

Stormy Times, Stormy Men

Alexander Hamilton was supposed to be President of the United States after George Washington. He was a Washington protégé. His detractors said that he ghost-wrote many of Washington's most memorable speeches. The Father of American Capitalism, as Hamilton has been called, was a New York trial lawyer who was born in the Caribbean to parents whose background would have been considered questionable at the time. Hamilton became known for his bravery during the Revolutionary War. He was an ardent Federalist, much to the chagrin and dismay of his enemies in the nascent Jeffersonian party. The Founder was also an unconscionable womanizer. Aside from possibly intimate relations with his sister-in-law and a male friend, Hamilton paid "hush money" to the husband of Maria Reynolds. Accusations swirled around Hamilton concerning the notorious affair but what most upset Hamilton was the suggestion that he stole money from the United States Treasury to pay what was essentially blackmail money to keep the Reynolds' quiet. So distressed was Hamilton by the attack on his integrity, that he wrote a book about the relationship in all its salacious detail. This was nothing other than hush money which would have completely sullied Hamilton's reputation were it not for his untimely death at the hands of Aaron Burr. The Revolutionary War hero and confidant of Washington would have suffered an ignominious legacy had it not been for the fact that Aaron Burr went off and tried to start another country in the southwest United States with the Spanish. What really saved Hamilton, however, was his own family. Hamilton's heirs and his wife worked diligently to promote the incorrigible Alexander Hamilton's reputation. It worked.

So notorious was Hamilton in his pursuit of women that Martha Washington is said to have named her tomcat, Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton was not the only Founder whose lifestyle was not exemplary from a Biblical point of view. It is said that Benjamin Franklin was well-known in the high-class brothels of France, where he lived for years during the Revolutionary War period promoting the welfare of the new nation. That was not all Franklin promoted, and rumors swirled that he contracted venereal disease thanks to his many exploits.

None of this, of course, lets Donald Trump or any other politician off the hook for their bad behavior. Many commentators have recounted the crude, sexist behavior of both John Kennedy and Bill Clinton. Their stories are well-known, even if a bit embellished from time to time.

What is remarkable about the behavior of these men is that it seemed to have little effect on their adoring public. During Bill Clinton's impeachment trial, his popularity soared. There are those who have noted Donald Trump's increasing popularity. Is it possible that Americans, while not condoning their alley cat politicians, have no particular interest in their sexual exploits? One would think that Bill Clinton's unforgiveable behavior with a young intern would have been horrific to most Americans. In Trump's case, he apparently has run around with many adult women, including adult movie stars.

When does it become unacceptable to the American public for a man or a woman to be living a hedonistic life? Certainly relationships with a minor crosses the line for most people. Americans say that predatory behavior, where there is not consent, is yet

another barrier. As many women's groups have correctly pointed out, just how consensual is a physical relationship when one party is in a position of power and wealth and the other is in a subservient status.

The press, while touting its interest in good public behavior, is apoplectic about reporting every detail of a public figure's sexual indiscretions. The news media every day on virtually every broadcast and headline trumpet the latest allegation of Donald Trump's bad boy behavior. The President's cause is not assisted by Rudy Giuliani or anybody else telling a completely inconsistent story from that given by the President. Giuliani must have read the book by James Carville and Paul Begala *Buck Up, Suck Up and Come Back When You Foul Up*. In their humorous book, the authors relate how politicians who admit their mistakes and ask for public mercy usually are able to overcome their foibles. Those who hide what they have done and try to run away from the truth are pursued by it like a hungry junkyard dog.

Judge Malcolm Muir once said to me that, "For men, the greatest aphrodisiac is power." Muir believed that men in high public places behave badly because they become intoxicated by the power which exhibits itself in nefarious deals involving sex, money, drugs, and Heaven knows what else. It certainly seems that time immemorial has proven Judge Muir to be correct.

Whether President Donald Trump becomes more or less popular based upon the Stormy Daniels allegations remains to be seen. Trump, like all of us, is his own worst villain. "Just do the job" my father would have advised but the publicity-seeking politician is unlikely to seriously take that admonishment seriously. It is likely the storms will continue.

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,
Waters & Dohrmann
161 West Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

Cliff Rieders is a Board Certified Trial Advocate in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a past member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.