

**THE BLOG**

What Rhymes With “Accountability”?

By Marty Kaplan

08/28/2006 10:40 am ET | Updated May 25, 2011

It’s amazing what suckers people are for poetry. I don’t mean the brand-name stuff we study in school; I mean the language tricks that are magnets for our attention — things like rhyme, meter, alliteration.

Consider “I don’t want to play the blame game.” Without that rhyme, would it really have been hauled out by the Bush team in the aftermath of Katrina as a defense against the charge of incompetence?

The first time anyone paid attention to what John Kerry had to say about Iraq since “I-was-against-it-before-I-was-for-it” was when he trumped “cut-and-run” with “lie-and-die.”

The only reason “we report, you decide” has any mojo is the hidden power of its anapests. Joe Lieberman’s presidential race may have been a disaster, but the first-syllable rhyme of “Joementum” turned a train wreck into a juggernaut. Say what you want about Jesse Jackson, but his rhythmic rhetoric made music that moved masses.

That’s what makes “Together, America Can Do Better” — the focus-grouped mid-term election slogan rolled out by congressional Democrats last fall — such a club-footed embarrassment. I’m not saying that “Buck Fush” is a motto to run on, but there are dozens of tag-lines that have been emblazoned on bumper stickers, T-shirts, signboards and Web sites by America’s curbside prophets whose poetic power is way more potent than most of what’s been coming out of Washington.

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