

CONASON'S LOST TRUTH ABOUT RECONCILIATION



h/t Zapiro @ sahistory

Joe Conason has a new piece out in Salon that is enough to cause sane heads to explode. Noting that, like math, bringing accountability is hard, Conason biliously opines:

Here we have no such consensus and no revolutionary government with the power to mete out retribution to vanquished foes. What we have instead are the unrepentant officials of the Bush era, who continue to justify their misconduct as critical to the nation's survival. We have a new administration, immured in a world economic crisis, that recognizes conflicting imperatives of accountability and cooperation. And we have a responsibility to explore how the nation embarked on "a dangerous and disastrous diversion from American values," as Leahy put it.

Is there a way for President Obama to pursue that responsibility without inflicting vengeance or humiliation? Perhaps he ought to consider the creation of a presidential commission whose aims would be purely investigative – and encourage the participation of those implicated in the abuses of the past by promising a complete pardon to anyone who testifies fully, honestly and publicly.

With that gesture, he would acknowledge the importance of uncovering the facts, no matter how ugly, while magnanimously binding up the nation's wounds. He could leave the issue of criminal prosecution to international authorities that can act without any partisan taint. And he

could seek truth without vengeance.

Conason waxes romantic about Sen. Pat Leahy's much ballyhooed truth and reconciliation plan. Here is the money quote from Leahy:

We could develop and authorize a person or group of people universally recognized as fair-minded, and without axes to grind. Their straightforward mission would be to find the truth. People would be invited to come forward and share their knowledge and experiences, not for purposes of constructing criminal indictments, but to assemble the facts.

That's right, another blue ribbon commission that is going to solve our difficult problems of governance. Yeah, that is going to work out well because, you know, such things always do. Paging Lee Hamilton to the blue ribbon phone. The problem with Leahy and Conason's commission is that there exists a body of law, both statutory and common, for a reason; for it to be the rule and for the rule to be enforced. Conason wants to be "magnanimous" and "pardon" and "leave the issue of criminal prosecution to international authorities that can act without any partisan taint". What a totally perfect bunch of tripe. Hey Joe, exactly what "international authorities" are you referring to here? And how are these "miscreant" defendants going to be rendered to justice by said international authorities? Is Conason saying he supports extradition of Americans to the Hague or other loci of international justice? Because if he isn't (and trust me, his shallow babble doesn't) then this chatter about international justice for the malfeasants is horribly idle.

Oh, and one more thing, when Conason notes that he and Leahy's claimed brilliance is founded upon

using a process modeled partly on the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of post-apartheid South Africa

it ought also be noted that not quite everybody considers that process to be all that wonderful, even in the tectonic change scenario where it is supposedly appropriate. From yesterday's Washington Post:

But the ruling also stirred debate about how to deal with history in a young democracy that depicts itself as a miracle built on the notion of forgiveness. In a country where many blacks remain poor and many white perpetrators walk free, it is a question on which even the widows of the Cradock Four do not agree: What is best for reconciliation – digging up the past or letting it lie?

"We have had trickle-down reconciliation in this country," said Piers Pigou, a former Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigator who now directs the South African History Archive.

"There's been an absence of commitment to those issues because it's likely to raise a lot of hard questions."

The main protagonists of the Bush/Cheney regime effectively reverse engineered our laws and Constitution in order to gut them of all meaning and effect, so that they could impose their demented whims of dominance and submission on the nation and the world. Their crimes are more than the violence of man on man that hold forth in truth and reconciliation commissions; the crimes of Bush and Cheney rip at the very heart of who and what we are, and were founded to be, as a Constitutional democracy.

The half baked blue ribbon commission of Conason and Leahy will not address the heart of what has gone on, and it will never bring valid accountability for it. Good governance and the

maintenance of the rule of law is hard,
especially when truth must be spoken to power.
Difficulty is no excuse for failure.