

OPINION

POLITICS | HISTORY

HILLARY AND THE FERGUSON FACTOR

Complex dynamics can arise when a former elected official finds himself back in the executive mansion.

When the history of the 2008 Democratic primaries is finally written, one of the central themes will be the role played by Bill Clinton.

If Hillary Clinton loses to Barack Obama, critics will point to the former president as having cost her the election, either by stealing the spotlight (sometimes in particularly counterproductive ways) or by reminding voters of the less savory elements of the Clinton presidency.

And if she wins, how will Bill be used in a new Clinton administration? Chief political adviser? Unofficial roving ambassador? Behind-the-scenes co-president?



GREGG CANTRELL

Or will he simply play the supportive spouse, as first ladies have always done?

The last option seems unlikely. When Bill ran in 1992, he promised “two presidents for the price of one.” He then went on to place Hillary in charge of his ill-fated healthcare initiative, and she has consistently cited her time in the White House as one of her qualifications to be president.

In the current race, she has made no bones about Bill playing an important role in

her own administration, whatever that might be.

All of this calls to mind a chapter from Texas history, detailed by professor Norman Brown in *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928*.

In 1924, James Ferguson announced that his wife, Miriam, would be running for governor — an office he had held from 1915 until 1917, when he was impeached for corruption and barred from holding any future office in Texas. “Two governors for the price of one” became the Fergusons’ slogan, as Jim clearly indicated his wife was his surrogate.

Miriam, whose initials “M.A.” led reporters to dub her “Ma” (Jim was “Pa”), was clearly no Hillary Clinton — she had no political experience and had even opposed women’s suffrage, as did Jim.

Yet Ma, like Hillary, recognized that voters might have a problem with the idea of a chief executive whose spouse was calling all the shots. In a campaign interview, Ma declared: “To Jim belongs only the honors that go with being the husband of the governor. He will be my right-hand man, that’s all just like I was his when he was Governor.”

Seeking to make her gender a plus, she publicly asked the state’s female voters, “Mothers, won’t you help me?” Soon bumper stickers reading “Me for Ma” began appearing throughout Texas, with some

of them adding, for good measure: “And I Ain’t Got a Darn Thing Against Pa.”

Ma soon warmed to the political race. Campaigning with Pa at a rally in Greenville attended by 10,000 people, she shook so many hands that she injured her own, requiring bandages and iodine.

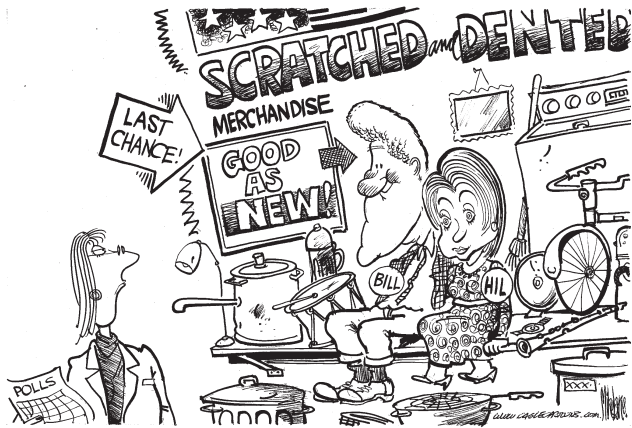
When her opponent, Klansman Felix Robertson, asserted that Pa would be the real governor, Jim disingenuously replied: “Of course, I am going to help my wife if she is elected governor. Every man helps his wife. While she is running the main show, I’m going to bring in the wood and water every day.”

Ma handily defeated Robertson, thanks largely to a backlash against his Ku Klux Klan affiliation. Once she was in office, there was no doubt that Pa was the power behind the throne, although she did take an active part in the daily running of the governor’s office. Occasionally, Ma asserted herself. Her daughter recalled Jim and Miriam having “heated arguments” about pardons.

Ma’s administration proved undistinguished. Freed from some restraints imposed by the governor’s office, Pa framed legislation, ran roughshod over state boards and enriched himself by taking kickbacks from state contractors.

Tainted by scandal, Ma lost in the Democratic primary in 1926 (terms ran two years back then), didn’t run in 1928 and

MIKE LANE | CAGLE CARTOONS



then lost again in 1930. Despite all this, she won a second term in 1932, and Texans got more of the same in the final Ferguson administration.

Historical analogies can only go so far. Nothing in the colorful Ferguson tale is meant to suggest that Hillary Clinton would be a mere surrogate, or that Bill Clinton would use his position in the nefarious ways that Jim Ferguson did. It does, however, serve as a reminder of the complicated dynamics that can arise when a former elected official finds himself back in the executive mansion, eager to serve but holding no title other than first spouse.

But the Ferguson story also underscores how much things have changed since Miriam Ferguson became the America’s first elected female governor. Unlike Hillary, she was never challenged for being too tough, or “unwomanly.”

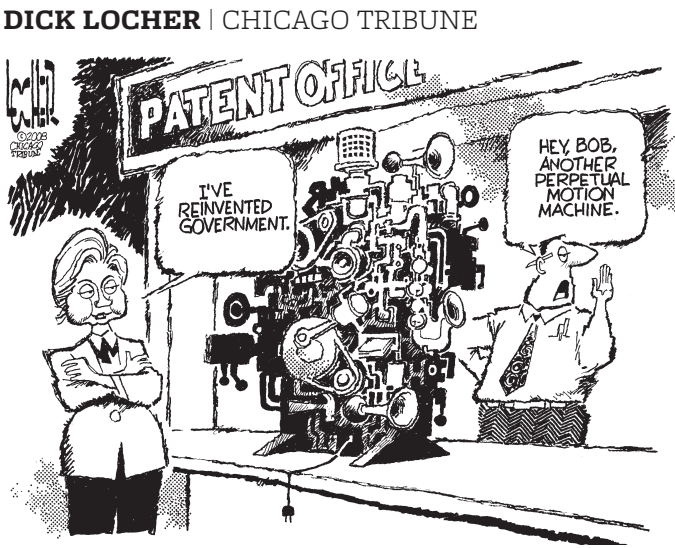
She never would have publicly told her husband to be quiet and let her handle a situation, as Hillary did after Bill

clumsily waded into the recent flap over her 1995 trip to Bosnia. Ma never truly stepped outside the traditional gender roles that dictated female subservience to men.

Still, the Fergusons made a formidable political team, and Ma ultimately found the political life alluring. In a 1955 *Dallas Morning News* interview, the 80-year-old was asked if she would like to get back into politics. Her answer showed how incurable the bite of the political bug can be: “I’d just love to, but don’t you dare print that,” she told the reporter, adding that “this is not an announcement.”

Hillary, if you’re listening, don’t despair if things don’t work out this year. If the fire’s still burning four, eight or 12 years hence, the ghost of Ma Ferguson will be there, cheering you on.

GREGG CANTRELL OF FORT WORTH IS A HISTORY PROFESSOR AT TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY AND A MEMBER OF THE STAR-TELEGRAM COMMUNITY COLUMNIST PANEL.

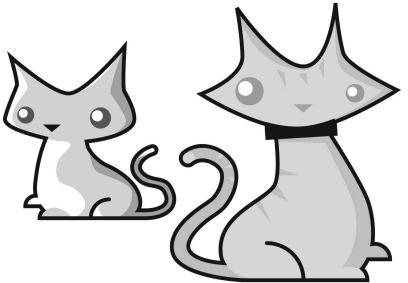


DICK LOCHER | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CHEERS AND JEERS

Cheers: To the woman at the District 10 Democratic Convention on March 29 who volunteered at a moment’s notice to serve as a sign language interpreter for our delegation’s caucus. You were a lifesaver!

— Efton Parke, Fort Worth



CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MARTIN GEE VIA MCT

Jeers: To whoever dumped two 4-week-old, starving, flea-infested kittens at the Riverside Branch Library on April 19. My husband and I rescued them. They’re now flea-free, clean, well-fed, happy and looking forward to being placed in a loving home.

— Sarilee Brewer, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Dr. Stewart Keller for allowing me to enjoy life again without pain. Cheers also to Dr. Joseph Daniels for very successful knee surgery.

— Melba Pierce, Fort Worth

Jeers: To Susan Tully, vice president of content for KXAS/Channel 5, for sneaking in Jennifer Lopez of the Weather Channel as the replacement for Rebecca Miller. (See April 17 news story “Channel 5 lands its own ‘J-Lo’ to do weather.”) We still miss Rebecca and wish her well.

— Caroline Carson, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the Fort Worth Zoo for continuing its association with Rebecca Miller. Although we no longer have her on a local TV station forecasting the weather, it was a pleasure to see her April 19 at the 11th annual Zoo Run Run.

— N.L. Harman, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Ericia Rymell and her many volunteers for an awesome hot dog supper. The money raised will go for many needed things at our school. Our PTA is outstanding!

— Sallie Wilkins, teacher, Ridglea Hills Elementary School, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Washington Mutual in the Westcliff neighborhood for funding and supporting Family Math Night at our school. Cheers also to teachers Kristi Shelton, Elvira Capelli, Dale Dodge, Jennifer Newcomb, Sylvia Ochoa, Jane Summers, Suzanne Tunnell, Neely York and Janis Pittman for coordinating the event. The parents and students learned many new games and how math can be fun!

— Diana Gunther, instructional specialist, South Hills Elementary, Fort Worth

Cheers: To our awesome teachers Cathy Tiller, Elaine Leshner, Jennifer Brown, Ashley Harmonson, Sherrie Dawkins and Andrea Morrow for bravely sitting in the dunk tank at our PTA carnival. Cheers also to all the faculty and parents for volunteering help and making donations.

— Laura Jungmann, Bryant Elementary PTA, Arlington

Cheers: To the gentleman who bought my breakfast at Debbie’s Kitchen in Glen Rose. I’m very grateful!

— Abbey Gilliland, Arlington

Jeers: To those who spread misinformation and blatant lies about the brave people who choose to run for president. Jeers also to those who base their votes on fear and intimidation. Pity and prayers to those who fall victim to such bullying.

— Cindy Brown, Arlington

Cheers: To Life Church for providing a delicious lunch on March 5 to our staff at Green Valley Elementary School. This was one of the days for our students to take the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test. It certainly helped our spirits to know how much we’re appreciated by you.

— Penny DeLuca, North Richland Hills

Cheers: To the North Richland Hills emergency medical technicians and Fire Department for their response to my 911 call after my husband’s heart attack in January. They worked hard trying to revive him before taking him to the North Hills Hospital cardiac unit. Cheers also to the doctors and nurses at North Hills, who kept the family informed of my husband’s condition. Their care and compassion when we lost him were beyond words.

— Doris Bradford, North Richland Hills

Cheers: To manager Brittany Brasher, waiter Austin and the entire staff of On the Border on Bryant Irvin Road. The caterer didn’t show up with dinner for our daughter’s wedding reception, but the On the Border staff welcomed the bridal party with thoughtful, attentive service. The next time we cater a meal for a happy occasion, we’ll turn to these fine people.

— Vicki Witt, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the Animal Clinic of Arlington on North Davis Drive, Dr. T.J. Walker and his staff. They’ve been our “pet vet” for more than 30 years. We recently lost our little dog Sassy, a family member for more than 12 years, and they were very helpful and sympathetic in helping us handle our loss.

— Allen and Della Overton, Arlington

Cheers: To a young man who found my purse in a shopping cart on the parking lot of the Albertsons at Ridgmar and called my husband. By that time, I had missed the purse and frantically returned to the parking lot to find this tall, young man with a grin on his face. He handed me my purse, completely intact.

— Meredith Graves, Fort Worth

Jeers: To the person who parked a full-size pickup in a parking spot marked “Compact car only” in a downtown Fort Worth parking garage. I had to choose between hitting the truck’s bumper or clipping a concrete corner to avoid it. I then had to choose whether to repaint my rear quarter panel or just live with it.

— Randy Westerman, Arlington



DULUTH NEWS-TRIBUNE/GARY MEADER VIA MCT

Cheers: To Wendy McGahey of North Richland Hills, who has worked tirelessly to improve our schools. She coaches children for academic competitions, volunteers for most school activities and is spearheading a “green team” to beautify North Richland Middle School. Cheers also to the students, teachers and parents who have put in the hours of hard labor to beautify the school.

— Lori Duncan, North Richland Hills

Cheers: To residents of the Woodland Hills subdivision in Colleyville for their generosity in the days after a home fire in the neighborhood. They opened their homes, their wallets and their hearts to bring new meaning to the phrase “neighbors helping neighbors.” Cheers to the Starbucks on Glade Road in Colleyville for donating coffee and pastries in support of my friend after she lost her home in the fire.

— Karen Simon, Bedford

Jeers: To the greedy cable company that seems to care more about advertising dollars than quality of service and customer satisfaction. This company increases the volume on commercials and reduces the volume for the programs.

— Kathleen Grady, Grapevine

Cheers: To Dr. Hanson, Pat and Sherry at Benbrook Family Vision Care for prompt, professional service and a friendly office atmosphere. Besides giving me thorough eye exams, Hanson has taken time for careful explanations that have been very helpful to me.

— Ann Ziehe, Benbrook

Jeers: To a local retail store that greeted customers on the day before Easter with scratch-off cards offering discounts of 10 to 50 percent. Cashiers would scratch off the circle to see your discount and then apologize by saying that the discount didn’t apply to that brand. On the back of the card, in small print, was a list of nearly every brand in the store.

— Shirley Mullinax, Comanche

Cheers: To the Texas Christian University rifle team and coach Karen Monez for finishing third in the NCAA national championships. Erin Lorenzen, Lauren Sullivan and Emily Paper earned All-America honors. Showcasing TCU athletics on this elite national level makes all Horned Frogs proud.

— Richard Sybesma, Fort Worth

Jeers: To a local handyman business that quoted a price and set an appointment to replace a door at my house and didn’t show up. Someone answered the phone at the business and said that I was left a message that said no one would be coming. They didn’t call me!

— Erica Murrell, Fort Worth

Cheers: To a lady behind me in the checkout line at an Arlington grocery who noticed that I had left two bags of groceries on the counter. She ran to the parking lot to stop me and then brought the bags to me. Jeers to the checker who did not help, even after the lady notified him of the problem.

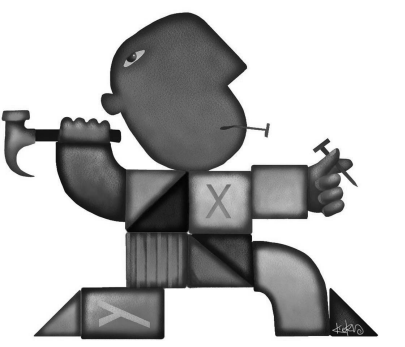
— Allie M. Woods, Arlington

Cheers: To Carolyn Giles at Westcreek Elementary School for teaching her third-graders respect, kindness, gentleness and concern by example. She may have a Helen Keller, Martin Luther King Jr. or Abraham Lincoln in her class because she teaches more than reading, writing and arithmetic. She teaches love and respect for all.

— Jean Tidwell, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the doctors and nurses on the third floor of Harris Methodist Fort Worth for the superb care of my husband. Special cheers to Vitas Innovative Hospice Care for the exceptional care and concern for him and the family. It was beyond whatever we imagined.

— Nellie Smith, Fort Worth



ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS/KIRK LYTTLE VIA MCT

Cheers: To Amanda, Ashley, Brittany, Chip, Dianne, Don, Erin, Jane, Joe, Julie, Manny, Melinda, Penny, Rochelle and Roy, all employees at Lowe’s Home Improvement Warehouse near the Ridgmar mall. During a challenging remodeling of our home, each of them supplied information, assistance and service in a professional manner with pleasantness.

— Bill Cothran, Fort Worth

Jeers: To whoever stole my husband’s cane at our recent garage sale in Ridglea Country Club Estates. He recently had hip replacement surgery and needed the cane. Cheers to our neighbor who loaned him a cane.

— Kim McMullen, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the couple who surprised my husband, mom and me at Abuelo’s on Feb. 21 by paying for our lunch. They were complete strangers but said that the Lord had laid it on their hearts to pay for our meal. I was too surprised to give a proper thank-you. It was my birthday, so the gesture was even more special.

— Eloise Stewart, Haslet

Jeers: To a restaurant on Hulen Street for the poorest service I’ve ever experienced. I went there for breakfast on a Sunday. After being seated and getting my coffee, the waitress took my order. After waiting 30 minutes for the food, I left.

— Dale Harper, Fort Worth

Jeers: To the vandals who stole the Hillary Clinton sign from my yard. Get a grip on your anger. Stay off my property and vote if you have an opinion.

— Juana Byrd, Arlington

Jeers: To the driver of a red BMW who on March 9 or 10 hit our fence, left a gaping hole and drove away. This happened at Sycamore School Road and Harmony Drive. We’re thankful that our three dogs were inside.

— Bob and Pat Thompson, Fort Worth