Pirate of Penance

No forgiveness for Bubba: Clinton dumped on HIVers once too often

December 1, 1998 By Doug Ireland

A famous song in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operetta The Mikado proclaims that, to have the punishment fit the crime, one must "make each prisoner pent/unwillingly represent/a source of innocent merriment." That's one way of looking at Bill Clinton's self-immolation in the Monica Lewinsky affair, for the biggest whopper purveyed by Clinton and his defenders is that the president's private conduct has had nothing to do with his governance. Quite the reverse is true.

The reason that Clinton decided—after taking a poll—to lie under oath about all those Sunday trysts with his "little humidor" (as Jay Leno dubbed Monica) is that the truth revealed him to be one of the greatest hypocrites of all time. For when Clinton adopted the right-wing's "family values" agenda in order to secure his presidency, this propaganda fan dance had devastating policy consequences for same-sexers and the HIV community.

It all began when the 1992 Clinton campaign's famous "bimbo patrol" failed to squelch the loquacious Gennifer Flowers, who can be viewed as the unwitting godmother of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and the witch-hunts against lesbians and gay men in the military it has fostered. And when the Democrats lost Congress in 1994, Clinton brought back to his inner circle Dick Morris, and together the prostitute-frequenting political consultant who had fathered a child out of wedlock and the serial-philandering president made the full-blown "family values" presidency the overarching theme for securing a second Clinton term. As part of this charade, Clinton decided not to implement the lifesaving recommendations even of George Bush's AIDS Commission, let alone his own.

He made permanent the ban on immigration by HIVers (thus breaking up many same-sex "families"); capitulated to the religious right on explicit sex education and condoms in the schools, while his administration preached the failed fantasy of "abstinence"; threatened prosecution of doctors who prescribed medical marijuana for PWAs and other patients to restore their appetites and prevent them from dying of malnutrition; sided with the know-nothing obscurantists on the issue of clean needles against the unanimous advice of the medical and AIDS-prevention experts; signed the religious fanatics' gay-bashing Defense of Marriage Act into law-—and then campaigned on it in 1996 with stealth radio ads targeting the Bible Belt so they'd be under the radar for gay voters on the two coasts; refused to lift a finger to try to make anti-gay violence a federal bias crime; and championed welfare abolition, which hit hard at unwed HIV positive

mothers and their kids.

And this is only a partial list. So pervasively did the family values cant permeate his presidency that Clinton's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eliminated questions about homosexuality from its teen sex survey, thus rendering it nearly useless in designing AIDS-prevention strategies, while making a mockery of Clinton's defense-of-children rhetoric. Many of these steps were taken *after* Clinton's re-election, which is all the more inexcusable.

In an apposite irony, Clinton's lies about his sex life were beamed to the grand jury from the White House Map Room, site of those infamous fat-cat coffees where Clinton sold his soul to corporate America to get the money for the Clinton-Morris "family values" ad campaign. Thus did the twin hypocrisies meet: Clinton-policy Tartufferies were just as much a sham as "Putting People First," which translated into putting the bond market first.

Instead of weeping over the effective end of this mendacious presidency, gays and the HIV positive community should welcome this opportunity to break with the lies and hypocrisy of Clintonism and construct a new politics that rejects sexual righteousness and theocratic moralizing. Hoist on the petard of his conniving V-chip rhetoric, Clinton is—now more than ever—a roadblock to progressive change. Al Gore cannot possibly be any worse for us than Clinton has been; indeed, shorn of the need to dissemble about his private life with policies that hurt us, he might even be marginally better.

The Starr report and the White House–prodded media exposés of GOP leaders' sexual antics have usefully demonstrated the truth of the dictum that homosexuals are different from everyone else *except* in bed. It is oppression, motored by religious superstition and cultural schizophrenia (which Clinton has so skillfully manipulated), that makes us so. Clinton's resignation could at least give us a fighting chance to put AIDS back on the national agenda, and inaugurate a more honest dialogue. He should go.

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