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Introduction to *The Bush Betrayal* **by James Bovard**

As we defend liberty and justice abroad, we must always honor those values here at home.

— George W. Bush, October 28, 2003

George W. Bush came to the presidency promising prosperity, peace, and humility. Instead, Bush has spawned record federal budget deficits, launched an unnecessary war, and made America the most hated nation in the world. Bush is expanding federal power and stretching prerogatives in almost every area that captures his fancy. Though Bush continually invokes freedom to sanctify himself and his policies, Bush freedom is based on boundless trust in the righteousness of the rulers and all their actions.

Truth is a lagging indicator in politics. A president's promises and speeches receive far more publicity than subsequent reports and revelations about how his cherished programs crash and burn. This book does not aim to analyze all Bush policies. Instead, it examines an array of his domestic and foreign actions that vivify the damage Bush is inflicting and the danger he poses both to America and the world.

Bush governs like an elective monarch, entitled to reverence and deference on all issues. Secret Service agents ensure that Bush rarely views opponents of his reign, carefully quarantining protesters in "free speech zones" far from public view. The FBI has formally requested that local police monitor antiwar groups and send information on demonstrators to FBI-led terrorism task forces. Thanks to the campaign finance act Bush signed, Americans have also lost much of their freedom to criticize their rulers — at least in the 60 days before an election.

After 9/11, privacy is a luxury Americans supposedly can no longer afford. The administration has left no stone unturned, giving itself powers to sweep up people's e-mail with the FBI's Carnivore system, unleash FBI agents to conduct surveillance almost anywhere, allow G-men to secretly search people's homes, bankroll Pentagon research on creating hundreds of millions of dossiers on Americans, expand the military's role in domestic surveillance, and vacuum up personal data to create a federal "color code" for every air traveler. The administration

is defining freedom down, pretending that protection from federal prying is no longer relevant to liberty. Americans are supposed to accept that freedom from terrorism is the ultimate freedom — and nothing else matters any more.

Bush is dropping an iron curtain around the federal government. The Bush administration is hollowing out the Freedom of Information Act, making it more difficult for citizens to discover government actions and abuses. Bush invoked executive privilege to block a congressional investigation into the FBI's role in mass murder in Boston and in framing innocent men for those murders. The Supreme Court tacitly endorsed the Bush doctrine that the feds may carry out mass secret arrests and suppress all information about the roundup (including names of those detained, charges, and details on prison beatings).

Bush is wrapping himself in a flag drenched with the blood of Americans who died due to the failure of the federal government he commanded. The Bush reelection campaign is running television ads showing an American flag flying in front of the ruins of the World Trade Center towers and a flag-draped corpse being carried out of Ground Zero by firefighters. The Republicans will hold their national convention in New York days before the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks. Bush exploits the 9/11 dead while he stonewalls the 9/11 Commission. The Bush reelection team seems convinced that Bush's actions on that day entitle Bush to rule Americans for four more years.

King of All Boondoggles

Americans will be forced to pay trillions of dollars in higher taxes in the coming decades to finance George Bush's 2004 reelection campaign. Bush browbeat Congress into enacting the biggest expansion of the welfare state since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. The White House blatantly deceived Congress about the cost of the new Medicare prescription drug entitlement, withholding key information that would have guaranteed the defeat of Bush's giveaway. The administration launched a federally financed ad campaign showing a crowd cheering Bush as he signed the new law; federal auditors ruled that the ads were illegal propaganda. The new drug benefit will expedite Medicare's bankruptcy and do nothing to improve medical care for most seniors.

Vote-buying is the prime motive of many Bush policies. Bush signed the most exorbitant farm bill in history in 2002, bilking taxpayers for \$180 billion to rain benefits on millionaire landowners and other deserving mendicants. Bush repeatedly bragged that his farm bill was "generous" — as if Washington politicians have carte blanche to redistribute Americans' paychecks to any group they choose. Bush imposed high tariffs on steel imports, wantonly destroying thousands of American manufacturing jobs simply because he wanted to try to snare the endorsement of the United Steel Workers and to boost his reelection chances.

After 9/11, almost every expansion of government became a coup for homeland security. When Bush announced plans to bloat the AmeriCorps “paid volunteer” program, he declared: “One way to defeat terrorism is to show the world the true values of America through the gathering momentum of a million acts of responsibility and decency and service.” While Bush portrays AmeriCorps recruits as heroes, AmeriCorps members busy themselves putting on puppet shows to persuade three-year-olds of the value of smoke alarms, hoeing corn at tourist farms, and sanctimoniously picking up litter in bad neighborhoods. Bush summoned every citizen to give four thousand hours of “service.” After dubious federal statistics showed a marginal rise in volunteering, Bush hyped the uptick as proof that his leadership is morally rejuvenating America.

The Transportation Security Administration and its 45,000-member airport occupation army is one of the Bush administration’s biggest shams. Despite more than \$10 billion spent since 9/11, airport screeners are not any more competent than they were in 1987. Yet, as long as TSA brags about seizing millions of pointy objects each year from grandmothers and other scofflaws, Americans are supposed to believe that the endless delays are worthwhile. TSA is punishing critics, slapping fines of up to \$1,500 on airline passengers guilty of showing the wrong “attitude” as they pass through TSA checkpoint gauntlets.

Some of Bush’s cherished reforms consist of little more than finding new names for old boondoggles. Bush sharply boosted foreign aid and created a new program, the Millennium Challenge Account. Bush denounces traditional foreign aid for bankrolling corruption, and insists that his program rewards governments for being honest. Even though the aid still goes to many of the same Third World politician-looters, the new program’s lofty rhetoric automatically converts the money into a force for goodness.

Political cosmetics pervade many Bush policies. The No Child Left Behind Act is perhaps Bush’s biggest domestic fraud. The act was falsely sold as giving freedom to local school officials. In reality, it empowers the feds to effectively judge and punish local schools for not fulfilling arbitrary guidelines. Many states are “dumbing down” academic standards, using bureaucratic racketeering to avoid harsh federal sanctions. Though the No Child Left Behind Act promised to permit children to escape “persistently dangerous” schools, most states defined that term to claim that all their schools were safe. As long as people believe Bush cares about children, it doesn’t matter that his education policy is a charade.

While Bush hypes himself as a “compassionate conservative,” his drug policy relies on wrath and harsh punishment (except for special cases like his niece Noelle Bush and talk show host Rush Limbaugh). John Walters, Bush’s drug czar, demonized drug users in federally funded TV ads, portraying people who buy drugs as terrorist financiers threatening America with complete destruction. Federal drug warriors have arrested cancer patients who smoke marijuana to control their chemo-induced nausea, busted doctors who give suffering patients more pain

killers than the DEA approves, and carried out high-profile crackdowns on targets ranging from hemp food makers to comedian Tommy Chong (busted for bong trafficking).

Terrorizing in the Name of Antiterrorism

Bush appears determined to force Americans to pay almost any price so that he can be a world savior. He declared in December 2003: “I believe we have a responsibility to promote freedom [abroad] that is as solemn as the responsibility is to protecting the American people, because the two go hand in hand.” But the Constitution does not grant the president the prerogative to dispose of the lives of American soldiers any place in the world he longs to do a good deed. Though Bush is adept at destroying freedom in America, he has yet to demonstrate any ability to create it in foreign lands.

Bush greatly exaggerates the benefits of his conquests. After the Afghan war, Bush repeatedly told Americans that they had liberated Afghan women and that Afghan girls were now going to school. Yet, women are still heavily oppressed in most of Afghanistan and most Afghan girls still do not attend schools. While Bush portrays Afghanistan as a liberated new democracy, most Afghans are brutalized either by warlords or the resurgent Taliban. But the Bush White House rarely allows cold facts to impede a warm and touching story line.

For Bush, the right to rule apparently includes the right to lie. In his 2004 State of the Union address, Bush proclaimed that, as a result of actions such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq, “No one can now doubt the word of America.” A year earlier, in his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush rattled off a long list of biological and chemical weapons that he claimed he knew that Iraq possessed. No such weapons have been found. Bush has never shown a speck of contrition for his false prewar statements. Instead, he acts like a clumsy magician who assumes his audience is too feeble-minded to recognize the elaborate trick that fell to pieces in front of their eyes.

The war in Iraq is the most visible debacle of the Bush war on terrorism. The president pirouetted in a flight suit on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003, in front of a giant banner proclaiming, “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.” But Iraq subsequently became far more treacherous. On July 2, when asked about Iraqi attacks on American forces, Bush issued a taunt: “Bring ’em on!” In the subsequent months, more than 600 American soldiers were killed and thousands were wounded and maimed as Iraqis took up the Bush challenge. While Bush continually brags of how the United States “liberated” 25 million Iraqis, the U.S. military government vigorously suppresses television stations and shuts down newspapers that criticize American forces or U.S. policy. While Bush rhapsodizes about winning Iraqi hearts and minds, U.S. troops carry out crackdowns with names such as Operation Iron Hammer, conduct thousands of no-knock raids in people’s homes searching for weapons, routinely demolish the houses of suspected resistance fighters, imprison people solely for being relatives of insurgents, and kill hundreds of innocent civilians. Bush-style benevolence was best captured by U.S. Army Lt.

Colonel Nathan Sassaman, commanding a battalion that enclosed an entire Iraqi town with barbed wire, when he observed: “With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them.”

Bush proudly declared last year: “No President has ever done more for human rights than I have.” In reality, Bush has done more to formally subvert rights than any American president of the modern era. Bush claimed the right to label people as enemy combatants and thereby nullify all of their legal rights. Once detainees had no rights, torturing them apparently became permissible — at least in the eyes of some Justice Department and Pentagon officials. The Bush administration ignored warning after warning of the gross abuses that were being committed against detainees in Afghanistan, Cuba, and Iraq. After the torture photos from the Abu Ghraib prison became public in April 2004, Bush repeatedly falsely claimed that the abuses were the result of a few wayward soldiers. In speeches in his reelection campaign, Bush continued to brag about ending Saddam’s torture.

Foreign military “victories” have done nothing to increase the competence of homeland security. Even though federal agencies’ failure to combine terrorist watch lists helped allow two known Al Qaeda members to enter the United States before the 9/11 hijackings, the federal government still does not have a single, up-to-date terrorist watch list. The General Accounting Office concluded in late 2003 that the feds are still doing a lousy job of pursuing terrorist finances, despite a vast increase in the financial surveillance of average Americans. A federal commission on terrorist threats reported in December 2003 that federal, state, and local government agencies are still doing a very poor job of sharing key information about terrorist threats. And some of the information that the feds do send along — such as the FBI warning that people carrying world almanacs could be terrorist plotters — aids only late-night television comics.

Bush’s foreign policies are creating more terrorists than he is vanquishing. There are far more terrorist attacks in the Middle East now than before the United States invaded Iraq. Rep. Jane Harman (D-Calif.), the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, declared in early 2004 that “Al Qaeda remains as dangerous as it was before September 11.” British intelligence experts warn that Al Qaeda is a greater threat than before. Bush’s interventionist policies and meddling are spurring intense animosity throughout the Arab and Muslim world. And there is no evidence that the Bush administration is competent to protect Americans from all the new enemies its policies are breeding.

Repealing 1776

President George W. Bush, Attorney General John Ashcroft, and other administration officials continually remind Americans that everything changed after 9/11. But does that include the Constitution? Are the myths of 9/11 undermining the truths of 1776?

The Founding Fathers taught Americans that power is dangerous regardless of who wields it. Bush would have people believe that, after 9/11, America will perish if the president lacks boundless power. The Founding Fathers saw individual rights as bulwarks against government abuses. Bush acts as if individual rights are barriers to public safety. The Founding Fathers sought to deter tyranny with checks and balances within the federal government. Bush acts as if the only legitimate check on his power is people's chance to cast a ballot once every four years. Bush perennially talks as if tax cuts are the only protection people need against Big Government.

The Bush presidency is continuing and accelerating many of the noxious trends of the Clinton era, most of which started long before William Jefferson Clinton became president. Many of the abuses of the last few years would likely have occurred regardless of who was elected president in 2000. However, the glorification of Bush after 9/11 would not have reached such extremes without the slavish efforts of many Republican congressmen and much of the conservative news media. The president's rarely challenged power grabs revealed the cravenness of many of Washington's avowed champions of freedom.

Though this book focuses primarily on the blunders and deceits of Bush and his team, Democratic members of Congress are either complicit in or acquiescent to most of Bush's abuses. Most of the budget disputes in Washington involve how to waste tax dollars, not whether tax dollars should be wasted. Some Democrats did yeoman work — such as Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) in opposing the war on Iraq, Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) in opposing the Patriot Act, and Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) in opposing Ashcroft. Yet Democratic members of Congress as a group have been less vigilant and courageous in opposing misgovernment than were Republicans during the first Clinton administration.

Regardless of who wins in November 2004, Americans must recognize the damage the federal government is inflicting on their rights, liberty, and safety. Even if Bush wins reelection, the more Americans who recognize the failures and frauds of his first term, the more difficult it will be for Bush to perpetrate new abuses in his second term. Americans must understand the Bush Betrayal if they are ever to rein in the government.

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This article was originally published in August 2004.