

Consider the Source

by Max Schulz

"I Don't Believe the Post!" is a bumper sticker occasionally spied on the cars of Washingtonians who refuse to buy into the city's prevailing orthodoxy. The *Washington Post* has played handmaiden to Washington's liberal, pro-government establishment for decades, and right-thinking types under siege in the capital have long resented the paper's flagrant political biases.

The Senate's ascending Majority Leader, Tom Daschle (D-SD), made a similar assertion this Sunday on ["Meet the Press."](#) He admonished Tim Russert to "consider the source" when Russert mentioned a newspaper report that Sen. Robert "The Torch" Torricelli (D-NJ) would be indicted.

"The source is federal investigators," Russert snapped back.

"Well, that's what they say," Daschle replied. "I really question whether that is the source. I don't trust the ... *Post*."

Oh, don't worry, Katharine Graham, Sen. Daschle wasn't calling your child ugly. It was the *New York Post* that Daschle was trashing. That *Post* is owned by Australian-turned-American press baron Rupert Murdoch, a man who routinely elicits reactions on the left ranging from contempt to disgust.

Despising Murdoch is required for membership in respectable circles, and Daschle was playing into this hatred for Murdoch to escape being grilled about an ethically challenged sheep in the flock he leads.

It was rich political theater seeing Daschle heap scorn on the *New York Post*. The *Post* is both entertaining and informative, two things Daschle is not. Anyone able to stay awake during his conversation with Russert was treated to a somnolent performance riddled with distortions, hypocrisy, and half-truths. Only as masterful a pol as Daschle could make dissembling seem so boring.

The "right people" turn their noses up at Murdoch's *Post*, which they view as the low-rent tabloid neighbor biting at the ankles of the esteemed *New York Times*. The *Columbia Journalism Review*, a rag almost as tedious as Daschle, once called the paper "a force for evil." Junior Leaguers are told by their mothers, "One just doesn't read the *New York Post*, dahling."

And to an extent they are right. The paper is lowbrow, as are many of its

readers. The story is often told of the time Murdoch suggested that Bloomingdale's Department Stores buy advertising in the *Post*. The suggestion was torpedoed quickly. "Rupert," a Bloomie's exec told him, "your readers are our shoplifters!"

The *Post* is sensationalistic, and it is fun. "HEADLESS BODY IN TOPLESS BAR" is the best-known *Post* headline. Every week there seems to be at least one about "Wacko Jacko," a.k.a. Michael Jackson. And when baseball legend Roger Maris died in 1985, the *Post* front page read, "TRADED TO THE ANGELS."

The paper is also usually fiercely patriotic. Every Memorial Day, for instance, the editorial page reprints the stirring St. Crispin's Day speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. No such sappy patriotism will ever be found in the pages of the *New York Times*.

For all the World War III headlines, flag waving, and celebrity news (it can always be counted on with the latest in the long running Puff Daddy/J-Lo saga), however, the *Post* actually practices some serious journalism. Deborah Orin and Brian Blomquist are reporters of the first stripe (Blomquist was the author of the [story](#) Daschle tried to discredit on "Meet the Press"), and they routinely scoop the *Times* and the *Washington Post* on important topics.

But to hear the Tom Daschles of the world tell it, the *New York Post* might as well be the *Weekly World News*. After all, the *New York Post* is a tabloid, isn't it? So no matter that the *Post* nailed the story about the feds' plan to extinguish the Torch. If it's in the *Post*, it simply cannot be trusted.

This misguided way of thinking has become more and more exposed in recent years with the rise of new media such as the Internet and talk radio. News is news, regardless of who breaks it. This flies in the face of the time-honored tradition holding that news is news only when the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* say it is. What's the point of being the gatekeepers of journalism when anyone with a microphone or an Internet connection can scale the walls?

It's not just the *Post*, belittled as it is by the media establishment. Nontraditional news sources have broken a number of hot news stories in recent years, from Monica Lewinsky (Matt Drudge) to would-be House Speaker Bob Livingston (*Hustler's* Larry Flynt) to Henry Hyde's and Dan Burton's infidelities (*Salon.com*) to Jesse Jackson's love child (*National Enquirer*). Many of these stories are unquestionably unsavory. But they *are* bona fide news stories. And there are legitimate questions about whether they would ever have come to

light if we only relied on the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* magazine.

All of which renders Tom Daschle's dig at the *New York Post* preposterous. If something is reported in the *New York Post*, goes his argument, it should not be trusted, or even believed. If only that were the case, considering this sentence about the Jim Jeffords switch published just last week in the *New York Post*: "The maverick, liberal-leaning Republican from Vermont plans on becoming an independent -- but will side with Democrats in the Senate, making Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota the new majority leader."

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(Posted 5/29/01)