

Boogie Man Script by Stefan Forbes & Noland Walker

Lee

OK, let's take the whole thing.

Judge

I, Ronald Reagan do solemnly swear.

Reagan

I, Ronald Reagan do solemnly swear.

Bush

that I will faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States.

W

preserve, protect and defend the constitution of the United States.

Judge

so help me god.

W

so help me god.

Reagan

You ain't seen nothing, yet.

I'M A BAD BOY.....

Tucker

Can you understand American politics if you don't understand Lee Atwater? I believe not.

Bush

He couldn't teach me rhythm but he did teach the democrats to sing the blues and I believe they are just starting.

Fineman

He mattered in American politics. Because of the man he got elected, because of the party he shaped. He was very important not only to George HW's victory, but to his son's victory.

Rove

Lee Atwater was part myth, part showman, and part political mastermind. He was one of the most unique people I've ever met in my life.

Conosan

Rove was the protégé of Lee Atwater. How do politics really work? How does a presidential election really work? The depths of it deserve to be examined closely.

Sam Donaldson

I don't think the American public understood some of the messages that Lee had planted in his mind. That were irresistible.

Talking Heads

Racist? Disgusting. Scumbag Politics. Garbage.

Lee

But I'm a very lovable guy.

BB King

Regardless of what a person may do for a living, if he played blues, he's my man. I like him.

Fineman

It's a great story not because of politics. It's American yearning and striving, both the glory and the sadness...and the personal risks of doing that. Life gets even with you in the end.

Tucker

Pride. Sin. Redemption. I've heard it described as some kind of Greek tragedy. I don't know about that; I just know Lee was at the height of the national political scene and you had to wonder: what next?

Boogie Man Title**Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir. of Communications 2000-3)**

Lee Atwater grew up in a standard southern looking white life. He pierced through all that. I would've love to have seen this guy operate at the grade school level, I mean that's where you learn politics.

Jimmy (Jim McCabe Lifelong Friend)

He could literally chug a whole bottle of Tabasco sauce. You know, give him five bucks or something.

Joe (Joe Sligh Friend & Bandmate)

He could just get a crowd into a frenzy. He was the only guy I knew who could do a split, stand on his head

Brian Gumbel

Just think if you had stayed with the Upsetters Review what you could've become.

Lee

Yeah, I could have been making 65 dollars a night.

Joe

We drank Purple Jesus...grain alcohol and vodka, it has to be made in trash can. He was good at disrupting a classroom. He did a book report on the phone book. He said it went from one character to another. It really didn't have a good theme to it. Next he did a book report on the Call of the Wild. He just got up and started howling in the class. He took this one guy and ran him as president of the school. And nobody had ever had a campaign manager in high school.

Jimmy

And they won, you know. He figured out early on, maybe I don't want to be the candidate, but the behind the scenes guy.

TITLE: first he took over South Carolina

Lee

Well, well I've always been anti establishment. In South Carolina, I just said, well, if these guys are the democrats, I'm a republican.

Jimmy

I asked Lee why did you go the Republican party, the fuddy dud, country club set. Lee said "Hey man, I have a lot better chance at doing something in the Republican party.

Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir. Of Communications 2000-3)

If the grand ol party stayed kind of grand and old it wasn't going to be much of a party. It had to go young, without that we would go into the wilderness.

Jimmy

The power was just waiting to be wielded and he was going to wield it.

YOUNG VOTERS

Lee

At Newberry College where I attend, we have signed up over 12,000 supporters for President Nixon which is a national record at this point.

Alterman (Eric Alterman Journalist, Professor)

Isn't it a shame that he didn't become a democrat, because it would have been just as easy for him. He didn't believe in any of those things...you think of yourself as a rebel and on the other hand, you have unfettered access to enormous riches. It must have been a lot of fun.

Jimmy

Lee built an army of college republicans all over the state of South Carolina. At first he took over South Carolina and then went national.

College Republican #1 (Stephen Raper President, Regent Republicans)

The liberal allegation has always been college republicans only care about the rich, or we're closet fascists, or we're people that hate the human race.

College Republican #2

Free book if you sign up for Islamist fascism week.

College Republican #1

Lee Atwater showed you could be a college republican and be cool, have musical interest, you didn't have to wear a pinstripe suit or a bow tie.

College Republican #3 (Christopher Stark, Chairman, NJ College Republicans)

We are the grass roots force. You know the liberals may have the unions, but we also have the college republicans and we're hit with liberal bias from every single professor so we know what we believe in. You can't learn these types of things in the classroom. Its tough and its dirty or it appears to be dirty and Karl Rove is a shining example of the work that the college republicans can do.

TITLE 1973

Can lee win one for Karl?

Conason (Joe Conason Journalist, Salon.com, The Nation)

1973 Convention, it really is a seminal moment in this little out of the way place with a bunch of college republicans who at the time seemed the most irrelevant figures in American politics.

Rove

One of the wildest weeks of my life was spent in the company of Lee Atwater in a ford pinto.

Conason

Rove was the protégé of Lee Atwater. He thought it was his turn to take over the national college republicans which was a prestigious position for a guy like him who was kind of coming out of nowhere and hadn't even gone to college really. Um, the problem was there was another guy named Robert Edgeworth who was actually the one in line to succeed.....They got into a tremendous nation wide battle.

Rove

This is the big showdown in my race for chairman, all the bad guys are on the other side. The vote count was evenly split and we were going to lose....

Conason

It was pretty clear that Edgeworth really did have more votes....Lee Atwater and Karl Rove used every conceivable trick, ballots are thrown away, unfairly....The election was appealed to the Republican national chairman, George Herbert Walker Bush..... History in the making....He gave the election to Rove..... You know echos of....you know the 2000 election in Florida where the ballots are disputed and the Supreme court makes the decision on a very dubious basis.....That was a pretty early lesson for Karl Rove from Lee, that you could play the hardest of hard ball and get away with it.

Lee

I make no bones about who I am, what I am and what I do and I think that's one the things that has always quote haunted me. Very few people in politics are like that. I just don't make any bones about it. If you are on the other team, I am going try and beat you.

Fineman (Howard Fineman Senior Political Writer, Newsweek)

Lee sometimes reminded me of a wolverine sort of chewing through the plywood. And he had a vaguely marsupial look about him, always sniffing the air. The George Bush crowd, Atwater saw that's where the future was.

Novak (Robert Novak Journalist, TV Host)

And that's what these guys do, they hook on to somebody. It's a hook and ladder. Lee Atwater never would have become chairman of the Republican National Committee without George HW Bush.

Joe (Joe Sligh Lifelong friend)

Everything was calculated. Power attracted Lee from the time he was 20 years old. And Lee got bored with a lot of famous people. He was never bored by Senator Thurmond.

Lee

I probably wouldn't have gotten into politics if it weren't for Strom Thurmond, the personal interest he took in me and my career.

Joe

I mean he was just fascinated by Strom Thurmond, I mean, just fascinated. He wanted to know as much as he could about him. And he did, he started at the very bottom.

STROM SPEECH

There is not enough troops in the army....

Chuck (Chuck Jackson, R&B recording artist, Atwater friend)

My grandfather hated Strom Thurmond with a passion ..and I grew up with that same hate and when I met Lee, I knew Lee was connected to him. He is a part of the system that hates us.

Turnipseed (Tom Turnipseed, SC State Senator '74-78)

Good ol' Strom, golly, 21 years old, has sex with the 15 year old daughter of the maid there at his house....and produces a child....and to come out and say blood will run before we integrate personifies what we are talking about, you know, the hypocrisy of racism.

Ishmael (Ishmael Reed, Media critic/journalist, The Nation)

The south is afro keltic, its where you find the kelt settled and where the Africans are. This is a place where the same person saying yes sir, yes ma'am, you can go out and get lynched the next day.... so I mean, the south is complicated.

Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir. of Communications 2000-3)

The south has got the same thing America's got, a complicated history on race. There are reasons to hate things about the south and still love the region and it's people.

TITLE WHILE THE DEMOCRATS SLEPT

Tucker

I am not aware of any democrat paying attention to what Lee what learned in his early races. They existed up in some elite layer of the clouds that had nothing to do with what moved people to feel. And they slept while Lee out maneuvered them. You absolutely have to look back at those early campaigns as helping make the republican party in the south what it was, ultimately helping make presidents.

Turnipseed (Tom Turnipseed SC State Senator '74-78)

In the Congressional race, I was the democratic nominee. He came out and in sort of an underhanded way in a sense, he got a reporter to ask him a question about, well, ain't it true that Tom Turnipseed had some kind of psychiatric problem as a kid. He was the master at creating juicy tidbits for the media.

Lee

Well I said that he had been hooked up to jumper cables in reference to a bout with mental illness that he had had in college which had been made public two year before so I wasn't breaking any new ground.

Bandy (Lee Bandy Political Journalist, The State, SC)

That got quoted all over kingdom come down here....Lee Atwater said, accused Tom Turnipseed of being hooked up to jumper cables.

Turnipseed

Jumper cables, I'm laughing now, but it ain't funny.

Bandy

Atwater's candidate won.

Tucker

Its so much easier to blame dirty tricks than it is to acknowledge hard work. Did he give his opponents ammunition to criticize him for negative tactics?.....Yes...Does that obscure the fact that he outfoxed them at nearly every turn.....not to those of us watching closely.

TITLE 1978 divide & conquer**Bandy**

Southerners like a good hard fought political campaign. He first made a name for himself on a race between Carol Campbell and a democrat by the name of Max Heller.

John Bass (Jack Bass, PHD, Pol. Sci Prof, College of Charleston)

Max Heller had been an immigrant, he was as a jewish teenager escaping Hitler and he was popular mayor.

Heller

Yeah, Max Heller

Sam Donaldson (Sam Donaldson White House Correspondent '77-88)

Lee was one of the first advocates of the push poll. The first few questions are routine, and then you say if governor X was a pedophile would that change your opinion. Now, the poller hasn't said that governor X is a pedophile, simply planted the idea that if he were.

John Bass

They did a poll which asked would you vote for a Jew who did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. No, they wouldn't.

Bandy

A redneck type candidate went around reminding people that Max Heller was Jewish. They said he entered the race on his own, but none of us really believe that.

John Bass

He had a press conference and he attacked Max Heller.

Don Sprausse

I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe he died to save my sins, Mr. Heller does not.

Heller

Anything you want to know about me.

Shopkeeper

I think I have heard quite a bit about you, what do you know about the Lord...I am a little prejudiced toward people and my lord.

Bandy

Lee Atwater's candidate won, he denied that he recruited this guy but none of us believed it.

Alterman

It was a brilliant nasty tactic, that worked perfectly.....no one has ever been able to pin it on Lee so he denied it vociferously.

Bandy

Lee Atwater did not leave his fingerprints on his dirty tricks... He liked to take an issue and use it as a wedge, abortion, he would use race and he used it to define people.... Divide and conquer, that's how Lee Atwater operated.

Tucker

Lee grew up in this brew of racial divide, driving the country. The role of the civil war, the south's rise from the ashes. At it's heart about learning lessons of defeat.

Eichel (Henry Eichel Political Journalist)

The south is the only part of the united states ever thoroughly defeated and humiliated in war. It was impoverished for generations and did not fully become a part of the rest of the country. It does create a very visceral reaction and Atwater was adept at tapping into that. It was a back lashing at people who think they're better than you are.

Alterman (Eric Alterman Journalist, Author)

Liberals have had a hard time understanding, but its this cultural resentment that people in the south feel because these liberals, these smart asses run everything and you have nothing but contempt for them. Lee's friends all said, but you guys all think we are dumb. You, you have the same kind of prejudice against us that you accuse us of having against black people

Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir of Communications 2000-3)

The big boys, trying to push us around, trying to remind us how much greater they are. We'll show them. Lee had a kind of we'll show them strength to him that was about as wide as his backbone. Resentment, it became the destiny of the republican party.

**TITLE 1980 primary
reagan's in trouble...
Can lee save him?****Bandy**

Reagan did poorly in New Hampshire. I don't think Ronald Reagan would've been elected if he had lost the South Carolina primary. It was pivotal. Reagan had to win.

Tucker

The Reagan campaign needed political operatives. Lee Atwater wanted to roar into Washington and on to the national political stage. But you have to get people to win big government office.

Bandy

Lee Atwater figured that Connally was their biggest threat. Lee leaked a story, to me, that John Connally was trying to buy the black vote.... That story got out, thanks to me. And it probably killed Connally. He spent \$10 million for one delegate.... Lee saved Ronald Reagan's candidacy. A few years later, Lee laughed about that story. He said, Bandy you got used.

Turnipseed

Anything goes, tell them what they want to hear. Lie, cheat, steel, make it up, making up stuff. He used to go back into the room, making up these polls. I tell you, he'd come back with a poll in about half an hour.

Bass

Go back and look at Ronald Reagan's 1980 run for president. Where does he begin. In Philadelphia, MI, where three civil rights workers were murdered, by the Klu Klux Klan and the local sheriff's department. Reagan speaking to a exclusively white audience, appeal to their most basic instincts. Fully breaks the code in a way. Lee later talks about that in an interview in the early 80's. He explained that it used to be nigger, nigger, nigger. You can't say that anymore. You had Ronald Reagan talking about welfare queens. Coded language. The emotional issues. The symbolism is so obvious.

Tucker

Strom Thurmond wanted to make a call, to remind people what all this boy from South Carolina had done. It was in keeping of Lee Atwater's nature to have be it be for something as big as getting in the White House and playing at that level. This was a bigger challenge. This was a bigger prize.

Rollins (Ed Rollins Campaign Manager, Reagan '84)

Strom Thurmond was trying to get Lee a job in the White House and here's this young kid without a real resume. He came into my office, he was fidgety. His legs everything moving, but there was something about his eyes. He had these piercing eyes. And as I have always thought, those, those, are the eyes of a killer... This was someone who was going to get what he wanted... He said I'll give you 20 hours a day... I said to him, I don't have a slot for you, I don't have a title for you. You're going to be at the bottom of the rung. In 24 hours, he figured out how to detail people and confiscate furniture out of other peoples offices.

Jimmy

The most powerful city in the world and we'd be out there running around the memorials and he'd just..his is where I make my living,

TITLE that burning need

Rollins

I watched him grow up. He was like a little brother, had great energy. No one will every out work him. He ate his meals there. He was there 7 days a week. Worked for me for a year, and one day he comes in to me and says "I am bringing up my wife and child." I said, "Lee, I didn't even know you were married, you never talked about them. He said, "you know, there in South Carolina, I'm going to bring them up. A lot of families suffer in Washington. It's a terrible addiction.....There is nothing else that is important. If he could have slept on a couch and showered in the White House he would have never gone home.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY...

Novak (Robert Novak, TV Host, Columnist)

A lot of people in Washington are ivy leaguers, class prejudice, feeling of the snopes family had invaded. That he had gone too far, too fast. I have met a million of them. Little political errand boy. Very ambitious. In the Reagan Administration they didn't take him seriously, he's a guy on the make, devious, manipulative.

Tucker

Speaking with a drawl and engaging in some of the less nuanced forms of politics assigns you to a certain position. We've seen your kind before. He had to fight to earn respect. for authority, for power. Lee was scrappin'.

What forces will drive this person to new heights or crash them to the greatest depths?

That need, that burning need to become something and transform and show them. He kept learning.

Lee Atwater

I do not ever remember sitting in a meeting in which someone didn't bring up how such and such would play in the press. I think there is a preoccupation, and justifiably so, once you understand the nature of power in America today, without quote a story plays out.

Ed Rollins

Here was this insecure kid, that I'm sure everyday had that imposter fear, is Ed Rollins going to fire my ass today, will they find out that I'm really not a PHD candidate? Is someone going to walk in here and say get the fuck out of here Lee, it's all bullshit.

Anything he had access to, he would always give to some reporter. Everything was leaked, he was a big source. He knows what they need.

Reporter

Lee, what are you selling?

Lee

Nothing in particular.

Ed Rollins

The National Journal had done a profile, and Lee had written that he had a record of 26 and 0. I said "Lee, we have not won 26 races in the south since the civil war. What kind of bullshit is that?" and he goes "it's my record now, its in the National Journal. The media never caught on, he was a very good con man.

Sam Donaldson

The best political operatives make friends with the press. Its easy if you don't watch yourself to fall into that, particularly if you are dealing with someone that you like personally because they like you.

Lee being interviewed by reporter in wide 2-shot.

Lee

I must say you are a very dapper dresser. You have the right collar, right tie with the suit, even down to the socks.

Tucker

Oh man, don't you know when somebody is gaming you?

Sam Donaldson

An operative never comes and says here is a story I'd like you to run for me, but just in private conversation, did you know this about so and so, we're still checking it mind you, but, but its probably going to turn out to be true. Well you don't want to be beaten by your competition and wait to they announce it. They just put it on the conveyer belt and they just run it out.

Lee in front of press conference in Atlanta, Georgia

Lee

And I am not going to sit here and spin you all - this is a high quality news conference.

The reporters and Lee laugh.

Fineman (Howard Fineman, Senior Political Writer, Newsweek)

He was an attractive figure to cover, because he could wink and nod with the reporters, saying ‘we all know what a phony deal this is, right?’ By saying it’s all wrestling, he used his own cynicism to anesthetize people to what was really going on.

Anchor

There is a bill in the Senate called the clean air bill of 1985. Its intended to restrict the so called negative political advertising.

Lee

What I think you would wind up doing is polluting the air with kind of candy cane type of commercials that are ooey and gooey. They are polluting the air more than anything else.

Tucker

Reagan benefited from having a scrapper to remind even some wavering Republicans what they should fear.

Lee

We had a kind of a rating scale of a one meaning this is kind the guy who you just go and blatantly intimidate in his district.

Tucker

The Washington establishment begins to take notice. This southern accented, fast talking knife fighter. Even if you thought he was a rube, you did not take him lightly.

BAD MAN WALKING.....

Rollins (Reagan ‘84 Campaign Manager)

I was appointed assistant to the president. A lot of people told me he wouldn’t be loyal to me, told me not to pick him. I admired his work ethic. I admired where he came from. How are we two guys here, my old man a shipyard worker from Vallejo, CA. Your parents from South Carolina, we’re in the big leagues together. I made him my deputy...he came into me one day and he said would you give an interview. So I sit down for the interview and NBC news lead that night with the story that Ed Rollins is running a dirty ops operation. There was no dirty ops operation. He brought the producer in, it was his old girlfriend...Lee had put a spear in my back.... The day I walked in his office after this thing he thought I was going to beat the shit out of him and I told him, you ever do anything like this again to me, I’ll fucking beat the living crap out of you. I’ll find your ass and I’ll beat the fucking living crap out of you. You set me up, your mentor. why would you do this to me?”...it was just a two year effort to destroy me. He wanted to run Bush’s campaign. He worked Bush very hard. He said George W, never trusted you, so I kept feeding it. He clearly made it that I would never be anywhere in the Bush world.

Sam

Everybody is jockeying for the great man’s attention and let me tell you those knives flashed brilliantly for a year or so.

Rollins

I had put so much trust in him, despite of everyone telling me you couldn’t trust him, I trusted him.

Fineman

What creates somebody who's that cold blooded are events in his background and his upbringing that leave them with a very bleak remorseless view of life.

Jimmy (Jim McCabe Lifelong friend)

He didn't talk about Joe much. His mother, she had a deep fryer I think, and uh, full of hot grease, and the little kid, you know he pulled on the cord, and pulled the thing over, yeah, he didn't talk about Joe much.

Joe Sligh

The grease on the stove ended up on Joe and it killed him.

Jimmy

He certainly told me about the screams. My god, can you imagine?

Joe Sligh

I don't know what affect it had over him, it's a callous, it's a big callous.

Fineman (Howard Fineman, Senior Political Writer)

He believed there was little or no mercy in life. What kind of God produces this.....

George HW Bush, the good son of the establishment, of tremendous privilege and access to power and money. And here, Lee Atwater was the bad seed of the anti-establishment. I think there were times when he was brutally brought up short by the Bushes, when Lee may have been presumed allowed in the mansion to sip the sherry. The Bushes never regarded him as anything other than the hired help and a somewhat untrustworthy member of the hired help. They could always jettison him if they had to. Cut him loose in a second. And Lee was perfectly willing because it gave him entrée into the world of power and celebrity that he so craved.

Alterman (Eric Alterman Journalist, Author)

In Esquire, Lee is going to the bathroom while he's talking to David Remnick. Remnick wrote it up as here's Lee imitating Johnson, a form of humiliating you. Barbara Bush was very offended. Both by Lee's language and by his vulgarity. It almost cost Lee his job running the Bush campaign. Lee complained to me, "what was I supposed to do, say this piss is off the record."

Tucker

He had to overcome the family suspicion. Who was this upstart. He was a kid. So then who arrives in town? George W Bush, the family liked the fact that they had one of their own keeping a close eye on Lee.

Rove

And Lee responded to that by saying "why don't you come and work with me, work along side me, office next to me. Lets work together in this campaign.

Tucker

So he's got a guy there who has lived a lot closer to the earth than some of his relatives....he and Lee hit it off.

JUST WILD ABOUT YOU

Bush

A true test of a good campaign manager is to be able to figure out how to deal with my mother. Would you please welcome a South Carolina cracker, Lee.

Lee

My #1 soul mate and a guy who's with me thick and thin, day in and day out, George Bush Jr.

Tucker

Lee's riding high, he's got mojo, leader of the next campaign. The eyes of the world upon you. This was an ever bigger leap up, its either going to make them master politicians or its going to ruin them. Its either going to show their way to victory in the future or show them to the door.

Conason (Joe Conason Journalist, Salon.com, The Nation).

The Iran Contra must have been perceived by Atwater and a very serious threat. One of the biggest scandals in American history and your guy is in the middle of it. That's a big problem.

Reagan

A charge has been made that the United States has shipped weapons to Iran trafficking with terrorist. Those charges are utterly false.

Sam

It's a lie, it's a lie, presidents lie.

Terry (Terry McAuliff DNC Chairman 2001-5)

Giving weapons to our sworn enemy, Iran who we're all rallying sabors about today. It's the same Iran.

Alterman

They were always intervening on behalf of drug smugglers and terrorist. If you look at it from a moral standpoint its indefensible but they were so good at controlling the discourse.

Terry

He came out months later and admitted.

Reagan

I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages, my heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not.

Terry

There were some renegades in the White House, you know he acted like he didn't know who was working in the White House.

Reagan

I didn't know about any diversion of funds to the Contras

Cheney

He deserves our support not the monday morning quarterbacking from the people that were not faced with the decisions he had to make.

Dukakis (Gov. Mike Dukakis Dem Nominee '88)

You had the president and the vice president lying to the American people and the congress. The documents being shredded in the White House. Why were we doing that? But then of course one of the reasons we were having Iranian problems was because we had overthrown the democratically elected governor of Iran in 1953. Terrible violations of American values, American law, you know everything this country is supposed to stand for. Bush wasn't the only CIA director to be up to his neck in relationships with drug dealing military leaders in Central and Latin America. If you could afford a uniform and a pair sunglasses and and told us you were anti-communist we supported you...The Vice-President showing Noriega around the CIA office. It was appalling. Truth be known the Iran Contra thing was the thing that got me into presidential campaign.

Reporter

Vice President Bush, did you know about the aid to Iran or not, Sir?

Conason

Bush was really damaged goods because of the sense that he was involved in a cover up secretly promoting war in Nicaragua that a lot of Americans opposed and just the deviousness of the whole thing raised the most serious possible questions about his integrity and fitness.

Haig (Alexander Haig fmr secretary of state)

If you can't answer your friends, what in heaven's name is going to happen next November if you are our standard bearer and these democrats get after you on this subject?

Lee

People want to get this Iranian situation behind them. They're tired of it. They got their children to think about. They have their pocket books to think about. Farmers have their crops to think about.

Rollins (Reagan '84 Campaign Manager)

He knew that in all probability his candidate had been up to his eyeballs in this activity. He'd get knocked out of the game pretty quick. There were a lot of very nervous moments.

Rather

You said if you had know this was an arms for hostages swap that you would have opposed it. You also said

Bush

Exactly

Rather

you did not know

Bush

May I answer that

Rather

That wasn't a question it was a statement

Bush

it was a statement and I'll answer it.

Rather

Let me ask a question if I may first...

Bush

The president created the program as testified...

Sam

Its very difficult to say that's a lie. You just can't do that for a whole variety o reasons when you are in a television interview and a great mass of people are watching and they know this. They will just sit there and lie to you.

Bush

May I explain out of the loop

Mary (Mary Matalin Atwater Aide '88)

And this is another thing that Lee had a particular mastery of. Staying on message. Bush was out of the loop, He was out of the loop. There was never any evidence that he was in the loop. They couldn't break that story so don't say anything different.

Sam

Well he was in the loop. I mean that was kind of clear from the evidence.

Alterman (Eric Alterman Journalist, Author)

Bush was lying. And Elliot Abrams was lying and Casper Weinberger was lying and George Schultz was lying.

Bush

You imply that I didn't tell the truth. Now this has all been looked into. I find this to be a rehash, something that has been exhaustively looked into.

Alterman

Its over, the votes were counted. The reporters are just trying to cause trouble. They are always trying to say things are done with, lets get back to business. We can't stand to stop and take a look at our processes and it seems to work.

Reporter

Sources and other campaigns speculate Bush's strategy may have been to set up Rather, the Vice President always planning to go on attack. CBS correspondent Terrance Smith asked Bush campaign director, Lee Atwater, about that today. Atwater laughed and then answered, "we never talk about how we make sausage."

Jimmy

Once you get to Washington and learn the game, the candidates are a lot of times puppets. There are some people behind the scenes pulling the strings on these guys. In college, he totally detested sports except wrestling. His thing was this is the only honest sport out there. Everybody knew wrestling was fake.

Fineman (Howard Fineman Senior Political Writer, Newsweek)

He was basically saying that politics is phony. The government is phony. That a lot of personal life is phony. Phony was a big word with him.

Conason (Joe Conason Journalist, Salon.com, The Nation)

He may have felt that wrestling was the only honest sport because it was so obviously dishonest. I mean, and that tells you a lot about him....what's there to entertain, what's there to distract is what counts. And actually things are run on a much more cynical bases by the people at the top.

Reporter

Atwater says he can't relax or take it easy because he is always preparing for a mental sparring match.

Lee

you are always in a battle of wits, there is always a bunch of guys out there trying to out smart you and trying to stick it to you and your job is to out smart them and stick it to them first.

**TITLE 1988 primary
Stick it to them first**

Reporter

Bob Dole wants this nomination very badly, He is going to come at you....

Lee

No question about it.

Reporter

He is going to come at you with everything that he has got. Now are you ready for this kind of hand to hand combat.

Tucker

Bob Dole sometimes got scene as mean spirited. Under the pressure of a campaign and under the hot lights of the television, Bob Dole might be forced to make an error. Lee had the campaign throw things at their campaign to press him.

Reporter

The Bush campaign said this morning, that Senator Dole broke the January 13th truce. The Bush campaign says

Dole

Come on, we're not going to answer, I'm not going to answer questions like this. We don't answer...

Fineman

We put out so many different things that others were hearing voices where.... and he got them off their game by making them angry. ... he understood that the media beast could only be chewing on one ankle at a time, make sure the ankle was the other guy's.

Dole

This kind of scurrilous, last minute desperation tactics. And this is only the first state.

Reporter

Did you in fact spread any false rumors about Elizabeth Dole.

Lee

You know better than that.

Reporter

I don't know...

Lee

No, I did not. No I did not.

Reporter

Bob Dole says you did.

Lee

No I did not.

Jimmy

This always fascinated Lee. He was in a profession. Your career could get dashed in a day. You know that totally intrigued him.

Reporter

Iowa has turned the Republican race upside down.

Kemp

Its obvious that George Bush is deeply damaged and Bob has to be considered the front runner in New Hampshire.

Rollins

When you fuck up in this arena, the spotlight is amplified 1000 times....Washington cheers for two things: the Washington Redskins to win on Sunday and it cheers for whoever is in power to fail.

Novak (Robert Novak, TV Host, Columnist)

George Bush thought they had all these country club white shoe Republicans and all this money. There was just this resentment by all the Iowans who belonged to the National Rifle Association. It really didn't like the crowd from the country club.... the New Hampshire primary was vital. It probably would have been the end for George Bush, the sitting Vice President of the United States and I think it would have been curtains for Lee Atwater.

Reporter

Lee Atwater will either solidify his image as the political wonder boy or be known as the one who steered political front runner George Bush into the ground....reports surfaced that Bush was prepared to fire Atwater if he lost the New Hampshire primary.

Reporter #2

For George Bush, Iowa really couldn't have been worse.

Bush

It's nice to be back in New Hampshire. Believe me. Believe me. Nice hospitable climb.

Reporter

His top command is now openly admitting work.

Lee

Sure we are concerned, We're out there campaigning day and night but in the end George Bush is going to win.

Mary (Mary Matalin Atwater Aide '88)

The vice president had to do something that he isn't naturally comfortable with, contrast politics, and you can call it, its been wrongly called negative, it wasn't negative... This is play big or go home.

Reporter

Bush says he won't raise taxes period. Dole straddles. He's been on both sides and you know what that means. Dole actually advised.....

Bush

Read my lips, No new taxes.

Novak

Dole could not take the no tax increase pledge. It killed him in New Hampshire. Bush was less ethical. Bush took it. He lied.

Bush

I would be remiss if I didn't say how well Lee Atwater, our great chairman performed. He did a superb job, and it's not just because he standing here. There is something wonderful about fighting back in life.

Reporter

What did you have to do to him, to turn him into a hit man.

Lee

He was not a hit man, what he did during that campaign was discuss issues.

Sam

Bush had won in New Hampshire and Tom Brokaw on NBC was interviewing the two of them.

Brokaw

And Senator Dole is there anything you'd like to say to the Vice President?

Dole

Yeah, stop lying about my record.

Sam

The look on his face and the tone of voice... I interviewed him later about it and he said, "you know, I lost my cool. It cost me, you work for two years of your life for something and its taken away from you. What are you supposed to say, gee, heck?"

Dole

We're not going to comment, I don't comment on Atwater.

Lee

The fact that the Vice President got the nomination so overwhelmingly is very indicative of the kind of support he's got to this point.

Ann Richards

Poor George, he can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth.

Kennedy

They're the party that talks tough on drugs but deals softly with drug running dictators, and George Bush is a dead duck.

Mary

They thought Atwater was a hick and hack, Bush was a wimp and wuss.

Eishel

They were making fun of him, he was a lap dog, late night TV fodder.

Presenter

I am happy to welcome one half of that winning tandem, the honorable John Bush, George Bush..God.

Reporter

Questions about scandal, mistrust. George Bush has to answer those questions, he hasn't done that yet.

Lee

I beg your pardon, he has spent a year in a very tough campaign under more scrutiny than anybody I'd ever seen. His integrity is totally unimpeachable.

Novak

Your candidate, the only thing he has done with that tax bill, is get the benefits back in for the oil and gas industry.

Lee

Well that was one measure in the thing which I am not going comment about.

Novak

George Bush comes out with his big power boat in Maine and his upper class background, being from Yale, do you think he is really the guy who is going to appeal to the blue collar workers, the ordinary citizens of America?

Lee

Well, you just named a bunch of things that have nothing to do with issues and this is going to be a campaign about issues.

Bush

The democrats are trying to miss lead you....and keep this country.

Workers

What about the deficit?

Bush

What about the deficit? Let me tell you what about it, I don't think you are paying too little in taxes, I think the government is spending too much.

Workers

jeers.....go home bush, go home bush.....

Cuomo (Gov. Mario Cuomo (D) NY)

Dukakis wins big everywhere. Not only will he win, he is going to win in a landslide. I think he will win in every part of this country.

Reporter

Governor Cuomo just came out here and said the Governor is going to win big everywhere.

Lee

I am glad they have that kind of attitude, because that kind of over confidence and cockiness is probably the most unhealthy attitude you can have in politics.

Reporter

Who's going to be VP

Lee

Bye.

Reporter

Wait one more question, what about the Vice President? When are we going to know?

Lee

That is a very interesting question, I will contemplate it when I go jogging. See you gang.

Joe Sligh

Lee's favorite statement was just play dumb and keep moving.

TITLE can lee win it?**W**

The great state of Texas, proudly cast all its votes for her favorite son and the best father in America, George Bush.

Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir. of Communications 2000-3)

Republicans, they have often been dismissed as slow, dumb, and its one of the fundamental reasons the republicans are successful. Lee loved exaggerating that image and just out foxing everyone around him.

Rich Peterson (Rich Peterson RNC Staff, 1989-90)

In the south that's called slow playing him. Being a slow talker and easy going, well a lot of northerners perceive that as not being too bright. Suck them in, you end up running all over them.

Terry

'88 is when your really saw it come into play, the partisan, personal character assignments.

Eishel

You can run, you can run, tell my big boy willie brown, I am standing at the crossroads, baby I think I am sinking down.

Lee

This is a crucial, crucial election. If we loose the presidency this time, we loose it all.

Terry

Ronald Reagan had to have George Bush in office. If a democrat one, we would have a real legal proceeding and Ronald Reagan could've gone to jail.

Reporter

Do you feel that Michael Dukakis should have made his medical records public.

Reagan

Look, I'm not going to pick on an invalid.

Reporters

Mr. President, Mr. President.

Terry

He got away with those sort of things because he did it in a sort of jocular way with his Irish wit. That statement was on the front page of every newspaper in America. Immediately Michael Dukakis's #s started to drop.

Novak (Robert Novak TV Host, Journalist)

They tried to get me to write about Governor Dukakis having psychiatric problems but it really was a slander. He thought my weakness was that if I could get an exclusive story, I would jump at it, bite at it and not be as careful as I should be. Well, that may be true, but I was careful enough not to get involved in that one.

Terry (Terry McAuliffe DNC 2001-3)

To be doing that against the nominee of the other party was so disgraceful. He said, I'll rip the bark off that little bastard. Who was Lee Atwater to say that about any one running for elective office. But you know what, you never saw George Bush 1 ever ask him to stop.

Bush

Did you guys meet Lee Atwater, our campaign manager.

Lee

Pipe down.

Bush

enough applause, it goes to his head.

Rollins

no one hires people like Lee Atwater to lose. There are no silver or bronze metals in this game and it's not about how you win, its about winning. I'm a former alter boy, this is not a business that recruits alter boys.

Sam (Sam Donaldson White House Correspondent '77-88)

You do need to be tough to win the presidency, I've been around a lot of them. And you do have to do things the normal person may shrink from, but that's it. Where is the line? Wanting to win makes people do things that they wouldn't consider in a normal sense. They wouldn't hire Lee Atwater. To win, though, that's what it takes.

Anchor

Earlier this week, Republican Senator Steve Simms of Idaho said that he had been told of reports that Kitty Dukakis had burned an American flag during an anti war demonstration in the 60's.

Symms (Sen. Steve Symms)

I said it was an allegation that had been told to me.

Reporter

But from who though, something like that is very important nationally. Who actually said it to you, I mean at this point somebody needs some kind of fact.

Symms

I wouldn't want to disclose the sources.

Reporter

What about pictures, you mentioned pictures. Have you seen any pictures?

Symms

No, I have not. I said I hadn't seen them. I have been told by some very responsible people that there are some pictures floating around.

Kitty

There couldn't be any photographs, because there was never any such incidence. It is outrageous, it did not happen, and um, there is nobody who loves the flag as much as Michael and myself. That flag is a symbol of freedom, symbol of what that country is all about.

Reporter

Were you at a demonstration at any time.

Kitty

Never.

Rich (Rich Peterson RNC Staff 1989-90)

When you are back on your heels and you are defending yourself constantly, it kind of looks like you are in the wrong and therefore, Lee's candidate usually comes out looking like he's in the right.

Lee

And what does Dukakis do? Every time he stands up, he attacks George Bush. He's a hypocrite. We all know that and you know it to. That is reflective of the kind out of touch crowd that they are. They probably sat up in Brookline eating Belgium endives and quiche out of the can and figure well what we need to do is go.....

Eishel

Quiche out o the can.

Lee

I'm gonna have a southern accent, but there's not much I can do.

Eishel (Henry Eichel, Columnist, NC Observer)

See, it works because there is a ring of truth to it. They probably think, you know, Dukakis they were a bunch of elitist.

Dukakis

Well, obviously, he and the folks around Bush were trying to make me a can of northeast liberal who was out of touch and that kind of a thing. The irony of this is, you know, I'm

the guy who was the son of Greek immigrants who came over here and lived the American dream. Nothing against Yankee Brahmins who were here since 1630.

Bush

A nice wasp kid, born in Milton

Lee

Texans want a Texan for president.

W

Texans want a Texan as president, not someone from Massachusetts

Bush

Born in Massachusetts, we lived down in, grew up in Connecticut.

Rollins

Bush could eat the pork rinds but he was a yalie and he was an elite and he may have lived in Texas, but people still thought of him from Connecticut. Lee was the one who understood the country. Bush was not a natural, climbing in trucks and snow plows, putting on cowboy hats and so, so much of that was Lee's, this is what you need to do Mr. President, this is what you need to do. He desperately needed Lee Atwater.

Bush

Don't let them tell you I'm no Texan, take a look at that.

Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir. of Communications 2000-3)

Lee understood the power of image and how American symbols resonated with a lot of southerners and a lot of people all over the country. The democrats to this day, scratch their head and can't believe that people vote against their own interest by supporting these republicans. When in fact the audacity and arrogance of that is that their interest is in that kind of America. Proud patriotism. It transcends money.

Flag Factory worker

This is Mr. President.

Lee

The question I really want to hear him answer, why in the world did he veto this bill calling for the pledge of allegiance to be said in our classrooms? Can you imagine that? Get down here Dukakis and answer that question.

Dukakis

Kids salute the flag every day, its part of the law, I'm all for it. The question was could you put teachers in jail who refused to lead the pledge. Supreme court of the United States said you can't do that.

Farmer

What's wrong with pledge of allegiance? It just showing that you believe and stand behind your country. I don't think there's nothing wrong with that.

Farmer #2

Everyone of us could stand some more patriotism.

Dukakis

What I should have done is make it very clear to Mr. Bush that I wasn't going to let him question my patriotism.

Bush

I am not questioning his patriotism, I questioning his judgement.

Reporter

Really extraordinarily strident almost in attacking Mike Dukakis

W

No, I don't think its strident. I think, I think that's a misadjective. I would say strong. Well mine is issue clarification.

Farmer #3

I don't like them taking my gun.

Dukakis

Well obviously, I wasn't taking people's guns away in Texas. Although, the President's son, now the president, ran around telling everyone in Texas that's what I was doing.

Farmer #4

If we didn't have any guns here, well, you know we might as well be a communist country.

Reporter

Texas republicans didn't waste a minute, 5 million letters told Texas voters that Michael Dukakis was nothing but a northeast liberal. And that's a cuss word for a lot of Texans.

Rove (Karl Rove Bush Campaign Consultant)

A liberal is somebody who wants more government. more taxes, more spending, more regulation, and more interference in our lives and the only thing they want less of is defense and that's the one thing we want more of.

Terry

The whole idea that somehow we're not man enough, we're weak, we're not going to fight for our country. We sit around the cafes reading editorial pages, sipping our little cappuccino, yeah we don't know what really happens in America. That's what they try to say. We need more people in our party standing up and fighting.

Lee, Cheerleaders
Democrats....

Fineman

He created the modern southern based Republican party and put faith issues and social issues like abortion, gay rights and so forth at the center of American political debate in a way they hadn't been before.

Eric

The republican party has turned into a stealth party, that argues on behalf of the common man and gives all of the benefits to the wealthiest one tenth of one percent. It argues on behalf of certain morality policies. He used to describe the anti-abortion forces as the extra chromosome group and the ones who had a hand coming out of their head, or third eye, you know, those were the people who were most devoted to his cause....

Lee, Cheerleaders

Bush, George Bush, a little louder

Alterman

.one thing Lee told me though, is never, ever, ever, allow yourself to be photographed in a funny hat.

Sam

I was there, I know exactly what you're going to show.

Announcer

Michael Dukakis is opposed to virtually every defense system we developed. He opposed new aircraft carriers, He opposed anti...

Sam

The tank ad went down his voting record. I remember thinking now we've got to check everyone of these points. I am not certain we did.

Dukakis

I was a governor. If they were bills involving national defense and security in Washington, obviously I wouldn't have voted on those, I never served a day in my life in the congress of the United States.

Marvin (Marvin Bush)

Its with a great deal of pride that I introduce my big little brother Georgie. I want you to do me a favor, George told me this morning that from now on he does not want to be referred to as Junior and its not because he doesn't have pride in his father and who he is, but because George has done an outstanding job on this campaign.....gong....

Lee

democrats

Marvin

democrats.

W

One reason, Marvin and I and brother Jeb from the state of Florida, are working so hard is because our dad needs a real job.

Tucker

Now president Bush was learning a lot about politics, This was a new level of playing field and he was watching a master in Lee Atwater.

Fineman (Howard Fineman Political Writer, Newsweek)

What George W saw in Lee was an attitude he might have been afraid to express the first time he ran for congress. It probably wasn't nearly as manipulative or cold blooded enough. He was probably trying to please his dad. Who he somewhat mistakenly thought

was a good guy. Uncapable of tough politics. George W was saying, “ now I see how this has to be done, do the deal, do the deed.”

W

Sometimes the sons can say something their fathers can't and that is, we're counting on you going out there and kick some of Micheal Dukakis and kick it hard. Thank you very much.

TITLE people vote their fear

Conason

Atwater had a genius for the sticky issue, Simple enough and scary enough that the media could latch on to it.

Announcer

As Governor Michael Dukakis vetoed mandatory sentences for drug dealers, he vetoed the death penalty. His revolving door prison policy gave weekend furlows to first degree murderers not eligible for parole. While out many committed other crimes like kidnapping and rape, and many are still at large. Now Michael Dukakis say he wants to do for America what he has done for Massachusetts. America can't afford that risk.

Ismael (Ismael Reed, Journalist, The Nation)

I was angry. I was like very angry. I saw through it right away. I saw the ad, where they had these guys coming out of prison. The black guy was the only one who looked up at the camera. So, ahhhhh, these are diabolical minds behind this thing.

Sam

That's the guy to be afraid of. This was calculated to emphasize the one Afro American here.

Tucker

Race is a powder keg. It, it deserves to be in many ways. And Lee got close to that powder keg and you know setting of sparks near by.

Dukakis

This was a piece of literature that was being distributed in a number of states. “All the rapist and murderers and drug pushers and child molesters in the state of Massachusetts vote for Michael Dukakis”. I thought it was despicable.

Ismael

Then they had the rape victim, this woman, go on tour and talk about in explicit details what happened to her during the rape. She was raped twice.

Dukakis

There was a so called independent committee ad where they simply used Horton's face. The candidate and the people around him deny any responsibility. Anybody who believes that believes in the tooth fairy.

Reporter

I just wonder whether there wasn't a tinge of racism.

Lee

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I don't even think many people in south even know what race Willie Horton is? I think that is totally irrelevant.

Conason (Joe Conason Journalist, Salon.com, The Nation)

Everybody saw how provocative it was and so it got a tremendous amount of free airtime. Who knows how many times hooked up to jumper cables got repeated in South Carolina, and who knows how many times Willie Horton's scowling, angry face of a killer was televised absolutely for free.

Lee

There is a story about a fellow named Willie Horton.

Bush

Willie Horton.

Lee

Convicted Murderer

Bush

Murderer

Announcer

Convicted murderer, Willie Horton.

Announcer #2

Willie Horton

Lee

Weekend vacation.

Bush

Weekend passes

Reporter

The cold blooded

Lee

convicted murderer

Bush

First degree

Lee

Convicted murderer

Bush

Killer, murderer

Lee

They rape people

Reporter

Raped his wife

Lee

And they maul people

Reporter

Willie Horton will become household name.

Bush

No more furloughs for people who rape, pillage and plunder. Thank you and God Bless.

Reporter

Do you think the Willie Horton commercial though gives hint of racial politics?

Lee

I haven't seen the Willie Horton commercial.

Reporter

You don't have a Willie Horton commercial on the air.

Lee

No

Reporter

Furlough program commercial... you don't have a crime, you don't have an ad on air about the crime issue

Lee

no

Reporter

So there is no plan in this campaign at all to use the Willie Horton commercial at all to appeal

Lee

Well there is no Willie Horton commercial. I do think that the criminal furlough program that Dukakis supported in which convicted murderers were allowed to go on weekend furlough.

Ismael

This malignant, overwhelming images of black men that we were to be feared, raising lynch mobs against the black people, this has been the historical role of the American press. There is something deep in the human consciousness that is attracted to fear. I know I like horror movies. Not only politicians but people who run the media will exploit this.

Turnipseed

Fear is an attention getter. Anything to keep a story going, terrorist, Hispanics, gays, communist....

Sam

I was amazed the Dukakis camp never seemed to find it in them to forcefully explain that that program in Massachusetts was copied after a popular state whose governor was the first governor to sign a law for weekend prisoner release. That governor's name was Ronald Reagan.

Dukakis

two of his furloughes went out and murdered people. He defended the program. But I never said that. Wasn't going to respond. I mean that was the decision I made. Crazy in retrospect, crazy.

Terry

Where we've made the mistake is not responding saying no one will believe that. If you don't defend yourself and they are doing negative ads against you and you just say oh, I don't want to play that game, I am going to be positive. You are going to get destroyed. Scare people into voting for you. That's what they're geniuses at.

Eichel

He told me "issues are just something to get attention...People vote on emotions."
CUT???

Alterman

Race is poison, but its poison that works for their side. People vote their fears and not their hopes and Lee understood that.

Conosan

It was bazaar that the Willie Horton case became the focus of the election.

Bernard Shaw

George Bush, the republican nominee, Michael Dukakis, the democratic nominee.

Conosan

The press learned to speak the talking points without even getting them through the fax machine

Bernard Shaw

The first question goes to governor Dukakis, if Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer

Dukakis

No I don't Bernard, and I think you know that I oppose the death penalty all my life.

Ismael

The question was so personal, It was totally out of line and I thought that Bernard Shaw contributed to Dukakis losing that election.

Dukakis

You know I kid around and say if I had beat the old man, maybe you would've never heard of the kid, so maybe its all my fault.

Bush

I have spoken of a thousand points of light, we as a society, must rise up united and express our intolerance. There are those who cannot free themselves of enslavement from whatever addiction, drugs, welfare, demoralization that rules the slums.

Ismael

The demoralization that rules the slums.

Bush

There is crime to be conquered. The rough crimes of the streets.

Ismael (Ismael Reed Media Critic/Journalist, The Nation)

Its just hypocritical for him to say something like that, when in his own family he has this demoralization. His son pretty much admits that he had an addiction problem, with liquor and drugs. The Bush daughters. Yet these are people that are always lecturing Afro Americans about family values.

Terry (Terry McAuliff DNC Chairman 2001-3)

These folks should all have been put away in jail. But you know what, because of their power, and because George Bush went into office and he got to pick the attorney general, the US attorneys, it all got hushed up and George Bush, he now the president of the United States of America, chief law enforcement officer. Huh!

Conason

W learned that the only thing that really matters is who wins. Whatever really happened doesn't matter. They create their own reality as people in this Bush White House later said.

Tucker

He was the first guy I ever heard who said that, now its kind of rote in politics, but Lee was saying early, Perception is reality.

Novak

Republicans tend to be people who don't believe in anything that just want to win elections. Democrats I think have really sincere beliefs, I think they're all wrong, most of them, but they're sincere. Nobody thought of George W. Bush running for governor of Texas til Lee Atwater planted the seeds and then he planted with his man in Austen, Karl Rove. Oh, yeah, it was all planned out. Atwater is a big man now.

Ismael

Runs one of the most racist campaigns in history, marking the wedge between whites and blacks...yet he admired African American culture...Governor Blackface.

Chuck (Chuck Jackson R&B Artist, Atwater Friend)

He was not like at all by none of the people that I knew. He was the head of the clan. I mean this is the way people felt about Lee Atwater.

Jimmy

Lee didn't have a racist bone in his body. Never heard him say the N word. When it came to his music and his dancing. You can ask anyone that ever saw him dance or whatever, Lee was a black person in a white body.

Fineman

That inaugural party was the culmination of Lee Atwater's life. He was the center of attention. He was the star. All the history, all the yearnings, all came together on that night. He was dancing as fast as he could, and I didn't know exactly what lay ahead for him.

Bryant Gumbel

One network called you the architect of the evil campaign. You were proud this morning of the achievement, are you as proud of the tactics?

Lee

If the American people truly thought he was running a negative campaign, they would have reacted negatively.

Bryant Gumbel

Well, I don't know, Lee in fairness I don't know that that's true, in poll after poll, they did say they didn't like the negative campaign, saying , may be the lowest turnout in 64 years and faulting people like you.

CNN Interviewer

Was it you who told George Bush you got to raise fear of black men.

Lee

We didn't do that.

Tom Delay (Tom Delay House Majority leader, 2003-6)

They did what they normally do with somebody who stands up and fights for what he believes in, and that is try and destroy him personally, but it didn't bother him a bit. He just kept going.

Terry

He destroyed Michael Dukakis. They love that. They destroyed the democrat. They all sit around, and you know, toast to themselves at their happy hours that they took a man down.

Kitty

Upsetting, I was angrya whole bunch of emotional feelings. They were falsehoods. The untruth of all that was very disheartening.

Bush

The whole concept of going negative, how much negative campaigning is troubling, but there is time here when sound political judgement says this kind of negative stuff might work. Did we ever do it? yeah, did we feel comfortable about it? No.

Sam

George Herbert Walker Bush has to take the responsibility for his campaign and he's not a dummy. He knew what was going on. You couldn't be around Lee Atwater, who was pretty open about his tactics, without knowing how he did it.

Kitty

Those were rumors and they were untrue. There was no bases for truth in any of that. He was above board and unfortunately didn't answer those charges. We have to answer charges, correct?

Dukakis

Yeah.

Kitty

Ok

Terry

I mean Lee Atwater said it himself, if you can't win on the issues, destroy the reputation of the person you are running against. What did they do, they made him chairman of the republican national committee.

Announcer

Lee Atwater looks to become one of the most powerful party chairmen in modern times.

Novak

Suddenly he is the national chairman. I think he thought he had died and gone to heaven.

Lee

You don't want a job at the White House, But there is one job that I think you would be good at. It's a job I used to have so I'm thinking wow, CIA. And by the way, I wouldn't have been bad there.

Novak

You did not name political operatives as chairman of the Republican National Committee. You just didn't do it.

Gumbel

Is it your intention to try to reshape the party to your image, to your tactics.

Lee

Well, actually I'm really a lovable guy and I just haven't gotten an opportunity....

Gumbel

I wasn't speaking about you personally, I'm talking about your style...

Lee

Well actually my political style is lovable.

Conason

When Atwater became the RNC chairman, this political party was turned over to dirty tricks, the new spirit of kind of ruthless, win at any cost, republicanism.

Tucker

He rose to a position that many of us couldn't of imagined him holding.

Jimmy

People would just come running up, I mean, it was like being with a movie star....Lee calls me up and says, "come on over to my house, James Brown's here. My lord, royalty.

David Letterman announcer

Ladies and Gentlemen please say hello to on guitar, the national chairman of the republican party, Mr. Lee Atwater. Man that brought the blues to the white house, ladies and gentlemen.

Letterman

Just take a shot of the band, find the republican.

Tucker

He was on an increasingly intense search for the buzz of fame, the height....

I CANT GET NO SATISFACTION

Tucker

pressing so hard. Lee got all these things. I felt like he took some satisfaction from it, but not enough to be happy.

Caller

Listen Lee, along with Willie Lee Dixon you're one of my idols.

Conason

Atwater perceived long before anyone else in American politics did that the biggest threat to Bush was a guy from Arkansas named Bill Clinton, the idea was to dirty up Clinton, to do enough damage to him that he would simply be too damaged to run for president. Distract and divert.

Rich (Rich Petersen RNC Staff '88-'90)

Lee recognized the threat of Bill Clinton and the quality of the candidate and tried to take him out of the game as early as possible.

Conason

The Washington press corps is extremely cynical, shallow. They care about ridicule, the rumor that blackens somebody's reputation. All that stuff is juicy. If you don't have a real scandal, you will have to invent a phony scandal.

Terry

When Bill Clinton got elected president, and you had all these wackos out there funding all these crazy projects. That all started with Lee Atwater. Whitewater was a land deal that Bill Clinton had invested, I can't remember the number, it was like \$28,000 where he lost all of his money. The first independent council said there was nothing there so to think they paid Ken Star and his perverted investigations, you know, \$70 million of taxpayer's money. These folks believe you win at all cost.

Conason

Atwater started transforming politics into a series of tabloid moments in a way that was incredibly powerful for the republicans.

Tucker (Tucker Eskew White House Dir. Of Communications 2000-3)

He was part of the roughening up of the political debates. Lee was at the center of it, Lee was driving it...I think it had some bad affects on the country. He had to struggle to get everything he had gotten in his life, but he wasn't going to stop.

Lee

I haven't changed a bit, I am the same guy I was the day I walked into politics, I'll be the same guy I am the day I walk out of it. I am proud of who I am and what I am, and I don't disavow anything I ever done.

Alterman (Eric Alterman Journalist, Author)

There was actually an incident where Lee went to Howard University. He got on the board and he told them all the great things he was going to do for them, like organize a blues concert for them. and they didn't have any interest at all. First of all, they listen to hip hop. Second of all, they were taking him seriously in terms of the political. His purpose was to try to fool black people into thinking they had a place in the Republican party.

LEE GOT GO, LEE GOT GO**Reporter**

They are shouting about Lee Atwater, the chairman of the Republican National Committee. Now a newly elected member of the Howard University Board of Trustees.

Protestor

We know that Willie Horton had America thinking that black men are rapist or murderers

Reporter

The protest comes at a time when Atwater is trying to attract more black republicans. The students insist they'll keep protesting until Lee Atwater is gone.

Jimmy

If the Howard group had given him a chance, they would have loved him, ...He got booted out, that hurt Lee.

Mary

He was purposefully, willfully mis-portrayed. He was over sensitive to everything. He was paranoid, because things did happen to him. People did trail him. We discovered that our phones were tapped. Documents were missing from the campaign.....This is not tiddly winks, this is the leader of the free world.

Tucker

Lee would collapse occasionally. The guy would be so exhausted. When you're at the top of the hill, well all arrows get fired up, right and people were gunning for him.

TITLE get inside your enemy's head**Anchor**

In Washington, Republican National Chairman, Lee Atwater fainted today while delivering a political speech. Cause is unknown. Atwater was taken to a hospital.

Lee

I am very pleased to get back to my wife, Sally, she's going to have a baby next month, and my two little girls. I missed them tremendously, and uh, but an experience like this really does a lot for you.

Interviewer

What does the doctors say about it?

Lee

They think it can be done away with after 6 weeks of radiation. They say it is...

Jimmy

If anybody in the world can beat this its Atwater. He was superman. If anybody can beat this its Lee.

Lee

See you gang. Just say Mo. He's one of my intellectual heroes. See you gang, thank you so much.

Jimmy

They would do all these mri things and it would show that there was less tumor activity. Maybe Lee's going to beat it.

Rollins

We had a three or four year period at odds. I am on the second floor, he's on the fourth floor of the same building. So Mary calls down to me and I go racing up ...and he holds my hand and he's shaking, he's just, he's having a seizure and so I ride with him to the hospital, and on the way over there, he just said "You're the only one I can trust. You've

got to take care of me” He said “they’re going try and finish me off. Please, please, take care of me.... All the hatred just sort of goes out, and I said, “Lee, I promise you, I’ll take care of you.”

Mary

He fought it and he would come to work when he shouldn’t ‘ve, and he was physically debilitated.

Lee

Hey Ben,

Guards

Morning Lee....How are you?

Lee

Everybody doing all right?

Rollins

They were trying to figure out how they could get him out as the National Chairman. No one cared about him anymore. It had to be extremely painful for him...Everything that matters in Washington is power, and when that power is gone, it’s gone.

Tucker

I recalled Sun Tzu’s maxim, get in side the head of your enemy. We’d used that to such effect on Bob Dole in 1988. Now cancer had used it on me.

Joe Sligh

He was about to try anything. Some fortune teller, voodoo, red underwear. He was going to try anything he could to shake this thing. He threw the dice, it was an experimental thing and there was a good chance that it was going to kill him....that he was going to die right there.

Jimmy

They found a tumor and they literally drilled a hole and dropped radiation to burn the tumor out. They had his head in a vice where he couldn’t move his head. There was a lead wall, he was literally radio active. He loved having people around, so you know, it must have been horrifying for him.

Fineman

In that lead lined room, radiation pellets, he couldn’t spin his way out of that. A gregarious guy, suddenly horribly alone. A non believer suddenly searching for belief. Declaring that so many things are phony is a backhanded way of saying I wish I had something I could believe in.

Joe Sligh

The steroids just blew his face. Looked like a man on the moon. As vain as he was, he really did not want us to see him. ... uh, very hard, uh, to, to, to, see somebody that strong be that weak.... it was the first time in his life that he couldn’t control something.

Chuck

My campaign strategies were simply no match for this opponent. Cancer is no democrat. He could handle a democrat but he couldn’t handle the cancer.

Tucker

Lee, uh really was confronting some very troubling facts, that in winning he had hurt people. He had done some bad things. Lee certainly wanted to create a sense of fear, that had been part of his tool kit. That fear came back on him. What was next for him in the afterlife?

Chuck

I stare out into the darkness. The terror of it all is blinding. The pain was so great I would have used a gun if I had one. He's being purified.

Mary

Two little ones and another one on the way. Being decimated, visibly day after day.

Bandy

Was Lee was growing uglier on the outside, there was a remarkable change inside of him that was really beautiful.

Chuck

He said Chuck, "I had never read a bible in my life. And the first thing I wanted was a bible. He told me that. Wow.

Bandy

He came back to South Carolina for one visit to celebrate his birthday and people just couldn't believe it. Wow, that's Lee

Lee

I had money, I had power, I had fame, I had fortune. Guess what? It meant nothing, it was all, it was all a waste, it was ridiculous. I had a bad day in March and in one day I learned what counts, that is you all, human relationship, brotherhood, love, friendship, those are what counts.

PEOPLE WITH.....CAN'T GET UP OFF THIS HARD KILLING FLOOR...**Turnipseed**

Here is the letter that I received from Lee Atwater, he says "my illness has taught me something about the nature of humanity, love, brotherhood, relationships that I probably never understood and never had".....and I have every reason to believe that Lee Atwater was telling the truth when he said, what I did was wrong, it was bad and bad for the country. Since then I have written articles about it in hoping that others that wanted to be like him in politics would realize that Lee finally said we don't want to do this anymore.

Sam

It's a little late after you have ruined somebody, to say, oops sorry. If Lee hadn't done some of those things, then he wouldn't have needed to write those letters of apology, but then of course, we probably wouldn't know his name would we.

Mary

What really disgusted me about Lee's "deathbed" pronouncements was that he was purposefully, willfully mis-portrayed. It wasn't about I want to go to heaven, or I'm going to, some confessional or something like that.

Chuck

If anybody says this man didn't apologize, they lied, I was there when he was on his deathbed. I was there, he told me. I have sent out telegrams to everyone that I might have hurt even to Willie Horton.

Tucker

He was not apologizing for the existence of the modern republican party and it's southern base. You know, he was apologizing for hurting some people's feelings. Good for him.

Mary

They had to kill the messenger because they couldn't kill the message. They had to turn him into the boogie man, Satan incarnate.

Fineman

Lee Atwater made himself a figure of demonology to psych out his opponents and to anesthetize people to his tactics. And the sad part, some people would say the justified part was that the roll that he made for himself ended up literally imprisoning him.

Chuck

He was a changed man, and it was hard for me to really relate to him because he was so soft and I wanted to see him beautiful, but that bad boy, I wanted to see that side too, but it was gone.

SOUNDS LIKE I'M HEADING ON

Jimmy

He always had a driver and we would just get in the car and ride.

Dukakis

1988, fighting Dukakis, I said that I would strip the bark off the little bastard and make Willie Horton his running mate. I am sorry for both statements. The first for it's naked cruelty, the second because it makes me sound racist, which I am not.

Bandy

There was one verse in the Bible that stuck with Lee, "what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his own soul." And that stuck in his craw.

Tucker

Died on good Friday, he was buried on April Fool's day but it was Easter Sunday in his jogging suit. There's Lee right there, seeking redemption and then he goes out thumbing his nose.

Strom

He was a kingmaker.

Baker

He referred to himself as Machiavellian, and he was in the very best sense of that term.

Rollins

This little guy from South Carolina was being treated like a head of state. I cried and I cried like a baby, the emotion just poored out of me. The tragedy is not the legacy of the greatness, it's the legacy of sort of one of the evil doers of American politics. He wasn't that, he was an insecure kid that got to play in the big league and get to the top of the mountain. ...He showed them. ...He definitely showed them.

Clinton

I William Jefferson Clinton do solemnly swear.

Rich

If Lee was alive, Bill Clinton would've never gotten elected. That was really sad to see.

Mary

When you have a talent as deep as Atwater's and Rove's, you lose but you don't lose, because losing a battle is not losing, and they don't go away.

W

preserve, protect and defend the constitution

Judge

so help me God.

W

so help me God.

Alterman

Rove learned these tactics at the knee of Lee. Moved into the white house. You have the entire resources of the national government in the service of a political operative and I'd say its new, and, and rather frightening.

Terry

The people who did the Dukakis tank ad are the same people that smeared John Kerry with the swiftboat ads. John Kerry volunteered and fought for our nation, George Bush ran and hid, and they beat us on the issue.

Turnipseed

False rumors, playing the media and the politics of fear, Republicans will do anything to win. Let me tell you this, Lee finally said before he died. Its all bullshit..... The truth has nothing to do with it.

Rollins

He was telling the story about how the little bible was what was giving him faith and I said to Mary, " I really sincerely hope that he found peace". She said, "Ed, when we were cleaning up his things afterwards, the bible was still wrapped in the cellophane never been taken out of the package. Ah, which just sort of told you everything there was, he was spinning right to the end.

Host of ABC's Close-Up

There is a bill in the Senate called the Clean Air bill of 1985. It's intended to restrict the so-called negative political advertising.

Lee Atwater

What I think you would wind up doing is polluting the air with kind of candy cane type of commercials that are ooey and gooey. They are polluting the air more than anything else.

Tucker Eskew, White House Global Communications Director 2000-3

Reagan benefited from having a scrapper to remind even some wavering Republicans what they should fear. The Washington establishment began to take notice. This southern-accented, fast-talking knife fighter. Even if you thought he was a rube, you did not take him lightly.

Rollins (Ed Rollins Huckabee '88 Campaign Mgr)

I was appointed assistant to the President. A lot of people told me Lee wouldn't be loyal to me, told me not to pick him. I admired his work ethic. I admired where he came from. How are we two guys here, my old man a shipyard worker from Vallejo, CA. Your parents from South Carolina, we're in the big leagues together. I made him my deputy

...he came into me one day and he said would you give an interview. So I sit down for the interview and NBC news lead that night with the story that Ed Rollins is running a dirty ops operation against Ferraro. There was no dirty ops operation. He brought the producer in, it was his old girlfriend, it was just a sandbag.... The day I walked in his office after this thing he thought I was going to beat the shit out of him and I told him, you ever do anything like this again to me, I'll fucking beat the living crap out of you. I'll find your ass and I'll beat the fucking living crap out of you. You set me up, your mentor. why would you do this to me?"...it was just a two year effort to destroy me. He wanted to run Bush's campaign. He said George W never trusted you, so I kept feeding it. He clearly made it that I would never be anywhere in the Bush world.

Sam

Everyone is jockeying for the great man's attention and let me tell you those knives flashed brilliantly for a year or so.

Rollins

I had put so much trust in him, despite of everyone telling me you couldn't trust him, I trusted him.

Fineman (Howard Fineman Political Wirter, Newsweek)

What creates somebody who's that cold blooded are events in his background and his upbringing that leave them with a very bleak remorseless view of life.

Jimmy (Jim McCabe Lifelong friend)

He didn't talk about Joe much. His mother, she had a deep fryer I think, and uh, full of hot grease, and the little kid, you know he pulled on the cord, and pulled the thing over, yeah, he didn't talk about Joe much.

Joe Sligh

The grease on the stove ended up on Joe and it killed him.

Jimmy

He certainly told me about the screams. My god, can you imagine?

Joe Sligh

I don't know what affect it had over him, it's a callous, it's a big callous.

Fineman

He believed there was little or no mercy in life. What kind of God produces this.....George HW Bush, the good son of the establishment, of tremendous privilege and access to power and money. And here, Lee Atwater was the bad seed of the anti-establishment. I think there were times when he was brutally brought up short by the Bushes when Lee may have been presumed allowed in the mansion to sip the sherry. The Bushes never regarded him as anything other than the hired help and a somewhat untrustworthy member of the hired help. They could always jettison him if they had to. Cut him loose in a second.

Alterman

In Esquire, Lee is going to the bathroom while he's talking to David Remnick. And Remnick wrote it up as here's Lee imitating Johnson, a form of humiliating you. Barbara Bush was very offended. Both by Lee's language and by his vulgarity. It almost cost Lee his job running the Bush campaign. Lee complains to me, "what was I supposed to do, say this piss is off the record."

Tucker

He had to overcome the family suspicion. Who was this upstart. He was a kid. So then who arrives in town? George W Bush, the family liked the fact that they had one of their own keeping a close eye on Lee.

Rove

And Lee responded to that by saying “why don’t you come and work with me, work along side me, office next to me. Lets work together in this campaign.

Tucker

So he’s got a guy there who has lived a lot closer to the earth than some of his relatives....he and Lee hit it off.

JUST WILD ABOUT YOU**Bush**

A true test of a good campaign manager is to be able to figure out how to deal with my mother. Would you please welcome a South Carolina cracker, Lee.

Lee

My #1 soul mate and a guy who’s with me thick and thin, day in and day out, George Bush Jr.

Conason

It’s tough for the incumbent party to hold the White House after 8 years in office anyway. The Iran Contra must have been perceived by Atwater as a very serious threat. One of the biggest scandals in American history, and your guy is in the middle of it. That’s a big problem.

Reagan

A charge has been made that the United States has shipped weapons to Iran trafficking with terrorist. Those charges are utterly false.

Sam

It’s a lie, it’s a lie, presidents lie.

Terry (Terry McAuliff DNC Chairman 2001-2005)

Giving weapons to our sworn enemy, Iran who we’re all rallying sabors about today. It’s the same Iran.

Alterman

They were always intervening on behalf of drug smugglers and terrorist. If you look at it from a moral standpoint its indefensible but they were so good at controlling the discourse.

Terry

He came out much later and admitted.

Reagan

I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages, my heart and my best intentions still tell me that’s true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not.

Terry

There were some renegades in the White House so he acted like he didn't know who was working in the White House.

Reagan

I didn't know about any diversion of funds to the Contras

Cheney

He deserves our support not the Monday morning quarterbacking from the people that were not faced with the decisions he had to make.

Dukakis (Michael Dukakis Dem Candidate '88)

You had the president and the vice president lying to the American people and the congress. The documents being shredded in the White House. Why were we doing that? But then of course one of the reasons we were having Iranian problems was because we had overthrown the democratically elected governor of Iran in 1953. The Vice-President showing Noriega around the CIA office. And he wasn't the only CIA director to be up to his neck in relationships with drug dealing military leaders in Central and Latin America. If you could afford a uniform and a pair sunglasses and told us you were anti-communist we supported you. It was appalling. Truth be known the Iran Contra thing was the thing that got me into presidential campaign.

Reporter

Vice President Bush, did you know about the aid to Iran or not, Sir?

Conason

Bush was really damaged goods because of the sense that he was involved in a cover up secretly promoting war in Nicaragua that a lot of Americans opposed and just the deviousness of the whole thing raised the most serious possible questions about his integrity and fitness.

Haig

If you can't answer your friends, what in heaven's name is going to happen next November if you are our standard bearer and these democrats get after you on this subject?

Lee

People want to get this Iranian situation behind them. They're tired of it. They got their children to think about. They have their pocket books to think about. Farmers have their crops to think about.

Rollins

He knew that in all probability his candidate had been up to his eyeballs in this activity. There were a lot of very nervous moments.

Rather

You said if you had know this was an arms for hostages swap that you would have opposed it. You also said

Bush

Exactly

Rather

you did not know

Bush

May I answer that

Rather

That wasn't a question it was a statement

Bush

it was a statement and I'll answer it.

Rather

Let me ask a question if I may first...

Bush

The president created the program as testified...

Sam

Its very difficult to say that's a lie. You just can't do that for a whole variety o reasons when you are in a television interview and a great mass of people are watching and they know this. They will just sit there and lie to you.

Bush

May I explain out of the loop

Mary (Mary Matalin Atwater Aide '88)

And this is another thing that Lee had a particular mastery of. Staying on message. Bush was out of the loop, He was out of the loop. There was never any evidence that he was in the loop. They couldn't break that story so don't say anything different.

Sam

Well he was in the loop. I mean that was kind of clear from the evidence.

Alterman

Bush was lying. And Elliot Abrams was lying and Casper Weinberger was lying and George Schultz was lying.

Bush

I find this to be a rehash, something that has been exhaustively looked into.

Alterman

Its over, the votes were counted. The reporters are just trying to cause trouble. They are always trying to say things are done with, lets get back to business. We can't stand to stop and take a look at our processes and it seems to work.

Reporter

Bushes and other campaigns speculate Bush's strategy may have been to set up Rather, the Vice President always planning to go on attack. CBS correspondent Terrance Smith asked Bush campaign director, Lee Atwater, about that today. Atwater laughed and then answered, "we never talk about how we make sausage."

Jimmy

In college, he totally detested sports except wrestling. His thing was this is the only honest sport out there. Everybody knew wrestling was fake.

Fineman (Howard Fineman Political Writer, Newsweek)

He was basically saying that politics is phony. The government is phony. That a lot of personal life is phony and phony was a big word with him.

Conason (Joe Conason Journalist, Salon.com, The Nation)

He may have felt that wrestling was the only honest sport because it was so obviously dishonest. I mean, and that tells you a lot about him....what's there to entertain, what's there to distract is what counts. And actually things are run on a much more cynical bases by the people at the top.

Reporter

Atwater says he can't relax or take it easy because he is always preparing for a mental sparring match.

Lee

you are always in a battle of wits, there is always a bunch of guys out there trying to out smart you and trying to stick it to you and your job is to out smart them and stick it to them first.

TITLE 1988 primary
Stick it to them first

Reporter

Bob Dole wants this nomination very badly, He is going to come at you....

Lee

No question about it.

Reporter

He is going to come at you with everything that he has got. Now are you ready for this kind of hand to hand combat.

Tucker

Bob Dole sometimes got seen as mean spirited. Lee had the campaign throw things at their campaign to press him.

Reporter

The Bush campaign said this morning, that Senator Dole broke the January 13th truce. The Bush campaign says

Dole

Come on, we're not going to answer, I'm not going to answer questions like this. We don't answer...

Fineman

He put out so many different things that others were hearing voices where.... and he got them off their game by making them angry. ... he understood that the media beast could only be chewing on one ankle at a time, make sure the ankle was the other guy's.

Dole

This kind of scurrilous, last minute desperation tactics. And this is only the first state.

Reporter

Did you in fact spread any false rumors about Elizabeth Dole.

Lee

You know better than that.

Reporter

I don't know...

Lee

No, I did not. No I did not.

Reporter

Bob Dole says you did.

Lee

No I did not.

Jimmy

This always fascinated Lee. He was in a profession. Your career could get dashed in a day. You know that totally intrigued him.

Reporter

Iowa has turned the Republican race upside down.

Kemp

Its obvious that George Bush is deeply damaged and Bob has to be considered the front runner in New Hampshire.

Rollins

When you fuck up in this arena, the spotlight is amplified 1000 times....Washington cheers for two things. It cheers for the Washington Redskins to win on Sunday and cheers for whoever is in power to fail.

Novak

George Bush thought they had all these country club white shoe Republicans and all this money. There was just this resentment by all the Iowans who belonged to the National Rifle Association. It really didn't like the crowd from the country club.... the New Hampshire primary was vital. It probably would have been the end for George Bush, the sitting Vice President of the United States and I think it would have been curtains for Lee Atwater.

Reporter

Lee Atwater will either solidify his image as the political wonder boy or be known as the one who steered political front runner George Bush into the ground....reports surfaced that Bush was prepared to fire Atwater if he lost the New Hampshire primary.

Reporter #2

For George Bush, Iowa really couldn't have been worse.

Bush

It's nice to be back in New Hampshire. Believe me. Believe me. Nice hospitable climb.

Reporter

His top command is now openly admitting work.

Lee

Sure we are concerned, We are out there campaigning day and night but in the end George Bush is going to win.

Mary

The vice president had to do something that he isn't naturally comfortable with, contrast politics, and you can call it, its been wrongly called negative, it wasn't negative.;

Reporter

Bush says he won't raise taxes period. Dole straddles. He's been on both sides and you know what that means. Dole actually advised.....

Bush

Read my lips, No new taxes.

Novak

Dole could not take the no tax increase pledge. It killed him in New Hampshire. Bush was less ethical. He lied.

George H.W. Bush (addressing staff after N.H. win)

I would be remiss if I didn't say how well Lee Atwater, our great Chairman, performed. He did a superb job, and it's not just because he's standing here. There is something wonderful about fighting back in life.

Braden, CNN

What did you have to do to him, to turn him into a hit man?

Lee Atwater

He was not a hit man. What he did during that campaign was to discuss issues. We discussed taxes.

Reporter

You discussed taxes!

Lee

We certainly did -

Reporter

You discussed taxes by saying read my lips! You didn't discuss taxes.

Shot of Bush and Tom Brokaw in studio.

Sam Donaldson, White House Correspondent 1977-88

Bush had won in New Hampshire and Tom Brokaw on NBC was interviewing the two of them.

Tom Brokaw

And Senator Dole is there anything you'd like to say to the Vice President?

Dole

Yeah, stop lying about my record.

Sam Donaldson

The look on his face and the tone of voice. I interviewed him later about it and he said, "you know, I lost my cool."

Slow push in to picture of Dole at podium

Sam Donaldson (con't.)

It cost me, you work for two years of your life for something and it's taken away from you. What are you supposed to say? Gee, heck?"

Dole (entering trailer with his campaign staff)

We're not going to comment, I don't comment on Atwater.

Lee Atwater

The fact that the Vice President got the nomination so overwhelmingly is very indicative of the kind of support he's got to this point.

Democratic n

Ann Richards

Poor George, he can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth.

Kennedy

They're the party that talks tough on drugs but deals softly with drug running dictators, and George Bush is a dead duck.

Mary

They thought Atwater was a hick and hack, Bush was a wimp and wuss.

Eishel

They were making fun of him, he was a lap dog, late night TV fodder.

Presenter

I am happy to welcome one half of that winning tandem, the honorable John Bush, George Bush..God.

Reporter

Well the questions about scandal, mistrust, debt, and about deficit. George Bush has to answer those questions, he hasn't done that yet.

Lee

I beg your pardon, he has spent a year in a very tough campaign under more scrutiny than anybody I'd ever seen. His integrity is totally unimpeachable.

Novak

Your candidate, the only thing he has done with that tax bill, is get the benefits back in for the oil and gas industry.

Lee

Well that was one measure in the thing which I am not going to talk about.

Novak

George Bush comes out with his big power boat in Maine and his upper class background, being from Yale, do you think he is really the guy who is going to appeal to the blue collar workers, the ordinary citizens of America?

Lee

Well, you just named a bunch of things that have nothing to do with issues and this is going to be a campaign about issues.

Bush

The democrats are trying to miss lead you....and keep this country.

Workers

What about the deficit?

Bush

What about the deficit? Let me tell you what about it, I don't think you are paying too little in taxes, I think the government is spending too much.

Workers

jeers.....go home bush, go home bush.....

Joe Sligh

I don't think the democrats thought they were going to have any problem beating them. Lee's favorite statement was just play dumb and keep moving.

TITLE 1988 general election**W**

The great state of Texas, proudly cast all its votes for her favorite son and the best father in America, George Bush.

Tucker

Republicans, they have often been dismissed as slow, dumb, and its one of the fundamental reasons the republicans are successful. Lee love exaggerating that image and just out foxing everyone around him.

Rich Peterson (Rich Peterson RNC Staff, 1989-90)

In the south that's called slow playing him. Being a slow talker and easy going, well a lot of northerners perceive that as not being too bright. Suck them in, you end up running all over them.

Terry

'88 is when your really saw it come into play, the partisan, personal character assignments.

Eishel

You can run, you can run, tell my big boy willie brown, I am standing at the crossroads, baby I think I am sinking down.

Lee

This is a crucial, crucial election. If we loose the presidency this time, we loose it all.

Terry

Ronald Reagan had to have George Bush in office. If a Democrat won, we would have a real legal proceeding and Ronald Reagan could've gone to jail.

Reporter

Do you feel that Michael Dukakis should have made his medical records public.

Reagan

Look, I'm not going to pick on an invalid.

Reporters

Mr. President, Mr. President.

Terry

He got away with those sort of things because he did it in a sort of jocular way with his Irish wit. That statement was on the front page of every newspaper in America. Immediately Michael Dukakis's #s started to drop.

Novak (Robert Novak TV Host, Journalist)

They tried to get me to write about Governor Dukakis having psychiatric problems but it really was a slander. He thought my weakness was that if I could get an exclusive story, I would jump at it, bite at it and not be as careful as I should be. Well, that may be true, but I was careful enough not to get involved in that one.

Terry

To be doing that against the nominee of the other party was so disgraceful. He said, I'll rip the bark off that little bastard. Who was Lee Atwater to say that about any one running for elective office. But you know what, you never saw George Bush 1 ever ask him to stop.

Bush

Did you guys meet Lee Atwater, our campaign manager.

Lee

Pipe down.

Bush

enough applause, it goes to his head.

Rollins

no one hires people like Lee Atwater to lose. There are no silver or bronze metals in this game and it's not about how you win, its about winning. I'm a former alter boy, this is not a business that recruits alter boys.

Sam

You do need to be tough to win the presidency, I've been around a lot of them. And you do have to do things the normal person may shrink from, but that's it. Where is the line? Wanting to win makes people do things that they wouldn't consider in a normal sense. They wouldn't hire Lee Atwater. To win, that's what it takes.

Anchor

Earlier this week, Republican Senator Steve Simms of Idaho said that he had been told of reports that Kitty Dukakis had burned an American flag during an anti war demonstration in the 60's.

Symms

I said it was an allegation that had been told to me.

Reporter

But from who though, something like that is very important nationally. Who actually said it to you, I mean at this point somebody needs some kind of fact.

Symms

I wouldn't want to disclose the sources.

Reporter

What about pictures, you mentioned pictures. Have you seen any pictures?

Symms

No, I have not. I said I hadn't seen them. I have been told by some very responsible people that there are some pictures floating around.

Kitty

There couldn't be any photographs, because there was never any such incidence. It is outrageous, it did not happen, and um, there is nobody who loves the flag as much as Michael and myself. That flag is a symbol of freedom, symbol of what that country is all about.

Reporter

Were you at a demonstration at any time.

Kitty

Never.

Rich (Rich Peterson RNC Staff 1989-90)

When you are back on your heels and you are defending yourself constantly, it kind of looks like you are in the wrong and therefore, Lee's candidate usually comes out looking like he's in the right.

Lee

And what does Dukakis do? Every time he stands up, he attacks George Bush. He's a hypocrite. We all know that and you know it to. That ad is reflective of the kind out of touch crowd that they are. They probably sat up in Brookline eating Belgium endives and quiche out of the can and figure what we need to do is go attack these campaign consultants.....

Eishel

Quiche out of the can.

Lee

I'm a little miffed that one of 'em didn't have a southern accent, but there's not much I can do.

Eishel (Henry Eichel, Columnist, NC Observer)

See, it works because there is a ring of truth to it. They probably think, you know, Dukakis they were a bunch of elitists...

Dukakis

Well, obviously, he and the folks around Bush were trying to make me a kind of northeast liberal who was out of touch and that kind of a thing. The irony of this is, you know, I'm the guy who was the son of Greek immigrants who came over here and lived the American dream. Nothing against Yankee Brahmins who here since 1630.

Bush

A nice wasp kid, born in Milton

Lee

Texans want a Texan for president.

W

Texans want a Texan as president, not someone from Massachusetts

Bush

Born in Massachusetts, we lived down in, grew up in Connecticut.

Rollins

Bush could eat the pork rinds but he was a yalie and he was an elite and he may have lived in Texas, but people still thought of him from Connecticut. Lee was the one who understood the country. Bush was not a natural, climbing in trucks and snow plows, putting on cowboy hats and so, so much of that was Lee's, this is what you need to do Mr. President, this is what you need to do. He desperately needed Lee Atwater.

Bush

Don't let them tell you I'm no Texan, take a look at that.

Tucker

Lee understood the power of image and how American symbols resonated with a lot of southerners and a lot of people all over the country. The democrats to this day, scratch their head and can't believe that people vote against their own interest by supporting these republicans. When in fact the audacity and arrogance of that is that their interest is in that kind of America. Proud patriotism. It transcends money.

Flag Factory worker

This is Mr. President.

Lee

The question I really want to hear him answer, why in the world did he veto this bill calling for the pledge of allegiance to be said in our classrooms? Can you imagine that? Get down here Dukakis and answer that question here in the South.

Dukakis

Kids salute the flag every day, its part of the law, I'm all for it. The question was could you put teachers in jail who refused to lead the pledge. Supreme court of the United States said you can't do that.

Farmer

What's wrong with pledge of allegiance? It just shows that you believe and stand behind your country. I don't think there's nothing wrong with that.

Farmer #2

Everyone of us could stand some more patriotism.

Dukakis

What I should have done is make it very clear to Mr. Bush that I wasn't going to let him question my patriotism.

Bush

I am not questioning his patriotism, I questioning his judgement.

Reporter

Really extraordinarily strident almost in attacking Mike Dukakis

W

No, I don't think its strident. I think, I think that's a misadjective. I would say strong. Well mine is issue clarification.

Farmer #3

I don't like them taking my gun.

Dukakis

Well obviously, I wasn't taking people's guns away in Texas. Although, the President's son, now the president, ran around telling everyone in Texas that's what I was doing.

Farmer #4

If we didn't have any guns here, well, you know we might as well be a communist country.

Reporter

Texas republicans didn't waste a minute, 5 million letters told Texas voters that Michael Dukakis was nothing but a northeast liberal. And that's a cuss word for a lot of Texans.

Rove

A liberal is somebody who wants more government. more taxes, more spending, more regulation, and more interference in our lives and the only thing they want less of is defense and that's the one thing we want more of.

Terry

The whole idea that somehow we're not man enough, we're weak, we're not going to fight for our country. We sit around the cafes reading editorial pages, sipping our little cappuccinos, yeah we don't know what really happens in America. That's what they try to say, you bet.

Lee, Cheerleaders

Democrats....

Fineman

He created the modern southern based Republican party and put faith issues and social issues like abortion, gay rights and so forth at the center of American political debate in a way they hadn't been before.

Rollins

He thought it was crazy, but at the end of the day, he understood the power of the mega churches.

Lee, Cheerleaders

Bush, George Bush, a little louder

Alterman

He used to describe the anti-abortion forces as the extra chromosome group and the ones who had a hand coming out of their head, or third eye, you know, those were the people who were most devoted to his cause.....one thing Lee told me though, is never, ever, ever, allow yourself to be photographed in a funny hat.

Sam

I was there, I know exactly what you're going to show.

Announcer

Michael Dukakis is opposed to virtually every defense system we developed. He opposed new aircraft carriers, He opposed new...

Sam

The tank ad went down his voting record. I remember thinking now we've got to check everyone of these points. I am not certain we did.

Dukakis

I was a governor. If they were bills involving national defense and security in Washington, obviously I wouldn't have voted on those, I never served a day in my life in the congress of the United States.

Marvin

Its with a great deal of pride that I introduce my big little brother Georgie. I want you to do me a favor, George told me this morning that from now on he does not want to be referred to as Junior and its not because he doesn't have pride in his father, but its because George has done an outstanding job on this campaign.....gong....

Lee

democrats

Marvin

democrats.

W

One reason, Marvin and I and brother Jeb from the state of Florida, are working so hard is because our dad needs a real job.

Tucker

Now president Bush was learning a lot about politics, This was a new level of playing field and he was watching a master in Lee Atwater.

Fineman

What George Bush saw in Lee was an attitude he might have been afraid to express the first time he ran for congress. It probably wasn't nearly as manipulative or cold blooded enough. He was probably trying to please his dad. Who he somewhat mistakenly thought was a good guy. Uncapable of tough politics. George W was saying now I see how this has to be done, do the deal, do the deed.

W

Sometimes the sons can say something their fathers can't and that is, we're counting on you going out there and kick some of Michael Dukakis and kick it hard. Thank you very much.

TITLE fear

Conason

Atwater had a genius for the sticky issue, simple enough and scary enough that the media could latch on to it.

Announcer

As Governor Michael Dukakis vetoed mandatory sentences for drug dealers, he vetoed the death penalty. His revolving door prison policy gave weekend furlows to first degree murderers not eligible for parole. While out many committed other crimes like kidnapping and rape, and many are still at large. Now Michael Dukakis say he wants to do for America what he has done for Massachusetts. America can't afford that risk.

Ismael (Ismael Reed, Journalist, The Nation)

I was angry. I was like very angry. I saw through it right away. I saw the ad, where they had these guys coming out of prison. The black guy was the only one who looked up at the camera. So, ahhhhh, these are diabolical minds behind this thing.

Sam

That's the guy to be afraid of. This was calculated to emphasize the one Afro American here.

Tucker

Race is a powder keg. It, it deserves to be in many ways. And Lee got close to that powder keg and you know setting of sparks near by.

Dukakis

This was a piece of literature that was being distributed in a number of states. "All the rapist and murderers and drug pushers and child molesters in the state of Massachusetts vote for Michael Dukakis". I thought it was despicable.

Ismael

Then they had the rape victim, this woman, go on tour and talk about in explicit details what happened to her during the rape. She was raped twice.

Dukakis

There was a so called independent committee ad where they simply used Horton's face. The candidate and the people around him deny any responsibility. Anybody who believes that believes in the tooth fairy.

Reporter

I just wonder whether there wasn't a tinge of racism.

Lee

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I don't even know if people in south even know what race Willie Horton is? I think that is totally irrelevant.

Conason

Everybody saw how provocative it was and so it got a tremendous amount of free airtime. Who knows how many times hooked up to jumper cables got repeated in South Carolina, and who knows how many times Willie Horton's scowling, angry face of a killer was televised absolutely for free.

Lee

There is a story about a fellow named Willie Horton.

Bush

Willie Horton.

Lee

Convicted Murderer

Bush

Murderer

Announcer

Convicted murderer, Willie Horton.

Announcer #2

Willie Horton

Lee

Weekend vacation.

Bush

Weekend passes

Reporter

The cold blooded

Lee

convicted murderer

Bush

First degree

Lee

Convicted murderer

Bush

Killer, murderer

Lee

They rape people

Reporter

Raped his wife

Lee

And they maul people

Reporter

Willie Horton will become household name.

Bush

No more furloughs for people who rape, pillage and plunder. Thank you and God Bless.

Reporter

Do you think the Willie Horton commercial though gives hint of racial politics?

Lee

I haven't seen the Willie Horton commercial.

Reporter

You don't have a Willie Horton commercial on the air.

Lee

No

Reporter

Furlough program commercial... you don't have a crime, you don't have an ad on air about the crime issue

Lee

no

Reporter

So there is no plan in this campaign at all to use the Willie Horton commercial at all to appeal

Lee

Well there is no Willie Horton commercial. I do think that the criminal furlough program that Dukakis supported in which convicted murderers were allowed to go on weekend furlough.

Ismael

Malignant, overwhelming images of black men that we were to be feared, raising lynch mobs against the black people, this has been the historical role of the American press. There is something deep in the human consciousness that is attracted to fear. I know I like horror movies. Not only politicians but people who run the media will exploit this.

Turnipseed

Fear is an attention getter. Anything to keep a story going, terrorist, Hispanics, gays, communist....

Sam

I was amazed the Dukakis camp never seemed to find it in them to forcefully explain that that program in Massachusetts was copied after a popular state whose governor was the first governor to sign a law for weekend prisoner release. That governor's name was Ronald Reagan.

Dukakis

two of his furlougees went out and murdered people. He defended the program. But I never said that. Wasn't going to respond. I mean that was the decision I made. Crazy in retrospect, crazy.

Terry

Where we've made the mistake is not responding saying no one will believe that. If you don't defend yourself and they are doing negative ads against you and you just say oh, I don't want to play that game, I am going to be positive. You are going to get destroyed. Scare people into voting for you. That's what they're geniuses at.

Eichel

The same issues are just something to get attention...People vote on emotions.

Alterman

Racism is poison, but its poison that works for their side. Race is what's destroyed liberalism. People vote their fears and not their hopes and Lee understood that.

Novak

Republicans tend to be people who don't believe in anything that just want to win elections. Democrats I think have really sincere beliefs, I think they're all wrong, most of them, but they're sincere.

Bernard Shaw

George Bush, the republican nominee, Michael Dukakis, the democratic nominee. The first question goes to governor Dukakis, if Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer

Dukakis

No I don't Bernard, and I think you know that I've opposed the death penalty all my life.

Ismael

The question was so personal, It was totally out of line and I thought that Bernard Shaw contributed to Dukakis losing that election.

Bush

I have spoken of a thousand points of light, we as a society, must rise up united and express our intolerance. There are those who cannot free themselves of enslavement from whatever addiction, drugs, welfare, demoralization that rules the slums. There is crime to be conquered. The rough crimes of the street.

Ismael

The demoralization that rules the slums. Dysfunctionality in the white society is not covered. The president pretty much admits that he had an addiction problem, not only with liquor and drugs I guess. The Bush daughters. Yet these are people that are always lecturing the Afro American people about family values.

Terry

These folks should all have been put away in jail. But you know what, because of their power, and because George Bush went into office and he got to pick the attorney general, the US attorneys, it all got hushed up and George Bush, he now the president of the United States of America, chief law enforcement officer. Huh!

Bush

protect and defend the constitution of the United States.

Conason

W learned that the only thing that really matters is who wins. They create their own reality.

Dukakis

You know I kid around and say, if I'd beaten the old man, you would've never heard of the kid. So maybe it's all my fault.

Novak

Nobody thought of George W. Bush running for governor of Texas til Lee Atwater planted the seeds and then he planted with his man in Austen, Karl Rove. Oh, yeah, it was all planned out. Atwater is a big man now.

Ismael

Runs one of the most racist campaigns in history, marking the wedge between whites and blacks...yet he admired African American culture...Governor Blackface.

Chuck

He was not like at all by none of the people I knew. He was the head of the clan. I mean this is the way people felt about Lee Atwater.

Fineman

That inaugural party was the culmination of Lee Atwater's life. He was the center of attention. He was the star. All the history, all the yearning, all came together on that night. He was dancing as fast as he could, and I didn't know exactly what lay ahead for him.

Bryant Gumbel

One network called you the architect of the evil campaign. You were proud this morning of the achievement, are you as proud of the tactics?

Lee

If the American people truly thought he was running a negative campaign, they would have reacted negatively.

Bryant Gumbel

Well, I don't know, Lee in fairness I don't know that that's true, in poll after poll, they did say they didn't like the negative campaign, maybe the lowest turnout in 64 years and faulting people like you...

CNN Interviewer

Was it you who told George Bush you got to raise fear of black men.

Lee

We didn't do that.

Tom Delay (Tom Delay House Majority leader, 2003-6)

They did what they normally do with somebody who stands up and fights for what he believes in, and that is try and destroy him personally, but it didn't bother him a bit. He just kept going.

Terry

He destroyed Michael Dukakis. They love that. They destroyed the Democrat. They all sit around, toast to themselves at their happy hours that they took a man down.

Kitty

Upsetting, I was angry ...a whole bunch of emotional feelings. They were falsehoods. The untruth of all that was very disheartening.

Bush

The whole concept of going negative, how much negative campaigning is troubling, but there is time here when sound political judgement says this kind of negative stuff might work. Did we ever do it? yeah, did we feel comfortable about it? No.

Sam

George Herbert Walker Bush has to take the responsibility for his campaign and he's not a dummy. He knew what was going on. You couldn't be around Lee Atwater, who was pretty open about his tactics, without knowing how he did it.

Kitty

Those were rumors and they were untrue. There was no bases for truth in any of that. He was above board and unfortunately didn't answer those charges. We have to answer charges, correct?

Dukakis

Yeah.

Kitty

Ok

Terry

I mean Lee Atwater said it himself, if you can't win on the issues, destroy the reputation of the person you are running against. What did they do? They made him chairman of the republican national committee.

Announcer

Lee Atwater looks to become one of the most powerful party chairmen in modern times.

Novak

Suddenly he is the national chairman. I think he thought he had died and gone to heaven.

Lee

And he said to me, there is one job that I think you would be good at. It's a job I used to have so I'm thinking wow, CIA. And by the way, I wouldn't have been bad at it.

Novak

You did not name political operatives as chairman of the Republican National Committee. You just didn't do it.

Gumbel

Lee, blacks have looked at the last 8 years and seen this administration retreat from civil rights, retreat from affirmative action, foster a spirit of racism that hasn't been seen in 20+ years. Is it your intention to try to reshape the party to your image, to your tactics.

Lee

Well, actually I'm really a lovable guy and I just haven't gotten an opportunity....

Gumbel

I wasn't speaking about you personally, I'm talking about your style...

Lee

Well actually my political style is lovable.

Conason

When Atwater became the RNC chairman, this political party was turned over to dirty tricks, the new spirit of kind of ruthless, win at any cost, republicanism.

Tucker

He rose to a position that many of us couldn't of imagined him holding.

Jimmy

Fame became kind of all consuming...people would just come running up, I mean, it was like being with a movie star...Lee calls me up and says, "come on over to my house, James Brown's here. My lord, royalty.

David Letterman announcer

Ladies and Gentlemen please say hello to on guitar, the national chairman of the republican party, Mr. Lee Atwater. Man that brought the blues to the white house, ladies and gentlemen.

Letterman

Just take a shot of the band, find the republican.

Tucker

He was on an increasingly intense search for the buzz of fame, the height....

I CANT GET NO SATISFACTION**Tucker**

pressing so hard. Lee got all those things. I felt like he took some satisfaction from it, but not enough to be happy.

Caller

along with Willie Lee Dixon you're one of my idols.

Conason

Atwater perceived long before anyone else in American politics did that the biggest threat to Bush was a guy from Arkansas named Bill Clinton, the idea was to dirty up Clinton, to do enough damage to him that he would simply be too damaged to run for president. Distract and divert.

Rich (Rich Petersen RNC Staff '88-'90)

Lee recognized the threat of Bill Clinton and the quality of the candidate and tried to take him out of the game as early as possible.

Conason

The Washington press corps is extremely cynical, shallow. They care about ridicule, the rumor that blackens somebody's reputation. All that stuff is juicy. If you don't have a real scandal, you will have to invent a phony scandal.

Terry

People forget about what they did to Bill Clinton. There was this issue of Whitewater, which was a land deal that Bill Clinton had invested, I can't remember the number, it was like \$28,000 where he lost all of his money. The first independent council said there was nothing there so they will take even no hint of impropriety. The Governor Clinton lost money and we then have a \$70 million investigation that goes everywhere which way.

Conason

Atwater started transforming politics into a series of tabloid moments in a way that was incredibly powerful for the republicans.

Tucker

Lee was part of the roughening up of the political debates. Lee was at the center of it, Lee was driving it...I think its had some bad affects on the country. He had to struggle to get everything in got in his life, but he wasn't going to stop.

Alterman

There was actually an incident where Lee went to Howard University. He got on the board and he told them all the great things he was going to do for them, like organize a blues concert for them. which they didn't have any interest at all. First of all, they listen to hip hop. Second of all, they were taking him seriously in terms of the political. His purpose was to try to fool black people into thinking they had a place in the Republican party.

LEE GOT GO, LEE GOT GO**Reporter**

They are shouting about Lee Atwater, the chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Protestor

We know that Willie Horton had America thinking that black men are rapist or murderers

Jimmy

If the Howard group had given him a chance, they would have loved him, and in his heart it didn't make any difference what color your skin was. When it came to music and his dancing, you can ask anyone whoever saw him dance or whatever, Lee was a black person in a white body...He got booted out, that hurt Lee.

Mary

He was over sensitive to everything. He was paranoid, because things did happen to him. People did trail him. We discovered that our phones were tapped. Documents were missing from the campaign. This is not tiddly winks, this is the leader of the free world.

Tucker

The guy would be so exhausted, in the middle, not even in the end run of a campaign, Lee would collapse occasionally, Lee would put everything into what he was doing. When you're at the top of the hill, well all arrows get fired up, right and people were gunning for him.

TITLE get inside the mind of your enemy**Anchor**

In Washington, Republican National Chairman, Lee Atwater fainted today while delivering a political speech. Cause is unknown. Atwater was taken to a hospital.

Title here?

Ladies @ hospital

We waited the longest, I'm sorry

Lee

I am very pleased to get back to my wife Sally, she's going to have a baby next month, and my two little girls. I missed them tremendously, and uh, but an experience like this really does a lot for you.

Interviewer

What does the doctors say about it?

Lee

They think it can be done away with after 6 weeks of radiation. They say it is...

Jimmy

If anybody in the world can beat this its Atwater. He was superman. If anybody can beat this its Lee.

Lee

See you gang. Just say Mo. He's one of my intellectual heroes. See you gang, thank you so much.

Jimmy

He would do these mri things and it would show that there was less tumor activity. Maybe Lee's going to beat it.

Rollins

We had a three or four year period at odds. I am on the second floor, he's on the fourth floor of the same building. So Mary calls down to me and I go racing up ...and he holds my hand and he's shaking, he's just, he's having a seizure and so I ride with him to the hospital, and on the way over there, he just said "You're the only one I can trust. You've got to take care of me" He said "they're going try and finish me off. Please, please, take care of me.... All the hatred just sort of goes out, and I said, "Lee, I promise you, I'll take care of you."

Mary

He fought it and he would come to work when he shouldn't 've, and he was physically debilitated.

Lee

Hey Ben,

Guards

Morning Lee....How are you?

Lee

I'm doing all right.

Rollins

They were trying to figure out how they could get him out as the National Chairman. No one cared about him anymore. It had to be extremely painful for him...Everything that matters in Washington is power, and when that power is gone, it's gone.

Tucker

I recalled SunTzu maxim, get in side the head of your enemy. We'd used that to such effect on Bob Dole in 1988. Now cancer had used it on me.

Joe Sligh

He was about to try anything. Some fortune teller, voodoo, red underwear. He was going to try anything he could to shake this thing. He threw the dice, it was an experimental thing and there was a good chance that it was going to kill him....that he was going to die right there.

Jimmy

They found a tumor and they literally drilled a hole and dropped radiation to burn the tumor out. They had his head in a vice where he couldn't move his head. There was a lead wall, he was literally radio active. He loved having people around, so you know, it must have been horrifying for him.

Fineman

In that lead lined room, radiation pellets, couldn't spin his way out of that. A gregarious guy, suddenly horribly alone. A non believer suddenly searching for belief. Declaring that so many things are phony is a backhanded way of saying I wish I had something I could believe in.

Joe Sligh

The steroids just blew his face. Looked like a man on the moon. As vain as he was, he really did not want us to see him. ... uh, very hard, uh, to, to, see somebody that strong be that weak....I mean he.. I can't think of anybody. I mean, it was the first time in his life that he couldn't control something.

Chuck

My campaign strategies were simply no match for this opponent. Cancer is no democrat. He could handle a democrat but he couldn't handle the cancer.

Tucker

Lee, uh really was confronting some troubling facts, that in winning he had hurt people. He had done some bad things. Lee certainly wanted to create a sense of fear, that had been part of his tool kit. That fear came back on him. What was next for him in the afterlife?

Chuck

I stare out into the darkness. The terror of it all is blinding. The pain was so great I would have used a gun if I had one.

Jimmy

Lee Atwater went through a year of hell.

Mary

Two little ones and another one on the way. Being decimated, visibly day after day.

Chuck

He's being purified.

Bandy

Was Lee was growing uglier on the outside, there was a remarkable change inside of him that was really beautiful.

Chuck

He said Chuck, "I had never read a bible in my life. And the first thing I wanted was a bible. He told me that. Wow.

Bandy

He came back to South Carolina for one visit to celebrate his birthday and people just couldn't believe it. Wow, that's Lee

Lee

I had money, I had power, I had fame, I had fortune. Guess what? It meant nothing, it was all a waste, it was ridiculous. I had a bad day in March and in one day I learned what counts, that is you all, human relationship, brotherhood, love, friendship, those are what counts.

***PEOPLE IF EVER GET UP OFF THIS HARD KILLING FLOOR
LORD I WON'T GET DOWN, DOWN LIKE THIS NO MORE***

Turnipseed

Here is the letter that I received from Lee Atwater, my illness has taught me something about the nature of humanity, love, brotherhood, relationships that I probably never understood and never had.....I have every reason to believe that Lee Atwater was telling the truth when he said, what I did was wrong, it was bad and bad for the country. Since then I have written articles about it hoping that others that wanted to be like him in politics would realize that Lee finally said we don't want to do this anymore.

Sam

It's a little late after you have ruined somebody, to say, oops sorry. If Lee hadn't done some of those things, then he wouldn't have needed to write those letters of apology, but then of course, we probably wouldn't know his name would we.

Mary

What really disgusted me about Lee's "deathbed" pronouncement was that he was purposefully, willfully mis-portrayed. It wasn't about I want to go to heaven, or I'm going to, some confessional or something like that.

Chuck

If anybody says this man didn't apologize, they lied, I was there when he was on his deathbed. I was there, he told me. I have sent out telegrams to everyone that I might have hurt even to Willie Horton.

Tucker

Lee was forced to look back on his life. He hadn't forgotten anything that he'd done. I and I think he didn't want to hurt people's feelings, he always wanted to win though and he was not apologizing for the existence of the modern republican party and it's southern base. You know, he was apologizing for hurting some people's feelings. Good for him.

Mary

They had to kill the messenger because they couldn't kill the message. They had to turn him into the boogie man, Satan incarnate.

Fineman

Lee Atwater brought the demonization on himself. He made himself a figure of demonology to psych out his opponents and to anesthetize people to his tactics.

Chuck

He was a changed man, and it was hard for me to really relate to him because he was so soft and I wanted to see him beautiful, but that bad boy, I wanted to see that side too, but it was gone.

Death Bells ringing all in my ear...

Jimmy

He always had a driver and we would just get in the car and ride.

Dukakis

1988, fighting Dukakis, I said that I would strip the bark off the little bastard and make Willie Horton his running mate. I am sorry for both statements. The first for its naked cruelty, the second because it makes me sound racist, which I am not.

Bandy

There was one verse in the Bible that stuck with Lee, "what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his own soul." And that stuck in his craw.

Tucker

Died on good Friday, but he was buried on April Fool's day but it was Easter Sunday in his jogging suit. There's Lee right there, seeking redemption and then he goes out thumbing his nose.

Strom

He was a kingmaker.

Rollins

This little guy from South Carolina was being treated like a head of state. I cried and I cried like a baby, the emotion just poured out of me. The tragedy is not the legacy of the greatness, but is the legacy of sort of one of the evil doers of American politics. He wasn't that, he was an insecure kid that got to play in the big league and get to the top of the mountain. ...He showed them. ...He definitely showed them.

Bandy

Lee is dead but he may not be gone. Lee's ghost is out there. The young people, they worshipped him. he was their idol. *****

Alterman

He did a lot of dirty tricks. Rove learned these tactics at the knee of Lee. Moved into the white house. You have the entire resources of the national government in the service of a political operative and I'd say its new, and, and rather frightening.

Mary

When you have a talent as deep as Atwater's and Rove's, you lose but you don't lose, because losing a battle is not losing, and they don't go away.

Turnipseed

The Republicans do what it takes to win elections. Smears, the politics of fear...Lee finally said before he died. It's all bullshit..... The truth has nothing to do with it.

Terry

The people who did the Dukakis tank ad are the same people that smeared John Kerry with the swiftboat ads. John Kerry volunteered and fought for our nation, George Bush ran and hid, and they beat us on the issue.

Rollins

He was telling the story about how the Living Bible was what was giving him faith and I said to Mary, " I really sincerely hope that he found peace". She said, "Ed, when we were cleaning up his things afterwards, the bible was still wrapped in the cellophane never been taken out of the package. Ah, which just sort of told you everything there was. He was spinning right to the end.

