

“I DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT POLITICS,” SAYS THE WOMAN ON THE BUS, OR THE GUY TWO BARSTOOLS OVER, “BUT AT LEAST GEORGE BUSH STICKS TO HIS GUNS. YOU KNOW WHERE HE STANDS.” You hear this everywhere; and it’s probably the best thing you can say about Bush these days. But when you think about it, the same could have been said of General Custer ... and look how *his* stand turned out. If we dug Custer up and ran a few volts through him—you know, like the Republicans had to do with Cheney—he might even have a warning for us. Just because a leader takes a stand, he might say, doesn’t mean you should get behind him. When people say things like, “At least I know where Bush stands...” what they often mean is “...and honestly, I can’t really make heads or tails of anything else going on.” Really, who *doesn’t* feel that way? It’s a complicated world, and we have complicated lives. A lot of us have given up on trying to follow the issues. Some have given up on voting. If you’re one of them, these posters and this essay are for you. The woman on the bus and the guy on the barstool are like most of us: What they mostly want from politics is to be left alone. That’s half the appeal of the Republican Party: It’s supposed to be about less government. (The other half is that, if you suddenly inherit a billion dollars, George Bush has a tax code just for you. He’s a big believer in inheriting stuff.) The thing is, George Bush *isn’t* leaving us alone. The guy on the barstool, for example, might be a Howard Stern fan. Ask him how happy *he* is with Bush appointees at the Federal Communications Commission, which just slapped Stern with a half-million fine for talking about sex on-air. The FCC has, in fact, set a new record for fines this year, and that’s not even including the Janet Jackson wardrobe malfunction. Meanwhile, when Vice President Dick Cheney tells a U.S. Senator to “go @#*&%! yourself” on the floor of the Senate, *he* doesn’t even have to drop a dime in the “swearing jar.” Suddenly, our guardians of moral decency are silent. Why? Because being a Republican means never having to say you’re sorry. It also means using the power of government to punish others for doing the same thing you do. And that woman on the bus? In May, the Bush administration denied her a chance to buy “morning after” birth-control over the counter. The method is safe, highly effective, and could discourage a few million surgical abortions and unwanted pregnancies each year. But that’s not good enough for Bush. In an election-year attempt to curry favor with the religious right, Bush appointees at the Food and Drug Administration rejected a bid to offer the drug over-the-counter—with no medical justification at all. Your freedom is being sold out for someone else’s vote. And God help you if you’re gay or lesbian and want to get married. Actually, God’s got His own hands full these days. Bush reportedly believes he was appointed by God—which is just as well, since most of us didn’t vote for him. But Bush apparently hasn’t spent much time reading the Bible. Jesus spoke a lot more about helping the “least among us” than he ever did about pushing gays and lesbians around. So why does Bush rely on scripture when it comes to setting policy on abortion or gay marriage, but not when it comes to providing health insurance to the working poor? Did he just skip that day in Bible-study class? Or is it that while a rich man may not get into heaven, he *can* get you into the White House? Republicans are supposed to believe in getting politics out of our lives. But thanks to Bush, politics is everywhere you look—from what you see on TV to what you hear in the pews, from the crimes the government prosecutes to the tax breaks it hands out. Bush has loosened air-pollution regulations on electrical utilities and other polluters, dropping investigations into whether they were poisoning our air and water. Perhaps the administration prefers a *different* approach to environmental concerns: arresting environmentalists. This summer, the administration pressed federal charges against a handful of Greenpeace activists at one of the country’s dirtiest power plants, just outside Pittsburgh. The charges were later dropped, but an increasing number of political protesters haven’t been so lucky: Activists are facing harsher prosecutions under federal law, and are being pushed farther away from the people they are protesting. At a recent economic summit in Georgia, demonstrations weren’t allowed within *10 miles* of the President and other world leaders. Even the scientific method is being politicized: Groups like the Union of Concerned Scientists say the Bush administration is manipulating or suppressing government research on the environment and other issues. It’s bad enough when politicians spin the facts; the Bush White House is trying to prevent you from hearing the facts at all. It’s *all* about politics with Bush—so much so that you wonder how he got a reputation for sticking to his guns. During the 2000 campaign, he promised to be a uniter, not a divider, yet here we are: as politically divided as we’ve ever been. Bush boasted of being an education president, of leaving no child behind; yet once the election is over, the 2005 budget will *cut* education spending to pay for Bush’s tax cuts. Back in 2000, his administration professed contempt for Democrat efforts at “nation-building”; today it’s trying to build a nation in Iraq. And if you *really* want to see some flip-flopping, try nailing down the reasons we went there in the first place. WMD? Ties to 9/11 and al-Qaeda? The strongest 9/11 link found so far has been to *Iran*, and North Korea has probably built a handful of nukes while our soldiers have been filling sandbags in Tikrit. Looks like we got the short end of the “Axis of Evil.” When I look at George Bush, I don’t see confidence; I see cockiness. I see him walking beneath a “Mission Accomplished” banner, strutting around an aircraft carrier in a Navy flight suit. And I’m reminded that Dwight Eisenhower—who really was the “war president” Bush claims to be, having actually fought in and won a war—never put on his uniform while president. He was the greatest general of the 20th century, but he never once played soldier in the Oval Office. Makes you wonder what Bush’s dress-up day was compensating for. Could it be that his tax cuts are forcing him to scale back veteran’s benefits, even as reservists in Iraq see their tours of duty extended? Or that soldiers are dying because we rushed into Iraq before we could get armor on their Humvees? Or could it just be some latent guilt that Bush dodged his own chance to serve in Vietnam? Whatever Bush’s psychological issues may be, do you want to see them play out for another four years? At this point, you see, most get-out-the-vote efforts say something like: “It doesn’t matter who you vote for, as long as you vote.” But it *does* matter who you vote for, especially this year. So the backers of this project are telling you straight out: We’re voting for Kerry, and unless you’re an arch-conservative, we want you to do the same. If you *are* an arch-conservative, you should vote against him anyway, or at least stay home. The party of Eisenhower, Goldwater and Lincoln—the Grand Old Party of individual liberty, government restraint, and limited global ambition—is being prostituted for the sake of one man’s dreams of power. Granted, some of us are more enthusiastic about Kerry than others. Some of us aren’t thrilled by Kerry’s style, but Bush’s substance (or lack of it) bothers us more. Some of us are old Nader supporters who realize that, while it was a good idea in 2000 to “send Democrats a message,” it’s more important now to send Republicans packing. Some of us even think Kerry is a good candidate. True, it’s not always easy to tell where Kerry stands. But at least you know it’s not with his foot on your throat. He’s pro-choice, and when *he* talks about moral values, the subject is more often about how to help struggling families get ahead. He cares about the global environment, physical and political, enough to work with the world community, rather than against it. Heck, he sounds more like Bush’s 2000 campaign than Bush does. But whatever our feelings about Kerry, what unites us is this: We think the damage Bush and Cheney have done in four years will take a generation to heal, and that the damage they’d do in *eight* years is beyond reckoning. We’re voting for Kerry because we want to take back our church *and* our state, our science *and* our scripture. We don’t want to bankrupt the country tomorrow so CEOs can enjoy off-shore tax breaks today. We care more about our kids inheriting decent schools than we do about Bill Gates’ kids inheriting his billions. We’re tired of George Bush’s arrogant stupidity and stupid arrogance. And we want to be able to say, and hear, whatever we want. We want to be left alone. Whether you agree or not, at least you know where we stand. Join us. — CHRIS POTTER