

**THE BLOG**

From Paul Wellstone to Coretta King

By Marty Kaplan

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Why are Republicans such weenies about funeral orations?

Wingnut crybabies are whining that W got dissed at Coretta King's funeral. What did they expect — praise for his civil rights record? Honor for his warrantless wiretapping? Encomia for widening the gap between rich and poor? *Heckofajob's* for his post-Katrina promise-keeping?

I can understand why he didn't plan on attending the funeral in the first place; W's kind of African-American event is more like the 2000 Republican convention that nominated him in Philadelphia, where the only black faces were the ones on stage.

Once he did get shamed into coming, is it any wonder that the speakers celebrated what Coretta King's life stood for, and cold-shouldered the Republican wrecking crew that's been trying to destroy what she and her husband worked a lifetime to achieve?

Something similar happened at Paul Wellstone's funeral, just before the 2002 mid-term elections. In a Minneapolis arena, a setting which couldn't help becoming a political rally, speaker after speaker praised Wellstone's progressive legacy, and said that the best way to honor it was to prevent Norm Coleman from replacing him in the Senate. Of course the Republican congressional delegation squirmed; having fought Wellstone tooth and nail in life, their presence was rank hypocrisy, and the boos they got when their faces were projected on the jumbotrons was the sound of democracy speaking truth to power. Did the angry Wellstone mourners go too far? I was there, working on the ten-day Mondale-for-Senate campaign that launched the next day, and I watched Minnesota Republicans work the media relentlessly, hounding itelelevision news into covering the funeral as an outrage. Seeing Coleman gain a lead, I wondered whether one or two of the funeral speakers, in righteous grief, got carried away, and hurt the cause of the Wellstone legacy among Minnesota voters. But I remain convinced that the media framing of the event — bad Dems dis wunnerful Washington bigwigs — tipped the balance.

Republicans love playing the civility card. I wonder where these Emily Posts were when the Pentagon lied about the circumstances of Pat Tillman's death at his funeral. I don't recall them denouncing Pat Robertson — while the World Trade Center towers were still smoldering — attributing 9/11 deaths to God's revenge on liberalism. Republicans get all

huffy, and invoke Marquess of Queensbury rules, when it suits them, but somehow that's never when they're spreading malicious lies and assassinating their living opponents' characters.

At Caesar's funeral, as Shakespeare tells it, Marc Antony nicely ripped Brutus a new one. Jimmy Carter was no less rhetorically elegant at Coretta King's service. Why should an elegy be an occasion to turn your back on all you believe, and all that the deceased life's stood for? If they should outlive me, I don't expect that Bill O'Reilly or Ann Coulter would come to my funeral. But if they or their kind did, I'd hope that at least one of the speakers would have the *cojones* to call them what they really are. Nicely, of course.

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