

THE PREVARICATOR* I: THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Republican Senator McCain was tortured for five years in Vietnam as a POW. Democrat Vice President Gore was a man of vision and integrity. Yet Bush managed to destroy the character of each of these men using twisted lies, setting himself up to become president by judicial appointment.

When George W. Bush announced his candidacy for president in 1999, he promised, “We will prove that someone who is conservative and compassionate can win without sacrificing principle. We will show that politics, after a time of tarnished ideals, can be higher and better. We will give our country a fresh start after a season of cynicism.”⁶¹ But did he? The truth is quite to the contrary.

Throughout the campaign, Bush misrepresented his accomplishments as governor of Texas, taking credit for things he had nothing to do with and misrepresenting the benefit of the things he did. It turns out that the tax cuts he claimed to have made really didn’t reduce the tax burden of the ordinary people; the size of government in Texas increased rather than decreased as he asserted it had; the “improvement” in student test scores was jiggered; and the quality of air in Texas got worse rather than better during his stewardship. However, these are complicated matters subject to multiple interpretations. What about basic political principles, shiny ideals, and the absence of cynicism?

“John. It’s politics.”

In 1967, while Bush Jr. was drinking himself through Yale, another son of an illustrious family was actually flying A-4E Skyhawks over North Vietnam. John McCain, whose father and

* To prevaricate—to be deliberately ambiguous or unclear in order to mislead or withhold information; to evade; equivocate; quibble; shuffle.

grandfather were four-star admirals in the Navy, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1958. McCain was shot down in 1967, and for the next 5½ years, while Bush was *using* his family's influence to avoid the draft, McCain was being tortured *because* of his family connections.

In 1973, while Lieutenant Bush was still AWOL, Captain McCain was released from prison, and for his heroism was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, Purple Heart and Distinguished Flying Cross. McCain went on to represent the people of Arizona during two terms in the House of Representatives and three terms in the U.S. Senate. Senator McCain was an outspoken opponent of wasteful government spending and an advocate for reform of the campaign finance system. He was an expert on telecommunications and aviation issues, and promoted business competition and government deregulation.⁶² A formidable candidate, Senator McCain ran in the primaries in 1999 against Bush for the Republican presidential nomination.

At the beginning of the campaign, Governor Bush and Senator McCain shook hands and promised not to run negative campaigns against each other. The promise held until McCain won the primary in New Hampshire by a wide margin, and the South Carolina primary became a must-win situation for the Bush campaign.⁶³ Bush was overheard on an open microphone speaking to South Carolina State Senator Mike Fair, who said, "Y'all haven't even hit his soft spots." Bush replied, "We're going to." And he added that he was "not going to do it on TV."⁶⁴

On another platform, Bush stood silently by while the head of the so-called "National Vietnam and Gulf War Veterans Coalition" accused McCain of having always opposed Agent Orange and Gulf War compensation measures. All of which were absolute lies. McCain actually sponsored the Agent Orange Act and testified in favor of compensation for Gulf War Syndrome veterans. Did Bush stand up and correct these malicious lies? Nope. He said, "Thank you, buddy." Even after five senators (including two Republicans) who had also fought

in Vietnam defended Senator McCain, Bush refused to apologize.⁶⁵

This diatribe was only the shot across the bow of the McCain campaign. What followed was a full broadside of nasty tactics, including spreading rumors that McCain had been brainwashed while a POW, and that he had infected his “mob-connected” wife with a venereal disease. Perhaps more effectively in the South, thousands of voters began receiving telephone calls in so-called “push polls” pioneered by Bush’s political advisor, Karl Rove. In a real live caricature of *Pinky and the Brain*, Rove has been called the “evil genius” behind Bush’s political career.* Pretending to represent a polling company, voters were asked such questions as, “If you knew that Senator McCain had fathered an illegitimate black child, would you be more likely or less likely to vote for him?” Duh! How different the result, if the voter had been asked if they were more or less likely to vote for McCain if they knew that he and his wife had adopted a dark-skinned orphan child from Bangladesh and rescued her from poverty. But the truth would not have worked nearly so well.

Perhaps Bush’s slickest trick was accusing Senator McCain, who had sponsored campaign finance reform legislation, of soliciting money from lobbyists who had special interests, and pressuring “agencies on behalf of contributors,” when in fact, lobbyists had contributed five times as much to Bush as to McCain. There was also the direct mail to Republicans accusing Senator McCain of trying to remove the anti-abortion plank from the Republican platform.⁶⁶ All lies. But it worked. Bush won the South Carolina primary 53 to 42 percent.

After it became public that Bush had given a speech at Bob Jones University (a fundamentalist Christian institution that prohibits its students from interracial dating), Bush stated that he “did denounce. I de-I denounced it. I denounced interracial dating. I denounced anti-Catholic bigacy-bigotry. ... No, I-I-I-I spoke out against interracial dating. I mean, I support inter-the policy of interracial dating.”⁶⁷ Whatever it was that he finally

*Bush Jr.’s nickname for Rove is “Turd Blossom,” because whenever he was around, something was sure to pop up.

spit out, Bush lied, because he had said nothing about the University's racist policy during his speech.⁶⁸

A remarkable quote in the *New York Times* on March 15, 2000 clearly illustrates that perceptions are far more important to Bush than the truth: "I readily concede I missed an opportunity at Bob Jones; I'd have been a hero. If I had gone down there and said, 'We're all God's children; we can receive redemption in all different kinds of ways; the Catholic religion is a great religion. Judaism is a great religion.' It's all I would have needed to have said. One sentence."⁶⁹

When McCain sponsored an ad during the Michigan primary revealing Bush's speech at the University, where it is taught that the Pope is the "anti-Christ" and the Catholic Church is a "satanic cult," Bush whined that McCain had called him "an anti-Catholic bigot."⁷⁰ True or not, that's not what the ad said.

Just before a debate in the South Carolina primary, Bush and Senator McCain stood next to each other. McCain looked sadly at Bush and shook his head, saying, "George." Bush wimped, "John. It's politics." McCain answered, "George, everything isn't politics."⁷¹

Do you think Bush ran an honest, "untarnished" campaign? Do you think the best candidate became the Republican nominee? Would you feel more secure if McCain had been elected president? You're not stupid! Get the truth.

The Goring of Gore

Once Bush was able to wrest the nomination from McCain, he turned his weapons of deception on Vice President Al Gore, the candidate of the Democratic Party. A Karl Rove poll had revealed a weakness—that voters had questions about Gore's integrity. Therefore, Bush began to say repeatedly that Gore would say anything to get elected, and the big lie of the Bush campaign became that Gore was the liar. Bush said, "I have always been concerned about Vice President Gore's willingness to exaggerate in order to become elected. ... America had better beware of a candidate who is willing to stretch reality in order to win points." The Bush campaign ran an ad accusing Gore of

“reinventing himself.”⁷² What was the truth? Who reinvented whom?

Early in the campaign, after a three-city tour of Texas, Gore was casually discussing movies late at night with several reporters aboard Air Force Two. He mentioned a story in the *Nashville Tennessean* newspaper that had apparently misquoted *Love Story* author Erich Segal as saying that Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, were the models for the lead characters in his book. When *Time* magazine carried a story about Gore and included the comment, Segal issued a correction to the effect that, while he *had* combined Gore and his college roommate, actor Tommy Lee Jones, to form the character of the male lead, the female lead was based upon someone other than Tipper.

The *Time* reporter who wrote the story later said that what Gore actually said was, “all I know is that’s what he [Segal] told reporters in Tennessee.” Was this a lie? The *Tennessean* had in fact quoted Segal (albeit wrongly) as saying that both were models for the story.⁷³ Gore did not lie, but once the snowball started rolling down the hill it sure got big before it crashed at the bottom.

During a television interview in March 1999, Gore said, “During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the Internet.” This is essentially a true statement. Gore *was* a co-sponsor of the legislation that created defensenet, a project that linked military computers and later became the Worldwide Web. In the 1980’s, after the Pentagon stopped funding a number of civilian projects that weren’t directly related to military applications, Gore *was* instrumental in arranging for the National Science Foundation to create nsfnets, which ultimately became today’s Internet.

In 1989, Gore *introduced* the National High-Performance Computer Technology Act, a five-year, \$1.7 billion program to expand the capacity of the Internet and to support research and development for an improved national computer system, and to assist colleges and libraries to connect to the new network. Speaking in 1989, Gore told a House committee, “I genuinely believe that the creation of this nationwide network will create an environment where work stations are common in homes and

even small businesses.” President Bush Sr. signed the bill in 1991. However, Republican Congressman Dick Arme \acute{y} *created* the story that Gore claimed to have “invented” the Internet. It was Arme \acute{y} ’s creative words that got picked up and misreported by the media during the 2000 campaign.⁷⁴

In November 1999, Gore was speaking to a group of high school students in Concord, New Hampshire. To encourage them to get involved, he told about a young high school girl in Toone, Tennessee, who reported a problem to him in the late 1970’s about toxic waste in her hometown. Gore had called for a congressional investigation and held hearings, and, as he told the students, “I looked around the country for other sites like that. I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal. Had the first hearing on that issue, and Toone, Tennessee—that was the one you didn’t hear of. But *that was the one that started it all.* (emphasis added)” Gore went on to say, “We passed a major national law to clean up hazardous dump sites. And we had new efforts to stop the practices that ended up poisoning water around the country. We’ve still got work to do. But we made a huge difference. And it all happened because one high school student got involved.”

All this was totally true; however, the next day in reporting the talk, the *Washington Post* ignored the context and twisted Gore’s words to ridicule him. The article said Gore had bragged in saying, “‘I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal,’ he said, referring to the Niagara homes evacuated in August 1978 because of chemical contamination. ‘I had the first hearing on this issue.’... Gore said his efforts made a lasting impact. ‘*I was the one that started it all,*’ he said. (emphasis added)”⁷⁵

The Republican National Committee seized upon the story, stating, “Al Gore is simply unbelievable—in the most literal sense of that term. ... It’s a pattern of phoniness.” The RNC then edited the *Post*’s misquotes even more to misrepresent Gore as saying, “*I was the one who started it all.* (emphasis added)” As the news media went wild over the story, the Concord students did everything in their power to correct the record, finally issuing a press release entitled, “Top 10 Reasons Why Many Concord

High Students Feel Betrayed by Some of the Media Coverage of Al Gore's Visit to their School." But who listens to children?

During the first presidential debate with Bush on October 3, 2000, Gore mistakenly mentioned that he had accompanied FEMA director James Lee Witt on a trip to Texas after major fires in the state. This was not quite true; Gore had actually traveled to Texas with one of Witt's deputies, although he had accompanied Witt on many such trips to other states. Karen Hughes, Bush's spokesperson, immediately crowed, "He made up the story." But what was the truth and what were the lies in the debate? In refusing to accept an invitation from Gore to endorse a campaign finance reform bill, Bush lied, "this man has outspent me."⁷⁶ At that point, Bush had spent more than \$121 million, more than double Gore's \$60 million.

Bush also lied in saying that "all seniors are covered under prescription drugs in my plan." However, according to Bush's website, only seniors with incomes below \$11,300 would receive full coverage. Those with incomes below \$14,600 would receive partial coverage, and those above would only receive approximately 25 percent of the premium costs for a drug plan. When Bush and Gore differed over whose plan would provide the greatest benefit to a senior earning \$25,000 a year, and when Gore seemed to be scoring points for accuracy, Bush took a cheap shot saying Gore "is a man who's got great numbers. He talks about numbers. I'm beginning to think not only did he invent the Internet but he invented the calculator."⁷⁷

In the second debate on October 11, 2000, Bush claimed that with his tax plan, "by far the vast majority of the help goes to the people at the bottom end of the economic ladder." Actually, under the proposed plan, the bottom half of the economic "ladder," those earning less than \$40,000, would only get ten percent of the tax cut. If Bush's proposed elimination of the estate tax were figured in, less than 13 percent would go to the bottom 60 percent, and 51 percent would go to the top five percent of the households.⁷⁸

Was Bush successful in his attack on Gore's credibility? As they say, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." Voters were asked in exit polling "Which one candidate quality

mattered most in deciding how you voted?" The most frequent answer, by 24 percent of voters, was "honesty." Of those, 80 percent said they voted for Bush; only 15 percent voted for Gore.⁷⁹ Go figure? Beginning to see the light? You're not stupid! Get the truth.

61. Corn, op. cit., pp. 12, 13.

62. "Senator John McCain Biography,"
www.vietnamwar.com/JohnMcCainBio.html.

63. Corn, op. cit., p. 33.

64. Moore, op. cit., p. 257.

65. Corn, op. cit., p. 34.

66. Ibid., pp. 35, 36.

67. Miller, op. cit., p. 189.

68. Corn, op. cit., pp. 36, 37.

69. Miller, op. cit., p. 248.

70. Corn, op. cit., p. 37.

71. Moore, op. cit., p. 257.

72. Corn, op. cit., pp. 38, 46.

73. Franken, op. cit., p. 41.

74. "Did Al Gore Invent the Internet?" August 18, 2000,
<http://www.issues2000.org/askme>.

75. "A Chronology of Media and GOP Distortions Re Gore's
Love Canal Statement," GoreWatch.net 2000,
<http://www.bushwatch.com/goremarch>.

76. Miller, op. cit., p. 163.

77. Corn, op. cit., p. 49.

78. Ibid., p. 40.

79. Ibid., p. 52.