

**THE BLOG**

Taylor Hicks for President

By Marty Kaplan

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Really - could it be any worse than what we have now?

Bush's meeting with the American Idol finalists is being described as part of a long tradition — stretching at least as far back as Calvin Coolidge's photo op with World Series winners — of Presidents trying to dust themselves with borrowed champion-glitter.

But perhaps a better tradition in which to locate it goes back Nero fiddling while Rome burned. Photogenically brush clearing after being warned that Osama was determined to attack; playing air guitar as New Orleans submerged; goin' to Graceland while the world's goin' to hell: there's nothing better to rouse the nation's battered morale than proving that no news, however horrible, can get between W and his good ol' Texas fun.

Much is being made of the Idols being the first reality TV stars to be invited to the White House. But this is demonstrably not so. In fact, George W. Bush is the first reality TV star to occupy the White House. He won the opportunity in a spinoff of Survivor, just after 9/11. Though he blew it during "The Pet Goat" round, and almost got eliminated during his ensuing national fly-around, he came from behind and triumphed in the Ground Zero finals.

That moment on the rubble with the bullhorn made him a true reality tv star. Never mind that what he said was sheer bravado; no matter that Osama still lives, and that Bush's Iraq war was an incalculably valuable gift to al Qaeda. What counted was the showmanship. It was great television; it was so real that it was surreal. At that moment, America desperately needed an idol, not an idiot, at the helm, and those cowboy words were exactly the right taunt at the right time.

I just wonder how long it'll be before Richard Hatch gets the Presidential Medal of Honor.

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