

March, 2001

### A Brief Reflection on Political Violence

Except for the fourth paragraph ("For some of us..."), the below was written the same day, and several hours before, I learned of the teen killings at the school in Santee CA March 5. Subsequent, there have been many articles written and published relating to the culture of disrespect among young people, but none I have seen thus far speak to identical adult behavior, especially the character assassination of political and other public figures which occurs daily in our country. I encourage you to read and reflect on the following.

Dick Bernard

### The Clintons and Character...and its assassination.

Dick Bernard, Woodbury MN

*"I've come a long way since the day I told [a former presidential candidate] that his [positive campaign] theme was a nice thought, but it wouldn't win us any votes. I used to say the President might be [more positive], but I wasn't going to be. How wrong I was. There is nothing more important in life than human beings, nothing sweeter than the human touch...."*

- source of quote is at end of this article

Most of us remember very painful incidents from our childhood when we were treated very badly by a sibling, or playmates, or parent or teacher. Perhaps we were the tormentor, or passively allowed the ill-treatment to continue.

These incidents make marks that last a lifetime. Oh, of course, some will say - even today - that the kid deserved it. Or so we rationalize, even years later.

For many of us, these early incidents can direct our future lives in very negative ways.

For some of us, like Charles Williams of Santana CA High School on March 5, 2001, we can't take the tormenting any more, and open fire, killing or wounding classmates, and before our future can even begin, we face a lifelong prison term.

I think of these scenarios frequently as the ever-righteous rabble of Clinton haters seem bent on continuing eight years of spewing venom with the intent of finally killing the Clintons. They are oh so articulate and clever and pious, still appearing (though thankfully much less frequently) through "news", pundit columns, talk radio and television, cartoons, published innuendo, insulting internet "humor", amazingly selective "facts" (with critical facts left out or minimized), and casual conversation,

They are like a never-ending schoolyard gang of tormentors all over again - playing "adult", but acting out what should be intolerable behavior in a civil society. I am sick and tired of it.

Perhaps the negative behavior is part of why my respect for the Clinton's has grown immensely since the scandal of 1998, and continues to grow past the pardons; and why my respect for the gang of character assassins has declined precipitously, as it has for people of prominence who have seemed to be afraid to come forward and say "stop it!" with conviction, probably for fear of being ridiculed themselves.

I have yet to see anyone, most certainly not the critics of the Clinton's, define "CHARACTER" in a fair manner, and then show that any of the Republican presidents of

the 20<sup>th</sup> century had "better" character in or out of their presidency than did President Clinton. Indeed this can never be fairly done, for to do so will require the critics not only to take the "plank" of judgment out of their own self-righteous "eye", but to judge themselves as well.

Each President, including the current president, had or has his own human failings, some very well hidden. So do each of us. The only difference is whether and how and for what purpose these faults are exposed and magnified.

And then there are the PARDONS....

Of course, here Clinton, according to his critics, could do nothing right, even though his predecessor Presidents pardoned thousands of people in similar circumstances in the past.

The Clinton pardons and commutations were of people who had been charged or convicted of something and asked for a pardon - nothing new to any of the past presidents. All that differs is that these pardons were granted by President Clinton.

Three well-known persons have defined the 2001 Pardon controversy for me: It was Senator Orrin Hatch who on January 7 piously suggested on national TV that George W. Bush might well pardon President Clinton so the country could move on. Later the same day, also on national TV, Senator John McCain, presumably no friend of the Clinton's, said that Clinton had not even been charged with anything and a presidential pardon would be inapplicable to him.

Then, about February 18, the Catholic Cardinal of Los Angeles, Roger Mahony, who had powerfully and successfully lobbied Clinton to pardon a felon, publicly regretted he had written the president in behalf of the person, but only after the pardon became controversial. In so doing, he left the President hanging out on a limb. Ah, what courage of conviction the good Cardinal showed. I wonder if Cardinal Mahony has at least privately apologized to the President.

When I was a kid growing up in the 1940s, I learned a little verse that has stuck with me all these years: *"Sticks and stones may break my bones/but words will never hurt me."* After 60 years of experience, I am left with the conclusion, that the thrust of this poem is entirely wrong: words can, do, and are, intended to kill, and can be far more evil than any wounds caused by "sticks and stones".

Sooner or later the Clinton haters will move on....

It can't happen soon enough.

The source of the quote at the beginning of this article (which refers to the "kindler and gentler" theme of the George HW Bush campaign in 1988) is Lee Atwater, former Republican strategist and then-head of the national Republican party. Nearing death from brain cancer at age 39, Atwater wrote these words on his changed perspective on both political conflict and personal life (see "Lee Atwater's Last Campaign", Life magazine, February, 1991). Atwater's successful political strategies were like warfare against an enemy - his weapons words and images used to kill opponents. He was very successful. (His contemporary, and early colleague, was Karl Rove, George W. Bush's chief strategist in the 2000 campaign.)