

Searching for truth in the Karl Rove story

NEW YORK, JULY 18, 2005 – How do we suss out truth from the coverage of the Karl Rove leakgate scandal in a time of deliberate obfuscation and hair-splitting, with endless ways on all sides to avoid and obscure reality?

Martin Luther King Jr. used to intone with great majesty that line from James Russell Lowell that “truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future.”

He preached on the importance of finding the truth, saying: “I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth crushed to earth will rise again!” (A line now used by the band House Of Pain as the title of an album.)

His optimism was unbowed when he spoke of “the arch of the moral universe.” He said, “it is long, but it bends toward justice. How long? Not long! For mine eyes have seen the coming of the glory of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on!”

That line from the Battle Hymn of the Republican must be invoked again because truth itself is what is contested in our political and media debates which has turned into a battleground where few on one side of our new civil war can hear or will hear what the other is saying.

As a media blogger and columnist, I have found this to be true where an assertion is often met with a “but what about?” (fill in the blank) a rhetorical device to change the subject and avoid confronting uncomfortable issues. If you don’t believe me, try discussing the Israel Palestine issue with people who hold opposing views.

The other night, an old friend refused to come to see my film WMD because he and his wife are uncomfortable with arguments they have decided in advance are left-wing.

The great Karl Rove debate is the latest case in point. From the left, the issue of the president advisor’s guilt in leaking the name of a CIA operative as a form

of political payback is a given. All that remains is his resignation leading to the President's impeachment. This protest against using the media for purposes of political retribution has led to using the media for another form of political retribution. The Houston Chronicle calls it "Rove Rage." Many progressives are convinced that the man who likes to brand others traitors is the real traitor."

Writes Frank Rich in the NY Times: "Well, of course, Karl Rove did it. He may not have violated the Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982, with its high threshold of criminality for outing a covert agent, but there's no doubt he trashed the agent, Valerie Plame, and her husband, Joseph Wilson.

On the right, this is all pictured as a tempest in a teapot with Ann Coulter denouncing – who else – Joe Wilson and his wife Valerie Plame: "By foisting their fantasies of themselves on the country," she spews." these two have instigated a massive criminal investigation, the result of which is: The only person who has demonstrably lied and possibly broken the law is Joseph Wilson.

"So the obvious solution is to fire Karl Rove."

There you have it: finger pointing galore with each side scoring points and trashing the other with nary an effort to find any common ground or get at the real issues. But both of these advocates do make insightful secondary points worth considering.

Coulter, for example, blames a tendency by some Democrats of trying to out-Bush Bush by posturing as more patriotic and more concerned with national security than their adversaries. This was the strategy of the hawks in the DLC and Kerry campaign – and it failed.

The mini-skirted marauder Coulter suggests many of them are "driven by that weird obsession liberals have of pretending they are Republicans in order to attack Republicans..."

More importantly, Rich dismisses the false ground that this whole debate is being fought on – i.e. on the question of which side is really protecting the identify of CIA undercover agents. He puts it in the political context that most of the media, the partisans and even the investigative bloggers miss.

"This case is about Iraq, not Niger. The real victims are the American people, not the Wilsons. The real culprit is not Rove but the gang that sent American sons and daughters to war on trumped-up grounds and in so doing diverted finite resources, human and otherwise, from fighting the terrorists

who attacked us on Sept. 11. That's why the stakes are so high: This scandal is about the unmasking of an ill-conceived war, not the unmasking of a CIA operative who posed for Vanity Fair."

Writing in the Christian Science Monitor, NPR's Daniel Schorr seconds the thought: "Let me remind you that the underlying issue in the Karl Rove controversy is not a leak, but a war and how America was misled into that war."

The Houston Chronicle's Michael Goodwin says we are in another war, a civil war, but of a different kind: "It's a civil war in Washington. The combatants have an eye-for-an-eye mentality. The partisanship is heated and nasty. Republicans versus Democrats? Nah. This one pits the media against the White House."

But actually the media is late to the battle, having served this Administration for so long and so well. And it, too, is divided if not incapable of really taking on the administration on the war in Iraq, which is at the unspoken center of this Modern Peyton Place horror movie starring archetypes: Bob Novak, Judy Miller, Joe Wilson and wife Valerie and, now, the real evil-doer Karl Rove.

It's a drama in which everyone shtups everyone else but in which no one can be satisfied.

Look to James Walcott in Vanity Fair to get at some transcendent truth: "It is no doubt a reductive fallacy to anthropomorphize the media – to personalize them as an individual with a quick mind, a padded ego, a shallow depth, and a professional case of A.D.D. Yet watching the news, reading the op-ed columns, and snorkeling the Internet, one gets the impression that Mr. Media – let's not kid ourselves, the media are white-middle-aged-male-dominated at the executive level – would be much happier if Iraq would resolve itself or, better yet, *go away* ... recede like Afghanistan into the hazy distance, reduced to three column inches on page A18. It's hard for cable-news networks to amp up the umpteenth American soldier killed by a roadside explosive or another bushel of Iraqi recruits blown to scatteration when it's so much juicier chasing the latest "Amber Alert" for an abducted white girl, or choppering over a tense hostage standoff."

Many of us like the arcane details of the Rove drama so much better than Iraq because the story, however confusing, is in the end "all about us." As Greg Palast puts it: "The great poison in the corpus of American journalism is the lust for tidbits of supposedly 'inside' information which is more often than not

inside misinformation parading as hot news.”

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