the score is kept. If there are no conservatives in positions of political responsibility in the nation's capital, it is not a sign that the game is being lost in Washington. It is a sign that the game is being lost elsewhere, that it is being lost in the homes, schools, and the houses of worship across the land.

The fight in which conservatives are involved today is not primarily a political one. Politics is one front in this war that has been going since the beginning of time and will go on for as long as mankind exists in its present state of sin.

As T.S. Eliot so eloquently said, "There is no such thing as a Lost Cause, because there is no such thing as a Gained Cause. We fight for lost causes because we know that our defeat and dismay may be the preface to our successors' victory, though that victory itself will be temporary; we fight rather to keep something alive than in the expectation that it will triumph."

The proper conservative response to McCain's success is to take it as a warning that more work needs to be done outside of Washington. Grass roots work. The kind that begins at home, in the community, up close and personal. One of liberalism's great conceits is that the world can be made a better place by political action. This isn't true. Conservatives who buy into this idea tend to get overwrought over politics, to their own detriment and to that of the country.

The great moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre ends his great classic *After Virtue* with the following observation. It is a bit pessimistic for our taste, but not any more so than the kind of despair that would lead one to vote for the likes of Mrs. Clinton.

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict.

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