

Lies At Least Have to Be Believable

by Jeremy M. Barker

The amazing thing about the Republican response to the atrocities at Abu Ghraib is how tenaciously they cling to smug self-righteousness. Since Sept. 11, Republicans (often aided and abetted by Democrats) in Congress and the White House have argued that the threat of international terrorism requires a reappraisal of how we balance rights against security. But no matter how far the Patriot Act went, the Administration claimed it would never violate human or civil rights. That would still be beyond the pale.

And then there was Abu Ghraib. Many commentators felt that the abuses there — far from being an aberration, the work of a few miscreants in the military — were the direct result of the Administration's policies of indefinite incarceration, circumvention of the Geneva Convention, and unwillingness to suffer Congressional oversight. But faced with the undeniable injustices of that prison, Republicans — far from showing a willingness to change their policies — simply claimed it wasn't that bad.

Back in May, Sen. James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma), widely considered the dumbest member of the Senate, said, "I'm probably not the only one ... that is more outraged by the outrage than we are by the treatment [of the prisoners]." Unwinding the senator's notoriously incomprehensible grammar, one stumbles upon the main Republican justification: namely, that it really wasn't that bad.

Rush Limbaugh, always known for his tact, described the photos of abuse at Abu Ghraib as the sort of thing "... you can see onstage at the Lincoln Center from an NEA grants, [or] maybe on Sex in the City."

Trent Lott, in a June 20 interview in *The New York Times Magazine* dispelled any hope that Republicans had grown up in the last two months. Asked about his defense of the brutal interrogation techniques at Abu Ghraib, Lott



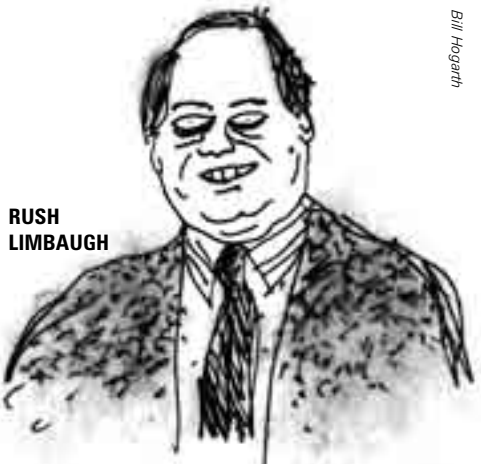
TRENT LOTT



JAMES INHOFE

responded, "Most of the people in Mississippi came up to me and said: 'Thank goodness. America comes first.' Interrogation is not Sunday-school class. You don't get information that will save American lives by withholding pancakes." Pressed that "unleashing killer dogs" was not the same as "withholding pancakes," Lott continued with dumbfounding mendaciousness, "I was amazed that people reacted like that. Did the dogs bite them? Did the dogs assault them?"

Lott no doubt knows the value of unleashing vicious dogs on the defenseless. Considering he lost his position as Senate majority leader for favorably commenting on Strom Thurmond's pro-segregation presidential bid from the 1950s, he may well look back fondly on the days when Jim Crow sheriffs unleashed the dogs on peacefully protesting black kids. But if the Republicans want to have some chance of winning the election this November, they need to accept responsibility for their mistakes instead of assuming the public is stupid enough to be convinced that torture isn't torture. ♦



RUSH LIMBAUGH

Bill Hogarth