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Bryant Gumbel Worries Latest Revelations Will Feed "Cottage Industry of Republican Clinton Bashers"

Clinton Is Victim In Latest Hugh-Don-It

Try as they do to keep their noses clean, bad things just keep happening to Bill and Hillary Clinton — at least according to some media figures' version of the umpteenth Clinton scandal. Now it's revelations that Hillary's brother, Hugh Rodham, temporarily pocketed at least \$400,000 for the President's pardon of a convicted swindler and the early prison release of a drug felon.

Hugh never pardoned anyone, of course, but in the media's eyes, the paid lobbyist is the wrongdoer while the oath-taking government official is the hapless victim.

"More trouble for the Clintons," NBC's Matt Lauer intoned this morning on *Today*. Yes, trouble "for" the Clintons, never "from" them.

Of the three broadcast networks, CBS offered the most pro-Clinton spin. Last night on the *Evening News*, a

sympathetic Phil Jones insisted that **"this latest scandal involving the former First Lady's brother is viewed by friends of the Clintons as disastrous."**

The wettest tears were saved for Hillary. **"This is terrible for her, Dan,"** CBS political analyst, Gloria Borger offered last night. Borger stuck with her story this morning: **"Oh, this is just terrible for her,"** she told *The Early Show's* Bryant Gumbel.

"But, aside from feeding the cottage industry of the usual Republican Clinton bashers, is anything likely to come of this?" Gumbel asked Borger, who reinforced the suggestion of cynical Republican glee: **"George W. Bush is sort of floating under the radar here. He seems to be having a very good time with this."**

Last night, Jones went out of his way to note that the pardoned swindler, Glenn Braswell, **"has also been a problem for Republicans. The Florida Republican party and the Bush campaign returned contributions from Braswell last fall after learning that he was a convicted felon."**

A few moments later, Dan Rather artfully described the drug dealer who Clinton released from prison nine years early: **"Carlos Vignali was convicted of shipping 800 pounds of cocaine from Los Angeles to Minneapolis, but**

he was a first-time offender and many political figures — a sheriff and a Roman Catholic cardinal — lobbied the White House for the sentence to be commuted."

Here's some of what CBS didn't tell viewers last night: Janet Reno's Justice Department had rejected Vignali's appeal for clemency months before it was granted on Clinton's final day; other first-time offenders given clemency were small dealers, but Vignali was at the top of a huge interstate drug ring; Vignali's father was a big-time donor to the Democratic Party; and Cardinal Roger Mahoney, cited by Rather, said several days ago that his letter asking for leniency for Vignali was "a serious mistake."

Appearing on *Good Morning America*, Todd Jones, the Clinton-appointed U.S. attorney who prosecuted Vignali, argued that the drug dealer had an even

weaker case than Marc Rich, the fugitive fraudster who Clinton pardoned. **"There's no viable legal argument that you could put forward about the tax code or the boycott or any of the other things put forward by Mr. Rich's counsel,"** Jones told Charles Gibson. **"This was a straight-up drug dealer, a source of cocaine, proven at trial, convicted by a jury and sentenced to a fair sentence."**

On February 11, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the grant of clemency for Vignali "has sparked disbelief and outrage from nearly everyone involved in his case. **'It's not plausible, it makes no sense at all,'** said Margaret Love, the [former Justice Department] pardon attorney...**'Somebody had to help him. There is no way that case could have possibly succeeded in the Department of Justice.'**"

That help obviously came from Bill Clinton, who signed the order putting Vignali back on the streets. Is CBS interested in demanding answers from the pardon-granting former President, or will they be content to push the fiction that it was all Hugh's fault? — *Rich Noyes*

Will the media demand answers from the pardon-granting former President, or will they fall for the fiction that it was all Hugh's fault?

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