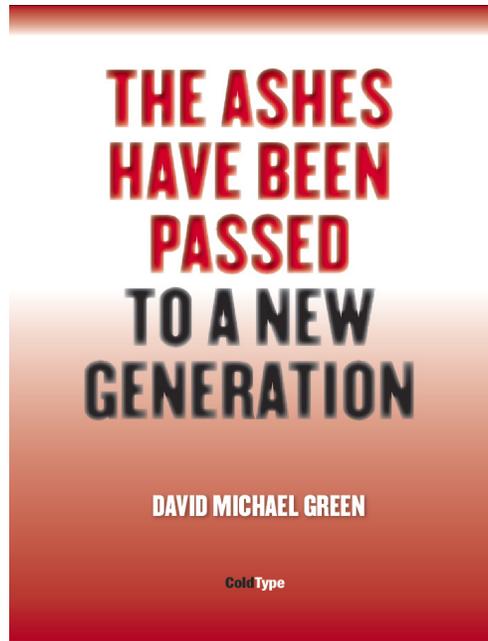


THE ASHES
HAVE BEEN
PASSED
TO A NEW
GENERATION

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ColdType



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We live in the most astonishing of times, politically speaking. And I don't mean that as a compliment. There is so much I would hate to try to have explain to an alien about our politics. Same with a human five centuries from now – it's just that I'm not so sure there'll be any.

In America, a regressive majority of one on the Supreme Court disappears a whole clause from the Second Amendment in order to interpret it favorably for an industry merchandizing mass quantities of small death machines. Thirty or forty thousand of us are swept away every year by these killers, but few find the coincidence of that fact with their ubiquitous presence – by some estimates, there is nearly one gun for every American nowadays – somehow noteworthy.

One president has oral sex in a private consensual relationship and lies about it, so right-wing freaks spend \$40 million to investigate this most heinous of crimes and bring impeachment charges against a presi-

dent for only the second time in American history. Meanwhile, one of their own admits to trashing the Constitution at every turn and isn't even investigated, let alone impeached, let alone removed from office.

This same president plunges the world into war on the basis of non-existent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but couldn't be less concerned when North Korea actually goes nuclear on his watch. This president goes to war to bring democracy to the Arab world, but can't even be bothered to pressure Egypt or Saudi Arabia to move a tad in that direction. This president uses an attack on the US to justify international belligerence and mass human rights violations, but doesn't seem very interested in even attacking, let alone vanquishing, the supposed perpetrator.

The list of these political out-of-body experiences is as endless as it is absurd. I may not speak Martian very well, but even I can tell you what the look on the face of that little green feller with the antennae means. He's thinking, "Wow, you humans are the

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strangest freaks in the galaxy, man!”

Well, actually, it's not so much the entire species, but mostly just us especially twisted sisters manning the bridge over here in the, uh, world's only superpower. Bad coincidence, eh? Even we wacky Gringos know that weapons and criminals make a bad combination, as do weapons and lunatics. So, what fool handed us the keys to this planetary oil tanker? Shouldn't, like, um, the Swedes or the Norwegians be the world's superpower? They seem harmless enough.

Yep, we could go on and on detailing the ludicrous inanities of American politics in the age of Bush (himself Exhibit A), but really my favorite has to be the case of global warming. In a society devoted like no other to the politics of fear, we have somehow managed to forget the one thing we should probably fear most.

Imagine if there was a meteor headed toward our one and only planet, with the potential to do devastating and possibly lethal damage to the planet. Imagine that we had the technological capability to divert the course of this weapon of the massiest mass destruction, and all we needed was the will to do so. And imagine that we chose to focus our society's energies instead on ... gay marriage. Or illegal immigration. Or pre-marital sex.

Not only would we screw up all of those policy areas, but we'd be toast anyhow, along with all our unmarried gays, undocumented workers and 'virgin' teenagers (who, have you seen, just become experts at anal

and oral sex in order to avoid the forbidden standard kind?). Good lord, this is a society which desperately needs medication! Or maybe that's the problem, and we desperately need to ditch all the brain-benders of every sort that we imbibe like candy.

Remember Dick Cheney's 'one percent doctrine'? He argued that if there's even a one percent chance of a terrorist attack, you have to go on the offensive. Of course, reality external to the Vice President's secret location tends to be a bit more nuanced than that, but that's why everyone calls him Dick, I guess. Anyhow, there's this little thing called cost-benefit analysis that seems to have gone sorely missing over the last, er, eight years or so. It was last seen flowing down the sewers of Baghdad. It would argue, for example, that yes, you should take threats seriously, but that if the solution to a one percent probability of danger that could threaten the lives of a thousand people is to adopt a policy which definitely kills 100 million of your own citizens, that's probably a bad plan. Costs and benefits, you see. I mean, people can differ on this, of course, but I'd vote to take the one percent risk in such a case. At a minimum I'd certainly argue that we ought to weight the costs along with the benefits every once in a while. Admittedly, though, that's not so helpful when you're in the middle of trying to scare the hell out of people so they'll vote for you, or acquiesce to your destructive policies.

But I digress. There is a monstrous catastrophe not only headed our way, but actu-

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ally already here. I'm not a climatologist, but my sense from paying attention to media reporting on this issue over the last two decades is that there is not only a one percent chance that global warming is both real and anthropogenic, but rather a ninety-five percent chance. Perhaps ninety-nine. Yep, sure, there are a few scientists out there still making the opposite argument. Probably some of them even aren't on oil company payrolls! But the vast majority of reputable climate scientists now agree that this is happening, that we are making it happen, and that the results will be catastrophic. This, after ten and twenty years of a (somewhat) healthy scientific skepticism about those claims, which only further underscores the validity of the findings.

So what will they say about us five centuries from now – those very few, very toasty, remaining humans, living on mountain tops, the only dry land to be found? What they'll say is probably unprintable in any family newspaper, that's for sure. But in-between the expletives I think you'd be likely to find words like ... "unconscionable" ... "breathhtakingly stupid" ... "astonishingly selfish" ... and, "If you weren't already dead I'd kill you!"

Last week we had James Hansen reminding Congress, twenty years after originally doing so, of the gravity of this situation. One of the top scientists from one of America's premier science agencies – who was told, by the way, to shut the hell up by the Bush administration – was reminding us yet again that we are facing mass species

extinctions and ecosystem collapse among the lovely perils awaiting us if we continue in the current direction. Assuming, that is, that it isn't already far too late to turn it around now.

Think about that for a second: Mass extinction. Ecosystem collapse. Meteor. Ninety-five or better percent chance.

Gay marriage.

Takes your breath right away, doesn't it? There are certainly few better ways to underscore the full scope of the regressive nightmare haunting a country that likes to think of itself as the last, best hope of humanity. Fat chance of that. Indeed, we – or at least some of us – half-deserve this fate for choosing the likes of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, DeLay, Scalia and the rest these last decades. It's the rest of the world I feel especially sorry for. Last, best hope? Jeez, the mercury had already burst out squirting from the top of my irony thermometer seven years ago. Somehow I don't think so. Well, maybe the 'last' part...

And what's especially killer about this particular issue is the degree to which the multiple maladies and solutions all line up so neatly. Sometimes the cosmos sends you a message in very subtle ways. Other times it beats you over the head with a two-by-four. Occasionally, it detonates a small nuclear device in your backyard swimming pool to get your attention.

We're very much in the latter category right now. You don't exactly have to do a full and complete inventory to figure this one out. Here, just take this pop quiz.

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Quick, now: What factor do all of the following items have in common: massive environmental devastation, skyrocketing transportation and food prices, a declining middle-class with disappearing jobs, and a war-prone and constant calamity-threatening Middle East continually sucking in American military involvement and nightmarishly distorting our foreign policy? (If you're somehow still struggling with this, you may want to consider spending a little more time catching up with current events. Meanwhile, though, here's a bonus hint for you: Alan Greenspan described this as the real reason America went to war in Iraq.)

Did you get it?!?! Okay! A+ for you! Now flip it on its head. What would be a way in which our society could address the massive threats of global warming, a sinking middle class with lousy jobs, poverty-inducing energy costs and military nightmares in the Middle East, all at once? How about if we made it a giant national priority to wean ourselves off carbon-based energy sources through a variety of policies mixing incentives and regulations, and a huge national effort to develop alternative fuel sources, with all the industrial development and good-paying jobs associated with launching such industries? You know. What did Jimmy Carter call it, thirty freakin' years ago? "The moral equivalent of war", wasn't it? Too bad he was a failed president, though. Hardly invaded any other countries. What could he possibly have known?

Seriously, though, here's a chance to go

from the all-wrong scenario of environmental destruction / energy dependence / Middle East war / horrific gas prices / recession / middle class decline, over to the all-right scenario of sustainability / energy independence / peace / reasonable energy costs / economic development / prosperity – all in one fell swoop. I mean, I know that regressives have a problem with any policies that actually make sense, and I know that Americans are just about the dumbest branch of the homo politicus family tree, but isn't this a no-brainer so obvious that even people who actually have no brains could figure it out?

So James Hansen reminded us recently that we are headed for such joyous 'lifestyle changes' as mass extinction and ecosystem collapse. Of course, most regressives continued to pooh-pooh such warnings as some sort of liberal conspiracy to undermine capitalism. I must say, these people blow me away with their unflinching and robotic dogmatism. I mean, I get why they insist on the Earth being only 6,000 years old and anything having to do with sex being a major sin. They're incredibly frightened, and these beliefs bring the existential comfort of order to an otherwise messy and capricious universe. But what's up with middle class fools ardently supporting tax cuts for the wealthy? Or any human being in the whole world denying the near unanimous testimony of scientific experts regarding a planetary threat, because oil companies told them to do so? Do climatologists seriously strike anybody as crypto-

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anarchists masquerading as scientists in order to destroy capitalism? (Listen to some regressive kooks talk about global warming and you could easily think so.) And, if that was really their goal, wouldn't there be a lot easier ways to crash the system than to go spend years getting a PhD, do a bunch of boring research for low pay, and grade a million mind-numbing term papers written by a million grammatically-challenged college sophomores?

Then there's that pesky little problem of evidence. Every week there's more, though hardly any quite as egregious as what you could have seen on CNN.com just a few days ago: "North Pole Could Be Ice-Free This Summer, Scientists Say". Woo-hoo. No worries there, eh? Now if Adam and Steve get married in California or Massachusetts, that's something to get worked up about. But the destruction of the Arctic ice

cap? We've already got polar bears in zoos, so what's the big damn deal? Prolly it'll be easier to get to the oil up there without all that ice in the way, anyhow.

What will they say – assuming there are any they left to be saying – in five centuries about us nice folks who managed to bequeath the solar system a second Mercury where a green and fertile planet once stood, just so we could party a little longer? I'm not sure, but I don't think it will be pretty. And I don't think it will be, "Well, sure, they weren't perfect. And, true, they wrecked the whole planet. But at least they kept boys from marrying other boys."

These regressive fools and their pre-/anti-scientific religious superstitions just kill me.

And that's just the problem. They're killing all of us.

Praise the lord.

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