

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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It Was Out Of The Room Now, It Was Prowling The Veldt Mark L. Melcher

The big story last week was once again the problems that Bill Clinton seems to be having with all the people who are lying about him. This large and rapidly growing crowd now apparently includes not only all the characters that comprise Mrs. Clinton's "vast right wing conspiracy," but Bill's own personal secretary. Where, he must be asking, is Rose Marie Woods when she is needed?

It seems to me, as I think about the events of last week, that it will be difficult for Bill to serve out this year in office. This is not a prediction. It is just an observation. It isn't that I am afraid to make a prediction. It is simply that the process of predicting seems kind of meaningless right now, given the madness that is afoot in the land, and the speed with which new events are occurring and new revelations are popping up.

If all the cats and dogs were out of the bag, he might be all right. But that doesn't seem to be the case. In fact, later this month Bill's lawyer in the Paula Jones affair is expected to make the customary request for a summary judgment, which is legalese for asking the judge to throw the case out. The response to this request from Jones's attorneys, which is almost certain to be made public, will include extensive summaries of the depositions in the case. These will include those from Arkansas State Troopers L.D. Brown and Roger Perry, which reportedly provide lurid details of their alleged efforts to fetch women for Bill when he was governor.

In addition, it seems likely that the tapes of Monica Lewinsky, which reportedly describe in graphic detail her alleged relationship with Bill, are almost certain to become public some time before the year is out. And then, of course, there is the upcoming Paula Jones trial in Little Rock, which can be expected to garner as much international news coverage as the OJ trial.

As I watched things unfold during the last few weeks, I kept thinking of lines from one of my favorite novels, namely Robert Penn Warren's classic, *All The King's Men*. This book, as everyone knows, was based on the life of former Louisiana Governor Huey Long, another ethically challenged Southern politician who had a superabundance of charm and chutzpah.

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o When Bill did so well handling the initial attack on him, actually rising in the polls, the following line from that great political novel came to mind.

He wasn't the real thing, but he sure was a good imitation of it, which is frequently better than the real thing, for the real thing can relax but the imitation can't afford to and has to spend all the time being just one cut more real than the real thing.

o When Mrs. Clinton came out fighting for her man, I thought of this line from Warren's great book.

Sadie burst out of the Boss' door about the way one of the big cats, no doubt, used to bounce out of the hutch at the far end of the arena and head for the Christian martyr.

o When it was learned that Bill had admitted in his deposition in the Paula Jones case that he had indeed had an affair with Gennifer Flowers, after denying it for five years, it reminded me of this quote from that wonderful book.

"It was out of the room now, it was prowling the veldt."

o When it was learned that Ms. Lewinsky had made 37 trips to the White House after having left her job there, this thought from Warren engulfed me.

His chances looked about as good as the chances of a flea making a living off a carved marble lion on a monument.

o When I saw Bill standing there at that press conference last week with England's preppy leader, Tony Blair, talking calmly about bombing Iraq back to the stone age, the thought that surfaced was Warren's observation about the unintended consequences that can result from our behavior.

I eat a persimmon and the teeth of a tinker in Tibet are put on edge.

o During that same press conference, when Bill attacked his critics, it was pure Warren.

The boss knew all about the so-called fallacy of the *argumentum ad hominem*. "It may be a fallacy," he said, "but it is shore-God useful. If you use the right kind of *argumentum* you can always scare the *hominem* into a laundry bill he didn't expect."

o When I saw Bill tell the world at this press conference that he wouldn't "let the American public down" by resigning, Warren came through once again, as follows.

Duffy was face to face with the margin of mystery where all our calculations collapse, where the stream of time dwindles into the sands of eternity, where the formula fails in the test tube, where chaos and old night hold sway and we hear the laughter in the ether dream. But he didn't know he was, and so he said, "Yeah."

● And finally, I thought of the most famous quote all from Warren's great novel, when I reflected on all the events of the past few weeks *in toto*.

Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something.

On a personal level, the events of the past few weeks seem to have made me very tired, and more than a little melancholy. I keep asking myself, who didn't know? Where have these people been, these people who express such surprise by it all, these talking heads, these "journalists," these "experts," these big shot politicians?

I keep asking myself, who are these people? And the answer to which I keep returning is that these are the same people who, for the past five years, were so quick to challenge, so sanctimoniously, the ethics and motives of anyone who questioned the honesty and integrity of the Bill Clinton and his cronies, whether it be the "loathsome" Rush Limbaugh, that "trailer part tramp" Paula Jones, or such "conspiracy theorists" as journalists Ambrose Evans-Pritchard and Chris Ruddy.

These are the same people who felt no remorse whatsoever about their attempts to destroy the remarkable life and career of Judge Clarence Thomas over an allegation that wouldn't even be worth noting in the Clinton White House today. These are the spawn of the 1960s, with its disdain for such traditional concepts as truth, honor, integrity, and prudence. These are the people about whom T.S. Eliot wrote.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar.

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion;

One thing that has bothered me more than anything else during the past few weeks is the cavalier way in which the media pundits, Democratic politicians and other "opinion leaders" have treated the subject of perjury.

They act as though it is a big game where the significance of lying under oath rests solely on whether it can be proven in a court of law. Everyone seems to forget that the term "sworn statement" implies that somewhere the phrase "So Help Me God" was uttered. It is, in my

opinion, a time for patriots to weep, when this phrase has no more than a technical and legal meaning.

There once was a guy named George Washington who believed this also. He put it this way in his now largely forgotten, but once famous, "Farewell Address," which, it is worth noting, was once read by school children across the land.

Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice?

And since I'm in the mood to quote passages with no direct relevance to the matters at hand, I'll offer another thought from the same wonderful address by the "Father of Our Country."

Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. -- The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of Free Government. -- Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?

Another thing that has bothered me a great deal during the past several weeks is the fact that, so far, there is not a single Democrat with the kind of integrity and courage that was displayed by Sen. Howard Baker, when he, in his time, determined that his party's president, Richard Nixon, did not have the moral authority to lead the nation, and he stepped forth and said as much. What kind of compromises are these people making with their consciences? Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* knew the answer. "Had I as many souls as there be stars, I'd give them all . . ."

What kind of place has Washington become in the twilight of the 20th century? And again, we turn to T.S. Eliot.

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star . . .

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms. . .

A crucial test of Bill's survival skills will occur in the next week or so, if and when he launches a sustained air attack on Iraq. This action will, I believe, require some pretty convincing explanation, once the television images of dead and wounded Iraqi civilians, including children, begin to appear on the nightly news.

Bill can certainly present a case that the mayhem is morally justified. The question is whether he has the moral authority to sell such a case to a majority of the American public, given his current circumstances.

If the mission is an unqualified success, then he will have no trouble convincing the public that it was both morally right and worth the cost. Nothing succeeds like success, as they say. If the outcome is ambiguous, or awful, then Bill could face some very damaging questions about both his judgment and his motives.

To be considered an unalloyed success, it seems to me the mission would have to succeed in killing Saddam Hussein. It will be a disaster if there are heavy American casualties, if the attack sets off a chain of terrorist attacks throughout the world, or if it turns the West Bank into a blood bath.

As I write this, I keep thinking about a line from the great moral philosopher George Santayana's *Soliloquies in England*, in which he discussed life in a changing world, then tempered his observations with the statement, "But then I am an old fogey and almost an ancient philosopher, and I don't count." At times like this, I think though that it is probably best not to count.

While looking up that quote, I found myself reading other parts of Santayana's reflections, and I will close with a short passage from that work. It has no direct relevance to the matters at hand, except to demonstrate that there was a time when at least some Americans who were considered "great," were not celebrities, athletes, or political hacks. There was a time when some "great" Americans were thoughtful men of quality and honesty, like Santayana.

I prize civilization, being bred in towns and liking to hear and to see what new things people are up to. I like to walk about amidst the beautiful things that adorn the world; but private wealth I should decline, or any sort of personal possessions, because they would take away my liberty . . .

I hear no laughter among the rich which is not forced and nervous. I find no sense of moral security amongst them, no happy freedom, no mastery over anything. Yet this is the very cream of liberal life, the brilliant success for the sake of which Christendom was overturned, and the dull peasantry elevated into factory-hands, shopkeepers and chauffeurs.

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