

Dana D. Nelson

The President and Presidentialism

A*mBushed*. The word is evident in its reference to our current president. But it is also meant to raise serious and uncomfortable questions for those who oppose his presidency. Ambushed by whom, or what? Similarly, the subtitle: the costs of *Machtpolitik*. Many of us ardently hoped the election would make Bush's *candidacy* accountable for the many costs we see in his administration's record of politics-as-war and war-as-politics since 9/11. We did not win this outcome. Bush's politics—his dirty attacks on political opponents; his gutting of national environmental protections and roadblocking of international environmental protocols; his support for corporate cronyism; his backing for the reallocation of public finance burdens; his misleading of the public to garner support for an ill-conceived war; his disregard for basic democratic rights, let alone internationally sanctioned human rights; his contempt for public accountability—did not cost him at all.¹ To the contrary, a slim majority of this nation's voting citizenry rewarded him and his team (at least those who survived into his second term) with the nation's highest mandate for its executive: four more years. So who will pay the many costs of this "investment-driven" wartime presidency?²

The *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105:1, Winter 2006.
Copyright © 2006 by Duke University Press.

AmBushed: The Consent of Helplessness

Astonishingly, Democrats and the Left were taken off-guard by the viability of this presidency: after they recovered from the extraordinary swirl of human and national feeling in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, they persisted in fending off awareness of Bush's growing popularity (if not necessarily support for his policies) by clinging to the illegitimacy of his "election." Well, he got elected this time. Though it seems possible the election could have been stolen in small increments (see Timothy Brennan and Keya Ganguly, this volume), it's a fact that there is absolutely no public will to challenge the legitimacy of this president's election, either on the Right or the Left. Democratic liberals and the Left feel ambushed, bushwhacked, KO'd by the fact that George Walker Bush is still POTUS.

But *why*? How did such organized and strong support come as such a surprise to so many thinking people? It may be that our civic selves and our intellectual selves don't line up with much facility: what we know about United States history and culture, and about the post-Kennedy era in particular, just doesn't compute during campaigns, those quadrennial exercises when we vest all our best hopes for a democratic U.S. future in our chosen candidate for president. These passions are real but, as I will suggest below, utterly and perhaps disastrously misplaced. The Left deeply believes that the first Bush administration aggressively imperiled our national democratic future as it bullied and invaded other countries and, through the device of no-bid-contracting, will for a long time be economically and environmentally pillaging those countries in the name of "democracy" (or what Michael Bérubé neatly terms "kleptocracy," this volume). Bush's reelection was devastating for those who believe that U.S. democracy may not survive another four years under Bush. They were incredulous that so many of their fellow citizens could have endorsed his agenda.

President Bush is, in the view of many on the Left, so patently unqualified for office, so bumbling, incompetent, and stupid or, alternatively, so bluntly malign, that it is impossible for them to comprehend the basis for his enthusiastic support. He's a figurehead, they insist—a puppet master-minded and manipulated by Dick Cheney and/or Karl Rove and/or Donald Rumsfeld. He's an aimless rich frat boy fronting a Machiavellian political family (see Kevin Phillips, Greg Palast, Michael Moore, Mark Crispin Miller, Bill Minutaglio). He's dyslexic (Gail Sheehy), and his malapropisms mean nothing; there's a cruel, systematic logic to his malaproping (Mark Crispin Miller); he's a chronic liar (Al Franken, David Corn, Michael Moore).³

He may be all this, but as Howard Gardner and other cognitive scientists have worked to establish, there are modes of intelligence beyond that captured by a standard IQ test.⁴ Whether you attribute Bush's success at mastering the symbols of contemporary politics to an alternative intelligence, canniness, or handling, there's no question that he excels at offering heartland voters a compelling impression of authentic, moral, and—importantly—consistent leadership. As Frank Bruni observed in his accounts of our president's first run at the office:

Bush and his aides lifted political theater to new, Sondheimian heights, and demonstrated in the process how much could be fixed with powder and pufferery, how thoroughly a candidate could be transformed from the outside in, how little he had to do but stand on the right set, under the right lighting, and say the right lines. If it was hard to figure out exactly what Bush was made of . . . this was a good part of the reason. Politics had become as much about the show as the showman, and it seemed entirely possible that a candidate could prevail in the end not because he had survived a rigorous vetting . . . but because he and his stage hands had put on a fabulous production.⁵

If, as political scientists Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley argue, Ronald Reagan managed to “uncouple” presidential personality from his administration's performance, it's possible that George W. Bush has raised this uncoupling to a new level.⁶ Bush, at least for the U.S. mainstream, has mastered the art of what Christopher Caldwell describes as “gesture politics,”⁷ and in that sense he is often effective at outfoxing—it is fair to call it outsmarting—his political foes. We had better start thinking about *that*.⁸

Bracketing the question of Bush's intelligence still leaves the Left with questions about the intelligence of his supporters. Many profess themselves utterly unable to comprehend the “stupidity” of their fellow citizens voting against their own economic interests. But given our own lack of rationality, for instance in the mismatch between our passionately romantic longing for a presidential candidate in shining armor to deliver a democratic rescue from this bad president (more on which below) and our intelligent perceptions of national and world trends, why would we expect our political opponents to be any more rational?

This returns us to the question: ambushed by whom? Left-bashing is all the rage, but we might need to consider that the Left has been overtaken by its own liberal tendencies for self-culture. This habit of substituting self-

improvement projects for activist and open-ended engagement could be described as a willful refusal to register and interact politically. It remains to be seen whether the Left can now finally process that the routinized brutality of Bush power politics will not go away if only we keep working at making our own hearts and homes right, buying organic, and contributing to an ever-expanding slate of political causes: Moveon.org, Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders, Amnesty International, Emily's List, the Sierra Club, the National Organization of Women, Planned Parenthood . . .

So far, it would seem, the Left's most organized action for countering *Machtspolitik* has been to insulate our lives from "bad" fellow citizens, socializing and working with politically like-minded people, and avoiding our Republican neighbors. This is in keeping with wider socioeconomic trends in the United States. But if democracy is about self-governing and making political community across our ongoing differences, such insulation, and the Left's participation in it, can only be seen as a rejection of democratic engagement and responsibility. Principles aside, this has certainly not helped us develop a useful political opposition. We've failed to notice visible trends at least a generation in the making, like the cultural turn away from secularity, or the continual lack of public support for late-term abortions even in the face of ongoing support for first-trimester procedures. To put it simply, it doesn't work to respond by calling these positions "stupid" and "illogical" or to suppose that this political difference can be remedied by our condescending to educate some 59,054,087 voters in order to "make them understand" our positions between now and the next election.

Self-enclaving is, I would submit, symptomatic of the Left's larger construction of political innocence. "I don't even *know* any Republicans," an acquaintance insisted with visible contempt when I suggested to her after the election that our unwillingness to associate and converse openly with political foes had become a pronounced liability for our own political understanding and engagement. If, as Mark Crispin Miller puts it, "whether they work brutally or entertainingly—or both—all anti-democratic forces see the people as extremely thick and basically oblivious—and work on them accordingly,"⁹ then what can be said for the democratic Left, which has cultivated a habit of avoiding interaction with those opponents it deems stupidly "voting against their own interests"?

Now more than ever, the Left does not like to get dirty with politics: we habitually prefer to analyze the conditions of that dirt's production, sub-

stituting argumentation for organization and thus evading susceptibility to charges of producing any dirt ourselves. This is at least in part what an administration official meant in telling Ron Suskind, “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”¹⁰

Machtropolitik: The Commander in Chief and the Rule of Force

This administration has cagily feminized its opposition, not in the least by running Bush as a “war president.” Here they have seized on a perdurable symbol: the executive office, with its promise of fortifying manliness. The presidency is now so central to our understanding of democracy that it can be hard to remember that our Founders did not immediately see this role as a necessity: the nation did not have a president in its earliest years. Rather, the office—this figure—was one of the key innovations offered by the Constitution. The president, in the arguments of *Federalist Papers* authors Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, was explicitly designed to rectify the fraternal democratic disorder they saw in the United States under the Articles of Confederation. In the contentious debates that preceded ratification, they argued that the integrity of national expansion could be guaranteed only by the firmness and potency of government. This virile spirit would be summarized in the person of the executive. The president was conceived to stand metonymically for unity, and this unity was framed as a manly, singular logic: the United over and against the disorderly, feminized States.¹¹

The Bush team has made presidential manliness central to its mission and image. Richard Goldstein has been perhaps our most vigilant analyst of how Bush has harnessed theatrical manliness to cultural ideology in service of his administration’s various agendas. Shortly after the Iraq invasion, Goldstein offered an analysis of neomachismo, a conservative, antifeminist backlash embrace of hypermasculinity. This trend gained momentum in the aftermath of 9/11, Goldstein argues, and was most clearly summarized in the inclusion of Donald Rumsfeld in *People Magazine*’s 2003 list of the sexiest men alive: “In his swagger we see the timeless union of militarism and macho.”¹² The Bush administration would harness the power of this union as it staged its Tom Cruise-ish announcement of the end of major

combat operations on live television: “Mission Accomplished.” This performance featured our commander in chief landing a fighter jet on an aircraft carrier,¹³ then striding toward the cameras dressed in pilot gear, with a clearly visible, definitely accented, and possibly, according to Goldstein, padded “basket”: “This manly exhibition was no accident. The media team that timed Bush’s appearance . . . must’ve chosen that uniform and had him try it on. I can’t prove they gave him a sock job, but clearly they thought long and hard about the crotch shot.”¹⁴

The machismo embraced by the Bush team would only become more crudely pronounced in the 2004 election, as Bush’s campaign handlers enlisted recently elected California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to vilify as “girlie men” John Kerry and any man considering voting for him. As Frank Rich predicted in the aftermath of the conventions, “Don’t believe anyone who says that this will soon fade, and that the election will henceforth turn on health-care policy or other wonkish debate. . . . In a time of fear, the only battle that matters is the broad-stroked cultural *mano a mano* over who’s the most macho.”¹⁵ The Bush administration’s military policies in coordination with its new Department of Homeland Security have excelled at extending the time of fear and its masculinist compensations (indeed, so successfully that Bush’s own actual avoidance of military service did not subtract from it).

But citizens also typically have other desires that they locate in the president, for democratic engagement and civic connection. These countervailing desires have, some argue, split the president into two manifestations that sociologist Michael Kimmel summarizes as “self-made” and “new man” presidencies.¹⁶ A hard warrior, the self-made president guarantees our safety (confirmed by the so-called security voters in our most recent election: see Melissa Orlie and Christopher Newfield, this volume); conversely, the soft, postfeminist president holds out the promise of democratic recognition and equalitarian exchange (as in Bill Clinton’s famous promise, “I feel your pain”). More recently, the cognitive linguist George Lakoff describes Kimmel’s alternating presidential modes as opposing party logics. In *Moral Politics*, Lakoff outlines two political cognitive maps for conservative and liberal thinking: the conservative strict father versus the liberal nurturing parent.¹⁷

Whether or not these reflections convince us that Republicans have a functional monopoly on the hard presidential mode, it is clear that George W. Bush, backed by Cheney, Rove, and Paul Wolfowitz, has maxi-

mized on its reach (see Pierre Guerlain, this volume).¹⁸ His administration has cagily seized on the title “commander in chief,” a hard-warrior, strict-father title if ever there was one. John M. Berezcz argues that “in order to understand Bush’s political personality one has to look at his mentors on both sides of the political spectrum—Lee Atwater on the Republican side and the late Lieutenant Governor of Texas, Bob Bullock, on the Democratic side. George W. Bush has been bi-partisanly admiring of political hardballers.”¹⁹ The presidency, in Bush’s interpretation, gives him a license for across-the-spectrum hardballing. As he summarized for reporter Bob Woodward: “I’m the commander—see, I don’t need to explain. . . . That’s the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation.”²⁰

The Bush team has been aggressive in claiming new powers for Bush as commander in chief. But as Senator Robert Byrd recently summarized, the phrase in our Constitution was offered only as a formality, since the Founders were careful to reserve war and purse powers for the Congress.²¹ Bush, taking part in a long trend of expanding presidential powers (see Matthew Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, this volume), effectively claimed these powers for the executive office in the congressional passage of the “Iraq resolution,” now Public Law 107-243, which authorizes the president “to use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary.” These powers coordinate with the administration’s explicit agenda outlined in the *National Security Strategy* of 2002, now known as the Bush Doctrine, which claims unprecedented preemptive, preventative, and unilateral military entitlements for the executive office.

As a recent investigative report by Seymour Hersh suggests, the administration is wielding its commander-in-chief dogma to shift responsibility for foreign intelligence and covert operations from the CIA, which is encumbered by legal restrictions and accountability to Congress, to the Pentagon, which in the administration’s view is not similarly obligated. In Hersh’s analysis:

The legal questions about the Pentagon’s right to conduct covert operations without informing Congress have not been resolved. “It’s a very, very gray area,” said Jeffrey H. Smith, a West Point graduate who served as the C.I.A.’s general counsel in the mid-nineteen-nineties. “Congress believes it voted to include all such covert activities carried out by the armed forces. The military says, ‘No, the things we’re doing are

not intelligence actions under the statues but necessary military steps authorized by the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to “prepare the battlefield.””²²

Clearly we can expect better camouflage and less accountability for the next incarnations of Abu Ghraib and Gitmo, an expectation that must make us wonder how central terror and its “extraordinary rendition” are to the expansion of the liberationist Bush agenda.²³

It would be terrifying enough if Bush meant simply to flex his title as commander in chief over military concerns. But as his comment to Woodward makes clear, he sees these powers as extending to his role as civilian leader. His unbending, paternalistic religious convictions have informed his foreign and domestic policy agendas, as has been widely noted. And he has effectively melded his position as the leader of the religious Right to an aggressive downsizing of social programs that foster, in his view, dependency and lack of self-discipline. This combination of fundamentalist hierarchalism and punitiveness emblemizes what Lakoff outlines as the strict father. In Lakoff’s argument, conservatism based on the strict-father model is unsatisfactory because child-rearing and cognitive developmental research demonstrates that strict fathering does not achieve what it aims at in children and relies on a deeply flawed understanding of human nature and the human mind.²⁴ Evolutionary biologists Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson frame the point more directly: a politics based on a personalized and masculinist force can quickly become antidemocratic.²⁵ It’s time to do more than analyze these trends and make projections about what can happen in the next four years, waiting for the next election before we begin hoping for better once again.

Democracy’s Number One Office, and Its Supporters

In her study *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, Jean Lipman-Blumin outlines a handful of defining destructive behaviors, including:

- Consciously feeding their followers illusions that enhance the leader’s power and impair the followers’ capacity to act independently . . .
- Playing to the basest fears and needs of the followers
- Stifling constructive criticism and teaching supporters (sometimes by threats and authoritarianism) to comply with rather than to question the leader’s judgments and actions

- Misleading followers through deliberate untruths and misdiagnoses of issues and problems . . .
- Structuring the costs of overthrowing them as a trigger for the downfall of the system they lead, thus further endangering followers and nonfollowers alike
- Ignoring or promoting incompetence, cronyism, or corruption²⁶

However tempting it is to tally Bush's policies and behaviors with this partial list of Lipman-Blumin's criteria, my point here is to highlight how the politics of gaining the office of the presidency and maintaining effectiveness in it fairly demand the utilization of such tactics. Honestly, we shrug at much of this when "our candidate" is in office. Lipman-Blumin argues that "we should view leadership as *interaction* between leaders and their followers. What goes on *between* leaders and their supporters is perhaps far more significant for the course of history than simply what leaders do to followers" (17). So it is worth remembering that leaders can't lead without followers—and not just the active ones but the passive resisters too. They can't make history without us, and it is time, as Wendell Berry reminds in an essay reprinted here, to stop confusing "peaceability with passivity," a passivity the Bush administration relies upon (see also Nikhil Singh, this volume). We might, as Melissa Orlie suggests, begin exploring ways to withdraw our passive consent first by relinquishing our habitual complacency and looking for a larger arena for action than simply governmental opposition: for instance, by detaching our lives, incomes, and habits from the consumerist dependencies and inevitabilities they create for us.²⁷

It's not easy these days, as Orlie and Berry signal, to conceive of grounds for an activist opposition, especially for the intellectual Left, which is in the habit of turning to analysis in times of trouble. As Timothy Brennan and Keya Ganguly observe, the Left is stymied in its attempt to imagine even political opposition in the face of a history that has seemingly rendered the totalizing aims of leftist social justice "unrealistic." We and our causes have become, it has seemed, victims of history, and here, it is curious that the rhetoric on both sides of the political divide now thrives on a sense of victimization. Thomas Frank details in *What's the Matter with Kansas?* how populist conservatives endlessly rehash their sense of victimization at the hands of "liberals"—their laws, social programs, and "culture." All the while, the Left feels hamstrung by the way history seems to be going against us, in combination with the Right's hypocrisy and lack of respect for our facts and

the rules of fair play. However you decide the victim contest, it would seem, for now at least, that the Right's cant of victimization does not stop them from seizing power, while the Left seemingly eschews power and turns to a kind of moralism that leaves us, in Wendy Brown's analysis, "standing against much but for very little, adopting the voice of moral judgement in the absence of a full-fledged moral apparatus and vision," or alternatively becoming "reactionary: clinging without logical ground to the last comforting frame in the unraveling narrative."²⁸ The fundamental problem with Left moralism, in Brown's analysis, is that it is antipolitical, that its subjects tend naively to cast the object of its critique—the U.S. government, or politics—as institutions and activities that should be fully democratic and therefore outside the domain of political struggle. As Brown summarizes, "Moralism's objection to politics as a domain of power and history rather than principle is not simply irritating, it results in a troubling and confused politics. It misleads about the nature of power, the state and capitalism; it misleads about the nature of oppressive social forces, and about the scope of the project of transformation required by serious ambitions for justice" (384).

Brown suggests that somehow the Left has gotten the mistaken idea that democracy happens only after political struggle has ended. It's worth remembering, then, that democracy's innovation is not to eliminate political struggle but to make self-governance the structure within which political struggle takes place. That means we get to—we have to—participate in political struggle. Forgoing political participation in favor of critically describing those struggles, we have allowed our activist, public sensibilities and abilities to atrophy. The Left's position as the discarded fringe of the Democratic opposition will become a historical fact if we don't figure out how actively to reclaim our politicalness. This will entail reanimating our civic purpose—which is not simply equivalent to our intellectual purpose.²⁹ We must, moreover, do this work in a strongly antipolitical culture, where political democracy is increasingly "downsized," social democracy is glued to consumer "choice," and economic democracy is actively vilified. The corporatization of media, the growth of the corporate lobby, and the conversion of government into a consumer service provider are coordinating, in Ginsberg and Crenson's analysis, to bring "the era of the citizen" to its end.³⁰ As they elaborate, "Americans are entering a political world in which citizens have ceased to compose a public. Americans continue to participate in politics (at reduced levels and with diminished influence), but they do so

increasingly on their own" (234). Our daily avoidance of political opponents both measures and fuels this trend. Our recourse to political giving aligns with the expansion of consumerism as the only realm for liberty and democratic choice: here "politics" happens as we watch Sharon Stone, Angelina Jolie, and Bono petitioning the corporate oligarchy at Davos for more concessions to social and environmental concerns.³¹ The substitution of the cult of celebrity for the political public is just another entailment of our "winner-take-all society."³² Politics is thus relocated to the realm where the celebrity "haves" engage in what organizational behavioralist Rakesh Khurana has described as the "irrational quest" for a "corporate savior" that may not mirror so much as eventually succeed our nation's search for a presidential savior.³³

The convergence of such forces makes this particular (MBA) president in this particular moment seem almost entirely inevitable.³⁴ Perhaps this is what Philip Roth means when he observes: "And now Aristophanes, who surely must be God, has given us George W. Bush, a man unfit to run a hardware store let alone a nation like this one, and who has merely reaffirmed for me the maxim that informed the writing of all these books and that makes our lives as Americans as precarious as anyone else's: all the assurances are provisional, even here in a 200-year-old democracy. We are ambushed, even as free Americans in a powerful republic armed to the teeth, by the unpredictability that is history."³⁵ I've been suggesting, though, that it's more than the inevitability of history ambushing us. Democracy is *not* run solely by history's cruel, invisible hand. Believing in democracy means believing that people can have this power, not just history, or presidents whom we do or do not elect. Democracy happens when people take responsibility for self-governing.³⁶

And I now want to argue something counterintuitive (especially in a volume by this title): that detaching ourselves from our obsession with this president may be one of the most important moves we can make toward reclaiming our politicalness. Our obsession with Bush keeps us locked into one of U.S. democracy's biggest magic tricks. Looking to the president as the container, the chalice, for our democratic hope, we collaborate with the very antidemocratic expansion of the presidency's powers, symbolic and actual, and with the antidemocratic contraction of our own.

The president, as a single person, cannot symbolize democracy, if we take democracy to be a principle for self-government that is founded in and thrives on *disagreement*. Moreover, in the language of our Constitution, the

president is not the leader of democracy. Quite differently, he is the executive of the institutions that are designed to support representative democratic self-governance. He's a *functionary*. Our country has never been able to remember that, and the antidemocratic affect generated by our desire to place our man in "the nation's number one democratic office,"³⁷ to see him as the "most powerful man on earth," is as disabling as the factual expansion of executive branch power. Looking for the (right) president to save (us from) democracy is antidemocratic and self-infantalizing. And this is not to ignore the very real power that the office has accrued and continues to grab and exercise—a trend we must confront. It is to say that we will never be able to do this work until we stop waiting to be rescued by the right president (the one who will give up executive power?!), and that we must remember politics is not just something that we do in the privacy of a voting booth every four years.

In a very real way, it's not particular presidents who are bad for U.S. democracy (though of course some have been better and some worse): it's presidentialism that is bad for our democracy. Political scientist Barbara Hinckley has capably outlined how the idealized symbolics of the presidency deplete the democratic imagination. One of her key arguments in *The Symbolic Presidency* is that the concentration of agency in the body of the president completely elides the cooperative efforts that produce every act of state: "We use the singular—the president—in describing what all presidents do, thereby creating the impression of specialness and incomparability."³⁸ Wanting the president to symbolize all that we treasure about our nation, we make him into both the apogee and the guarantor of our representative system and all those working for it.

But democracy is, properly speaking, *our* job. Insofar as we try to make it the president's we participate in a fantasy that drains our democratic and political imaginations, that lowers our tolerance for the necessity and practice of democratic disagreement, that keeps us from exercising our politicalness in fuller civic and political spaces (and this is surely not a mistake the radical Right has made). The Left, having lost, resigns itself to "four more years"—not just of Bush rule but of contracted political activity before we can power up again to hope for presidential change. Our obsession with the president keeps us hamstrung, hating him and hating his supporters as his metonymical "base": when we look at them, we don't see possible allies whose positions we currently lack the ability to understand and enlist; we see George Bush, whom we revile. This misprision profoundly skews our

ability to work constantly, resourcefully, publicly, democratically for political change.

What can we do? We can get over our distaste for political disagreement. We can make it a new exercise to meet and discuss politics with people who may disagree with us, keeping our eye toward the possibility that they might contribute to *our* thinking on any given subject. We can explore our disagreements civilly and subversively, as Jeffrey Goldfarb suggests. We can, as Orlie demands, make a careful accounting of how our consuming habits might contribute toward the maintenance of the neoliberal corporate regime, and change them, living and not just voting against our most comfortable interests. We can contribute money to our causes with the demand that they *find something for us to do*. We can organize even little street protests, write letters to the editor, make research projects out of finding ways to depict Left visions for social change that will actually connect with people who vote for Bush. Every Thursday we can meet in public with like-minded activists at lunch and brownbag while wearing protest boards. We can practice political arguments with total strangers in airports, on subways, in parking lots. We can pay attention to and become involved in local, daily politics. We can make it our business to meet more people who share these involvements, if not necessarily our politics. We can organize conferences that involve local democracy, environmental, and human rights activists along with intellectuals. We can get ourselves out of the habit of mentally and argumentatively overtotalizing our opposition. We can stop hoping that our arguments will be the center of attention and work at paying more attention to the arguments of others.

The Volume

A number of essays broach the subject of a U.S. fascism. Singh argues “that while democratic liberalism continually reimagines fascism as its monstrous other, fascism might be better understood as its doppelganger or double.” Somewhat differently, Thomas Dumm sees fascism working in opposition to democracy, but emerging in coordination with the modern capitalist, consuming subject, whose need for security “can never be satisfied.” This needy subject authorizes the enormous expansions of executive branch power in the twentieth century and allows a Machiavellian sovereign free reign to deliver us to, in Dumm’s phrasing, the “vestibule” of fascism.

Whether we are witnessing a new form of totalitarianism or something

more loosely organized, like the conversion of republican democracy to autocratic, corporate empire, as Neil Smith suggests, or something new altogether, as Orlie speculates, such forms depend on followers, and here several contributors tackle the question of a Left response that would go beyond analysis to action. Timothy Brennan and Keya Ganguly call on the Left to reconstruct a belief in sweeping change that can dislodge its current cynicism, disappointment, and immobility. Orlie and Berry alike appeal for a radical reexamination of the politics of daily life, asking readers to “change the fabric of our lives each day”; Lawrence Schehr urges that we mobilize an unparalleled, public exercise of logic to combat the hollowing of U.S. democratic values in the name of “moral values.” Their perspectives and those of the rest of our contributors do not fall into any comfortable alignment. We hope the theoretical, practical, and political disagreements that emerge between these essays will stimulate both debate and new plans for action.

Notes

Thanks to all the people who read and talked me through the draft and this project: Carolyn Dever and Teresa A. Goddu, Cecelia Tichi, Tom Dillehay, Julie Hayward, and especially Grant Farred. Thank you to all the contributors to this issue, whose work I had the pleasure of reading before I wrote this introduction: you inspire me.

- 1 As Molly Ivins and Lou DuBose summarize, “There has been a huge shift in the tax burden from corporations to ordinary citizens. Three times as much money now comes into the federal treasury from working people’s payroll taxes as from corporate tax payments.” *Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush’s America* (New York: Random House, 2003), 283.
- 2 Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush* (New York: Viking, 2004), 125. See also 41–43.
- 3 Ibid.; Greg Palast, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy: The Truth about Corporate Cons, Globalization, and High-Finance Fraudsters* (New York: Plume, 2003); Michael Moore, *Dude, Where’s My Country?* (New York: Warner Books, 2003); Mark Crispin Miller, *The Bush Dyslexicon: Observations on a National Disorder* (New York: Norton, 2001); Bill Minutaglio, *First Son: George W. Bush and the Family Dynasty* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999; afterword, 2001); Gail Sheehy, “The Accidental Candidate,” *Vanity Fair*, October 2000; Al Franken, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* (New York: Dutton, 2003); David Corn, *The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception* (New York: Crown, 2003).
- 4 See Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) and *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 5 Frank Bruni, *Ambling into History: The Unlikely Odyssey of George W. Bush* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 87–88.
- 6 Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 134.

- 7 “It appeals to citizens on the grounds of what their leader does as a person—probably because citizens lack the attention span to follow the things he does as head of state.” Christopher Caldwell, “The Triumph of Gesture Politics,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 23, 2005, 12.
- 8 Here the Left might usefully heed the analysis of sociolinguist Michael Silverstein. He argues that the “conceptual elite” misunderstand the reach of the so-called Dubya-speak: “Talking politics is publicly experienced nowadays through a very different, this-world rhetorical sensibility. It rests upon a different set of intertextual connections, to what I would term *corporatized language*.” Silverstein describes this language as one that aspires not to make claims on truth or falsehood but to “socially locat[e] speakers and addressees.” See his *Talking Politics: The Substance of Style from Abe to “W”* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 71, 116, 121.
- 9 Miller, *The Bush Dyslexicon*, 71.
- 10 Quoted in Ron Suskind, “Without a Doubt,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004, 44–51, 64, 102, 106.
- 11 See chapter 1 and the afterword of my *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) for a more detailed version of this argument.
- 12 Richard Goldstein, “Neo-Macho Man: Pop Culture and Post-9/11 Politics,” *The Nation*, March 24, 2003.
- 13 The landing was described by CNN as “picture perfect.” See www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/05/01/bush.carrier.landing/ (accessed January 29, 2005).
- 14 See Goldstein, “Bush’s Basket,” *Village Voice*, May 21–27, 2003. You can see the famous shot online at www.villagevoice.com/news/0321.goldstein,44234.1.html (accessed March 10, 2005). See also Elisabeth Bumiller, “Glimpses of a Leader, Through Chosen Eyes Only,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2003, 12, which details the working philosophy of Eric Draper, chief White House photographer. Notes Bumiller: “All recent presidents have had official photographers and all have distributed White House photographs that they hoped put the president and his administration in the best light. But photographers, picture editors, and even administration officials say that no other administration has moved as forcefully as the Bush White House to limit the access of outside news photographers to the president.” Indeed, the iconic photo of our manly and possibly enhanced president striding across the deck of the USS *Lincoln* was supplied by the White House.
- 15 Frank Rich, “How Kerry Became a Girlie-Man,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2004.
- 16 Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996). See especially chap. 8, “The Masculine Mystique.”
- 17 See his *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 18 By this terminology, we can also newly appreciate the caginess of the Great Communicator, whose passion for jelly beans is only one of many symbols of his ability to switch hit between the hard and soft modes of appeal.
- 19 John M. Berez, *Character in Chief: George W. Bush* (Atlanta: Humanics Trade Group, 2000), 73.
- 20 Quoted in Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 145–46.
- 21 Robert C. Byrd, *Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency* (New York:

- Norton, 2004), 169. Byrd elaborates: "At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the fifty-five statesmen who hammered out our nation's organic charter provided that the president be 'Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States' but that the Congress 'shall have the power to declare war.' . . . There are no fewer than seven clauses within Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution that directly vest war powers in Congress" (168).
- 22 Seymour M. Hersh, "The Coming Wars: What the Pentagon Can Now Do in Secret," *New Yorker*, January 24 and 31, 2005, 45.
 - 23 For additional analysis of Bush rendition policies, see Jane Mayer, "Outsourcing Torture: The Secret History of America's 'Extraordinary Rendition' Program," *New Yorker*, February 14 and 21, 2005.
 - 24 See Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, especially chaps. 20–22, "Nonideological Reasons for Being a Liberal," "Raising Real Children," and "The Human Mind," 335–78.
 - 25 See Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 244–47.
 - 26 Jean Lipman-Blumin, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians—and How We Can Survive Them* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19–20.
 - 27 As she puts this in a different article, "We can and must return to the political and ethical importance of practices of individual conduct because our everyday conduct may be the missing link and source of disjunction between our professed convictions and our actual political prospects." See Melissa Orlie, "The Desire for Freedom and the Consumption of Politics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 28.4 (2002): 397.
 - 28 Wendy Brown, "Moralism and Antipolitics," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 376.
 - 29 On this subject see Jeffrey Goldfarb, *Civility and Subversion: The Intellectual in Democratic Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
 - 30 Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined Its Citizens and Privatized Its Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), x.
 - 31 Here again, Orlie offers a nice summary of the promise and costs of such impulses: "Practices of commodity consumption reveal a persistent desire for freedom and a capacity for the deliberate exercise of power in conditions that would otherwise appear to extinguish them. But the promise and power of such free desire are squandered when the consumption of democracy is confused with the practice of democracy." "Desire for Freedom and the Consumption of Politics," 399.
 - 32 Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society: How More and More Americans Compete for Ever Fewer and Bigger Prizes, Encouraging Economic Waste, Income Inequality, and an Impoverished Cultural Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
 - 33 Rakesh Khurana, *Searching for a Corporate Savior: The Irrational Quest for Charismatic CEOs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
 - 34 The cover of the January 14, 2001, *New York Times Magazine*, featuring a photograph of George W. Bush, read, "America, Inc.: The M.B.A. President."

- 35 Philip Roth, "The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America,'" *New York Times Magazine*, September 19, 2004.
- 36 This is an argument luminously if polemically summarized by C. Douglass Lummis in his *Radical Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).
- 37 Brace and Hinckley, *Follow the Leader*, 6.
- 38 Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.