



Campaign 2000

Media Reality Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias  Monday, August 21, 2000

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Dan Rather Embarrasses Himself By Claiming "Carefully Orchestrated Leak" by "Jesse Helms Wing"

Verdict First, Evidence Later on Ray "Leak"

Network TV stars love to run down the Internet as a mud pit of unverified allegations that no one should take seriously unless vetted by the professionals. On July 19, CBS anchor Bob Schieffer warned that "unlike other media, much of the information is unedited, meaning it's not necessarily accurate, and in some cases flat-out wrong and potentially damaging. Tonight, Wyatt Andrews reports the new electronic rumor mill in Eye on America."

When the Associated Press reported last Thursday that independent counsel Robert Ray had empaneled a grand jury to explore indicting Bill Clinton for lying under oath, the networks quickly suggested a GOP plot without any evidence. When those hot-headed suspicions crumbled on Friday with an apology from Carter-appointed Judge Richard Cudahy, who inadvertently blabbed, how did network journalism look then? How about "flat out wrong and potentially damaging"?

■ **NBC Nightly News** led Thursday with the grand jury revelation and suspicions about GOP leakers, but Friday night, anchor Brian Williams didn't get to the update until several stories into the show and then he only gave it 23 seconds. Likewise, NBC's *Today* gave a whole interview segment to the "leak" on Friday morning, then gave just 17 seconds to the real news on Saturday.

■ **ABC's World News Tonight** featured a Linda Douglass report: "Officials believe it is a dirty trick, hatched by aides to President Clinton's nemesis, former Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr." Gore aide Mark Fabiani claimed: "People are wise by now to these Ken Starr-like tactics." Bob Woodruff noted Friday: "After all this finger pointing, it turns out this was not a Republican dirty trick after all."

■ **CBS Evening News** anchor Dan Rather delivered the most loaded language, in a formulation he repeated at the

opening of CBS's prime time convention coverage: "Timing is everything. Al Gore must stand and deliver here tonight as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee. And now Gore must do so against the backdrop of a potentially damaging, carefully orchestrated story leak about President Clinton. The story is that Republican-backed special prosecutor Robert Ray, Ken Starr's successor, has a new grand jury looking into possible criminal charges against the president growing out of Mr. Clinton's sex life."

Is It Time...For Dan...To Go?

"You don't have to be a cynic to note that this has all the earmarks of a carefully orchestrated, politically motivated leak. The Republican-backed Robert Ray is sponsored by a three-judge panel that must periodically decide whether Ray's investigation should continue. This panel features two federal judges backed by the Jesse Helms wing of the Republican Party." — Dan Rather's Thursday CBS.com commentary.

On both shows, Gloria Borger then passed along the Gore campaign spin with a warning about Ken Starr: "One top Gore adviser portrayed it as what he called a quote 'grand Republican strategy to tie Al Gore to President Clinton.'"

The CBS News Web site, as of Sunday night, still featured Dan Rather's Thursday "Notebook" essay titled "Low-Road Politics: Clinton Grand Jury Leak Carefully Orchestrated." [See box.] Rather wrote: "Any reporter who's spent time on the police beat learns to look for motive. So you ask yourself — what group has the motive to see that such a leak would occur at such a time, hours before Gore is set to accept his party's nomination in the most important speech of his political life?"

Wrong. Any police reporter would be expected to check the facts before running with his first suspicions. Now it is Rather who is exploiting the "electronic rumor mill." — *Tim Graham and Brent Baker*

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