

NIXON

ON THE ROCKS

Director Oliver Stone has made a career out of rewriting American history to conform to his stale countercultural obsessions. But his latest effort went completely over the top, except at the box office. Oliver's twist missed—and Richard Nixon survives again.

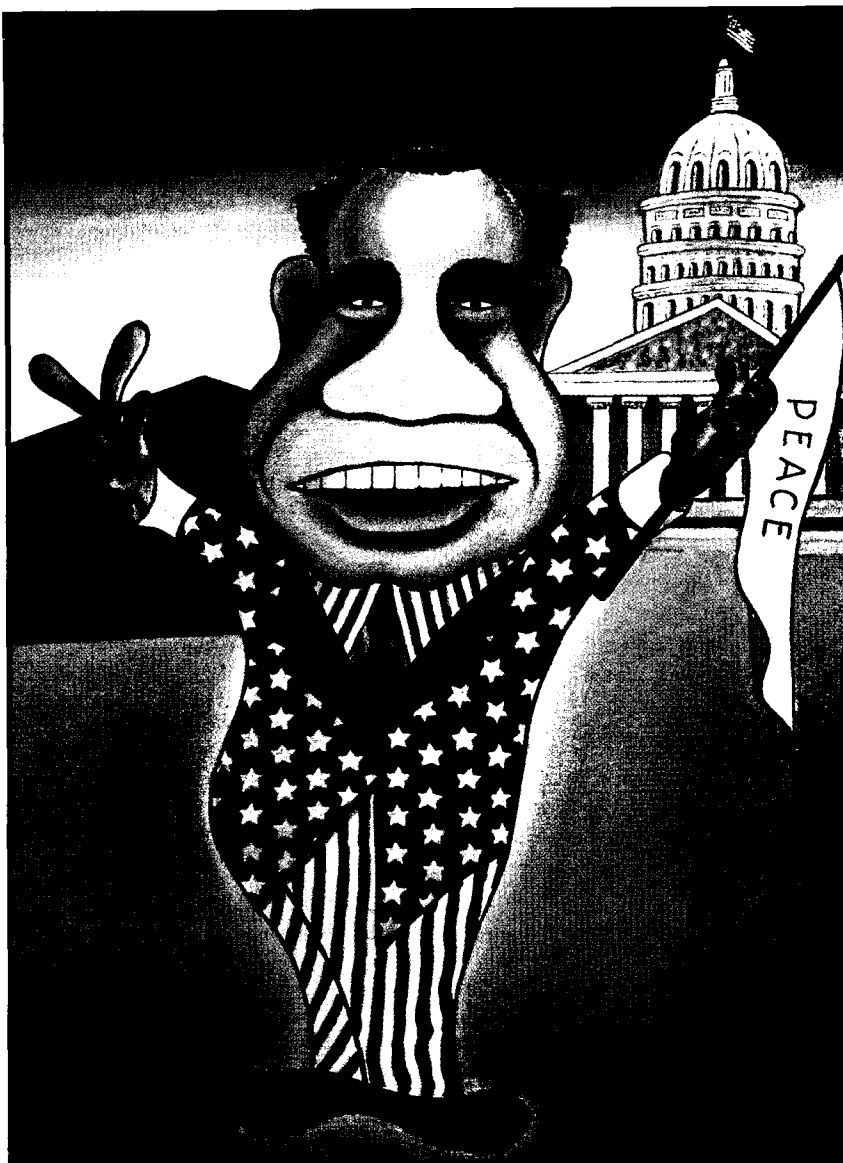
JOHN H. TAYLOR

Those who pooh-pooh Newt Gingrich's rhetoric about the legacy of the sixties should see Oliver Stone's *Nixon*. Like the Japanese soldier hunkered down on a Pacific island a generation after V-J Day, Stone has the culture war raging in his brain on continuous loop, but with one difference: \$43 million of fresh ammo from the Walt Disney Company. With all that money, and the grinding ruthlessness of the true ideologue, Stone has built a mausoleum of lies over the graves of Richard and Pat Nixon.

After fingering Lyndon Johnson in *JFK* for the Dallas caper and transforming wacky Jim Garrison into sexy Kevin Costner, Stone was widely judged to be a crank. But when he went to work on *RN*, the cultural secretariat seemed to want to clean Stone up. In the months leading up to the film's release, journalists reported that he had found Buddhism and stopped yelling at subordinates so much. Stone's flacks said *Nixon* was more carefully documented than *JFK*—and then Disney tried

to prove it by publishing an advance annotated script designed to be weighed rather than read. It was an unnecessary gesture; in this country you can say whatever you want about the dead, regardless of the feelings and rights of their heirs. The Nixon Library learned this the hard way when it obtained Stone's shooting script last May and then consulted its attorneys. Although the script did not say or show a single purely honest thing about Richard Nixon, we were told we could do nothing except speak out when the film was finally released.

Despite the Nixon family's condemnation of Stone's revisionism, some reviewers and journalists seemed happy to play along with the director. "Good Morning America," broadcast on the network Disney plans to buy, gave the film no fewer than nine promotional interviews and reviews. Snug in the lap of the surly-looking Stone, host Charlie Gibson didn't ask him to defend the slander that Nixon was complicit in the Kennedy assassination, nor did he question Stone's claim that Nixon "was one of the founding fathers of a system of political murder



in this country.” Siskel and Ebert gave Stone “two thumbs up,” but their Chicago-based program is distributed by Disney, too—and in Cook County they never learned to count anyway.

One begins to understand how thoroughly Nixon’s reputation was destroyed during Watergate after reading the review in the esteemed *Daily Variety*, which deemed the film “uncharacteristically uncontroversial.” One supposes the reviewer, and the others who wrote in the same vein, really do think that Nixon was an incompetent, venal, pill-popping, asexual, megalomaniacal drunk who bombed Cambodia because Mary Steenburgen was cold to him and plotted the assassination of Fidel Castro—thus helping bring about the death of John F. Kennedy and the destruction of his own administration. I guess a controversial scene would have

JOHN H. TAYLOR is executive director of the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace Foundation in Yorba Linda, California.

involved barnyard animals.

In 1987 Stone remarked that, during the anti-war movement, he had advised his colleagues, “If you want to protest, let’s get a sniper scope and *do* Nixon.” As the Nixon family noted when the film was released, he settled for character assassination instead, accomplished in large part by drowning his character in alcohol and profanity.

One of the first words out of Nixon’s mouth in the film is “cocksucker.” I called a number of RN’s aides, from Herb Klein to Charles Colson, and asked if they had ever heard him utter that word. None had. Nor had I, in fourteen years of virtually daily conversation. As for the drinking, I never saw him drink during the day or have more than two glasses of wine at night. His longtime aide Bob Haldeman, a Christian Scientist inclined to be judgmental about such things, frequently said that he had never seen Nixon drunk. In fact he was remarkably temperate in his personal habits, an aspect of his temperament consistent with his intellectual and political discipline.

The movie's ridiculous caricature was created by a director who insisted that he had come to empathize with his subject, which means either that Stone was lying or had previously been unaware that the thirty-seventh president walked upright or ate with a fork. The record shows that the director has been planning since President Nixon's death, if not before, to make a movie pinning the crime of the century on him, which, as empathetic acts go, is pretty weird.

A few weeks after the funeral, *Harper's* asked Stone and three others to guess what had been on the 18-and-a-half-minute gap in the June 20, 1972 Nixon White House tape that may—or may not—have been erased intentionally. Stone's submission was an imaginary dialogue between Nixon and Haldeman tying Watergate to the Kennedy assassination and telegraphing that his Kennedy demons had delivered him to Nixon's grave where he was already poised, licking his chops.

In March 1995, *Time* published a detailed summary of the major fabrications about Castro and Kennedy that Stone planned to peddle in his movie. He flatly denied the *Time* story, terming the allegation that his film was about RN's essential complicity in the Kennedy assassination "ridiculous." In a letter to the editor, Stone wrote, "Your item . . . totally misrepresents the film we are trying to make." To my knowledge nobody has called Stone on his bogus denial. In the film he has Nixon saying, "It's the lie that gets you." Stone got away with his scot free.

Tracking Stone was easy, since people close to the production kept leaking versions of the script to us—not only the May 1995 shooting script but the same one, dated February 1995 and bearing the names of Stephen J. Rivele and Christopher Wilkinson, that *Time* obtained for its story. So we know that the essence of *Nixon* was in place months before shooting began.

Yet last spring Stone began a promotional tour for the film disguised as research. Through a family contact he put the arm on Republican guru Stephen Hess to arrange a meeting in Washington with people who had served Nixon, such as counsel Leonard Garment and press secretary Ronald Ziegler. One participant told me the director was largely passive during the session, though he did have one query: "Stone did ask me if the President had smelled funny."

Stone's search for the facts then brought him and some of his adjutants to the Nixon Library for an unannounced visit. They paid their \$5.95 each and paraded around in high dudgeon: imagine Greenpeace activists in a rendering plant. "You must really *admire* him," Stone barked at a volunteer docent in the president's birthplace. Soon after, Anthony Hopkins materialized at the library along with his mother, who had flown in for the Academy Awards. He posed for pictures as President Nixon's last chief of staff, Kathy O'Connor, and I told him that Richard Nixon was a serious intellectual who as a president and as an elder statesman had spent an enormous amount of time working on the substance of what he said and wrote about the issues of the day. Hopkins kept looking nervously over our shoulders, as if afraid that G. Gordon Liddy might appear and offer to take him on a one-way ride. As soon as propriety permitted he rushed off, promising to give a fair portrayal. His mum confidently assured Kathy that "my Tony" would never say anything mean about anyone.

All of these contacts were evidently made just to be talked up by the Stone-Disney PR machine. The missions to Washington and Yorba Linda were described to every journalist who would listen as evidence that Stone's mind was still open. A letter Julie Nixon Eisenhower wrote to Mrs. Hopkins had barely landed on her tea table in London before news of it was broadcast to the world.

Meanwhile Joan Allen, who played Pat Nixon, was also hitting the books. She told a reporter that she had read and admired Mrs. Eisenhower's biography of her mother, which contains nothing about threat of divorce or her spurned sexual overtures, nor anything about the president deceiving her about his political plans—all of which appear in the movie.

Allen's was *Nixon's* most praised performance, and the actress has been a potent PR weapon for the Stone-Disney machine. She resembles Mrs. Nixon, although her eyes are blue and the First Lady's were brown. When "Good Morning America" invited her back for yet another video press release on the eve of the movie's expanded distribution the first week of January, the actress was wearing brown contacts. Did someone think that the tens of millions who admired the First Lady would be more likely to go see the movie as a result?

Her eye color was the only thing they got right. In the film Allen drunkenly says to Hopkins, "I remember Alger Hiss. I know how ugly you can be—you're capable of anything." Mrs. Nixon berating her husband for his handling of the Hiss case, of course, is inconceivable. In the book Allen says that she studied, Julie Eisenhower, quoting her father's *Six Crises*, wrote that after the Hiss case in 1948, Nixon "was subjected to an ugly campaign of false charges, some whispered, others publicly aired: 'Bigamy, forgery, drunkenness, insanity, thievery, anti-Semitism, perjury . . .'" Eisenhower continued, "For my mother, the vindictiveness of some of the Hiss supporters in the years ahead caused an irreparable crack in her idealistic view of politics."

The dishonest portrait of the Nixon marriage is by far the cruelest cut in the movie. Stone's motive is obvious. To make his character a complete pariah, he wants to isolate him even from his wife. But anyone who honestly says that this portrayal honors Pat Nixon cannot have known anything significant about her. Hearing the lines Joan Allen speaks in her behalf would have broken her heart. As all who knew Mrs. Nixon will readily affirm, she was proud of having stood by her husband, beginning with the Hiss case and ending with her death in June 1993. It was her choice to do so. How dare Stone take that away from her?

A Hiss fault line, in fact, runs all through *Nixon*. In one of the film's faux newsreels the narrator says that Hiss was convicted "not of espionage but of perjury." Of course the perjury indictments were directly related to Hiss's spying, for which he could not be charged directly because of the statute of limitations. The Rivele-Wilkinson February script simply notes that Hiss was "convicted." Stone added the pro-Hiss spin later. Since a draft of Disney's own "study guide" for the film is honest enough to reveal that "the judgment of most historians is that [Hiss] was indeed a spy," why is Oliver Stone, whose buddies in

*"There's no such thing as other people's children."**

— Hillary Rodham Clinton



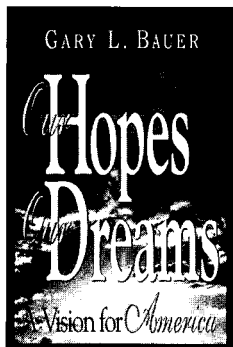
The first lady wants you to believe "it takes a village to raise a child." Gary Bauer wants you to know why the village can't replace Moms & Dads.

Mrs. Clinton actually believes "there's no such thing as other peoples' children." That's why her new book lays out ambitious plans for "the village" to raise America's children. She is determined to implement these and other plans through the power of the Federal government - radical plans that can only separate children from their parents:

- ✱ "Children's Rights" to choose their own medical treatment, education, and entertainment, even without parental consent.
- ✱ Abortion-on-demand for minors through taxpayer-funded health care.
- ✱ Explicit sex education materials for all elementary school children.

But Gary Bauer's book *Our Hopes, Our Dreams* is a pro-family alternative to the first lady's far-

reaching plans. *Our Hopes, Our Dreams* is a positive vision for America's children. It's based on self-reliant families who don't need the counterfeit authority of the global "village," or the approval of government bureaucrats, to make the vital decisions in their lives.



This pivotal debate on the family will determine the future of how you will be allowed to raise your children. *Our Hopes, Our Dreams* outlines the issues and offers practical steps to ensure that the right to raise your family stays where it belongs - at home with you.

Order your copy today, then share this pro-family vision with your friends and neighbors, your co-workers, local libraries and church groups.

\$3.99 Suggested donation | To order, call Family Research Council, or visit your local Christian bookstore

*Newsweek, January 15, 1996



1-800-225-4008

Family Research Council 700 Thirteenth Street NW, Suite 500 Washington, D.C. 20005 Gary L. Bauer, President

96AASC

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vietnam were slaughtered by Communist aggressors, still carrying water for a traitor?

Like Hiss's testimony before Nixon's House committee in 1948, the Stone-Disney annotated script is a masterpiece of dissembling. My favorite example involves the Nixons' friend Bebe Rebozo, who was also the godfather of their elder grandson. The May 1995 shooting script contains a coarse scene in which Bebe attempts to persuade Nixon to commit adultery with a young woman. Stone's people evidently discovered that Rebozo was still alive. In the published script "Bebe" is a Cuban-American called "Trini." Consulting the footnotes of which Stone and his henchmen have bragged so prodigiously, one learns, "Trini is a composite character. Richard Nixon had a number of male friends who were successful businessmen and with whom he spent time." Composite com-shmosite. Call your lawyer, Bebe! If the person who's been defamed is still breathing, it works.

In the May shooting script former CIA director Richard Helms is a blackmailer of presidents and knower of all evil regarding the Castro and Kennedy plots. When I shared a copy of the script with Helms last summer, he asked in his courtly way for permission to have his attorney write a little note to Stone. Knowing when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em, Stone cut Helms out of the picture, even though he had already filmed scenes with Sam Waterston—who must have cost him and Mickey Mouse real money. Stone even ground down John Ehrlichman's rough edges after threats of legal action.

But only Watergate buffs will appreciate the favor Stone does for his paid consultant, John Dean. The director sends up a bizarre smoke screen about Watergate and JFK. If you want to know what was really said in the famous June 23, 1972 "smoking gun" conversation, the released transcript of which drove the president from office by tying him to the Watergate cover-up, don't go to the movies; go to the National Archives or come to our museum in Yorba Linda and listen to the real tape. There's no mystery about it. Said Haldeman to the President that morning, "[John] Mitchell came up with yesterday, and John Dean analyzed very carefully last night and concludes, concurs now with Mitchell's recommendation that the only way to solve this...is for us to have [CIA Deputy Director Vernon] Walters call [acting FBI director] Pat Gray and just say, 'Stay the hell out of this...'"

Conscious that the CIA was sensitive about its failure at the Bay of Pigs, Nixon approved the suggestion, and added that Walters should mention the invasion when discussing the matter with agency director Helms. Haldeman's handwritten notes confirm that Dean had argued his case for the cover-up vigorously. The record also shows that the president personally countermanded the order just two weeks later, but that's another movie.

In 1987 Stone remarked that, during the anti-war movement, he had advised his colleagues, "If you want to protest, let's get a sniper scope and do Nixon." Here was his chance.

In their 1991 book *Silent Coup*, Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin suggest that Dean never discussed the matter with Mitchell, head of the Nixon re-election campaign, before pitching it to Haldeman. They argued that Dean wanted the cover-up launched to mask his own role in the break-in and brought Mitchell's name into the piece to get the president's attention. And so the brilliant idea that destroyed a president may have been the brainchild not of Nixon himself or Haldeman but of Stone's man Dean. If true, his ploy worked better than he could have

hoped, since RN always believed that the break-in occurred because his friend Mitchell was distracted by family troubles.

Dean and his wife have sued the authors of *Silent Coup* and its publisher, St. Martin's Press, for libel. With a trial pending, it is salutary for the Deans to have a movie stating that the Watergate cover-up was rooted not in John Dean's actions, as the White House tapes show it was, but in the Kennedy assassination. Why Stone cares enough to cover up for Dean, however, remains a mystery. Somebody should make a movie about it.

Stone's polemic has been condemned by authorities such as Stephen Ambrose, a Nixon biographer widely praised for his even-handedness, and former Tip O'Neill aide Chris Matthews; it's even been criticized, albeit more gently, by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose royalty checks from Simon & Schuster presumably swell with any anti-Nixon wave that hits shore. Although Woodstein were among the first journalists in history to get rich writing about the First Lady's sex life, even they must realize that Stone twists the knife too sadistically to be even vaguely credible. The few sympathetic scenes were inserted by a cynical propagandist who knows you can magnify a character's fundamental evil by granting him a glimmer or two of humanity and even majesty.

How to explain any praise whatsoever in respectable circles for this ferocious assault on a statesman who—in spite of his imperfections, and in the opinion of many independent observers as well as his friends—left a legacy of progressive Republicanism at home and enlightened national interest in foreign policy? It's because Stone is channeling the angst of the most sanctimonious horde ever to have established hegemony over mainstream debate in this country. A whole generation of privileged youngsters concluded that the United States was acting not imprudently or unwisely but immorally in Indochina. It remains the unifying myth of a whole generation of commentators, reviewers, college professors, editors, television producers, corporate executives—just about everybody who smoked dope to the first Jefferson Airplane record.

Stone himself said it to *People*: "It [Nixon] sums up the conscience of that time"—the conscience, that is, of people such as Oliver Stone. The director represents those, for instance, who

looked at Nixon's swift and carefully planned move into Cambodia in 1970 and saw only the four young people who died at Kent State, not the countless young people serving in Vietnam whose lives were saved because Communist military sanctuaries were cleaned out. He represents those who looked at the greatest democracy in history and saw a nation controlled by secret, unaccountable interests—he calls this agency “the beast”—that killed presidents and launched wars at will. Stone has become America's pharisee of the sixties, guardian of a cynical elite's most cherished conceits. The defining one is that they were right about Indochina, although the Vietnamese gulag and the Cambodian killing fields have long since proved they were tragically wrong.

By being as vicious as he was, Stone may have made Nixon-hating respectable for a time. Those rooted in the hard left of the sixties must have been alarmed by the outpouring of affection for Nixon at his funeral. If he stood tall historically, they reasoned, so might his achievements. So Stone panicked and overreached. His post-JFK rehabilitation was incomplete, and for Nixon he surrounded himself with unreconstructed lefties such as Robert Scheer, another paid consultant who has been one of the film's loudest defenders. In July 1969 Scheer wrote in *Ramparts*, “It is still the U.S. government which is, as Martin Luther King said shortly before his death, ‘the major purveyor of violence in the world,’ in Vietnam and elsewhere.” It's no surprise that he's playing the role of Oliver Stone's Spiro Agnew on every talk show that will have him.

After reading the script but before seeing the movie, I was afraid that young people with no direct or scholarly knowledge about the Nixon years would be swayed by its mendacity. But the movie itself seems so malicious and cruelly invasive of the Nixons' privacy that I don't think it will have much impact on what an uninformed but intelligent person of good will thinks about the Nixons. Perhaps that is an overly optimistic view in an era when even college educators have conceded that students get much of their history and current events from films and television.

But as for people who do know the record—well, I've talked to several who said they were grinning much of the time, as I was, John Williams's portentous score notwithstanding. My favorite scene was just before the credits rolled. The real Nixon spent several hours after his resignation speech working the phones and then got up at six for a plate of corned beef hash and poached eggs. Anthony Hopkins spent it wandering around in the cross hall of the White House, speaking a line to JFK's portrait that Stone cribbed from Tom Wicker. Then Joan Allen emerges from the

Stone's search for the “facts” then brought him and some of his adjutants to the Nixon Library for an unannounced visit. They paid their \$5.95 each and paraded around in high dudgeon: imagine Greenpeace activists in a rendering plant.

shadows, doing the Lady Macbeth shuffle. Hopkins lays his head on her breast. Sounding like Dylan Thomas reading “A Child's Christmas in Wales,” he says that he remembered throwing up on his mother after taking some medicine and wished he could do it again. I laughed out loud and thought that in the old days, before he mellowed, when he was young and strong and angry and terrible and making *Salvador* and *Wall Street* and *JFK*, Stone would've had the guts to go for the big play and show the President actually vomiting on the First Lady. *Everybody* would've been talking about it.

Instead, after weeks of ads and controversy, Nixon failed to crack the top ten in box office receipts. As

Disney prepared to spend millions more advertising its early January rollout to nearly a thousand screens, the director himself was reduced to sending the Nixon Library (and every journalist in the country) a letter praising our loyalty to the president—and asking us to please spend money conducting a conference about his movie. One imagines he hated signing that message almost as much as the president did his resignation letter. Maybe Mickey made him do it.

Having congratulated himself repeatedly for helping pry loose classified Kennedy assassination documents in the wake of JFK, Stone clearly hoped to relive that glory. He also proposed in his letter that the Nixon Library “join me in an effort to overcome the legal disputes of the past 21 years and facilitate the earliest possible release of the nearly four thousand hours of tape-recorded White House conversations.” Thanks anyway. For a year a federal judge in Washington has been sponsoring a mediation process in which the litigants—the late president's estate, the National Archives, and liberal Watergate scholar Stanley Kutler—have been negotiating about precisely that. The existence of the mediation is public information; the U.S. District Court is in the white pages, should Stone want confirmation.

There were a few other light moments as the extended Nixon family prepared over the course of the last year to get thoroughly Stoned over the holidays. When *Time* revealed that he planned to pin Kennedy's murder on a “Track II” apparatus personally created by Richard Nixon, Tricia Nixon Cox called me in Yorba Linda. She asked rhetorically if there wasn't anything that could be done to stop such lies about her father. I said I supposed that the president's family and friends would need to rally around in an orderly fashion to counteract the damage that Stone would inevitably do to the memories of her parents. Tricia laughed her mother's delightful laugh and said, “We'll call that Track III!”

So who's next for Stone? Hollywood wags say Dr. King, but I don't believe it. Hey, Ronald Reagan! As Johnnie Cochran might say, where were you on November Twenty-Two? ❧

When Jean Lewis began to plumb the depths of Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan in the summer of 1992, she found it teeming with possible crime. But her now-famous attempts to make it a federal case disappeared into bureaucratic murk.

So what happened? A story of political leaking and back-stabbing is now emerging, and new evidence suggests that it wasn't just a routine breakdown. White House crisis managers left fingerprints all over a Justice Department too willing to play politics. Federal law enforcers have felt interference from elected officials long before Whitewater, but the corruption has advanced apace. Lewis, a federal savings and loan investigator, was the latest of a series of dedicated workers in the field to become its victim.

In the course of doing her job, she and her colleagues filed a report that could have caused the Clintons tremendous embarrassment if it were ever acted on. It now appears that the Clintons and their friend Webster Hubbell worked to discredit the report almost from the first days of the administration. *The American Spectator* has documents showing intense activity by Clinton damage controllers as soon as the report, a criminal referral, reached the Washington bureaucracy. It was buried in the bowels of the Justice Department, in a still obscure sequence of events that is drawing the attention of the Independent Counsel. When it was finally unearthed, almost entirely because of Lewis's stubborn persis-

REBECCA BORDERS wrote about Webster Hubbell's telephone logs in our January issue. JAMES RING ADAMS is an investigative writer for *The American Spectator*.



FILLING IN

A political storm broke in 1994 after revelations that the White House had been tipped off about criminal referrals that named the Clintons in the investigation

tence, the only people punished were Lewis herself and her supervisors, who found themselves suspended from their jobs for two weeks and vilified in the press. The picture that emerges of bureaucratic intrigue and high-level manipulation is one of the most revealing of the Whitewater affair.

I. The Criminal Referral

Jean Lewis was a criminal investigator in the Kansas City office of the Resolution Trust Corporation, the temporary agency