

Terrorist teachers, a Nazi dad and Haiti

THE CONCEPT of terrorism is firmly planted in American culture as the end-all of national scourges. If the Bush administration has its way, just the accusation of being a terrorist is severe enough to disappear someone into the tar pit of indefinite detention without trial or legal representation – possibly at an offshore gulag out of reach of the American legal system. Giving money to a terrorist organization, innocent as your contribution may be, is enough to get all of your assets seized, instantly pauperizing you with the ultimate fine – also without the benefit of a trial. “Terrorism” and “terrorist,” in this context, constitute some pretty heavy words.

Terrorist teachers

It's still unclear, however, just exactly what constitutes a terrorist or somebody who supports terrorism. We know that random attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure constitutes terror – unless it is orchestrated by US forces or US backed “freedom fighters.” And yeah, we know bombers and apocalyptic hijackers are terrorists – but, we are told, so are a number of charities and a wayward group of wanderers from Lackawanna, New York.

It gets confusing. For those of us who don't want anything to do with terrorists, we

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need a clearer definition. Hence, it was rather appropriate that the people who are throwing the word around like a hackysack, last week took steps to define the term by identifying the largest group of terrorists in our midst. This clarification from the Bush administration came in the form of a pronouncement from Education Secretary Rod Paige, that teachers are terrorists. Or, more specifically, he identified the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union (of which the Buffalo Teachers Federation is a member), as "a terrorist group."

This is not a joke. The same administration that created the policy of denying accused terrorists their constitutional rights to defend themselves from such charges, now has a cabinet level appointee, identifying teachers as terrorists. The union's crime, he explained, was opposing Bush's "No Child Left Behind" scheme and its devastating impact on public education. This is similar to the McCarthy era, when reactionary politicians labeled their opponents as "communists." The only difference is where supposed communists lost their livelihoods, accused terrorists can lose all of their liberties. "Terrorism" isn't a word to throw around lightly – especially for an administration that aspires to use the term as a guillotine.

Gibson's Reich

Mel Gibson has been under a lot of fire lately from critics who argue that his film, "The Passion of The Christ," is anti-Semitic. They also accuse him of initially producing three pre-production edits of the film, allegedly showing the Pope a copy with the most offensive material removed in an effort to gain the Pontiff's blessing for the film.

Gibson, for his part, argues that he's not an anti-Semite. His case isn't bolstered, however, by his neo-Nazi father, Hutton Gibson, going public on a New York radio interview on the eve of the film's release, claiming that Jews fabricated the holocaust and are now conspiring to take over the world. The elder Gibson defended Hitler's concentration camps as "work camps," arguing that the Jews supposedly killed in the extermination camps had actually just up and moved to Brooklyn, the Bronx, Los Angeles and Sydney, Australia. Mel's dad also called for overthrowing the US government and lynching at least one prominent Jew. As for the Pope, who has strongly condemned such anti-Semitism, the elder Gibson told his radio audience that his son told him the Pope is an "ass." Mel Gibson, who in an earlier interview said his dad "never lied to him," has so far declined to distance himself from his father's statements.

Bush: The Anti-Family Conservative

Thirty-seven years after the last miscegenation statute outlawing interracial marriage

was struck down in court, George W. Bush is at the podium calling for a new round of marriage restrictions. The minority groups now under fire are gays and lesbians. The homophobic Bush, however, has gone one step further than his racist predecessors. He doesn't just want to outlaw gay and lesbian marriages – he wants to tinker with the US constitution, posing the prohibition as an amendment. If passed, this would be only the second amendment purposely designed not to protect citizen's rights, but to take them away. The other such amendment was the ill-fated alcohol prohibition amendment.

Quite frankly, given this nation's high divorce rate, the supposedly pro-family Bush should be happy to find families wherever he can. The new gay marriage craze is the biggest shot in the arm that the otherwise beleaguered institution of marriage has had in centuries. Conservatives who claim to support nuclear families, state's rights, religious freedom and the US constitution, should not be eviscerating the constitution in order to deny a state the ability to protect the rights of its citizens to create legally recognized nuclear families as sanctioned by their personal religious doctrines.

Politically, this is Bush's "Hail Mary" pass. It's a desperate campaign move designed to fire up the culture wars at a time when the Iraq quagmire and Bush's record budget deficits are dominating the national debate. Finding a group to scapegoat is a time-tested rancid old propaganda tool. The marginalization of the target group is supposed to solidify the propagandist's core base. In practice, this means that the so-called NASCAR dads so widely touted in the media should forget about their kin fighting in Iraq as well as their own underemployment or unemployment, and instead worry that the happy lesbian couple down the block is somehow a threat. The recent round of heckling and raised middle fingers that greeted Bush when he tried campaigning at a recent NASCAR event indicates, however, that he might well have underestimated race fans. They're either more tolerant, or more fed-up, than his handlers could have imagined.

In essence, this is a replay of papa Bush's 1988 Willie Horton campaign. At that time, a desperate Bush Senior successfully pulled off his own Hail Mary pass, unleashing a series of ads focusing on a black convict who committed a murder after being pardoned by Bush's Democratic opponent. Critics called the imagery racist, saying it played on white fears of blacks that have been an engineered part of American culture since reconstruction. This October surprise gave George Senior the electoral nudge he needed to slip into the White House.

George Junior might be planning his own October surprise – and it isn't related to the gay marriage ban. As I wrote previously, we can expect to see an Osama bin Laden capture or kill sometime this fall in the run-up to the election. Reports out of Iran, echoed in Reuters and a host of other media outlets, claim that bin Laden is already in US custody.

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Tehran Radio, citing its own sources, claims bin Laden was captured "some time ago" on the Afghanistan Pakistan border. If this is the case, a captured bin Laden becomes a Bush campaign asset, to be unleashed at will, guaranteeing to dominate three day's worth of newscasts. US officials deny the reports of bin Laden's capture, however, calling them "stray voltage" (whatever that means).

On the subject of October surprises, also expect "weapons of mass destruction" to be found in Iraq. Anything is possible when you get to write the scripts.

Meanwhile In Haiti

The current situation in Haiti is heart-wrenching. Haiti is the poorest nation in the hemisphere. This is not an accident. Haiti won its freedom in an African slave revolt, sending a chilling warning throughout the hemisphere which ultimately led to the eradication of slavery. A newly independent Haiti, stripped of its resources by over 250 years of colonial plundering, was immediately greeted by a devastating economic boycott. Haiti's former colonial ruler, France, then extracted, by military and economic force, over a century of "reparation" payments – in essence making the Haitian's "buy" their country from France for an inflated price much higher than that of the Louisiana purchase. This arrangement thrust Haiti into a cycle of debt that it is still mired in today. The French then established trade ties only with the light skinned Haitians, effectively crating a race-based caste system that also is still in place today.

Jean Bertrand Aristide, the Haitian president, is the first dark skinned man to lead Haiti, elected by a landslide in the early 1990s after Haitians suffered for 40 years under the brutal US backed Duvalier family dictatorship. Aristide, a former Catholic priest and liberation theologian, however, was quickly deposed during the Bush Senior administration in a 1991 military coup which led to the murder of 3,000 backers of the democratic government. Aristide was restored to power during the Clinton administration in 1994 by a multinational invasion force, but at a cost – Aristide agreed to abandon land reform efforts and support structural readjustment programs dictated by the World Bank, diverting funds from domestic programs to service Haiti's perpetual foreign debt (a debt it has had since imposed by France).

After a second term, Aristide stepped down from the presidency in 1996, only to be elected again by a landslide in 2000. Aristide's concessions to the World Bank, however, caused unrest and cost him some of his political backing. Recently, he started backing away from these policies – calling for raising the minimum wage from \$1.35 per day (bad news for sweatshops manufacturing Disney branded clothing) and going as far as to levy a multi-billion dollar reparations lawsuit against France. This is his real crime. If Haiti is

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successful in suing its former colonial oppressor in World Court, the precedent both for colonized nations and formally enslaved peoples could be earthshaking. Hence, it is no surprise that France has called for the democratically elected Aristide to step down from power.

During the past two weeks the Bush administration refused Haiti's request for help in their war against terrorism, instead calling this past weekend for Aristide's resignation. On Sunday, as terrorist gangs circled the capitol, US Marines reportedly took Aristide and his wife into custody at gunpoint. Later that day, the Bush administration announced that the military aid that the US refused to provide before Aristide's forced departure, would be forthcoming. We call this a coup. In this case, US forces forcefully removed a popular democratically elected president from power. This is a clear crime under international law. Ordering such criminal activity also violates US law and is an impeachable offense. So far the US corporate media has played down US involvement in this coup.

The other untold story is that polls still show Aristide as being popular. If an election was held today, he would win just as he did back in 2000. For better or for worse, he was the legitimate president of Haiti. Haitian supporters of the coup have no such legitimacy. The leader of the political opposition in Haiti is a US citizen who by trade is a garment plant (read: sweatshop) manager. The military wing of the opposition is being led by former death squad operatives who recently escaped from prison. Many of these people have connections to the US Defense Intelligence Agency and were involved in earlier coup attempts. They are better armed than the Haitian police force who number only about 3,000 people armed mostly with revolvers (Haiti has no army). By contrast, the opposition forces have new Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers capable of shooting down Haiti's only helicopter. These so-called rebels are nothing more than terrorists without a popular base, roving the country killing police officers and breaking convicted criminals out of prison to join their ranks.

This year marks Haiti's bicentennial celebration as the world's oldest free black nation since the colonial invasion of Africa. But there will be no celebration this year. Haiti represents too much to many powerful nations to ever be left alone in peace.