

# The Scandalous Fall of Feminism and the “First Black President”

Melissa Deem

Feminism is always on trial. The most recent indictments occurred during the popular coverage of the Clinton/Lewinsky affair. Ironically, this time feminism was called forth to defend itself against the charge of silence. One commentator argued that this latest indictment “signifies the end of feminism as we know it.” He continues, “the once shrill voice of feminist outrage is suddenly, deafeningly still” (Horowitz 1998). These comments represent a new trend within the popular discourses concerning feminism in the United States. This may be the first moment in history when feminists have been castigated for too little speech. The “fall” of Bill Clinton (which never came to completion but saturated the political public sphere for two long years) was accompanied by another anticipated fall: the demise of feminism. Public discourse across the political spectrum heralded the “death of feminism” when commenting on the relative silence of feminists in regard to the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal. Feminism’s “silence” has been found especially noteworthy when contrasted to the loud anti-Republican pedagogy concerning sex and power with which feminists trumped patriarchy during the earlier Clarence Thomas and Bob Packwood scandals.

Feminism may be the most visibly culpable post-1960s political movement called into question by the discourses of the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, but it is certainly not alone. Clinton has come to embody a set of complaints against feminism and post-1960s racial and class politics more generally. His embodiment of minoritarian politics has been striking. Attached to Clinton’s body are all the anxieties engendered by post-1960s US racial and sexual politics. In the 1990s, Clinton became the cultural icon of the 1960s, the body traumatized by a decade that transformed and, by some accounts, destroyed and degraded American politics and civic life (Shalit 1997; Lears 1998; Rosen 1998; Beinart 1999; Ponnuru 1999; Shapiro 1999). From the discourses of addiction and abuse to redemption and healing through shared pain, Clinton is encumbered by history as the post-civil-rights president who bears the trauma of a degraded America. Women and African Americans are represented as the two major categories of citizens who support Bill Clinton without question. Not incidentally, it is the

transformations in the positioning of African Americans (male) and women (white) which undergird post-1960s political change.

This chapter addresses the way in which the fate of post-1960s leftist political movements was tightly bound to that of Bill Clinton as the emergent mainstream narrative demonized both Clinton and feminism, while simultaneously reducing African Americans to “dupes.” Feminism and racial politics are left compromised by the scandal. Clinton ultimately regained his “zone of privacy” (Berlant 1997), allowing for the reconstitution of the majoritarian body. The purpose of this analysis of the popular trials of feminism and the racializing rhetorics of Clinton is to call for an expanded field of reference, and hence a more challenging representational space, for minoritarian politics in the United States. The field of reference for these discourses must be expanded in order to create possibilities for multiplying the painfully constricted speaking positions which are currently possible. Readings of the discourses positioning feminists and African Americans are necessary for identifying the different strategies of reference which work to produce certain descriptions. I examine the production of speaking positions within these discourses which situate feminism as hypocritical and African Americans as dupes. Thematizing these structures may open spaces for the creation of effective strategies for minoritarian politics within US public culture.

By telling a story of Clinton/feminism in the intimate public sphere, I want to change the conditions of possibility for feminism by enabling a space of internal difference. In order to multiply the political possibilities for feminism, I argue for the necessity of radically recontextualizing feminism in the public sphere such that it can be viewed as a contextual practice. The field of reference for feminism within the popular must be expanded in order to disarticulate feminism from its representation as a moral dogma. The production of new histories that allow for the complexity of feminism’s contextual political practices is crucial.

The struggle in the contemporary public sphere over the space of feminism is instructive as a struggle over the space of history. In this case, “the personal is political” is blamed for the problem of compromising leftist and feminist positions, the nation, and civility since the 1960s. Feminism and other minoritarian politics and practices are reduced to complaints within the public sphere partly through “paramnesiac” morality mongering. In order to best understand these positions and the place of the “personal” it is necessary to engage public discourses. At particular moments, political politics becomes public/popular culture through the site of scandal. This intermingling can be seen as producing key moments for understanding the strategies of reference involved in producing particular descriptions, descriptions that have everything to do with what is possible within a particular context. The becoming popular of political politics demonstrates that something is at stake, in this case, beyond the fate of the president – specifically feminism, race and leftist politics. Morris (1988) interrogates the relationship of leftist intellectual work to the popular and argues for the need to learn from the theories that circulate in and as the popular. It is important to pay attention to moments of optimism as well as moments of failure

(Morris 1990). However, within the critical practice of Cultural Studies, political politics and cultural politics are often at odds, with often little engagement of their intersections (Morris 1990; Berube 1994) and hence opportunities for political effectiveness are missed.

Cultural Studies, like feminism, has been accused by the right and the left of being caught up in identity politics. Cultural Studies, often regardless of the multiple practices which circulate under its sign, is attacked for partaking in the politics of identity. Identity politics and political correctness become the signs under which Cultural Studies and leftist political practices more generally are disciplined within the public sphere (Grossberg 1992; Berube 1994; Brown 1995; Roiphe 1993; Gubar 2000). Any position which advances a politics concerned with race, gender, sexuality, and class is too easily conflated with regressive politics and hence easily dismissed. Contrary to this position, I want to take seriously Berlant's (1988) claim that identity is being deployed by the right through a rhetoric and affect of intimacy within the public sphere. The struggle within public culture over the categories of identity is fierce and most often employed to contain and limit the authority of those on the cultural left. The strategies of delegitimation of feminism, race politics, and Cultural Studies work to contain the radical possibilities of these political projects. It is important that those working within Cultural Studies read these discourses and examine their rhetorical practices in order to develop multiple and provisional political strategies that do not simply accept the terms of the debate as they are given.

I want to embed this analysis within a discussion of the critical practice of Cultural Studies in the hope that lessons can be learned from the rhetorical machinations involved in compromising feminism and racial politics. Cultural Studies can learn from feminism the necessity of a self-awareness of the political discourses which circulate around its name. Feminism has never had the "luxury" of being an academic discourse disarticulated from the political activism and practices of women within public and everyday life. Cultural Studies, on the other hand, has no such direct connection to public political activities. In this sense, Cultural Studies has not been forced by necessity into the self-awareness that feminism has developed. Hence feminism is not only an intellectual/political project, but an object of study. Feminism is continually studying its own circulation. Cultural Studies, while engaged in debates around its status as a discipline, has not often engaged itself as an object of study within public life. Cultural Studies must develop more of an awareness of its own circulation. The popular debates over political correctness and identity politics have done much to represent Cultural Studies within public discourses as a morally dogmatic and inconsistent intellectual practice. This representation is foisted upon Cultural Studies, allowing the latter no power in its representational politics. Following Morris (1990) these moments of failure are also important sites of study and can prove instructive for future practice. In this sense, it is important for feminism, minoritarian politics, and Cultural Studies to be objects of study at particular moments, and as I argue in this paper, the site of scandal becomes one such

moment. Feminism, racial politics, and Cultural Studies are scandalous, and importantly it is at this site of scandal that political politics and cultural politics come together.

Feminism may be most culpable for the national trauma and the concomitant degradation of civic life; however, it is not alone among 1960s political movements to be vilified by the discourses on Clinton. This nostalgia yearns for a time when public discourse was clean, and the iconic masculine body retained the prophylaxis of the nation to shield his physicality. In many ways, the discourses on Clinton can be read as overt and insidious attacks against the transformations in US public culture – the publicness of minoritarian politics and bodies. These corporeal inscriptions demonstrate yet again the interrelatedness of the transformations in US culture wrought by minoritarian politics. Simply put, this is just the latest narrative of heteronormative majoritarian culture, the story of humiliation, degradation, trauma, and desire for the national body.

### Scandal, Civility, and Post-1960s Nostalgia

It might be commonplace to say that public discourse often proceeds from scandal to scandal. In relation to feminism in the public sphere, however, the logic of scandal seems to take on specific characteristics. The feminist discourses circulating in and through the Clinton sex scandal demonstrate, yet again, that the primary manner in which feminism gains access to majoritarian political space is through anxiety over the bodies of men (see also Deem 1996). In this instance, the hypermasculinized iconic figure of the “most powerful” man in the world, the US President, provides the grounds for feminism’s prominence. The “failure” of feminists to condemn Clinton outright and take a stand for an unmitigated sisterhood has served as a rallying cry for a virulent attack against feminism. Thus, the Clinton sex scandal serves as an object lesson for feminism in the national public sphere regarding the mechanisms of containment and discipline that operate to contain, reduce, and obfuscate feminism within the political. Feminism has variously been charged with hypocrisy for failing to take a stand on the scandal and also for supporting only certain women as sisters (Kathleen Willey but not Paula Jones or Monica Lewinsky). At the same time, feminism is held responsible for the intimate turn within the political by changing that which is appropriate for public discourse. Feminism and Clinton are both charged with bringing into public discourse the intimate aspects of peoples’ lives (Taylor 1998). Thus, feminism stands accused of hypocrisy and the degradation of public discourse – which is to say, it stands accused of the degradation of morals.

Feminists might rather discuss the implications of the 1996 Personal Responsibility Act or the effects of NAFTA, but they are called forth to testify most often when the issue is one of sexual conduct. Within the contemporary political climate, sexual harassment has become the sign of feminism. Feminism is

reduced to a molar politics aligned with the state and juridical apparatus. Yet even within these discourses, it is not masculinist conduct held up for scrutiny but the fracturing and splintering of women and the “sisterhood” as feminism loses its moral undergirding by doing anything other than conform to a particular dogma. The “cramped space” of feminism within the national political imaginary severely constricts the possibilities of feminist positions.

While the discourses surrounding President Clinton’s sexual exploits may be seen by many as trivial, sensational, and most of all not properly the “public’s” concern, the discourses mark an important moment in the multiple mechanisms of containment for female and feminist speech within majoritarian political space. Discourses concerning feminism have yet again entered the political imaginary. Not, however, to herald the positive transformations of US public culture wrought by feminism, or over the commemorations of feminism’s past (the 150th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Rights and Sentiments and the Woman’s Movement in 1998), but instead over the indecorous “Malthusian” erotic proclivities of President Bill Clinton. This is not the first time that Clinton and feminism have been linked in the national political imaginary, or the first time that the vagaries of the majoritarian male body have propeled feminism onto center stage. And it is not the first time that feminists’ relationship to Clinton has resulted in the disciplining and indictment of feminism.

This move to the majoritarian body and the policing of previously “personal” practices requires a complex reexamination of the place of intimacy and the “personal” within public sphere politics. Lauren Berlant (1997) argues that “intimacy has been transformed from a private relation to a structuring aspect and affect of citizenship in the contemporary US public sphere” (p. 131). The point is not so much that the intimate aspects of people’s lives are media fodder but that their nonfamilial sexual practices are at odds with the familial intimacy which structures US public culture – hence the rebuke of any engaged in sexual practices not in line with familial intimacy. Importantly, it is not the influence of identity politics or feminist discourse that has wrought such change to public discourse, but rather the conservative Right which has brought about the intimate transformation of public discourse in order to preserve majoritarian identity (Berlant 1997). Of course, the assaults on the body of the president, the iconic figure of masculinity, bring about a palpable anxiety over the vulnerability of the majoritarian body. Placing feminism in such a powerful position in this transformation works to shield Reaganite politics at the expense of feminism.

Familial politics have collapsed the personal and the political into a world of “public intimacy” (Berlant 1997: 1). The Clinton scandal has precipitated a mass experience of sexual unease. Clinton is a stunning example of an icon losing the protections and accoutrements of national iconicity. He is a politician who has been seen to have lost and then regained his “zone of privacy.” The zone of trauma around the body of the masculinist icon turns to a form of political therapy and redemption to end the suffering and trauma of the national body.

Rather than see the political as a space of struggle over racial, sexual, and economic inequality, “the dominant idea marketed by patriotic traditionalists is a core nation whose survival depends on personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domain of the quotidian” (Berlant 1997: 4). Clinton is decried as unfit to be a citizen-president, not because of his civic acts, but because of personal acts of nonfamilial sex. This is clearly demonstrated by the continuing irrelevance of his possible financial malfeasance to his standing in polls. Scandal is the site within US public culture for the policing of nonfamilial forms of intimacy through the trauma of the national body. The therapeutic discourses of addiction dominate as an explanation of nonfamilial forms of intimacy (Clemetson & Wingert 1998; Handy 1998; Steinem 1998; Franks 1999; Rich 1999). A nostalgia permeates public discourses for a time when the zone of privacy was intact and feminists had not yet destroyed the political. Feminists are blamed for the national trauma, the crisis in the regime. Feminism stands in as the cause of national suffering.

Familial intimacy joins comfortably with the contemporary interest in civility in public life. One of the features of traditional male privilege that is most glaringly violated or transformed in this scandal is the privileged position of male lockerroom talk. In fact, one could argue that the nation has been transformed into a lockerroom. Speculations run rampant about Clinton and Vernon Jordon bonding over “pussy jokes” as late night comedians have produced an extensive repertoire on the scandal. The nation’s newspaper publishers have been forced to publish “a document that fused civic, legal and sexual issues into one seamless, X-rated package” (Barringer 1998: 27). Daytime television has been forced to run explicit sexual language warnings before presidential testimony. Newt Gingrich has lectured members of the House about decorum, saying, “Freedom of speech in debate does not mean license to indulge in personal abuses or ridicule” (quoted in Berke 1998: 1). Even Ken Starr’s report can be classified as government-produced pornography. Clinton has been charged with lowering the standards of public discourse; representatives of the antifeminist “Concerned Women for America,” for example, have claimed that he brought this low culture to the nation. This lack of “erotic decorum” is exhibited by the national fascination with the stained dress of Monica Lewinsky and the specificity of the sexual practices that constitute sex. The president is blamed for having brought to new lows this kind of intimate talk, while feminists are blamed for having started it all. A veritable industry has sprung up around speculations over the details of Clinton’s sexual exploits as well as his sexual taste. It is not incidental that Clinton is charged with lowering cultural standards of civil discourse. After all, he is the “white trash president” from Hope who has a taste for women with “big hair and bad pumps” (Feirstein & Peretz 1998). Clinton is most certainly not the first president to have indulged in extramarital sex; however, he is the most closely linked to sexual politics in recent history with his “defense” of gay and lesbian rights, gender equity, and reproductive freedom, as well as his own sexual exploits which have earned him such nicknames as

the “Viagra Kid” (Rich 1998; Dowd 1998; Grann 1998). Bob Dole, the spokesperson for Viagra, may have become the butt of jokes, but he did not lose his “zone of privacy” through admissions of erectile dysfunction and the use and promotion of Viagra to treat this condition. Dole ingests Viagra in the service of national familial intimacy. Thus his consumption becomes an act of citizenship as it enables him to perform the very quotidian acts that situate him within a certain patriotic traditionalism.

### The National Body Minoritized

The relatively recent attention paid to the previously shielded masculine body has led the online magazine *Suck* (1998) to name the 1990s the “decade of the penis.” Even as white masculinity is the privileged site of political agency, so also has it become commodified and hyperembodied. The majoritarian body has been rendered visible, vulnerable, and traumatized with the prophylaxes of the nation no longer functioning to shield its visibility (Warner 1993; Berlant 1997). When white heterosexual masculinity has lost many of the protections of abstraction – when political figures have lost their privacy – Clinton stands as exemplar of the national body minoritized. It is precisely the site of masculine sameness (the decade of the penis, whereby the racial, class, and sexual differences which break the homogeneity of the masculine are elided), which betrays the cultural panic underwriting the move to gender and racial equity (Wiegman 1995).

Ironically, it is through this minoritization that class, race, and sexual politics are brought into public discourse. The minoritizing of the white heterosexual male body is situated precisely in the contradiction of citizenship. The recalcitrance of the privilege of corporeal abstraction for white masculinity functions within a “visual culture predicated on a commodification of those very identities minoritized by the discourses and social organizations of enlightened democracy” (Wiegman 1995: 49). In tension are the visual’s increasing demand for difference and citizenship’s “philosophic dis-incorporation” as embedded within privileged bodies. Wiegman has demonstrated how the disciplinary regime of visibility, working through an anatomical logic, commodifies minoritarian bodies. However, in this case, it is the majoritarian body *par excellence* which is minoritized by this regime. Within this visual terrain of the mass-mediated public, the specificities and positivities of all bodies do not signify equally (Warner 1993; Wiegman 1995). In the case of Clinton, the process of minoritizing the national body becomes a ruse for undermining post-1960s political transformations around race, sexuality, class, and gender. It is not Clinton who is damaged, but minoritarian politics.

Hyperembodiment functions through the denial of any “private” bodily space as “Clinton” is consumed by minor excesses. For Clinton, the loss of masculine privilege through intimate publicity is complicated by the complex discourses articulated through his body: Democrat, hypersexual, hyperconsumptive,

Southern, feminized affect, rapacious appetites, woman, and “black.” Clinton’s body has been traumatized by the movements for social justice and reform that he has been seen to represent and that have been “compromised” by his “fall.”

The intersections of the body of the president, minoritarian politics, and the crisis of the regime are revealing. The crisis of the regime is explicitly linked to the sexual proclivities, or more accurately the sexual prowess of the president. Toby Miller (1998) has argued that the ubiquitous “First Penis” and the health of the regime connect over anxieties of governance. Clinton, through his hypersexuality, has been transformed from a masculine body of governance into a sexual body which cannot govern itself, let alone govern others. The ability of the “Comeback Kid” (Brookhiser 1998) to reconstitute the masculine body of the president has media pundits acting as if the future of the national regime is at stake (Goldstein 1998). Goldstein claims that media coverage has put “male hysteria on the map” (p. 67). In fact, this male hysteria concerns the transformation of iconic masculinity within the national imaginary.

According to Goldstein, Clinton draws so much fire because he represents a far more fundamental shift in masculinity than John F. Kennedy ever did. JFK functioned as a traditional icon of masculinity, while Clinton’s iconic masculinity is saturated with affect: “I feel your pain.” Specifically, he feels the pain of women. This “feminization” of masculine power produces in Clinton an ability to “project affect” (Goldstein 1998). However, this “feminization” does more as it is clearly coupled with a transformation in class politics. What Goldstein has neglected is the crucial role of the Kennedy women – specifically Jackie Kennedy – in shoring up this heteronormative fantasy of masculinity. The decorous aristocratic woman who always knows her place, both in public and in relation to her husband, is what undergirds the masculinist regime. Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to know her place and continually transgresses the proper role of women and the first lady (Campbell 1998). Hillary is referred to as a “ball breaker,” “a lesbian,” and “a congenital liar”; the “nightmare image of potent woman” (Goldstein 1998: 67). So, even while Clinton’s sexual exploits are well known, the image of the strong wife and the “bimbo” flings undermine the shoring up of traditional masculinity.

Feminism has been placed in an impossible position: to challenge Starr equals hypocrisy, and to question Clinton is prudery. Robust attacks on feminists have flourished in the media accounts of the scandal. Female supporters of Clinton are assumed to bear any humiliation rather than “abandon their guy.” Feminism is depicted as selling out for political goals (O’Beirne 1998; Podhoretz 1998). Morality and purity of principle is the domain of feminism. In this way, when feminists act strategically in a given situation they are defiled by the world of politics, a world they should be above inhabiting. When feminists exhibit any political acumen they are hypocrites, and each individual woman who doesn’t fall in line invalidates feminism. Borger (1998a) exemplifies this approach impeccably as she argues, “Sisters, we have a problem” (p. 33). She claims that the “personal is political” is not even needed to show feminists the contradictions

of their position on Clinton because, more importantly, feminists used to personify the virtue of an insistence on principle. Instead of feminists leading the cry for virtue, they are being politically expedient. Thereby, a feminist history of purity of purpose which constrains possibilities and serves as a moral yardstick with which to measure feminism is constructed. In fact, the discovery that feminism is political has revealed it to be the “Democratic Party in drag” (Podhoretz 1998: 26). Feminism is caught within discursive traps that restrict the possibilities of women and feminists to articulate positions within the political. Consequently, feminism is in a bind: either it must refuse to speak or it must speak but not fulfil stereotypes.

The argument from the left merely repeats that from the right as it both exhibits an anxiety about transformations in masculinity and shores up traditional masculinity, again at the expense of feminists. Christopher Hitchens (1998), in an article entitled “Viagra Falls,” indicts feminism for lowering the bar on what constitutes consensual sex by putting feminism into a context of hypermasculine heteronormativity. Feminism has been “cowed” by the “hydraulic of patriarchy” (p. 8). The “cowing” of feminism by the powers of patriarchy and its reinvigoration from a pharmacological fix is reiterated by Bob Guccione (1998), the publisher of *Penthouse*, who claimed that, “Feminism has emasculated the American male, and that emasculation has led to physical problems. This pill [Viagra] will take the pressure off men. It will lead to new relationships between men and women and undercut the feminist agenda” (p. 56). The transformations of gender relations in US public culture are stymied by the political performance of a newly reinvigorated masculinity. The reconstituted majoritarian body invests Clinton with renewed masculine vigor.

Clinton’s power over feminists reconstitutes the masculine sexuality lost by the “ball-breaking” wife, whose image is now mediated by her victimage and loyalty as she stands by her man and thereby compromises not only herself, but feminism as well. Hillary as both feminist icon (though Hillary Clinton herself has carefully avoided identifying herself as feminist) and betrayer of feminism saturates the media discourses. Margaret Talbot (1998) in “Wife Story” not only inscribes Hillary as feminist icon, but as with Hitchens, levels all of feminism through an indictment of Hillary. Hillary has not only damaged her own image, but ironically enough, the gender politics of the Clinton administration. Talbot supports this last accusation by charging Hillary with colluding with the administration on its “bashing” of the women who have accused Bill Clinton of misconduct. As if this were not enough, Talbot also claims that by staying with Bill Clinton, she has compromised the “internal consistency of contemporary feminism” (p. 19). All feminism, embodied in Hillary, becomes the accomplice of Clinton. What enables Talbot to perform such a rhetorical maneuver is her indictment of feminism for popularizing the slogan “the personal is political.” Feminists are caught in a bind. They are accused of producing the problem by violating the domain of the personal, while all of feminist politics are reduced to the personal. Hence, the relationship of feminism to Bill Clinton becomes

analogous to Hillary's relationship with Bill, thereby further metonymically reducing feminisms' complex relations to the state and masculine authority. Talbot further condemns feminism for not meeting the demands of sisterhood, which for her and others is the unequivocal, univocal support of *all* women.

The scandal surrounding President Clinton's sexual exploits has much to say about the containment of feminism, the proliferation of intimacy, and the concomitant crisis in the national body. Feminism is captured by a double movement of majoritarian discursive containment. First, heteronormative logics cast feminists as women desirous of their oppressor (in this case Clinton). These very logics conflate women and feminism, before reducing all women/feminists to the same through the homogenizing trope of sisterhood. In this way, any woman is pre-supposed to speak in the name of feminism, regardless of her political positioning, on the assumption that her "sex" gives her privileged access to the inside story of the feminist establishment. Any feminist who does not support all women all the time (at stake is what constitutes support) is then held up as a hypocrite and a traitor to the sisterhood. The conflation of the female body and feminism has proven disastrous for feminism, producing a regime in which bodily and linguistic deportment are highly surveilled and disciplined. This hyperpoliticization demands of all feminists/women complete consistency between deportment, speech, politics, and the body. Second, feminism's containment functions through reductive and paramnesiac historical representations. Feminisms and feminists are cast within a narrative of moral purity and consistency between "public" politics and "private" life which prevents feminism from either being grounded within a complex history or from being a contextual practice.

### Lynching the President

Just as the fate of feminism has been read onto Clinton's body, so has his relationship with African Americans and civil rights politics. As his fall has been embodied in feminism's own fall, so has he come to embody "blackness." The articulation of hypervirility (he is the Viagra kid) and tropes of blackness are not incidental given the historical depictions of black hypersexuality in US public culture. The predatory hypersexuality of the African American male articulated through rape narratives and the publicly available sexuality of the African American female have never been afforded the zone of privacy attached to the majoritarian body (Davis 1981; Giddings 1984; Collins 1991; Carby 1992; Morrison 1992; Wiegman 1995).

Clinton's relationship to civil rights as well as his relationship to individual African Americans has been called into question. He has been vilified for his friendship with Vernon Jordan, his spiritual relationship with Jesse Jackson, his legal relationship to Deputy White House Council Cheryl Mills, and his trip to Africa (Bates 1998; Jackson 1998; Lavelle 1998; French 1999). Wiegman (1995) argues that depictions of interracial fraternity come to signify the

post-civil-rights era. The cultural panic over race and gender transformations can be read through Clinton's "fraternity" with African Americans. *Primary Colors*, which can be read as indicative of the popular discourses on Clinton, calls into question his relationships with African Americans, inscribes Clinton within a discourse of corporeal excess, and situates Clinton within a narrative of betrayal of the political ideals and constituencies of 1960s radicalism (Anonymous 1996).

Not only is Clinton questioned for his "use" of race, African Americans have been questioned for their support of Clinton. The arguments on race in some ways mirror those on feminism, with a critical difference. While it has been argued that race politics have been damaged by African American supporters of Clinton such as John Lewis, civil rights is not compromised as completely as feminism. Instead of being represented as hypocritical, African Americans are merely "dupes." The political platform of raced-based politics is damaged while feminism is simply destroyed. Culpability for the damage to racial politics, however, does not rest with those involved. Instead, Clinton's diabolical use of race through his racially galvanizing rhetoric is indicted.

Toni Morrison (1998), writing in the *New Yorker*, offered what has become a highly controversial reading of black male support for Clinton. She turns not only to the history of racial prejudice and violence but to the inscriptions of Clinton's body to explain why the majority of African American men do not condemn Clinton and in fact understand the dynamics of the scandal. Morrison simply states, "white skin notwithstanding, this is our first black president. Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime" (p. 32). Morrison dislodges the dominant practice of reading race as visible anatomical markers and resituates race within a complex field of racializing cultural practices. It is, in fact, Clinton's embodiment of almost every trope of blackness that leads Morrison to her conclusion: he's the iconic "single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone-playing, McDonald's and junk-food loving boy from Arkansas" (p. 32). Morrison reads the "disappearance" of virtually all of Clinton's African American appointees coupled with the focus on the president's body, his privacy, and his sexuality, as metaphoric seizure and body search. So, rather than support the charge that Clinton "sells out" women and minorities, Morrison is able to rearticulate these discourses as part and parcel of the anti-Clinton/black fervor within US public culture. Black men know what is being said: "No matter how smart you are, how hard you work, how much coin you earn for us, we will put you in your place or put you out of the place you have, albeit with our permission, achieved" (p. 32). The targeting of Clinton and the criminalization of his life not only tramples crucial freedoms, but becomes part of a rhetorical chain proceeding from "targeting" through "lynching," and "crucifixion," which joins Clinton with the history of black oppression in this country. For Morrison, the "*coup d'état*," which is a danger to the nation, is not the president's conduct, but the history of racial violence within US public culture which now adheres to the president's body.

In an interview on election eve (Nov. 1998), Tavis Smiley asks Bill Clinton to discuss this racial inscription by reflecting on the politics of hate that are directed at Hillary Rodham Clinton and himself. Smiley suggests that many African Americans feel that it is not just his support of “African American political issues,” but his very comfort with “black folk and other people of color, and women” (p. 2235) that have led to his vilification. In questioning Clinton, Smiley turns to Morrison’s *New Yorker* piece and says that “a lot of black folk feel” that Clinton is indeed the first black president (p. 2235). He then asks if the attacks against Clinton have in fact been motivated by Clinton’s openness to diversity. Clinton gives a noncommittal response that emphasizes his abiding love of diversity, which was instilled in him by his mother and grandparents.

Even Congressional leaders such as Cynthia McKinney (1998, *Jet*) have argued that, while she deplores Clinton’s conduct, opponents of Clinton’s policies “are trying to lynch him during a congressional trial” (p. 8). By embedding Clinton into a history of African American torture and spectacle through lynching, McKinney inscribes Clinton as raced. Ida Lewis called forth this corporealized cultural memory even more vividly in an open letter published in *Crisis*, “To those who fail to understand why the majority of African-Americans do not support the removal of President Clinton” (p. 5). Lewis argues that it is precisely Clinton’s antiracism and his “American Rainbow Administration” that has brought forth the right-wing attacks against him. In fact, Lewis terms these attacks a “bloodless” *coup d’état* that is televised and “inked in black.” Not only does Lewis depict the scandal as part of the strategies of “media lynchings” and “electronic assassination” of the right wing, she depicts the current scandal as the “Niggerization of Bill Clinton” (p. 5). Lewis is quite powerful in her claim that the conservative Right is indeed putting the nation in peril through their attacks: “The result is that they are decapitating the office he holds, and the constituencies whose will he embodies, as surely as the good ole boys of Jasper, Texas, last June reduced decency, humanity, and compassion to bloody clumps of torn flesh littering a country road” (p. 5). Lewis concludes that as far as the Right is concerned, Clinton made the unforgivable error; he betrayed their trust by “giving access to people of color and women based on merit” (p. 5).

Clinton as the “first black president” was not ignored by conservative commentators. Walter Shapiro (1999) leads the virulent attacks against Clinton as both black and female. In the article “Blind Faith,” Shapiro finds the mystery to be “the collective decision by the leading lights of American liberalism to serve as Clinton’s enablers” (p. 12). Shapiro links Clinton’s body with that of “another lustily oversized Democratic president (Grover Cleveland)” in a revealing move before proceeding to an anti-impeachment rally at NYU (p. 13). What Shapiro found most memorable at the rally was “novelist Mary Gordon gushing over Clinton without a tinge of irony: ‘Toni Morrison said that he may be our first black president. He may also be our first female president’” (p. 13). Shapiro finds the claim so ludicrous as to be transparent. It is a short slide from collapsing the “self-centered values of the American left” (p. 13) to the expedient politics of

race and gender. For Shapiro, as for so many of the conservative pundits, Clinton embodies the post-1960s cultural revolution, the politics of which are discredited through his fall. The attack therefore is not focused on Clinton, but the entire Left.

Jay Nordlinger (1999), writing in the *National Review*, moves from an indictment of Clinton to an indictment of the way white liberals used race during the Clinton scandal. He argues that if you were tempted to forget that the house managers in charge of the case against Clinton were white, Democrats and their “cheerleaders in the media” reminded you every two seconds (p. 20). Nordlinger sarcastically asks, “So, you hadn’t realized the Clinton scandal was about race?” (p. 20). Even though to the “tranquil” mind it seems far afield, this scandal is actually about race. For Nordlinger, a complex history of racial discrimination is not the reason. Instead, race has become an issue because, “black political leaders made it that way. So, to an extent did white demagogues on the Democratic left. But Bill Clinton, more than anyone else, is responsible. He plays race as shrewdly as any southern governor” and, contrary to his “healer image,” Clinton has aggravated the nation’s “racial sores.” Nordlinger further argues that when Clinton is in trouble, he reaches for black people “as if for a shield” (pp. 20–2). In effect, Clinton serves as a shield for racist politics. Of course, as I argued earlier it is through attacking Clinton that this rhetorical strategy functions to discredit African Americans. They may not be dangerous, but they are certainly gullible in Nordlinger’s reading. Further, African Americans who are either in close proximity with Clinton and/or who have achieved national prominence are simply used. As Nordlinger argues, “for a liberal of his type, there is no higher validation of goodness than the approval of black people. It washes away every complaint” (p. 22). Clinton was able to link his political survival to the cause of black progress. In this manner, the “moral capital of a beloved movement [was] spent on Clinton.” Clinton, by this logic, played race in an event that had nothing whatsoever to do with race. Casting himself as the defender of African Americans, Nordlinger concludes with the patronizing assertion that there is enough to hurt African Americans without reading race where it isn’t. Whereas feminists are culpable, African Americans are exploitable.

What is most striking in the contrast between depictions of African American Clinton supporters and the detractors is the ability to discuss race as an historically situated and complex category. The history of racism in the United States has figured within the political imaginary of Black America in quite graphic ways. Alexander (1994) argues that “Black bodies in pain have been an American national spectacle for centuries” (p. 78). The archive of collective pain has traveled from public rapes, lynchings, and beatings to the 1990s display of African American bodies on video tapes exhibiting national trauma. The spectacle of the consumption of black bodies for a largely white audience has dominated black experience in the United States (Alexander 1994). Minoritarian historical memory produces a different reading of the Clinton spectacle, one attuned to histories of racialized spectacles for the national body. In this manner,

the history of “lynching” as a disciplinary apparatus comes to bear during the virulent attacks and technologies of surveillance cohering around Clinton’s body. Lynching is an historically raced practice that punishes transgression and polices borders that have become too permeable. These practices break the “rhetorical homogeneity” of masculinity along racial lines (Wiegman 1995). In this context, the minoritization of Clinton’s body can be articulated to African American masculinity.

African American masculinity, with its predatory sexuality, has never been afforded the zone of privacy of the majoritarian body. However, as Wiegman (1995) argues, black masculinity’s threat of hypersexuality is nonetheless feminized through lynching and its often attending practices and mythologies of castration – the symbolic removal of black male potential for citizenship. Similarly, the racializing discourses policing Clinton’s personal behavior are used as a warrant for Clinton’s lack of fitness for citizenship and presidency.

A remarkable feature of the discourse on Clinton as black is Clinton’s own metacommentary. In the interview with Smiley, Clinton would only laugh and admit that he loved the depiction of himself as the first black president (1998). However, by late September in a speech before the Congressional Black Caucus, Clinton (1999) more closely addressed the discourses heralding him as such. He recognized that this status had been conferred from both the right and the left, admittedly for different ends. After acknowledging these inscriptions, Clinton shared an anecdote about a black actor who came to the White House to research a role he was about to play as the first black president. Clinton revealed to his audience, “I didn’t have the heart to tell him that I already had the job.” Clinton does not say, “I am the first black president,” but instead “I already have the job.” The rhetorical maneuvering, which like Morrison dislodges race from the strictly anatomical, posits that a set of structuring discourses and practices within racist US culture can indeed position a white man into the “job.” However, as Wiegman (1995) notes, race signifies differently when worn by certain bodies. Soon after this speech, Clinton resigned from this particular job.

### Going Down on Feminism

Along with articulating minoritarian excess onto the body of Clinton, the discourses surrounding the Clinton scandal depict feminism as both part of a complex debate and as the epitome of inappropriate levels of female speech. The mainstream is never so fascinated with feminism as during a sexual harassment case. And no such forum has been available since the Hill/Thomas hearings. Benedict (1998) sees all of this discussion as healthy because it has allowed a multitude of feminists’ voices to circulate and hence performatively contest the dominant conception that feminism is monolithic, antimale, and antisex. But as seductive as the idea of a heterogeneous feminist discourse in the public sphere might be, it proves little more than a feminist fantasy. The discourses that

circulate as and about feminism through the Clinton scandal demonstrate all too clearly the multiple mechanisms of containment for feminist and female speech in US public culture. This containment calls into questions the very politics of visibility.

Feminists who speak are held responsible for loose morals and a crisis in the body politic, while those who don't are deemed hypocritical and lacking in judgment. Katha Pollitt (1998) argued that immediately following Kathleen Willey's appearance on the TV news program *60 Minutes*, any feminist who didn't join Patricia Ireland in condemning Clinton's alleged conduct received a scarlet H for hypocrisy. Of course, by later that week, any who did was branded "a dupe of the right-wing conspiracy, a Victorian maiden with the vapors, a female chauvinist who thought all women were angels, [or] a sergeant in the sex police" (p. 9). Ironically, conservative women's groups which previously fought sexual harassment legislation were galvanizing arguments based on this legislation and were hence deemed the protectors of morals (Beinart 1998, Rosin 1998, Young 1998). Of course, the ultimate irony may have been President Clinton's own part in promoting laws governing sexual harassment.

Podhoretz (1998) argues that the Clinton scandal has discredited feminism, and to prove this he both deploys the homogenizing trope of sisterhood and constructs a history for feminism. His history begins with the Hill/Thomas hearings. In fact, he claims that feminists' instant support of Anita Hill infected the body politic with the disease of "sexual harassment." He holds Anita Hill singly responsible for transforming sexual harassment from the "arcane lucubrations of marginal academics into the very center of our mainstream culture." Sexual harassment has "metastasized its way through the body politic," with no indication that its growth can be abated (p. 24). Its very codification and enforcement parallels the Salem Witch Trials.

No feminist received more attention than Gloria Steinem. From the initial moments of the controversy, feminists have been indicted and even vilified for their lack of support for the women that have accused Clinton of sexual harassment. Steinem (1998) wrote a rebuttal to charges against feminists by invoking a history of feminism, which included a critique of the standards to which feminists are held. Steinem also defended Clinton by comparing the charges against him to those leveled against Bob Packwood and Clarence Thomas. First, Steinem argued that forcing feminists to take a stand on Clinton exemplifies a double standard. No other Clinton supporters are expected to repudiate him over the Lewinsky scandal except feminists. For instance, no one is questioning environmentalists' support of Clinton, at least not in relation to his sexual practices. This double standard functions by collapsing identity and political practice in a manner that punishes feminists and delineates in advance the political and discursive possibilities that feminists are allowed to occupy.

The other claim Steinem critiques – feminist hypocrisy – compares feminist charges against Thomas and Packwood to the lack of feminist support for accusations against Clinton. In this way, feminists are charged with a "deadly"

inconsistency. According to Steinem, Clinton (unlike Thomas or Packwood) adhered to precisely what the feminists had been arguing all these years; “no means no and yes means yes.” For Steinem, Willey illustrates no, while Lewinsky illustrates yes (p. 15). Steinem thus preserves the female agency for which feminism has fought. However, virulent attacks took place against Steinem precisely because her position was not intelligible in the discursive terrain of public sphere feminism. My point is not necessarily to support Steinem’s position, but rather to examine the discursive logics which disallow and render inarticulate certain forms of feminist speech. The scandal of feminist failure (to be feminist enough or in the right way) engenders conventional responses as any animating event justifies a rehearsal of the usual ambivalence.

Gwedolyn Mink (1998) takes “some feminists” to task for painting “the rest of us in a corner” by arguing that what Clinton is doing is not sexual harassment (p. A17). Mink claims that this argument trivializes women’s experiences and distorts the law. While it might be productive for Mink to initiate a discussion concerning sexual harassment, she goes further by participating in the same discursive machinations which have disciplined feminism. She particularly takes Gloria Steinem to task for her *New York Times* piece. Rather than take women’s experiences seriously, which is “what feminism is supposed to be about,” Steinem is protecting a man and “in effect compromising 20 years of sexual harassment jurisprudence” (p. A17). Again, the speech of one feminist can be seen as compromising a complex historical movement.

*The New York Times* ran an editorial in response to Steinem’s OpEd piece just two days after it was published. According to Faludi (1998), this was the only time in her memory that the *New York Times* ran a piece repudiating an earlier editorial. In “A Feminist Dilemma” the *Times* rebukes Steinem, not for her interpretation of legal doctrine, but for the “danger involved” in her position (1998: A22). As a feminist, Steinem’s attention to “technicalities” such as the law are likened to “philosophical sellout” (A22). A movement such as feminism cannot afford such strategic thinking. The editorial warns that allowing the president to “get away with it,” raises the possibility that any boss will be “free to behave abominably” (A22). Any erosion of women’s hard-won progress in the workplace must be prevented. Abe Rosenthal (1998) goes even further than the *Times* editorial when warning of the dangers for women involved in a position such as Steinem’s. Rosenthal claims that, “for a feminist leader, this is an act of grievous intellectual self-mutilation” (A19). In fact, the danger for women from men’s sexual advances cannot be underestimated; “we are talking about acts that could terrorize some women, and lead them to horrified flight, even to death.”

Faludi (1998) argued that what is most striking in the responses to Steinem is the display of male hysteria. Rather than asking what is the danger to women of a feminist taking a complex position on sexual harassment, Faludi refigures the discussion to interrogate the threat to men. The male writers depict women as “maiden underlings” who are in danger from all men at all times (p. 5). Faludi

points out that this is just the flipside of seeing women as available to harass at all times. What these discourses can't allow for are feminists to step outside of the confines of the rigid sex police perpetuating a PC orthodoxy.

When feminists exhibit a more complex understanding of female sexual agency, they not only jeopardize women, they compromise feminism. A recent edition of CNN/Time "NewsStand" asked the question, "has feminism sold out or just grown up?" (1998). This question is not unique; feminism is always being prematurely autopsied in order to understand and render impotent its remains. Not only is the Clinton scandal used as an alibi for the special on feminism, "NewsStand" also refers to the recent issue of *Time* entitled, "Is Feminism Dead?" (1998). *Salon*, the on line magazine, issued a special called "Is *Time* Brain Dead?" which criticized the contemporary and barely pubescent representatives that *Time* chose for feminism (Brown 1998). For instance, Bellafante (1998), writing for *Time*, chose the Spice Girls and Ally McBeal to represent contemporary feminism and measured them against earlier, and what they clearly saw as more serious women's groups and political practices, such as the creation of *Ms.* magazine and Vietnam War protests. "NewsStand" is interesting both for the women called forth to speak on and against feminism as well as for the rhetorical strategies it exemplifies. After displaying pictures of feminist marches and protests from the television archives, CNN/Time trots out a parade of racially homogenous feminist talking heads. Tellingly, even though Steinem had been the most "newsworthy" feminist and did appear on the cover of *Time*, she is absent from the field of feminists interviewed.

Camille Paglia, the first person interviewed, collapses the complexity of feminism through her usual charges against the "feminist establishment," its state of disarray, and its inability to articulate a collective position. Paglia is billed as a dissident feminist, thereby occupying that most respected of positions, the political outsider who is more credible than any other because of her dissident status; she speaks the truth. Next Katie Roiphe, the author of the attack on feminism *The Morning After* (1993), blames feminists for creating hysteria over rape on college campuses. Roiphe makes the outrageous claim that feminism is in a profound identity crisis and has nothing to do with sexuality, for it was a mistake to ever argue that the "personal is political." Feminism is yet again to blame for bringing the personal into public life. Roiphe fails to recognize feminism as a contextual practice situated within historical milieux which might allow for strategic response. Naomi Wolf, alone among the feminists, evades the constraints of the question and sticks to workplace harassment and argues that it affects all in the workplace, rather than indicting women for masculinist behavior. However, this discussion of the workplace can't be heard within the parameters that feminism has been placed.

Patricia Ireland and Betty Friedan are the two remaining feminists on this edition of "NewsStand." Along with defending feminism's ability not to be morally pure in their politics, both women make a dangerous and troubling conflation between heterosexual women's relationships with their husbands

and all women's relationships to male politicians and employers; a rhetorical move similar to those employed by conservatives celebrating feminism's collapse. Ireland argues that women's acceptance of their husbands' behavior as the best they can get is the same acceptance that women give to Clinton. It is not so much that women are fans of Clinton, just that they understand their relation to him in a familial logic which tolerates male indiscretion. Friedan, who is cast not only as the matriarch of modern feminism but as a friend of the Clintons, is shown holding the issue of *Time* which proclaims feminism's death. After pointing out the performative contradiction between the question of feminism's death and the interview of prominent feminists, Friedan turns to the wall with photos of herself with various celebrities, most notably with Bill Clinton, and with Hillary Rodham Clinton. Friedan gestures to the photo of Bill Clinton and comments on his sexiness, as if that serves as an explanation for Clinton's power, before further establishing the intimacy of her relations with the first couple. Friedan is at her most disturbing as she moves from the particulars of Clinton's sexual exploits to all workplace harassment. Workplace harassment is reduced to sexual passes made by a male superior to a female subordinate. Just as Clinton's indiscretions should be dealt with by Hillary slapping Bill in the face each morning before breakfast, the female subordinate should slap her male boss when he makes inappropriate sexual advances. Thus, the complexities of the workplace and the political sphere are reduced to the intimate confines of the heterosexual and hence private marriage.

The deployment of Friedan, as an historical figure from the "early days" of feminism, provides a paramnesiac function by reducing the complex history of feminism to the maternal figure of Friedan as she marched for the rights of women in an earlier era, an era when feminism was "clear" about its goals and principles. This form of cultural amnesia has ruptured feminism from its recent past and homogenizes the multiplicity of feminist practices. Even though it has been little more than 25 years since the prominence of second-wave discourses in the public sphere, the discourses produced in this historical milieu are usually seen as distinct from and largely irrelevant to both contemporary feminist theoretical debates and public sphere politics.

Popular feminisms, often under the rubrics of "Third Wave" or "Postfeminism," distance themselves from this recent past through homogenizing and essentializing narratives of the political practices of this earlier generation of women. Popular standards of effectivity or "success" for feminist politics most often look for clear identifiable effects within institutional, legal, and everyday life. Unfortunately, for a politics such as feminism or the radical movement of women in the late twentieth century, change or success cannot so easily be measured. This set of criteria works to either elide women's political practices, dismiss them as ineffectual, or on the other hand, is used to discipline feminists. Popular discourses often blame feminists for any "undesirable" restructuring of women's cultural/economic conditions and everyday lives. Feminism is only given credit for "positive" change in women's lives as the

grounds of an argument about the obsolescence of feminism (hence, postfeminism). As Bonnie Dow (1996) has argued, feminism becomes the problem in postfeminism.

Mapping contemporary feminism is a daunting yet necessary task. Since the late 1960s in the United States, there has been something of a boom in feminist discourse and discourses concerning feminism. Not only in the academy but within the popular media as well, feminism is at moments symptomatic of cultural anxieties concerning nation, masculinity, femininity, and boundaries. Neoconservative cultural commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Katie Roiphe have captured the ability to tell feminism's public story and history. Serious attention must be paid to the popular stories of feminism, not so much to debunk, but because the lack of feminist history in the public sphere limits the possibilities for contemporary feminist politics. The restricted field of reference for feminism not only limits or contains the possibility for complex feminist discourses by reducing feminism to questions of representation and definitional disputes, it has produced a pluralism which allows any discourse to circulate as feminist within the political.

The "identity crisis" or amnesia of contemporary feminism, coupled with the lack of context and history for feminist practices, must be recognized as precisely the crisis which, as a matter of displacement, has been articulated to a new conservatism. Without adroit reading practices the "moments of juxtaposition, flirtatious encounter, or even embrace" between these discourses will appear unintelligible (Morris 1984: 55). This caution is particularly pertinent at a time when feminism is on trial over its refusal to take a position on the scandals surrounding Clinton's sexual activities. Being able to tell which positions belong to the "conservatives" or the "liberals" and which, if any, further the interest of women is an unintelligible task. It is for this reason that an insistence on the necessity of reading practices which refuse the tried route is crucial for developing histories of feminism which can interrupt contemporary narratives and politics that discipline feminism and strain women's everyday lives.

### Conclusion

Expanding the field of reference for contemporary minoritarian politics is crucial. In the case of feminism expanding the field of reference requires the possibility of speech which does not fall in line with dominant conceptions of feminism's perceived dogmas to register as other than compromise, betrayal, and hypocrisy. Internal inconsistency within feminism must not only be intelligible, but a hallmark of the multiplicity of feminists and feminisms. Within the discursive terrain of the scandal it seems that no matter how sophisticated, no matter how articulate, African Americans are condemned to the position of "dupes" whenever race is a factor. Ultimately, unless race is unproblematically "visible," it cannot be argued. As demonstrated throughout the discourses of the

Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, post-1960s minoritarian politics converge in ways which shield and reconstitute majoritarian masculinity.

The necessity of radical contextualization turns on the ephemerality of the object of cultural studies (Grossberg 1992, Morris 1998). This contextualization for Morris (1998) not only prolongs the life of the ephemeral, but as it saturates “with detail an articulated place and point in time, a critical reading can extract from its objects a parable of practice that converts them into *models* with a past and a potential for reuse, thus aspiring to invest them with a future” (p. 3). The creation of context becomes both the method and object of cultural studies research. As such, the move to examine the sites, such as scandal where the political and cultural converge in revealing and important ways, is crucial to further the project of Cultural Studies. The job for Cultural Studies, feminism, and leftist politics more generally is to capture the representational power, or to at least strategize to do so. What is at stake is the ability to foster contextuality, internal inconsistency and the ability to tell histories that do not conform to dogmas and pieties; the ability to be minor.

Ultimately, the lesson of this chapter is not about Clinton and Lewinsky, but about black men and feminism. They are the subjects who “fell” and paid the price for the minoritization of the national body. It wasn’t and never could be a story of the fall of Clinton.

### Notes

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