

# The Frantic Fear of Islam

The American Right and neocon activists have whipped up so much Islamophobia that this bigotry is now shaping the Republican presidential race and contributed to the arrest of a 14-year-old Texas boy who built a clock as a school project, writes Nat Parry.

By Nat Parry

The arrest of Ahmed Mohamed, the 14-year-old whiz kid who brought a home-made clock to school in Irving, Texas, seems to have struck a nerve in the United States in a way that any number of other stories regarding anti-Muslim bigotry over the years have not.

While there have been countless examples of Islamophobia run amok since 9/11 including attacks on places of worship, harassment at airports, hostile protests against the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque,” and even a recent “Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest,” which encouraged Americans to draw deliberately offensive cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad few events have garnered as much sympathy for the Muslim targets of religious and racial intolerance as the shabby treatment endured by Ahmed Mohamed last week.

A photo of the high school freshman being marched out of school in handcuffs after administrators accused him of possessing a “hoax bomb” quickly went viral. Yet, even following his release from custody, the police apparently refused to accept that he only built the device as a clock and did not intend it to resemble a bomb, saying, “He kept maintaining it was a clock, but there was no broader explanation.”

While being interrogated, Mohamed was not allowed to contact his family and was repeatedly asked about his suspicious-sounding last name, according to reporting by the Washington Post. During the questioning, he also claims he was threatened with expulsion, and although he was not criminally charged, he was ultimately suspended from school for three days.

The support he has received has been overwhelming, including invites from Facebook, Google, MIT and the White House. The hashtag #IStandWithAhmed quickly shot to number one as the top trending topic on Twitter, garnering more than 370,000 tweets within five hours last Wednesday, and the Twitter account @IStandWithAhmed ballooned to thousands of followers within a few hours of being set up.

Even the music streaming site Spotify threw its support behind the wrongfully arrested teen with a special playlist titled “For Ahmed.” Featuring tracks

intended to send Mohamed “good vibes & upbeat jams” with songs such as “Time Is On Your Side,” “Keep Your Head Up” and “You’re the Best,” the playlist was meant, it seems, to both inspire the young inventor and to counter the culture of fear that led to his arrest in the first place.

But notwithstanding this touching outpouring of sympathy and solidarity, America’s uglier side of intolerance and small-mindedness has returned with a vengeance. In case anyone may have hoped that this unfortunate incident would provide a teaching moment leading to greater tolerance and understanding, prominent right-wing politicians jumped in to remind everyone that nastiness and prejudice still rule the day.

Sarah Palin for example chastised Obama for inviting Mohamed to the White House, calling his clock a “dangerous wired-up bomb-looking contraption.”

“Yep, believing that’s a clock in a school pencil box is like believing Barack Obama is ruling over the most transparent administration in history,” Palin wrote on Facebook. “Right. That’s a clock, and I’m the Queen of England.”

Beth Van Duyne, the mayor of Irving, defended the actions of school administrators and police as understandable and justifiable. “We have all seen terrible and violent acts committed in schools, the workplace, and in public venues,” Van Duyne wrote on her Facebook page. “Perhaps some of those could have been prevented and lives could have been spared if people were more vigilant.”

Some have pointed out that Van Duyne’s response is unsurprising considering that she has “been on an anti-Muslim crusade all year,” having led an earlier attempt to nip “sharia law” in the bud when an “Islamic Tribunal” was set up in nearby Dallas to arbitrate civil disputes between Muslims in the community.

Van Duyne took a firm stand against the Dallas arbitration panel, vowing to keep a close eye on it and fight any perceived encroachment into state law.

“While I am working to better understand how this ‘court’ will function and whom will be subject to its decisions, please know that if it is determined that there are violations of basic rights occurring, I will not stand idle and will fight with every fiber of my being against this action,” she wrote.

Her stance earned her a reputation as an “anti-sharia crusader,” but although the words “crusade” and “crusader” are sometimes casually thrown around to describe the demagoguery of politicians like Van Duyne, it is not clear whether the historical significance of these terms are fully understood, nor how fitting they actually are to describe the climate of anti-Islamic hysteria in the United States today.

## **Cause or Crusade?**

George W. Bush was once criticized for using the word “crusade” to describe the campaign against terrorism that was being launched in the wake of 9/11. As the president said on the afternoon of Sept. 11, 2001, “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.”

Wall Street Journal reporters Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope noted at the time that the “crusade” reference “could hardly have been a more indelicate gaffe.”

“Crusade?” they asked. “In strict usage, the word describes the Christian military expeditions a millennium ago to capture the Holy Land from Muslims. But in much of the Islamic world, where history and religion suffuse daily life in ways unfathomable to most Americans, it is shorthand for something else: a cultural and economic Western invasion that, Muslims fear, could subjugate them and desecrate Islam.”

While Bush’s spokesperson later tried to clarify his remark, saying that it was only meant in “the traditional English sense of the word, a broad cause,” the damage had largely already been done, and America’s enemies seized on the statement as proof of the West’s anti-Muslim bias.

As al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden said in a televised message on Nov. 3, 2001, “After the U.S. politicians spoke and after the U.S. newspapers and television channels became full of clear crusading hatred in this campaign that aims at mobilizing the West against Islam and Muslims, Bush left no room for doubts or the opinions of journalists, but he openly and clearly said that this war is a crusader war. He said this before the whole world to emphasize this fact.”

Bin Laden described what he perceived as historical continuity between the medieval Crusades and the modern-day “war on terror.”

“These battles cannot be viewed in any case whatsoever as isolated battles, but rather, as part of a chain of the long, fierce, and ugly crusader war,” he said.

However Bush meant the “crusade” reference, there are clearly recognizable parallels between the historical Crusades and the current “war on terror,” both of which can be seen as an amalgamation of religion, politics, opportunism and conquest. What the historical Crusades dramatically demonstrated most clearly is the power of exploiting religion in order to advance political goals not unlike the demagoguery on display in contemporary American political discourse.

## **Victim Status**

In calling for the liberation of Christians living under Muslim rule in

Jerusalem, Pope Urban II appealed to a sense of victimhood and desire for revenge prevalent among medieval European Christians. In his call for the First Crusade, he said in 1095: "We have heard how, with great hurt and dire sufferings our Christian brothers, members in Christ, are scourged, oppressed, and injured in Jerusalem, in Antioch, and the other cities of the East. Gird yourselves, every one of you, I say, and be valiant sons; for it is better for you to die in battle than to behold, the sorrows of your race and of your holy places."

While he appealed to religious sensibilities, it is clear that political considerations played a key role in Pope Urban II's decision to launch the Crusades, calculating that there was no better way to gather the various elements of the Christian West under his cloak.

To entice people to take up arms, the pope promised the suspension of any legal proceedings being taken against them the modern day equivalent of prosecutorial immunity and absolution for any sins they may have committed, assuring them a place in heaven.

Claiming their ordained status as victims of Muslim oppression, the Christian Crusaders then proceeded to "liberate" Jerusalem on July 15, 1099, killing an estimated 40,000 men, women and children in the process. The massacre was described by eyewitness Raymond of Aguiles:

"Wonderful sights were to be seen. Some of our men cut off the heads of their enemies; others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames. Piles of heads, hands and feet were to be seen in the streets of the city. It was necessary to pick one's way over the bodies of men and horses. [I]n the temple and porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed it was a just and splendid judgement of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies."

And so began an era of sustained and extraordinary violence that lasted two centuries. This violence ultimately included attacks against not only Muslims and pagans but also other Christians.

The Fourth Crusade in 1204 for example sacked Constantinople, the seat of the Greek Orthodox Church. While some Crusaders dissented against the idea of attacking an innocent Christian city and deserted the Crusade before the attack, others stayed on and eagerly joined the assault.

Despite having taken oaths to conquer the city in a manner appropriate to the occupation of a Christian city, with no women were to be molested and no

churches to suffer depredations, the Crusaders attacked the city mercilessly.

According to historian Jean Richard, the Crusaders spared “neither churches nor the monuments and works of art inherited from Antiquity; the population, without there being a true massacre, suffered badly.” Karen Armstrong goes into more gruesome detail, calling the sack of Constantinople “one of the great crimes of history.”

As she described the rampage: “For three days the Venetians and Crusaders rushed through the streets, raping, killing and pillaging with a horrible eagerness. Women and children lay dying in the streets and nuns were raped in their convents.”

Pope Innocent III was so distressed by the sack of Constantinople that he excommunicated the entire Crusade.

### **Historical Revisionism**

Scholars have long debated the efficacy of the Crusades and their larger meaning, and while there may be no clear historical consensus yet, most experts tend to agree that this was generally a dark chapter in history, with Christian teachings exploited and misused as an excuse for murder and pillage.

What is striking however is that there now seems to be a concerted effort underway to revive the Crusades and polish their status in history, with recent books such as Steve Weidenkopf’s *The Glory of the Crusades* claiming to “debunk the numerous myths about the Crusades that our secular culture uses as clubs to attack the Church.”

Similarly, the “Real Crusades History” series on YouTube paints a picture of the Crusades as a necessary and just campaign against alleged Islamic expansionism. Islam is portrayed as bent on devouring Christian Europe despite the fact that there is no historical evidence to support this theory, and the Crusades are further celebrated in the videos as a crucial event that united European Christendom.

Mainstream conservative pundits have also taken up this cause, with Jonah Goldberg, writing recently in the *National Review*, emphasizing that “The Crusades despite their terrible organized cruelties were a *defensive war*” (thus distinguishing them from the barbarities of offensive jihad).

Those who fail to see the Crusades as glorious, necessary and just are the ones guilty of historical revisionism, according to the contemporary conservative view.

Running for the Republican nomination for president four years ago, Rick Santorum said, “The idea that the Crusades and the fight of Christendom against Islam is somehow an aggression on our part is absolutely anti-historical.” He attributed this “anti-historical” perception to propaganda perpetrated by “the American left who hates Christendom.”

The revival of the Crusades has even extended into the marketing of firearms, with one Florida-based gun manufacturer now offering a “Crusader Rifle,” emblazoned with biblical verses and a symbol of the Knights Templar, a religious sect tracing its roots to the First Crusade. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) of Florida objected to the gun, asking whether it may inspire right-wing extremists to commit violence against Muslims.

“Sadly, this manufacturer’s fancy new gun won’t do anything to stop the real threat in America: the escalating problem of gun violence,” said Hasan Shibly, executive director of CAIR-Florida. “This is just another shameful marketing ploy intended to profit from the promotion of hatred, division, and violence.”

While it might be easy to dismiss the rantings of a few right-wing politicians and pundits, or as shameless profiteering the marketing tactics of an obscure Florida gun maker, the fact is, these views are infusing the U.S. political debate to a degree once unimaginable. Far from the fringes where they belong, the Christian-Crusader mentality has seeped into the echelons of both policy-making and military strategy.

### **Total War on Islam**

In May 2012, journalists Noah Shachtman and Spencer Ackerman revealed in Wired magazine that for years, the U.S. military had been teaching its future leaders that a “total war” against the world’s 1.4 billion Muslims would be necessary to protect America from Islamic extremism.

The lessons taught in the class included using the lessons of “Hiroshima” to wipe out entire cities at once, targeting the “civilian population wherever necessary.”

“For the better part of the last decade,” Shachtman and Ackerman reported, “a small cabal of self-anointed counterterrorism experts has been working its way through the U.S. military, intelligence and law enforcement communities, trying to convince whoever it could that America’s real terrorist enemy wasn’t al-Qaida , but the Islamic faith itself.”

“We have now come to understand that there is no such thing as ‘moderate Islam,’” Army Lt. Col. Matthew A. Dooley noted in a July 2011 presentation to young cadets. “It is therefore time for the United States to make our true

intentions clear. This barbaric ideology will no longer be tolerated. Islam must change or we will facilitate its self-destruction.”

The class, which has since been discontinued by the Defense Department, included course material that explicitly stated that international law including the Geneva Conventions no longer applies to the United States in its conduct of the “war on terror.”

More recently, Republican presidential hopefuls have insinuated that Muslims are constitutionally unqualified to hold the highest office in the land, and have even hinted at the possibility of removing Muslims entirely from the country.

Ben Carson, who’s currently running for the Republican nomination, said on NBC’s “Meet the Press” on Sunday that Islam is antithetical to U.S. constitutional principles, and that a Muslim should never be elected president in the United States.

“I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation. I absolutely would not agree with that,” Carson said.

Other presidential candidates criticized Carson for his statement, including Lindsey Graham, who said that Carson should apologize to American Muslims. Ted Cruz reminded Carson that “the Constitution specifies there shall be no religious test for public office.”

Democratic hopeful Bernie Sanders said his sentiments have no place in the Twenty-first Century.

“You know, this is the year 2015,” Sanders told reporters. “You judge candidates for president not on their religion, not on the color of their skin, but on their ideas on what they stand for. I was very disappointed in Dr. Carson’s statement.”

Curiously silent on Carson’s controversial remarks was Donald Trump, the billionaire construction tycoon and reality TV personality who has propelled to the front of the race for the Republican nomination with his own divisive statements on immigration, race and religion.

For his part, the Republican frontrunner last week seemed to suggest that deportations of Muslims could be a possibility if he lands himself in the White House.

At a town hall in New Hampshire on Thursday, Donald Trump nodded in agreement when a supporter declared, “We have a problem in this country, it’s called Muslims,” warning darkly of supposed “training camps” in America. “When

can we get rid of 'em?" the man asked.

Throughout the meandering question, Trump encouraged the man, saying "we need this question" and "mm-hmm." He then responded, "We're going to be looking at that and plenty of other things." The implication was that a future Trump Administration would be "looking at" how to "get rid of 'em," i.e. Muslims.

Clarifying Trump's response, his campaign issued a statement the next day blaming the media for twisting the issue. "The media wants to make this issue about Obama," said Trump's campaign. "The bigger issue is that Obama is waging war against Christians in this country. Their religious liberty is at stake."

Thus, much like Pope Urban II a millennium ago, Trump portrayed the issue in simple terms that victimized Christians can easily understand: their faith is under attack by heretics who threaten their very religious liberty.

Meanwhile, the actual victims of persecution, innocent clock-makers like Ahmed Mohamed, continue to suffer the very real consequences of religious intolerance.

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## War on Whistleblowers, After Obama

The war on whistleblowers has injected fear of prosecution into all honest communications between national security officials and reporters, meaning that the public instead gets a steady diet of U.S. government lies, propaganda and self-serving rhetoric, a problem addressed by John Hanrahan.

By John Hanrahan

Here's the thing about President Barack Obama's war on whistleblowers: In bringing espionage charges in nine cases involving disclosures or alleged misuse of classified information, the current administration has set a floor, rather than a ceiling, on the number and types of whistleblower espionage cases a future president can bring.

And here's another thing: With leaders of both political parties having either kept silent or cheered on the Obama administration's unprecedented crackdown on whistleblowers, who in high position in Congress would have one shred of moral



authority or credibility to challenge a future president's excesses under the Espionage Act? On the question of keeping American citizens in the dark and of punishing whistleblowers who dare to enlighten them, we truly have bipartisan authoritarianism.

And then a third thing: Don't count much on major U.S. news media for any meaningful oversight of, and opposition to, the treatment of whistleblowers under future presidents. The mainstream press and big-name journalists, with some intermittent, notable exceptions such as these two *New York Times* editorials and this *Newark Star-Ledger* editorial, have largely ignored the jail-the-whistleblowers policies of the Obama administration.

Or, worse, as we've reported before, some of the most prominent names in the media joined elected and appointed government officials in calling for harsh penalties for Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and Wikileaks, and others whom they claim (without proof) to have endangered U.S. national security by providing classified information to the news media.

With his Justice Department having produced three times as many Espionage Act indictments for classified document disclosure as all other administrations combined since the passage of that legislation back in 1917, Obama has opened the door for his successors to continue, and even expand, the assault on national security state whistleblowers who act in the public interest.

Would any of the announced presidential candidates close that door after Obama leaves office in January 2017? Again, as with leading journalists and members of Congress, don't count on it.

It's an open question as to whether any future president could be more aggressive than Obama in going after whistleblowers. But based on the vengeful views of many of the large crop of Republican candidates and on Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton's tough statements on Edward Snowden's NSA spying disclosures, prospects are not good for a sharp departure from the whistleblower crackdown of the last six years. Clinton and leading Republican candidates take the hard line that Snowden committed a serious crime and must be punished for it, with no chance of leniency.

Ultimately, as is the case with the ever-growing campaigns against the Trans-Pacific Partnership and National Security Agency spying, for example, it is not presidents or Congress, or the mainstream press, but an aroused citizenry and activist organizations with petitions, street protests, sit-ins, lobbying, etc. that can at least impede such undemocratic programs as the war on whistleblowers.

It also, though, might help if there were a president and Justice Department that were at least somewhat receptive to grassroots pressure to stop prosecuting whistleblowers, so in that vein it is worthwhile to have a look at where the many candidates to date stand.

Because of the monumental nature of Snowden's NSA disclosures, his case presents the best litmus test of candidates' views on the role of whistleblowers in a democracy. Bearing in mind, of course, as voters often learn to their regret, what candidates say, and how their views are perceived, before they are in office differs sharply from what they actually do once they are in office.

Look no further than Obama, circa 2008, and his perceived antiwar credentials among Democratic activists, as well as the point from the Obama-Biden ethics agenda from the 2008 campaign in which Obama and running-mate Joe Biden pledged to "protect whistleblowers." This administration has given a whole new meaning to the word "protect."

While candidates can back away from progressive positions once in office, it seems a safe bet, though, that candidates who now call Snowden a "traitor" or a "criminal" are unlikely to change their minds to favor whistleblowers once they are elected.

### **Hillary Clinton: No Friend to Whistleblowers**

On the Democratic side, nothing that Hillary Clinton has said to date shows any sympathy toward, or understanding of the role of, whistleblowers. It is laughable that she suggests Snowden and other national security state whistleblowers "go through channels", as she perpetuates the fairy tale that we have a good system in place for airing whistleblowers' concerns about military and surveillance issues if only people would avail themselves of it.

During her book tour, *The Hill* newspaper reported last year, Clinton told National Public Radio: "There were other ways that Mr. Snowden could have expressed his concerns," such as going to Congress.

Clinton continued: "I think everyone would have applauded that because it would have added to the debate that was already started. Instead, he left the country, first to China, then to Russia, taking with him a huge amount of [sensitive] information." Clinton has also contended that Snowden's disclosures had damaged national security by providing information to terrorist networks.

And here is Clinton again in the same vein in a July 4, 2014 interview with *The Guardian* about holding Snowden "accountable": "If he [Snowden] wishes to return knowing he would be held accountable and also able to present a defense, that is his decision to make. Whether he chooses to return or not is up to him. He

certainly can stay in Russia apparently under Putin's protection for the rest of his life if that's what he chooses, but if he is serious about engaging in the debate then he could take the opportunity to come back and have that debate."

Clinton talks as if there is some sort of Oxford Union mechanism whereby defenders and opponents of the national security state sit together on a stage exchanging deep thoughts about major issues of the day before a well-informed audience.

As many Snowden supporters have pointed out, the "debate" Edward Snowden would face the minute he hits U.S. shores would be to be shackled and put in solitary confinement, like Chelsea Manning, far out of the reach of any press interviews or would-be fellow debaters. He would engage in the same sort of "debate" Manning engaged in under an espionage law which barred her or any defendant from mounting any sort of public-interest defense as to why they did what they did.

Clinton and others who recommend the "channels" route also need to be reminded that Daniel Ellsberg four-plus decades ago went to influential, antiwar members of the Senate, J. William Fulbright (D-Arkansas) and George McGovern (D-South Dakota) with the Pentagon Papers before he released them to *The New York Times* and other newspapers, but they rebuffed him.

In more recent times, in the early 2000s, CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling went to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence with his concerns over a CIA scheme (Operation Merlin) to provide flawed nuclear weapons blueprints to Iran. Sterling was not only rebuffed, but as his recent trial illustrated (and Sterling did not know at the time), the committee was already aware of this program and did nothing with his allegations.

Sterling was subsequently investigated by the government for allegedly providing information about Operation Merlin to *New York Times* reporter James Risen, charges Sterling denies to this day. For his troubles in "going through channels," he became a main suspect in the disclosure to Risen, was hounded for years, was indicted and finally this past January convicted of espionage and other charges. Sterling has begun serving a 42-month prison term as he pursues an appeal.

### **Sanders, Chafee Favor Leniency for Snowden**

Among the small pool of other announced Democratic candidates, long-shot Democrat Lincoln Chafee (a former Republican senator and former independent governor of Rhode Island) and independent socialist Bernie Sanders, running as a Democrat, are calling for some sort of leniency, Sanders calls it "clemency", that would allow Snowden to come back to the United States and apparently not

face a prison term.

A year before announcing his presidential run, Sanders called for leniency for Snowden, but at the same time felt it necessary to gratuitously add that Snowden “violated an oath and committed a crime,” without acknowledging that the duty to uphold the U.S. Constitution should trump any oath of secrecy.

In an early 2014 statement to the Burlington (Vermont) *Free Press*, Sanders said: “The information disclosed by Edward Snowden has been extremely important in allowing Congress and the American people to understand the degree to which the NSA has abused its authority and violated our constitutional rights. On the other hand, there is no debate that Mr. Snowden violated an oath and committed a crime.

“In my view, the interests of justice would be best served if our government granted him some form of clemency or a plea agreement that would spare him a long prison sentence or permanent exile from the country whose freedoms he cared enough about to risk his own freedom.”

In announcing his Democratic presidential candidacy in June 2015, Chafee also offered a much friendlier attitude than Clinton toward the world’s most famous modern-day whistleblower, calling for Snowden to be allowed to come back to the United States without apparently facing a prison term.

“I want America to be a leader and inspiration for civilized behavior in this new century,” Chafee said at his campaign kick-off. “We will abide by the Geneva conventions, which means we will not torture prisoners. Our sacred Constitution requires a warrant before unreasonable searches, which include our phone records. Let’s enforce that and while we’re at it, allow Edward Snowden to come home.”

Notably, unlike Clinton who as a senator voted for the Iraq war resolution, Chafee was one of only 23 senators, and the lone Republican senator, to vote against it.

Democratic presidential candidate and former Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley has called for more restrictions on NSA surveillance than was provided for in the recently passed USA Freedom Act, including as he said recently “having a role for a public advocate in the FISA court.” However, he made no mention of Snowden in his statement.

### **Rand Paul Thanks Snowden But Would Send Him to Prison**

On the crowded Republican presidential side, libertarian Kentucky Senator Rand Paul has expressed gratitude for Snowden’s disclosures, but still envisions a

prison term, albeit apparently a lenient one, for the whistleblower, even as most other Republican candidates who have taken a position are calling for Snowden's head as a criminal and a traitor.

Despite Paul's strong opposition to renewal of the Patriot Act and his acknowledgement that Snowden performed a public service in disclosing NSA's "illegal" acts, he opts for "a fair trial with a reasonable sentence" for Snowden, rather than clemency.

"I don't think Edward Snowden deserves the death penalty or life in prison, I think that's inappropriate, and I think that's why he fled, because that's what he faced," Paul said on ABC's "This Week" in January 2014. "I think the only way he's coming home is if someone would offer him a fair trial with a reasonable sentence."

"Do I think that it's o.k. to leak secrets and give up national secrets and things that could endanger lives?," he continued. "I don't think that's o.k. But I think the courts are now saying that what he revealed was something the government was doing was illegal."

Paul went on to pose a false equivalency between NSA's law-breaking and what Snowden did. Noting the false testimony before Congress of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper that the NSA did not deliberately collect data from U.S. citizens, Paul said:

"I don't think we can selectively apply the law. So James Clapper did break the law and there is a prison sentence for that. So did Edward Snowden. So I think personally he probably would come home for some penalty of a few years in prison which would be probably not unlike what James Clapper probably deserves for lying to Congress, and that maybe if they served in a prison cell together, we'd become further enlightened as a country over what we should and shouldn't do."

Paul's comments about prison time for Snowden prompted CNNPolitics.com to opine that if a top antagonist of the NSA such as Paul "believes Snowden should be locked up, the famed whistleblower is unlikely to get any reprieve from the rest of the 2016 Republican field."

### **Other Republicans Mainly See Snowden as 'Criminal,' 'Traitor'**

Here's a sampling of what some other declared and potential Republican presidential candidates have said about Snowden:

—Senator Ted Cruz has been somewhat sympathetic to the whistleblower, saying that "Snowden has done a considerable public service by bringing [the NSA disclosures] to light." But he added that "there are consequences to violating

laws and that is something [Snowden] has publicly stated he understands, and I think the law needs to be enforced.”

–Jeb Bush has called the NSA’s spy programs “the best part of the Obama administration,” and termed Snowden “not a hero.” “He violated U.S. law. That’s why he’s living large in Moscow, the land of freedom,” Bush said with some sarcasm in May 2015.

–Marco Rubio said Snowden’s disclosures marked “the single most damaging revelation of American secrets in our history,” adding in a November 2013 speech to the American Enterprise Institute: “This man is a traitor who has sought assistance and refuge from some of the world’s most notorious violators of liberty and human rights.”

–Rick Perry told Bloomberg Television in a March 2014 interview that Snowden was “more criminal than he is a whistleblower,” adding: “We have rules and regulations, and we just can’t have people passing out information that could do damage to our intelligence gathering.”

–Chris Christie in May 2015 told Fox News that Snowden is “a criminal and is living and he’s hiding in Russia and he’s lecturing to us about the evils of authoritarian government while he’s living under the umbrella of Vladimir Putin.”

–Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) has been among the most vengeful in his statements about Snowden, you have “blood on your hands,” he said. “I don’t think he’s a hero. I believe he hurt our nation. He compromised our national security program designed to find out what terrorists are up to. I hope we’ll chase him to the ends of the earth, bring him to justice.”

–Mike Huckabee opposed extension of the Patriot Act, but his position on Snowden is unclear. On his Fox television show, Huckabee did have guests who debated NSA’s spying, including critics such as former NSA whistleblower William Binney, but doesn’t appear to have passed any judgment on Snowden, other than to cite specific disclosures made by Snowden as being important for the American people to know.

–Bobby Jindal has apparently not stated specifically what he thinks of Snowden, saying only about NSA spying that: “I believe that government should have to get a warrant to spy on American citizens, and I oppose the mass collection of data. At the same time, I also believe that when the government has a lead, they must have the freedom to follow that lead, wherever it goes.”

–Rick Santorum has said: “I don’t think people who are undermining the security of our country are heroes.”

–Donald Trump, in a “Fox & Friends” appearance in June 2013 shortly after Snowden’s disclosures, said, “in the old days [spies] used to be executed.” He continued: “This guy [Snowden] is a bad guy. You know there is still a thing called execution. You really have thousands of people with access to the kind of material like this. We’re not going to have a country any longer.”

–Other declared or potential Republican candidates, Carly Fiorina, John Kasich, Ben Carson, Scott Walker, etc., appear not to have made reported statements about Snowden or whistleblowers in general.

–Among announced third-party presidential candidates, Jill Stein, who is seeking the Green Party’s nomination for a second time, has long called for a pardon for Chelsea Manning who is serving a 35-year prison sentence as her case is under appeal.

### **Whistleblower Crackdown Part of Landscape of Fear**

Thanks to Obama, and the lack of significant congressional, journalistic or public outcry against his crackdowns on whistleblowers over the last six years, the bringing of espionage charges has become commonplace, a dangerous precedent seemingly controversial only among civil libertarians, non-Democratic progressive activists and bloggers.

Punishing whistleblowers has become part of the landscape of fear that blankets our country today, just as with drone warfare, presidential kill lists, targeted and random assassinations, a high level of U.S. surveillance of citizens and people throughout the world, unpunished torturers, undeclared wars, and a claimed right of interventions and invasions anywhere on the planet to keep Americans “safe.”

Democratic leaders in Congress, in fact, believe Snowden should go to prison for a long time for his disclosures. Then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) in August 2013 said: “I think Snowden is a traitor, and I think he has hurt our country, and I hope someday he is brought to justice.”

Likewise, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-California), at the time chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said shortly after the first Snowden disclosures in June 2013: “I don’t look at this as being a whistleblower. I think it’s an act of treason.”

And House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-California) in January 2014 termed Snowden “no hero,” said he should not be granted clemency, but should instead “come back and face the music for what he did (but) the music shouldn’t be the death penalty or life in prison.”

Most of the mainstream press, for its part, even today after all of the NSA disclosures triggered by Edward Snowden, continues to label what Snowden did as a crime. Typical of this was a June 4, 2015 editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*, whose headline rather sums up the feelings of much of the mainstream press toward whistleblowers: “Snowden deserves credit for NSA reform, and to stand trial.”

Telling whistleblowers “thanks for exposing nefarious government activities, but now you’re going to jail” hardly amounts to a ringing defense of whistleblowers, nor much of an incentive for others to do the same. Nor does it recognize that without whistleblowers most blockbuster news stories would never see the light of day, to the detriment of the public and the ever-shrinking traditional news media.

This is the sad state of most corporate journalism in the early Twenty-first Century: report explosive revelations from the whistleblower but offer nothing but prison in return.

By failing to rally vigorously to the defense of whistleblowers, congressional Democrats and most of the mainstream press have implicitly given the o.k. for any future president to go after as many whistleblowers as he or she deems proper.

And if a future president decides to up the ante and also go after recipients of classified materials, i.e., reporters, in an even more aggressive fashion than this administration did in the case of James Risen of *The New York Times* (who was threatened with jail for refusing to reveal a source’s identity), and James Rosen of Fox News (who was alleged by the government to have been a co-conspirator, but not indicted, in another Espionage Act case), what then?

Would the mainstream press and influential members of Congress go to the barricades for the First Amendment, the press and whistleblowers in such a scenario?

Regardless of what pessimistic answer one gives to that question, the U.S. public should know by now that, as with all of the other repressive measures imposed under Presidents George W. Bush and Obama, we aren’t going to get out of any of these messes by figuring that the next president will somehow be better in restoring some of our democratic rights. Only an inflamed citizenry pressuring all of our unresponsive government and journalistic institutions can help us move in that direction.

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## The Pope's Global Warming Warning

Jeb Bush and Rick Santorum are among the Catholic Republicans who have cited Church teachings on abortion as guiding their political positions, but now are objecting to Pope Francis issuing an encyclical on the dangers of global warming, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Pope Francis's encyclical *On Care For Our Common Home* is significant as a strong and unqualified declaration of the need for humankind to change course if it is to avoid calamitous physical degradation of the only planet it has as a home.

Although the Roman Catholic pope lacks, as Stalin reminded us, any army divisions with which to exert his influence, he does have one of the most credible claims to worldwide moral authority. This week he is using that authority to tell the world that the environmental calamity of which he writes is, to quote from the encyclical, "one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day."

The encyclical is in some respects an oddly heterogeneous read, which intersperses theology between sections that sound more like the products of a think tank, a nerdy advocacy group, or a philosophical discussion group. The document is sprinkled with terms such as *anthropocentrism* and *techno-economic paradigm*.

The encyclical addresses multiple aspects of the environmental damage that is despoiling our "common home," but its single most important theme is acceptance of the mountain of scientific evidence that human activity is heating the planet, and the consequent need to change the direction of that activity.

The encyclical also is blunt and perceptive in describing the reasons for resistance to that message. "Many of those who possess more resources or economic or political power," says Francis, "seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms."

The document further observes, "There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected."

That is a good analysis of what underlies some of the resistant reaction to the encyclical, including from some American politicians who belong to the church that Francis heads. That includes Jeb Bush, who earlier this month was the sole Republican presidential candidate invited to speak at a golf and fishing retreat hosted by the coal industry, which is one of the most prominent of the special interests opposing action on global warming.

Reacting to the papal encyclical, Bush said, "I don't get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinal or my pope." Bush continued, "I think religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that end up getting in the political realm."

Bush did not appear to have qualms as governor of Florida about taking guidance from his church on things that get in the political realm; he often cited church teachings as a guide for public policy on matters such as abortion.

Even more prominent inconsistencies of that sort come from fellow Catholic and an avowedly Christianist politician, Rick Santorum, who said about the encyclical, "The church has gotten it wrong a few times on science, and I think that we probably are better off leaving science to the scientists."

Pope Francis, of course, far from trying to have the church make scientific pronouncements, was instead deferring to the overwhelming scientific consensus about global climate change and the reasons for it. Leaving science to the scientists is exactly what he is doing in the encyclical.

This is much more respectful of Enlightenment values and the scientific method than either outright climate change denial or the usual tactic of resistant American politicians who, realizing the stupidity of such denial, still try to cast doubt on the scientific consensus with a pseudo-agnostic "I'm not a scientist" tactic.

When it comes to being guided by teachings from the Holy See (on matters other than climate change), one of Santorum's most direct pronouncements, uttered during the 2012 presidential campaign, was a comment about John F. Kennedy's assurance a half century earlier that if he were elected president he would not impose his Catholic faith on the nation. Kennedy's reassuring statement about separation of church and state, said Santorum, made him "want to throw up."

Now in response to publication of the new encyclical, Santorum says the church should focus on what it's "really good at, which is theology and morality."

Well, there certainly is a lot of both theology and morality in the encyclical.

Francis frames global warming and other environmental degradation as a moral issue along two chief dimensions. One is rich versus poor, with the former's economic interests and political clout impeding action to correct environmental destruction that makes the poor suffer at least as much as anyone else. The other dimension involves the current generation versus future generations.

The encyclical has a section titled "Justice Between the Generations." It is wrong, says Francis, for the current generation, with a narrow focus on its own immediate economic interests, to ruin the planet on which future generations must live. That is a moral issue, as well as an economic issue and a political issue. Politicians must be made to confront the subject on all of those levels.

**Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as [a blog post](#) at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)**

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## GOP's Fact-Challenged Convention

Even by the measure of modern U.S. political events, the Republican National Convention was fact-challenged. Again and again, Republicans reprised their favorite canards and distortions, including the claim that President Obama has eliminated the work requirement in welfare, writes William Boardman.

By William Boardman

Some people don't believe in such a thing as objective truth. Other people don't care what's true or not true. And then there's the rest of us, trying to figure out what's real in the modern media maelstrom. Take Tuesday night at the Republican National Convention, just a snapshot, the truth problem in a microcosm, before, during, and after Rick Santorum spoke.

Rachel Maddow was anchoring the coverage on MSNBC, Maddow is avowedly liberal, but even more avowedly committed to getting facts right. She habitually asks her guests if she got her facts right in stories they are knowledgeable about, something few other newspeople do so consistently. And she is scrupulous in making corrections when she gets something wrong.

In other words, Maddow is a reporter with real integrity and here she is with

her assortment of MSNBC talking heads getting ready to listen to former Senator and presidential candidate Rick Santorum, and she predicts that he will lie. (Journalists often do have the benefit of getting prepared texts of major speeches.)

Maddow predicts that Santorum will specifically lie about the waivers that five governors (including two Republicans) asked the Obama administration to consider in relation to the federal welfare rules on work for those receiving welfare.

When the administration agreed to consider waivers, it made clear it would grant a waiver to the law's work requirements only on the condition that more welfare recipients find jobs than under current rules. To date, the Obama administration has granted no waivers. And the two Republican governors who joined in the original request, Brian Sandoval of Nevada and Gary Herbert of Utah, are backing away from their initial position.

In 2005, during George W. Bush's administration, Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts joined 28 other governors who wrote a letter to Congress seeking broader waiver authority from the law than the Obama administration has agreed to consider. And Gov. Romney also supported a program that provided free automobiles to welfare recipients.

But since early August, presidential candidate Mitt Romney has been running ads claiming that President Obama is eliminating work as a welfare requirement with a racially tinged explanation suggesting that Obama is pandering to his base.

One Romney ad in early August claimed that: "On July 12, President Obama quietly ended the work requirement, gutting welfare reform. One of the most respected newspapers in the country called it 'nuts'. Under Obama's plan, you wouldn't have to work and you wouldn't have to train for a job. They just send you your welfare check. And welfare to work goes back to being plain old welfare."

Romney's claims have been widely criticized and debunked as false by fact-checking organizations including CNN, the New York Times, Daily Kos, ABC News, the Christian Science Monitor, the Los Angeles Times, and others. PolitiFact called Romney's claims "pants on fire" bogus, the Washington Post gave Romney four "Pinocchios" for maximum falsity, and the Annenberg Public Policy Center agreed. Even Republican Newt Gingrich said there was "no proof" to support Romney's claims.

The Romney campaign responded through pollster Neil Newhouse who said matter-of-factly, "We're not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers."

In this context, Maddow made her prediction that Santorum, who has had several dramatic engagements of his own with untruth, would end up lying in his speech

about Obama and welfare reform.

Sure enough, Santorum lied when he said, “This summer [Obama] showed us once again he believes in government handouts and dependency by waiving the work requirement for welfare. I helped write the welfare reform bill; we made the law crystal clear – no president can waive the work requirement. But as with his refusal to enforce our immigration laws, President Obama rules like he is above the law.”

When the MSNBC panel returned after the speech, one of its members, Chris Matthews, commented respectfully on Santorum’s speech and remarked that Santorum hadn’t even mentioned welfare. Moments later Maddow gently and gracefully corrected him and Matthews admitted he’d missed the comments.

The next day, on The Maddow Blog featured Kansas Republican Gov. Sam Brownback reluctantly acknowledging that the Romney campaign’s claims about work and welfare are false.

And the ads are still running.

**William Boardman lives in Vermont, where he has produced political satire for public radio and served as a lay judge.**

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## Did the Founders Hate Government?

**Exclusive:** Orwell’s insight that who controls the present controls the past, and who controls the past controls the future could apply to the American political debate in which the Right has built a false narrative that enlists the Framers of the Constitution as enemies of a strong central government, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

In the coming months with a new fight over the federal budget, the Supreme Court’s review of health-care reform and the November elections the battle in the United States will pit not just political parties and economic ideologies against one another but competing national narratives of how and why the United States was founded.

Indeed, it is that conflict over the American narrative that may well determine the outcome of the presidential election and the future direction of the United States. Yet, this dispute over the Founders’ vision is rarely debated in the

mainstream news media.

The argument does, however, inspire right-wing groups which obsess over “strict construction” of the Constitution and the “originalist” intent of the Founders. Such references also have become standard fare on the Republican campaign trail with the four remaining major candidates claiming to be in this fight to defend American “liberty.”

On Saturday, for instance, ex-Sen. Rick Santorum declared that President Barack Obama’s health-care reform is “a threat to the very essence of who America is.” As the New York Times noted, “numbers like 1776 and 1860 increasingly pepper his speeches as he stresses the historical urgency of his candidacy.”

The Right’s historical narrative holds that the Founders designed the United States to have a weak central government barred from confronting most domestic problems (though with broad powers for defense). Under this “free-market” system, wealthy business interests had the “liberty” to set their own rules and the average citizen had the “freedom” to make his way the best he could.

There is, of course, a counter-narrative, but Democrats and progressives rarely make it, preferring to cede the history to the Right and to argue that the Founders couldn’t possibly have anticipated the complex problems of the modern age.

Still, the counter-narrative to the GOP mythology is grounded in solid history. Indeed, the evidence is that most constitutional framers were pragmatic men interested in building a strong nation. They also were fed up with the weak central government under the Articles of Confederation. They surely weren’t anti-government ideologues.

In the Constitution, they created a robust central authority, stating in the preamble the explicit responsibility of the government “to promote the general Welfare.” The document also granted the federal government broad domestic powers, including authority to regulate interstate commerce, the so-called Commerce Clause.

### **Framing the Commerce Clause**

Plus, the Commerce Clause was not some afterthought at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. It was presented as one of the new federal powers in James Madison’s Virginia plan on the first day of substantive debate. It also was considered one of the least controversial features of the new governing framework.

Indeed, constitutional architect Madison had been maneuvering to give this power

to the federal government for years, seeking such a change in the Articles of Confederation, which governed the United States from 1777 to 1787.

Madison “sponsored a resolution instructing Virginia congressmen to vote to give the federal government the authority to regulate commerce for twenty-five years,” noted Chris DeRose in *Founding Rivals*, a resolution that won the support of Gen. George Washington, one of the fiercest critics of the weak central government in the Articles of Confederation.

Because the Articles’ structure of 13 “independent” and “sovereign” states had left Washington’s soldiers starving and desperate when the states reneged on promised funding Washington advocated a much stronger central government.

Regarding Madison’s commerce idea, Washington wrote that “the proposition in my opinion is so self evident that I confess I am at a loss to discover wherein lies the weight of the objection to the measure. We are either a united people, or we are not. If the former, let us, in all matters of a general concern act as a nation, which have national objects to promote, and a national character to support. If we are not, let us no longer act a farce by pretending it to be.”

When the Virginia legislature slashed Madison’s proposal for federal control of commerce from 25 years to 13 years, he voted against it as insufficient. His thoughts then turned to a more drastic scheme for consolidating power in the hands of the federal government, a constitutional convention, albeit under the guise of simply proposing some changes to the Articles.

### **A Dramatic Change**

In spring 1787 with a convention called in Philadelphia to amend the Articles of Confederation Madison unveiled his radical alternative, not simply some modifications to the Articles but an entirely new system that wiped away the Articles’ language about the “independence” and “sovereignty” of the states.

On May 29, 1787, the first day of substantive debate at the Constitutional Convention, a fellow Virginian, Edmund Randolph, presented Madison’s framework. Madison’s Commerce Clause was there from the start, except that instead of a 25-year grant of federal authority, the central government’s control of interstate commerce would be made permanent.

Madison’s convention notes on Randolph’s presentation recount him saying that “there were many advantages, which the U. S. might acquire, which were not attainable under the confederation such as a productive impost [or tax] counteraction of the commercial regulations of other nations pushing of commerce ad libitum &c &c.”

In other words, the Founders at their most “originalist” moment understood the value of the federal government taking action to negate the commercial advantages of other countries and to take steps for “pushing of [American] commerce.” The “ad libitum &c &c” notation suggests that Randolph provided other examples off the top of his head.

Historian Bill Chapman has summarized Randolph’s point as saying “we needed a government that could co-ordinate commerce in order to compete effectively with other nations.”

So, from the very start of the debate on a new Constitution, Madison and other key framers recognized that a legitimate role of the U.S. Congress was to ensure that the nation could match up against other countries economically and could address problems impeding the nation’s economic success and the public welfare.

The constitutional framers understood what they were doing. As historian Richard Labunski wrote in *James Madison and the Struggle for the Bill of Rights*, “no one knew better than the delegates that the proposed Constitution would drastically alter the structure of government. Much of the power of the states would be taken from them.”

The point also was not missed by the advocates of states’ rights. After the Constitutional Convention, these Anti-Federalists, led by Madison’s chief rival Patrick Henry, mounted a fierce campaign to defeat Madison’s scheme because they recognized that it concentrated power in the central government.

For instance, dissidents from Pennsylvania’s convention delegation wrote: “We dissent because the powers vested in Congress by this constitution, must necessarily annihilate and absorb the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the several states, and produce from their ruins one consolidated government.” [See David Wootton, *The Essential Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers*.]

As resistance to Madison’s plan spread and as states elected delegates to ratifying conventions Madison feared that his constitutional masterwork would go down to defeat or be subjected to a second convention that might remove important federal powers like the Commerce Clause.

### **Finessing the Opposition**

So, Madison along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay began a series of essays, called the Federalist Papers, designed to counter the fierce (though generally accurate) attacks by the Anti-Federalists against the broad assertion of federal power in the Constitution.



Madison's strategy was essentially to insist that the drastic changes contained in the Constitution were not all that drastic, an approach he took both as a delegate to the Virginia ratifying convention and in the Federalist Papers.

Today's Right has sought to transform Madison from his role as the chief advocate for a strong central government into the opposite a modern-day Tea Partier before his time by citing Federalist Paper No. 45, entitled "The Alleged Danger From the Powers of the Union to the State Governments Considered," in which Madison used the pseudonym Publius.

Trying to finesse the opposition to his plan for enhanced federal powers, Madison wrote: "If the new Constitution be examined with accuracy, it will be found that the change which it proposes consists much less in the addition of NEW POWERS to the Union, than in the invigoration of its ORIGINAL POWERS."

But even that was an admission from Madison that the Constitution added teeth to what had been toothless authorities theoretically granted to the central government under the Articles. Making powers meaningful, rather than ineffectual, is not an insignificant change.

Madison also noted: "The regulation of commerce, it is true, is a new power; but that seems to be an addition which few oppose, and from which no apprehensions are entertained."

To claim Madison as an opponent of an activist federal government, the Right must ignore both his advocacy for beefing up what had been weak authorities and adding the crucial new one over commerce. The Right also must ignore Federalist Paper No. 14 in which Madison envisioned major construction projects under the powers granted by the Commerce Clause.

"[T]he union will be daily facilitated by new improvements," Madison wrote. "Roads will everywhere be shortened, and kept in better order; accommodations for travelers will be multiplied and meliorated; an interior navigation on our eastern side will be opened throughout, or nearly throughout the whole extent of the Thirteen States.

"The communication between the western and Atlantic districts, and between different parts of each, will be rendered more and more easy by those numerous canals with which the beneficence of nature has intersected our country, and which art finds it so little difficult to connect and complete."

The building of canals, as an argument in support of the Commerce Clause and the Constitution, further reflects the pragmatic and commercial attitudes of key founders. In 1785, two years before the Constitutional Convention, George Washington founded the Potowmack Company, which began the work of digging canals

to extend navigable waterways westward where he and other Founders had invested in Ohio and other undeveloped lands.

Thus, the idea of involving the central government in major economic projects a government-business partnership to create jobs and profits was there from the beginning. Madison, Washington and other early American leaders saw the Constitution as creating a dynamic system so the young country could grow and overcome the daunting challenges of its vast territory.

The Founders did debate the proper limits of federal and state powers, but again Madison and Washington came down on the side of making federal statutes and treaties the supreme law of the land. (Madison had even favored giving Congress veto power over each state law, but settled for granting the federal courts the authority to overturn state laws that violated federal statutes.)

### **After Ratification**

The narrow ratification of the Constitution in 1788 did not end the confrontations over states' rights, especially when the South began to fear that its agriculture-based economy and its lucrative industry of slavery might be threatened as the industrialized North expanded and the anti-slavery movement grew.

In the early 1830s, President Andrew Jackson faced down South Carolina over its claimed right to "nullify" federal law. And three decades later, President Abraham Lincoln fought the Civil War to settle the issue of states having the right to secede from the Union.

Still, as late as the 1950s and 1960s, Southern white supremacists were still citing the principle of states' right in defending segregation. Though the segregationists lost those fights in federal courts and in the battle for public opinion, they never surrendered. They simply regrouped.

In the mid-1970s, as the Vietnam War ended, the American Left began shutting down or selling off much its media, which had proved effective in reaching out to the public to build opposition to the war. At the same time, the Right began investing heavily in its own media infrastructure.

Wealthy right-wing foundations and industrialists, like the Koch Brothers, also poured money into think tanks, which hired clever individuals who began reframing the national narrative. Part of that effort was to support "scholarship" that transformed Madison and other key framers from advocates of a strong central government into proponents for states' rights.

A few of Madison's quotes from 1788 as he tried to downplay how radical his new

constitutional system actually was were plucked out of context, while other parts of his biography as an advocate for a strong central government were simply erased.

By Ronald Reagan's inauguration in 1981, Americans were being told that "government is the problem" and that the nation had deviated from the Founders' original vision of an Ayn Rand-style "free-market" society in which everyone was on their own and the government only worried about fighting wars.

Increasingly, the Right pitched itself as the defender of the nation's founding ideals. Any time the central government sought to address vexing national problems from the need to regulate Wall Street to extending health coverage to the tens of millions of uninsured Americans these proposals were labeled "unconstitutional."

Some right-wing jurists, most notably Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, advocated "originalism," insisting that constitutional powers should apply only to what the Founders had in mind at the time. The Right ignored the clear record that the Founders intended their governing structure to meet both their immediate needs and the distant interests of their "posterity."

Indeed, if there was any true "originalism," it was that the Constitution should be sufficiently dynamic to cope with any number of anticipated and unanticipated challenges that might confront the nation. As the discussion about canal building shows, Madison, Washington and other key framers were pragmatists.

### **One-Sided Debate**

Yet, while the Right was bending the founding narrative to its purposes, the Left largely dismissed the importance of this debate, perhaps in part because the Left tends to disdain many Founders as slave-owning aristocrats who hypocritically denied their precious "unalienable rights" to women, blacks, Indians, the poor and many others.

While that surely was true, the nation's founding narrative retains a strong mythic appeal to many Americans and the Right's twisting of the history has proved a powerful tactic to rally many middle- and working-class Americans, particularly white men, to the Tea Party cause and to the Republican Party.

Believing they're channeling the true spirit of the Founders, many of these average Americans end up siding with ultra-rich plutocrats who see an effective and democratized federal government as the last obstacle to their total domination of the United States.

Thus, the Tea Partiers and their allies fight: to let Wall Street banks operate

as recklessly as they wish; to let health insurance companies deny coverage to sick people; to let rich investors pay lower tax rates than their secretaries; to let billionaires buy up the political process through Super-PACs; to let companies outsource jobs; to let industry despoil the environment; and to slash life-saving federal programs like Medicare, food stamps and Social Security.

The “logic” behind this “populist” support for the interests of the rich is that many average folk think they are engaged in a principled stand for “liberty” with the federal government their oppressor, standing in for the British Crown in 1776. That’s why the Tea Partiers wave “Don’t Tread on Me” flags and dress up in Revolutionary War costumes.

Simply put, these Tea Partiers have been fooled by a well-funded propaganda campaign tricking them by substituting a false narrative about the nation’s founding and thus enlisting their help in dismantling the Great American Middle Class.

### **Building the Middle Class**

Many of these Americans have forgotten a basic truth: that the Great American Middle Class was largely a creation of the federal government and its policies dating back to Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. For many Tea Partiers, it is more satisfying to think that they or their parents climbed the social ladder on their own, that they “didn’t need no gov-mint help.”

But the truth is that it was government policies arising out of the Great Depression and carried forward through the post-World War II years by both Republican and Democratic presidents that created the opportunities for tens of millions of Americans to achieve relative comfort and economic security.

Those policies ranged from Social Security and labor rights in the 1930s to the GI Bill after World War II to Medicare in the 1960s and to government investments in infrastructure and technological research over many decades. Even in recent years, despite right-wing efforts to choke off money to government research, federal programs such as the Internet have brought greater efficiency to markets, as well as wealth to many entrepreneurs.

So, the Right’s success in dismantling the New Deal, piece by piece, and shoving more and more Americans down the social ladder has hinged on the demonization of “gov-mint.” This message often wrapped in patriotic hoopla and coded appeals to bigotry was delivered most effectively by the personable Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

Yet, while rallying many working-class “Reagan Democrats” to his banner, Reagan’s most important policy was slashing taxes on the rich. Under Reagan’s

“supply-side economics,” the top marginal tax rate what the richest Americans pay on their highest tranche of income was more than halved, from 70 percent to 28 percent.

Still, the promised surge in “supply-side” growth never really materialized and a key result was the dramatic rise in the national debt. Another less obvious change was the incentivizing of greed, which had been discouraged by the much higher marginal tax rates of the post-World War II years, from Dwight Eisenhower (when the top marginal tax rate was 90 percent) through Jimmy Carter (with a 70 percent top rate).

After all, if 70 to 90 percent of your highest tranche of income went to the government to help pay for building the nation, you had little personal incentive to press for that extra \$1 million or \$2 million in compensation.

So corporate CEOs while well-paid were happy earning about 25 times as much as their average worker in the 1960s. A few decades later, that ratio on CEO pay was about 200 times what the average worker was making.

The consequences of several decades of Reaganism and its related ideas (such as the “free-market” shipping of many middle-class jobs overseas where workers are paid much less) are now apparent. Wealth has been concentrated at the top with billionaires living extravagant lives while the middle class struggles. One everyman after another gets shoved down the ladder.

The data is now clear that the last three decades have witnessed a divergence between the haves and the have-nots unprecedented in the United States, at least since the lead-up to the Great Depression when a similar era of income inequality set the stage for financial disaster.

For instance, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office in an analysis of data from 1979 to 2005 found that the inflation-adjusted income of middle-class Americans rose about 21 percent (only about one-fifth the increase enjoyed by the middle class during the post-World War II era).

Meanwhile, the income for the ultra-rich (the top 100<sup>th</sup> of one percent) jumped 480 percent from 1979 to 2005, rising from an average of \$4.2 million to \$24.3 million. And CBO’s analysis ends in 2005, thus missing the decimation of the middle class from the Wall Street bust of 2008.

### **Struggling Americans**

Behind the numbers, the real-life consequences are painful. Millions of Americans forego needed medical care because they can’t afford health insurance; young people, burdened by college loans, crowd back in with their parents;

trained workers settle for low-paying jobs or are unemployed; families skip vacations and other simple pleasures of life.

Beyond the unfairness, there is the macro-economic problem which comes from massive income disparity. A strong economy is one in which the vast majority people can buy products, which can then be manufactured more cheaply, creating a positive cycle of profits and prosperity.

Plus, the problems facing the nation grow even more severe with looming shortages of vital resources and the impending catastrophe of global warming. Only an energetic federal government can focus the national will to tackle these challenges.

The pragmatic Founders would understand this need for unified action. Yet, Republicans running for President and GOP members of Congress continue to call for further cuts in taxes for the rich and more cuts in government spending, rending the social safety net and slashing investments in infrastructure, education, research and the environment.

House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan unveiled a plan Tuesday to reduce the highest marginal tax rate from 35 percent to 25 percent even lower than it was under Reagan while domestic spending would be slashed and Medicare would be turned into a voucher system with the elderly paying a much higher share of their health costs.

As in the past, this approach is accompanied by assurances of faster economic growth, but the record for those promises should now be clear. The GOP plans are also wrapped in rhetoric about "liberty" and the "spirit of the Founders" though in truth that spirit was infused with a pragmatic notion of the country pulling together to meet its challenges

So, what's at stake in 2012 is not just who wins and how that will affect the immediate welfare of the American people but whether a false narrative about America's past will lead it into a darkening future.

**Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.**

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# On American 'Exceptionalism'

American politicians forever talk about the nation's "exceptionalism," a special greatness that sets the U.S.A. apart from all others. But this jingoism requires whitewashing much of U.S. history and ignoring much of the present, too, says Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Everyone wants to be exceptional, to be special, to be great at something. Parents spend a lot of time assuring their children that they are indeed exceptional, even though they often know that their offspring will spend their working lives selling mattresses or cars.

When it comes to individuals there is a very wide range of achievements that can make you stand out. Everyone can be exceptional in some way or other. Yet it is not only individuals who need to feel themselves exceptional or great.

It seems that entire nations, working at some level of collective consciousness, yearn for this status as well. This is particularly true of the citizenry of the USA, who are often told by their politicians that their country is exceptional, special, great the most talented child in the family of nations.

It presently being a political campaign season, one gets these assertions almost daily. Here are some examples:

1. Mitt Romney: "God did not create this country to be a nation of followers. America is not destined to be one of several equally balanced global powers. America must lead the world."

Back in the 1960s, when citizens' ears were more attuned to the country's sins, the first part of this statement might easily have suggested God's complicity in genocide. After all, just how was America "created"? Over the dead bodies of innumerable Native Americans. Yet even here Mr. Romney is looking in the wrong direction for American specialness. Colonial massacres were not at all exceptional.

2. Mitt Romney, part II: "I will not surrender America's role in the world. This is very simple: If you want America to be the strongest nation on Earth, I am your President."

Making such a statement begs the question of just what it takes to assure that the U.S. is the "strongest nation on Earth." Well, the man from Massachusetts

gives the recipe in his 2010 book, *No Apology: the Case for American Greatness*.  
The recipe: expand American military programs and their funding.

He recommends adding a minimum of 100,000 soldiers to the Marines and Army specifically. He writes as well about updating America's nuclear stockpile, building a missile defense system and researching into cyber-warfare. Want to be great? Muscle up! As we will see this is a very traditional position.

3. Rick Santorum: To assure that American "exceptionalism" is recognized and promoted, American leaders must a) never suggest that any past policies could have been wrong b) never apologize for anything and c) never suggest that anyone can possibly be as exceptional as we are.

Having gotten that straight, Santorum also goes the muscle up route. American greatness is dependent on recruiting more soldiers because "America is in a war" with evil, which we must learn to recognize for "what it is" like, among other things, "Sharia law."

It is said that Santorum is "selling himself as a conservative crusader." However, he sounds like a spoiled child to me, the sort that shouts: "I won't say I'm wrong! I won't apologize! I'm better than you are! And if you push me, I'll call you evil and beat you up!" How great is that?

4. Newt Gingrich: What makes American exceptionalism different is that we are the only people I know of in history to say power comes directly from God to each one of you, [which means] in America no politician, no bureaucrat, no judge can take those rights away." Given the history of the United States from slavery through the "war on terror," someone might want to at least take Newt's Ph.D. away.

And, despite Thomas Jefferson's "endowed by their Creator" line in the Declaration of Independence, American rights legally come from the State via the Constitution, which makes no reference to God anywhere but rather to "We the People." As far as I know Habeas Corpus appears nowhere in the Bible.

The fact that rights come from the state and not God means that, by making up new categories such as "enemy combatants," the state can (albeit illegally), and indeed has, taken rights away from citizens as well as others. Newt must have been out to lunch when this happened.

As for the assertion that it is only Americans who claim that God directly sends them "power" in the form of rights, it is just plain wrong in another way. Among others, Muslims make this claim when they assert that God is always with the Muslim. He is "closer to you than your own veins" (Quran 50.16). According to the Quran, Allah has delivered rights and obligations to all and, if you heed



them, they will put you on the “straight path” to salvation.

5. President Obama also believes in American “exceptionalism.” He talks about the nation’s “unmatched military capability,” the great size of its economy, and “a set of core values” such as free speech that are “enshrined in its Constitution, laws and democratic practices.”

Actually, what makes Obama different than his political foes is not only leaving God out of this, but also his willingness to concede that other countries have exceptional qualities too and that, on occasion, Americans do stupid things for which they should apologize. Maybe coming from an African-American background has something to do with these insights.

### **Why Are Nations ‘Great’?**

Throughout history there has been one major definition for national greatness (or exceptionalism) and that is great military power. As we see, all the mentioned politicians pick up on this theme and those challenging Obama want more troops, more missiles, more nukes.

It has long been this way. Why were the Romans great? Conquest. Why was France under Napoleon exceptional? Conquest. Why was the British Empire great? Conquest. And why is America exceptional? The capacity to force much of the world to its will.

Oh, there are other things people sometimes mention: Roman law and great architecture; the Napoleonic Code and freeing the Jews from their ghettos; England making the seas safe from pirates and introducing the world to Indian food; and finally, when it comes to the U.S., there is that multifaceted thing called “freedom.”

But all that is really secondary. The first and foremost historical criterion for national greatness is: going out, hitting your neighbor over the head and stealing his stuff. That is why “great powers” are great.

Here are some achievements other than military might and conquest that ought to have a higher claim on national greatness or “exceptionalism”:

1. The ability to eliminate hunger among citizens.
2. The ability to provide decent housing for all citizens.
3. The ability to provide healthcare for all citizens.
4. The ability to provide affordable education for all citizens.

5. The ability to provide citizens with productive work at a living wage.

The nation that can provide these primary needs for its people is well on its way to greatness. Indeed, the other things that Americans so value, such as freedoms enshrined in the Bill of Rights or even the right to vote, are only fully convincing as “inalienable rights” when you are not chronically hungry and your kids aren’t dying of curable diseases.

That doesn’t mean that they are not important and should not be fought for, it just means that rights come in the form of an hierarchical package and the American package is incomplete.

The sound bite versions of greatness or “exceptionalism” that come from our politicians are so superficial and decontextualized as to be meaningless. They are the verbal equivalent of that little hammer doctors use to make your lower leg jump forward. Sure, they get a response, but do you really know what it all means?

Then again many Americans just can’t see beyond the big army, big navy (ah, those Navy Seals), and big air force. Guns, guns, guns, that is the traditional, historical road to greatness. Just read a bit of history. All the rest is fluff.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest*; *America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*.**

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## Santorum ‘Throws Up’ on JFK/Obama

**Exclusive:** Rick Santorum says he almost threw up reading John Kennedy’s 1960 speech on religious tolerance, and the GOP presidential hopeful sees sinister intent in President Obama’s plea that young Americans seek higher education. So, what would a Santorum America be like, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

With Republican presidential front-runner Rick Santorum, it’s hard to decide what is more alarming, his know-nothingism or his dishonesty. In recent days, he has put on displays of both, decrying President Barack Obama’s advocacy for higher learning and distorting John F. Kennedy’s 1960 appeal for religious tolerance.

Like many on the Right, Santorum also selectively disregards the founding principles of the United States, which include government neutrality on religion. In one speech, Santorum said he “almost threw up” when reading Kennedy’s reiteration of that principle more than a half century ago when JFK was seeking to become the first Catholic president.

Instead of embracing Kennedy’s support for the separation of church and state, which has spared America much of the religious violence that has marred other parts of the world, Santorum espouses a chip-on-the-shoulder notion that by not embracing the Bible as a governing philosophy the government is picking on fundamentalist Christians.

Of course, we’ve seen a version of this religious “victimhood” before, when Fox News and other right-wing media outlets concocted the absurd notion of a “War on Christmas” despite the annual extravagance of a month-long celebration in honor of the mythological birth of the baby Jesus, ending in the nation’s only official religious holiday.

The reality is that Americans of all religious views while out buying their groceries or riding in elevators have no choice but to listen to Christmas carols. They watch their cities decked out in red-and-green Christmas colors. To state the obvious, there is no comparable celebration for Yom Kippur or Ramadan.

But fundamentalist Christians still detect a “war” in the renaming of public-school “Christmas concerts” as “winter concerts” and similar concessions to the fact that America also is home to Jews, Muslims, atheists and people of other religious persuasions.

What Santorum is now doing on the campaign trail is retrofitting the “war on Christmas” into a more general “war on religion.” In recent speeches, he has accused President Obama of following a “phony theology,” i.e. “not a theology based on the Bible.”

Santorum’s argument plays on two levels first, raising fresh doubts that Obama is a real Christian (when many right-wing Christians still insist that he’s a Muslim) and second, maintaining that Obama’s promotion of environmentalism is somehow an assault on Christianity.

Santorum wants Americans to see legislation aimed at protecting the Earth and Nature as a violation of the Bible’s granting Man dominion over the planet, as if God bestowed on Man the right to plunder the Earth to the point of making it uninhabitable for future generations.

Some of Santorum’s reckless views on the environment fit with the fundamentalist Christian notion that the End Times are near and thus the Earth’s resources can

be used without regard to the future. (Note to the campaign press: before Santorum becomes the U.S. president, you might want to ask about his views on the End Times.)

### **No College For You**

Santorum is contemptuous, too, of Obama's appeals to America's youth to seek higher education so they can fill the high-tech jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Obama has asked "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training."

But Santorum sees in that a dark conspiracy to indoctrinate American youth away from "faith" as well as an example of Obama's elitism. Santorum told one campaign crowd, "President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob!"

In that advice from Obama about higher education, the former Pennsylvania senator detected a slight against "good, decent men and women who go out and work hard every day and put their skills to tests that aren't taught by some liberal college professor."

Santorum then advocated that Americans seek out other alternatives for upgrading their skills. "There's technical schools, there's additional training, vocational training," he said, although that would seem to be no different than Obama's frequent touting of community colleges that partner with companies on job training.

Except that when Obama makes these appeals like when he addresses students at the start of the school year and urges them to do their homework his agenda must be to brainwash the children into some atheistic dystopia where true believers are hunted down by black helicopters and delivered to reeducation camps.

The more Santorum speaks the more it appears that his world view has been shaped by right-wing Christian paranoia that can be found in some fundamentalist novels rather than in the real world.

The truth is that the Americans most discriminated against for their religious views are probably atheists, perhaps even more so than Muslims and Jews. Despite the constitutional mandate in Article VI that "no religious Test shall ever be required" for any public office, it's hard to find an avowed atheist in any elected government post anywhere.

### **Hard Times at Penn State**

However, in Santorum World, the Christians are the persecuted ones. In an

appearance on ABC-TV's "This Week" on Sunday, Santorum was still recalling his victimhood several decades ago while attending Penn State.

"I went through it at Penn State," Santorum told host George Stephanopoulos. "You talk to most kids who go to college who are conservatives, and you are singled out, you are ridiculed, you are I can tell you personally, I know that, you know, we I went through a process where I was docked for my conservative views. This is sort of a regular routine.

"You know the statistic that at least I was familiar with from a few years ago – I don't know if it still holds true but I suspect it may even be worse that 62 percent of kids who enter college with some sort of faith commitment leave without it. This is not a neutral setting."

But, of course, it may actually be "a neutral setting." It may just be that some of the myths taught by religious fundamentalists don't withstand objective scrutiny in an environment of factual learning and in different circumstances, most Americans would cheer that fact.

For instance, if Muslims trained in fundamentalist Islamist madrassas went to a cosmopolitan university and learned real history like, say, reading about the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust that presumably would be a good thing because it would increase tolerance and understanding.

Or, let's say that Christian children who believe in Santa Claus attend a public school and learn from other children that there is no Santa Claus. We might feel sad about that development, but it would not mean the public school was not "a neutral setting." The hard truth is there is no Santa Claus.

So, what would a President Santorum want? An American system of higher education that is the Christian equivalent of an Islamic fundamentalist madrassa, schools that indoctrinate American youth in the Faith and tell them to view Reason as the temptation of the Devil?

### **The Founders' Wisdom**

The Christian world has seen this script before and it does not end well. Indeed, it is what motivated America's Founders to adopt the First Amendment's joint edict that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Founders were well aware of the dark side of official religions.

By enacting the First Amendment, James Madison and other constitutional framers were not prohibiting the involvement of religious people in the public square, but they were saying that the government must remain neutral on matters of

religion.

That is what John F. Kennedy was recalling in his famous 1960 address pleading for religious tolerance toward Catholics, the speech that Santorum said made him almost vomit. On the campaign trail recently, Santorum noted that “earlier in my political career, I had the opportunity to read the speech, and I almost threw up. You should read the speech.”

Asked by Stephanopoulos “why did it make you throw up,” Santorum responded: “Because the first line, first substantive line in the speech says, ‘I believe in America where the separation of church and state is absolute.’ I don’t believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.

“The idea that the church can have no influence or no involvement in the operation of the state is absolutely antithetical to the objectives and vision of our country. Kennedy for the first time articulated the vision saying, ‘no, faith is not allowed in the public square. I will keep it separate.’ Go on and read the speech.

“[Kennedy says] ‘I will have nothing to do with faith. I won’t consult with people of faith.’ It was an absolutist doctrine that was abhorrent at the time of 1960. And I went down to Houston, Texas, 50 years almost to the day [after Kennedy’s speech, which also was delivered in Houston], and gave a speech and talked about how important it is for everybody to feel welcome in the public square. ”

Stephanopoulos: “You think you wanted to throw up?”

Santorum: “Well, yes, absolutely, to say that people of faith have no role in the public square? You bet that makes you throw up. What kind of country do we live in that says only people of non-faith can come into the public square and make their case?

“That makes me throw up and it should make every American who is seen from the President [Obama], someone who is now trying to tell people of faith that you will do what the government says, we are going to impose our values on you, not that you can’t come to the public square and argue against it, but now we’re going to turn around and say we’re going to impose our values from the government on people of faith, which of course is the next logical step when people of faith, at least according to John Kennedy, have no role in the public square.”

### **Not True**

Of course, Kennedy said no such thing in 1960. His speech did not declare that

“people of faith have no role in the public square.” Kennedy himself was a practicing Catholic as is Santorum. Kennedy also collaborated with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a person of faith who clearly operated in the public square. It’s odd, too, that Santorum, while speaking as a person of faith in the public square, would say that a person of faith can’t speak in the public square.

Indeed, there are countless examples of people of faith operating in America’s public square, both as advocates and officeholders. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, probably the Americans most excluded from the public square are atheists and other non-believers who generally are punished by voters for not having a religious faith.

What Kennedy was seeking in his speech on Sept. 12, 1960, was an acceptance by voters of candidates based on their character and positions, not their religion. Facing accusations that he might take orders from the Vatican, Kennedy asserted that he would strictly respect the founding American principle of separation of church and state.

In part, Kennedy said, “But because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected president, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured, perhaps deliberately, in some quarters less responsible than this. So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again not what kind of church I believe in, for that should be important only to me, but what kind of America I believe in.

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

“I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

“For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has been, and may someday be again, a Jew, or a

Quaker or a Unitarian or a Baptist. It was Virginia's harassment of Baptist preachers, for example, that helped lead to Jefferson's statute of religious freedom. Today I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you, until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped at a time of great national peril.

"Finally, I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end; where all men and all churches are treated as equal; where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice; where there is no Catholic vote, no anti-Catholic vote, no bloc voting of any kind; and where Catholics, Protestants and Jews, at both the lay and pastoral level, will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood.

"That is the kind of America in which I believe. And it represents the kind of presidency in which I believe, a great office that must neither be humbled by making it the instrument of any one religious group, nor tarnished by arbitrarily withholding its occupancy from the members of any one religious group. I believe in a president whose religious views are his own private affair, neither imposed by him upon the nation, or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office.

"I would not look with favor upon a president working to subvert the First Amendment's guarantees of religious liberty. Nor would our system of checks and balances permit him to do so. And neither do I look with favor upon those who would work to subvert Article VI of the Constitution by requiring a religious test, even by indirection, for it. If they disagree with that safeguard, they should be out openly working to repeal it.

"I want a chief executive whose public acts are responsible to all groups and obligated to none; who can attend any ceremony, service or dinner his office may appropriately require of him; and whose fulfillment of his presidential oath is not limited or conditioned by any religious oath, ritual or obligation.

"This is the kind of America I believe in, and this is the kind I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe. No one suggested then that we may have a 'divided loyalty,' that we did 'not believe in liberty,' or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened the 'freedoms for which our forefathers died.'

"And in fact ,this is the kind of America for which our forefathers died, when they fled here to escape religious test oaths that denied office to members of less favored churches; when they fought for the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom; and when they fought at the shrine I visited today, the Alamo. For side by side with Bowie and Crockett died



McCafferty and Bailey and Carey. But no one knows whether they were Catholic or not, for there was no religious test at the Alamo.

"I ask you tonight to follow in that tradition, to judge me on the basis of my record of 14 years in Congress, on my declared stands against an ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools, and against any boycott of the public schools (which I have attended myself), instead of judging me on the basis of these pamphlets and publications we all have seen that carefully select quotations out of context from the statements of Catholic church leaders, usually in other countries, frequently in other centuries, and always omitting, of course, the statement of the American Bishops in 1948, which strongly endorsed church-state separation, and which more nearly reflects the views of almost every American Catholic.

"I do not consider these other quotations binding upon my public acts. Why should you? But let me say, with respect to other countries, that I am wholly opposed to the state being used by any religious group, Catholic or Protestant, to compel, prohibit, or persecute the free exercise of any other religion.

"And I hope that you and I condemn with equal fervor those nations which deny their presidency to Protestants, and those which deny it to Catholics. And rather than cite the misdeeds of those who differ, I would cite the record of the Catholic Church in such nations as Ireland and France, and the independence of such statesmen as Adenauer and De Gaulle.

"But let me stress again that these are my views. For contrary to common newspaper usage, I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president, who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me.

"Whatever issue may come before me as president, on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject, I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise.

"But if the time should ever come, and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible, when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.

"But I do not intend to apologize for these views to my critics of either

Catholic or Protestant faith, nor do I intend to disavow either my views or my church in order to win this election.

“If I should lose on the real issues, I shall return to my seat in the Senate, satisfied that I had tried my best and was fairly judged. But if this election is decided on the basis that 40 million Americans lost their chance of being president on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser, in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people.

“But if, on the other hand, I should win the election, then I shall devote every effort of mind and spirit to fulfilling the oath of the presidency, practically identical, I might add, to the oath I have taken for 14 years in the Congress. For without reservation, I can ‘solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, so help me God.’”

So what does it say about one of the Republican presidential frontrunners that Kennedy’s speech from 1960 would make him almost throw up?

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & ‘Project Truth’* are also available there.

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## The Roots of US Religious Tolerance

**From the Archive:** Ex-Sen. Rick Santorum’s accusation that President Obama follows a “phony theology,” one not “based on the Bible,” revives the right-wing notion that the United States must be a “Christian nation” and that “separation of church and state” is a “myth,” a topic that Baptist Minister Howard Bess addressed in 2011.

By the Rev. Howard Bess (Originally published Jan. 21, 2011)

Most people do not realize the meaning of being a Baptist. Theologically, we cover the full spectrum from right to left. We are scattered politically throughout Republicans, Democrats, Tea Partiers and None of the Above. Our hallmark is freedom.

Differing opinions are our strength, and we feel free to speak what other religious folk might call heresy. We are suspicious of all hierarchies, and when we feel our freedom is being challenged, we are quick to start another church. Baptist of course. There are far more varieties of Baptists than all the products that will ever be produced by Heinz.

Though we now cover the world, Baptists are a uniquely American phenomenon, dating back to early colonial days when Roger Williams was driven out of Massachusetts by the Congregationalists. (Ironically, these Massachusetts Puritans had fled England to avoid persecution for their religious beliefs, only to land in America and begin persecuting others for their religious beliefs.)

In 1636, Williams founded Providence Plantation, the first American colony truly dedicated to the free practice of religion (though even in Rhode Island, Jews and Catholics were looked upon with suspicion).

Though Williams started the first Baptist church in America in Providence, I believe Baptists made their finest contribution to American life in Virginia in the years after the Revolution. The new United States, with 13 member states, did not know what to do with religion in America. Though Thomas Jefferson was the country's most prominent advocate of freedom of religion, another important figure was his neighbor, James Madison.

Neither Jefferson nor Madison liked what was going on in Virginia. At the time, Baptist preachers and other dissenters were required to get a government issued license to preach. Naturally the Baptist preachers kept on preaching without benefit of a license leading to whippings, fines and jail time. Still, they continued to preach. "One firebrand preacher named John Leland became friends with Madison and convinced him that there should be no state church, that a complete separation between church and state was the only answer.

This wall of separation was born in Virginia and a Baptist was the prime mover. Subsequently, this principle was embedded in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution with the mandate that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Since then, Baptists have remained in the forefront of the struggle to keep government out of religion. Our watchdog agency is the Baptist Joint Committee, a powerful Washington, D.C., lobby that regularly presents briefs before the

U.S. Supreme Court. BJC, now 75 years old, keeps Baptists across the country informed about the constant stream of religious freedom cases that come before the High Court.

In 2011, two church/state issues were making news, though under-reported in the daily newspapers. The first was President Barack Obama's announcement of new clarifying policies for government partnerships with faith-based organizations. For many years faith-based organizations have provided services that are funded by federal grants. However, under President George W. Bush, the funding of faith-based organizations was greatly expanded.

Without congressional approval or oversight, President Bush by executive order established a whole new federal agency, called the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Under it, President Bush was able to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to faith-based organizations.

On one level, the idea is not a bad one. Many faith-based agencies do wonderful work with people with special needs. Many times they have been shown to do tasks better and more effectively than government agencies. However, under the Bush program, violations of church-and-state separation were numerous. Large block grants were made to religious organizations with little oversight.

After taking office, President Obama endorsed the program but promised new regulations and better oversight. He issued the new policies, forbidding organizations to engage in explicitly religious activities. Government-funded programs must not include religious content. Many observers had hoped Obama would go further and require religious organizations to form separate not-for-profit entities. He chose not to take that step, while promising to closely monitor the programs and to require transparency in their operations.

The other looming issue is how the United States will treat the expanding religious diversity in America. Will government treat all religions evenhandedly or will some face discrimination? House Speaker John Boehner and Rep. Peter King, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, called for investigation of "radical" Muslims. Dare the Federal government investigate those of a particular religious persuasion?

J. Brent Walker, Executive Director of BJC, commented: "Ours is not a Christian nation, as some contend, but made up of many faiths, including now 17 percent who embrace no faith at all. Our plush pluralism is something to be celebrated, not something to be feared. And our biggest challenge today may be how we view Islam and treat our Muslim friends."

I am pleased to be a part of a tradition that celebrates religious freedom.

Diversity is good for us all.

**The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His e-mail address is [hdbss@mtaonline.net](mailto:hdbss@mtaonline.net).**

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## Onward-Marching Christian Soldiers

**From the Archive:** In 2008, Rick Santorum declared, “Satan has his sights on the United States of America.” Though sounding odd to many, Santorum’s Satan talk is common among right-wing Christians who have intervened in U.S. politics before, like President Clinton’s impeachment, as Frederick Clarkson noted in this 1998 article.

By Frederick Clarkson (Originally published in 1998)

Most attorneys who ascend into the rarefied atmosphere of media celebrity-hood are either dashing courtroom warriors, like O.J. Simpson’s Johnnie Cochran, or inside-the-Beltway power types, like Bill Clinton’s Robert Bennett. The Monica Lewinsky case broke that mold with the unlikely emergence of the family’s Los Angeles-based lawyer, the garrulous William Ginsburg, as a five-talk-shows-per-Sunday phenomenon.

But perhaps even more unusual – and less examined – is the entrance of Paula Jones’s lawyer, John Whitehead, into the exclusive “Burden of Proof” club of TV-courtroom stardom. As the Paula Jones case merged with the Monica Lewinsky case in 1998, the rumpled Whitehead became a fixture as a talking head on Nightline, CNN and other network news shows.

Yet, there has been only superficial attention to who Whitehead is and what he stands for – despite a lengthy public record of controversial remarks. During his legal-religious career, for instance, Whitehead has asserted that democracy is “heresy”; that the defining aspect of history is the “race war” between Christians and non-Christians; and that the harsh Calvinism of the “Puritan Fathers” is the standard to which temporal law should strive.

But, even as the TV networks ran up millions of dollars in expenses covering Monica and Paula, there was next to no attention to Whitehead’s religious-political goals. Those motives might normally have been expected to draw some interest, especially as the possibility grew that the Jones-Lewinsky controversy could lead to some form of impeachment proceedings against President Clinton (which it did later in 1998).

Still, more often than not, the Washington news media served only as a conveyor belt for P.R. boiler-plate. In a typical description, *The New York Times* called Whitehead's Rutherford Institute "a kind of evangelical Christian civil liberties union" – which is how Rutherford describes itself in its publicity material. The P.R. handouts just leave out "kind of."

Are Whitehead's beliefs too white-hot to handle? Or are reporters of a kinder and gentler generation merely being considerate of people whose religious beliefs are deeply held? Or is that sensitivity a cover for reporters and editors too timid to investigate and fully report potentially controversial beliefs for fear of being labeled religious bigots?

But as Whitehead and his organization sponsored a legal action aimed at crippling a president, it would seem reasonable to trace the trajectory of Whitehead's ideas and his career. In this case, there is a fairly straightforward story about his theocratic ideological roots. The story can be found in Whitehead's books and speeches, those of his close colleagues and founding documents of the Rutherford Institute.

### **The Mentor**

The man who launched Whitehead's career is Rousas John Rushdoony, perhaps the leading theocratic Christian thinker of the 20th Century. Rushdoony (who died in 2001 at the age of 84) headed the secretive Chalcedon Foundation in Vallecito, California, and was the founder of what is called the Christian Reconstructionist movement. "Reconstructionism" asserts that in order to pave the way for the "Kingdom of God," the world must develop theocratic republics ruled by "Biblical law."

Rushdoony's magnum opus, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, was published in 1973. It opposes democracy and argues that the Ten Commandments and the Biblical stories of their adjudication in Old Testament Israel provide the only legitimate legal blueprint for society.

Although few adhere fully to Rushdoony's view, such prominent conservatives as Howard Phillips and Robert Billings credit Rushdoony's work as the intellectual catalyst for the Christian Right. Billings, a founder of the Moral Majority, once said, "if it weren't for [Rushdoony's] books, none of us would be here." [See David Cantor's *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance & Pluralism*.]

The man whose books launched the Christian Right also inspired and guided the career of John Whitehead. Rushdoony supplied the outline for Whitehead's first book, *The Separation Illusion*, which the young attorney researched in his mentor's library. Published in 1977 – with an introduction by Rushdoony –

Whitehead's book attacks the constitutional doctrine of the separation of church and state.

The book advocates the reorganization of the United States as a "Christian Nation" under the rationale that "the Christians are a spiritual race chosen to serve as the sons of God." But Whitehead envisions something worse than second-class citizenship for what he calls "the other spiritual race." He warns ominously that "doom happens to be their lot."

Whitehead invokes the intolerant Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as the natural role models for this new government. "The Calvinist doctrine of predestination separates mankind into those who are damned and those who are saved," Whitehead wrote in *The Separation Illusion*. "The elect of God," Whitehead continued, "partake of divine favor while the non-elect are cursed."

The U.S. Constitution's recognition that all religious faiths are equal under the law is anathema to Whitehead. In his book, he argues that the doctrine of separation of church and state causes "the true God" to be an "outcast" and a "criminal."

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Whitehead insists, than the notion that everyone is "equal in the eyes of God." Whitehead declares: "To hold that the Christian religion is no better than Buddhism or Judaism is blasphemy."

Following this line of thought, Whitehead disdains religious pluralism as explicitly anti-Christian. He argues that "the atheists, the American Jewish Committee and the Synagogue Council of America" colluded to "eradicate" state-sponsored prayer in public schools.

Their motive? The "sons of darkness believed that cutting the reciting of prayer from school would aid in their gaining control of the system," Whitehead wrote. "The public schools are satanic imitations of the true God's institutional church." He asserts that when the U.S. Supreme Court decides cases on the basis of religious equality, it "merely assaults the one faith."

In his book, Whitehead views this conflict between Christian theocrats and civil libertarians in apocalyptic terms. "The Christians serve God and the non-Christians serve the leader of the ungodly, Satan. Conflict results. It's total spiritual warfare, and it is being fought every second of every day."

Whitehead sees this war as going badly. "At one time Christians had command of the United States," he wrote. But "through toleration they receded until the non-Christians grew too strong to combat any longer." Ambiguously, Whitehead adds that this struggle is "an arena of both spiritual and physical warfare."

These opinions from Whitehead's book also were not pulled out of context, nor are they the reflections of youthful ideological excess. They were penned as part of a thoroughly argued book by a 30-year-old constitutional lawyer. That book then launched Whitehead's career as a "Christian lawyer" and author of other books sounding similar notes. [For a more detailed description of Whitehead's views, see Chip Berlet's "Clinton, Conspiracism and Civil Society," a paper published by Political Research Associates.]

## **The Institute**

In 1982, five years after publication of *The Separation Illusion*, Whitehead founded the Rutherford Institute in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Institute, essentially a legal project of Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation, was named after the 17th Century Scottish revolutionary Samuel Rutherford, who called for adherence to God's laws over those of the King of England. Rushdoony was a member of the Rutherford Institute's small founding board.

At a Reconstructionist conference in 1983, Rushdoony spoke of "our plans, through Rutherford ... to fight the battle against statism and the freedom of Christ's Kingdom." He introduced Whitehead as a man "chosen by God" for this work.

Joining Whitehead and Rushdoony on the founding Rutherford board was Howard Ahmanson Jr., at that time a director of Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation and its biggest funder. In a rare 1985 interview with the *Orange County Register*, the usually secretive Ahmanson declared, "my purpose is total integration of Biblical law into our lives."

Heir to a huge California savings and loan fortune, Ahmanson was a leading financier of Christian Right organizations and conservative California politicians. Ahmanson-backed Christian Right candidates tipped the scale of political power in Sacramento toward the Republicans and made the Christian Right a potent faction in the state's GOP.

Another founding director of Rutherford was Frank Schaeffer, son of the late theologian Francis Schaeffer, who was another mentor to Whitehead. The elder Schaeffer's books, *A Christian Manifesto* and *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, were influential rallying cries for evangelical politicians.

Rounding out Rutherford's founding board was Jerry Nims, who worked with Whitehead on a legal project for Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, which was the leading Christian Right political organization of the 1970s and early 1980s. At one point, Nims took over the reins of the now-defunct Moral Majority.

The Rutherford Institute is best known for "specializing in the defense of anti-



abortion protesters and 'parents rights' to home school their children," according to sociologist Sara Diamond. [See Diamond's *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times*.] Under the rubric of "religious freedom," these cases have benefitted conservative Christians seeking greater latitude to influence public policy and to spread their evangelical doctrines.

### **The Agenda**

But there is a more aggressive plan behind the Reconstructionist revolution. Under a "reconstructed" Christian nation, many offenses would result in the death penalty, including crimes relating to sexuality and religion. Death would be the punishment for adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, promiscuity, heresy, apostasy, blasphemy and "propagation of false doctrines." [See R.J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*.]

Functioning as the legal arm for the militant wing of the Christian Right, Whitehead's anti-abortion legal work suggests a tolerance for violence or "physical warfare" in the pursuit of political goals. Rutherford attorneys have represented Operation Rescue militants in connection with abortion clinic blockades. Although Whitehead claims that he is opposed to the use of violence, he offered in 1994 to represent Paul Hill, the admitted and convicted murderer of an abortion doctor.

Yet, as the Rutherford Institute grew in prominence, Whitehead distanced himself from Rushdoony and some of his mentor's more controversial positions. Whitehead has said he is not a Reconstructionist, and Rushdoony left the Rutherford board of directors (years before his death). But unlike other public figures who have broken with a political movement or school of thought, Whitehead offered no written explanation of his supposed change of heart and mind.

When writer Robert Boston asked Whitehead about *The Separation Illusion*, Whitehead dissembled, insisting that "he has not read the book 'in a long time,' adding that there are probably things in it he would not stand by today." But Whitehead did not specify which of his views he might recant. [*Church & State Magazine*, March 1998]

Whitehead's explicitly theocratic world view raises other questions as he plays a central role in hobbling President Clinton over alleged sexual impropriety. Does Whitehead see the Paula Jones case – and its new spin-off criminal investigation – as a way to impose punishments on an enemy of a "Christian nation?" Is Whitehead's institute acting as God's hammer while special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, another Christian conservative, is the anvil?

In *The Separation Illusion*, Whitehead declares that "the government is to punish

the evildoer while protecting the godly in administering God's justice." Arguably from that point of view, legal action against perceived immorality in the person of President Clinton might move the United States in the direction of Whitehead's idealized Calvinist society – and perhaps lessen the severity of God's "judgment" against the nation for allegedly falling away from that standard.

But whatever his personal objectives, Whitehead's theocratic agenda would seem to merit at least as much media attention as Paula Jones's cosmetic make-over or Monica Lewinsky's choice of entree at a pricy Washington restaurant.

Frederick Clarkson is author of *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy*, from which this article is adapted. See <http://www.frederickclarkson.com/>

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## Santorum Abuses 'E Pluribus Unum'

**Exclusive:** In 1776, when America's 13 colonies were uniting to fight for independence, they adopted a slogan, "E Pluribus Unum, from many, one." Now, GOP presidential frontrunner Rick Santorum has hijacked the motto to mean that a diverse United States must live under a single Biblical code, notes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Americans get manipulated daily by the Right's false references to U.S. founding principles, most recently by Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum and his misrepresentation of what "E Pluribus Unum" means.

The phrase, Latin for "from many, one," was a motto of the 13 original colonies banding together in 1776 to demand independence from the United Kingdom. It has remained a national slogan for the togetherness of a diverse country ever since.

However, Santorum has transformed this motto of unity into the latest cultural wedge issue of division, claiming it means the United States, as "a moral enterprise," must reject government secularism respecting religious diversity in favor of "traditional Judeo-Christian principles" based on the Bible.

At a campaign event in Tucson, Arizona, on Wednesday, Santorum said, "The greatness of America is we have such diversity, with the proviso – 'E Pluribus Unum, out of many, one.'" Essentially we are going to need to hold together on some set of moral codes and principles." The ex-senator from Pennsylvania then added, "And we're seeing very evidently what the president's moral codes and

principles are about. We see a president who is systematically trying to crush the traditional Judeo-Christian principles in this country.”

In other words, Santorum believes that despite the wide-ranging differences in the United States regarding religious and moral issues, Americans must abide by one Biblical standard of “traditional Judeo-Christian principles,” Santorum’s version of “E Pluribus Unum, from many, one.”

Yet, America’s founding documents, particularly the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, created a secular system of government, one that guaranteed both freedom of and freedom from religion. Americans were free to practice their religious faiths but they could not use the government to impose their religious views on others.

The Constitution, which is as secular as any document could be, contains not a single word regarding the supremacy of Judeo-Christian religions or values. It makes no reference to God at all. Indeed, its singular reference to religion is that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

After the Constitution was ratified in 1788, a Bill of Rights was added in 1791. The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” That means the government can do nothing to promote religion or punish people for their religious views, the so-called separation of church and state.

However, it has become a central goal of the Religious Right to confuse Americans about these core principles, by insisting that contrary to the governing documents that the Founders created they really intended a form of theocracy committed to Biblical teachings and imposing religious tenets on the people of the United States.

Similarly, the Right has snatched a few quotes out of context to transform James Madison and other drafters of the Constitution into people who opposed a strong central government and favored a system of states rights, when the historical reality is nearly the opposite: the framers scrapped the Articles of Confederation because that original governing structure hamstrung the new nation with a weak central government dominated by “independent” states. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Right’s Inside-Out Constitution.”](#)]

Now, Rick Santorum is using America’s founding motto, “E Pluribus Unum,” as if it meant that out of the Many differing views that Americans had then and have now about public religion and personal morality that One set of religious/moral standards, based on “traditional Judeo-Christian principles,” must be

established for the United States and imposed on its people.

Presumably, a President Rick Santorum would be in charge of selecting which Biblical edicts must be followed.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

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