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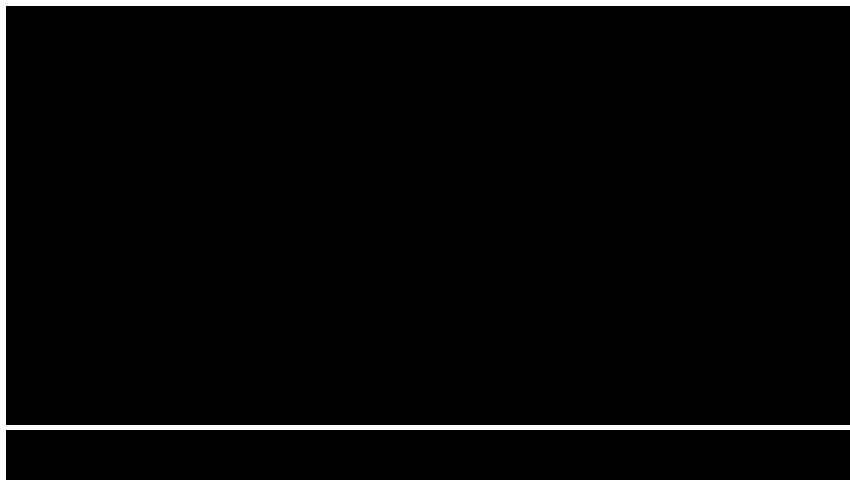
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### Netizens call on CNN to apologize for sympathetic coverage of teenagers found guilty of rape

By Alejandro Martínez

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Around 200,000 netizens have signed [an online petition calling CNN to apologize](#) for its breaking news coverage this Sunday of the conclusion of a controversial rape trial in Steubenville, Ohio. The TV network's story has come under intense fire this week for focusing its attention and sympathies on the two teenage football stars who were found guilty of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl last summer, while omitting any mention of what the ruling meant for the victim.

On Sunday, a Steubenville court found Trent Mays, 17, and Ma'lik Richmond, 16, [delinquent \(the juvenile equivalent of a guilty verdict\) of raping the victim](#) and were sentenced to at least one year in a juvenile detention facility.

The case has underscored the powerful social standing of high school football players in their communities and re-ignited a discussion on social perceptions of rape victims, who are often accused of being responsible of the crime against them. It also drew national attention for how social media was used by the two young men and their friends to share images, videos and texts of the rape. The same online tools were later used by bloggers and [even the hacker community Anonymous](#) to reveal and propagate more materials, which were later used as evidence in the court.

In its coverage of the verdict, CNN focused on the scene at the court and on what the verdict meant for the young men, underscoring the long-term consequences of permanently being labeled as sex offenders.

"That will haunt them for the rest of their lives," said CNN legal contributor Paul Callan.

CNN correspondent Poppy Harlow said the scene was "incredibly emotional — incredibly difficult even for an outsider like me to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star

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football players, very good students, literally watched as they believe their life fell apart.”

While many other media outlets were accused of forgetting about the victim, outraged tweeters focused most of their comments on the TV network:

“ Shame on CNN: Apologize for Steubenville coverage. [@signon](http://signon.org/s/aS1Vht)  
— Adrien Korczynski (@AdrienHope) March 19, 2013

“ Hey @cnn I know you've got a lot of time to fill, but you can do better than the "poor convicted rapists" angle [upworthy.com/cnn-pays-touch...](http://upworthy.com/cnn-pays-touch...)  
— James Van Der Beek (@vanderjames) March 19, 2013

“ Like DUH, @cnn. #steubenville [twitter.com/carinainthecity...](https://twitter.com/carinainthecity)  
— Carina Hsieh (@carinainthecity) March 18, 2013

Meanwhile, the New Yorker said CNN “fully deserved” the angry responses over its coverage. The Huffington Post said “it’s telling that this tone continued over multiple segments, despite a cadre of tweets and blog posts deriding the network’s earlier coverage”.

Gawker’s Mallory Ortberg wrote:

“ It is unlikely that Candy Crowley and Poppy Harlow are committed rape apologists; more likely they simply wanted a showy, emotional angle at the close of a messy and sensationalized trial. Since the identity of the victim is protected, and the rapists obliged the camera crews by memorably breaking down and crying in court, they found an angle to match: extremely gifted young men were brought tragically low by... mumbleumblesomething. That isn't how rape trials ought to be discussed by professional journalists.

CNN’s coverage led to a petition on Change.org calling the network to apologize, which has already collected almost 202,000 signatures. Addressed to CNN Worldwide president Jeff Zucker, the petitioners said:

“ We demand an on air apology for your disgustingly biased coverage. Further, we demand that you use your position as a premier news network to focus on changing rape culture in America. Devote an hour long, prime time segment to rape, it's victims, what can be done to prevent it, and how to change the culture that gives rise to this violent crime.

However, Poynter’s Kelly McBride offered a different perspective on the lashing against CNN and called people not to sign the petition. While she agreed that CNN anchors said “clumsy things” about the convicted teenagers, McBride said the push against CNN was “a misplaced anger that will do nothing but further confuse the public about issues of rape and sexual assault” and called people to look instead at good coverage, such as ESPN’s long podcast on the topic, the National Sexual Violence Center’s study on teenager’s difficulty in intervening when witnessing a rape, or a former Steubenville resident’s role in uncovering material on the assault.

“... We in the media have to do more to put a face on the victims of childhood rape,” McBride wrote. “Railing against missteps or an imbalance in coverage makes us less likely to take up powerful stories that will change the way we as a society understand the extent of the rape problem and the power we have to change it.”

Posted at 2003-03-20 21:01

Topics: [CNN](#) [covering violence](#) [EE.UU.](#) [Huffington Post](#) [television](#)

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