



Gray Lady Down: What the Decline and Fall of the New York Times Means for America

William McGowan

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The story of Jayson Blair and the chaos he sowed at the New York Times is a cautionary tale for the American media and for a public concerned about the accuracy of the news it consumes. A young African American reporter said to be "promising and talented" was found to have plagiarized a former fellow NYT intern on a story about Iraq War casualties. This led to revelations involving a long pattern of egregious plagiarism, outright fabrication, dateline fraud and other forms of journalistic deception - rocking the Times to its foundations. After nearly a month in the hot seat, the paper's two top editors resigned, under pressure from publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. and despite promises that no such "newsroom scapegoating" would occur. The Times management called the Blair scandal an anomaly that shouldn't stain the paper's reputation or raise questions about racial favoritism. But as William McGowan shows in this hard-hitting inquiry, the episode was symptomatic of a long institutional and intellectual downward slide that has set America's most important news icon at odds with its journalistic mission - and with much of mainstream America. Using the Blair Affair as a springboard, McGowan examines the past decade at the Times, focusing on figures such as Sulzberger, fired editor Howell Raines and Jayson Blair himself to understand how an "irreplaceable national institution" could turn into the butt of late-night Letterman and Leno jokes. How did the Times become so suffused with intellectual orthodoxy and so committed to a tattered political correctness? Who is responsible for squandering the finest legacy in American journalism? Can the Times recover? These are some of the questions McGowan ponders in *Gray Lady Down*, the inside story of what happened to America's "Paper of Record."

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