

DEBATE PREDICTION: SCHIEFFER RAISES AYERS

✖ In tonight's debate, will McCain have to choose to retain his manhood (by raising Bill Ayers, as he has promised to do), or his honor (by pretending to be above the vile insinuations his campaign has resorted to)? I predict, with Bob Schieffer's help, he won't have to make that choice.

I predict Bob Schieffer will direct Obama to speak about Bill Ayers, thereby resolving McCain's dilemma of whether or not he should raise it himself.

You see, in spite of the right wing worries that Gwen Ifill would throw the debate to make sure her new book sold tons, and in spite of real concerns that the guy who was NBC's special liaison to the McCain campaign was moderating a debate, the moderator with the real objectivity problem is Bob Schieffer.

Schieffer loves McCain. More specifically, Schieffer is in love with—and still propagates—the myth that McCain is a man of honor above the fray of Washington politics.

Schieffer has consistently bought McCain's most outrageous baloney—most recently his claim that he had suspended his campaign, for example, or that Sarah Palin had opposed the Bridge to Nowhere.

But the most instructive example, I think, is the way Schieffer let McCain off the hook for having had two of his convention speakers attack Obama for serving as a community organizer, even while setting up McCain to talk about what an exceptional man he is.

SCHIEFFER: We heard Rudy Giuliani talk about Barack Obama being a community organizer, and he sort of did it in a

sort of denigrating way.

Sen. McCain: Mm-hmm.

Schieffer: And the audience sort of giggled when he said that. And then we heard Governor Palin talk about being a mayor, and she said, "That's being a community organizer with responsibilities." You know, I know a lot of people who think being a community organizer's a pretty good thing to do. I know in your speech, at the end, one of the parts that I liked most was when you called on Americans, "If you want to make things better, enlist in the military, teach, help somebody that's hungry." **Why would they** use that term in that way?

Sen. McCain: I think, Bob, first of all, I meant every word of my speech, that people who serve causes greater than themselves are the happiest in the world. And you and I have known some very wealthy people that aren't very happy.

Schieffer: Mm-hmm.

Sen. McCain: And we've known some people who are out there every day helping others who are the happiest. So I admire and respect all public service. **I think what happened was it was a reaction to the Obama campaign saying and denigrating the fact that she had been mayor of a small town.** Now, that was an attack that immediately was launched against her, which I—obviously, the fact that she's most popular governor and knows more about energy than anyone else in America at that level, in my view. But, so I think it was a reaction to the denigration of her role as mayor. But I know that she shares my respect for all people and appreciation for all people who are—serve their community and their

nation. And as you know, she's got a son who's doing that.

SCHIEFFER: **So you do not think that it's a negative that Barack Obama was a community organizer?**

Sen. McCAIN: I do not. I do not think it's a negative. **I think it's very honorable. I do know that he never took on his party on any major issue from the time he came up in the Chicago political arena to the time he—the short time he was in the Senate.** He never took on his party on a single major issue. I've taken them on a lot.

SCHIEFFER: **Is that why you said that you're the one who can change, and that he's just sort of not up to it?** [my emphasis]

On an issue with similar stakes and themes to the McCain campaign's race-baiting, Schieffer stopped well short of holding McCain responsible for the ugliness propagated by his campaign. Not only did Schieffer allow McCain to excuse Palin's and Rudy's ugliness, but he let McCain claim his own beliefs were unrelated to what got said at the Convention. And then, as McCain used the discussion to pivot into an attack on Obama, Schieffer magnified McCain's attack by asserting, as if it were McCain's argument and not Schieffer's, that Obama's just not up to being President. "Here, McCain," Schieffer seems to be saying, "here are the words you need to successfully pivot from a real stain on your own honor to an attack on your opponent's."

In short, Schieffer collaborated with McCain to turn what should reflect badly on McCain directly into an attack on his opponent.

Aside from the stakes for McCain of this debate, the biggest drama will be whether McCain fulfills his promise to make insinuations about Ayers to Obama's face, or whether he will instead choose to forgo the kind of smears that

are inciting violent outbursts. It's a drama pitting McCain's manhood against his vaunted honor.

But I'm guessing Schieffer won't let McCain make that choice—I'm guessing Schieffer will ask Obama about Ayers himself.

Update: Great minds think alike.

Crooks and Liars

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