

**THE BLOG**

The Axis of the Banality of Evil

By Marty Kaplan

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George W. Bush does a pretty good imitation of Jon Stewart doing Bush. At today's press conference following the U.S.-EU summit, he deftly played himself as a breath of fresh air blowing through stuffy old Europe — a towel-snappin first-name-usin “heh heh heh” First Frat Boy who gets Texas-ornery when Some Say that it's ok for the people of other nations to live under tyranny.

But seeing that performance just a few hours after “The Dark Side,” the Frontline documentary about Cheney, and just a day after Ron Suskind's “The One Percent Doctrine” was injected into the media bloodstream, I wonder whether anyone else felt, as I did, that Bush's act has now been, as the brainos say, recontextualized - plunked into a different narrative than the one Rove wants us to believe.

The story the White House wants to tell is about the axis of evil - Bush vs Voldemort. But these Frontline and Suskind counter-narratives make clear how banal Bush is; he and Condi (and her predecessor, Colin Powell) are enablers, co-dependents, useful idiots for the Cheney-Rumsfeld cabal to carry out its agenda.

Until this moment, it was of course possible to see the skull beneath Cheney's skin. Despite best Congressional efforts to conceal it, and despite the impotent MSM's fear of finding it, the evidence of the Cheney-Rummy coup was still plentiful. But there is something about the form of the dispassionate documentary that sears this story into the brain as no collage of blogs and articles can. To see with our own eyes how deeply discredited within the Administration were the WMD “evidence” and the 9/11-Saddam “connection,” and then to see one clip after another of Cheney declaring that there's “no doubt” about them, is like being forced by a private investigator to watch lurid videos of your spouse's serial infidelity. No wonder the Republicans want to defund public broadcasting.

There is also something about a richly-sourced, on-the-record, book-length piece of investigative reporting that remind us of the crucial distinction between history and polemic. No matter how much entertainment has appropriated news and politics, no matter how easy it is for pole dancers like Ann Coulter to get us to leer at her, there nevertheless remains in this nation a residue of the very un-postmodern view that bloviation isn't the same thing as information. Rage porn may hit the best-seller list, but real books are a different species, and they still matter.

Since 9/11, there has been a horror that many Americans have been unable to confront. It is not the horror of terrorism, or the ugliness of despotism, or the ambitions of our adversaries. It is the fear that — at this terrible crossroads in

human history — the Constitution no longer protects us from the ad hoc fascism of monomaniacal ideologues, and that the President who fronts for them is no less clueless today than when he was plucked from mediocrity at the end of the last century to be their Manchurian candidate. Perhaps now, finally, we are becoming more willing to lower our hands from our eyes and see the awful truth.

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