

The Broaddrick affair: the media renews the war against the White House

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In a February 27 editorial ("The President's Missing Voice") the *New York Times* denounced Bill Clinton for refusing to personally respond to Arkansas businesswoman Juanita Broaddrick's charges, avidly promoted by prominent segments of the US media, that Clinton raped her in a Little Rock motel room 21 years ago.

The *Times* tacitly acknowledged that there is no evidence to corroborate Broaddrick's charges (and much that undermines her credibility) when it declared, "It would be nice to hear Mr. Clinton himself address the matter and provide his version of what transpired, *if in fact the two did meet in a Little Rock hotel room in 1978.*" (our emphasis).

The fact that these are unsubstantiated allegations did not prevent the *Times'* editors from calling Clinton "a serial masher or worse." The *Times* went on to complain, in language similar to that used by the editorial writers of the *Wall Street Journal*, that "There is no legal or constitutional remedy for the situation," suggesting a degree of sympathy with those who are inclined to seek a supra-legal and extra-constitutional "remedy" against the president.

The aim of the *Times* editorial was fairly transparent: to goad Clinton into making new statements about his sex life that could become the basis for new investigations, lawsuits, demands for his resignation, etc. The *Times* piece was cited by a series of Republican politicians on the Sunday TV interview programs, who demanded that Clinton "come clean" on the Broaddrick story. The prostration and complicity which the liberal establishment exhibited throughout the impeachment process was once again on display. National Organization of Women President Patricia Ireland, for example, demanded that Clinton present documents to disprove Broaddrick's allegations.

The publication of the Broaddrick material violates every canon of journalistic ethics. The *Washington Post* ombudsman felt compelled to publish, in his column last Sunday, a scathing denunciation of the *Post's* decision to carry a front-page article on February 20 detailing Broaddrick's allegations.

There is a logic to the increasingly bizarre outpourings of salacious gossip by the media. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the TV networks all played a critical part in legitimizing the effort of right-wing forces to remove Clinton from office on the basis of a sex scandal. They thought their lurid allegations would create a groundswell of public support for Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's investigation and the subsequent impeachment drive.

To their surprise and chagrin, the great majority of the American people reacted first with suspicion, then with disgust toward Starr, his Republican co-conspirators and the media. In the face of overwhelming public opposition, the effort to force Clinton from office failed.

Now, in the aftermath of Clinton's acquittal by the Senate, the *Times* seeks ex post facto to legitimize the impeachment drive and justify its own role. To obscure the evidence that the entire impeachment process was the product of a political conspiracy and to counter the public perception that the affair was a witch-hunt, the *Times* is driven to escalate the charges against Clinton.

If allegations of extramarital sex, presented in graphic detail by Starr and the Paula Jones lawyers and repeated endlessly on television talk shows, failed to stampede public opinion against the White House, then it is necessary to up the ante. Hence the charges escalate from consensual sex to rape.

Nor will the allegations end there. For the US media,

anything goes. There is no reason to assume that the *Times* will not before long find itself repeating the type of charges that have long been peddled by the Christian right and echoed on the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, imputing to Clinton crimes ranging from extortion and drug smuggling to sexual perversion and murder.

The American political and media establishment has become quite openly a fount of slime and degradation. This state of affairs is the culmination of a long process of decay marked by the increasing dominance of the extreme right within bourgeois politics in the US. Things that would have been considered unthinkable even within the conformist and corrupt world of American politics are now everyday occurrences. Whatever restraints previously existed are no longer operative. It as though the powers-that-be are determined to keep pouring buckets of muck on the population at large.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial board, which speaks for the neo-fascist wing of the Republican Party, is quite shameless in this regard. On Tuesday it carried a column entitled "In Defense of Tabloid Sleaze." The author, Mark Steyn, writes frequently for Britain's *Daily Telegraph*.

Steyn, who once described himself in print as a "fully paid-up right-wing bastard," has specialized in producing semi-pornographic diatribes against Clinton for the delectation of the Thatcherite right wing. His column in the *Journal* is laced with sexual innuendoes and affects the "bad boy" tone of a cynic proud of his cynicism. Arguing in support of the Matt Drudges of the American media, he denounces the establishment press for being too squeamish. "America's mainstream media," he declares, "need more tabloid values, not less."

The ascendancy of the extreme right wing in the politics of America is producing a vast change in the country's political culture. It is not simply a matter of a few Wall Street and Washington conspirators carrying out a preset plan. Rather it is a general debasement of the political and intellectual environment. This in turn is bound up with a decay of democratic institutions and a growth within the political establishment of tendencies which are contemptuous of constitutional procedures and increasingly employ the methods of conspiracy, provocation and political coup.

To carry through their reactionary agenda, these forces must undermine the resistance of the broad mass of the population. Part of this ideological assault is the attempt to desensitize and demoralize the public. The extreme right would like the atmosphere of the police precinct--reeking with cynicism, indifference and cruelty--to become the atmosphere of society at large.

The sources of this malaise are deep and complex. They can, however, begin to be traced if one asks a simple question: what is the American political system today?

It is one in which the forms of constitutional government are increasingly devoid of democratic content. The vast and growing chasm between the rich and the great majority of the population is reflected ever more openly in the role of big money in manipulating elections, buying and installing candidates, and shaping the policies of government entirely for the benefit of the wealthy few.

The bourgeois media expresses in a concentrated way the decadence of bourgeois society as a whole. The people who write the editorials for the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, and the pundits who promote the politics of pornography on television, live in a sick milieu whose depravity is nourished by limitless supplies of cash.

The masses of working people are effectively excluded from political life, which is monopolized by two capitalist parties whose policy differences become increasingly insubstantial. Behind the forms of constitutional rule, America is a democracy in decay taking on with increasing openness the character of an oligarchy of wealth and privilege.

The aftermath of the Senate trial has already revealed that the sickness which produced the impeachment crisis remains and grows more virulent. The cure cannot be found within the confines of the two-party system, or the capitalist order which the political system defends.



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