

The Vileness of the Clintons

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'Shall we only threaten and be angry for an hour?
When the storm is ended shall we find
How softly but swiftly they have sidled back to power
By the favor and contrivance of their kind?'

- Rudyard Kipling, Mesopotamia

What could possibly explain the staying power of the Clintons? After all it's been over two decades and numerous scandals since Bill and Hillary Clinton emerged out of Arkansas to first claim the White House. A few explanations present themselves but none are particularly sunny. Is it the sheer reactionary ineptitude of the Republicans? Perhaps, but one would like to think that even the staunchest lesser-evil liberals have their limits. Was it actually the Lewinsky affair that somehow turned the Clintons in everyman victims relegating every sordid aspect of Clinton political life before and after to the realm of the 'personal' and therefore nobody's business? Or does one really have to reach for the idea that the Clintons simply embody an ethical bankruptcy of our epoch where everybody lies, cheats, and cashes in- in which case everything just boils down to shady legalisms and smoking guns.

Hillary Clinton, in defiance of the law, uses a private email server for government business while serving as Secretary of State and releases the e-mails at her whim but- ah, there's no smoking gun. Bill Clinton receives a speaking fee of \$500,000 for eleven speeches made when his wife is Secretary of State, meaning, as Michael Tomasky points out in the *New York Review of Books*, that even assuming the Clintons are squeaky clean, rich individuals and corporations may well have thought they spent their money well in paying Clinton thousands of dollars a minute to speak on nothing particularly relevant to their businesses. And is not the reverse also true: would a public figure interested in being, or at least appearing, squeaky clean put himself in the position where the question can be so obviously raised? But hence nothing could really be 'proven'.

The *International Business Times* reports that under Hillary Clinton's leadership the State Department approved \$165 billion worth of commercial arms sales to 20 nations whose governments have given money to the Clinton Foundation, including such worthy donors and recipients as the governments of Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. There were a further \$151 billion of separate Pentagon-brokered deals for 16 of those countries- all in all a 143 percent increase in completed sales compared to the same timeframe during the Bush Administration. Yeah, but just try to really 'prove' a connection.

A change of heart on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (a change that did mirror Obama's own flip flop) coinciding with a major donor and family friend's increased

investment in the Colombian oil sector? Oh come on now. In her memoir *Hard Choices* Hillary Clinton recalls a scene in Colombia with Bill and friends at a local steakhouse where they 'toasted Colombia's progress' while human rights groups continued to document widespread violence against union members.

As for any notion of lesser evil one can gather how little Bill Clinton's presidency lived up to that shabby billing just by looking at what he has actually issued half-hearted apologies for: support for the final stages Indonesia military's slaughter in East Timor ('I don't believe America or any other countries were sufficiently sensitive in the beginning and for a long time, a long time before 1999, going all the way back to the 70s, to the suffering of the people of East Timor'), undermining Aristide in Haiti with imposed subsidized rice ('It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake. I had to live everyday with the consequences of the loss of capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people because of what I did'), and unregulated derivatives ('Now, on derivatives, yeah I think they [his Treasury Secretaries Robert Rubin, Lawrence Summers] were wrong and I think I was wrong to take their advice'). More recently he shed half a crocodile tear for his crime bill that contributed such a great deal to the mass incarceration of black men. Alas we still wait in vain for anything on Plan Colombia, the sanctions on Iraq, or too big to fail banks. Gay Americans who are old enough to remember the mid-1990s probably forgive Clinton for signing the now invalidated Defense of Marriage Act (in a newer triangulation he now claims to support gay marriage), but should any gay person be expected to get over Clinton's reelection campaign trumpeting that signature with paid ads on Christian radio?

It's that ruthless quality that should put fear stir up fear in the mind of anyone. Given the sheer inevitability of scandal in any future Clinton presidency one does to remember what the original candidate or president Clinton was capable of when he felt cornered. Back during the 1992 campaign, in the wake of the Gennifer Flowers revelations and some requisite decline in his poll numbers, Clinton retreated back to Arkansas to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a black man who was convicted of a double murder but who blew off a piece of his brain in a suicide attempt in the immediate aftermath of the alleged crime. Rector was reduced to a child-like state- saving some pie from his last meal 'for later' and helping his executors find a viable vein when he was strapped to the gurney. The hour long spectacle made even the battle-hardened warden queasy and the prison chaplain resign. Clinton at least solidified his tough on crime credentials and assured there would be no haunting Willie Horton moments in his campaign future.

Some years later, during the big sex scandal and perjury period, on August 20, 1998 to be exact, the very day Monica Lewinsky returned to the grand jury (and just three days after Clinton's televised non-apology for the affair) Clinton ordered the cruise missile attack of the El Shifa Pharmaceutical Industries Company in Sudan. The claims the administration made against the plant, that it produced chemical weaponry, was funded by Osama bin Laden, were all easily disposed of in short order. What the plant was, still denied by Clinton and his apologists, was an impoverished country's main source of pharmaceutical medicine and pesticides, the loss of which had to lead to a death count for poor, unnamed Africans which still remain uncounted. There had been no warning, no demand for inspections (chemical weapons not being easily cleared out). Given the fact that the attacks on the American embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, for which the attack on the El Shifa plant was an official response, were already three weeks earlier there was no need to rush. The rapid response time had already passed and it's worth noting that Sudan's government, awful as

it was then and remains now, did expel Bin Laden from its territory in part at America's behest. Diplomacy had therefore already proven to be possible. Furthermore it was revealed by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* that four of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the head of the FBI were not told of the attack beforehand due to what would have been their dissent. It was as cheap and cynical a crime as a president had ever committed and for quite spurious motives. All this contains the same built-in deniability but a pattern should be clear by now. In essence it would be hard to say that Bill Clinton, at least, is truly above anything.

If it's the economy, stupid, well the dot.com bubble of the late 1990s burst shortly after Clinton left office and clearly the deregulation he signed off on was a major contributor to the foreshadowed Great Recession. The ranks of the uninsured swelled greatly during the Clinton years, a fact that Hillary had a large hand in as well. So Clinton competence and nostalgia for the peace and prosperity of an earlier age should probably be a harder sell than it has been. It also shouldn't be forgotten the many post 9/11 voices that blamed Clinton for not disposing of Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda while there was still time. And how much in legal fees did Clinton owe by the time he left office? In other words, there's plenty for every side to hate.

Yet here Bill and Hillary remain: a world class philanthropist and a presidential frontrunner and not only a frontrunner but one who large portions of the media are, despite all the evidence of the past two decades, actually brandishing with progressive credentials. That evidence goes back a lot longer: Hillary sat on the board at Wal-Mart from 1986-1992. Try to find a word of dissent from her about union busting; it was Hillary Clinton who brought Dick Morris to the Clinton team. It was she who had private investigators trail and intimidate many of her husband's lovers with orders, regarding Gennifer Flowers at any rate, to 'impeach Flowers' character and veracity until she is destroyed beyond all recognition.' 'Progressive' being only one of such fawning descriptions she's now bestowed with, some others being bandied include 'activist', 'fighter'. Indeed no less a liberal than *The Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel has in written in the *Washington Post* of "Hillary Clinton's historic opportunity."

All this is obviously beyond insulting, but perhaps a touch of comfort can be found in that another factor in Clinton staying power can be attributed to an almost always complacent media willing to cast anything aside under the neutral flags of objectivity and bipartisanship and that such a corrupt state of affairs lies at the root of all other reasons one could give. But for those who concern themselves with the state of American democracy it is a dark cloud that is indeed hovering.

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