

**THE BLOG**

This Is How It Works

By Marty Kaplan

10/15/2005 07:35 pm ET | Updated May 25, 2011

If you want to see the reality-based community in action, check out this excerpt from Judy Miller's account of her Grand Jury testimony:

Mr. Fitzgerald asked about a notation I made on the first page of my notes about this July 8 meeting, "Former Hill staffer."

My recollection, I told him, was that Mr. Libby wanted to modify our prior understanding that I would attribute information from him to a "senior administration official." When the subject turned to Mr. Wilson, Mr. Libby requested that he be identified only as a "former Hill staffer." I agreed to the new ground rules because I knew that Mr. Libby had once worked on Capitol Hill.

Did Mr. Libby explain this request? Mr. Fitzgerald asked. No, I don't recall, I replied. But I said I assumed Mr. Libby did not want the White House to be seen as attacking Mr. Wilson.

So even though the White House *was* attacking Joe Wilson, Libby felt no compunction about creating his own reality, where the White House *wasn't* attacking him.

Though Judy Miller, scooped by Bob Novak, never published a piece based on this conversation, it's entirely conceivable that the Times would have run the attribution Libby requested. This is how the game works in Washington. Not to realize it, say Beltway royalty, is to be naive about high-end journalism, and to "criminalize politics."

In recent years, many papers have come up with new rules for indicating a source's motive for being unnamed. But I don't recall a guideline that would generate an accurate attribution for this case. It would need to be something like, "said a former Hill staffer, who did not want his position as Vice President Cheney's chief of staff noted because it could lead to his being indicted and undermine the administration's case for sending thousands of American troops to their death."

Maybe they should update the journalism handbooks - they could call it "the Libby rule."

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