

Camp*aign Response

May 3, 2009

Re: May 2, 2009, New York Times OPED, "How Character Corrodes," (full text on p.2)

Dear Ms. Doud,

Thank you for your words. I have a keen interest in the "corrosion of character," particularly as it pertains to character formation in youngsters. As you inadvertently pointed out, degradation of character often stems from one's wish to keep a job, feed a family and safeguard a pension. We both understand the impetus for Rice's remarks. Every person, institution, and even religious organization is subject to, and eroded by, the same principle, the second law of thermodynamics: All things tend toward chaos and disorder. We should not be surprised.

There is, however, a different type of values-corrosion that results, not from abandoning principles, but from never having learned them. Call it "trickle-up" erosion. It begins when neurologically soft-wired youngsters, by the tens-of-thousands, are led to believe that lying is fine, hurting others is natural, having things is an entitlement, and indolence is actually a career option.

If you care to imagine the cumulative effects of such character-omission, simply stop for a moment and smell "the roses." Consider today's record-levels of classroom chaos, drop outs, schools shootings, and acts of violence among American youth. Consider that now, one in every 100 adults is behind bars, here in "the land of the free." Wait: that odor – it's not roses.

Yes, it's sad to see public institutions rust before our very eyes: sad, but not surprising. However, it is absolutely frightening to stand by and watch as an entire army of youth, rusted well before their time, begins moving into positions of leadership in our country.

This, we can – and we must – do something about! The future of our nation is at stake.

All good wishes,



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The New York Times

Op-Ed Columnist

How Character Corrodes

By MAUREEN DOUD, Published: May 2, 2009

How quaint.

The Republicans are concerned about checks and balances.

The specter of Specter helping the president have his way with Congress has actually made conservatives remember why they respected the Constitution in the first place. Senator Mitch McConnell, the leader of the shrinking Republican minority, fretted that there was a “threat to the country” and wondered if people would want the majority to rule “without a check or a balance.”

Senator John Thune worried that Democrats would run “roughshod” and argued that Americans wanted checks and balances. Senator Judd Gregg mourned that “there’s no checks and balances on this massive expansion on the size of government.”

Bill Kristol, the editor of *The Weekly Standard*, tried to put the best face on it, noting, “This will make it easier for G.O.P. candidates in 2010 to ask to be elected to help restore some checks and balances in Washington.”

This is quite touching, given that the start of the 21st century will be remembered as the harrowing era when an arrogant Republican administration did its best to undermine checks and balances. (Maybe when your reign begins with *Bush v. Gore*, a Supreme heist that kissed off checks and balances, you feel no need to follow the founding fathers’ lead.)

After so many years of watching a White House upend laws, I now listen raptly when President Obama plays the constitutional law professor. He was asked at his news conference Wednesday night about the Republican fear that he will “ride roughshod over any opposition” and establish one-party rule.

“I’ve got Democrats who don’t agree with me on everything,” he said. “And that’s how it should be. Congress is a coequal branch of government.” You almost thought the professor in chief was going to ask the assembled students to please turn to page 317 in their *Con Law* book.

He went on to reassure Republicans that his vision of the presidency is very different from the imperial view held by the Boy Emperor and his regents.

“I do think that, to my Republican friends, I want them to realize that me reaching out to them has been genuine,” the president said, adding, “The majority will probably be determinative when it comes to resolving just hard-core differences that we can’t resolve, but there is a whole host of other areas where we can work together” and “make progress.”

The officials who actually represented a threat to the country while they were running the country are continuing to defend themselves. But they just end up further implicating themselves.

Condi Rice, who plans to go back to being a professor of political science at Stanford, got grilled by a student at a reception at a dorm there on Monday.

I've often wondered why students haven't been more vocal in questioning the architects of the Iraq war and "legal" torture who landed plum spots at prestigious universities. Probably because it would have taken the draft, like the guillotine, to concentrate the mind. But finally, the young man at Stanford spoke up. Saying he had read that Ms. Rice authorized waterboarding, he asked her, "Is waterboarding torture?"

She replied: "The president instructed us that nothing we would do would be outside of our obligations, legal obligations, under the Convention Against Torture. So that's — and by the way, I didn't authorize anything. I conveyed the authorization of the administration to the agency."

This was precisely Condi's problem. She simply relayed. She never stood up against Cheney and Rummy for either what was morally right or what was smart in terms of our national security.

The student pressed again about whether waterboarding was torture.

"By definition, if it was authorized by the president, it did not violate our obligations under the Conventions Against Torture," Ms. Rice said, almost quoting Nixon's logic: "When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal."

She also stressed that, "Unless you were there in a position of responsibility after Sept. 11, you cannot possibly imagine the dilemmas that you faced in trying to protect Americans."

Reyna Garcia, a Stanford sophomore who videotaped the exchange, said of Condi's aria, "I wasn't completely satisfied with her answers, to be honest," adding that "President Obama went ahead and called it torture and she did everything she could not to do that."

As Mr. Obama said in his news conference, it is in moments of crisis that a country must cleave to its principles. Asserting that "waterboarding violates our ideals," he said he had been struck by an article describing how Churchill would not torture prisoners even when "London was being bombed to smithereens."

"And the reason was that Churchill understood, you start taking shortcuts and over time, that corrodes what's best in a people," he said. "It corrodes the character of a country."

Class dismissed.