



## Sex, Blackmail, And Jeff Bezos

Jon Larsen

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The nation is now agog over a sex and blackmail scandal that involves two of the more famous publishers in the world — Jeffrey Bezos, owner of Amazon and the Washington Post, and David Pecker, publisher of the National Enquirer. By now you know the bare — and I do mean bare — outlines of the scandal. Jeffrey Bezos, married for 26 years, entered into a relationship with another woman, also married.

As a Washington Post columnist recently put it with the utmost delicacy, Bezos “fell into a hormonally induced trance, during which he texted her intimate messages and pictures.”

Somehow the National Enquirer obtained copies of said “messages and pictures” and published a few in an 11-page exposé that effectively ended Bezos’s marriage. Bezos immediately ponied up some of his \$130 billion fortune to fund an investigation into how the emails and texts had been obtained. Recently he has gone public with his suspicions that the Enquirer’s story was politically motivated — most likely on behalf of Donald Trump.

Bezos even floated the idea that a foreign country, possibly Saudi Arabia, had plucked his sexting messages from the cloud to curry favor with Trump.

The charge that the Enquirer’s story was politically motivated is easy enough to believe. Trump and Pecker are old friends, and Pecker had already been caught breaking campaign finance regulations on Trump’s behalf. During the 2016 election, the Enquirer purchased the stories of two women who alleged affairs with Trump — one a quickie tryst with porn star Stormy Daniels, the other a long-running romance with Playboy model Karen McDougal. The Enquirer’s motive for the two deals was apparently to bury the allegations in what is known as a “catch and kill” scheme, which had been elaborately worked out with Trump’s personal attorney, Michael Cohen.

According to Bezos, the Enquirer’s parent company, American Media, apparently in a panic that Pecker may have been caught violating the terms of his plea deal with the Southern District of New York, sent Bezos what look very much like blackmail letters through its attorneys, essentially telling Bezos, if you publicly disavow your charges of political motivation, we will not publish the rest of the salacious material we have on you.

This is where a third publisher enters the picture — Rupert Murdoch, who owns Fox News, the Wall Street Journal and the New York Post. The latter tabloid put the scandal on its front page with the headline,

Accompanying the headline was a photograph of Bezos with his mistress. The New York Post is rightly famous for its headlines. Whatever one thinks of the current scandal and its various actors, one would have to agree that this is one of the funniest, punniest headlines in the Post's long history.

Once one stopped laughing, it was easy enough to see that Murdoch's media platforms had entered the fray on the side of Pecker. In its cover story on the scandal the New York Post ran a smaller headline next to a photograph of Bezos that read, "Prime Slime."

Murdoch is famous for being one of the most ruthless publishers of the modern era, not to mention one of the most partisan. Throughout the 2016 election his media outlets did their unlevel best to help Trump — the Wall Street Journal through its opinion pages, the New York Post through its headlines and editorials, and the Fox News network 24/7 through its talking heads.

Even before Trump had been nominated by the GOP, the late Roger Ailes, then the CEO of Fox News, offered Trump a home on Fox and Friends, inviting him to call in to the program whenever he chose. It was the gift that kept on giving throughout the campaign.

Murdoch did not think much of Trump at the outset, and famously laughed when Ivanka told him over lunch that her father was running for president. But he soon fell in line along with most other Republicans, and now seems determined to protect his bet. Part of that strategy seems to be siding with the peckerwoods at the Enquirer.

The day after the New York Post headline, Holman Jenkins Jr., of the Wall Street Journal's editorial board, opined that Bezos "thinks it would be really, really convenient to turn the story into a Trump political scandal rather than a Bezos sexting and infidelity scandal." Meanwhile, on Fox News, the Cato Institute's Patrick Eddington called Bezos's claims "a lot of hot air."

Stay tuned. This may prove to be a long-running soap opera. The fat is in the fire — not to mention Bezos's billions, Murdoch's minions, and Pecker's famous lack of regard for fairness, truth, or decency. One wants to say, may the best man win, but it seems that may not apply in this case.

Jonathan Z. Larsen served as editor of the Village Voice from 1989 to 1994, and is a former editor of New Times and a former Time magazine editor and correspondent.