

THE BLOWJOB THAT SHALL NOT BE NAMED

Politico has a festival of stupidity on yesterday's release by Obama of his long form birth certificate. The varieties of stupid in the article include:

- Ignoring the real precedent of the blowjob that shall not be named
- Blaming birtherism on the InterToobz, and not cable TV
- Conflating correct doubts about Bush ignoring warnings about al Qaeda with 9/11 Truththerism

The central argument of the piece relies on Robert Gibbs' claim that "we've crossed some Rubicon" into a realm in which "there are no arbiters of truth." And while Politico reports Obama's advisors trace this new era to, "the decline of traditional media and the rise of viral emails and partisan Web and cable TV platforms," Politico labels this new era simply "the Internet era."

It's the hippies' fault, apparently, and not that of the traditional press (or even the cable news channels) themselves.

As a result, the argument goes, Obama faces a new challenge to rebut claims like birtherism that no one before him did.

And to sustain that claim—to sustain the claim that Obama faces something Clinton didn't, to sustain the claim that we are only newly in an "era of public life with no referee – and no common understandings between fair and unfair, between relevant and trivial, or even between facts and fantasy," Politco drones on for over 1600 words with no more than indirect allusions

to the fact that, in an era when the NYT still reigned supreme, a President was impeached over a consensual blowjob with the enthusiastic complicity of that arbiter of truth, the traditional press.

It takes some work for Politico and those it quotes to avoid mentioning that blowjob precedent. Politico muses,

It's hard to imagine Bill Clinton coming out to the White House briefing room to present evidence showing why people who thought he helped plot the murder of aide Vincent Foster— never mind official rulings of suicide — were wrong.

But it doesn't consider the discussions by very serious arbiters of truth that maybe we need to see which direction the President's penis curves to confirm or refute claims about the President's sex life. It doesn't consider that the Village cherished a certain semen-stained dress like the holy grail.

Because all that happened in an era when the press had a clear consensus about what was fair and unfair, relevant and trivial, you see.

And rather bizarrely, Politico quotes the man who might have preempted that blowjob impeachment by doing what Obama did, a man who has admitted to me publicly that he wanted to come out and say it was just a consensual blowjob between adults:

Marcy Wheeler: So, finally you get to the point where, yes, Clinton did not, was not completely forthcoming about a consensual blow job. The other thing that I think could have happened is that a lot of people said but, fundamentally what happened was a consensual blow job between consenting adults. I think it's between Bill and Hillary and Monica Lewinsky. And again, that didn't happen. So those are three things that might have short-circuited the story.

Joe Lockhart: I will say this. I spent two and a half years with great discipline not once using that phrase, and you won't get it out of me today. I think it, I agree with you, but it's just, it's a mental block. You have no idea how many times I wanted to say exactly that from behind the podium. It's just a goddamn [grimaces face]. I completely agree with that.

Yet in his extensive quotes for this story, Joe Lockhart doesn't mention the blowjob directly either.

Joe Lockhart, who was Clinton's White House press secretary, said: "You've lost the ability to starve a story to death. So what you have to do is raise the price of those who are making the charges. If Donald Trump is out there saying this, you've got to make him pay a price for throwing a bomb before too much collateral damage is done."

The days of not elevating an opponent or refraining from punching down are gone.

"You literally can't laugh anything off," Lockhart said. "There's nothing neutral in politics. It's either helping you or hurting you. You've got to make sure it's helping you or you're going to lose."

[snip]

"The political discourse is much worse now, but that's not always to the detriment of the so-called victim," [Ari Fleischer] said. "In this case, President Obama came out looking better."

Lockhart agreed, recalling some of the conservatives who tormented his boss.

"Look at the rogue's gallery of Clinton accusers," he said. "Most of them blew

themselves up.”

And Lockhart noted that even now, the most hardcore of the birthers still won't be satisfied.

“They'll probably ask for the first diaper,” he said. “They'll want to see the DNA.”

It seems to me the blowjob impeachment is proof you haven't been able to “starve a story to death” for well over a decade, long before the InterToobz purportedly ruined the consensus about fair and unfair, relevant and trivial.

The other really fascinating thing is the way the Politico strives for the false balance that is one of the culprits for this problem by claiming this has affected Democrats and Republicans equally. To do so, they conflate two claims made against Bush.

George W. Bush, likewise, was never tempted to take to the Rose Garden to deny allegations from voices on the liberal fringe who believed that he knew about the Sept. 11 attacks ahead of time and chose to let them happen.

The “fringe” accusation, of course, is that al Qaeda did not cause 9/11, the US government did; it's not a distinctly partisan accusation in the least, nor is it one that was ever treated at a level in the press like birtherism. The very mainstream accusation, however, is that George Bush received a briefing on August 6, 2001 warning that “Bin Laden determined to strike in US,” told his briefer he had covered his ass, and then continued to blow off people like Richard Clarke and George Tenet trying to do something about it. And sure, Bush didn't take the Rose Garden to deny that; he sent Condi to try to deny it to the 9/11 Commission.

Finally, there's Politico's curious treatment of the TANG scandal, which is a precedent where, like Obama, an Administration directly addressed a controversy.

Democratic professionals, meanwhile, may not have publicly embraced the controversy over alleged gaps in George W. Bush's Vietnam-era service in the National Guard, but they enjoyed it when liberal commentators waved that flag.

Not only did they address it, they succeeded in having Dan Rather fired for reporting on it.

Perhaps Obama isn't trying hard enough to force Fox to fire Roger Ailes and all the Presidential candidate-Fox hosts that validate birtherism publicly? Because that would likely end the birther controversy more effectively than releasing his birth certificate will.

And somehow also gone missing, like that blowjob that shall not be named, is the traditional media's long embrace of Swiftboaters, further proof that Presidential level figures really do need to rebut false claims early and have had to do so for years.

In any case, with its suggestion that AZ's circumcision law doesn't have direct precedent with Bill Clinton's blowjob, Politico ignores some of the real underlying causes of this problem, which has a lot more to do with a well-funded scandal industry that plays all type of press successfully, from Drudge and viral emails to the NYT, than it has to do with more recent changes in the media.