

1. AL GORE: THE BAREFOOT BOY FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

The year was 1998. William Jefferson Clinton, a Democrat from Arkansas, was in his sixth year as President of the United States. Suddenly a personal scandal of monumental proportions swept through the Clinton Administration. Monica Lewinsky, a young intern at the White House, was said to be having a love affair with Bill Clinton. The President at first denied the charges, but a stain on a blue dress belonging to Monica Lewinsky later offered scientific proof that there had been a romantic relationship between the intern and President Clinton.

The scandal was damaging enough in terms of the fact that Bill Clinton was married and the father of a college-age daughter. But there also was a legal angle. Answering a sexual harassment charge dating back to the time when Bill Clinton was the Governor of Arkansas, the President denied in a court of law that he had ever had a love affair with Monica Lewinsky. In the eyes of his critics, that made Clinton guilty of perjury, or lying when testifying in court.

The result was that the U.S. House of Representatives, which had a Republican Party majority, impeached Democratic President Bill Clinton. As the U.S. Constitution requires, Clinton's impeachment was tried in the U.S. Senate, with a two-thirds vote of the Senate required for conviction. If President Clinton had been convicted by the Senate, his presidency would have ended at that point.

The Monica Lewinsky affair and the subsequent impeachment of President Clinton split the nation sharply along partisan lines. Democrats argued that Clinton's love affair with a young woman half his age was irresponsible and immature but no more than that. Such behavior was reckless, the President's Democratic defenders said, but essentially a trifling matter.

Republicans, on the other hand, emphasized the point that President Clinton had lied "in

court" about his affair with Monica Lewinsky. The President, who had sworn to uphold the law in the United States, had instead committed a major crime, Republican zealots charged. "Lying in court," many Republicans concluded, was a serious enough crime to merit impeaching Clinton, finding him guilty, and thereby forcing him to exit the White House.

In the end, the Democrats did a better job of presenting the Monica Lewinsky affair as a trifle than the Republicans did of painting it as a crime. The Senate did not come close to the two-thirds majority needed to convict Bill Clinton and prematurely conclude his tenure as President of the United States. As he had done a number of times before, Bill Clinton survived the scandal and continued to serve out his second four-year term in the Oval Office at the White House.

But there was a fearful cost to the Democratic Party. During the more than one-year period that the Monica Lewinsky affair played itself out on the national stage, there was no positive action from the Clinton Administration. The Democratic Party agenda, which emphasized health care reform and shoring up the Social Security retirement system, was put on hold while Bill Clinton struggled to save his presidency.

Just at the time when the Monica Lewinsky unpleasantness was ending, the nation began getting ready for the year 2000 presidential election. The 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which limits presidents to two four-year terms in office, precluded Bill Clinton from running for reelection. But it was crystal clear that, although William Jefferson Clinton was about to end his eight-year stay in the White House, Clinton's character problems were going to be a major issue in the year 2000 election. The President's great political strengths - and profound personal weaknesses - would remain at center stage in United States national politics, even as Bill Clinton himself was departing.

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Albert Gore, Jr., served as Vice President throughout the entire eight years of Bill Clinton's presidency. Gore was viewed as a good Vice President, a man who performed well the wide variety of minor political and governmental chores associated with the vice presidency. As the year 2000 presidential election approached, Al Gore was rated the odds-on favorite to win the Democratic Party nomination for President and then go on to capture the White House.

Politically speaking, Albert Gore, Jr., was from Tennessee. In reality, he was a native of Washington, D.C., having been born at Columbia Hospital in the national capital on March 31, 1948. At that time, Al Gore's father, Albert Gore, Sr., was a U.S. Senator from Tennessee. The elder Gore was a somewhat rare sort of political bird. Although representing the southern state of Tennessee in the Senate, Albert Gore, Sr., was essentially a staunch liberal Democrat who strongly supported New Deal type economic reforms.

Albert Gore, Jr., spent his boyhood summers playing and working on the family farm in Carthage, Tennessee. But he essentially grew up in the District of Columbia. During the school year the younger Al Gore lived with his mother and father and older sister in Suite 809 at the Fairfax Hotel, an apartment-hotel located on downtown Washington's fashionable Embassy Row. Al Gore went to high school at St. Alban's, an upscale private school for young men. St. Alban's was noted for providing angelic-looking and heavenly-sounding choir boys to the nearby National Episcopal Cathedral.

Even when a child, an image began to emerge of Albert Gore, Jr. He seemed very anxious to please both his parents and his school teachers. He soon was being characterized as highly-structured, hard-working, ambitious, disciplined, and "anxious to get things done." But there was a

drawback to these otherwise laudable characteristics. As one of Gore's teachers at St. Alban's put it, Al Gore was a "a very competent young man" but "not scintillating."¹

After graduating from St. Alban's, the young Al Gore went to college at Harvard University. It was the late 1960s. The campus was politically aflame with opposition to the growing United States role in the war in South Vietnam. But Albert Gore, Jr., thinking ahead to a possible future political career, held back from openly protesting the Vietnam War. On graduation day, in June of 1969, hundreds of Gore's classmates raised clenched fists and stalked noisily out of the graduation ceremony to physically express their opposition to the war. Albert Gore, Jr., however, stayed quietly in his seat and received his Harvard diploma in the traditional manner.

Al Gore the younger then faced the question of whether he should join the U.S. Army and actually fight in Vietnam. One of his Harvard professors, Richard Neustadt, urged Gore to help shoulder the military burdens of his generation of young Americans. "If you want any future in politics," Professor Neustadt argued, "you've got to serve."²

The situation was further complicated by the fact that Al Gore's father, Albert Gore, Sr., was running for reelection to the U.S. Senate in 1970. It would greatly harm the elder Gore's campaign if his son evaded the military draft by getting an exemption for graduate school or used an old football injury to be declared medically ineligible. In the end, Albert Gore, Jr., joined the Army and went to Vietnam.

But the younger Gore's military service was not heroic. He was assigned to be a journalist for an Army newspaper, writing about the war rather than actually fighting in it. At one point during his tour of duty in the Vietnam War, Gore was assigned to write press releases for hometown

newspapers about the accomplishments of his fellow soldiers.

Sadly for the Gore family, the younger Al Gore's service in Vietnam did not rescue the elder Gore's political career. Albert Gore, Sr., was defeated in his bid to retain his U.S. Senate seat in 1970. The older Gore's Republican opponent, Bill Brock, portrayed Al Gore, Sr., as much too liberal for Tennessee. Al Gore, Jr., learned from his father's defeat what happens to a politician who becomes philosophically disconnected from his home state constituents.

While serving in the Army, Albert Gore, Jr., returned to Washington to marry his longtime sweetheart, Mary Elizabeth Aitcheson, known to all by the nickname "Tipper." The wedding reflected the Washington roots of the Gore family. The rehearsal dinner was held in a congressional dining room beneath the Rotunda of the Capitol building. Following the dinner, the younger members of the wedding party went bar hopping in Georgetown.

The wedding ceremony proper was held at the National Episcopal Cathedral. A tune by a legendary British rock band, the Beatles, boomed from the giant pipe organ as newly-married Al and Tipper Gore walked down the aisle together and exited the church. The wedding reception took place at the swank Belle Haven Country Club in Virginia.³

A few years after completing his tour of duty in the U.S. Army, Albert Gore, Jr., entered Tennessee politics. A Democratic Party stalwart, he eventually was elected to the United States Senate, inhabiting the same legislative halls where his father had served. The younger Gore firmly established his own political persona, so much so that by the early 1980s the name "Al Gore" stood for the young political scion of the family and not for the father.

In 1988 Al Gore made an unsuccessful try for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. Running in a crowded field of Democratic candidates, Gore lost the nomination to

Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts. Governor Dukakis in turn was defeated by the Republican candidate for President in 1988, George Herbert Walker Bush, the sitting Vice President and political heir to outgoing President Ronald Reagan.

Many observers speculated that Albert Gore's defeat in the race for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination would eliminate Gore from future consideration as a presidential contender. But political lightning struck Al Gore on Thursday, July 9, 1992. Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, who had sewed up the 1992 Democratic nomination for President in that year's presidential primaries, chose Al Gore to be his vice-presidential running mate.⁴

All at once Albert Gore was back in the national political spotlight. Bill Clinton announced his selection of Gore on the lush grass lawn of the Arkansas governor's mansion in Little Rock, the state capital. The ceremony took place at high noon with a bright sun shining. Tipper Gore and the couple's children were present as Clinton announced that he and Al Gore, two white moderate southerners, would carry the banner of the Democratic Party into the 1992 presidential election.

That 1992 campaign for the White House further polished Al Gore's national political image. Clinton and Gore and their wives, Hilary Clinton and Tipper Gore, boarded a highway bus and set off on an extended campaign tour of the Northeast and Midwest. Everywhere the bus stopped, Clinton and Gore would give a short speech to the crowd, shake as many hands as possible, and sign autographs. The news reporters were instantly enthralled with this Clinton-Gore "buscapade" as they trailed along behind in a bus of their own.

Large crowds of people, many more than originally expected, began turning out to see and hear the two Democratic candidates and their spouses as the big bus rolled across the political hinterlands. Thousands of people were content to just stand at the edge of the road and wave to the

candidates as the bus went by. Often, when the bus stopped in a sizeable city or town, Bill and Hilary Clinton and Al and Tipper Gore would appear on the stage together. The audience would loudly cheer this happy foursome, who seemed to be on a kind of political "double date" to meet and greet the voters.

The Clinton-Gore buscapade of 1992 did wonders for the popular image of Al Gore. On stage with Bill and Hillary and Tipper, the old wooden and much-too-serious Al Gore was replaced by a light-hearted campaigner who seemed to be really enjoying all the goings-on. The buscapade helped to humanize Al Gore and minimized his old reputation for being non-scintillating.

The Clinton-Gore team won the 1992 presidential election, easily defeating incumbent President George H. W. Bush in a three-way race that included independent candidate Ross Perot. On January 20, 1993, Albert Gore, Jr., was inaugurated as Vice-President of the United States. Al Gore would hold that office for eight years. He faithfully served President Clinton, staying in the background and attending to routine political chores, such as giving endless numbers of speeches at state and local Democratic Party annual dinners.

Sitting in the vice-presidential chair made Al Gore the automatic front-runner for the year 2000 Democratic nomination for President. There was widespread agreement that Gore had done a good and competent job as Vice-President. In addition, Al Gore enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Bill Clinton. The outgoing President wanted to polish the historical memory of his own presidency by having his Vice-President elected as his successor in the White House.⁵

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A number of other prominent Democrats made noises that sounded like they were going to challenge Al Gore for the year 2000 Democratic nomination. Prominent among them was Richard

Gephardt, the Democratic Party Minority Leader in the U.S. House of Representatives. But Gephardt eventually decided to devote his efforts to electing more Democrats to the House of Representatives rather than running for President.

Other Democrats who threw their political hats into the presidential ring, and then pulled those hats back out again, included Jesse Jackson, an African-American civil rights leader; Robert Kerrey, U.S. Senator from Nebraska; John Kerry, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts; and Paul Wellstone, a very liberal U.S. Senator from Minnesota.

But one man threw his hat in the presidential ring and left it there. That man was Bill Bradley, a legendary professional basketball player for the New York Knicks who, when his sports career was over, served 18-years as U.S. Senator from New Jersey. In 1996 Bradley declined to run for reelection to the Senate, saying that American politics was "broken" and that he needed time to think of better ways to govern the nation.

For two years ex-Senator Bradley traveled around the country, did some teaching, and wrote about the problems facing the United States. Then, refreshed and renewed after his two year sabbatical from politics, Bill Bradley announced that he was ready to mount a major challenge to Albert Gore, Jr., for the year 2000 Democratic nomination for President.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 1:

1. David Maraniss and Ellen Nakashima, "A Disciplined Life; Young Al Gore Thrived Within The Confines Of A Washington Childhood," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, November 29, 1999, pp. 7-10.

2. David Maraniss and Ellen Nakishima, "To Serve Or Not To Serve: Al Gore Saw Enlistment As His Only Real Option," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, February 28, 2000, pp. 6-7.

3. Ellen Nakishima and David Maraniss, "The Dutiful Soldier; Gore adjusted to the military, marriage, and Al Sr.'s defeat," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, March 6, 2000, p. 6.

4. For a detailed account of the Clinton-Gore campaign in the 1992 presidential election, see Robert D. Loevy, *The Flawed Path To The Presidency 1992; Unfairness And Inequality In The Presidential Selection Process* (Albany, NY: State University Of New York Press, 1995). For the reelection of Clinton and Gore in 1996, see Robert D. Loevy, *The Manipulated Path To The White House 1996; Maximizing Advantage In The Presidential Selection Process* (Lanham, MD: University Press Of America, 1998).

5. Mimi Hall, "Clinton And Gore Are Pair, For Better Or Worse," *USA Today*, December 10, 1999, p. 18A.