

# RICHARD MELLON SCAIFE, “WITH MICHAEL ISIKOFF”?

I found this article on Richard Mellon Scaife’s newfound admiration for the Clinton’s via tristero. It’s a remarkable article, in that it frames Scaife’s purported admiration for the Clinton’s against the background of Scaife’s smear factory from the nineties, all told in a pseudo-objective omniscient third person voice.

Scaife was no run-of-the-mill Clinton hater. In the 1990s, the heir to the Mellon banking fortune contributed millions to efforts to dig up dirt on President Clinton. He backed the Clinton-bashing American Spectator magazine, whose muckrakers produced lurid stories about Clinton’s alleged financial improprieties and trysts. Scaife also financed a probe called the Arkansas Project that tried, among other things, to show that Clinton, while Arkansas governor, protected drug runners.

The Arkansas Project largely came up empty, and most of the stories were ignored by all but the most avid Clinton antagonists. But one Scaife-backed conspiracy theory got widespread attention. In 1993, White House aide and Clinton friend Vince Foster was found dead of a gunshot wound in a park outside Washington, D.C. Three official investigations concluded the death was a suicide. Yet Scaife dollars helped promote assertions that Foster had been murdered—the not-so-subtle subtext being that the Clintons had something to do with it. Scaife hired Christopher Ruddy, a reporter who doggedly pursued the conspiracy theory in a Scaife newspaper, the Pittsburgh

Tribune-Review. Though discredited, the story resonated with people who believed Clinton was hiding dark secrets. Scaife and Ruddy later started Newsmax, a Web site and magazine that attacks their enemies and lauds their heroes.

All presented as if a reporting team that includes Michael Isikoff would need to do any actual reporting to tell the story of the smear campaigns directed at the Clintons. And note: Isikoff does not include himself in his little narrative of his former life, nor does anyone admit that much of the vocabulary used here—Ruddy as "a dogged reporter"—makes a pretty bold value judgment coming from someone deeply involved in this swamp, particularly given that Ruddy is pretty clearly the source of the "scoop."

And then the actual scoop—that Scaife recently donated money to Clinton's AIDS in Africa program—is introduced with Newsweek's pseudo-impersonal "NEWSWEEK has learned." To be fair, that's a structure Hosenball and Isikoff use regularly. But in this case, it deserves attention for the way it obscures the most important information about the story: who got the scoop (Hosenball or Isikoff?), whether it was peddled (Scaife to Isikoff, who then had Hosenball do an "objective" report on it?) or whether any actual reporting was involved. "NEWSWEEK has learned" in a sort of immaculate conception style or reporting.

Now add to this pseudo-objective structure the designated authorship of the article. This is Isikoff and Hosenball's weekly article. Yet Hosenball gets the byline; Isikoff is relegated to a note at the end, "With Michael Isikoff." That's remarkable particularly since a lot of Hosenball and Isikoff's stories are clearly one or the other of the partner's. Yet normally, they give both full credit, even if one is working harder than the other in a given week.

All I'm saying, I guess, is the article is as

remarkable for its narrative evasions as it is for the actual news it reports: that the Clintons are making nice with yet another institution of Right Wing smear.