



COLUMN of the AMERICAS

by Patricia Gonzales
and Roberto Rodriguez

OUR ROLE-MODEL NATION

Something is amiss. Recent revelations by whistleblowers have made it difficult to teach good morals to children who are taught that government exists to protect the common good and to ensure the rights of the powerless.

Nowadays, Republicans and Democrats take care of the rich and "the middle class," while neither will even use the word "poor." And rather than be taught that "the love of money is the root of all evil," kids are learning to worship at the altar of profit. The recent revelations that the FDA rushes multibillion-dollar drugs to the market -- with deadly results -- and that the EPA is now firmly in the hands of polluters (adios Superfund) affirm this new ethos.

The de-emphasis in the enforcement of consumer, health, safety, civil and labor laws is the governmental version of "turn the other cheek" or "look the other way." Furthermore, children are learning that it's corporate plunderers, rather than the meek, who shall inherit the Earth. They're also learning that blurring the line between truth and fiction (a culture of lying) does have its rewards.

The recent opening of ex-president Bill Clinton's library revealed that most of his detractors have a huge moral blind spot. They're right to be outraged by his lying about his White House sexual escapades, but they seemingly have no qualms about supporting unjust wars.

The current president's recent purge and controversial cabinet nominations also teach us more about loyalty than honesty.

White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales is the author of legal memos that justify torture (with advice on how to avoid war crimes charges) and the view that some prisoners are not entitled to Geneva Conventions protections.

Despite the resultant prisoner abuse worldwide, he's being marketed as the nation's "first Hispanic attorney general," thereby trumping his egregious legal opinions. He becomes "acceptable" only because he replaces John "Torquemada" Ashcroft. In regard to torture and the shooting of innocent civilians (whom we don't even bother to count, much less name), it's punish the peons, but ignore the generals.

Enter Condoleezza "Mushroom Cloud" Rice -- the perceived "intellectual author" of the administration's case that Iraq constituted a threat to the United States. The 9/11 Commission report confirmed that the case for war was trumped up (the truth will set you free), and despite the unjustified deaths of thousands, she's being promoted to State Department chief.

Speaking of role models, Colin Powell, who was sent to sell the demonstrably false case for war before the United Nations, leaves the administration (similar to retired Army Gen. Eric Shinseki) with his popularity intact. The message: Dissent and get purged; assent and get promoted.

Also, if you're honest and work hard ... well, this dictum is now history, as incompetence, dishonesty and international lawlessness are being rewarded. For example, current administration officials who support the president's disastrous pre-emptive and permanent war policies (love thy neighbor) are being trotted out as "role models."

And accountability is AWOL. The likes of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith and John Negroponte are staying. Also, Tom "gimme the money" DeLay -- who, if indicted, will remain as House Republican leader. Apparently, crime does pay, this while Rep. Dan Hastert wants to run Congress like a Republican fiefdom.

What's next? Cabinet positions for moral giants Newt Gingrich and Oliver North? Actually, what's

next is a movement to make California Gov. Arnold "The Groper" Schwarzenegger eligible to run for president.

On the other side are moral cowards or willing dupes -- for failing to stand up to the president. This includes virtually all the leading Democratic senators, plus their recent standard-bearers. It's one thing is to support the immoral war (Sen. Joseph Lieberman); it's quite another to claim that they were fooled by the cooked intelligence.

Meanwhile, President George W. Bush has reversed the precept of "Blessed are the peacemakers," as they are now morally depraved traitors. (Perhaps that's why the whole world seems to despise him.) Additionally, as he promises more support for Colombia's drug war, U.S.-backed Afghanistan has become the world's No. 1 source of heroin. Reap what you sow? The administration's word to human rights butchers: Cooperate on the war on terror and we'll overlook everything ... and please exempt us from the international war crimes tribunal -- or else.

These are the messages and faces that our kids are supposed to look to for moral guidance. Truthfully, the nation is not lacking in role models: Just have our children look to those who daily risk their lives and to those with thankless jobs. That's usually where honesty and integrity reside.

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