

The last Republican

Investigative journalist Max Blumenthal looked deep into the heart of the Republican Party. What he found should make the GOP blush

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Sometimes, you admire someone before you meet him. Such was the case with Max Blumenthal.

A little more than a year ago, I came across a YouTube video called "Generation Chickenhawk," an eight-minute piece on the 2007 College Republican National Convention. In it, a whole cadre of young men and women, done up in business attire, wax philosophical about why the Iraq War is necessary ("We went there because al Qaeda is there.") and why they hadn't enlisted ("I can't because of medical reasons."), all the while, completely embarrassing themselves. It's pretty hysterical. Until you realize how disturbing it is.

These rightwing lads and lasses were confessing their opinions to a young, almost Republican-looking man who was interviewing them on camera. Who, I wondered, was he? Turned out his name was Max Blumenthal. I decided to see what else he'd done. That search didn't prove hard.

Basically, Blumenthal could be found just about everywhere a lefty might search out information: The Nation, NPR, Democracy Now!, The Rachel Maddow Show, The Huffington Post, salon.com, altnet.org. He provided both print and video journalism for these and other media outlets, often focusing on the impact of the conservative movement on the Republican Party. Not only was his work damning, but pretty damn witty.

Those investigative skills, that wit: They're all on display in his first book, "Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party" (Nation Books, \$25), an enlightening — and, at times, terrifying — narrative recounting of how the Religious Right's emphasis on creating a theocracy based on a Christian G-O-D did a number on the G.O.P. The cast of characters is huge and their scandals legion. It reads like fiction. Too bad it's fact.

So when Blumenthal gave a talk in Seattle recently, I knew I wanted to meet him. And the stars, they aligned: We wound up having brunch earlier that day, in Belltown. And over omelets — I had veggie sausage and Swiss, he had veggie sausage and broccoli — we took a rightwing tour of Biblical proportions, with stops in the Swiss Alps, the White House, Kiambu, Kenya and, of course, Wasilla, Alaska.

Rosette Royale: "Republican Gomorrah." You know, Gomorrah's a Biblical town that's linked to Sodom and, essentially, things didn't go so well. So why choose Gomorrah as part of the title?

Max Blumenthal: And I managed to look into Gomorrah and not turn into a pillar of salt.

It's a reference to the Republican experiment — from the Gingrich Revolution in '94 to the end of the Bush era — and during that time, a Gomorrah-like sea of scandals exploded into the open, ranging from the bizarre sexual escapades of rightwing, supposed family-values Republicans from Ted Haggard [the evangelical preacher caught having sex with a male escort while using meth] to Larry Craig [the former Idaho Republican senator arrested for lewd conduct in an airport bathroom] to David Vitter (the Louisiana Republican senator who frequented a high-end prostitute called the "D.C. Madam"), to

lesser known figures who did even more bizarre acts, to the wanton criminality of Tom DeLay, "The Hammer," who (was charged with money laundering and violating campaign finance laws and) was the majority leader of Congress. And these scandals, to me, while they're entertaining, they suggest a lot of hypocrisy. I wanted to go beyond that and show how they reflected an essential sensibility of the Christian Right, and how bringing that movement into that party brought the party down.

R. R.: When did this movement begin? You mention Newt Gingrich.

M. B.: The movement had been building capacity in the 1960s, and my narrative sort of starts in the Civil Rights struggle, and Jerry Falwell was inveighing against Martin Luther King from the pulpit: He's attacking King for being political and saying preachers shouldn't be. Falwell was primarily concerned with his private Christian schools being integrated and King was a threat to that. The irony of attacking King as political can't be lost — I don't know how long I can go with the answer.

R.R.: As long as you want.

M.B.: So moving from the Deep South with Falwell, I move to the Swiss Alps, to a hippie commune run by a guy named Francis Schaeffer, who was the quintessential Jesus freak. Timothy Leary, the LSD guru, came to visit him; Jimmy Page, from Led Zeppelin, was a fan.

After Roe v. Wade, Schaeffer became radicalized and believed the government had legalized infanticide and went to Washington D.C. And using his incredible oratory skills to evangelize the Republican leadership there, he became friends with Gerald Ford and helped Falwell start the Moral Majority. He told Falwell: Forget about this business

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with integration; what we need to do is use the tactics of Martin Luther King against abortion, and target abortion clinics and abortion doctors as a means, not just of stopping abortion, but of unraveling the underpinnings of secular society. But Schaeffer was a sophisticated guy and saw where Falwell and these characters were going. He saw Reagan tell Falwell and a group of evangelicals, "I know you can't endorse me, but I endorse you." He saw that it was really becoming all about power, and that they had this disgusting homophobic and racist strain. But Schaeffer died of cancer in 1985, before he could denounce the Christian Right.

They moved into Washington, and other figures took the reins of the movement and moved it into more of the Republican mainstream, to the point where they reached the mountaintop with the reelection of George W. Bush.

R. R.: A rather unfortunate mountaintop.



M. B.: Well, Martin Luther King reached the mountaintop and, like Moses, he saw the Promised Land. What these people saw is a theocratic dystopia that they wanted to create that would have made you and I second-class citizens, at best.

R.R.: You were recently on MSNBC and you cited a poll that claims 58 percent of Republicans don't believe Obama was born in the U.S.? How can people believe that?

M.B.: It's a Research 2000 Coast poll taken in, I think, August of this year.

Republicans started going after him; a video with Jones referring to Republicans as "assholes" can be seen on YouTube).

It all stems from the same "know-nothingism" of the Right: The belief that Barack Obama can't be one of us, the only way to fix America is to get all the foreign elements out. Including Barack Obama. And they will not accept alternative forms of information. They demonize mainstream media: They call it secular or liberal media. Some of them believe it's run by the antichrist; 12 percent of Republicans in New Jersey, according to a recent Public Policy poll, believe Barack

Obama is the antichrist. In other words: the son of Satan.

They can believe that because their sources of media are telling them he has no birth certificate; that he was either born in a Kenyan salaam or Indonesia; he's a foreigner; he might even be a Muslim. It's a way to de-legitimize his presidency.

In my book, I talk about how it all started when Sarah Palin, without the permission of John McCain and his staffers, attacked Barack Obama as not one of us: He's friends with terrorists, he's friends of people who hate America. And that inspired, at these rallies, cries of "traitor," and even worse: racial slurs. It's all on video.

And it didn't end when Obama was inaugurated: It just intensified, to the point where (Fox News TV host) Glenn Beck started going after the people that Palin had named, trying to oust them, people like (former special advisor to the White House Council on Environmental Quality) Van Jones, who I know, who's not really that radical. And unfortunately, the Obama administration has capitulated on this. (Van Jones resigned from his White House post on Sept. 5, months after

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R.R.: You mention a lot of names. So I thought maybe I could give you a name and you could talk a little bit about this person. Let's start with Sarah Palin. And your relationship. [Chuckles.]

M. B.: Yeah, I'm going to Alaska on Saturday (Sept. 26). It's my one-year anniversary.

R.R.: Of?

M.B.: Of going to her church, that she spent 20 years in — the Wasilla Assembly of God — which is a pretty extreme Pentecostal