

**THE BLOG**

# CNN: Oh What a Tangled Web We Weave, When First We Practice to Deceive

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By Marty Kaplan

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In case CNN's executives and flacks think they've done a heckuva damage control job and put this battered debate baby to bed, here's a checklist of contradictions and disparities coming out of their mouths.

## DID THEY, OR DIDN'T THEY?

Nov 28, *St. Petersburg Times*: "Gotcha questions were eliminated. So were most that seemed like they came from Democrats...."

Nov 30, *Los Angeles Times*: "CNN officials said that in the Democratic debate [four months ago], as in Wednesday's Republican encounter, they had not attempted to determine the party or ideology of the questioners."

## MR. KLEIN VS. MR. KLEIN

Nov 30, *New York Times*: "Jon Klein, the president of CNN's domestic networks... said that a small group of producers had conducted basic searches on the questioners picked as finalists, including whether they had made donations to an presidential campaigns."

Nov 30, *New York Times*: "'We were looking for questions that would help Republican voters decide amongst the candidates,' Mr. Klein said. 'We didn't particularly care who was asking the question'...."

## MR. KLEIN VS. MR. FEIST:

Nov 30, *Los Angeles Times*: "'We were looking for people who were interested enough in the process to ask a question,' Sam Feist, CNN's political director, said Thursday. 'We didn't inquire about people's ideological beliefs, and that wasn't relevant.'"

## MR. FEIST VS. MR. FEIST:

Nov 30, *Los Angeles Times*: "CNN's [political director Sam Feist] said conservative commentators did not complain when questioners who shared their political ideology had videos aired during the Democratic forum in July."

**MR. KLEIN AND MR. FEIST VS. MR. BOHRMAN:**

Nov 21, *New York Times*: ““There are quite a few things you might describe as Democratic ‘gotchas,’ and we are weeding those out,” [CNN Washington bureau chief and executive producer of the debate David] Bohrman said. CNN wants to ensure that next Wednesday’s Republican event is “a debate of their party.”

**MR. BOHRMAN VS. MR. BOHRMAN:**

Nov 30, *Los Angeles Times*: “A review by the Los Angeles Times of the debate... four months ago found that the Democratic presidential candidates also faced queries that seemed to come from the conservative perspective.... During that session, one video questioner asked the candidates to choose between raising taxes or cutting benefits in order to save Social Security. Another demanded to know whether taxes would rise ‘like usually they do when a Democrat comes in office.’ A third featured a gun-toting Michigan man, who in an interview Thursday said he had voted twice for President Bush, who wanted to know if the Democrats would protect his ‘baby’ — an assault rifle he cradled in his arms. Another questioner from that forum who seemed to have clear conservative credentials was John McAlpin, a sailor who asked Clinton: ‘How do you think you would be taken seriously’ by Arab and Muslim nations that treat women as second-class citizens’? McAlpin’s MySpace page features pictures of Rudolph W. Giuliani, the former New York mayor and Republican presidential candidate. It depicts Fox commentator Bill O’Reilly as a friend, while offering a caricature of a bearded, turban-wearing ‘Borat Hussein Obama’ — a derogatory reference to Obama, the Democratic candidate who as a youth attended a Muslim school.”

Hey, CNN. When in doubt, just remember Crisis Management 101: Get your story straight, and get it out fast — and right — the first time. Have a swell weekend.

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