



Petrina Ryan-Kleid, Parsing Bill (2012)

Slick Willie

*Sometimes I feel like a fire hydrant
looking at a pack of dogs.*

Bill Clinton on his presidency

AMONG THE MANY UNUSUAL furnishings scattered throughout the late, disgraced billionaire Jeffrey Epstein’s numerous residences—which included, among other things, female mannequins hanging from a chandelier and a chessboard with pieces depicting naked likenesses of his household staff—one well publicized work of art was particularly unsettling.

Displayed in a prominent location in Epstein’s \$56 million NYC townhouse, the painting featured a smiling Bill Clinton clad in a blue dress and high heels, lounging in an armchair while gesturing to the viewer. (The blue dress was likely a not-so-subtle nod to the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal, which preoccupied Clinton’s term in office.)

A former governor, Clinton defeated incumbent George H.W. Bush in 1992, and won a second term against Bob Dole in 1996.

Clinton insisted on maintaining the military budget at Cold War levels, despite the collapse of the USSR and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell’s lament that he was “running out of demons.” By 1999, the U.S. was selling more weapons than the rest of the world combined.

Perhaps touchy about criticism of his lack of a military record (having shrewdly avoided the draft during the Vietnam War) ‘Bubba’ Clinton showed no hesitation to use arms himself whenever the opportunity arose, overseeing a botched attempt to capture a Somali warlord and ordering the bombing of what he claimed was a weapons plant in the Sudan. (The factory was actually making half of the country’s vital medicine supply.)

NATO and U.S. forces illegally bombed Kosovo in a 78-day bombing campaign—dropping cluster bombs into marketplaces, hospitals, and other civilian areas—while Clinton deliberately prevented a diplomatic solution to the conflict. (The Caspian Sea region holds as much as \$17 trillion in oil, and coincidentally, the proposed pipeline route passed directly alongside a huge new permanent U.S. military base in Kosovo.)

While he could apparently hardly wait to bomb Yugoslavia, Clinton impeded UN intervention while 800,000 people were shot or hacked to death in a three month-long killing spree in Rwanda. Clinton was made aware well in advance of the impending genocide, during which even modest U.S. intervention could have saved at least 300,000 lives. (Too bad Rwanda has no oil.)

Clinton initiated ‘Plan Colombia,’ a multi-billion dollar military aid program which temporarily slowed that country’s cocaine production, but in the process aided in the killing of tens of thousands of human rights protestors by paramilitary groups.

Clinton’s notorious secretary of state, Madeline Albright, defended Clinton’s expansion of U.S. economic sanctions on Iraq—despite their causing the death of over a half million children under age five—insisting the cost was “worth it.”

Seizing the opportunity to appear to be tough on crime, Clinton promoted the Omnibus Federal Crime Bill in 1994. The bill—which included the now-infamous ‘three strikes’ law (in which three felony convictions mandated an automatic life sentence)—doubled the prison population and was responsible for greatest mass incarceration of Americans in U.S. history. (The U.S currently has 2.3 million people in prison, 200,000 serving life sentences.)

While campaigning for president in 2016, Hillary Clinton deflected questions about her and her husband’s support for the crime bill, ludicrously claiming that they didn’t understand the consequences of passing it.

Making good on his 1992 campaign promise to “end welfare as we know it,” Clinton’s 1996 welfare reform bill was equally devastating to millions of American families, playing into exaggerated fears about black crime and sexually reckless ‘welfare queens.’ The poverty rate among American children subsequently exploded.

But the single greatest consequence of Clinton’s presidency was his signing into law more financial deregulation legislation than any other president in history.

Clinton revoked the Glass-Steagall law barring investment banks from engaging in commercial banking activities, and signed other bills deregulating the high risk derivatives market and reducing the ability of states to regulate the banking industry. (The 2008 financial crisis and the current ‘Too Big to Fail’ status of the nation’s big banks were a direct result of these bills.)

While strengthening the banking cartel which had a stranglehold over the American economy, Clinton helped gut the nation’s manufacturing base by signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), causing the loss of thousands of jobs and cutting the wages of millions of workers by U.S. corporations struggling to compete.

‘Slick Willie’ went too far, however, when he lied about having sex with a White House intern. But despite being impeached for obstructing justice, Clinton not only escaped removal from office, but finished out his term with the highest approval rating of any departing president in over seven decades.

Slick Willie, indeed. ■