

**THE BLOG**

# Outing Homo Pomo

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By Marty Kaplan

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The oddest role reversal has occurred in the culture wars: we have switched sides. Those on the right — the supposed defenders of moral absolutes, eternal truths and personal responsibility — are now singing the postmodern anthem, “Everything is political.” Those on the left — long denounced by the right for secularism, relativism and moral decay — are now saying that truth is more than merely “my truth,” that the rule of law is more than some arbitrary social construction, and that people should be held accountable for their actions. Who would have thunk it?

Example: the Administration’s defense of its firing of US Attorneys. Their argument has two pillars. One: Butt out — this is politics, these are political appointments, and we have the pleasure of exercising our power. Two: Everyone does it. The first sounds like something you might learn from Nietzsche or Dostoevsky, but surely not in ethics class at Regent University, alma mater of Fifth-pleader Monica Goodling. The second — “But Bill Clinton did it, too!” — is hardly the kind of moral warrant that you’d expect conservative values vigilantes to invoke.

By contrast, it’s supposedly permissive progressives who want prosecutors to weigh the evidence, and to keep the political hacks’ thumbs off the scales of justice. It’s the liberals, not the conservatives, trying to conserve the tradition of prosecutorial independence. It’s the left, not the right, rejecting situation ethics and demanding personal accountability.

Example: science. In the last part of the 20th century, it was avant-garde lefty theorists who called for an end to the “privileged” position held by science; they claimed that scientific knowledge was no less tribal than shamanism, no more free of politics than politics. It was conservatives — “reactionaries,” “hegemonists,” they were called — who contested the demotion of science to the realm of opinion.

But today, it’s the left that invokes the scientific consensus on climate change, evolution, mercury pollution, abstinence education. It’s the right that funds conflicting theories, floats outlier data, confects one-percent dissent, and urges us — in the name of scientific openmindedness — to “teach the controversy.”

For six years, Bush and the loyal Bushies have behaved like doctoral students high on pomo fumes. Like the stoners and slackers they accuse their opponents of being, the Bushies have found no talking point too spacey (“But British intelligence believed it!”) to defend lying, no excuse too lame (“Let’s not play the blame game!”) to evade accountability, no delusion too narcissistic (“God is on our side!”) to invoke.

They would be getting away with it still, were it not for a new Democratic Congress muscularly discharging its oversight obligations. So it's the Republicans who turn out to be the Mommy Party after all — an indulgent, negligent Mommy Party without the character to discipline its own, without the values to teach its young, juiced with self-esteem, the difference between right and wrong.

The media, of course, have been little help in exposing the new nihilism of the right, because mainstream journalism has been busy suffering its own epistemological nervous breakdown. Instead of trying to tell us what's true, journalism now prides itself on finding two sides to every story, no matter how meretricious one version may be. Aren't you sick of hearing reporters and pundits talk about "narratives"? There's no true-or-false any more, no reliable vs. batshit-insane; there are just dueling narratives, competing storylines, alternate and equally plausible ways to connect the dots. It's as though a generation of journalists has been weaned on Derrida and deconstruction, and their only recourse is stenography and collage.

*Homo pomo*, postmodern man, is what the Coulters, Limbaughs and O'Reillys say the Godless culture of liberalism has birthed. It's ironic: the very decadence the right says it despises most in a civilization — an inability to recognize evil when it sees it — is the French disease to which it has itself succumbed.

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