



Tears of a Clown: Glenn Beck and the Tea Bagging of America

Dana Milbank

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Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank takes a fair and balanced look at the unsettling rise of the silly Fox News host Glenn Beck.

Thomas Jefferson famously wrote that “the tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.” In America in 2010, Glenn Beck provides the very refreshment Jefferson had in mind: Whether he’s the patriot or the tyrant, he’s definitely full of manure.

The wildly popular Fox News host with three million daily viewers perfectly captures the vitriol of our time and the fact-free state of our political culture. The secret to his success is his willingness to traffic in the fringe conspiracies and Internet hearsay that others wouldn’t touch with a ten-foot pole: death panels, government health insurance for dogs, FEMA concentration camps, an Obama security force like Hitler’s SS.

But Beck, who is, according to a recent Gallup poll, admired by more Americans than the Pope, has nothing in his background that identifies him as an ideologue, giving rise to the speculation that his right-wing shtick is just that—the act of a brilliant showman, known for both his over-the-top daily outrages and for weeping on the air.

Milbank describes, with lacerating wit, just how the former shock jock without a college degree has managed to become the most recognizable leader of antigovernment conservatives and exposes him as the guy who is single-handedly giving patriotism a bad name.

From the Hardcover edition.

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