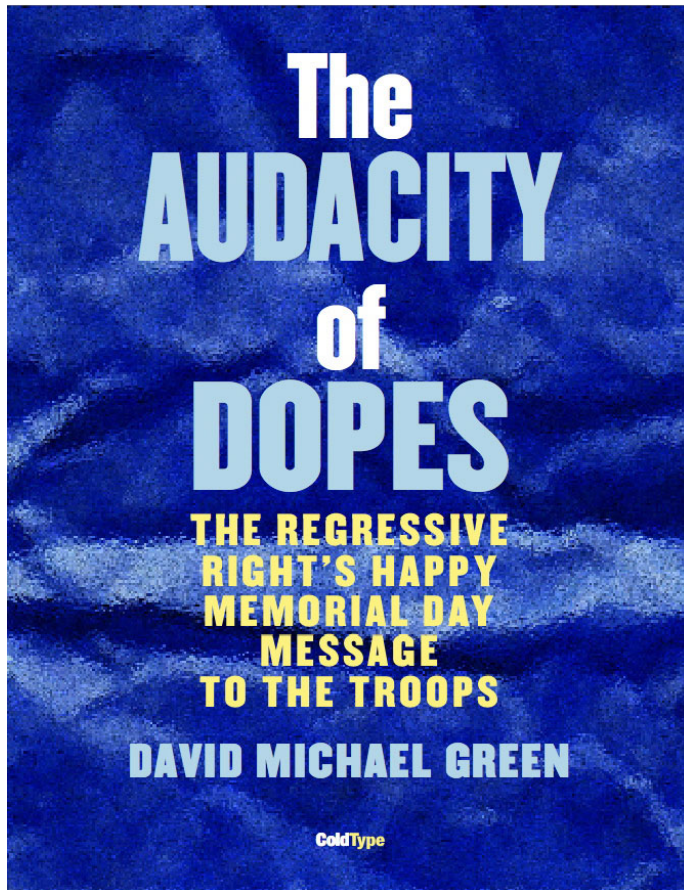


The
AUDACITY
of
DOPE

**THE REGRESSIVE
RIGHT'S HAPPY
MEMORIAL DAY
MESSAGE
TO THE TROOPS**

DAVID MICHAEL GREEN



David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. He is delighted to receive readers' reactions to his articles (mailto:dmg@regressiveantidote.net), but regrets that time constraints do not always allow him to respond.

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

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GREETINGS, American Servicemen and Servicewomen (those of you who are still alive)

'Happy' Memorial Day.

This is a message from your good friends in America's conservative movement – otherwise known as the regressive right – and our nice team running the country's government, the Republican Party.

You remember us, don't you? We're the folks who very much like to have our pictures taken with you, especially right before elections. You've been voting for us for years. Your drill instructors get you all pumped up with testosterone and adrenaline and then we're kind enough to provide outlets for your energies in extended quagmires like Vietnam or Iraq.

We want to let you know, especially on this Memorial Day, that the rumors you've been hearing about us these last few years are not, um, exactly correct. Just mostly.

Look, we'll be candid with you. It's true that we've asked quite a lot from our country's men and women in uniform these last few years. But, remember, the cause was good, and therefore highly worthy of the sacrifice involved, especially because that sacrifice was all yours, not ours. You may have come to think that you were fighting and dying for nothing, but in fact your service has been helping to make sure that we were continuing to win elect... er, that American corporations were continuing to domi... er, that the US was continuing to bring freedom and democracy to the world. Yes, that's it, that's it!

Some of you have criticized us for not providing you with adequate armor in this war. Remember that grunt who publicly embarrassed Rumsfeld with his question about that, right before Rumsfeld publicly embarrassed himself with his answer

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about how you go to war with the Army you have? That was years ago, and we still haven't gotten you the stuff you need. The important thing, though, was to enrich Jabba-The-Hut-size corpulent contractors at every opportunity by loading them up with fat no-bid contracts and then quietly letting them fail to provide the material they've been contracted to supply. I'm sure you can understand those priorities. Just duck a little faster when those pesky IEDs go off, and you should be okay.

Oh, and we're genuinely, truly sorry about that lousy care you're getting when you come home injured. You know, like that Walter Reed scandal, and the way that the military uses every means possible to make sure you don't get properly treated, including denying that you're actually injured. We'd really like to help out here, since you fought our little war for us and everything, but the darned thing about it is that adequate medical care is hugely expensive, especially for all the PTSD cases and head injuries that are going to require vast amounts of money to treat over decades worth of time. Sure, the country has the cash, but not enough to also cover obscene tax breaks for the wealthiest elites. Guess what our priorities are?

Maybe you're a little pissed off about your salary, too, especially since we're asking you to risk life and limb in the ungodly conditions of that hell-hole we created in Iraq. It's true that the starting salary for a private in the US Army is only \$14,904 (yes, that's actually per year, not per month), but don't forget you're getting the chance to serve your country and see the world! Or, at least one little corner of it we've turned into charcoal, rubble, and burnt DNA samples that used to be human beings.

Does it anger you that we award these outrageously lush contracts to Blackwater and other mercenary companies, so that the people you're fighting next to are earning six to nine times the salary of a top Army sergeant? Are you bugged that the US government spends \$1,222 per day for each Blackwater hired gun, for a total of \$445,891 per mercenary, per year? Do you think it's a bit, well, wrong, that General David Petraeus earns less than half what some Blackwater officials in Iraq are making? Sorry about all that. If it makes you feel any better, you might like to know that Blackwater contributed scads of money to make sure that we win elections against those wimpy, appeaser Democrats. It certainly makes us feel better.

Maybe you're upset that there are such mercenary forces in Iraq, anyhow, especially in numbers that actually exceed the amount of uniformed troops there. If so, you're probably also irritated about the fact that you've had to do two, three and four rotations of combat duty now. That your rotations have been extended from twelve to fifteen months. That you've been stop-lossed, so that even when you've done your part and fulfilled your contract with the government you are being forced to stay in the military longer, while those who never signed-up at all are untouch-

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able. That you signed up for the National Guard or Reserves to help out in an emergency, but not for these endless extended tours for which neither outfit was ever intended to be used.

Maybe you're thinking, "There are 300 million Americans. They haven't even been asked to pay additional taxes for this war, let alone to serve. Why is the government balancing this entire war effort on the backs of less than one percent of the country's population, including me?!?" Of course, we've carefully trained you not to think like that, and indeed not really to think about politics at all, other than to vote-Republican-cause-they're-gung-ho-and-that's-all-you-really-need-to-know-soldier. But apparently we need to revise our training methods here in Oceania to make them just a bit tighter.

Anyhow, the answer to all these questions is the same. We've got to stick it to you guys, then stick it to you again. First, because we can. And second, because the alternative is completely untenable. We know you won't complain too much. You'll spend the first half year in Iraq still living off your macho fumes. You'll spend the next year silently enraged, but still careful to respect your chain of command and avoid politics. And you'll spend the rest of your time sinking into despair and accumulating the unimaginably horrific experiences that will later put the 'T' into your PTSD.

Sure, we could solve all of this in a heartbeat. In fact, we could do it the old-fashioned way. We could have a draft. That would mean that tens of millions of Americans would share the burdens and risks of this war, rather than just the few who were economically desperate or foolishly patriotic enough to enlist. That would mean that the country wouldn't have to continue plummeting toward national bankruptcy by paying private mercenaries ten times what it costs to field a GI. Maybe some of that money could even be spent on treating the wounded, or preventing them from getting that way in the first place by providing them with sufficient armor.

But the goddamned thing about a draft is that it would turn latent hostility toward us war profiteers and our Republican marionettes into outright fury, spilling out all over onto the streets. Already, two-thirds of the country opposes the war and thinks that it was the wrong thing for the country to do. A majority even believes that we deliberately lied about the WMD thing. (Of course we did! Jesus Christ, what did you expect? A lecture on energy sector economics?) Anyhow, these people are angry, and they're showing it in elections. Can you even imagine what would happen if, on top of all that, we did the right thing – the thing that this country has always done – and went ahead and instituted a draft and raised taxes during

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wartime? Well, we can imagine. Our little regressive movement would be about as popular as the bubonic plague, and our front operation, the GOP, would make the Whigs look like a much-beloved popular party, by comparison. Which it looks like those idiots are about to do, anyhow, since they can't seem to keep their peckers in their pants. Stupid jerks. Oh well, don't get us started on that one.

Perhaps you're also a bit incensed that we who send you off to fight wars never bother to show up ourselves. Maybe you heard that Bush got his daddy to get him into the very safe Texas Air National Guard during Vietnam (and then didn't even show up for that). Pretty shameful, eh? Well, at least he's decided to give up golf for the duration of this war. No one can say that the man doesn't sacrifice for his country. Or maybe you're angry that Ashcroft got seven draft deferments, or that Cheney got five and literally even said "I had better things to do in the Sixties than fight in Vietnam", or that Wolfowitz didn't go, or Feith or Perle or any of the rest of them, or that Romney thinks that his five boys working on his presidential campaign is a contribution equivalent to serving in Iraq. We can see why that might make you mad, but sorry, friends, this is war, and everybody has a role to play. You dudes get to be the fodder. We're the profiteers. Got it? We'd appreciate it very much if you'd just do your job, and let us do ours. That way, we don't have to throw you into some Guantánamo-like pit for the rest of your miserable life on some trumped up charge, in order to discredit and silence you.

Sure, it sucks. But don't feel too bad. We do have one final gift for you – a special Memorial Day present. We're going to do our best to make sure that the new GI Bill that would give you decent college benefits is treated to the same fate as we gave to Saddam, with about the same degree of dignity, too. Even though god knows you've earned it. Even though it was one of the smartest things this country ever did last time around. Even though the story we're running around trumpeting as our excuse for opposing benefits for the people we always wrap ourselves in during election time – that it would result in sixteen percent of the armed forces retiring so they could obtain the benefit – is nonsense, because the same Congressional Budget Office study that produced that finding also showed that the bill would increase recruitment by exactly the same amount, as more people signed-up to receive the benefit.

And even though – in what is the most remarkably shameful behavior of all by people who wouldn't know shame if it hit them like a bunker-buster bomb – the underlying logic of this argument is that we cannot give you this benefit because you've earned it, you more than deserve it, and damn if you wouldn't actually use it. Therefore we'd lose you, and since we're unwilling to risk our own fortunes by having a draft, we can't have that. So, our way of saying thanks to you, our way of supporting the troops, our way of showing our patriotism this Memorial Day, is to deny

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you these benefits so that we can further exploit you yet further, after which time we will still be denying you these benefits.

All of which might make you wonder, “How do these guys ever win elections? How is it these guys are in the White House, instead of cleaning up litter by the side of the road with the rest of the chain gang?” To which we might respond, “How come morons like you keep voting for us?” It’s really not so difficult to figure out. We use hate and fear and divisiveness to win elections, and they work great. Wetbacks, ragheads, niggers, fags, kikes, bitches. Whatever. As long as it isn’t plutocrats, we don’t really care what the prejudice du jour might be. Just as long as you’re thinking about something else as we pick your pocket or line you up in battle formation. Or, in the case of you dumb SOBs and this whole GI Bill thing, doing both at the same time.

How can this happen in an America that claims to love and support the troops, that is as nationalistic and as armchair-patriotic as can be? It can happen because we make sure to keep this war as invisible as possible to the whole country. That’s why there’s no draft. That’s why there’s no tax increases. That’s why you don’t see the flag-draped caskets coming back to Dover Air Force Base anymore. That’s why the media are embedded and censored and perhaps even murdered. That’s why we pay whores like Scott McClellan to lie to you. Maybe the rest of you muttonheads weren’t paying attention during Vietnam, but we sure as hell were. Who says America didn’t learn any lessons in Southeast Asia?

True, there are signs that the natives are restless. And desperate Republicans in Congress are voting for the GI Bill in the hopes they won’t ultimately need those resumes they are nevertheless furiously updating just in case. But, honestly, even on this Memorial Day, most Americans are completely clueless about what you’re doing in Iraq and why. It’s doubtful they could even find the place on a map.

They sorta care about you, and they definitely know they’re supposed to, but let’s be honest. It’s very, very easy – one might even say purposely convenient – to simply and nonchalantly believe that you’re off fighting for our national security, and that’s a wonderful thing and all, but, hey, can we flip back to the celebrity channel or the game already, eh? Did you know that Katie Couric’s already dismal ratings actually plummeted even further when they sent her to Iraq to try to make her look like a serious journalist? Who wants to see that? Did you know that coverage of Iraq in the media is drying up faster nowadays than a puddle of blood under the Fallujan sun?

So, yeah, sure. On this Memorial Day, Americans are appreciative of all that you do. But, more than anything, what they really appreciate is the day off work.

Thank you for your service!



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