

**THE BLOG**

Graceless Land

By Marty Kaplan

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With American kids dying daily in a war without end, with the Middle East boiling over, with the nation held hostage to foreign oil and the planet on the eco-brink, W's traveling Elvis-thon has to be the most graceless illustration of tonedearfness, irrelevance and bad timing ever... unless you include his guitar fiddling while New Orleans flooded... or his "Not under here!" missing-WMD gags for an appreciative Washington press corps... or his goat-in-the-headlights gap... or his uninterrupted vacation after the "Bin Laden Determined To Strike in US" PDB... and then of course, for insulting off-pointness, it's also hard to beat Congress's current focus on flag-burning, gay marriage, the estate tax and the Pledge of Allegiance... and the media's obsession with Star Jones, the Duke lacrosse team and Superman's package.

In theory, this is the "circuses" part of "bread and circuses." Those Roman emperors knew how to calm the rabble: feed 'em and amuse 'em. It must be baffling to Bush that the polls say it's not working for him. Maybe it's because he confuses tax cuts for gazillionaires with bread for the masses (rather than, say, raising the minimum wage). Maybe it's because he mistakes the bonhomie in his buddy-buddy bubble for the good times that surely must be rolling in the land. That's an error that Marie Antoinette made, too; conceivably "Let them eat grilled peanut-butter-and-banana sandwiches!" works better in French.

When they're not branding their opponents as traitors, sexual deviants and secular Satanists, Republicans like to paint Democrats as the downer party, the doom-and-gloomers. Rove & Co must believe that criticizing Bush's Hound Dog whoring would be perceived as downright un-American. I wonder, though, whether the Architect might be overreaching here. With the Fourth of July around the corner, with plenty of reasons to be sober and sorrowful about the state of the country, it's entirely possible that the majority of Americans, rather than singing merrily along with this out-of-synch spectacle, would today like to do nothing more than to step, and step hard, on W's blue suede boots. Here's hoping they remember that when November comes around.

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