

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 150 – September 15, 2005

*Freedom Rider
Judith Miller and Jayson Blair
by Margaret Kimberley*

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In 2003 the New York Times faced a major scandal involving one of its reporters, Jayson Blair. Blair was caught with his pants down, so to speak. He plagiarized the work of other reporters, quoted people he had never contacted, and claimed to be in places he never visited.

The Times called the Blair mess "a low point in the 152-year history of the paper." It is indeed very bad if a reporter behaves more like a novelist, but it always seemed to me that the Times protested a little too much in the Blair case. While the Times is said to be the newspaper of record, it has had many low moments in its history.

The Times told Martin Luther King to shut up and mind his own business when he dared to speak out against the war in Vietnam. Dr. Wen Ho Lee went to jail because of the Times' hyperventilation, only to be cleared of any wrongdoing. Tons of newsprint went into reporting the Whitewater non-scandal.

The Times hasn't always lived up to its highly vaunted reputation. Today it faces a scandal involving a reporter who makes Jayson Blair look like a paragon of journalistic virtue.

Judith Miller, one of the Times' star reporters, sits in jail after refusing to name a source in a grand jury investigation. The alleged source revealed the name of CIA agent Valerie Plame, all in an effort to punish her husband, Ambassador Joe Wilson, and anyone else who revealed the Bushmen lies about Iraq.

It is bad enough if Miller is telling the truth about her silence. She isn't protecting a whistle blower. She is protecting someone who retaliated against a whistle blower.

When Miller first entered the gray bar hotel she and her bosses made her out to be a fighter for journalistic freedom, a martyr for a noble cause. As time progressed it became clear that while Miller claimed to be protecting the first amendment she may actually have been exercising her fifth amendment right against self-incrimination. Judith Miller may have been the source for the White House. Miller may have been the one who gave up Valerie Plame.

Judith Miller and her bosses at the Times are all complicit in bringing hell to the people of Iraq. They aided

and abetted the Bush administration's web of lies that convinced many Americans to support making war on a helpless people. When Judith Miller reported that a confidential source provided her with proof of the existence of WMD, already spineless members of Congress turned completely to jelly. They held their fingers in the political winds and concluded that shock and awe was a great idea after all.

Miller's so-called source on WMD was Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi darling of the neocon clique who sat next to Laura Bush during the 2003 State of the Union address. The Times has never come clean on its role in ethical and journalistic disgrace. Yet it is just one of many provocative questions raised by Miller's behavior.

When the Blair fiasco was made public, the Times disclosed each and every instance of his lies, plagiarism and dubious reporting, and rightly so. But if the New York Times can tell the world about the professional foibles of a substance abuser suffering from bipolar disease, it can certainly tell us about how it came to be a willing tool of the Bushmen and why they continue to defend Judith Miller.

The Times is faced with a growing scandal but also with an opportunity. How will the Times react when the not so noble truth about Judith Miller is revealed?

It will be interesting to see how others react too. As always happens when one black person is involved in a scandal, every black person in America was called to account because of Blair. Was Blair an affirmative action hire? Was black editor Gerald Boyd protecting him? Should black people be allowed to work in journalism? Should any of us be allowed to work anywhere at all?

No such questions have arisen because of Miller. No group that she claims affinity with will be asked to pledge loyalty, explain itself or prove that it hasn't been given some special privilege.

Of course, one can always gloat. Imagining Judith Miller in an orange jumpsuit elicits a smile from any thinking person. She could be treated as she has advocated that others be treated. Her nation is not under occupation. A bomb hasn't fallen on her house. Cooling her heels behind bars is the least she can do to bring some balance to the wheels of justice.

If Miller is treated like other lying white journalists she will do just fine when she walks out of jail. She will have no problem finding work and the corporate media will continue to defend her. If they don't they will have to tell the truth about their own complicity in feeding lies to their readers and viewers.

The press is supposed to reveal official malfeasance, not be a partner to it. The paper of record has a chance to live up to that moniker, but if recent history is any indication, that is unlikely to happen.

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