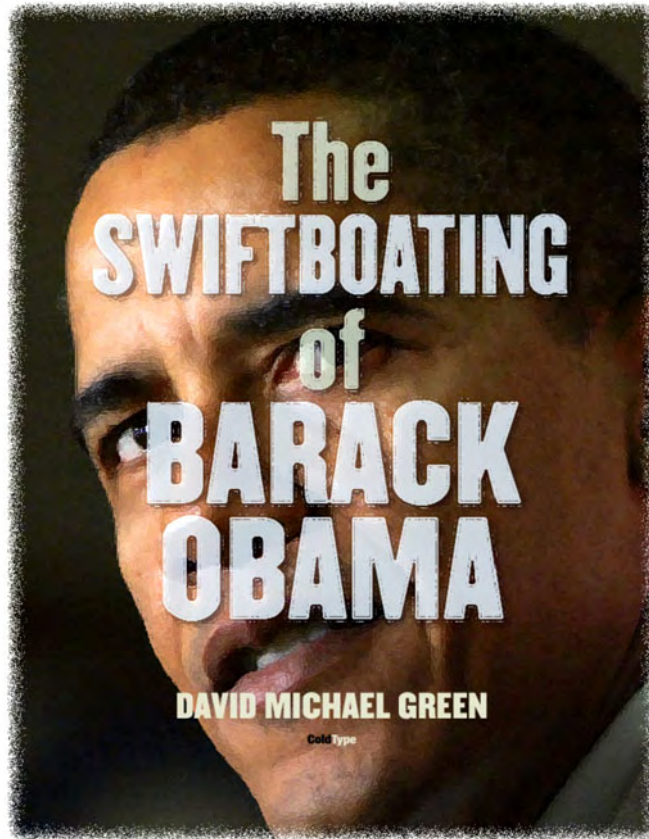


The  
SWIFTBOATING  
of  
BARACK  
OBAMA

DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

ColdType



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More of his work can be found at his website, <http://regressiveantidote.net>

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 If there's anything I've learned about American politics over the past decade, it's this: First, regressives will do anything – and I mean anything – to obtain power (the real purpose of which is to loot the public fisc of all items not securely nailed to the floor). And, second, just about everything they try works when employed against an American public possessed of stunning political immaturity. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that two things happened over the last couple of weeks of arch. One, that Barack Obama was swiftboated by means of a bogus inference in order to make him look like an angry black radical. And two, that a lot of dumb voters went for it.

It was pretty inevitable, really. I mean, the guy was getting rather, um, uppity, if you know what I mean. Winning elections and all. Mobilizing millions of voters. And so on. Plus he's talking like he might actually, really, seriously, shut off the government teat of Iraq war no-bid contracts, NAFTA/WTO-based cheap labor, and massive tax transfers for the hyper-wealthy. This shit had to end.

True, John McCain is not quite as reliable a special interests whore as, say, Mitt Ownme, but he knows where his bread is buttered, and sometimes it seems like he even genuinely believes all the crap they feed him. Anyhow, he's far more controllable than some Democrat, especially one who seems increasingly able to get voters (with a massive assist from the complete failure of Bush and the regressive agenda) to cease responding to the cues for which they've been so well trained these last decades. Hear that bell? Salivate now. We say "Jump"? Ask "How high?" See that grainy image of a black criminal? Vote Republican. Oh, and please be sure to hand over your wallet before exiting the building.

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No doubt about it, people. The American plutocracy paid good money to create such a well disciplined voting class, and they're not about to let that investment go down the drain without a fight.

The damn thing about it, though, is that Obama hardly gives them anything to work with. I mean, the guy is mild-mannered to a fault. He's inspirational when he speaks, never angry and alienating. He was supposed to be vulnerable for opposing the stupidest foreign policy decision ever made, but instead all except the most low-wattage voters see Iraq as, well, the stupidest foreign policy decision ever made. I mean, the guy doesn't even really seem black.

That only leaves one option remaining, then: Swiftboat the SOB. Find some tangential pseudo-vulnerability that goes after Obama's biggest potential asset and turn it into a negative. Is he coming off to a mesmerized public as some kind of post-ideological, post-racial-divide healer who could unite the country and return us to our sanity? Then he must be turned into Eldrige Cleaver. All that's needed to complete the picture is a big 'fro, a beret and an AK-47 with a menacing tilt to it.

Preposterous? Think it can't be done? So did I, until I saw a guy with three Purple Hearts and a Silver Cross turned into a weak, wimpy, lying coward, in order to make sure that a weak, wimpy, lying coward who went to Margaritaville instead of the Mekong Delta during the Sixties could be portrayed as some sort of macho tough guy, and thus steal another four years in the White House.

Fortunately, Obama is no John Kerry. The latter waited three weeks to respond to the attacks against him. He might as well have waited three years. Obama didn't make the same mistake. And when he did speak, what a tour de force it was.

The most stunning feature of his speech was the least overt. This was a speech about his pastor, but that was not its central motif. This was a discussion of race, of course, but that was not its deepest theme.

What really mattered most about this speech was the way in which Obama addressed us. American politicians have treated the voting public with barely concealed contempt for so long now, we've largely forgotten what respectful discourse looks like. On March 18th, Obama reminded us.

Forget about charisma, a very much overrated if not dangerous characteristic in politicians anyhow. What matters instead is this: It's been decades since someone spoke to the public with this much honesty and sophistication about our society and its choices. It was breathtaking just to witness that level of esteem pointed in our direction.

All the more so because of the epoch we've just survived. George Bush is far from

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the only contemptuous politician in recent history, but he is surely the worst of the lot, and his politics are instructive because of that.

In Bush's world, everyone is two-dimensional, at best. They're either good or evil. Folks is either with us or with the enemy. In Bush's comic book reality, no issue is ever nuanced. There's only right – which, remarkably, always happens to be his way – and there's wrong. Once asked if he could name any mistakes he'd made as president, a flustered Bush was unable to identify even a single one. (I wish I could have been there to assist him. We probably could have made a dent in it after a week or two.) He cannot conceive that anyone he's labeled evil could have legitimate grievances. He cannot imagine that America could ever have committed any crimes, such as using violence to achieve political ends.

Or so he acts when he speaks to us. I doubt he truly believes his own sorry shtick, which of course only makes it far worse.

Nor has the so-called opposition been much better. While their positions on issues might be slightly more thoughtful (and how could they be less so?), one has little sense from a John Kerry or a Hillary Clinton that they can say something just because it is truthful, as opposed to because they've calculated that it's popular. Theirs is different from Republican pandering in scale and destructiveness, but not in kind. It is still pandering for purposes of personal benefit.

And American politics have been deeply impoverished for decades now because of our politicians' contemptuousness. Worse, the effect has been cyclically corrosive. The more of it we get, the more of it we breed.

We live today in a polity characterized by the most unsophisticated public discourse, one where twenty-second scare ads win elections every time. And one where attempts at thinking through basic questions – such as whether our enemy resides in Afghanistan or Iraq – are ridiculed as effete intellectual elitism.

Look what it's produced for us. Whether it is the federal debt, falling economic standards, environmental crisis, or our diminished world standing that we're discussing – or, more likely, not discussing – Americans have dug themselves into failed policy holes of epic proportions. In very large part, this is because it's been mutually convenient for both politicians and voters alike to indulge in a Potemkin politics of fantasy.

But the stunning sub-text of Obama's speech is that we can think of these issues and the people involved in them as more than mere caricatures. In adopting this posture, he telegraphed to Americans more respect, and less contempt, than they've seen from any politician in three decades, ever since Reagan seduced them into

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assisting in their own looting.

When Obama reminded us that his former pastor had not only bad but also good ideas – like most anyone, black or white, emerging from the cauldron of American race relations might – he treated his listeners with a dignity and an intellectual esteem largely absent for a generation.

When he rejected the expedient route of completely disassociating himself from Reverend Wright, he demanded sophistication in our thinking. He asked us to use our minds rather than our emotional reflexes, and to invest more energy into determining our own fate than that which is required for passively imbibing deceitful television ads, cold beer in hand.

When he implored us to reject the divisions of race, religion and nationality that right-wing politicians have been exploiting for decades to divert attention from “the real culprits of the middle class squeeze,” he showed a political courage that is as exemplary as it is rare.

And when he did all of these things – but especially when he showed us an intellectual respect that we frankly haven’t often deserved – Obama demonstrated that he perhaps really might belong in that pantheon of American political giants that includes Jefferson, Lincoln, FDR and King, but precious few others.

He also made clear why those who peddle the politics of contempt have lately shown such desperation to somehow silence his revolution, a revolution not so much of policy – Obama is no V.I. Lenin; he’s not even a Paul Wellstone – as it is of esteem. Think, for a moment, of the sheer absurdity of what they are asking you to accept on the face of their argument.

Has this man committed treason, like Scooter Libby, for example? No. Did he lie to the world at a cost of a million lives, like Bush and everyone else in his reprobate camp? Uh, no. Has he bankrupted the future of our children through his environmental, fiscal and foreign policies, like the entire Republican Party? No, he did not. Heck, is he even guilty of the heinous crime of screwing an expensive prostitute, like silly Eliot Spitzer? Nein.

Barack Obama’s great crime, as the regressive noise machine (as well as a certain senator from New York) would have you believe it, is failing to quit a church where the pastor has controversial ideas. Let’s say this again, because the absurdity of it is so astonishing (as with all regressive politics, once you look closely). This man is being excoriated for the crime of failing to quit a church whose pastor has ideas with which he doesn’t entirely agree. That is why, it is being argued, Obama should be rejected as a contender to lead America as president.

This, by the way, while John McCain has been actively wooing televangelist (a

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modern euphemism for crook) John Hagee for his endorsement, despite that the good reverend has called Catholicism “a godless theology”, blamed the Holocaust on Jewish “disobedience and rebellion”, argued that Katrina was “the judgment of God against New Orleans”, and claimed that the Koran gives Muslims “a scriptural mandate to kill Christians and Jews”. Notwithstanding any of those slightly controversial remarks, McCain sought this clown’s support, got what he wanted, and thus stated at a campaign event that “I was pleased to have the endorsement of Pastor John Hagee yesterday”.

If it seems like a helluva logical conundrum that Obama gets trashed for comments his pastor makes, over which he has no control, while McCain goes scot-free after seeking the endorsement of a king-size bigot, well then welcome to Swiftboat Land. Park your brain over there, to the right. By the same ‘logic’, John Kerry, who went to Nam, became our national security wimp, while Wee Caligula, who couldn’t even stay sober enough to show up for the faux service Poppy arranged to keep him out of the jungle, became our tough commander-in-chief.

Of course, logic has nothing to do with swiftboating, apart from the crucial requirement that it must be murdered in more ways than Rasputin was, and buried deep on some distant continent, lest anyone in America should actually awaken from their regressive-induced stupor long enough to ask why that emperor dude is running around in his underwear.

In truth, what Reverend Wright said is of as much actual concern to regressives as was John McCain’s supposed black love-child or Willie Horton’s crimes. Which is to say none at all. The point is to swiftboat Obama by injecting race into the campaign and frightening away closet racist voters. The point of doing that is to win power. And the point of that is to steal your money and your country.

That’s why Obama’s ‘revolution’ represents that most threatening commodity of all for those who employ contemptuous deceit to mask “economic policies that favor the few over the many,” as he accurately labeled it.

It’s a revolution, ultimately, of respect – and that’s really dangerous. For the first time in a very long time, a presidential candidate is speaking to Americans as if they were grown-ups.

We’re about to find out if anyone is listening.



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