

Retrospective No. 1: "I'm Shocked, Shocked (about the Libby Commutation), Not" By Steven Jonas

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Introduction: This is the first in an occasional series that I will be running of columns that I published both on OpEdNews and other sites, that bear relevance to current events. There will be very slight, if any, editing, and contemporaneous notes in []. I wrote this one, in 2007, on the commutation by Pres. George W. Bush of the sentence that Scooter Libby received for lying and obstruction of Justice in the Valerie Plame case. The whole episode is, of course, now receiving wide publicity because President Trump has chosen to issue a full pardon to Libby. One still wonders if Libby was taking the fall for a higher-up (guess who?) just as any of the Trump lower-downs might, or might not, take the fall for him. This column was originally published on the old BuzzFlash, on July 10, 2007.

Original Column

In the famous Humphrey Bogart/Ingrid Bergman movie *Casablanca*, the character Captain Renault of the French police is famously played by Claude Rains. Upon walking into Rick's (the Humphrey Bogart character) bar near the beginning of the movie, he famously says: "I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on here!" And so, the reaction among many on all sides of the political spectrum to the Libby commutation has been: "shocked, shocked" to find that it has happened. ((How could Bush do this? After all, he has always been so strict on the question of commutations, and pardons too. It is so obviously political, or a payback, or a payoff, or a cover-up, or a bone for his "conservative" base, or he is reaching out at least halfway to Sean Hannity (who is saying that well, it's OK, but now Bush should really go and do the right [in both senses, I guess] thing and pardon the guy." [Oh my! Hannity was involved in that one too!]) Yes, it is obviously most of those things and probably all of them.

For example, on July 3, the well-known journalist and author Robert Parry said:

President Bush's decision to spare Scooter Libby from jail time represents the final step in a cover-up that began four years ago when Bush, Vice President Cheney and other top officials launched a campaign to discredit an American citizen for daring to question Bush's case for war in Iraq. . . . That criminal act was followed by lies to the public and an organized cover-up. By commuting Libby's sentence, Bush now has made sure that Libby will keep his mouth shut and that the full story will never be told."

Former Congresswoman and key Watergate impeachment protagonist Elizabeth Holtzman said:

The commutation undoes the simple application of justice. It's just one more example of how this administration believes that the president and his team can violate the law with impunity."

Larry Johnson, a former CIA intelligence analyst and State Department counter-terrorism official [not the much better-known former New York Knicks basketball player, Larry Johnson most famous for the "Four-Point Play"], who has known Valerie Plame Wilson since they trained together in 1985, said:

The commutation of Scooter Libby's prison sentence represents a tacit endorsement of the obstruction of justice perpetrated by the Bush administration as a whole. . . . The Libby get-out-of-jail card is another sign that George Bush cares nothing about the law or the security of this nation."

William Rivers Pitt, writing on Truthout on July 3, 2007, summed it all up in "Was Commuting Libby an Impeachable

Offense?"

Bush has the constitutional power to offer commutations, of course. But if this commutation was granted to Libby in order to derail a criminal investigation, if it was granted to cover up prior or ongoing criminal activities, that is itself a crime meriting the impeachment of George W. Bush."

So what else is new, folks? Paraphrasing what Cheney once famously said to Sen. Patrick Leahy on the Senate floor, this is the "F___ You" Presidency. So let us not be shocked, shocked, by anything of this sort that comes out of it. Further, just because while in granting the Libby pardon Bush went back on everything he said and did about commutations and pardons while Governor of Texas, let us not be shocked, shocked, if his policy for everybody else caught up in the U.S. criminal "justice" system remains totally unchanged. Defense lawyers around the country will be licking their chops dry before any briefs they put together based on Bush's Libby-commutation reasoning were to move him one inch away from the totally merciless and anti-establishment-of-justice stance he has consistently taken on this issue, both as Governor and President.

It only took the Republicans a couple of days before they trotted out their totally stale (except to Democratic officeholders, consultants, and pundits) "two wrongs make a right" attack-on-defense. Well, Clinton pardoned Marc Rich and, and, and. . . . (What would the Republicans do without the Clintons? Why invent them, of course.) And then it came out that Libby himself was the lawyer who plead Rich's case before Clinton. Oh my! That juicy little fact has been virtually ignored by the Republican Scream Machine, of course. As for me, I must say that I was truly shocked (yes, really) by this one. Clinton was actually doing a favor for Libby and his people, the people who had worked so hard, with great success in fact, to shackle his Presidency for 8 years. I wonder if the Clintons will ever be able to figure out who their friends are and who are their enemies. If they ever do, I will be truly shocked by that one too.