

AFTERWORD

Clinton Recidivus

WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON has now been out of the White House for nearly two terms. Yet no one quite knows how to measure his spectacular yet fractured presidency. Seen today through the nostalgic lens of the pre-9/11 tech boom and the good times of the nineties, it seems encircled and crowded out by other presidencies in which the rival first family Bush has held sway. Yet while fortune has moved on to embrace Clinton's life partner and possibly the next president of the United States, Senator Hillary Clinton, it seems still to smile with lingering affection on Bill, newly reincarnated as "The Giver" and ever ubiquitous in the media, making it difficult to reach firm or realistic conclusions about exactly what place in history the ever-charismatic, ever-elusive ex-president will secure.

Bill Clinton probably achieved too little by the measure of the expectations aroused by his charisma to be able to ascend to the acropolis of great presidents. Even as the nation swooned at his feet, Clinton himself often swooned at history's imposing portico. Always on the threshold but never quite able to cross it. Fighting a rearguard action against his detractors' "Slick Willie" while trying to build a bridge to the future across which a truly presidential William Jefferson Clinton could stride. Yet he was and is far too compelling and successful to be relegated to that gray zone of presidential nonentities to which the nonachieving likes of Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, or Andrew Johnson belong. He has yet to attain the reputation as a thriving ex-president enjoyed by Jimmy Carter, for many, an insufficient president but a flourishing if

controversial figure afterward, or of Eleanor Roosevelt (not of course an actual ex-president, but a stand-in of the highest caliber for her husband). Yet, he is making a run at it, using his fall 2007 tome on philanthropy entitled *Giving* as his latest calling card, but steering an unsteady course as his wife's campaign stand-in, where he continues to attract crowds and votes, but is sometimes deemed off the message if not altogether off the reservation. In "finding her own voice" in the January 2008 New Hampshire primary, Hillary Clinton perhaps distanced herself just a little from the cozy pair who had campaigned together over a lifetime.

However Senator Hillary Clinton's political career turns out, Bill Clinton will have to compete forever not with her but with the unrealistic expectations set by his remarkable charisma. His likely official legacy may be on the order of "most disappointing 'promising' president of all time,"—not his fault but the consequence of the hopes with which he has always been burdened by his ardent supporters. He certainly failed to live up to the adoring expectations of that 60 percent of the American electorate—including me—that stood by him in good days and bad until the very end of his impeachment proceedings and the final (somewhat soiled) days of his second term, a fan base that would no doubt reelect him to office again today were it not for the Twenty-second Amendment, which bars citizens from more than two terms in the White House. After all, still up there with around 60 percent positive ratings, he continues to outpoll his wife as a pop celebrity, though she is now the serious candidate who although she raises lesser expectations seems more than capable of fulfilling them.

It is possible that Bill Clinton will end up more productive in his role as a private philanthropist and celebrity ex-president than as a brilliant but controversial and not always admired public president. Perhaps even that he will be more comfortable in that role than as a would-be Lincoln. He writes at the end of his autobiography *My Life* about leading "parallel lives"—a public one, in which he was genuinely concerned with the future of America, and a private one, in which he fought "to hold the old demons at bay." In his own assessment, he won his public struggle but lost his private one (p. 811). Yet the failed private struggle often undermined the more successful public struggle, which may be why he is today more at home living a private life—demons or not—than he was living the public one. And why some might conclude

that playing the discretionary philanthropist on the celebrity circuit suits him better than playing the obligatory power wielder and decision maker in government. And also why, much as he fights for it, a Hillary Clinton presidency could have the unwelcome side effect of forcing him back into an awkward official role where those demons could once again emerge to torment him in public. In the course of the primary campaign, Hillary Clinton has established her own autonomous voice and if elected is likely to produce a welcome first “Hillary Rodham presidency” rather than merely a second Clinton presidency. A deeply loving husband (don’t let the cynics fool you) and a Democrat fully committed to Hillary’s election, Bill will be there alongside her. But both Clinton and the public might prefer that it could be otherwise.

Sometimes it feels as if Clinton’s charisma and political virtuosity gave him access to a power he feared more than he wanted, a power he never quite figured out how to use without calling out the demons. Whatever else he did as president, he never embraced the role of what in his clumsy lucidity George Bush called “the decider.” When big decisions were put before Clinton, he often transformed them into lesser decisions; or he punted to pollsters and advisors. Where Bush has relished obstinacy and accepted popular enmity and national divisiveness as its price, Clinton courted accommodation and accepted compromise as the price of a pleasing consensus and a genuine if only modest success with his policy goals. For him prudence seemed always to mandate caution, even when it became an excuse for indecision or for a kind of inconsequential and trivial decisiveness. Whether or not he could feel sure about the role of public schools in public life, he could be certain that school uniforms were a good idea! In place of radical health reform of the sort represented by, say, a single-payer plan including all Americans, under Hillary the president convened thirty-four committees and produced a 1,324-page-plus health plan that could hardly be comprehended by its supporters, let alone embraced as legislation. It fell easy prey to its vituperative special interest opponents.

In *My Life*, Clinton defended himself against the charge that advisor Dick Morris was too cautious and accommodating by insisting that Morris’s “politics of triangulation bridging the divide between Republicans and Democrats” was not “compromise without conviction” but instead “just another way of articulating what [Clinton] had advocated as Governor, with the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council], and in

1992 during the campaign,” namely trying “to synthesize new ideas and traditional values . . . to build a new consensus” (p. 660).

Yet this penchant for immediate and hence sometimes trivial common ground left a man of large spirit with a presidency of more modest dimensions. To think consensus, to think accommodation, to think triangulation, too often meant thinking small. Triangulation was precisely compromise without conviction and left Clinton looking like he knew better how to win power than how to exercise it. He would say, of course, that when he said he preferred consensus to confrontation, he was saying he preferred people to power. His 1992 campaign mantra “putting people first” turned out not only to drive his politics but to fit his personality to a T. Putting people first turned out to be pleasing people first. To use power on the people’s behalf was something quite different, however. Clinton allowed others to use power in his name, but for a man sitting in the most powerful office in the world, he was oddly averse to using it himself. Where George W. Bush went to bat for embattled appointees, even where they were afflicted with glaring defects, and about whom many of his own supporters were dubious (Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld or Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, for example), Clinton rarely fought for beleaguered nominees who were widely supported (Zoe Baird or Lani Guinier, for example).

Although he had considerable success when he confronted enemies (as when he dared to allow the closing down of government in 1995 to bring the recalcitrant Congress to its senses), he generally preferred to accommodate them. Newt Gingrich, for instance, elicited his admiration. Following a noteworthy common appearance with him in 1995, Clinton concluded, “if we could have continued in the same vein, I believe the Speaker and I could have resolved most of our differences. . . . At his best, Newt Gingrich was creative, flexible, and brimming over with new ideas” (p. 659). Yet surely this was to radically understate the deep divisions between even DLC Democrats and Gingrich Republicans in that era of emerging right-wing radicalism in America, and indulge instead in a kind of dispositional wishful thinking. In this, President Clinton seemed more like presidential candidate Barack Obama than like presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Like Obama today, Bill Clinton would speak movingly about a soaring unity that put him above the partisan fray and then speak of change as if change were possible without inciting opposition.

Much in this spirit of embracing adversaries, Clinton said only nice things about Richard Nixon and moved as an ex-president to befriend and work closely with President Bush *père* even though it compelled him (permitted him?) to avoid political criticism of and confrontation with President Bush *filis*—who most Democrats believed was screwing up the country and irreparably damaging the world. When asked on David Letterman’s late night television show in September 2007 what he thought about President Bush’s surprise visit to the base in Iraq (“Camp Cupcake,” according to the marines), rather than join the chorus of criticism coming from congressional Democrats who were calling the visit pointless showboating, he said it was very useful for the commander in chief to visit the troops during wartime. Such temperateness is a gracious virtue in a friend but can be hazardous in a statesman with a compelling political mission. It suggested that although Clinton certainly held strong convictions, he rarely took too many risks on their behalf or challenged adversaries in their name. He wasn’t quite Groucho Marx announcing, “I have principles! And if you don’t like them, I have others!” Nonetheless, accommodation seemed less a political tactic than a way of being for him, and as such fatally compromised his political vision.

The contrast to George W. Bush is striking. Bush has been stubborn to a fault in defending his convictions, even where they have been unpopular and politically risky—as with his bullheadedness on Iraq or empty-headed doggedness on global warming or stem cell research. He has given the shoddiest and least plausible of beliefs the most courageous defense. Clinton’s convictions were far more attuned to those of the American people, and certainly more reality based; moreover, they were often reformist and progressive. But though Clinton *spoke* with the rhetorical power of a bold doer (remember his speech in Memphis when arsonists were torching Southern black churches? or his Oklahoma City speech after the domestic terrorism attack there?), he *acted* with the caution of an accomplished fence-sitter. His fine oratory launched a promising new program of national service (Americorps), but he never quite dared extend himself sufficiently on behalf of such programs to allow them to become defining moments in a great presidency or springboards for a new philosophy (the idea of a “new citizenship” that some counselors tried to associate with the civic service ideal, for example). Which is why for at least some critics a rhetorically brilliant

presidency fired by political charisma and filled with bracing symbolism nonetheless felt historically inconsequential.

Part of the sense critics had of a presidency-lite derived from the seeming lightness of the times. So shallow and self-involved a decade in American history can hardly be recalled. Clinton certainly had a right to feel as if this easy and complacent American mood was as much a curse as a blessing. Critics like journalist Charles Krauthammer have criticized Clinton for taking a “holiday from history,” but the truth is history took a holiday from Clinton. Despite roiling undercurrents in the international atmosphere—chaos in Russia, ongoing trouble in the Middle East, the Somalian fiasco, and incipient terrorism—the largest challenges Clinton faced were personal scandals like Whitewater and the Monica Lewinsky mess. Even impeachment concerned lowly private peccadilloes rather than high crimes and misdemeanors, almost as if the country had nothing better to do. History would not return to the American stage for real until 9/11, well after Clinton left the White House.

That too seemed to represent a kind of historical malice, since—toying with tragedy’s timing—history returned to the United States with a vengeance at a moment that robbed Clinton of any chance he might have had for greatness. It bestowed on his pedestrian successor the burdensome but uplifting confrontation with terrorism and war that could have propelled Clinton to Lincolnesque heights—had he still been in office on September 11, 2001. As it was, Clinton can be forgiven for imagining (not that he did) that what could have been *his* Civil War had fallen into the lap of a forgettable modern Franklin Pierce, as if *his* Pearl Harbor had happened on the watch of a Warren G. Harding knock-off.

Some disappointed Clintonites (though there is no evidence that Clinton would embrace them) will continue to believe that all that Clinton needed to embark on the real road to greatness was a great war. Whatever his own insufficiencies, it was hard for him to achieve world historical prominence in such parochial and trifling times where an exuberant stock market, a desultory tech boom, and a hot consumer economy were all Americans cared about during that short-lived era of unipolar global hegemony and national self-congratulation. The foreign diversions brewing in Weapons of Mass Destruction-seeking North Korea, in retribalizing Somalia, in war-prone Iraq, and in a Talibanized

Afghanistan hinted at the weightier decade to come, but the American president and most of his political colleagues, Democrats and Republicans alike, were focused on domestic joys and their accompanying partisan scandals rather than on the global perils facing the nation. Indeed, the world America ignored revealed in Clinton's glamorous presidency as much as many Americans did. He remains one of the most popular men on earth.

These contextual realities shadowed Clinton's entrancing White House interactions with American intellectuals and scholars that are the subject of this book. We, his chosen sometime companions, thought ourselves to be guests at some latter day Platonic symposium where high wit and formidable power met and, over exquisite cuisine, contrived to change the course of history. Yet in search of practicality and consensus Clinton himself had a very different view. Such interactions apparently remained for him inconsequential with respect to real policy making. A vague commitment to a new citizen politics to balance off the new DLC friendliness to private-sector business here, a reference to the new global interdependence there; a brief reference to Bill Galston's "new covenant" language in an early speech, a civic rationale (rather than a philanthropic one) for national service later on—these were all tokens of a marginal process that meant more to speechwriters and to us than it seemed to mean to the president. For Clinton already had all the vision he wanted from the DLC—with its commitment to the reality of economic change, the importance of human capital, a "more constructive partnership between business and government," cooperation rather than conflict, punishing waste, and a strong America with a "resurgent sense of community" and a "strong sense of mutual obligations." (p. 327) This soft communitarian vision of a harmonious realm of private/public partnerships and easy corporate/governmental relations secured many small victories important in larger ways to ordinary Americans. But at the same time it was belied by political and economic realities. And it risked internal incoherence. The communitarian emphasis on responsible citizenship was at odds with the radical individualist impetus of corporate greed. Ending welfare did not end inequality in America, any more than deregulating the communications sector (as Clinton's 1996 revision of the Federal Communications Act did) actually impacted or constrained media monopolies or enhanced civic communications.

With his potted and safe DLC “philosophy” in his pocket and conservative counselors of caution like Dick Morris and Mark Penn at the other end of his secure phone line, Clinton never had to take too seriously either the old populist noises or new communitarian and civic sounds coming from the serial intellectual kitchen cabinets he convened. Such voices were inaudible in the memories of his White House years as he set them down in *My Life*. As the scenes that follow show, those who came to Washington or Camp David to engage in ardent and affecting exchanges with Clinton about “big issues” and the “big picture” regarded what transpired as crucial—and no doubt it *was* crucial to them (as it had been to me).

Yet there is scarcely a word about them in *My Life*, and no index references to any of the visitors, several of whom were there more than once and all of whom counted as more than just dinner party adornments. More startling still, neither ideas nor those responsible for ideas make an appearance in Clinton’s epic memoir. Renowned intellectuals such as Skip Gates, Robert Putnam, Theda Skocpol, Alan Brinkley, Harry Boyte, and Patricia J. Williams go unmentioned. Not even Harvard’s famed Sam Beer, a professor known for his Democratic Party connections who long before he visited the Clinton White House had visited the Harding White House, merits a reference. Barbra Streisand rates six entries (she befriended Clinton’s mom), and Charlton Heston, Don Imus, and Larry King, along with other media stars, get attention. There is a lovely tribute to Maya Angelou, the first poet to write something for a presidential inaugural since Robert Frost did it for John F. Kennedy.

The “ideas” people go missing, however, along with those within the White House responsible for cultivating both ideas and their authors. William Galston, the brilliant political theorist who worked on the policy side in the White House and organized many of the first-term meetings, is invisible in the memoir. Moreover, Sid Blumenthal, who orchestrated many of the second-term meetings as well as the transatlantic forums critical to Clinton’s engagement with Tony Blair’s “Third Way” ideas—which had been taken up by the DLC and by Clinton—receives attention only for the legal problems he got into by way of his loyalty to the President during the impeachment hearings. Don Baer, a speechwriter and then communications director with an appetite for serious ideas, is also invisible.

The ideas with which Clinton was so seductively engaged at our many White House seminars hardly appeared as moments or movers in policy or practice, and certainly do not occupy the memoirist. Clinton the charming conversationalist dazzled his voluble guests over five-course dinners late into the night—yes, he really *was* always the last to leave the conversationalist drawing room. But he used his voluble intelligence and fluency with ideas to charm and flatter friends (putting people first!) rather than to animate policy or change history.

Clinton's agile intellect made him theory prone, but as a practical politician he was theory averse. He loved to talk but apparently saw little connection between that kind of talk and action. Words, as we learned from his gyrations in the Monica Lewinsky case, were tricky things for Clinton—traps set by lawyers, political snares contrived by adversaries, vehicles of spin more than of meaning, meant to capture opinion or deflect criticism. When it was not merely the costume jewelry of his charisma, Clinton's rhetoric ultimately was the lawyer's rather than the philosopher's. He mentions that he read Kant in college, but he clearly never accepted Kant's view that ideas shape history and determine our "objective reality" more than the material forces that constitute that reality.

His is of course a very American view, and one that has much to recommend it politically. European ideas bred the Enlightenment but also nurtured fascist and communist totalitarianism. It is one of this book's chief themes that among those with responsibility for the use of real power, untethered ideas can be dangerous. This was a lesson taught by David Stockman in his revelatory book about the Reagan revolution in which he acknowledged that the revolutionary purists probably didn't understand the country the way the compromising Reagan did. The distance from ideas to ideology and from ideology to some toxic form of historical determinism is smaller than theorists like to think. So that ideas played a lesser role in Clinton's actual political program than they did in the approach to politics of, say, Vice-President Al Gore or Governor Howard Dean or in earlier years of Eugene McCarthy or Adlai Stevenson may be regarded as a virtue rather than a vice, to a point.

Still, it's one thing to win and keep power—no politician in the past one hundred years was more adept at it—and another to exercise power effectively on behalf of the ideas in whose name power is won. It is here that Clinton's disinterest in taking seriously the ideas on which he could

so winningly discourse and which he seemed so easily to comprehend, pointed to a potentially more serious flaw. Without vision, power becomes self-absorbed and reflexive. Without large ideas, policy is made small and trivial. People respond to and will make sacrifices in the name of great ideas, but will prefer their own small selves to a trifling vision of a small country. The campaigns of Senators Obama and McCain speak to the power of vision even when it is abstract, its content unspecified and unclear; meanwhile Hillary Clinton seems intent on avoiding rhetoric—not her strong suit—and focusing on the real work experience can engender and guide. Historically, there have been great presidents who came to power without compellingly great ideas but who managed to acquire them once in the White House. Neither Lincoln nor Roosevelt was a notably visionary power player in the early stages of his political career. Both were seen, as Clinton was, as a bit slick and even unprincipled. Both became empowered as events challenged them and demanded from them a vision on which America's fate would turn. Clinton, however, was never greatly challenged by events, and was himself the source of vexing personal incidents that imperiled his presidency. Moreover, Clinton's attachment to Dick Morris's centrist caution was more than a sometime reversion to tactical conservatism. Morris's infamous triangulation strategy is embraced by Clinton in *My Life* (p. 660), where he insists triangulation is his own idea of accommodation applied to politics. For all the damage Morris eventually did as a reactionary critic of the Clintons once they left office (he continues to this day to savage Hillary Clinton's run for the Presidency), Dick Morris's White House legacy has not been repudiated. Mark Penn, the pollster Morris brought into the Clinton White House, along with the corporate mentality associated with the corporate clients Penn & Schoen and their colleagues serve, remains a fixture in Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, although in finding her own voice in the New Hampshire primary she seems to have stopped listening quite so compliantly to Penn.¹

The combination of inconsequential times and Clinton's ambivalences about power may then have deprived the Clinton presidency of the impact it could have had. Only so much blame can be attributed to

¹ See Ari Berman, "Hillary Inc.: The Corporate Ties That Bind," *The Nation*, June 4, 2007.

the times, however. There have been presidents who, without being called to greatness by events, have taken it upon themselves to confront an indifferent destiny with a vision of their own. Andrew Jackson brought from the new American West beyond the thirteen colonies a vision of a rough-and-tumble, individualist America that stretched across a whole continent and fired the imagination of immigrants and pioneers alike. Teddy Roosevelt challenged a complacent post-Gilded Age nation with his own vision of American greatness—American Empire—that, when yoked to his ideals of economic fairness and the regulation of cartels and trusts, transformed the nation.

For these reasons, in spite of my admiration for Clinton's many excellent public works and his devotion to achieving a more just society, I conclude in this study that Clinton was a compromised president not because of personal deficiencies or psychic liabilities alone, but because of the absence of an overriding vision—an absence that allowed his liabilities to weigh down his presidency. Clinton recognized that a new emergent interdependent world lay on the other side of his "bridge to the future." Yet his perspective appeared to be that of an astute observer rather than of a bold architect. With his sharp eye, he saw new challenges before America that would rock the nation. But he was satisfied with agile political gamesmanship and facile personality politics as responses, and while he secured a host of changes that made America a better place for all Americans, especially those on the periphery, he could not secure a permanent change of course for a nation sinking under the weight of self-absorption, market greed, and an anemic citizenry. Putting people first translated into a political doctrine that put ideas well to the side. The bridge to the future was more rhetoric than plan of action, much like Reagan's "morning in America"

Americans love such vague imagery, with its hazy invocation of hope, optimism, and an "exceptionalist" America that is the greatest nation on earth. The presidential campaign in 2008 was afloat in what Christopher Hitchens called a "tsunami of rhetorical drool." But rarely do citizens look across the glow of morning to high noon, or beyond the other side of the bridge to the future to the somber and uncertain landscape to which it leads. Americans think of themselves as future oriented but are too pragmatic and reactive to live by lessons that might be learned from real prescience. And so with the pragmatic and wily Bill Clinton the nation had a man in office who was—however effectively—perhaps the

smartest president in history to treat ideas so slightly. Perhaps this was a tribute to just how smart he was.

Recently, the country has witnessed a former vice-president preoccupied with a real and grim future of ecological peril, and some have wished that Al Gore would run for president. But such dark forebodings do not suit the cheeriness demanded by the American electoral politics at which Clinton excelled, and Al Gore seems more likely to stay his course outside rather than inside the political arena. During the 2007/2008 primary campaign, John Edwards was faulted for becoming too dark about the new American inequality, whereas Barack Obama was applauded for his fresh and sunny optimism. Jimmy Carter's quite apt recognition of a national "malaise" more or less wrecked his presidency. Bill Clinton's current focus on private philanthropy and personal giving as remedies to global problems strikes just the right tone. Don't ask too much of government, just do the right thing in private and the world can become a better place.

And so it can. But we cannot undo one by one all the problems we have forged through common malfeasance. Public crises cry out for public responses—whether in unreconstructed New Orleans, the melting Antarctic, or war-torn Iraq. Private choices often have inadvertent public consequences that only citizens can deal with. Giving is good for the soul, but the world's collective body also demands civic responsibility and public work: the work of leaders and citizens. And not just within nations alone.

Clinton more or less grasped this. The closest he came to a vision was in his appreciation of the globe's new interdependence, and his sense that America needed a way to come to terms with it. What interdependence suggests is that all of the pathologies and problems troubling modern nations have fled the nation state and gone global, beyond the reach of sovereign power. Democratic sovereignty, the key to power for three hundred years, is today fatally impaired, with citizens and their democratic institutions trapped inside the sovereign nation-state box. The United States remains an independent global hegemon, but its problems are mostly interdependent. Its twenty-first-century destiny is global and beyond sovereignty; yet, the remedies all remain painfully local and bound by that same antique sovereignty—a dire asymmetry that constrains power and puts liberty and security at risk.

President Clinton had and has a feel for these realities. This is why the

work of the Clinton Foundation has focused on global issues and tried to divert the gaze of parochial Americans to the world beyond. During his two-term stint as president, however, such concerns remained in the background, whereas today they are made objects of private giving. To globalize democracy or democratize globalization, as he might have tried to do, was a bridge too far for his pragmatic leadership. Taking his foundation there is one thing; taking the country there was quite another. Not that it is easy to push any parochial nation (and all nations are parochial) to a global vision. Some would say it is political suicide even to try.

Many presidents, including Nixon and Reagan, have grown more concerned towards the end of their tenure with foreign policy, sometimes as an escape from domestic troubles but also because America's challenges have global dimensions. True to the tradition, on the warm winter night when John McCain, Mitt Romney, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton duked it out in the January primary in New Hampshire, President Bush embarked from Edwards Air Force Base on a fateful trip to the Middle East where he seemed to stake his reputation on doing what no president before him had done: repair the ruptured narrative linking Israel and Palestine. But ordinary Americans rarely follow their leaders on these last-chance overseas expeditions. Yet in today's world of terrorism, global disease, planetary ecological crises, and universal communications, America's problems demand global solutions in ways even ordinary citizens are beginning to understand. President Clinton knew as much. Had he just been able to put his leadership to the purposes of making a case for interdependence . . . But this is just wishful thinking.

What Clinton did achieve—no small thing—was more in the realm of symbolic politics. His efficacy as president was less *what* he did than *who* he was. He was, as Toni Morrison remarked and so many Americans felt, the “first black president,” helping to open the way to Barack Obama's admirable run against Hillary Clinton to become the first *real* black president. Whether or not Clinton did enough for the welfare clients and struggling unemployed, so many of whom were black, was not necessarily what counted most, even for African-Americans themselves. But although it counts for much, symbolic politics is not everything. In embodying a deep empathy for Americans marginalized because they were gay, Clinton might have also been the first gay president. But “don't

ask, don't tell" was hardly a visionary solution to the challenge of gays in the military. He may even have beaten his wife to the punch in having been regarded symbolically as "the first woman president," yet his careless philandering hardly served women, while his economic policies did not always put their interests first. The president who could feel our pain could not necessarily cure our maladies. The empathizer who could assume our identity could not necessarily fix our problems. For that a president needs vision as well as empathy, a politics of courage as well as a politics of identity. For that a president must be both Martin Luther King Jr. *and* Lyndon Johnson—and when that happens, as Abraham Lincoln's presidency made clear, the result can be national division and civil war, not costless change or easy unity.

The Clinton presidency is not quite over. There remains the great residual question of a possible Hillary Clinton presidency—which may also represent Bill's deft defeat of the Twenty-second Amendment. Not that he will be some Dick Cheney figure lurking in the background and running the Hillary White House. Or that a Hillary presidency will not become more of a first "Rodham" presidency than a second "Clinton" presidency. But the "Bill factor" will clearly play a large role in the contest for the presidency, and should Hillary win, in the unfolding of her own administration.

Some think he will become a kind of "global ambassador," taking advantage of his global popularity and the Clinton Foundation concerns with global AIDS, poverty in Africa, and childhood obesity; notably, these are all nonconflictual and apolitical problems that leave him without antagonists. Projects on which he can work with rather than against both Bush I and Bush II. A global role will also get him out of the White House. In any case, he will be the *first* First Gentleman, and he clearly will not be some retiring Denis Thatcher. There has never been so formidable a power couple: if Bill's presidency was also Hillary's, then Hillary's will inevitably be Bill's, however peripatetic his role.

The questions all persist: How different will a new Clinton in the White House be? Will Hillary learn the lessons of her husband's weaknesses as well as of his strengths? Some accuse her of being even more opportunistic; some, of being too rigid and ideological. Sometimes it is the same critics taking both lines. Is she likely to be more progressive or less? She was the Midwestern girl from a Republican background; he, the Arkansas populist. How little these labels mean, however, is evident

from today's primary politics where the radical conservative Mike Huckabee plays the Arkansas populist, while Chicago is the home of liberal Democrat Barack Obama. Still, during her time in the White House Hillary more often talked like an inflexible liberal ideologue while Bill played the pragmatist ready to triangulate and accommodate in order to win over his opponents.

Will she be more attuned to ideas (and ideology) and hence more likely to seek and govern by a vision? Or be even more "flexible" (critics will say opportunistic) and free of principle than her husband? After all, she was the one who brought back Dick Morris to the White House toward the chaotic end of the first term, and her campaign remained embedded in the kind of DLC pragmatism and centrist polling represented by Mark Penn and other self-styled no-nonsense realists, at least until their brand of front-runner cautiousness broke down in Iowa and led her to speak in her own more intimate voice in New Hampshire.

So which is the "real" Hillary? That is the uncertainty bedeviling her presidential campaign. Her rightist critics see her, incoherently, both as a covert liberal ideologue *and* as an unprincipled opportunist. As recent biographies such as those by Carl Bernstein and Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta Jr. show, she has played both parts convincingly.²

To me, she seems more Bill's contrary than his clone—hence the success of their political partnership and their marriage (for all the *Sturm und Drang*, it is a successful marriage). If anything, Bill Clinton had Obama's virtues, whereas Hillary embodies their antithesis. For Bill Clinton, it was a cinch to win power, a burden to exercise it. For Hillary Clinton, it seems more of a burden to compete for the presidency. But perhaps, if she wins, she may be more comfortable using presidential power, as she has been comfortable deploying her senatorial authority. Under the tutelage of Mark Penn and other centrist pragmatists, she

² Carl Bernstein, *A Woman in Charge* (New York: Knopf, 2007) and Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta Jr., *Her Way: The Hopes and Ambitions of Hillary Rodham Clinton* (New York: Little, Brown, 2007). Other books on Hillary include Donnie Radcliffe, *Hillary Rodham Clinton: A First Lady for Our Time* (New York: Warner Books, 1993), Gail Sheehy, *Hillary's Choice* (New York: Random House, 1999), David Brock, *The Seduction of Hillary Rodham* (New York: Free Press, 1996), and Edward Klein, *The Truth About Hillary: What She Knew, When She Knew It, and How Far She'll Go to Become President* (New York: Sentinel, 2005). And then there is Turk Regan, *The Hillary Clinton Voodoo Kit: Stick It to Her Before She Sticks It to You!* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2007).

has paid little attention to—even studiously avoided—big ideas in the campaign. That does not mean, once elected (if she *is* nominated and elected), she will not opt for a more visionary path. Whether, novice visionary that she will be, she can cross the bridge to the future and help build a world on the other side that America can both inhabit and survive remains to be seen.

In the partnership with Bill, she was the rock; he, the soaring dove. She was the constant one; he, the mercurial philanderer, toying not only with women but with the nation's soul. His softness, if that is what it was, has been literally underscored by his heart operation, which has left him seeming a bit fragile. If elected, can Hillary counterbalance her husband and complete the circle, shedding the well-grounded pragmatists and political operatives who got her elected, and take to the air where she might be able to see to a far horizon, see far enough to use the power she labors today to win to shape America's destiny as it unfolds tomorrow?

To believe she might is no doubt at least in part the product of wishful thinking. But whatever else I learned in Washington in the complacent nineties and anxious new millennium that followed, I learned that the nation can do far worse than have a Clinton in the White House; that though the deeds on which Bill's final reputation will be fashioned are mostly done, the making of Hillary's destiny, like America's, is still a work in progress.