

Monica Lewinsky describes intimidation and threats by Kenneth Starr

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The television interviews with Monica Lewinsky, broadcast Wednesday in the United States and Thursday in Britain, and her ghost-written book released at the same time, provide chilling details of the methods employed by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and his squad of special prosecutors and FBI agents.

Despite the media sensationalism surrounding Lewinsky's appearances, the first public statements by the former White House intern have a serious content. They provide a new insight into the atmosphere of intimidation and fear created by Starr's police-state tactics, in the course of the right-wing attempt to oust Clinton from the White House.

Lewinsky gave a very believable picture of how her relationship with Clinton, a private matter between two consenting adults, was seized upon by the most reactionary and ruthless elements in American society, who subjected her and her family to horrific persecution and public humiliation. For attempting to conceal this affair from the Christian fundamentalist attorneys who prosecuted the Paula Jones lawsuit against Clinton, Lewinsky was threatened with up to 27 years in prison.

Starr's deputies threatened not only Lewinsky, but also her mother, Marcia Lewis. During Lewinsky's 12-hour interrogation on January 16, 1998, after she had walked into the trap sprung by Linda Tripp, Lewinsky was told that her mother could face charges of obstruction of justice.

Lewinsky remains under threat from Starr's office to this day. In her interview on ABC with Barbara Walters, she declined to provide any details of the January 16 interrogation under a gag order imposed by the Independent Counsel as a condition of her immunity agreement. Barbara Walters barely took note of this extraordinary restriction, demonstrating how distant the American media is from the defense of elementary democratic rights, including freedom of the press.

While silent on camera, Lewinsky gives many details of this interrogation in her book, written for her by author Andrew Morton. One chapter, entitled "Terror in Room 1012," describes the events at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, where she was held by nine armed men. Though terrified and shocked, and even at one point driven to thoughts of suicide--she considered throwing herself out of the tenth floor window--Lewinsky

refused to carry out their instructions, repeatedly demanding that she be allowed to speak to her mother and a lawyer.

There are several details of that day's events, recounted in the book, which give telling evidence of the illegal coordination between the Starr investigation and the Paula Jones lawsuit that was at the heart of the destabilization campaign against the Clinton administration.

At one point FBI agents told her she could not call her lawyer, Francis Carter, because their case was "time sensitive." This was a clear reference to Clinton's deposition testimony in the Paula Jones lawsuit, which took place the following day. Starr's office wanted to make sure that Clinton went ahead with the deposition without advance warning from Lewinsky, so that he could be surprised with questions about their relations.

On another occasion, she saw two FBI agents pull prosecutor Michael Emmick away from the phone when he was offering to fax a copy of Lewinsky's deposition in the Paula Jones suit to her new attorney, William Ginsburg. The deposition had not yet been filed with the federal district court hearing the suit, but Jones's attorneys had been sent a copy. Emmick's possession of the document was proof of the behind-the-scenes contacts between Starr's office and the Jones lawyers.

While voicing ambivalent feelings about Clinton, Lewinsky expressed hatred for Starr and Linda Tripp. She came across as a victim, not of a sexual predator in the White House, but of political predators in the Office of Independent Counsel and the media, which swung into high gear once the White House sex scandal was well and truly launched in January 1998.

At one point in the ABC interview, Barbara Walters asked her to give her opinion of Kenneth Starr. Lewinsky hesitated visibly, then declined, saying, "I'm afraid to."

Lewinsky's British interviewer, anchorman Jonathan Snow, took issue with Lewinsky's suggestion that Starr would dare to put her in jail now, after the failure of the impeachment effort. Lewinsky replied, "When you're the person who would be put in jail, that fear is not far from your thoughts, ever."

Later Snow admitted that he was taken aback by Lewinsky's treatment at the hands of Starr's prosecutors. "I've been chastened by what I found," he said. "It is an appalling abuse of a very young woman's rights and it is painful to listen to." His viewers would be "very angry about the way the Land of the

Free has treated her," he added.

Snow's interview focused largely on these issues, avoiding the fixation with sex that is characteristic of the American media's treatment of the Clinton impeachment campaign.

Much of the editorial comment in the British press expressed similar concerns. The *Guardian* editorial declared: "Her account to Jon Snow of her persecution at the hands of Kenneth Starr may finally impress on Americans the precise nature of the impeachment drama.... There is now an investigation of the investigator, Mr. Starr, looming. Let's hope Ms. Lewinsky's media offensive will help that effort--fueling public anger against the witchfinder-general ..."

While Barbara Walters never raised this issue in the course of a two-hour interview, Snow asked Lewinsky about Hillary Rodham Clinton's suggestion that a "vast right-wing conspiracy" was out to get Clinton, using the sexual affair as a pretext. Lewinsky emphatically agreed, saying, "I think so, in both regards," she said. "Yes, I do think there's a right-wing conspiracy, and I think I've definitely been used as a pawn."

There was virtually no coverage of the British interview in the American press. The *Washington Post* relegated to the inside of its Style pages an article by its foreign correspondent in London, T.R. Reid. He noted that the British interviewer "focused on the subtext that has colored much European coverage of the Lewinsky case: that the White House sex scandal reveals deep pathologies in America's political and legal systems."

The two American dailies which have spearheaded the media campaign against Clinton, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, responded to Lewinsky's appearances with open hostility. The *Times* published a bitter editorial, entitled "The Rules of Monica's Game," which sneered moralistically at Lewinsky's attitude to sex, while denouncing the book "in which she vilifies Mr. Starr without restraint."

The *Times* has defended Starr editorially throughout the Lewinsky affair, excusing his flagrant attacks on democratic rights as isolated errors or "clumsiness." A better word would be thuggery. Lewinsky reveals in her book that Starr had demanded, until her lawyers successfully objected, that she testify about the most intimate details of her sexual relations with Clinton in front of a television camera--to provide salacious videotape as ammunition for the anti-Clinton campaign.

The *Wall Street Journal* has alternately denounced and praised Lewinsky, depending on whether its editors believed she was helping or hurting the campaign to drive Clinton from the White House. The *Journal* demanded that Starr "indict the little tart" last summer, when Lewinsky was balking at the Independent Counsel's demand that she tailor her testimony to fit obstruction of justice charges against Clinton. In January, when House Republican managers hoped to use televised testimony by Lewinsky to stampede the Senate impeachment trial, the *Journal* feigned sympathy for her. Friday's *Journal*

editorial reverted to type, dismissing her as a "twit" and a symbol of moral decay.

The venom from the *Times* and the *Journal*, echoed to one degree or another in most of the American media, reveals frustration over yet another failure to shift public opinion on the Lewinsky affair. Despite hopes in right-wing circles that the ABC interview might, at long last, sway the public in Starr's direction, overnight polls found that the record audience of 70 million responded to Lewinsky's account with considerable sympathy.

The reaction to the Lewinsky affair continues to demonstrate the instinctive and deep-seated revulsion of the public at the brutal methods employed by Starr--browbeating and threatening witnesses, compelling mothers to testify about their daughters, even jailing those whose testimony presents a roadblock to the right-wing campaign.

Others besides Lewinsky remain in danger from the gangster methods of those who are conducting this politically motivated inquisition. On Monday another of Starr's victims, Susan McDougal, goes on trial in Little Rock, Arkansas on contempt charges for refusing to provide the Independent Counsel with made-to-order testimony about the Whitewater land deal. McDougal has already served 18 months on a previous contempt conviction, and her prosecution is an outrageous example of prosecutorial abuse.

Later this month another recalcitrant witness, Julie Hiatt Steele, faces trial in Alexandria, Virginia. Starr's office has gone so far as to threaten the 53-year-old woman with the loss of her eight-year-old adopted son if she continues to contradict the testimony of Kathleen Willey.



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