
Book Reviews

President Clinton should listen to James Carville more often

by Debra Hanania Freeman

. . . And the Horse He Rode in on—The People v. Kenneth Starr

by James Carville

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998

176 pages, hardbound, \$14.95

I am not going to make you read this whole review before I reveal whether I'd recommend reading James Carville's new book. I'll tell you right here in the first paragraph: You should read this book.

Let me tell you why I like this book. It isn't because it represents the most comprehensive accounting of every detail behind the unprecedented, unconstitutional assault on the person and the institution of the U.S. Presidency that Ken Starr's witch-hunt represents. Carville has been on this case for a long time. His files are extensive.

Remember, it was Carville who, back in 1994, before anyone had ever heard of Paula Jones, or Monica Lewinsky, or even knew much about Whitewater, invited the Washington, D.C. press corps to breakfast, and embarrassed them with his "Media Food Chain" chart. Carville documented for them, in great detail, the genesis of every single "Clinton scandal" story that had appeared, under the guise of Woodward and Bernstein (of Watergate fame) "investigative journalism," in the American press and media. First, the story would be published, usually in its most scurrilous and vicious form, in the British press. Then, a week or two later, the story would come out in the *Washington Times*, or the *American Spectator*, or on the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*. Finally, the story's last stop would be under the by-line of some so-called investigative reporter, in the pages of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, or some other "authoritative" outlet.

This isn't that kind of book. One can almost picture the inimitable "Ragin' Cajun" himself, who was frequently seen, during the War Room days of Bill Clinton's first Presidential

campaign, clutching a dog-eared copy of *EIR*'s 700-page *George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography*, saying, "Hell, I wasn't looking to produce some 100 pound tome that Simon & Schuster would charge \$50 bucks for, and no one could afford—let alone read! Man, I've always been a Dagnet fan! You know, 'Just the facts, ma'am.'"

Don't misunderstand me, though. It's clear that some quality research went into the book. Carville documents a whole string of unappealing facts about the appointment and tenure of Starr, starting with the fact that Starr was appointed by a panel headed by right-wing Judge David Sentelle just after Sentelle's lunch meeting with North Carolina's dynamic duo, Senators Jesse Helms and Lauch Faircloth. He "follows the money," documenting billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife's involvement in chapters on Whitewater and the Arkansas Troopers, and right-wing payola.

Starr's personal motives

Carville documents Starr's history as an attack dog for this group in the GOP, and he also establishes some pretty shocking personal motives for Starr's vendetta against Clinton. I know more than just about anybody (with the possible exception of Law Editor, Ed Spannaus) about this stuff, and I didn't know that Starr's law firm was sued by the Resolution Trust Corp., a government agency in charge of liquidating failed savings and loans (and an early target of Starr's "investigations"). Yes, indeed! There was Ken Starr, investigating the RTC for connections to a bad loan (the \$300,000 Whitewater loan) at the same time that the RTC was suing Starr's firm for aiding and abetting breaches of fiduciary responsibility in its connections to a failed savings and loan.

But, what the hell, maybe Ken Starr really was just dispassionately serving the public interest when he subpoenaed the very same people who were involved in the lawsuit against the law firm that made him a wealthy man.

Carville documents a couple of other choice facts that might cause a person, even a person who isn't a paranoid conspiracy theorist, to raise his or her eyebrows. How many American citizens know that Ken Starr represented Interna-

tional Paper, the company that sold land (and lost an awful lot of money on it) to the Whitewater Development Company? How many know that Starr was forced by Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell, who continues to be so badly victimized by Starr during these last four years, to stop representing Bell Atlantic?

Maybe, the fact that Hubbell got between Ken Starr and an awful lot of money had absolutely nothing to do with what happened to Webb Hubbell.

There's a good deal more useful stuff in Carville's book: Ken Starr's chronic leaking (to the media); the abuses of power by Ken Starr and his underlings, and more. It's fashionable among Washington journalists and Ken Starr apologists to accuse Carville of being a "junkyard dog" for the White House. It's pretty clear that Carville doesn't really give a damn about the accusations. But, it's also pretty clear that they just aren't true.

There is no question that Carville holds Bill Clinton in pretty high regard, both as a President and as a friend. But, Carville is no apologist for Bill Clinton. He writes, "he's disappointed me a few times over the years. I think it was wrong of him to sign a bill that took away the benefits of legal immigrants, who work so hard to make it in this country." He makes no secret of the fact that he thinks the President was dead wrong in signing the welfare reform bill, that it represented bad policy *and* bad politics (Carville has been quoted many times saying it probably cost the Democrats a majority in at least the House of Representatives). And, Carville nails Clinton for what may be this President's greatest flaw, "I definitely think that, to his own harm, the President has a tendency to be far too accommodating to his political enemies."

The book's most valuable insights come, not from the research files of Carville's famous Rapid Response Team. They come from James Carville's own experience as an extremely intelligent, honest, and tough political operative, fighting for a policy and a nation he truly believes in.

An encounter with Starr

Very early in the book, Carville tells a chilling story. He explains that his problems with Ken Starr began in October 1993, long before Starr was named Independent Counsel. Carville recounts sitting in Washington National Airport, waiting for his wife. "I noticed an intense, bespectacled man sidling up to me. . . . I gave him a nod and flashed him a big, friendly Serpenthed grin. Suddenly . . . this guy started spouting an unsolicited and shameful tirade against the President. 'Your boy's getting rolled,' muttered the stranger with undisguised glee." Carville jumps forward to early August 1994. He describes watching CNN when, "under the caption New Whitewater Independent Counsel, a familiar face stared back me. . . . It all came back to me with a jolt—the new independent counsel was the weirdo from the airport!"

Carville describes his obvious suspicion. When he carried



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out a preliminary background check on Starr, his suspicions were confirmed. He describes his anger, and the fact that he wrote a letter to the White House, specifically to then-Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, explaining that it was essential to warn the American people about who Ken Starr really was. He writes that he also forwarded a copy of the letter to the late Ann Devroy, a good friend of his who wrote for the *Washington Post*. He even prints the text of the letter.

Carville reports that the "powers-that-be" at the White House worried that an offensive against Starr would be counterproductive, and they begged him to withdraw the letter. He did. He says that today, he believes that getting talked out of that fight was the biggest personal error he has ever made. Carville went along with the White House advisers for two years. "Finally, in October 1996, after hearing that the taxpayer-funded Ken Starr put in an appearance at Pat Robertson's school, I couldn't take it anymore. My mother, Miss Nippy, raised me to be a fighter, and now, embarrassed by my cowardly behavior, I could no longer allow the White House to constrain me to keep quiet about something I knew in my heart was wrong. That's when I began my new campaign, the Education and Information Project (EIP)."

This guy is no junkyard dog for the White House. But, he is unquestionably one of the greatest assets President Clinton has on his side. He was right during Clinton's first campaign, when he hung the sign that said, "It's the economy, stupid," in the campaign nerve center in Little Rock. He was right when he tried to mobilize the Democratic Party to launch an all-out offensive against the Gingrichites, while the Democratic National Committee tried instead to become a second Republican Party. And, he was dead right about Ken Starr. President Clinton should listen to James Carville more often.

Yes, I recommend Carville's book. It's a good read, and James Carville is a good guy. And, finally, just getting your hands on Miss Nippy's brisket recipe (it's on page 154) is worth the cover price!