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Trends. The Phallic Presidency

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(IBPP Note: This Trend analysis has been written by Lloyd deMause. Our guest analyst is editor of The Journal of Psychohistory and author of The History of Childhood, Jimmy Carter and American Fantasy, Foundations of Psychohistory, and Reagan's America. The analysis has been edited only in a minor way by the IBPP Editorial Board. Please send comments either to the IBPP editor or to our guest analyst at psychhst@tiac.net)

Washington, Jackson, Buchanan, Cleveland, Wilson, Harding, FDR, Eisenhower, JFK, Johnson, Bush, Clinton--adulterers, fathers of illegitimate children, prostitute chasers, sex addicts. Why do Americans so often choose as leaders men who betray and humiliate their wives with their compulsive sex affairs rather than mature men who are capable of loving their wives and not betraying them?

It is no coincidence that of the twelve presidents listed above who were womanizers, all but three also commanded major military ventures. Clinton may cut that to two if he goes ahead with his threatened bombing of Iraq. The twenty-nine other presidents were far more peaceful. Might modern nations sometimes unconsciously choose their leaders as some primitive tribes choose theirs--for their ability to conquer both women and enemies?

Clinton's threat to bomb Iraq has the approval of most Americans. In addition, according to Ramsey Clark's book, *The Children Are Dying: The Impact of Sanctions on Iraq*, our embargo already has killed one million Iraqi children--nearly as many as the number of Jewish children that were killed in the Holocaust--even though it hasn't deterred Saddam from his military preparations. It is widely believed that, as one columnist put it, "Saddam is so vile, so evil, so patently irrational that letting him get his way is simply not an option...he needs to be whacked." But a new massive bombing of Iraq is not backed by most Middle East nations, nor even by the Secretary General of the U.N., and it won't deter Saddam from anything. It will just add a new slaughter of innocents to our genocidal Embargo--as will any wider Middle East war--with Iraq having enough biological missiles to "blow away Tel Aviv" if attacked.

Sexually compulsive personalities in our leaders do not surprise us, since we are so often warned of them before we elect them. That Bill Clinton--whose mother left him at birth for two years and who had a violent, alcoholic stepfather--might have been a sex addict was suspected while he was still a candidate. As he told a reporter once, "Some people are addicted to drugs...Some to sex. We're all addicted to something." Since he remained the Democratic front-runner after admitting infidelity on 60 Minutes, perhaps his infidelities only made him more qualified to be president in our minds. The media had already widely reproduced his sexually explicit telephone conversations with Gennifer Flowers, and since the voice on her tapes was unmistakably his, we all knew it was him telling her to "hang tough...if everybody's on record denying it, you've got no problem." So when Monica Lewinsky reportedly says she was told "there were only two people in the room and if both of you say nothing happened, nothing happened," we shouldn't act surprised that Clinton might suggest lying to cover up his affairs.

I began my file on "Clinton's Sexual Addiction" during the Flowers revelations. As the file grew thick with evidence, I wasn't surprised when he was quoted in the Lewinsky tapes as saying he had affairs with

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"hundreds" of women. Even though Lewinsky reportedly exaggerates, she is neither clinically psychotic nor delusional, so her unguarded voice on the tapes isn't likely to be reporting hallucinations. While collecting evidence on Clinton's sex addiction, I have been particularly struck, by how his continuous humiliation of his wife seems to express his unconscious anger toward his mother and restages the betrayal he must have felt by her early abandonment of him--except that through his affairs he became the betrayer and his wife the betrayed. Clinical studies of sex addicts find they aren't just "expressing their drives" so much as combating desperate inner feelings of maternal abandonment, impotence and self-fragmentation through their repeated conquests of women. One must have compassion for the early traumas endured by sexual predators like JFK and Clinton, as well as for Monica Lewinsky--seduced at sixteen by her teacher. That so many American men are enjoying jokes that express a thinly-veiled admiration of Clinton's conquests only shows how dysfunctional many men still are. With Clinton's polls and the stock market both soaring to new heights, perhaps we enjoy having a phallic presidency to embody our fantasies and may soon ask Clinton to be a sacrificial scapegoat for our guilt, to pay for our six years of peace and prosperity.

That nations choose their leaders because of their personal emotional dysfunctions seems an odd notion. Of course, other nations often choose leaders--like Hitler or Saddam--who have serious emotional problems, starting wars that end by costing the lives of millions. But "not us." Yet many scholars argue that America chose JFK for his phallic, Cold War personality. Thus, it should not have surprised us when he ordered the Cuban invasion and even risked incinerating millions of Americans with Russian nuclear missiles through his Cuban embargo. During the latter crisis he stated, "If Khrushchev wants to rub my nose in the dirt, it's all over." With JFK, there was an intimate emotional link between his sexual addiction--requiring continuous conquests of mistresses and prostitutes--and his equally compulsive need for Cold War conquests.

Our use of leaders as containers for our sexual and aggressive fantasies is responsible for many of our political problems and could now lead to a useless bombing of the Iraqi people for Saddam's "rubbing our nose in the dirt." That our potency is at stake can be seen in the psychotic insight that our attack must be massive "to avoid it being a pinprick." Even if nuclear and bacteriological missile warfare is avoided, should our bombs hit the anthrax plants we claim he has built? Only American troops--not Iraqi civilians--are inoculated against anthrax. That America--deep in manic denial--may because of internal emotional problems set off a plague in the Middle East that could kill more millions could mean that Bill Clinton will not be the only sacrificial victim in this deadly tragedy.