

# LexisNexis™ Academic

Copyright 1999 The New York Observer, L.P.  
New York Observer

August 16, 1999

**SECTION:** POLITICS&OPINIONS; Wise Guys

**LENGTH:** 867 words

**HEADLINE:** Al Gore's Biggest Woe: Clinton's a Republican!

**BYLINE:** Mitchell L. Moss

**HIGHLIGHT:**

Bill Clinton has been a peace-and-prosperity President, and that's a Republican platform.

**BODY:**

In his new book, *Name-Dropping*, John Kenneth Galbraith suggests that Dwight Eisenhower's political legacy consisted of accepting, confirming and carrying forward the social welfare programs launched under the New Deal. As we approach the end of Bill Clinton's tenure, it's clear that his legacy will be a mirror image of Ike's. Just as Eisenhower validated the policies of his Democratic predecessors, Mr. Clinton's Presidency has successfully achieved the domestic policy objectives of his Republican predecessors, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

It took a Democrat like Bill Clinton to fulfill goals Republicans have been talking about (but not always doing anything about) for a quarter-century: He has replaced welfare with workfare, transformed a budget deficit into a balanced budget, and even brought homicides down to their lowest point in three decades. Most striking, the Clinton Administration has been singularly effective in creating wealth. More millionaires have been created during the Clinton years than ever before. Indeed, under Mr. Clinton the making of money has superseded all other forms of human achievement and has become the dominant cultural trend. An executive chef in a Manhattan restaurant and a computer programmer in Washington state are now worth more than some orthopedic surgeons or corporate lawyers.

It's hard to remember the pre-Clinton years, when the Dow Jones industrial average had trouble reaching 3,000. Today the Dow exceeds 10,000. Mr. Clinton's performance exceeds that of Joseph, son of Jacob, adviser to the Pharaohs, who predicted seven consecutive prosperous years, but only after seven years of famine.

Simply put, Bill Clinton has been both the best Republican and the best Democratic President of this century. He saved the Democrats by adopting moderate policies on spending, crime and welfare. Mr. Clinton can rightfully claim that by putting money into crime prevention, he helped violent crime fall by more than 20 percent. Further, Mr. Clinton's success at carrying out anticrime and antiwelfare policies has marginalized the left wing of his party, which has abandoned politics for new age pursuits like aromatherapy, gourmet vegetarian cooking and Tae-Bo.

The recent Republican tax cut proposal reinforces the President's image as a champion of fiscal, if not physical, prudence. Even Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan believes that the Republican plan is irresponsible. No wonder that the Republican Party despises Bill Clinton: He has taken away their core ideological weapons, leaving them with their pro-life plank and not much else. After NATO's success in Kosovo, Mr. Clinton can now claim that he is the first Democratic President to win a war since Franklin Roosevelt. As Commander in Chief, Mr. Clinton has performed better than Harry Truman in Korea, John Kennedy in Cuba, Lyndon Johnson in Vietnam and Jimmy Carter in Iran.

It's ironic, but Al Gore is cursed by Mr. Clinton's success. Democrats don't get elected to dispense joy; their only political purpose is to diminish pain and suffering. So Mr. Clinton's legacy is an albatross, not an asset. No Democratic candidate can mobilize the party faithful -- labor unions, minorities and women -- by invoking a record that has heightened income inequality, eliminated welfare and reduced trade barriers through Nafta and GATT. Granted, Mr. Clinton in recent months has been trying to find ways to appeal to traditional Democratic Party constituencies, but it is too little, too late for his would-be heir. No matter how often Mr. Clinton takes a scenic tour of the poorest American communities or attacks state governments for failing to provide health care to children, the Clinton legacy cannot be undone. He has been a peace-and-prosperity President, and that's a Republican platform.

Mr. Gore's campaign is in trouble, all right, but not for the reasons cited by the Washington press corps. Yes, Mr. Gore lacks charisma, but that's not his core problem. Ultimately, he is running on the Clinton record, but that record is too conservative to excite and engage Democratic voters. That's why Mr. Gore continues to search for issues to define his candidacy. He tried to make suburban sprawl into a campaign issue but, like global warming, it didn't play well as a sound bite.

That's why Bill Bradley poses such a serious challenge for the Democratic Presidential nomination. Mr. Bradley has the virtue of not being associated with the President or with the Beltway (even though he was a Senator for 18 years). Unlike Mr. Gore, Mr. Bradley is not burdened with a definable political record. In fact, Mr. Bradley's cypherlike persona works well against Mr. Gore; people can easily impose their own values on Mr. Bradley, since he has no strong ideological positions.

Ultimately, the biggest beneficiary of Bill Clinton's legacy may be Gov. George W. Bush of Texas, the Republican Presidential front-runner. No wonder Al Gore is in trouble. It isn't easy for a Democrat to run on a Republican record.

*Mitchell L. Moss is the Henry Hart Rice Professor of Urban Policy at New York University. Terry Golway claims he will return next week.*

**LOAD-DATE:** March 27, 2001