

# FIRST ABU GHRAIB, AND NOW SIEGELMAN

Larisa reports that 60 Minutes has decided to spike its story on Don Siegelman.

## *60 Minutes Caves to Pressure from White House on Siegelman Story...*

Well folks, seems that 60 Minutes is postponing (read "killing") its Siegelman story. The excuse I am told for this lapse in ethics is that the network needs more time to vet the whistle-blower, Dana Jill Simpson. You see, the reason the network suddenly needs more time to vet Simpson is that the White House has launched a direct campaign inside CBS to discredit her and just to make sure the dirt sticks, they have called in some favors too. I am told that Senator Jeff Sessions has been instructed to help the White House discredit Simpson as part of his "Senatorial" duties. Nice system of government we have here, eh?

So, two things are going to happen now. The first is, we will be including what 60 Minutes did not report as part of the Raw Story series on the case. Instead of 5 installments, we will now have 6. Second, all of you as citizens of this nation must voice your concerns about this situation to CBS. You want a free press? Then fight for it!

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It's probably worth reminding folks that 60 Minutes attempted to spike—and managed to postpone—another story that was politically damaging to the Administration.

The most interesting thing about the Dan Rather complaint, IMO, is the description it gave of CBS and Administration attempts to spike the Abu Ghraib story.

In late April 2004, Mr. Rather, as Correspondant, and Mary Mapes, a veteran producer, broke a news story of national importance on *60 Minutes II*—the abuse by American military personnel of Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison. The story, which included photographs of the abusive treatment of prisoners, consumer American news media for many months.

Despite the story's importance, and because of the obvious negative impact the story would have on **the Bush administration with which Viacom and CBS wished to curry favor**, CBS management attempted to bury it. As a general rule, senior executives of CBS News do not take a hands-on role in the editing and vetting of a story. However, CBS News President Andrew Heyward and Senior Vice President Betsy West were involved intimately in the editing and vetting process of the Abu Ghraib story. However, for weeks, they refused to grant permission to air the story, continuously insisting that it lacked sufficient

substantiation. As Mr. Rather and Ms. Mapes provided each requested verification, Mr. Heyward and Ms. West continued to "raise the goalposts," insisting on additional substantiation.

Even after obtaining nearly a dozen, now notorious, photographs, which made it impossible to deny the accuracy of the story, **Mr. Heyward and Ms. West continued to delay the story for an additional three weeks.** This delay was, in part, occasioned by acceding to pressures brought to bear by government officials urging CBS to drop the story or at least delay it. As a part of that pressure, **Mr. Rather received a personal telephone call from General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, urging him to delay the story.**

Only after it became apparent that, due to the delay, sources were talking to other news organizations and that CBS would be "scooped," Mr. Heyward and Ms. West approved the airing of the story for April 28, 2004. Even then, **CBS imposed the unusual restrictions that the story would be aired only once, that it would not be preceded by on-air promotion, and that it would not be reference on the *CBS Evening News*.**

By my count, we've got:

- *A description of a*

*craven CBS and Viacom  
hoping to "curry favor"  
with the Bush  
Administration*

- *Heyward and West  
postponing a scoop **for  
three weeks** and thereby  
allowing torture to  
continue unabated*
- *Personal knowledge of  
the scandal by Richard  
Myers ... and personal  
intervention on his  
part to hide a scandal*
- *The deliberate refusal  
to publicize a huge  
news story*

I recommend not just a blogger ethics  
conference, but an entire college  
curriculum.

So when you call 60 Minutes, you might want to  
ask them if they're spiking this story—as they  
attempted to spike the Abu Ghraib story—at the  
request of the White House.