



Media Reality ✓ Check

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Networks Pile On With 58 Rove Stories in 10 Days, But Helped Bury Pentagon's Abuse of Tripp in 1998

Media Now Roast Rove, But Wouldn't Fry Bacon

ABC, CBS and NBC are maintaining their relentless coverage of the CIA leak investigation, which ramped into high gear back on Sunday, July 10. Then, *Newsweek* published an e-mail showing that *Time* magazine reporter Matt Cooper talked to Karl Rove about the fact that Bush critic Joseph Wilson — who in 2002 went to Niger to investigate claims that Iraq was seeking enriched uranium from Africa — received that assignment from the CIA at least partly because his wife worked there.

Now the "outing" of Valerie Plame has been the main political story on the three network morning and evening news for nearly two weeks, as reporters find new ways to keep hyping the case. Last Tuesday, ABC's Charles Gibson began *Good Morning America* by presenting Rove as certainly guilty: "The big question, will or should the President fire him?"

The next day, NBC's Jamie Gangel treated Joseph Wilson to a softball *Today* interview that presented both Wilsons as victims: "Do you and your wife believe the perpetrators of this will ever be punished?" Just last night on the *CBS Evening News*, correspondent Gloria Borger promised fill-in anchor John Roberts that the case would end with a bang: "I'm told by somebody close to this investigation that it's going to be very messy when the truth comes out, John."

MRC interns Kyle Drennen and Patrick Skeehan reviewed the three network morning and evening news shows from July 10 through July 19. They found that the networks ran 58 stories on the Rove-Plame-Wilson flap in just those 10 days, even though there's been no indication from the special prosecutor that Rove is even the target of the investigation, which began in the fall of 2003. Even though the morning shows often eschew esoteric political stories, there have actually been 32 morning show segments devoted to Rove, compared with 26 on the

evening newscasts.

Flash back seven years ago to the Lewinsky scandal, when the *New Yorker* ran an article attempting to discredit Linda Tripp by announcing that she had been arrested for shoplifting as a teenager, but hadn't noted the arrest when she applied for a Pentagon security clearance (because the judge had expunged the arrest from her official record). Bill Clinton's Pentagon spokesman, Kenneth Bacon, eventually confessed to leaking Tripp's confidential personnel file to the *New Yorker's* Clinton-friendly reporter Jane Mayer, but his "apology" could be described as less than contrite: "I'm sorry that I did not check with our lawyers or check with Linda Tripp's lawyers about this," he said at a May 21, 1998 briefing.

But when the victim was an anti-Clinton whistleblower, the networks didn't seem to care that a high-ranking government official had used an illegal leak (violating the Privacy Act) to a reporter in an effort to discredit a critic. From March 1998 to November 2003 (when Tripp was awarded \$595,000 from the Defense Department), the ABC, CBS and NBC morning and evening shows ran just 13 stories on Clinton's "Leakgate" over five-and-a-half years. Much of the coverage was downright hostile to Tripp, not those who violated her privacy. (See box.)

The media's outrage over the supposed campaign to discredit Joe Wilson would seem a lot less contrived if they had shown the slightest bit of sympathy when Team Clinton used illegal leaks to malign Linda Tripp. — *Rich Noyes*

But No Sympathy for Clinton's Victim

"I suspect a lot of people would find it the height of irony that Linda Tripp files a suit for invasion of privacy....You charge there was an attempt to smear Ms. Tripp. The only thing that the Defense Department revealed was that she said she'd never committed a crime. That seems to be rather favorable to her....In order to show a conspiracy to harass or intimidate Ms. Tripp, you have to show some sort of conspiracy, and you've alleged that involves the White House. What evidence do you have of that?"

— Good Morning America co-host Charles Gibson's questions to Tripp lawyer Stephen Kohn, September 28, 1999. The Defense Department eventually settled with Tripp for \$595,000.

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