

of local men during the infamous Galipoli landings. He was a respected magistrate, popular for his genial and unpretentious manner. There was little in his appearance or attire to distinguish the Master of the Ynysfor Hunt from his little band of followers, mostly farmers and youths, all of whom hunted on foot over mountainous terrain.

"Jack Jones was a plain-spoken, roughly dressed, soldierly man with no concern for social pretensions. Although approaching his sixtieth birthday and thus nearly twice Patrick's age, he possessed a constitution so tough and resilient as to place him almost invariably foremost in pursuit of the fox," says Tolstoy. He was the first to wield a pickaxe or crowbar upon arrival at the fox's den. He was blunt in speech, and he valued a man "purely by the extent of his contribution to the concerns of the Hunt." He never spared himself.

Remarkably, O'Brian, who was never deferential to authority, "accepted the most peremptory commands and roughest abuse from the Master of the Ynysfor Hunt without a tinge of resentment. "He

CAPTAIN JONES WAS THE **PROTOTYPE FOR CAPTAIN JACK AUBREY**, AN OFFICER WHO ALWAYS LIKED **"A TAUT BUT HAPPY SHIP."**

recognized Captain Jones's instinctive authority and skill as a leader, which is why, in Tolstoy's opinion, Jones "played a more fundamental part in Patrick's fiction than that of affording realism to his descriptions of fox-hunting."

Captain Jones was the prototype for Capt. Jack Aubrey, an officer who, as described in *The Far Side of the World*, always liked "a taut but happy ship" with flogging a most infrequent occurrence. Tolstoy notes, quite accurately, "One of the great strengths of Patrick's portrayal of Jack Aubrey lies in its absence of sentimentality." Like Jack Aubrey aboard the *Surprise*, "Jack Jones exercised nonsense, efficient control over the members of the Hunt."

D.H. Lawrence once insisted: "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale." Despite

Patrick O'Brian's serious personality disorders and human flaws, the reader is left with his remarkable stories of Jack Aubrey and his "particular friend," Stephen Maturin. The most interesting question is how this miraculous literary triumph emerged from the crooked timber of the author's humanity.

Genius is one explanation. O'Brian was essentially an autodidact who, with only the minimum of formal education supplemented by evening classes at London University, learned history, literature, mathematics, art, French, Latin, naval lore, and natural history. Thus, his literary success is a very personal one.

But it is hard to conceive of any genius producing such accomplishments, in the realm of historical fiction at least, absent an underlying culture of learning, tradition, social affection, and humanity as vibrant as that of pre-war Britain, Wales, and also Ireland, whose people and culture he genuinely treasured despite his lack of common ancestry.

This culture is rapidly becoming a mere artifact in the museum of the past. With diminishing population, cut adrift

from its unique history and traditions by multiculturalism, secularism, and political correctness, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Europe generally are experiencing the dissolution of their cohesive culture and society. In *The Abolition of Britain: From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana*, Peter Hitchens warned his countrymen, "a forest that has taken centuries to grow can be cut down in weeks, or even hours, especially if the foresters have grown indolent and slack, and take their charge for granted." ■

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[*Impostor: How George W. Bush Bankrupted America and Betrayed the Reagan Legacy*, Bruce Bartlett, Doubleday, 320 pages]

## Counterfeit Conservative

By Doug Bandow

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH took office to the sustained applause of America's conservative movement. In 2000, he defeated the liberal environmentalist Al Gore, abruptly terminated the legacy of the even more hated Bill Clinton, and gave Republicans control of both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. A few cynics were suspicious of Bush's understanding of and commitment to conservative principles, but most on the Right welcomed his inauguration.

Five years later, the traditional conservative agenda lies in ruins. Government is bigger, spending is higher, and Washington is more powerful. The national government has intruded further into state and local concerns. Federal officials have sacrificed civil liberties and constitutional rights while airily demanding that the public trust them not to abuse their power.

The U.S. has engaged in aggressive war to promote democracy and undertaken an expensive foreign-aid program. The administration and its supporters routinely denounce critics as partisans and even traitors. Indeed, the White House defenestrates anyone who acknowledges that reality sometimes conflicts with official fantasies.

In short, it is precisely the sort of government that conservatives once feared would result from liberal control in Washington.

Still, conservative criticism remains muted. Mumbled complaints are heard at right-wing gatherings. Worries are expressed on blogs and internet discussions. A few activists such as former Congressman Bob Barr challenge

administration policies. And a few courageous publications more directly confront Republicans who, like the pigs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, have morphed into what they originally opposed.

The criticisms are about to get louder, however. Bruce Bartlett has been involved in conservative politics for a quarter century. He authored one of the leading books on supply-side economics, worked in the Reagan administration, and held a position at the National Center for Policy Analysis—until the Dallas-based group fired him, apparently fearful of financial retaliation arising from his sharp criticisms of the administration.

That the truth is so feared is particularly notable because Bartlett's criticism is measured, largely limited to economics. Bartlett notes in passing his concern over Iraq, federalism, and Bush's "insistence on absolute, unquestioning loyalty, which stifles honest criticism and creates a cult of personality around him." These issues warrant a separate book, since it is apparent that Americans have died, not, perhaps, because Bush lied, but certainly because Bush and his appointees are both arrogant and incompetent.

Although modest in scope, *Impostor* is a critically important book. Bartlett demonstrates that Bush is no conservative. He notes: "I write as a Reaganite, by which I mean someone who believes in the historical conservative philosophy of small government, federalism, free trade, and the Constitution as originally understood by the Founding Fathers."

Bush believes in none of these things. His conservatism, such as it is, is cultural rather than political. Writes Bartlett, "Philosophically, he has more in common with liberals, who see no limits to state power as long as it is used to advance what they think is right." Until now, big-government conservatism was widely understood to be an oxymoron.

For this reason, Bartlett contends that Bush has betrayed the Reagan legacy. Obviously, Ronald Reagan had only

indifferent success in reducing government spending and power. For this there were many reasons, including Democratic control of the House and the need to compromise to win more money for the military.

Yet Reagan, in sharp contrast to Bush, read books, magazines, and newspapers. (On the campaign plane in 1980 he handed articles to me to review.) He believed in limited government even if he fell short of achieving that goal. And he understood that he was sacrificing his basic principles

**BUSH'S CONSERVATISM IS CULTURAL RATHER THAN POLITICAL. WRITES BARTLETT, "PHILOSOPHICALLY, HE HAS MORE IN COMMON WITH LIBERALS, WHO SEE NO LIMITS TO STATE POWER AS LONG AS IT IS USED TO ADVANCE WHAT THEY THINK IS RIGHT."**

when he forged one or another political compromise. George W. Bush has no principles to sacrifice. Rather, complains Bartlett, Bush "is simply a partisan Republican, anxious to improve the fortunes of his party, to be sure. But he is perfectly willing to jettison conservative principles at a moment's notice to achieve that goal."

Which means Bush's conservative image bears no relation to his actions. Indeed, reading *Impostor* leaves one thinking of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, as if the administration's real record is depicted in a painting hidden from public view.

Bartlett's analysis is devastating. He begins with process rather than substance, Bush's "apparent disdain for serious thought and research to develop his policy initiatives." In this way, Bartlett helps explain why Bush's policies are almost uniformly bad.

As someone who served on a presidential staff, I can affirm that developing policy is never easy. Departments push their agendas, political allies and interest groups fight for influence, and legislators intrude. But the best hope for good policy, and especially good policy that also is good politics, is an open policy-making process.

That is precisely the opposite of the Bush White House, which views obsessive secrecy as a virtue and demands lockstep obedience. Bartlett reviews the experience of several officials who fell out with the administration, as well as the downgrading of policy agencies and the "total subordination of analysis to short-term politics."

The biggest problem is Bush himself, who—though a decent person who might make a good neighbor—suffers from unbridled hubris. His absolute certainty appears to be matched only by his

extraordinary ignorance. His refusal to reconsider his own decisions and hold his officials accountable for obvious errors have proved to be a combustible combination. As a result, writes Bartlett, "Bush is failing to win any converts to the conservative cause."

The consequences have been dire. Bartlett, long an advocate of supply-side economics, is critical of the Bush tax program. A rebate was added and the program was sold on Keynesian grounds of getting the economy moving. The politics might have been good, but the economics was bad. Unfortunately, writes Bartlett, the rebate "and other add-ons to the original Bush proposal ballooned its cost, forcing a scale-back of some important provisions, which undermined their effectiveness." Although rate reductions have the greatest economic impact, rates were lowered less and less quickly.

Bartlett also criticizes Bush on trade, on which he views him as potentially the worst president since Herbert Hoover. "Since then, all presidents except George W. Bush have made free trade a cornerstone of their international economic policy. While his rhetoric on the subject is little different than theirs, Bush's actions have been far more protectionist."

Many *TAC* readers may view Bush as insufficiently protectionist. However, the obvious inconsistency—rhetorical commitment to open international markets mixed with protectionist splurges—is not good policy. Here, as elsewhere, Bush’s actions are supremely political, where the nation’s long-term economic health is bartered away for short-term political gain.

However, it is on spending that the Bush administration has most obviously and most dramatically failed. Bartlett entitles one chapter “On the Budget, Clinton was Better.” Not just Clinton but George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, and even Lyndon Johnson, depending on the measure used.

In this area *Impostor* makes for particularly depressing reading. The administration is not just spendthrift. It is dishonest. Given the administration’s

foreign-policy deceptions, it should come as no surprise that the administration cares little about the truth in fiscal matters. Writes Bartlett:

As budget expert Stan Collender has pointed out, the Bush Administration had a habit of putting out inaccurate budget numbers. The deficit in its 2004 budget appears to have been deliberately overestimated just so that a lower figure could be reported right before the election, thus giving the illusion of budgetary improvement. The following year, the deficit projected in January 2005 was also significantly higher than estimated in the mid-session budget review in July. This led Collender to conclude that budget numbers produced by the Bush Administration ‘should not be taken seriously.’

Like the typical Democratic demagogue, Bush has used spending to buy votes whenever possible. In this, of course, he has been joined by the Republican Congress. But his lack of commitment is evident from just one statistic: Bush has yet to veto a single bill. One has to go back almost two centuries to find another full-term president who did not veto even one measure.

In fact, the Republican president and Republican Congress have been full partners in bankrupting the nation. The low point was undoubtedly passage of the Medicare drug benefit, to which Bartlett devotes one chapter. The GOP majority misused House rules and employed a dubious set of carrots and sticks to turn around an apparent 216 to 218 loss. Worse was the administration’s conduct. The administration shamelessly lied about the program’s costs, covered up the truth, and threatened to fire Medicare’s chief actuary if he talked to Congress. The bill is badly drafted and, more importantly, adds \$18 trillion to Medicare’s unfunded liability.

In Bartlett’s view, this might be the worst single piece of legislation in U.S. history, which would be quite a legacy.

Writes Bartlett, “It will cost vast sums the nation cannot afford, even if its initial budgetary projections prove to be accurate, which is highly doubtful. It will inevitably lead to higher taxes and price controls that will reduce the supply of new lifesaving drugs.” In short, an allegedly conservative president inaugurated the biggest expansion of the welfare state in four decades.

Bartlett believes that tax hikes are inevitable, and he offers some decidedly unconservative observations on these issues, including the desirability of imposing a Value-Added Tax. He also speculates on the political future and a likely “Republican crack-up.”

But the core of his book remains his analysis of the Bush record. Bush, Bartlett believes, is likely to be seen as another Richard Nixon:

There has been an interesting transformation of Richard Nixon over the last twenty years or so. Whereas once he was viewed as an archconservative, increasing numbers of historians now view him as basically a liberal, at least on domestic policy. They have learned to look past Nixon’s rhetoric and methods to the substance of his policies, and discovered that there is almost nothing conservative about them. So it is likely to be with George W. Bush.

It is almost certainly too late to save the Bush presidency. *Impostor* demonstrates that the problems are systemic, well beyond the remedy of a simple change in policy or personnel. There may still be time, however, to save the conservative movement. But the hour is late. Unless the Right soon demonstrates that it is no longer Bush’s obsequious political tool, it may never escape his destructive legacy. ■

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# Ugly Americans on the March



“This is not an easy time to be American. Your motives are questioned, actions vilified, values mocked. ... Many Americans venturing overseas

feel that they are held to be culpable merely for the sound of their accent. ... There is a grave danger in this visceral hostility. The number of Americans who believe the US should mind its own business and let other countries get along on their own has leapt in only three years from 30 percent to 42 percent...”

This editorial comes from the *London Times*, a Murdoch paper, to be sure, but it makes a lot of sense. Many American Winter Olympians must have felt the chill. Never have I heard louder cheering than when tiny Finland outskated and outscored the good old U.S. of A., whose hockey players concentrated on body checks rather than accurate passing and precise shooting. David versus Goliath fans would have had a field day. One side was big, strong, and tried to bully its opponent into making mistakes. The other was smart, swift, and relied on skill rather than brawn. I don't think I have ever rooted against America, but this time I did—just as I rooted against the bragging Bode Miller, who despite being among the favorites in Torino ended up with egg on his face.

Yes, I'm afraid it is a lousy time to be an American abroad. Actually, there's more anti-Bushism than anti-Americanism. I live in Switzerland and England for seven to eight months a year, the rest in New York. I have never seen it so bad, not even during the closing days of the Vietnam War. At least back then we had a big Soviet bear to worry about. Europeans may be lazy and laid back, but they knew whose tanks or bombs would stop the commies if they ever crossed over into Western Europe. For some strange reason, Saddam Hussein's legions never impressed old Europe. Nor did the Taliban. Ergo, Uncle Sam is

now seen as just a big bad bully shoving people around, and if the good uncle can get poor little me angry at his meddling, just think what he's done for traditional America-haters.

Mind you, there's more. Bush's lopsided foray into Iraq started the disenchantment among many Euros who loved and admired America. But then came the Bush style, reflected by his cabinet and his advisers, the dreaded neocons. This churlish, unchivalrous manner offends many Europeans.

I have just finished debating at the Oxford Union against the motion that “Hurricane Katrina blew away the myth of U.S. racial equality.” I was put through the grinder for defending the government and putting the blame where it belonged: the local kleptocracy.

**THE ANTAGONISM EMANATES FROM A FERVENT DISLIKE OF THOSE WHO WERE BEHIND THE UNILATERAL AND DUPLICITOUS AGGRESSION IN IRAQ. BASICALLY THE NEOCONS.**

No one wanted to know. America, according to the Oxford crowd, is a racist bully who kills Iraqis like flies and lets black Americans die because they're black. Although my side lost gracefully, we all sensed that there was more to it than just Katrina. In the United States, the top 10 percent of income earners receive six times that of the lowest 10 percent. This earnings gap is staggering for most Europeans, especially students ready to go out into the cruel world. In the old continent, the richest 10 percent earn only three times more than the lowest 10 percent.

Much of the aversion toward America is not against the culture, traditions, or values. Many Europeans claim the same

values for themselves. The antagonism emanates from a fervent dislike of those who were behind the unilateral and duplicitous aggression in Iraq. Basically the neocons. Now word is out that Washington wants to get tougher—with Iran this time, now that the administration has learned the difference between the two neighboring countries. Alas, the lessons from Iraq have obviously not sunk in. The “war on terrorism” has now become “the long war,” a fact my colleague Pat Buchanan predicted three years ago.

It is a very typical American belief that assertiveness and threats are essential macho qualities. And this administration is particularly macho and proud of it. Yet bombing Iran would not only escalate the conflict between Islam and the West, it would help recruit terrorists and suicide bombers in untold numbers. Even the threat of an attack is encouraging Muslims to enlist. And the argument does not hold water. Even if Iran did

develop nuclear weapons—and they are far away in the future—the theory goes that it would attack Israel. But Iranians are not crazy, nor does any Iranian leader wish to commit national suicide. The idea is as ludicrous as the one that Saddam was 45 minutes away from attacking us with WMD.

Spite and vindictiveness against America on the part of Europeans hardly seems sensible. Yet the powers that be in D.C. are not helping. Trying to please hard-liners in Israel by starving the Palestinians—because they democratically elected Hamas—is terrorism in itself, or so many fair-minded people see it. The Ugly American is back on the warpath, I'm afraid. ■