

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.

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