

**PL13- "THE HORNY DILEMMA: DO WE REALLY WANT A SEXUALLY FRUSTRATED PRESIDENT -- OR IS THE CLINTON SCANDAL AN OPPORTUNITY TO REDEFINE THE TYRANNICAL INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE?", SALON, 2/10/98**

**BY FRED BRANFMAN | Let's try a thought-experiment. Is it in the national interest to have a satisfied, relaxed, loose president making decisions as to whether and how to bomb Iraq? Or do we prefer a frustrated, irritable, snappish commander-in-chief determining who will live and who will die?**

**Is our nation best served by a chief executive who regularly engages in towering fits that reduce his aides to cowering children because of sexually frustrating nights spent in the presidential boudoir? Or are we and the president's hard-pressed staff better off if the chief's sexual needs are better met, even if that means allowing him more sexual freedom than most of us who live lives of quiet desperation?**

**It is curious how little examination has been given to the real issue underlying the Clinton sex scandal -- how to remain faithful to a loved spouse when it so often requires a lifetime of sexual frustration. One wonders how useful it is to force people into this Procrustean bed where millions either give up satisfying sex or cheat and lie in order to stay married to the one they love.**

**I happened to be directing presidential candidate Gary Hart's think tank in 1984 when Donna Rice came into our lives and such questions first had such a profound effect on the nation's politics. What struck me most at the time was that Hart had both behaved badly and that he had been driven to it for a decent reason: an unwillingness to leave his wife.**

**His friend Jack Nicholson's observation of Hart's behavior at the time - "Gary likes to fuck" -- provided only a partial explanation. Hart also felt a real love and/or old-fashioned loyalty toward his wife, or at least that's what sources close to them told me. Faced with living a life of sexual frustration or leaving the wife he loved, he tried to find a**

**compromise both could live with. But, in the glare of publicity, he failed.**

**This dilemma bedevils millions of Americans of both sexes, but the president has raised it to a new level of awareness. If he does survive in the White House for the next three years, it is difficult to imagine that even he will be enjoying the kind of sexual release he has been accustomed to (assuming Monica Lewinsky's alleged allegations have some truth to them).**

**In that case, America may be led by a president, possibly the first in the nation's history, who is denied the kind of release he craves to help soothe the tensions of his office. It's hard to believe that's good for the nation, however much it may satisfy those who want our man to be punished for his sins, or to provide a "role model" so that millions of young people can grow up to face the same frustration.**

**The world of the married is divided into three basic groups:**

**The few who are able over the years to experience sustained sexual pleasure with each other;**

**A larger number who accept the absence of long-term sexual satisfaction in return for other benefits, such as children, companionship, security, non-sexual love;**

**Those with high sex drives who have periodic relations with partners outside of marriage -- often lying about it to their spouses -- who also happen often to be among the more high-achieving and successful of the population.**

**Clinton, by all accounts, belongs in the last category, as do many of our senior politicians, including recent presidential candidates, as well as artists, business leaders and journalists (including those who apparently see no contradiction in criticizing the president for the same infidelity they have engaged in). And this is not just a guy thing: Polls indicate that almost as many women as men experience sexual frustration in marriage, and act out accordingly.**

**N E X T+P A G E| Is lusting in your heart better?**

**If only the president did not love his wife! What makes it so excruciating is that he does love her, but also experiences an intense desire for sex outside the marriage, in a society that has not figured out how to offer him a solution.**

**This is not to excuse our pitiful, helpless president, who if the stories are true, bears some personal responsibility for the firestorm raging around him -- especially if he lied. But the real problem lies not with his psyche but with a tyrannical institution that creates similarly irresponsible behavior in millions of men and women.**

**Would we rather have had George Bush, or Bob Dole (both of whom are rumored to have had a fling in their time), in his place? Or Gerald Ford for more than half a term?**

**Perhaps the man from Hope could have followed the advice of one of his surgeons general and embraced the joys of masturbation. Somehow, that wouldn't have cut it. The truth is he had no available sexual alternatives that would have served the national interest. And now that he's apparently been caught, it is not clear that the nation really wants him to tell the truth -- as witness his record high approval ratings. Perhaps ordinary Americans have a better understanding of the irrationality of marriage than the shocked pundits of the New York Times.**

**One could argue that Clinton should not have run for president in the first place, a choice made by many others who had trouble keeping their fly buttoned. Whatever happens, there has been, and will be, a price that Clinton will pay for his alleged deceits. But what of the nation? Is a fondness for carnality now to be a disqualification for higher office? Is the presidential gene pool to be restricted to the tepid and eternally frustrated?**

**It is not easy to separate public and private morality, although that is the direction in which American society appears to be moving. It is not impossible to imagine a situation a generation or two hence where**

**people will form genuine long-term attachments while allowing each other a far higher degree of sexual liberty than they do today.**

**If it does not, then political leadership will be continually sacrificed on the altar of scandal, or it will be limited to those who, like Richard Nixon, find outlets for their frustrations in other, more dangerous ways. There are those blessed few -- perhaps Al Gore is one of them -- who have attained a satisfying balance. But they are the exception, not the norm.**

**While the issue of sexual freedom is debated endlessly in private -- on the therapist's couch, among friends over a beer or on "Oprah" -- it is still taboo politically. But unless we want to go through this wrenching, endless cycle of scandal, we need to ask whether linking marriage and sexual fidelity, for our leaders as well as ourselves, really makes sense anymore.**

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**Fred Branfman is a regular contributor to Salon**