

Sean Spicer Is Honored Because — As Bush Officials Have Shown — D.C. Elites Always Thrive

 [theintercept.com /2017/09/18/sean-spicer-is-honored-because-as-bush-officials-showed-dc-elites-always-thrive/](https://theintercept.com/2017/09/18/sean-spicer-is-honored-because-as-bush-officials-showed-dc-elites-always-thrive/)

Glenn Greenwald

Sean Spicer's [playful, glamorous appearance](#) at last night's Emmy Awards and being honored as a visiting fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School (the honorific which the CIA vetoed for Chelsea Manning) has prompted a mix of shock and indignation. Former Obama speechwriter Jon Favreau [wrote](#): "Harvard fellowships, Emmy appearances, huge speaking fees: there's just gonna be no penalty for working in Trump's White House, huh?" Slate's Jamelle Bouie [added](#): "The degree to which Sean Spicer has faced no consequences is a glimpse into the post-Trump future."

There should be nothing whatsoever surprising about any of this, as it is the logical and necessary outcome of the self-serving template of immunity which D.C. elites have erected for themselves. The Bush administration was filled with high-level officials who did not just lie from podiums, but did so in service of actual war crimes. They invaded and destroyed a country of 26 million people based on blatant falsehoods and relentless propaganda. They instituted a *worldwide torture regime* by issuing decrees that purported to redefine what that term meant. They spied on the communications of American citizens [without the warrants required by law](#). They [kidnapped innocent people](#) from foreign soil and sent them to be tortured in the dungeons of the world's worst regimes, and [rounded up Muslims on domestic soil](#) with [no charges](#). They [imprisoned Muslim journalists](#) for years without a whiff of due process. And they generally embraced and implemented the fundamental tenets of authoritarianism by [explicitly positioning](#) the president and his White House above the law.

We're supposed to all forget about that, or at least agree to minimize it, in service of this revisionist conceit that the United States has long been governed by noble, honorable, and decent people until Donald Trump defaced the sanctity of the Oval Office with his band of gauche miscreants and evil clowns. Many of the same people who, just a decade ago, were depicting Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, and Paul Wolfowitz — remember them? — as monsters of historic proportions are today propagating the mythology that Trump is desecrating what had always been sacred and benevolent American civic space.

Not only were all Bush officials [fully immunized from the legal consequences](#) of their crimes — in D.C., that's a given — but they were also fully welcomed back into decent, elite society with breakneck speed, lavished with honors, rewards, lucrative jobs, and praise. Those same Bush officials responsible for the most horrific crimes are now beloved by many of the same circles that, today, are expressing such righteous rage that Spicer is allowed onto the Emmy stage and a classroom at Harvard.

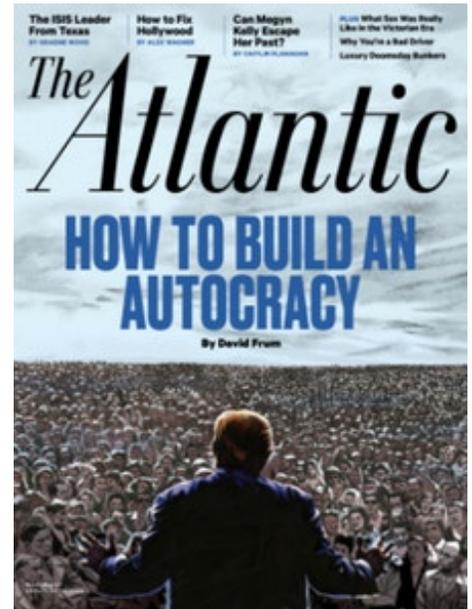
The speechwriter who churned out some of George W. Bush's worst lies and most obscene justifications, David "Axis of Evil" Frum, is a senior editor at The Atlantic, a CNN contributor, and one of the most beloved and cited commentators by the self-styled, anti-Trump "Resistance." With a straight face, he wrote a long, somber Atlantic article earlier this year, which the magazine put on its cover, in which he postured as someone qualified to warn of the dangers of authoritarianism when his only real qualification would be to write a manual on how to implement it.

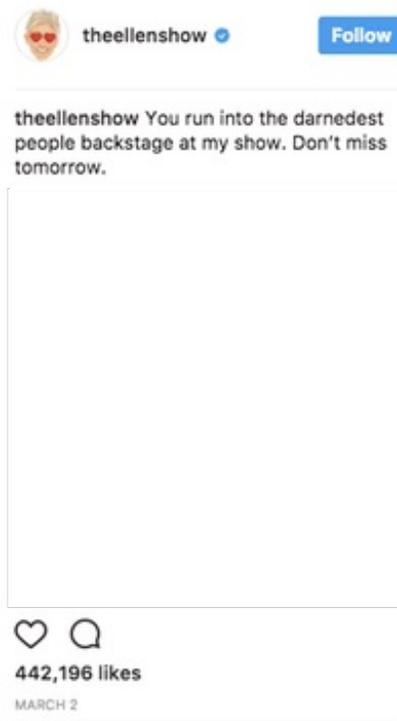
The Sean Spicer of torture and the Iraq War, Ari Fleischer, is a regular CNN contributor and makes many millions of dollars on the speaking circuit and [providing communications consulting advice](#) to large corporations and sports teams. One of the most vocal proponents of torture, former Bush and Rumsfeld speechwriter Marc Thiessen, was [hired as a columnist](#) by the Washington Post shortly after his torture-advocating book was published, and he remains employed there.

John Yoo, author of the memos justifying torture and lawlessness, is on the faculty of Berkeley Law School, where he holds an endowed chair. Condoleezza Rice, who [literally chaired the meetings](#) inside the White House where torture was choreographed to the last detail and crusaded for the invasion of Iraq, is not only on the faculty of Stanford but serves on the boards of multiple Fortune 500 corporations and is virtually universally beloved.

Darth Cheney himself, after leaving the Bush administration, made millions from a book that he was able to promote by being welcomed onto all major television networks, where he was treated like a wise, old statesman. When a marble bust of him was unveiled at the Capitol, Joe Biden — whose administration had previously immunized Bush officials from prosecution for war crimes — [attended to pay homage](#) and heap praise on his predecessor, gushing: "I actually like Dick Cheney."

The rehabilitation of George W. Bush has been as widespread as it has been nauseating, culminating with a recent appearance on the talk show of liberal icon Ellen DeGeneres, who hugged him, hailed him as a personal friend, invited him to denounce Trump for sullying the office which Bush served with such honor, and then posted warm and loving pictures of the pair to her 48 million followers on Instagram.





Hillary Clinton, in her new book, fondly recalls how “George [W. Bush] actually called just minutes after I finished my concession speech, and graciously waited on the line while I hugged my team and supporters one last time. When we talked, he suggested we find time to get burgers together.” She added: “I think that’s Texan for ‘I feel your pain.’” We’ve put all that Iraq War, torture, and rendition unpleasantness behind us — just some good-faith policy disputes — and now see him as a nice, kind, decent, and honorable statesman.

In a [recent interview with Vulture](#), the weekend MSNBC host Joy Reid, a former Obama campaign aide, gushed about the favorable views she now holds about, and the alignments she has now formed with, the Bush-era neocons who helped justify and usher in some of the most repugnant abuses and war crimes in American history:

Vulture: On the flip side, it has to be a bit heartening that some conservatives who used to be sort of MSNBC “villains” are now on your network trashing a Republican president.

Reid: One of the most amazing outcomes of the Trump administration is the number of neo-conservatives that are now my friends and I am aligned with. I found myself agreeing on a panel with Bill Kristol. I agree more with Jennifer Rubin, David Frum, and Max Boot than I do with some people on the far left. I am shocked at the way that Donald Trump has brought people together. [Laughs.]

So if initiating an aggressive war (which the Nuremberg Tribunal [called](#) “the supreme international crime”), instituting an international torture regime (which Ronald Reagan [called](#) “an abhorrent practice” that no circumstance can justify), and embracing the full model of presidential lawlessness does not result in ostracization, sanction, or exclusion from polite society, why on earth would anyone expect that Sean Spicer would face any sort of actual recrimination or consequence?

If you’re someone who employs David Frum or hires Ari Fleischer or treats Bush-era war criminals as respectable and honored sources, you really have no standing to object to the paradigm that has ushered Spicer into the halls of elite power. This is the [precedent of elite immunity](#) that has been created, often by the same people who are now so upset that Sean Spicer and his fellow Trump functionaries are the beneficiaries of the framework they helped to

install.