

## **Bush at the Helm: A Modern Ahab or a Toy Action Figure?**

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KB Toys has released a George W. Bush "Action Figure" entitled "Naval Aviator," produced by Blue Box Toys in China. It sells for \$39.99 and it commemorates the "historic" May 1 Bush dressed-as-combat-pilot landing on the USS Lincoln. We won, he said. Hostilities in Iraq were over.

When some Iraqis resisted, Bush taunted them. "Bring `em on." Scores of dead U.S. soldiers have paid the price for Bush's challenge. Hey, that's war! Leaders lead and soldiers die!

Similarly, Bush appears to scoff at Nature. The President, a feisty sort of guy, fears no one and nothing. Then again he spends most of his time in the White House, his Texas ranch or at fundraisers. Is he a flesh and blood, wind-it-up-and-it-talks toy, or should we compare him to the skipper who commanded the literary ship Pequod in Herman Melville's tale?

Like Ahab, Bush pursues personal crusades behind a religious facade. Cursed Al Qaeda! Cursed whale! Ahab defied the white beast, God's symbol of power in the ocean. Bush took on Osama bin Laden--for a short time--and now has switched his attention to God's earthly resources.

"We'll smoke 'em out," he might have goaded the trees in the forests as he boasted about getting Osama bin Laden; or was he referring to the Virgin lands on which he planned to order new oil and gas drilling?

Melville's indomitable sea creature may have represented the inscrutable power, will and presence of God, as if to say: "You may go so far with your exploration of ways to dominate Nature and no further." Speaking through Moby Dick, God had warned Ahab by biting his leg off. Ahab dismissed the warning and continued his unnatural hunt.

God or Nature tuned all species to persevere; thus, most animals know instinctively not to foul their nests or commit acts that endanger the species. Biologists have even explained the behavior of the supposedly suicidal lemmings, the Norwegian rodents that seem to commit suicide by marching into the ocean every so often.

According to University of Connecticut biologist Peter Turchin, writing in the June 2000 *Nature*, lemmings appear to respond to scarce food supply rather "than the widespread belief that the furry rodents commit suicide en masse when their numbers grow too large." These predators eat moss, but "as their numbers grow, lemmings deplete their forage in arctic and alpine habitats more rapidly than the slow-growing mosses can replenish themselves. Faced with a desperate shortage of food, the lemmings attempt to migrate in search of areas where food may still be remaining."

But the humans running the United States sneer at the environment. Do they have something to prove like Ahab in his mortal struggle with the whale? That man can exert his will over His domain?

When global warming, thinning ozone layers, melting ice caps in the Andes and Mt. Kilimanjaro occur in a short period of time, alongside the breaking up of arctic ice blocks, the recurrence of El Nino and growing desertification, the proverbial global alarm clock has rung.

We cannot trust the corporate CEOs to take responsibility for the earth's environment. Even the best and brightest of the corporate CEOs prove themselves more dedicated to the bottom line than to the public welfare.

The much-heralded GE CEO Jack Welch responded testily to 60 Minutes' Lesley Stahl about his company's policy of dumping dangerous chemicals in the Hudson River.

"The word 'dump' is used! We didn't dump! We had a permit from the U.S. government and the State of New York to do exactly what we did. Do you think I'd come to work in a company that would do that or condone that? I wouldn't do it, Lesley! This is nuts!" (CBS News Transcripts, 60 Minutes, October 29, 2000).

In fact, GE's "dumping" violated the permits and the water quality laws, ruled a New York State administrative law judge in 1976. Indeed, in 1970, Monsanto, the manufacturer of the deadly PCBs, had warned GE not to emit PCBs into the environment. GE nevertheless continued to dump the lethal substances until 1977.

Welch's behavior followed from earlier capitalists. Before the Peqod left port, Bilbad, one of the ship's owners, counsels the crew: "Don't whale it too much a Lord's day men; but don't miss a fair chance either, that's rejecting Heaven's good gifts." Some code of ethics!

"Rejecting Heaven's good gifts" means don't waste money to properly neutralize toxic waste. Welch and others have "dumped" PCBs or hydrofluorocarbons in the water, air and soil. Or, they looked the other way as branch-plant managers in Third World countries engage in those practices. The successful CEOs in the main offices don't want to know the details: no environmental "excuses" will improve a bad bottom line.

In Ecuador, the oil companies created havoc. A May 2, 2003 Reuters dispatch states that between 1971-1992, Texaco Petroleum Co, a subsidiary of Texaco Inc., which merged with Chevron in 2001, dumped almost 19 billion gallons of "oil-laden water into unlined pits, estuaries and rivers during its operations in Ecuador's Oriente province."

Years later, thousands of Ecuadorians sued the company, charging that Texaco/Chevron had polluted "sources of drinking water, caused health problems, and led to deaths of farm animals."

Chevron/Texaco officials predictably denied the allegations, claiming they treated the water properly before replacing it. "Texaco made a decision to dump these toxins into the Amazon in order to save money and increase its profits," said the plaintiff's attorney

Steven Donziger, who estimated that Texaco between 1964 and 1992 had "increased its profits \$4.5 billion by dumping the produced water instead of re-injecting it."

Reluctantly recognizing, thanks to the efforts of environmental activists, that corporations had no intention of stopping--or could not stop--their global fouling of the human nest to make profits, governments of most nations signed the 1989 Montreal Protocol to force industry to stop producing and using materials that thinned the ozone layer.

Not a moment too soon! In southern Chile, where the layer had grown flimsiest, residents began to develop skin cancers in record numbers. Indeed, without ozone to protect human skin from ultraviolet radiation, life itself becomes unsustainable.

When past "civilizations" ignored Nature's rules, they devastated the environment. The Spaniards unleashed their pigs onto the delicately balanced landscapes of the Aztecs in Mexico. The U.S. tested A-bombs on ecologically fragile Pacific atolls in the 1940s and 50s. Cancer and habitat destruction resulted.

Since then, strong reaction to environmentally destructive policies by activists led governments to face the issue in Kyoto in 1997. After President Clinton made overtures to get the Treaty approved, Congress dissented. Some fifty Senators, many of whom sat on energy committees, coincidentally received more than \$10 million in donations from oil and gas companies. Ah, "Heaven's good gifts" again!

In 2001, Bush simply dismissed the treaty signed by the United States and 54 other nations. Government leaders and environmentalists around the world wring their hands. The energy company CEOs rejoiced!

Kyoto aimed to limit emissions by industrial nations of greenhouse gases. "I will not accept a plan," Bush said defiantly on March 30 2001 (UPI), "that will harm our economy and hurt American workers." The vast majority of relevant scientists declared that more than sufficient evidence existed that global warming would lead to devastating consequences. Governments had to contain environmental threats. Bush sneered.

Oklahoma Republican Senator James Inhofe suggested that global warming might be "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people." Ranting Rush Limbaugh spoke on radio for countless other Bush supporters when he declared global warming to be a liberal plot.

NY Times columnist Paul Krugman (August 8, 2003) charged the Administration with "pursuing a strategy of denial and deception." Krugman cited a Fall 2002 memo from Frank Luntz, the Republican pollster, "about how to neutralize public perceptions that the party was anti-environmental."

The memo acknowledged that although scientists had practically closed the debate on global warming, but that the Republicans still have a narrow window. "There is still an opportunity to challenge the science," Luntz offered. Lobbyists for industries that have a stake in de-regulating emissions (cars and trucks, coal, oil and gas for examples) keep

fibbing about science's uncertainty. Recall the tobacco lobbyists' sneering at evidence that smoking caused cancer.

Bush, a religious, born-again Rapturist, also shows little concern for what scientists predict as dire consequences due to U.S. industrial policies. In an August 8, 2003 e-mail, Beah Robinson described Rapture for the Christians she knew growing up "as a sort of protection from God's wrath on the hard headed sinners of this world. Because "born agains" have a 'personal' relationship with Jesus, they look to Him to spare them from the end time battles. They feel their job is to be good Christians, follow the Bible, and be prepared for the end times to come at any moment."

I'm not concerned with my final destiny. But I'm worried now. The President and those around him seem to covet destruction. Ahab destroyed his crew and ship in pursuit of vengeance or conquest. Bush's impulse to dominate Nature may go beyond his obligations to the fossil fuel burning industries. Rapture may have captured him. Or is he no more than a model for a company that manufactures its toys in China?

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