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Latimer the Liberator?

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If Matt Latimer's new book had been released a few weeks ago, the Tea Party marchers would have hoisted him onto their shoulders and carried him -- laughing and cheering -- all the way up Capitol Hill.

Laughing, because Latimer's new book, [Speech-less: Tales of a White House Survivor](#), renews conservatives' license to chuckle at ourselves. Cheering, because it lifts the burden of George W. Bush from our shoulders.

There are only two kinds of people who won't like this book. First are the liberal media who tied the Gordian knot that binds conservatism to Bush.

As Byron York reported in the *Washington Examiner*, Latimer relates a conversation with President Bush in which the president said that there was no such thing as the "conservative movement" and quotes Bush as saying, "Look, I know this probably sounds arrogant to say, but I redefined the Republican Party."

And so he did. The media narrative that was built upon that redefinition also established false boundaries around the idea, and ideals, of conservatism. That narrative -- that Bushism is conservatism and conservatism is Bushism -- is now, thanks to Latimer, shattered.

The media will fight Latimer to defend their narrative. They created it to push John McCain as the Republicans' only chance to win in 2008 and pave way for Barack Obama to campaign on it successfully. They will do their best to bury this book. They know that once the narrative is debunked -- and now it has been -- the restoration of conservatism as the main political force in America will be accomplished quickly.

The other people who will fight Latimer's book are the gaggle of Bush political staffers whose careers depend on maintaining the media narrative. They are already out there -- former White House spokeswoman Dana Perino the most noticeable -- throwing eggs at Latimer. They are reportedly working hard to control the positive media about Latimer's book and even some conservative media such as *National Review* are playing along.

But Perino et al. are the same people who left a smoking hole in the ground where the Republican Party once stood. They are not interested in assisting conservatism's resurgence.

George W. Bush made Nancy Pelosi possible and someone such as Barack Obama inevitable by governing from the left of center. His superb reaction to 9-11 is overshadowed by his decision to go nation-building, putting us on the strategic defensive in a global war. In his first term, according to the Cato Institute, government grew by 33%. Mr. Bush arm-wrestled Congress into passing a new entitlement program, the prescription drug program, and oversaw increased enrollment in government social welfare programs of almost 25%.

History will probably grade George W. Bush much more generously than the daily media, but he will not be recorded as a conservative.

Another part of Latimer's book -- this one dealing with Captive Nations Week -- reveals how distant President Bush's core beliefs were from conservatives' own.

Captive Nations Week was first proclaimed by President Eisenhower in 1959, intending to keep the hope of freedom alive among the people enslaved by the Soviet Union. In 2005, Lee Edwards of the Heritage Foundation wrote about Lev Dobriensky, the man who wrote the original proclamation. "In 1978, two years before he successfully ran for president, Reagan devoted one of his radio commentaries to Captive Nations Week, reminding his listeners that the Soviet Union still held 'millions of people in bondage' and asking, 'Are we really serious about human rights?'"

President Reagan was the first to hold a public ceremony marking Captive Nations Week. But George W. Bush's concept of "captive nations" apparently had nothing to

do with freedom from slavery.

Assigned to write a “Captive Nations Week” speech for Bush, Latimer relates how White House staffers Ed Gillespie and Barry Jackson were on a different frequency than Reagan or Latimer: they were tuned precisely to the Bush channel. This from *Speech-less*:

Traditionally Captive Nations Week was marked to remember dissidents around the world still trapped in captivity. It gained special prominence during the Cold War when Ronald Reagan used the occasion to give speeches condemning the tyranny of the Soviet Union. Reagan publicly celebrated the anniversary over the strong objections of his State Department, which warned about offending the Soviets. I thought the speech would be right up President Bush’s alley -- another dusting off of his Freedom Agenda and a condemnation of dictatorships across the world.

But Ed Gillespie and Barry Jackson -- the man who wanted to compare Bush to Thomas Jefferson -- had another revelation. They’d looked at a series of polls and decided to “rebrand” the Freedom Agenda. They even held meetings in the EEOB about it, complete with PowerPoint presentations and colorful slides. To their apparent surprise, it turned out that all that stuff the President had been talking about -- standing up to dictators and encouraging democracy around the world -- was unpopular with the American people. The war in Iraq was even more unpopular. (Again, these are the conclusions that were being drawn in 2008.)

By contrast, fighting hunger and disease in places like Africa and Latin America was viewed by Americans as a good thing. So it turned out that fighting river blindness and elephantitis and who knows what else was really what the President’s Freedom Agenda had been about all along. (Wink.) As for the President’s inaugural address -- the one supporting democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq and calling for an end to global tyranny? Uh, never mind. Now assistance to Africa, our one popular initiatives, was infiltrating our national security and foreign policies. The

speechwriters were told to argue that battling HIV and malaria on a continent thousands of miles away was central, indeed essential, to America's national security. Rebranding the Freedom Agenda was our version of "New Coke."

So Latimer went ahead drafting the speech to land somewhere between Reagan's beliefs and Bush's White House. The president didn't like the first cut, or the second. As Latimer found to his discomfort:

Now grossly dissatisfied with two drafts of the speech, the President finally told us what he wanted: a speech that recognized the freedom agenda as freedom from disease, freedom from poverty, freedom from despair. Oh, and freedom from tyranny too, if you could fit it in. It was true: the President really did want the freedom agenda to be about fighting river blindness in Botswana. I couldn't believe it. All the big talk about standing up for democracy around the world, well, that was clearly over.

Two years ago this month, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich warned that unless Republicans made a "clean break" from President Bush, they would lose in 2008. Gingrich said, "If you don't represent real change, you just gave away the 2008 election...Now that may or may not make the White House happy. But I think that's the whole point about making a clean break."

Republicans ignored Gingrich and paid the price in 2008.

Doctor Gingrich wrote the prescription but it took an unforeseen political pharmacist, Matt Latimer, to fill it. Bitter or sweet, it's a pill we have to swallow quickly.

Barry Goldwater made Ronald Reagan possible by reaching the American people with a conservative message that was intolerable to the media and uncomfortable to the Republican establishment. Matt Latimer has erased the political blackboard for the next Goldwater to write upon, and the next Reagan to perfect.

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