

Bush's Supporters Had It Worse Than Trump's

We've all heard those stories of families and friendships being pulled apart over the results of the November election. Maybe we've even witnessed it firsthand: heated arguments at the dinner table, the silent treatment, retracted invitations to events, social-media jousting and unfriending... And those are some of the milder instances.



In the eyes of many, voting for Donald Trump was not only irresponsible, but an unforgivable offense. Every day, we see fresh examples of just how divided our nation is over the impending Trump presidency. Massive protest-marches are being planned, boycotts are being organized, and the rhetorical hysteria in Washington, on television, and in many communities (which some have called *Trump Derangement Syndrome*) is off the charts.

Monday on *Fox News*, Brit Hume stated that in his nearly 50 years of covering the news, he's never seen a pre-inauguration atmosphere as poisonous as what we're seeing in this country right now. I think his assessment is probably right. Most incoming presidents are given a bit of a grace period, at first, even by their detractors. Not this time (though Trump has certainly fueled much of the resistance).

When asked to compare the situation with the rancor surrounding George W. Bush's presidency, Hume said that the personal antipathy people feel toward Trump is worse than it ever was for Bush. He's certainly not alone in that belief. Many political analysts have argued that Trump and his

supporters have taken far more flak.

I, however, disagree.

A lot of people seem to have forgotten, with the passage of time, just how absolutely despised George W. Bush was during his last couple of years in office (and well into the Obama presidency).

Despite overwhelming proof to the contrary, Bush was widely believed to have *lied* about weapons of mass destruction in order to wage a seemingly endless war in Iraq – one that cost many American lives. Shameless partisans and irresponsible members of the liberal media had a large number of people sold on conspiracy-riddled ulterior motives that portrayed Bush as nothing short of a war criminal. Some on the Left were even salivating over the bad news regularly coming out of Iraq, just because it hurt Bush politically.

Every hardship associated with Hurricane Katrina was pinned on Bush, even when it came from local government failures, decades-old engineering, or Mother Nature herself. And when ineffectual leadership was too simple of a culprit, singer Kanye West made sure we all understood that Bush's *racism* was to blame.

Did you hear that Bush's economic policies caused the Great Recession? I'm sure you did. It was not only the prevailing wisdom back in 2008, but also the message that Barack Obama won the presidency with that year.

In fact, Bush was so disliked that Obama had absolutely no qualms in blaming the numerous failures of his own first term in office on the "mess" that he inherited from his predecessor. And years after that, Donald Trump only grew in popularity as a presidential candidate when he repeated the hard-left's rhetoric that Bush lied about WMDs, and that he knew of the 9/11 plot ahead of time and did nothing to stop it.

“As George Bush leaves office today, the loathing of him once confined to liberal elites is nearly universal.” That’s what Jeremy Lott of *The Guardian* wrote in a piece published on January 20, 2009, entitled, “We’re are all Bush-haters now.”

Lott wasn’t that far off. Bush’s final approval ratings as president were in the low twenties. The hatred was so deeply ingrained in our culture that people were scraping old Bush/Cheney bumper stickers off of their cars, out of fear that their vehicles would be vandalized. Merely saying Bush’s name in public, in a non-negative tone, earned you instant scowls and arms angrily crossed in front of chests.

If you were a Bush supporter, you were best to keep quiet about it. Believe me, I remember those days well...

Back in late 2010 (nearly two years after Bush had left office), I was giving blood plasma two nights a week at a local bank. The economy was still in tatters, and I had taken a pay-cut in hopes of keeping the small business I worked for afloat. Selling my plasma made for a good supplemental income from which to support my family of four.

Each trip to the plasma bank involved waiting in a room with dozens of people for my name to be called (which took anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours), going through a blood test and a lengthy questionnaire, and then lying in a recliner for up to an hour and a half with a cold needle in my arm. It was a long, drawn-out process, but the idle time at least let me catch up on some reading.

One night, shortly after receiving a copy of “Decision Points” by George W. Bush for my birthday, I signed in at the plasma-bank’s reception desk with the book hidden under my arm. Once I sat down in the waiting room, I opened it with the cover face-down on my lap so others couldn’t see what I was reading. I was in no mood to be accosted over my selection, and that’s exactly what I was convinced would happen given the country’s

attitude. I was there to earn money – my second donation of the week (for which I was paid extra), and I wasn't going to let anything screw it up.

Things went smoothly until my name was called, and I walked into a booth where an assistant (a woman in her 40s) began testing my blood protein from a finger-prick sample. She then strapped my arm up to a blood-pressure monitor, before noticing the book beside me. I figured that the booth and *workplace professionalism* would provide a proverbial *safe space* from political vitriol, but I was wrong.

To the best of my recollection, this is how the conversation ensued:

Assistant: "Is that a good book?"

Me: "I'm not sure yet. I just started it. So far, it's..."

Assistant (interrupting): "Because he was a terrible president, you know, and I figured that he *has* to be good at *something*. Maybe book writing."

Me (sighing): "Well, everyone has their opinion."

Assistant: "Did you know that we didn't have a national debt until Bush took office? Clinton left us with a surplus, and Bush blew it all on Afghanistan and Iraq."

Me: "Well, we actually *did* have quite a bit of debt when Clinton left office. But yes, Bush added more. Fighting terrorists isn't cheap."

I politely told her that I wasn't interested in a political debate, but she simply couldn't help herself. She kept right on going.

Assistant: "He lied about WMDs, you know."

Me: "No he didn't."

Assistant: "Oh yes he did. Because of Halliburton."

Me: "Nope. Can we just finish this up please?"

She wouldn't let it drop, and continued peppering me with sanctimonious non-facts that I suspect made her feel as though she sounded smart (which she didn't). She simply couldn't believe that the person sitting across from her had the nerve to actually stick up for Bush. Oh, the humanity!

I kept my composure, but I silently found her so aggravating that my heart-rate had risen above the acceptable limit required to donate plasma (a first for me). I was rejected entry, and had to sit in the waiting room for a mandatory 20 minutes, before another test could be run.

I was not amused, but I stuck around because I needed the money.

Unfortunately, I stewed during those 20 minutes, and when a different assistant re-ran the test, I failed again, which meant I wasn't allowed to have my plasma drawn that night. I was going to have to go home empty-handed, except for my book.

"Do you have any idea why your heart is racing?" asked the new assistant.

"Yeah," I answered, holding up *Decision Points*. "I made the mistake of bringing this book in to read, and the other lady wanted to turn it into a segment on the O'Reilly Factor."

"Oh," she said with an apologetic grin. "Yeah, you probably shouldn't have brought that in here."

You see, it was *my* fault for having the gall to read something that didn't square with the societal normalization of anti-Bush lunacy. And I was in Colorado, a state that Bush won twice!

My wife found the story hilarious when I later told it to her

(especially the bit about my heart-rate), but I didn't as easily recognize the humor. That night was my last visit to the plasma bank; I ratcheted up my buying and selling on eBay to make up the difference.

Societal condemnation of Bush defenders was the norm back then, even if a lot of us have forgotten about it. So, when people suggest that Trump Derangement Syndrome is worse than Bush Derangement Syndrome, I just don't see it. Not yet anyway.

Could it *get* to that point? Absolutely, especially with Trump being the provocateur that he is. But the partisan angst has yet to result in a cultural taboo.

Case in point, my state went for Hillary Clinton this year (and Barack Obama in the two previous elections), and yet I see proud Trump bumper-stickers all over the place. No one's being accosted for walking around with books or magazines with Trump on the cover. People aren't looking for any opportunity to engage in anti-Trump rants with strangers.

Trump fans may feel devalued at times, but the *real* "deplorables" were those who, nearly a decade ago, had the guts to admit that they had a favorable opinion of George W. Bush. They were the real outcasts.

