

# 10 Examples of Bush and the Republicans Using Government Power to Target Critics

Bob Cesca: 05/16/2013

They say two wrongs don't make a right, but ignoring one of those wrongs while vilifying the other is intellectually dishonest and violently hypocritical, among other things. And certainly that's the case surrounding news that the IRS targeted tea-party groups as a means of determining and verifying their tax-exempt status has resurrected a familiar debate about government overreach and abuse of power.

As of right now, it's unknown whether the IRS was acting on the behalf of the Obama White House. What we do know, however, is that it's not the first time something like this has happened. And we know that the lock-step party, the Republicans, spent eight years defending, applauding and enabling Bush abuses on this front, while subsequently cheerleading the congressional Republicans as they carry forward the politics of intimidation and government overreach into the Obama era.

Let's begin there. The congressional Republicans are outraged by the IRS story, but they haven't been able to scramble to the floor of the House quickly enough to target left-leaning groups. Yes, the following list contains some forgotten history from the Bush years, but the first three items are quite new and ongoing.

**1. Planned Parenthood.** After a hoax video was produced by James O'Keefe and released by a professional clown-wrangler, the late Andrew Breitbart, the Republican Party has engaged in a years-long effort to strip the organization, which offers cancer screenings and other affordable medical services for women, of critical funding from the government. The votes in the House as well as in state legislatures from Arizona to New Jersey to Texas and New Hampshire -- to the tune of at least \$60 million -- are nothing more than assault against a political enemy.

**2. ACORN.** The government attack on ACORN, traditionally a left-leaning organization, might be hilarious if it wasn't so tragic. As with Planned Parenthood, the Republican inquisition against ACORN was nothing more than a politically motivated witch hunt based on, once again, a selectively-edited prank video by a scam artist, O'Keefe, who's been convicted of wiretapping a sitting U.S. Senator and forced in court to pay \$100,000 in restitution to a fired ACORN employee. Yet the entire Republican congressional delegation lined up behind Breitbart and O'Keefe and destroyed ACORN, which entirely shut down in 2010. But that hasn't stopped the

Republicans from continuing to vote on at least several occasions to defund the nonexistent group. In fact, last week the chairman House Appropriations Committee Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) introduced a section into a spending bill that reads: "None of the funds made available in this Act may be distributed to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) or its subsidiaries or successors."

**3. Voter ID Laws and Voter Purges.** Whether it's Governor Rick Scott of Florida purging voter rolls of minority voters who are likely to vote for Democratic candidates or states like Georgia, Indiana, Kansas and Tennessee passing restrictive Voter ID laws, the Republicans are making sure that fewer and fewer Democrats will be able to freely cast a ballot -- our most sacred right as citizens in a representative democracy.

What about the Bush years?

**4. The Bush Justice Department Targeted Democrats for Prosecution.** Back in 2007, the House Judiciary Committee investigated charges that attorney general Alberto Gonzales singled out prominent Democrats for prosecution, specifically Pennsylvania Democrats -- an assertion that was backed up by Dick Thornburgh, the attorney general under Reagan and Bush 41.

**5. The Attorney Firing Scandal.** Of course there was the attorney firing scandal in which the Bush Justice Department fired a slate of U.S. attorneys for strictly partisan reasons, either because the attorneys were prosecuting too many Republicans or because they weren't prosecuting enough Democrats.

**6. The Bush IRS Audited Greenpeace and the NAACP.** Not only was the NAACP suspiciously audited during Bush's 2004 re-election campaign, but high-profile Republicans like Joe Scarborough had previously supported an audit of the organization even though he's suddenly shocked by the current IRS audit story. Also in 2004, the Wall Street Journal reported that the IRS audited the hyper-liberal group Greenpeace at the request of Public Interest Watch, a group that's funded by Exxon-Mobil.

**7. The Bush IRS Collected Political Affiliation Data on Taxpayers.** In 2006, a contractor hired by the IRS collected party affiliation via a search of voter registration roles in a laundry list of states: Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin. This begs the obvious question: why? Why would the IRS need voter registration and party affiliation information?

**8. The Bush FBI and Joint Terrorism Task Force Targeted Civil Rights / Anti-war Activists.** In 2005, an ACLU investigation revealed that both the FBI and the JTTF surveilled and gathered intelligence about a variety of liberal groups including PETA and the Catholic Workers, along with other groups that it hyperbolically referred to as having "semi-communistic ideology."

**9. The Bush Pentagon Spied on Dozens of Anti-war Meetings.** Also in 2005, the Department of Defense tracked 1,500 "suspicious incidents" and spied on four dozen meetings involving, for example, anti-war Quaker groups and the like. Yes, really. The Bush administration actually kept track of who was attending these meetings down to descriptions of the vehicles used by the attendees, calling to mind the pre-Watergate era when the government investigated 100,000 Americans during the Vietnam War.

**10. The Bush FBI Targeted Journalists with the New York Times and the Washington Post.** By now, we're all familiar with the AP situation in which U.S. attorney Ronald Machen subpoenaed and confiscated phone records from the AP as part of a leak investigation into an article about a CIA operation that took place in Yemen to thwart a terrorist attack on the anniversary of Bin Laden's death. Well, this story pales in comparison with the Bush administration's inquisition against the reporters who broke the story about the NSA wiretapping program. In fact, the Justice Department considered invoking the Espionage Act of 1917, the archaic sequel to the John Adams-era Alien and Sedition Acts. The Bush FBI seized phone records -- without subpoena -- from four American journalists, including Raymond Bonner and Jane Perlez. How do we know this for sure? Former FBI Director Robert Mueller apologized to the New York Times and the Washington Post.

Adding... Bush White House Warns Bill Maher After 9/11. Congressional Republicans Condemn Moveon.org. I've coupled these two instances into one simply because they each underscore the Republican penchant for bullying dissenters. Shortly after 9/11, Bill Maher committed the mortal sin of suggesting that terrorists weren't "cowards" (he was merely agreeing with conservative fire-eater Dinesh D'Souza). White House press secretary Ari Fleischer, speaking from the White House, warned Maher: "people have to watch what they say and watch what they do." Maher's show at the time, *Politically Incorrect*, was cancelled shortly thereafter. Years later, Moveon.org criticized conservative superhero David Petraeus with a full-page ad featuring the awkward play-on-words "General Betray Us." George W. Bush himself pilloried MoveOn and the Senate voted to condemn the ad while lionizing Petraeus (a love affair that came to an end last year).

With the IRS and AP stories, any cursory glimpse at the news will prove that Democrats -- even liberal bloggers -- have been critical of the Obama administration's actions, just as they had been with the actions of the Bush White House and the Republican Party. But Republicans? No such fairness or honesty. Of course. And it's also important to note the distinction between these recent stories and what's obviously a Republican textbook strategy of employing any means necessary in suppressing its opposition -- from the ballot box to the pages of our top-shelf newspapers. This is what they do: they intimidate, bully, prosecute and silence their critics as a matter of routine. And they rarely apologize or accept responsibility for it.

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