

Whitewater, Paula Jones and the ultra-right

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The latest stage in the Clinton political crisis, centered on his alleged sexual relations with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, marks a coming together of the long-running Whitewater investigation and the lawsuit by Paula Jones.

Both cases are under the direction of right-wing Republicans with close ties to Christian fundamentalist and other extreme-right groups, whose fanatical hostility to Clinton has not been assuaged by his administration's alliance with congressional Republicans to slash domestic social programs and eliminate welfare.

Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr is a longtime Republican Party activist who was appointed to the federal Appeals Court by Ronald Reagan and then named Solicitor General by George Bush. The selection of the top courtroom representative of the Bush administration to head the probe of the Clinton administration was made by a judicial body dominated by Republican appointees.

The three-judge panel of the federal Appeals Court in Washington, DC was chaired by David Sentelle, a former top aide of ultra-reactionary Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina. Also on the panel was Lawrence Silberman, a former campaign aide to Ronald Reagan.

Sentelle was seen lunching with Helms on the day he decide to fire Democrat Robert Fiske, who had served for six months as Whitewater prosecutor under a temporary appointment, and replace him with the Republican Starr. The action came shortly after Fiske issued preliminary findings that no criminal violations were committed in the handling of the Vincent Foster suicide and the White House contacts with the Treasury over the federal investigation into Madison Guaranty, one of the key issues in the Whitewater probe.

Sentelle and Silberman were the Appeals Court justices who voided the convictions of Lt. Col. Oliver

North and Admiral John Poindexter, torpedoing the independent counsel's investigation into the Iran-Contra affair. While intervening to cover up a scandal which exposed a genuine threat to democratic rights, they sought to expand and intensify the probe of a scandal which, however seedy, involved no such political issues.

The political motivations are even more blatant in the Paula Jones lawsuit. Her name first came to public attention in an article in the right-wing magazine *American Prospect*, and Jones traveled to Washington and met the media for the first time at a session of the Conservative Political Action Conference, an annual gathering which brings together tax-cut zealots, fundamentalists, the organizers of attacks on abortion clinics and other right-wing activists.

Jones took her case to the Supreme Court and won a unanimous 9-0 decision last summer that her suit should go to trial while Clinton was still in the White House. Then she fired her lawyers, themselves affiliated with the right wing of the Republican Party, and replaced them with attorneys supplied by a Christian fundamentalist thinktank, the Rutherford Institute, which is now handling the fundraising and media publicity for her lawsuit.

A key figure in the current media frenzy also has ties to the political right. Linda Tripp, the Pentagon aide who tape-recorded 20 hours of conversations with Monica Lewinsky, is a Republican who was hired for the White House staff during the Bush administration and kept on under Clinton. She was only eased out of the White House in 1994, after a series of statements to the press in which she criticized the handling of Vincent Foster's suicide—Tripp was the last person in the White House to see Foster alive.

Last year, while working at the Pentagon, Tripp was quoted as a witness in a *Newsweek* magazine article which charged that Clinton had "groped" a female

White House staffer. The aide denied the charges, Clinton's lawyer Robert Bennett denounced Tripp as a liar, and the media dismissed the incident. By then, however, Tripp had become friendly with Lewinsky, who had transferred to a nearby Pentagon office, and decided to tape record her conversations. In early January she delivered these tapes to the Whitewater prosecutor.

Tapes in hand, Starr employed methods to snare Clinton that are, from the standpoint of traditional bourgeois politics and its elevation of the presidency, both unprecedented and astonishing. He had Tripp outfitted with a tape recorder by FBI agents to provide additional tapes of conversations with Lewinsky. FBI agents also photographed the sessions surreptitiously. At Starr's direction, Tripp discussed with Lewinsky the testimony she was giving under oath to attorneys for Paula Jones, including the advice she was being given by Clinton and his close associate Vernon Jordan.

Paula Jones' attorneys, apparently working in tandem with Starr, questioned Clinton under oath in a deposition taken January 17 in Washington. Clinton reportedly denied any relationship with Lewinsky, testimony which, if false, would subject him to felony charges of perjury.

Starr sought to utilize Lewinsky herself, in addition to Tripp, as an undercover "investigator" for his office. Newsweek magazine reportedly delayed publication of an item on Lewinsky, at Starr's request, because the Whitewater prosecutor was seeking to persuade her to wear a wire as part of a sting against Vernon Jordan, with the object of recording him on tape telling her to perjure herself.



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