

SECOND EDITION

The Angry American

.....

*How Voter Rage Is
Changing the Nation*



Susan J. Tolchin

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Changing the Nation*

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Susan J. Tolchin
George Mason University

Westview Press

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Dilemmas in American Politics

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The Angry American

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To Martin with love

Preface and Acknowledgments

A month after the famous Republican electoral sweep in 1994 my husband and I traveled to London for a week of theater-going with our playwright friend Irene Wurtzel and her husband, Alan. To my surprise, London newspapers were bursting with stories about public anger leveled at the ruling Conservative Party. Voters in Great Britain had grown so angry, declared the articles, that if an election were held that very week Prime Minister John Major would have been ousted from office and replaced by the Labour Party. What a switch, given the conventional wisdom about the U.S. election symbolizing the rejection of “liberalism.”

With the benefit of this transoceanic perspective, I started thinking seriously about political anger as a phenomenon of the 1990s. In fact, by the time Americans were agonizing over the impact of the angry white male, political anger had achieved a new universality. No matter what culture or nation was involved, they all shared one target in common: government. No wonder the Tories looked nervously across the Atlantic at Canada, where their counterparts in the Conservative Party had been recently swept out of office by a flash of voter anger. In Morocco, 100,000 university graduates faced the future without jobs, no longer blaming “Allah for their poverty and misfortune,” as one political leader told me. “Instead, they now blame government.”

This book has many mentors, intellectual and personal, and I am deeply indebted to them all. When I returned from London, Pranay Gupte, my editor at the *Earth Times* (where I write a column from Washington), asked me to pursue the anger theme in relation to President Clinton’s first year in office. Pranay is a wellspring of ideas, and I am grateful for all his advice, for forcing me to write fast, and for dispatching me all over the world. I would also like to thank Arthur Gelb of the *New York Times* for coming up with the idea for the column and for putting Pranay in touch with me.

After writing the Clinton piece, I knew there was a book out there somewhere; indeed, this was a book I felt in my bones from the beginning. With me from the “creation” were a great many people who also shared my belief in the book and who helped and encouraged me to further develop the ideas and publishing possibilities. Among them were Nick Veliotis, Roz and Dick

Kleeman, Barbara Bergmann, Sandee Brawarsky, Richard E. Cohen, Judith Rosener, and Cathy Rudder.

My relationship with Westview Press began one balmy evening when I was waiting for a taxi at the American Political Science Association convention in Chicago. As I described the book project to my friend, Beryl Radin, sotto voce, I thought, Sandy Maisel overheard our conversation. "Do you have a publisher yet?" he asked. Sandy and I had worked on several projects together over the years, and before I knew it, he and the editors had signed me on as an author for his series *Dilemmas in American Politics*. My experience with Westview has been all an author could ask. Specifically, I would like to thank Sandy as well as Matt Kerbel for their intellectual input and for editing chapters almost as quickly as I finished them. I would also like to thank Jennifer Knerr, the original editor of the book, for her incisive, meticulous editing and for sticking with the project even after she had left the company. I owe Leo Wiegman, the editor of Westview Press, a deep debt of gratitude for taking over the book and skillfully guiding it through its first and second editions. I would especially like to thank Linda Simpson for helping with the editing of the second edition. Thanks also to the talented and dedicated members of the Westview family, including Brenda Hadenfeldt, who guided the book to publication; Shena L. Redmond, project editor; Diane Hess, copy editor; Michelle Schayes, assistant college marketing manager; and Lisa Paradise and Ellen Williams, directors of publicity.

The book is based on data collected from a variety of sources, including discussions and formal interviews with members of Congress, political scientists, officials from the executive branch, historians, trade-association representatives, and journalists. All direct quotes in the text that are not cited in the notes are drawn from these interviews. Many thanks to the following respondents for sharing their insights, knowledge, and experience with me: Gary Ackerman, Nan Aron, Dwayne Austin, Susan Bauman, William Becker, Lloyd Bentsen, Ira Berlin, Barry Bluestone, Sid Blumenthal, Daniel J. Boorstin, Leroy Bridges, Pat Choate, David L. Clay, Mary Cleveland, Matthew Dallas, Janet L. Douglass, Roger Durbin, Lillian Darrington, Barbara Dixon, Harriet Eckel, Eva Eronakowski, Amitai Etzioni, Bill Frymoyer, Lynn Gerber, Ralph Goldman, Stan Greenberg, Roy C. Grosswiler, Charles Guggenheim, Linda Gustitus, Phyllis Hanfling, Ron Harris, Marvin Kalb, Marcy Kaptur, Kitty Kelley, Lou Kerr, David Kusnet, Ann Lewis, Betty Lewis, Michael Lieberman, Robert Jay Lifton, Frank Luntz, Sandra McElwaine, Rick McGahey, Chris McLean, Cynthia McSwain, Marianne Means, Mark Melman, Abner Mikva, Tim Miles, Scott Murray, Gladys Ottman, John Owad, Bruce Perry, Margy Perz, James Pfiffner, Irene Pollin, Tarso Ramos, Leo Ribuffo, David Rosenbloom, Barbara

Rosenfeld, Jim Sasser, Karen Schlossberg, Chuck Schumer, Barbara Shailor, Cynthia Stachelberger, Richard Stott, Jim Thurber, Alan Tonelson, Sherrie Voyles, Stephen J. Wayne, Mike Wessel, and Betsey Wright.

The staffers in Marcy Kaptur's office, both in Washington and Toledo, helped maximize my short time in Toledo, making it an especially rich and fruitful experience. In addition to Marcy Kaptur, I would especially like to thank Susan Lowe, George Wilson, Sarah O'Neil, and Steve Katich.

When the book was just a gleam in my eye, Charles Goodsell invited me to give a lecture on political anger to his graduate students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg. The author of many well-known works, including the groundbreaking *The Case for Bureaucracy*, Goodsell has contributed to my own thinking, and I thank him for providing me with an early opportunity to test my theories.

My former professional home at George Washington University has been supportive of my research over the past twenty years with grants of time and resources. A Dilthey research grant, matched by Deans F. David Fowler and James Edwin Kee of the School of Business and Public Management, enabled me to begin working on this project. Special thanks also to my friend and colleague William C. Adams for his ideas on the political role of values.

Three graduate research assistants from the Public Administration Department contributed their enthusiasm, time, and editorial advice to this project. For the skill with which they tracked down leads, checked facts, read successive drafts of the manuscript, and overcame enormous obstacles, I thank Jill Moses, Stephen Burns, and especially Scott Haggard, who bore the brunt of this book, working tirelessly to help me meet the tight deadlines. The second edition of the book benefited from the effort of my graduate research assistant, Andrew Sisk, who worked cheerfully and quickly to meet a tight deadline.

Former academic vice president and provost Roderick French's early vision and concrete support of interdisciplinary scholarship came to fruition with this book, which draws on more disciplines than I have ever tackled on one project, namely, psychology, English literature, biology, sociology, political science (of course), and history.

I am especially thankful also to Judith Plotz, chair of the English Department at George Washington University, for inviting me to keynote a conference on postcolonialism. Preparing the paper, as well as discussions with Professor Plotz, introduced me to a range of ideas and literature on anger that substantially enhanced my own thinking.

Actually, my daughter, Karen, a graduate student in English at Brandeis University, first introduced me to the concepts of postcolonialism and to the relevance of English literature to political science. Karen has been wonderfully

supportive, as well as a great editor. My son, Charles, a writer and advertising executive, has also provided me with penetrating criticism, very helpful editing, and constant encouragement. Both Charles and Karen have turned into very talented fiction writers, and I am very proud of them both.

For her friendship through thick and thin, I thank Nancy K. Schlossberg, who also helped educate me about the psychological elements of anger. I also feel especially lucky to be part of a few groups that have provided me with literary advice, steadfast support, and intellectual fodder. I thank Irene Wurtzel, Patricia O'Brien, and Linda Cashdan in my Shakespeare group; Irene and Patricia read drafts of my original outline and provided useful suggestions, and Linda read and critiqued my work and contributed many new ideas to my thinking. The manuscript has also benefited greatly from the comments of my friends from the New Synthesis group and its leader, Ruy Teixeira. I would also like to thank Pat Choate, who also read the manuscript, for his contributions and his friendship.

Sadly, my dear mother died in the winter of 1996, while I was writing the first edition of this book. One of my best friends, as well as a superb proof-reader and critic, she was way ahead of her time in believing in women's achievement. She had a profound influence on my own life, and I'm grateful that she lived to see the third generation of teachers emerge in our family as Karen began her stint as a teaching assistant in a freshman writing class.

Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Martin, for his love, devotion, support, steady flow of ideas, and close attention to this manuscript. We have collaborated on five books and numerous other ventures, including two children. I missed him on this project, but on the bright side at least I could finally dedicate a book to him.

Susan J. Tolchin

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1

Political Anger

The Dilemma of Voter Rage for Democratic Government

Politics, as a practice . . . had always been the
systematic organization of hatreds.

—Henry Adams¹

.....

THE SIGNS WERE ALL THERE for those who cared to look. Leaders of the House Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee ignored videotapes of focus meetings held in early fall 1994 that revealed scenes of voter rage unfolding in the heart of Middle America. In Idaho, “people were so frustrated, they were talking of armed revolt. These were not the gun folks. They were normal voters,” said Monica Maples, director of the committee. “There is voter anger at both political parties, but the Republicans addressed it, and the Democrats didn’t.”²

The Democrats held on to the tapes until well after the 1994 congressional election, when they held a meeting on political anger for fellow members of Congress. “Fazio [Vic Fazio, D-Calif. and chair of the committee] talked about the anger tapes,” recalled Representative Marcy Kaptur, a Democrat from Toledo, Ohio. “I asked him, ‘Why didn’t you share them with us before the election?’ Fazio answered: ‘Because I didn’t want more members to lose.’ I said, ‘Is that what you call leadership?’ The Democrats were into massive denial. They are supposed to be for us.”

“Anger” has become the political watchword of the 1990s: Leaders from both parties worry about the absence of civility, the decline of intelligent dialogue, and the rising decibels of hate in political discourse. Polls reveal that Americans are angrier at government than at any time in recent memory. Disputes that traditionally gravitate toward centrist compromises instead move to opposite extremes, where they divide into intransigent stances. A political form of bipolar disorder has emerged that is a symptom as well as a cause of anger. At peace for the first time in almost a century, Americans question the legitimacy of their own democracy. They are “mad as hell,” and political leaders constantly ask why.

Anger in the Mainstream

Two watershed elections, in 1992 and 1994, revealed increasing waves of anger among the voters, which eventually led to political changes of historic proportions. Democrats blamed angry voters for their debacle of 1994, when the Re-