



ABC, CBS, NBC Pound Bush, But Protected Draft-Dodging Clinton from the "Willie Horton Crowd"

Partisan Tools, Not Objective Observers

Last night, ABC, CBS and NBC all led with the Democrat-concocted "AWOL" charges about George W. Bush's National Guard service on their evening newscasts. Despite (or even because) the White House brought out evidence to refute the charges, the networks uniformly suggested their hectoring of Bush aides had only just begun. The sharks were seeing blood in the water.

"There are plenty of Democrats who are willing to stoke this. The issue is not going to go away," promised ABC's Terry Moran.

Who can believe it? **The networks are devoting more time and gravity to the Bush-Guard story than they did to Bill Clinton's draft scandal in 1992.** Not only that, but only Team Bush is on "the defensive," not his liberal accusers. Twelve years ago, the media were hostile only to Clinton's accusers:

■ On February 6, 1992, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that to avoid the draft, Bill Clinton had promised to serve in the ROTC at the University of Arkansas, which he quickly ditched for studies at Oxford. **CBS and NBC aired nothing. A bored ABC made it story number five,** and did not promote the story at their show's beginning. ABC chose instead to highlight Queen Elizabeth's 40th anniversary on the throne.

■ On February 12, 1992, the Clinton campaign released a 1969 letter from Clinton to ROTC commander Clinton Jones thanking him for "saving me from the draft." The response was again protective. None of the evening newscasts began with it, and each aired only one story. CBS supinely allowed Clinton (and only Clinton) to speak, with four soundbites accusing the GOP and the Pentagon of smearing him. Rather began the show by sounding like James Carville: **"Bill Clinton says President Bush's 1988 Willie Horton crowd is smearing him with new campaign**

dirty tricks." (The other networks noted that Jones had given the letter to ABC.)

The networks also avoided the story as it deepened. On April 6, 1992, former Clinton friend Cliff Jackson revealed that Clinton had received a draft notice in the spring of 1969, which contradicted months of Clinton's claims that he had "never been called." **ABC, CBS, and NBC never gave that revelation, exposing months of lying, one complete story.**

On September 2, 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* discovered Clinton's Uncle Raymond, who manipulated an almost year-long delay in Clinton's draft physical, and secured a Naval Reserve slot that Clinton didn't ultimately use. **ABC and CBS aired one story. NBC aired nothing.**

True to their promise, this morning, the network shows continued the story-not-ending line. On top of news rehashes from their correspondents, ABC, CBS, and NBC all questioned Condoleezza Rice about the Guard story. "In a hot political season, the questions just won't stop," declared ABC's Claire Shipman.

But all three networks have exposed themselves as eager purveyors of a shameless double standard in campaign coverage. Twelve years ago, the Clinton draft story was treated as a partisan dirty trick and an unfortunate distraction voters didn't care about (see box). Now, the networks have done nothing to question why the Democrats led with "AWOL" charges without any proof, and have not suggested in any way that this story is a distraction. They look like partisan tools, not objective observers. — *Tim Graham*

1992: Voters Don't Care About Draft

"In the campaign's final crunch, questions of Clinton's character, his personal life, and the draft are pursued daily, almost always by the press. And that is the trouble for Clinton: the press hounds him about his character; voters seem more worried about other things."— ABC's Chris Bury on *World News Tonight*, February 14, 1992. In fact, ABC's evening news carried only four stories in the scandal's first ten days.

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