

IF CONDI SAYS “NIXON” DIRECTLY RATHER THAN THROUGH ANONYMOUS SOURCES, DOES THE NYT HEAR?

Okay, I was going to make this a fuller rant tomorrow, but the last thread got to be a drag, so here's my half rant.

Best as I can tell, this was the NYT's complete coverage of Condi channeling Nixon. An "Opinionator" piece on it—that sterilizes it so much that it feels like a sorority tea.

If the words “college dorm” and “video” uttered in the same sentence make you queasy, or you've recently written a tuition check, you might want to watch the wholesome, yet compelling footage of students in a Stanford dormitory engaged in an unenhanced interrogation of the former secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice. Refreshingly, there is not a beer bong in sight.

And this reference in the Mazetti/Shane article, with neither a link to the YouTube nor a hint of her shocking statements.

Just last week, bloggers seized upon a new video clip of Condoleezza Rice, a former secretary of state, sharply defending the program to a Stanford undergraduate and saying nothing about the bitter internal arguments that accompanied the demise of the program.

And yet, the NYT devotes 1,400 words to a story that does not use one single on the record source. Here's how they justify doing so:

This is the story of its unraveling, based on interviews with more than a dozen former Bush administration officials. They insisted on anonymity because they feared being enmeshed in future investigations or public controversy, but they shed new light on the battle about the C.I.A. methods that grew passionate in Mr. Bush's second term.

Now, as I said, this story does offer some useful data points, once you wade beneath the thick ooze of spin. But that doesn't forgive the NYT's absurd news judgment here.

It's bad enough that they say, "well, there wasn't enough internal conflict in Condi's directly stated YouTube comments," so rather than covering that, we'll let a bunch of Condi's allies anonymously fluff up the story into a heroic fight against Cheney.

But then look at why their 12 anonymous sources won't go on the record: "they feared being enmeshed in future investigations or public controversy." Since they're already enmeshed in public controversy (albeit taking their potshots at Cheney while hiding behind the Gray Lady's skirts), I suspect the issue is more the second part, a fear of "being enmeshed in future investigations." These people fear legal consequences for saying, in their own names, the things they've told the NYT are true. They won't say any of this stuff on the record for fear they'll have to do so under oath.

Yeah, those are some credible sources.

Given that the sources for this story are completely identifiable—at least by faction—why in god's name did any reporter give them anonymity?

Which means, ultimately, the NYT has decided not to cover Condi saying something, in her own voice, that might well have huge legal consequences for her and the other Bushies.

Instead, they're going to let a dozen people say things they refuse to say on the record because they're trying to game the legal system. The story, for the NYT, is not the clear evidence of the crime itself, but a kabuki piece performing "conflict" to distract from the crime itself.

If Condi had said, "By definition, if it was authorized by the President, it did not violate our obligations in the Convention Against Torture," to the NYT via these same legally covering anonymous sources, then would they consider it news?