

Mississippi Delta Disaster: The Absence of a Viable Opposition in America

No Direction Home

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Let's be clear about one thing. Nothing that happened last week — the mass destruction in the Mississippi Delta, the obliteration of the city of New Orleans, the murderous abandonment of thousands of people to death, chaos and disease — will change the Bush Administration or American politics at all. Not one whit. President George W. Bush will not reverse his brutal policies; his Congressional rubber-stamps will not revolt against the White House; the Democrats will not suddenly grow a spine. There will be no real change, and the bitter corrosion of injustice, indifference and inhumanity that is consuming American society will go on as before.

One indication of this can be found in the first polls coming out after the disaster, which show that some 45 percent of the American people approve of Bush's handling of the relief effort. It seems inconceivable that any sentient being could witness the agonizing results of the Bush team's dithering, dilatory response — an agony played out in the full glare of non-stop media coverage — and not come away with a sense of towering anger at this criminal incompetence. But it's obvious that nearly half the American people have now left the "reality-based community" altogether; they see only what they want to see, a world bathed in the hazy, golden nimbus of the Leader. The fact — the undeniable truth — that behind this carefully-concocted mirage lies nothing more than a steaming pile of rancid, rotting offal means nothing to these true believers. The Lie is better, the Lie is more comforting, the Lie lets them keep feeding on the suffering of others without guilt or shame.

The fact that a few conservative commentators and politicians are making mild criticisms of Bush means nothing. Their "attacks" amount to no more than this: Gosh, old George really dropped the ball on this one. He'd better turn the PR thing around, or he might lose some of the "political capital" he needs to "advance his second-term agenda." That's it. That's as far as it goes.

After all, they fully support the "agenda" — more war, more tax cuts for the rich, more impunity for corporations, more welfare for the energy barons, more coddling of elite investors, more state power for Christian extremists, more media consolidation, more kickbacks, more easy money for greasy palms. And now that Karl Rove has finally figured out his response — employing brazen lies to smear state and local officials — you will very quickly see the conservative critics fall into lockstep with the porcine counselor's program. By the time Congress holds hearings into the disaster, they'll be singing love songs to the Leader.

The hearings themselves will doubtless turn into a pageant of heroic tableaux — glittering stories of the federal effort to rescue the perishing, all of it driven by the steady hand of the Commander in chief. Oh, there might be a scapegoat or two for the Congressmen to pummel with puff-cheeked righteous rage for the cameras. But anyone hoping for a fearless, presidency-shaking probe will be disappointed.

Just as the media have always overhyped Bush’s popularity, they are now overhyping the “political crisis” he is supposedly facing. There is no political crisis whatsoever, if by that phrase you mean something that will cause Bush to alter his policies. The war in Iraq will go on. The war against the poor will go on. The slow destruction of middle-class security and stability will go on. The long and ferocious right-wing campaign against the very idea of a “common good” will go on, unabated — perhaps even strengthened — as it faces a backlash from the half of the American public that does accept the reality of what they saw in New Orleans and all along the Gulf Coast.

This is what you must understand: Bush and his faction do not care if they have “the consent of the governed” or not. They are not interested in governing at all, in responding to the needs and desires and will of the people. They are only interested in ruling, in using the power of the state to force their radical agenda of elitist aggrandizement and ideological crankery on the nation, and on the world.

They have a large, hard core of true believers who will countenance — even applaud — any crime, any corruption, any incompetence of the Leader and his minions. With this base, and with all three branches of government in their hands, the Faction need only procure the support of a small percentage of the rest of the population — through fearmongering, through smears and lies, and, as we saw in 2000 and 2004, through the manipulation of election results via politically connected voting-machine corporations and politically partisan election officials.

None of this will change because of what happened in New Orleans. If the Bush Factionists could be touched by suffering and injustice, by death and destruction, by corruption and incompetence, then they would not be where they are today. If there was a viable opposition in the American Establishment to Bush’s policies, it would have stood up long ago. Like the people left behind in New Orleans, we’re all on our own — “with no direction home.”

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