

Nobel Ironies - The “Not George Bush” Prize

October 15, 2009

It seems doubly ironic that the Nobel Peace Prize Committee has given its 2009 award to Barack Obama — just a few months after Arizona State University declined to award him the customary, symbolic honorary degree as its commencement speaker. The ASU decision, on the grounds that president Obama “had not yet accomplished enough,” was fully understandable in view of the reputation which that esteemed University is committed to uphold. You don’t command a degree from ASU on academic credentials alone, or just from a decade of teaching at elite law schools. At the well-known leading party school of the Great American Southwest, participation in a requisite number of alcohol-soaked frat binges, football riots or other forms of creative anti-social behavior is de rigeur. Nothing in Barack Obama’s documentary or police record indicates that he met these essential conditions of Arizona State University honors. On the other hand, it’s difficult to see how president Obama has yet reached the stature of a Nobel Peace Prize winner either. For the most part, that award goes to figures who have either accomplished some tangible gains for human rights, or disarmament, or something - or else, as in the case of Henry Kissinger, attained the status of a truly world-class war criminal. President Obama’s Nobel award, if we can interpret the committee’s language, would seem to be mainly a “He’s Not George W. Bush Prize.” Beyond that, given that his appeal for an Israeli settlement freeze has been met with open derision, and that he’s getting ready to send thousands more troops to Afghanistan for the next two or three decades, the label of “peacemaker” doesn’t quite fit - not yet, at least. Miracles can happen, I guess. Let president Obama go on television and use his executive authority to order a ban on the importation of all products from Israeli settlements, the full disclosure of secret rendition and torture from the Clinton and GW Bush administrations, the long-overdue release of Leonard Peltier and Sami al-Arian, and for good measure the closure of Guantanamo as he promised - then we’ll have a Nobel Peace Prize winner we can believe in. David Finkel