

# We Couldn't Get Enough: President Clinton's Legacy of Entertainment

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores "why Clinton was fun to watch." The Democrats loved him because he had Kennedy-like charisma and was a proven political winner. The Republicans loved to hate him because he adopted, as his own, their economic agenda with regard to welfare, tax credits, and a balanced budget amendment. Clinton also proved to be a cultural wedge issue with his perceived history as a 60's leftist, anti-American, draft dodger. This combination proved irresistible to the media and entertainment industry that loved him because of their ability to capitalize on this visceral reaction along with the drama of the Lewinsky affair and impeachment.

The Presidency of William Jefferson Clinton proved to be exhilarating, polarizing, and most of all entertaining. His presidential legacy of accomplishments and failures has yet to be determined, but his footprint on the American culture cannot be erased. From the start of his Presidential campaign to his current status as former President, he is a person who instills strong emotions from conditional love to visceral hate. His exhilarating attributes such as charisma, empathy, and high intellect won him many strong supporters. His polarizing attributes, such as his marital infidelity, his avoidance of the draft, and his adoption of conservative issues forged him many critics throughout the political spectrum. This dichotomy of America's opinions was taking shape during a technological evolution. This evolution developed within the multi-media segment of our culture consisting of the old mediums of network news and newsprint and the new mediums of the Internet and cable news stations.

This cultural change in the media facilitated America's appetite for sensational news. Within this cultural context Bill Clinton became a suitable target. As his critics mounted attacks on his character, his allies supplied a defense and counterattack. The ensuing coverage involving the President developed high ratings for the industry and its participants. Even as people were claiming 'Clinton fatigue,' viewer ratings were showing that they could not get enough of the coverage. The coverage of Clinton scandals became a virtual industry of itself producing book deals, big budget movies, and comedic entertainment. None of this would have reached its magnitude without the stirring of emotions brought on by Bill Clinton. This all worked in sync providing profits to some and providing entertainment to us all.

## "BLONDES FOR BILL"

There were varying reasons for the support of Bill Clinton within his own party and throughout his political life. Many were drawn to him as a natural pub-

lic speaker with his charm, grace, and intellect. Others were drawn by his conservative economic agenda while still embracing a liberal social platform. The state of the economy in both of his Presidential elections played an active role in growing and continuing his support. All of these attributed to perception that Bill Clinton was the winner the Democratic Party had longed awaited. Although there would prove to be tumultuous times for Bill Clinton, his rise to the presidency would not be denied.

The national political outlook for Bill Clinton began with a dismal speech at the 1988 Democratic convention. His speech, introducing the Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis, lasted for 32 minutes and did not receive applause until he uttered the words, "In closing" (Maraniss 446). This speech proved to be an anomaly for the candidate as his future national appearances illustrated his poise, confidence, and intelligence. In a Time magazine article in 1992, George J. Church wrote, "Clinton has got off to an impressive start. He has improved immensely as an orator; his latest efforts have been smooth, colloquial and grace with a touch of self-deprecating humor" (Church "Is Bill" 18). A New York Times article from the same period stated, "In a nation so fractionalized that each voting block has its own political language he is multilingual. He does not speak the language of the masses but of each diverse subset" (Kelly 1). The columnist, Michael Kelly, appreciated Clinton's abilities as an orator so much as to equate it to being able to speak in tongues, a phenomenon not seen in 2000 years. Paul Begala, a Clinton campaign director, noted Clinton's oratory skills in an interview on PBS he recalled, "So the poor guy is up there alone ... on the most complex public policy issue, a fairly complex bill, and he went the first nine minutes without a note, and nobody could tell. It was phenomenal ... it's part of the Clinton legend" (1). Clinton's ability to perform well in public appearances demonstrated to the public not only his intelligence and poise but also that he was empathetic to their concerns.

Clinton's personal empathy may have been his biggest asset in securing the disassociated voters of the 1992 election. In a New York Times interview, Illinois Senator Paul Simon discussed the relevance of understanding the difficulties Americans were faced with during that election. Simon stated, "Bill Clinton enjoys mixing with the people, and that comes across on television. The image is one of warmth. Here's a man who really identifies with the ordinary guy who's in trouble" (Apple Jr. A1). Paul Begala also spoke about Clinton's empathy during the campaign, he stated:

He would have these endless town hall meetings, the handshakes, and he never met somebody he didn't like. He didn't ever meet somebody he couldn't persuade or feel like he could, but he also listened.... but his most compelling attribute is that interpersonal empathy. When he is connecting with someone, the whole world melts away. (Begala 1)

Clinton's empathy served him well in connecting with the voters. It showed that he was a different type of candidate, one that truly understood the concerns and problems of the average American citizen. This attribute was one that played well on television. His style of personal communication which included his approach to shaking hands demonstrated that he was comfortable and at ease with all of society.

Clinton maintained other attributes associated with his empathy. Clinton also had a charismatic charm to which many voters connected. Many people were enamored with his charisma, as one columnist wrote in the New York Times, "His allure becomes clear when he opens his mouth.... His smile runs a dizzying gamut, from open-jawed wonder to lip-biting coyness and to beaming boyish delight" (Kelly A1). Clinton practically presented himself with a superstar aura. In a 1992 campaign columnist Maureen Dowd writes, "The Clintons are still uncomfortable with their new level of rock-star-style celebrity, in which women scream as they once did for Frank Sinatra, hold up signs reading 'Bill's a Babe' and 'Blondes for Bill'..." (A1). These feelings toward Clinton were not just school-girl banter. David Gergen, Clinton's Communication Director and former Reagan Aide stated, "Clinton exuded an animal magnetism that drew both men and women. They loved to be around him, to hang on his words, and enjoy a hug" (254). Clinton's charm, empathy and speaking ability gave him the personal assets that showcased him as a legitimate contender for the presidency.

Clinton's contender status also came from his stance on political issues. He supported many moderate or conservative issues such as welfare reform and economic stimulation. As part of the Democratic Leadership Council, Clinton attempted to retrieve the departed conservative southern Democrats

(Boyer 447). This co-option of conservative ideals enabled Clinton to refute most criticisms as a tax and spend liberal. David Brooks stated in *The Atlantic*, "He (Clinton) inoculated the Democratic Party against the charge that it is dangerously liberal" (1). Although the liberal wing of the Democratic Party did not agree with the co-option of conservative ideals it did not abandon Clinton as their nominee. In his book *All too Human*, George Stephanopoulos stated:

Most liberals knew this, understood that Clinton wasn't really one of us. But it felt good...a time when the Kennedy brothers epitomized the best and the brightest, a time long before McGovern, Carter, Mondale, and Dukakis were caricatured. (Stephanopoulos 47)

Most everyone in the party realized that Clinton was more than just a contender; he was a winner. After twelve years out of Presidential power the liberal wing of the party was willing to accommodate Clinton's agenda to further their own.

After winning the election in 1992, President Clinton made early attempts to placate the left. This included securing rights for homosexuals and promoting a national health care plan. Although these ideals fell to harsh criticism and controversy, Clinton did succeed in fulfilling a campaign pledge by appointing women and minorities to political office (Boyer 449). Other controversies such as Filegate, Travelgate, Whitewater, and the Lewinsky affair provided cohesion for the President's allies. This cohesion came in the form of a united defense for the President against his political enemies. The National Organization for Women (NOW) presented their support with a statement reading, "Women voters elected Clinton, and the majority of women still approve of his performance in office, apparently judging him as a president whose strength outweighs his flaws" (1). *The Nation*, a liberal publication supported Clinton in a similar fashion by stating, "For at least the remainder of this century the fate of the left will be tied to Bill Clinton's political health" (Isserman and Kazin 44). The left wing of the Democratic Party had continued with their assumption that a moderate Democrat in the White House would further their agenda more so than any Republican, even if he did not champion their causes to the extent of actual legislation.

Along with the cohesion of Clinton's allies, a prolonged booming economy helped Clinton overcome his scandals and obtain not only reelection in the 1996 campaign, but also high approval ratings after the election. An analysis by the Gallup News service stated,

The public's positive feelings about the way things are going in the country were reinforced by President Clinton in his

State of the Union address which focused exclusively on the country's business and made no mention of the Lewinsky allegations. Previous Gallup data have documented the extent to which the public is positive about the current economic situation in this country, and Clinton himself now receives very high marks for his stewardship of the country's economy (Gallup and Newport 1).

The majority of American citizens regarded the scandals as being irrelevant to their support for the President and his handling of the economy. From the 1992 presidential election with 'it's the economy, stupid'<sup>1</sup> slogan against the recession plagued George Bush, to the impeachment trial during a seventh year expansion of the economy, the status of the economy proved to be a tremendous asset to Clinton's popularity.

"POT-SMOKING, DRAFT DODGING, ANTI-VIETNAM WAR LIBERAL"

Clinton's popular appeal did more than gain him many admirers — it also sparked resentment amongst his political opponents. To Clinton's opponents his popular attributes came off as staged, insincere, and politically motivated. Clinton also had a political history that included activities associated with the far left that fueled partisan attacks against his patriotism. As stated by the writer, Lars-Eric Nelson, in the article *Clinton and His Enemies*, "To the Republicans, ...He was a pot-smoking, draft-dodging, anti-Vietnam War liberal with a socialist wife..." (6). Bill Clinton likewise had a personal history and future marred with allegations of marital infidelity. To add to these issues of character, Clinton's opponents were incensed with their perception of media bias directed towards him and against their efforts to dissolve his popularity. Taken individually, Clinton's opponents' tactics were nothing more than partisan politics as usual, yet taken as a whole many perceived them to be as the First Lady described, a "vast right wing conspiracy" (Toobin 279). Whether viewed as co-conspirators or political opposition, Clinton's antagonists included partisan Republicans, fiscal conservatives, and the religious right. Clinton supplied every individual opponent with accusations to attack him, yet in spite of this he maintained his popularity to his opponents' dismay.

One of Clinton's early obstacles came in the form of the disclosure of his letter to the draft board in 1969. This letter was revealing in different ways; to some it pointed out all that was wrong with the 60's generation, to many others it showcased Clinton's shrewd sense of political being and his ability

to straddle difficult subjects (Chafe and Sitkoff 309). The draft letter along with Clinton's collegiate history, which entailed anti-war protest and a visit to Moscow, provided them with a disdain for his youthful transgressions. An article in the conservative magazine *National Review* entitled *THE HUNT FOR RED IN OCTOBER* hypothesized Clinton as a mole for the KGB by using those transgressions for its basis (Buckley 52). Although the article is done satirically, the reader is left with the understanding that this particular opponent continues to view Clinton's political ideology to be cemented with the liberal left.

The draft letter also depicted Clinton's uncanny ability to dodge difficult circumstances. Clinton continually used this ability throughout his career. To his allies, Clinton's evasiveness was just smart politics; to his opponents it was viewed as deceit and waffling. As stated in a New York Times op-ed article, "He [Clinton] has also shown another, less attractive characteristic, a propensity for evasive ambiguity when challenged, either on personal matters, like the draft, or on policy" (Bill Clinton's Promise). Two political science professors, Norman Thomas and Joseph Pika, who authored the book *The Politics of the Presidency* summarized, "His eagerness to please and his tendency to ruminate publicly about pending decisions resulted in the perception of inconstancy with respect to his basic beliefs and goals, reinforcing the 'slick Willie' image that carried over from his days in Arkansas politics" (Thomas, and Pika 449). Clinton's inconsistency and ambiguity as described by these authors were continually used as focal points in his opposition's attacks. Yet as his opponents argued over this persona, Clinton's strategy was to claim it as a consequence of his centrist ideology.

Clinton's centrist ideology entailed the political manipulation later coined as triangulation. Clinton used this strategy through co-opting conservative issues along with long standing liberal issues. An article by columnist Steve Chapman, illustrated this strategy through the use of Clinton's promise to put 100,000 new cops on the street. The article stated:

By pushing the then old-fashioned conservative idea of cracking down on bad guys with armies of men in blue, Clinton did a huge amount to steal the law-and-order issue from Republicans. At the same time, he appealed to liberals with lots of syrupy rhetoric about 'community policing'...

By collectively using parts of both ideologies, Clinton was able to appear above the partisan bickering (Milkis and Nelson 384). Clinton's opponents seethed at this strategy.

Clinton's political viability was threatened by a more personal character issue: his marital infidelity.

<sup>1</sup>James Carville developed the slogan "It's the economy, stupid" in the 1992 Clinton Presidential campaign. This slogan was documented in the video, *The War Room* by Pennebucker Associated Inc. and Mc-Ettinger Films Inc.

It first surfaced nationally with the allegations by Jennifer Flowers of a sexual affair. Although both Bill and Hillary minimized the damage of those allegations by appearing on 60 Minutes, with Bill stating, "I have acknowledged causing pain in my marriage", it resurfaced with charges of sexual harassment by Paula Jones and later with infidelities involving former intern Monica Lewinsky (Didion). The initial allegations by Jennifer Flowers were all that the conservative Christians needed to charge Clinton with moral improprieties. Yet when their charges were ignored or not given enough credence by the public or the press, these opponents strengthened their resolve when further allegations were revealed (Didion).

The resolve of Clinton's opponents can be related to Herman Melville's character in *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab. To Ahab, Moby Dick was initially just another whaling prospect that was an appealing target, described as a great white whale. Yet when Moby Dick removed Ahab's leg, it became a personal vendetta and strengthened the resolve of Ahab to kill Moby Dick. Likewise, to Clinton's opponents he was just another adversary that was an easy target with his flawed character. Yet when polls showed that the American people did not care about character, this made irrelevant a fundamental aspect of their ideology, which strengthened their resolve to prove the public wrong and became a near obsession to topple Clinton from power.

Ralph Reed while he was the Executive Director of the Christian Coalition wrote about this obsession in his book *Active Faith*. In it he stated, "Like an army that overwhelms its enemy but leaves the land uninhabitable, some religious conservatives have come dangerously close to defining themselves in purely anti-Clinton terms" (259). Examples of this obsession can be found in the *Clinton Chronicles* and *Circle of Power*. These two video documentaries were funded and marketed by Christian organizations associated with religious leader Jerry Fallwell (Church. "White-water"). These documentaries made salacious allegations and accusations of drug use, murder, and sexual harassment against Clinton (Toobin 35). Other Christian fundamentalist organizations participated in the obsessed quest to topple Clinton from power. The Rutherford Institute, a conservative religious legal foundation, underwrote legal costs to help support the sexual harassment lawsuit of Paula Jones against Clinton (Toobin 134-136). Although the most visceral accusations and disdain came from zealots of the religious right, many mainstream partisan Republicans shared equally in their scorn for Clinton.

William Bennett, former cabinet secretary under both Presidents Reagan and Bush senior, wrote a book entitled *The Death of Outrage*, which details his beliefs that the character and values of a President do matter culturally with regards to Clinton's conduct. Within the book he states, "What has been revealed,

through this scandal (Monica Lewinsky affair) and others, are the worst elements of Bill Clinton's private and public character: reckless and irresponsible private behavior; habitual lying; abuse of power" (5). In his quest to reclaim the ideological aspect of values and morals into the realm of legitimate public discourse Bennett continually argues that personal issues of character are relevant to the governance of the nation.

Elected representatives were also fervent participants in denouncing Clinton's personal character. The grounds for impeachment brought against Clinton by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr provided a public forum for Clinton's opponents to show their contempt for his character. Tom Delay, Republican minority whip, developed into the lead cheerleader for impeachment in the House of Representatives. He led activities to ensure that the house would hold hearings for impeachment and secured votes for impeachment (Toobin 352-353). Representative Robert Barr, a recognized Republican that supported impeachment proceedings, stated, "I believe terrible damage to the presidency will be done if we fail to uphold the rule of law and of our constitution, in failing to make this President accountable" (Clinton Accused). These types of statements and cheerleading led to the passage of two articles of impeachment: one on perjury and the other on obstruction of justice. However, their passage proved inconsequential, as the Senate did not ratify the articles of impeachment (Toobin 367-368).

Although it is predictable that partisan Republicans and their base would oppose a President from the opposing party, the magnitude and force behind their contempt for Clinton exhibited its true emotional roots (Bennett 57). Just as his empathy and charisma touched his supporters, his insincerity and other character flaws deeply angered his opponents. It was these incitements of raw emotion, both positive and negative, that supplied a multitude of viewers for the multi-media industry's coverage of Clinton.

#### 'EXTRAORDINARY SHOW'

As the decade of the 1990s began, the technological culture had begun a transformation. America's voyeuristic greed was being fulfilled not only through the old channels of network television, newsprint, and radio, but also through the new blossoming technologies of cable-news programs and the Internet. America's demand to have things immediately was being accommodated with twenty-four hour news programs and internet access. One part of America's culture that remained a constant was their intrigue with sex and controversy. Bill Clinton provided both. America's infatuated love and hate for Bill Clinton proved both profitable and entertaining for all parties involved.

A book by Haynes Johnson, entitled *The Best of Times: America in the Clinton Years*, details the

cultural changes that affected the media industry. The changes in culture were first altered in mid-1980 through deregulation, which created competition and the need for profitability among media outlets (176). The need for profitability encouraged programming that would sustain and increase ratings that would, in turn, sell commercial advertising. The author, Johnson, cites sensational examples such as the O.J. Simpson trial and JonBenet Ramsey case to illustrate the change in which ratings were the end goal of news stations. Johnson states, "In both print and electronic journalism, the same trends could be seen — a blurring of the line between news and entertainment, a greater focus on scandal and celebrity...." (182) The cultural paradigm in the news media with the advent of cable news was further altered with the rising influence of the Internet.

The Internet was still in its early stages at the beginning of the Clinton era. When Clinton took office the Internet had just broken one million host users, by the end of his term that number would grow to over twenty million (Zakon). The growth of the Internet affected the media culture in a number of ways. Two significant alterations were the public's immediate access to news and information, and the unbridled ability of Internet news disseminators to publish uncollaborated allegations as news. A prominent Internet journalist named Matt Drudge used the Drudge Report in this way to escalate his viewership and notoriety (Toobin 113). The Internet provided a vehicle to present information and ideas without the old media filter regardless of its truth or consequences (Johnson 187). Along with the rise of the Internet, writer Lars-Erik Nelson noted, "It was Clinton's great, and as yet unexplored misfortune that he was the first Democratic president to take office since the astonishing rise of the demagogic radio talk-show hosts and their counterparts on cable television" (6). Clinton has shown to be affected by, and to cause effects in the cultural change that America was experiencing within multi-media.

The mainstream press saw his story carrying potential early on in his initial primary campaign. One article in Time magazine noted, "...The national press and television have anointed Bill Clinton as the front runner for the Democratic presidential nomination" (15). Another article entitled, "Who Cares, Anyway?" in regard to Clinton's infidelity stated, "...The nation cannot afford to waste good candidates... look at what the country has in the way of Presidents" (Morrow 15). Articles like these and similar ones by the New York Times that categorized Clinton as a 'rock-star-celebrity' angered those on the right claiming media bias. The American Spectator stated, "...The press coverage was so uneven that it is obtuse to deny any active or conscious bias" (Eastland 72). Whether the bias was conscious or not was irrelevant to the new media culture. The relevant issue was

that the mainstream media was supplying the public with the entertainment it preferred: William Jefferson Clinton.

As a candidate, Clinton provided fodder for all the competing news organizations from Jennifer Flowers to the Draft letter. As President, Clinton and his opponents would continue to provide storylines that would excite emotions into a heightened sense of drama. Since the Watergate crisis, the media has attached the suffix -gate to dramatize political scandals (Johnson 252). The Clinton era produced a seemingly endless array of -gates: Troopergate, Filegate, Travelgate, Hairgate, Nannygate and Monicagate (Day). This list is inconclusive and the names vary depending upon the tone of the publication. Yet two things remained consistent; Clinton's opponents would present them as monumental and damaging to the President, while his supporters would denounce them as unsubstantiated trivial partisan attacks. As each subsequent -gate became publicized; its negative ramifications to the President were showcased as the 'BIG ONE' only to be outdone by the next scandal (Day).

Some of the stories surrounding Clinton were perceived to be trivial in nature, but nonetheless they secured time in the news cycle. An example of this was called Hairgate. Hairgate involved the President getting a haircut on Air Force One while on the runway in Los Angeles. The story centered on allegations that the haircut cost taxpayers two hundred dollars and that it delayed air traffic (Devroy A11). Dee Dee Myers, Clinton's press secretary stated the opposition's viewpoint clearly in an interview on PBS. Myers stated, "...It was married to this notion that air traffic was delayed and here was this, you know, populist 'putting-people-first' president, you know, just basking in the perks of his new power sitting on the runway, you know, air travelers be damned." Former Clinton campaign aide, Paul Begal, answered the allegations by stating, "It's stunning to me that on a day in which powerful forces are trying to cut Social Security, cut Medicare, cut tax burdens on the rich, that the great and powerful Washington post wants to write about a damn haircut" (Devroy A11). Hairgate has shown as the others will as well, that the rhetoric of the accusations and the following answers center on the newsworthiness of the stories.

Another crisis that occurred early in Clinton's administration was Travelgate. The American Spectator, a conservative magazine, called travelgate "a story about influence-peddling and sleazy deal-making...in the Clinton White House" and, "specifically... the plan to replace the White House travel office with a hand-picked travel agency, World Wide Travel of Little Rock" (Brock, "Travelgate" 30). These accusations were based on the firing of seven White House travel employees that were replaced with persons connected with the Clinton campaign, suggesting improprieties of political patronage. Republi-

can Senator Robert Dole called these actions "real conflicts of interest, real perception problems, real appearances of impropriety and possibly some real sleaze" (Devroy and Marcus A1). The White House defended these accusations claiming, "The seven long-time travel office workers were summarily fired because of gross financial mismanagement" (Devroy and Marcus A1). Regardless of their reasoning and the administrations right to make those changes, the story attracted viewers and subscribers while supplying their opponents with ample opportunity for accusations. An example of this was William Safire's column in the *New York Times*, in which he called Hillary Clinton a "Congenital Liar" with regard to the Travelgate scandal (Safire, "Blizzard" 27). This column further enhanced the story as the President threatened to "punch him [Safire] in the nose", in defense of the First Lady (Safire, "On Language" A1). Yet as the Clinton Presidency continued, this story with all of its intrigue was relegated to secondary status as other storylines gained favor.

One of the main stories that haunted Clinton throughout his campaign and Presidency was Whitewater. Whitewater entailed the land dealings of Bill and Hillary Clinton with regard to Madison Savings and Loan and his oversight as Governor of Arkansas (Marcus and Schneider A1). The Whitewater allegations were difficult to follow and did not involve the needed sexual intrigue to carry a story. It was not until the suicide of Vincent Foster, a White House lawyer, that the story gained momentum (Toobin 62). Foster's records of Whitewater were transferred out of his office after his death without informing investigators (Kuntz xii). Although the suicide led to another -gate, Fostergate, it was the transfer of files that led to appointment of an independent counsel (Toobin 67). An article entitled "Beyond Whitewater" in the *American Spectator* stated, "The appointment of Robert B. Fiske as independent counsel with a broad mandate brings a new level of permanence to the Whitewatergate scandal" (Ring 59). As much as Clinton's opponents savored the appointment of an independent counsel, it also gave the media a needed pretext to keep this story alive. As cited by Author, Haynes Johnson, "In one week in mid-March at the peak of the press frenzy, the nation's seven largest newspapers published 92 Whitewater stories," and "the three TV networks aired 126 Whitewater stories" (59). The independent counsel had legitimized the investigations and reporting of the media.

Another scandal that unraveled into further storylines was Troopergate. Troopergate began initially with the publication the *American Spectator's* magazine entitled, "His Cheatin Heart".<sup>2</sup> The article by David Brock detailed interviews with Arkansas

State Troopers who served as Clinton's bodyguards. The troopers made claims that their "official duties included facilitating Clinton's cheating on his wife" (Brock, "Living" 21). Brock concludes, "Clinton's private activities have caused lies to be told, threats to be made, and cover-ups to be undertaken" (Ibid. 21). The allegations carried the scandal through several days of front-page stories. The *Washington Post* ran front-page articles entitled, "Clinton Tried to Derail Troopers Sex Allegations" and "Clinton Denies Abuse of State Power, Saying He 'Did Not Do Anything Wrong.'" <sup>3</sup> Troopergate, unlike Whitewater, contained sexual intrigue yet was founded on unsubstantiated allegations. The making of a truly scandalous story was unearthed by the troopers' mention of a Clinton encounter with a woman named 'Paula' (Kuntz xii).

The 'Paula' in the trooper's tale was Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee. The Troopergate story would eventually lead to Paula Jones' claims of sexual harassment by Bill Clinton and to yet another suffixed -gate; Paulagate. Paulagate bore all the trimmings of a scandalous story: sex, politics, plots, and subplots. The subplots of the story revolved around the 'vast right wing conspiracy' out to get Bill Clinton. Various conservative and neo-conservative persons and organizations funneled money or information into the case of Paula Jones (Johnson 260). This subplot was one of the President's main counter-arguments of the lawsuit. He argued that the Jones' case was not legitimate and was the culmination of work by his political and personal opponents (Toobin 51). This proved to be a credible strategy for Clinton. In a public opinion poll at the time of his deposition in the *Jones v. Clinton* case, more people believed Clinton's story than Paula's story (Lacayo 46). The case was eventually ended when the judge granted summary judgment to Clinton (Toobin 295).

Although the *Jones v. Clinton* case was over, Clinton's deposition proved to be a critical moment for his Presidency. It was at this time that he first lied under oath and cemented the intertwining of Paulagate with Whitewater (Toobin 202). The forces of the Independent Counsel had already been in contact with persons involved in *Jones v. Clinton*. Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's approval to investigate obstruction of justice in the *Jones v. Clinton* case had preceded Clinton's deposition on January seventeenth by two days (Toobin 213). Clinton's perjurious testimony would unravel yet another subplot that would explode into the mother lode of all news stories: Monicagate.

Monicagate entailed the affair of Bill Clinton with a White House Intern named Monica Lewinsky and the subsequent charges of perjury and obstruction of

<sup>2</sup>The *American Spectator* cover had an illustration of Bill Clinton sneaking away in the cover of night entitled, "His Cheatin' Heart" January 1994

<sup>3</sup>These headlines were printed on December 21 & 23 after the release of the Troopergate article



justice that led to his impeachment. Monica had falsely claimed in her affidavit in the Jones trial that she did not have a sexual relationship with the President (Toobin 195). The President gave perjurious testimony by denying a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky (Kuntz 24). Although this series of events led to Clinton's impeachment, the charges were not confirmed by the Senate (Toobin 291).

The intricacies of Monicagate and the impeachment brought out a cast of characters worthy of a novel. Monica played the range of roles from a young naïve intern to a star-struck stalker (Ratnesar 51). Monica's friend and confidant Linda Tripp, who taped telephone conversations between the two, played the evil witch (Carlson 54). Kenneth Starr played both the possessed Ahab to Clinton's white whale (Didion 5) and the filthy minded old man asking inappropriate sexual questions of a young woman (Carville). Hillary Clinton reluctantly played the role of Tammy Wynette, standing by her man (Gigot). Bill Clinton himself played the leading role of the underdog (Gibbs).

The media's newfound role of scandalmonger helped facilitate the construction of these characters. Joshua Quittner detailed the continuous coverage of the saga in *Time* magazine. In an article he stated, "It was radio Monica every day and TV-talk-show Monica every night," and "On the Web it was all Monica all the time" (23). Romesh Ratnesar of *Time* magazine wrote consecutive articles about Monica in attempts to pigeonhole her character (51). Margaret Carlson of *Time* in a salacious article about Linda Tripp called her a "spy provocateur," a "villain of the press," a "busy body," and a "bitter secretary" (54). These articles are not necessarily an illustration of *Time* having a political bias, but more so that they were portraying the story similar to the rest of the media. Joan Didion referred to this phenomenon in her article "Clinton Agonistes" as a *zeitgeist* (7). Once an angle of thought was portrayed by a certain medium, the rest followed suit. This is not to say that there were not any differing views. Conservative journals and various web sites continually offered opposing viewpoints. In general, the mainstream media followed the 'zeitgeist', from numbering his remaining days as president to his comeback kid ability. The 'all Monica all the time', helped fulfill America's voyeuristic gluttony of scandal.

The avenues for profitability were not limited to the news mediums. There were endless publications of books detailing Clinton and the cast of characters. An online search at the popular bookseller Barnes & Noble under the keyword 'Bill Clinton' registers two hundred ninety four books. There are biographies that portrayed him in a harsh, negative light such as David Tyrell's book *Boy Clinton*, as well as those that attempted to portray him in a more dis-

passionate manner, as David Maranis had done in *First in His Class*. The First Lady was a popular subject as well, both positive and negative. Conservative commentator Barbara Olson wrote a damning portrayal of Hillary in *Hell to Pay* and author Gail Sheehy wrote a kinder biography in *Hillary's Choice*. The books about Bill Clinton and the other cast of characters ran the whole gamut of genre, from serious political documentaries to satire and joke books. The fictional book entitled *Primary Colors*, which loosely chronicles Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign, was adapted into a film version.<sup>4</sup>

The movies affiliated with Bill Clinton within context or innuendo, created a blurring of reality between life imitating art and art imitating life. *Primary Colors* was a direct example of the latter. The fictional movie and book portrayed a Presidential candidate with all of the empathy and charisma as well as the character flaws of President Clinton (*Primary Colors*). The editor of the *American Spectator* even went as far as to use the movie to verify a problem with Clinton's personal character (Pleszczyński 4). Another movie, *Wag the Dog*, exemplified the former. This movie depicts Presidential aides using a fake war to prop up falling poll numbers after a sexual scandal. President Clinton was accused of using similar tactics during his impeachment when he ordered air strikes against Iraq (Johnson 406). These blurring lines of reality and the cast of Monicagate characters surrounding Clinton transcended to the comedic talents as well.

Comedic shows such as *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, *The Late Show* with David Letterman, and *Saturday Night Live* used Clinton and his scandals regularly throughout his term. Jokes based on Clinton's sexual affairs proved to be most often used. David Letterman's "Top Ten Surprises in Clinton's Whitewater Testimony", (even though Whitewater lacked any sexual misgivings) included a number six that read, "Admitted that he'd once sexually harassed himself." An archived joke from Jay Leno reads, "A tabloid reports that Paula Jones has decided to get a nose job. Is that such a good idea? Isn't there a chance Clinton might not recognize her and hit on her all over again?" Although Clinton provided easy punch lines, skits performed by the *Saturday Night Live* crew proved to be very popular as well. The skit voted best of the year in 1998 contained male actor John Goodman portraying Linda Tripp and actress Molly Shannon portraying Monica Lewinsky. During Monicagate, Clinton was portrayed by actor Darrel Hammond who accurately captured Clinton's mannerisms and empathy. Darrel Hammond commented in the video "Best of the Clinton Scandals," that Clinton gave him job security with all of his sexual mischief (Best of). Clinton effortlessly provided entertaining material for comedy writers as well as he provided accusations for his opponents.

<sup>4</sup>The descriptions and tones of the books were amassed from the book seller Barnes & Noble at [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)

## LEGACY OF ENTERTAINMENT

The true historical, political, profitable, and entertainment value of William Jefferson Clinton has yet to be accumulated. There have been varying reasons put forth as to why America was drawn to Clinton. A New Yorker article loosely defending Clinton because of a 'sex addiction' stated, "Perhaps this is why we watch with such interest the behavior of others around us. We realize that in everyone we see ourselves" (Verghese 43). Perhaps many Americans did see themselves in Clinton, or perhaps as Clinton's conservative antithesis the American Spectator wrote, "Americans simply can't stop watching him spin his tales. Sometimes he lies well, sometimes he lies badly, but he always puts on an extraordinary show" (York 31). With the blurred lines of reality, Clinton did put on an 'extraordinary show'. One other factor has shown to be true as well. As Jay Leno quipped, "A movie called 'The Opposite of Sex' has opened. It's about what life would be like under a Gore administration. You're going to miss Clinton when he's gone." Whether the public loved him or hated him politically, or were just fans of late night comedy, the public is 'going to miss Clinton when he's gone.'

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