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an excerpt of

*Just How New Is the Terror Paradigm?**

To the Bush administration's claims that 9/11 changed everything, skeptics retort that it didn't change anything. Both assertions contain some truth, to the extent that a relatively stable (although anxious) democracy, even if it begins to subscribe to a new model of self-understanding, still must retain large chunks of ingrained institutional and cultural behavior. The books under review in this essay show us the recent stages of the war within; examining these narratives together may offer at least a tentative synthesis of our moment.

Each of these studies is both strengthened and weakened by its peculiar angle of focus. For Susan Faludi, a renowned feminist who ushered in the "backlash" explanation for the retreat of women's rights in the 1980s, the nation has reverted to the original terror dream embodied in the Puritan captivity narratives of frail white womanhood abducted and rescued. This perspective explodes some of the myths surrounding the onset of the 9/11 trauma industry, but it is deficient in coming to terms with other narratives of unchecked imperial agency that have since engulfed the national response. Naomi Wolf, another leading culture warrior of the 1990s, who borrowed from the backlash thesis to offer her version of "power feminism" overcoming "victim feminism," has composed a letter of warning that identifies the perennial way stations in what she calls the "fascist shift," remarkably similar across twentieth-century experience. Wolf's guide has the virtue of succinct admonition, but because it derives from the progressive polemical mode it shuns deeper historical or philosophical explanation, thereby depriving itself of emotional ballast. Journalist Charlie Savage documents the Bush administration's urge to expand presidential power, as embodied in the

*An essay-review of

THE TERROR DREAM: FEAR AND FANTASY IN POST-9/11 AMERICA. By Susan Faludi. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007. 351 pp. \$26.00.

THE END OF AMERICA: LETTER OF WARNING TO A YOUNG PATRIOT. By Naomi Wolf. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007. 176 pp. \$13.95, paper.

TAKEOVER: THE RETURN OF THE IMPERIAL PRESIDENCY AND THE SUBVERSION OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY. By Charlie Savage. New York: Little, Brown, 2007. 400 pp. \$25.99.

THE TERROR PRESIDENCY: LAW AND JUDGMENT INSIDE THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION. By Jack Goldsmith. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 256 pp. \$25.95.

MONSTERING: INSIDE AMERICA'S POLICY OF SECRET INTERROGATIONS AND TORTURE IN THE TERROR WAR. By Tara McKelvey. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2007. 292 pp. \$25.95.

out-of-the-mainstream theory of the “unitary executive,” yet like many other capable Washington reporters he fails to draw connections between this inarguable impulse and some deeper internal and external transformations. The previously low-profile Office of Legal Counsel (OLC), in the Department of Justice, has become the locus of creeping presidential power, particularly in the conduct of detentions and interrogations. Jack Goldsmith, one of the OLC lawyers whose claim to fame is to have slightly modified some of the most egregious violations of law pertaining to torture, has written a *mea culpa* offering himself as a more judicious lawyer than his predecessors, who were running away with the latitude offered by the new type of war against a stateless enemy. Yet Goldsmith’s account is revealing not so much for his minimal deviations from administration groupthink on terror as for bringing the subject of lawyerly ethics to the fore in a climate of crisis where legal opinions serve as prelude to violations of law. Finally, Tara McKelvey seeks to understand Abu Ghraib, interviewing some of the culprits and victims to expand the torture debate, but her assumed naiveté—how *could* Americans, particularly women, have committed such depravities?—blocks out not only the helpful literature on torture generated since the Abu Ghraib revelations, but also the preexisting scholarship on the institutional determinants of torture.

In short, these are all partial explanations by sincere investigators (one of them a participant at the highest levels), firmly anchored in, and therefore limited by, the genre to which each belongs.