



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 13, 2013

Rand Paul's Plagiarism Scandal Explained

Kentucky Senator Rand Paul has had a rough few weeks with a burgeoning "plagiarism" scandal for borrowing multiple ideas from a variety of sources without full attribution.

The news about Paul [broke](#) with revelations by Rachel Maddow on her [scarcely watched MSNBC show](#) October 28, where she revealed Rand Paul had borrowed four lines from a Wikipedia page. The Liberty University speech had used a Wikipedia reference about the dystopian sci-fi movie *Gattica*.



Rand Paul responded by [calling Maddow a "hater."](#) Paul also [claimed in his own defense](#) that he had cited the original source — the film *Gattica* — in his speech (which he did), even though he didn't cite the Wikipedia page describing *Gattica* he'd also borrowed from:

I am not a plagiarist. A plagiarist is someone who commits the "wrongful appropriation" and "purloining and publication" of another author's "language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions" and the representation of them as one's own original work.

The greater sin in the controversy was Maddow's, who characterized Paul's speech as "anti-abortion," though Paul didn't even mention abortion in the speech. The speech had actually been about the double-sided nature of technology. While Paul failed to fully disclose in his speech where he had acquired the information, [Maddow patently misled her listeners](#). Ironically, Rachel Maddow has been [accused of plagiarism](#) too, by blogger Michael Rodgers in his "Open Salon" blog.

But from there, Paul's troubles got deeper. Lifting a few lines from a Wikipedia entry for a speech is sloppy, but copying for anything in print is a more severe offense. BuzzFeed.com revealed November 2 that several pages from Senator Paul's most recent book [Government Bullies](#) had been copied from Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute studies without full attribution:

An entire section of Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul's 2013 book *Government Bullies* was copied wholesale from a 2003 case study by the Heritage Foundation, BuzzFeed has learned. The copied section, 1,318 words, is by far the most significant instance reported so far of Paul borrowing language from other published material.

But in *Government Bullies*, Paul basically admitted in the back of the book he was borrowing liberally from actual research services. In the end notes, he included the following [admission](#):

This book is not an investigative book. Many of the stories told and information reported represent work already done by others. Rather than endlessly noting multiple sourced items mixed in with



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personal conversations and research, we have included here other sources of information for the stories presented. Some are activist websites. Some are blogs. Some are reporters. Some are government websites with official releases of information. All of these sources contributed in one way or another to the finished material in this book, and I am grateful for the work many individuals have done in various fields to help expose these government bullies.

Then the *Washington Times* [found](#) another instance of a purloined paragraph from another writer on November 5. The *Washington Times* newspaper reviewed the columns it had published by Senator Paul, and found that the Kentucky Republican had not properly cited a paragraph in one of his columns. The *Times* [reported](#) that it had “independently reviewed Mr. Paul’s columns and op-eds and published a correction to his Sept. 20 column in which the senator had failed to attribute a passage that first appeared in *The Week*.” The column in the left-wing weekly magazine *The Week* dealt with mandatory minimum sentencing for drug cases, and Paul took the same tone of opposition to state and federal laws fighting the most extreme end of the so-called “war on drugs.” And the original author of the piece borrowed by Paul was hardly insulted. Dan Stewart of *The Week* wrote in a [follow-up](#): “I was plagiarized by Rand Paul and I don’t care.... In fact, I’m rather flattered.”

Don’t fret for Rand Paul — a likely presidential contender — for his lost *Washington Times* column, as Breitbart.com [picked up his column](#). The popular conservative Breitbart website [will likely better position Paul](#) for taking his message to the Republican Party base as the presidential election cycle of 2016 begins.

The lesson from the Rand Paul scandal is that it is not likely to derail a Rand Paul presidential candidacy. It’s certainly less serious than Vice President [Joe Biden’s plagiarism](#) scandal, which included both plagiarism of speeches in the 1980s and a case of academic plagiarism for which he received an F in a college class. Biden’s political career took a hit when his plagiarism scandal publicly exploded in 1987, but his political career recovered.

Ironically, in one instance, Rand Paul himself was plagiarized, according to a *New York Times* [blog](#), by North Carolina Senate candidate Greg Brannon.

Photo of Rand Paul giving a speech at Liberty University



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