

Op-Ed Contributor

# Damned Yankees

By ARI FLEISCHER

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IT is hard to find a bigger admirer of President George W. Bush than me. I support his policies; I believe in him; he's a really good guy to be around; and he throws a mean fastball. As his press secretary, I stood by him through thick and thin. But recent events require me to speak out about my former boss: For eight long years, President Bush put a curse on my New York Yankees.

It's not lost on me, as a lifelong Yankee fan, that the Bronx Bombers won the World Series four times during Bill Clinton's presidency, the last time in 2000. On Wednesday, they won it again — in the first year of Barack Obama's administration. Yankee success bookended the Bush presidency and that presents a problem for fans like me.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was standing in the Oval Office when the president secretly put his curse on my team. The 2000 champions paid a celebratory visit to the White House in May 2001. President Bush gathered the players in the Oval Office and was telling them what role models they were when George Steinbrenner, the team owner, suddenly tried to talk over him.

"George," Mr. Bush interjected, "not even the Boss gets to interrupt the president."

The players hooted and hollered. They had never seen anyone correct the team owner like that. They loved it.

But then terrible things started to happen. The Yankees lost a World Series heartbreaker in 2001, despite the president's prediction to me that they would win. (This came the morning after he threw out a perfect strike to open Game 3 in the Bronx.)

And for eight straight years — all of which perfectly coincided with his time in office — the Yankees didn't win.

But now order is restored in the universe. The Yankees are again World Series champions.

But a Democrat is in the White House. What are Republican Yankee fans to do?

History is not on our side. The previous eight Yankee victories took place on the Democrats' watch, during the terms of Presidents John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Under Presidents Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George H. W. and George W. Bush, the Yankees never won. The last time the Yankees won it all with a Republican in office was under Dwight Eisenhower, in 1958. Joe Girardi, the Yankee manager, hadn't even been born.

Gulp.

When it comes to divisions in America, forget about the splits in the Republican Party over social issues. Don't focus on whether Blue Dog Democrats will support health care reform.

The real split is baseball.

If you're a Democrat who wants the Yankees to lose — like the Boston Red Sox president, Larry Lucchino — you need to start voting Republican. And if you're a Yankee fan like me, well, I just can't bear to say it. ...

Ari Fleischer was the press secretary to President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2003.