



# Media Reality ✓ Check

A Regular Report on Major News Stories Distorted or Ignored □ [www.mediaresearch.org](http://www.mediaresearch.org)

NBC Host Won't Renew Contract, But She Leaves a Legacy of Promoting Controversial Women

## Jane Pauley's "Unusual Empathy" for Liberals

NBC announced this morning that *Dateline* co-host Jane Pauley will let her contract expire in May. It's been a long ride since NBC signed Pauley up to co-host *Today* in 1976 after she served short stints with the Indiana State Democratic Committee and former New York Mayor John Lindsay's 1972 Democratic campaign for President.

In today's *New York Times*, Pauley explained that while she was often beaten to big interviews by aggressive competitors like Barbara Walters, "she countered, she said, by trying to build a reputation for unusual empathy for interview subjects." Pauley did have a pattern of unusual empathy for liberal guests, which were based more on promotion than professionalism:

**Hillary Clinton.** On September 8, 1992, Pauley tossed Mrs. Clinton softball after softball about conservative criticism: "When you hear yourself held up, as you were at the Republican convention, some people have used the word 'demonized,' does it make you hurt or does it make you mad?...What was the worst thing you've heard said about you?...All right, what was the grossest distortion of your record?" Another tough question: **"What don't you do perfectly?"**

On September 12, 1998, the day after the Starr Report's release, NBC aired a two-hour *Dateline* special titled "The President and the People." Pauley had no interview, but she claimed Mrs. Clinton "believed" her husband's denials: "As the investigation turned up the heat on friends and colleagues, even as he testifies under oath before a grand jury, she says nothing. Balancing a threat to her marriage against the assault on his presidency, she does what she does best. She goes to work. In July, a bus tour to preserve historic places." Pauley turned the President's infidelity into a plus for Hillary: "Once vilified for ambition and political overreaching when she took on health care, now she's admired for being the faithful, loving wife."

**Anita Hill.** *Dateline* offered two nights of segments promoting Anita Hill's new book on September 29 and 30, 1997. Instead of challenging Hill for waiting ten years before

charging Clarence Thomas with sexual harassment, or asking why she would first make these charges in an anonymous fax to the Senate, Pauley only asked Hill: "Courage came slowly, didn't it?" Later, as Hill expressed surprise that Thomas denied her charges, Pauley cooed: **"I can see the steel in your spine even as you say that."**

**Julie Hiatt Steele.** On the November 27, 1998 *Dateline*, Pauley promoted the pain of Julie Hiatt Steele, who initially said Kathleen Willey told her President Clinton fondled her in the White House, and then mysteriously recanted. Pauley began the segment by dismissing the Starr probe: "Is it over yet? Will it ever be over?"

Pauley oozed empathy for the alleged victim: "Steele says Starr's investigators have scrutinized everything about her so relentlessly, they've made her life miserable." Pauley promoted Steele's most heart-tugging claim, that Starr was investigating her adoption: "After her four-year-old

baby died in her arms, Steele brought her son home from Romania eight years ago....What evidence Starr's investigators are looking for is unclear. Or is it evidence that the Starr investigation is out of control?...Her attorney Nancy Luque says Kenneth Starr rewards witnesses who say what he wants to hear and punishes witnesses who don't."

Pauley's one-sided segment had no rebutting soundbites from Starr or any other Steele critic. In May 2000, a U.S. district judge dismissed her suit against Starr by noting Steele presented "absolutely no evidence that [Starr's office] ever directly or impliedly asked her to lie."

With a few exceptions (see box), Pauley was never as rough on conservatives as her long-time *Today* co-host Bryant Gumbel. But when it came to broadcasting empathy for liberal guests, Pauley could get out a hanky and feel their pain with the best of them. — *Tim Graham*

### **No Empathy Reserved for Pro-Lifers**

**"Still ahead, the latest round of bloodshed and violence at abortion clinics. The anti-abortion movement has been creeping to the edge of bloody fanaticism for a decade." — NBC's Jane Pauley promoting an upcoming segment on *Dateline*, January 3, 1995.**

**L. Brent Bozell III**, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens, Jessica Anderson, Brad Wilmouth, Brian Boyd, Ken Shepherd**, and **Patrick Gregory**, Media Analysts; **Kristina Sewell**, Research Associate; **Liz Swasey**, Director of Communications. For the latest media bias, sign up for *CyberAlerts* at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org).