



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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Broadcast Networks, News Magazines Ignore or Downplay Barack Obama's Sleazy Home Purchase

## The Audacity of Silence About Tony Rezko

Jury selection began today in Chicago in the trial of Syrian-born businessman Antoin "Tony" Rezko, a major supporter of Barack Obama. Two days before the 2006 elections in which Democrats won by running against a "culture of corruption," Chicago newspapers revealed that Obama purchased a home that summer for \$1.6 million, but only because Rezko's wife bought an adjoining parcel for \$625,000 to complete the deal. Rezko was already under federal investigation for kickback schemes.

To a political opponent, this might resemble a lobbyist's sweetheart deal like the one that started Rep. Duke Cunningham's political decline, where a lobbyist paid \$700,000 more for Cunningham's home than his own sale price months later. But the national media are anything but opponents of Obama's. Despite Obama's high national profile as a Democratic symbol of hope, network TV news and the national news magazines have done a dreadful job of telling the Rezko story, and have struggled not to repeat it.

A Nexis search through February 2008 finds *Time* magazine never mentioned Tony Rezko, despite several soaring cover stories on Obama. *U.S. News & World Report* noted it once, briefly (September 24, 2007). *Newsweek* disposed of the smelly land deal in one paragraph – paragraph 20 – in a January 31, 2008 story that actually touted Obama as a reformer.

An MRC analysis of all broadcast news shows through February 29 found the TV networks weren't much better.

**Evening News.** Only the *NBC Nightly News* has aired a full Rezko story, by reporter Lisa Myers on January 28, a week after Hillary Clinton threw out Rezko's name at a debate. ABC's *World News* hasn't touched it.

*CBS Evening News* anchor Katie Couric mentioned it once in passing on April 27, 2007. She then reported her own story celebrating the ardor of Obama's community organizing in Chicago. Reporter Dean Reynolds mentioned Rezko in passing again on February 28.

**Morning News.** The networks aired only one story explaining the Rezko deal, from ABC reporter Brian Ross on the January 10 *Good Morning America*. ABC's Diane Sawyer asked Obama two questions about Rezko on January 23, two mornings after Hillary mentioned the name in a debate. She pressed him on whether he had really returned all Rezko's donations, but she also disdained the topic: "We have heard a lot of people say they are exhausted by this charge, counter charge." On CBS that morning, Harry Smith tossed in one Rezko inquiry.

On NBC, Matt Lauer pressed not Obama, but Hillary Clinton with it on January 25: "Does it make sense to use something like this, Tony Rezko, against Senator Obama, when there really is no such thing as political purity anymore?"

**Other Shows.** When the Rezko issue has surfaced on other shows, its appearance is usually brief. On NBC's *Meet the Press*, Tim Russert softly pressed Obama last November 11 (for about 300 words of talk between them, less than a typical Russert question.) CBS *Sunday Morning* commentator Nancy Giles mentioned it in passing on February 24, but CBS's other Sunday shows (*Face the Nation* and *60 Minutes*) have repeatedly skipped it in their Obama interviews.

Terry Moran raised it on ABC's *Nightline* on February 25 (for about 500 words of chat). George Stephanopoulos raised Rezko in two *This Week* interviews before this past weekend. On May 13, 2007, he asked Obama, "What were you thinking?" Obama replied "I'm very proud of my ethics record. I mean, I was famous in Springfield for not letting lobbyists even buy me lunch." How many lunches would a lobbyist have to buy to equal Rezko's \$625,000 parcel purchase? — *Tim Graham*

**Obama purchased his home alongside a man he knew was under a federal criminal probe. How badly does this clash with the media's years of celebrating Obama as a savior of American idealism and hope?**

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