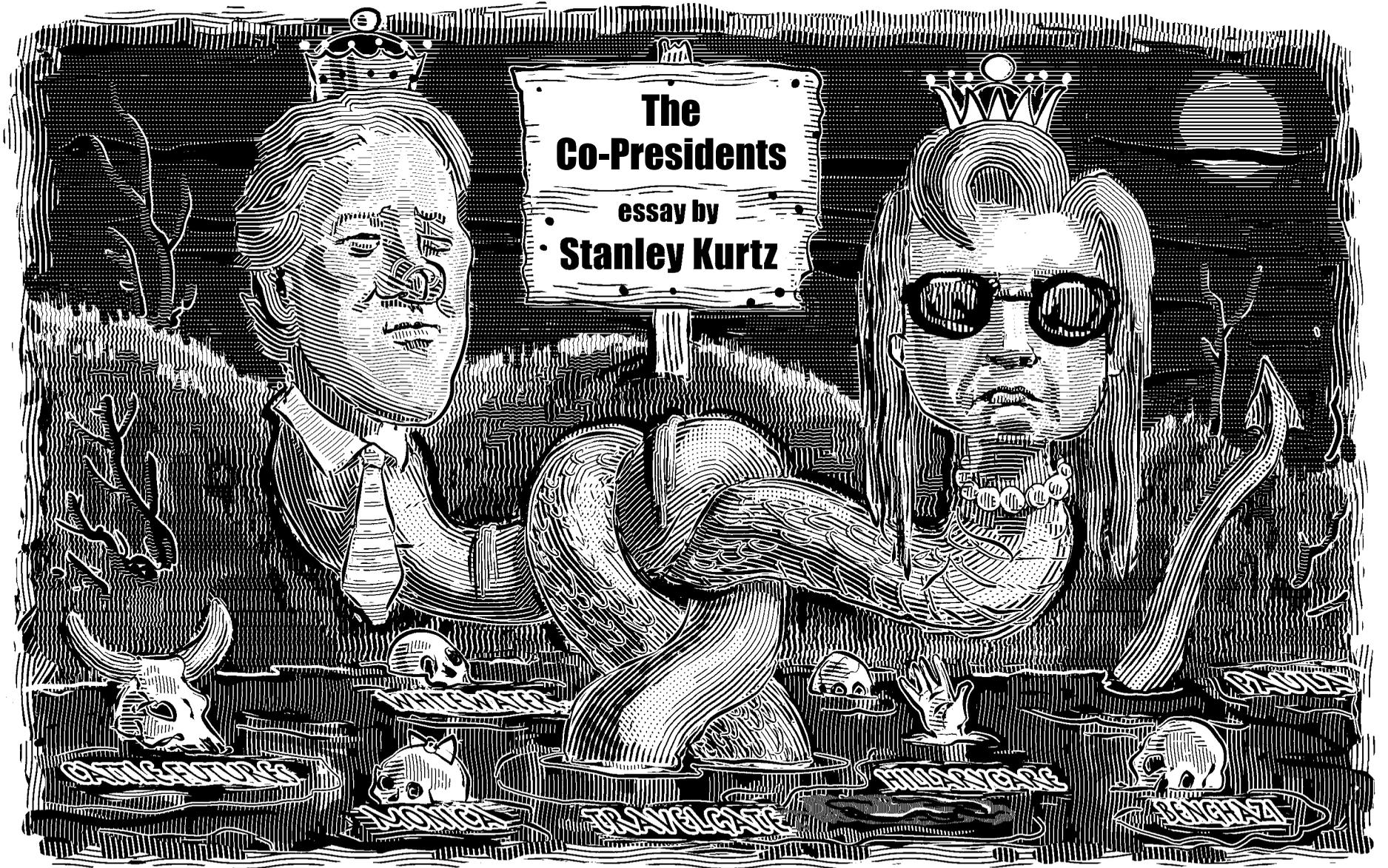


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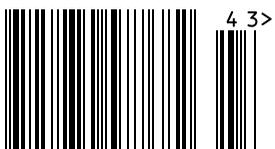
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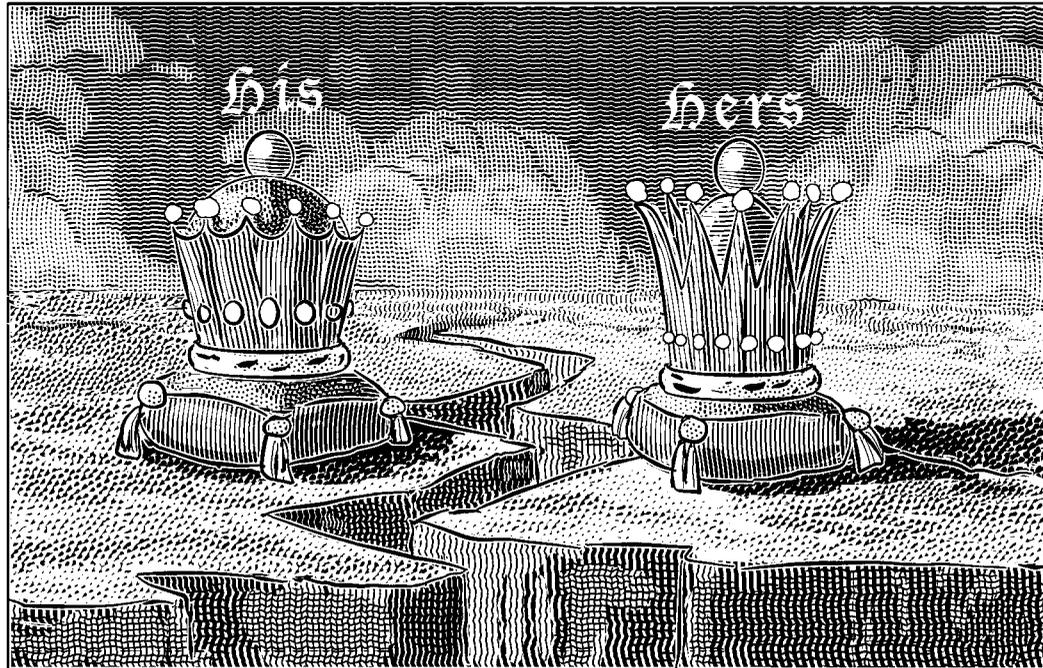
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Essay by Stanley Kurtz

## DÉJÀ TWO



IT WAS THE FIRST AND ONLY TIME IN THIS country's history that supreme executive authority had been simultaneously wielded by two people, man and wife. Bill was away on a foreign trip. That left his wife, who'd only recently rebuffed Henry Hyde's bid to remove them both from power, in command of the nation's domestic affairs. At this delicate juncture, Bill's powerful spouse confided her innermost thoughts to a private diary she habitually kept close by and ready for burning in the event of discovery. Few Americans know anything of this diary's contents, which can now be publicly revealed.

I refer, of course, to the private papers of Queen Mary II, who ruled England with her husband, King William III, from 1689 to 1694, an example of joint sovereignty unique in English history. Mary's share in the government of England was recently described in an essay by historian Richard Price, based on her heretofore neglected private papers. It is a curiosity of history that, much like a later ruling couple in America, William and Mary fought off efforts to displace (if not impeach) them by one Henry Hyde, Mary's uncle, the 2nd earl of Clarendon.

The reign of William and Mary is a relatively rare historical example of smoothly functioning joint executive power. The couple's accession to the throne was the foundation stone of England's Glorious Revolution,

which replaced a reigning king with a monarch elected by Parliament. As the daughter of the displaced king, and wife of the new one, Mary's presence on the throne smoothed over the break in succession. William, however, held full executive power, by grant of Parliament.

With the king frequently out of the country prosecuting a war against France, Mary was left to take control of domestic affairs. Parliament passed a Regency Bill granting her authority while William was away, yet the nature of the arrangement remained ambiguous. What if Mary's commands contradicted William's wishes? What if William issued a counter-order negating hers? Thanks to Mary's limited enthusiasm for governance, along with her determination to solidify the joint monarchy's tenuous legitimacy, these difficulties were never faced. For all practical purposes, Mary successfully served as William's vicegerent.

William and Mary are the exception that proves the rule. From ancient Rome to contemporary Latin America, history shows that in the absence of clear, hierarchical lines of authority, joint executive power tends to produce debilitating confusion and weakness.

Although she frequently invokes her White House years as a credential, Hillary Clinton's scandal-plagued past is nowadays generally dismissed as irrelevant to her political future.

Most Americans, for example, have long since forgiven, forgotten, or discounted the Whitewater affair, Mrs. Clinton's startling acumen at investing in cattle futures, even Vince Foster's suicide. And when it comes to Jennifer Flowers, Monica Lewinsky, and other such friends of Bill, the public's sympathies seem to be solidly on the First Lady's side.

Yet what if the deepest political problem in Hillary's past has never been fully grasped? Legal and constitutional formalities aside, Bill and Hillary Clinton shared executive power. "Buy one, get one free," Bill famously bragged during the 1992 presidential campaign. Hillary was not merely an important advisor but a true co-president, wielding far more consequential executive authority than, say, Mary II ever did. The results were disastrous, and are likely to be so again should the Clintons once more attempt to adapt their power-sharing arrangement to an American presidency expressly designed to exclude what the founders called a "plural executive."

Studies of the Clintons, even by sympathetic supporters, typically retail a litany of the couple's personal foibles. And problems with their truthfulness, Bill's indecisiveness and infidelities, and her penchant for polarization and secrecy, explain a great deal. Yet these are distractions compared to the structural defect at the heart of the Clintons' early political career and presidency: Bill and Hill-

ary's still poorly-understood power-sharing arrangement.

### Energy in the Executive

ONE REASON WE TEND NOT TO NOTICE the reach, or appreciate the risks, of the Clintons' presidential partnership is that we've forgotten why America's founders deliberately rejected the idea of a multi-headed executive to begin with.

Perhaps a quarter of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 favored a plural executive of two, three, or more. These tended to be older representatives like Benjamin Franklin, fearful of concentrated executive power and shaped by memories of pre-revolutionary battles against the royal governors. The younger founders were troubled instead by the weakness of executive power under the post-1776 state constitutions and the Articles of Confederation. Many of those constitutions featured a governor's council with extensive powers of advice and consent. In Pennsylvania, a council of twelve with equal powers amounted to a full-fledged plural executive. Although many delegates to the Constitutional Convention wanted the national president to share power with an advisory council, months of deliberation produced a strong majority in favor of an executive power vested solely in the presidency. Limited powers of advice and consent were lodged in the Senate instead of in a council.

In *The Federalist*, Alexander Hamilton famously summarized the rationale behind the American presidency, arguing that a unitary executive is "conducive to energy," that is, to "decision, activity, secrecy, and despatch." As an example of the threat posed by a plural executive, Hamilton pointed to ancient republican Rome, whose founders, hating monarchy and fearing its return, had established a dual executive, two consuls, elected annually. Hamilton argued that these powerful magistrates habitually inflicted weakness, faction, and paralysis on the republic. As he noted, successful consuls were eventually obliged to devise strategies for hurrying their counterparts out of Rome. Cicero, for example, dangled a lucrative provincial governorship before his feeble and heavily indebted fellow consul, Antonius. That left Cicero effectively the sole consul for the duration of his term.

Over and above unclouded, swift, and energetic decision-making, Hamilton emphasized that a unitary executive makes for the clear assignment of responsibility. Post-independence American governors had evaded criticism for unpopular decisions by pointing a finger at their executive councils. Since

collective decisions were taken behind closed doors, voters had no way of knowing whom to praise or blame. Ultimately, Hamilton argued, multiple rulers emboldened by their collective power and the public's inability to keep a watchful eye, constitute a greater threat to liberty than a single, clearly responsible, and carefully-monitored executive.

As we shall see, these warnings were borne out years later by the bedeviled first Clinton co-presidency. And Bill's conduct since he and Hillary reversed political roles foreshadows yet another troubled co-consular regime.

The closest antecedent in our history to the Clintons' power-sharing arrangement is Edith Wilson's role as gateway to the president af-

ary: *The Politics of the Personal*. All three authors are disappointed liberals troubled by a presidency dissipated in missteps and scandals. Bernstein and Smith offer deeply reported accounts. Chafe draws on published memoirs and biographies, synthesizing and updating the considerable literature on the Clinton political partnership. Without quite recognizing it, these studies powerfully vindicate the founders' warnings against a plural executive.

### Strengths and Quarrels

BILL CLINTON AND HILLARY RODHAM fell in love when they were students at Yale Law School in the early 1970s. Plenty of Clinton's classmates at Yale thought him destined for the presidency. Rodham had gained national attention in 1969 when her bold Wellesley graduation speech landed her in *Life* magazine. Her law school friends assumed she, too, would have a political career, and many saw her as potentially the first woman president. These aspirations shaped the couple's relationship from the start with Hillary joining the crowd touting Bill as a future president, without exactly renouncing her own ambition.

Their first act of public partnership was to serve as co-counsels in a prestigious Prize Trial held before the entire law school. Hillary's razor-sharp critical eye and affable Bill's persuasive powers blended perfectly. Though the couple's complementary strengths were brilliantly displayed on that occasion, their frequent quarrels just as often resulted in conflict and paralysis.

After graduating from Yale, Bill headed back to Arkansas to run for Congress, while Hillary became a staffer for the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment investigation of President Richard Nixon. She often bragged to fellow impeachment staffers that Bill was bound to become president one day. When her colleague and close friend Bernard Nussbaum (the future Clinton White House Counsel) scoffed and called her fantasy "nuts," Hillary was not amused. "You asshole, Bernie," she shot back, reiterating her faith in Bill's presidential destiny. It took days for the relationship to return to normal, according to Chafe's account.

With Bill's run for Congress in high gear, Hillary phoned almost daily, pressing detailed instructions on his campaign managers. The good ol' boys running the operation did not appreciate this advice, especially since Hillary knew next to nothing about Arkansas. When she decamped to the state after Nixon's resignation, "our organization went to shit," said

#### Books mentioned in this essay:

*A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton*, by Carl Bernstein.  
Knopf, 656 pages, \$18 (paper)

*For Love of Politics: Bill and Hillary Clinton: The White House Years*,  
by Sally Bedell Smith.  
Random House, 624 pages, \$16 (paper)

*Bill and Hillary: The Politics of the Personal*, by William H. Chafe.  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,  
400 pages, \$28

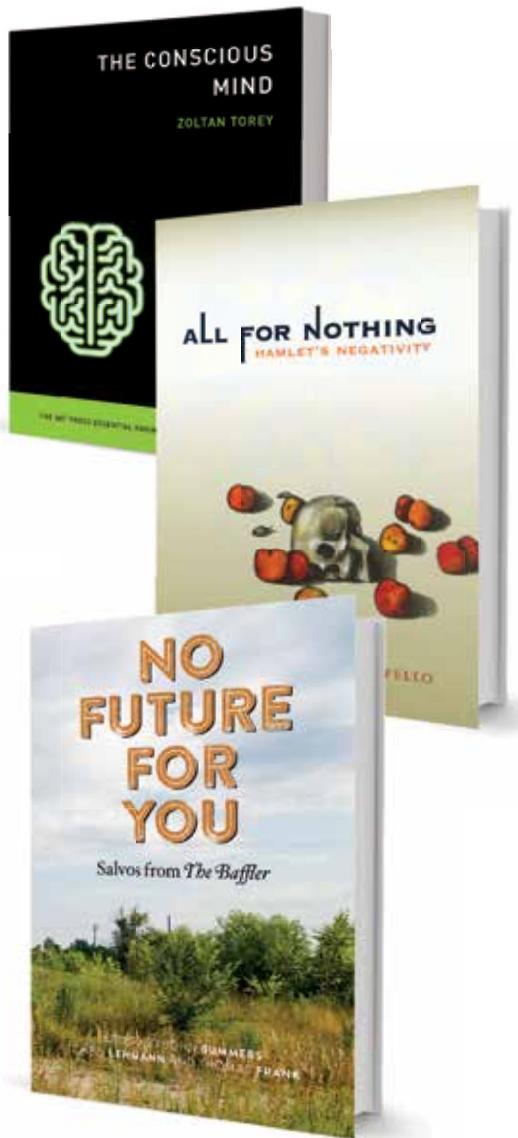
*Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime*, by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin. Harper,  
480 pages, \$16.90 (paper)

*HRC: State Secrets and the Rebirth of Hillary Clinton*, by Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes. Crown,  
448 pages, \$26

ter her husband, Woodrow Wilson, suffered a stroke in 1919. Though she denied making "a single decision regarding the disposition of public affairs," her control over access to the president clearly had an impact. To the extent that Edith was a co-president, she confirms the inherent weakness of the plural executive.

The three best resources for reconstructing the Clinton power-sharing arrangement are Carl Bernstein's 2007 biography, *A Woman In Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton*; Sally Bedell Smith's 2007 study, *For Love of Politics: Bill and Hillary Clinton: The White House Years*; and William H. Chafe's 2012 dual biography, *Bill and Hill-*

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a campaign manager. In a memo to Clinton, quoted by Bernstein and Chafe, the campaign's press secretary complained that Hillary had "managed to antagonize the entire staff."

Bernstein senses some Arkansas provincialism here, and depending on their leanings, other biographers chalk this clash up either to sexism or to Hillary's overbearing personality. Though any or all of these factors may have aggravated the tensions within Bill's first campaign, the underlying problem was structural.

Hillary's complicating role in Bill's failed congressional campaign is only the first of a long series of cases in which clear lines of authority were scrambled by the presence of a duo at the top, spawning chaos and resentment below. In the typical scenario, Bill's campaign managers, gubernatorial staffers, cabinet members, or top White House aides, reported directly to him. Although Hillary had no official place in the chain of command, in practice her authority was on a par with his. Her interventions could delay or reverse decisions already made. Hillary was "first among unequals," in Bernstein's words. Oftentimes Bill himself backed down when he differed with Hillary, for fear of losing her or her help. Though First Lady Nancy Reagan may have occasionally intervened on a question of personnel, Hillary's roughly co-equal executive authority was systematic, pervasive, and persistent, touching on all important policy areas.

As plans were upended by her interventions, staffers turned confused, frustrated, and resentful. Hillary may be forceful and Bill may be indecisive, yet these character traits so often emphasized by the couple's biographers are aggravated and deepened by the dynamic of the plural executive. He would have looked more decisive had he not ceded so much power to her in the first place.

### Gubernatorial Transition

**B**ILL PROPOSED MARRIAGE WELL BEFORE Hillary moved to Arkansas yet by all accounts she hesitated, worried about sacrificing her political aspirations and, not unrelated, adjusting to what she considered a cultural backwater. Then there was Bill's womanizing, which she already reckoned beyond her ability to control. Against these concerns was her conviction that Bill could ascend the political heights, with her alongside as an equal partner. The implicit bargain served as a compensation for Hillary, and also a constraint on Bill—any political power he attained would have to be faithfully shared.

After winning a term as Arkansas attorney general in 1976, he jumped into the governor's race two years later. Although she would not

become de facto co-governor until Bill's 1983 term, Hillary was nonetheless deeply involved in his first gubernatorial campaign. As in 1974 and 1976, no campaign manager could override her. What's more, she also exercised essentially equal control with Bill over policy planning and staffing during the transition to his first term. As Bernstein notes, this was the same role she would play during the 1992-93 presidential transition—"with disastrous consequences" on both occasions.

During that first gubernatorial transition, as Bernstein puts it, "it became impossible to see clearly where the influence of one Clinton began and the other ended." "Our vote was a vindication of what my wife and I have done and what we hope to do for the state," Bill exulted on election night. Yet the way he and Hillary chose to run the governor's office fostered an administrative chaos that led directly to his failed 1980 reelection bid.

Instead of installing a strong chief of staff in 1979, Bill and Hillary decided to create three equal power centers beneath them. Chafe attributes this ill-fated decision to the governor's character flaws: his disorganization, his wish to ingratiate rather than crack the whip, and his general indecisiveness. Yet a better explanation for this template, which appeared again in the White House, is Hillary's interest in preserving her co-gubernatorial authority. A strong chief of staff directly answerable to Bill would, inevitably, crowd out Hillary.

At this point in Bernstein's narrative, he expresses astonishment: "What was so extraordinary about Hillary's failures in the White House more than a decade later was that she seemed to have learned almost nothing from her experience those first two years in the governor's mansion." He is puzzled because he often highlights Hillary's ability to learn from her mistakes, echoing the most commonly offered Democratic defense of the Clintons' administrative failures: they're wonderful learners and won't make those mistakes again.

The record contradicts this. When it comes to problems that bear directly on the Clintons' political partnership, disasters repeat and lessons go unlearned. They are caught in a contradiction: unable to renege on their power-sharing arrangement, they are also unable to make it work.

Clinton's chaotic first term as Arkansas governor killed his reelection bid in 1980 (the governorship has a two-year term). After that, Hillary wound down her legal work and effectively took charge of his successful 1982 campaign. After victory, and at her urging, Bill decided to make education his signature issue, with Hillary in charge. Now they were true



co-governors, and the pattern of a co-presidency with Hillary in charge of its signature initiative was set.

Shifting strategies, Hillary installed her most devoted political acolyte, Betsy Wright, to be Bill's powerful chief of staff. Hillary would only allow a single strong chief of staff when she could be certain of complete control.

Her belated success in Arkansas created the illusion that co-executive government could work at the national level. Yet the leap from a small state to the White House meant grafting an already risky, and only partially successful, dual system onto a vast and complex modern bureaucracy—a problem posing as a solution. But first they'd have to win the White House.

### A Rolling Disaster

HILLARY TOOK COMMAND OF THE 1992 presidential campaign, and in an unprecedented move created a personal staff paralleling Bill's. The staffs interacted poorly, given their conflicting outlooks and loyalties, but Bill and Hillary were determined to break what they saw as new feminist ground as the first true "partnership" to seek the White House. Constitutional concerns over an unelected co-president never troubled them. In interviews reported by Bernstein and Chafe, Hillary regularly used the pronoun "we" to refer to her policy plans with Bill. Only after this provoked a backlash did the Clintons attempt to disguise her influence.

During the transition, Hillary largely staffed the cabinet and the White House. By comparison, Mary II had virtually no role in staffing the dual monarchy. Far more powerful than nominal transition head Warren Christopher, Hillary appeared on no flow chart, Smith notes. The extent of her power remained secret, calling to mind Hamilton's warnings about muddled responsibility in the absence of a unitary executive. Even among insiders, her authority was left unstated. Bill had promised Vice President Al Gore extensive powers, overlapping the life-long pledges to Hillary. In practice, she was Bill's equal, and Gore became a distant third. Yet to keep up appearances, all three had to sign off on significant decisions. Clinton aide David Gergen later called this system "a rolling disaster."

Mickey Kantor, Bill's nominal campaign chair, was set to serve as White House chief of staff. Hillary sent him packing and instead installed Mack McLarty, a family friend but no manager. She was repeating the chaos of the first Clinton governorship. Chafe quotes Stephen Hess of the Brookings

Institute who dubbed the process in 1992-93 the "worst [presidential] transition in modern history."

Hillary edged out the vice president for control of Clinton's signature healthcare initiative. Yet her role was strenuously opposed by Clinton's most experienced appointees, Leon Panetta, Lloyd Bentsen, Alice Rivlin, and Donna Shalala, and by Clinton-family advisor Vernon Jordan. Sexism was not at issue. Shalala, Hillary's friend and an ardent feminist, found it easiest to speak out, along with Jordan, a strong Hillary supporter. The rest were fearful of retaliation from the one person Bill couldn't fire.

All fretted that her command of healthcare inevitably would raise the issue of an unelected co-presidency. Yet he and Hillary also saw positives in the arrangement. They hoped that their pact would allow them to circumvent the bureaucracy and anticipate and adjust rapidly to the political winds. Instead, the policy-planning bureaucracy, including the White House and cabinet secretaries, was thrown into confusion, while Hillary was forced to

### A second Clinton co-presidency would, like the first, violate both the spirit and the good sense of the Constitution.

create an unwieldy parallel healthcare bureaucracy of her own. The result: political and administrative disarray.

"It would be difficult to overstate the chaos of the first one hundred days of the Clinton presidency," writes Bernstein. All three authors finger Hillary as the chief culprit. By a margin of 68%, according to a *Los Angeles Times* poll, the public objected to the idea of a First Lady attending cabinet meetings. (Hillary was actually participating in nearly every consequential presidential decision, but no one would have thought to poll that scenario.) Such sentiment forced her to operate in secret, which only increased the chaos. Staffers expended endless effort "erasing her fingerprints" from controversial moves, like closing off the press corridor to the White House, or firing White House travel office personnel to replace them with Clinton cronies. These politically damaging decisions would have been reversed by Kantor and even by McLarty had anyone but Hillary made them.

### Covert Operations

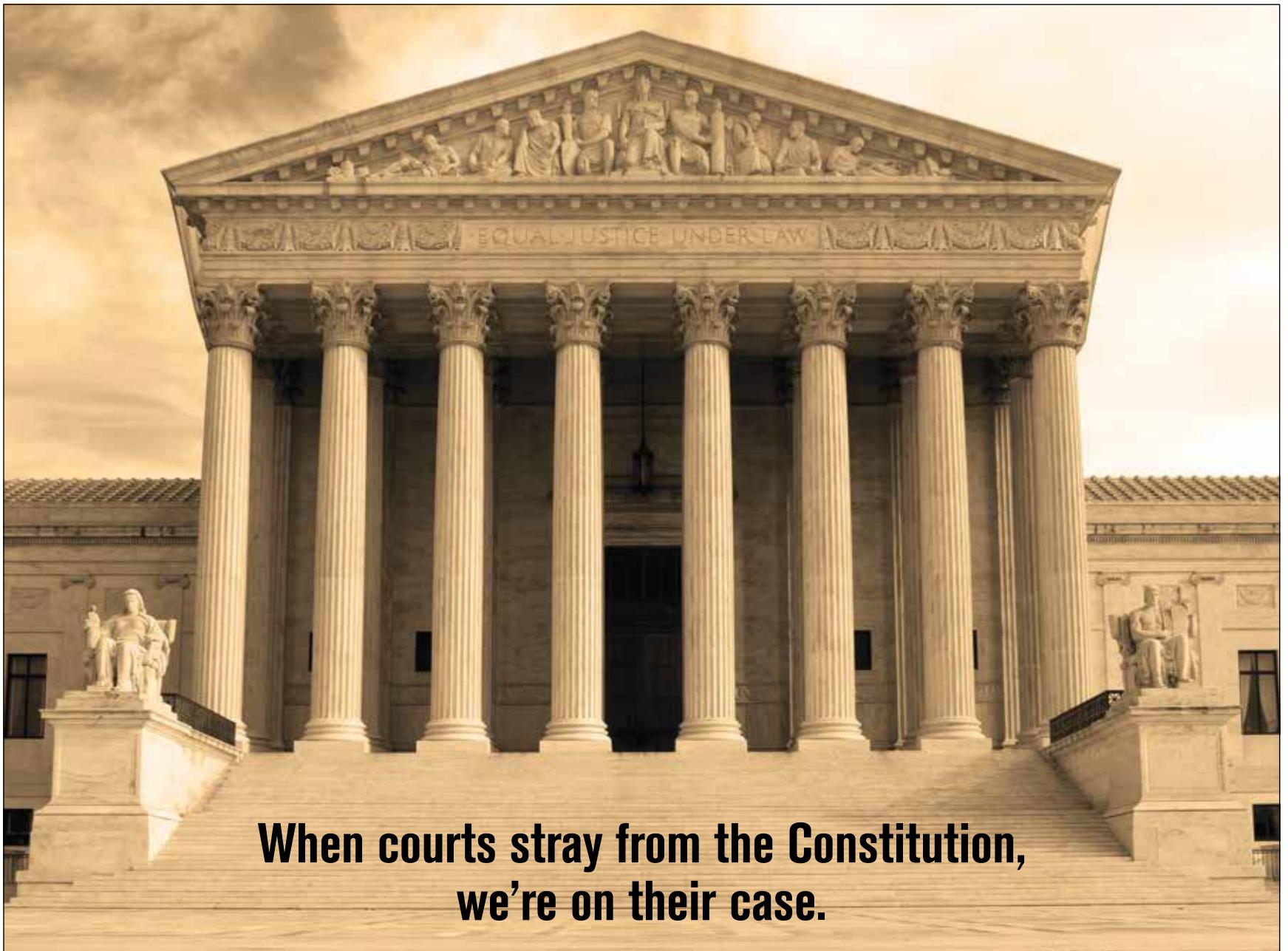
HILLARY GREW ADEPT AT DISGUISSING her activities. With direct access to Bill, she was able to avoid leaving a paper trail for eight years, and depended on aides to erase records of her interventions when others were present. She also used proxies. Early on, her close advisor, Ira Magaziner, derailed the consensus at an economic policy meeting, causing considerable consternation. Only later did participants realize that Magaziner had been acting as Hillary's catspaw.

Clinton's economics team viewed Hillary's healthcare budget numbers as wishful thinking. Her interest in deficit reduction seemed virtually nonexistent. The economists feared steep tax increases if her optimistic healthcare numbers didn't pan out. According to a top aide to Clinton interviewed by Bernstein, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin was "terrified that [Hillary] was going to drive the country over the cliff."

Bringing these concerns across wasn't easy. When Bill installed Hillary as head of his healthcare task force, he insisted aides should treat her like anyone else. Yet she quickly cut off even modest objections to her no-compromise tactics, take-no-prisoners rhetoric, and budgetary overreach. Advisers stopped even trying to convey their doubts. Some approached the president, who declined to intervene. This was her bailiwick. Once, under public questioning, the president indicated some flexibility on the extent of mandated healthcare coverage and financing. Hillary immediately went ballistic, writes Smith, phoning him and screaming, "What the f[---]k are you doing up there?" Bill retracted his comments and apologized the next day.

Bernstein, Smith, and Chafe agree that Hillary's polarizing tactics and refusal to brook questioning or compromise were responsible for the collapse of the Clinton healthcare plan. As Smith notes, however: "With his eye fixed firmly on Hillary's future in politics, Bill [has] repeatedly insisted over the years that she was not at fault for the failure of health care." This is a classic case of blame-shifting and obfuscation of responsibility in the plural executive. Hillary's mistake was made in her very real, if covert, capacity as co-president. Yet Bill has protected Hillary by taking the blame, even as she claims credit for her years of White House experience. Alexander Hamilton would be dismayed, but not surprised.

Divisions between Bill's aides and "Hillaryland" burgeoned. At one point notes Chafe, the First Lady "screamed at Bill for forty minutes about just 'how shitty his staff was.'" The Clintons were arguing explosively in front of



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staffers more often. This deepened divisions between the two camps, demoralized everyone, and made it even tougher to deal frankly with the two principals.

Vince Foster's suicide in July 1993 may have been the most tragic consequence of Hillary's public evasion of co-presidential responsibility. Deputy White House Counsel in name, Foster was Hillary's personal counsel in fact. She set him to work erasing evidence of her role in the White House travel office firings. When the scandal broke, Foster knew he'd be vulnerable to charges of having misled congressional investigators under oath. He was preoccupied by the travel office fiasco just before his suicide.

In short, Hillary's disavowed co-consular role was at the root of what Bernstein calls, "the unprecedented disarray of the early Clinton presidency." As the founders predicted, the co-consulship brought confusion, division, delay, and obfuscation. The Clintons alternated between disrupting existing bureaucracy and counterproductive efforts to evade it, all the while trying to conceal a de facto co-presidency within a de jure unitary executive.

### Commanders' Coup

**I**N THE 1994 MID-TERM ELECTIONS, THE Democrats suffered a dramatic reversal, with the Republicans capturing the House for the first time in 42 years. Public opposition to Hillary's health care initiative drove the outcome.

The couple responded with a bizarre political subterfuge. They called in Dick Morris, a political consultant who'd advised them in Arkansas, to recommend a series of small-bore reforms designed to appeal to niche constituencies. Transformative liberal initiatives were temporarily abandoned; school uniforms and midnight basketball were suddenly in. Fearing this shift would anger White House staffers, the Clintons kept Morris hidden.

According to Chafe, Hillary set her terms when she contacted Morris. He would visit the White House only late at night. No records would be kept. If it became necessary to phone during the day, says Smith, he'd identify himself as "Charlie." Hillary acted as Morris's beard, covering his tracks when staffers got suspicious. The result, writes Chafe, "was the existence of two White Houses," and "bewilderment among those...caught in the middle." Top Clinton adviser George Stephanopoulos later said, "The president had engaged [Morris] to run a covert operation against his own White House—a commander's coup against the colonels."

The Clintons hoped to continue this deception indefinitely. "I like subterfuge, that's why I like you," Bill told Morris. Hillary welcomed any way around Bill's people. Yet a clandestine operation at the heart of the White House eventually proved unsustainable. Morris was revealed, and full-scale bureaucratic civil war followed, aggravated by distrust over the earlier secrecy.

The Morris affair was the clearest example of the Clintons' tendency to isolate themselves from their own staffers. The couple's conviction that their complementary knowledge and talents serve as force multipliers led them to overestimate their combined ability. The confusion and deception of the "commanders' coup" vindicated *The Federalist's* warning that multiple governors are not only difficult to monitor, but prone to false confidence and collective mischief.

Morris's polling revealed that Hillary had become the administration's chief political liability. Voters disliked the idea of a co-presidency, though the full extent of Hillary's power remained hidden. So she voluntarily withdrew from anything smacking of a direct political role.

Yet as Smith's thoroughly-researched *For Love of Politics* shows, the oft-made claim that Hillary's co-presidency ended after 1994 is false. True, she no longer swept like a whirlwind through West Wing corridors, interrupting meetings and dressing down staff in front of Bill. Yet behind the scenes the First Lady exerted tremendous influence, whether working directly with the president or operating through proxies in the West Wing. From the budget, to Bosnia, cabinet appointments, speech-writing, and welfare reform, Hillary's influence was unrivaled. Her power had merely been driven further behind the scenes.

If conflict between Bill, Hillary, and their respective camps declined during this period, it was due less to Hillary's reduced stature than to the administration's new posture. For a time, policy initiative lay with House Speaker Newt Gingrich and the resurgent Republicans. With no bold proposals emanating from the White House, occasions for staff conflict receded. If a dual consulship inhibits energy in the executive, depleted energy makes for relative harmony among the consuls.

Yet dissatisfied with her diminished public role, Hillary planned education and childcare initiatives designed to return her to the limelight. According to Smith, those plans were dashed by the emergence of the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky sex scandals, escalation of the Whitewater controversy, and impeachment proceedings. As scandals paralyzed the White House in the second term, Hillary

reemerged as a public co-president, manning the battlements and commanding the administration's defense.

Ironically, cabinet government now ran smoothly, since the Clintons could no longer be bothered to interfere. And as impeachment wound down, Hillary focused on her Senate race and presidential aspirations, postponing rather than resolving the co-presidential dilemma.

Chafe's treatment of the Clinton co-presidency highlights the couple's shifting balance of power. Hillary overreaches and retreats; and then rescues Bill from scandal and resurges. Yet after factoring in Smith's luminous account of Hillary's covert post-1994 co-presidency, it is the continuity of the Clinton power-sharing arrangement that stands out. Each Clinton sees the other as his/her indispensable counselor and co-conspirator. Hillary was never frozen out by Bill. And Bill became Hillary's top advisor from the moment she launched her own political career, with an eye to his own White House return. They'd now march under Hillary's banner, yet their power-sharing arrangement continues.

In short, the notion that voters disposed of the Clinton co-presidency in 1994 is mistaken. The Clintons never "learned their lesson," never ended their ill-conceived co-consulship. Any doubts on this score should be put to rest by the Clintons' conduct during Hillary's bid for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. Hillary's campaign was a second Clinton co-presidency-in-waiting, and concern about this played a far greater role in her eventual defeat than is generally recognized.

### Vote Hill, Get Bill

**T**HE STANDARD TREATMENT OF THE campaign, *Game Change* by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin (2010), offers a riveting account of backstage maneuvering in the Clinton camp. The scenes are right out of the first Clinton co-presidency, but with roles reversed. As Bill's aggressive criticism of Obama famously backfired in South Carolina, for example, Hillary found it impossible to confront him directly. Instead she sent aides, whose pleas for Bill "either to leave the state or pipe down" were rejected. "God-damn it, I'm doing this," he answered. It was Hillary's health care fiasco redux.

*Game Change* offers a superb insider account, but public debate over the looming Clinton co-presidency barely registers for Heilemann and Halperin. Yet a bit of digging uncovers a cascade of news and opinion pieces in the months between the January 2008 Iowa



caucus and the May North Carolina primary on the specter of another plural executive.

Fear that Bill's charisma would overshadow Hillary kept him out of the limelight for much of 2008. Things changed when Hillary seemed to be losing steam in Iowa. Once Bill stepped in, the co-presidency issue emerged again—this time as a positive. Democrats openly enthused about a “two-for-one” presidency, lauding the Clinton “package.” A bumper sticker read, “Vote Hill, Get Bill.” One early poll showed 44% of Democratic voters more likely to vote for Hillary because of Bill. Exit polls in New Hampshire indicated that Hillary supporters would rather have voted for the former president than for Hill by a greater than two-to-one margin.

Bill's outsized presence quickly became a problem. When he went off script and wandered away from Hillary during a joint appearance at an Iowa grocery store, the media circus followed. After cameras caught her alone, confused, and scanning the aisles, that became the story.

Bill's touting of Hillary's White House experience gave him an excuse to talk about himself. “I'm here for Hillary, but let me tell you more about me,” read one headline. Reporters calculated that Bill was talking about himself instead of Hillary by a ratio of 9 to 1. Feminists worried that Hillary's “gender breakthrough” was turning into a “gender throwback.” One headline complained, “As Bubba hogs spotlight, experts wonder if it's dooming Hil.”

As at the Iowa grocery store, Bill's interventions wreaked havoc on campaign plans. Hillary staffers frequently—and unsuccessfully—tried to cut short his time with reporters. On one occasion in the fall of 2007, the campaign publicly repudiated his comments. Although the confusion reflected divisions within Hillary's camp on how to make use of Bill, gamesmanship and distancing were likely at work as well. Bill was playing bad cop to Hillary's good cop, and some of his controversial remarks may have been cleared by Hillary privately. The 2008 Clinton campaign combined co-consular chaos and guile in equal measure. Feuds between Bill and Hillary staffers added to the confusion.

The co-presidency issue caused problems for Hillary as early as Iowa. Five days before

the caucuses there, Hillary announced that Bill would have no “formal official role” in her White House. She added, “he will be my close confidant and advisor, as I was with him.” Critics were not mollified. She also promised to bar Bill from top-secret national security meetings, a ban that hadn't prevented Hillary from profoundly influencing Bill's foreign-policy decisions.

When one of Bill's attacks came up during a South Carolina debate, Obama snapped at Hillary, “I can't tell who I'm running against sometimes.” This is when the co-presidency issue boiled over. Liberal columnists and the mainstream press came down hard on the Clintons. Gail Collins confessed in the *New York Times* that she'd been wrong in the '90s to dismiss criticism of the Clinton co-presidency as sexist. In retrospect, Collins said, husband/wife management “muddies up the lines of authority.” Collins worried that Bill was undermining Hillary's core campaign narrative—her claim to have learned from her mistakes as First Lady. Instead of a wiser Hillary, said Collins, “we're being offered the worst-case scenario—that the pair of them are going to return to Pennsylvania Avenue and re-create the old Clinton chaos.” Two days later, the *Times* featured liberal historian Garry Wills invoking the founders' warnings against the plural executive.

Around the same time, *USA Today* cautioned against a co-presidency, noting that despite reassurances from the Clintons, “voters have every right to wonder how this would actually work.” *Newsweek* flatly predicted “an unelected, unofficial, but nonetheless true co-presidency.” Former Clinton White House aide Elaine Kamarck wondered if Bill would use his influence to work against Hillary when they disagreed.

Pressed on the *Today* show, Bill said he'd advise Hillary as “we've always done for each other,” adding that he'd “be available for whatever specific assignments that seem right.” This would licence a rerun of the first Clinton co-presidency. As numerous commentators noted, however, Bill's stature as a former president would make containing his influence far more difficult than containing Hillary's had been when she was First Lady.

Explanations of Obama's 2008 victory for the Democratic nomination focus on his cha-

risma and organizing skills. Hillary's loss is generally put down to her weak effort in the caucus states and Bill's incendiary attacks on Obama, which some claim were racially tinged. Yet the specter of a second Clinton co-presidency played a major and underappreciated role in her defeat. All the problems of the first Clinton co-presidency returned in 2008, with roles reversed.

### Nothing Has Changed

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2008 ARE CONSISTENT with what went before. With Hillary legally barred from political activity or fundraising during her time as secretary of state, Bill has spent years campaigning on her behalf. In their new book, *HRC: State Secrets and the Rebirth of Hillary Clinton*, reporters Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes chronicle Bill's energetic efforts to back politicians who supported Hillary in 2008, while punishing those who defected to Obama.

During the '08 campaign, a couple of columnists half-seriously suggested that Hillary ought to appoint Bill “special envoy to Swaziland” or some similarly distant country, the modern equivalent of Roman consular exile. In practice, however, exiling Bill is impossible. After years of campaigning for his wife, he surely expects to be a power in her White House. Hillary justified her own co-presidential role by noting how essential she'd been to Bill's rise. If Bill wants co-presidential power—as he so clearly does—Hillary is in no position to deny him. Impulsive, self-centered, reckless at times, a former president empowered by instant media access, a Bill scorned or shut out could cause serious trouble.

The danger is that Hillary's path to the nomination may be so smooth this time that Bill could avoid stepping in. This would foster the illusion that their co-presidential problem had been solved, when in fact it has not.

A Hillary Clinton White House might adhere to the letter of the law, but a de facto second Clinton co-presidency would, like the first, violate both the spirit and the good sense of the Constitution. Buy one, get two—but at far too high a price.

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