

# ON SIMPLE HUMAN DECENCY

BY BEN METCALF

Before I attempt to fill these pages with my disgust, which the odd reader who knows me will surely expect, I am obliged to address a preliminary concern, which that same odd reader may safely ignore. Some time has passed since I last raised my voice to the multitude, and whereas literary taste does not seem to have advanced much in the interim, and I assume is still arrayed so as to engage only the weak-minded and dull, I find that I am no longer able to discern with any accuracy where the bounds of simple decency lie. This would bother me less than does the taste issue were it not for the fact that ground gained or lost in the theater of decency tends now and then to affect the law, and it has long been a personal goal of mine to avoid capture and imprisonment.

I am therefore led to wonder what the common citizen is allowed to "say" anymore, in print or otherwise, and still feel reasonably sure that some indignant team of G-men, or else a pair of gung-ho local screws, will not drag him away to a detention center, there to act out, with the detainee as a prop, that familiar scene in which one hero cop or another is patriotically unable to resist certain outbursts against the detainee and what were once imagined to be the detainee's constitutional rights. Because I am loath to violate whatever fresh new mores the people have agreed upon, or have been told they agree upon, and because I do not care to have my ass kicked repeatedly in a holding cell while I beg to see a lawyer, I almost hesitate to ask the following question. I will ask it, though, out of what used to be called simple human decency:

*Am I allowed to write that I would like to hunt down George W. Bush, the President of the United States and kill him with my bare hands?*

Let me be clear that I have no wish to perform such a deed in fact, nor do I want anyone else to destroy bodily what is, at least in the technical sense, a fellow human being. (Let me be equally clear that the above qualification, although true, is intended primarily as a legal ploy and should in no way be attributed to my claimed pacifism, which today's prosecutor might find a way to use against me. I would also like excused from the proceedings my personal feelings for George W. Bush, embarrassment and rage, as they could probably be turned to my disadvantage as well.) In truth, I bring neither a message nor a promise of violence. I seek only to gauge what level of discourse is still acceptable in this country by asking, in the hope that I might someday participate in that discourse, whether I am free to posit that it would probably be great fun, and a boon to all mankind, if I were to slaughter the President of the United States with my bare hands.

This caution is despicable, yes, but it cannot be helped. If I am to remain at large, then here and there a sentence will need to be perverted. I harbor no desire to become a litmus test for a justice system I already understand to be base, or to look on from the dock as my words are converted into mathematical symbols so many Americans now expect them to be, indicative of quantities rather than qualities, each best thought of as a price so as to aid in the computation of a verdict or a bill. All I ask is these particular words be read literally, which I gather is not yet the same as their being received as a dumb stream of numbers.

In 1917, before even a handful of Presidents had been offed (and when Wilson, one of the worst, remained on), our first red-scare Congress resolved to build up a legislative wall between the chief executive and his many potential executioners. Murder was already a crime in this country, as was the attempt to commit murder, but the law did not differentiate between a President and a dirty voter, at least where victimhood was concerned, despite the fact the President clearly was not of the people, was not a common citizen given great responsibility by the people, but was rather a great man in need of uncommon protection from the people. That is, he was a party hack, often delusional, whose permission to rob and mislead the people for the benefit of his friends had not yet been cemented into law, and whose ability to perform that function was being compromised every time one of the suckers managed to shoot him.

I hardly mean to imply that George W. Bush is a delusional party hack whose aim is to rob and mislead us for the benefit of his friends. That idea deserves to be stated outright: George W. Bush is a delusional party hack whose aim is to rob and mislead us for the benefit of his friends. What I mean to imply is that his free ride on our backs was made possible by the clever solution Congress found to its conundrum back in 1917: a law that deems guilty of a federal offense anyone who knowingly and willfully deposits for conveyance in the mail...any letter, paper, writing, print, missive, or document containing any threat to take the life, to kidnap, or to



REX BABIN

*inflict bodily harm upon the President of the United States...or knowingly and willfully otherwise makes such a threat...*

Consider for a moment the simple brilliance of the language here. It presupposes, not always wrongly, that the stupidity of the American character will demand an announcement of any grand and deadly intention beforehand, and it

manages also, via that lovely invocation of the mail, to implicate as a possible assassin (and certainly an "inciter to violence") anyone who does not adequately curb his anger in a publication. All publications were then, and most still are, conveyed through the mail. *Touché.*

The non-postal aspect of this edict ("or knowingly and willfully otherwise makes any such threat") has proved handy many times over in the persecution of those unlucky or unwise enough to swear a physical oath against the President within earshot of a fink, such as when a prospective Vietnam draftee (*Watts v. United States*) was overheard to say, "If they ever make me carry a rifle the first man I want to get in my sights is LBJ"; or when the Black Panther David Hilliard was said to have said, "We will kill Nixon" (and went somehow unkill himself); or when an obviously disturbed man (*United States v. Fredrickson*) was quoted as saying he would "have to kill" Jimmy Carter; or when an already confined mental patient (*United States v. Howell*) calmly explained to a Regan-era FBI agent that "If released, I would make my way to Washington and kill him — I will kill the President"; or when a brig-bound and pissed-off sailor (*United States v. Ogren*) was heard by his guard to say of Bill Clinton, "Hell, fuck the President...If I could get out of here right now, I would get a gun and kill the bastard."

Yet as much as I admire these flouters of a law that serves not public need but rather the greed of a conceited oligarchy, I suspect that they are but secondary targets in this on going raid, and I doubt their separation from the American flock has improved Presidential safety so much as it has lessened the willingness of marginally more literate lambs, the ones who publish, to test their shepherds with anything sharper than the conventionally approved tropes of the day.

Here are those tropes: the President is ignorant; the President is cruel; the President is a zealot; the President is a tool of the corporations; the President hides his agenda from the people; the President's agenda endangers the people; the President is a thief; the President is a madman; the President is a drunkard; the President is a criminal; the President is protected by his cronies; the President is a smug prevaricator; the President should be removed from office.

True, George W. Bush is an ignorant, cruel, avaricious, close-minded, sneaky, irresponsible, thieving, brain-damaged frat boy with a drinking problem and a taste for bloodshed whose numerous crimes have been abetted by the moral corruption of his Party cohort and whose contempt for American military lives alone warrants his impeachment, but what has it ever won us to say so? How has it profited the people for their writers to argue that a wealthy, comfortable citizen deserves a wealthy comfortable retirement when we all know full well that he has earned confinement and perhaps even a request for the barbaric death penalty he so loudly supports? What goal, besides an impoverished guarantee of my own personal "freedom," is served by a refusal to acknowledge that I might easily, and enjoyably, rid us of this man forever with my hands?

## IMPEACHMENT? NO. IMPALEMENT!

BY WILL DURST

I don't know about you guys, but I am so sick and tired of these lying, thieving, holier-than-thou, rightwing, cruel, crude, rude, gauche, coarse, crass, cocky, corrupt, dishonest, debauched, degenerate, dissolute, swaggering, lawyer shooting, bullhorn, shouting, infrastructure destroying, buck passing, hysterical, criminal, history defying, finger pointing, puppy stomping, roommate appointing, pretzel choking, collateral damaging, aspersion casting, wedding party bombing, clearcutting, torturing, jobs outsourcing, torture outsourcing, election fixing, women's rights eradicating, Medicare cutting, a con outh, spiteful, boorish, vengeful, jingoistic, homophobic, xenophobic, xylophobic, racist, sexist, ageist, fascist, cashist, audaciously stupid, brazenly selfish, lethally ignorant, journalist purchasing, genocide ignoring, corporation kissing, poverty inducing, crooked, coercive, autocratic, primitive, uppity, high-handed, domineering, arrogant, inhuman, inhumane, inbred, inept, insipid, incapable, incompetent, ineffectual, insolent, insincere, know-it-all, snotty, pompous, contemptuous, supercilious, gutless, spineless, shameless, avaricious, noxious, poisonous, imperious, merciless, graceless, tactless, brutish, brutal, Karl Roving, backward thinking, persistent vegetative state grandstanding, nuclear option threatening, evolution denying, irony deprived, consciously depraved, conceited, perverted, preemptory invading, thirty-five day vacation taking, bribe soliciting, hellish, smarty pants, loudmouth, bullying, swell headed, ethics eluding, domestic spying, medical marijuana busting, Halliburtoning, narcissistic, undiplomatic, blustering, malevolent, demonizing, Duke Cunninghaming, hectoring, dry drunk, Muslim baiting, hurricane disregarding, oil company hugging, judge packing, science disputing, faith based advocating, armament selling, nonsense spewing, education ravaging, whiny, insane, unscrupulous, lily livered, greedy (exponential factor fifteen), fraudulent, delusional, CIA outing, redistricting, anybody who disagrees with them slandering, fact twisting, ally alienating, betraying, chickenhawk, sell out, quising, god & flag waving, scare mongering, Cindy Sheehan libeling, smirking, bastardly, voting machine tampering, sociopathic, cowardly, treasonous, Constitution shredding, oppressive, antagonistic, vulgar, trust funding, nontipping, tyrannizing, peace hating, water and air and ground and media polluting (which is pretty much all the polluting you can get), deadly, traitorous, con man, swindling, pernicious, lethal, illegal, haughty, venomous, virulent, mephitic, egotistic, bloodthirsty, yellowbelly, hypocritical, Oepidal, did I say evil, I'm not sure if I said evil, because I want to make sure I say evil...EVIL, cretinous, slime buckets in the Bush administration that I could just spit. Impeachment? Hell no. Impalement. Upon the sharp and righteous sword of the people's justice. Make it a curtain rod. Because it would hurt more.

Political comic writer, actor, radio talkshow host Will Durst wrote this for *The Progressive*.

**FOOTNOTES**

1 Especially the angry seaman, who reportedly produced this further ejaculation against Clinton: "I'm going to shove a gun up his ass, and I'm going to blow his fucking brains out." Where is that spirit today?

2 Reader, is this honestly you?

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