

MAX BLUMENTHAL

REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party

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New York Times Bestseller

IndieBound bestseller

“Terrific...but appalling.” **Jane Smiley, *The Huffington Post***

“Jaw-dropping.” **New Yorker.com**

“In an important new book... Max Blumenthal reports how a party once epitomized by honorable conservatives like Bob Dole, George H.W. Bush and John McCain has come to be dominated by extremists, lunatics and just plain creepy people.”—**Paul Begala, CNN.com**

“Terrific... Blumenthal does two things that no one else I have read manages to do—the first of these is that he organizes the network... Right wing psychology is the other thing that Blumenthal has to offer... an eye-opener.” – **Jane Smiley, *The Huffington Post***

“Blumenthal is at his best examining these characters up close... For those who enjoyed Jeff Sharlet's Capitol Hill exposé *The Family*, this makes a spicy follow-up.”
– ***Publishers Weekly***

“[*Republican Gomorrah*] is an explosive book that gets to the heart of the winger psychoses...fascinating, incisive and groundbreaking.” – **BuzzFlash.com**

"With scarcely more than a pith helmet, a notebook, and a tattered copy of *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm's great study of authoritarian psychology, the dauntless Max Blumenthal set forth years ago to explore the dank forests of American Christianity. Now he has returned to civilization, bringing back a fine collection of shrunken heads and a riveting account of a religio-political subculture that's even weirder than you thought it was. *Republican Gomorrah* is an irresistible combination of anthropology and psychopathology that exerts the queasy fascination of (let's face it) something very like pornography."
—**Hendrik Hertzberg, *The New Yorker***

“*Republican Gomorrah* is a powerful study of right-wing extremism, replete with perversions perpetrated on all Americans in the name of the Culture Wars. Blumenthal shines a klieg light on the charlatans whose tactics would make Goebbels proud but must cause mainstream Republicans to hang their heads in shame.”
—**Ambassador Joe Wilson**

“A brave and resourceful reporter adept at turning over rocks that public-relations-savvy Christian conservative leaders would prefer remain undisturbed.”

—**Rick Perlstein**, *New York Times Book Review*

“Max Blumenthal’s bold and brash reporting style should not overshadow his keen understanding of the extremist ideology that passes for “conservatism” in America today. A witty writer who thinks for himself, he shows the mainstream media where the story is, not vice versa. And his short videos have transformed the conservative crack-up into must-see TV.”

—**Joe Conason**, author of *It Can Happen Here: Authoritarian Peril in the Age of Bush*

“Over the past several years, Blumenthal’s work has focused on fringe groups on the right. He has excelled in covering political activism among evangelicals. His technique is simple: he confronts the subjects and lets them speak for themselves... Were it not for the determination and fearlessness of Max Blumenthal, we would [be] largely ignorant of Palin’s Christianist political theology.”

—**Scott Horton**, *Harper’s*

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REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party

By Max Blumenthal

Since the November 2008 election, the future of the Republican Party has been a central matter for politicians, historians, and the media. What happened to the GOP? How did the party of Dwight Eisenhower become the party of Sarah Palin? And why are its supporters so extreme? With **REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party (Nation Books; September 8, 2009)**, journalist Max Blumenthal answers these questions, delivering the inside story of the bizarre rise and extraordinary reach of the Christian Right—a movement that has transformed the Republican Party into a haven for zealots and hypocrites.

Inspired by the work of psychologist Erich Fromm, who asserted that the fear of freedom propels anxiety-ridden people into authoritarian settings, **REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH** documents a culture of personal crisis in which many of the movement's leaders have weathered extra-marital affairs, homosexual urges, addiction to drugs and pornography, and domestic abuse, and how they use authoritarian religion to medicate their longings and lapses. And further, the shocking stories of these influential individuals are mostly unknown.

A senior writer for *The Daily Beast* and writing fellow for The Nation Institute, Blumenthal is best known for his shocking video documentaries that have exposed the disturbing machinations of the extreme right. Armed with nothing more than a notebook, a cameraman, and, as columnist Joe Conason notes, "a keen understanding of the extremist ideology that passes for conservatism," Blumenthal has successfully infiltrated the Conservative Political Action Conference, the Christians United for Israel's "Washington-Israel" Summit, and the Republican National Convention, among others, gaining strikingly candid interviews with top-ranking figures, revealing their agendas and hypocrisy, often before they even know what hit them. In **REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH**, Blumenthal draws on years of reporting to show that the angry extremism of the town-hall mobs and the serial scandals plaguing GOP congressmen are symptoms of movement's dominance over the Republican Party.

Through scores of interviews with the movement's key activists and leaders, and by infiltrating its rallies, conferences, radio programs, and movement-oriented houses of worship, Blumenthal reveals not only how the Religious Right has strategically gained political power over the last several decades, but why we have seen some of its most ardent supporters fall from political grace in a sea of scandal. Tracing the movement's roots back to James Dobson, a child psychologist who burst onto the scene with a bestselling book that urged beating children into submission, **REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH** reveals Dobson as the true man-behind-the-curtain, the figure who, as he forgave serial killers Ted Bundy and David Berkowitz because of their supposed religious conversion, also fueled the careers of nearly every major Evangelical Republican figure from Tom DeLay and George W. Bush to Sarah Palin. Featuring a litany of characters, from Newt Gingrich and Ted Haggard to David Vitter and Larry Craig, Blumenthal uncovers careers ruined by the personal crises that led them to the redemptive promises of authoritarian religion in the first place. With verve and shocking insight, **REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH** contains revelations including:

- The Council for National Policy—a highly secretive group that brings together top right-wing activists with conservative moneymen—was founded by T. Cullen Davis, a man accused of murdering his step-daughter and ex-wife's boyfriend, who emerged a free man.
- Howard F. Ahmanson—who became one of the far right's most reliable financial angels—inherited a massive wealth that literally drove him mad, prompting his institutionalization
- Ted Bundy—before his killing spree, and nationally televised death row confession to movement leader Dobson—was once the assistant director of the Washington State Republican Party who pioneered opposition research techniques
- Tom DeLay was transformed through evangelical religion from "Hot Tub Tommy"—referring to his alleged taste for bawdy liquor-sodden bashes and rowdy sex—into a dictatorial House majority leader known as "The Hammer"

While there's nothing like a good scandal—especially from the party of "family values"—to incite spectacle and feed the 24-hour news cycle, Blumenthal's revelations go beyond mere muckraking. By stringing these sordid tales together within the framework of Fromm's psychological theory, **REPUBLICAN GOMORRAH** forms a revelatory, if disturbing, narrative of the distraught, desperate, and rigidly ideological people who, united by eternal salvation, wield their collective power within the GOP to further their mission to purify the land—and who will ultimately destroy traditional conservatism for good.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist whose articles and video documentaries have appeared in *The Nation*, *The Huffington Post*, *Salon*, and many other publications. He is a senior writer for *The Daily Beast* and a Puffin Foundation writing fellow at The Nation Institute.

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Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party

By Max Blumenthal

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Max Blumenthal vs. The Far Right "God" Of Dumb Hate

For me reading Max Blumenthal's Republican Gomorrah--Inside The Movement That Shattered The Party, (Nation Books) is like looking into a mirror. That might be because Blumenthal extensively interviewed me and drew rather heavily on my book *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back* as a reference for his in-depth exposé of what has gone so very wrong with the Republican Party. He's on my turf so I happen to know he's telling the truth as its not been told before. But there's more.

Republican Gomorrah is the first book that actually "gets" what's happened to the Republican Party and in turn what the Republicans have done to our country. The usual Democratic Party and/or progressive "take" on the Republican Party is that it's been taken over by a far right lunatic fringe of hate and hypocrisy, combining as it does, sexual and other scandals with moralistic finger wagging. But Blumenthal explains a far deeper pathology: it isn't so much religion as the psychosis and sadomasochism of the losers now called "Republicans" that drives the party. And the "Christianity" that shapes so much "conservative" thinking now is anything but Christian. It's a series of deranged personality cults.

The Religious Right/Republicans have perfected the method of capturing people in personal crisis and turning them into far right evangelical/far right foot soldiers. This explains a great deal that otherwise, to outsiders, seems almost inexplicable -- the why and wherefore of "Deathers" "Birthers" et al. Blumenthal brilliantly sums up this pathology as:

...a culture of personal crisis lurking behind the histrionics and expressions of social resentment. This culture is the mortar that bonds leaders and followers together.

Tracing the thinking of the fathers of the Republican Party, including my dad, the late Francis Schaeffer, who I teamed up with when I was a young man to help launch the Protestant wing of the "pro-life" movement, along with other such as Rousas John Rushdoony and the philanthropist Howard Ahmanson -- who used to donate generously to my far right work -- Blumenthal explains where the current Republican Party came from. He also details who its foundational thinkers were, and just why it's still so dangerous. (A threat proved again this summer as the gun-toting fringe derailed the health care reform debate.)

He has their number. For one thing this book -- at last! -- will forever put James Dobson where he belongs: onto the top of the list of the American national rogue's gallery of mean-spirited, even sadistic, cranks.

Blumenthal first came to my attention when he was doing his in-depth reporting on Sarah Palin. He was a guest on a TV program I was on too. There was something accomplished and in-depth about the quality of his reporting on religion that I hadn't seen from other progressive sources. I've been following his work since. Blumenthal understands the philosophy, psychology and religion of Religious Right figures like Palin, Dobson, Robertson et al in a way that no other reporter (with the exception of the always amazingly perceptive Jeff Sharlet author of *The Family*) does.

Now, having read Blumenthal's book I know why he seems to really understand the nuances of far right religion. No one else has ever investigated this subject with as much insight into the psychological sickness that is the basis of the Religious right's power to delude other people who are also needy and unstable.

In another time and place the despicable (and sometimes tragic figures) Blumenthal describes would be the leaders of, or the participants in, local lynch mobs, or the followers of the Ku Klux Klan. But today figures such as James Dobson, Pat Robertson, (the late) Jerry Falwell, Newt Gingrich, and Sarah Palin have led a resentment-driven second American revolution, not just against Democrats and progressives but against the United States of America itself. And this group of outsiders (in every sense of that word) now control one of our major political parties.

As I explained to Blumenthal when he interviewed me, one of the reasons I left the far right movement in the 1980s was because I perceived it becoming the bedrock of anti-Americanism. The worst things got the better we right wing activists liked it. We loved crisis. We manufactured crisis! Crisis (public or personal) would force the country to embrace our radical solution: a radical turn to Old Testament law that would put homosexuals to death, see adulterers stoned at the city gates and so forth.

There were exceptions to the hard edge, my late father Francis Schaeffer was one. And Blumenthal (in his chapter on Dad and I) describes how my father was a compassionate man who opened his ministry to all before something "snapped" after the *Roe v. Wade* decision when he became a leader in the pro-life movement.

But with a few exceptions (like my late father) most of the people described in Blumenthal's book have no "other side" to them. They are the sick bedrock of what, at any moment, may become a full-blown American fascism. (Sharlet has done great work on showing how these Religious Right folks have also invaded the US Military, especially the chaplaincy ranks.)

My one -- very slight -- criticism of Republican Gomorrah is that Blumenthal neglected to do something that would have bolstered his arguments and given them deeper credibility: introduce a bit of paradox and nuance into his book. He could have made a better case for the left by frankly looking at some of the extremism on the left that has played into the hands of the cynics who control the Religious Right: for instance the the way Roe v. Wade was (in the view of many liberal pro-choice advocates) a tactical mistake preempting what was already happening in states including California and New York, in terms of legalizing abortion, and thereby galvanizing the culture war as we know it. And in the same vein, perhaps when it comes to the current ethics of abortion and porn Blumenthal's case would be stronger if he had pointed out that there are many progressives, who have serious moral qualms on these issues as well.

That said Blumenthal's case against the Religious Right is breathtakingly damning. What these folks want -- to destroy our pluralistic democracy and replace it with theocracy -- appears so far-fetched to most Americans that unfortunately their agenda is not taken seriously. The great service Blumenthal performs is to not only enlighten those who didn't grow up in the movement (as I did, sad to say) but to offer a genuine warning as to the seriousness of what these people will unleash if not stopped, then stopped again and again -- because they are here to stay. And they just happen to control the Republican Party!

Why should Blumenthal's book to be taken seriously? Take it from this former "insider" he knows what he's talking about. His thesis is less about politics than about the deviant psychology that people like Dobson have cashed in on by feeding delusion, victimhood and failure as a means through which to build a political movement. What Blumenthal reveals is the heart of the most dysfunctional and truly dangerous -- not to mention armed -- darkest reaches of our country.

What should we "do"? Read the book! Then fight like hell to keep Republicans out of power come what may. And maybe (note to progressives!) be a little less critical of President Obama and a little more grateful that he's in the White House!

Once in a while a book comes along about which one can say: If you love our country read this! Republican Gomorrah is one such book. One other thing: if you know any sane Republicans that would like to save what's left of their party beg them to read this book. If you have to beg them in the name of Jesus!

Frank Schaeffer is the author of Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back and the forthcoming Patience With God: Faith For People Who Don't Like Religion (Or Atheism)

Read more at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-schaeffer/max-blumenthal-vs-the-far_b_278800.html

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HuffPost Book Review: Republican Gomorrah

About twenty years ago, I read an article about a death row inmate who had shot a clerk in a convenience store. The way the murder was presented by the man on death row was mysterious--his hand just rose up and the gun went off. Shooting the clerk in the face in the midst of a robbery wasn't in fact his fault. He never said, "I shot a man." It just happened.

I thought of that man while reading Max Blumenthal's terrific, but also, of course, appalling new book, Republican Gomorrah. Apparently there isn't a single person in the present incarnation of the Republican party who does anything. Things happen--God does it. Satan does it. No Republican is an agent of his or her own success or failure, sin or redemption. It just happens.

The consequences of this lack of responsibility are there for all to see--screaming threats, guns at rallies, unhinged behavior every time a Republican doesn't feel the way he or she wants to feel, absolute sense of powerlessness leading directly to an absolute will to power. Because that was the thing that struck me about the murderer in the 7-11--he had the power and in his own last moments, the clerk knew it. But the killer, no matter how well armed, never felt it.

Republican Gomorrah is a frightening book because it is clear to all of us on the outside that the various Republican operatives who surround James Dobson and his ilk have no consciences and will stop at nothing. They invoke the name of God for purposes that shame God absolutely--hurting, destroying, maiming, and damning others who either don't accept their beliefs or don't acknowledge their power and righteousness. Of course that is frightening.

But Blumenthal's cast of characters, beginning with Dobson and his prodigal son, Ryan, and including John Hagee, Sarah Palin, Ralph Reed, Charles Colson, Judith Reisman, Christina Regnery, Donald Wildmon, et al. strike the reader as above all else very small--egocentric, narrow minded, uneducated, selfish, and resentful. Each of these qualities is destructive in and of itself. The combination is turning out to be coercive. Even those of us who are immune to the emotions these people play upon are getting more and more nervous about the power that they wish to exert.

Blumenthal does two things that no one else I have read manages to do--the first of these is that he organizes the network. He shows how Ted Bundy is connected to James Dobson is connected to Gary Bauer is connected to Erik Prince is connected to Ralph Reed is connected to Jack Abramoff is connected to Tom Delay is connected to Tony Perkins is connected to David Duke is connected to Mel Gibson, and so forth, and in the course of tracing these connections, he informs us, or reminds us, of the crimes and misdemeanors these people have committed.

Two of my favorites are James Dobson's son Ryan's messy divorce (Dad seems to have paid the settlement--did he not dare to discipline? Or did he discipline too much?) and David Vitter's habitual recourse to a brothel in New Orleans where Republicans "wanted to be spanked and tortured and wear stockings--Republicans have impeccable taste in silk stockings" (the madam is talking about men). Republican Gomorrah is full of crimes--both those we've already heard of, such as Abramoff's and Ted Haggard's, and those we haven't (there is good evidence that Texas billionaire T. Cullen Davis, funder of the right wing Council For National Policy, ordered hits on his estranged wife, and succeeded in murdering his step-daughter and the wife's boyfriend).

This aspect of the book reminds me of a Scottish novel called *The Private Memoirs And Confessions Of A Justified Sinner* by James Hogg, in which, once a man believes he is among the saved, he can commit any sin he wants to and be sure he will go to heaven. Once Davis was "saved," for example, he said, "My goal is to get to heaven. I'll do anything it takes to get there, and I'm not going to let anything stand in my way." He must have thought getting to heaven was just another power play.

And power plays are the key to right wing psychology. Right wing psychology is the other thing that Blumenthal has to offer. At the periphery of this world is your run-of-the-mill bully, a man like Jack Abramoff, whose brutality is well remembered by his high school classmates, but who sang like a bird once he was caught. At the center of is James Dobson, a much more destructive figure than Abramoff, who advocates, in the strongest terms, child beating, and not only child-beating, but dog-beating. At one point he brags about going after the family canine (who weighed twelve pounds) and engaging in "the most vicious fight ever staged between man and beast." As for children, the goal is to keep beating the child until "he wants(s) to crumple on the breast of his parent." In other words, Dobson is a proud sadist who thinks sadism is kind of funny, and who, over the years, has successfully advocated sadism as the only workable form of child-rearing.

In order to understand the deeply disturbing effect Dobson and his theories have had on our culture, Blumenthal cites Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, about the psychology of Nazism and authoritarianism, and Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*. Insofar as he finds the documentation, Blumenthal points out how many of these powerful Evangelical Christians were beaten and abused as children (including Dobson). It's a high number. The beatings, often arbitrary, cruel, and frequent, were then, in many cases, backed up with constant lessons about God--that he is arbitrary, that he is cruel, that he demands obedience above all things, and that he surpasseth understanding. The point of these exercises is to establish the powerlessness of the child, his shame and guilt as a worthless sinner, and his absolute fear of thinking for himself. He will then take his place in the hierarchy and thereby reinforce the existence of the hierarchy.

Blumenthal goes pretty far with this psychology, but, in my view, not far enough. I'm sure he was reared by liberal parents, who gave him a sense of responsibility, curiosity, and autonomy, and since he is only in his thirties, I don't think that he really empathizes with the tortured and damaged souls that he has been interviewing and watching for the last few years. I don't think he understands their fear--how deep it is, how constant it is, and how arousing it is. I don't think, in fact, that Max Blumenthal looks within and sees evil. I think he looks within, and says, "I'm okay; you're okay." That's the goal of liberal parenting, and as we can tell by statistics he cites concerning unwed pregnancy, divorce, and occurrence of STDs, liberal parenting works--atheists and agnostics, for example, have a much lower rate of divorce than Evangelicals, and states that have sex education in the schools, rather than abstinence-only education, have lower rates of teen pregnancy.

But a child who is beaten enough eventually comes to understand two things above all--that the world makes no sense (and so why try to make sense of it?) and that the world is so dangerous that to be oneself, or even to try to figure out what oneself might be, is a death-defying exercise. There is safety only in two things--conforming to a group and, as a part of that group, dominating and even destroying other groups. The rules of the group can be anything at all, as long as the members of the group abide by them. And other groups have to abide by them, too, or the painful and arbitrary rules that group abides by are meaningless. The beaten child's sense of terror can only be assuaged by evanescent feelings of power, because in relation to his parents and to God, he is defined as powerless. When he "crumples" on the "loving" breast of his parent (and in my view a person who administers a beating to a living being who is 1/16th his size doesn't know what love is) he accepts his powerlessness and he also accepts that power is what defines this life.

That's where your freedom and mine come in.

Many of the Evangelicals Blumenthal discusses are Christian Dominionists--that is, they differ from the Taliban only in their choice of doctrine. Their uses of that doctrine (to dehumanize women and other groups, to never share power, to control every aspect of every life within their power, and to create society as a steeply hierarchical structure with them at the top) are those of the Taliban.

It's an eye-opener to read about R.J. Rushdoony, son of Armenian immigrants who fled the Armenian genocide of 1915. You would think that a man whose family escaped mass murder would go on to espouse peace, love, and understanding, but Rushdoony went the other way, taking literally the 613 laws in the Book of Leviticus. In his book, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, he advocates capital punishment for "disobedient children, unchaste women, apostates, blasphemers, practitioners of witchcraft, adulterers," and homosexuals. Gary North, the Presbyterian Christian Reconstructionist, is his son-in-law, and, while not backing down on the mass death penalty, advocates stoning rather than burning at the stake, because stoning is cheaper (and of course that is a factor, because there would be a lot of people to exterminate). As for who would be doing the killing (of you and me, if they could catch us), well, Christians would, but not because they wanted to. Ever unable to accept responsibility, they assign agency to God, who wants us killed, who will beat us until we "crumple" on his "loving" breast, a God

who has given us all sorts of talents, skills, and interests, but is, like these Christian Dominionists, interested only in power. I believe his motto is "Adore me or I will hurt you."

Can you believe in a God so small? When I was a parent of young children, I, too, got frustrated, and I, too, thought a spanking might be a good thing. I soon realized that my motives for administering physical punishment were highly suspect--more anger and frustration than care for the child or knowledge about effective methods. I then saw a show about child-rearing, in which a woman who firmly believed in child-beating aroused far more resistance in her beaten daughter, and had much more family disruption, than the parents who ignored the tantrum and then used the technique of redirection to train their toddlers. Works with horses, dogs, and other animals, too. It was then I decided that if I, in my human weakness, could put two and two together concerning free will and proper behavior, surely God could, also. I didn't want to believe in a God who was a smaller being than myself. And I don't.

The ray of hope in Blumenthal's book is that the right-wingers he talks about tend to be so psychologically unstable that they don't have much staying power--think Ted Haggard. But they have numbers. The bad thing about that is that they could take control. The defeat of Sarah Palin, Conrad Burns (R-MT), George Allen (R-VA), Rick Santorum (R-PA), James Talent (R-MO), and Mike DeWine (R-OH) brought us "back from the brink" according to the website Theocracy Watch. But only back from the brink. The good thing is that they would not be able to maintain what we call a government for very long (see George W. Bush). The bad thing is that they would destroy the country as we know it while they were trying. If I take the long view, well, I think, Stalinism lasted about 25 years, Nazism 12. The Iranian Mullahs have been at it for 30 years. Russia and Germany survived, Iran might, as well. But generations were lost in all these places. And Stalin and Hitler didn't have nuclear weapons.

I think about the 22-year-old clerk in that convenience store, looking down the barrel of that pistol. He probably had no idea that his killer had no sense of agency, hardly even knew what he was doing, was seeing his hand as separate from himself. But I have to feel sorry for the killer, too, subject to feelings that he could not label that were terrifying and overpowering. I bet he was beaten, shamed, and neglected as a child. I bet, afterward, he wished someone, somehow, had stopped him.

Read more at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jane-smiley/republican-gomorrah_b_290293.html

VIDEOS of Max Blumenthal on “Republican Gomorrah”

<http://www.progressivebookclub.com/blog/2009/10/05/max-blumenthal-on-the-gop-crack-up/>

<http://www.pbs.org/kcet/tavissmiley/video/share.html?s=tavi08s31bbqbc8>