

Scandal fatigue and the new American coup

IF the Bush administration and their backers around the country have proven themselves adept at anything, it's their proclivity for creating outrageous scandals. Initially, this band of shameless clowns seemed to be making journalism quite easy, providing a steady stream of moral and ethical transgressions to report on – so much so that there've been ample scoops to go around, which each of us in the alternative press focusing on a different Republican outrage each week. The problem is that it's now three years later, and the stories keep coming faster and faster, leaving us little time to give them the coverage that they each deserve, while keeping us from covering our old beats, whatever they were.

For instance, here's one of those news stories you just can't let slip by. Women convicts are being chained together in forced labor gangs and ordered to bury the bodies of nameless homeless indigenous persons who had died of starvation and disease on city streets. The report came from the European Reuters news agency, but they weren't reporting on Burma, the Sudan, Chinese occupied Tibet or any other commonly thought of human rights abuse hotspot. No. They were reporting about Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona, where Republican Sheriff Joe Arpaio boasts of housing prisoners, including children, in desert tent cities adorned with giant hot pink "no vacancy" banners,

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and forcing inmates onto chain gangs.

On his department's website (google "Joe Arpaio"), he boasts about spending less than twenty cents per meal to feed his charges, who must earn their keep by, among other onerous tasks, burying the indigent. His department spends nearly three times as much per day to feed its dogs than to feed prisoners.

The Bush/Cheney 04 sweatshop

As the United States rises within the ranks of internationally recognized human rights violators, stories like this are becoming more common. Hence, it didn't come as a surprise two weeks ago when Newsday purchased campaign wear from both the Kerry and Bush campaigns, only to receive a "Bush/Cheney 2004" fleece pullover manufactured in Burma (Myanmar). The newspaper, which was conducting an investigation to see if the campaigns were buying American or foreign clothing items, didn't really expect to find the Bush camp buying its sportswear from one of the world's worst human rights violators – especially since such imports are banned by the Treasury Department because of the Burmese junta's abysmal treatment of activists in that nation's struggle for democracy.

Invade Jamaica?

On the subject of democracy, the 15-nation Caribbean Community (CARICOM) unanimously decided not to recognize the US occupation government in Haiti. The Caribbean countries expressed concern that the forced removal of Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide, who was voted into office by over 90% of the Haitian electorate, set a dangerous anti-democratic precedent. They asked the UN to investigate allegations made by the Haitian president that US forces kidnapped him at gunpoint.

Of course I think this is a big story – all of our Caribbean neighbors refusing to adhere to the Bush administration script on the Haiti coup. The Buffalo News, on the other hand, thought it was only worthy of a three column inch piece buried a few pages behind the front page above-the-fold lead story about potholes. In the meantime Bush National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stuck her snorkel out of the cesspool just long enough to threaten the Jamaican government with unspeakable nasties if they don't immediately expel the visiting Haitian president, who the Bush administration wants shipped to Africa (I don't make this stuff up!).

This threat would place Jamaica under the category of "etc." on the Republican National Committee's recent "Ask America 2004 Nationwide Policy Survey." The survey which is basically a fundraising tool designed to extract revenue from GOP yahoos, asks Republicans if America should "broaden the War on Terrorism" to include "Thailand, Syria,

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Somalia, the Philippines, etc?" Of course US allies Thailand and the Philippines were rather upset to find themselves on the Republican shortlist for an off-season invasion. Syria, however, must be rather used to this by now. And Somalia, last I knew, didn't have a government.

Funding Neil Bush

Or there's always the story of George W's brother Neil Bush. He first came to fame as an un-indicted co-star in the Savings and Loan scandal, playing a cameo role as director of a looted bank whose collapse cost taxpayers over \$1 billion. It seems this Bush brother is back in the news again, this time suckling on the nation's dwindling education budget. As the Bush administration comes under fire from major education organizations over its Orwellian "No Child Left Behind" program, which guts funding for many educational programs while saddling school districts with unfunded mandates, brother Neil is once again making curtain calls.

Shortly after the US invaded Afghanistan, Neil made a trip to Saudi Arabia, sponsored by the bin Laden Construction Group. Once there, he started hitting up a few embattled old family friends for venture capital for his latest endeavor, an educational-software company called "Ignite." Ignite sells software that prepares students for standardized exams. Here's where the brothers all come together. Brother George W's "No Child" scheme mandates standardized testing for all public school children. Following Bush's dyslexic logic, if the kids fail the exams, which in a normal world would indicate a need for more educational resources, in the Bushworld, means the schools will lose their federal funding. Hence, cramming students for exams is now taking a pedagogical priority over actual teaching. In brother Jeb Bush's Florida, this means contracting with brother Neil's Saudi-funded Ignite to provide software to prepare Florida's youth to fill in the correct bubbles – at a cost of about \$30 per pupil per year. Finally the Bush education plan is starting to make sense.

Neil Bush is also netting a \$60,000 per year consulting contract with a firm established for the explicit purpose of taking "advantage of business opportunities" in postwar Iraq. Neil's position calls for the presidential brother to be available to take unspecified phone calls three hours per week. In 2002 Neil received \$2 million from a semiconductor company run by the son of Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin. In that deal, Neil was contracted to provide "expertized advices" [sic.] in a field where he has no credentials or experience.

Like rats on a sinking ship

Any of these stories are worthy of a whole column – but they're coming in too fast and

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too frequently, without letting up. As a columnist, I'm suffering from scandal fatigue. Put simply, the Bushistas and their cheeseball fascist cronies are creating scandals quicker than I can report them. And the sheer quantity of these scandals is overwhelming – especially for someone who only can write one story each week (There is a daily paper in town. Right? Hello? Maybe they can cover some more of this stuff ?).

The apparently endless flow of Bush administration scandals, however, seems to finally be taking its toll on the White House, with Bushies fleeing the administration like rats jumping off of a sinking ship. I started reporting about this phenomenon last year when high ranking Pentagon officials started turning against the White House. At the time, I called this a new American coup – arguing that high ranking military officials were strategically making damaging statements designed to embarrass and ultimately defeat an administration that has callously sent soldiers to meaningless deaths while profiting from war and making the country more vulnerable to terrorism.

The trend has continued, but the defectors now hail from the White House itself, with former White House Counterterrorism Chief Richard Clarke being the highest profile defector to date. Clarke is seen around the world as a whistle-blower, selflessly exposing himself to ridicule while acting as a slave to the truth. There's also a bit of self-interest being served here, however. While the 9/11 commission was incubating, Clarke had to make the call whether he wanted to go on the stand as a fall-guy for the Bush White House, or as an American hero.

The Left's Republicans

Clark opted for hero, making him the most recent in a mélange of Republicans whose voice is dominating the growing alternative-media radio circuit. This is the odd anomaly of the Bush presidency. If you want to hear Republican voices making news, you have to read and listen to the alternative media. Pacifica Radio's Democracy Now show, for example, has been dominated for months by Republican voices hailing from both the military and the Bush administration. One after another they reaffirm their support for the military and the Republican Party, and then fire away at the current Bush administration, who they believe has sold out both the military and true conservative political ideals.

The pro-Bush Republicans who are making the rounds on the corporate media circuits, by comparison, aren't saying much of anything that makes sense these days. Take National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. Rice provided good theater-of-the-absurd from the get go, being the only Cabinet-level appointee in history to enter the White House already having an oil tanker named after her – an honor bestowed by Chevron on

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whose corporate board she previously sat. Rice has been making news this week by stonewalling the bipartisan commission investigating the 9/11 attacks.

Rice has also joined Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld in a frantic character assassination battle against the charismatic Richard Clarke. Clarke, for his part, seems more than able to respond to anything thrown at him. The administration fired its best shot, releasing a copy of his letter of resignation where he outlined what an honor it was to serve in the Bush administration. Crooning on like third graders in a school yard, whining, "you saiiid you were my beeeesst friennndd," they attacked Clarke for changing his tune. Clark calmly fired back, according to Mike Allen of The Washington Post, replying, "A polite resignation. How shocking and terrible."

Cheney on Limburger

Dick Cheney continued in his quest to see how low he could drag the office of the Vice President, appearing on documented serial-liar Rush Limbaugh's syndicated radio belch-a-thon, accusing Clark of being out of the loop. Limbaugh never got off of his knees to ask Cheney what kind of an administration would keep its Counterterrorism Chief "out of the loop" on terrorism issues. Rice, however, at about the same time, was contradicting Cheney, explaining how Clarke was ultimately in the loop and responsible for any terrorist attacks that occurred under his watch.

From here the contradictions kind of get out of control – as documented in a recent report issued by the nonpartisan Center for American Progress. Rice argued last May that nobody could have "predicted that [al Qaida] would try to use an airplane as a missile." As it turns out, George W. Bush knew they could, courtesy of a July 2001 FBI report to the administration and a personal presidential briefing in August of 2001. Richard Clarke also knew, and as early as January 2001, asked for a Cabinet-level meeting to deal with the threat of an impending al Qaida attack.

The Center also cites John Ashcroft's 2001 Strategic Plan for the Justice Department, which did not list fighting terrorism as one of the agency's seven goals (the war on drugs, however, was a prominent feature in his plan). At roughly the same time the Ashcroft plan came out, the administration terminated a classified FBI program monitoring al Qaida suspects in the US. These actions mark a strong departure from the previous administration where Attorney General Janet Reno listed the threat from terrorism as the Justice Department's number one concern.

The Grassley Knoll

Among the intelligence community people coming out of the woodwork to back up

Clarke's assertions are a number of FBI officials, such as translator Sibel Edmonds, who recently testified that the FBI knew that an al Qaida attack involving airplanes was being plotted. Republican Senator Charles Grassley, offering more evidence of a meltdown in Bush's base of support, called Edmonds' testimony "very credible."

Meanwhile, the Bushistas are also coming under further attack for faking the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction threat. The British newspaper, The Guardian, reported early last month that the Bush administration's lead weapons inspector, David Kay, who resigned in January, stated that he believed there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq before the invasion, and that Bush has to "come clean" about misleading the American people. The American corporate media picked up the story last week, giving evidence of a further chink in the administration's Teflon armor. Kay, of course, is not telling us anything new – he's simply following the path taken by previous US and UN weapons inspectors such as Scott Ritter and Hans Blix. In the long run it's easier to be a tool of the truth than to live with a lie.

Wal-Mart uncovered

Much of the information about now being unearthed by administration whistleblowers and the 9/11 commission has already been clearly presented in filmmaker Robert Greenwald's critically acclaimed documentary, "Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War." But don't go looking for the DVD at America's biggest media retailer, Wal-Mart, because you won't find it there. Wal-Mart's media buyers called the film, "Unpatriotic" and hence, inappropriate for Wal-Mart's star spangled Chinese sweatshop booty-laden isles. The truth is getting out, however, despite Wal-Mart's best efforts to keep it from their glazed denizens.

This all brings me to a meeting of the College Republicans I had the opportunity to attend at a small private liberal arts college in Central New York. They were a personable group – but most importantly, they had a much deeper understanding of how American politics work than any group of Democrats, Greens, Black Block Anarchists or Commies that I've ever encountered. Fresh from a weekend at a national strategy camp, the young Republicans hosted a workshop ironically titled, "How to Steal an Election." There, they explained that politics is about image, not substance. And they unveiled their plans to lace trick or treat candy bags with Bush literature (which I think is quite in line with the holiday), and to engage in guerrilla tactics like spelling "Bush" in rye grass seeds on college campuses. But, they forgot the most important strategy if they are to really maintain their morale and their electoral base until November. They've got to stop reading newspapers and listening to the news – because no matter how you spin it, it doesn't look

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good for the band of liars and thieves in the White House.

The Wal-Mart-banned film, "Uncovered..." can be ordered online at www.truthuncovered.com (\$10 inc. shipping). Democracy Now! can be heard weekdays at 8AM at www.democracynow.org. Special thanks to Phyllis McClusky for the Neil Bush tip.