

IT'S SAFER WHEN YOU DON'T LET THE PRESIDENT REFLECT FOR HIMSELF

I am very very grateful that Ryan Grim exposed Bush as a plagiarist on Thursday.

When Crown Publishing inked a deal with George W. Bush for his memoirs, the publisher knew it wasn't getting Faulkner. But the book, at least, promises "gripping, never-before-heard detail" about the former president's key decisions, offering to bring readers "aboard Air Force One on 9/11, in the hours after America's most devastating attack since Pearl Harbor; at the head of the table in the Situation Room in the moments before launching the war in Iraq," and other undisclosed and weighty locations.

Crown also got a mash-up of worn-out anecdotes from previously published memoirs written by his subordinates, from which Bush lifts quotes word for word, passing them off as his own recollections. He took equal license in lifting from nonfiction books about his presidency or newspaper or magazine articles from the time. Far from shedding light on how the president approached the crucial "decision points" of his presidency, the clip jobs illuminate something shallower and less surprising about Bush's character: He's too lazy to write his own memoir.

You see, I was traveling yesterday, and had almost prepared myself to pay full price for Bush's memoir so I could do a close reading of the Iraq intelligence, torture, and illegal

wiretapping bits. But Ryan's piece gave me a convenient excuse to put that off until I can get the book for a dollar or so online. After all, if I want to read what Bush's memoir says, I can just go re-read Woodward, right?

But I'm curious whether there's another reason than the one Ryan suggests—laziness—that explains Bush's plagiarism.

For some of the sections that appear to be lifted, is it possible that Bush plagiarized the existing carefully crafted narrative of an event to make sure his "memoir" matched that narrative? After all, Karen Hughes and others did a lot of work on those narratives in the first go-around, so why not lift them?

And for passages such as the following one that Ryan suggests may have been lifted, that may be more important given the underlying legal issues.

From *Decision Points*, p. 105: "In one of our final meetings, I informed Dick that I would not issue a pardon. He stared at me with an intense look. 'I can't believe you are going to leave a soldier on the battlefield,' he said. The comment stung. In eight years, I had never seen Dick like this, or even close to this."

Or did Bush pull this from Time magazine, "Legacy Fight: Inside Bush and Cheney's Final Days," July 24, 2009: "A day later, Cheney gave an interview to a conservative magazine, saying he disagreed with the President's decision on the Libby pardon. Other Libby backers were quoted in the article, calling Bush 'dishonorable' and saying he had left a soldier on the battlefield, language Cheney had used throughout the debate over the pardon."

After all, the decision not to pardon Libby was made after consulting with his personal defense

lawyer, so I imagine Bush wants to get this one right.

Now, granted, Bush admitted to war crimes in his book, so he did exhibit a general lack of caution in his presentation of some of the touchy legal issues dealt with in the book. But unlike Cheney (who has explicitly said that the statute of limitations will have expired on some of the crimes he'll describe in his upcoming memoir), Bush may well need to finesse these issues.