

# The Cost of a GOP Myth

By Harold Meyerson  
 Wednesday, May 16, 2007; A15

If Attorney General Alberto Gonzales clings to his job much longer, he may end up as the only remaining employee of the Justice Department. By [resigning](#) on Monday, Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty joined Gonzales's chief of staff, D. Kyle Sampson; the department's White House liaison, Monica Goodling; and Justice official Michael Battle, who oversaw the dismissal of federal prosecutors, on the list of Gonzalesites who've left the building. At this point, the number of U.S. attorneys dismissed for political reasons still exceeds the number of Justice officials who've left because of their involvement in dismissing those attorneys or dissembling about it, but the ratio is tightening.

By now, it's abundantly clear that a number of the U.S. attorneys whom Gonzales's minions sent packing didn't live up to Karl Rove's expectations in one crucial particular: They had failed to ring up convictions, or even mount prosecutions, for voter fraud. As [Dan Eggen](#) and [Amy Goldstein](#) reported in [Monday's Post](#), five of the 12 federal prosecutors either sacked or considered for sacking last year had been singled out by Rove and other administration officials for nonperformance on voter fraud. Amazingly, all five came from states -- Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Washington and Wisconsin -- where Republicans were embroiled in tight election contests.

With the home office in Washington breathing down their necks, why did these experienced prosecutors fail to bring voter fraud indictments? The crime, after all, had become a major Justice Department concern. Starting in 2002, Justice required every U.S. attorney to designate a district election officer, whose job it would be to end this epidemic of electoral fraud. These officers' attendance was required at annual training seminars, where they were taught how to investigate, prosecute and convict fraudulent voters. The statutes were adequate; the investigators were primed, well funded and raring to go.

And nothing happened. For the simple reason that when it comes to voter fraud in America, there's no there there. Voter fraud is a myth -- not an urban or rural myth, as such, but a Republican one.

As a report authored this spring by Lorraine Minnite, a political science professor at Barnard College of Columbia University, for the voter-rights program Project Vote makes unmistakably clear, the government's failure to prosecute or convict more than a handful of people for voter fraud isn't for lack of trying. Since 2002, the Justice Department's Ballot Access and Voting Integrity Initiative has, as Gonzales put it, "made enforcement of election fraud and corruption offenses a top priority." And yet between October 2002 and September 2005, just 38 cases were brought nationally, and of those, 14 ended in dismissals or acquittals, 11 in guilty pleas, and 13 in convictions. Though a Justice Department manual on election crime states that these cases "may present an easier means of obtaining convictions than do other forms of public corruption," federal attorneys have failed to rack up those convictions, for the simple reason that incidents of fraud have been few and far between.

As the Republican Myth has it, nothing is more fraught with fraud than voter-registration campaigns waged in working-class and poor neighborhoods that are largely black or Hispanic. According to the 2004 Census, 15 percent of blacks and Hispanics were registered during such campaigns; the figure for whites is just 9 percent. But of those 38 prosecutions that the Justice Department brought between 2002 and 2005, a grand total of two were for fabricating or falsifying voter registration applications. This qualifies as one of our smaller crime waves.

From Rove's perspective, however, a crackdown on voter registration campaigns in minority communities made cold electoral sense. Shortly after George W. Bush became president, Rove began to impress upon leading Republicans the importance of the nation's changing demographics -- that with the nation becoming steadily less white, Republican survival depended on winning a greater share of black and Hispanic voters. That, of course, was just one way to address the party's electoral problem. The other, in close races, was to suppress black and Hispanic turnout -- a task that would become far easier if the airwaves were buzzing with news of voter-fraud indictments. It was a task that required federal prosecutors who would indict first and ask questions later.

And thus, as has so often been the case in the Bush presidency, a government department was instructed to negate its raison d'etre. Just as consumer protection and environmental protection agencies were transformed into agencies protecting manufacturers and despoilers, so Justice -- whose imperishable glory was its role in extending the franchise to African Americans during the civil rights years -- was told that its new mission was to suppress the franchise. When you think of it, it's surprising that anyone still works there at all.

[meyersonh@washpost.com](mailto:meyersonh@washpost.com)

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

## Post a Comment

[View all comments](#) that have been posted about this article.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) | [Register](#)

Submit

Comments that include profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material will be removed from the site. Additionally, entries that are unsigned or contain "signatures" by someone other than the actual author will be removed. Finally, we will take steps to block users who violate any of our posting standards, terms of use or privacy policies or any other policies governing this site. Please review the [full rules](#) governing commentaries and discussions. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.

© 2007 The Washington Post Company



Get the Best **Value** in Broadband

**Verizon High Speed Internet**

First Month FREE

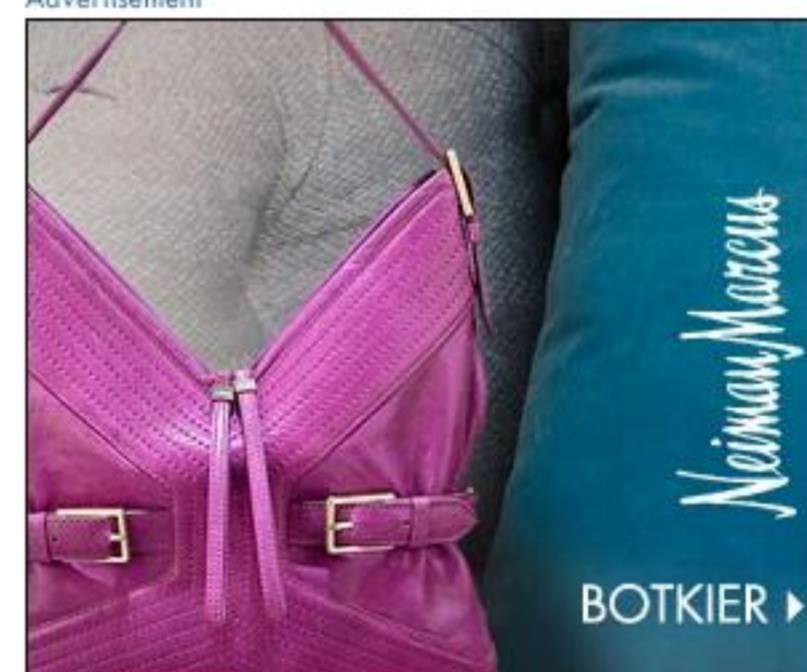
**\$12.99** per month\*

\* for months 2-6 with 1-year agreement



**Get Connected**

Advertisement



*Neiman Marcus*

**BOTKIER**

## Ads by Google

**Federal Fraud**  
 There are Huge Rewards for exposing Fraud against the U.S. Government  
[www.FederalFraud.com](http://www.FederalFraud.com)

**Drug offense in WI ?**  
 John A. Birdsall, defense attorney. Winning record. Free consultations.  
[www.Birdsall-Law.com](http://www.Birdsall-Law.com)

**George W. Bush**  
 A Presidency To Forget? 1-Minute Poll.  
[www.splashquiz.com](http://www.splashquiz.com)