

10 MILES SQUARE

"...such district (not exceeding ten miles square)...[shall] become the seat of the government of the United States"

—THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

Writers' Block

What will Bush-bashing book authors do if Kerry wins?

By Matthew Quirk

Jack Huberman doesn't seem particularly mad as he reads *The New York Times* on his laptop. He doesn't grumble or cringe, or ball his fists. As his tongue snatches a small crumb of toasted English muffin from his top lip, he looks the way any other trim, middle-aged man of average height with retreating gray hair would look while catching up on the news and checking his email on a Sunday afternoon. But Jack is full of hate. It's his job.

"Surge in Iraqi violence results in overflowing morgues," he says, checking the headlines. "That's a good one." When Huberman finds something in the paper that makes him hate George W. Bush, which is often, he copies it into a Microsoft Word document, organized by alphabetical headings (Campaign Finance Reform; Cheney and Halliburton; Chicken hawks), and formats it according to an elaborate system. For every tidbit excerpted, the chief reason to hate Bush is put in bold type, while secondary reasons are underlined. Copied text goes in

11-point font; editorial comments from Huberman in 12-point. Everything else is cut, with deletions indicated by ellipses. Occasionally, Bush elicits so much hate on a given subject that Huberman is forced to make adjustments. At one point this summer, for instance, he noticed the file was getting very front-heavy, owing to a strong performance by the president in the "Iraq" category. "The mid-point was about F," notes Huberman. "So I had to break War Profiteering out from Iraq as a separate section."

So goes work on the potential sec-

ond volume of *The Bush-Haters Handbook: A Guide to the Most Appalling President of the Past 100 Years*. (The first volume, which came out last December, is currently in its fifth printing.) So far, volume two is 432-pages long. Every entry still needs to be trimmed and condensed into



Liberal authors love to hate 'em

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what will become short essays detailing different aspects of the 43rd president's loathsomeness. But before any of that can happen, an event must occur which Huberman's many readers almost certainly dread: George W. Bush must win reelection. "It is a conflict," admits Huberman, whose months of research would go to waste should John Kerry win. "But I would gladly sacrifice volume two," Huberman adds hurriedly, "if it meant living through another four years with this crew, it wouldn't be worth it. But if they're back, God forbid, I'm ready."

Huberman isn't the only one. By a conservative count, there are over 150 books on the market dedicated exclusively to the president's faults and failures. He's been attacked at book length as greedy, corrupt, stupid, and fascist; as an alleged rapist, murderer, drug addict, alcoholic, and alien; as a zealot, putschist, dyslexic, liar, traitor, coward, evil genius, and marionette; with psychoanalysis, philosophy, economics; and, counterfactually, as an African American. (*What if George W. Bush Were a Black Man*, by Dr. Boyce D. Watkins). He's been bashed about jobs, the war on terror, the environment, AIDS, reproductive rights, poverty, and the sorry state of contemporary culture in general. Bush's liberal critics have taken advantage of every medium imaginable. They've published in hardcover, paperback, and e-books; in large print editions and books-on-tape; in novels, graphic novels, comics, cartoons, photographs, and verse; in calendars, parenting guides, quizzes and coloring books, box kits, trading cards,

handbooks, guidebooks, readers and lists, both alphabetic and ordered by rank.

Anti-Bush authors have singled out the president's five biggest lies about Iraq as well as his top 20 lies across all topics, and they are dedicated to making sure you don't vote for Bush this November. For those already inclined to vote against the incumbent, Bill Press's *Bush Must Go: The Top Ten Reasons Why George Bush Doesn't Deserve a Second Term* will probably suffice; those who need more convincing might pick up *50 Reasons Not to Vote for Bush*, a collection edited by Robert Sterling, or even John Heckenlively's *2004 Reasons America Needs Regime Change*. Collectively, the anti-Bush books sell well enough that they merit their own table at the bookstore. Sometimes more room is needed. When I stopped by the Barnes & Noble in New York's Union Square looking for *The Bush-Hater's Handbook*, the clerk directed me to the fourth floor: "There's a whole wall."

Most publishers trace the election-season glut of books to the summer of 2003, when a crop of liberal books, beginning with Al Franken's *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, Lou Dubose and Molly Ivins's *Bushwhacked*, and Joe Conason's *Big Lies*, jumped onto bestseller lists. "Everyone was taken by surprise by the degree of interest and sales with Franken's book and the others," says Rick Kot, an editor at Viking Press. "It's a copy-cat industry, so everyone jumped on the bandwagon." In the year or so since, 25 anti-Bush books have made it onto the bestsellers lists. Even books from small liberal presses have sold

hundreds of thousands of copies, and publishers have been inundated with new proposals. "I was getting so many phone calls from agents, all yadda yadda yadda; I was passing on everything," says Carl Bromley, editorial director of Nation Books. Greg Bates, of Common Courage, was still getting calls during the last days of September: "It was ridiculous. I get proposals now asking can you get this out by the election. I feel like putting up a sign or billboard that says: 'No. Forget it. It's too late.'" Even President Bush noted the stimulus his administration has provided to booksellers. "It really gets me when the critics say I haven't done enough for the economy," he joked at the White House Correspondents Dinner this spring. "Look what I've done for the book publishing industry."

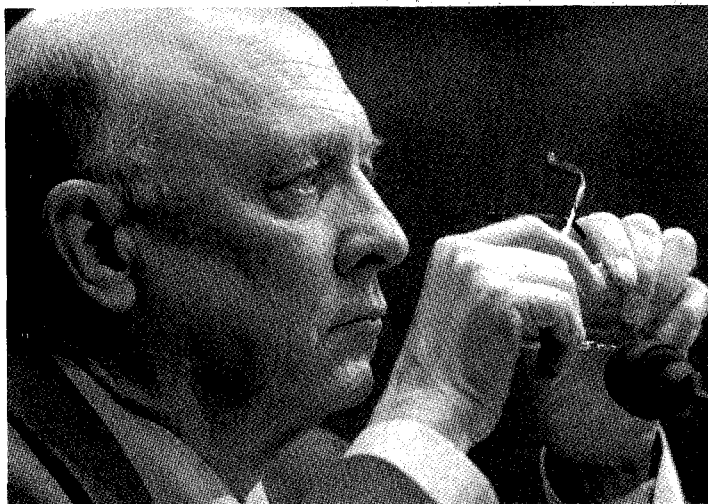
A Kerry victory, most publishers agree, would mean instant commercial death for many of the anti-Bush books now on the shelves. But some authors would rather see Bush lose—and their sales numbers drop off—than endure four more years. "My wife has mentioned that if Bush wins, it will be bad from a household finances point of view," says David Corn, author of 2003's *The Lies of George W. Bush*, among the first anti-Bush books published. "But from a mental health perspective, I'd be willing to take the financial hit, and of course it's best for the country." Eric Alterman published *The Book on Bush: How George W. (Mis)Leads America* in February, and it was still selling hundreds of copies a week when he began hounding Viking to print the paperback, hoping to get it out before the election. But

they weren't sure what to do. If Viking waited, and Bush won, they could do well on the paperback edition without cannibalizing hardcover sales. Alterman kept pushing. "I was sending my publisher a constant stream of emails, making a business argument to get it out at the height of the election season, though in my head it was a psychological argument," he says. "I didn't want a single corpuscle in my body to be divided." (Viking eventually agreed, and the soft cover edition of *The Book on Bush* is now out.) "I'm betting the farm."

But for less-established authors with books only recently published or, worse, still in progress, the political concern that Bush will win must be balanced against the professional concern that he won't. David Lindorff, a former Asian correspondent for *BusinessWeek*, had trouble getting publishers interested when he first pitched his idea for an anti-Bush book. *This Can't Be Happening! Resisting the Disintegration of American Democracy* only hit the shelves in September, leaving him with a month or two of sales. A Bush victory—which he expects—would give the book a longer life, "the silver lining to a dismal election night," says Lindorff. Chris Mooney, a correspondent for the *American Prospect* and a frequent contributor to this magazine, pitched a book about Bush's war on science last October but was told there was no way it could be done before the election. Mooney went back to election-proof the concept. "Now it's the history of conservative war on science," he says. The broader theme is safe no matter who wins in November, but a Bush win would still help.

"I joke about whether I should vote for him," Mooney says, then pauses. "I don't think I really will."

Matthew Quirk is a reporter-researcher at the *Atlantic Monthly*.



James Woolsey in 2004; Getty Images

Clear and Present Danger

The hawks relaunch a Cold-War relic.

By Jaideep Singh

James Woolsey, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is leaning over a speakerphone at the front of a small, ornate ballroom in Washington's Mayflower Hotel. "Hi George. It's Jim Woolsey." On the other end is George P. Schultz, former secretary of state under Ronald Reagan. Woolsey leans into the phone, speaking loudly and slowly, as people do when they're speaking to foreign tourists. "We've just gotten underway here at the Mayflower here in Washington," he tells Schultz, in a crowd of some four dozen think tank scholars, graduate students, interns, and journalists. "I've just announced that

you've kindly agreed to serve as co-chairman of the Committee on the Present Danger ... I thought I'd see if you'd like to share any thoughts that you might have."

The disembodied voice of Schultz pipes in from California, where it's around 6 in the morning. "I welcome the reemergence of the CPD," says Schultz, sounding half-asleep. "In the early days, what the people [on the Committee] thought and said made a big difference." There is scattered applause.

It is a somewhat awkward beginning for "World War IV," as organizers have dubbed the first public gathering of the re-reformed CPD. The