



## The dominant Clinton

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Jeff Jacoby

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On the day a new president is inaugurated, the outgoing president traditionally keeps a low profile, slipping away quietly after the swearing-in and leaving the spotlight to his successor. Not Bill Clinton. His first order of post-presidential business on Jan. 20, 2001, was a 90-minute rally at Andrews Air Force Base, complete with honor guard and a 21-gun salute.

"I left the White House, but I'm still here!" Clinton exultantly told the crowd. "We're not going anywhere!"

Like most Americans, I was ready for the tawdry and tiring psychodrama that was the Clinton administration to finally be over. But something told me he wasn't being rhetorical.

"He means it," [I wrote at the time](#). "He *\*isn't\** going anywhere. Yes, he packed his bags, zipped his pants, and turned the White House keys over to the new tenants -- but he's still here. There are more grotesqueries to come from our ex-president. There will be more truth-twisting, more money-grubbing, more scandal. Even out of office, he will find seamy new ways to degrade the presidency. Just wait."

So here we are, seven years and one week later, and what do you know - - Clinton is back in the news, his angry rants and political attacks [casting a shadow](#) over the presidential campaign. Once again the only elected president to face an impeachment trial is generating waves of outrage and dismay. A Rip Van Winkle newly awakened from 10 years of slumber wouldn't be sur-

prised to find Clinton under fire for spreading falsehoods and behaving disreputably. But he might do a double-take upon discovering that Clinton's critics now aren't Republicans. They are fellow Democrats and liberals recoiling from his attacks on Senator Barack Obama, who has had the effrontery to challenge Hillary Clinton for the presidential nomination.

Last week, Clinton was [blasted](#) by Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, an Obama supporter, for taking "glib cheap shots" that are "beneath the dignity of a former president." He was [excoriated](#) by Ed Schultz, the nation's top liberal radio talk host, for "lying about Barack Obama's record" and "embarrassing" the Democratic Party. Tom Daschle, the former Senate Democratic leader who has endorsed Obama, warned that Clinton's "overt distortions" were "not presidential" and could "destroy the party" if not checked.

A past chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party charged the Clintons with practicing the ["politics of deception"](#) and likened the former president to Lee Atwater, a Republican operative who became infamous for his ruthless political warfare.

"The Clintons play dirty when they feel threatened," wrote William Greider in a [scathing piece](#) for The Nation, a leading journal of the left. "The recent roughing-up of Barack Obama was in the trademark style of the Clinton years in the White House. High-minded and self-

important on the surface, smarmily duplicitous underneath, meanwhile jabbing hard to the groin area. They are a slippery pair and come as a package. The nation is at fair risk of getting them back in the White House for four more years. The thought makes me queasy."

What a pity that liberals and Democrats weren't as plainspoken about the Clintons' shamelessness and dishonesty back in the 1990s. In fairness, a few were: Former senator Bob Kerrey famously characterized Bill Clinton as "an unusually good liar -- unusually good," and Jesse Jackson once described him as "immune to shame," someone who at the core consisted of "absolutely nothing . . . nothing but an appetite." But far too often the Clintons' habits of mendacity, anger, and self-pity, their constant blame-shifting, their stop-at-nothing pursuit of power were excused or minimized by the left.

America's political culture might never have grown so embittered if Democrats then had been a little more outraged by the Clintons' lack of ethics and a little less zealous about demonizing those who criticized them.

If recent weeks have made one thing clear, it is that the current Clinton campaign is as much about returning Bill to the White House as about making Hillary president.

Bill Clinton's angry outbursts, his lack of self-control, his overpowering presence in the public arena are surely a preview of what a Clinton

Restoration would be like. Hillary might be the president, but Bill would still be, as he has always been, the dominant Clinton. To whom would he be answerable in a second Clinton administration? Not to the woman whose political career is a derivative of his, that's for sure.

Hillary likes to claim she is "[running to break the highest and hardest glass ceiling](#)," but with Bill back in the White House, would it ever be

clear just where the lines of authority really ran? What could possibly check and balance the extraconstitutional power of a presidential spouse who was also a former president? Anytime he wants it, Bill Clinton can have the spotlight. In a revived Clinton presidency, would he be content to remain in his wife's shadow? Or would she continue -- as she continues even now -- to be in his?