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FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 2005

"The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House" -- The Americablog review

by Michael in New York on [6/24/2005 06:00:00 PM](#)

NOTE: On Fridays and down times, we are considering post reviews and previews of books, and the like that should be of interest to politically minded bloggers. Hey, we're reading them anyway -- might as well let you know what we think. Tell us if you think it's appropriate. Coming next week: "1776" by David McCullough."

"THE SURVIVOR: BILL CLINTON IN THE WHITE HOUSE"

By John F. Harris
(\$29.95; Random House)

While the muckraking book on Hillary is getting trashed (even by the New York Post), this look at Clinton's run for the Presidency and White House years has vaulted onto the charts. Harris, a reporter for the Washington Post, happily doesn't have an ax to grind or a career to burnish. He's not trying to praise Clinton or denounce him. Harris just lays out as factually as possible the eight years that Clinton served the country, the people he worked with and the personal traits -- conciliation, empathy, delaying tough decisions -- that served Clinton so well in so many ways but doomed him on the Paula Jones scandal.

Some unexpected heroes emerge here (including Lloyd Bentsen, who Harris says Clinton curried favor with and was rather in awe of) as well as some who come of more poorly than in the past (including, perhaps, George Stephanopoulos). And Harris reminds us that we can blame Newt Gingrich in part for Monica Lewinsky (it was Gingrich's ploy of shutting down the government that led to a skeleton White House staff and thus the conditions for their first liaison).

As you'd expect from a reporter, the style is no-nonsense and straightforward. It all comes in a rush -- Gore's contributions and political caution, Hillary's loyalty and brash sense of purpose, the Karl Rove-ian figure of Dick Morris, and the constant polling that both allowed Clinton to pursue the policies he believed in and led Clinton to policies he hadn't considered.

Perhaps the book's signal achievement is the overwhelming sense of crisis after crisis and issue after issue that threatens to swamp even the most capable president. As welfare reform and Bosnia and Haitian refugees and midterm elections and the realignment of NATO and Boris Yeltsin's drunkenness and other topics demand attention and affect each other in unexpected ways, you begin to appreciate the awesome responsibility of the Presidency.

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