

Opinion

The Other and the Angry Right conflict

by Toby Carlson

When Joseph Stack crashed his plane into the Internal Revenue Building in Texas this past February, he became the first indigenous American suicide bomber. What this destructive act intended to accomplish or did accomplish is not clear. On the surface, what provoked Stack to commit this act was anger, sheer unbridled anger, ostensibly at the government. Why he did this is a question that requires one to look below the surface motivations.

Stack's behavior, though extreme, is not something that has occurred in isolation. Such expressions of vitriolic anger that drives someone to suicide do not emerge from the superficialities of this or that act of government, but from a much deeper level of consciousness. In a very broad sense, the rage on the right is an expression of conflict between a white, rural and older America and the multicultural, urban newcomers, joined by the intellectual elite. The skirmishes over health care, abortion, climate change, taxes, the environment, unions, jobs and welfare are battles in this larger

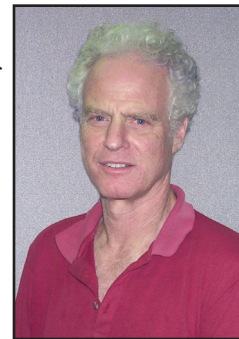
conflict between these two opposing and mutually hostile sides. I'll call one side the Angry Right and its opposite, the Other. The conflict is cultural, racial and religious, and it is about fear of loss.

Angry voices on the right are mostly rural or suburban and Protestant and Evangelical, almost exclusively white. Their heated but diffuse anger is directed not only against the government (and government social programs such as health care), but covertly against unwanted multicultural elements in our society, such as immigrants, gays and blacks, as well as against the mistrusted intellectual "elite." By contrast, the Angry Right refers to themselves as "real Americans." Their fear of the Other, whom they regard with thinly disguised hatred, drives many of the more emotional to paranoia and violence. On one hand, they believe themselves to be part of the majority (moral majority), who are ready to rise up and join their protests. On the other hand, they see themselves as an oppressed minority.

Their claim of dominance may have been justified 150 years ago, but their America

vanished by the 20th century with its huge influx of immigrants, fueled by America's rise as an industrial, agricultural and scientific giant. That the right's cherished belief in their dominance is in question is highly disturbing. They feel disinherited and diminished by the Other, whom they once dominated. Paul Rasor, writing in the spring issue of the Unitarian magazine "UU World" presents figures showing that blacks and other non-white groups, plus Hispanics, made up 28 percent of the American population in 1997 and about 34 percent in 2008. Moreover, demographic predictions indicate that the majority of voting age public will be non-white in about 30 to 40 years from now. I find these rather amazing statistics.

The oft-repeated phrase, "Take back our country" is a war cry against this demographic onslaught of the Other, personified



by the emergence of a black president and his multicultural administration. If the loss of power in the presidential election to the Other was a blow, the Angry Right was enraged by the passage of the president's health care bill. Stones, epithets and mud, along with violent threats, were hurled by members of a mob at black, Hispanic and gay congressmen, presumably for their support of the health bill, but more specifically because they represent the menace of the Other. Congressmen have even been harassed at home.

In his book, "The Invention of Air," Steven Johnson describes how the English Church and King movement, a reactionary band of largely working-class men, incited by the conservative elites, hostile to change in all its diverse forms were incited to physically attack the radical preacher and scientist, Joseph Priestly, burning down his home. The working men described by Johnson were terrified of having their world turned upside down by Priestly's sermons

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Public needs real facts about pension issue

by Holli Jo Warner and Patricia Weaver

There is a lot of talk around the state these days about the looming pension crisis. It is a topic of conversation at school board meetings, legislative meetings and in the news media.

Like other hot button topics, any issue that involves taxpayer monies, public education, retirement funding and politics is bound to stir up strong emotions and a lot of conflicting talking points.

It's time to lay the facts out on the table. Funding for the Public School Employees' Retirement System is supposed to be a partnership—the employees and the employers (school districts and the Commonwealth).

Public school employees, who are also taxpayers, have paid their share—twice as much to PSERS as school districts and the state combined—over the last 10 years.

The employers meanwhile took a "pension holiday," dropping their combined contribution far below the cost of benefits earned by their employees over this same period of time. School administrators who are objecting to increased pension

costs now weren't complaining earlier in this decade when their districts were paying close to zero for PSERS.

In 2002-2003, the legislature attempted to provide some relief to the Commonwealth and the school employers as a result of the down markets in 2001-2003. Instead of dealing with the problem, the general assembly passed legislation that simply



Holli Jo Warner

pushed the problem off to the future. Unfortunately, that future is 2012-13.

You would have to go back to 1997-1998 to find the last year the state and school districts together contributed enough to cover the employer's share of the normal cost of benefits earned by employees during the same year. Pennsylvania's Joint State Government Commission in 2004 warned that without contributions set at a rate to cover normal costs, funding pressures would increase.

School boards and administrators are understandably concerned about the looming pension spike. However, they should know that creating a separate, inferior system of retirement benefits for school employees will do nothing to mitigate the increased pension costs that are expected for 2012-13. But it will increase administrative costs.

In fact, three states—Alaska, Nebraska

and West Virginia—moved to 401(k)-type retirement plans for new school employees only to discover the new plans were more costly to administer. Nebraska and West Virginia have already moved back to defined benefits plans due to the shortcomings of 401(k)-type retirement plans, and Alaskan legislators are considering a similar bill.

In order to keep the promise of a secure retirement—which employees have paid their share for—the state and school dis-



Patricia Weaver

see Pension, pg. 28

More facts about the pension debate

by Brad Siegfried

In recent months, media reports have focused on the viability and future of Pennsylvania's public employee pension systems. It is critical that the public know the real facts about the pension issue.

Most of the coverage has been in reaction to projections of increased costs by school boards, without really examining the merits of the proposals.

There are some important terms to know in the pension conversation. For example, defined benefit and defined contribution are the two main types of retirement plans available today, and sometimes there are plans that incorporate elements of both.

The defined benefit (DB) concept most familiar to everyone is Social Security. Workers contribute from their earnings throughout their adult lives, and upon retirement they receive a guaranteed pension check—a defined benefit.

I've contributed to my own pension during my entire teaching career. On average, public school employees in Pennsylvania contribute 7.5 percent of their earnings for their pension benefits.

The most common form of defined contribution (DC) plan is the 401(k), the indi-

vidual tax-deferred plan funded by contributions from workers and, usually, their employers.

Upon retirement, the money accumulated in your 401(k) account is basically savings that you must hope will last longer than you do.

But, as Time magazine reported in October 2009, "If you have even peeked at your account statements in the past year, it's painfully obvious that something is wrong with the way we save."

Invented nearly 30 years ago as a tax-deferred perk for top corporate executives (who could afford to contribute to it while still living comfortably), the 401(k) was never intended to replace the employer-sponsored DB, supplemented by Social Security, as the cornerstone of America's retirement system.

During the stock market decline that precipitated the current recession, the average 401(k) balance fell 31 percent, according to Fidelity Investments. So before Pennsylvania starts making changes to pension plans affecting hundreds of thousands

rate hikes.

Holli Jo Warner is the president of the State College Area Education Association and Patricia Weaver is the president of the State College Educational Support Personnel Association

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districts need to make their fair share of contributions to cover the cost of retirement benefits. By building stronger reserves in good times, PSERS will better be able to weather economic downturns without resorting to

Whitey-Blue addresses gulf oil spill

by David M. Silverman

I was talking the other day to Whitey Blue, longtime Centre Region resident and hard-nose.

Whitey, I know it's out of our geographic area, but do you have any words of wisdom about the Gulf oil gusher?

"I certainly do! I think BP is getting a lot of unjustifiable criticism"

What do you mean "unjustifiable?" Oil is gushing out and coating birds, animals and pure white sands!

"Eh! All these bird-lovers and animal

huggers do is complain. As far as the white sands go, anyone dumb enough to own a property right down at sea level deserves what they get."

So you don't think BP should be severely criticized and fined?

"I do not! They've made big investments in this deep-in-the-water oil well and should make all the bucks they can. This country runs on oil. All these windmill and other offbeat fuel suppliers are justified only by the liberal establishment. We need gas!"



of workers, it's worth questioning a few basic assumptions.

In contrast, DB pension plans are considerably better than DC plans for employees because they provide a secure, stable income for retirement. But DB plans also have significant advantages over DC plans for school districts and the commonwealth. Investment returns cover a large portion of retiree pension obligations. DB plans cost half as much to administer as DC plans. They reduce staff turnover, which in public schools contributes to a stable learning environment for children. And they provide employee dollars for the Pennsylvania economy, business and job creation.

Every dollar invested in employer contributions to Pennsylvania's state and local pension plans supported almost \$10 in total state economic output, according to the National Institute for Retirement Security. In fact, Pennsylvania ranks second in the nation in terms of economic activity stimulated by public pension spending.

Three states (Alaska, Nebraska and West Virginia) moved to 401(k)-type plans for new school employees. Nebraska and West Virginia have already moved back to defined benefits plans due to the shortcomings of these plans, and legislation is under

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against both the Trinity and the monarchy.

Today, reactionary elements, a current version of the Church and King movement, are encouraging citizens to bring guns to public places, such as political rallies. Even Other. This movement, whose goal is to foment treason among our military, is shocking.

Kevin Phillips in his book "American Theocracy" claims that the source of the right's anger today originates with southerners' resentment against what they view as an invasion by the federal government 150 years ago. Phillips expresses concern that this elemental anger, which began after the end of the Civil War and which he calls "southernization," is beginning to infect white society. Obama's most vociferous adversaries are southern congressmen. In all fairness, however, most whites are simply not buying into the paranoia.

consideration to do the same in Alaska.

Teachers and school employees deserve a secure retirement. Pennsylvania was cited last year by the Center for Education Policy for recording gains in all academic categories from 2002-08 and was one of nine states in which eighth-graders scored a gain on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test. More Pennsylvania students are going to college than ever before.

In debating the future of public sector pension plans, we should end the politics of "pension envy" and look at ways to provide retirement security for everyone without demonizing public employees. Due to a decade of employer underfunding, combined with two historic economic downturns, some difficult times are ahead to return Pennsylvania's public school pension system to a solid financial footing. But that doesn't mean we should abandon DB pensions. They are worth saving.

Brad Siegfried is the president of the Philipsburg Osceola Education Association and the president of the Central Region PSEA.

more sinister, Justine Sharrock, writing in "Mother Jones Magazine," reported in the April, 2010 issue that a movement is underway to recruit a shadow anti-governmental army of policemen and military personnel, whose patriotic duty is to resist by force of arms their government, specifically the Obama administration and, more subtly, the

The current rancorous diatribe by the Angry Right against the government is an expression of fear, fear that they have lost control of their government, which is personified by Barack Obama, a black man with a foreign name. Yet, the strong undercurrent of racism on the right is driving the Other into the Democratic Party, while the Republicans become increasingly the party of white men.

Toby Carlson is a retired professor of meteorology at Penn State. He lives in State College. The full essay can be found on voicesweb.org, entitled America's Sunnis.

To build, or not to build

by Richard Alden

Dedicated to Ferguson Township

To build, or not to build: that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler by building to suffer
 The invasive onslaught of monolithic structures,
 Or to take arms against a sea of developments,
 And by opposing end them? To defy: to decry;
 No more; and by not building to say we end
 The gross mismanagement of the environment
 Developers are heir to; 'tis a needed reform
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To defy, to decry;
 To decry: perchance to deny: ay, there's the rub;
 For in denial what future developments may
 come?

What new faith in the Gospel of Greed?
 Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of need, speed and greed;
 For who would bear these pompous erections,
 The increasing densities, the decreasing diver-
 sity,

The sterile facades, the car-lined streets,
 The congested traffic and air
 Wreaking of pollution; and what irony!
 When a bird its own home can build
 With a bare beak? who would street noise
 daily bear

Along trees and brush covered with pesticides,
 Relegated to the poor to dread forever
 An unknown future from which no creature
 Is safe, puzzles all but developers,
 And makes them rather hold to their mind-set
 Than fly to alternatives they know not of!
 Thus greed does make robbers of them all;
 And thus our earth, their toxic waste dump
 Is sicklied o'er with immune deficiencies,
 And natural resources of great moment
 With disregard, grow defective and
 Irreversibly compromised. -Hopefully,
 The meek shall inherit the earth
 Before the strong destroy it.

*Richard Alden is a retired professor of
 architecture at Penn State.*



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Instructions:

Fill in the grid so every row, every column and every three-by-three box contains the digits 1 through 9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reason and logic.

Thanks to Peter Morris for contributing this puzzle.

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5		9		1		3	7	8
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1			5	2			9	
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Letters to the editor

Security breach at Penn State makes trouble for victims

by Don Kunze

I'm writing about the recent disclosure by the University Libraries that some Social Security numbers were on one of their computers that had been subject to a cyber attack. Although there was no evidence that the numbers were being misused, they thought it best to warn us.

The letter was not, however, comforting or ultimately all that helpful. Fundamentally, it passed on the responsibility for dealing with the problem to the potential victims. We were asked to contact credit rating agencies to place a "temporary advisory" on our credit applications, which means that our real access to credit is now limited for about three months, possibly longer.

Disconcertingly, when I tried one of the addresses given to contact, I found that it was incorrect. The letter did not detail the security breach, did not say how many people were affected and gave no details about when or how the breach occurred. It did, however, give a phone number to contact, which I did. My polite operator gave me the official version of what had happened. Surprisingly, I learned that the hack occurred on January 1. I was not satisfied with the explanation of why it took so long to contact those whose accounts could have been affected during the nearly six months they allowed to lapse. Surely, they would have been able to know rather soon whose

confidential information was stored on the affected computers. I was not told how many people were affected. Recently, this has been reported as a seriously large number.

What I find deeply troubling is that Penn State has adopted a posture of defensiveness. They have drawn a line around the problem, letting the victims fend for themselves and not been forthcoming about the full scale of the problem. This comes in the context of a move, this spring, to introduce invasive procedures for every personal computer that belongs to the University. Every Thursday, my college's IT staff "visits" my computer, silently. I don't know what they do, what they see. I don't have any control over those who have access to all of my files, although the staff I now know personally I trust. They are underpaid and overqualified; they work hard at what they do. But, trust is something waiting to be violated. While we are asked to entrust IT with matters that can truly turn into disasters, this letter seems to regard the victims as, fundamentally, a PR problem.

Recently at an international conference, my laptop use was brought to a halt by a message commanding me to restart my computer. The message contained little information about where it came from, so I suspected a "bot." But, I couldn't close the pop-up screen. I had to force quit; I dared not restart my computer in a possibly compromised wireless zone. Later I found that

my IT service had "intended" to explain that this was a necessary security measure, but somehow forgotten or decided not to send the e-mail. Why? Wouldn't that have been the collegial thing to do? What if I had been in the middle of my presentation?

Increasingly, I feel the University IT considers most of us worthy only of manipulated explanations rather than full and helpful disclosure. Is that really the best way to meet the threat of cyber attack? I have heard that there are over a million attempts to hack the University system every day. Given this kind of threat, more support and transparency should be shown to those who may actually suffer. So far, I have no evidence of any kind that my Social Security number has been used. And, I am grudgingly grateful to my IT staff for their efforts in

the face of so many challenges. But, when IT fails to protect us, isn't it time to drop the "us-them" mentality?

Don Kunze teaches in the College of Arts and Architecture at Penn State.

Thanks for Lyme story

We got our copy of Voices and are sharing it with others too! Thank you so much for tackling such a complicated and controversial topic. Great interview with Dr. Corson and excellent job explaining the politics of Lyme. It was very clear how much research you had done. We really appreciate you raising awareness of this issue.

*Emily Steffensmeier
State College*



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ASK Cosmo



Dear Cosmo,

The oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is terrible. I'm surprised people are making such a political drama out of it all—right wing, left wing, pro-environment, anti-environment, pro-Obama, anti-Obama, etc. Can't it just be a tragedy? Signed, Sick of the Slant

Dear Dizzy From Spin,

I'm not just baying at the moon when I tune up my favorite refrain that people just aren't very smart. All you have to do is look around...at your family, your classroom, your office or whatever room you happen to be in at the time. The players in the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico are at the vortex of high-tech oil extraction, state-of-the-art underwater surveillance, Katrina-hardened emergency response, and up-to-the-minute news reporting. They are supposedly among the people who are the very best at what they do, and yet there seem to be so few answers that this easily could be construed as cluelessness. It's certainly tempting to dole out a few honorary dunce caps, but I think the prestige of being an honorary dunce may be a bit diminished in the presence of actual ones.

Of course, the golden dunce cap goes to anyone who claims that this was done intentionally. That would be Rush Limbaugh. His latest orbit of Planet Ridiculous alleges that it was hardcore radical environmentalists out to "make a statement." And you know those environmentalists are clearly anti-sea turtle, anti-bluefin tuna, anti-oyster, anti-shrimp and decidedly anti-pelican. Mr. Limbaugh also alleges that it's a "big ocean" that can easily absorb this oil. He insisted on his radio program that "the ocean will take care of this on its own if it was left alone and was left out there. It's natural. It's as natural as the ocean water is."

Sure, and forest clear-cutting is an act of God. Highways are alternative habitats for opossums. Housekeepers are the main cause of oxycodone addiction. While oil is a naturally occurring compound, as is sea water, its natural state is several thousand feet beneath the ocean floor. Its natural

velocity is a stately undulation through deep subterranean veins as pure crude oil, not a high-pressure gush from a manmade jugular vein after being chocked full of chemical thinners to help it disperse.

In addition to the gold-plated dunce cap for his conspiracy theory, it's only natural we issue a second cap for Rush's observations on principles of ecological balance. For that, I think a nice orange road cone, signifying "avoid at all costs" would do nicely.

Dear Cosmo,

I get lots of email from family and friends. Sometimes the notes are religious, and they usually end with something like "If you're not ashamed of this, send it on," but sometimes it's worse. Sometimes they promise if you send it to 10 other people in 10 minutes, you'll have a wish come true, and if you don't, you'll have bad luck. One even said, "This must leave your hands in 6 MINUTES. Otherwise you will get a very unpleasant surprise. This is true, even if you are not superstitious, agnostic or otherwise faith impaired." So I have several questions: How does the Internet keep track of how fast you respond or how many people you actually send it to? Also, how does it know how to transmit either good luck or bad luck to the proper recipient? Signed, Scared of Internet Voodoo Dolls

Dear Beware of Pricks,

Your friends sound like some kind of oddball witchcraft practitioners to me. I can't think of any mechanism for Karma redistribution that works on either a quantity or rapidity of response basis. It might just be a manipulation ploy either to make you feel guilty, or else to cajole you into doing their bidding by posing some seemingly supernatural threat. But who knows? Send it and reap the benefits, or else roll the dice

Campus and Culture from the Canine Perspective

and see what ills befall you as a result of your uncooperative, negligent and "otherwise faith impaired" nature.

It reminds me of the competing theories on whether or not one should pick up a penny. You know, "See a penny pick it up and have good luck; let it lay and have bad luck all day." Some say it has to be face-up to be lucky, while others say that the penny carries the inscription, "In God we trust," so it's lucky either way.

As with any arcane, obscure or abstruse topic, there's an abundance of discussion about it on the Web. Found pennies are no different, as can be seen from this rather brilliant analysis from the Penny Priestess, a contributor appearing on the National Association of Science Writers' web site. In her Summa Numismatica, (i.e., all there is to know about coin collecting) she reveals the sacred mysteries of the penny god. She claims to pattern her work after St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica, although she complains that his observations in service to his God were done so at much greater length.

"Bad luck certainly abounds, but it is not due to the innocent copper penny," she writes. "The heads-good/tails-bad doctrine

is the heresy of those who are unable to appreciate that the good luck granted by a found penny, whether face up or face down, may take the form of an absence of bad luck or the mitigation of a really awful impending doom. It is impious to see a fallen penny, then forbear to take it up merely because it is face down. We may not pick and choose our fate by natural reason alone. We can perceive that this is contrary to our penny faith, which urges us to treasure small gifts and not examine them for defects."

I think the same can be said for your well-meaning but heavy-handed pen pals. They are sending you something in hopes that it improves your life or your afterlife. Whether or not it really does, really doesn't matter—it's the thought that counts. It's nice to have folks express concern. And as the Priestess says, we should treasure small gifts and not examine them for defects.

Now send this to five of your friends in the next 11 minutes or the son of a Nigerian investment banker will divest his fortune elsewhere, and you will not receive the secrets of penis enlargement, credit rating improvement or learn the names of Russian brides who are just dying to meet you.

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