

**THE BLOG**

Impeachment is an Underblown Personnel Matter

By Marty Kaplan

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Fresh from his Nixonian press conference at the Justice Department, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has now taken his passive-exculpatory “mistakes were made” show on the road — the media road. I caught his act on MSNBC, where anchor Alex Witt’s follow-up to Gonzales’ opening lie was, “How does this differ from President Clinton’s mass dismissal of US Attorneys?” — a journalistically bizarre attempt to elicit a White House talking point whose message (US Attorneys are political appointees) is in blithe contradiction with another White House talking point (these firings weren’t political, they’re merit-based). I also saw Gonzales interviewed on CNN, where anchor-bobble Tony Harris wrapped by telling viewers that “no one’s been accused of criminality,” conveniently ignoring charges that Gonzales lied under oath to Congress, or that New Mexico Republicans Pete Domenici and Heather Wilson obstructed justice by pressuring US Attorney David Iglesias to trump up a pre-election indictment of a Democrat.

Sooner or later, it will all come out — not only this Gonzales/Rove/Miers sewer, but all the other depredations visited on us by the Bush Administration. We will run out of -gates to affix to their names long before we will run out of crimes. The cherry-picking of intelligence to drag us into pre-emptive war, the rendition and torture, the wiretapping, the no-bid billions, the rest: it will all, one day, be exposed. Reputations will surely die. How? In the book of the future, it is already written — who by subpoena, and who by indictment; who by leak, and who by memoir; who by court, and who by committee; who by accusation, and who by confession; who by resignation, and who by impeachment.

Oh, wait. Impeachment is off the table — I keep forgetting. Lying about a blowjob is a high crime, but lying about Iraq’s nukes is merely high Kissinger. The daily actions of Bush, Cheney, Gonzales et al are the very dictionary definition of “impeachable,” but because thirty percent of fundamentalists, and a hundred percent of Fox, would scream bloody murder, we will have to wait for this endless Administration to end, wait until after the pardons are inevitably issued, after the Freedom of Information requests are finally honored, after the manacles on the presidential archives are finally broken, after the press finally suffers stenographer’s remorse, after the historians at last connect the dots, to learn how really bad it has been, how close we have danced to the brink of a de facto coup.

The other day, I heard Richard Land, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Tony Perkins from the Family Research Council, talking on a cable show about the ‘08 campaign. One of them, I forget which, said that the two biggest issues in the race were going to be the war in Iraq, and America’s moral decline. Holy homo! From Dobson to Robertson, O’Reilly to D’Souza, we are being hectored about Good and Bad by an army of apologists for the most morally corrupt, ethically bankrupt, criminally culpable cohort in

American history. Listening to these defenders of the faith rationalize the indefensible has long ceased being entertaining; if you have no spine, it is not much of a feat to be an epistemological contortionist.

The right loves to call its opponents “secular progressives,” and “moral relativists.” The truth is that there is no moral relativism more pernicious than the one — theirs — which will justify any abuse of power as a pursuit of divine ends. But as it turns out, our country was founded not on a Gospel, but on a Constitution, one that says that the president has a duty “to take care that the laws be faithfully executed.” That’s the same Constitution, of course, that spells out the right to impeach public officials. Too bad that neither provision is much in use these days.

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