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## The Clinton Chronicle: Diary of a Political Psychologist

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# The Clinton Chronicle: Diary of a Political Psychologist

Aubrey Immelman

On December 19, 1998 William Jefferson Clinton became only the second U.S. president to be impeached by the House of Representatives. What follows is a chronicle, from my perspective as a political psychologist, of debates and controversies in the unfolding of this national drama.<sup>1</sup> The curtain rises as the president prepares on August 17, 1998 to testify before the grand jury in the Starr investigation. The narrative proceeds to the final act as the Senate acquits the president on February 12, 1999 on articles of impeachment brought by the House. But this nightmarish production has no final curtain, as Washington persists in practicing its poisonous partisan politics of personal destruction and as charges of sexual assault more than two decades before are leveled against Bill Clinton.<sup>2</sup>

## A Political–Psychological Prediction of President Bill Clinton’s Grand Jury Testimony in the Starr Investigation

Aug. 17, 1998 — The days preceding President Bill Clinton’s appearance before the grand jury in independent counsel Kenneth Starr’s investigation have been marked by intense media speculation concerning the president’s likely testimony. From a political–psychological perspective, three major sources of inference for predicting the president’s performance are his personality, situational constraints, and his track record of past behavior.

### Personality

I indirectly assessed Bill Clinton’s personality (Immelman, 1996, 1998) from the conceptual perspective of Theodore Millon (1969, 1981, 1986a, 1986b, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1996; Millon & Everly, 1985). Millon’s model employs a coherent psychodiagnostic framework for integrating, organizing, and systematizing personological knowledge from a broad array of source materials encompassing divergent perspectives. A methodology that matches this criterion has heuristic value for (a) *inferring* that which is not readily apparent when observing political leaders at a distance and (b) *predicting* future political behavior, based on established knowledge concerning temporally stable and cross-situationally consistent predispositions associated with specific personality patterns. Information pertaining to Bill Clinton was collected from published biographical accounts and synthesized into a personality profile using Millon’s diagnostic criteria. President Clinton was found to be primarily Ambitious/arrogant and Extraverted/gregarious (Immelman, 1996, 1998).

According to Millon (1994, p. 32), Ambitious individuals are competitive, self-confident, audacious, bold, and clever. They are charming and skilled at winning others over to their own

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<sup>1</sup> All commentary and analysis is informed by my assessment of Bill Clinton’s personality, published elsewhere (Immelman, 1996, 1998). Although this lends consistency to the essays comprising this chronicle, it unavoidably results in occasional repetition.

<sup>2</sup> This article is reprinted from *The Saint John’s Symposium*, vol. 16 (1998–99), pp. 30–68.

causes and purposes, fully expect others to recognize their special qualities and cater to them, lack social reciprocity, and have a sense of entitlement. They may be viewed as exploitative and arrogant.

Extraverted individuals are sociable, with a warm, likeable personal style. Though image-conscious and needing validation, they are confident about their social skills and their ability to charm and influence others. They tend to be easily bored with routine, are prone to intense and shifting moods, and may be viewed as inconsistent and unreliable (see Millon, 1994, pp. 31–32).

Individuals who display a mix of Ambitious and Extraverted characteristics, as does Bill Clinton, are driven by a need for excitement, stimulation, and challenge; are highly self-promoting and self-serving and motivated by a need for achievement and public recognition; are socially clever, charming, and skilled at attracting and seducing others; display a tendency to be overly but transiently attached to one thing or person after another and exhibit a restless, “driven” quality that may be accompanied by a deficit in social dependability; hastily assume agreements, which creates difficulty in honoring promises or meeting obligations; are undisciplined, traveling an erratic course of successes, failures, and abandoned hopes; may act impulsively or imprudently; and are more attuned to their own needs than to those of others (Immelman, 1996; Millon, 1981).

This combination of ambition and extraversion may render a leader susceptible to scandal by contributing to “neglect of the role demands of political office, low resistance to corrupting influences, and impulsiveness. ... [as well as] favoring loyalty and friendship over competence-for-the-position in making appointments to high-level public office” (Immelman, 1993a, p. 736). Based on my assessment of his personality, my “worst-case” prediction for President Clinton prior to his reelection in 1996, was that

he may commit errors of judgment stemming from a combination of strong ambition, a sense of entitlement, and inflated self-confidence. Ambitious characteristics may also predispose him to dissemble or equivocate, not only ego-defensively to protect and bolster an admirable self-image, but instrumentally to have his way with others. Concurrent Extraverted features in President Clinton’s ... [personality] profile suggest a strong need for public recognition, approval, and validation, along with a willingness to use his social skills to influence and charm others (though lacking some fidelity in consistently fulfilling his promises). Extraverted traits are further associated with scattered attention to detail, boredom with routine activities, intense but short-lived moods, and avoidance of introspection — all of which may potentially interfere with effective leadership. Finally, there is a danger that Extraverted presidents such as Bill Clinton may be oversensitive to public opinion and neglectful of role demands relating to oversight. In Choiniere and Keirse’s (1992) scheme of presidential temperament ... the task of “guarding protocol and morality against violation” and “physical resources against improper and unwarranted use” (p. 164) is [not associated with Bill Clinton’s personality pattern]. (Immelman, 1996; 1998, pp. 355–356)

I further noted that “[t]he profile for Bill Clinton is consistent with a presidency troubled by ethical questions and lapses of judgment, and provides an explanatory framework for Clinton’s high achievement drive and his ability to retain a following and maintain his self-confidence in the face of adversity. ... [and that an] optimistic conclusion ... [would be] that Bill Clinton will

continue to bring to the presidency his driving ambition, supreme sense of self-confidence, and a personal charisma with the power to inspire” (Immelman, 1998, pp. 335, 359).

## **Situational Constraints**

There are several compelling situational factors that may impinge on President Clinton’s testimony. Being the “consummate political animal” (reflected both in his personality profile and his track record) his testimony will likely be guided by considerations of political expedience, including the survival of his presidency and the protection of his legacy. This includes the likelihood that he will follow the advice of his lawyers and political advisers on matters such as avoiding a perjury trap and taking whatever action may be necessary to bolster his public image as a buffer to the outcome of potential impeachment hearings.

Another situational constraint is that President Clinton may be unable to sustain his supreme sense of self-confidence in the face of tough questioning by prosecutors — a tough predicament for someone like Bill Clinton, with his strong need for validation. Potential outcomes include an unplanned admission of guilt or losing his temper when his confidence is shaken. The major situational constraint with respect to an admission of wrongdoing will be confrontation with incontrovertible evidence of wrongdoing, including physical evidence and compelling contradictory testimony by other witnesses before the grand jury.

## **Past Behavior**

If Bill Clinton’s evasiveness with reference to matters such as his experimentation with marijuana, his Vietnam draft status, and the nature of his relationship with Gennifer Flowers represents the expression of an underlying personal disposition, it can be assumed — based on the consistency principle of personality — that Clinton’s testimony before the grand jury will have a similar tenor. One of the best predictors of future behavior, after all, is past behavior under similar circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

The personality construct is predicated on the assumption that the psychological functioning of individuals is shaped by a coherent set of tightly-knit, pervasive, enduring dispositions, yielding temporal stability and cross-situational consistency in the core psychological domains of affect, behavior, and cognition. Thus, personality psychologists expect substantial functional continuity. Compelling contextual and role-related variables, however, modulate and modify the expression of personal attributes — and testifying before a grand jury is undoubtedly a compelling context. Thus, it is difficult to resolve the question of the degree to which Bill Clinton’s track record of prevarication reflects situational constraints, an underlying character flaw, or both.

Nonetheless, taking into account President Clinton’s personality profile, situational constraints, and past behavior, the general expectation is that his grand jury testimony will be evasive rather than forthright, vague rather than precise, and ambiguous rather than explicit. It seems to be a pattern with President Clinton that outright denial is later followed, under duress,

by measured honesty, carefully calibrated truth-telling, and — ultimately — contrition. All things considered, his grand jury testimony is likely to have a similar tenor. By the same token, the “mea culpa” scenario appears to be rather remote.

Media speculation in the hours preceding President Clinton’s grand jury appearance, that he will not admit to any of the alleged acts with dire legal implications (perjury, subornation of perjury, witness tampering, obstruction of justice), but will acknowledge an inappropriate relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, is supported by the available data.

## **On “Wag the Dog” and Hardball Politics: Can Character Precipitate Military Adventures?**

Aug. 21, 1998 — ABC and NBC News polls released this morning show that about one-third of Americans question President Clinton’s motives in ordering yesterday’s cruise missile strikes against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. These numbers suggest a significant degree of public doubt. Several observers expressed concern about the necessity or timing of the attacks, raising the specter of the “Wag the Dog” scenario.

In an article (Immelman, 1998) in this fall’s issue of the journal *Leadership Quarterly*, I report my findings that Bill Clinton is an amalgam of the Ambitious and Extraverted personality patterns. Earlier, in an article (Immelman, 1993a) in the journal *Political Psychology*, I noted that the Ambitious pattern (which is related to narcissistic character) “is politically relevant by virtue of the risk ... for exploitation and possibly a tendency to indulge in macho adventures that may be at variance with political stability” (p. 736).

The Ambitious pattern — though necessary — is not, however, sufficient to predispose a leader to military adventures. In my opinion the use of force or military action to achieve political objectives is best predicted by a *combination* of the Ambitious and Dominant patterns, in addition to significant Distrusting features.

The Ambitious–Dominant personality profile, in my view, provides the theoretical underpinnings for Etheredge’s (1979) notion of the “hardball player” in politics. Practitioners of hardball politics have a “public veneer of ... idealistic concern” (Etheredge, 1979), but are, in fact, “cynically calculating, ambitious promoters of themselves” who are narcissistic and Machiavellian (Stone & Schaffner, 1988, p. 156).

Although Bill Clinton obtained a moderate Dominant score in my study, it is not a central feature of his personality configuration, which, as stated above, is primarily Ambitious–Extraverted. The “distinctive feature” of the Ambitious–Extraverted amalgam “is an erotic and seductive orientation” (Millon, 1996, p. 410), which renders these individuals vulnerable to sex scandal. Although not entirely averse to hardball politics, Ambitious personalities tend to be “benignly arrogant” (p. 394); that is, they are overconfident and irresponsible and take unnecessary or senseless risks. However, these risks are typically self-indulgent and portend neither a broader recklessness or malfeasance with reference to discharging the duties of public office, nor an aggressive interpersonal orientation.

Thus, from the perspective of political personality, the logical resolution of the “Wag the Dog” dilemma is that President Clinton was situationally constrained to approve yesterday’s airstrikes in Afghanistan and Sudan, though apparently he had some flexibility with respect to timing. In short, practically any president, irrespective of personality dynamics, would have taken a course of action similar to President Clinton’s.

## Clinton “Antisocial Personality” Claim Outrageous, Irresponsible

Sept. 6, 1998 — On Fox News Channel’s “This Evening with Judith Regan,” psychotherapist Sheenah Henkin claimed that President Clinton had an antisocial personality disorder. Most psychologists would agree that it is fundamentally irresponsible to diagnose a mental disorder without a formal assessment. My systematic, indirect evaluation of Bill Clinton’s personality (Immelman, 1998) provided no credible evidence of antisocial personality.

Dr. Henkin based her speculation on diagnostic criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA; 1994); however, even a cursory examination of the manual reveals the speciousness of her argument. According to the DSM-IV, “[t]he essential feature of Antisocial Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood” (APA, 1994, p. 645).

For this diagnosis to be given, the individual ... must have had a history of some symptoms of Conduct Disorder before the age of 15 years. ... Conduct Disorder involves a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated. The specific behaviors characteristic of Conduct Disorder fall into one of four categories: aggression to people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, or serious violation of rules. (APA, 1994, p. 646)

The most perfunctory reading of the authoritative *First in His Class* (1995) by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Maraniss, would falter as a basis for inferring the existence of childhood conduct disorder with reference to Bill Clinton. DSM-IV continues:

Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder fail to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior. ... They may repeatedly perform acts that are grounds for arrest ..., such as destroying property, harassing others, stealing, or pursuing illegal occupations. Persons with this disorder disregard the wishes, rights, or feelings of others. They are frequently deceitful and manipulative in order to gain personal profit or pleasure. ... They may repeatedly lie, use aliases, con others, or malingering. A pattern of impulsivity may be manifested by a failure to plan ahead. ... Decisions are made on the spur of the moment, without forethought, and without consideration for the consequences to self or others; this may lead to sudden changes of jobs, residences, or relationships. Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder tend to be irritable and aggressive and may repeatedly get into physical fights or commit acts of physical assault. ... These individuals also display a reckless disregard for the safety of themselves or others. ... This may be evidenced in their driving behavior (recurrent speeding, driving while intoxicated, multiple accidents). They may engage in sexual behavior or substance use

that has a high risk for harmful consequences. They may neglect or fail to care for a child in a way that puts the child in danger. (APA, 1994, p. 646)

It defies logic that character flaws of this magnitude and the associated pattern of egregious behaviors and flagrant norm violations could have escaped detection for so long in someone with a public record as extensive as Bill Clinton's, dating back a quarter of a century. And there's more:

Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder also tend to be consistently and extremely irresponsible. ... Irresponsible work behavior may be indicated by significant periods of unemployment despite available job opportunities, or by abandonment of several jobs without a realistic plan for getting another job. There may also be a pattern of repeated absences from work that are not explained by illness either in themselves or in their family. Financial irresponsibility is indicated by acts such as defaulting on debts, failing to provide child support, or failing to support other dependents on a regular basis. Individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder show little remorse for the consequences of their acts. ... They may be indifferent to, or provide a superficial rationalization for, having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from someone. ... These individuals may blame the victims for being foolish, helpless, or deserving their fate; they may minimize the harmful consequences of their actions; or they may simply indicate complete indifference. They generally fail to compensate or make amends for their behavior. (APA, 1994, p.646)

Although some of these features no doubt are present in Bill Clinton — as are characteristics of all 12 astrological signs — neither a selective reading nor superficial behavioral similarities provides an adequate basis for inferring the existence of a clinical syndrome, no less a personality disorder of severe proportions.

People with antisocial personality disorder are interpersonally “malignant.” As characterized by personality theorist Theodore Millon, they are physically brutal, violate established social codes, and exhibit a pervasive pattern of aggressive conduct and hostile vindictiveness. People with an antisocial personality disorder are fundamentally callous; they are “insensitive, irritable, and aggressive, as expressed in a wide-ranging deficit in social charitableness, human compassion or personal remorse,” and exhibit “a course incivility, as well as an offensive, if not reckless disregard for the safety of self and others” (Millon, 1996, p. 446).

Not even Richard Nixon at his most maligned would fit that profile.

## **The Character of President Clinton's Misconduct as Inferred from Personality Variables**

Sept. 9, 1998 — Should character become a defining issue in the present investigation of President Clinton, it may ultimately be determined that Mr. Clinton's personal failings and self-acknowledged lapses of judgment may, at least in part, have been an expression of underlying personality traits. After a systematic analysis of biographical materials I determined (Immelman, 1996, 1998) that Bill Clinton's personality was an amalgam of the “Ambitious” and “Extraverted” patterns described by psychologist Theodore Millon, a leading contemporary

authority in the field of personality assessment. In my judgment, these findings represent the best approximation of a definitive psychological evaluation without the benefit of a face-to-face clinical interview and formal psychological testing.

## **President Clinton's Personality**

Following is my synopsis of the Ambitious–Extraverted personality configuration, condensed and adapted from Millon's (1996) text on personality disorders and their normal, adaptive variants. As Bill Clinton's scale elevations on the *Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria* (MIDC; Immelman, 1993b) were in the intermediate (normal though slightly exaggerated) range, it is appropriate that Millon's descriptions are attenuated, or toned down, in the case of the president.

Ambitious personalities are status-oriented and self-promoting, driven by a need to achieve fame and public recognition (Millon, 1996, p. 412). The “distinctive feature” of the Ambitious–Extraverted personality composite, which Millon calls the “amorous narcissist,” is an “erotic and seductive orientation” (p. 410). For these personalities, sexual prowess serves to enhance self-worth. Millon (1996) writes, “It is the act of exhibitionistically being seductive, and hence gaining in narcissistic stature, that compels” (p. 411). Ambitious–Extraverted individuals may have “an indifferent conscience, an aloofness to truth and social responsibility” that, if brought to their attention, is likely to elicit “nonchalant innocence” (p. 410). They tend to be undisciplined, traveling an erratic course of successes, failures, and abandoned hopes, and are driven by a need for excitement, public recognition, challenge, and stimulation.

Millon (1996) notes that, because of their “indifferent conscience” and the pressing need to nourish their “overinflated self-image,” these individuals may “fabricate stories that enhance their worth” and “succeed in seducing others into supporting their excesses” (p. 411). Although they may leave a trail of broken promises and outrageous acts, including sexual excesses and fraudulent behavior, their “disregard for truth and talent for exploitation and deception” are rarely “hostile” or “malicious” in intent (p. 411). More likely, it stems from a sense of entitlement — their assumption that what they wish for is their due. Thus, wrongdoing, when and if it occurs, characteristically derives from “an attitude of narcissistic omnipotence and self-assurance, a feeling that the implicit rules of human relationships do not apply to them” (p. 411).

## **Presidential Personality and the Starr Report**

With reference to the likely content of independent counsel Kenneth Starr's referral to Congress, my assessment of President Clinton's personality style permits the following inferences to be drawn on social-scientific and theoretical grounds:

**Abuse of power.** Concerning potential charges of abuse of power, there is theoretical justification for the assertion that the failings associated with personalities such as Mr. Clinton's are relatively compartmentalized, extending primarily to self-indulgence or personal excess, including sexual intemperance and overzealous pursuit of personal ambitions and policy initiatives. The underlying personality dynamics do not, however, point to malice aforethought or deliberate malfeasance as in, say, the Dominant or Distrusting personality patterns. The law



makes corresponding distinctions between *actus reus* and *mens rea* with reference to criminal intent and culpability. Be that as it may, from a purely psychological perspective one may venture that, though the president may indeed have committed wrongful acts, the position seems more equivocal with respect to criminal intent. Of relevance in this regard is Millon's (1996) contention that, "[i]n contrast to the antisocial personality, the self-centeredness of the narcissist is not anchored to feelings of deep distrust and animosity. Narcissistic individuals are benignly arrogant" (p. 394).

**Perjury and witness tampering.** As for potential charges of perjury and witness tampering, audacious behaviors and acts of deceit in personalities such as Mr. Clinton's are rarely hostile or malicious in intent. More typically, the underlying motives are purely self-indulgent and self-protective. Though perhaps disgraceful and dishonorable, these behaviors are neither malevolent nor fundamentally heinous. This theoretical assumption can be further contextualized and nuanced with reference to the large body of research on situational control of behavior — that is, that some circumstances are so compelling as to blur individual differences in personality or character. In this regard, one can justifiably claim that many reasonable people would be similarly evasive and prone to equivocation and deception if faced with the degree of public scrutiny and humiliation to which the president has been subjected.

**Subornation of perjury and obstruction of justice.** On potential charges of suborning perjury or obstructing justice by permitting subordinates to mislead the public on his behalf, an aspect of personalities such as Mr. Clinton's is that, in an executive role, they tend to be neglectful of role demands relating to oversight, including the custodial imperatives of guarding protocol and morality against violation and physical resources against improper and unwarranted use. Ethical lapses more likely are the product of these personal flaws than of malice aforethought. More precisely, in these characters, personal failures tend to be clustered in the realm of overconfidence — even grandiosity — but rarely extend to malevolence, hostility, or sinister intent. In short, these individuals lose sight of their shortcomings and vulnerabilities and take unwarranted risks that may cause them to “fall from grace.” Here again, their actions are mostly marked by absence of malice or criminal intent; misconduct therefore is more likely the product of misplaced trust and priorities, misdirected focus, and deficient oversight.

## Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted to provide a psychological perspective on the likely character of President Bill Clinton's wrongdoing derived from an analysis of his underlying motives and dispositions, based on a systematic study of his personality at a distance, and formulated prior to the release of the Starr report. The sexual misconduct of which Mr. Clinton stands accused is part and parcel of a personality configuration that also embraces more admirable qualities such as self-confidence, personal charisma, leadership skill, an ability to connect with people, and power to inspire — precisely those qualities that contributed to his election victories in 1992 and 1996.

Although some analysts have searched for parallels between the current crisis and Watergate, the present assessment suggests that in psychological terms Bill Clinton — whose underlying motives are substantively free of paranoid ideation or hostile, malicious intent — is very far removed from Richard Nixon.

## A “Pre-Analysis” of President Bill Clinton’s Grand Jury Testimony in the Starr Investigation

Sept. 20, 1998 — In anticipation of tomorrow’s release of President Clinton’s videotaped testimony, there has been intense speculation concerning his performance before the grand jury in the Starr investigation. Based on what is already known, the public is primed to expect an evasive, sometimes irritable President Clinton who occasionally fails to restrain his temper.

On August 17, prior to the start of the grand jury proceedings, I filed a prediction (see first essay in this article) of the president’s likely testimony, based on my analysis of his personality, situational constraints, and his past behavior. Specifically, I predicted that President Clinton’s testimony would be “evasive rather than forthright, vague rather than precise, and ambiguous rather than explicit” and that the likelihood of a “mea culpa” was “rather remote.”

I concurred with conventional wisdom that the president was unlikely to admit to anything with “dire legal implications” but would indeed “acknowledge an inappropriate relationship with Ms. Lewinsky.” Based on his personality profile and situational constraints, I anticipated that President Clinton “may be unable to sustain his supreme sense of self-confidence in the face of tough questioning by prosecutors,” resulting in his “losing his temper when his confidence is shaken.”

### What to Look for in the President’s Testimony

Following are some of the president’s core personality features identified in my prior research (Immelman, 1996, 1998), along with an indication of how those traits are expected to play out in his videotaped grand jury testimony under aggressive questioning by prosecutors.

- **Ambitious, competitive.** Mr. Clinton can be expected to be vigorous and enterprising, determined to present his point of view. Thus, look for the president to challenge the prosecutors as opposed to meekly accepting their line of questioning.
- **Charming, persuasive.** Personalities like Mr. Clinton display an interpersonal boldness stemming from a belief in themselves and their talents. They believe they can readily charm and influence others and are convinced that people will recognize their special qualities and cater to them. They are highly skilled at manipulating others to meet their needs. Remember that the president is also playing to an audience — the grand jury. Look for the president to be resourceful, unyielding, and not easily outflanked by relentless questioning on the part of the prosecutors.
- **Approval-seeking, needing validation.** Personalities such as the president’s have a strong need for public recognition, approval, and validation, and a willingness to use their social skills and charm to persuade and influence others. Expect the president to be shrewd and crafty, charming his unseen audience in a difficult situation; personalities such as Mr. Clinton are effective rhetoricians and artful manipulators. Don’t be surprised to see flashes of boldness, which may come across either as convincing and eloquent, or as brazen and arrogant, depending on the context and one’s point of view.

- **Confident.** Expect Mr. Clinton to be composed and poised under the circumstances, even imperturbable, in his overall demeanor. Overconfidence in his persuasive skills may, however, trap the president into “saying more” than is warranted — for example, by contradicting himself or exposing his reported penchant to be “technically truthful but not fundamentally honest,” “bobbing and weaving” his way out of trouble with “half-truths and word games,” and “parsing the truth.” When his confidence is shaken — and this is key to understanding Mr. Clinton’s basic character — his demeanor will likely change dramatically.

Here are the basic dynamics: When humiliated, these personalities initially strive to screen out criticism by rationalizing their dilemma and devising plausible explanations. Relentless pressure, however, chips at the facade of their characteristic charm and charisma, revealing an increasingly irritable and angry individual turning ever more defiant, hostile, and contemptuous. They may erupt with anger. If all else fails, they become insular and uncooperative. Psychologically, this gambit has a twofold objective: ego-defensively, to bolster their embattled sense of self (a self-protective function); and instrumentally, to manipulate the situation (a strategic, self-enhancing function). Expect, however, a certain vacillation in the president’s demeanor; personalities such as his are predisposed to shifting moods. Thus, when matters go well, there should be a relatively quick return to emotional equilibrium.

It must be borne in mind that there are countervailing constraints on the expression of the president’s underlying personality. A critical situational factor impinging on the president’s testimony will be political expedience, including the survival of his presidency and the protection of his legacy. Nonetheless, my expectation is that the basic trends outlined here will be evident in the general tenor of the president’s videotaped grand jury testimony.

## **Psychological Defenses Revealed in President Clinton’s Grand Jury Testimony**

Sept. 21, 1998 — President Clinton’s videotaped testimony before independent counsel Kenneth Starr’s grand jury, released today, offered a revealing glimpse into his psychological defenses. These intrapsychic regulatory mechanisms of self-protection, need gratification, and conflict resolution typically operate at an unconscious level of awareness (Millon, 1996, p. 143).

**Rationalization** is revealed in the glib concoction of plausible reasons to justify self-serving or socially inconsiderate behaviors, and in frequent alibis to place oneself in the best possible light despite evident shortcomings or failures (Millon, 1996, p. 407). It is most strongly associated with the asserting, ambitious personality pattern and with narcissistic personality disorder.

In practical terms, the rationalization mechanism provides the theoretical underpinning for the president’s frequently reported penchant to be “technically truthful but not fundamentally honest,” “bobbing and weaving” his way out of trouble with “half-truths and word games,” “threading the needle,” “dancing on the head of a pin,” “parsing his words,” and “shading the truth.” To quote the president, “It depends on what the meaning of the word *is* is.”

**Dissociation** may be at work when someone frequently alters his or her self-presentation to create a succession of socially attractive but changing facades. It stems from an avoidance of introspection, which hinders insight into one's own motives and impairs one's ability to integrate unpleasant thoughts and emotions (Millon, 1996, p. 370). The person may seal off or compartmentalize entire segments of memory and feeling that may prompt discomfort. It is associated with the outgoing, extraverted personality pattern and with histrionic personality disorder.

President Clinton's August 17 grand jury testimony, that his memory "is not what it was when I came here [to the White House, in 1993] because my life is so crowded" — if literally true — might be indicative of dissociation. A more likely explanation for this apparently disingenuous claim, however, given the circumstances, is that it simply reflects a legalistic defense to avoid a perjury trap. A more convincing case for dissociation can be made with reference to the president's famous ability to "compartmentalize" different areas of his life, for example, mentally "sealing off" the conduct of his private affairs from the discharge of his public duties.

### **President's Removal from Office Would Criminalize Human Folly**

Sept. 24, 1998 — Much media attention in the current White House crisis has been directed to the debate on whether President Clinton's misconduct rises to the level of an impeachable offense. The Starr report has revealed little that we had not already known or suspected about this president. Most conspicuously absent from the referral was what some pundits promised would be "mountains of evidence" establishing a clear pattern of abuse of power. In my opinion, the president's fate will ultimately hinge more on public perception and the question of character than on narrow legal considerations. So, what exactly is the nature of the president's character, what are its weaknesses and strengths, and how does the issue of character impinge on the impeachment question?

Psychobiographical studies of Bill Clinton have converged around two major personality themes. The first, highlighted by Stanley Renshon (1996a) in his book *High Hopes: The Clinton Presidency and the Politics of Ambition*, is the narcissistic character. In *The Clinton Enigma* (1998a) David Maraniss, too, comments on the president's narcissistic qualities. Healthy narcissism includes many traits related to effective leadership, including ambition, self-confidence, and persistence in the face of adversity — and Clinton is amply endowed with all of these.

The other dominant theme emerging from studies of Bill Clinton's personality is extraversion. Steve Rubenzer, Tom Faschingbauer, and Deniz Ones, for example, at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association in 1996 reported that President Clinton ranked third among the 42 U.S. presidents on extraversion, surpassed only by Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. Extraversion is a facet of the histrionic character, whose adaptive variant incorporates the politically desirable traits of sociability, personal charm, and high achievement drive (sustained by a need for validation). Once again, these traits are an integral part of Clinton's personal political style.

Not as widely recognized with reference to the president's present predicament are the psychological consequences of a mixed narcissistic–histrionic character structure. According to personality theorist Theodore Millon (1996), the distinctive feature of this amalgam is “an erotic and seductive orientation” (p. 410). Evidently, the underlying character expressed in the president's considerable political skills and talents serves also as the basis for his sexual indiscretion. If character is to be accorded a role in determining the president's fate, the most relevant consideration is that exploitation or misconduct in this personality type, which Millon has called the “amorous narcissist,” “is often neither hostile nor malicious in intent” (p. 411).

Ultimately, it will prove difficult on grounds of character to make a convincing case that President Clinton's sexual risk-taking portends a broader recklessness in discharging the duties of his office. All clues to Clinton's character point to a pattern of self-indulgence rather than malice aforethought or abuse of power. This assessment provides a theoretical basis for columnist Robert J. Samuelson's claim, in today's *Washington Post*, that removing the president from office would be tantamount to “criminalizing. . . the excesses or errors of much of ordinary life, politics and government.”

In the end, what remains is the foreboding sense that our elected representatives have embarked on a course that risks reducing impeachment to the precarious act of punishing a duly elected president — ironically — for being true to his own self. To criminalize human folly in this way would set a bad precedent, weaken the office of the presidency, and undermine our constitutional, democratic, federal form of government.

Samuelson may have gotten it right when he wrote that “the president's fate ought to hang on more than bad character” and that in the larger scheme of things, keeping Clinton in office may well be “the lesser evil.”

### **Do President Clinton's “Sexual Dalliances” Feed His Male Ego?**

Sept. 27, 1998 — Tonight, on Fox News Channel's “This Evening with Judith Regan,” psychologist Judy Kuriansky suggested that the kind of sexual dalliances in which President Clinton reputedly engaged with Monica Lewinsky “feeds a man's ego.” Though I would not go so far as to cast all men in this mold, there is certainly theoretical support for Dr. Kuriansky's contention with respect to some personality types — most notably the “amorous narcissist,” whose personality pattern is dominated by narcissistic and histrionic traits.

According to the literature on personality disorders, the “distinctive feature” of amorous narcissists is “an erotic and seductive orientation” (Millon, 1996, p. 410). For these personalities, sexual prowess serves to enhance self-worth; “it is the act of exhibitionistically being seductive, and hence gaining in narcissistic stature, that compels” (or “feeds a man's ego,” to use Dr. Kuriansky's turn of phrase). The literature also documents that these personalities may have “an indifferent conscience, an aloofness to truth and social responsibility” that, if brought to their attention, is likely to elicit “nonchalant innocence.” They tend to be undisciplined, traveling an erratic course of successes, failures, and abandoned hopes, and are driven by a need for excitement, public recognition, challenge, and stimulation. Although they may leave a trail of broken promises and outrageous acts, including sexual excesses and fraudulent behavior, their

“disregard for truth and talent for exploitation and deception” are rarely “hostile” or “malicious” in intent (Millon, 1996, pp. 410–411).

From a political psychologist’s perspective, it is encouraging to see a psychological point of view in public discourse regarding the president. It seems that too much media attention has been directed to the issue of whether President Clinton’s misconduct rises to the level of an impeachable offense. In my judgment, the president’s fate will ultimately hinge more on public perception and the question of character than on narrowly defined legal considerations.

Impeachment is a politically infused quasi-legal process and, as pointed out by Roberto Suro and Bill Miller in the September 24 issue of the *Washington Post*, perjury is difficult to prove. Accordingly, it will have to be shown that the president intentionally lied under oath. This will ultimately shift the discourse to the president’s state of mind, where political–psychological analyses of character and personality will hold the key. Virtually all indicators in Bill Clinton’s personality profile point to a will to fight impeachment and removal to the bitter end. There can be little doubt that the final battle will be waged on the grounds of character.

### **Bogus Clinton “Sex Addict” Scenario**

Sept. 28, 1998 — Just because Bill Clinton’s sexual dalliances may feed his ego, one cannot leap to the conclusion that his is “addicted to sex.” The “sex addict” scenario seems to have become a cottage industry in armchair psychological analyses of the president. Does President Clinton have an addiction to sex? I believe this is a specious conjecture, reminiscent at best of efforts to diagnose Clinton as an “adult child of an alcoholic,” as did clinical psychologist Paul Fick in *The Dysfunctional President* (1995, 1998) and, at worst, the 1964 *FACT* magazine debacle in which Barry Goldwater was depicted as psychologically unfit for the presidency (see Renshon, 1996b, pp. 122–145).

In my opinion, the sexual addiction hypothesis — along with the speculative adult child of an alcoholic (ACOA) syndrome — represents the cold fusion of character analysis with reference to Clinton. I am reminded of George Washington’s physicians who bled their patient to death through a series of incisions, ostensibly to rid his body of impurities. Each era has its conventional wisdom, and in ours the popular sentiment is that Bill Clinton suffers from a sexual addiction. It would be unfortunate if this spurious claim were left unchallenged.

Sexual addiction specialists, such as Jerome Levin, author of *The Clinton Syndrome* (1998) and Robert Weiss, clinical director of the Sexual Recovery Institute in Los Angeles, define sexual addiction as a repetitive pattern of compulsive sexual behavior (beyond the occasional affair) engaged in despite negative consequences. Clinton’s sexual indiscretions undoubtedly have created significant consequences in his life, but does that make him a “sex addict”?

Even if we accept the legitimacy of sexual addiction as a clinical entity, there is little justification for diagnosing Bill Clinton as a sex addict on the basis of his affair with Monica Lewinsky. Based on Ms. Lewinsky’s testimony in the Starr investigation, she had 11 sexual encounters with the president over a one-and-a-half-year period, which seems rather modest in the realm of sexual behavior, given Masters and Johnson’s (1966) normative data on sexual

frequency. To use an analogy from the taxonomy of true addictions, would one diagnose someone as an alcoholic on the basis of fewer than a dozen instances of alcohol abuse or inebriation over a one-and-a-half-year period? I think not. A problem drinker perhaps, just as Clinton obviously experiences difficulty in managing his sexual impulses. True addiction is characterized by the development of tolerance for the addictive substance and the appearance of physiological withdrawal symptoms upon its discontinuation.

The point is that addicts and compulsives of various stripes are truly obsessed with the object of their desire. Indeed, they may spend inordinate amounts of leisure time and resources pursuing their choice substance or activity. If we consider that President Kennedy — like millions of ordinary, otherwise well-adjusted people today — engaged in indiscrete, even reckless, sexual behaviors, we can perhaps place the subject of sexual addiction in more sober perspective. Simply stated, repeated sexual indiscretions, even self-destructive ones, cannot form the basis for branding a person with the “sex addict” label. Such personal flaws and lapses of judgment are not indicative of psychological dysfunction or mental illness, as implied by clinical labels such as “sexual addiction” or “sexual compulsion.”

I firmly believe that the sexual addiction scenario with respect to Bill Clinton is bogus. Moreover, sexual addiction is not officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) — and is thus essentially a fringe diagnosis. A more parsimonious, plausible, and defensible explanation for the behavior pattern witnessed in the Flowers, Jones, and Lewinsky matters, among others, is that it is simply a reflection of Clinton’s character — in other words, an expression of his underlying personality. Though some are more flawed than others, all personalities have their strengths and limitations, and Mr. Clinton is no exception.

President Clinton’s personality is an amalgam of the “Ambitious” and “Extraverted” patterns described by personality theorist Theodore Millon (1994, 1996). These patterns are nonpathological, adaptive equivalents of, respectively, the narcissistic and histrionic character types. A distinctive feature of the Ambitious–Extraverted personality composite — Millon uses the term *amorous narcissist* — is “an erotic and seductive orientation.” For these personalities, sexual prowess serves to enhance self-worth (Millon, 1996, p. 410).

A personality attribution offers a robust explanation for President Clinton’s sexual indiscretion, unlike the restricted “sex addict” label, which medicalizes Mr. Clinton’s risk-taking behavior pattern. This assessment is consistent with reputable scholarly analyses, for example, Stanley Renshon’s (1996a) *High Hopes: The Clinton Presidency and the Politics of Ambition* and my own (Immelman, 1998) published work, which attribute Clinton’s “lapses of judgment” to basic personality dynamics, or character.

Among its many problems, the sexual addiction diagnosis is both an overgeneralization and an oversimplification. There is a real danger that, if one starts out with the assumption that Bill Clinton is a sex addict, one may impute to the president characteristics that he simply does not possess — though he may seem to, when viewed through the distorted lens of the addiction model. Thus, the pitfall of the self-fulfilling expectation, the scourge of pseudoscience.

In short, the “sexual addiction” scenario offers a circular argument that begs the question. At best, the “sex addict” label may, under some conditions, be useful at the operational level for treatment purposes. But at the conceptual level, the personality-based “amorous narcissist” explanatory framework must be retained for the sake of theoretical veracity — at least in the case of Bill Clinton.

## **Why the President Cannot “Come Clean”**

Sept. 30, 1998 — The lead editorial in today’s *Washington Post* calls on President Clinton to admit that he lied under oath. To heed this call and hope to reach a negotiated settlement, Mr. Clinton has an obstacle even more formidable than the Republican majority in Congress: himself.

The principal mechanism of conflict resolution and self-protection in personalities such as the president’s is *rationalization*. The hidden hand of rationalization is revealed in the habitual fabrication of technically plausible explanations for less-than-admirable behaviors, and frequent recourse to alibis to put a positive spin on conduct unbecoming. The psychodynamics of rationalization provide the theoretical underpinnings for President Clinton’s propensity to “parse his words” and “shade the truth.”

Expecting Bill Clinton simply to “come clean” is psychologically equivalent to asking FDR in the latter days of his presidency to get along without his cane.

## **Why Bill Clinton Will Not Resign**

Oct. 9, 1998 — Over the past two months I have been intrigued by the mounting tally of newspapers calling on President Clinton to resign. Not surprisingly, in view of his personality profile, Mr. Clinton is unfazed by these appeals. So certain are some commentators that the president will be unable to prevail that they have all but adopted the mindset of a compulsive gambler on a losing streak who steadfastly believes that his next wager will hit the jackpot.

With reference to the president’s fortunes in the face of revelations and accusations that stick to the president with all the tenacity of water on the back of a duck, Fox News Channel’s Bill O’Reilly, for example, has repetitively expressed the view, “One more thing, and he’s gone.” Perhaps O’Reilly’s unyielding faith in the improbable says more about himself — by all appearances a highly moralistic person with a well-developed sense of decency — than about Bill Clinton, whose inner experience of shame is vastly different.

In situations that would ordinarily elicit shame or humiliation, personalities such as Bill Clinton initially try to screen out negative and judgmental reactions through rationalization and denial, devising plausible “proofs” or alibis to present themselves in the best possible light to salvage their deflated self-esteem. When this fails, these personalities typically become defiant and, if necessary, unleash their self-bolstering rage. Reluctant contrition appears very late in their repertoire, when their confidence is shaken, and even then their experience of remorse or shame is momentary.



President Clinton has the ability to be unperturbed by circumstances that would prompt most people to hang their head in shame. For that reason, I believe Mr. Clinton is unlikely to resign, unless so pressured that his position becomes utterly untenable. But ultimately, there is no need even for a personality profile to understand why Bill Clinton is practically incapable of resignation: given his obsession with his legacy, it is inconceivable that Clinton would meekly join the ranks of Richard Nixon in the history books as the only president to have resigned from office.

## **Bill Clinton: A Measure of the Man, Beyond Hope**

Oct. 15, 1998 — Last week on the MSNBC program “Today in America,” Linda Vester and Hoda Kotbe raised the following question with reference to the impeachment inquiry of President Clinton: “If you take sex out of the equation, what do you have left?” The answer, quite frankly, may be more mundane than conspiracy theorists would have us believe: A flawed, imperfect man who boldly skirts the fringes of the law, yet probably — with apologies to Richard Nixon — is not a crook.

To truly understand President Clinton we need to look past Monica Lewinsky and the Oval Office to William Jefferson Clinton’s origins in Hope, Arkansas, and beyond, to Vienna. It is here, at the turn of the century, that Sigmund Freud advanced the notion that sometimes we deceive not just others, but *ourselves*. Often outside of awareness, we employ a variety of psychological defenses, the mechanism of choice depending on our developmental history, our emotional adjustment, and our personality style.

As it happens, the principal self-protective mechanism in ambitious, self-confident individuals such as Bill Clinton, is *rationalization*. The hidden hand of rationalization is revealed in the habitual fabrication of technically plausible explanations for less-than-admirable behaviors, and frequent recourse to alibis that put a positive spin on conduct unbecoming. At base, the psychodynamics of rationalization provide the theoretical underpinnings for President Clinton’s propensity to parse his words and shade the truth.

After the televised broadcast of President Clinton’s August 17 grand jury testimony, Clinton biographer David Maraniss (1998b) noted that the most striking features of the president’s performance were his ability to rationalize, his semantic word-play, and his astonishing luck (that reports of his anger had been greatly exaggerated). Good fortune aside, the personal characteristics observed by Maraniss essentially reflect the psychological mechanism of rationalization.

What Maraniss did not mention is *dissociation* — and understandably so, as dissociation is far more difficult to infer from the president’s grand jury testimony. Yet, one cannot take the full measure of the man without appreciating the role of dissociation in the way Clinton conducts his presidency and his life. Dissociation is relevant because it is the principal self-protective mechanism in outgoing, extraverted personalities such as the president. It provides the psychodynamic foundation for what political commentator Elizabeth Drew (1994) has called “a very personal presidency” (p. 15). It elucidates why a presidential candidate would respond on national television to questions concerning his preferences in underwear. It informs the

president's famous "compartmentalization" and helps explain why President Clinton has been able to maintain his self-confidence in the face of adversity, why his presidency was so quick to rebound following the House vote to move to impeachment proceedings, and why he is so unlikely to resign.

Ultimately, in Bill Clinton we have an ambitious, outgoing president whose coping mechanisms of choice are rationalization and dissociation. According to personality theorist Theodore Millon (1996), the "distinctive feature" of this personality composite is an "erotic and seductive orientation" (p. 410). Although these individuals may leave a trail of broken promises and outrageous acts, including sexual excesses and deceit, their "disregard for truth and talent for exploitation and deception" are rarely "hostile" or "malicious" in intent. Millon's insight, arrived at in the course of decades of personality research unadulterated by party-political bias, may provide an answer to the opening question. Perhaps, after all, the president's misconduct is just about sex and lying about sex to cover up an extramarital affair.

Theoretically, the failings associated with ambitious, outgoing personalities such as President Clinton are relatively compartmentalized, extending primarily to self-indulgent excess, including sexual intemperance. The redeeming feature, such as it is, is this: sexual risk-taking in the case of President Clinton does not portend a larger recklessness in discharging the duties of his office. The polls suggest that a preponderance of the American people have already made that determination.

What, then, does this mean for the president? Given that he has already admitted, in his August 17 address to the nation, to "a critical lapse in judgment and a personal failure," my advice to him would be to hold this ground, stop shifting blame to the Starr investigation, and call off his "attack dogs." Any action on perceived hypocrisy on the part of the president's critics should be left in the hands of a fundamentally fair, basically decent American people.

No less flawed, Bill Clinton, fundamentally, is not a crook.

## **Sorry, Mr. Gingrich — You Should Have Seen It Coming**

Nov. 9, 1998 — In his announcement last week that he would challenge House Majority Leader Dick Armey for the majority leader post, Rep. Steve Largent said, "I think it's also clear ... that on November 3rd, the Republican Party hit an iceberg. And I think the question that is before our conference today is whether we retain the crew of the Titanic or we look for some new leadership."

Commenting on the Republican Party's unexpected midterm election losses last week, Rep. Joe Scarborough said that more than one head ought to roll, but that that would be "like putting duct tape on the Titanic," adding, "We're going to see some dramatic changes, and if we don't see dramatic changes, then I'm afraid the speaker and everybody else [in the Republican congressional leadership] is in danger of losing their job." And in a November 4 MSNBC opinion column, Dennis Shea wrote, "The election was an unmitigated disaster for the national Republican Party, a political wreck of Titanic-size proportions."

Why this post-election flurry of “Titanic” allusions? Frankly, it’s hard to imagine a better metaphor for unmitigated disaster in the face of hubris, which in hindsight could so easily have been foreseen and prevented. Speaker Newt Gingrich should have seen it coming. Outcomes invariably seem to have been inevitable in retrospect, which explains the common search for scapegoats. In fairness to the Republican Party, no pollster accurately predicted the election outcome and very few political analysts predicted Republican losses. But it could have been foreseen, and here’s why.

The problem with polls is that they bias our perceptions. Starting with poll numbers, we work backward to divine the truth — uncertain truths, such as “President Clinton did not commit an impeachable offense” or “the Republican Party is on track for an election victory.” In short, overreliance on polls encourages a retrospective, deductive-like logic; we try to find truth through the lens of poll results. The more disciplined approach is to observe political realities directly and to proceed inductively.

Last week’s election outcome could have been anticipated by examining the group dynamics and political–psychological processes operating in the House Judiciary Committee, the Congress, and American society at large. But alas, our reliance on polling data induced a kind of mental sloth, inhibiting our ability to examine actual leadership performance and political dynamics.

To exemplify these points, consider my October 8 MSNBC column, “Perilous Voyage”: *With a straight, party-line vote by the House Judiciary Committee on Monday, our ship of state prepared for a perilous journey. And now, with a vote by the full House to begin impeachment proceedings against President Clinton, the voyage is underway. What was it they said about the Titanic before she set sail?*

For a course of action as serious as the impeachment of a president, it is extremely risky for the majority party to proceed in the absence of bipartisan agreement. Victory in the House should not have inspired confidence in the Republican Party that it could weather the storm of public opinion.

*Now that the full House of Representatives has voted to proceed with an impeachment inquiry, the imminent danger is that its members, having taken a stand, will become entrenched in these positions, making it increasingly difficult for reason to prevail. Some may be blinded by their moral certitude. ...*

It is an established fact that once people commit to a position they tend to lose sight of alternatives.

*Where responsible leadership is at stake, the House can take a page from Nobel laureate Nelson Mandela. A negotiator, Mandela mastered the art of accommodation without compromise of principle. He pursued the politics of possibility, charting a careful course between scorched earth politics and the self-righteous moralistic mentality of slash and burn.*

Before the election, partisanship in the impeachment debate escalated to a point where some Democrats seemed more intent on destroying the messenger than on contemplating the message,

and some Republicans risked losing their critical faculties in the heat of their zeal to topple the president.

*As impeachment hearings proceed, it's a cinch that a failure of bipartisanship and a lack of unity in Congress will be mirrored in the mood of the American people, portending a greater national malaise. ...*

As an indicator of the extent of voter apathy in the wake of partisan bickering, witness the state of Minnesota. With a viable third-party alternative in Jesse “The Body” Ventura, it recorded the highest voter turnout in the nation: 59.5 percent, in contrast to the national average of less than 37 percent, a 50-year low.

*We have set sail on an uncharted course, ignoring the muted warning that our inability to reach a threshold level of national consensus on the meaning of ‘high crimes and misdemeanors’ should have sent a warning signal. But never mind. Take a lesson from the Titanic: If we pursue this matter long and far enough, we just may hit on something.*

Ignoring calls by congressional Democrats and the president’s legal counsel, the Republican Party stumbled into the impeachment inquiry and the midterm elections with little more than members’ subjective notions of appropriate grounds for impeachment. More recklessly, in defiance of clear evidence that the majority of likely voters did not believe the president had committed an impeachable offense, it made little attempt in the election campaign to shape public opinion on the impeachment issue or to set an alternative agenda. Sorry, Mr. Gingrich — you should have seen it coming.

For the Republican Party to avoid making the same error twice it must proceed in a spirit of bipartisanship to forge a broad consensus on an acceptable yardstick for measuring what constitutes an impeachable offense. This is a problem that will not be resolved by further bloodletting or a search for scapegoats. If establishing legitimate grounds for impeachment is an insurmountable obstacle, perhaps we have no business proceeding with an impeachment inquiry at all.

## **Clinton Blinked**

Nov. 16, 1998 — Saddam feinted, Clinton flinched — a lesson in political personality. Time and again a malignant narcissist will prevail over an amorous narcissist in head-to-head confrontation when lives are at stake, all things being equal. Things are not equal of course, given the vast disparities in power between the United States and Iraq — so President Clinton may yet order the threatened air strikes from which he backed down this weekend for the second time since February.

In politics, just a fraction of outcomes is dictated by leaders’ personal characteristics, though less so in authoritarian regimes than in democratic systems with their extensive systems of checks and balances. This principle, in fact, is the fatal flaw in the “Wag the Dog” scenario with reference to Clinton, rampant after air strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan last August following the U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

That said, the point remains that on November 14, with air strikes less than one hour away, the battle of wills came down to a personal contest between Bill Clinton and Saddam Hussein. Driving a wedge between the U.S. and its allies, which just hours earlier had seemed to be speaking with one voice, Hussein — isolated even from his Arab neighbors — used one of the oldest tricks in the book: divide and rule. And Clinton, perhaps wisely, chose not to call Saddam's bluff, keeping the door cracked open ever so slightly for a diplomatic resolution to the standoff.

What light does an analysis of personal dynamics shed on this showdown? Saddam Hussein has been characterized in the political psychology literature (see Post, 1991; Renshon, 1993) as a "malignant narcissist." These personalities have features of both the narcissistic and sadistic character structures, combined with a paranoid orientation. The core characteristics of malignant narcissism, according to psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg (1975, 1984) who originated the concept, are an arrogant sense of grandiosity, sadistic cruelty, suspiciousness, and a lack of remorse.

My own study of Bill Clinton's character reveals a blend of narcissistic and outgoing features, essentially devoid of sadism or paranoia. Personality theorist Theodore Millon (1996) has called this amalgam "amorous narcissism," noting that its distinctive feature is "an erotic and seductive orientation" (p. 410). Unlike malignant narcissists, the motives of amorous narcissists are rarely hostile or malicious in intent. Though highly ambitious and self-promoting, with a keen sense of self-preservation, they lack a "killer instinct" in the blood sport that is politics.

It is not that these personalities are entirely averse to hardball politics; it's a case of being benignly arrogant without being fundamentally malign. They are overconfident and inclined to take unwarranted risks; however, these risks are typically self-indulgent, not aggressive or malevolent. Rather than use force to overpower their adversaries, they rely on personal charm, persuasive skills, and craftiness to outflank their opponents.

In recent months those personal qualities have been clearly evident in President Clinton's ability to maintain his self-confidence and retain a following in the face of adversity. However, there is also more specific evidence that Clinton, in all his hubris, believes he can talk Saddam Hussein into submission. In 1993, the *New York Times* reported president-elect Clinton as saying, "I think that if he [Saddam] were sitting here on the couch I would further the change in his behavior" (Excerpts, 1993, p. A8).

History may yet show that, with reference to foreign policy, the inflated confidence implicit in that statement equals the personal lapse of judgment to which the president admitted in his August 17 address to the nation. On the upside, President Clinton this weekend may have salvaged international support for future U.S. military action against Iraq. Indeed, one of his particular personality strengths is consensus building. On the downside, he may have simply delayed the inevitable.

Given Saddam's personality profile and his history of duplicity, President Clinton in all likelihood will be tested again. And given Bill Clinton's conflict-averse personality style, it remains to be seen whether he makes good on his pledge to strike decisively and without warning when that time finally comes, as no doubt it will.

## William Jefferson Clinton: The Character Behind the Charges

Dec. 11, 1998 — Tomorrow the House Judiciary Committee will vote on four articles of impeachment against President Clinton: two counts of perjury and one each of obstruction of justice and abuse of power. Impeachment is a politically infused quasi-legal process. Thus, when articles of impeachment are debated on the floor of the House next week, members of Congress will be mindful of matters of law, constitutional constraints, public opinion, political expediency, and the character of William Jefferson Clinton.

- **The law.** In a court of law, perjury is difficult to prove; the prosecution must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused intentionally made a false statement, under oath, about a material fact. But the House of Representative is not a court of law; it can set a lower standard — for example, that of clear and convincing evidence. The fact remains: whether in court or in the House, it will be difficult to make a convincing case for perjury without considering the president’s state of mind.
- **The Constitution.** The constitutional standard for an impeachable offense is treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors. However, the malleability of this standard in a party-political context is reflected in former president Gerald Ford’s Watergate-era statement that an impeachable offense is “whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers it to be at a given point in history” — or Senate majority leader Trent Lott’s recent assertion that “bad conduct” that brings “disrepute” to the office of the presidency may be possible grounds for impeachment.
- **Public opinion.** Polls suggest that nearly two-thirds of the public oppose President Clinton’s impeachment and removal from office. House Judiciary Committee chairman Henry Hyde himself has said that it is difficult to impeach a president in defiance of the will of the people.
- **Political expedience.** Democratic voters are overwhelmingly opposed to impeachment; however, for Republican representatives the political situation is more delicate. Polls suggest that a small majority of Republican voters favor impeachment. But not all Republicans represent safe districts; some owe their seat in Congress to bipartisan support and independent voters. For them, a vote for impeachment carries real political risk.
- **The character of William Jefferson Clinton.** Judgment of character is well established in politics and in the law. The law, for example considers a defendant’s state of mind in determining whether a wrongful act constitutes a crime, and may consider testimony from character witnesses in determining the severity of the sentence. In politics, a legacy of Vietnam, Watergate, and Iran–Contra has been to accord character an increasingly central role in presidential elections — as evidenced by the scrutiny of candidate Clinton’s Vietnam draft status and the Gennifer Flowers matter in the 1992 campaign.

## The Meaning of Character

As a political psychologist rather than a legal scholar, pollster, or political consultant, my focus is the character issue. Character entails more than just moral fiber or personal flaws. It refers to deeply etched personal characteristics that persist over time and reveal themselves in a broad range of situations and behaviors, both private and public. For the present purpose, the terms *character* and *personality* are interchangeable. In politics, character constitutes a cornerstone of presidential leadership and performance.

An important benefit of an accurate personality assessment is that it provides a clue to typical strategies of coping with adversity, thus permitting political observers to predict a leader's reaction to crisis. These psychological defenses are usually employed without much thought and often operate outside of awareness.

## Bill Clinton's Character

Bill Clinton's major personality patterns are personal ambition and gregariousness. The ambitious style is characterized by assertiveness, self-assurance, personal charm, persuasiveness, self-centeredness, arrogance, and a sense of entitlement. People with a gregarious style are outgoing; image-conscious; have a personal style that makes others like them; are socially clever, glib, and inventive; and believe they can readily charm and influence others.

Studies have shown that failings associated with ambitious, outgoing personalities such as Clinton are relatively limited in scope, extending primarily to self-indulgent excess, including sexual intemperance. More important, when these personalities land themselves in trouble, it is generally without malice aforethought; their instincts are self-serving rather than malevolent. In their benign arrogance they overlook their characterological vulnerabilities and take unwarranted risks — including self-protective lying and duplicity — which precipitate a fall from grace. The redeeming feature, such as it is, is this: sexual risk-taking in the case of someone like President Clinton does not portend a larger recklessness in discharging the duties of his office.

What does this mean for the president? It is widely expected that the president will make a public statement prior to the Judiciary Committee vote. It will be fully consistent with his character for the president to seek his salvation in a direct appeal to the people (and undecided members of Congress). Should he pursue this prospect, he can choose to offer a contrite apology, take full responsibility for his actions, or both.

Given that he has already admitted, in his August 17 address to the nation, to “a critical lapse in judgment and a personal failure,” my advice for him would be to hold this ground, stop trying to shift the blame or shade the truth, and call off his “attack dogs.” As for flirting with a public statement, the president should either accept full responsibility for his lies and duplicity — a full *mea culpa* — or hold his peace.

Based on my own assessment and the public record of his character, any expressions of contrition, penitence, or remorse on the part of the president should be treated with disbelief. The

president's personality profile makes a convincing case that flaunting his "contrition" will be mere smoke and mirrors, a sham, a politically expedient, tactical act of deceit.

## **Wag the Dog? Probably Not**

Dec. 18, 1998 — The first polls following the onset of the latest U.S. bombing of Iraq showed that more than a quarter of Americans questioned President Clinton's motives in ordering the attack on the eve of the impeachment debate in the House of Representatives.

This figure is only slightly lower than the one-third that expressed reservations about last August's strikes against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan in the wake of the president's grand jury testimony in the Starr investigation. Taken together, these numbers suggest significant public concern regarding the president's motives, judgment, and character and raise urgent questions about Bill Clinton's ability to lead.

The president's national security advisers — indeed, the president himself — have made a strong case for both the necessity and the timing of the offensive. Among the more compelling arguments are considerations of spiritual forbearance in completing the mission before the start of the holy month of Ramadan and the tactical advantage of preempting substantial evasive action by Saddam Hussein.

Though pointless for an outsider to second-guess tactical military decisions, it is not unreasonable to scrutinize the person of the president. While little hope remains that reason will prevail in the poisonous partisan debate surrounding the president, consider this:

- Is Bill Clinton's character consistent with the use of lethal force or military action to achieve personal political objectives? *No*. He characteristically employs personal charm, persuasion, and deception and outflanks his opponents by exploiting their weaknesses.
- Does Bill Clinton fit the profile of a person who will do practically anything to salvage his imperiled presidency? *Yes*. Blinding ambition and a driving need for public recognition permeate his character.
- Will Bill Clinton abuse the power of his office to save his own skin? *Maybe*. The failings in personalities such as the president's are typically of a self-indulgent, exploitative nature. But those flaws usually portend neither a rampant recklessness with reference to discharging the duties of public office, nor malevolent hostility.

To complicate the matter, in politics a mere fraction of outcomes is dictated by a leader's personal characteristics. This holds especially true for constitutional democracies such as the United States, with their extensive checks and balances. That is the fatal flaw of the so-called "Wag the Dog" scenario in the present context.

True, Bill Clinton is a shrewd politician who has abundantly flaunted his opportunistic colors. But all things considered, the president deserves the benefit of the doubt.



## **An Unrepentant Address to Secure a Legacy**

Jan. 19, 1999 — Former Clinton advisor Dick Morris believes President Clinton will use tonight's State of the Union address as a forum for expressing contrition for his conduct — “something he has not done in prime time since August 17” — and to acknowledge the reality that he stands before the nation on trial for impeachment.

Either Morris knows something we don't — perhaps, inexplicably, he had a hand in writing the speech — or he is trying to influence the president from afar. Common sense, however, dictates that it is simply not in the content of Clinton's character to do what Morris claims he will.

Benignly narcissistic characters such as the president realize their ambitions opportunistically through popular appeal, deceit, and exploitation. For characters like Clinton, people can be the means to self-aggrandizement and personal ambition — and tonight we, the people, play the part of the pawns and the puppets.

### **A Stage for the Scribes of History**

It's not that Morris misreads the president's character, for indeed he knows better than most that the president is not above feigning contrition when it suits his purpose. The problem with Morris's take is that he underestimates the magnitude of the occasion. Tonight's address will be one for the scribes of history. Following as it does in the wake of the opening salvo of the president's impeachment defense, it may turn out to be one of the more intensely scrutinized State of the Union addresses in the history of the presidency. In short, it defies logic that the president should sully it with his shame. Nor would contrition be congruent with the consistent strategy of the president to admit to no more than what is required to retain political viability. That much, at least, seems secured in view of his stratospheric job approval ratings.

Thus, in the confluence of character and circumstance we should expect no less from the State of the Union address than an unrepentant, ambitious policy agenda that lays the foundation for a rehabilitated legacy and a rampart against the erosion of public approval in his defense against conviction for perjury and obstruction of justice. Rather than looking for Morris's predicted presidential bending to the critics, expect an unrepentant, insouciant Clinton impudently invoking “the people's business.”

### **An Armor-Clad Character**

Remember Richard Nixon's halting delivery of his 1974 State of the Union address, which he concluded with references to Watergate? Expect nothing of the kind from Clinton — his armor-clad character all but rules that out. The principal self-protective mechanism of ambitious, confident individuals such as Bill Clinton, is *rationalization*.

The hidden hand of rationalization is revealed in the habitual fabrication of technically plausible explanations for less-than-admirable behaviors, and frequent recourse to alibis that put a positive spin on conduct unbecoming. It provides the psychodynamic underpinnings for

President Clinton's propensity to parse his words and shade the truth, and in his State of the Union address it will impel the president to showcase his achievements and provide cover for his failures.

Beyond being ambitious and confident, Clinton is a gregarious, outgoing character who basks in the warmth of public adulation. These personalities seek psychological cover through the self-protective device of *dissociation*. It is revealed in frequently altered self-presentation to create a succession of socially attractive facades: "I did not inhale" ... "I did not have sexual relations with that woman."

Dissociation stems from an avoidance of sincere soul-searching, which hinders insight into one's inner motives and impairs one's ability to achieve character integrity. It forms the psychological underpinnings of, in Beltway vernacular, the president's "compartmentalization" and accounts for Clinton's ability to maintain his supreme self-confidence and cool imperturbability in the face of adversity.

## **The President's Flaws**

One of the president's fatal flaws is his lack of honest remorse. A telling instance of his public floundering to find words for his feigned contrition was his joint news conference with Czech president Vaclav Havel on September 16 last year, when he responded as follows to a reporter's question: "I feel the pain better now, because I'm working on what I should be working on." Nothing the president has (or hasn't) said more starkly exposes the shallowness of his remorse, and a State of the Union address is no place for further flaunting this flaw.

The president's redeeming feature, such as it is, is this: sexual risk-taking in the case of the Clintonian character generally does not portend a larger recklessness in discharging the duties of public office. Moreover, in the case of Clinton, sexual intemperance and deceit are part and parcel of a personality configuration that also embraces the more admirable qualities of self-confidence, personal charisma, and connecting with people — precisely those qualities and political skills that contributed to his election victories in 1992 and 1996.

## **Feigned Contrition**

Although some analysts have searched for parallels between the Clinton affair and Watergate, in psychological terms this president is very far removed from Richard Nixon — and so will be the delivery of his State of the Union address tonight. But what if I'm wrong and the president finally does come clean?

If indeed the president takes any personal responsibility whatsoever for his present predicament it will be abstractly indirect, if not cloaked in literary allusion. But ultimately, based on the public record of his character, any expression of contrition, penitence, or remorse on the part of the president should be taken with a pinch of salt. It will be mere smoke and mirrors, a sham, a politically expedient, tactical act of deceit.

## The Mind of Kenneth Starr

Feb. 3, 1999 — Independent counsel Kenneth Starr has been maligned as a sexual McCarthyist and hailed as a champion of justice. What manner of man lurks behind the self-effacing smile and denials of prosecutorial overkill? What kind of character can conclude that he has the constitutional authority to indict a sitting president?

Cut to the quick, the character revealed in psychobiographical analysis of Ken Starr reveals a conscientious, dutiful person with a distinct need for dominance and control. Personality theorist Theodore Millon provides a compelling insight into the conscientious character, portraying it as the epitome of discipline and duty in human nature.

Among its distinctive features, these personalities display an unusual degree of integrity and firmly adhere to an internalized system of ethics and morals. Principled and scrupulous, they aspire to high moral standards from which they are disinclined to deviate. They typically act in an objective and rational manner and decide matters in terms of what they believe is right. Often religious, integrity is the hallmark of their personal code of conduct.

Against this background, it comes as no surprise that the Justice Department has dismissed many of the charges of prosecutorial misconduct leveled against Ken Starr's Office of Independent Counsel. Clinton attorney David Kendall's allegations this week, that Starr violated grand jury secrecy laws by leaking information to the media, will likely meet a similar fate; indeed, a major strength of conscientious personalities is their low susceptibility to impropriety or transgression.

Like all personality patterns, the conscientious style is not without its pitfalls. Its major flaws are "superrationality" and dichotomous thinking. Conscientious, dutiful characters favor reason over emotion and have a penchant for reducing complex matters to black and white, good and bad, or right and wrong. Given the wide-ranging powers granted by the independent counsel statute, the conscientious character can fan the flames of the politically infused, quasi-legal process that is the essence of presidential impeachment. Given the unbending moral rectitude of the conscientious character, Starr is preordained to play his part strictly by the book, with little tolerance for prosecutorial discretion.

History may recall Ken Starr as the George Mallory of prosecutors — a relentless crusader who pursued a prosecution with a fervor reminiscent of the doggedly determined Mallory, who single-mindedly set out on a self-destructive quest to conquer Everest, "because it's there." This tenacious pursuit of mission finds expression in the character of Alfred Lord Tennyson's Ulysses: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." It is axiomatic of Ken Starr's nature that he should defy public disapproval in righteous pursuit of his objective: to find the truth and render justice under the law. But in a political context the tendency to pursue moral objectives without compromise, at any cost, can be self-defeating. Playing for broke, one risks losing all.

In practical terms, insight into Ken Starr's conscientious, controlling character has predictive utility for anticipating his likely moves:

- If Starr has determined that he can indict the president, he probably will. Rigid adherence to rules, regulations, and procedures is integral to the conscientious style.
- Starr will not be hostage to threats or intimidation. His blend of conscientious and controlling traits ensures that he will assert his independence and protect his institutional prerogatives.
- Starr will not be lured into public debate. Conscientious personalities pride themselves on their adherence to propriety and their formally correct behavior
- Starr will keep his composure under fire. The conscientious style is quintessentially respectful, polite, civil, and courteous; they keep a tight rein on emotions and display reasonableness in situations that may evoke anger or dismay in others.

## Conclusion

Though cast by his critics as an obsessive moral crusader, there is scant empirical justification for this assertion. Starr's conscientious qualities fail to reach the clinical threshold for obsession; moreover, his personality profile is substantively devoid of the paranoid undercurrent that typifies the "puritanical compulsive" syndrome described in the clinical literature. On grounds of character, my assessment casts doubt on Kendall's charges of prosecutorial misconduct and lends some credence to Starr's denials of alleged leaks. While by no means inconceivable, the larger truth is that ethical or professional misconduct is inconsistent with the content of Kenneth Starr's character.

## Bill Clinton: The Dual Character of a President Impeached

Feb. 13, 1999 — History will make little sense of the misconduct and political struggles of the 42nd president of the United States without recourse to Bill Clinton's character. Academically, the unforeseen legacy of the Clinton presidency may well be psychobiography's place of prominence alongside more customary approaches to presidential scholarship.

What have we learned about the president's character in the course of independent counsel Kenneth Starr's investigation of the Lewinsky matter and the ensuing impeachment proceedings? To address this question I focus on three landmark events in the impeachment saga that illustrate the remarkable cross-situational consistency and temporal stability of President Clinton's personality pattern: his August 17, 1998 grand jury testimony, his January 19, 1999 State of the Union address, and his February 12, 1999 post-acquittal statement to the nation. To set the stage, I offer two converging commentaries on Clinton's character: the media perspective and my own empirically based personality assessment.

## Media Representations of Bill Clinton's Character

In cracking the code of Clinton's character, an emerging consensus in the media is the president's duality. As journalist David Brooks (1998) has written in *The Weekly Standard*, "there are two sides to Bill Clinton. There is the Yale and Oxford side, all policy talk and high

aspiration. But then there is the Elvis-loving, Hot Springs side — Clinton’s ... appetites for fame, sex, and approval, and his willingness to trample others to serve himself” (p. 19). Part of the contradiction here is between a public persona and an undisciplined, self-indulgent inner self.

*Newsweek*’s Jonathan Alter (1998), too, has commented on Bill Clinton’s dual nature: one responsible, solid, cautious, and supersmart; the other heedless, squalid, reckless, and superdumb. Former Clinton consultant Dick Morris has dubbed the two faces of the president “Saturday Night Bill” and “Sunday Morning President Clinton.”

*New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd (1999) has mocked the president’s duality, pointing to pop culture multiple personality icons “Eve” and “Sybil” in characterizing Clinton as a president who “has raised his personality disorder to a management style” (p. A31). If nothing else, Dowd’s caricature offers an ironic sequel to Bill Clinton’s 1992 election promise to give us “two for the price of one.”

## **An Empirical Assessment of Bill Clinton’s Character**

My own research (Immelman, 1996, 1998) suggests that Bill Clinton’s character is composed primarily of narcissistic (ambitious, confident) and histrionic (gregarious, outgoing) elements. Personality theorist Theodore Millon (1996) has asserted that in the realm of ego defenses, the narcissistic pattern is associated with rationalization and the histrionic pattern with dissociation.

In the case of Clinton, the hidden hand of *rationalization* is revealed in the habitual fabrication of technically plausible explanations for less-than-admirable behaviors, and frequent recourse to alibis that put a positive spin on conduct unbecoming. It provides the psychodynamic underpinnings for President Clinton’s propensity to parse his words and shade the truth.

The self-protective dynamics of *dissociation* are revealed in Clinton’s penchant for frequently altering his self-presentation to create a succession of socially attractive facades: “I did not inhale” ... “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” Dissociation provides the psychological underpinnings of, in Beltway vernacular, the president’s “compartmentalization” and accounts for President Clinton’s ability to maintain his self-confidence and composure in the face of adversity.

The predictable expression of these personal dynamics is a recurrent theme in the past year’s political crisis, permitting some reliability in anticipating the president’s moves. This is precisely what I attempted in three unpublished reports documenting my personality-based predictions of President Clinton’s performance under pressure: his August 1998 grand jury testimony, his 1999 State of the Union address delivered in the wake of his defense team’s opening arguments in the impeachment trial, and his brief February 1999 response to his acquittal.

## **The Grand Jury Testimony**

The days preceding President Bill Clinton’s appearance before the grand jury in independent counsel Kenneth Starr’s investigation were marked by intense speculation about the president’s

likely testimony. I based my own analysis on Clinton’s personality, his past behavior, and compelling situational constraints.

- **Personality.** Narcissistic characters are ambitious, competitive, and self-assured. They are audacious and clever, display an interpersonal boldness, believe in themselves and their talents, and have sufficient charm to win others over to their causes and purposes. They have an expectation that others will recognize their special qualities and cater to them, but lack social reciprocity, and feel entitled. Histrionic characters have a need to be popular, believe they can readily charm and influence others, and are skilled at manipulating others to meet their needs.
- **Situational constraints.** Clinton is the consummate political animal. Given this context, I anticipated that his testimony would be guided by considerations of political expedience, including the survival of his presidency and the protection of his legacy. It seemed likely that he would heed the advice of his lawyers on matters such as the need to avoid a perjury trap and exploit the opportunity to bolster his public image as a buffer to the outcome of a potential impeachment inquiry.
- **Past behavior.** Assuming that Clinton’s evasiveness with reference to his marijuana experimentation, his Vietnam draft status, and the nature of his relationship with Gennifer Flowers represents the expression of an underlying disposition, it seemed safe to expect — based on the consistency principle of personality — that President Clinton’s testimony before the grand jury would have a similar tenor.

**Conclusion.** Based on personality, past behavior, and situational constraints, I predicted that the president’s grand jury testimony would be “evasive rather than forthright, vague rather than precise, and ambiguous rather than explicit.” I also noted that Bill Clinton has displayed a pattern of “initial denial followed, under duress, by measured honesty, carefully calibrated truth-telling, and — ultimately — feigned contrition.”

**Resolution.** As predicted, the president’s grand jury testimony was evasive, though on the face of it “technically truthful,” to use the president’s turn of phrase. Also as expected, the president avoided legal jeopardy by acknowledging an inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky, but offered no unequivocal “mea culpa” as many political analysts had predicted. Subsequent public admissions of wrongdoing and expressions of contrition were incomplete, unconvincing, and transparently dictated by political motives. In general, President Clinton’s performance was consistent with a personality style that relies primarily on the regulatory mechanism of rationalization for self-protection.

## The State of the Union Address

Dick Morris predicted that President Clinton would use his State of the Union address as a forum to express contrition for his conduct and to acknowledge the reality of his impeachment trial. I found those speculations by a former Clinton insider notable by virtue of their incongruence with my assessment of the president’s character.

In the confluence of character and circumstance I expected nothing less than an ambitious policy agenda to lay the foundation for a rehabilitated legacy and prevent the erosion of public approval — in other words, a calculated move by the president to buttress his defense against charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. In short, rather than Morris’s predicted presidential bending, I anticipated an unrepentant president craftily wielding his “people power.”

As reported in the *New York Times*, the president “ignored the trial,” “coupled a rosy appraisal of the nation’s state with an urgent appeal for action,” “left it to his lawyers to attack the charges that he broke the law,” and seized upon his State of the Union message “as his most potent defense” (“Unbowed,” 1999, p. A1).

From a psychological perspective, the most striking aspect of the 1999 State of the Union address was its congruity with Clinton’s character. More specifically, it revealed a personality style that adaptively employs dissociation to present a pleasing public facade — or, in Maureen Dowd’s more disparaging view, a “tour de farce” by a “compartmentalizing” president with an unprecedented capacity “to wall himself off from himself.”

### **The Post-Acquittal Statement**

My general expectation was that President Clinton’s public response to his acquittal on February 12, 1999 would combine the essential features of his August 17, 1998 address to the nation following his grand jury testimony and his 1999 State of the Union address: a carefully crafted expression of contrition without full acknowledgment of personal responsibility for any wrongdoing, punctuated by an undertone of defiance and underscored by his agenda for the future.

The president’s five-sentence statement was notable for its classic Clintonian ambiguity as much as for its brevity. Its key element was encrypted in the phrase “I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events [the impeachment proceedings] and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and the American people.”

In parsing the meaning of those words, it is patently clear that the president admitted to no specific wrongdoing; there is no elaboration on what, exactly, it is that he “said and did.” More striking, however, is the president’s use of the word “trigger,” which cleverly connotes diminished responsibility. The plausible subtext, given Bill Clinton’s way with words, is that his private misconduct distally triggered an independent counsel investigation and a partisan prosecution, which in turn served as proximate causes for “the great burden” imposed on the nation.

With reference to his agenda for the future, the president limited his remarks to a general appeal to “rededicate ourselves to the work of serving our nation and building our future together.” However, in a more comprehensive contemporaneous message to his White House staff, released to the press, he said, “Now, together we have much more to do to meet our obligations to future generations. We have set our goals before the American people — from

saving Social Security and Medicare, to strengthening education and health care, to advancing peace and security around the world.”

## Conclusion

How did we get to this ignoble juncture in the history of the American presidency? For the record, Clinton is psychologically far removed from Richard Nixon, the only other president this century to have faced impeachment. That said, I submit that in the character of Clinton the seeds of its own undoing germinate abundantly in the fertile fields of presidential power.

The failings of the narcissistic–histrionic character extend predominately to self-indulgent excess, including sexual intemperance. More important, when these personalities land themselves in trouble, it is generally with absence of malice. Their instincts are self-serving rather than malevolent. In their benign arrogance they overlook their vulnerabilities and take unwarranted risks, including self-protective lying and duplicity. When entrusted with the high office of the presidency, such individuals, without posing an undue risk to constitutional democracy, may nonetheless exploit their privileged position to bring disrepute to the presidency and compromise the public trust.

## Does Clinton’s Character Fit the Charges?

Feb. 25, 1999 — Lisa Myers’ interview with Juanita Broadrick, aired Wednesday night on “Dateline NBC,” once again places the Clinton character issue under the spotlight. For a president so consumed with his legacy, it is ironic that character has become the defining feature of the Clinton presidency. But what exactly *do* we know about the president’s character, and is it congruent with Ms. Broadrick’s charges?

Character entails more than just moral fiber or personal flaws. It involves deeply etched, pervasive, and persistent personal characteristics that reveal themselves both in private and in public life. In cracking the code of Clinton’s character, scholarly analysis and media accounts have converged on two enduring themes: narcissism and gregariousness.

## An Outgoing Narcissist

Healthy narcissism includes many traits related to effective leadership, including ambition, self-confidence, and persistence in the face of adversity — and Bill Clinton is amply endowed with all of those qualities. Gregariousness or extraversion, a facet of the histrionic character, incorporates the politically desirable traits of sociability and personal charm — once again, integral parts of Clinton’s personal political style.

The work of personality theorist Theodore Millon offers compelling insights into character and personality. As described by Millon (1996, p. 408), narcissistic characters are ambitious, self-centered, confident, assertive, and competitive. They are audacious, bold, and clever, believe in themselves and their talents, and have ample charm to win others over to their causes and purposes. They expect people to recognize their special qualities and cater to them, but they



often lack social reciprocity and feel entitled. For that reason they may seem exploitative or arrogant.

Histrionic characters, with their outgoing, gregarious style, are sociable, image-conscious, warm and likeable, believe they can readily charm and influence others, and are skilled at manipulating others to meet their needs. They are easily bored and prone to shifting moods, which may prompt others to view them as inconsistent or undependable (Millon, 1996, p. 371).

## **A Seductive Presence**

Accurate understanding of the mutually reinforcing nature of a person's governing character patterns is key to understanding someone's personal style. According to Millon (1996), the distinctive feature of the narcissistic-histrionic composite, termed *amorous narcissism*, is "an erotic and seductive orientation." For these personalities, sexual prowess serves to enhance self-worth. These individuals may have "an indifferent conscience" and "aloofness to truth and social responsibility," which, if brought to their attention, typically elicits "an attitude of nonchalant innocence." They are undisciplined, travel an erratic life course of successes, failures, and abandoned hopes, and leave a trail of broken promises and outrageous acts (pp. 410–411).

Although amorous narcissists often succeed in seducing others to support their reckless excesses, their misconduct, disregard for truth, and talent for exploitation and deception are rarely hostile or malicious in intent. Rather, it stems from their sense of entitlement, their assumption that what they wish for is their due — "a feeling that the implicit rules of human relationships do not apply to them" (Millon, 1996, p. 411).

In the realm of politics, it bears note that the amorous narcissist's patterns of misconduct are relatively circumscribed in scope, extending primarily to self-indulgent excess, including sexual intemperance. Their character flaws portend neither a broader recklessness nor malfeasance with regard to discharging the duties of public office. They may neglect role demands relating to oversight, including the custodial imperatives of guarding protocol and morality against violation and physical resources against improper and unwarranted use. But those ethical lapses are characteristically the product of personal failings stemming from a combination of strong ambition, inflated self-confidence, a sense of entitlement, and a need for validation and ego gratification rather than a consequence of malice aforethought or abuse of power.

## **Good Points and Bad**

Ironically, the sexual misconduct and deceit of which Mr. Clinton has so often been accused is part and parcel of a personality configuration that also embraces the more admirable qualities of charisma, an ability to connect with people, and the capacity to maintain one's self-confidence and composure in the face of adversity — precisely those personal qualities and political skills that contributed to his election victories in 1992 and 1996.

The president's staunchest defenders may have been correct in insisting that the charges against the president that led to his impeachment were all about sex — and lies to cover up an illicit extramarital affair. But if that is so, consistency and intellectual honesty require that they

take heed and not trivialize the accusations Juanita Broaddrick has leveled against Clinton. Without witnesses or corroborating evidence, it's unlikely that these charges will ever be proven. Which leaves us exactly where we were before: familiar old questions about the president and the content of his character.

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