

An Ode to Bill Rice

Rumors of Bill Rice's demise were not much exaggerated. It is a fact that Washington's premier political junkie has ceased to be a member in good standing of the Blackberry Administration.

In a fit of cost cutting, the city eliminated Rice's position as the Persuasive Indirection Officer (PIO) at the Office of Property Mismanagement (OPM). In the future, reporters will have to pester Sean Madigan at the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Promoting Egregious Deals (ODMPED) for information on the fate of the Old Naval Hospital or the renovation of Eastern Market.

The relationship between journalists and government spokespeople such as Rice, oft referred to as "Flaks," resembles nothing so much as a dysfunctional marriage. A good journalist, much like the stereotypical jealous spouse, obsessively checks whether his friendly Flak is cheating on him by spinning the news or deliberately ducking until his deadline has long since passed. Simultaneously, the Flak works the press to shape the news to his masters' needs, alternatively whispering seductive hints or dispatching press releases to the farthest corners of cyberspace.

Rice was the master of his trade. Beloved by reporters for his wit and deep knowledge of the arcane intricacies of District politics, he served as a member of the Fourth Estate and as a perennial political candidate. An ever-present face at local functions, Rice was known as raconteur.

The Nose himself walks in the delicate shoeprints left by Rice's tasseled loafers during his famous dalliance with Ken Cummings at Washington City Paper.

Now that Rice has been stripped of his flak jacket, The Nose and many of his journalistic brethren will no doubt be dusting off their mourning jackets in preparation for a truly Irish wake.

Dear Readers, let your imagination take you to the now smokeless backroom of the Hawk'n'Dove. There gather the elite of Washington's local press corps to pay tribute to Bill Rice.

With his graceful baritone (Think "Oklahoma!"), Tom Sherwood takes the lead singing:

*Poor Bill is dead
Poor Bill Rice is dead
All gather 'round his coffin now and cry
He had a heart of gold
And he wasn't very bold
Oh why did such a feller have to lie?*

*Poor Bill is dead
Poor Bill Rice is dead
He's lookin' oh so peaceful and serene
(with Mark Segraves chiming in) and serene
His bike's laid out to rest
A broken Blackberry on his chest
His e-mail box has never been so clean*

Then, Mark Plotkin stands up to say,
*Folks, we are gathered here to morn and groan
over our brother, Bill Rice, ex-member of our
vast and quickly dwindling fraternity, whose
position as Flak at the Office of Property Mis-
management (OPM) was the victim of an er-
rant Blackberry budgetary axe.*

After weepin' an' wailin' from the attending reporters, Plotkin continues,

*Bill was the most misunderstood Flak in the
District of Columbia. Reporters claimed that no
man could say so much and mean so little – es-
pecially when he called them the morning after
the deadline passed. But, as much as Bill might
shade the truth in the Name of a Higher Author-
ity, there has never been a Flak that so loved The
News and bicycled so many of the streets of this
fair metropolis.*

When asked about his termination, Rice, quite predictably, had no comment.

A Kinder, Gentler Chancellor?

Just when The Nose thought up the perfect Wizard of Oz tune to characterize the DC Public School's Michelle Rhee (Think monkeys flying in the direction of California!), the chancellor quashed an entire column by unleashing a charm offensive. How rude!

In her end-of-the-year letter to teachers, Rhee swapped her trademark broom for effusive praise. Then, like Mohammed, she trekked to the Wilson Building mending fences with Chair Vincent C. Gray and others on the council in a largely successful effort to preserve her budget from the legislative axe.

Having secured her money, Rhee quickly returned to her bad old ways. In June, according to WaPo, she retrieved her broom and swept out fully 7 percent of her instructional workforce, nearly a third of which were tenured teachers.

The return of "Red Queen" Rhee delights The Nose. After all, what's so funny about peace, love and understanding?

It Takes a Mayor to Build a Market

In 100 years, when some poor soul is tasked with writing the tortured history of the Blackberry Administration, the Eastern Market will likely warrant its own chapter. In an example of efficiency seldom witnessed in municipal governance, the city successfully rebuilt this DC institution in a record 26 months. While many were involved in this rare example of public-private partnership, none of this would have been possible but for the determined political leadership of Mayor Adrian Fenty.

Perhaps Market Lunch's famous Blue Bucks need to be renamed Blackberry Cakes in his honor.

Have a tidbit for The Nose? E-mail thenose@billrag.com. ★



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