

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

February 4, 2005

Although Hollywood is an actual geographic place (I ought to know, I was born there), the term "Hollywood" is universal. "Hollywood" refers to films made everywhere and anywhere from Canada to Cashmir. As Wilson Mizner said long, long ago, "Hollywood isn't a place; it's a state-of-mind." Amen!

Let's get together through the miracle of this thing called a Blog and discuss that wonderful world called Hollywood. I will divulge what I know -- old neighbors, people on my paper route, who did what to whom -- and you can respond in kind. Hopefully, along the way, we'll have a great time. And who knows? Maybe collectively we'll come up with the makings of the next great "Made in Hollywood" movie!

By the way: I'm not into today's Hollywood. My expertise, interest and involvement is Hollywood from the very beginning (about 1912) until, say, the end of the studio-era (roughly the mid-1950s). I know that there's plenty of you fans out there who are fascinated by Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd, Gable, Garbo, and Garson (how's that for alliteration?).

Now on with the show . . .

Dad used to say: "The gravest sin of all is treating me like a fool." Well, the Bushies commit that sin on a daily basis -- against all of us. Just how stupid and gullible do they think we are? Who in their right mind would attack a mountain of overdue bills by first going on a spending spree? Who but a fool would be concerned with rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic? Well, the Bush Administration's proposal for privatizing Social Security is just that. Making all the recent tax-cuts permanent is more of the same. Fudging facts (and here I'm being overly kind) and telling the American public that unless "fixed," the Social Security program is going to be totally bankrupt by (pick a year) is the height of arrogance.

And for what? Giving your friends and political allies short-term financial gains? Making the world safe for . . . save for what? With each day's headlines, I am more and more reminded of the 1920s -- the era of Harding, Coolidge and Hoover -- three of the weakest, most politically inept men to ever occupy 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Unless we, the loyal opposition, mount a serious unified

campaign in both 2006 and 2008, America is going to become a second-rate nation. Its time to begin beating the Bushes . .

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February 7, 2005

Back when the American colonies were in their infancy, a person whose actions, thoughts or deeds were not in consonance with the popular scruple would likely be tarred with the brush of witchcraft. As any high school student knows, these "witches" became social outcasts and pariahs. Why did this happen?

There is something in the mindset of humankind that requires quick, black-and-white answers to problems and uncertainties that are almost always laced with shades of gray. Ever since the days of the ancient Israelites, scapegoating has been as prevalent as the morning star. When the problems of society become overwhelming -- when things aren't the way their "supposed to be" -- people look for answers. In America, we have historically addressed our questions, fears and uncertainties to our civic and political leaders. Unfortunately, they are rarely equipped to answer the "Why?" Instead, they deflect the "Why?" by setting up the scapegoat -- the "Who's responsible" approach to social problems.

In America, the script has long been the same. All that changes are the names of those blamed. As an example:

Shortly after the Revolutionary War, some sharp cookie decided that America's problems were the result of a secret cabal of Masons.

In the 1840s, the bogeymen were the Irish Catholics.

In the 1890s and early 20th century, blame was heaped on Anarchists and Socialists.

Right after World War I, America went through its first "Red Scare," blaming everything on Eastern European Communists.

In the post-World War II period, it was Communists, Pinkos, Fellow-Travelers and Hollywood.

In the 1960s, the culprits were hippies and anti-war activists.

Which brings us to the Bush era. If one listens with even one bum ear to Republican politicians, Fox-Cable commentators and religious broadcasters, one hears that in place of Masons, Irish Catholics, Anarchists and the rest, today, our problems are caused by . . . LIBERALS!! It has reached the point that the very term has about it the stench of treachery and the devil.

The Bushies have done an exemplary job of making progressives, environmentalists, peaceniks, intellectuals and secularists come off as the scourges of morality. Yes, this sort of thing does have a long history here in

America. Somehow, though, those of us who are being singled out must band together and make our voices heard. The problems and challenges of modernity will never be solved by pointing fingers. Its the hands, not the fingers, the arms, not the fists, the hearts and heads of the multitudes, that must join as one. We are not the problem. Those pointing fingers are . . .

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February 9, 2005

- **Item:** During the current municipal election in Jupiter Florida, two candidates vying for the city commission were scheduled to speak at a particular venue. The incumbent demanded that her opponent be excluded from the hall during her presentation. He gallantly agreed, even offering her the choice of speaking first or second. As per their understanding, the challenger departed, and the incumbent began her speech. No more than a minute into her presentation, she stopped and announced that she would not continue until the volunteers supporting her opponent also left the room.
- **Item:** During the 2004 Presidential election, the Bush campaign routinely checked the backgrounds, “credentials,” party affiliation (and for all we know, blood- and tissue-type as well) of everyone attending presidential campaign appearances.
- **Item:** Several readers of this Blog contacted us, complaining that some of the ads running along the border of the page were blatantly pro-Bush/Cheney/Republican sites. In light of the fact that the Blog is called “Beating the Bushes,” they argued, isn’t it inconsistent at best, hypocritical at worst, to run these ads?

All three of these seemingly disparate items are tied together by a double-woven thread: freedom of speech and assembly – or to be more precise, the limitation thereof. In the first two cases it was the “conservatives” seeking to limit (if not outright ban) the presence of “liberals” from a political gathering.

(By the way: I put the political labels “conservative” and “liberal” in quotation marks because, in truth, they have all but lost concrete meaning; more on that in a future article).

In the third case – that of our steadily growing readership – they are basically seeking to do the same thing – only in reverse. They want us to limit advertising links to only those who are on the same side of the political fence. “Why offer linkage to a site that sells George W. Bush tee-shirts when the very purpose of your Blog is to hold his miserable feet to the fire?” one reader asks. Why indeed.

It would be easier than A-B-C to offer a technical excuse – to explain that “Google Ad-Sense” searches for key words within a Blog and then puts up ads that match. But we won’t do that. Why? Because it evades and avoids a far more important lesson: to wit, that if there is to be true freedom of speech (or assembly or religion), those freedoms

must be extended to all – especially to those we think are daft, wrongheaded, mean-spirited or just plain off their rockers. It is patently arrogant – and perhaps even unconstitutional – to limit speech and/or assembly to only those who agree with you. In the case of the Bush campaign, we can understand their actions; they are orchestrated by people whose greatest fear is that someone might shine an inquiring light on their main man, thus exposing him for the empty suit he is.

But in the case of our loyal readers, we are neither (we fervently hope and pray) arrogant nor empty. A bit confused, a tad *farshiml* perhaps, but certainly not arrogant. If the light of reason and understanding is ever to pierce the darkness of ignorance and misplaced moral certainty, then we will just have to accept the fact that those with whom we vehemently disagree have just as much right to read, speak, assemble – and yes, even advertise – as we do. I for one would be overcome with paroxysms of joy to know that die-hard Bushies are reading our Blog. Maybe, just maybe, we could give them something to think about. And if a couple of our more “conservative” readers come back because of the pro-Bush links, who are we to complain?

As Adlai Stevenson said a long time ago, “Freedom rings whenever opinions clash.”

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February 10, 2005

Pity poor Jim Guckert -- a.k.a. Jeff Gannon. Not only has the erstwhile White House correspondent for the fictional "Talon News Service" been unmasked as a White House mole; he has imploded -- evaporated into thin air. He's even fast becoming the legendary butt of every late-nite TV host in America. Before you know it he'll be inducted into the Scoundrel's Hall of Fame.

For the uninitiated, Gannon/Guckert is the guy who, despite not being a recognized, credentialed journalist, somehow managed to receive the White House's Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. How in the world do you think he managed to do that? Now that he has been unmasked, there is egg all over the faces of Carl Rove, the White House Political Boss-of-Bosses and his bosses, Bush/Cheney/Rummy *et al.* It may well be that Gannon/Guckert is but the tip of the calumny iceberg. Many now suspect that Gannon/Guckert may have been responsible for all the scurrilous stories that led to the downfall of former Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, and are currently being spread about his successor, Nevada Senator Harry Reid. There are those who even suggest that Gannon/Guckert was behind the Internet stories that were "shocked" to discover that John Forbes Kerry was a stealth candidate on behalf of America's homosexual community. This is pretty hot stuff!

We can easily see both the word "Gannon" and the verbal term "to be Gannonized" (not to be confused with *to be cannonized*) entering the American political lexicon, joining such classics as "deep-freeze," "vicuna coat" and the wondrously ubiquitous suffix "-gate." In the future, we might well read about a politician being "Gannonized" -- i.e. smeared from head-to-toe with lies, slanders and other forms of verbal garbage.

As 'tis said in the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, "there's nothing new under the sun." More than 160 years ago, here in the United States, another campaign of treachery and falsehood gave birth to an early version of *Gannon*: that term was **roorback**. The genesis for *roorback* hearkens back to the presidential elections of 1844, when Tennessee Governor James Knox Polk squared off against the "Great Compromiser," Henry Clay. Both campaigns were long on *ad hominem* attacks, short on substantive issues. In one episode, Polk's followers published a pamphlet that accused Clay of breaking every one of the Ten Commandments.

Clay's supporters vainly looked for something -- anything with which they could attack Polk. After much investigation and inquiry they discovered two things: first, James Knox Polk was as clean as the proverbial driven snow; second -- and far, far worse -- he was utterly, monotonously boring. Faced with the daunting task of pinning something on the bland, simon-pure Polk, the Clay people (perhaps taking a page from some great-great-great ancestor of Carl Rove), decided to go the route of fabrication. They claimed that a book by one Count von Roorback, entitled *Roorback's Tour Through the Southern and Western United States* "proved" that Polk was deeply involved in the slave trade.

Needless to say, it was not too difficult to prove that the Clay campaign was lying through its teeth. The fallout against Clay was so great that he went down to ignominious defeat. About all that remained was that term *roorback*.

A dictionary from the year 1850 carried the following entry:

**Roorback** [*ruur-bock*]: N. A false or slanderous story that is meant to cause political harm.

Whether it is *Gannon* or *roorback*, the intent is the same: to spread malicious lies, gossip and slander in order to achieve political victory. We find it rather insulting and ridiculous (not to mention totally hypocritical) for those who publicly claim to uphold "traditional values" are so quick to break that old commandment which states: *Thou shalt not lie* . . .

One is reminded is reminded of the eternal question posed by that master of political satire, Juvenal: *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Namely, "Who will guard the guards themselves . . . ?"

Who indeed? Roorback? Gannon?

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February 17, 2005

## God Bless . . . Janet Jackson?

Today we pay a visit to that self-styled “greatest deliberative body in the world,” the United States Congress. Let’s head up to the gallery, take a seat, and listen in on the incisive debate, the witty colloquy, the erudite discourse of the men and women we’ve elected to represent our interests. What issue of weighty importance captures their time and attention this day?

- The war in Iraq?
- America’s staggering budget deficit?
- The alarming lack of security at our ports and harbors?
- The inability of the average 10<sup>th</sup> grader to read at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level?

No, no, no, you silly fool. We said “issue of weighty importance,” not matter of national concern. Care to guess again? Well, while Rome is burning, the Neros of Capitol Hill have been busily denouncing such apocalyptic evils as:

- Janet Jackson’s “wardrobe malfunction,”
- Howard Stern’s “potty mouth,”
- *Saving Private Ryan*’s “nauseating violence,” and
- Sponge Bob Squarepants’ “promoting homosexuality to children.”

I can just hear the stifled, disbelieving groans: “You’ve *got* to be kidding.”

Sorry. I kid you not.

While America continues its freefall toward becoming a bankrupt bastion of soundbytes, our House of Representatives has actually been debating and then voting on a bill that increases the for on-air indecency from a maximum of \$32,500 to \$500,000 for a company, and from \$11,000 to \$500,000 for an individual entertainer.

“The Hell you say! Must be the work of the lunatic fringe.”

Guess again. The bill in question, sponsored by Michigan Republican Fred Upton, actually passed the House by a vote of (gasp!) 389-38. Oh yes, there were a few brave souls who prophesied that such a measure was but another misstep on that slippery slope that sharply curtails free speech and expression, and eventually reams, steams and drycleans the life out of performance art. But they were like brave little soldiers raking leaves in the wind – striving mightily to accomplish the impossible.

Where would Bush, Rush, and Rove be without the likes of Janet Jackson, Howard Stern, Michael Moore or even the late lamented Robert Mapplethorpe? They’d be waste-deep in the real issues confronting our nation – the issues of war and peace,

health and economy, education and ecology – for which they have little interest and even less understanding.

Make no mistake about it: there are certainly people out there who are really and sincerely affronted by a nano-second's glimpse of Janet Jackson's breast or the sounds of Stern's more scatological skits. However, for them – as indeed for the rest of us who merely find Jackson silly or Stern puerile – there is a simple solution: change channels.

What truly bothers me to the very marrow of my being are those self-appointed guardians of morality who use the Jacksons, Sterns and Mapplethorpes of society as a wedge-issue – an act of political misdirection designed to keep our eyes and minds off the real issues. This is an act of unmitigated, cynical duplicity.

I can just see the Bushies behind closed doors, high-fiving each other over their spectacular good fortune. “Whatever would we do without Janet?” I can hear one of them asking.

“Even more importantly,” says another, “what would *she* do without *us*? I bet we’ve been responsible for at least a 25% jump in her record sales.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” whistles a third. “Think we can hit her up for a contribution?”

The Duke said it best in *Measure for Measure*: “Oh, what may man within him hide, though angel on the outward side!”

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February 21, 2005

*Chutzpah* is one of those marvelously evocative words whose true meaning transcends definition. That the term has been subsumed into polite English is obvious: just type the word on your computer screen and behold! No telltale red underlining that screams out YOU'RE WRONG! YOU'VE MISSPELLED THE WORD! My computer even lists *five* separate synonymous terms: "gall," "nerve," "cheek," "impudence," and (although I'm not too sure about this one) "brass neck." For many, the best definition of *chutzpah* comes from a classic Borsht Belt routine: "*Chutzpah* is a child, who having killed his mother and father, pleads for mercy for the court because he is, after all (drum roll here), an orphan!"

This definition of *chutzpah* has more than sufficed for yours truly for a long, long time – up until yesterday at 8:45 in the A.M.. "So what happened yesterday at 8:45 in the A.M.?" you may certainly ask. Well, I'll tell you. Yesterday, at 8:45 in the A.M., right there on the first page of my local paper's metro section was an article entitled "Christians Groups Praise Progress." The article was about the 10<sup>th</sup> annual "Reclaiming America" conference held at our local Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. There, at the very beginning of the second paragraph, was a quote from David Barton, head of a Texas-based evangelical group WallBuilders: "Christians have a better concept of citizenship. They've gone from being bystanders to participants." That struck me as being even better – more *chutzpadik* if you will – than the jibe about the parenticide claiming orphan status. Christians have a better concept of citizenship? Better than whom? And what kind of Christians? Would Mr. Barton be willing to lump all Christians from, say, Pentecostal to Unitarian Universalist into his holy brew of *über menschen*? Who, we may well ask, is he to decide that a Christian makes a better, more heartfelt citizen, than a Jew, Muslim, Agnostic, Buddhists or Bahai?

Barton, who was cited by *Time* magazine as one of the most influential American evangelicals, heads WallBuilders, which takes its name from the wallbuilding activities of the Biblical scribe Nehemiah. WallBuilders sees itself as a latter-day Nehemiah, dedicated to "... presenting America's forgotten history and heroes, with an emphasis on the moral, religious, and constitutional foundation on which America was built." In WallBuilders' understanding of American history, this nation was founded by, of and for Christians. Moreover, they argue, the Founding Fathers never intended for Christianity to be separate from the town square, the local school, or the Halls of Congress. Besides being egregiously revisionist, such a worldview is narrow, exclusionary and ... well, just plain *chutzpadik*.

Speaking before nearly 900 people (who paid \$59.00 a head) at the Reclaiming America conference, Barton proclaimed that 24 of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence “had the equivalent of seminary or bible college educations.” OK. So not quite 43% of the signers of the Declaration had received religious education. Forgetting for the moment that Barton is willing to turn a minority (43%) into a prevailing majority, it must be remembered that in 1776 the vast, vast majority of colonial colleges and institutions of higher learning were in the business of turning out Protestant clergymen. Secular education, as we understand it today, was the exception, not the rule. What Dr. Barton fails (or refuses) to see is that many of these so-called Biblically-trained signers were also slave-owners who believed that blacks and Native Americans counted as only three-fifths of a human person, and that women were little more than chattel.

Leaders of the Center for Reclaiming America used the conference to announce their spring agenda. This agenda includes:

- “Liberty’s Voice,” a Washington D.C.-based lobby meant to “influence Congress toward religious and moral values.
- “Reclaiming America Media,” which uses radio, TV and the Internet “to mobilize people.
- “The National Grassroots Alliance,” described as “a campaign to recruit up to 1 million people to press conservative issues at the national and local levels.

To read the words of Barton and his colleagues, one would assume that Christians and Christianity are under dire attack here in America; that they are an oppressed minority facing certain extinction unless a moral government lead us all back down the proper path toward morality and ultimate salvation. This is, undoubtedly, the ultimate misunderstanding of American history. This is, quite likely, the ultimate definition of *chutzpah*.

Let us close then with a quote from Macaulay, who certainly understood the meaning of *chutzpah* even if he never heard the word in polite conversation: *Nothing is so galling to a people, not broken in from the birth, as a paternal or, in other words, a meddling government, a government which tells them what to read and say and eat and drink and wear.*

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February 22, 2005

## **Beware of the A.A.R.P.**

It can now be revealed. After countless hours and untold millions – all spent in the pursuit of truth – the self-appointed guardians of morality have finally uncovered the faceless, ubiquitous source of modern malevolence. Our guardians are now ready to go public and put both a name and a face to that nefarious force of evil that daily turns otherwise patriotic, upright Americans into traitorous pacifists and – even worse – supporters of immoral alternative lifestyles.

Yes, it can now be revealed. That force of evil is . . . (drum roll, please) . . . none other than the American Association for the Advancement of Retired People – the seemingly staid, uncontroversial A.A.R.P! How, you may well ask, was their villainy unmasked? What false step finally brought their devilry to light? Turns out, we never would have discovered their dastardliness if it had not been for their stance against personal retirement accounts. Once they began revealing their opposition to the president's proposal, the cat was out of the bag: A.A.R.P. showed themselves for what they truly are: a pack of traitorous debauchees.

Charlie Jarvis, president of USA Next and former deputy under secretary of the interior in the Reagan and first Bush Administrations, accused A.A.R.P. of being “the boulder in the middle of the highway to personal savings accounts.” Extending his stony metaphor, Jarvis went on to say that his USA Next minions will be “the dynamite that removes them.” Founded in 1991 by direct-mail king (and conservative Republican sugar daddy) Richard Viguerie, USA Next has a well-documented history of pouring millions and millions of dollars into ad campaigns that promote a far-right, big business agenda. In 2002, USA Next spent roughly \$9 million on television commercials and mailings supporting the Republican prescription drug plan – a plan to which AARP also gave its enthusiastic support.

USA Next's frontal assault on A.A.R.P., its former ally, came in the form of an ad on its Internet site featuring a photograph of a soldier in camouflage, crossed out by a red X, juxtaposed against a green check mark over two tuxedo-clad men kissing. The caption read, “The real AARP agenda.” Although the ad was pulled in less than 24 hours, it has taken on a life of its own, displayed on countless news shows as “exhibit A.”

Where in the world did Jarvis and USA Next get the idea that AARP supported gay marriage? Well, Jarvis states, the Ohio chapter of AARP *did* oppose an amendment to that state's Constitution that banned such marriages. That is true. However, a few minutes worth of research would have turned up the reason: the second clause of the proposed amendment blocked legal recognition of any union, potentially including unmarried heterosexuals that approximated marriage rights.

Once again, we observe that those who publicly disagree with a Republican proposal are likely to be tarred with the brush of pro-gay-marriage immorality. It has gotten to the point where the Bushies will seek to halt any legitimate political debate by resorting to the *ad hominem* device of crying "Pro-gay! Pro-gay!" Not only does this stifle meaningful dialogue and frustrate attempts at democratic discussion; it panders to base instinct. Where will it all end? As David M. Smith, vice president of policy for the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights group, said, "These groups think that the debate on any issue can be dismissed by bringing up gay marriage. We're probably going to see the cancellation of the N.H.L. hockey season blamed on gay marriage next." I can't wait for *that* disclosure.

It only goes to show the truth of H.L. Mencken's old barb: "No one ever went broke underestimating the bad taste of the American public."

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February 28, 2005

Over the past several years, the National Republican Party has been making a concerted effort to convince Jewish voters that their interests are best served by the G.O.P. Their message has been abundantly clear: “George Bush is the best friend Israel ever had.” While the president was taking the high road, freely associating himself with the Sharon government, his trusty allies were slogging away in the gutters of vituperation.

During the 2004 election, one Republican group, hiding behind the mask of a generic organizational title, launched an ad campaign in which they “linked” Senator John F. Kerry to Yassir Arafat and Mahathir Mohammed, a notorious Malaysian anti-Semite. One group of Jewish Republicans underwrote three full-page ads claiming that the Democrat Party was anti-Israel! Despite their best efforts, Jewish voters weren’t buying into the Republican deceit. Final exit polls showed that the American Jewish community cast 76% of its votes for Kerry to roughly. Although Bush’s percentage of Jewish votes (24%) in 2005 was up slightly over 2000 (19%), it was nowhere near the 40% Republican strategists were expecting.

One would expect that the Republicans, having held on to the White House (albeit by one of history’s smallest majorities) and the Congress, would have put the “Democrats-are-anti-Semites” campaign to rest – at least until they begin gearing up for the 2006 mid-term elections. That is what a reasonable person might expect. However, we have come to expect the unexpected from this administration. Believe it or not, despite victory, Republicans have not lost a step. Their latest campaign of misinformation charges that Democrats are soft on terrorism and do not support Israel. Additionally, they are having a field day pouring over old speeches of Governor Howard Dean and airing out-of-context nuggets that make him sound like a member of a sleeper cell.

Using Israel for the basest of partisan political gains is beyond the pale of appropriate behavior. Coming as it does, at precisely the moment when tempers are at the boiling point over Israel’s planned departure from Gaza, the Republican-Jewish coalition’s campaign is lamentably ill-timed at best, an incredible disgrace at worst.

Calls have gone out demanding that the Republican Jewish Coalition pull their ads and issue a blanket apology. To date, neither of these have occurred.

One wonders if there is any depth to which Republicans will not stoop, any slime in which they will not wallow, in order to achieve their apocalyptic political endgame. One fears that the answer is “of course not . . .”

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March 5, 2005

Leonardo DiCaprio: *Du bist a yid?*

During the Nazi occupation of Denmark, the Germans ordered all that country's Jews to identify themselves by wearing a Yellow Star. History records that in defiance of this edict, King Christian X himself donned a Yellow Star, thereby showing solidarity with that country's 7,000 Jews. Moreover – so the story goes – all Danes took to wearing the star. Through this act of civil defiance, King Christian and his subjects were telling the Nazis “we are all Danes, we are all Jewish.”

In October of 1943, the Germans ordered the roundup and deportation of all Danish Jews. Before the edict could be carried out, the Jews, who had been in hiding, were spirited across the Oresund to neutral Sweden, which guaranteed their freedom. As a result of their defiance and humanity, more than 90% of the Danish Jewish community wound up surviving the war.

One can debate whether or not King Christian's donning of the Yellow Star is historic myth or fact. What cannot be debated is that over the period of several weeks in the fall of 1943, Danes, piloting tug boats, yachts, pleasure craft, rowboats and canoes, managed to transport all but 284 Jews to Sweden.

It would seem that the spirit of King Christian X and his war-tossed Danes are still alive. Their incarnation comes in the partnership of bipolar opposites: Mark Schneier, an Orthodox Rabbi, and Russell Simmons, the cofounder of Def-Jam Records. Rabbi Schneier, who is the founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, has for years worked tirelessly to bring about understanding between Jews and other ethnic minorities around the world. Simmons, who is widely regarded as the man who, more than any other, pushed hip-hop music and culture into the American mainstream. Moreover, he has an “abiding passion for black-Jewish relations,” and has long used his vast wealth and influence to promote numerous initiatives against poverty, inner-city violence and racism.

Together, Schneier and Simmons have proposed an ad campaign that is undoubtedly making old King Christian smile. What they have proposed is a series of “I Am a Jew” ads to be run on MTV in Europe, America and even Israel. What makes this campaign so unique are the “Jews” who will likely appear in the various ads: Leonardo DeCaprio, Beyonce Knowles, Denzel Washington, Ricky Martin and perhaps even Eminem. The campaign is limited to non-Jewish stars.

"The impact these personalities make, not only on the masses, but specifically on younger people, is huge," Rabbi Schneier said in a recent *Jerusalem Post* article. Simmons is taking the campaign very seriously. "Anti-Semitism is growing so quickly around the world . . . . I want to do everything I can to fight it," he said in the *Post* interview. "People forget how quickly the world can change. I mean, it was only yesterday that Jews were being put into ovens."

What Schneier and Simmons are proposing is nothing short of brilliant – a full-scale assault on one of humanity's oldest, most vile and inhumane diseases – the hatred of Jews. If their ads can begin influencing young blacks, Latinos and other ethnics in the way they view bigotry against Jews – indeed, if they can get across the message that "we are all Jewish, we are all black, we are all Latino" – they will have performed an incalculably valuable service to all humanity.

Somewhere, King Christian must be smiling . . .

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March 11, 2005

## Repeat After Me: “DAR-FUR”

OK . . . quickly now: What’s the name of the billionaire-domestic icon princess who recently completed a five-month sentence at Camp Cupcake?

For those of you who answered “Martha Stewart” in less than a nanosecond, a big round of applause. Feel free to take a handsomely hand-glazed, low-calorie donut out of petty cash.

Next, where in the world is the “Neverland Ranch,” and who is its owner?

If you managed to get out the words “Santa Barbara” and “Michael Jackson” out in less than a heartbeat, you’ve won a front row seat at Jacko’s trial.

Lastly, how many times has Elizabeth Taylor been married? For an extra gold star, can you name them in reverse order?

Our Cat on a Hot Tin Roof has been married 7 times (well, 8 if you count Richard Burton twice). And now, for the extra gold star . . . they are: Conrad Hilton, Jr., Michael Wilding, Michael Todd, Eddie Fisher, Richard Burton, Richard Burton, Senator John Warner, and Larry Fortinsky.

Congratulations! You are now eligible for our winner-take-all-break-the-tie playoff round. The grand prizes are clear skies, clean water, world peace and chance to tell Donald Trump “You’re Fired!” during primetime.

And for that winner-take-all-break-the-tie question:

Name a region of the world that is bordered by Libya, Chad and the Central African Republic.

Silence. I can’t hear you.

Need another clue? Well, how about this: the region in question is found in the westernmost portion of Sudan.

More silence. What’s wrong? Cat got your tongue?

No closer? Here are a host of clues: the people of this region are victims of government-backed militias known collectively as the Janjaweed. The Janjaweed are systematically eliminating entire communities of African tribal farmers. Villages are being razed, women and girls raped and branded, men and boys murdered, and food and water supplies targeted and destroyed. Moreover, victims report that government air strikes frequently precede militia raids.

Still befuddled? Well join the crowd. Seems that no one in America can provide the correct answer, which just happens to be *Darfur*.

Yes, Darfur. Not since Rwanda in 1994, has the world seen such a calculated campaign of slaughter, starvation, rape and displacement. The effects of this ethnic

cleansing campaign have been devastating. It is estimated that at least 200,000 people have died. More than 1.6 million people have been displaced from their homes and over 200,000 have fled across the border to Chad. The situation has become so degraded that the Committee on Conscience of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has declared a “genocide emergency” in the Sudan, indicating that genocide is imminent or is actually happening in the Darfur region.

And yet, few Americans have heard of the region, let alone know what is going on there. We are so obsessed with the lives, fortunes and peccadilloes of the “rich and famous” that we have little time, energy or interest in the rest of the world. Out of sight, out of mind.

Neverland Ranch? Sure. Darfur? Where?

Larry Fortinsky (Liz’s eighth and presumably last)? Cinch. Omar Hassan El-Bashir (The President of Sudan) Who?

Barry Bonds on steroids? A national disgrace. Genocide in Darfur? Yawwwwn.

Shame on us.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

March 18, 2005

## **A Valentine From George W. to Abdullah bin Saud**

On February 14, President George W. Bush had a brief phone conversation with his Saudi counterpart, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. During their chat, the president, according to White House press secretary Scott McClellan, "complimented the Crown Prince on last week's successful counter-terrorism conference in Saudi Arabia." Moreover, the president expressed his gratitude for all that the Saudis were doing to help stem the tide of terrorism and hatred in the Middle East.

The Bush Administration considered this international conference important enough to select Frances Fragos Townsend, who serves as President Bush's Homeland Security Advisor with the rank of Assistant to the President, to head the American delegation. The conference included delegates from Iran, Syria and Sudan – all state sponsors of terrorism, according to our own Department of State. And just what, you may well ask, transpired at the conference that merited the sweet nothings George W. whispered into the ear of the Crown Prince?

- An on-the-record pledge that Saudi Arabia will do everything within its considerable power to hunt down, capture and bring Osama bin Laden to justice? In your dreams.
- A declaration of intent that Saudi Arabia, along with other likeminded nations, will affect an end to global terrorism? What's in the pipe that you're smoking?

- A resolution calling for the PLO to renounce terrorism and embrace diplomacy as its number one weapon? If you believe that, let me tell you about some swampland I've got for sale . . .

Apparently, the president sent along his Valentine's Day bonbons without benefit of having first read (or been told) the translation of the conference's business. For if he had, he would have learned that Ms. Townsend and members of the American delegation were witness to:

- Saudi Cleric Aed Al-Qarni's astonishing discovery that "The first to kill and use terrorism in the world were the Jews," and that September 11<sup>th</sup> was "an American terror attack."
- A diatribe by another Saudi cleric who endlessly ranted on that "Jews and Christians are enemies of Allah."
- The startling revelation that Osama was "sent by the Jews."

In defense of President Bush, one might argue that he was likely unaware of the kinds of people and beliefs that would be given a platform at the conference. The problem with this defense is that New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg had pointedly warned the White House about the conference and its conferees nearly two weeks before the Townsend delegation departed for Riyadh. In a letter that was both clear and unambiguous, told the President to avoid the conference like the plague. Lamentably, Lautenberg's warning fell on deaf ears and blind eyes; by its very presence, the American delegation wound up giving the conference the Administration's sanction and imprimatur.

Ira N. Forman, National Jewish Democratic Council Executive Director termed the president's actions "self-delusional" and noted that even without Senator Lautenberg's pointed warning, the White House was certainly aware of the "contemptible statements" made on Saudi television in the days prior to the conference. And yet, the Townsend group flew off to Riyadh and participated in a conference where anti-American, anti-Christian and anti-Semitic diatribes were hurled with abandon. What kind of message

does this send to our allies? What does it say about the Bush Administration's commitment to decency, morality and truth?

I guess all these venerable concepts get thrown to the wind when there's oil involved. But remember this: during the Clinton years, when the administration was telling it like it was to the house of Saud, the price of a barrel of oil got down as low as \$18.00. Now that we have an administration straight out of the West Texas oil fields, a barrel is at \$56.00. What a great valentine for us all.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

March 20, 2005

## **The Indecency of It All: In the Matter of Terry Schiavo**

Make no mistake about it: for those conservative Republicans accustomed to marching to a Christian Right drumbeat, the plight of poor Terry Schiavo is, to employ a Yiddish expression, *fun himmel a mataneh* – namely, “a gift from heaven.” And while one can be reasonably certain that the opinions of most people have been shaped by sensitivity and religious scruple, there is more than ample proof that the Congressional rush to enact legislation finds its motivation in a realm quite a bit lower than heaven.

Simply stated, House Majority Leader Tom “The Hammer” DeLay and his minions see political dividends galore. A one-page memo, distributed to Republican senators by party leaders (read: Tom DeLay) called the debate over Schiavo legislation “a great political issue” that would appeal to the party’s base, or core supporters.

Now, people of good will, faith, and humane instincts can and do disagree on this wrenching issue. Many believe that any determination ought to be left to the parties most directly involved, namely Terry’s parents and husband. And, as everyone in America knows, they are at loggerheads with each other. Terry’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Schindler, want to keep Terry alive. They believe that, despite their daughter’s having been in what medical science calls a “persistent vegetative state” for 15 years, she can be rehabilitated if only her husband would allow her to receive the necessary therapy. Medical science is in all but unanimous disagreement with the Schindlers.

Terry’s husband, Michael Schiavo, wants to remove his wife’s feeding tube. His reason, made abundantly clear over the past several years, is that he is trying to follow his wife’s wishes. He insists that he has done everything medically possible for his wife, and now, understanding that her situation is hopelessly irreversible, must comply with her request – not to be kept alive by artificial means.

As far back as February 2000, a Pinellas County (Florida) circuit court approved Michael’s request to have Terry’s feeding tube removed. His parents, backed by right-to-life groups filed numerous appeals. Both the Florida Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court refused to intervene.

Enter the United States Congress. At his most recent press conference, Majority Leader DeLay, who is at the center of the current rush-to-action, stated "We should investigate every avenue before we take the life of a living human being. That is the very least we can do." Likewise, White House Spokesman Scott McClellan added "Everyone recognizes that time is important here. This is about defending life."

There are several factors that tend to make their page-one defense of life questionable:

- This Republican-controlled Congress has repeatedly cut funds for healthcare, childcare, clean air, clean water and education – all issues that affect living human beings.
- This is a Congress that has as its operative philosophy "less government, less taxes, more freedom."
- Tom DeLay, Washington's master banshee politico, has shown time and again that he is far more concerned with power, votes and winning, than with coming to the aid of the weak, the voiceless and the disenfranchised.

Already, DeLay and his whip-squad are figuring out how to equate use a vote against the proposed bill – a bill that will mandate replacing Mrs. Schiavo's feeding tube – as a weapon in the upcoming 2006 midterm elections. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and their banshees have been unmasked as nothing more than shameless, cynical opportunists

One is reminded of the emotional question asked of Senator McCarthy by attorney Joseph Welch a half-century ago: "have you left no sense of decency?"

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

March 25, 2005

## Whatever Happened to Consistency?

The Algonquin wit Dorothy Parker once quipped: “There are two things that will always bewilder me: how zippers work and the precise function of Bernard Baruch.” With all due apologies to Parker, I must admit to *at least* two things that, I fear, shall always bewilder me: the enduring popularity of Rush Limbaugh, and whatever in the world happened to consistency. Actually, the two are sort of tied in together.

Let’s take Rush first. As we know, Limbaugh’s partisans believe that he is a genius, a prophet and a seer – a man who truly understands the how and why of reality and tells it like it is. He is the darling of the religious right; a man who – unlike the smarmy pundits of the left – is guided by a set of unshakable moral principles. Never mind that until just a few years ago he was totally apolitical, or that recently, he was unmasked as an overmedicated pill popper who was receiving simultaneous prescriptions from at least a half-dozen different physicians. These glaring inconsistencies are blithely overlooked by the adoring ditto-heads who accept his every pronouncement as a gem from the Mount.

And while I am not one to generally indulge in *schadenfreude* (the taking of pleasure someone else’s misfortune), for Limbaugh, Gingrich, Swaggart, DeLay and the rest of the moral paragons-with-feet-of-clay, I will gladly make an exception. Call me inconsistent. I’m funny that way – and I’ve just conveniently taken us to one of the other things that truly bewilder me.

Inconsistency. Once described by Emerson as “the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little philosophers and statesmen and divines,” inconsistency has actually reached epidemic proportions in modern public life. Consider the following:

- People of faith, who are so passionate about preserving the life of Terry Shiavo on the grounds that every human life is holy, are also issuing death threats against her husband Michael.
- Congress, which just last weekend voted overwhelmingly in favor of keeping Terry Shiavo alive, are about to cut \$15 billion from the very program (Medicaid) that helps keep her alive.
- Political leaders, who time and again bear witness to life’s beginnings at conception, vote as if life ends at birth, by cutting and curtailing such life-

sustaining and life-enhancing programs as clean air, clean water, pesticide control, school lunches and affordable healthcare.

- Religious leaders, who call abortion murder, are, for the most part, against any form of gun control.

I could go on, but you get the picture. The prevailing ruling elite have determined that so long as you “talk the talk,” there’s no need to “walk the walk.” The easiest way to insure unfettered prosperity for the already prosperous is to throw scraps of religious rhetoric to the starving masses. And if it appears that the masses are getting close to questioning the relative lack of consistency between words and deeds, throw in a week’s worth of attention-diverting activities – like hearings on steroids in major league baseball or a dramatic late-night vote on Terry Shiavo. I find it utterly fascinating that these two issues, which captured the time and attention of the networks over the past two weeks, arose at precisely the time when questions about whether or not Majority Leader Tom “The Exterminator” DeLay would be indicted on multiple ethics violations.

Perhaps inconsistency is part of a consistent political strategy on the part of the Republican majority to keep themselves in power until the end time – or the 2006 midterm elections, whichever comes first.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

March 31, 2005

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), being of sound mind and body, unequivocally declare that in the event of a catastrophic injury, I do not wish to be kept alive indefinitely by artificial means. I hereby instruct my loved ones and relatives to remove all life-support systems, once it has been determined that my brain is longer functioning in a cognizant realm. However, that judgment should be made only after thorough consultation with medical experts; i.e., individuals who actually have been trained, educated and certified as doctors. Under no circumstances! -- and I can't state this too strongly -- should my fate be put in the hands of peckerwood politicians who couldn't pass ninth-grade biology if their lives depended on it.

Furthermore, it is my firm hope that, when the time comes, any discussion about terminating my medical treatment should remain private and confidential. Living in Florida, however, I am acutely aware that the legislative and executive branches of state government are fond of meddling in family matters, and have little concern for the privacy and dignity of individuals. Therefore, I wish to make my views on this subject as clear and unambiguous as possible. Recognizing that some politicians seem cerebrally challenged themselves (and with no medical excuse), I'll try to keep this simple and to the point:

1. While remaining sensitive to the feelings of loved ones who might cling to hope for my recovery, let me state that if a reasonable amount of time passes - - say, \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) months -- and I fail to sit up and ask for a cold beer, it should be presumed that I won't ever get better. When such a determination is reached, I hereby instruct my spouse, children and attending physicians to pull the plug, reel in the tubes, and call it a day.

2. Under no circumstances shall the members of the Legislature enact a special law to keep me on life-support machinery. It is my wish that these boneheads mind their own damn business, and pay attention instead to the health, education and future of the millions of Floridians who aren't in a permanent coma.

3. Under no circumstances shall the governor of Florida butt into this case and order my doctors to put a feeding tube down my throat. I don't care how many fundamentalist votes he's trying to scrounge for, it is my wish that he plays

politics with someone else's life and leaves me to die in peace!

4. I couldn't care less if a hundred religious zealots send e-mails to legislators in which they pretend to care about me. I don't know these people, and I certainly haven't authorized them to preach and crusade on my behalf. They should mind their own business, too.

5. It is my heartfelt wish to expire quietly and without a public spectacle.

This is obviously impossible once elected officials become involved. So, while recognizing the wrenching emotions that attend the prolonged death of a loved one, I hereby instruct my relatives to settle all disagreements about my care in private or in the courts, as provided by law. If any of my family goes against my wishes and turns my case into a political cause, I hereby promise to come back from the grave and make his or her existence a living \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

April 1, 2005

## The Masses Are Asses

Grandpa Doc was a man with who came equipped with a subtle wit, a trove of stories and a slightly off-center way of looking at the world. One of his favorite maxims was " . . . the masses are asses." Generally, after making the statement, he would look you in the eye, adopt an Eastern European accent (which he definitely did not have) and continue: "Tell 'dem dat deys gonna get new bosses, dey's gonna ask for Greyhound bosses!" Just behind the veil of his pun was a powerful truth: *en masse*, people, in their blindness and naivety, can be led to go against their enlightened self-interest. Woe to them who are so easily led astray. A pox on those who do the leading.

I have a feeling that Grandpa must be spinning in his grave these days. Of late, Doc's dictum has been buzzing around in my brain. Seems that just about every day, there's either a White House proposal or Congressional vote that once enacted, will benefit the very few, and deleteriously affect the overwhelming many. Need a few examples?

- We start with President Dubya's **private accounts** scenario, whereby workers can opt out remove a portion of their Social Security tax out of the system and play Russian roulette with the stock market. Clearly, the only ones who are guaranteed of receiving benefits from this gnarly proposal are brokers and account executives, who collect commissions whether an investors portfolio rises, falls or self-destructs.
- The recently enacted **tort reform** measures by which the average citizen, already vulnerable to the whims, incompetence and indifference of unregulated big business America, are going to find it nigh-on impossible to lodge law suits. Great protection for Dubya's supporters; terrible exposure for the rest of us.
- **Tax breaks for the top 1%**, which have driven the deficit sky high, imperiled the economy with rising inflation, and pushed the stock market increasingly lower. The beneficiaries of these breaks definitely don't live on my street or yours, here in Middletown, U.S.A.
- **Continuing military involvement in Iraq**, which is still being sold under false pretenses. This military debacle is great for corporate America (or at least those who participate in no-bid, no-competition contracts) and

horrible for the young men and women whose boots are on the ground. And for what? Oil?

- **Drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWAR):** we are being told that more than a million barrels a day can be dredged up from this pristine patch of God's good earth. Never mind that it will cost untold billions, will do nothing to lower the price of fuel, and will irrevocably upset the gentle balance of nature that has existed since the Six Days of Creation.

We could go on -- and on and on -- but to what advantage? How in the world can Dubya and the posse convince so many Americans to go against their own self-interest? Simple. By throwing crumbs of Christian morality (think: Terri Schiavo, Right-to-Life and Faith-based Initiatives) and an aw-shucks delivery at the American people.

If there is a God in heaven (and I believe that he/she is a moderate-to-liberal Democrat), people will wake up sometime before November 2006, smell the foul air emanating from both 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and Capitol Hill, and begin the process of taking back America. Putting America back on the right track can benefit us all. Let's leave the "bosses" to Greyhound. And who knows? Maybe Grandpa Doc will be able to rest just a bit easier . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

April 08, 2005

## WHERE IS JEFFERSON SMITH WHEN WE NEED HIM?

Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear when Jimmy Stewart (a.k.a. Senator Jefferson Smith of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*) filibustered Claude Rains (Senator Joseph Harrison Paine) and the entire Senate over a point of moral honor. Against all odds, the still wet-behind-the-ears Stewart (with all the help that Jean Arthur, Thomas Mitchell and Harry Cary could muster) held the floor hour after hour, time and again rejuvenated by the knowledge that his fight was right, his purpose honorable. And being a Frank Capra movie, everything turned out just dandy.

Oh that Jefferson Smith stilled stalked the halls of Congress, that the Senate Majority leader was more like Capra's H.B. Warner than W's Bill Frist. For in Bill Frist -- along with his comrade-in-arms Senator Rick Santorum -- we find two dangerous ideologues who think nothing of overturning nearly two centuries of senate procedural tradition. In what has been increasingly called "The Nuclear Option," Majority Leader Frist is threatening to eliminate the three-fifths cloture rule. This rule, which has existed for generations, requires that no less than 60% of the Senate must agree before a filibuster can be broken.

Political junkies with a decent knowledge of Senate history will know that filibusters are far more the exception than the rule on Capitol Hill. In the 1930s, Louisiana Senator (and Governor) Huey Long held the upper chamber at bay for endless hours, droning on and on about the proper way to make fried oysters. The only thing that got the Kingfish to drop the histrionics (after an incredible 23 hours, 16 minutes) was a bursting bladder. Then, there was South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, who filibustered the 1957 Civil Rights Act for a record 24 hours, 18 minutes. Back in those days, there was no such thing as cloture. Now there is. But if Senators Frist and Santorum have their way, not for long.

What they propose is that Vice President Cheney, acting in his capacity as the Senate's presiding officer, simply rule any filibuster as "out of order." Frist would then need only 50 Republican votes to turn back any Democrat challenge to the chair's ruling. And that, dear reader, would spell both doom and disaster for the democratic process. A filibuster-less United Senate would soon become a chamber where "tyranny by the majority" was the hard-and-fast reality. And in the process, the Republicans would have silenced the Democrat minority just as surely as if they had taken a scalpel to their collective vocal chords.

Frist, Santorum and their moral minions are threatening this so-called "Nuclear Option" so that Democrats cannot filibuster any future judicial nominations. What they fear is that the Democrats (in a replay of the Haynsworth, Carswell and Bork nominations of years past), might actually keep incompetent, far-right jurists off the federal bench. And for those who are working twenty-four-seven to create a permanent arch-Conservative Republican White House, Congress and Judiciary, any and all obstacles must be dynamited out of the roadway. The filibuster is just something whose day is done.

Without the ability to filibuster, minority voices cease to be heard; other points of view are shushed into oblivion. Not only is this dangerous; it is downright undemocratic.

But, as the old saw goes, "what goes around comes around." If the Republicans want to outlaw the filibuster, their day will come. For as sure as God made little green apples, the Democrats will one day once again hold a Senate majority. And at that time, the filibuster, which in 2005 looked like such a dangerous weapon, will be their best friend. But there won't be a thing they can do about it.

Hello Senator Jefferson Smith? Get on down to the Senate chamber. We need you!

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# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

April 15, 2005

## The Shays Rebellion

Back in the summer of 1786, a group of disgruntled farmers in Western Massachusetts, feeling the acute sting of financial oppression, decided to band together and create "unsponsored, extra-legal" conventions. Their aim was straightforward: to better articulate their grievances and then forward them as petitions to the Massachusetts General Assembly. The farmer's primary aim was to get their many creditors to back off and show a bit of understanding, forbearance and Christian charity during tough, tough economic times. In response, the august gentlemen of the General Assembly -- to whom economic hardship was as foreign as a pork chop to a Lubavitcher Hassid, counseled the farmers to practice "thrift, virtue and patience" -- three not particularly appetizing values for people who are frightened, frustrated and on the verge of starvation. Taking matters into their own hands, the farmers formed armed mobs and soon began attacking and closing down the various Courts of Common Pleas. In so doing, the rebellious farmers made it impossible for the Courts to prosecute for non-payment of debt.

Despite earning a paragraph in most American history texts, this rag-tag hit-and-run rebellion, led by the eponymous Daniel Shays, was, to put it bluntly, an abysmal failure. For not only were they unable to get their eastern, blue-blood creditors off their backs, mutiny was largely responsible for the good folks of Massachusetts voting in an even more stiff-necked, tone-deaf General Assembly. In the end, all that saved the rebellious farmers was an upturn in the general economy.

One need not be a Marxist to see that the Shays Rebellion was a classic case of society's "have-nots" seeking help from society's "haves." In taking up arms, overwhelming the local courts, and eventually staging their unsuccessful raids on local munitions centers, they were attempting to get someone -- anyone -- to listen. In their case, no one did. In other cases however, one voice, passionately raised, has been able to redirect history's tide. Take as an example another son of Massachusetts, attorney Joseph Welch who, on June 10, 1954, began the process of bringing down Senator Joe McCarthy with 17

heartfelt words: *"Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"*

Perhaps, just perhaps, we will once again see just how much power one passionate voice can have. Ironically, the voice belongs to another New Englander named Shays -- Representative Christopher Shays of Connecticut's 4th Congressional District. For the mild-mannered, thoroughly decent Shays, one of the few moderate voices left in the Republican Party, has called upon his party's leader, Tom "The Hammer" DeLay, to step down.

Readers of this Blog need not be reminded of the litany of abuses -- ethical, financial and political -- that the Majority Leader has committed in his God-intoxicated drive to remake America in his own image. Frighteningly, recent polls show that fewer than 4 Americans in 10 even know who DeLay is. Think of that: 6 out of every 10 Americans have no idea that this man has:

- Given over the hallowed halls of Congress to the smarmy lobbyists of K Street;
- Threatened federal judges with his own version of "Divine Retribution" for not going his way in the recent Terri Schiavo case;
- Made it virtually impossible for Democrats to be heard, much less effective;
- Strong-armed national associations and lobbying groups to make sure that no Democrats be included in their roster of employees;
- Virtually insulated himself against any ethical challenge that may be raised by his colleagues, and
- Turned the federal government into a massive feed trough for his corporate backers.

With Representative Shays firing the first shots across the Majority Leader's bow, one can only hope that his ship -- to continue the metaphor -- will soon spring a mortal leak and sink back into the ooze from which it arose.

From Daniel Shays to Christopher Shays is a leap of 219 years and less than 150 miles. May this Shays have better fortune.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

April 23, 2005

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## It's the Health Insurance, Stupid!

Back in the early days of the '92 campaign, old Doc Carville prescribed the following medicinal mantra, to be taken at least twice-an-hour by then-Governor Bill Clinton and anyone and everyone working for his nomination/election: **"IT'S THE ECONOMY STUPID!"** This mantra, Doc Carville predicted, would not only keep the campaign on track and in focus; it would all but guarantee victory in November. Well, as history proves, Carville was right on the money; it was the economy, stupid.

Fast forward some thirteen-plus years. We are now beginning to talk about strategy and prospects for the 2006 Congressional elections, even as we bear witness to the languid stretching and eye-rubbing of a slowly awakening batch of candidates for the 2008 presidential nomination. It seems to me that regardless of whomsoever the Republicans put up in 2008 (The Reverend Doctor Frist? Jeb? Newt? Ahnold?), we progressives are going to once again be seriously in need of a medicinal mantra. With all due modesty, I hereby tender the following prescription to any and all willing to take it:

**"IT'S THE HEALTH INSURANCE, STUPID!"**

**"IT'S THE HEALTH INSURANCE, STUPID!"**

Believe me, I guranatee that any candidate, any campaign smart enough to ingest this mantra on an hourly basis, will have a Bekins Moving and Storage

Van bound for 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue pulling up to their front door in December, 2008. For just as **"IT'S THE ECONOMY STUPID!"** resonated so very well with the American voting public in 1992 (Remember: Clinton won 33 of the 50 states and garnered 43% of the popular vote despite E. Ross Perot's spoiler role), I fully believe that **"IT'S THE HEALTH INSURANCE, STUPID!"** will resonate equally well in 2008. How do I know this? Simply stated, I have insight based on deeply-vested self interest. Permit me a digressive explanation.

A little over ten years ago, I became deathly ill, had to undergo several surgical procedures, and as a result, wound up unable to metabolize any nourishment from the food I ate. Simply stated, I was starving to death. Well God bless medical science, for there turned out to be an alternative way of getting nourishment when the digestive system takes a hike: it's called TPN, short for "Total Parenteral Nutrition." TPN is a lifesaver for people like me, who are unable to absorb nutrition through their intestines. The TPN setup is administered through an intravenous infusion, usually using a central line. A central line is a special long-lasting IV line that goes through a vein directly to the heart. It is usually placed on the chest, though sometimes if the location must be changed frequently it will be placed in other areas such as the groin or the neck. Then, a milky substance filled with vitamins, minerals, protein and fat are infused through the system by a little computer gizmo that runs twelve hours a day, seven days a week, three-hundred-and-sixty-five days a year. Without it, people with my condition (Crohn's Disease) can easily die. The only problem is that it costs more than **\$3,000.00 a week**.

Needless to say, my health insurance carrier was aghast. After I had been on the TPN for about 6 weeks, my insurance carrier informed me that they were going to cancel my coverage within the month. When, in my frustration and fear, I asked them what in the Hell I was supposed to do -- die? -- they suggested that I transfer any assets I might have to a second party, declare indigency, and apply for Medicaid. Imagine that! They were actually telling

me -- a living, breathing, hard-working American -- that I should become a ward of the state!

Taking pen to paper (well, actually fingers to keyboard), I wrote and had published several op-ed pieces about the criminal conspiracy known as "Health Insurance in America." Within a week, I was contacted by an insurance executive who, moved by my plight, offered to sell me insurance that would cover me regardless of previous condition. Well, my mother raised no fools; I quickly signed up -- despite the fact that it cost an arm, a leg and a pancreas gland.

Over the past decade, my monthly premiums have risen to the point where they are now higher than the monthly mortgage on a large house on the water. And to add ultimate insult to mortal injury, according to the bill I just received, my rates will be going up by nearly 30% next year!

Why? Why is health insurance so incredibly expensive in the United States? Ask this of the Bushies or their bedfellows of the health insurance industry, and they will tell you **It's the trial lawyers, stupid!**" Guess again. According to the best, most recent statistics, medical malpractice suits account for no more than 2% of current costs. So what's the real reason behind the never-ending upward spiral of health insurance costs? Greedy doctors? Greedy corporations? Beats me. But then again, that's not my field. I'm just a Blogger with 11 years of higher education and a serious medical condition. But one thing I do know: I'm not alone.

I am fortunate in that I can afford (though just barely) to pay even more outrageous monthly premiums for myself and my family. Truth to tell, I really have no choice; I'm in love with being alive. But what about the rest of America? What about the 40 or 45 million uninsured Americans who have no health coverage whatsoever? What about all the un- and under-insured who are going to be euchred by the latest proposed cuts in Medicaid

expenditures? What are they going to do? Where are they going to go when they get sick? Hang on until they qualify for Medicare? Who will be their voice? Perhaps we all ought to run for Congress. Afterall, *their* healthcare coverage is fantastic. I can just imagine the campaign slogan: "The job needs Joe Dokes and Joe Dokes Needs the Job!!"

I cannot tell you how many people I speak with on a daily and weekly basis who are in the same boat: scared to death that one significant illness will consign them to ignominy, bankruptcy, and poverty. If everyone who is filled with anger and fear over sky-rocketing healthcare costs would band together; if a single politician on the national stage were to take up this cudgel and make this issue his or her own; he or she could easily win any office in the land from dog catcher to -- dare we say -- President of these United States.

So, go to your medicine cabinet, pull out that amber-colored bottle marked 'TO VICTORY IN '08!' and begin taking that mantric medicament:

**"IT'S THE HEALTH INSURANCE, STUPID!"**

**"IT'S THE HEALTH INSURANCE, STUPID!"**

**"IT'S THE HEALTH INSURANCE, STUPID!"**

There. Don't you feel better already? I know I do . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

April 29, 2005

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## God Visits Capitol Hill

God made an appearance in the United States Senate this morning. Entered the chamber just a few minutes before ten, Eastern Daylight Time. Walked right up to Senator Frist, stuck out a well-manicured hand and asked the Majority Leader and putative presidential candidate if **Co** [this is the Divine pronoun -- sort of like "he/she" or "she/he"] could give the morning invocation. Well, what could the good Dr. [he who had miraculously diagnosed Terri Schiavo without benefit of ever being within 150 miles of her] say but "Good God! You want it, you got it."

Word soon spread throughout the Capitol that God **Co-self** was in the Senate chamber, waiting for a quorum (perhaps a Minyan) to arrive. By ten-eighteen, all one-hundred members of the Senate were gathered in hushed awe. Off to one side, just in front of the door leading to the Democrat Cloak Room stood Senators Boxer, Coleman, Feingold, Feinstein, Kohl, Lautenberg, Levin, Lieberman, Schumer, Spector and Wydner. Emanating from them was a radiance that shone with all the intensity of a 2,000 kilowatt flare.

Approaching the central rostrum, God motioned all the assembled to rise and bow their heads. **Co** then began:

*August ladies and gentlemen of the United States Senate:*

*Humankind calls me by a hundred different names, and calls upon me in a thousand different ways. And yet, whether you choose to address me as God,*

*Jesus, Ha-Shem, Allah, Vishnu or Yahweh; whether you stand, kneel or fall prostrate on the ground; whether you recite prayers that are written from left to right, right to left or top to bottom, you are all, essentially addressing Me - the one who creates and sustains, who exalts and judges, who blesses and enables that which I pray is the very best within each of you.*

*Through the very act of invoking My name, you seek My guidance, My approval, and above all, My strength and blessing.*

*I hope you understand that I have already bestowed manifold blessings upon each and every one of you; how else could you have become United States Senators? I have permitted each of you to become leaders in this great nation. I pray that you be ever mindful of the awesome responsibility that comes from being so engifted; that you pause constantly to reflect upon the very nature of communal responsibility. May you ever keep uppermost in your hearts and minds the most basic and purposive reasons why you are here in this chamber: to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; to exercise stewardship over all the natural glories that I have created; to educate, to elevate and to advocate.*

*May you, who have already been given so many, many blessings, be ever cognizant of the fact that many paths can lead to the same destination. May you -- and I mean this in the collective sense -- you who call each other "My good friend," "Honorable" and "Distinguished" -- realize that I have given you two ears with which to hear and but one mouth with which to speak.*

*May all of you understand that although there are unquestionably many paths to the Gates of Glory, there is but one Gatekeeper -- and that is Yours Truly!*

*I'll make you a deal:*

*I shall continue to bless and keep you if you, in return, will begin acting more like the head of a fox and less like the tail-end of an ass.*

*I shall cause **My** great countenance to shine upon you if you will remember that this government belongs to the people, and not the other way around.*

*I shall lift up the light of **My** countenance and grant you peace if you will mend your ways, stop cavorting about as if you were Joshua, Isaiah, Saul of Tarshis and Mother Teresa all-rolled-into-one, and begin acting like humane servants of the people.*

*If you will do all these things, then I can say **AMEN!!***

With that, Dr. Frist walked over to Senator Reid, begged his forgiveness for being such an incredibly obnoxious blatherskite, and decided then and there to become a liberal Democrat.

When last seen, God was heading up Pennsylvania Avenue, a beatific smile on **Co's** face. After walking several blocks, **Co** headed up the drive leading to the big house sitting far back from the Avenue. The street number was 1600. Knocking on the massive front door, God waited. And waited. At last, the door opened. Peering inside, God, a strange, almost prophetic glow emanating from **Co's** eyes, asked the servant who answered the door "Is Karl Rove in this morning . . .?"

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

May 06, 2005

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## The Oil of Politics

By any stretch of the imagination, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were bipolar opposites in matters of politics, personality and *weltanschauung*. In fact, the priggish Adams so loathed the cosmopolite Jefferson that he refused to attend his successor's inauguration. Adams was so firmly convinced that Jefferson was a rake, a roue and -- far worse -- an atheist, that he actually drove his family and possessions out of Washington on the morning of the inaugural in full view of Jefferson's well wishers.

As fate would have it, they did affect a rapprochement. Between 1812 and 1826, they kept a constant stream of letters, monographs, and opinions flowing between Braintree and Charleston, covering everything from government, philosophy and religion to agronomy, astronomy and quotidiania. Amazingly, these two titans of American history died within hours of one another on the 4th of July, 1826 -- the fiftieth anniversary of the country they had founded. Eerie, no? A coincidence? I wonder. Sometimes fact is stranger than fiction.

Then there's the true story about a truly eerie coincidence involving the making of "The Wizard of Oz." It seems that try as he might, MGM costume designer "Adrian" (Adrian Adolph Greenburg) couldn't come up with a proper coat for actor Frank Morgan (Francis Wuppermann) to wear as Professor Marvel. After nearly a dozen false starts, someone recommended that Adrian send one of his assistants to scour the local thrift shops. The assistant spent

several days canvassing thrift shops from Hollywood to Santa Monica, finally returning with what he thought was the perfect coat. Well, not only did the coat fit Morgan to a tee, but when they began cleaning it, they discovered that the garment had originally belonged to L(yman) Frank Baum -- the author of The Wizard of Oz! Can't you just hear the opening notes from "The Twilight Zone?"

Where am I going with this (hopefully) interesting, definitely digressive idyll on coincidence? Straight to the Bush White House. Why? To make a couple of rather simple, albeit necessary observations.

To wit:

- When you people an administration with a surfeit of oil barons, it should come as no surprise that the price of oil will go through the roof.
- When your primary financial backers are the executives of Enron, Chevron and Haliburton, you're going to want to do them a mess of favors. Has anyone checked out the most recently quarterly reports from our nation's largest oil companies? They're doing just fine, thank you very much.
- When the country is being run by people whose hemoglobin has been replaced by refined petroleum, there is going to be a mad scramble to find ever increasing venues in which to dig, drill, refine and pollute.

Is it any wonder that the Bushies have reversed the Clinton-era edict that protects some 60 million acres of pristine wilderness from the ravages of road building? Or that our oil-dominated, Republican controlled Congress has voted to permit oil exploration in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge? Or that we are pouring hundreds of billions of dollars and destroying thousands of lives in the oil-rich quagmire that is Iraq?

Back in the late 1960s, there was a book entitled "The Politics of Oil." It was a must-read for anyone working on Capitol Hill. During the days when Congress was setting up the Alaskan North Slope giveaway, seems like every person you met in the halls of Congress had a copy of that book.

Today, some 35 years later, someone should write a sequel entitled "The Oil of Politics." For it is oil -- and gas and other non-renewable energy sources -- that is fueling today's political juggernaut. What we pay at the pump is merely part of the payoff for those who have put Dubya and his cohorts into power.

It doesn't take a wizard to figure out that that's no coincidence.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

May 13, 2005

## Tom DeLay: The Progressive's Best Hope

As I peck away on my laptop, I'm ensconced in a B737 flying some 36,000 feet above Sugarland, Texas, the home of House Majority Leader Tom "The Hammer" DeLay. While I'm up here in the wild blue yonder, old Tommy boy's ultra-conservative friends and allies are throwing him a \$2,000.00-a-table testimonial bash at Washington's swank Governor's Hotel. It seems hardly fair that I, who have never been the target of a House Ethics Committee probe, who have never wallowed in the illegal largesse of K Street Lobbyists or even threatened to take someone off at the knees, should be snacking on airline crackers and Oreos while Tom and the troglodytic right are feasting on filet mignon and Mouton Cadet Rothschild. I mean, the last time anyone threw *me* a testimonial bash it was a lunchtime event, the faire consisting of bagels, tuna fish and diet coke. And, as I recall, the tab for that affair was a paltry \$15.00 a head. I guess duplicity, dishonesty and strong-armed tactics trump civility any day of the week.

I must admit that when I first read about all those movement conservatives gathering to break bread and extol their favorite son at \$250.00 a plate, I was a might peeved. I mean what better definition of the old Yiddish word *chutzpah* could there be than what Grover Norquist, Gary Bauer and the rest of the conservative glitterati were

planning for the man once known as “Hot Tub Tom?” Didn’t that show the absolute moral hypocrisy and intellectual bankruptcy of the political right? How, I thought, could things get any worse? Reading about the testimonial banquet-to-be, I couldn’t help but feel that America was teetering somewhere between The Twilight Zone and the Land of Oz.

But you know something? Flying up here way, way above the clouds where the sky is a brilliant blue and the vista without limit, I’ve had a moment of ecstatic clarity. The DeLay banquet is neither a travesty nor a death-knell for political sanity. No, it is precisely the opposite: it is the opening volley in a campaign to pin Tom DeLay’s name, face and political baggage on virtually every Republican running for reelection in 2006. (I say *virtually*, because there are still a handful of thoughtful, intellectually engaged moderate Republicans around.)

At this juncture, the last thing that the Republican right should be doing is putting Tom DeLay’s name and face on page one. One of the reasons why he has been so incredibly successful over the years is that with the exception of the voters in his Texas congressional district and a couple of thousand hardcore political junkies, few people had ever heard of him. Is it any wonder? I mean, in poll after poll conducted over the years, less than 20% of those queried had any idea of who their own senators were, let alone a representative from the 22<sup>nd</sup> District in Texas. In other words, it has been DeLay’s very anonymity that has allowed his “*scorched-earth-take-no-prisoners-back-to-the-days-of-the-Robber-Barons*” policy to succeed. As long as John and Jane Q. Public were unaware of just who “The Exterminator” was, he could get away with mulcting the system and putting endless dollars into the pockets of those who agreed with him. But now, that is beginning to change. It would

seem that the heretofore excellent political instincts that Mr. DeLay and his acolytes have displayed over the years is beginning to crumble under the weight of its own arrogance.

The first breach came with the Schiavo case. Instead of laying low and permitting others to get facetime on the Sunday talk shows, DeLay (and President Bush, for that matter) erred in making a public deal of racing back to Washington in order to try for a thirteenth hour reprieve for the tragically brain-dead Mrs. Schiavo. In so doing, DeLay erred twice: once by misreading public sentiment (which was clearly against keeping Mrs. Schiavo “alive”); and once by permitting his name and face to get all over network television.

From that moment, the media has been swarming about Tom DeLay like vultures circling a gravely wounded animal. They can smell death in the wind. If one were to chart Tom DeLay’s name recognition factor over the past two months, it would look like a graph for Wall Street’s most successful I.P.O. – up, up, up. And, as his name recognition rises his favorables go down. It’s the classic “good news/bad news” situation: the good news, Mr. Majority Leader, is that more than 75% of the American public now know who your are. The bad news is that most of them think you’re out of your mind.

Armed with this news of this wonderful development, I think it is high time for liberals and progressives to begin using it to our advantage. To wit, every Democrat candidate running for a House seat currently occupied by a marginal Republican (defined as one who won their last race by 53% or less) should let the voting public know how many times the incumbent voted with Tom DeLay, how much money

they received from Tom DeLay's PAC, and how much money they contributed to Tom DeLay's legal defense fund.

This information is but a mouse click away. Just go to <http://www.pcactionfund.org/delayspocket/> and see how few Republicans have had the political courage to vote against their leader even 5% of the time.

It is high time that progressives turn Tom DeLay into a political weapon – a weapon that will one day return American governance to those who look to the future and not the past, who seek to unite and not divide, who believe that America belongs to all the people, all the time.

Thanks a lot Tom. It'll be a pleasure using you as our not-so-secret weapon. We'll think about holding our own testimonial dinner for you after the next election. How do bagels, tuna fish and diet coke sound?

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

May 20, 2005

President Bush says he will definitely veto any legislation that increases the scope of stem-cell research. Although Dubya seems to understand the stunning potential such research offers in curing or ameliorating heretofore hopeless medical conditions, he is unwilling to permit the use of any but the handful of the currently extant cell lines. "I won't save a human life at the expense of a human life," he says. Without question, here is a man who believes that life begins at conception. I have no problem with this belief. True, I don't agree with it, but then again, I have no problem with someone who really and truly does. That's the thing about intellectual integrity: you don't have to agree in order to respect.

Where I do have serious problems and reservations with the *life-begins-at-conception* folks is with the issue of when does life end? It seems that for many of the most ardent movement Christians, life ends at birth! Where in the world, you may well ask, did I come up with such a preposterous notion? Well, how can one reconcile being anti-abortion and pro-death penalty? How about being anti-stem cell (because life begins at conception) and then supporting measures that reduce the quality of life itself, by reducing aid to education, health care, clean air, clean water, foodstamps, etc., etc., etc. What is it that I don't get . . .?

By now, we've all heard and read enough about the so-called "Nuclear Option" to be in serious need of a potent emetic. The Republicans are so far off base on this one as to be beyond credibility. How so? Well first, they would have the public believe that those pesky Democrats are standing foresquarely against *all* of President Bush's judicial nominees. Far from it. To date, the Democrats have approved close to 210 of Dubya's nominees. The few that they are digging their heels in about are so patently off-the-judicial-wall that even some of *their own conservative colleagues* find them to be a bit much to take.

Additionally, the Republicans would have us believe that in exercising the "nuclear" (read: filibuster) option with an eye toward downright rejection, the Democrats are somehow rewriting the whole of American

history. Wrong! Anyone with even a smattering of political knowledge or memory will recall that back in 1965, Senate Republicans waged a fierce (some would say ugly) battle against Abe Fortas, L.B.J.'s nominee for Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Believe me, when it comes to filibustering judicial nominees, all you need to know is written in the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes: "There is nothing new under the sun."

A reminder to the majoritarian Republicans: be careful what you wish for, because it will likely come back and bite you in the rear. Some day -- despite your apocalyptic desire to be a permanent majority -- you will return to minority status. And then, what has been good for the goose will be equally good for the gander.

Lastly, what's with all these Republicans using Holocaust terminology in describing things they neither appreciate nor understand? I for one find it beyond repugnant to hear someone like Senator Santorum refer to Democrats as "Nazis" or read that there is a "Holocaust" being perpetrated against Christians in America. Oh really? Where are the camps? When was the last time a Christian had his or her citizenship taken away? Have Christians been denied access to clubs, schools or professions? Seems to me that the "most religious" amongst us could stand a few history lessons. The last time I looked, Christians represented a huge majority in this country.

But then again, what do I know?

And while I'm at it, congratulations to my old boss Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr., former California Governor and current Mayor of Oakland on his upcoming marriage. Take it from one who knows: the governor is one of the most exceptionally bright and visionary people to ever occupy political office. He is precisely the opposite of the so-called "religious" politicians of today; he's a man for whom religion is religion and politics politics. And believe me, he's far, far more religious than most. It's nice to know that after all these years, he has finally found someone to share his extraordinarily fascinating life with.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

May 24, 2005

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## Tom DeLay and the Northern Marianas: It's Not the Heat, It's the Cupidity

I'm convinced that Edmund Burke (1729-97), the great conservative Irish philosopher/politician must have possessed one heck of a nifty crystal ball. How else could he have known that one day, a man named Tom DeLay would arise, and, with a straight face, attempt to flummox an entire nation? It's entirely likely that Burke was focusing on the future House Majority Leader when he wrote "Hypocrisy can afford to be magnificent in its promises; for never intending to go beyond promises, it costs nothing." And that, dear reader, is one of the most succinct, most prescient summations of Mr. DeLay you will ever read.

For in Mr. DeLay and his coterie of virtuous paragons, we find the quintessence of political and moral hypocrisy. Armed with a Bible, moral certitude and an unquenchable thirst for victory, DeLay has taken duplicity to heights that might even astound Mr. Burke. But in the process, maybe -- just maybe -- he has sown the seeds of his own (and, dare, we pray, his party's) defeat.

Throughout American history, certain key words and phrases have served as summary death-knells -- Waterloos, if you will -- for people and parties. Who amongst us fails to recall such classics as *At long last, have you no sense of shame, Senator McCarthy? Who lost China?* and those Eisenhower-era favorites *deep-freeze* and *vicuna coat*. Grabbing hold of Burke's crystal ball, I see three words -- *The Northern Marianas* -- pulsing in the light. Let us all hope and pray that this little phrase -- *The Northern Marianas* -- will become Mr. DeLay's (and by extension his party's) Waterloo.

Until recently, few people had ever heard of the CNMI (The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). And Saipan, its only true city, well, if anything there was a vague, vague recollection of some bloody long-ago South Pacific battle in the closing days of World War II. Of late however, The Northern Marianas, Saipan and Tom DeLay have been receiving a lot of space and ink. What's it all about, and what in the world does all this have to do with Edmund Burke's *mot* about hypocrisy?

In reality, it's a long, terribly involved tale involving prostitution and white slavery, forced labor and abortion, political bribery and overnight fortunes. In addition to Majority Leader DeLay, the cast of characters includes such disparate players as super-lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Rabbi Daniel Lapin, anti-tax revolutionary Grover Norquist and the Tan family of Saipan. For those who want to steep themselves in all the grisly details, we invite you to go to either <http://saipansucks.com/> or the May 15th edition of <http://www.dailykos.com/>

OK, let's get to the short-hand version. The CNMI is a U.S. Commonwealth in the West Pacific Ocean. Although near Asia, it is hardly Asian in outlook. For people in the Northern Marianas, politics is a full-contact blood sport. Corruption is rife. As a U.S. Commonwealth, its citizens are supposed to under the aegis of American law -- offered the same protections as people in Puerto Rico, Portland or Poughkeepsie. *Suppose to* is the operative expression here, for in fact, many people there live in a world of subjugation and servility. It is hot there. But it's not so much the heat; it's the cupidity.

The family of Tan Siu Lin moved to the Commonwealth from Hong Kong in either the late 1970s or early 1980s. Their family corporation, Luen Thai, recently went public on the Hong Kong exchange in order to further expand their garment manufacturing enterprise. They are extraordinarily generous in their contributions to the Republican Party here in America, and rub shoulders with just about anyone they care to on Capitol Hill.

The Tan family has a not so secret little enterprise: they sponsor white slavery and prostitution. The scheme goes like this: girls from all over Asia (most notably China) are sold on the idea of paying anywhere from \$2,000 to \$7,000 to go to the CNMI. Once there, they are told, they will be put to work in jobs where they will easily be able to earn in one year more than they could expect to make in a decade back home. There are even hints that they may be able to go to the United States. That is the lure. Now for the reality.

Once in the Northern Marianas, the young women are sent to sweat shops where they work 50, 60, 70 hours a week and more at criminally low wages, making garments that are then sold with "Made In America" labels. They are forced to live in tiny, substandard hovels for which Luen Thai charges a minimum of \$100.00 a month. Before too long, these girls and women realize that they are never going to be able to repay all the money they begged or borrowed to leave home. In their desperation, they learn that there is an alternative: they can become "party girls" at one of the Tan family's many "clubs," "discotechs" or "restaurants." Moreover, they sign contracts that obligate them to have abortions if, in the course of their "hostessing" they should become pregnant.

In 1998, George Miller, a liberal Democrat who represents California's East Bay (Oakland) in the House of Representatives, issued a report detailing the deplorable, immoral, and criminal activities going on in the CNMI. At the time his report was issued, Majority Whip DeLay and his cohorts were

far, far more interested in the deplorable, immoral and criminal activities of President William Jefferson Clinton, who committed the singular sin of having Monica Lewinsky's head in his lap. Miller's report withered on the Congressional vine.

Three months after Miller published his findings, DeLay made his first trip to the Northern Marianas. He found it to be a "wonderful place" where "people are so happy." When asked about the living and working conditions uncovered by Representative Miller, DeLay responded that Miller's report had more to do with the Democrat's not-so-hidden political agenda than reality! One wonders just how much Tom DeLay got to see of life in the Northern Mariana's from the back nine of the golf course he was playing.

Over the years, DeLay, along with lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Rabbi Daniel Lapin, tax revolter Grover Norquist and a host of Republican bigwigs have made the Northern Marianas their personal cause. Have they, who blithely accuse Democrats of being immoral secular humanists, decried the existence of white slavery or prostitution there? Not on your Nelly. Has DeLay, who will witness his born-again faith at the drop of a hat done or said anything to put an end to contractually-obligated abortion there? You've got to be kidding. Has anyone in the majority addressed the fact that garments, which are being manufactured thousands and thousands of miles from our shores by women working under inhuman conditions, are labeled "Made in America?" Not a peep. Why?

The answer to this was given by Edmund Burke nearly 250 years ago. DeLay and his minions are moral hypocrites -- men [and women] who occupy the front pew on Sunday and then slosh through the gutter the other six days. They are cynical politicians who promise to make America a Christian Nation while on the campaign trail, and then suborn immorality while in office. It is only fitting that they who proclaim their moral certainty, they who accuse others of being "atheists," and "advocates of the culture of death," should be exposed for what they are: hypocrites who never intend to go beyond making promises.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

May 27, 2005

From the "Just When I Thought I'd Heard Everything" Department comes the following:

Yesterday's *Los Angeles Times* ran an A.P. story about the strange goings-on at the East Lynne District School in Cass County Missouri. Seems that seven of ten classroom teachers in the tiny district resigned after a colleague was fired for helping an 11-year-old girl who was left alone in a playground to pick up rocks as a punishment.

According to the article, the fourth-grader was assigned the task last September for refusing to do her homework. Furthermore, she was left unsupervised except for a security camera.

The fired teacher, Christa Price, went to the principal -- who is also the district superintendent -- and asked him to reconsider the punishment. The principal/superintendent, one Dan Doerhoff, refused. So, on her free period, Ms. Price helped the girl pick up the rocks.

At contract time in March, Superintendent Doerhoff recommended firing Ms. Price, described as "a popular teacher who had good performance evaluations." In a show of solidarity, seven other teachers chose not to return their contracts.

"If a teacher who advocates on behalf of safety of a student is not fit to be a teacher at East Lynne or anywhere in Missouri according to this administration, then none of us are fit to teach at East Lynne," the teachers who resigned said in a statement.

The girl's parents said they had agreed to the rock-gathering punishment, which was the only alternative Superintendent Doerhoff gave them to suspension. To add insult to injury, Doerhoff refused to sign the certification that Ms. Price needs to get another teaching job. To read the entire A.P./Times story go to [Teachers Quit Over Punishment.](#)

Concerned parents gathered at an open meeting of the Cass County School Board to voice their concerns about the seven teachers and direct anger toward Doerhoff. "When as many teachers are leaving as there are, it should raise a



red flag," one parent said. When the assembled demanded to know if Price's non-renewal and Doerhoff's refusal to recertify her had anything to do with the popular teacher's complaints about the 4th grade girl's "rock picking-up" punishment, Doerhoff said the reasons were personnel matters that could not be revealed in an open meeting.

"Those are things legal constraints prevent us from revealing," he said.

In a separate but no less maddening development, Principal Doerhoff kicked a boy off school computers for the rest of the year after he was accused of accessing pornography online. According to a report filed by KMBC, the 13-year old student pulled up Whitehouse.org in class. The site, which parodies the official White House Web Site is far from pornographic. When confronted, the student said he was researching the White House for a school project and that his teacher suggested the Web site herself.

"We don't condone it. We don't like it and we discipline it," Dr. Doerhoff said. "The information we had to act on was very certain, very definite and necessary. And the action we took was imperative."

For those wondering if the site the youngster pulled up is pornographic, check for yourselves: go to [WhiteHouse.Org](http://WhiteHouse.Org) and then compare it to the site it parodys, [Welcome to the White House](http://Welcome to the White House).

Tell me I'm wrong, but I thought the year was 2005, not 1845, and that this was the United States of America, not Victorian England. The more I read about Dr. Doerhoff, the more I am reminded Charles Dickens' character in Nicholas Nickleby, [Wackford Squeers](#).

Squeers, as all good Dickens fans will recall, was the pompous, slightly demented headmaster, teacher and proprietor of Dotheboys Hall, an institution that took in boys who were not wanted by their families. Squeers' *modus operandi* involved meting out arbitrary punishments for sins both unreal and perceived. Dickens has young Nickleby come to Dotheboys Hall in order that he may, in short order, become Squeers' assistant master, see the way he treats his charges, and in his utter disgust, give the older man a sound and thorough thrashing. Readers will recall that Squeers, who seeks revenge and conspires with Nicholas' rich, miserly Uncle Ralph, is eventually undone, imprisoned and transported far away from the Yorkshire Moors.

While I am certainly not advocating that anyone mete out the same fate to Dr. Doerhoff, I do hope that he is hounded from his job. How can anyone in this day and age treat children, teachers and parents in such an outrageous manner. Picking up rocks? Losing one's livelihood for being a student advocate? Curtailing a student's ability to learn and inquire because you don't

agree with the politics of a particular web site? Dr. Doerhoff, I am sorry to say, is a blot on the educational establishment.

For anyone who would like to contact him, Dr. Dan Doerhoff can be reached by phone at 816-626-3511 or, by email him at [grw002@mail.connect.more.net](mailto:grw002@mail.connect.more.net)

If you call, don't be surprised if the message on his machine has the following refrain:

*School day, school days*

*dear old golden rule days*

*Reading and writing and 'rithmetic*

*Taught to the tune of a hickory stick . . .*

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

June 03, 2005

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## The Theory of Zippers

The irrepressible Dorothy Parker once quipped that no matter how long she lived, there were two things she knew would always confuse her: the theory of zippers and the exact function of Bernard Baruch. As far as I know, Mrs. Parker (1893-1967), the world-class punster who wrote the screenplay for the original "A Star Is Born," willed her estate to Dr. Martin Luther King and her ashes to Lillian Hellman, never did figure out how zippers worked. No matter; even without grasping the theory behind them, they nonetheless still worked every time she gave one a tug. And the fact that the diminutive "mouth-that-roared" never could plumb Baruch's precise function within political society, meant that she was in some pretty good company. From an early 21st century point of view, Bernard Baruch's "exact function" still remains a mystery.

If Baruch (1870-1965) were alive today, the financial mastermind would likely be as confused as Dorothy Parker -- but not about zippers. No, his bafflement would deal with the average American's maddening propensity for supporting people and political policies that go against their own self-interest. The one thing Baruch would no doubt conclude was that whoever was responsible for this nonsensical trend was a diabolical genius.

It is a fact: In the year 2000, voters in McPherson County, Nebraska [America's poorest county] cast 80% of their votes for George W. Bush. Never mind that candidate Bush never offered a coherent strategy or program for helping the chronically impoverished, under-fed and under-educated denizens

of McPherson. They voted for him in overwhelming numbers *despite* his running on a platform that called for tax-cuts for the wealthy, budget cuts for education, and a general scaling-back of what has come to be known as the "social safety-net."

It is a fact: the incredible success enjoyed by the National Republican Party is due in large measure to their wooing of, catering to and scaring the daylights out of, *the hoi polloi* -- little people whom they have trained to vote like corporate sachems.

It is a fact: in election after election, the National Republican Party has given social, cultural and religious issues a seat in the front row. In essence, they have become "the party of God." Nonetheless, even with a born-again Republican in the White House, a Republican House and Senate and a vast amen corner in the national media, abortion is still legal, there is no constitutional amendment specifically permitting prayer in the public schools, and gay people have not been banished to Tristan de Cuna.

A thoughtful person might opine that the Republicans are a party of cynics - pols who trot out a host of value-laden cultural issues during campaigns, and then, once the election is over, put these same value-laden cultural issues back on the shelf for another two or four years. And just what do the people who truly believe that abortion is murder, or that stem-cell research is immoral, or that most of the difficulties we encounter in modern society are the fault of pointy-headed, latte-slurping, Volvo-driving permissive liberal urban nabobs -- what do they get in return for their votes? Why tort reform, drastic changes in federal bankruptcy laws, massive tax-cuts for the wealthy and a frontal assault on almost every New Deal/Great Society program on the books.

It's just plain criminal -- and confusing as hell. Seems to me that heretofore, the G.O.P was the party of balanced budgets, fiscal responsibility and a touch of what used to call *noblesse oblige*. Seems to me that the old

Republican Party used to rail at the Democrats for being economic wastrels -- for drowning America in a sea of red ink. Oh how times have changed!

For those interested in just how the Republicans were able to convince a wide segment of the lower middle class to vote like financial magnates, I highly recommend Thomas Franks' marvelous book *What's the Matter With Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (2004, Henry Holt & Company). I also heartily recommend Rick Perlstein's *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (2002, Hill & Wang). Armed with these two books, readers of this Blog will have a better understanding of just how conservatism swept across America like some 19th-century burnt-over district. And if, as they say, knowledge is power, perhaps, we will stand a better chance of creating and delivering a message in 2006 and 2008 that can resonate with the people who, by all rights, should be our natural constituency.

So tell me, how *do* zippers work?

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

June 10, 2005

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## One Strike and You're Out

Back in the dark ages (1972 to be precise), Maine Senator Edmund Muskie sought the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. Muskie had an enviable political track record: He was a former Governor, and the first Democrat the voters of Maine had ever elected to the United States Senate. Having been the Democrat's vice presidential candidate in the 1968 race, he had great national name recognition. Moreover, his craggy honesty, his braininess and his fervor made him something considerably more than the run-of-the-mill ethnic politician from the liberal Northeast. Many people thought Muskie had what it took to make not only an attractive candidate, but a successful president. History records that Muskie ran a strong, positive and largely effective campaign -- a campaign that despite its strength and efficacy, completely derailed in less than 30 seconds.

How, you may well ask, could this be possible? What in the world could have happened? Was it discovered that Senator Muskie had been a Kremlin agent? Was he caught in the sack with a local cheerleader? No. Worse. Muskie actually *cried* in front of cameras while defending his wife's reputation at a press conference. Muskie's tears (he later claimed that they were actually snowflakes) occurred while he was responding to a *Manchester* (New Hampshire) *Union Leader* editorial which alleged that Mrs. Muskie "enjoyed excessive drinking and telling dirty jokes." Standing out in front of the newspaper's offices on a cold, snowy New Hampshire day, Muskie's emotional, teary (?) response sounded the death-knell for his

campaign. How in the world, writers and pundits asked, could the American people possibly entrust the nation's highest office to a man who cries at the drop of a hat? One strike, and Senator Muskie was out.

Jump ahead to 1987. This time, the candidate is Delaware Senator Joseph Biden. An articulate (some would say mellifluous) man who was first elected to the Senate at age 29, Biden had garnered a reputation for being a thoughtful, dynamic, politically adroit moderate. Then came his one strike and he was out. A cagey staffer working for the Michael Dukakis campaign leaked an "attack video" showing similarities between Biden's stump speech about his background and a speech by British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock. Biden, it turned out, wasn't just paraphrasing Kinnock; he was grafting one man's life story onto another's. As soon as the video came to light -- a first strike -- Biden was out.

Now we turn to 2005. In a recent round-table discussion in California, Howard Dean, the newly-elected head of the Democratic National Committee, lobbed several verbal hand grenades at the Republican leadership. Dean was quoted as saying of the Republicans, "they're a pretty monolithic party. They all behave the same, they all look the same." Although within context, Governor Dean was speaking about the G.O.P leadership (which is, after all, pretty monolithic), the press and Republican mouthpieces claimed that Dean was actually referring to the party as a whole. What *they* heard was an angry liberal frontally assaulting conservative white Christians. And if the G.O.P. has its way, this will be both Howard Dean's and the Democratic Party's one permitted strike.

Now mind you, I think Governor Dean is both off-base and off-message here. He does a disservice to the Democratic Party by essentially throwing hunks of tantalizing red meat into the opposition's cage. Republicans from Alaska to Florida will get to chew and re-chew Dean's comments for months (perhaps even years) to come. It all fits into that convenient battle cry that

"conservative Christians are an endangered species here in increasingly decadent liberal America."

For some strange reason, Republicans are often permitted two, even three strikes. Take Richard Nixon. One might have thought that accepting and spending money from lobbyists back in the 1950s would have had him sent to the showers. Wrong. His "Checkers Speech," a classic in the early days of televised politics, got him a second chance. Well what about his second strike, the "you won't have Richard Nixon to kick around any more" diatribe following his failed run for California Governor in 1962? As history records, he was still in the game. And even after his Watergate-influenced resignation (a third, fourth and fifth strike), Nixon was forgiven and eventually advanced to the status of "grand old man."

How about Illinois Republican Henry Hyde, he of the eponymous Hyde Amendment (passed in 1976) which excluded abortion from comprehensive health care services provided to low income people through Medicaid? A couple of years ago St. Henry admitted to having engaged in an adulterous relationship. "It was a youthful indiscretion" he said, despite the fact that said indiscretion occurred when he was in his 40s. Contrite and deeply apologetic, Hyde stayed in the game. Then there's everybody's favorite cleanup hitter, Tom DeLay. Despite taking numerous strikes, the House Majority Leader is still at bat. No ethics complaint, no act of political blackmail or extortion is enough to have this man sent to the showers. Must be heaven to be able to swing and miss as often as you wish and never have to return to the dugout.

In American political life, it is often the case that the party with the weakest set of positions on the most important issues (like Social Security, health care and the economy, to name but three) resorts to attacking the other party for its moral bankruptcy. It's an easy swap for shadow over substance, and has the added advantage of shoring up one's base constituency -- in the Republican case, the religious right. You can bet that the Republicans will wave Governor

Dean's supposed verbal gaffe about like a bloody shirt. Then they will remind their team that the Democrats are also the party of Teddy Kennedy, (remember Chappaquiddick!!), Bill Clinton (can you say "Monica?") and Al Gore (did he *really* invent the Internet?). All three had their one strike. All three have been thrown out of the game, which to the Republican mind, also invalidates the entire Democratic Party. If you want any proof for the fact that Chappaquiddick, as an example, lives, just do a Google search using that one word. Amazingly, there are more than 62,500 sites on the Internet that are still moaning and bitching about Ted Kennedy, Chappaquiddick and Mary Jo.

Politics is, without question, one of the most difficult games in the world to master. But one wishes that the American voting public might remember from time to time that candidates are just like everyone else; imperfect human beings who will, from time to time, fall prey to error. Anyone who expects human perfection from politicians (or anyone else for that matter) is living in a fool's paradise.

Far be it from this Blogger to be quoting William F. Buckley, but in this case, I must. For it was Buckley who once wrote that: "To my way of thinking, there are only two moral sins that should disqualify one from being in public life. The first is pederasty. The second is virginity."

We would all do well to remember that our politicians run for nomination, not beatification, for the senate, not sainthood, and for President, not Pontiff.

Batter up!

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

June 16, 2005

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## Doin' the Sidestep

Well, the autopsy's complete, the press conference concluded, and the facts conveyed. It has now been proven well beyond a reasonable doubt that dozens of so-called "activist" judges were right all along: Terri Schiavo was in a persistent vegetative state after all.

Pinellas-Pasco (Florida) Medical Examiner John Thogmartin concluded that there was "no evidence of strangulation or other trauma leading to her collapse," thereby taking the wind out of the sails of those who accused Mrs. Schiavo's husband, Michael, of somehow being responsible for putting her into a coma. Moreover, Medical Examiner Thogmartin's autopsy showed that at the time of her death, Mrs. Schiavo's brain weighed 615 grams -- less than half the weight of a normal brain. Additionally, the autopsy showed that as a result of the brain damage she sustained, Mrs. Schiavo was blind.

Logic would dictate that this welter of scientific evidence would finally put an end to all the controversy, conspiracy and Conservative commentary. But no. Just when you think that its safe to venture back out, that the naysayers and political grandstanders, the self-proclaimed champions of the "culture of life" have returned to their caves, up pops Tennessee Senator Bill Frist. Possessed of a Harvard M.D., a portfolio chock full of Columbia/HCA stock and a moral compass pointing to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the Senate Majority Leader is attempting to have his cake (or is that manna?) and eat it too.

One only need recall that during the sad, heady days immediately prior to Mrs. Schiavo's death, Dr. Frist proclaimed that based on his repeated observation of a video, he did not believe her to be in a persistent vegetative state. Moreover he proclaimed, he could see that she was responding to light, to sound and to touch. Never mind the fact that no reputable doctor would ever deign to diagnose a patient based upon a 15-second snippet of videotape. Well, perhaps the Hippocratic Oath doesn't apply to M.D.s who want to run for President of the United States.

In a slight-of-hand that would make Mandrake the Magician swoon, Frist has simultaneously managed to agree with Thogmartin's autopsy ("It's the pathology, I'll respect that . . ."), deny that he ever diagnosed Mrs. Schiavo in the first place ("I never made the diagnosis, I wouldn't even attempt to make a diagnosis from a videotape . . ."), and still maintain that he, along with President Bush, Tom DeLay and the rest of the gang were fundamentally correct in pushing to have Terri's feeding tube reinstalled.

One need only recall that it was Frist and his holy Republican acolytes who pushed through unprecedented emergency legislation, signed by President Bush, aimed at prolonging Schiavo's life by allowing the case to be reviewed by the federal courts. Further, it was during debate over this legislation that Frist first questioned the diagnosis of Schiavo's doctors, who said that her smiles and eye movements were automatic responses and not indicative of consciousness. It was at this point that Frist proclaimed "I question [the diagnosis] based on a review of the video footage. . .and that footage, to me, depicted something very different from persistent vegetative state." He also said at the time that she "certainly seems to respond to visual stimuli."

With the release of the Schiavo autopsy, Dr. Frist is all over the place, dancing just as fast as he can to be all things to all people. If Senator Frist fails in his attempt to win the Republican nomination in '08, he will have only his own big mouth to blame. Then again, if he chooses not to return to the

operating room, I predict that he may well have a future on stage. I can just see him now as one of the co-stars of a revamped "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas." I can see him playing the Governor, the fellow who always stops the show with that great, great piece "The Sidestep." Can't you just hear Senator Frist belting out those immortal words:

*"I'll continue to stand tall,*

*You can trust me,*

*For I promise,*

*I shall keep a watchful eye upon ya'll,*

*Oooo I love to dance a little sidestep,*

*Now they see me, now they don't,*

*I've come and gone,*

*And Oooo I love to sweep around the wide step,*

*Cut a little swathe and lead the people on."*

Hey, Pennsylvania Avenue's loss just might be Broadway's gain . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

June 23, 2005

Let's see if I've got this straight:

- *The war in Iraq goes on and on*, with no end in sight. Its *monthly* costs easily outstrip that which both the North and South combined spent on a 4-year Civil War.
- *Recruitment into America's all-volunteer army is at an all time low*. In response, the Defense Department has begun working with a private marketing firm to create a database of all U.S. high school and college students between the ages of 16 and 18. Can a renewed draft be far behind?
- *Flying in the face of reality*, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld declares that the "last days of the Iraqi insurgency are at hand." (Is that the right or the left hand Mr. Secretary?)
- *Imported oil is now hovering around the \$60.00 a barrel mark*. In response, President George W. (the "W" is for "Wildcatter") Bush recommends that we begin looking toward that wonderfully safe alternate energy source: nuclear (or is that *nucular*?) energy.
- *More than 45 million Americans are without any form of health insurance*. And to make a horrible situation even worse, America's Medicaid program is on the verge of bankruptcy (and you thought it was Social Security that was about to go under for the third time!)
- *The United States is without an ambassador to the United Nations*. And what makes matters even worse, the Bush Administration's nominee for the post, John Bolton (he of the Harry Reems mustache), thinks the U.N. is about as useless as last year's Chia Pet.
- *American corporations are "outsourcing"* (shades of Orwell's *1984*, where "war" was "peace" and "love" was "hate") jobs by the carload. My god! I just looked at the label of my Izod shirt: it was made in Cambodia!
- Etc., etc., etc., *ad nauseum*.

OK, you get the picture. Rome is burning all around us. Or, to put things more diplomatically, there is simply no end to the challenges of modernity -- challenges that should easily keep Congress, the White House and the American public engaged in thoughtful, purposive dialogue for at least the next generation or two. With challenges such as these (plus all those that fit into *ad nauseum*), one would think that the level of debate and commitment would be at an all time high. One might also think that we'd all be keeping our eyes,

ears and minds open to policies and programs that might -- just might -- help turn the tide.

One might think . . .

Let's look at the record:

- By a vote of 286-130, the House had the courage to pass the following bill: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." Wow! That will show those flag-burning, pot-smoking, long-haired . . . Wait a second. When was the last time you read or heard about a rash of flag burning? Could it be that the House has aimed a Constitutional amendment at members of the 60s antiwar clique? I thought that most of the long-haired pot smokers were getting ready to cash their first Social Security check. And besides, what is more important: safeguarding American values (like dissenting from policies with which we do not agree) or the symbol of those values?
- The Bush White House, even in the face of increasing opposition, continues to push its revolutionary plan vis-a-vis Social Security. Despite the fact that statistics prove Social Security will remain perfectly solvent for at least the next 40 years, Bush and company blithely march on. And at each stop along the parade route, W's handlers make damn sure that the only people he sees, hears or smells are robotic acolytes -- folks who believe that father truly knows best.
- Vice President Dick Cheney wonders aloud if even Howard Dean's mother loves him. Now there's a high-water mark in American political discourse. Instead of merely taking your opponent out to the woodshed, you question his lineage. Now the debate becomes whose mother loved them more: Mrs. Cheney or Mrs. Dean?
- During a debate on whether or not there is religious pressure or prejudice at the United States Air Force Academy, Indiana Representative John Hostettler proclaims that "Like a moth to a flame, Democrats can't help themselves when it comes to denigrating and demonizing Christians." Further, Hostettler has claimed that there is a concerted effort afoot on the part of the secular, anti-God crowd to put both Christians and Christianity on the endangered species list. What planet is he living on? A conspiracy to annihilate Christians? Last time I looked, Christians were, by a huge margin, the majority religion in the United States.
- Down here in Florida, where neither Johnny nor Janie can read and most new jobs pay minimum wage, the president's brother, Jeb Bush, has asked state law enforcement authorities to reopen the Terri Schiavo case. Now he wants to find out if Terri's husband, Michael Schiavo, might have been criminally liable for her death. Now there's a great investment of taxpayers dollars.

And Rome continues to burn.

Back in the year 64 C.E. (that's *A.D.* to a non-Christian), Rome's last Caesar, the 27-year old Nero, so the story goes, set fire to the Eternal City in order to see how Troy would look when it was in flames, and to serve as a suitable background for a recitation of his poetry while accompanying himself on the lyre. Yes, I know. You thought he was fiddling on the fiddle. Well, sorry to burst your bubble, but the violin wouldn't be invented for several centuries. Nonetheless, the concept of "Fiddling while Rome burns" entered our vocabulary connoting standing and doing nothing during a grave crisis.

In point of truth, Nero wasn't the brain-dead hedonist history paints him out to have been. Rome actually was burning out of control. Nero likely set several fires in a vain attempt to slow down the already raging inferno. This is a technique known to all modern forest fighters. Problem is, it doesn't work too well in an urban setting.

Once two-thirds of Rome lay in ruins and the mob began looking through bloody eyes, Nero did what all good politicians will do: he found a way to divert public attention away from the problem. Nero proceeded to blame the Christians for the fire (do you hear that Rep. Hostettler?). In point of fact, the Christians were an easy target. First, they didn't do much by way of assisting to put out the fire. Second, they got it into their heads that the fire was a *good* thing -- a sign from the Almighty that the Second Coming was nigh. I guess there's nothing new under the sun.

The tendency that leaders have to engage in inanities and trivialities while society burns is as old as Nero. Bush and company are merely the latest in a long, long chain of fiddlers. But that doesn't make it right, and it certainly doesn't make the music any less discordant.

Its time for a new score, a new conductor and a new orchestra -- one with more brass and less fiddle(r)s.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

July 01, 2005

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## Challenging the Future

Nearly forty-five years ago, President John F. Kennedy issued a boldly audacious challenge to the American people: *"I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth."* Moreover, Kennedy predicted that *"No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind or more important for the long-range exploration of space."* As history records, America met Kennedy's challenge by landing Neil Armstrong on the moon some six months before the close of the decade -- a stunning achievement that proved just how much America could accomplish. All it took was a tinder of brains, dollars, imagination, political will and foresightedness, ignited by sparks of pride and determination. Of course, the major -- the most purposive -- spark was Kennedy himself; the President who challenged each and every one of us to *"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."* Fast forward some forty-five years, to January 15, 2004. On that date, George W. Bush proposed that America send a man to Mars and back by the year 2020. [Perhaps he would like to volunteer to be the first man.] Unlike Kennedy's historic speech, Bush did not [or perhaps could not] frame his words within the pattern of a distinct challenge. Rather, he took what should have been the boldest, most visionary of proposal ever issued from the Oval Office, and made it sound as dry, dull and unimportant as a U.S.D.A quarterly crop report. And by the way, has anyone heard word one about the Mars proposal since?

Unquestionably, John F. Kennedy possessed a lot of character traits unknown to the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: wit, élan, intellectual vigor [*vigah!*] and the ability to reach out, to touch, to inspire, to motivate and to challenge -- really challenge. And that, dear reader, is one of the things most desperately lacking in our leadership these days: the ability to motivate, to inspire and above all, to *challenge*. For the most part, our leaders ask nothing from us anymore but our financial contributions [if we happen to be rich, powerful or in need of government largess], or our votes. No longer are we challenged to conquer the stars or to harness the atom. Heck, we aren't even asked to conserve gasoline! I for one cannot fathom why, in a time when gas has shot past \$60.00 a barrel, there are absolutely no tax breaks for those purchasing hybrid vehicles, but lots of tax advantages for anyone wealthy and irresponsible enough to purchase and drive a behemoth, gas-guzzling Hummer.

What America needs is a challenge -- *a let's-get-together-roll-up-our-sleeves-and-together-we-can-move-mountains-and-make-the-world-a-better-place* kind of challenge. Well, believe it or not, someone *has* issued precisely that kind of challenge, and not surprisingly, it has the *word Apollo* attached to it.

Earlier this month [i.e. June], Congressman Jay Inslee (D-WA) introduced HR2828, *The New Apollo Energy Act*. Inslee, whose constituents include Bill and Melinda Gates, has issued a stunning challenge easily worthy of the name Apollo. For HR2828 seeks nothing less than "*To ensure that the United States leads the world in developing and manufacturing next generation energy technologies, to grow the economy of the United States, to create new highly trained, highly skilled American jobs, to eliminate American overdependence on foreign oil, and to address the threat of global warming.*"

(For those interested in reading the bill in its entirety, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:H.R.2828>: If you wish to read a

less prosaic summary of the bill, go to [Legislative Issues - New Apollo Energy Act](#)).

Inslee's New Apollo Energy Act, which currently has 15 cosponsors, is a wonderfully imaginative, incredibly well-conceived bill. This is no overnight, fly-by-the-seat-of-your pants initiative. Inslee has been researching, holding hearings and writing this bill for a long, long time. If it were to be implemented, it could actually cut the petro-umbilicus between the Arab world and Mainstreet, U.S.A. It would do this by putting American brains, dollars and collective will into the task of creating, encouraging, fostering, clean, renewable sources of energy. Believe me, the technology already exists. There *already are* methods, systems and devices that could cut the oil lifeline - - methods involving wind, wave and sun. What is missing, is the challenge and the political will. Inslee has issued the challenge; what is needed is the will to make that challenge a reality.

Yes, the technology already exists. Permit me an example: My best friend is a creative genius. Some years back, he came up with a radically new design for a wind-generating device based not on the propeller, but rather on the egg-beater. In test after test, it has proven to be vastly superior to anything currently in use. It produces more energy almost no friction. When he first showed me the design I [who am about as mechanically-inclined as a house plant] thought it to be pie-in-the-sky, and nicknamed it "The Quixote Turbine." Then he proved to me [and to many, many others] that it really works. Wonderful! The problem, however, is that no one in this country wanted to put money into development. Why invest in the future when there are dollars to be made in the present? That is the mentality that has kept my friend's device off the market and kept us in the dirty air/dirty water/shrinking resources morass of today.

Inslee's HR2828 not only promises to release us from the grip of Middle-Eastern oil, but to create some 3.3 million jobs in the process. Tangible

secondary effects include cleaner water and air, lower balance of payments, tax breaks and incentives for those who -- like my friend -- are in the business of answering the energy challenge -- and a host of new products which America can sell on the world market. Indeed, HR2828 opens up the possibility for an entirely new field of manufacture.

Ideally, this should not be a partisan issue. Ideally. In reality, it is a highly partisan issue. Republicans often deride Democrats for lacking any new ideas. That's almost laughable coming from a party whose "new" ideas all seem come from a time prior to the creation of the SEC, FEC ICC, or FDIC. Republicans, who have an overwhelming majority in Congress, will undoubtedly give HR2828 about as much attention as a child would a plate of broccoli.

Make no mistake about it: Representative Inslee's challenge is both bold and doable. It positions America to once again lead the world towards a brighter future. The only question at this juncture is whether or not we have the collective will, the collective energy, and the collective imagination, to answer that challenge by challenging the future.

If you have a minute, you might want to write, call or email your senators and representative and let them know you want them to vote in favor of HR2828 -- that the challenge has been issued, and that now is the time to act.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

July 07, 2005

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## Gaylord Nelson: A Man Who Made A Difference

With the death of Gaylord Nelson - former governor and United States Senator from Wisconsin - planet earth has lost one of its best and most compassionate friends. In a legacy-filled life of eighty-nine years, Senator Nelson was one of that truly rare breed of whom it can be honestly said: "He really made a difference." Through his energy, his imagination and his deeds, he carved out an indelible niche in the pantheon of immortals.



Nelson's passion was Mother Earth: its care, its health and its future. While serving as Wisconsin governor in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nelson pushed through a penny-a-pack tax on cigarettes to pay for his Outdoor Recreation Acquisition Program. At a time when few men or women in public life were cognizant of environmental issues, Nelson virtually broke new ground by pushing through a program which allowed Wisconsin to buy literally hundreds of thousands of acres of park land, wetlands and other open space.

In 1962, the Governor became a Senator when he defeated 4-term incumbent Republican Alexander Wiley (1884-1967), one-time chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. As Wisconsin's Junior Senator (his "senior" was William Proxmire, who had been elected in 1957 to fill the unexpired term of

the late Senator Joseph McCarthy), Nelson quickly made a name for himself as an able advocate for planet earth. During his 18-years in the Senate, Nelson championed conservation policies, including legislation to preserve the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail and create a national hiking system. Without question, his crowning achievement was "Earth Day," which he started as an environmental demonstration modeled on the anti-war teach-ins of the Vietnam War. As Nelson would later recall: "It suddenly occurred to me, why not have a nationwide teach-in on the environment." He announced his Earth Day idea in a speech in Seattle in September 1969. The idea "took off like gangbusters." The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970.

In the thirty-five years since the first Earth Day, people have gathered each April 22 for convocations, teach-ins and such activities as planting trees, cleaning up trash, and lobbying for a cleaner, healthier environment. As a result of Nelson's passion, he came to be recognized as one of the world's leading environmentalists. In 1995, then-President Bill Clinton presented Senator Nelson with a Presidential Medal of Freedom -- the nation's highest civilian honor. The proclamation, read by President Clinton stated: "As the father of Earth Day, he is the grandfather of all that grew out of that event: the Environmental Protection Agency, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act."

To my way of thinking, the highest praise with which one can grace another comes in the form of four simple words: "He [or she] made a difference." In this age when religious rhetoric and scruple seem to be directed mainly toward that which is arch-conservative, pro-business, and "cult-of-life," it is gratifying to note that more and more people of faith are coming to realize that to be religious -- truly religious -- means to be a steward of the earth. For in protecting the skies and oceans, the forests and plains, we are doing precisely what God intended.

There is an old Jewish tradition which teaches about the six Days of Creation: whatever was created first was not reliant upon that which was

created second; whatever was created third was reliant upon whatever was created first and second. In other words, seas no more require fish than trees do birds. Fish, however, which were created *after* the sea, are totally reliant upon their watery home. This teaches us that nothing depends upon man, who was the last of God's creation. Conversely, this means that man depends on virtually everything. Anyone who teaches this lesson -- and few did it better than Senator Gaylord Nelson -- can truly be said to have made a difference.

Nelson's fellow Badger, the great Aldo Leopold is known as the "*Father of Wildlife Ecology*." In his seminal work *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold noted: "Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for Gods and poets, but humbler folk may circumvent this restriction if they know how. To plant a pine, for example, one need be neither God nor poet; one need only own a good shovel. By virtue of this curious loophole in the rules, any clodhopper may say: Let there be a tree -- and there will be one."

In like fashion, Gaylord Nelson taught that each and every person can rise to the level of God or poet, by learning to love, protect and defend the earth. In teaching this lesson, Gaylord Nelson truly made a difference.

May his memory be a blessing for us all.

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July 07, 2005 in Remembrance | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

## **An Act of Creation**

July 10, 2005

There are blogs and there are blogs. On a scale of 1 to 10 most of us rank anywhere from 2-6 or 7. We try, we care, but an occasional blogger shows us how it should be done. Such is the case with Kurt Stone: Rabbi, Actor, Medical Ethicist and one great writer. His blog, Beat the Bushes is thoughtful, well researched and right on target.

In the post below, Kurt reminds us of the life and death of an American that we, in our headline grabbing world, just might miss. This shouldn't be the case with Gaylord Nelson. As I search for bits of the past that I hope will be included in the 21st century world, Gaylord Nelson is one of my Wild Apples. Growing patiently in a corner of a midwestern state, easily missed, one man made a very great difference in our world; a difference that we will be sorry if we ignore.

### **Here's Kurt's post for July 7, 2005**

With the death of Gaylord Nelson - former governor and United States Senator from Wisconsin -planet earth has lost one of its best and most compassionate friends. In a legacy-filled life of eighty-nine years, Senator Nelson was one of that truly rare breed of whom it can be honestly said: "He really made a difference." Through his energy, his imagination and his deeds, he carved out an indelible niche in the pantheon of immortals.

Nelson's passion was Mother Earth: its care, its health and its future. While serving as Wisconsin governor in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nelson pushed through a penny-a-pack tax on cigarettes to pay for his Outdoor Recreation Acquisition Program. At a time when few men or women in public life were cognizant of environmental issues, Nelson virtually broke new ground by pushing through a program which allowed Wisconsin to buy literally hundreds of thousands of acres of park land, wetlands and other open space.

In 1962, the Governor became a Senator when he defeated 4-term incumbent Republican Alexander Wiley (1884-1967), one-time chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. As Wisconsin's Junior Senator (his "senior" was William Proxmire, who had been elected in 1957 to fill the unexpired term of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy), Nelson quickly made a name for himself as an able advocate for planet earth. During his 18-years in the Senate, Nelson championed conservation policies, including legislation to preserve the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail and create a national hiking system. Without question, his crowning achievement was "Earth Day," which he started as an environmental demonstration modeled on the anti-war teach-ins of the Vietnam War. As Nelson would later recall: "It suddenly occurred to me, why not have a nationwide teach-in on the environment." He announced his Earth Day idea in a speech in Seattle in September 1969. The idea "took off like gangbusters." The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970.

In the thirty-five years since the first Earth Day, people have gathered each April 22 for convocations, teach-ins and such activities as planting trees, cleaning up trash, and lobbying for a cleaner, healthier environment. As a result of Nelson's passion, he came to be recognized

as one of the world's leading environmentalists. In 1995, then-President Bill Clinton presented Senator Nelson with a Presidential Medal of Freedom -- the nation's highest civilian honor. The proclamation, read by President Clinton stated: "As the father of Earth Day, he is the grandfather of all that grew out of that event: the Environmental Protection Agency, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act."

To my way of thinking, the highest praise with which one can grace another comes in the form of four simple words: "He [or she] made a difference." In this age when religious rhetoric and scruple seem to be directed mainly toward that which is arch-conservative, pro-business, and "cult-of-life," it is gratifying to note that more and more people of faith are coming to realize that to be religious -- truly religious -- means to be a steward of the earth. For in protecting the skies and oceans, the forests and plains, we are doing precisely what God intended.

There is an old Jewish tradition which teaches about the six Days of Creation: whatever was created first was not reliant upon that which was created second; whatever was created third was reliant upon whatever was created first and second. In other words, seas no more require fish than trees do birds. Fish, however, which were created after the sea, are totally reliant upon their watery home. This teaches us that nothing depends upon man, who was the last of God's creation. Conversely, this means that man depends on virtually everything. Anyone who teaches this lesson -- and few did it better than Senator Gaylord Nelson -- can truly be said to have made a difference.

Nelson's fellow Badger, the great Aldo Leopold is known as the "Father of Wildlife Ecology." In his seminal work *A Sand County Almanac*,

Leopold noted: "Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for Gods and poets, but humbler folk may circumvent this restriction if they know how. To plant a pine, for example, one need be neither God nor poet; one need only own a good shovel. By virtue of this curious loophole in the rules, any clodhopper may say: Let there be a tree -- and there will be one."

In like fashion, Gaylord Nelson taught that each and every person can rise to the level of God or poet, by learning to love, protect and defend the earth. In teaching this lesson, Gaylord Nelson truly made a difference.

May his memory be a blessing for us all.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

July 14, 2005

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## Schadenfreude

The Germans have a dandy word for what I've been feeling of late. This feeling, which started as a nearly imperceptible twinge has, with the passage of time, now bloomed into something approaching an instinctual response. The word -- and its concomitant feeling -- is *schadenfreude*, which comes from two Old High German terms meaning, roughly, "pleasure derived from the misfortune of others." Amazing how those German's can put so much meaning into a single 13-letter word.

Yes, I know that gloating over another's ill-fortune is something that a reasonably intelligent, sensitive gentleman ought to avoid like the plague; that feeling pleasure or --dare we say? -- gloating, when others are beginning to get their "just desserts," is really beneath one's dignity. But let's face it: when the objects of the aforementioned *schadenfreude* are George W. Bush and Karl "The Architect" Rove . . . well, you've just gotta kick up your heels and say *Ye-Hah!*

After stealing an election, wrecking the economy, sending our military off onto a fool's mission in Iraq and giving self-righteousness a bad name, its really quite a thrill to see Bush and the man he lovingly (?) refers to as "Turd Blossom" beginning to twist in the wind. Of course, the latest -- and potentially most lethal -- misstep involves Valerie Plame, the covert CIA operative who was "outed" in a Robert Novack article two years ago yesterday. Without question, this was an incredibly serious, absolutely illegal act on the part of the

lugubrious Mr. Novack who, amazingly, has to this point, been insulated from both flack and fallout.

Trying to keep up with rapid-fire "he said-he said" of this story is akin to writing a piece about a tennis match while its being played: a frustrating, mind-numbing waste of time. Suffice it to say that if Rove, the "Boy Genius," is not the *direct* cause of Ms. Plame's outing, he is without doubt the *proximate* factor. What possible reason could Rove or anyone else connected with the Bush Marching Band and Chowder Society have for jeopardizing the life of a long-time CIA operative? Glad you asked. Can you spell p-a-r-t-i-s-a-n- p-o-l-i-t-i-c-s? Ms. Plame's outing is nothing less than payback for the op-ed piece that Plame's husband, Ambassador Joseph Wilson, wrote in the *New York Times*. You will remember that Wilson was sent to Niger to dig up dirt on Sadaam Hussein. It was assumed that Wilson would bring back incontrovertible proof that Hussein (or his agents) had gone to Niger in order to purchase enriched uranium -- justification aplenty for our invasion of Iraq. As history records, Ambassador Wilson found so such proof. And it was precisely for going public with this information [or lack thereof] in his *Times* op-ed piece, that Bush and Rove decided to hit back below the belt. Never mind that by outing Ms. Plame, Rove *et al* put her life on the line. Just as egregiously [not to mention shortsightedly], they severely compromised -- if not totally destroyed -- more than two-decades of Agent Plame's carefully-cultivated intelligence contacts around the globe.

It simply amazes that the White House could, with a straight face, claim that the entire Plame flap is a partisan tempest-in-a-teapot raised by -- you guessed it -- *liberal Democrats* in order to discredit the administration. Trust me, this administration doesn't need any outside help when it comes to being discredited. The most recent sampling of public opinion shows that confidence in the Bush White House is at an historic low. John and Jane Q. Public simply don't trust the administration to tell the truth, and, in overwhelming numbers, feel that Bush and his team haven't the slightest idea how to handle the war,

the economy, Social Security, the environment, education or just about anything else of importance. Is it any wonder that a card-carrying progressive is suffused with *schadenfreude*?

It would seem that most of Bush's and Rove's strategic dreams are turning into nightmares; that, as the poet Burns would have it, "*The best-laid schemes o' mice an men gang aft agley*." [Roughly speaking, the "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry."] But the Bushmen and women don't see it that way. When one's public posture is buttressed by principles of utter religious certainty, saying that the moon is made of green cheese tends to make it so. Likewise, claiming that Valerie Plame was behind sending her husband to Niger [despite the fact that as a GS-13 she was too far down the espionage food chain to arrange for such a mission] has to make it so. Well guess again Mr. Rove. You've been caught with your political pants down. Glory be!

Now that the political sky is falling in Bushland, what are we progressives to do? Merely hurling brickbats emblazoned with the words "WE TOLD 'YA SO!" is neither sufficient nor smart. No, what we must do is come up with an intelligent, positive political game plan; one that seriously addresses our military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, comes to grips with our burgeoning healthcare crisis, restores fiscal sanity, figures out how to shore up Social Security, nurture our environment and on and on and on.

By seriously and painstakingly addressing all the issues that the Bushies have studiously avoided, we can make giant inroads in both 2006 and 2008. In order to do this however, we will have to go well beyond the self-gratification of *schadenfreude*. In order to set the country back on the right path, we will have to spend time remaking and refashioning that which can best be summed up in yet another incredible German word: *weltanschauung* -- the way one looks at the world.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

July 21, 2005

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## Coincidence and Concatenation

As much as one might admire the writers Aldous Huxley and C.S. Lewis, one also has to reserve a bit of pity for them both. "And why is that?" you may well ask. Because these two highly literate and thought-provoking scribes both had the extraordinary misfortune of dying on November 22, 1963. On most any other day of the year -- or decade for that matter -- their respective passings would have merited page-one news. As it turned out, most people weren't away of their deaths until the first of December. Sometimes, the coincidence - or simultaneity -- of events can wreak havoc in an otherwise orderly universe.

Then again, simultaneity and coincidence can serve a positive, salient purpose. As an example: back in 1974-75, I was a graduate student in Jerusalem. For untold months I researched, wrote and rewrote a major paper on the topic of political paranoia, with specific emphasis on the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. I was long scheduled to deliver the paper before a gathering of faculty and fellow graduate students in mid-February. As the date drew nearer and nearer, I became more and more fearful that I really had not mastered the subject; that I would make a fool out of myself in front of a lot of people. As luck -- or coincidence -- would have it, about three or four minutes after beginning my lecture, it began to snow. As one says in Yiddish, *fun himmel ah matonah* -- ". . . a gift from heaven." Needless to say, the attention of everyone in the lecture hall (including yours truly) was drawn to the white winter wonderland outside. Within a few minutes, my adviser

asked if I would mind postponing the lecture for another day. "No problem," I said, trying to sound mildly disappointed.

OK, there are **coincidence** and **simultaneity**. Then there is concatenation.

**Concatenation** [kon-kat-uh-NAY-shuhn] from the Latin *concatenare*, means "a series or order of things depending on one another. as if linked together." In the world of big-league politics, there are no coincidences, only concatenations. *Concatenation* is the driving force behind the timing of Judge John G. Roberts' nomination to the Supreme Court. One need only recall that up until the day before the nominee's identity found its way into public domain, the Bush White House steadfastly asserted that the president would proffer a name "sometime before the Senate reconvenes in the fall." That was of course *before* Karl Rove became the front-page flavor of the week. What public airing of the Roberts nomination effectively has done, is to save Mr. Rove's political hind end -- at least for the nonce. Now the public's attention can be diverted to the thorough vetting of Judge Roberts' life story, philosophy likes and dislikes. *Concatenation*. Ain't it wonderful?

Not that there's going to be anything terribly dramatic or difficult in getting Judge Roberts confirmed. His is a singularly safe, mostly predictable nomination. How so? Consider the following. Historically, of the 110 Justices to serve on the United States Supreme Court:

- 2 have been women
- 2 have been black
- 7 have been Jews (Ruth Bader Ginsberg fits into two categories here), and
- 100 have been white Christian men.

Yes, we can expect a fair amount of huffing, puffing and posturing on the part of Democrats who will claim that:

- Roberts is a Bush family factotum,
- He helped engineer the "Florida heist" in 2000
- He is a conservative activist,
- He will overturn Roe v. Wade, and
- He isn't a woman.

Some have referred to Roberts as a "stealth candidate" about whom little is known. From what little we do know, he is clearly a judicial conservative. In one case for which there is a paper trail, Roberts argued that Operation Rescue's routine -- sometimes violent -- blocking of clinics where abortions were performed constituted protected free speech. Moreover, in *Rust v. Sullivan*, Roberts co-authored a brief in support of regulations prohibiting family planning programs that received federal aid from providing any abortion counseling. In that brief, he wrote: "*We continue to believe that Roe was wrongly decided and should be overturned.*"

Tell me: is anyone all that surprised? Is there anyone out there who really believes that Bush was going to nominate someone with a more liberal point of view? Could Bush have selected a better nominee? Absolutely, but I don't think he's on speaking terms with Alan Dershowitz or Abner Mikveh.

Despite all the huffing, puffing and posturing we will no doubt be hearing from our beloved Senators Biden, Kennedy, Schumer and Durbin [who voted against Roberts' confirmation to the Court of Appeals] and various public interest groups, it is a safe bet that Roberts will be spending the next thirty-odd years on the Supreme Court. Having a large majority tends to do that.

"Can't he be defeated?" one might ask. There are two chances of that happening: absolutely none and less than that. Let's face facts: in all of American history, only 13 men have ever been turned back by the United States Senate. In the post-World War II era, of the four rejectees, two [Clement Haynsworth and G. Harold Carswell] were found to be dumber than the proverbial box of rocks; one [Robert Bork] was found to be a raging egomaniac;

and one [Douglas Ginsberg] admitted to having smoked pot. From what we have learned about Judge Roberts, he is neither mediocre nor an egotist, and undoubtedly too much of a straight-arrow to have ever owned a bong.

Nearly a thousand years ago, Ibn Gabirol, a wise and discerning man wrote: "The beginning of intelligence is discrimination between the probable and improbable, and acceptance of the inevitable." I fear that in the case of Judge Roberts, we will have to opt for the intelligent path and accept that which is inevitable. We would be better served to store up energy for a fight we can win -- like the presidency in '08.

Now, from the Republican point of view, the glory of the Roberts' nomination is not just that he will be approved. More to the point, Republicans glory in the fact that, for at least the foreseeable future, Karl Rove's name is going to be buried on page 6. And even if we wake up one morning to learn that Mr. Rove has quietly taken his leave, his power will remain unabated. All he has to do is move the couple of blocks from Pennsylvania Avenue to K Street, find himself an office, phone, secretary and cable modem, and have a new batch of business cards printed. Not only will he be able to continue being "Bush's Brain;" he will be paid one heck of a lot more than he is currently earning.

Coincidence? Not on your life.

Concatenation? It's a wonderful thing.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

July 29, 2005

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## Excuuuuse Meeeee!

Back in his "*Well excuuuuuuuse meeee*" days, comedian Steve Martin had a brilliant little comedic riff he would use in between the larger set routines:

"People are always asking me 'Hey Steve, how can I make a million dollars and not pay any taxes on it?'" Having set up the riff's improbable premise, Martin would stare out at the audience, his face a mask of smirking mirth. Pause, pause, pause.

"Well," he would eventually deadpan, "once you've made your million, here's what you do." Pause, pause, pause until the few titters turn into chuckles, and the chuckles into guffaws. Finally, Martin would conclude with " . . . you simply tell the I.R.S. I FORGOT!!"

The routine always got polite, generally enthusiastic laughter. I always felt that had the audience really gotten the joke's underlying satirical premise, they would have been rolling in the aisles. For Martin's joke was not so much about taxes and amnesia, as it was about the American mania for instant riches . . . our utter fascination with all things glittering and golden.

Is it any wonder? Whether it's *People Magazine*, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, *Architectural Digest*, or *I Want to Be a Hilton*, our homes and lives are saturated with the power, possessions and peccadilloes of a tiny, tiny fraction of the American public. Indeed, for the average American, it has become far, far easier to relate to people of vast means than to those who lead lives of

quiet desperation. Not only has this all-American mania turned us into a nation of keyhole peekers; it has caused us to feed the hand that bites us.

Excuse me?

Even as I write this piece, Congress is on the verge of permanently eliminating the Inheritance Tax -- that which its proponents long ago renamed the "Death Tax." This proposal, which if enacted will cost the U.S. Treasury nearly \$400 billion (yes, that "B" for "Billion) over the first ten years, will never affect 99.5% of the American public. Why? Because the current Inheritance Tax law (the most progressive of all taxes, it should be noted) currently exempts all estates, small businesses and family farms of \$5 million or less. You got it: inherit \$5 million or less, and you won't pay a cent in taxes. And, as a matter of fact, there is a proposal before Congress to raise the Floor from \$5 to \$8 million. Sounds great, no? Of course, as with the Steve Martin bit, avoiding the tax isn't the real issue; inheriting the \$5 (or \$8) million is.

Listening to repeal proponents like the mossbacked Grover Norquist (President of "Americans for Tax Reform"), one would think that everyone in America is either wealthy, or on the verge of inheriting a fortune. The Gospel, according to Norquist has it that the only reason some people don't inherit wealth is because their parents, grandparents or well-off friends and relatives have voluntarily chosen to spend their millions before dying. ("Once you've made your million . . ."). How dare they? Norquist and his buddies go so far as to proclaim that more than 70% of the American public supports repeal because "Americans of all means believe the government should not tax the same dollar of income twice, and in this case, three times." I guess that means that if we can't be fabulously wealthy, the least we can do is bend over backwards in support of those who are.

It is a fact that 99.5% of the American public (about 1 out of 200) has never and will never be affected by the Inheritance Tax. It is also a fact that should repeal be made permanent, in one year alone (2011), some 750 estates will

share a windfall of over \$13 billion -- that works out to about \$17 million an estate. And yet, those of us who bring up these incontrovertible facts are met with Norquist & Company's venomous ire: "[Those] who point out that a minority of Americans pay this tax [are] playing to the politics of hatred and class division." Just where do we pesky liberals get off doing that?

Excuse me?

I have to believe that a sizeable chunk of the 750 families who are going to collectively contribute \$13 billion to an already unfathomable federal debt are on the Bush family Christmas list. I also have to believe that there is more to life and political philosophy than bankrupting an entire nation in the pursuit of enhancing personal wealth. I have to believe that the American people are not so utterly detached from reality as to blithely sit by and give away our entire treasury. Then again, as Dorothy Parker once quipped, "If you want to know what God thinks about money, just look at some of the people he gave it to." Kind of frightening, no?

Ironically, it was President Theodore Roosevelt -- one of those to whom God gave a great deal of money -- who originated the Inheritance Tax. By the time T.R. acceded to the Presidency in 1901 (following the assassination of William McKinley), the Roosevelt clan had been living off inherited money for more than 200 years. In comparison to the Roosevelts, the Bushes are mere parvenus. Unlike the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Theodore Roosevelt and his compatriots firmly understood the concept of *noblesse oblige* -- that "nobility hath obligation." True, the Roosevelts, Rockefellers, Saltinstalls, Claibornes, Astors, Vanderbilts, Harrimans and others of their ilk did manage to shelter their vast wealth through the creation of family trusts and foundations. Nonetheless, they did not, to the best of my knowledge, attempt to preside over a frontal assault on the American treasury. And, each of those families created foundations that have contributed greatly to the wealth of America. As the old saw goes, "the best way to do well is by doing good."

T.R.'s legacy was, among other things, a phenomenal system of national parks. FDR's legacy was Social Security, 30-year mortgages and victory over Fascism. The Kennedys have underwritten the Special Olympics, and the Claibornes and Pells substantial financial assistance to thousands of American graduate students. By contrast, the Bush's legacy will apparently be giving away the treasury to a handful of wildcat capitalists whose mantra is "more, more, more," and whose favorite poet is, no doubt, Charles Churchill. Who, you may well ask was Churchill? He was a mid-Eighteenth Century English poet and satirist who wrote:

*What is't to us, if taxes rise or fall?*

*Thanks to our fortune, we pay none at al.*

*Let muckworms, who in dirty acres deal,*

*Lament those hardships which we cannot feel.*

Excuuuuuse meeeee!

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

August 05, 2005

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## Enlightened Self Interest

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), the French aristocrat who toured the United States in 1831, understood the American ethos as well as anyone who ever lived. In his classic work *Democracy in America* [1835], de Tocqueville offered up trenchant, wondrously insightful observations on everything from "How American Democracy has Modified the English Language," and "Why Some Americans Manifest a Sort of Spiritual Fanaticism," to "Of the Taste For Physical Well-being in America."

One of de Toqueville's greatest insights deals with the power of enlightened self-interest. de Tocqueville notes [vol.. 2, sec. viii] that in America, a land of hyper-individualists, working together for a common goal is the exception, not the rule: *In the United States hardly anybody talks of the beauty of virtue, but they maintain that virtue is useful and prove it every day. The American moralists do not profess that men ought to sacrifice themselves for their fellow creatures because it is noble to make such sacrifices, but they boldly aver that such sacrifices are as necessary to him who imposes them upon himself as to him for whose sake they are made.*

Simply stated, dig just a hair beneath the surface of a selfless act, and one is likely to find a deed motivated by self-interest. Now, this is not to say that enlightened self-interest is bad. Au contraire. It can lead to tremendous good. As an illustration, take the case of Jim Langevin of Warwick, Rhode Island . . .

At age 16, Jim Langevin had hopes of one day becoming an FBI agent. Those dreams were dashed when one day in 1980, Langevin, by then a police cadet, was accidentally shot by a police officer. The bullet, which ripped through his upper back and throat, damaging the upper part of his spinal column, left him a quadriplegic. Armed with a \$2.2 million settlement from the city of Warwick, Langevin began life anew. Understandably, the tragic accident focused all sorts of public attention on him. Remarkably, Langevin decided that rather than give in to pity, he was going to make something of his life.

Turning to politics and public service, Langevin became an intern in the Rhode Island State House and for then-United State Senator Claiborne Pell. In 1988, while a student at Rhode Island College, he was elected to the state House of Representatives. That same year, another twenty-something college student, Patrick Kennedy was also elected to the state House of Representatives. While in the state House, Langevin graduated from college and earned a master's degree from the Kennedy School at Harvard. In 1994 he was elected Rhode Island's Secretary of State. In 2000, he was overwhelmingly elected to the United State Congress from Rhode Island's Second District. Langevin, who employs a home health care aide, is to date, the first and only quadriplegic to serve in Congress.

Jim Langevin is both a progressive Democrat and a pro-life Catholic. He has been recognized for his work in education and election reform. He is a strong supporter of America's Armed Forces and "First Responders." He is undoubtedly best known for his tireless efforts on behalf of stem-cell research. His understanding of what it means to be "pro-life" is based as much upon his own starkly dramatic situation as upon his Catholicism. Because of his enlightened self-interest, he can vote in favor of banning so-called "Partial-birth" abortions and be a tireless advocate for enhanced stem-cell research. For most of the those on the pro-life side of the aisle, these two positions would be both religiously inconsistent and politically dangerous. Not so for Representative Langevin. He sees no such inconsistency.

Langevin is a co-sponsor of H.R. 810, the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act." The bill, which passed the House of Representatives on this past May, is now being considered by the Senate. This bill, authored by Delaware Republican Michael Castle would expand the existing federal policy on embryonic stem cell research by lifting the August 9, 2001 cutoff. As presented in the House, H.R. 810 had 23 Republican and more than 190 Democratic co-sponsors. Among the measures supporters are such staunch anti-abortion paladins as Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, former Majority Leader Trent Lott, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, California Representative Randy "Duke" Cunningham, and former First Lady Nancy Reagan. Nonetheless, President Bush said if passed by both House and Senate, he would exercise his veto option.

Mrs. Reagan, one of the strongest voices in favor of increased stem-cell research funding, says this research must be pursued "to save families from the pain" of debilitating illness. Obviously, she knows of what she speaks. It's her enlightened self-interest. "I don't see how we can turn our backs on this," she was recently quoted as saying. "We have lost so much time; I just can't bear to lose any more."

Enlightened self-interest can work both ways. It is likely that President Bush's veto threat is as much a matter of enlightened self-interest as moral imperative. How so? Perhaps Bush's [or, rather, Karl Rove's] political instincts tell him that his self-interest lies with the hard-core religious right. Keeping their attention riveted on the implied immorality of embryonic stem cell research [along with such ancillary concerns as abortion, gay marriage and the Ten Commandments], keeps Bush and the Republican's core constituency from contemplating:

- What an incredible muck their heroes have made of America's fiscal future,

- How the Bushies have bent over backwards to give aid, comfort and public dollars to the nation's wealthiest,
- How little concern they have shown for those without healthcare, homes or hope,
- How morally bankrupt such prominent movement conservatives as Rove, DeLay, and Bolton really are.

Yes, enlightened self-interest can be a powerful motivator. I have to believe that Alexis de Tocqueville had such public-spirited individuals as Jim Langevin, Michael Castle and Nancy Reagan in mind when he wrote about self-interest. For through that great motivator, he predicted, great good would be extended to the masses. Were he, on the other hand, to contemplate the obverse side of self-interest -- as manifested by the Bush White House -- it is likely that he would turn over in his grave, arise, and write an addendum to *Democracy in America* -- one perhaps entitled "Things I've Reconsidered . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

August 12, 2005

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## Jack Who?

The late California Assembly Speaker Jesse "Big Daddy" Unruh (1922-1987) was known for two gritty, pithy political maxims:

- *"Money is the mother's milk of politics" and*
- *"If you can't drink a lobbyist's whiskey, take his money, sleep with his women and still vote against him in the morning, you don't belong in politics."*

Back in 1969, I worked for Jess [he preferred this version of his name] in his unsuccessful campaign to unseat the then-incumbent governor of California, Ronald Reagan. Working for [and with] "Big Daddy" was like taking a graduate course in practical politics. To Jess, politics was a no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners, full-contact sport -- definitely not a calling for the faint of heart. In Jess's world, one had to know when best to fight by the gentlemanly Marquis of Queensbury rules, and when best to revert to kicking, clawing and the gouging out of eyes. In addition to possessing an encyclopedic knowledge of issues and procedure, the successful politician had to evince both an unswerving loyalty toward one's friends and a toxic resolve toward one's enemies. One also had to possess the agility of a gymnast, the guts of a safecracker and a backbone of case-hardened steel. In short, Jess taught that politics was definitely not a congenial world for the milksop, milquetoast or mollicoddle.

I found myself thinking about Jess and his political *weltanschauung* this morning when I read the front-page account of lobbyist Jack Abramoff's

impending fall from grace. For the uninformed, Abramoff is the DC lawyer/lobbyist/close friend of Majority Leader Tom DeLay who, over the past several years has managed to give venality a bad name. Abramoff is probably the only Beverly Hills High School graduate who wound up being to the right of Ronald Reagan. Indeed, while in college Abramoff was national chair of the College Republicans. It was in that position that Abramoff hired to future stars of the apocalyptic right: Ralph Reed and Grover Norquist. Abramoff is known for one statement and one statement alone: *It is not our job to seek peaceful co-existence with the Left. Our job is to remove them from power permanently.*

Now, Abramoff's particular brand of larceny is gambling. He stands accused, along with partner Adam Kidan, of an act of massive fraud in their purchase of the now-bankrupt Sun-Cruz floating casino fleet. This is a case that will be written about for years to come. It has all the ingredients of a major, first-class scandal: tens of millions of dollars in graft, "consulting fees" paid to a Gambino crime family associate and an as yet unsolved murder of a the man from whom Abramoff and Kidan purchased Sun-Cruz.

As a "rainmaker" for two major DC law firms -- Preston Gates Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds and Greenberg Traurig -- Abramoff [known as "Casino Jack"] made a fortune working on behalf of Native American gambling interests, and underwriting congressional "fact finding" junkets to the casinos of the Northern Marianas, the golf courses of Scotland and the fleshpots of Russia. In recent years, most all of Abramoff's activities have been under scrutiny by the Department of Justice. Thursday's six-count indictment is likely to be merely the first rung on the downward ladder that has Abramoff's name on it.

So why, you may well ask, does reading about Abramoff's legal woes bring Jess Unruh to mind? Actually, it's not so much Abramoff as DeLay who motivates my stroll down Memory Lane. During all those years when Abramoff was known as *the* mega-lobbying-gotta-be-on-his-A-List-cash-cow of the Republican Right, Tom DeLay let it be known that Casino Jack was one of his

best friends and closest associates. Why they'd traveled all over the world together, played golf at Glen Eagles together, even split up a few Congressional districts together. They were the Orville and Wilbur, the Romulus and Remus of Capitol Hill. And now that Abramoff has got himself into a first-class legal quagmire, DeLay can't even remember the poor guy's name. I can just hear Tom muttering to himself: "Jack who? Jack who?" "Jack Benny?" "Jack Armstrong?"

In courting [and being courted by] Abramoff, DeLay forgot one of Jess's most fundamental rules of full-contact major-league politics: never make your relationships with lobbyists a matter of public record. For those who do, it will no doubt come back to bite you in the derriere. Sure, you can, as Jess's truism goes, "drink their whiskey, take their money and sleep with their women," but you were always supposed to do all this behind closed doors. In making his unswerving devotion to his good friend Jack so incredibly public over the years, DeLay has left himself precious little wiggle-room. As Abramoff's legal/ethical/moral woes continue to mount DeLay's exposure is likely to reach toxic proportions. And there are only two protocols for that level of toxicity: resignation or defeat. Which will it be Mr. DeLay?

Jess must be shaking his head in amazement . . .

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August 12, 2005 in Politics | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

August 19, 2005

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## Villainova

If it wasn't so mindlessly stupid, I'd have to laugh. I mean, can you fathom that there are actually living, breathing, sentient beings out there who really, truly believe Cindy Sheehan is nothing more than a tool of "the vast liberal left?" Why the liberal left? Why not claim that the Devil made her go on down to Crawford? How's about aliens from outer space? Perhaps it's the ghost of Alger Hiss reading a script prepared by Dalton Trumbo? Why is it that everything "Moral America" disagrees with is eventually blamed on the liberal left? Is there some conspiracy going on that we don't know about?

Seems like ever since our early colonial period, we've suffered sporadic bouts of a potentially dangerous, national affliction known as *fingerpointingitis*. This ailment, which attacks the body politic, begins as a dulling of common sense, spreads through the extremities, and, if left unchecked, can lead to paroxysms of political paranoia. The afflicted come to believe that those who evince a different point of view -- whether social, political or cultural -- are the underlying cause of society's ills. Moreover, they are so incredibly evil, that they actually *want* society to take a header. The early symptomology of *fingerpointingitis* includes cloying moral rectitude, 20-20 hindsight, and an inerrant memory of something called "the good old days," when boys were boys, girls were girls, and the skies were not cloudy all day.

Over the past three hundred and fifty years, America has suffered sporadic outbreaks of *fingerpointingitis*. And, although its disruptive effects have been more-or-less uniform, each situation involved a slightly variant strain. To wit:

- The mid-1600s outbreak of *The Witches of Salem* strain;
- The late-1700s *Masonic conspiracy* variety;
- The mid-1800s *Irish Catholic Immigrant* peril;
- The late 1800s infestation of *Eastern European Socialists*;
- The early 1900s epidemic of *Anarchic bomb-throwers*;
- The mid-1900s *Communist conspiracy* outbreak, and
- The late 1900s-early 2000s *Left-liberal-militant-gay* contagion.

In all cases, the underlying diagnosis and symptomology were the same; overt manifestations differed only in degree.

Today, we are faced with the same thing.

- Don't like the fact that Cindy Sheehan and tens of thousands of other loyal, patriotic Americans are out protesting and highlighting our fallacious involvement in Iraq? *Blame it on the liberals!*
- Ticked off because some Americans believe that the state should not sanction religion? *Blame it on the secular humanists* (who are probably liberals).
- Want to defeat a moderately conservative Democrat Senator? *Label him or her a dangerous left-liberal.*
- Feel in need of discrediting environmentalists, supporters of a woman's right to choose, gays, or anyone else who gets in the way of your right-wing agenda? *Tar them with the brush of left-wing-anti-Christian lunacy.*
- Tired of all those mouthy *Air America* types who keep pointing out the cause-and-effect relationship between having a Bush in the White House and paying nearly \$3.00 a gallon at the pump? *Damn them to hell as godless secularist allies of Satan.*

This *fingerpointingitis* contagion inflames intolerance, retards progress and consigns any hope of meaningful two-way dialogue to the intensive care unit.

In much the same way that pornography objectifies human beings, *fingerpointingitus* actually subjectifies [and damns to perdition] those who have a different point of view. It is not enough that an individual, group of segment of society exercises its legitimate right to disagree; that individual, group or segment of society must be villainized, demonized and cauterized. Its reminiscent of one of the final scenes in *The Maltese Falcon* where Sam Spade [Bogie] is attempting to wrap things up with "The Fat Man" [Sidney Greenstreet] and Joe Cairo [Peter Lorre]. Spade's opening gambit is " . . . we've got to have a fall-guy . . . we've got to have someone to take the rap." Seems to be the same way in political society nowadays: some folks have just got to have a fall-guy, got to have somebody to blame for the fact that they can't turn America into a haven for those who summer in Bar Harbour.

75 or 80 years ago, director William de Mille [Cecil's brother] proposed the formation of a syndicate to purchase an island on which a new state be erected. Mr. de Mille wanted it to be named Villainova. The inhabitants would be supported in luxury by a tax on Hollywood studios, which in return would receive the right to make the heavies in all their pictures Villainovans. In this fashion they could hope to avoid the protests of foreign governments and domestic pressure groups when one of their nationals or members, fictitious or real, was portrayed on the screen in a less than favorable light. De Mille's proposal, of course, came to naught, but the idea remains. And not a bad one at that.

If those in power are going to continue to blame, heap scorn and villainize those who have differing philosophies, priorities or concerns -- in short, with those who just won't agree with everything they say and do -- perhaps what we need is something akin to de Mille's Villainova -- a mythical land toward which all fingers can be pointed, and all scorn can be heaped. Goodness knows it makes about as much sense as blaming the emerging anti-war movement on Cindy Sheehan and the puppets of the liberal left, or tarring everyone who favors, say stem-cell research with the brush of the ungodly Saracen.

During the dark days of the Third Reich, there was a joke going around Berlin: Two men meet on the street. They bemoan the sorry state of German society -- how everything is going to hell in a hand basket.

"Why are all these terrible things happening?" the first man asks. "Who's to blame for all our troubles?"

"I know precisely who's to blame," his friend answers confidently.

"Who?" the first man asks impatiently. "Don't keep me in suspense."

"Well, his friends says, "we can actually lay blame at the feet of two different groups."

"And they are?" the first man says, impatiently tapping his foot.

"The Jews and the bicycle riders," the man answers proudly. The first man ponders his friends answer.

"I don't understand," he finally says, slowly shaking his head. "What in the world do the bicycle riders have to do with all our problems?"

"Beats me," his friend answers, a broad grin on his face. "What do the Jews have to do with our problems?"

He might as well have said "The Villainovans."

Let's seek a cure to *fingerpointingitis*; let's stop assessing blame and labeling those with whom we disagree. Otherwise, meaningful dialogue is going to become as obsolete as a slide rule. And in that case, we all lose.

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# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

August 26, 2005

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## Pat Robertson: The Mouth That Roared

When last we checked, God gave Moses **Ten** Commandments on Mount Sinai. Then again, for all we know, perhaps when our attention was drawn elsewhere (a riveting episode of Tommy Lee at the University of Nebraska?), the Lord determined that ten was too many, and decided to reduce the list by one. Perhaps that's what happened when we weren't watching; how else to explain the Reverend Pat Robertson's televised call for the assassination of Hugo Chavez, the democratically-elected President of Venezuela? ([Watch the Robertson Video Here](#) )

Now, since assassination is defined as "the murder of a prominent person by surprise attack, as for political reasons," and since the Reverend Robertson has long proclaimed that the Almighty speaks with him on a regular basis, what other conclusion are we to draw but that the Commandment "Thou Shalt Not Murder" has been rescinded? Mind you, this is not the first time that Robertson, the famed televangelist and darling of movement conservatives, has made outrageous statements on his "700 Club." Last year, he said that President George W. Bush told him *before* the Iraq invasion, "we're not going to have any casualties," but that "the Lord told *me* it was going to be (a) a disaster and (b) messy." Needless to say, after the first few hundred casualties, the Bush Administration issued a blanket denial.

Then too, shortly after 9/11, Robertson proclaimed that "Gold Almighty is lifting his protection from us," because "we have insulted God at the highest level of government," by allowing such things as abortion and pornography, and

barring prayer in the public schools. Could it be that God, the Holy One Blessed Be He, revealed to Pat Robertson that He [or She] is a conservative Republican?

In 2003, Robertson initiated a 21-day "prayer offensive" to pray for three Supreme Court justices to leave the court, after it had decriminalized sodomy. At that time, Robertson said: "We ask for miracles in regard to the Supreme Court." It should be noted that at the time of this fervent, nationally-televised plea, one Supreme Court justice was 83-years old, while two others were suffering from serious health problems. That same year, Robertson, criticizing the U.S. State Department, told his minions that "maybe we need a very small nuke thrown off on Foggy Bottom to shake things up." And let us never forget that nearly six years ago, Robertson called for the assassination of both North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il and Saddam Hussein.

Certainly no sane person can disagree that Jong Il and Hussein are sociopathic monsters who deserve to be consigned to the deepest, most fiery depths of Hell. And while at one point political assassination was the deadliest arrow in the American quiver [witness the 1963 assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, the first President of the Republic of Vietnam, and the attempted murder of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro], it is no longer a lawful weapon. President Gerald R. Ford made sure of that in his 1974 Executive Order that put political assassination off-limits. So in essence, we have Pat Robertson -- a man who claims to have the ear of God -- counseling political assassination -- an act that is strictly forbidden by both the laws of the United States and the word of God.

Can we imagine any situation in which political assassination would be warranted? Without question. Adolph Hitler. His crimes were so utterly despicable, so unbelievably ineffable as to make assassination what today we would call a "no-brainer." Case made. Case closed. However, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez is no Adolph Hitler. True, he *is* pals with Fidel Castro and *does* sell oil at below-market rates to his Latin American brethren. And

true, he has little love or patience for the President Bush [whom he has publicly referred to as an "ass. .le" in Spanish], and will, from time-to-time warn that he, Chavez, has a gigantic bulls eye on his back. All those things may make him a leftist, an anti-American anti-yanqui icon and a paranoid opportunist, but certainly not one who should be "taken out," in Robertson's words.

One of the things Robertson and his ilk continually rail against is what philosopher's call "situational ethics" -- a theory first promulgated during [when else?] the 1960s by Joseph Fletcher. "Situational ethics" was intended to be a middle ground between antinomianism [which says there is no law and that everything is relative to the moment] and legalism, which has a set of predetermined and different laws for every decision-making situation. Robertson, Bush and the vast majority of movement conservatives are its natural and vociferous enemies. Surprisingly though, the administration response to Robertson's televised diatribe has been nothing short of an object lesson in situational ethics. How so?

Recall that a while back, when Illinois Senator Richard Durbin [a moderate Democrat] publicly compared the Guantanamo military prison to a Gulag, the White House beat the drums of outrage for days on end and furiously demanded an apology, which the Senator delivered. Then too, any and all who question Supreme Court nominee John Roberts' legal philosophy or predisposition are loudly and roundly condemned and accused of being irreligious bigots. But in the case of Pat Robertson, all we hear from the State Department is the word "inappropriate" -- hardly a condemnation. Inappropriate? To term Robertson's call for political assassination "inappropriate," is tantamount to calling Hedy Lamarr "cute," Stephen Hawking "bright," or Bill Gates "comfortable." At Defense, all Rumsfeld would say is that "the Pentagon isn't in the business of killing foreign leaders." Nowhere in those ten words is even a hint of condemnation or shock, let alone distancing. Seems like Robertson gets a free

pass. Seems like the ethics of black-and-white or right-and-wrong become situational when a [if not *the*] leader of your political base becomes the issue.

Forty-eight hours after his bout of verbal diarrhea, Robertson tried to deny that he had ever called for Chavez's assassination. ["I never said that we should assassinate him. I merely said 'take him out,' which could mean lots of things, like . . . well. . . like kidnap him."] When that tactic looked like it was going to die aborning, he apologized -- sort of. Thanks Reverend. Your contrition is the stuff that saints are made of.

Today, precisely 72 hours after Robertson's initial gaffe, there isn't word one about him or it in the papers. It never ceases to amaze how well the administration can manage news. Especially when it involves one of their vote-cows. This White House, which proclaims itself to be on the side of the angels, has once again shown its moral hypocrisy. Shout out your moral indignation from the highest heavens when you want your loyal political base to hear; turn the volume down to less than a whisper when you don't wish to offend those who cast votes and write checks.

Pat Robertson is indeed, the mouth that roars. Wondrously, the sound he makes produces virtually no echo. And that, my friends is a miracle worthy of He who gave the world the original Ten [or is that Nine?] Commandments.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

September 02, 2005

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## "Oh, the Humanity!"

Among traditional Jews, there are a set of blessings known collectively as *b'rachot hoda-ah* -- i.e. "Blessings of Praise and Gratitude." These are prayers that the observant Jew might recite upon:

- Hearing thunder (" . . . for God's strength and power fill the universe")
- Seeing lightening (" . . . Who makes the work of Creation")
- Seeing a strange-looking animal (" . . .Who makes the creatures different")
- Beholding a rainbow (" . . . Who remembers the covenant . . . and fulfills His word"), even
- Seeing a truly beautiful person (" . . . Who has such in His universe")

So far as I know, there are no specific prayers for natural disasters -- or national calamities -- such as Hurricane Katrina; no concrete expression that could hope, in but a few words, to give shape or meaning to something which is so overwhelming, so awful, so . . . so ineffable. And for those who have survived Katrina's initial fury only to be put in the continuing hell of thirst and hunger, discomfort and dislocation, not to mention real physical peril [witness the sniping and "shoot-to-kill" orders] there are simply no words. One is reminded of Herb Morrison, the radio newscaster reporting for Chicago's WLS who, witnessing the Hindenburg disaster back in 1937, hauntingly exclaimed "Oh, the humanity!" What more can one say than that? Oh, the humanity!

Fortunately, there are a multiplicity of things we can do: places we can direct contributions, homes we can open for those in need of shelter, plans we can make for the future. Among the many online sites that one can go to make contributions, the following are tried and true:

- [Union for Reform Judaism - URJ Disaster Relief Fund](#)
- [USCJ: Hurricane Relief-You Can Help](#)
- [B'nai B'rith International Disaster Relief](#)
- [UJC Presents UJCWeb](#)
- [American Red Cross - Preparing for and Responding to Hurricane Katrina](#)
- <http://www.mazon.org/>

There's something about the American ethos: disaster brings out the best in us. And, if generosity of spirit and level of compassion are directly related to the severity of catastrophe, then we are likely going to be just a little lower than the angels in the coming days, weeks and months. For in Katrina, we are not speaking of a mere disaster; this is a cataclysm of epic, epic proportion. What Katrina has wrought in New Orleans and the entire Gulf Coast hearkens back to the opening words of the Biblical Book of Lamentations: *"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow!"*

I don't know about you, but in the midst of the shock, the sorrow, the need to extend myself and do good deeds, the little "there but for the grace of God go we" prayers that I have been muttering, there is a gnawing, smoldering anger. This anger is so close to the surface that I fear its going to explode at any moment. I mean, here's the great city of New Orleans -- destroyed and bereft of not only food, water, power and patience, but of sufficient national guard troops, ambulances, helicopters and first-alert providers. Where have they gone? To Iraq. For what purpose? To root out all the weapons of mass destruction! [Sorry, that rationale is now, repeat, is now inoperative]. OK, we've gone over there to put down the terrorists so they can't come over here

to America! [Oops, that too has gone by the wayside]. Well, how about providing the Iraqi people with the Democratic society they've always craved. [Can't someone please get the Shiites and Sunnis to agree on something?] Oh yes, we're there to protect the oil fields! [That's it! We're there to protect, preserve and defend our ability to have the price of gas go up by more than 30 cents a day.]

About the only things the scientists and engineers who have long been warning us about this-in-the-making disaster did not know, was what the hurricane's name would be, and the precise date of its arrival. For years, scientists have been telling us that global warming inevitably leads to storms of pestilential proportions. "Not so," say the geniuses in Washington. "There is no such thing as global warming. That's all just a hoax perpetrated by a bunch of smarmy tree-hugging, deviant-loving liberals who can't find a single nice thing to say about America." I wonder how much longer the sand in which these naysayers have chosen to bury their heads is going to be sticking around. They better watch out, because if they keep it up, there's not going to be any sand in which to bury their heads.

And as for the engineers, they have been spent the last couple of years decrying the fact that the powers-that-be in Washington have cut out funding for the shoring up of the two levees that protect New Orleans from Mother Nature. Truth to tell, the amount they cut last year [about \$75 million] is roughly equivalent to what Cheney and Rumsfeld made in salary and bonuses in the two years prior to their joining the Bush Administration. The Administration argued that the money was needed elsewhere. Hey, Tikrit needs a new Denny's a lot more than New Orleans needs a new dike.

My smoldering anger is also directed at the president, whose has treated Katrina as just one more infringement on his well-deserved summer vacation. I mean, Hells Bells, the man hasn't had a respite since his vacation since last April. Did you know that during his four years in the White House President Carter took only 79 days off? George W. has already taken off 79 days *this year*

*alone*. By his actions, Mr. Bush seems to be treating Katrina as just one more photo-op. Molly Ivans declared Bush's speech on Katrina [delivered at least two days late] as perhaps the worst speech any president has ever given. Once again, he has shown himself to be devoid of that common spark of humanity -- of that which in Yiddish we call *dos pintele mensch* -- that would let us know that underneath the cowboy hat and weather-beaten grin is someone who really feels our pain, understands our fear and can give voice to our uncertainty. Instead, we get bromides and statistics.

For the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast -- and for the nabobs of Crawford-on-Kennebunkport -- I deliver the same message:

Oh, the humanity!

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

September 09, 2005

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## Amateur Hour

I've been thinking a lot about Howard Beale this past week. Who? Oh come now, you certainly must remember Howard, don't you? He was that fictional newscaster portrayed by the late Peter Finch in the Paddy Chayevsky/Sidney Lumet film *Network*. Remember? Remember how when Beale, the avuncular UBS network anchor was informed that due to a precipitous decline in ratings he was being canned, he went on the air with an incredible rant-and-rave session, culminating in his insisting that everyone go to the windows, throw them open, and shout at the top of their lungs, "I'M MAD AS HELL AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANY LONGER!" (Should you, by chance, wish to hear Howard's rant, just click here: ["I'm mad as hell . . ."](#))

Well, dear reader, that's precisely how I'm feeling these days: mad as hell, and not willing to take it. Mad as hell about what?

- *I'm mad as hell* about an **administration** that can get the mighty wheels of government rolling on behalf of Terry Schiavo within the blink of an eye, but then take an eternity to even put the key in the federal ignition when it comes to Hurricane Katrina. Terry Schiavo, of course, was white, solidly middle-class, and an obvious lightning rod for the vote-seeking, religion-pandering Republican right. The victims in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast were largely impoverished African Americans -- among the last of that breed known "Mad-Dog Democrats." ("I'd vote for a mad-dog so long as he was a Democrat. . .")

- *I'm mad as hell* about **FEMA** being under the leadership of Michael Brown an incompetent political hack who, it should be noted, originally got his job because he was the college roommate of former FEMA head Joe Allbaugh. Allbaugh, by the way who resigned his FEMA post in March, 2003, currently runs a lobbying-consulting firm with many clients in the disaster-relief business. One of the companies he currently represents is KBR, a division of . . . what else . . . Halliburton. Allbaugh is currently scampering around the gulf area seeking to make a fortune for himself and the firms he represents.
- *I'm mad as hell* at the president's mother, **Barbara Bush**, who, when questioned about the tens of thousands of Katrina victims stranded in the Houston Astrodome during an American Public Radio interview had the audacity to say: "Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality. And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this, this is working very well for them." All Barbara B. left out was something about letting them eat cake.
- *I'm mad as hell* at her son, **George W. Bush**. Yesterday, at what passed for a presidential press briefing, W., proving that he is definitely his mother's son when it comes to being a blind elitist, proudly proclaimed: "Anyone who feels that they aren't getting the level of disaster assistance they need or require should call us at 1-800 - - -," or Email us at [www.FEMA.gov](http://www.FEMA.gov)." Call? Email? Mr. President, take off your rose-colored glasses. The people to whom you were addressing yourself don't have phones or Internet connections, let alone television sets upon which they can see your Cheshire-grinning countenance. Hell's bells, they don't have food, potable water or a change of underwear for that matter.
- *I'm mad as hell* at **Grover Norquist, Leo Strauss, Jude Wanniski** and the rest of the iconic Supply-Side neocons. Over the past generation, they have taken a virtual meat-axe to the Federal Government, rebated (given away) hundreds upon hundreds of billions in taxes for the truly

wealthy, and created a national debt that will easily define all American politics for the next 100 years. Norquist, who is famous for claiming that his ultimate dream is shrink the federal government until it is small enough to drown in a bathtub, is drowning the future in a massive tidal wave of red ink. Strauss (1899-1973) the patron-saint of neoconservative ideology, taught his students (among whom were Alan Bloom and Paul Wolfowitz) that America is best run by an elite that doesn't have to bother with the will or desires of the populace. Moreover, this elite, according to Strauss, doesn't even have to bother with the truth while pursuing its agenda. The elite is, after all, the elite . . .

- *I'm mad as* hell at the death of competence and professionalism. What ever happened to a government that was easily able to attract a generation's "best and brightest?" How is it that a government which once created programs to assist every man, woman and child achieve the American Dream has turned into a mythic debating society where so-called moral issues best left in the sanctuary, the vestry or the classroom have taken center stage? Where once there was a cadre of men and women who saw government service as a moral opportunity to do well by doing good, there is now a clique that sees government as a guilt-edged feeding trough where they and their best buds can dine until stuffed. Let's face it: Bill Frist is to Mike Mansfield as Bo Belinsky was to Sandy Koufax -- a pale incompetent shadow of a great, great man.

On the bright side, We the People are beginning to wake up. More and more windows are being thrown open. More and more minds are beginning to fathom the incompetence, rapacity and mendacity of our current administration. More and more light is being aimed into the once-dark creases and crevasses of the elite. More and more, it looks like Howard Beale had the right idea.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

September 16, 2005

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## All Hail the U. S. of H.

Here's one from the *There's a sucker born every minute* department: Last night, in a national television address broadcast live from New Orleans, President George W. Bush donned the mantle of not one, but two Democrat Presidents. For in committing himself, his administration, and the American economy to the rebuilding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, W came perilously close to sounding like a born-again amalgam of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. On the rhetorical surface, his willingness to spend untold hundreds of billions of dollars on an epic, Brobdingnagian program of restoration, sounds like a cross between Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Marshall Plan. I repeat: on the rhetorical surface. Don't you dare buy into it.

Buying into W as F.D.R. or H.S.T. *redoux* requires both an ignorance of American political history and a willful suspension of disbelief. The massive, heretofore unprecedented public works spending of the New Deal was buttressed by both the Roosevelt Administration's political philosophy and its belief in the fundamental correctness of Keynesian economics. To refresh our memories, John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) the preeminent British economist, opined that the way out of economic disaster was for the government to spend money that it did not have. This Roosevelt and his Democratic majority did with gay abandon, appropriating billions and billions of deficit-dollars for the myriad programs that eventually put America back on the road to recovery. It goes without saying, however, that Keynes' theories would never have received a test -- much less a listen -- had not Roosevelt and his braintrust harbored a liberal, benevolent view of the role of government in the lives of the

governed. They truly believed that the federal government could, should, and must act as the protector of last resort. And this is precisely where George W. Bush and his cronies fail to live up to their rhetoric.

Simply stated, the libertarian oligarchs of the Bush Administration view government as the problem, not the solution. In Bushian *weltanschauung*, both polity and economy are best served by the private sector, not the government. To their way of thinking, it would seem, the federal government's *raison d'être* is to preserve, protect, defend and expand the private sector. Anything that needs to be done -- from picking up litter to rebuilding New Orleans, Gulfport or Iraq -- can best be done by private enterprise. In other words, President Bush -- a man who represents a wealthy cadre of oil-industry billionaires who have virtually zero faith in the ability of government to do anything right -- has seemingly committed the very government he both distrusts and wishes to emasculate -- to the biggest relief and recovery program in the past 75 years. It just doesn't add up. Or does it?

Ever since the days of Brown Brothers, Harriman (of which W's grandfather, Prescott, was a principle) the Bush family fortunes have been inextricably tied to oil. That should come as no surprise. Well, when you come from an oil family that resides in an oil state, and have most of your campaign expenses underwritten by friends in the oil industry, it makes pretty good sense that you're going to want to help them out whenever you can. And that is just what Bush, Cheney, Allbough and the gang are doing. Is it any surprise that during the years when an oil man resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue that gas costs \$3.00 a gallon, or that our military is entrenched in Iraq -- the second-largest oil producing country in the world? Should it surprise us that Halliburton, the company that is still paying our Vice President nearly \$200,000 a year in deferred pay, has already received multi-billion dollar non-competitive contracts for rebuilding Iraq? And how about Katrina? Kellogg, Brown and Root, a Halliburton subsidiary [ably represented by Joe Allbough, W's 2000

campaign manager and the former head of FEMA] has already received a \$29.0 million contract for cleanup work in the gulf. And this is just the beginning.

In Roosevelt's day, New Deal programs were paid via deficit government spending. The theory went something like this: pumping federal dollars into the economy, putting people to work, rebuilding the infrastructure, giving men, women and children hope and restoring their dignity, would eventually bring more and more tax dollars into our coffers, thereby making a significant dent in the deficits caused by government spending. And although it took World War II to bring us totally out of the Depression, Roosevelt's plan did work; the economy was in much, much better shape in 1940 than it was in 1932 or 1936. For Roosevelt and his team, political philosophy and economic theory were the servants of recovery.

In Bush's time, it is the other way around: recovery is the servant of political philosophy. The true believers of the Bush Administration are people who seemingly haven't the slightest idea of what it's like to be a wage-earner without health insurance, savings or prospects. They are so certain that their political and economic philosophy comes from Mount Sinai [or whatever Mount they consider holy] that they won't budge an inch even in the face of unparalleled disaster. One might think that with all the new debt the president is going to be adding to our already multi-trillion dollar debt, he and his advisors would consider suspending some of the tax cuts they've enacted for the wealthiest 2%. There's about as much chance of that happening as Tiger Woods giving up golf for competitive chess. One would think that with all the families who have been financially -- not to mention spiritually and emotionally -- wiped out, they would ease up on some of the newly-enacted bankruptcy laws. Not on your life.

Further the Bush Administration is using the Katrina disaster to help promote many of its pet political projects. According to the Administration's post-Katrina policy manifesto, we are going to be seeing waivers on environmental rules, the elimination of capital gains taxes and the private

ownership of public school buildings in disaster areas. And, [a drum roll here, please] if anyone killed by Hurricane Katrina left an estate in excess of \$1.5 million, they are going to be exempt from any estate tax. Doesn't that just make you feel like running out and hugging a Republican? I can just see all those people huddled in the Astrodome running to call their banks back home, only to find that the bank is no longer there.

Considering the Bush Administration's extraordinary aversion to oversight, auditing or investigation, one worries about how many of these billions of dollars are going to wind up in the wrong hands. During the New Deal, Roosevelt made damn sure that there was complete and rigorous oversight of the Works Progress Administration. History records that, unbelievably, it was as clean as a hounds' tooth. The current White House resident has assured us that members of his own administration will be handling the oversight responsibilities. Someone, this doesn't make me feel too confident.

No, the administration's response to Katrina is no New Deal. George W. Bush is no F.D.R. And it would seem that that ill wind called Katrina, has blown through Washington, D.C., and turned our beloved nation into the United States of Halliburton.

All hail the red, white and yellow . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

September 22, 2005

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## Simon Weisenthal: A Giant Who Walked the Earth

Among the most persistent delusions we humans commonly share is the myth of the bygone era -- the "Golden Age" -- when people were superior to the sorry specimens running around today. Examples abound. Pick a field. Any field.

Out in my hometown, Hollywood, California, we natives are often heard yammering about the film industry's "Golden Age;" that time when there were "real stars" like Gable, Cooper, Davis and Crawford. "How in the world," these moaners and groaners complain, "can any knowledgeable person compare the likes of Hanks, DeCaprio, Zeta-Jones or Thurman with the real stars of yesteryear? By comparison, these current Hollywood wannabes are nothing more than a bunch of one-note stiffs!"

Then there are the diehard baseball purists who absolutely, positively insist that guys like Bonds, Sosa and Martinez can't hold a candle to such "real" giants as Mays, Ott and Hubbell. And of course to the true political junkie, the likes of Bush (take your pick), DeLay and Lott are mere pygmies when stacked up against *real* political giants like Roosevelt (take your pick), Rayburn and Fulbright.

"Oh yeah? Sez who?" cry out voices from an even dimmer past. "Cooper and Crawford were nothing -- absolutely nothing -- compared to Gilbert and Garbo." "And if you want to talk *about real* political giants let's begin with Webster, Calhoun and Lincoln." And on and on. Every era looks back to a past, when the women were more beautiful, the heroes more heroic the artistes

more artistic, the sands more pristine. Hell's bells, even Homer's *Iliad* tells of an earlier time when "Giants walked the earth." Its a mortal passion, a human delusion, as old as time itself.

But I'm here to tell you that while we were all looking backward for inspiration, we missed the chance to be held breathless by a giant in our own time: Simon Wiesenthal.

As I write this, Wiesenthal's funeral service is taking place in Jerusalem. He is no doubt being eulogized as one of the greats; a person who, like the Phoenix, rose from the ashes of despoliation and went on to become one of history's most estimable, most courageous individuals. Who would ever have imagined that this middle-class man, born in the waning days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and educated in the technical institutes of Prague and Warsaw, this Jew who, along with millions of his *lantsleyt* was marked for extinction in the camps and gas chambers of the Third Reich -- that this man would survive and then spend the next 60 years hunting down the deranged perpetrators of the so-called "Final Solution" -- history's most monstrous, most flagitious act of barbarity? A short answer to a rather long question: no one. No one would ever have believed that anyone -- short of perhaps a fictional superhero -- could be so possessed, so driven as to develop a global network dedicated to the sole purpose of hunting down and bringing to justice, history's most infamous doers of evil.

In a sense, Simon Wiesenthal *did* become a fictional character -- in movies such as "The Nazi" (2002) and "Max and Helen" (1990) and novels like "The Boys From Brazil" and "The Odessa File." For in Wiesenthal, we find a man whose humanity, whose passion and obsessive drive for ultimate justice is the stuff of Homeric legend -- well beyond the ken of "modern mortal man." Who but the truly great, the truly heroic, could arise day after day, month after month, decade after decade, energized by the same goal, the exact same purpose as yesterday, last month or the previous decade? Who but the truly Homeric could, after escaping death not once, not twice but a dozen times over,

continue to place himself in harm's way in pursuit of an overwhelming goal? And who but the truly lion-hearted would ever go out into battle against history's ultimate evildoers armed primarily with the haunting voices of the murdered as his lance, his shield and his goad? This, Simon Wiesenthal did decade after decade, identifying, hunting down and bringing before the bar of justice, more than 1,100 Nazis and pro-Nazi sympathizers. Starting out as one man on a holy mission, Wiesenthal build up an international following. He also became the target of those who vehemently denied the truth of the very horror he was seeking to requite. And despite being told time and time again to let the hounds of history lie dormant, he persisted -- just like a giant, just like a hero.

Over the past fifteen or twenty years, the term "Holocaust" has been hijacked and misappropriated by groups and individuals who are either blind to the facts of history, or else possess third-rate vocabularies. For Christian conservatives to claim that there is an ongoing Secular Humanist-led "holocaust" against the unborn, or for Arabs to aver that the Israelis are perpetrating a "holocaust" against the Palestinians is patent nonsense. It denigrates denatures, and trivializes that which occurred to the Jews, Gypsies and Gays during the dark days of the Third Reich. It also shows just how cynical, how intellectually bankrupt some people can be.

In Simon Wiesenthal, all humanity -- and not just Jews, Gypsies and Gays -- have had a champion, a man who would not rest so long as the voices of victims rang in his ears. Wiesenthal's life is an extraordinary testament to the energizing power of an ideal. Indeed, as with all giants, he has, through both his deeds and his very mien, achieved immortality.

Contemplating his own mortality, Wiesenthal was once quoted as saying: "When my life is over and I meet up with victims of the Holocaust, I shall have the privilege of saying to them '*I never have forgotten you.*'"

Back in 1977, when Sir Charles Chaplin passed away, tributes came fast and furious from the four corners of the world. Everyone -- from royalty and diplomats to actors and fans -- wanted to express their thoughts about this giant of comedy. It fell to Bob Hope to express what perhaps was the best eulogy of all -- and one that seems entirely fitting for Simon Wiesenthal: "*We were fortunate to have lived in his time . . .*"

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

September 30, 2005

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## What If They Gave a War . . . ?

This past week, our local PBS affiliate (WPBT) ran a series of documentaries on a subject near and dear to my heart: the 1960s. Intently watching "Get Up, Stand Up: The Story of Pop and Protest" and Martin Scorsese's four-hour documentary on Bob Dylan, "No Direction Home," I couldn't help but feel . . . well, aged. I mean, here were the people, the events, the lyrics, the political movements of my college-age salad days, now reduced to grainy black-and-white images. Wait a second: wasn't Woodstock in color? Weren't lightshows at the Fillmore suffused with psychedelic hues of red and purple? Since when did my youth become part of ancient history?

I found myself recalling people places and words that were long ago buried in the inner recesses of my mind:

- James Rector, the sole fatality at People's Park -- He died on May 15, 1969.
- Mark Rudd, the head of S.D.S. at Columbia University.
- The Port Huron Statement.
- "What we've got in mind is breakfast in bed for 400,000!"
- The "Chicago Seven [well, eight really]: Bobby Seale, John Froines, Lee Weiner, Rennie Davis, Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman.
- *Pigasus*, the pig that Jerry Rubin wanted to run for President in 1968
- "You can get anything you want, at Alice's Restaurant ['cepting Alice] . . ."

- "Hey, hey L.B.J., how many kid's you kill today?"
- "Impeach Bonzo and his buddy!"
- "Ho, ho, Ho Chi Minh, N.L.F. is going to win?"
- "Make love, not war!"
- "What if they gave a war and no one came?"

This last slogan was still ringing in my ears as I read an email from a friend who had attended the anti-war rally in D.C. last weekend. "It was really quite an amazing event," she wrote. There hasn't been a mass protest, of similar scope and size since the 1970s." According to my friend, who, like any good child of the 60s knows how to guesstimate the size of an anti-war rally, last week's D.C. protest march consisted of a minimum of 150,000 people. And, there were similar [though smaller] gatherings in cities across the country. Nonetheless, anyone getting their news from major media outlets would have been totally unaware. ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, FOX, even NPR chose to devote less than 100 words on their nightly broadcasts. Yes indeed: What if they gave an anti-war rally and no one publicized it?

Back in 1965, topical folk singer [and Harvard math professor] Tom Lehr, introducing a song about a then-proposed Multi-Lateral Force {"MLF Lullaby"} chided his San Francisco audience for their ignorance: "Much of the discussion [about the proposed MLF] took place during the baseball season, so the [San Francisco] *Chronicle* may not have covered it . . ." Well, that's precisely what happened with last weekend's protest: it occurred during the Katrina/Rita cycle, so no one covered it. Or at least that's what C.N.N's Aaron Brown proffered during his news broadcast last Saturday evening. According to the unedited transcript, Brown stated:

*There was a huge 100,000 people in Washington protesting the war in Iraq today, and I sometimes today feel like I've heard from all 100,000 upset that they did not get any coverage, and it's true they didn't get any courage. Many of them see conspiracy. I assure you there is none, but it's just the national*

*story today and the national conversation today is the hurricane that put millions and millions of people at risk, and it's just kind of an accident of bad timing, and I know that won't satisfy anyone but that's the truth of it.*

Let's see if I've got this straight: C.N.N., a cable network devoted exclusively to providing 24-hour, round the clock news, can't manage to cover more than one major story a day? Are we to believe that C.N.N. merely listens to -- and reports on -- the "national conversation," rather than helping shape it? ABC, CBS and NBC were no better in their coverage.

Leave it to the Fox Network to make a malignant molehill out of a moral mountain. Fox correspondent Jim Angle categorized that mountain of anti-war protesters as "disparate groups united by their hatred of President Bush, in particular, and U.S. policies in general." In just 16 words, Angle [and Fox] managed to revive one of the worst aspects of the 1960s -- slighting and sequestering the apostles of protest. And you thought the Fourth Estate was independent?

On the Fox News Sunday the situation went from bad to worse. Panelist Juan Williams -- one of the media's up-and-coming stars -- was rebuked by his colleagues when he noted that public opinion had turned in favor of pulling out of Iraq. One would think that Williams was on pretty firm ground here; he was merely stating a fact backed up by every recent poll of the American public. That's what a reasonable person would think. But NPR's Mara Liasson, Williams' Fox News Sunday colleague, responded, "Oh, I don't think that's true." Brit Hume, a dyed-in-the-wool Buchanan Republican, echoed Liasson's sentiment. When Williams brought up the Saudi foreign minister's statement that foreign troops were not helping to stabilize Iraq, panelist William Kristol retorted: "So now the American left is with the House of Saud." Excuse me? Bill, it's precisely the American "left," as you so blithely call any and everyone who doesn't stand heel-to-toe with the Administration, who has been most outspoken in their opposition to the House of Saud. It's the so-called "left" who have repeatedly sounded the tocsin, attempting to awaken the Administration and the American

people to the fact that the House of Saud runs one of the most backward, most repressive regimes on the face of Mother Earth.

Meanwhile, the media treated the 200 or so pro-war hecklers as if they were somehow equivalent to the massive throng who came out to protest the war. In a headline that summed up the absurdity of this type of coverage, the *Washington Post* reported: "Smaller but Spirited Crowd Protests Antiwar March; More Than 200 Say They Represent Majority." Perhaps this "crowd" felt that way because they've grown accustomed to a media system that so frequently echoes their views, while keeping antiwar voices -- representing the actual majority opinion -- off the radar.

Those of us who spent our college years singing, toking, marching and protesting, always assumed that the likes of George W., Newt G. and Tom D. were swilling brew and trying to keep America safe for Ozzie and Harriet. Perhaps we underestimated them. Perhaps they were studying our techniques, committing them to memory, and awaiting the day when they could turn the tables. In the 60s, it was the anti-war movement that got the media's attention by mouthing such curiosities as "What if they gave a war and no one came?" Perhaps the tables have indeed turned, and it is the straights' revenge, for now they are the ones asking "What if they had a protest and no one reported it?"

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

October 07, 2005

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## You Don't Need a Weather Man . . .

As Bob Dylan noted forty years (!) ago in *Subterranean Homesick Blues*: "You don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows." Now I don't know if our benighted President is, was, or ever shall be a devotee of the erstwhile Mr. Zimmerman, but as they [whoever *they* are] say, *it couldn't hoit*. Perhaps if Mr. Bush would take a respite from his current travails and familiarize himself with some of the Bard of Hibbing's more trenchant lyrics and insights, he would realize that there's an "*Idiot wind blowing every time you move your mouth; idiot wind blowing every time you move your teeth*." [From "Idiot Wind," found on Dylan's 1975 album *Blood on the Tracks*] Even more to the point, he might discover that at long last, "*The times, they are a'changing*."

Indeed, the past several months have been anything but kind to George, Dick, Karl, Tom, Bill, Jack, Gop-ocrats and the K-Street Mafia. Everywhere the President looks, there are ill winds blowing:

- ***Indictments*** (DeLay and Abramoff)
- ***Grand Jury subpoenas*** (Rove)
- ***Senate and S.E.C. investigations*** (Frist)
- ***A P-oed Republican-controlled Senate*** that finally got the gumption and guts to defy their President (a 90-9 vote against the use of "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment" against those in U.S. government custody)

- *The public's growing nausea* at the thought of privatizing Social Security, eliminating the estate tax, and making bankruptcy all but impossible for any but the mega-wealthy.
- *Katrina and Rita*
- *Michael Brown* (a.k.a. "Your doing a great job" Brownie)
- *The Economy* Oy!
- *The War in Iraq* -- W's newest reason for the war is perhaps the best: God told him to do it!
- *Those pesky public opinion numbers* -- Can you believe that 26% actually believe the country is on the right course? Who are these people?

*And on and on and on. . .*

And, to make matters even worse, the punditocracy is beginning to envision the upcoming 2006 elections as 1994 redux -- only in reverse. One need only recall that in 1994, the G.O.P., under both the tutelage and leadership of Newt Gingrich, took back Congress from the Democrats for the first time in 40 years. And how did they do it? By hammering away at what they perceived as the Democrats' moral and political hypocrisy. It would seem that at least for some Republicans, the consequences [if not the answer] is blowing in the wind. Already, we are seeing some of the G.O.P.'s best upcoming talent preferring to remain on the sidelines rather than get into the game:

- In West Virginia, Rep. Shelly Moore Caputo, who was being groomed to run against 88-year old Senator Robert Byrd, has removed herself from contention.
- Despite Karl Rove's blandishments, popular North Dakota Governor John Hoeven has decided not to run against Senator Kent Conrad, the incumbent Democrat.
- In Florida, the state G.O.P. hasn't been able to find anyone save Rep. Katherine Harris [she of the overly-bouffant hairdo, maniac grin and

pocketful of hanging chads] to run against incumbent Democrat Senator Bill Nelson [who, despite being somewhere between moderate and right-of-center is being portrayed as a dangerous leftist.]

- Republicans have repeatedly failed to attract first-tier candidates to make Senate races in both New York and Nebraska as well. [Who in their right mind would want to challenge Hillary Clinton?]

So what is a President to do? What should he do in order to stage a comeback, revivify his political base, and fortify his party against the gale-force currents that threaten to blow them clean off Capitol Hill? One might think that a savvy conservative would nominate a down-the-road, doctrinaire, fire-breathing, pro-life, pro-family-values conservative for the seat being vacated by Sandra Day O'Connor -- someone along the lines of Clarence Thomas or Anton Scalia. Guess again. Instead of scoring a couple of easy lay-up points with his political base, Bush decided to nominate Harriet Miers, a Texas lawyer with absolutely no judicial experience who can easily be attacked by the right, the left *and* the center. A pretty nifty trick, no?

Okay, there certainly have been a handful of Supreme Court justices whose first judicial appointment was to the Supreme Court -- William Rehnquist comes to mind. However, in the case of Ms. Miers, there is virtually no track record whatsoever; just a term on the Dallas City Council. Movement conservatives are steaming; they believe that their champion, their white knight has let them down and nominated not another Clarence Thomas, but rather, the second coming of David Souter. And from what has been reported over the past week, it would seem that Mier's number one qualification for the position is her personal loyalty to the man who nominated her. Well what the heck: Miers was Bush's personal attorney when he was governor of Texas, and ran the all-important damage control check on him to see if there was anything in his background that might impede his run for the presidency. Moreover, Miers has a very, very high opinion of her client: former White House speechwriter David Frum says that Miers once told him that "the president is

the most brilliant man she ever met." Based on that statement and that statement alone, the woman is not qualified to house sit my pets or plants, let alone receive a lifetime appointment to the United States Supreme Court.

But wait! Maybe this isn't so bad after all. And I don't mean that Miers will turn out to be what movement conservatives fear the most -- a "stealth moderate." Rather, perhaps this nomination isn't so bad because it will act as the straw that finally breaks the camel's back. We know that Democrats from Maine to California are spoiling for a fight. We know that Bush's very conservative Christian-right base is beginning to have serious, serious doubts about their boy's bona fides. We also know that fiscally responsible, balance-the-budget, how-can-you-wage-war-and-cut-taxes Republicans have all but been shocked into stupefaction by the administration's let's-treat-the-federal-treasury-as-our-own-personal-piggy-bank philosophy. Combine all these forces, present the American public with a coherent, unified message that remains on point [how about "It's About Economy, Morality, and Hypocrisy Stupid!"], work like the dickens and . . . voila! Congress could conceivably be back in the hands of the Democrats in 2006, the White House in 2008.

Before we start breaking out the champagne glasses however, we will have to sit down, hammer out a message, quit fearing that speaking of morality and values is somehow beneath Democratic scruples, and recognize that quite likely, *the answer my friend is blowing in the wind, the answer is blowing in the wind* . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

October 14, 2005

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## What hath God wrought?

May 24, 1844 was one of the most important dates in all human history. On that day, Samuel Finley Breese Morse transmitted the first telegraphic message from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore. As he was making final preparations for that historic first, his dear friend and Yale classmate, Henry Ellsworth [who, as luck would have it, was Commissioner of the United States Patent Office] asked Morse if he had given serious consideration to what words or phrase he wished to send. After all, Ellsworth told his old friend, whatever that first message might be, would no doubt live on in history much like such phrases as *vini, vidi, vici* ["I came, I saw, I conquered"], or "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

In matter of fact, Morse, who, under normal circumstances was seldom at a lose for words, was suddenly speechless. he had *not* considered what that first message should be. Instead of admitting weakness -- something he was loathe to do -- Morse suggested that perhaps Ellsworth's young daughter, Annie, might be given the honor of coming up with that historic phrase. History records that once given the assignment, Annie consulted with her mother, and decided to use a quote from the Bible -- Numbers 22:23: "What hath God wrought?" In the Bible, these four words [actually, *three* in Hebrew] are spoken by Balaam, the chap who turned out to be a false prophet. It was a most fitting quote -- and not because Morse was a deceptive oracle. Morse may have been a religious zealot, but unlike the modern variety we see nightly on cable TV, Morse also believed in scientific truth. Morse, unlike the current apostles of what has come to be known as either "Creation Science" or the "Theory of Intelligent

Design," firmly believed that scientific truth and religious scruple were not mutually exclusive. Rather, he believed, man's ability to limn the secrets of the universe was, in fact, a gift from God.

Of course, for every scientist or otherwise thinking individual untroubled by the purported contradiction betwixt science and religion, there are at least two religious fundamentalists who scream out that evolution is a hoax, Darwin was Satan's stepson, there were dinosaurs on Noah's Ark, and that the world was created in six twenty-four hour days. Think I'm pulling your leg? Just tune in to any of a number of televangelist broadcasts on the cable, watch and listen. You'll be amazed. . .

A few years back, religious fundamentalists, in an attempt to hamstring and possibly curtail the teaching of evolution in public schools, dreamt up something called "Creation Science." This "science" posited, among other things, that the Biblical account of creation was the true scientific explanation of man's genesis, and that Darwin's theory of evolution was nothing more than a fair tale. A nifty trick, no? What the so-called "Creationists" did, in essence, was turn a pretty well-grounded scientific hypothesis into a *bubbe meise*, and crown religious dogma as the new science.

When the scientific community proved beyond all reasonable doubt that "Creation Science" was anything but, fundamentalists, armed with the shield of inerrant certainty, returned to the public arena with a new tact -- something now called "The Theory of Intelligent Design." According to this theory -- which they treat as a God-given axiom -- there is no such thing as Evolution. Why? Because, they say, the great variety of species is proof positive of a conscious, intelligent creator, rather than an act of random selection. In other words, what they are saying is "We declare evolution to be false because we refuse to believe in it." And, as weak and intellectually flaccid as this may seem, it has lots and lots and lots of adherents.

Two weeks ago, the case of *Kitzmiller et al v. Dover Area School District* got underway in United States District Court in Pennsylvania. The basis for the case is simple: eleven Dover-area families brought suit against the local school district for mandating students in high school biology classes hear about "alternatives" to evolution, including the aforementioned theory of Intelligent Design. In their suit, the plaintiffs contend that Intelligent Design is nothing more than a Trojan Horse for the teaching of religion in public school. With the new political empowerment of religious conservatives in this country, challenges to evolution are popping up with greater frequency in schools, courts and legislatures. The Dover case, however, is *sui generis*: it represents the first direct challenge to a school district that has tried to mandate the teaching of intelligent design.

The eleven families suing the Dover School District are being represented by attorneys from both the A.C.L.U. and *Americans United for the Separation of Church and State*. Meanwhile, the defendants -- those who contend that evolution is bogus -- are in turn being represented by the *Thomas Moore Law Center*, a nonprofit Christian firm that declares its mission to be acting as "a sword and shield for people of faith," in cases involving abortion, school prayer and the Ten Commandments. The Center, by the way, was founded and funded by Thomas Monaghan, the founder of the Domino's Pizza chain.

Dubbed "Scopes II," after the famous 1920s case in which Clarence Darrow argued Evolution with William Jennings Bryan in a Tennessee courtroom. The current case is sure to draw international attention. Witnesses for the plaintiffs include professors of science, religion, philosophy and history from Yale, Boston College, Dartmouth and Penn. State. The defense plans to call leading "Intelligent Design" theorist Michael J. Behe, who is Professor of Biochemistry at Lehigh University. While the scholars from Yale, Penn and Dartmouth plan to argue that "Intelligent Design is not science because it does not meet the ground rules of science," Professor Behe will counter with the argument that "allowing students to be aware of the controversy [by including

Intelligent Design in the school curriculum] is good pedagogy because it develops critical thinking." Moreover, the defense has said it will prove that "Intelligent Design" is neither "Creationism" or "Creation Science," because it does not specifically mention God or the Bible, and does not posit the Creator's identity. As the Church Lady would say, "Well, isn't that special?"

During the trial's first week, one of the Dover parents testified that her daughter, having been exposed to the theory of Intelligent Design in her biology class, came home and told her mother -- a church-going Methodist who happens to support Darwin's theory of Evolution -- that she was no better than a Satanist, and was undoubtedly going straight to Hell! Is this what supporters of Design Theory call "critical thinking?" And how could this girl conclude that her mother was a backer of Beelzebub and going straight to Hades if Diety never entered into the discussion in her biology class?

A fascinating twist developed in the case when the Seattle-based Discovery Institute -- one of the nation's leading advocates of Intelligent Design theory -- removed its one staff member from the Dover School Board witness list. According to John G. West, a senior fellow at the Institute, "We thought it was a bad idea, because we oppose any effort to require students to learn about Intelligent Design because we feel it politicizes what should be a scientific debate."

Parents in the Dover School District appear to be split on the issue of teaching Intelligent Design alongside Darwin's theory of Evolution. One of the plaintiffs to the suit, a Mr. Rehm -- who is a former high school science teacher -- decided to run for the Dover School Board. He reports that while out campaigning he has had doors slammed in his face, and has been subject to neighbors doing a "monkey dance" when he attempted to pass out campaign literature at a recent fireman's fair.

As a Jew [and a rabbi to boot], I've just celebrated Rosh Hashanah -- ushering in the new Jewish Year 5766 -- along with millions of my co-

religionists around the world. At services, we say *hyyom harat olam* -- namely, "Today the world came into being." And while I would imagine that there are still a few literalists among us who still believe that the world is precisely 5,766 years old, the vast majority of us take that to be a metaphor for divinity and creativity. For most of us, there is no need to make a choice between science or faith.

If we Jews had really taken the Biblical text literally -- actually and really believed that the world was but 5,766 years old, we never would have immersed ourselves in the sciences. We never would have produced the Einsteins and Sabins, the Feynmans and Yaslows -- the 117 Jewish men and women who have received Nobel Prizes in Medicine, Chemistry or Physics. Imagine how much poorer the world would be without their scientific discoveries: Richard Feynman's Quantum Electrodynamics; Gerald Edelman's discoveries concerning the chemical structure of antibodies; Ernest Chain's discovery of Penicillin; or Joshua Lederberg's discoveries concerning genetic recombination. Indeed, the world would be a much poorer place.

Those of us who do not find an unbridgeable chasm between science and religion -- between Creation and Darwin -- tend to see the world as being born anew each year, each month -- indeed, each and every day. The discoveries we make, the lessons we learn, the words we write, the ideas we create -- these are at odds with neither God nor science. Rather, they are merely (!) God's continuing dynamic influence upon the world. Moreover, through our actions, our inventions and our contemplations, we are getting ever closer to the time when we might be able to answer both Balaam's and Morse's question, "What *hath* God wrought?"

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

October 21, 2005

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## Memo to Liator

### MEMO

Star Date

18 Irhsit 5766

**From:** Radue, Chief Scout, Earth Sector

**To:** Liator, Director, Interstellar Research Bureau

**Re:** Should Shinar Invade Planet Earth?

Having spent the better part of 9 moon quadrants on Planet Earth, I have concluded that it (or should that be "she?") is ripe for the taking. However, due to the moral, intellectual, and cultural flaccidity of its strongest and [self-proclaimed] most upright tribe -- and especially its leaders -- I rather doubt it will even be worth Shinar's effort to try! And before, oh Omniscient Liator, you conclude that my senses have abandoned me, permit me to explain:

Never mind the fact that the entire planet is beset with what its inhabitants call "natural disasters." It seems that each week brings a hurricane [they give them names!], typhoon, tsunami, earthquake or new prime-time television show. In the case of the latter, they either deal with something called "forensic science" or have the words "Law and Order" in the title. In the case of the former -- these occurrences of nature -- there are actually those among the leaders who blame them on those who don't agree with them. I kid you not! I've heard it said that the recent hurricanes (named Katrina, Rita and

Wilma) are the fault of those who favor something called "abortion," and those who are against the repeal of something they call "the death tax." I know, oh Omnipotent Liator that it makes no sense, but that's the way things go with some of these humans.

Then there are their wars. You know, the most powerful and upright of the tribes (they call themselves the *United States of America*) has chosen to go to war against a tribe on the other side of the Earth -- a tribe called *Iraq*. They have told the Iraqis that the war is for their own good -- for something called their *liberation*. They tell them that what they must do is put together a Constitution -- a set of laws and standards by which everyone will agree to live. It would appear that the Iraqi tribe is made up of several smaller tribes who, in all likelihood, haven't gotten along with each other for at least 1,800 of these Earth years. The leaders of the *United States of America* tell the Iraqis that in order for their new Constitution and new government to work, they will have to exclude a group called *Radical Islamic Extremists*. From what I have learned, these are some sort of religious fanatics. On the surface, this might be a smart proposition -- to exclude them from the government in light of the fact that they cannot agree on anything. And yet -- and here I'm totally amazed oh Omnipotent Liator -- the leader of the *United States of America* just nominated a woman to be on their Supreme Court and said she should be approved precisely because of her religion! Am I missing something? The leader of the *United States of America* is lecturing *Iraq* about keeping religion out of their politics, and then turning around and urging people to endorse his Supreme Court nominee precisely because she is what they call an *Evangelical Christian*! I tell you Liator, it makes little sense.

Just the other day, the leader of Earth's most powerful tribe, a human [well, at least I think he's a human] called George W. Bush, threatened to veto [i.e. kill] a piece of legislation that would ban "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners of war." Liator, this is fantastic! Why? Because one of the reasons this Bush has given for going to war in *Iraq* is that this is precisely

what *their* former leader had done -- cruelly and inhumanly tortured his subjects. I think there is a gigantic inconsistency here.

You know Liator, the other day I was watching this thing called a *television* -- a primitive box-like device that transmits grainy moving pictures with sound. There on the screen was what they call a *Presidential Videoconference*. From what I can gather, it is an assemblage of humans who come together in order to make their leader [the *President*] look good. In doing a bit of a mind scan, I determined that the 10 *Americans* and 1 *Iraqi* who were there with the *President* had actually been coached by an aide from someplace called the *Pentagon* on how to respond to their leader. And yet, while this charade was going on, the *President* is proclaiming that the war in *Iraq* is being waged precisely so that the people of *Iraq* can throw off the shackles of oppression and enjoy the benefits of something called *freedom of speech*. Again, Oh Omniscient one, this does not make any sense.

In conclusion, I would say that although they are both morally weak and intellectually flabby, and as a result could be easily conquered, I really don't think it's worth our while. I have the feeling that taking over the earth and its creatures [especially the ones led by this *Bush*], would require a commitment of time, energy, patience and what the earthlings call *bucks* well beyond our means or desires. I recommend instead, that you send our Interstellar Research team on to another galaxy -- one in which hopefully we will find creatures who possess both consistency and the milk of human kindness.

And lest you think our stay has been entirely without benefit, please know that we have added greatly to our storehouse of knowledge, and greatly increased our vocabulary. But can you tell me Oh Beneficent One: what means the word *hypocrisy*?

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

October 28, 2005

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## The Reality of Wilma

The power is finally back on. Phone service and DSL have also been restored. Going on line, I find that since early Monday, I have collected over 150 emails -- many from friends wanting to know if we survived Wilma. I am happy -- deliriously happy -- to report that everyone in our house -- of both the two- and four-legged variety, is in fine fettle. I wish I could say the same for the house, the pool, the trees and assorted windows, screens and the like, but I cannot. For those of you who have yet to encounter a category-two or three hurricane, count your blessings. You have absolutely no idea of just how powerful and other-worldly such a storm can be. How to explain it for the fortunately uninitiated? I guess in the words of the 17th century Dutch/Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza: *The power of nature is the power of God.* Amen!

Its truly amazing how much the world can change when you're hunkered down in a safe-room and then away from the Internet, television and newspapers for the better part of a week. I mean, just prior to Wilma, when last I was "plugged in":

- W was ready to go through the fires of hell for Harriet Miers.
- Scooter Libby was gainfully employed in Vice President Cheney's office,
- Patrick Fitzgerald was not a household name, and
- The Chicago White Sox hadn't won the World Series in nearly 80 years.

Ah well, stuff happens whether we're there to absorb it or not.

I'll tell you, the past five days have been a real eye-opener in a number of ways. Some random thoughts:

- **Natural disasters can bring out both the best and the worst in people.** Take our neighbors. On one side of us is a family that hasn't spoken to us since the first time they saw me wearing my yarmulke -- that is, the first day we moved in some 7 years ago. Today, a gang of tree-cutters came canvassing in our neighborhood, looking to cut down the massive trees that have landed on our roofs, blasted through our walls, and made driving down the street all but impossible. One tree, which sits on this particular neighbor's property, landed on my roof. I went over to his home, with an offer to split the cost (about \$900.00) of cutting it down. I could barely get this proposal out of my mouth before he slammed the door in my face. End of discussion. What a horrible excuse for a *homo sapiens*. Then again, on the other side live a family of Sikhs from New Delhi. On the second day after the devastation, just as I was Jonesing for my morning pot of Harney's Lavender Earl Grey Tea [the Platonic Absolute of Tea!], who should appear at our back door but Deepak with the extraordinarily wonderful news that she has access to a pot of boiling water! I don't know if it's proper to use a Yiddish expression when raving about a Sikh neighbor, but I shall: *fun himmel a matoneh* -- i.e. "A gift from heaven."
- **The Federal Government Hasn't a Clue:** So what has FEMA been up to in South Florida? As Grandpa Doc would say, *Vell, I'll tell 'ya*. They've magnanimously set up stations in local parks where tired, unwashed, frightened, frustrated people can expect to stand in line for up to seven hours in order to receive three (count 'em three) bottles of tepid water and a five-pound bag of melting ice. Those of us fortunate enough to have had access to a working cell phone (three cheers for Cingular wireless!) called the local 800 number for FEMA, in the hopes of perhaps getting some of the paperwork underway. Imagine our surprise to learn

that first, they suggested we go on line (!), and second, that they wished us to know that by answering their questions (annual income, social security number, etc.), we were also giving them *carte blanche* to give out that information to whomsoever they wish. About the only thing FEMA has been able to do is tell the people of South Florida that they care. Well isn't that special?

- **Jeb's really no better than George:** Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who, living in the Governor's mansion up in Tallahassee has been spared all of the trauma, decreed that he was establishing a "blame-free zone." How's that? Well, it seems that Jeb is attempting to spare his older brother another round of well-deserved grief by mandating an embargo on blame. That's his contribution to the post-Wilma frenzy.
- **There's a lot to be said for simplicity:** Its simply amazing how many more stars you can see in the heavens than when they are forced to compete with 340 million incandescent lights. Its also rather amazing just how dark it gets when the only light comes from the moon. Then again, being bereft of electricity meant no television, no DVDs, no entertainment. So what did we do? Believe it or not, we actually sat in our candle-lit family room and listened while Abba (that's me) read wonderfully droll stories by the Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem. I also managed to read two remarkable books -- Rick Perlstein's *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, and Justin Franks' *Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President*. Its wonderful how a power outage can bring back the good old days. I highly recommend these two books -- even if the forecast in your neck of the woods doesn't include a hurricane, tornado or smog alert.

Today we spent more than eight hours hacking, raking, bundling and aching. It seemed that every time we gathered a substantial pile of leaves, branches and pine cones, a breeze would arise, thereby making the pile a lot less substantial. Along about the forth hour of hacking, raking and bundling

(the aching wouldn't reach its apex for another 3 hours), I began feeling a kinship with Sisyphus, the sly and evil son of Aeolus and Enarte. He's the schnook who, in the realm of the dead, is forced to roll a block of stone against a steep hill, which then tumbles back down when he reaches the top. Then he starts the process all over again -- throughout eternity. That's how I was feeling at hour four.

By hour seven I'd forgotten all about Sisyphus, and started flashing on good old Charlie Allnut -- the character played by Bogie in *The African Queen*. Specifically, I was remembering the look on Charlie's face when he realized that he had to get back into the grimy, leech-infested Ulonga and continue the super-human task of pulling his boat through the swamp. Fortunately, it dawned on me that Charlie eventually succeeded, and along with his beloved Rosie Thayer, lived happily ever after.

And so shall we all.

Thanks Wilma, you've taught at least one frail human an awful lot about reality.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

November 04, 2005

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## The Land No One Knows

Back in 1976-77, I had the pleasure of working for California Governor Jerry Brown. Specifically, I was assigned to *The Office of Planning and Research* [OPR], a kind of state-sponsored think-tank under the directorship of the redoubtable Bill Press -- the same Bill Press who today is one heck of an insightful political commentator. While working for Bill at OPR, my major assignment was putting together a small book on land use and environmental ethics. We called the work *As Their Land Is*, after a quote from Gertrude Stein.

While doing research for the book, I came across the following bit of Native American lore:

*A White man came seeking a piece of land from an Indian. The Indian told him he could have all the land his blanket could cover. The Indian meant by this that the only land a person could possess was the ground he stood on at the moment -- about the area a blanket would cover. But the white man proceeded to tear up the blanket into single threads, laced them all together with a string, and then staked out a sizeable portion of the land -- and wondered afterward why the Indian would not honor his claim. He called the Indian all sorts of vile names. But for the Indian, of course, there was no sense of giving, nor of selling, for he had no sense of owning in the first place. The Indian walked away with tears of incomprehension in his eyes . . .*

I find myself remembering both my days at OPR -- struggling to create an ethic for land use -- and the Indian's tale quite a bit this week. I, like the native of our tale, feel the "tears of incomprehension" beginning to well up in my eyes. Why? Because the United States Congress stands poised to give the Brobdingnagian behemoths of petroleum license to rape, plunder and denude the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). A majority of senators and representatives are sold on the idea of drilling for oil there. They claim that the 10.4 billion barrels that could potentially be dragged from ANWR's approximately 1.5 million acres will "go a long way" toward relieving America's dependence on high-priced foreign oil. Stuff and nonsense! First of all, no one knows for sure just how much oil might be beneath the tundra and permafrost. And second, even if there are 10.4 billion barrels to be gotten, that would translate to a single year of American consumption at a savings of about two-cents-a-gallon over current prices [this according to an Energy Department estimate]. Hallelujah!

This is by no means the first time the issue of drilling in ANWR has come before Congress. Indeed, the petroleum shills of Capitol Hill have been lasciviously ogling ANWR for a generation or more. What has stopped them in the past was the threat -- if not the reality -- of a filibuster. What that means is that heretofore, Democrats [along with a few of their Republican colleagues] only needed 41 votes to keep the measure off the floor. But now, in an act of political legerdemain that would make Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson wince, Frist & Co. have appended the ANWR legislation to budget bills -- which may *not* be filibustered. According to Senator Maria Cantwell (D.-WA), who is firmly against drilling in ANWR, "this is too important a question to slide into a budget bill. We are setting a very, very dangerous precedent."

Justification for drilling in the Alaskan Native Wildlife Refuge -- a land mass approximately the size of South Carolina -- comes in all shapes and sizes. Most point to the creation of jobs -- by one estimate [that for all we know was pulled out of thin air] 736,000 "well-paying American jobs." No one knows for

sure how many jobs will be created up in ANWR. However, the very lure of increased employment has led America's labor unions -- notably Jim Hoffa's Teamsters -- to become vocal supporters of drilling. Alaska's two senators -- Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski -- are of course major cheerleaders for the project. "We need to face it," Senator Murkowski said recently, "as a nation we have a reliance on petroleum." Now there's a real eye-opener. And according to Senator Stevens, no one should be overly concerned about drilling in ANWR because, in reality, "it is a barren, frozen wasteland." The tundra has "no breeze, no beauty," the Senator informed his colleagues. Tell that to the Inupiat, the Gwich'in and other native peoples who depend on the caribou as much as the Plains Indians depended on the buffalo.

Proponents claim that in actuality, drilling would only take place on about 2,000 of ANWR's 1.5 million acres. Ever heard of slant drilling? It's the legerdemain phenotype [observable] and genotype [beneath the surface] of oil exploration. Slant drilling is the process whereby an oil field that appears on the surface [phenotypically] to cover only, say, 2,000 acres, extends [or slants] beneath the surface [genotypically] to hundreds of thousands of unseen acres.

Those who have visited or flown a bush-plane over ANWR (which I have), can readily understand why it has oftentimes been called the "American Serengeti." ANWR is, in fact, a pristine wilderness, home to caribou, polar bears, oxen, arctic foxes, wolverines, grizzly bears, snow geese, and other migrating birds. It is *their* home not *ours*.

I, like the Indian of our folktale above, don't understand the notion of "owning" the earth. "Ah me!" Fenimore Cooper's *Pathfinder* exclaims: "*The things they call improvements and betterments, are undermining and defacing the land! The glorious works of God are daily cut down and destroyed, and the hand of man seems to be upraised in contempt of his mighty will.*" As a person of reasonably religious convictions, I cannot for the life of me understand how those who have made a career of injecting Christian morality into secular politics can be so incredibly irreligious. Anyone who has read the

Biblical account of creation [as I would presume all those proponents of "Creation Science" have] knows, there is a wondrous symmetry and genius to the stages of earthly development. Nothing created prior requires that which is created after. In other words, nothing created on say, Day Three [earth, grass, fruit-bearing trees, etc.] is depended or relies on anything created on days four, five or six. Then again, everything created after, requires everything created prior. Namely, those things created on, say, Day Five [fish and birds] require that which precedes. In short, trees don't need birds; birds need trees. Water does not need fish; fish need water. By this logic -- which is unassailable -- nothing depends on human beings [well, perhaps the cats and dogs we have domesticated]. By the same token, we, the so-called "Crown of Creation," require everything God created before us -- the entire world.

Is it logical to lobby for the rights of the unborn and then turn a blind eye to nature? Is there consistency in decrying the immorality or "unnaturalness" of, say homosexuality, and then finding nothing abhorrent in consigning entire species to extinction? You tell me. It just doesn't make any sense. If we are truly the spiritual Crown of Creation, we would be far better serving the God who made us by seeking alternative sources of energy -- wind, wave and solar come to mind -- and less time figuring out how to undo all that has been done on our behalf.

For all my religious brothers and sisters in Congress, remember this bit of wisdom from the Book of Psalms [24:1-2]:

*The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof;*

*The world, and they that dwell therein.*

*For He hath founded it upon the seas,*

*And established it upon the floods.*

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

November 11, 2005

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## That Was The Week That Was

Good evening Mr. and Mrs. America and all the ships at sea . . . let's go to press. I can just imagine Walter Winchell's nasally staccato rat-a-tat-tatting across the static airways of radio land, accentuated by the urgent tap-tap-tapping of a telegraph key as he presented the nightly news. I don't think he would have been any too thrilled with this week's developments; after all, Winchell [nee *Winchel* with one "l"] was a curmudgeonly right-winger, and this week's major events are bonbons for the mellow left. Yes indeed, it's been a rather good week for those of us who don't think "liberal" is a major pejorative. As one of Winchell's contemporaries, Gabriel Heatter would have put it: **There's good news tonight!**

Consider some of the past week's major events:

- ***Tuesday's "off-off year" elections*** were, by every barometer, a resounding success for Democrats, progressives and those who believe that substance outweighs emotion. In New Jersey, voters gave an overwhelming [54-43%] victory to Democrat Senator John Corzine, who becomes that state's new governor. The multi-centamillionaire Corzine easily defeated the equally wealthy Douglas Forrester in a race that cost upwards of \$80 million --most of which came out of the candidates' pockets. The race took an especially nasty turn in its final days when the Forrester campaign ran spots featuring Corzine's former wife, Joanne, who mused that her former husband might "let New Jersey

down" the same way he "let his family down" by engaging in an adulterous affair.

- ***Voters in Virginia***, that "reddest of states," elected Democrat Tim Kaine their new governor. This marks the second time in four years that Virginia voters have rejected Republican gubernatorial candidates. In this race, Kaine, Virginia's Lieutenant Governor, defeated Jerry W. Kilgore, the Virginia Attorney General by a 54-46% margin, despite a last-minute campaign visit by President Bush. Running against the centrist, pro-life Kaine, Republican Kilgore spent the campaign trying to convince voters that Kaine was too liberal for the conservative state. In soundly rejecting Kilgore's claim, Virginia voters also elected Democrats to several open, heretofore Republican-held seats in the Virginia House of Delegates. In rejecting Kilgore's candidacy, voters also rebuffed their President.
- ***In California***, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, in the words of *L.A. Times* writer Harold Meyerson, "terminated himself." Each of the four ballot measures he inflicted on the people of California in this special election, went down to overwhelming defeat. Schwarzenegger, whose public approval rating stood at 62% at the beginning of 2005, saw his spending-limit proposal tanking by 24%, and his measure to curb the clout of public-sector unions (Proposition 75) by 7%. In Meyerson's words, "The mystery of this election is what on earth Schwarzenegger could have been thinking." No comparable elected official in recent memory has picked a fight so gratuitously and come out of it so beat up. California's unions produced a torrent of advertising that featured cops, nurses, teachers and firefighters condemning the governor. They revved up the most effective Democratic voter mobilization operation in the nation. When they were done, not only did the governor's propositions fail, but his approval rating collapsed to a Bushian 35 percent.
- ***Readers of this Blog*** will recall our October 14 article [*What Hath God Wrought?*] about the Dover, Pennsylvania school board, which was

seeking to introduce "Intelligent Design" into the local school curriculum. In that article, we derided their attempts to prove that evolution was a hoax, as being "weak and intellectually flaccid." Well, on Tuesday, reason and ration returned to Dover: local voters threw out all eight board members who were up for reelection, replacing them with citizens who do not think that Charles Darwin is Satan's first-born. The Reverend Pat Robertson, never far from a television camera, got into the act by offering up his normal five minutes of stand-up comedy. Robertson, speaking directly to the people of Dover on his televised "700 Club," said, "I'd like to say to the good citizens of Dover: If there is a disaster in your area, don't turn to God. You just rejected him from your city." Not content with merely lodging one foot in his mouth, Robertson went for the world record: "God is tolerant and loving, but you can't keep sticking your finger in his eye forever. If they have future problems in Dover, I recommend they call Charles Darwin. Maybe he can help them." I never realized that cynicism and sarcasm were religious ideals.

- **Lastly**, just last week, in our article *The Land No One Knows*, we spoke out against Congressional attempts to open up the Alaskan National Wildlife Reserve [ANWR] to massive oil exploration. In that article, we explained how the Republican leadership had appended the issue to the budget bill which, according to Congressional rules, may not be filibustered. But wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles, a group of moderate House Republicans, joining in with virtually every House Democrat, successfully pushed to have the ANWR proposal severed. Moreover, these same moderate Republicans, perhaps reading the handwriting on the wall after Tuesday's election results, decided to recommit the entire budget bill -- a bill calling for \$54 billion in spending cuts for things like food stamps, medical coverage for the poor, and aid to education. The Republicans are beginning to flex their collective muscles -- against their president. Even Bush's call to make

his first-term tax cuts [53 percent of which affects just .2% of the population] permanent has run into a brick wall. This proposal has so little support in the Senate that Senator Charles Grassley, the Budget Committee Chair, has drafted a bill that would simply some of the tax cuts for a single year. Even that proposal is in dire straits. Yes indeed, *Good night and good luck!*

Do these, and other events too numerous to mention, portend good things for the upcoming elections in 2006 and 2008? Maybe yes, but likely no. Off-off year election results are notoriously poor barometers of future voting patterns. Moreover, Americans have notoriously short attention spans. That which bothers us today is likely to be forgotten by next week. And taking the position that all one must do is remind voters of their former pique, dissatisfaction and feelings of betrayal, is likely to backfire; in order to succeed, a campaign must have a positive message. Merely pointing out how weak, ineffectual, uncaring or duplicitous the incumbent party or office-holder is, rarely leads to victory.

Now is the time for the strategists, philosophers and wordsmiths of the Democrat Party to begin crafting a positive message that responds to this past week's hopeful developments. It's not enough, to quote Walter Cronkite, that we proclaim *And That's The Way It Is*.

Rather, we should be living by the signature sign-off of the immortal [?]  
Casey Kasem: *Keep your feet on the ground and keep reaching for the stars*  
...

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

November 18, 2005

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## The Man From Johnstown

On May 31, 1889, floodwater from the ruptured South Fork Dam, gaining speed during an 18-mile trip down steep-walled valleys, poured into the little industrial town of Johnstown, Pennsylvania with a force equal to Niagara Falls. During ten awful minutes buildings crumbled like paper, the tumbling hearths and gaslights ignited the wreckage, a flaming pile of debris converged on a 30-acre expanse, and 2,209 people died. Ninety-nine entire families were swept away, including 396 children. Bodies were found as far away as Cincinnati, and as late as 1911. The Johnstown flood represented the worst single-day civilian loss of life in American history -- until September 11, 2001. Eerily, one of the airliners used on that horrific day crashed in a field just 50 miles southwest of Johnstown.

As future historians will no doubt record, President George W. Bush, responding to the carnage of 9/11, convinced himself, Congress and the American public that the best way to protect the nation from future terrorist attacks was to send military troops into Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush declared that in hunting down Osama bin Laden and liberating Iraq from the clutches of Saddam Hussein, America would not only be protecting herself from future terrorist attacks; she would also be earning the eternal gratitude of subjugated Afghans and Iraqis, who would no doubt welcome them with flowers and candy. History will also record that the United States Congress, basing its decision on military intelligence provided by the Bush White House, voted to authorize force in Iraq (HJRes 114) by a vote of 296-133 in the House, and 77-23 in the Senate. Among the 81 House Democrats voting to authorize the use of military

force [126 Democrats voted no] was Representative John Murtha of . . . you guessed it, Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Yesterday, November 17, 2005, John Murtha, the top House Democrat on military spending matters, stunned his colleagues -- and the nation -- by calling for the immediate withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq. "Our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency," Murtha said in a Capitol Hill news conference, which left him in tears. Murtha, who rarely speaks to the press, further stated that Islamic insurgents "are united against U.S. forces, and we have become a catalyst for violence. It's time to bring them home." Predictably, Republicans in both the White House and on Capitol Hill accused Murtha and his Democrat colleagues -- many of whom are, in fact, opting for a more measured, wait-and-see approach to withdrawal -- of adopting a policy of "cut-and-run," and of "siding with the terrorists." Referring to Murtha and his colleagues, House Speaker Dennis Hastert hotly declared "they would prefer that the United States surrender to the terrorists who would harm innocent Americans. To add insult to injury, this is done while the president is on foreign soil."

Emerging from his bunker, Vice President Dick Cheney opined that politicians who criticize the administration's handling of prewar intelligence are engaging in "dishonest and reprehensible" behavior. Another Republican leader -- House Armed Services Committee Chair Duncan Hunter of California -- said that if the United States does not prevail in Iraq, it will invite attacks akin to those of September 11, 2001. "Four years have expired," Hunter said, "without a second attack on our homeland because we've aggressively projected America's fighting forces in the theaters of Afghanistan and Iraq." Sounds to me like Hastert, Cheney, Hunter *et al* are aiming their remarks at the rapidly shrinking unwashed majority, who they hope and pray are still buying this bilge -- i.e. that somehow Saddam Hussein and Iraq were behind the 9/11 attacks.

For those not yet familiar with Representative Murtha, please know that he is no starry-eyed, tree-hugging, latte-sipping liberal. Far from it. He is a hard-

boiled political pro who, prior to his 1974 election to the House of Representatives, served two tours in the United States Marines (1952-55 and 1966-67). At age 34 (he was born in 1932), he re-enlisted and went to Vietnam, where he was awarded the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts and the Vietnamese Cross for Gallantry. He was the first Vietnam veteran to serve in Congress. For years, he has been a key man on the defense budget. According to *The Almanac of American Politics*, Murtha is "hawkish and patriotic on foreign policy, interventionist on economics and usually tradition-minded on cultural issues." During his more than 30 years in the House, he has proved himself to be an old-time politician who operates best in secret, holding court in the back corner of the House chamber, where he trades gossip and votes with colleagues who crowd around him as if they were kissing his ring. He speaks for attribution to few national or local reporters, hardly ever appears on television, and rarely speaks in the House chamber except for the annual defense-spending bill. So why now? And why on this particular hot-button issue?

Why? Because Murtha, like Senator Carl Levin -- his Armed Services counterpart in the Upper Chamber -- and an increasing number of Democrats have concluded that the Bush Administration sold America on going to war with faulty intelligence. Responding to charges that pre-war intelligence was incomplete at best, contrived at worst, the President responded: ". . . when Democrats say that I deliberately misled Congress and the people, that's irresponsible. They looked at the same intelligence I did, and they voted -- many of them voted -- to support the decision I made."

When asked about the president and vice president's comments, Representative Murtha replied sarcastically, "I like guys who got five deferments and [have] never been there and send people to war, and then don't like to hear suggestions about what needs to be done." Speaking to the same point, Senator Levin was even more terse: ""During their drive to war, representatives of the White House repeatedly claimed that Iraq provided

Osama bin Laden's terrorist network, al Qaeda, with chemical and biological weapons training. But Bush Administration officials knew at the time that claim was based on information from an informant that the Defense Department's own intelligence agency had concluded was probably intentionally misleading us."

Make no mistake about it: the White House is now on the defensive, if not on the run. The fact that they never had either an exit or post-war strategy is becoming more painfully apparent with each passing day. Even Republican loyalists on Capitol Hill are beginning to see which way the wind is blowing. They see their own political necks being stretched out over the chopping block -- and they don't like it one bit.

It is just possible that when the history of this war is written, the name of John Murtha will loom large. And it should. For in the man from Johnstown, we have a leader who is wise enough to understand that sometimes it takes a flood of public opinion to divert a flood of disaster.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

November 25, 2005

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## Apocalypse Never

I don't know about you, but it seems to me that ever since the *beginning* of time, there have been folks out there predicting the *end* of time. Forecasting - or predicting -- the Apocalypse of course, begins with the Biblical Book of Revelations. And for about as long as humankind has scratched, carved, etched, calligraphed or written, there have been the eschatologists. [No, no, not *scatologists* -- those obsessed with excretory functions, but *eschatologists* - those preoccupied with Endtimes]. History is rife with examples:

- In the Apocrypha, it was prophesied that the world would end in the year 1,000. Fanatics all over Europe believed that the Last Judgment was to be expected at Jerusalem on the last day of the year 999. Despite official discouragement by the Church, throngs of pilgrims proceeded eastward. On the fateful day, thousands of people ascended what they thought was the Biblical Mt. Zion, awaiting the final firestorm of destruction. Nothing happened.
- As early as June 1523, a group of British fortune-tellers and astrologers concurred that the end of the world would begin with the destruction of London by deluge on February 1, 1524. This caused a flood of humanity to flee London for the high ground of Kent and Essex. It is estimated that by the middle of January of that year, at least 20,000 people had left their homes. When February 1 came and went without incident, angry Londoners descended upon the hapless astrologers like locusts in a wheat field. Hurriedly, the fortune-tellers reexamined their figures and

- discovered a tiny error in their calculations. London -- and hence the world -- they now proclaimed, would be destroyed by flood not in 1524, but one hundred years hence -- in 1624.
- On April 3, 1843, thousands of the followers of William Miller, a farmer and former atheist, gathered on the hilltops in New England, solemnly expecting the end of the world. Miller had picked this day, he claimed, after carefully studying the Biblical Books of Daniel and Revelation. Miller even convinced *the New York Herald* to publish his prediction that the world would be destroyed by fire on April 3. Believing the dead would pass through heaven first, fanatics murdered relatives and committed suicide. April 3 came and went without incident. Miller then simply moved the date to July 7. In preparation for this new date, Miller now told his followers that they must be wearing white ascension gowns -- which he happily sold them by the gross. Miller kept changing dates -- from July 7, to March 21 and finally to October 22. By the time the latter date had passed without incident, the Millerites were becoming a tad peevish with their prophet. The once powerful 100,000-strong movement disbanded and split into several sections, of which the Seventh-Day Adventists became the most numerous. And Miller? He ended his days delivering over 3,200 speeches predicting the end of the world, while amassing quite a fortune from the sale of his white ascension robes.
  - In the fall of 1967, millions of TV viewers watching the *David Frost Show* saw and heard Anders Jensen, the Danish leader of the Disciples of Orthon, predict that Christmas Day would mark the Apocalypse. His sect chose a field near Copenhagen to build an underground bunker with a 20-ton lead roof that would see them through the danger period. When the Orthonians emerged from their bunker on December 26 -- only to find that the world still existed -- they were gravely disappointed. However, all was not lost: they did manage to sell their beloved bunker at a large profit.

Now, its one thing for self-styled seers, visionaries and prophets-of-doom to ply their trade amongst the frightened masses. Let's face it: there *are* times when this planet seems to be fraught with nothing but danger, deprivation, misery, and misanthropy. When Biblical prophecy -- either of the Old or New Testament variety -- is stirred into the cauldron of human fear and uncertainty, what emerges is a powerful, intoxicating brew. When measured against the very real pains of reality then, is it any wonder that throughout history, millions and millions of people have indulged in this other-worldly concoction?

As we said, that is one thing. It is totally another when the seers, the visionaries and the prophets-of-doom occupy the White House, the Congressional Chamber, and the Courts of Law. For when this happens -- and it has -- one winds up with the unholy rat's nest that has been afflicting this country for the past five years or more. When a nation's leaders -- be they of the executive, legislative, judicial or military stripe -- believe that all signs, omens and portents are pointing to an ever-nearing Endtime, who then has to give a fig about the poor, the defenseless, the have-nots of this world? What's to keep them from adopting an "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we all die" attitude? Virtually nothing. And that's what should scare the hell out of us. When eschatology becomes political fiat, its time to head not for the hills, but for the public square.

So how in the world, I can hear you asking, do I know that the President, the former House Majority Leader, the current Senate Majority Leader and more than half the members of the Cabinet espouse these beliefs? Has anyone actually heard them say: "Screw Social Security; the world's coming to an end next week anyway!" Well, no. But if you pay attention to who their religious mentors are -- the Pat Robertsons, Jerry Falwells, and James Dobsons of the world, and then listen to what these guys are preaching about Endtimes, you can safely -- and frightenly -- conclude that they -- the Bushes, DeLay's, Frist's and Santorums -- must also believe in Apocalypse Now.

I myself, of course, am not a Christian. What I am is a practicing, observant Jew -- a person with one foot in the past, the other in the future. I have no more idea of what's in God's mind than George Bush, Tom DeLay, Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson. The only difference is that I am willing to admit it. As a Jew, I am far more concerned with what we call *tikkun olam* -- Hebrew for "repairing the world" -- than in lolling around, taking all I can get, while awaiting the end of the world. I believe that God put us here to act as stewards -- and not masters -- of creation. As such, it is our sacred obligation to make this world as much like heaven as possible -- and to leave the rest to God. To do otherwise -- to enrich the already rich, to invade a country that did not first invade us, to denude forests, befoul air and pollute streams -- these are not the acts of a caring, God-fearing, benevolent society.

I say let the prophets of doom, the advocates of Apocalypse do all the prophesying they wish. Just don't do it from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue or the Halls of Congress. Return to your churches where you can shout *Apocalypse Now!!* to your hearts content. Just don't do it in the name of our nation or of its citizens.

Apocalypse never . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

December 01, 2005

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## Until . . .

Back in the days when I was a congregational rabbi, the synagogue president and I would, from time to time, play a little game while sitting on the pulpit during services. When we got to within five or six minutes of the time for me to deliver my sermon, the president would say, "You want to do a challenge?" I would invariably say "I was hoping you'd ask; let's get to it." The rules of the "challenge" were simple: I would give him three potential sermon topics, from which he would choose one. In exchange, he would give me a word that I had to somehow fit into my extemporized talk. If I stumbled or said "uh" I owed the synagogue building fund \$50.00. If, on the other hand, I could extemporize a meaningful sermon on the topic he had chosen and worked in the word in seamless fashion, then he owed \$100.00 to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund. I would imagine that over the years we must have played out this challenge no fewer than a dozen times. As I recall, he made at least ten deposits to the Discretionary Fund.

The synagogue president has long since shuffled off this mortal coil. I miss him, for he was a bright, charming, and engaging gentleman of the old school. I also miss those occasional Friday evening "Challenges." Seeing that today is *the* Yartzheit (anniversary) of his passing, I hereby re-institute the challenge by giving myself the word *until*. OK, I now have five minutes to come up with a coherent message that somehow works into the flow of words. Ready? Set? Go!

It is now a little more than 48 hours since President Bush spoke on Iraq to the students, faculty and staff at Annapolis. His speech left me dumbfounded - not with profound awe, but, rather, with utter disbelief. I find it terribly hard to believe that someone -- anyone -- with degrees from Harvard and Yale can be so intellectually obtuse. I am amazed to the point of stupefaction that the President actually expects the American public to swallow all the platitudes and bilge water he spews. Does he really, truly believe that this fiasco in Iraq is winnable? If so, how? And even more importantly, how in the world will anyone be able to tell -- short of proclaiming "WE WON!!" -- that the war is over? Will the insurgents send an email to the White House that reads "Uncle!" Will the Shites, Sunnis, Wahabis and Kurds lay down their sabers, gather around the tube and together watch the latest episode of *Desperate Housewives* or *The West Wing*? What precisely will be the sign?

It would seem that the President and his advisers still haven't given up on tying our military adventure in Iraq to the tragedy of 9/11. We must, he informs us, "stay the course," whatever in the name of Warren G. Harding that means. If "staying the course" means more death, destruction and dislocation for our troops and the people of Iraq, than I would seriously recommend veering off course as soon as possible. If "staying the course" means borrowing more tens of billions of dollars from our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, then I say get a new navigator.

The president proudly proclaimed that the Iraqis are getting closer and closer to be able to defend themselves; that they are being equipped and trained in record time and in record numbers. Really? Then why are the very military men and women who are in charge of the training telling a different story? Could it be that the president is still puffing smoke?

By keeping their eyes on Iraq [and Halliburton -- let's call a spade a spade], Bush and his fellow Republicans are willfully blinkering themselves, and shortchanging all of us. When all one sees is Iraq, when 100% of one's political will and commitment are directed toward a festering maw of corruption, one is

going to be blinded to far too many other modalities and realities. How long must this continue?

*Until* we start holding our leaders feet to the fire there will be no change.

*Until* we begin reminding ourselves that we -- the American public -- don't work for Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Rice, but rather they work for us, then there will be blood on our hands.

*Until* we exercise our prerogative as citizens and vote out all those whose primary allegiance is to wealth, we will continue to have substandard schools, wildly overpriced health insurance, foul air, grimy water and rapacious, duplicitous leaders who pray aloud on Sundays and rob the nation the rest of the week.

*Until* we demand that our politicians stop dealing in shadow and start working with substance, we will continue being led into blind alleys where abortion, gay marriage and intelligent design are the only visible mile markers.

None of the above are impossible. We can -- and we must -- exercise our collective will, find our collective voice, and get on with the true tasks facing America. But none of this will occur *until* we wake up and grab hold of our future.

*Until* -- its a word I've come to love . . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

December 09, 2005

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## "Qu'il mange de la brioche . . ."

Let's see if we've got this straight.

- The United States is horribly bogged down in a war in which no one knows what "victory" entails.
- There are currently more than 45 million Americans without health insurance.
- Unless the situation is addressed -- and seriously -- global warming could destroy the precarious balance that permits and sustains life on this planet.
- The United States is in debt to the tune of **\$7 trillion** and growing by the second.
- We may well be on the brink of an avian-flu pandemic.
- America's prestige in the community of nations is at an all-time low.

So which of these would you imagine the talking heads have been giving the greatest amount of air time to on cable news and talk radio the past several weeks? Iraq? Global warming? Bird flu? Not even close. For the punditocrats of the right, the most pressing, the most over-arching issue of them all is [a drum roll please] . . . the "Happy Holiday"-versus-"Merry Christmas" controversy. Or, to put it in the doom-and-gloom phraseology of the Reverend Jerry Falwell, "the attack on Christianity in America." How's that? Christianity is under siege right here in the land of the red-white-and-blue? Yes indeed, to listen to and watch the likes of O'Reilly, Gibson, Coulter, Limbaugh, Savage and their unholy cabal, one would actually think that Christianity in America was

about to go the way of the trilobite, *Australopithecus Rosbustus* and the World Football League.

The Christian Right and their loopy media allies have made a huge issue out of -- and are deeply, deeply offended by -- those businesses and municipalities that persist in wishing people a "Happy Holiday" rather than a "Merry Christmas."

"Idiocy" you say?

"A tempest in a teapot," you aver?

"Much ado about nothing" you guffaw?

If such is your response, put on your seat belt and listen to the Reverend Jerry Falwell, appearing on the December 1 edition of *The Big Story With John Gibson*. Falwell made an absolutely unbelievable comment while discussing a lawsuit he'd threatened to bring against the City of Boston unless Mayor Thomas M. Menino agreed to refer to the municipal holiday tree as a Christmas tree. In the Right Reverend's trenchant words: "Well, the idea is if they are allowed to stand, it sends a message across the country that the word "Christ," which is part of "Christmas," commemorating the birth of Christ is a bad word and should not be used. And *its just a continuation of the efforts of many to secularize this country and drive God from the public square*" [italicization added for emphasis]. Several days later, Bill O'Reilly flatly stated that no such suit had ever been lodged. This is what we in the ethics biz call "a big fat lie."

The next day, December 2, the redoubtable O'Reilly proclaimed to his radio listeners that he would "use all the power that I have on radio and television to bring horror into the world of people" who "diminish and denigrate [the] Christmas holiday." Saint Bill told his rapt listeners of a conspiracy on the part of "oppressive, totalitarian, anti-Christian forces in this country." I don't know about you, but I must have lost my invitation to the last anti-Christian meeting, because I was totally in the dark until Bill told me about it.

O'Reilly's peroration is one for the books: While on the one hand he proclaimed that "There is no reason on this earth that all of us cannot celebrate a public holiday devoted to generosity, peace, and love together," he followed it up with "And anyone who tries to stop us from doing it is gonna face me."

Huh? What in the name of Father Coughlin does that mean?

Its reminiscent of the old bumper sticker that proclaimed: "Support Mental Health -- Or I'll Kill You!"

On the December 3 edition of *Fox News Watch*, in which panelists discussed, among other things, the so-called "battle" over public acknowledgment of Christmas, media writer Neil Gabler [who is Jewish] suggested that Fox News coverage was "excessive," declared the so-called "war on Christmas" a "demagogic campaign," and referred to Fox anchors Sean Hannity, Bil O'Reilly and John Gibson as "demagogues" who seek to "rally the masses." Two days later, Gibson called Gabler an "ultra-lefty liberal" who, if "in charge" would send Gibson off to a Khmer Rouge reeducation camp to make sure that his [Gabler] message that there is no war on Christmas is beat into my [Gibson's] head." Oy! Calling people like Gabler "anti-Christian warriors," Gibson concluded the segment by likening the the "war on Christmas" to "the secret bombing of Cambodia" during the Vietnam War. And this is a man who actually graduated from an American high school!

Enough already. There is no war on Christianity in America. Christmas is in no danger of passing away. Corporate America will make sure of that. For Christmas [and Hanukkah and Kwanzaa] add up to big bucks in the cash register. It seems to me that whether or not a mall, a store, a municipal authority or a media personality proclaims "Happy Holidays," or "Merry Christmas" doesn't amount to a hill of beans. I hate to say it, but I have to assume that those who keep thumping the drum for this issue are really

exercising what we'll call the "*Qu'il mange de la brioche*" approach to social issues.

*Qu'il mange de la brioche*, roughly translated, means "let them eat cake." [Actually brioche is quite a bit better than cake, although I personally am rather in love with challah. And yes, although most people ascribe the comment to Marie Antoinette, it actually comes from *The Confessions* of Jean-Jaques Rousseau]. What these conservative talking heads are essentially saying is that all we really have to concern ourselves with is this one issue, and let all the others slide. It is an embarrassment to watch supposedly intelligent, well-educated anchors go on and on about something that has about as much reality and import as the "Tastes great/less filling" commercials for Bud Light. Their artificial debate, meant to keep conservatives het up until the next election, is about as peurile as one can get without actually turning the electric blanket up to 9 and assuming the fetal position.

So Happy Holidays, an early Merry Christmas, a *Chanukah s'maycha*, and a glorious Kwanzaa [is that the proper adjective?]. Let the pundits eat cake, brioche or eclairs for that matter; I'll stick to the issues that really matter, and content myself with yet another slice of challah.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

December 15, 2005

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## "Suppose You Were An Idiot . . ."

Throughout the length and breadth of American history, one institution -- Congress -- has provided more fodder for more wits, wags and wastrels than the White House, Judiciary and the Catskills combined. What follows are three of my all time favorites:

- *"The Senate is a body of old men charged with high duties and misdemeanors." [Ambrose Bierce]*
- *"With Congress, every time they make a joke it's a law, and every time they make a law, it's a joke." [Will Rogers]*
- *"Reader: Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself." [Mark Twain]*

To this list, we can now add another jape, one that consists of a mere three words and two abbreviations: **Representative Frank Wolf [R-VA]**

"Frank Who?" You ask.

And more importantly "What for?"

In the spirit of Borscht Belt comedy, let's begin with *Vell I'll tell 'ya*:

Frank Wolf is a conservative Republican who has represented Virginia's 10th Congressional District since 1980. Wolf's district contains most of Northern Virginia, which is home to much of Washington's political and lawyer-lobbyist elite. Prior to winning a seat in Congress, Wolf worked as an Interior Department appointee in the Nixon and Ford Administrations. A long-time

member of the powerful House Appropriation's Committee, Wolf chairs that panel's Commerce, Justice, State & Judiciary Subcommittee. During his years in Congress, Wolf has become one of that body's leading crusaders for human rights, and has served as co-chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. He is one of the very few members of Congress to ever visit East Timor and Tibet [which he did in 1997] and, has focused attention on human rights abuses in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Sounds like a pretty good guy, no? In truth, there's a lot in Rep. Wolf's record to admire. After all, any Republican who can work hand-in-hand with a "whacked-out lefty" like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi toward denying Permanent Normal Trade Relations [PNTR] for China because of human rights violations must be a pretty level-headed sort. Right?

Wrong.

You see, Representative Wolf's other passion is gambling; he is, without question, Congress's leading opponent. *"Gambling,"* Wolf has been quoted as saying *"leaves in its path the wreckage of human misery. Addiction, crime, corruption, loss of revenue to local business, bankruptcy and even suicide -- these are the fruits of this industry which is sweeping America."*

So, whatever in the world has Frank Wolf been up to that would make him the star of this week's article?

*Vell I'll tell 'ya . . .*

Of late, the House has been working overtime to craft a bill that will give significant tax breaks to the people, businesses and infrastructure that have fallen victim to Hurricane Katrina. As will regularly occur, the House and Senate versions have significant differences that will eventually have to be worked out in what is called "conference committee." There is one glaring difference between the two chambers' proposals -- and here we finally come back to Frank Wolf. For the distinguished gentleman from Virginia [along with a gaggle of other like-minded prigs], have thrown down the gauntlet,

demanding that casinos, country clubs, tanning salons, hot-tub manufacturers and liquor stores be excluded from any form of hurricane-related tax relief. In other words, Wolf and his buddies are seeking to use the tax-forgiveness bill as a prod toward creating a New Orleans, Louisiana and a Gulfport, Mississippi that are closer in cultural mien to Provo Utah than Las Vegas, Nevada. By their actions, they are obviously intent on doing major, major surgery on these two southern playgrounds.

In his letter to the House Republican leadership, Wolf asked *"Why can't -- or more accurately -- why won't -- we continue to say no to using our constituents' hard-earned tax dollars to subsidize massage parlors, liquor stores and casinos?"* Oh really? Has Mr. Wolf willfully blinded himself to the tens upon tens of billions of our "hard-earned tax dollars" that are used to subsidize multi-national corporations -- corporations that then turn around and export hundreds of thousands of jobs to third-world countries? How about all those "hard-earned tax dollars" that underwrite useless pork barrel projects in every Republican's home town? [In all fairness, it must be noted that were the Democrats in charge, the pork barrel projects would be in *their* districts. Politics may be dirty, but at least its predictable.]

While one may object to gambling, alcohol, golf, tanning or hot tubs [sorry Mr. DeLay] on moral grounds, that is an issue better left at the front door of one's church, synagogue or mosque. The fact of the matter is that gambling -- and its ancillary establishments -- are a major economic factor in the life of the Gulf Coast. As Representative Shelly Berkley, who represents Las Vegas, pointed out, gaming is a Gulf Coast industry which employs more than 50,000 workers in Louisiana and Mississippi and pays in excess of \$800 million in state and local taxes. Referring to Wolf, Representative Berkley said she was *"astounded that one member who has a long held contempt for the gaming industry should insert language in this legislation which is supposed to be helping the victims of Katrina."* The anti-gambling restriction, she continued,

*"will prevent thousands of our fellow citizens from going back to work, going back to their homes."* Indeed.

One would think that at a time when the Gulf Coast's very economic infrastructure has been all but destroyed, that Congress would see the wisdom of permitting them to rebuild that which had -- until the coming of Katrina -- provided the region with an incredibly remunerative shot in the arm. But no, Capitol Hill's moral constabulary has to show that compassion and understanding -- not to mention economic realities and practicalities -- mean nothing when there are political points to be scored, sanctimonious chits to cash in.

Unbeknown to him, Representative Wolf has proved that Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce and Will Rogers were correct: there *are* idiots in Congress who make laws that resemble jokes and jokes that resemble laws.

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I would be derelict in my responsibility as a passionate -- if not always even-handed -- student of Congress if I were not to mention the passing of two giants -- Senators Eugene McCarthy and William Proxmire. I can remember as clearly as if it was yesterday [and not 38 years ago] when so many of us at the University of California did the unthinkable: we cut off our pony-tails and shaved off our beards. We got "clean for Gene." I remember thinking "Finally, a McCarthy who is worthy of being a United States Senator." Ironically, it was Proxmire, the Wisconsin maverick, who took over the other McCarthy's (Joe, that is) seat in late August, 1957. Senator Gene McCarthy was far more of an academic than a politician, and did not suffer fools gladly. What he brought to the political arena was an unerring compass that always pointed to the truth, and a set of principles that would not let him sit back and merely go along with the leaders of his party. Senator McCarthy was to his era what one can only hope Representative John Murtha shall be to his: a leader whose clarion call

cannot be ignored. Senator Proxmire was a man who marched to the beat of his own drum. A fiscal hawk of the first water, Proxmire was the father of the infamous "Golden Fleece," the award he would occasionally bestow on government programs and offices that wasted public money. Unbelievably, Proxmire's senate campaigns [he was reelected 5 times and wound up serving more than 30 years] rarely cost more than the amount of money he might be carrying in his wallet on any given day -- generally less than \$50.00.

Senators McCarthy and Proxmire shall be deeply missed. Our country greatly benefited by their efforts; their passing impoverishes all of us.

Good night sweet princes. . .

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

December 23, 2005

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## Villainova

Back in the 1920s, Cecil B. De Mille's elder brother, William [who spelled his name **de Mille**] proposed the formation of a syndicate to purchase an island out in the middle of nowhere on which a new state should be erected. He proposed that it be named **Villainova**. The inhabitants, he suggested, could be supported in luxury by a tax on Hollywood studios, which in return would receive the exclusive right to make all the heavies in their pictures **Villainovans**. In this fashion, he opined, Hollywood cineastes could hope to avoid the protests of foreign governments, foreign-born Americans and domestic pressure groups when one of their nationals or members -- fictitious or real -- was portrayed on the screen in a less than favorable light.

Well, as history has proven time and time again, fact is oftentimes far stranger than fiction. In this case, Willie d's proposal has borne fruit -- except that Villainova has had its name changed to **Liberaland**, the capitol of which is **Terroristville**. For any and all who have been keeping up with the news of late, the truth of this is painfully obvious -- all satiric jests and jibes aside. For the Bush Administration has once again played the "necessary evil in the war against Terroristville" card in justifying warrantless wiretaps against American citizens and a lifetime extension of the Patriot Act -- which in turn "legalizes" a host of other dubious activities. And of course, anyone who fails [or worse] refuses to see the legitimacy of these actions is branded a "liberal," which in recent years, has become synonymous with "traitor," "pervert," "reprobate," and "partner in the firm of Satan, Saddam and Osama."

In her December 21 column entitled "Live and Let Spy," Bush Administration attack dog Anne Coulter wrote: *"I think the government should be spying on all Arabs, engaging in torture as a spectator sport, dropping daisy cutters wantonly throughout the Middle East and sending liberals to Guantanamo."* [A "daisy cutter," by the way, is a 15,000-pound bomb with a lethal radius of 300 to 900 feet, making it the largest conventional weapon in the U.S. arsenal.] Such incredibly inane commentary brings to mind a Bill Mauldin cartoon that ran at the very end of World War II: Mauldin's two begrimed foot soldiers, Willie and Joe, are huddled in a foxhole. Off in the distance are the devastated remains of a once-enormous metropolis. It has been pummeled and pounded into an endless heap of slag and ashes. Against this background, Willie says to Joe: "Well, at least we won!" That, in a nutshell, is where Bush, Cheyney, Rummy, Coulter and the gang are leading us: to a place where liberty is abrogated in the name of security.

Acting as little more than an administration mouthpiece, Coulter, the "Mouth that Roared," continued her column with: *"After 9-11, any president who was not spying on people calling people associated with terrorists should be impeached for being an inept Commander-in-Chief."* Well the fact of the matter is that any president who proceeds with wiretaps against American citizens without first obtaining even nominal approval from one of the 11 [now 10] members of the super-secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court [which historically has been a "slam-dunk"] is in violation of the law and should be impeached for being an inept demagogue.

Coulter went so far as to compare Bush's right to engage in indiscriminate wire-taps with Roosevelt's internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Citing *Korematsu v. United States* [Certiorari 321 U.S. 760] Coulter proudly [if inaccurately] proclaimed "The Supreme Court upheld the president's authority to intern Japanese during wartime. *Korematsu v. United States* is still a good law." Hold on Anne, you left out one important point: Justices Black and Frankfurter's understanding of "wartime" meant a legally declared state of

conflict -- something upon which the United States Congress had already weighed in and given its seal of approval. Our current war bears no such pedigree.

Historically, American conservatives have been of a mind that political power is best wielded on the local level; that Washington's chief export to the various states should be local authority. But for some cockeyed reason, the Bush Administration has seen fit to stand historical conservatism on its head and grab enough centralized power to make Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal compatriots blush with envy. Blame it on the Villainovans; go ahead and attack Terroristville.

According to the old saw, pessimists see the glass as being half-empty, optimists as half-full. I have always been of a mind that so long as there's something -- anything -- in the glass, we're headed in the right direction. I guess that makes me a realist. So what's in the glass? Well, Congress has seen fit to give the Bush Administration's Patriot Act -- *the bete noire* of post 9-11 hysteria -- but a single month's stay of execution. Moreover, in flexing their collective legislative muscles, they have also put the White House on notice that torture is off-limits. How is it that after nearly five years of acting as the Administration's somnambulant defanged, de-clawed lapdogs, Congress has suddenly shown signs of coming to life? Is it possible that they have been rereading the Constitution? Have they been spending their after-hours bending elbows with liberal Democrats? No, not at all. Simply stated, Congressional Republicans, whose House and Senate are in political disarray [can you say Frist-DeLay-Ney-Cunningham-Abramoff in one breath?] and whose party's polling numbers are slowly sinking in the west, are taking care of their own skin. As we learned in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, "There are no rules in a knife fight."

It was bound to eventually happen: that continually blaming Villainovans and castigating Terroristville-ites would one day lose its efficacy and charm. The great urge, of course, is to pile on, point fingers and proudly proclaim "we

told you so . . . you can't fight a so-called war on terror by going to war against the rights of the American people and becoming as inhumane as our enemies." That is the great urge. Prudence, however, informs that those of us who are currently sitting on the sidelines, can more profitably benefit by letting the Republicans continue their self-destructive dance while we focus on a positive message for 2006 and 2008.

It's far, far better to leave Villainova to Bush and de Mille.

# Beating the Bushes

Taking America back from Bush, Rush, Rove, and the rest.

December 30, 2005

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## New Beginnings

As I write this article, 2006 is about 35 hours away. Its time wrap up the old and ring in the new; time to put finishing flourishes and touches on that most indelible of human conventions, the New Year's resolution. And while I do have a fairly lengthy list of resolutions -- the "dos," "don'ts," and "you bloody well better nots" for the coming 52 weeks, they are things best kept between me, my wife Annie, and our family. Hope you understand . . . discretion, valor . . . the gentleman's code . . . all that sort of thing.

What I *do* wish to make public is my New Year's Wish List; things I would give a lung, a liver and a pancreas gland to see happen. In an order that is only fathomable to myself and my nearest and dearest:

- I long to see my beloved Los Angeles Dodgers win the World Series. Its been far, far too long between sips of champagne, and they owe that supreme victory to me, my late father Henry, my fellow Dodger fanatic Mel Levine, and all of us who have been "bleeding" tribal blue for the past 48 (!) seasons.
- I look forward to attending the swearing in of Harry Reid as the new Senate Majority Leader and Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House of Representatives. In order for this wish to occur, of course, that will mean that we Democrats will once again have a majority in Congress. And toward this end, I pledge time, tenacity and whatever talent I may have.

- It would thrill be no end to wake up one day in this new year and discover that there are less than a handful of American troops remaining in Iraq, that Saddam Hussein has been drawn and quartered, and that Osama bin Laden is in American custody -- thanks, perhaps, to the Israeli Mossad.
- Speaking of Israel: nothing could bring greater gladness to my heart than to hear that the rest of the world has finally come to understand that all humanity benefits by having a safe, secure Jewish State. How so? Well, given the opportunity to live their lives with peace and hope, Israel could get back to doing what it does best: mastering new technologies, discovering new cures for age-old diseases, and acting as the world's intellectual main-frame.
- I'm anxious to pick up my morning newspaper and read that Congress has raised the federal minimum wage to at least \$8.50 -- if not \$10.00 -- an hour. Yes, yes, I can just hear all the moaning and groaning from the business community and their Republican cheerleaders: "But raising the minimum wage will eliminate jobs!!" Guess again Groucho. Right now, a day-and-a-half before the fireworks go off, twenty-one of the fifty states have already established a minimum wage that exceeds that of the feds. And you know what? In all twenty-one states, they report a significant *gain* in overall job growth.
- I pray that the words "liberal" and "conservative" will stop being used as surrogates for, respectively, "demonic, atheistic, latte-sipping libertines" and "bigoted, mean-spirited, troglodytic elitists." I look forward to what is essentially a return to the past; a past when political discourse actually involved the reasoned exchange of ideas and points of view. I long to get away from political discourse as a "take-no-prisoners" bloodsport. I also sincerely hope and pray that conservatives will start acting more like conservatives [i.e., favoring balanced budgets and responsible management] and that liberals will, likewise, start acting more like liberals [namely, doing their utmost to help secure America's

vast bounty for all citizens, and not just those who are already in the top 1%.]

- I truly yearn to see the time when a handful with incredibly loud, truculent voices are no longer able to drown out the voices of the many. Then, perhaps, we will be get back on the road to progress, where scientists can do their stem-cell research in peace and explore the bounds of human history, and we are no longer waylaid with debates over whether the expression "Happy Holidays" is really just code for "the death of Christianity."
- I hunger for an America that rejects both plutocracy and theocracy; an America in which religion spurs us on to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and provide for the orphan and widow. I thirst for an America in which we no longer hear that God is a Republican, that Jesus favors an end to the Capital Gains Tax, or that the Gates of Heaven are off limits to those who neither believe nor practice in a particular way.
- Along the same lines, I fervently wish that in this coming year, America's moral watchdogs will finally start showing some consistency in their sense of moral outrage. How so? To wit: how is it that those who bang the gong against a president who has an illicit relationship with a woman not his wife [a blatant moral wrong that is between him, his wife and God] and thereby seek to have him removed from office, remain oddly passive and mute when it comes to a president who lies about why the nation is at war and permits private citizens to be spied upon illegally [both of which are legal torts that, although they might not get one thrown out of Heaven, can easily send one to Leavenworth]? My outrage at the inconsistency in the level of our moral watchdogs outrage is as old as time. Indeed, it was Juvenal, the 2nd century Roman satirist who had both the first and the last word on the subject: *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* -- namely, "Who will guard the guards themselves?"
- In the coming year, I of course pray for the health, welfare, prosperity and progress of the greatest country on earth. And may we so live our

lives, as to be truly worthy of all the manifold -- and manifest -- blessings which have been granted to us.

Best wishes for a sane and successful 2006!

*Kurt F. Stone*

[P.S. And Mel, let's make plans for the World Series. I mean, with the addition of Garciparra, Kent, Furcal, Mueller Lofton, Tomko, *et al*, how can the Dodgers lose? Perhaps by keeping the same ownership!]