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Students: Cockroaches or Dirty Hippies?



By Marty Kaplan

Over the years, in some places I've lived, I've sometimes found myself totally freaked out by a cockroach invasion. As soon after that as I could manage, I'd be holding a can of roach spray in my hand, blasting those buggers mercilessly. Sometimes the environmentalist in me might feel a moment of guilt about the toxins I was unleashing, but mainly it was my inner killer that took over. Rage, revenge, remorselessness: those vermin had it coming.

This weekend, watching police at UC-Davis coolly drench crouching, nonviolent students with pepper spray at close range, I couldn't help likening their ruthless canister blitzkrieg with my own roach attacks. To those cops, there wasn't a shred of humanity in those kids. They were disgusting bugs who deserved what they got.

This same weekend, at an Iowa "Thanksgiving Family Forum," Newt Gingrich sprayed bile at Occupy Wall Street protesters, denouncing them as lazy thieving self-righteous hypocrites, and instructing them to "go get a job right after you take a bath."

In the latest Reuters poll, Gingrich has pulled ahead of Mitt Romney and is now the frontrunner for the GOP presidential nomination. You can see why: with their raucous applause at Gingrich's onslaught, the Thanksgivers in that room have earned their right to be called the Republican "base."

With Gingrich, of course, the way to understand him is always to assume that he's projecting his own attributes on those he attacks. Hypocrite? Check. Self-righteous? Check. Unemployed? Check, unless you count his pricey escort service for foreclosure johns. Take a bath? A few minutes of Newt is more than enough to make me feel dirty.

What the pepper-spraying cops and the contempt-spewing candidate have in common is how easily they demonize American kids who want only to exercise their right to free assembly in order to swing the spotlight from Ashton and Demi to the unfairness and unaccountability that is ravaging our nation.

It's scary to be consumed by hatred. It's even scarier to watch people dehumanize other people. But what troubles me the most is that apparently 24 percent of the registered voters in one of our two political parties like to feel how it feels when you hold a can of poison in your hand.

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