

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Everybody Knows



When will the Boy President's ratings in the polls match his performance in office? This is one of those rare moments in modern American history when Wash-

ington is more in touch with reality than the rest of the country.

The president's stature steadily declines here among the political cognoscenti. His condition is perceived as either laughable or embarrassing, depending on one's original estimate of him. Actually, a growing number of Democrats, fetched by candor, are now admitting behind closed doors that they never believed back in 1992 that candidate Clinton could survive the Gennifer Flowers scandal. Now it is the Monica Lewinsky scandal that threatens, and do you recall when it was chic to say that Bill Clinton did not really have a women problem or that his private life could not have public consequences?

Clinton pulled through the Flowers scandal by having more money than his opponents—possibly Asian money. (The Associated Press reported on June 9 that money from Indonesia was donated in 1992 by Clinton's friend James Riady after Clinton's nomination. There is reason to believe it was available during the primaries.) Will money—foreign or domestic—help him now? Can money whisk away the two scandals that now threaten his presidency, *l'affaire* Lewinsky and the Chop Suey connection? Who by now doubts that our ithyphallic president took advantage of a terminal-

.....
Adapted from RET's weekly Washington Times column syndicated by Creators Syndicate.

ly silly 21-year-old White House intern? That he has lied about it under oath is a grim fact that even his staff must realize. That he suborned perjury and obstruction of justice are two likelihoods that in all probability will soon be established as facts.

Then there is the Chop Suey connection. From such disparate sources as the *New York Times* and the Thompson committee hearings the realization has grown in Washington that our happy-go-lucky president raised funds for his 1996 campaign against the hellish Bob Dole by recklessly disregarding past standards of decorum, established ethics, and in some instances, the law. More damaging still to the public interest, the Boy President approved of technology transfers—even more than he has admitted—from companies run by his domestic campaign contributors to some of his foreign campaign contributors. Some of those technology transfers appear to have set off a nuclear arms race in south Asia. The president's trip to China actually put him in the company of some of his most generous 1996 campaign contributors. No other president has ever been able to make this claim. In fact no other president has ever raised funds in China. Do you suppose that when Richard Nixon made his opening to China he realized that he was establishing an eventual source of campaign support for the Democrats? The vicissitudes of history, as they say.

The White House's response to the president's detumescence is to pounce on any opponent who says anything the least bit controversial, even though the opponent might be speaking the unsailable truth. Sometimes the exploited statement does not even have to be controversial. Thus Rahm Emanuel terms it a "bombshell" when Ken Starr admits to a so-called journalist that he has spoken off

the record to real journalists to correct misinformation fed to them by the White House. So long as a prosecutor does not talk about grand jury testimony this is common practice established by legal precedent. There is no bombshell here.

Or consider the huge row the White House orchestrated against Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. In response to an interviewer's question as to whether homosexuality is a sin, Lott, a Southern Baptist, answered "Yeah." He went on to say, "You should still love that person. You should not try to mistreat them or treat them as outcasts." Yet the White House saw its opportunity. White House press secretary Mike McCurry, moral watch dog for the nation, rushed out with the judgment that Lott was "backward" and that "the majority leader has taken an incorrect view."

.....
**25 YEARS AGO IN
 The American Spectator**

There are two ways of explaining the rise of student activism over the last ten or fifteen years, and no matter who you are—historian, journalist, curious observer—your views are bound to lean toward one side or the other. You either conclude that student movements have been political movements and that activism is a means chosen by students to react to and influence the "issues." Or you believe that student movements are not deliberately political at all, but rather intellectualized frustration, an involuntary reaction to widespread cultural changes which the students themselves do not comprehend.... It may well be, as the public fears, that certain tendencies of the American student movement in the sixties were fundamentally new to the tradition of intellectual dissent. And perhaps these should be (or should have been) strongly opposed as destructive to liberal free inquiry.

—Neil Howe
"Rebellion in the University"
 JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1973

Unfortunately the White House is not in a very good position to venture into disputes over morality. Lott's rejoinder to McCurry was irrefutable: "Mr. McCurry's experience within the White House does not qualify him to tell the American people what is right and what is wrong. What he considers to be back-

ward are the views and the values of the great majority of Americans who understand and are concerned about the grave social and ethical questions our country faces." In time that majority is going to apply its "views and values" to Mr. McCurry's boss. All they need to know is what Washington already knows. ❁

cial moralists. They believe that money is at the root of all evil, when in truth evil is at the root of all evil.

Ever since the Clintons discovered that conservative intellectuals had conservative financial supporters, they and their servitors have been insinuating that this is some grave inequity. From listening to their diabolical musings one would conclude that liberals have no liberal financial supporters. Their existence in the country is a kind of miracle or perhaps an act of patriotism. James Carville has taken the vow of poverty and the money that funds his pro-Clinton activity comes from heaven as manna once came from heaven. God so loves the Clintons that he rains money from heaven for their support and provides them with a Carville.

Unfortunately it now appears that God was on occasion funneling funds to the Clintons through Indonesian bankers and the Communist Chinese who got advanced missile technology in return. Alas, look what has again happened. Here we were pursuing a line of thought about the Clinton's assessment of their critics and we find ourselves once again confronted by Clinton scandals, this time a fundraising scandal and a national security scandal.

But let us back away from the spectacle of illegal foreign campaign contributions being reciprocated by reckless arms transfers to unfriendly powers. Let us return to the Clintons' treatment of those who disagree with them. Through the government and such loyal henchmen as Sidney Blumenthal, they are now pursuing criminal investigations and such nuisance lawsuits as Blumenthal's libel action against the journalist Matt Drudge, a lawsuit that reportedly will be used to harass other journalists. These ham-fisted attempts to suppress criticism and to threaten democratic process in America will only bring the Clintons more infamy. Meanwhile Ken Starr continues to ensure their place in history. ❁



1967

All Is Vanity

I have returned from decadent Europe to—well, to Washington, and let us abstain from any descriptive adjectives about this city that might disturb Mayor Marion Barry or the Clintons. After all, the criminal justice process is grinding on, albeit ever so slowly. Congressional committees are preparing still more investigations, this time into the administration's role in technology transfers that may have set off a nuclear arms race in the Asian subcontinent. And the Speaker of the House has tapped a congressman of irreproachable record to survey impeachment in the event Independent Counsel Ken Starr's report contains a proper *corpus delicti*. After all these procedures have run their course we can decide whether the term "decadent" applies to this great city.

Meanwhile history wobbles on. Mounting data indicate that Viagra might be even more harmful than tobacco. Already the Food and Drug Administration has investigated sixteen deaths of elderly men using Viagra. Bearing in mind that the pill has only been out a few months it seems suspicious that the Hon. Henry Waxman has issued no declarations. Congressman, this impotence pill is killing our seniors! It takes thousands of cigarettes to kill a kid. A few minutes on Viagra in the presence of a loved one can wipe out an experienced taxpayer with years of tax returns left to fill out. Or might the anti-tobacco crowd envisage an elderly man's use of Viagra more auspiciously? Might it be seen as *Playboy* magazine's approved mode of assisted suicide? A moral breakthrough!

Then there is the latest development in the Monica Lewinsky saga. Portrayed for months as a New Age vestal virgin cruelly victimized by the office of the Independent Counsel, Miss Lewinsky just wrecked her reputation. She appeared in *Vanity Fair* in seductive photographs that cast grave doubt on her chastity. The photographs were approved by her erstwhile lawyer, the incomparable William Ginsburg. His public explanation was that Miss Lewinsky was suffering from what sounded like a malignant libido. The shoot was to be therapeutic, and remember, Ginsburg is a wizard of medical malpractice. Possibly Mr. Ginsburg miscalculated the Lewinsky family's tolerance for imbecility. They have hired new lawyers and Ginsburg would make an excellent patient for Dr. Kevorkian. Times are strange, but it is too early to call them decadent.

The Clintons are obviously alarmed about the moral tone of the times. Not only have they vowed to eliminate tobacco among "the kids," but they also want to take action against journalists and critics who turn up unsavory information about them. That so much unsavory information keeps coming out is proof, they say, of a dreadful decline in journalistic standards and of the existence of "a vast right-wing conspiracy."

The Clintons rarely address whether or not the information is in error. Rather they point out what they insist are their critics' moral and ethical irregularities, namely that the critics do not accept the Clintons' balderdash and that they receive salaries. Here the Clintons commit the timeless error of so many other super-

Read RET's editorials every week.
Visit TAS Online at
www.spectator.org



Hot Property

Private property and Western civilization.

The book that I have been working on for years should now be available, although the official date is early August. It's about property, broadly speaking. The full title is *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity through the Ages*, and St. Martin's Press is the publisher. It was Jeremy Bentham who called the law that gives security to property "the noblest triumph of humanity over itself." What he meant was that in order to enforce property rights, governments must acquire power, but must also refrain from using it to invade those property rights. Finding the balance between power and self-restraint is something that few governments in history have been able to do for long. But in the years when Bentham was writing—the late eighteenth century—Great Britain did manage it, and of course was the leading power in the world at that time.

The United States also achieved the same beneficial balance from the time of its founding until (roughly) the New Deal. In that period, too, the U.S. became the wealthiest country in the world. Since then, the limits to government action established by the U.S. Constitution have been broken down, and we now live at a time when (all across the Western world) the range of government action is essentially unlimited. It tries to fulfill all those tasks that families would have earlier undertaken, and taxes us accordingly.

The establishment of the institution of property—in which things of value can be exchanged by consent and owned securely for an indefinite period—is the greatest

single prerequisite for the attainment of national wealth and prosperity. Countries without the institution will certainly remain impoverished. Only recently has this connection between property and wealth been accepted by the economics profession, however. For decades, there was a consensus that the rapid economic growth claimed by the Soviet Union and accepted on faith by the U.S. government had shown that private property was dispensable. In the year the Berlin Wall fell, the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, published by the Commerce Department, claimed that East Germany's GDP per capita was higher than West Germany's. The figures, now an embarrassment, may have erred by a factor of ten.

That my general thesis about property was considered wrong-headed was brought home to me when I spoke to a bag-lunch seminar at the World Bank in 1990. It was attended by fifty or so staffers from the Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Hailing from many different countries, they were professionally involved in economic development all over the world. Briefly, I told them that tinkering with the familiar economic policy levers—a little monetary stimulus here, a little fiscal restraint there—would not do the job. If they wanted their economies to develop as those of the U.S. and a few other countries had done, they would have to establish the rule of law, security for private property, and the enforceability of contracts. The response was what you might call...polite puzzlement. Well, they seemed to say as they munched their sandwiches, the purpose of these seminars is to expose us to something different; some-

thing that we don't normally hear around the office. Their unspoken comment was: "Do eighteenth-century ideas really belong in the late twentieth century?"

More recently (June 1996), the *Economist* published a cover story, "The Mystery of Economic Growth"—skinny beasts of burden were shown juxtaposed with the Manhattan skyline—pointing out that the very lopsided economic development of the past fifty years was not anticipated, and is still not understood by the right people. Easily transported capital and technology were supposed to do the trick everywhere. But that has not happened. It turns out that a specific political and legal infrastructure was indispensable. Hernando de Soto, the Peruvian author of *The Other Path*, is one of the few people who has figured all this out. The law, he wrote, has been the "missing ingredient" in the doomed theories and formulae of the development economists. Karl Marx had greatly confused matters by putting the cart of economy before the horse of law, believing economic relations to be more fundamental than legal relations.

As a topic of investigation, property was for a long time out of fashion. In fact, for about a hundred years, an intellectual taboo surrounded the whole subject. It was then that the socialist experiment in life without private property was conducted, and in the end collapsed, along with the Berlin Wall. The great project of the intellectual classes in that period was to engineer such a transformation of human nature that the rules and restrictions of private property would no longer be needed. Alfred Marshall of Cambridge, the teacher of John Maynard Keynes, earnestly believed in 1890 that such a change was indeed occurring: the need for private property goes "no deeper" than human nature, he wrote. By the early

TOM BETHELL is The American Spectator's Washington correspondent.