

A little outrage for the children?

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O.K., you guys over there on 15th Street, if you sleep through this one, too, you ought to go back to Dubuque to sell shoes.

When last we left those wonderful folks at The Post, they were explaining that the way to cover the Great Summer Sex Scandal, starring Craig Spence and a cast of frightened dozens, was to tell their readers that actually there's no story there.

"The Bombshell That Didn't Explode" is the way Eleanor Randolph, the O.P. media critic, described on Aug. 1 the story that everybody in town has been talking about since the story broke here June 29. The Wall Street Journal even did a story about how The Times had got the best of The Post.

"Journalists have been left debating whether The Times published a blockbuster or a 'blockbluster,'" she wrote. The second 'l' in "blockbluster" was supposed to be the equivalent of a nudge and a wink from the classy Miss Randolph.

Leonard Downie Jr., the managing editor at The Post, stroked his chin whiskers, put on his wise-old-owl look, and told her: ". . . we [had] already reported about this raid and we wondered what more there was in this story that we would want to publish." What he didn't say, but what his readers could only conclude, was that he couldn't get anybody to find out. So he just wondered.

The usual suspects were brought in to help. Jack Nelson of the Los Angeles Times conceded that his newspaper defers to The Post and The New York Times to decide what's news in Washington, and said he sent reporters out to see whether there was a story and they couldn't find anything.

Howell Raines of The New York Times seemed, as usual, a bit dazed by it all. He agreed there was "obviously some kind of investigation going on," but danged if he could figure out what it was about. He said he would wait, as befits a proper New York Timesman, to see whether there was anything in the story about "public policy." (He ought to think a little faster, since he's keeping Mr. Nelson's California readers waiting.)

"Other reporters around Washington said they were interested in pursuing the story but decided against it when they checked with the Secret Service and other investigative agencies and were told the raid was relatively routine."

Alas, she's probably right. **That's the energy and curiosity level of a lot of Washington reporters. They get a press flack's lie and that satisfies them.**

Fortunately for the community, that doesn't satisfy The Times, and in particular it doesn't satisfy Paul Rodriguez and George Archibald, the two reporters whose work is arrayed across the top of Page One this morning.

Despite the lady-like grunting and straining by Miss Randolph, seeking to explain why The Post never considered this a story, her editors have in fact tried to keep the story in sight. They ran not once but twice a story on the White House guard's accepting a gold watch from Craig Spence. Despite The Post's disdainful insistence that the story is merely about a commonplace local prostitution ring, its editors devoted 60 inches of newsprint to profile Henry Vinson, the "madame" of the ring. Despite scoffing at the importance of mid-level White House figures, as named in The Times' coverage, they ran a fanciful front-page story, citing unnamed

sources (one of whom is said to be John Belushi, interviewed by Bob Woodward at Forest Lawn) about Fawn Hall, a mere secretary at the White House, who was supposed to be snorting coke.

But not to be too hard on Miss Randolph, who was only doing what she was told, and whose heart may not be in the debunking, anyway. Her husband, Peter Pringle, a reporter for the London Independent, has written several stories about the call boy scandal, with none of The Post's pouting skepticism.

Now, with this morning's disclosures, a little domestic harmony can descend on the Pringle/Randolph breakfast table. "The bombshell" has exploded at the seat of Ben Bradlee's pants.

This morning's accounts show the male prostitution ring to have reached into Congress, the White House and a public elementary school. The disclosures about Barney Frank won't surprise many of us. But unless this city, the Congress, the journalists who live here, and the U.S. attorney's office have lost the last vestige of public and private decency, **we can expect a little outrage in behalf of our children.**

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