

**THE BLOG**

Here Come the Culture War Games

By Marty Kaplan

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Irony is hardly what the architects of the coming weeks of gay-bashing have in mind. Their stated goal is to draw a bright line between Us and Other, between God's faithful and Satan's secularists, between moral absolutes that must not bend, and moral relativists who must be bent.

The problem, though, is that there's hardly anyone in the audience who takes this staged witch hunt at face value.

The White House, and Republican Senators, aren't dewey-eyed. They know this is political theater. They fully embrace the cynical motivation behind it: an attempt to turn the nation's attention to the homo horror show. Iraq, energy, health care, global warming — who wouldn't be delighted to avoid accountability for a disgraceful record of neglect by playing pin the tail on the pansy?

And yet most members of Bush's own base also know the score. They know this isn't the real culture war; it's a culture war game. They rightly see this amendment hoopla as a charade, an attempt to pander them back into the fold, a half-hearted bit of pre-election showmanship aimed at diverting them from their anger about deficits, spending, corruption and incompetence.

Younger Americans, too, are largely immune from this spectacle. Most people under 40 think love-and-let-love is the right reaction to same sex marriage, and they don't see the problem with gay couples getting the same civil rights that married spouses have.

So it turns out that there's practically nobody left in the audience for these pious solons to play to. Everyone's hip to the con; everyone's backstage, behind the curtain, eye-to-eye with Oz. Rather than putting on a grand national affirmation of traditional values, our own American Oberammergau, the Republican right is instead producing the ultimate postmodern wink-wink. The only people these posturers are really playing to are themselves.

And, of course, to homophobes, whose anger this phony passion play will undoubtedly arouse. It may be only a culture war game to preening pomos like Rove and Frist, but to its targets, it's no game. That's not just stage blood on Washington's hands.

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