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## **The American Presidency: Bill Clinton Transcript**

Date: Tuesday, 31 March 2009 - 12:00AM

# The American Presidency: Bill Clinton

by

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***FROM ROOSEVELT TO BUSH***  
**THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY:**  
**TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE -**  
**BILL CLINTON**

**Professor Vernon Bogdanor**

Bill Clinton was born in 1946, and elected President in 1992. He was the first American President born after the War; the first baby-boomer President, if you like. He was also the first Democratic President since Roosevelt to serve two full terms, and he was also the successor to Roosevelt in another sense.

Roosevelt had inaugurated a period of activist government, which lasted, broadly speaking, until 1968. During that period, Republicans were in opposition, and they elected just one President, who was Eisenhower, a popular General. Eisenhower was elected on condition that he did nothing to undermine the New Deal and the active government in America. But it is a striking paradox perhaps that, despite the triumphs of Roosevelt and Truman, the Democrats could not re-elect a full-term incumbent for over forty years afterwards. The Republicans had three Presidents who were re-elected before Clinton: Eisenhower, Nixon and Reagan, and then, after Clinton, George W. Bush. Nixon, of course, did not serve the whole of his second term, but nevertheless he was re-elected. But it seemed, after 1968, that the Democratic Party did not know where to go, and it seemed that both Lyndon Johnson, at the end of his period of office, and Carter, had led Americans into a wilderness. The Democratic Party seemed to have lost its way, and they were regarded, I think, perhaps unfairly in the case of Johnson, as failed Presidents.

Clinton's role was to rescue the Democratic Party from that wilderness, and he did so by becoming what he called a New Democrat. Anyone who is interested in British politics will see an echo of that in New Labour. I think there is a similarity, because Tony Blair rescued Labour from the wilderness after eighteen years in opposition, and Blair took the view you could only get Labour re-elected if it transformed itself into something different called New Labour. There are a lot of similarities between Clinton and Blair. Clinton gave the Democrats electoral credibility, as did Blair for Labour. But the key question one has to ask about both of them is whether they gave their parties that electoral credibility at the expense of what the Party fundamentally stood for - did they modernise the Party or did they transform it out of all recognition? I think that is a question you can ask, as I say, both about Clinton and about Blair.

I mentioned that Clinton, in a sense, can be seen as the successor of Roosevelt, but his background was as different from Roosevelt as you could possibly imagine, and as different from that of his predecessor, George H W Bush, and his successor, George W Bush. Their backgrounds are as different as you could imagine because Roosevelt and the two Bushes were born with silver spoons in their mouths. They were born to wealthy families, with an assured position in society. Clinton's mother was a rickety good-time girl, living in dirt-poor conditions in Hope, Arkansas. Although, very typically, Clinton could use that for political purposes, and he would introduce himself as 'The man from Hope' - that was his political slogan, that he was 'The man from Hope who would bring hope to America.' His father, who was called William Jefferson Blythe, was a travelling salesman who was killed in a motor accident before Clinton was born. In 1950, when Clinton was four years old, his mother re-married Roger Clinton, and Bill Clinton took his name from his stepfather, perhaps unfortunately from one point of view, because Roger Clinton was generally out of work, was drunken, foul-mouthed and violent. Clinton, as a teenager, often used to break the bedroom door down in order to prevent his mother being physically attacked. He had a traumatic childhood, really quite unlike that of any other President we have talked about. The nearest perhaps, although it is not wholly near, is perhaps Ronald Reagan, whose father was also an alcoholic, though not an abuser.

But despite this, Clinton was successful educationally. He attended Georgetown University in Washington, and won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford. Some people asked how it was that Clinton, who was a Baptist attending a Catholic University, was nominated for a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, but in a characteristic piece of politics, Clinton told the President of the University that he was considering taking instruction on how to become a Catholic, but that never came to much. At Oxford, he was,

contrary to what is often said, a good student. I have spoken to a man who taught him, who is now retired, and he said that although he did not actually take his Master's degree, he was a very good and capable student.

After Oxford, he went to Yale Law School, but he made little mark there, and he did not become, as many people did from Yale, a clerk to a Supreme Court Justice. But what he did do is he met Hillary Rodham, whom he married and who is now Secretary of State.

But he then went back to Arkansas and stood for Congress, where he was defeated. But in 1976, he was elected Attorney General for the State, and then, in 1978, Governor, and Arkansas was normally a Democratic state, so Clinton could look forward to a long stay in the Governor's mansion in Arkansas.

However, in 1980, at the time of the Reagan landslide, something people never expected happened in Arkansas: a Republican won the Governorship for only the second time in the Twentieth Century. It looked as if Clinton was finished, that he had lost, after all, one of the safest states in the South to a Republican, but he returned, and he won again in 1982. This marked the birth of another of his slogans about himself, as he called himself 'the Comeback Kid.' Indeed, as you will see, he was to come back many times from seemingly disastrous situations.

He hoped very much to win the 1988 nomination for the Presidency, but he had a stroke of bad luck that turned into a stroke of good luck, because 1988 was not a year I think in which a Democrat could have won the Presidency. But another of the candidates for the Presidency, Senator Gary Hart, challenged the press to discover any indiscretions about him, but that was rather foolish because he was seen cavorting on a yacht with a young woman to whom he was not married, and the press photographed that and that ended Senator Hart's presidential chances. It also ended Clinton's chances, because it was well-known that if you looked for indiscretions with Clinton, there were a whole barrelful and a large number of skeletons in a very capacious closet, so Clinton also stood down in that year.

In 1992, he had another stroke of luck, because it seemed that George H W Bush, at the end of his first term, would probably be unbeatable. His polls after the Gulf War were about 90% approval, and almost everyone, including I have to say myself, thought that he would win re-election, and most of the favoured Democratic candidates found excuses of one sort or another to make themselves unavailable, because they wanted to wait for the election of 1996. Clinton was the only one who was really prepared to stand, and Clinton, very wisely, thought that Bush was not invulnerable, because people were less interested, he thought, in the Gulf War than in their economic circumstances, and Bush, he thought, was weak on economics. He coined another famous slogan of his: 'It's the economy, stupid!' Meaning that it was not foreign policy that really mattered, it was the economy.

But then Clinton ran into trouble, because tapes were found revealing that there had been a twelve-year affair with a lady called Jennifer Flowers, in Arkansas. This seemed to finish off Clinton as it had finished off Gary Hart four years before. But, unlike Hart, Clinton brazened it out, and said he regretted what had happened, and Hillary said she would stand by him, so it did not actually finish his career.

But nevertheless, a week before the New Hampshire Primary, which was one of the first ones, Clinton was 20% behind Bush as a possible President. However, he succeeded in winning the Primaries, but even then, his position seemed very poor, and although he was going to win the Democratic nomination, just before the Convention met, he was actually running third, behind not only Bush but an independent candidate named Ross Perot, a Texas millionaire, who was standing on the platform of ending the budget deficit and reducing the size of Government. But again, he was the Comeback Kid, and he said that the Democratic Party had changed, and that he was not going to follow the policies of previous Democrats. Some of the flavour of this is given by a commercial in 1992 for Clinton and Gore, his running mate: 'There are a new generation of Democrats, Bill Clinton and Al Gore, and they don't think the way the old Democratic Party did. They've called for an end to welfare as we know it,' which of course is normally a Republican slogan, 'so welfare can be a second-chance, not a way of life.' They sent a strong signal to criminals by supporting the death penalty, and they rejected the old tax-and-spend politics. Clinton's balanced twelve budgets, and they propose a new plan, investing in people, detailing \$140 billion in spending cuts they'd make right now.' Again, that was normally a Republican position to make spending cuts. 'Clinton and Gore,' it ended, 'for people, for a change!'

The new Democrats was a response to the Democratic dilemma, because the Democrats, after Lyndon Johnson, seemed to have lost the position as being the natural party of government. They were in opposition; the Republicans now seemed to be the natural part of government, just as, in Britain, the Conservatives seemed to be the natural party of Government. As I said a few moments ago, the dilemma of the left in both countries seemed to be similar, because the class basis of their support was

gradually being eroded: the trade union membership was falling; membership of the organised working class was falling; people's aspirations were changing. Indeed, in America, no less than 90% of Americans during this period defined themselves as middle class. People were defining themselves in terms of their aspirations and hopes and, in America, it seemed the Republicans understood those aspirations better than the party of the left, just as, in Britain, it seemed that Margaret Thatcher understood their aspirations better than the party of the left.

Also, ethnic minority voters, particularly Jews and Catholics, who traditionally voted Democrat, were becoming upwardly mobile and they too were moving away from the Democratic camp. Democrats could no longer rely, as Roosevelt and Truman had relied, on the solid support of Jews and Catholics. As people became upwardly mobile, they came to believe that the Federal Government was playing too large a part in their affairs, that taxes were too high, and they were against what was perhaps caricatured as 'tax and spend liberalism'. They also were strongly in favour with law and order. They had no sympathy with rioters, and not as much sympathy with victims of crime as perhaps was thought.

Some people here may remember Tony Blair's famous slogan 'Tough on crime; tough on the causes of crime.' Dukakis had lost the 1988 Election partly because of a very damaging film released about him by Bush, suggesting that he was letting too many dangerous prisoners out on parole. Clinton was determined not to make that mistake and, in a rather callous move, in the middle of his campaign, he returned to Arkansas to refuse a reprieve a man on death row who was then executed, despite being very severely mentally retarded.

But in general, it appeared that progress was undermining the New Deal coalition and that the Democrats had lost their base amongst the ethnic minorities, amongst the aspiring middle classes, and also in the South. As a result of the civil rights legislation, the South was gradually moving away from being one party, and 1980, when Clinton had lost the Governorship, proved a harbinger of that. It was not an accident, but the South was gradually becoming two party, and in fact, veering towards the Republicans. Once the Republicans had been anathema in the South because they were the party of Lincoln, the party of the North in the Civil War, but the civil rights legislation had changed all that, and the South now became competitive, and since the Republicans were the more conservative party, and the South tended to be conservative, people veered towards the Republican Party in the South. Lyndon Johnston had realised that. It is reported that, when signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he said, 'That is the South gone for the Democratic Party for a generation - we've lost the South for a generation because it'll no longer be a one-party state based on racial segregations.' Many of the poor whites, amongst whom Clinton had grown up, said that the reforms were all at their expense; they were the ones who had been asked to pay for the progress, for black emancipation, more liberal policies on crime, and so on. So, Clinton said you have to include them in the progress and stop making them pay the price for the reforms of others, and that was the only way to unite the Democratic Party.

So, this was an ideological challenge, if you like, facing the Democratic Party, but there was also a practical challenge that, even on its own terms, the New Deal seemed no longer to be working, because federal intervention in the economy under George H W Bush seemed not to be having the effects it was hoped to achieve. Unemployment was high, inflation was high, the economic system seemed to be breaking down, welfare programmes did not seem to be achieving their aim of reducing poverty - large amounts of money were spent on federal programmes to reduce poverty, but it seemed not to have much effect on the welfare roles. Ronald Reagan famously mocked the Democrat programmes by saying, 'We fought a war on poverty and poverty won.' Many Americans were seeing welfare payments as a transfer from the industrious to the feckless, and that the hard earned dollars of their wages were going to the lazy.

So Clinton said we cannot win simply by restoring the New Deal coalition and attacking Ronald Reagan - that will not work anymore, you cannot do that - just as Labour, in Britain, found it could not win just by attacking Margaret Thatcher and harking back to the good old days of Labour Government.

Clinton became, in 1990, Chairman of a very important body called the Democratic Leadership Council, which was formed to modernise the Democratic Party. He was very much influenced by two reports issued by that Council. The first, in 1981, was called 'The Politics of Evasion' and it said that Democrats had evaded the truth about their position by finding demons to blame - Ronald Reagan, Nixon, whoever it was - but their defeats were not transitory but were a real problem for the Party. The report stated that by clinging to their old views, they had lost much of American opinion and lost touch with the average American. It challenged the Democrats to ask why it was that many Americans have come to see the Party as inattentive to their economic interests, indifferent, if not hostile, to their moral sentiments, and ineffective in defence of their national security. Above all, this report said that the next Democratic nominee must convey a clear understanding of, and identification with, the social values and moral sentiments of average Americans. The consistent use of middle class values, individual responsibility, hard work, equality opportunity, rather than the language of compensation would also help. They said the older activist liberalism was

appropriate to the industrial society of the early part of the Twentieth Century, based on mass production and class conflict, but something new was needed in a technological society characterised by globalisation, in which class boundaries are eroded. Again, I think a lot of this can be applied to Blair's analysis of Labour's problems in Britain, New Labour.

The second of the reports from the Democratic Leadership Council was called 'The New American Choice: Opportunity, Responsibility, Community'. These were the new slogans, and they demanded welfare reform, spending cuts, strong national defence and defence of American values so that the Democrats could no longer be portrayed as people favouring high taxation, deficit spending, burning the American flag, alternative lifestyles, against the family, soft on crime, and against the United States.

Again, I think Blair adopted this from Clinton, but Clinton said that his position lay midway between two false alternatives. The first false position was that of the old left, which we have been talking about - if you like, the New Deal, the activist left. The second false position was that of the Republicans, the new right, if you like, that simply went too far and threw the baby out with the bathwater. Clinton said that the old left, the New Deal, no longer works. He said the new right relied almost wholly on the market and was not concerned with the possible unfairness of the market through the distributional consequences of the market. So the Republicans were too far to the right and the old Democrats were too far to the left, and Clinton was in exactly the right position in the middle, as Blair also claimed to be - the Third Way is the transatlantic phrase. Clinton said the middle way, the Third Way, combines the both: you can have certainly the use of the market, but also the state to correct the inadequacies of the market. The slogan was: 'Markets where possible; the state where necessary.' You did not need to choose between the big bad government and the user-friendly private markets, as the right and Reagan in particular had said, and you did not need to choose between the welfare state and every person for himself or herself - you could have a reformed welfare state - and the slogan was, 'Mend it, don't end it!' which was another Clinton slogan. So it was a synthesis to be distinguished from these two old-fashioned or outdated views, as he saw them, the old left and the new right. He said you could have both; he said you did not have to choose between them. Someone said that Clinton was in himself a one-man coalition because he seemed to synthesise all these opposing views.

In 1992, Clinton won the Election. It was a three-cornered Election and he gained 43% of the vote, with 38% of the vote going to Bush, and 19% to Ross Perot, which is quite a high percentage for an independent in America. It is fair to say he did not win only because of his ideas, but because of his personality, which was remarkable, and in particular his empathy.

This came out in one of the television debates, when a woman asked a question about unemployment - she herself was unemployed, and others in her family were unemployed. Bush answered it by saying that he was very concerned about unemployment and he was working all day to deal with it, listing all the measures he had taken, and so on. Clinton answered it by walking across to the woman, hugging her, and saying, 'I feel your pain.' You may think this is rather corny - indeed, it is - but it went down very well on television.

Clinton's personality and persuasiveness was such that the Republican Leader of the House said that no one should ever make a decision after meeting Clinton until they had at least slept over it for a night, because he was so persuasive, you would find yourself agreeing to things with him that you would later regret.

The black writer, Toni Morrison, called him 'the first black President'. It is true to say Clinton defended affirmative action, but he did not actually do anything else substantive for Afro-Americans. Nevertheless, they said that he was the first black President, and that is a sign of how, simply by appearing empathetic, he could win people to his side.

He was known as a great communicator, although some of his critics called him Slick Willie. He won the Election not only because of his ideas, but also because he seemed to empathise with the American people, and sympathise with what they were doing, and this was not only in the mass, as it were, on television, but also personally.

But with only 43% of the vote, he was a minority President. In fact, he got a smaller Democratic vote than Dukakis in 1988 - Dukakis got 46%. At first, it seemed that Clinton would not last very long, because, in 1994, in the first off year elections, the Republicans won both Houses of Congress, the first time since 1954 it had happened, and these were the worst results for the Democrats since the 1920s.

The new Republican Leader of the House, the Speaker, was, it is fair to say, a right wing ideologue, in the Reagan mould, called Newt Gingrich. Newt Gingrich proposed a radical programme, which he said he was going to push through, over the head of the President if possible. This programme meant large tax cuts, cuts in Medicare and Medicaid to the elderly and disabled, cuts in federal support for student loans, and cuts on expenditure on environment, and the only thing America should spend more on would be defence. So this was a programme even further to the right than Ronald Reagan's programme, and Gingrich called

it 'a contract with America', although Clinton renamed it 'a contract on America'!

Gingrich said that Government was the problem, not the solution, as Reagan had said, and he said the Democrats were missing these new ideas of privatisation, individual responsibility - they claimed to believe them, but they did not really. Clinton had to deal with that, and Clinton quoted a woman who had said to him, 'Don't let Government mess with Medicare!' She thought it was a private programme that Government might undermine, and she thought that Government was so terrible that everything it did was wrong; she did not realise Medicare was a Government programme. So Clinton said it is not the case that Government is always the problem, though it is also not the case that Government is always the solution. He made a famous comment, which was misinterpreted, in his State of the Union speech in 1996, when he said, 'The era of big Government is over.' Indeed, in his first term, the percentage of GNP spent on Government was less than at any time since 1933, but he did not mean that the era of Government was over. He meant the era of big Government was over: Government had a role, but it was a different role; he said, 'The role of Government should be as a facilitator. Government should not be rowing but it should be steering.' He said: 'To reform overloaded Government is not a war against all Government, but an attempt to make Government more effective,' and famously, 'Mend it - don't end it!'

Gingrich was caught by Clinton's, as it were, triangulation of the centre. He was pushed out to the right and overreached himself, and Clinton managed to get back in 1996, with a bigger victory than in 1992. In 1996, he won 49% of the vote. His opponent, the Senate Majority Leader, Dole, won 41%, and Ross Perot was down to 10%. Though Republicans did retain control of Congress, and that was the first time since the 1920s the Republicans had retained control of Congress for two successive terms in both Houses. But part of the reason Clinton got back - and I will elaborate on this later - is that it is very difficult to attack you if you are in the middle, if you triangulate, because the only way to attack is to be extreme, by saying that you are on the extreme left, or the extreme right. I think Blair was in the same position often; that the only way to attack him was to say you were Old Labour, which people had rejected, or you really wanted quite radical right wing policies, which, again, the electorate would probably reject.

Clinton had his greatest success in the economic field, and it was a success in a way the Republicans could not oppose because he said he was going to remove the deficit from the budget. By the time he had left office, America was in surplus for the first time since the late 1960s. Indeed, by the time he left office, a \$290 billion annual deficit was transformed into a \$75 billion surplus.

Early in his term, before the Republicans gained control of Congress, he reduced the deficit by taxes on the wealthy, but when the Republicans won control of Congress, he could only do it by cuts in public spending. Nevertheless, the economy was, I think, his greatest success and that success was partly, although not wholly, due to his efforts. He made a deal with Alan Greenspan, the Head of the Federal Reserve, that he would lower the federal deficit in exchange for lower interest which would encourage the economy. It was partly the fact that the economic cycle favoured Clinton, and partly the fact the Republicans supported him in cutting the deficit, and partly luck, but whatever the reason, it was a golden age of economic growth. But Clinton used the growth of the economy to reduce the deficit and not to expand public services.

The second success of Clinton's Presidency, though it was really a Republican success more than his, was the success in welfare reform. He said, as I mentioned, that to end welfare as we know it, did not mean no benefits at all, but welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life; that welfare should empower people. What he did was to end the entitlement, the right, if you like, to benefit under any circumstances, and he shifted the responsibility for welfare out of the Federal Government to the states, and said that their welfare proposals had to be within the following framework: that no one would get benefit for more than two years - they had to find work; and that no one could get more benefit over the whole of their working career than five years. He said it was up to the states to come up with schemes for reform. This put an end to public assistance as a right, or entitlement. People protested about this, saying that it was a brutal act of social policy: what if there were no jobs, people said, or high unemployment where you could not get a job; what if the recipients were simply incapable of holding jobs or earning enough to support their families - if people were inadequate, would their children not be harmed by this policy? The most alarming prognoses were drawn up by people, perhaps understandably, but, one has to say, the policy worked. There was large decline in the number of Americans on public cash assistance - it was down from twelve million in 1996 to just over five million in 2001, partly helped of course by the fact that there was an expanding economy with full employment. It will be interesting to see what happens now, with the recession, as to whether those policies can still work. But this, of course, lessened the role of Federal Government in welfare policy.

Full employment, it is fair to say, also helped the worse off, and Clinton put forward a policy, copied by Gordon Brown, of the Earned Income Tax Credit that also helped the poor. So it is fair to say, the poor benefited during Clinton's period of office, not

so much from specific federal welfare measures as from the general prosperity which ensued from his economic policies.

The criticism of Clinton - from the Democrats anyway - is that he went too far he went too far in the Republican direction; that he adopted a Republican view of welfare reform, and that he used a budget surplus to pay off the debt rather than to expand social programmes. His critics said that there were great gaps in the US welfare system, that what Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson had achieved was primarily care for the elderly and social security, the welfare system, and Clinton had undermined one of those, social security, and that he was not giving much to working families - there was no federal provision for childcare, no federal provision for lifelong training, and above all, no federal provision for healthcare - no national health service.

Clinton tried to put forward a universal healthcare policy, and he appointed Hillary, his wife, as head of a White House Task Force on national healthcare reform. That failed disastrously, and it was really done in a very foolish way I think. For a start, Clinton did not involve Congress in the proposals, even though he did not have a majority in Congress for most of his term, and perhaps the reason for that was he thought the Republicans were opposed to healthcare, but even if they were, he would not get anything through without their support. Hillary Clinton produced a very complex bill, which went to 1,300 pages, and which few people could understand, and it lacked the simplicity of the British National Health Service. It proposed a very complex system, putting the onus on employers to contribute towards the healthcare of their employees, and also requiring the cooperation of the insurance companies to work successfully. It seemed a bureaucratic nightmare. The Republicans said the proposal, when you drew an organogram of them, looked like a street map of Istanbul. Because it lacked the simplicity of the National Health Service, it was very difficult for the public to understand what was involved, so there was no public support for it either, and it got hopelessly bogged down in Congress and had to be abandoned, and that is the greatest failure in Clinton's domestic policies.

But otherwise, he was successful, though you may say that he was successful in a Republican direction. At the Republican Convention of San Diego in 1996, his 1996 Republican opponent, Senator Dole, the Majority Leader, said that Clinton ought to have been there, because he had adopted so many Republican programmes, he ought himself to have been the Republican candidate. Indeed, one of the problems for the Republicans was that they could not get at him from the right, because he had taken over so many of their programmes.

Oddly enough, Michael Howard said something similar after the 2005 Election. You may remember his slogan was, 'Are you thinking what we're thinking?' After he had lost the Election, Tony Blair announced his programme, with strong measures on crime and immigration and all the things that Michael Howard had talked about. Michael Howard then got up in the House of Commons and said, 'I had no idea during the Election that he was thinking what we were thinking!' So it was very similar, and people said a traditional Democrat would have vetoed these Republican measures and not taken the credit for policies which were not really Democratic policies at all.

In foreign policy, Clinton appeared to be offering a fresh start, because he had attacked the older Bush for appeasement of dictators. He said the older Bush had not defended the students who had been shot down in China, in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, he had left the Kurds to their fate in Iraq, he had appeased Saddam Hussein, and he had appeased Milosevic in Yugoslavia. But all that turned out to be rhetoric when he came to office, because his own policies were not very different.

At first, he did nothing on Bosnia, where ethnic cleansing was being carried out, as is now clear, on a very large scale, although it is fair to say here that he was deterred from doing anything by John Major's British Government. But Clinton said here is a problem in Europe - the Europeans ought to take the lead, and the Americans refused to do anything to help. The Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, said it was a humanitarian crisis, a long way from home, in the middle of another continent, a bit like Neville Chamberlain's famous comment about Czechoslovakia in 1938: 'A far away country of which we know nothing.'

The Republicans in the Senate, led by Senator Dole and Senator McCain, the presidential candidate last time around, said lift the arms embargo to enable the Muslims to defend themselves in Bosnia. But Clinton did not agree with that, and nor did the British Government, though most Republicans supported Dole and McCain, and around twenty Democrats did as well. But it took four years for Clinton to take action, and it was not until after the Srebrenica massacre of 1996 that Clinton took action through NATO to stop the ethnic cleansing.

In Rwanda, where 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered, again, Clinton did nothing, or perhaps a more accurate way of putting it is to say that the UN did nothing because America would not give a lead.

When Saddam Hussain banned inspections in 1998, Clinton authorised air attacks on Iraq and was moving towards the position that George W Bush took; that Saddam should be overthrown. My suspicion and guess is that he would have followed the

same policy as George W Bush eventually as he was moving to that position by the time he left office.

In Kosovo, in 1999, he acted quite differently from Bosnia - and I think that is partly under the influence of Blair - and he intervened to stop ethnic cleansing. But people said, if you are intervening to stop it in Kosovo, why are you not doing anything in Rwanda, and that was of course a question that Clinton found difficult to answer.

But above all, I think the criticism of the Clinton record in foreign policy is that he had no rules or vision of a new post-Communist or post-Cold War world order: under what circumstances could America legitimately use force, intervene in the affairs of other countries? America, the only real superpower, some said a global superpower, with responsibilities all over the world, was it right and proper for America to intervene if there was a humanitarian crisis, ethnic cleansing or genocide, in other countries - what should the American position be? Clinton had no doctrine. You may say that was better than his successor, who did have a doctrine but one that many people disagreed with, but I will talk about that next time. Brzezinski, who had advised Carter, foreign policy advisor, said that while Clinton was in office, the post of leader of the free world was currently vacant.

I have talked about Clinton's domestic policy and Clinton's foreign policy, and now I come to sex. While Clinton was in office, he was accused by a lady called Paula Jones of sexual harassment, and the Supreme Court said that this case could in fact be heard, and that did consume a good deal of his time. Then, in August 1998, impeachment proceedings were instituted against him because it was said he had committed perjury in denying a sexual relationship with a young intern at the White House called Monica Lewinsky. With a majority in the House of Representatives, which of course was dominated by the Republicans, they were beginning impeachment proceedings against him. Because you can only impeach a President for high crimes and misdemeanours, he Republicans said perjury amounted to such high crimes and misdemeanours. This was effectively trying to distort the judicial process, if you like.

The American public did not seem very impressed with this, and in 1998, the Democrats won a bit more - they won five seats in the House of Representatives - because most Americans saw it as a private matter. It is remarkable because 1998 was the first off year since 1954 when the party in power actually gained seats. That showed the views of the Americans, and people were unsympathetic, it appears, to the special prosecutor appointed by the Republicans, called Kenneth Starr, who seemed both very purient and an extremely puritanical and bible-thumping figure, unsympathetic, rather like the Puritan Fathers in some ways.

But then, shortly after the 1998 Elections, it was discovered that Gingrich, the Leader of the House of Representatives, who had pressed for the impeachment proceedings against Clinton, had had an affair himself with a Congressional aide who was young enough to be his daughter. He then, therefore, had to resign, but it was then found that his replacement, Robert Livingston, had also committed various sexual offences, so the whole moral issue became somewhat muddled. Anyway, the matter went to the Senate, where a two-thirds majority was needed, but there was not such a majority there, not even a majority - 55 to 45 voted not to impeach Clinton on grounds of perjury, and on obstruction of justice. The vote was effectively 50/50, so there was nowhere near the two-thirds majority necessary for impeachment.

But nevertheless, while this was going on, the Paula Jones case was also continuing, and in the end, Clinton agreed to pay her \$90,000 and admitted that he had given false and misleading answers under oath to her, and he also had to pay her expenses, which amounted to \$850,000. You can see why Clinton has been such a keen fundraiser since he has retired - the cost to the taxpayer of the Paula Jones case is said to be \$60 million.

On his last day in office, Clinton admitted to having given false testimony in relation to Monica Lewinsky, and had to pay \$25,000 to the Arkansas Bar Association. He paid the money in return for immunity from prosecution for perjury from Arkansas, but he was barred from practising law in Arkansas for five years - a very unusual outcome for a President leaving office.

So as I say, there were a large number of skeletons in a very capacious closet! Clinton's legacy depends on what you think about the Democratic Party, which I suspect relates also to what you think about the Labour Party in Britain. If you take the view that the Democrats needed to re-evaluate their position, as the Labour Party did, on crime, welfare, family policy, defence, and fiscal prudence, you can say that Clinton's legacy was a very good one. If you think it need not have done that, you say it was a bad one, and I suspect your judgement of Tony Blair would be very similar.

It is undoubtedly true, I think, that America became a more tolerant country under Clinton. Although it annoyed many in the Army, one of his first acts was to pass the Executive Order allowing homosexuals to serve in the military. There was much greater tolerance towards homosexuals and Afro-Americans after his period in office. It is notable that his strongest supporters tend to be amongst Afro-Americans and, despite the sexual scandals, he has had much greater support amongst women than



amongst men.

But you may say the weakness of his triangulation strategy was it amounted, his critics said, to compromise without convictions; that your position was set by others if it was the middle point. If, as seems to be the case, America was moving to the right in this period, under Gingrich, you meet the Republicans halfway, then they move further to the right, and you too go further to the right to keep up with them; you are not setting your own position - your position is being set by other people. That was very different from what, for instance, Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson or Reagan had done - they had actually set the agenda for themselves. They did not merely have to accept, if you like, the opinion polls - they changed them. Clinton, therefore, was not what you might call a transformational President. He did not set the agenda as these other Presidents did. So from the point of view of someone on the left, it was a wasted presidency, and some might say the same about Blair, except for the constitutional reforms, if you are a left winger. Clinton did not achieve a more egalitarian economic policy, he did not achieve a universal health policy, and that is why, in the year 2000, the Democratic vote was split because: running against Al Gore was not only George W Bush, but also an independent left winger, Ralph Nader, representative of consumer interests. In fact, Ralph Nader running in the Election threw the Election to Bush, because he had siphoned off just enough Democrat votes to give Bush the vote certainly in Florida, in a very close Election.

So the critics say that Clinton left America in a weaker position, and someone called him the 'Typhoid Mary of American politics', that he was a carrier who maintained his own health while infecting everyone else. He certainly did not excite the American public as Reagan, Kennedy or Roosevelt had.

But again, you may come back and say: was there the possibility of a transformational or radical presidency at that time, because after all, unlike the other Presidents we have been talking about, Clinton had no majority in Congress - unlike Reagan, unlike Johnson, unlike Roosevelt. The opposition was in power. You may say, without Clinton, Gingrich would have been a transformational Speaker of the House - he would have got much more of his own agenda through - and so people say you must judge Clinton not only on what he did, but what he prevented. Perhaps he did too little for the left, but he outmanoeuvred the great enemy of the left, who was Gingrich, the Speaker of the House. Moreover, you may say, unlike Ronald Reagan's presidency or Roosevelt's presidency, Clinton was governing in good times economically - there were no obvious crises impelling action. The country was not in a heroic mood, it did not need heroes, and you may say it was fortunate things were going very well - it did not need a Roosevelt or a Lyndon Johnson.

But I come back to the point that the greatest weakness of his presidency was the absence of any unifying vision. His position was determined by others, and therefore, it seemed his presidency merely consisted in weaving together various incremental measures, and the criticism of him comes mainly - not that people necessarily objected to his programmes, though some did - but for a lack of understanding about how they fitted into any coherent strategy at all. You compare that with Roosevelt and Reagan, who both gave America a vision, a way of making Americans believe in themselves again, to shape the nation's idea of themselves, and that was a legacy, in a sense, more important than their legislative achievements - it was an idea of America. Clinton never answered the question, 'What is the purpose of a downsized Government?' a smaller Federal Government that he wanted, a re-invented Government, if you like. In foreign policy, he never answered the question, 'What should America's role be in a post-Cold War world?' So his legacy seems to be a list of incremental changes. Someone referred to his term in office as 'acupuncture politics'.

But because of the success of the economy, his ratings remained high when he left office. He would certainly have been re-elected to a third term, if that had been possible, and he would certainly have done better than Gore in the Election, despite his private behaviour. You can compare that with President Carter, whose private life was impeccable, but who people judged not to be a very good President. Surveys show that Americans distinguished between the private life of the President and the public life. The Republicans spoke a lot about the moral majority of the American people, but it turns out we are really talking about the moral minority, because most American people did not judge the President by his private behaviour, but they did judge Carter by his public behaviour, and they returned him, in a sense, to the private life for which he was very eminently suited!

But I think the question one has to ask of Clinton in the end is what he did with power. Margaret Thatcher said of him, 'He is the great communicator, but he has nothing to communicate.' John McCain, standing in 2000 in the Primaries against George W Bush, to whom he lost, said it was 'a presidency of great talent and great waste,' and that I fear will be the verdict of history.

