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## t r u t h o u t • editorial

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donate**Burning the Law in a Riot of Treason**By William Rivers Pitt  
t r u t h o u t | Columnist

Monday 27 August 2007

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***As nightfall does not come at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there's a twilight where everything remains seemingly unchanged, and it is in such twilight that we must be aware of change in the air, however slight, lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness.***

- Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas

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issues

The departure of Alberto Gonzales from the Attorney General's Office brings America to a place of definitions, and hanging in the balance is the very idea of the nation itself. The basic concepts and fundamental principles of our republic now stand as the only legitimate considerations going forward, for they have been tested almost to annihilation already, and will not endure much longer if we continue on this path.

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It is the mythology within the Declaration of Independence we speak of, the fiction that tells us we are endowed with rights, and that those rights are unalienable. This falsehood has been vividly exposed in the last several years, and it has been a harsh lesson indeed. All the rights we hold dear and believe to be our greatest strength are, in fact, only words on old paper with neither force nor power. The next line - "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed" - is the muscle behind the myth, the core that has endured a withering assault.

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Matters are so much worse than our national political dialogue lets on. The resignation of Gonzales has unleashed a torrent of hard words and harsh criticisms aimed at the deplorable nature of his tenure, but the truth of it continues to elude mention. They call Gonzales an incompetent, a crony, a loyalist, a disgrace, leaving off the one word necessary to fully explain who he is, and what he was engaged in before he stepped down.

Alberto Gonzales is a traitor. That is the only word to explain it.

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He is not the only one; there are many more traitors like him in the Bush administration, criminals joined in an act of treason so vast and comprehensive that it beggars comparison. Nothing quite like this has ever before been attempted in America, and if they are allowed to succeed, there will be nothing of what defines America left to be seen.

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Gonzales and his Bush administration collaborators have committed their treason against the rule of law itself, a crime so absolute that it is technically not illegal. There is no code, ordinance or law specifically forbidding the total ruination of all our rights and protections; the act is neither felony nor misdemeanor, because nobody ever considered the black-letter necessity of making it illegal to destroy the rule of law.

But there is no America without that rule of law - no rights, no protections, no Constitution; there is nothing, and if you destroy the rule of law, you destroy the idea that is America itself. The only word for a crime like that is treason, and those who would dare commit it are traitors. Gonzales and his Bush administration collaborators have done more than dare. They have been pursuing it, with deliberation and intent, throughout each moment of their tenure.

Their treason is not in the actual crimes they have committed, but in the way they have chosen to

avoid accountability for them. Their treason is not their refusal to obey the Freedom of Information Act, but in their insistence that they are above the application of that law. Their treason is not in their refusal to obey subpoenas from Congress, but in their claim that they are above the laws behind those subpoenas. Their treason is not that they fired United States attorneys and then refused to come clean about it, but that they decimated the impartiality of the Department of Justice and turned the rule of law into another partisan weapon. Their treason is not the NSA surveillance of Americans, but their steadfast refusal to submit to the governing laws and the requirement of oversight.

When George W. Bush asserted a claim of Executive Privilege that made him and his administration immune to all laws and oversight, that was an act of treason because it shattered the rule of law. When Dick Cheney asserted that the Office of the Vice President was not part of the Executive Branch, because he did not want to obey the laws requiring him to hand over official documents to the Archives, that was an act of treason because it shattered the rule of law. When Alberto Gonzales chose to surrender the independence of the Department of Justice so he could protect those assertions, that was an act of treason because it shattered the rule of law.

Americans have only the rights they are able to protect and defend. Our rights are nothing more than ideas; only theory and argument on parchment all too easily burned to ashes. The power of those rights is only found in our collective submission to the rule of law, and submission to that rule of law is all that stands between our freedoms and the conflagration of tyranny. Without the rule of law, there is no America.

That is the treason of Alberto Gonzales, and the treason of the Bush administration entire. They have attacked and undercut the rule of law by refusing to submit to it, and in doing so have brought us to the edge of appalling infamy. There is a crime without peer, and we will be fortunate beyond measure if we are able to recover from it.

The fact that Alberto Gonzales has left is meaningless in the main, because the treason he participated in continues in his absence. If the damage is to be repaired, he must be replaced by someone who will submit to the main imperative, someone who will submit to the rule of law, someone with real independence and unbending respect for the idea that is America. Gonzales must not be replaced by another crony or yes-man, because Americans have only those rights we can protect and defend, and another traitor in that lofty post is no protection at all.

Gonzales was more than a poor steward of this trust. He was a traitor among traitors. If the rule of law is to stand, the treason he helped commit must be ended, and a patriot must take his place.

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*William Rivers Pitt is a New York Times and internationally bestselling author of two books: "War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn't Want You to Know" and "The Greatest Seditious Silence." His newest book, "House of Ill Repute: Reflections on War, Lies, and America's Ravaged Reputation," is now available from PoliPointPress.*

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