

Bull Clinton

The man, the myth, the way of lie

By Thomas W. Hazlett

The Clinton administration has contributed mightily to American civic life. Indeed, in spurring a long overdue debate regarding what precisely constitutes “high crimes and misdemeanors,” our president can claim credit for tripping yet another “national conversation.” He has reinvigorated popular interest in the words and meanings embodied in that most remarkable document, the U.S. Constitution. How refreshing it is to hear impressionable young school children, curious about original intent and brimming with knowledge about the affairs of state, excitedly passing on the most minute details of presidential leadership. Another kudo for the “most ethical administration in history.”

This rosy scenario seems inappropriate to those who cannot forgive the president for the little trick he played on the public. Lying, after all, is a no-no. But he didn't really *intend* to lie. You—I'm talking to you, Mr. and Mrs. America—made him do it. Clinton campaign consultant and spiritual counselor Dick Morris spoke to the president just after the Lewinsky matter broke in January and assures us that Clinton *seriously considered* telling the truth about the whole affair—until the poll numbers came in.

“If [the American people] feel that you lied under oath, and they feel that you suborned perjury in any way, you're cooked,” Morris said he told Clinton. “Forgiveness won't work.”

January polls indicated a confession would indeed be politically devastating. By August, polls indicated the truth was pretty much of a yawn. But the real windfall was that Clinton's political sleaze factor—bargaining for Chinese campaign cash, the rate card on the Lincoln Bedroom, a Cabinet that qualifies for a volume discount from defense attorneys, the litany of scandal stretching from Arkansas futures to

stolen FBI files—had been blasted off the public's radar screen.

The truth has never tested very well for Clinton, and his abilities as a statesman have been most spectacular when crafting cover stories for actual public policy. In 1993, Clinton failed to deliver his promised middle class tax cut, and the country's recovery sputtered: First-quarter gross domestic product growth fell nearly to zero, and full-year growth barely matched that of 1992, the year dubbed by candidate Clinton as showcasing “the worst economy in 50 years.”

That was also the year in which a Republican filibuster nixed the president's magic economic elixir, \$16 billion in government infrastructure “investments.” In 1995, Clinton's Office of Management and Budget was projecting \$200 billion deficits into the next millennium.

Budget surpluses and robust economic growth coincide with the Republican congressional era (the creation of which Clinton *can* take credit for). These real accomplishments occurred while the president engaged in recreational demagoguery over minimum wages, school uniforms, and Social Security “reform.”

The observation by Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) that the president is an “unusually good liar” may yet be borne out, especially if one takes into account degree of difficulty. While many of our maximum leader's mendacities have landed him in a hot tub of job-security risks, he has continued to sell both the elites and the Booboisie the incredible line that diddling employees, lying under oath, and directing a lengthy and costly government campaign to cover-up a string of falsehoods is a matter to be adjudicated not by the public or the legal authorities, but by his wife. “If Hillary forgives him, then it's none of our business,” the man on the street recites.

Of course, if the Clinton affairs were truly none of our business, then it would not matter one whit if his wife forgave him. But in the soap opera that is the Clinton presidency, Ms. Rodham-Clinton—issuing hourly press releases on the state of her forgiveness process—has been propped on stage as judge and jury to render a verdict on the abuse of office to whom she is married.

To Bill Clinton, the bright line which marks his “private life” is as imaginary as the stories he poll-tests when choosing what to testify to under oath. Not only does our president drag us, kicking and screaming, into the world of Hillary and Chelsea and Buddy and Socks, his *official* acts are what prompted this whole “private” mess.

The president claims to be the victim of an out-of-control independent prosecutor. A prosecutor that is mandated by the very 1994 law his party passed, and he signed, over the strenuous objections of the “vast right-wing conspiracy.” The Paula Jones suit, the embarrassing stain which the king could not quite make disappear fast enough, is the sort of case trial lawyers claim as an inalienable right; who has been a greater champion, or richer PAC recipient, of the litigation lobby than the president?

Clinton has reveled in the trappings of power, and via his actions has bared his soul. Not much there. He used his office to get chicks and have kicks; he lied, he obstructed, he conspired. The system did indeed motor on pretty efficiently without him; perhaps his diddle time spared us from another Health Care Plan or two.

America must now decide how egregious an offense it is to turn the White House into Animal House and reach a consensus as to which felonies constitute behavior unbecoming a president. High crime? Misdemeanor? Oh, how masterfully Clinton has set the national agenda in the year of our lord, 1993. ♦

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