



Media Reality ✓ Check **QUICK TAKE**

Thursday, May 15, 2003 ★ www.mrc.org ★ Contact: Katie Wright (703) 683-5004

RAINES IN '98: "IF YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A WORTHY BUT ERRING COLLEAGUE AND THE NEWSPAPER ITSELF, YOU CHOOSE FOR THE PAPER"

HOWELL RAINES ADMITS: RACE MATTERED

Buried on Page A31 of today's *New York Times* story on the feisty *New York Times* staff meeting about the Jayson Blair falsehood fiasco was an admission from Executive Editor Howell Raines: race mattered in Blair's too-long career of making things up at the *Times*.

Reporter Jacques Steinberg reported that Raines told employees, **"You have a right to ask if I, as a white man from Alabama, with those convictions, gave him one chance too many by not stopping his appointment to the sniper team. When I look into my heart for the truth of that, the answer is yes."** So much for the theory that race was irrelevant.

Today, Clay Waters of the MRC's TimesWatch project has uncovered another display of shifting Raines standards. On August 13, 1998, then-Editorial Page Editor Raines went out of his way to write a signed editorial criticizing *The Boston Globe* for dismissing factually-challenged black columnist Patricia Smith, while trying to keep factually-challenged white columnist Mike Barnicle.

"Trust is the glue that holds newsrooms together and ultimately binds readers to a specific newspaper and to newspapers in general," Raines lectured. "Editors have to be able to trust what reporters and columnists write and say. Journalists do not make things up or present others' writing and thought as their own."

In the Jayson Blair case, the *Times* trusted, but did not verify. They were informed of Blair's errors, and made excuses, and promoted him to increasingly visible heights of the newspaper instead of dismissing him. Raines treated Blair as a star minority reporter beyond the rules, making his 1998 sentence stand out: "Public respect for newspapering is wounded when rules that would be enforced with doctrinal ferocity among the mass of journalists are lightened for a star who has great value to the paper."

Raines concluded his signed editorial: **"You'll buy my position, of course, only if you believe in strict enforcement of rules about borrowing, lifting and leveling with colleagues, and if you believe, as I do, that if you have to choose between a worthy but erring colleague and the newspaper itself, you choose for the paper."**

For more, visit www.timeswatch.org