

Is the Media Railroading Ben Carson...Or Doing Its Job?



When someone runs for the most important office in the country, they should expect their past to be thoroughly scrutinized by the media. Actually, let me rephrase that: If they're a *Republican*, they should expect it. If they're a Democrat...well, there's at least a chance it will happen.

Regardless, the media *should* be digging into these candidates' pasts and reporting relevant findings about their character and conduct to the electorate. It's their job, and it's what citizens should demand of journalists in a democratic republic.

The problem, of course, is that the media has repeatedly failed us over the years. News entities far too often place personal ideology above journalistic ethics. A breathtaking lack of discipline among those in the profession routinely forges national narratives out of little more than wishful, partisan sentiment. Double-standards and one-sided reporting have shaped our elections and altered the direction of the country, and there's little reason to believe that things will change anytime soon.

That's why, when someone like me – who leans right politically, but wants a fair and balanced media – looks at how hard reporters are probing Ben Carson's past, I'm not quite sure what to think.

On one hand, I want all presidential candidates (especially those who have a serious chance of winning) to be thoroughly vetted. On the other hand, I'm not quite sure that's what's going on right now with the way Carson is being treated.

CNN has spent a lot of time this week [dissecting autobiographical claims](#) that Carson has made in his books, specifically in regard to his descriptions of a violent past, and his life having been bettered through faith. While I think it's safe to say that the collective media had no such interest in substantiating Barack Obama's self-described past when *he* was running for president, I don't think it's out of bounds for journalists to truth-test Carson's.

What *does* seem to be out of bounds is the narrative the network has been presenting in their reporting. The implication is that Carson may be lying about his past, simply because some old friends of his (who were interviewed by network reporters) could neither confirm nor contradict several of his personal accounts – accounts that those friends were never said to have been a part of in the first place. Some of those friends were surprised by what Carson had written, and felt the stories were inconsistent with the person they knew, but none of them were in a position to deny their accuracy.

This draws an obvious question: What's the news story?

I don't know about the rest of you, but there are a number of pivotal moments from my past that would come as a surprise to the people who were my friends at the time, simply because they weren't around to witness them.

This morning, it was *The Politico's* turn. The news website posted a very [provocative headline](#) that grabbed many people's attention: "Ben Carson admits fabricating West Point scholarship."

The column, written by Kyle Cheney, begins this way:

“Ben Carson’s campaign on Friday admitted, in a response to an inquiry from POLITICO, that a central point in his inspirational personal story was fabricated: his application and acceptance into the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.”

Admitting to “fabricating” a significant part of one’s past? That sounds pretty damaging. Even notable conservative pundits on Twitter were ready to throw Carson under the bus, comparing the revelation to Brian Williams being shot out of the sky in Iraq, and Hillary Clinton dodging sniper fire in Bosnia.

But as Ben Shapiro of *The Daily Wire* quickly pointed out in [his own column](#), Carson’s campaign had admitted no such thing. In fact, the claim that Cheney had insisted Carson was reversing himself on had never been made by Carson in the first place.

The point of contention comes from the below excerpt from Carson’s autobiography:



Breaking: Presidential candidate Donald Trump endorses John A. Daly’s new novel.

“At the end of my twelfth grade I marched at the head of the Memorial Day parade. I felt so proud, my chest bursting with

ribbons and braids of every kind. To make it more wonderful, We had important visitors that day. Two soldiers who had won the Congressional Medal of Honor in Viet Nam were present. More exciting to me, General William Westmoreland (very prominent in the Viet Nam war) attended with an impressive entourage. Afterward, Sgt. Hunt introduced me to General Westmoreland, and I had dinner with him and the Congressional Medal winners. Later I was offered a full scholarship to West Point. I didn't refuse the scholarship outright, but I let them know that a military career wasn't where I saw myself going."

Apparently, in an attempt to verify the authenticity of this account, Cheney checked with West Point's admissions department and discovered that Carson had never applied there, and was never extended admission. But if you read what Carson actually wrote (and has confirmed in other interviews), he never said he applied there, thus he would have never been offered any official form of admission. What he was offered by General Westmoreland (a military man who was impressed with young Carson) was essentially an informal invitation to attend the military academy, where the admission was already free.

All Carson's campaign did, in their response to Cheney's false premise, was clarify that Carson had never sought admission to West Point. It was Cheney who then somehow concluded that a contradiction of his own faulty interpretation of what Carson had written was in some way an *admission*, by Carson, that he had lied.

I don't know a thing about Kyle Cheney, but Ben Shapiro's analysis seems pretty air-tight on this. Unless there's something I'm missing, it's hard not to conclude that Cheney is either hopelessly biased or just one awful reporter.

So what are Americans to make of all this? In a week's time, a presidential front-runner has essentially been categorized as a *liar* by at least two national news organizations (with

several other major outlets picking up the stories). And though the reports crumble apart, under even the slightest bit of scrutiny, a nation-wide narrative has already been created and repeated extensively: *Ben Carson is one dishonest man.*

Has our media become totally incapable of vetting a presidential candidate? Between this and the media-pass Hillary Clinton has been granted for lying about the Benghazi video (and for that matter, her email server), it sure seems so.

UPDATE: The Politico piece was [significantly edited](#) after I wrote this column, presumably due to the backlash they've received.

CNN: The Place to Go for a Few Laughs

☒ I used to think that if you could bottle CNN you'd have a cure for insomnia. CNN gave dull a bad name. But CNN had good points, too. It was seen as the place to go if you were in the market for serious news.

Not anymore.

Ever since Malaysian Airlines flight 370 disappeared a month ago, CNN's credibility has gone missing too. The network has gone wall-to-wall with coverage of the missing plane – not with actual news, but with hours and hours of speculation, some of it downright outrageous.

One of the network's anchors, a fellow named Don Lemon,

wondered out loud whether something “supernatural” might have happened to the plane. That not being inane enough, a few days later he outdid himself, asking a panel CNN put together if the plane might have disappeared into a black hole.

Dull is one thing. Embarrassing is something else. School children know that black holes only exist in space – *outer space*! They don’t exist at 35,000 feet where airplanes fly.

Mr. Lemon, who seems like a nice enough guy, is a lucky man. If I were running CNN he would be looking for work someplace else. He didn’t simply embarrass himself with his ridiculous questions. He embarrassed his entire network. CNN used to be the place to go for real news. These days it’s the place to go for a few laughs.

I tuned in the other day to see if anything was new – not with the missing plane, but with CNN’s coverage of the missing plane.

Don Lemon was still there, still doing a pretty good impression of Ron Burgundy, the anchorman Will Ferrell made famous. Looking very serious, Lemon informed his viewers that “CNN has learned” that there would be a “big operations news conference in the coming hours.”

One doesn’t “learn” that there’s going to be a news conference. The people who call news conferences alert the media that one is coming. They tell reporters where the news conference is going to be held and when. Journalists “learn” of things other journalists don’t know about. They don’t “learn” things everybody knows about.

Don Lemon then called on someone named Jeff Wise, who was identified as an aviation analyst, and asked him what we might learn at the news conference. Wise seemed unprepared for the question and said: “It’s either going to be we found something or we didn’t find anything and we’re probably not going to find something.”

“We either found something or we didn’t find anything.” We need an *expert* to tell us that?

Lemon also advised his viewers that, “We’ve learned a British Navy ship will conduct a *specific search* for flight 370 in the Indian Ocean.” A “specific search.” As opposed to what?

But Don Lemon didn’t come up with the wall-to-wall strategy – and neither did Wolf Blitzer or Candy Crowley or any of the other CNN journalists who can’t go two minutes without sharing non-news and endless speculation about the plane with their viewers. Ratings at CNN have gone way up since they started covering the missing plane, proving there are plenty of people out there who like to be entertained by shiny objects.

And the brains – a word I use loosely in this case – behind the decision to go non-stop with the missing plane story is a man called Jeff Zucker, who runs CNN. Zucker used to run the entire NBC entertainment network and famously yanked Jay Leno from the Tonight Show – while he was beating everyone in the ratings – and plopped him down at 10pm where the ratings tanked. So did the Tonight Show ratings with Leno gone.

Zucker went to Harvard, proving that even guys who get big numbers on their SATs can do really, really dumb things. And for his brilliant handling of things at NBC, when his time was up, he landed the top job at CNN. This is proof enough that either there is no God or he’s got one hell of a sense of humor.

If Zucker worked in Silicon Valley, where talent and accountability matter, he’d be hauling trash from Apple and Google – if he were lucky.

Not long ago I went on television and characterized CNN’s supernatural, dark hole coverage of the missing plane story as “stupendously dumb and jaw-droppingly stupid.” I admit this was not gracious. In retrospect, I think I was too kind.

Why Megyn Kelly and Newt Gingrich Will Help Cable News Ratings

✘ Fox News recently announced that *America Live* host, Megyn Kelly, will be getting her own prime-time show beginning this Fall. For fans like myself, this was great news. I've long recognized Kelly as a standout performer on the network, and there's something almost prideful in watching someone like her rise up through the ranks of their profession through a lot of hard work, real talent, and proven integrity. She'll be a real asset in her new position.

Though Fox News still dominates the cable news ratings, the truth is that their prime-time lineup (including *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Hannity*) isn't pulling quite as strong of numbers as it once did. Megyn Kelly's afternoon show, however, has added to its audience over time, and has led the way in increased daytime viewership for the network. Clearly, this didn't go unnoticed by Fox executives.

Promoting Kelly to prime-time was smart. What she brings to the table is the capacity to bring in new viewers who typically wouldn't tune into the network during that time because they're turned off by the often overbearing style of Bill O'Reilly and the overt partisanship of Sean Hannity. Kelly obviously won't be replacing either of those personalities (my guess is that Greta Van Susteren will be the one taking the hit), but she will surely add some freshness and variety to the line-up.

Kelly has set herself aside as someone who is very much in

touch with the concerns of her viewers. She listens to them, and does an excellent job of pinning down guests with the questions people want answers to. It's clear in her presentation that she researches stories exhaustively, and unlike many in the business, she's more concerned with getting the story right than *being* right. Sadly, that's a real rarity today.

How will that style translate to a time-slot in which much of the opinionated analysis on *all* cable news networks is loud, animated, and ideologically-driven? I actually think she'll carve out her own niche quite well.

Likeability and charm aside, Kelly has a genuineness and strong moral presence about her that lets her make a real connection with people. It's not all that different, really, than how people once viewed Oprah Winfrey. That's a *good* thing, and that factor should draw in a prime-time audience more diverse than the one Fox News typically attracts.

Fox isn't the only news network mixing up their prime-time programming. CNN recently announced that they'll be resurrecting *Crossfire*, their once very popular program that pitted opposing sides of the political spectrum against each other, on equal footing, in sharp debate.

The return of this format to prime-time isn't all that exciting in itself. After all, CNN tried it a couple of years ago with *Parker Spitzer*, which was a colossal flop. What might make this attempt different, however, is that former Speaker of the House and presidential candidate, Newt Gingrich, will be representing the conservative side of the table.

One of the reasons news networks other than Fox have long struggled to attract conservative-thinking viewers is because they don't feature individuals, in important roles, that conservatives respect. This is primarily due to the liberal bubble of like-mindedness that surrounds the media industry.

The industry largely doesn't understand the conservative viewpoint. They're hostile to it, and they don't take it serious enough or lend it enough credibility to accurately represent it.

The acquisition of Gingrich, however, shows that CNN may finally be learning something from their past mistakes. Gingrich is one the most competent and compelling voices for conservatism that we have in this country today. Mitt Romney certainly figured this out, much to his dismay, back during the 2012 primaries.

While most of the media presents the conservative argument as a lone, defensive voice against a merciless onslaught of leftist, bumper-sticker cliches, that's not what CNN will be getting with Gingrich. Gingrich has become well known as a man who outright rejects the premises and sensibilities of the liberal media culture, and has a knack for taking ownership of the narratives on big issues. 

By making Gingrich one of *Crossfire's* hosts (and not merely a guest), I think CNN may finally be giving people like me a reason to tune into their network.

You know, with MSNBC recently falling back into last place among the cable news networks, one would think that *they* would be announcing big changes to their programming as well. They haven't, and I don't expect them to. MSNBC has demonstrated a complete inability to address ratings-slumps and credibility-problems with anything other than a revolving door of snarky, left-wing-media activists dedicated to promoting and defending the Obama administration.

There was a time, after Comcast came in, when I was hopeful that the network might actually mend its ways. That's clearly not going to happen... And how ironic is it that an entity that has invested itself so deeply in the platitude of "change" absolutely refuses to do so itself?

Their continued losses will hopefully be the other networks' gains.

Was This Rubio's Fatal Sip?

✘ Did Florida Senator Marco Rubio, a likely Republican contender for president in 2016, destroy his political career by taking a sip of water on national television? CNN and some of the other slavishly Democratic-liberal news outlets seem to think so – or at least hope so.

Rubio was giving a speech rebutting President Obama's State of the Union message the other night, and as public speakers often do, he decided to wet his whistle. His fatal error, it appears, was to have placed his water bottle out of reach, rather than in front of him, as is customary. So he had to cross the screen to reach his bottle and take a swig.

I'm not exactly sure why, but the news commentators are calling this a "bungle." Will potential voters in the next presidential election ever be able to take Rubio seriously, now that he has revealed that he gets thirsty and drinks water? Worst of all, did he demonstrate an inability to plan ahead?

Obviously he did, so how can we even consider him for President?

If the time comes when Rubio, sitting in the situation room, has to launch a nuclear attack against one of our enemies – say, Israel – will he forget to bring the military aide with the codes into the room with him?

This reminds me of how the media managed to turn the fact that

the Mormon Mitt Romney was a teetotaler into a black mark against him. Who would want a president who wasn't manly enough to throw back a drink or two with his buddies? To be certain that all bases were covered, it also was suggested that Romney's claims of being a non-drinker may have been bogus. We all know Mormons who don't take their church's anti-drinking mandate seriously, so why should we believe Romney's declarations of purity?

Clearly, Rubio has a few things to learn before he can be considered for the Top Spot. First of all, no more water. Gordon's gin, perhaps, to win over East Coast limousine liberals, or some moonshine to solidify his party's grip on voters in the Ozark states.

There are nearly four years left before the next presidential election, so I am hoping that Rubio will learn what it takes to be President of the United States in the modern era. What we used to think of as the mainstream in this country is the mainstream no longer. If Rubio wants to bond with the American majority, here are some things he will have to do.

- 1.) Cheat on his wife with a man, then marry him.
- 2.) Hire an underage female intern to help out in his senatorial office, and engage in oral sex with her.
- 3.) Dispense with the water bottle when he is on the podium and replace it with a mirror covered with half a dozen lines of cocaine. Learn the street meaning of "smoke" and "blow," both essential to any President's vocabulary.
- 4.) Instead of hugging and patting on the back the politicians who introduce him to campaign crowds, take them in a firm embrace and give them a deep French kiss. This works best with men.
- 5.) Renounce his U.S. citizenship, establish residency in Mexico, then illegally cross the border into the United States

and refuse to speak English. If anyone asks, say he was born in Hawaii.

6.)Cut a rap record, calling for the murder of police officers. Suggested title: "The Ballad of Christopher Dorner."

7.)Make a well-publicized campaign visit to a Planned Parenthood clinic, and help the medical team carry out an abortion while the flashbulbs, among other things, pop.

8.)Declare that religion is a crock, that there is no God, and then show how he can prove it.

He may find it difficult to stomach some of these tactics, but they are his best chance of establishing an image that today's American majority considers beyond reproach.

Enlisting in the War on Liberalism

Even back in the 1960s when I was in my 20s and a registered Democrat, I refused to call myself a liberal. To me, liberals were those of my fellow collegians who dodged the draft and pretended it was character and not cowardice that sent them north to Canada or those others who evaded service through deferments and medical fraud, but got to display their moral superiority by spitting on returning veterans.

Even that long ago, I couldn't quite decide if it was their lack of spine or their hypocrisy that I found more reprehensible.

On top of everything else, it didn't help that I hated their music, their movies, their fads, their lack of personal

hygiene and their infantile slogans.

It never occurred to me that 50 years later, they and their goofy offspring would be America's school teachers, professors, journalists, judges, union leaders and politicians, and that they'd still be mucking up the works.

On CNN, on New Year's Eve, viewers got to watch Kathy Griffin ring in 2013 by repeatedly kissing Anderson Cooper's crotch. Lest anyone think that Mr. Cooper was the innocent victim of a desperate aging comedienne, a few days later, he invited her to appear on his own show.

One of the things I hate the most about comics who depend on shock, as opposed to wit, be they Kathy Griffin or Lenny Bruce, isn't that they're simply not funny, but that if you suggest that they'd be well-advised to pursue vocational guidance, they and their slavish fans get to accuse you of prudery. And in our dippy world, it is often far less damaging to one's reputation to be a known drug addict or pederast than to be called a square.

But anyone who thinks it's funny to watch a woman in her 50s pretending to be engaging in oral sex with a gay man on television is the sort of knucklehead who probably relishes every second of the annual 24-hour retrospective devoted to the artistry of The Three Stooges.

I assume that if CNN's ringing in of the New Year got large ratings anywhere, it was probably in San Francisco. That's the place where the City Council only recently got around to banning public nudity, and did so based on the singular grounds that it wasn't sanitary. Only in the modern Sodom would walking around without covering your anus and your genitals be equated with coughing without covering your mouth.

In the run-up to the Fiscal Cliff vote, Harry Reid accused John Boehner of running the House like a dictator. Kathy Griffin should pay heed because that's the sort of material

that most normal people think is hilarious. Imagine, the man who has spent four years refusing to allow his 99 colleagues to vote on a federal budget has the unmitigated gall to accuse the Speaker of the House of being high-handed. When it comes to pots calling kettles names, we haven't seen anything like it since Hitler told Mussolini to lighten up.

Obama has vowed to make gun control a major part of his 2013 agenda. In fact, he promises to get to it just as soon as he shortens the length of fairways through presidential fiat.

I, myself, would suggest that colleges begin conducting classes in hypocrisy, starting with people who never show their faces in public without being protected by several heavily-armed men insisting that the rest of us not be trusted anywhere near guns. If attacking the Second Amendment was punishable in a court of law, every limousine liberal from Dianne Feinstein and Michael Bloomberg to Jamie Foxx and Sarah Jessica Parker, would be found guilty of overkill in the first degree.

Left-wingers are quick to blame guns, gun manufacturers and gun sellers, whenever a loony tune goes berserk and shoots up a mall, a school or a movie theater, but when a guy like William Spengler, after bludgeoning his grandmother to death, is free to murder two firemen 30 years down the road, I don't ever hear them condemning those lawyers, judges and parole boards, who played a role in getting him released from prison. Is it possible the reason might be that lawyers, judges and members of parole boards, are, more often than not, liberals like themselves?

Until reading Bernie Goldberg's column on the subject, I had been unaware that Al Gore and his business partners not only refused to sell their failing TV network, Current, to Glenn Beck, but then turned around and sold it to Al Jazeera, the Arab TV network owned by the government of Qatar. Not only does the deal make one question Gore's bona fides as a

dedicated foe of carbon emissions, but it shows that in his heart he holds oil sheiks in higher regard than American conservatives.

Still, it turns out that there was one line in the oil-soaked sand that Gore refused to cross. He absolutely insisted that the deal be consummated prior to taxes rising from 36% to 39.6% on the top two percent of wealthy Americans.

But is anyone terribly surprised that when the world's biggest gasbag insisted that it was imperative that taxes be raised on the stinking swine that had the effrontery to be rich, he meant all the pigs in the sty except those who happened to be named Al Gore?

©2013 [Burt Prelutsky](#). Comments? Write BurtPrelutsky@aol.com.