

**THE BLOG****Woodward's Woody**

By Marty Kaplan

12/28/2006 11:15 am ET | Updated May 25, 2011

Bob sure had a big one. A hard one, too: he had it on tape. But he kept it under wraps.

Gerald Ford, who had brought Rumsfeld and Cheney to the White House, who had presided over the end of the Vietnam war, who was widely believed by journalists to be the Nicest. Guy. Ever., and who was a Republican, ferchrissakes, told Bob Woodward two-and-a-half years ago that the Iraq war had been a mistake from the git-go (let alone from the Gitmo).

A White House spokesperson — asked by CNN if President Bush had a reaction to learning that Ford had pre-posthumously ripped him a new one — said that W was “focused on grieving.”

I can see why some people might think it's odd that *Washington Post* publisher Don Graham pays Bob Woodward's heroic salary even though it's Woodward's book publisher — not Graham's paper — that benefits from Woodward's scoops.

But I can't fault Woodward for cutting himself one helluva sweet deal at the *Post*. The whole star system in journalism arguably began with Woodward and Bernstein. Before them, and Ben Bradlee, the *Post* was nowhere near the national journalistic brand name it then became. If Don Graham can justify to Post Company shareholders the ways that Woodward scoops his own paper in his books, and the ways that his interview ground rules seem to put his publishing career ahead of his day job, who am I to say?

I can also see the consequences to the country of the post-mortem embargo under which Woodward heard Ford excoriate Bush's war. Had those July 2004 comments been aired earlier, who knows what impact they might have had on the presidential election, let alone the conduct of the war?

But I don't fault the cone of silence under which Woodward heard Ford's confession. Obituary writers routinely coax their living subjects into saying things they don't want published until after their passing, and if that's the persona

Woodward put on — or maybe it was his Future Historian mask — then it wouldn't be the first time that he'd beguiled a source into singing.

The person I do fault is Ford. There was no national interest to be served by keeping his thoughts to himself. Former presidents may constitute a kind of Skull & Bones, but speaking out to try to save us from our next "long national nightmare" would have been way more patriotic than preserving the towel-snapping bonhomie of the Ex-POTUS Society.

One by one, refugees from the Bush Administration have been telling the truth about what goes on inside there. Though Colin Powell has been doing it in a particularly craven way — telling Washington intimates, off-the-record — he's been doing it nevertheless. Paul O'Neill did it. Tyler Drumheller, Lawrence Wilkerson, Pentagon whistleblowers, others whose names we didn't know before they exited: they've done it.

Why do these people wait? What does it say about Washington's code of conduct that loyalty to patrons, power and Party outweighs loyalty to truth, to country, to national security, to tens of thousands of America's finest young people, now wounded or dead?

For all we know, Condi, Tony and the rest of them may already be whispering sweet somethings into Bob's ear. It may be verbal Viagra for him. But for them, it's too late. The I-fought-it-from-the-inside tales they tell Bob, or their memoirs, or their biographers, will undo no damage they have done. Their reputations, like their conscience, are already beyond salvage.

Follow Marty Kaplan on Twitter: www.twitter.com/martykaplan



Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director