

**THE BLOG****Pretzel Time**

By Marty Kaplan

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Today's Washington Post op-ed by Bill Kristol and Gary Schmitt applauding Bush's unauthorized domestic wiretapping is an illustration of one of the biggest difference between Republicans and Democrats.

Democratic politicians, and the talking heads allegedly sympathetic to them, will go out of their way to create daylight between themselves and Party leaders. Forming acircular firing squad, eating your own kind, sandpapering your supporters: it's not just the DLC that's made an art of distancing yourself from your own team. Independence, irony, "I'm deeply troubled" press backgrounding, Joementum, triangulation, Sista Soulja moments: these are familiar Democratic moves, designed to move the integrity needle away from sycophancy end of the scale and toward – well, if not all the way to self-loathing, at least to maverick.

But Republicans pride themselves on their ability to bend themselves into pretzels to defend anything their President and their leadership does. No matter what conservative first principles a Republican leader may violate – federalism, balanced budgets, conservation, the rule of law, to name just a few – the Party's members and its enablers in the right-wing echo chamber will find a way to defend it. No betrayal of public trust by Bush, Cheney, Frist, DeLay et al can be so outrageous that Republicans are at a loss for confecting some tortuous defense of it. No Republican conduct can be so disgraceful or illegal that the right wing media harpies are incapable of the intellectual contortions necessary to excuse it.

Torture? *What about that ticking time bomb, dude?* Abrogation of intelligence laws? *They're doing it to save your life – you got a problem with that?* The sole exception to this goosestep that comes to mind was the Harriet Miers debacle, when the more thoughtful conservative commentators were troubled that Bush had chosen someone who might get the vapors and waver on her opposition to homo marriage and women's choice, once she breathed that rarefied SCOTUS air.

It's not surprising that the original name for true believers' relentless defense of the faith comes from religious tradition: it's called "apologetics." The word doesn't mean apology; there's no sorry about it. It means defense. In religion, it justifies the ways of God to man (you know – Katrina and Kashmir are all part of the Divine plan). In politics, it says that no matter what W does, it's his way or the highway.

So now, once again, it's pretzel time for the defenders of the Republican faith. But those apologists might do well to recall that it was a pretzel that W nearly choked on.

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**Marty Kaplan** 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director