

The Clinton Reprise: Part III

Bill Clinton's attempt to make a comeback and serve as President of the United States for a third term, though constitutionally impermissible, is not quite as unusual as it sounds. Would our current President, George Bush, ever have been elected but for the chits collected by his father? Many thought that the current Bush presidency would simply be George II, but the current Bush strayed far from his father's pragmatic view of the role of the United States in world politics.

Hillary Clinton is not the first to attempt to ride the coattails of a man to a powerful position. Eva Peron, and the recently assassinated Benazir Bhutto, were products of powerful male leadership and family tradition. Perhaps the most notable exception to the man begets woman syndrome was Golda Meir, the Prime Minister of Israel, whose husband was so quiet that many people never knew she was married. Meir's husband was never seen in public, and therefore was never a public issue.

Hillary Clinton's current struggle against a popular Kennedy-esque man is of her own doing. Hillary Clinton, only a few months ago, was certainly the presumptive Democratic candidate who looked like she would ride a wave of discontent against the war in Iraq and the deteriorating economy, straight to the White House. What intervened to make that road so bumpy? The answer is Bill Clinton. In a totally unabashed, and at times bizarre manner, the former President injected himself into the campaign, becoming the candidate even more than his wife. Hillary's attempts to shove the gregarious and ambitious Bill Clinton into the background looked pitiful and embarrassing. If she could not handle Bill Clinton how is she going to handle the President of Iran or Russia?

Hillary Clinton lamely protests that she will wear the pantsuit in the family, but so long as she permits her husband on the campaign trail to steal the thunder, set the agenda and upstage her, she will continue to appear as the weak damsel needing the support of her husband's controversial legacy. The other alternative is for Hillary Clinton to assert that indeed her presidency will be Bill Clinton III. The majority of Americans today would certainly trade the present economy and the war-torn state of the world for the relative bliss of Clinton I or II. Bill Clinton's economy was one of the best in this nation's history, and it appeared as though our deficit might actually be erased. The world was at relative peace while terrorists prepared their attacks, only to be ignored by both Clinton and Bush. Clinton packaged up America for shipment abroad, and Bush put the crates on the boat. If Hillary is interested in bringing back the good times of Bill Clinton minus Monica Lewinsky, perhaps she ought to say so. If Hillary Clinton wants to be her own person, then she ought to publicly boot her intrusive hubby off the campaign trail and show that she can handle him before she takes on Congress, dictatorial foreign leaders, and the terrorists of the world.

The other aspect of this campaign that Hillary Clinton must manage is the nescient racism of her campaign. She should not be proud of her husband following the lead of those who called him the first black President. The fact that Bill Clinton was proud of his pandering and childlike approach to African American citizens should not be a source of pride, but rather disgust. This approach has fed the impression that the Clintons look at Barack Obama as an upstart Black man who needs to wait his turn at the back of the line. The American democracy will surprise the Clintons and find that type of thinking unacceptable in the modern world. The Democratic party will always be looking for the perfect George McGovern and Eugene McCarthy; a true-blue liberal, unabashed but electable. Perhaps they have found that in Barack Obama.

The Republicans, in the meantime, will continue to compete in the primary for who is the most narrow, religious, outside-the-main-stream conservative. They mistakenly think that was the basis of the appeal of Ronald Reagan. The Republican candidate, most probably John McCain, will, in the general election, point out the fact that he was the real consensus builder; a middle-of-the-roader, and not a right-wing conspirator at all. The Democrats will attack this as flip-flopping, while they do their own flip-flops to mainstream their candidate. Both Republican and Democratic candidates will thereafter try to meet somewhere in the middle, consolidating their relative bases while trying to get elected by the majority of Americans who do not perceive themselves as extreme in any way, shape or manner. The money to be elected will come from the extremes, and the margin of victory to get elected will come from the middle. Ronald Reagan's genius was his ability to receive the necessary financing to run for office provided by the right-wing of the Republican party while looking and acting every bit like the middle-of-the-roader who could bring America together under one big, happy canopy. Reagan succeeded in the feel-good department, even if he was a horrible manager of an impossible to maintain supply-side economy.

The good news about the foibles of our candidates is that it may assure the highest turnout in American history. Those of us that are political junkies wring our hands constantly over the fact that people complain about politics but refuse to vote. Perhaps this election will be different.

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