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FAIR COMMENT

Clinton and Jackson Must Rise to the Occasion in L'Affaire Lewinsky

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Having apparently prayed with everyone in the first family about - if not against - the Monica Lewinsky specter, the Rev. Jesse Jackson has become the spiritual point man for the **Clinton** White House.

In this context, the infamous King David and Bathsheba extramarital sexual escapade and subsequent cover-up 3,000 years ago should be both instructive and illuminating to Jackson and President **Clinton**, notwithstanding the caveats of the president's lawyers. The secret of David's dalliance with Bathsheba, one of his subjects, her subsequent pregnancy and David's ensuing military order that indirectly led to the death of her soldier-husband in combat, stayed carefully hidden in the king's inner chambers for nearly a year, according to the biblical account. There was no Fourth Estate then to ferret out any sexual rumors leaking from the palace.

But then Nathan, a prophet without compromise, enters the stage and exposes the sordid tale in a dramatic face-to-face confrontation with the king. Significantly, David immediately confesses to Nathan and documents his contrition in one of the most moving poems in Western literature. Nathan was a check on the abuse of power. David - destined to undergo catastrophic personal, family and national agony in the aftermath of his cover-up - kept his kingship. Israel survived.

Unfortunately for Republican congressional leaders, Monicagate is a political time bomb set to go off in their faces during the elections this fall, with shock waves reverberating through the millennial presidential election. It is a very sad testimony to our rich and vibrant constitutional-law heritage that the rule of law will not prevail over the resourcefulness of the White House spin doctors.

There might be a scintilla of truth that Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, in part, is politically motivated. But even with Starr's commendable tenacity and legal brilliance, Monicagate will never rise above a Pyrrhic victory for the criminal-justice system. Lamentably, Starr will become a mere footnote in history: a crusader for justice capsized in the high seas of politics. Here's a simple but sobering political fact of life: This popular president is politically unimpeachable no matter what kind of evidence Starr unloads on the House Judiciary Committee -with or without Lewinsky's testimony and no matter how the Supreme Court ultimately rules on **Clinton**'s claim of attorney-client privilege over his conversations with White House lawyers.

But the same cannot be said of the unassailability of **Clinton**'s integrity and character. For the sake of the nation, and the office of the presidency, **Clinton** and Jackson need to put on the mantle of David and Nathan and preempt Starr's grand-jury investigation. A Jackson aspiring to be remembered in the history books as an uncompromising Nathan should remind the president of his groundbreaking 1992 promise to make his the most ethical, open and accountable administration in history.

An Oval Office address to the nation would be a fitting venue for the president to seize the moral high ground and finally tell the taxpayers, in a circumspect way, how two government employees actually spent their time on government property. Such an exemplary display of probity would constitute what James MacGregor Burns,

the father of modern leadership studies, calls "transforming leadership," a leadership style that motivates followers to a higher level of virtue.

Clinton's refreshing and timely candor could profoundly and positively affect a nation struggling to keep its moral balance in the face of schoolyard mass homicides and the fearless slaughter of police officers.

Jackson must convince **Clinton** that an enduring presidential legacy does not consist of a few political good works - which even Richard Nixon could claim - but rather honesty with the people. The result: **Clinton**, though severely scarred, may just keep his Pennsylvania Avenue address, anyway. Politics aside, **Clinton** has been an effective leader and America's characteristic resiliency will see her through to the millennium.

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