



## Why Rand Paul's plagiarism matters

By: Mitchell Blatt – November 15, 2013

Sen. Rand Paul's (R-Ky.) pathetic excuses for plagiarizing content in his speeches and book show that either he has no shame, or he has no concept of what plagiarism is and why it is wrong. Either way, it's a serious problem, and Paul needs to take responsibility for it rather than continuing to attack those who simply reported the truth, as when he called MSNBC host Rachel Maddow a "hater."

In an interview with Fusion.net shortly after Maddow caught him lifting from the Wikipedia page about the movie *Gattaca*, Paul said, "I gave credit to the people who wrote the movie." Missing from his statement is that Paul never gave credit to Wikipedia, from which he took language directly. No one ever accused him of plagiarizing the movie.

It gets worse. BuzzFeed reported (ironically, some would say) that in his book *Government Bullies*, Paul used the direct wording from a 2003 Heritage Foundation case study, 1,318 words in all, to fill three pages of his book, with only slight modifications. He didn't put the report's text inside quotation marks. He didn't even write, "According to the Heritage Foundation..." He just put an endnote at the end of the book citing the study.

That is not how end notes are supposed to be used. An end note cites information. It doesn't mean that you can lift the text.

If Paul thinks that is a trivial distinction, he's going to have another think coming when he runs for president. In the 1988 presidential campaign, it was just this kind of plagiarism that sunk Joe Biden. Among the many charges of plagiarism against Biden that year, one was about a paper he wrote in his first year of law school. In that paper, Biden pulled text from a *Fordham Law Review* article and included a single footnote citing the source. After getting caught, he failed the class, and that story, along with stories about his plagiarism of British Labour Party politician Neil Kinnock, caused him to withdraw from the campaign.

As a professional writer, it is important to me that people understand why the plagiarism of Paul and others is a serious crime. Citing information from a source is fine. It's part of writing. But when you express an idea, you need to do so in your own words. To steal the words themselves from someone else is theft.

It is telling that one of the sources of Paul's stolen content was Wikipedia, a free crowd-sourced online encyclopedia. Joe Biden proves that you don't need the Internet to plagiarize, yet the Internet has greatly devalued the written word and made plagiarism much easier. Bloggers think they have free reign to copy and paste from a news article. Photos, as BuzzFeed's publishing model illustrates, are published with blatant disregard for copyright protections. What is lost on many is the fact that words and images

are the creation of people—and those people deserve compensation for their work creating things just like Paul deserves compensation for his work shutting down the government.

It requires a lot less effort to take someone else's work, copy it almost word-for-word, and pass it off as your own than it does to search for information and espouse on it yourself. That is probably why Paul, or his writers, chose the former path for compiling his book and speeches.

The Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, another think tank from which he copied, have decided not to make a fuss about it. "We don't care," a Heritage spokesman told BuzzFeed.

But the issue isn't whether or not Heritage cares. Plagiarism is unethical in any case. In the first place, Paul didn't even ask Heritage whether or not they were okay with him plagiarizing beforehand. It's good to know that he gets permission after the fact.

Moreover, Paul hasn't asked the public for permission to lie to us. When you write a book with your name on it, you are representing that the work inside the book is your own. Paul seems to have a track record of wanting to get credit for other people's work in order to inflate his own personal image.