



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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Waco Fire, Stonewalling, and Elian Seizure All Greeted By Mass Media Sympathy, Not Skepticism

## Eight Years of Praising Reno's Righteousness

No matter how many times Janet Reno protected the Democratic Party's scandalous 1996 fund-raising schemes from an independent investigation, the media insisted that she was really a non-political Attorney General. But journalists' carefully-nurtured portrait of Reno as a politically-clueless bureaucrat is being undermined by her own politically-ambitious plan to become the next Governor of Florida.

"She's a gritty, unorthodox candidate and I think she has a very good chance of winning the primary," NBC's Tim Russert told Katie Couric on Tuesday's *Today*. "If blacks turn out, if seniors turn out, and if the economy is still in trouble, I think Janet Reno has a better than even chance of winning. Right now, she's a good 15 points behind Jeb Bush, but she is someone who's hard to pigeonhole in terms of her various policies."

Hard to pigeonhole? Reno is a proud liberal, as her sister proclaimed in an interview with *Time* magazine for a gushing 1993 cover story (see box), highlighting the idea that Southern liberals like Miss Reno are particularly ideological: "You weren't a liberal because it was a fad or you were supposed to. You weren't supposed to. So you did it from profound conviction."

■ "Reno has never been shy about second-guessing the President," *Newsweek's* Bob Cohn and Eleanor Clift praised in another 1993 profile, approvingly citing an instance when Reno was even more liberal than her boss: "In June, the day after Clinton dropped Lani Guinier as his choice to run the Justice Department's civil-rights division, Reno told reporters that Guinier was still 'the best possible choice.' She even gave Guinier a Justice Department conference room to make her case to the press."

■ The national media's applause for Reno was matched by contempt for her conservative predecessors. Crowning her with "full-fledged folk-hero status" in a May 10, 1993 article, *Time's* Stanley Cloud spun that Reno "was cheered on both sides of the aisle in Congress and in her own Justice

Department, where a succession of 25-watt, responsibility-ducking Attorneys General had left morale lower than — well, lower than an alligator's belly."

■ The media insisted that fiascos such as the Waco fire that killed two dozen children and her decision to force a six-year-old back to Communist Cuba were moments when the public should feel sorry for Reno. Discussing Elian's seizure on April 22, 2000, CBS reporter Jim Stewart rued "that will be the bookend on Janet Reno's tenure as Attorney General, that and Waco on the other end. It is appalling from her

perspective because of the true compassion she has for children. If you've ever seen her around children, you know how much she truly cares for them, and this has got to be tearing at her."

■ Not even her refusal to name an independent counsel to examine any of the wide array of allegations of campaign finance law violations by Clinton and Gore in 1996 shook the media's denial that Reno was a politically-minded Attorney General.

"People just assume she's honest. Honest Janet Reno," National Public Radio's Juan Williams relayed on *Fox News Sunday* in 1999. That's still the theme: "Reno enjoys a reputation as a principled leader who does what she thinks is right," *Time's* Tim Padgett echoed in this week's issue.

On Tuesday's *Early Show*, CBS's Bryant Gumbel pitched the idea that "a Reno/Bush match-up [might be] some kind of a symbolic sequel to what happened last November," adding that, "whatever happens, Katherine Harris won't be around to certify the results, right?" Of course, the national media will be on the scene, proclaiming Reno's righteousness and showering the candidate with all the benefits of sympathetic coverage. — Rich Noyes

### Ready For a Reno Revolution

"Her heart is big but her solutions are sound; she cares more for results than for labels, for ideas over ideology. If the White House is worried about taking the country in a new direction, perhaps it should send Reno on ahead as a scout. If she fails, she'll say so. And if she continues to get it right, she may be the one to lead the revolution." — *Time's* Nancy Gibbs in a July 12, 1993 cover story, "Truth, Justice and the Reno Way."

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