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EDITORIAL

The curse of Clintonism

BY RICH LOWRY

It is the curse of Clintonism that it is associated with the Clintons.

A centrist-oriented Democratic politics that is pragmatic and economically literate is better than the alternatives: a fluffy politics of hope (Barack Obama) and angry politics of anti-corporate zeal (John Edwards). At least on paper.

For the champions of this otherwise preferable approach are Bill and Hillary Clinton. As individuals, they have their strengths and weaknesses, as do any talented, but flawed, politicians; as a team, they tend to be a roiling mess, with something to repel everyone lately.

Bill has supplemented Hillary's tightly wound discipline with his out-of-control ego, her off-putting devotion to script with his wild and dishonest improvisations, her inability to project warmth with his self-adoring affability. What they have always held in common is ambition and willingness to resort to any means -- sheathed in self-righteousness -- to achieve power.

Throughout the 1990s, their attacks were directed at people who were vulnerable by

virtue of their status as allegedly self-interested women accusing Bill of misconduct, or as conservative politicians hated by the press, or as special prosecutors whose work was distasteful to the public.

Obama's offense is opposing Hillary for the nomination, making the flailing attacks against him seem the product of an outraged sense of entitlement. Hitting Obama for a kindergarten essay is pathetic; knocking him by suggesting he once might have dealt drugs is pathetic and slimy.

The unbecoming broadsides against Obama can only remind people of what they disliked about the decade to which Hillary promises a glorious return. Along with the peace and prosperity that Hillary wants the public to associate with the 1990s came a "politics of personal destruction" (on both sides) that curdled into her husband's impeachment. Hillary can't help being connected with the worst as well as the best of the 1990s, since she is married to them.

George W. Bush's presidency was made more psychologically complex by the fact that his father, George H.W. Bush, was one of his predecessors. Imagine if W. had had to try to run the government together with

H.W. "Oedipal city," as his dad might have put it. A Hillary administration promises all that fraught emotional tension and more.

What will Bill's role be in her administration, how will it change with the vagaries of their marriage, and who will be right when they say conflicting things about policy?

Who knows? Clintonism delivered the White House to the Democrats twice in campaigns in 1992 and 1996 that hewed to the middle and made the party more appealing than it had been in decades. But no one else has picked up the mantle nationally.

Al Gore would have been the natural ideological successor in 2000, but angered by Bill's spectacularly irresponsible conduct in office, he distanced himself and lurched left. Since the left-wing base of the Democratic Party never liked the Clinton pragmatism, the only ones with support in the party strong enough to maintain a relative centrism are the Clintons themselves.

And so the devil's bargain: Clintonism comes only with the Clintons attached. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review*.

GUEST OPINION

Illegal Spanish

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

From small time to over the hill, the conservative punditocracy is worried, very worried, that Spanish is taking over. Pretty mad about it, too.

"I don't know about you, but I do a slow burn when I get a recorded telephone message telling me to 'Press 1 for English,'" writes Dot Ward of Madison, Miss., in her local newspaper's reader blog.

And Reagan-era activist Phyllis Schlafly asks, "Are you tired of anonymous voices on the phone telling you to 'Press 1 (or sometimes 2) for English?'"

But that's not what this is all about, is it? "The ability to speak and communicate in English is the litmus test of whether immigrants are assimilating into U.S. culture," Schlafly continues. "[T]he Pew Hispanic Center just reported that only 52 percent of Hispanic naturalized citizens speak English well or pretty well. Pew also reported that 28 percent of Latino immigrants speak only Spanish on the job."

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., is acting

to stop some of that Spanish speakin' with his introduction last month of the "Protecting English in the Workplace Act of 2007." A press release from his office explains that the bill "would clarify that it's not against the law to prohibit foreign languages from being spoken while engaged in work."

The legislation was prompted by a lawsuit the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed against the Salvation Army, alleging discrimination for requiring two employees to speak English while sorting clothes.

Alexander (a sensible moderate Republican, once upon a time) and the right-wing blogosphere are framing it as a fight to preserve our supposedly vulnerable linguistic unity.

The problem stems from the false premise that immigrants are tearing apart the national fabric with their refusal to speak English.

That study by the Pew Hispanic Center, from which Schlafly cherry-picked statistics to support her view, actually undermines her view.

She failed to mention that three-quarters of foreign-born Hispanic adults who arrived at age 10 or younger can carry on a conver-

sation in English "very well." She also did not say that 91 percent of second-generation Hispanics speak English well, and 97 percent of the third generation.

So, yes, immigrants are passing Schlafly's linguistic litmus test and assimilating into U.S. culture.

Then what's the problem?

Supporters of Alexander's bill pretend that unless it is passed, a torrent of EEOC lawsuits will force employers to hire people who don't speak English — which is utter nonsense. There are already laws that acknowledge knowing English can be as a business necessity.

What Alexander's bill does is enable employers to prohibit employees from uttering words in languages other than English, even in private conversations with no relation to workplace safety or the conduct of business.

When they hear Spanish, some people do a "slow burn," some find it "annoying," some are "tired" of it.

And others try to ban it. ■

— Roger Hernandez is a syndicated columnist and writer-in-residence at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On Jan. 10, 1961, Dashiell Hammett, author of "The Maltese Falcon," dies. The novel was filmed three times: once in 1931; once in 1936 under the title "Satan Met a Lady," starring Bette Davis; and again in 1941, starring Humphrey Bogart.

- On Jan. 11, 1927, Charlie Chaplin's \$16 million estate is frozen by court receivers after his second wife, Lita Grey Chaplin, sues for divorce. Lita was a 16-year-old hopeful actress when the 35-year-old Chaplin married her in 1924.

- On Jan. 12, 1944, Alfred Hitchcock's "Lifeboat" premieres at the Astor Theater in New York. "Lifeboat" demonstrated Hitch-

cock's mastery of suspense by confining all action to the space of the small boat.

- On Jan. 13, 1939, Arthur "Doc" Barker is killed while trying to escape from Alcatraz Prison in San Francisco Bay. Barker, of the notorious "Bloody Barkers" gang, was spotted on the shore of the island after climbing over the walls.

- On Jan. 14, 1875, theologian, musician, philosopher and Nobel Prize-winning physician Albert Schweitzer is born in Upper-Alsace, Germany. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1952, Schweitzer used his \$33,000 award to start a leprosarium at Lambarene.

- On Jan. 15, 1919, fiery-hot molasses floods the streets of Boston when the bolts on a 58-foot-high tank filled with 2.5 million gallons of crude molasses suddenly explode. The molasses flowed into the street, knocked over the local firehouse and pushed over the support beams for the elevated train line. In all, 21 people were killed.

- On Jan. 16, 1973, the long-running Western series "Bonanza" is canceled after 14 seasons. The show, which debuted in 1959, was the first Western to be televised in color. Its trademark theme song rose to No. 19 on Billboard's Top Singles chart in 1961. ■