

New York Times assesses Andrew Breitbart's career

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By Jonathan Tilove, The Times-Picayune

WASHINGTON - Sunday saw a 2600-word assessment on the front cover of The New York Times Sunday Styles section of the **life of the late Andrew Breitbart**, "The Provocateur," best known for his role in bringing down the community organization **ACORN**. "Mr. Breitbart, as much as anyone, turned the Web into an assault rifle," writes David Carr, a media reporter for The Times. "Through a carefully managed release of clips from Mr. (James) O'Keefe, the undercover conservative operative, he brought down Acorn, a huge nonprofit that found itself summarily defunded by Congress after its representatives appeared to offer help to Mr. O'Keefe and a colleague when they showed up posing as a pimp and a prostitute."



The Associated Press Andrew Breitbart

But even as Carr was offering a critical yet ultimately affectionate accounting of Breitbart, ACORN Founder Wade Rathke, a New Orleanian, was **engaged in an on-line book salon** on the left-wing site Firedoglake, in which he said that ACORN's fall also had something to do with the fact that the former community organizer that ACORN helped put in the White House, **Barack Obama**, didn't have its back and buckled under the pressure mounted by Breitbart and O'Keefe.

Rathke, who had relinquished the ACORN helm before the controversy, noted, that, "having left in mid-2008 I was pretty much watching from the outside for two years until the existing management and leadership felt they were forced to pull the plug. My best guess, knowing and having worked with some many of them for decades, is that they must have been under terrible and excruciating pressure, and not been able to see a way out, or were just beaten down and exhausted and couldn't imagine ever getting to the other side."

Rathke went on, in the conversation moderated by John Atlas, author of a sympathetic history of ACORN, "**Seeds of Change**," to explain that, "part of it may have been, as John mentions, and I have speculated, that they were disoriented a bit by the Obama victory, the fact that he had been a community organizer, and that the organization had taken way too many for the team in registering new voters in record numbers for the 2008 election."

"I'm not saying they thought they were going to be sleeping in the Lincoln bedroom, but unlike an old, cynical street organizer like myself, they may have thought unrealistically that they would have some access and some input," said Rathke. "When Obama turned tail and ran from them in the election and then threw them under the bus on the video ... I think that sucked the soul out of some of the folks who had strategized a new role for ACORN and its members from his presidency. That was clearly never going to happen anyway, but to the degree some were betting heavily on that as a way to pull out of the spiral, it was clearly not going to occur."

Said Rathke: "Had I been there, perhaps foolishly, I would have simply hunkered down with the membership and kept going, which is what I did with all of the organizations where I was working throughout this terrible period. I think that was a choice too many were too tired and beaten and disappointed to be able to make. Instead they hoped that by saving a few of the pieces they might create some space in some cities around the country, and that's the strategy they have pursued with uneven results, but certainly my huge hope and wishes for success."

Said Atlas: "When ACORN was under attack most of the leaders of left and liberal foundations fled to the hills rather than defend ACORN. Afraid of losing funding or being attacked by the right, they, at best, gave lip service in their defense of ACORN."

In the conversation, Atlas took note of Sunday's New York Times piece on Breitbart.

"The NY Times today had yet another article focusing on one of the activists who helped destroy ACORN's reputation with trickery and deceit. This time it was Andrew Breitbart. Of course what the story wrote about ACORN was wrong," said Atlas. "I don't think the Times ever did a profile of you. The Times has not done a story on what actually happened to ACORN. Why do you think that's so? And how do you feel when the Times kind of glorify an evil bully like Andrew Breitbart but basically refuses to do a post-Obama-election-ACORN-story that accurately portrays what ACORN was and what happened?"

Replied Rathke: "I wouldn't be holding out any hope of the Times getting the story right at this point. As you know better than most, they got caught in a web of rationalizations with their former Public Editor and a woe-is-me excuse pattern of claiming that they had too many reporters on the story with no one really driving it. Whatever that says for accountability! They seem to have decided in Murdoch-like fashion to dig in their heels and pull the covers over their heads. After all the people hurt by ACORN going under were low-and-moderate income families, which is not exactly the Times demographic. The arc of justice is long though, so what goes around will come around here as well, and it's already begun. It just make take a while to get there, but inevitably it will."