
Book Reviews

How the news media invented Whitewater

by Edward Spannaus

Fools for Scandal: How the Media Invented Whitewater

by Gene Lyons and the editors of Harper's magazine
Franklin Square Press, New York, 1996
224 pages, paperbound, \$9.95

Blood Sport: The President and His Adversaries

by James B. Stewart
Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996
479 pages, hardbound, \$25

Almost everything you think you know about Bill and Hillary Clinton, the President's libido, and the couple's allegedly seamy business dealings in darkest Arkansas—from Gennifer Flowers to the entire Whitewater affair—rests on “facts” that are somewhere between the highly dubious and demonstrably false. Far from being the result of muckraking reporting by a vigorous and independent press, what the “Clinton scandals” amount to is possibly the most politically charged case of journalistic malpractice in recent American history.
—from *Fools for Scandal*

Gene Lyons's *Fools for Scandal* is an extremely useful book, written by a reporter and columnist for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* who has watched the national, and international news media trample into Arkansas, and then put out stories which are often patently false and laughable to those who have some familiarity with Arkansas politics.

For example, would you know from the national news

coverage that Bill Clinton and Gov. Jim Guy Tucker were political rivals, and not friends or cronies, who never had any private business dealings? Or that when he was governor, Bill Clinton had a running feud with the chicken and trucking lobbies (including Tyson Foods), and that those industries considered Clinton to be their bitter enemy? Not from the *New York Times*, you wouldn't.

The *New York Times* comes in for a well-deserved drubbing in *Fools for Scandal*, because it was the *Times*'s Jeff Gerth who wrote the first nationally prominent “Whitewater” story in March 1992, and the *Times* has stuck to its lies ever since.

The so-called “Clinton scandals” didn't just happen, Lyons writes, and he explains:

“They are also a result of one of the nastiest and most successful political ‘dirty tricks’ campaigns in recent American history. Aided and abetted by a small group of Arkansas Republicans whose hatred for the Clintons knows no bounds, they originated in a planned, coordinated smear campaign underwritten by right-wing organizations such as Floyd Brown's Citizens United, a California outfit called Citizens for Honest Government [producer of *The Clinton Chronicles*], Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Media, and evangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. The *American Spectator* magazine, the *Washington Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page pitched in enthusiastically. Self-styled ‘conservative’ talk-show hosts from Rush Limbaugh on down have disseminated hysterical falsehoods to an audience of millions.

“But,” Lyons adds, “the role of the *New York Times* and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the *Washington Post* in creating and sustaining the Whitewater hoax can hardly be overstated.

“Having bungled the Whitewater story to begin with, both newspapers' goal for months, indeed years, has been to protect themselves and their damaged credibility. With a few rare but honorable exceptions, the rest of the media pack has obediently followed.”

‘All the lies that fit, we print’

The initial *New York Times* story—which provided the template for all future stories about Whitewater-Madison per se (as distinguished from “Troopergate,” and so on)—ran on March 8, 1992, which was in between the New Hampshire primary and the Super Tuesday primaries. The story more or less just sat there until the end of 1993, after Clinton had been President for almost a year, when it was revived under very different circumstances.

Regular readers of *EIR* know what those circumstances were, and they know that the impetus in late 1993 and early 1994 came from London—not New York or Washington. We will return to that shortly. But first, let's follow Lyons's dissection of the March 1992 *New York Times* story.

In a 1994 forum at the National Press Club in Washington, Lyons pointed out that the *American Journalism Review*