

His approval ratings are in the mid 30's. The current occupant of the White House is doing an acceptable job according to only about a third of us. It would seem that the scales are falling from the eyes of at least a sizable chunk of the American public. So I guess my main question is: Who are these people that make up this remaining 30-some percent?

After several years of watching and listening, experiencing statements that later turned out to be lies, flying out of the mouths of the Bush, Cheney, Rice, and Rumsfeld administration self-love society, not to mention the right wing media blowhards who can't seem to be able to construct a factual statement at any time, I have wondered how clear and simple it has to get before the last diehards drop out of the "I approve" column.

John Dean's new book *"Conservatives Without Conscience"* presents a compelling explanation to this nagging question. Dean was White House counsel to Richard Nixon in addition to being chief minority counsel for the House Judiciary Committee and an associate attorney general in the U.S. Department of Justice. Not what you would call a raving liberal.

The inception of this book dates back to the later years of Barry Goldwater's life. Goldwater and Dean had been good friends for many years. They both began to notice a frightening change in the conservative party. They noticed the ascension of the so-called "Christian Right" to a dominant position in Republican politics. The right wing had gradually begun using "good versus evil" framing to refer to anyone who disagreed with them. Unfortunately, Goldwater's health became an issue so the project was shelved until Dean could take it up again on his own.

In the early part of the book, Dean gives a short but very interesting history of the conservative movement in this country. The older conservatism he writes about has little resemblance to the GOP of today, who seem to practice a vicious, take-no-prisoners style of "governing". I say "governing" because these people are self professed haters of government. It's like opening up a fancy up-scale restaurant and hiring Amish bartenders. They don't seem to have much interest in governing

# Follow the Leader

An editorial by  
Bill Reichenbach



so they don't do a very good job at it. They are more interested in controlling. This is in direct contradiction with the more traditional idea of limited government that tries to stay out of people's personal lives. The embarrassing Terry Shiavo circus created by the President, his brother in Florida, the congress, and various right wing Christian groups stands out as a very clear example of the erosion of traditional conservative thought. The President's heavy-handed reinterpretations of his own powers vis-à-vis the torture of prisoners and the privacy of American citizens are further examples of this slide toward the beginnings of fascism. Yep, I said the "f" word. Not the same one that Dick Cheney is so famous for, but a serious "f" word nonetheless.

In chapter two, Dean asks questions about issues that can't be answered with traditional conservative philosophy, like "taking America to war in Iraq on false pretenses, and the blatant law breaking by countless executive branch departments . . . directed by the president . . . These activities have been acquiesced to by the Republican-controlled Congress, and by millions of conservatives who are tolerating, if not encouraging, this behavior." Dean found answers in the work of Stanley

Milgram and Bob Altemeyer.

Milgram's work centered around obedience to authority. He stated that obedience is "the psychological mechanism that links individual action to political purposes," and he called it "the dispositional cement that binds men to systems of authority." Milgram conducted an experiment that revealed that 65 percent of ordinary people "were willing to subject what they believed to be protesting victims to painful, if not lethal, electric shocks (450 volts of electricity). They did so simply because they were instructed to by a scientist dressed in a gray lab coat in the setting of a scientific laboratory. This apparent authority figure ordered that the jolts of electricity be administered to determine if the "learner" would memorize word pairings faster if punished with increasingly painful electric shocks when he failed. Actually, this experiment was designed to test not the learning but rather the willingness of those administering the electric shocks to obey the authority figure. The subjects were not told that the "learners" were not actually being shocked but were pretending to experience pain. This work made a compelling explanation of why people obey or disobey authority figures, and how conscience relates to this. A normal person's conscience will not allow him to hurt, maim, or kill another person under normal circumstances, but this changes "when the individual becomes part of a group, with the individual's conscience often becoming subordinated to that of the group, or to that of its leader." This person places his moral views aside and becomes more concerned with how well he is living up to the expectations of the authority figure.

Dean next focuses on the work of Bob Altemeyer who has studied and written about authoritarianism and its relationship to conservatism. From his studies of over 1500 elected lawmakers, Altemeyer states, "When I started out . . . I was not looking for political conservatives . . . Now as it turns out, in North America persons who score highly on my measure of authoritarianism tend to favor right-wing political parties and have "conservative" economic philosophies and religious sentiments."

The right-wing authoritarians are discussed in three categories—the followers, the leaders, and the "Double Highs". The "followers" are especially submissive to established authority, generally aggressive toward others when this behavior "is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities, and highly compliant with social conventions endorsed by society and established authorities." While they are submissive to established authority, they believe that there are good and bad authorities (good and bad judges, good and bad presidents) and their decision to submit is based on whether the authority is in agreement with their own views. Their aggressiveness is a willingness "to cause harm to others when such behavior is believed to be sanctioned by authority." Homosexuals are typical targets of this type of aggression. "Research finds that authoritarian aggression is fueled by fear and encouraged by remarkable self-righteousness, which frees aggressive impulses." Conventionality shows up as following traditional norms of society. They tend to be religious fundamentalists. "Their thinking is more likely based on what authorities have told them rather than on their own critical judgment, which results in their beliefs being filled with inconsistencies." They also tend to think of themselves as far more moral and upstanding than others—a self-deception aided by their religiosity and their ability to "evaporate guilt." These are the people who helped elect George W. Bush, often at the instructions of their church leaders.

For almost 50 years, authoritarian studies focused on "followers" in order to understand, for example, how so many people could follow such leaders as Hitler or Mussolini. In order to understand the "leaders", studies into the Social Dominance Orientation scale measured not only dominance but economic conservatism and belief in inequality. The testing seeks agreement or disagreement with statements such as "Some people are just more worthy than others" and "This country would be better off if we cared less about how equal all people were." Dominators tend to agree with statements like "There really is no such thing

as 'right and wrong'; it all boils down to what you can get away with," and "basically, people are objects to be quietly and coolly manipulated for your own benefit." They tend to disagree with statements like "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you . . ." They have a related but different worldview from followers.

The third group scores high in both leader and follower categories. Altemeyer calls them the "Double Highs". He has found that as the two authoritarian streams converge in the "Double Highs", it produces people who possess "extra-extra unfair" natures and tend to be the most racially prejudiced and the most hostile towards the rights of homosexuals and women. They tend to be Christian fundamentalists but not out of any great sense of religious commitment. They think of themselves as religious but tend to "believe in lying, cheating, and manipulating more than the rest of the congregation does." They think going to church is important for projecting a good image and meeting important people. Altemeyer noted that, "social dominators believe that a really good skill to develop is the ability to look someone straight in the face and lie convincingly. Obviously, that person has no conscience . . . lying, however, is not a uniquely social dominator skill; it is also easy for right-wing authoritarian followers to do because of their remarkable self-righteousness."

Please remember that this book was written by a conservative Republican. I would venture to say that these findings were more surprising to him than they were to me. But this information and much more which I don't have the luxury of space to address, helps me to understand how the Bush administration can so proudly mismanage everything they touch while simultaneously insisting on greater and greater powers to control the very lives of our citizens.

Maybe, sometime in the near future, when the President comes out of a restroom dragging a bit of the U.S. Constitution stuck to his shoe, let's hope that some member of his own party will have the courage to tap him on the shoulder and gently remind him not to use the Constitution that way.

*"Conservatives Without Conscience" by John W. Dean, Viking Publishing*

## LA OBSERVED by Marian Evans

### *My Mom's too sexy for my school.*

A youngish mother in skinny jeans hurried down a steep hillside sidewalk in Laurel Canyon, anxious to make it to school by the time the afternoon dismissal bell rang. She pushed a stroller in front of her as she trotted. Just outside the schoolyard, she ducked behind a Range Rover, removed her sneaks, and slipped into a pair of 6" heeled patent leather Ferragamos. Head high, she minced onto campus, pushing the stroller in front of her.

### *Just because you work for one doesn't mean you can behave like one.*

A middle-aged, chunky customer shook her fist

and yelled at a startled, young Bristol Farms cashier. "You not speak Spanish to me! I speak English. You think I speak only Spanish?"

A manager darted over, took the irate customer aside and tried to calm her as she continued to gesticulate in the direction of the wide-eyed cashier.

"Having a bad morning?" asked the next person line sympathetically. Before the cashier could respond, the irate customer broke into a tirade of Spanish directed at a hapless box boy who was trying to help her outside with her fully loaded shopping cart.

"Oh, it's okay," said the cashier, brushing a lock

of hair from her forehead. "She works for a celebrity."

### *Most men don't even know what one is.*

The sign went up at noon: "Closing at 5 p.m. Tonight. Must have all laundry out." 9:00 p.m. that night: A fine-looking young man dashes across Victor's Square parking lot towards the darkened corner unit that was, until 5 p.m. that same night, the home of Coin Laundry for 30 years plus. The man holds the sides of his head as he runs, trying to hold in the words that erupt as he grabs the chained and locked door handles and rattles them over and over again. "My girlfriend's duvet! I am sooooo f\*\*ked."