

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN THE WORLD

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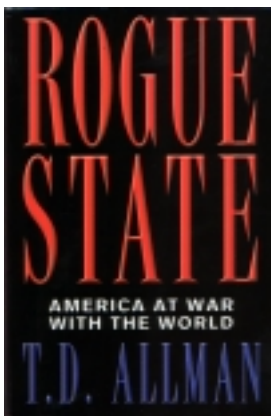
AN EXCERPT FROM **ROGUE STATE**
AMERICA AT WAR WITH THE WORLD



T.D. ALLMAN

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An excerpt from the book

ROGUE STATE

AMERICA AT WAR WITH THE WORLD

BY T.D. ALLMAN

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Life

is a comedy for those who think, a tragedy for those who feel. That's why the spectacle of the George W. Bush presidency makes you want to laugh and cry at the same time.

The reasons this unelected president has given us to cry are as numberless as the sands of the Iraqi desert. He's done more than Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein to endanger America. All by himself, he's destabilized a fragile, emerging world order. He's poisoned alliances; he's torn up treaties. He has convinced foes they better get nuclear weapons, and get them quick. He's made America the global enemy of law and order. No enemy of human rights, or of the environment, or of a realistic approach to dealing with the problems of living sanely on this planet is friendless so long as George W. Bush is in the White House.

George Bush has destroyed belief in America's goodness and America's wisdom among hundreds of millions of people. Gratuitously, with his trade-mark smirk, he's turned a friendly world into a hostile world. Nations and people who once saw America as a global protector now see the United States as the greatest threat to civilized human values currently at large in the world. Important, worthwhile allies, people whose help we need and whose judgment we should respect – the Canadians, the Germans, the Turks and, yes, the French – have complete contempt for the president of the United States, as do the Russians and Chinese. Every nation in Africa explicitly opposed his attack on Iraq. Every one of Iraq's neighbors – Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Iran – warned catastrophe would be the result. But George W. Bush, a C student at

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Yale and Harvard, sneers at wisdom. Facts don't matter. Reality can take a walk. You're either for us, or against us, he announces. Among those George Bush has turned against us include Nelson Mandela. According to Mandela, "The President of the United States does not know how to think. His attitude is a threat to world peace."

In a world where the technology of death is a mouse-click away, it's the hatred Bush has sown in countless unknown hearts that, sooner or later, may harm America most. Right now, in many places – including, it is reasonable to assume, inside the United States itself – smart, angry kids are on the Internet, amassing information on nuclear fission and biological warfare. In the world they know, George W. Bush, not some swarthy terrorist, personifies evil. Meanwhile, intelligent people everywhere ask themselves: How can the American people go on supporting this peculiar man? Why did they let him grab the presidency in the first place? Why, now, of all times – when the world truly needs sane, measured, constructive and patient U.S. leadership – is an American president running wild?

The world was dangerous when Bush took office. He's made it much more dangerous. Every day he stays in office it gets even more dangerous. Bush's recklessness creates the danger. His bungling incompetence multiplies it. Americans today have a president who can invade Afghanistan – but, after three years, still can't bring back Osama bin Laden, dead or alive. American power is in the hands of a president who invades Iraq in order to rid the world of Saddam Hussein and Weapons of Mass Destruction – and then takes eight months just to find Saddam, never unearths the Weapons of Mass Destruction, and treats the death trap he's creat-

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ed there for our National Guardsmen (and women) as some kind of victory. The Bush bungling isn't limited to foreign wars. He is also the president whose administration, years later, still hasn't managed to track down, right here in the United States, whoever it was who sent anthrax to some of George W. Bush's more unfavorite people, including Senator Tom Daschle and Dan Rather, as well to many quite average Americans, who died.

A willful, prideful ignorance completes the circle of incompetence and reckless endangerment. Why did the U.S. "intelligence" community – with its thousands of analysts, and multi-billion dollar secret budgets – fail so utterly to warn us about the impending attacks of September 11, 2001? Why is it that the Bush administration did not foresee the catastrophe in Iraq it was creating for us, and for the Iraqis, when it plunged so blindly into war? Hans Blix, the astute and philosophical head of the U.N. inspectors, afterwards remarked that, before it invaded Iraq, the Bush administration had "100 per cent certainty that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and zero per cent knowledge as to where they were."

That's George Bush: 100 per certainty, zero knowledge. He is the president who doesn't know, doesn't care, and doesn't care to know. That's why America's president has stymied impartial investigations into the 9/11 intelligence catastrophe. It's why he opposed the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and then, when it became politically impossible not to create it, left out both the FBI and the CIA. It's why, even now, Bush and his crowd never ask themselves: Could it be that others oppose us not because they are evil, but because we're wrong? Could it be those uppity French and craven Germans and all the others on the Security Council did not

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support us because invading Iraq was a dreadful, stupid idea? Could it be we are the problem? Could it be we have some explaining to do?

Now ask yourself a question. Are you safer now than you were four years ago? The reason why you and your family are not safer – and probably are in greater danger – is that George W. Bush, for all his talk about fighting terrorism, has no aptitude and no interest in running the kind of government that might protect you and me from another 9/11. He prefers to sneer at the U.N., insult NATO, and pick grudge matches with unsavory, faraway dictators who, nasty as they are, had nothing to do with 9/11, instead of doing his duty as president, which is to protect our lives, and our property. George W. Bush starts wars as a kind of diversion from the real responsibilities of his office. And why shouldn't he? Very few wealthy white Republicans die in Bush's wars.

All this is a crying shame for America yet, when you stop to think about it, there's also something deeply comical about George W. Bush's performance as president. You don't find him funny? That's because you're feeling, not thinking. Suppress your emotions for a moment. Wrap your intellect, and only your intellect, around what Bush said on May 1, 2003, in the course of a political appearance as lavishly choreographed as a Michael Jackson video. As he stood at taxpayers' expense on the deck of the U.S. aircraft carrier, "Abraham Lincoln," George W. Bush announced: "In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed."

In the same speech, scripted by the White House to be a triumphant overture to his 2004 presidential election campaign, he also declared, "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended." He at

least had that right. Two months after Bush had defied the U.N. Security Council, defied world public opinion, and defied reality by invading Iraq, "major combat operations" were indeed over. The drip-drip phase of Americans getting killed – on patrols in Baghdad; at the wheels of Humvees in the Iraqi countryside – had begun. George Bush's video game Iraq war had given way to the war in which young men and women from Hometown America – mostly with high school diplomas, and disproportionately working class, black and Latino – were being bludgeoned in the head, and shot in the back, and left bleeding to death by their Iraqi attackers who included, in addition to violent young Iraqi males, women and in one documented case, a twelve-year old little girl.

George W. Bush is the president who, while all this is happening, stands beneath a banner proclaiming "Mission Accomplished," and announces, "Iraq is free." Why, then, are so many Americans being killed in what Bush described as "liberated Iraq"? "Decades of lies and intimidation could not make the Iraqi people love their oppressors or desire their own enslavement," Bush proclaimed on the aircraft carrier. Now that the American occupation was running into resistance, however, he had a different explanation. The "evil agents of terror" were "making war on democratic Iraq." Wasn't his invasion supposed to have put a stop to all that?

Except when his knees are bothering him, George W. Bush runs around the world making trouble for himself, and even more trouble for others, the way Larry David runs around Beverly Hills in the cult comedy "Curb Your Enthusiasm." Each new George W. Bush-generated disaster, just like on TV, is propelled by the supercharged super-ego of a spoiled middle-aged narcissist who, having willfully

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and bizarrely misconstrued reality, gets himself ensnared in a series of weird, yet initially avoidable, misadventures of his own making. In each case, what escalates a minor misjudgment into a major crisis is the protagonist's refusal to conceive of the possibility that it might be he, not reality, that's to blame when things go wrong.

In February 2003, nearly two months before Bush ordered the Iraq invasion. George W. Bush and his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, were so fixated on attacking Iraq that, in spite of all the diplomatic scurrying at the United Nations, it was beyond doubt that there would be an invasion. Given that Saddam Hussein was a tinpot torturer and that the United States, militarily, was the mightiest nation on earth, the outcome of the invasion also was not in doubt. However – to use a medical metaphor much favored by politicians and the press – a good surgeon always takes pains to make sure everything is just right, even when the patient on the operating table is undergoing minor surgery. How many troops would it take to make sure that the Iraq strike truly was surgical – and that, once the surgery was finished, the patient not only survived the operation, but got better?

It would take "something on the order of several hundred thousand" ground troops to defeat Saddam, and then secure the country, former U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki pointed out. This figure, as events in Iraq soon showed, was correct, just as one would hope it to be, coming from a highly-experienced senior military commander. However Rumsfeld – who's never fought in a war; walked patrol in a hostile city, or spent the night in a foxhole – already had decided that he knew better than the professionals. A mere 140,000 U.S. troops, he informed the Joint Chiefs, was the

magic number sufficient to impose democratic tranquility on Iraq, while simultaneously scooping up Saddam Hussein, and his weapons of mass destruction, for exhibit in the ensuing Bush administration victory parade. While military men who had actually experienced the reality of war tried to keep their faces expressionless, Rumsfeld made a further prediction even more wildly defiant of reality. By Christmas 2003, he announced, the Bush administration's triumph over evil in Iraq would be so total that the U.S. occupation force there would be down to a mere 30,000 Americans, about the same size as the New York City police force.

Events on the ground soon proved that General Shinseki's judgment on the force levels necessary in Iraq had been, if anything, low. Maybe not even half a million ground troops could pacify Iraq. At the rate things were going, American soldiers, unless the U.S. scuttled and ran, would be celebrating Christmas beside the Tigris and Euphrates forever. Troop levels were not Rumsfeld's only error of judgment. When it came to counting the dollars necessary to occupy Iraq, his powers of clairvoyance had also failed him. Initially, Rumsfeld and other Bush officials treated the costs of occupying Iraq as incidental. There was talk of a mere billion a month sufficing to get "free Iraq" up and running; once U.S. troops reached Baghdad, the Bush-Rumsfeld sound-bite number edged up to two billion a month. Even this great sum, as it turned out, was not nearly enough just to hang on in Iraq, let alone actually end the chaos – and the killing of Americans there. Under Congressional quizzing, Rumsfeld was forced to concede that "estimated" U.S. expenditures in Iraq were actually running at about \$4 billion a month. This was nearly \$50 billion a year to maintain a U.S. military presence that

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had brought neither peace to the Iraqis nor success to the United States. How much would it cost actually to win the guerrilla war George W. Bush had started in Iraq? \$10 billion a month? \$20 billion? And how many more Americans would have to die? While the American death toll crept higher, the cost to the U.S. taxpayer kept soaring. \$87 billion turned out to be the number – provisional, and only for the first year following the invasion – which George W. Bush eventually pulled from a hat.

Oh, there was another little detail they had not foreseen. All that Iraqi oil that was supposed to have paid for Iraq's construction (and made U.S. construction companies, including Vice President Cheney's Halliburton Corporation, mega-bucks)? It wasn't flowing. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, as always, was as unalarmed by reality as his boss. Once free market forces took hold, he predicted, all Iraq's ills – including the drive-by murders of Americans – would disappear. This was Rumsfeld's judgment of prospects for the country which had invented the bazaar, and yet in spite of its 5,000-year experience with free markets, has not ever enjoyed the delights of democracy, or known peace except while under the heel of some tyrant.

While neither the hemorrhage of blood nor of money in the war zone shakes Rumsfeld's virtually autistic serenity, even a brief stop-over in the "old Europe" can unnerve him, as was demonstrated during his June 2003 visit to the tidy constitutional kingdom of Belgium. The horrendous problems of Mesopotamia were but bagatelles to Rumsfeld, compared with the shocking discovery that tiny Belgium should be so presumptuous as to try foreign war criminals in its courts Rumsfeld lost it. Outraged that the perpetrators of

genocide, as well as dictators who had tortured their people, to say nothing of the perpetrators of illegal, unprovoked wars of aggression, might under certain circumstances be subjected to the ordeal of Belgian justice, the Secretary of Defense presented our Belgian allies with an ultimatum. Chuck your laws against war crimes and genocide, or forget about getting any U.S. dollars for the new NATO headquarters in Brussels. Unfortunately for him, Rumsfeld's threat to unleash dollar diplomacy carried considerably less weight than it once would have – about twenty per cent less. That was how much value of the once mighty U.S. dollar had lost in Europe since the Bush administration had started frightening away foreign tourists and investment in the United States with its "for us or against us" insults. Thanks to George W. Bush continuing fiscal wizardry, the dollar has fallen even further since then.

As she traverses the world, Condoleezza Rice, Bush's National Security Adviser, evokes a different kind of laughter – the snortling and snickering that comes when a third-rate, irredeemably conventional intellect pretends to elucidate important global complexities to an audience made up of people more intelligent, more experienced, and much better informed than she is. Such scenes are never pleasant. The unease rises to the level of embarrassment when the speaker is both a representative of the president of the United States and oblivious to the fact she is making a fool of herself.

Such was the distressful scene at London's International Institute of Strategic Studies when, a little after Rumsfeld let loose on the Belgians, Condoleezza Rice delivered her latest lecture to the Europeans on how they should comport themselves. Earlier Rice, in her self-assumed role as homeroom enforcer of the Western

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Alliance, had pronounced the Europeans guilty of "appeasement" – that is, of being the same kind of people who condoned Hitler's aggression, and excused the crimes of the Nazis – because they disagreed with U.S. policy. In her latest monologue, Rice lectured the British foreign policy elite on the perils of another great threat to global security to which they were, in this case also, in her opinion, insufficiently vigilant. This latest menace so obvious to Condoleezza Rice yet, mysteriously, hitherto invisible to otherwise perceptive people on the other side of the Atlantic, wasn't Saddam. Nor was it hunger, or global warming, or even militant Islam. This time the threat was what Rice called "multi-polarity."

The snares and evils of "multi-polarity," which Rice abjured her audience to avoid like the plague, were, in her presentation, contrasted with the beauties and benefits of "multi-lateralism." In her lengthy exegesis, Rice never explicitly defined her terms. But by question time it was clear what they meant. "Multi-polarity" was bad because it was a term the French liked. It therefore violated Rule Two in the Bush instruction manual for the new Europe: "Always Thwart Anything the French Suggest." "Multi-lateralism," conversely, was highly desirable because, as Rice used the term, it consisted of obeying the Bush administration's Rule One: "Do Exactly What We Tell You to Do, When We Tell You, Whatever It is."

"Multi-polarity," Rice warned her distinguished audience in conclusion, "would take us back to the Concert of Europe." Had she been a Member of Parliament, and this been the House of Commons, Rice's sermonette would have been hooted down. Had she been an Oxbridge doctoral candidate defending her thesis, her examiners would have cut her to shreds. But since Condoleezza Rice

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was an adviser to the president of the United States, there was silence. Eventually, one member of the audience did ask Rice if she thought "six per cent of the world's population." that is, the Americans, should always be the ones who decided what's best for "the other 94 percent of us."

"We want multi-lateralism," George W. Bush's chief confidante on war and peace reiterated, "but it must be a multi-lateralism that produces solutions, not delays and inaction." To everyone in the room except the speaker, it was already sadly evident that the Iraq war was no "solution." Even the London cabbies driving past the International Institute of Strategic Studies understood what eluded her: Far from providing a solution, invading Iraq had created a vast new international problem which was now was going to torture the Mideast, the United States and the rest of the world for years, maybe decades, to come. Like Rumsfeld, Rice wasn't merely oblivious to this disturbing new reality. She still regarded the failure of others to have supported the U.S. attack as the result of some character flaw – evidence of lack of moral fiber among the effete Europeans. It simply did not occur to her, any more than it did to her president, that so many people disagreed with U.S. policy because their understanding of this major international problem was superior to her own. Holding up the Iraq fiasco as a model of U.S. leadership, she informed distinguished audience that "Iran and North Korea are serious threats to security which require a multi-lateral solution." Not since Lyndon Johnson's emissaries, during their London and Paris transits to Saigon, had lectured the obtuse Europeans on the self-evident verities of the Domino Theory had such geopolitical lunacy been so solemnly presented to them by an American official

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enjoying the confidence of a President of the United States, several members of the audience afterwards noted.

Then there are the Two Stooges of the Bush comedy team, Richard "The Magician" Perle and Kenneth "Cakewalk" Adelman. Both have been prominent agitators for a shoot-now-think-later U.S. foreign policy since the 1980s, when they cheer-led for the disastrous Iran-contra operation. It was Perle who predicted that Saddam Hussein and his henchmen would disappear, as if by magic, in a puff of smoke. "Support for Saddam, including within his military organization, will collapse at the first whiff of gunpowder" was Perle's exact prognosis. Adelman – who likes to compare George W. Bush to Winston Churchill favorably while wearing an American-flag tie during his TV performances – was the one who predicted conquering Iraq would be like dancing at an old-fashioned cotillion.

More than a year before the Iraq invasion, at a time when the difficulties and risks of such a complicated and dangerous military operation should have been seriously debated by serious people, the Washington Post lent Adelman its editorial columns. He used them to deride the findings of two researchers at the Brookings Institution, one of Washington's most respected think-tanks. The two Brookings experts, Philip H. Gordon and Michael E. O'Hanlon, unlike those within the Bush entourage, had tried to assess what level of forces actually would be necessary to mount a successful invasion of Iraq. They concluded that the United States would "almost surely" need "at least 100,000 to 200,000" ground forces to defeat Saddam and secure the country.

The Brookings assessment, as we know now, was over-optimistic. But it was not nearly unrealistic enough for "regime change" true

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believers like Adelman. Instead of pondering the implications of their findings, Adelman treated the Brookings report as a joke. "I believe demolishing Hussein's military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk," he wrote.

Even those who agreed with him considered Adelman a lightweight in comparison to Rice (which, if true, would make him, intellectually speaking, lighter than hydrogen). However he shares with George W. Bush himself, as well as with Rice and Rumsfeld, a capacity which is highly regarded in the Washington world of TV sound bites and op-ed sloganeering. This is the ability to deal with evidence that totally refutes his claims by shouting: See! I told you so! I told you I was right, and this proves it!

Bush launched his Iraq invasion on March 19, 2003. Within days it was clear to anyone capable of turning on a TV that the George W. Bush administration, as one U.S. military man put it, had made a "serious strategic miscalculation" in not sending enough troops to Iraq. Though the full consequences of this miscalculation were only beginning to accumulate, conditions from the first day of the invasion were worse on the battlefield than either the administration or the American media had previously considered possible. The dark shape of worse things to come quickly became visible. This was an invasion without enough boots on the ground to prevent looting in Baghdad, or even direct traffic there, but worse quickly followed. Saddam's timely escape, along with the futile search for Weapons of Mass Destruction, would tie down tens of thousand of U.S. troops from the start. Thanks to hit-and-run low intensity resistance to the Americans, the U.S. occupation force never would be able to pacify the country. By April Fools' Day, it was clear, the cakewalkers had

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danced into a quagmire. What was Adelman's reaction?

"Now we know!" Adelman exulted on April 10, 2003 – even as Saddam slipped out of the America's grasp and Iraqi forces regrouped for the coming guerrilla war against the American occupation. What did we know? "I always said it would be a cakewalk," Adelman exulted, yet again in the pages of *The Washington Post*.

Vice President Dick Cheney, though far less frequently, can also cut loose with a memorable one-liner. The last time was actually in 1989; it had to do with the future Vice President's military record or, rather, lack of one. Cheney has spent his career in Washington promoting wars for others to fight. Yet he himself, like Bush and virtually all Bush's closest advisers with the exception of Secretary of State Colin Powell, avoided fighting in the Vietnam War. In fact Cheney, the fiercest hawk in the Bush administration, has never carried so much as a sling-shot in his nation's defense. Along with Adelman and Perle, he escaped the draft altogether.

Even Cheney's boss and president, George W. Bush, had, in the end, to serve in the Texas national guard – the martial arts equivalent of majoring in the Bartending at Party Animal State U. How did the Vice President, one of Washington's master maneuverers, manage to maneuver himself out of military service of any kind? Cheney has never answered that question. However, once, back in 1989, when pressed on the subject of why he – unlike the three million Americans of his age who did go to Vietnam – never fought for his country, Cheney grabbed the chance to show that he, too, if he so chooses, can be funny. "I had other priorities than military service in the Sixties," he shot back, as though getting maimed and killed in Vietnam had ever been anyone's priority.

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Within George W. Bush himself, as within many comics, there seems always to gurgle, and frequently to surge, a well-spring of anger. A kind of rage at somehow being short-changed by life seems to animate his world-view. Though it's hard to figure out why a person as privileged as he should feel that way, it's not an uncommon syndrome. Many of us have known the rich kid, the son of the famous father who goofs off a lot, makes fun of the wonks and weirdos, and then, when he hits the trifecta – the Ivy League degrees, the pretty girl, the Big Job – still has a chip on his shoulder.

Whatever the reason for his peculiarly deficient approach to the world, it certainly is not that Bush is stupid. Far from being a "moron," as a Canadian government official erroneously suggested, Bush is quick-witted and has a very resourceful political mind. Think how adroitly, for instance, he used the vileness of Saddam Hussein to distract attention from the fact that he himself had gone AWOL from the real war on terrorism. Until he diverted attention from his failures in the war on terrorism by beating the Iraq war drums, it was starting to becoming clear that on every front of the real war on terror, Bush was a loser. Even his biggest victory – Afghanistan – had turned out hollow. Osama, unlike Saddam, was never caught. True, American techno-power did overthrow the local government, in this case the Taliban. But to what effect? The result was not "regime change" but merely, and disastrously, as in Iraq later, "regime elimination" – the creation, by U.S. firepower, of a power vacuum. Not even after Mohammed Karzai was installed in Kabul did Afghanistan have a national government – let along the kind of human and institutional infrastructure that could prevent it from being used as a ter-

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rorist base again, once U.S. forces, under George W. Bush's direction, bugged out, this time to invade Iraq.

Fighting a real war against terrorism would have required wisdom, not just smart bombs – and, in Afghanistan, Bush didn't even try. He had sneered at "nation building" in the 2000 presidential debates. Now it wasn't even a case of Shoot Now, Think Later. It was Shoot Now, Then Start Another War, So We'll Never Have to Think. The result? Even as Bush bungled into a self-inflicted guerrilla war in Iraq, Afghanistan once again was being abandoned to warlords, heroin producers and political outlaws.

Bush's failure is larger than Iraq and Afghanistan: He and his administration have not done anything effective anywhere to solve the problem of failed states being used as terrorist bases for attacks on innocent civilians, including you and me. He's blocked meaningful, indeed even token reform of the FBI, CIA and INS. He's tried to keep even the facts of the 9/11 intelligence catastrophe secret, especially where they concern relations with his Saudi friends.

Bush's domestic "anti-terror" policies mirror his economic policies. When it comes to jobs and incomes for the American people, Bush's objective isn't to "revive the economy." It's to make the rich richer, however much doing that enfeebles the economy, and deforms the U.S. tax system. Similarly, his domestic "anti-terror" measures serve to protect the agencies, politicians and paper pushers who made 9/11 possible in the first place, not the American people.

Under Bush's leadership, the U.S. government remains, on the whole, simply uninvolved in protecting our lives and our property from future attack. But who noticed, once Bush's big buildup to the

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Iraq war began? Launching a new war to distract attention from failure in an old war – like manufacturing a foreign crisis to conceal a domestic hidden agenda – is a tactic older than Machiavelli. The tactic worked for Ming emperors and for Medicis, and it certainly worked for Bush in the 2002 mid-term election, when he used the danger of war he himself had manufactured to make the Democrats seem iffy on national security. Yet as our last president from Texas, Lyndon Johnson, learned, the war you start overseas can come home and devour you. In the event George W. Bush is ever undone, it may be the result of him having been too clever. That, in turn, would be an oddly humorous denouement both for Bush, who often has pretended to be less clever than he really is, and for his critics – who all too often fall for the idea that some slowness of mental process explains why George W. Bush acts as he does.

The problem with Bush is not his IQ, but his emotional intelligence – along with what Martin Luther King, Jr., would have called “the content of his character.” Something is missing in the quality of Bush’s temperament; and temperament, as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes memorably noted about FDR, is far more essential to presidential greatness than intellect. George W. Bush’s meanness of spirit is at the heart of the mystery. Why does someone with such a sunny background surround himself with dark souls? Why has he turned a world that wanted to be pals with him into a world that finds him the most dislikeable U.S. president in living memory – a far worse pill of a president than Nixon was? He himself sometimes claims that the attacks of 9/11 made his aggressive, violent and hostile chip-on-the-shoulder approach to the world necessary. Not since Pearl Harbor, he likes to remind us. He forgets that following Pearl

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Harbor President Franklin Roosevelt united America, and filled it with hope. He won the respect and love of the world by treating the world with love and respect.

George W. Bush in contrast has used 9/11 to divide, and divide, and divide. He has turned his constitutional responsibility to defend the United States into the biggest of all the wedge issues – including abortion, and the makeup of the Supreme Court – he has used to propel his presidency. In the Bush presidency, 9/11 is used to excuse everything, and justify anything, but it explains nothing. George W. Bush – and those whose advice he chooses to follow when he makes life-and-death decisions – regarded the world and its possibilities with dark contempt long before 9/11.

Not since Coolidge has a president kept his inner self so remote from the American people but, in Bush's case too, sometimes a little window opens. This happened two months after he announced that the United States had "prevailed." It was just before the Fourth of July holiday. Every night now, on TV, Americans were watching other Americans dying in Iraq. There are moments when Bush reveals he has a soul. This was one of them, and what a dark, insensitive one it turns out to be. The Bush soul-window opened when he was asked for his reaction to the drip-drip of American dead in Iraq. Even some Republicans were startled by George W. Bush's response. He delighted in these deaths. He reveled in them. They made him gleeful. "Bring 'em on!" he challenged the killers of Americans. Bush's Fourth of July speech, delivered a few days later, was also a revelation.

It is current White House practice to conscript members of the U.S. armed forces to serve as extras in the Bush disinfomercials.

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George W. Bush made his Fourth of July speech at a U.S. Air Force base in Ohio to an audience from which the public was excluded. He spoke, instead, to an audience of Americans in uniform who had been ordered to provide the human back-drop for his patriotic remarks, along with their families. This Independence Day – July 4, 2003 – was the first since the Iraq invasion. The nature of the holiday, the composition of Bush's audience, above all the disturbing events in Iraq, all legitimately posed the question: How many more Fourths of July would see Americans being killed in Iraq?

On this occasion Bush – enveloped by the banners and symbols of American patriotism – once again did something that, when you stop to think about it, was laughable. In his Fourth of July speech to this military audience he did not mention the Iraq war, or the Americans being killed there, not once.

In the previous few days, as if responding to Bush's "Bring 'em on" dare, Iraqis had killed and wounded nearly thirty Americans. Bush's carefully selected audience knew that. They knew something else: It could have been me, or my son, or husband, or my wife. Yet on America's most patriotic holiday, in spite of these special circumstances, the painful sacrifices being made in Iraq were not in the script. Bush did not so much as mention Iraq, or the American dead there, just as the word "Afghanistan" is seldom heard, any more, to emerge from his lips. However, to the cheering, flag-waving crowd he did say the following: "The enemies of America plot against us and our people in uniform do not have an easy duty." This was his closest allusion to the dying.

Admit it. All this is funny when you think about it – though it has to be understood from the start that when George W. Bush per-

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forms, it's not "Brady Bunch" humor you're getting, or even a riff suitable for "Seinfeld." You can imagine a George W. guest spot on "The Simpsons." Those Simpson kids, you can be sure, would put a George W. Bush address to the student body in its proper moral perspective. But it is really Richard Pryor territory George W. Bush is working, most of the time, as he flies from aircraft carrier to air force base, orating about the plotters. Richard Pryor, that is, in the case of his lighter riffs: The next time you watch Bush talking about some situation that, with him handling it, is going to lead to Americans getting killed, consider the possibility that the ghost of Lenny Bruce is head joke writer in the Bush White House.

An American was shot dead in downtown Baghdad just before Bush began his speech in Ohio. His name never made the news reports; such deaths were hardly news now. He had been killed while guarding the wrecked antiquities museum, so on the Fourth of July an American death shaded into metaphor. Having arrived too late, and in insufficient numbers, to save civilization and its artifacts in Iraq, Americans now were bringing tragedy down upon themselves. A few days earlier, the decomposing bodies of two other GIs had been discovered, dumped in the countryside outside Baghdad, This time names were attached to the deaths. Sgt. 1st Class Gladimir Philippe, 37, had been from Roselle, N.J., and Pfc. Kevin Ott, 27, had hailed from Orient, Ohio – and as soon as you attach the names of real human beings to the dark hilarity it stops being funny, of course. If you have any human compassion – and, before George W. Bush entered the White House, you were proud of your country, and even now, in spite of all he's done, you still love America – it makes you want to cry for America, when you stop to feel about it.

T.D. ALLMAN

Ott had owned a Harley-Davidson back in Ohio. Philippe was the son of Haitian immigrants who, acting out their version of the American Dream, had already made it to the suburbs. Ott's family, as non-ethnic Americans of his background often do, asked to be allowed to grieve in private. "Please don't bother us at the moment and thank you very much for respecting our wishes," the voice answering the Ott telephone told a reporter. In New Jersey, Philippe's kid brother Fedlyn, 16, said: "I looked up to him a lot. He always told me not to join the military. He told me to play basketball and keep my head strong and don't worry about girls, and to do good in school."

Philippe, the Haitian with the exotic name who liked to go bowling when off-duty had died with Ott, the biker from the Cleveland suburbs whose family knew how to fend off the press. Such details only seem to make the dead live: Gladimir Philippe and Kevin Ott had been killed while on guard duty at a town called Balad, about 25 miles north of Baghdad. Their bodies were found stripped of their weapons. Their Humvee was recovered before their bodies were, at a different location.

Such deaths were beginning to become normal in Iraq, which was why in this instance they had attracted unusual attention. The killings of Philippe and Ott were among the first to demonstrate unequivocally what the Bush administration denies to this day: The invasion of Iraq all along had been based on a calculus of fantasy. These disturbing deaths of Americans like Philippe and Ott, happening all over Iraq, were not, as U.S. officials were still trying to claim, "isolated incidents." These deaths were the first casualties in a war the American occupation force would have been unprepared to fight

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even if Bush and those around him had possessed the courage to admit the extraordinarily dark reality their arrogance and blundering had created for America in the Middle East.

Thanks to the Bush invasion, the United States now faced the prospect of fighting an imperial war in the same land that, in the end, has consumed every super power that ever has presumed to hoist its pennants in the shadows of Babylon. The British, the French, the Ottomans, Genghiz Khan, Alexander the Great: Every one of them had come, seen and eventually been conquered. Just how unprepared the America of George W. Bush was to follow in the footsteps of either the Western "civilizers" or of the Mongol Horde was illustrated by the deaths of Sgt. Philippe and Private Ott. Historically, you could say their deaths were inevitable, but as a practical matter they were the product of what, in civil law, would be called criminal negligence. Had the government of the United States listened to the voices of reason, and not invaded Iraq in the first place, they would never have been killed. Had the Bush administration, having determined to invade Iraq whatever the cost, listened to the voices of reason when it came to assessing the cost, they might never have been killed.

But George W. Bush had chosen to be reckless on the cheap. So just before the Fourth of July, 2003, a guy from New Jersey and another from Ohio found themselves alone in an Iraqi town that, prior to their arrival, had been ruled by Saddam Hussein for more than twenty years. They were approached by some Iraqis, persuaded to get out of their vehicle – to investigate something, to help someone?

How were they lured out of their Humvee? Why didn't they fire

in self-defense? We'll never know. As always with the Bush blunders, there was no back up and there would be no follow up. What we do know is that if George W. Bush had paid attention to the Pentagon force estimates, and not preferred to rule through people like Rumsfeld – if he had bothered to read the Brookings report on troop strengths, not watch people like Adelman gesticulate on the cable news channels – these two American citizens might never have found themselves so alone in such a dangerous place.

Was there an additional reason they died? Someone who actually knows war first-hand could speculate that perhaps some fundamental misapprehension caused Ott and Philippe to fatally misconstrue the nature of the danger they faced. One could speculate – and it would only be speculation – that they died because, like most Americans, they believed what their president had told them about his invasion of Iraq: Following the cakewalk to Baghdad, a rapturous and grateful Iraqi population would welcome them as liberators. Not Bush or anyone else, including the free press of America, had told people like the Philippe family and the Ott family the truth, unvarnished and straight out: "Your loved ones are being sent on a mad adventure. God help them."

It was all lies. It always had been all lies – and not just the specific lies, for example about the weapons of mass destruction. The entire false construct spun and respun with such expertise by Bush and those around him that had convinced a majority of Americans – though no one else – that invading Iraq was, if not absolutely essential to America's self-defense, then certainly a plausible, and desirable, thing to do.

Now that the drip-drip war was underway, it was time to spin new

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lies – this time, about who was killing Americans in Iraq and why. In addition to Saddam Hussein's loyalists and "common criminals," a U.S. official spokesman told the Associated Press, when asked about the two soldiers' disappearance, "outside agitators" were responsible for the mounting American death toll. These American deaths in Iraq resonated with the long, tragic history of the Middle East. In fact they were a continuation of it, but this latest official explanation for why Americans were being killed came straight out of America's own past. "Outside agitators" also had been the ones blamed by officials in the Deep South for the freedom marches of the 1960s, as they dispersed the demonstrators with truncheons, attack dogs and water cannon.

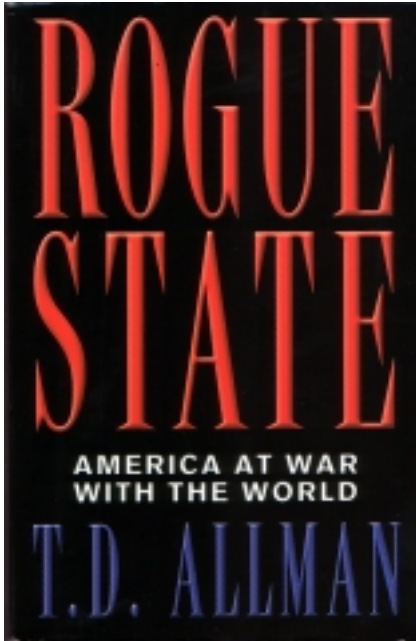
It was in reaction to the disappearance of Philippe and Ott, and a cluster of deaths like theirs, that Bush had unleashed his dare: "Bring 'em on." Once their bodies were recovered, they were flown from Iraq to the military mortuary at the U.S. air force base near Dover, Delaware. So it happened that on the same Fourth of July as they lay dead at one air force base, George W. Bush was orating about plotters at another. Americans as well as foreigners like to think of the United States as a new country, but this was America's two hundredth and twenty-seventh Fourth of July, For nearly a quarter of a millennium now, Americans have been celebrating the Fourth of July. Thanks to Bush, this Fourth of July – "the Glorious Fourth" as it's sometimes called – was different from all previous ones.

What made it different was that all over the world ordinary people as well as national leaders were troubled by questions that, until recently, it never would have occurred to them to ask: What might

America do next to disrupt and endanger the world? What was to be done about the threat America posed? This was the first Fourth of July when it fairly could be said that the United States, not some foreign power, was the most dangerous country on earth.

It was all part of George W. Bush's transformation. Without really noticing it, an entire nation – and not just any nation – had been dragged along by George W. Bush's presidential transformation. On September 12, 2001, if you asked, most people everywhere would have told you Osama binLaden was the world's most dangerous man. But by July 4, 2003, most people outside the United States would have given you a different answer because they could see what, to millions of Americans, was still invisible.

Had he betrayed America's trust, or only taken advantage of the American people's startling indifference to the realities of the world? Whatever the case, George W. Bush had displaced binLaden as the focus of the world's anxiety and fears. He was now the most dangerous man on earth.



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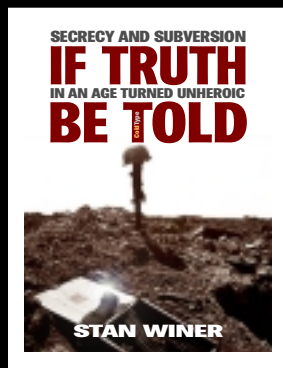
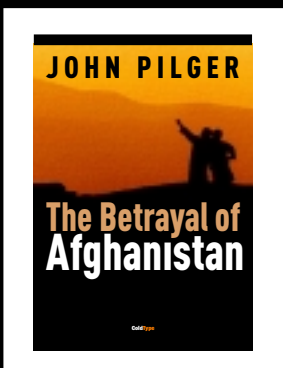
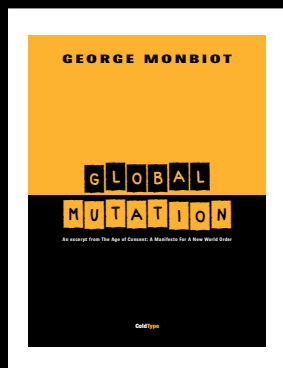
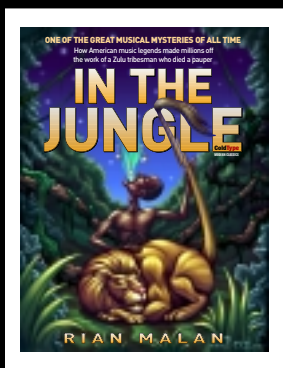
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