

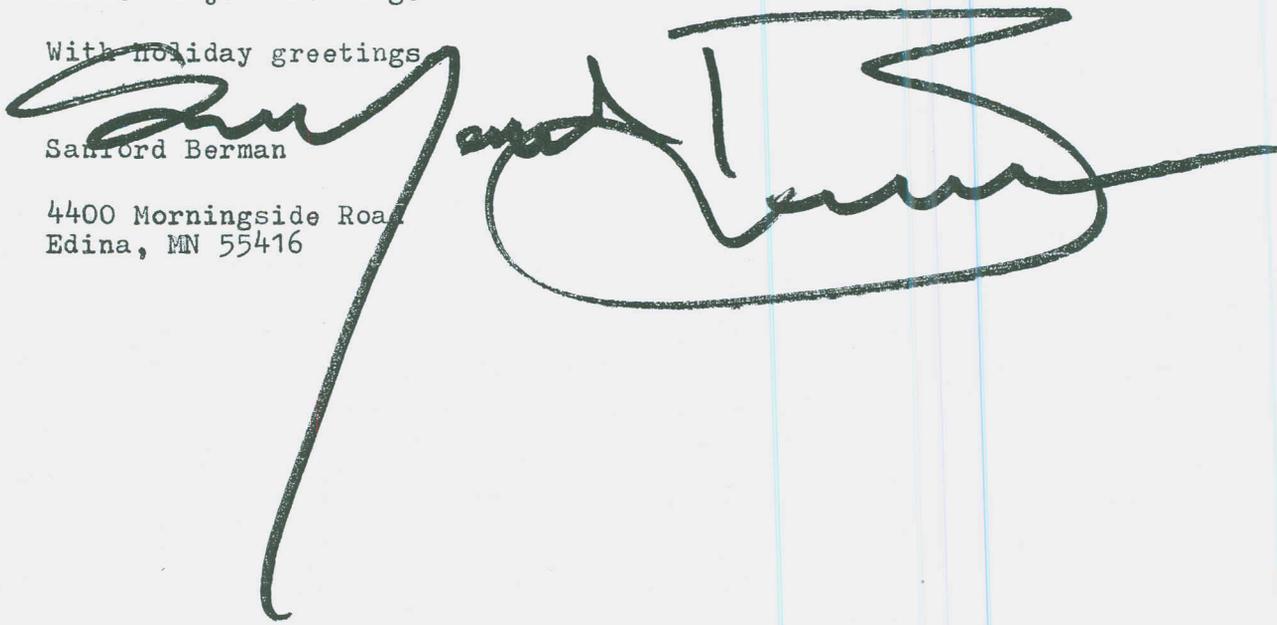
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Dear Colleagues,

Additional reasons for instituting CULTURE WARS as a stand-alone subject heading.

With holiday greetings

  
Sanford Berman

4400 Morningside Road  
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# Books & the Arts.



Jack Abramoff, an unidentified man, Ralph Reed, David Safavian and Ohio Republican Representative Bob Ney (from left) during an August 2002 trip to Scotland

## Lords of Misrule

by JEFFERSON DECKER

In 1928 Homer Ferguson, a former president of the Chamber of Commerce, took to the pages of the *Nation's Business* to complain about the federal government. The problems he addressed were not the usual bugbears of red tape, inefficiency and waste. Rather, Ferguson argued that government sometimes worked too well. "A thoroughly first-rate man in public service is corrosive," he said. "He eats holes in our liberties." Even worse was an "enthusiast," that "bright-eyed madman who is frantic to make this the finest government in the world." Ferguson was candid about his animus toward good government. He was a military contractor, building warships for the Navy, and he feared that bright and talented public officials might figure out how to build boats faster and cheaper than he could.

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Much better a government unworthy of that trust. "The best public servant," he concluded, "is the worst one."

In *The Wrecking Crew*, Thomas Frank argues that the spirit of Homer Ferguson is alive and well in the Republican Party. It was resurrected in the 1980s, when President Reagan appointed an Environmental Protection Agency administrator who opposed most environmental regulation and eviscerated the agency's enforcement division. It lives on in the hapless cronies and inexperienced ideologues the Bush administration has elevated to positions of authority, of whom Michael Brown and Monica Goodling are only the most famous examples. And its presence explains, at least in part, according to Frank, the triumphs of misgovernment to which Americans have been subjected during the past eight years: the incompetent response to Hurricane Katrina, the failure to plan for the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, various scandals

### **The Wrecking Crew**

*How Conservatives Rule.*

By Thomas Frank.

Metropolitan. 369 pp. \$25.

involving military contracting and regulatory snafus in matters ranging from food safety to financial markets.

Frank argues that the public failures of the Bush administration are the very essence of conservative government—the predictable outcome of the anti-Washington, free-market ideology that has triumphed within the Republican Party and in national politics over the past three decades. Conservatives won elections by arguing that government is an oversized and unaccountable drag on the economy; they proceeded to starve agencies of funds and replace public-sector employees with private, for-profit contractors. The result is a demoralized, hollowed-out state that does not work very well, except to redistribute wealth from

taxpayers to corporate lobbyists and interest groups. "Fantastic misgovernment of the kind we have seen is not an accident, nor is it the work of a few bad individuals," Frank writes. "It is the consequence of triumph by a particular philosophy of government, by a movement that understands the liberal state as a perversion and considers the market the ideal nexus of human society."

A journalist and cultural critic with a gift for polemical writing, Frank peppers his account of the evolution of antigovernment governance over the past three decades with observations about life in Washington, from the sartorial tastes of its lobbyists ("these days...orange or lavender" neckties) to the absence of mall rats at the underground

## Culture warriors on the campaign trail, conservatives follow the money when they reach office.

shopping center in Arlington's Crystal City ("just army officers in camo and executives in suits"). Such entertaining reportage does not quite conceal a scattershot approach to history, an irritating prosecutorial tone and a cartoon portrait of American conservatism. Still, *The Wrecking Crew* is a useful introduction to a world of pricey lobbyists, crackpot theorists, bought legislators and hapless government. And, in part through these very caricatures, the book gets at some essential questions about politics and markets in a democratic society.

At its heart, *The Wrecking Crew* is about two long-term developments in American government. The first is the rise of entrepreneurial politics—of people figuring out how to make big money from the basic stuff of American civic life. The second is what Frank calls the "marketization" of government. This includes the privatization of government functions by for-profit contractors, from the Blackwater guards doing the jobs of soldiers in Iraq to the faith-based charities that were recently supposed to supplant the welfare state. But for Frank, it also includes the broader economy of lobbying, influence peddling, fundraising and fine dining in which public policy gets made. As Frank argues, these two developments have a symbiotic relationship. The entrepreneurial turn in American politics is sustained by the lucrative business opportunities that emerge when private enterprise bores its way into functions that had previously been the exclusive job of the state. When

big money can be made from securing government appropriations, Congressional campaigns require ever larger war chests, and when legislators rely on lobbyists to write legislation, new industries and interest groups emerge to cash in.

Frank catalogs a range of behaviors, once beyond the pale, that have become commonplace in Washington. Companies in the contracting business pay enormous bonuses to their employees when they leave for government jobs, in essence keeping staff on retainer even as they formally serve the American people. Lobbyists advertise their record securing "earmarked" appropriations—which legislators insert into spending bills with little oversight or independent

assessment of need—on behalf of specific clients. A prominent politician encourages Americans to "invest in politics" as they might in stocks or bonds. A university president

whips out a calculator in front of a journalist to figure out the "return on investment" that his institution received from playing the earmark game. In one relatively modest deal, lobbyists charged the University of Alabama \$1.5 million for making \$123,500 in contributions to Senator Richard Shelby, who in turn earmarked \$150 million for the university during the appropriations process. The university multiplied its investment 100 times over, while the lobbyists earned a 1,100 percent return. Everyone won, except the taxpayers footing the bill.

Marketized government can be observed in the raw at restaurants like Charlie Palmer Steak, across the street from Constitution Avenue's premier lobbyist hive. The menu features miniature lobster corn dogs—"a nod to the deep-fried treats of your red-state youth," Frank writes—the décor an "ostentatious glass 'wine cube' perched on a platform over an indoor pond, like a Richard Neutra building in captivity." Frank marvels that with such transparency, a "dedicated, score-keeping fan of lobbying, if such a thing exists, could actually determine which particular vintage was being uncorked to advance which particular political cause." The rewards of the system are on display in Loudoun County, in northern Virginia, where lobbyists have been parking their new wealth. New mansions sprout "like brick-colonial mushrooms" behind "white rail fences of the kind that denote 'horse country.'" As Frank observes, "Every few miles you pass another castle going up, sometimes with stone posterns so large they are seemingly

meant to serve as a defensive perimeter. Battlements are very much in vogue; one house I saw had matching his 'n' hers turrets on either end."

According to Frank, these developments have been made possible by the ideological triumph during the past thirty years of "the market" as a means of organizing society over its primary competitors—namely tradition, organized labor and the state. Believing that markets are always more efficient and fairer than government, conservatives pushed to deregulate the economy and reduce the size of the state. When that was not possible, the right pushed for the next best thing, as they saw it: handing government over to business and letting it regulate itself. This is hardly the same thing. Privatization still requires that some government official dole out contracts; business often wants protection or subsidies from government, not a competitive marketplace. It is, rather, what political scientists would call the "capture" of a liberal state by corporations and their representatives. Helpfully, though, faith in the market could justify this process as well, since it presumed that the private sector, battle-tested by competitive markets, would always be lean, efficient and competent compared with government, and because it elevated risk-taking, entrepreneurial businessmen over those petty, grasping bureaucrats. (The idea that the private sector might want to enrich itself at public expense was conveniently forgotten.)

As the market triumphed, the idea of competent government or disinterested judgment waned. And so, Washington embraces the revolving door between military contractors and government procurement offices as a positive, since business experience trumps independence. And anyway, notes *Washington Post* columnist Steven Pearlstein, every major contractor takes part in the revolving door, so nobody should get an unfair advantage. The *Post* has also celebrated the lobbying fortunes that have accumulated in metro Washington as an example of local enterprise—not the organized bilking of taxpayers. Libertarian pundit Doug Bandow defends himself for receiving payoffs from disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff in exchange for puffing Abramoff's clients in print. "The number of folks underwriting the pursuit of pure knowledge can be counted on one hand, if not one finger," he scoffs. Of course, the triumph of the market also provides electoral rewards. While Americans like a government that provides clean air, pure food and a safe workplace, they are much less fond of bumbling. So voters reward wrecking crews for their incompetence, angrily electing people who will hack the state down further.

# Katha Pollitt

## Culture War: Out of Juice?

The right seems to have decided that the culture war, like just about everything else, sells better if promoted by attractive youthful spokesmodels. Goodbye Pat Buchanan, hello Sarah Palin—and an especially big shout-out to that bright-eyed smiling newcomer to the national hate sweeps, Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann. Bachmann, as you may know, has become a YouTube star, thanks to her interview on *Hardball*, in which, talking to an incredulous Chris Matthews, she called for the news media to ferret out “anti-American” members of Congress.

The stronger Obama gets, the more unhinged the Republicans become—at least, those Republicans who haven’t already detached (Chris Buckley! Colin Powell! Charles Krauthammer! Peggy Noonan! Kenneth Adelman!)—although to be fair, Bachmann has been sending bulletins from Outer Wingnutia for quite a while. In August she mocked Nancy Pelosi for “global warming fanaticism.... She has said that she’s just trying to save the planet. We all know that someone did that over 2,000 years ago.” Bachmann also claimed that Democrats want high gas prices in order to force Americans to move to “the inner city.” Watch out, Real America, Democrats want to turn you into black people!

Many are worried about the way the McCain campaign has revved up the culture war—Bill Ayers is more famous right now than Obama’s earlier BFF Paris Hilton, to say nothing of Reverend Wright, ACORN *aka* perpetrator of “one of the greatest frauds in voter history,” secret Muslims, socialism, exotic Hawaii, Joe the Plumber, small towns, the real Virginia and the pro-America parts of the country. (According to McCain, if Obama had only agreed to do ten town hall debates with him, none of this mud would be slung now. It’s as if he’s blaming Obama for his own decision to take the low road. You leave me no choice, sir, but to lie and slander in a most ridiculous fashion! So much for Republicans standing for self-reliance and responsibility.) Sometimes it does feel like McCain, by choosing Sarah Palin, has lifted up a rock and revealed the national id in all its unregenerate glory, seething with racism, paranoia, McCarthyism, xenophobia and bigotry.

And yet this is the country where every poll suggests that these appeals to the devils of our nature aren’t working their mojo. It may have taken the collapse of the global financial system to get Americans to elect a black man president, but give the voters a little credit: it could just happen.

Not too much credit, though. The culture war may fail at the top of the ticket, but it still has enough juice to do damage further down. This year’s state ballot initiatives offer numerous opportunities for social conservatives to damage women’s health and human rights: Californians can vote to require parental notification on abortion, a measure they’ve rejected twice but which looks likely to pass this time around. South Dakotans can vote to ban abortion entirely, with narrowly tailored exceptions

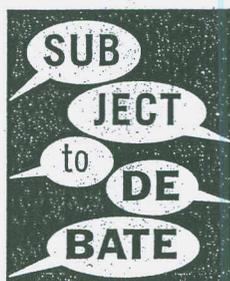
for rape, incest and serious injury to the woman’s health—just make sure you report being raped by your brother immediately and that your doctor is prepared to risk ten years in prison if his colleagues think he’s erred on the side of keeping you alive. For the true fetal fan, though, Colorado is the place to be: there voters can choose to declare that human personhood, with all its legal protections, begins with the fertilized egg, putting at risk not only legal abortion but also emergency contraception, the pill, chemotherapy and other medically necessary procedures, to say nothing of in vitro fertilization (protecting fertilized eggs, it turns out, is more important even than creating a born child).

The old standby, banning gay marriage, is on the ballot in California, Arizona and Florida, even as in October Connecticut became the third state whose Supreme Court ruled that same-sexers had a right to wed. With twenty-seven states already having added marriage bans to their constitutions, the day will

soon be upon us when every state with enough homophobes to pass a ban will have done so. What will social conservatives do then? Some 35 percent of Americans support gay marriage, and that number is on the rise. After all, young people are much more tolerant of homosexuality than their elders. And if you leave aside biblical fulminations and lies (like, legalizing same-sex marriage will force schools to teach kindergartners about anal sex), the arguments against gay marriage are pretty feeble. I almost felt sorry for

family values think-tanker David Blankenhorn, who argued in a recent *Los Angeles Times* op-ed that gay marriage is wrong because the universal purpose of marriage throughout history has been to give children two parents, one of each sex. Where to begin? Single parenting, donor sperm and eggs, blended families, the millions of marriages among people who can’t, won’t or don’t procreate but who imagine their marriages are as valid as that of, say, the superfertile Sarah and Todd Palin. Oh, and the mounting evidence that children raised by same-sex couples turn out just fine. There are days Blankenhorn, who describes himself as a “liberal Democrat,” must feel he earns every dime of the many millions his Institute for American Values gets from Bradley, Scaife and other right-wing foundations.

On the plus side, Californians can also vote for Proposition 2, which improves conditions for factory-farm animals, and Proposition 5, which would provide almost a half-billion dollars for drug treatment programs. In general, though, progressives and feminists have been slow to use ballot initiatives to forward our causes. One big opportunity is coming up in Milwaukee, where a coalition of activists have placed an initiative on the ballot that would give workers nine paid sick days a year. Number legally mandated now? Zero. Workers risk losing their jobs if they stay out because of illness or to care for a sick child or parent. This callous policy hits women hardest, but it’s bad for everyone—co-workers, restaurant diners, families. Could the Milwaukee measure spark a national grassroots movement? Show them some love by donating at [www.9to5.org](http://www.9to5.org). ■



# The far right, out of the shadows



**e.j. dionne jr. washington post**

- This year we're witnessing a culture war like we've rarely seen. Candidate McCain must make a stand.

WASHINGTON — Are we witnessing the reemergence of the far right as a power in American politics? Has John McCain, inadvertently perhaps, become the midwife of a new movement built around fear, xenophobia, racism and anger?

McCain has clearly become uneasy with some of the forces that have gathered around him. He has begun to insist, against the sometimes loud protests from his crowds, that Barack Obama is, among things, a “decent person.”

Yet McCain's own campaign is playing with powerful extremist themes to denigrate Obama. When his running mate Sarah Palin first brought up Obama's association with 1960s radical Bill Ayers, who has become a centerpiece of McCain's attacks, she accused Obama of “palling around with terrorists.”

What other “terrorists” was she thinking about?

Since Obama was a child when Ayers was part of the Weather Underground, and since even Republicans have served on boards with Ayers, this is classic guilt by association.

Ayers has been dragged into this campaign because there is a deep frustration on the right with Obama's enthusiasm for shutting down the culture wars of the 1960s.

Precisely because Obama is not a baby boomer, he carries none of that generation's scars. Most Americans (including most boomers) are weary of living in the past and reprising the 1960s every four years.

Yet culture-war politics is relative-

ly mild compared with the far right appeals that are emerging this year. It is as if McCain's loyalists overshot the '60s and went back to the '50s or even the '30s.

What we are now witnessing is the mainstreaming of the far right, a phenomenon that began to take shape with some of the earliest attacks on Bill Clinton in the 1990s.

False claims that Obama is a Muslim or that he trained to overthrow the government or that he was educated in Wahhabi Muslim schools are a standard part of the political discussion. These fake stories come from voices on the ultra right that have dabbled in other forms of conspiracy, including classic anti-Semitism. McCain and his campaign do not pick up the most extreme charges. They just fan the flames by suggesting that voters don't *really* know who Obama is, hinting at a sinister back story without filling in the details. That is left to the voters' imaginations.

The tragic irony here is that McCain was the victim of some of the very same extremist forces in the 2000 South Carolina primary.

To bring McCain down, some of George W. Bush's supporters on the far right peddled all manner of falsehoods about McCain, raising despicable charges about his time as a POW and suggesting (again falsely) that he had fathered an illegitimate child of color. In the past, McCain publicly condemned some of the very people who are now going after Obama.

McCain cannot be blamed for all of the crazies who see in Obama a chance

to earn fame and fortune by concocting lies about him. And yes, we should defend the speech rights even of those whose views we find abhorrent.

But the angry McCain-Palin crowds, and particularly those who threaten violence or shout racist epithets, should be a wake-up call to McCain. The dark hints about Obama that McCain's campaign is dropping dovetail too nicely with the nasty trash floating around the Internet and the airwaves.

We are in the midst of what could become — and here's hoping it doesn't — the worst economic downturn in decades. The last thing we need is a campaign that strengthens fanaticism, tarnishes the authority of the next president and whips up the worst kinds of prejudice. This works both ways: Obama should not be delegitimized if he wins, and McCain should not want to win in a way that would undermine his own capacity to lead.

When Christopher Buckley, a novelist and former speechwriter for George H.W. Bush, announced last week that he would vote for Obama (his first vote ever for a Democrat), he referred to words once spoken to him by his late father. “You know,” the conservative hero William F. Buckley Jr. said, “I've spent my entire lifetime separating the right from the kooks.”

McCain has an obligation, to his own legacy and the country he has served, to separate himself and his campaign from the kooks. Extremism in defense of liberty may be no vice, but extremism in pursuit of the presidency is as dysfunctional as it is degrading.

E.J. Dionne's column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group.