

The Bill Clinton Legacy

THE DUOPOLY WATCH | Steven Jonas, MD, MPH

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Legacy"

With Bill Clinton's 70th birthday on August 19, and with, of course, Hillary running for President, there has been a lot of talk about his "legacy." The Democrats of course try to place it in the most favourable light, which requires that they mainly focus on what he said, not actually what he *did*. As for the Republicans, they of course ignore what he did (for, as we shall see below, he mainly carried out Republican policies), and focus on Clinton-and-sex (some real, some not) and economic/money scandals like "Whitewater," which itself actually never came to anything. Indeed, the real Clinton record, on issues of importance, is an ideal example of the Duopoly at work. After all, Clinton was the chairman of the Republican-lite Democratic Leadership Council in the 1980s. And so when he got to the Presidency, after running a campaign that for the most part covered up his true agenda, he proceeded to go DLC all the way.



“Look, Ma, top of the world!” Until Obama, Bill Clinton was probably the nation’s foremost demagog. (Eventually, history books may record a tie.) Image by DonkeyHotey.

Despite all the “progressive talk,” “listening to Bernie,” and “listening to Elizabeth Warren,” there certainly are indications that if Hillary does become President she will follow a pathway similar to that followed by Bill, and indeed herself when she was ensconced in the White House. There are those “Wall St.” speeches, the texts of which she still refuses to release; the “Wall St.” money she has pulled in; and indeed the Republican endorsements she is pulling in, in increasing numbers. They cannot all be coming about simply because Trump is so awful (which of course he is). And so, let’s turn to that “Clinton Legacy,” mainly on the domestic side.

[dropcap]I[/dropcap] am presenting the elements of it that I find to be most important, but not necessarily in order of importance, for some would think that some are more important

than others. However, I think that most persons, from “true Democrat” on to “true socialist,” viewing this particular list would agree that they are all negative to a greater or lesser extent. Or at least they would agree that I just happen to have picked out a bunch of negative ones (but I did have a hard time remembering any positive ones). And so, in no particular order, here’s my list.

Bill Clinton introduced us to Big Pharma advertising for prescription drugs on television. The main purpose of these ads, at least as they are now constructed, would seem to be an attempt to protect the firms from charges of non-full disclosure when various pharmaceuticals come to suit. But at the same time, with the visuals all the way through, and the often dream-like text about what the pills can do for you at the beginning and the end, the ads: a) reinforce the US drug culture: “take this pill; it will solve your problem; b) add to the pressure that physicians feel all the time anyway about prescribing; and c) attempt to make patient into self-prescribers.

Following a Reagan decision of 1987, Bill Clinton confirmed the elimination of what was called the Fairness Doctrine that governed the use by private parties of the publicly owned radio and television waves in the United States. This is what has led to the dominance of US radio in particular by the right-wing political talk that so reinforces the Repub. political agenda. (By the way, Obama *reinforced this elimination in 2011.*)



Koresh and his sect proved the ineptitude of the Clinton regime when it came to dealing with actual policy at any real level, as opposed to criminal foreign policy or simply looting the public treasure for the benefit of his true constituency, the super-rich.

Clinton, aided and abetted by his totally inept Attorney General, Janet Reno, completely mis-handled the Waco affair, allowing the leader of a tiny religious sect called the Branch Davidians, one David Koresh, to make himself into a national hero for the Christian Right and the gun industry. Koresh was clearly violating gun laws. Even a United Parcel Service driver knew that. He should have been confronted and arrested right up front before he had the chance to develop his clear lunacy into a "movement." But the "Good Ol' Boy" let the thing drag on until in the end it became a tragedy that was totally preventable.

Related to that one was his total failure to make an issue of

Domestic Right-wing terrorism in re the Oklahoma City Bombing. There was an extensive Federal investigation of the roles of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols in the assault, but it never led to the broader investigation of the role and place of right-wing militias in this country, which has grown virtually non-stop ever since. (A current inventory is provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center.) A Republican-led Senate "investigation" of the Oklahoma City bombing, chaired by the man who gave us Clarence Thomas, Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, led to two days of hearings at which one right-wing hate group after another was permitted to testify to how misunderstood and discriminated against they were. Neither the Clinton Administration nor the Democratic minority in the Senate did anything to counter that travesty. Again, the Duopoly at work. We couldn't have a serious attack on White Terrorism (e.g., Dylan Roof) back then any more than we can have it now.

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Then there was Clinton's failure to achieve health care reform. (It happens that I know how poorly organized they were for that initiative, with Hillary supposedly at the helm,

from the inside. For I was what was known as a “Designated Speaker for the Clinton Health Plan.”) I can tell you that although I did go out to community meetings in the spring of 1994, I also came home from the first “organizational meeting” that I attended at the White House in December, 1993 and told my wife at the time, “If this is how they are going to go about it, they are never going to get anything passed.” Not only did they not, but that failure led to the Gingrich so-called “landslide” (in which GOP House candidates got 18% of the total eligible voters nationally while Democratic candidates got 17% [betcha didn’t know that, didya?])

Briefly, we can mention, among other things:

There was no fight-back on Whitewater, “travelgate,” etc., even though there was, as my College Classmate and first Clinton White House Counsel, Bernard Nussbaum, said, “no there there or anywhere,” from the beginning.

Like all US presidents—the nominal heads of the criminal committee that rules the US on behalf of the global plutocracy—Bill Clinton too, despite his carefully polished image of a happy-go-lucky liberal chap, is also a world-class war criminal. No president in recent memory has escaped that obligation, to engage in and sell high crimes, which is inherent in running the American empire. JFK did it, LBJ, did it, Nixon did it, Carter did it (in Afghanistan), and so on and so forth until we reach the culmination of American hypocrisy and lawlessness in the age of Clinton-Bush-Obama, and now possible another Clinton. It’s by any standard a ghastly period. Bill Clinton’s bloody hands came principally from his war against Yugoslavia.

[dropcap]T[/dropcap>here was the bombing of Serbia without UN sanction. That set the precedent taken full advantage of by George W. Bush for the Iraq invasion. (Unfortunately, Bush did not take advantage of a major Clinton success, the intelligence gathering and “black ops” that were behind the thwarting of both the 1998 “bombing 25 airliners over the Atlantic” plot and the “Millennium Bomb Plot” aimed at Los Angeles International Airport, either of which would have

resulted in far more casualties than 9/11. Of course we have a pretty good idea of why Bush didn't do that, but that's another story.)



Like two peas in a pod. Everything unites them; nothing separates them. George Bush never pretended to be anything but the shamelessly biased plutocrat that he is, but Bill Clinton wrapped himself in the mantle of progressive populism.

On gay rights, there were the continuation of discrimination against gay and lesbian service people under the so-called "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" doctrine, as well as the "Defense of Marriage Act" which defined marriage at the Federal level as "between one man and one woman" and extended that authority to state governments as well.

Then there was the repeal of "welfare as we know it," that is the end of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (which, despite Reagan's "welfare Queens" spiel, served more

whites than non-whites, [betcha didn't know that either]). Of course, that legislation does not prevent the ongoing GOP screams about what now is a virtually non-existent Federal welfare program except for the one focused on providing food stamps that feed both the hungry and the food industry, and the limited "temporary assistance" program.

It was the "Three Strikes and You're Out" law, strongly supported by President Clinton (and then-Senator Joe Biden as well) that led to the current disaster of mass incarceration, resulting from, among other things, the expansion of the "drug war."

Much of this was subsumed by Clinton's infamous announcement, in his 1996 State of the Union Address, that the "era of big government is over." This full extension of Reaganite social and economic policy of course applied only to national domestic spending, not such areas as the expansion of the draconian "drug war:" a prime example of big government intruding into choices of personal behavior.

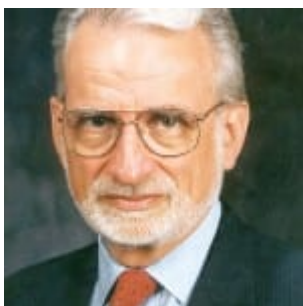
In the economic realm, but again also just briefly here, there were the likely two most important actions/disasters of the Clinton Administration, each of which has played a direct role in the continuation and indeed strengthening of Reaganomics and the increasing stranglehold that the GOP has over fiscal policy. First was the Repeal of the Depression Era Glass-Steagall Act (interestingly enough, they were both Southerners) that had separated commercial and investment banking. That repeal of course led directly to the Crash of 2008 from which millions of people on this country have never recovered and likely never will. Second, there were NAFTA (actually, Clinton just gave in to following through on a George H.W. Bush initiative – the Duopoly at work) and the World Trade Organization initiatives, which led to the massive export of US capital to countries with (much) cheaper labor and that "massive whooshing sound" of job outflow that Ross Perot referred to in the 1992 Presidential Election

Campaign). One could write a whole column about those two, of course.

They have led invariably to the decline of US manufacturing, the parallel decline of US trade unionism, the creation of the permanent army of the unemployed, the ever-widening gap between the poor and everyone else, the increasingly creative use of the tax code to support the use of overseas so-called “tax shelters” that enable the avoidance of the payment of billions of dollars in taxes, and so on and so forth. And who is taking advantage of all these negative outcomes of Republican policies that have been further promoted by Democratic Duopolists? Indeed, Trump, as intellectually limited as he is, has been able to exploit so well what I have called “Republican Genius.”

Some legacy, eh wot? Clinton’s policies led to long-range disaster on the domestic side, while Bush’s led to long-range disaster on the foreign policy side. No wonder they seem to get along so well with each other when they meet at various galas. Indeed, there is every chance that the first Clinton Presidency could be an overture to a second one. And not an overture by either Mozart or Rossini, either.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Senior Editor, Politics, Steven Jonas, MD, MPH is a Professor Emeritus of Preventive Medicine at Stony Brook University (NY) and author/co-author/editor/co-editor of over 30 books. In addition to being Senior Editor, Politics, for [The Greenville Post](#), he is: a Contributor for American Politics to [The Planetary Movement](#); a “Trusted Author” for [Op-Ed News.com](#); a contributor to the “[Writing for Godot](#)” section of Reader Supported News; and a contributor to [From The G-Man](#). He is the Editorial Director and a Contributing Author for [TPJ magazine.us](#). Further, he is an occasional Contributor to [TheHarderStuff newsletter](#), [BuzzFlash Commentary](#), and [Dandelion Salad](#).

Dr. Jonas' latest book is [Ending the "Drug War"; Solving the Drug Problem: The Public Health Approach \(Punto Press, 2016\)](#). His last political title was the provocative *The 15% Solution: How the Republican Religious Right Took Control of the U.S., 1981-2022: A Futuristic Novel*, Brewster, NY, Trepper & Katz Impact Books, [Punto Press Publishing, 2013](#), and available [on Amazon](#).



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