Children's Advocacy Institute

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MEDIAGATE ENTERS ITS THIRD WEEK

America's media has entered its third week of crisis. Will the nation's pundits and journalists choose to resign? Will the credibility of the nation's journalists be subject to public impeachment? We have just endured the one millionth repetition of the President intimately hugging a groupie -- in front of 50,000 people; the two millionth reference to the president's "affair," as if it were established fact; and the three millionth parsing of every word in a double hearsay recording -- as if the blatherings of a stage struck ingenue were the Dead Sea scrolls. Hundreds of otherwise dignified and serious journalists, joined by the usual group of loud mouthed pundits, gravely repeat their speculations about facts mutually exchanged, withdrawn, and generally verified by rumor and mutual repetition.

Each television, radio and newspaper headline screams about its capture of the "up to the minute" news about the president's "crisis." Grown men wearing suits intone with wrinkled brow about every possible detail concerning some girl bragging about oral sex with the President. The trappings would be less portentous if presenting the genocide of a billion persons.

But, surprise: polled Americans score a record positive approval rating for Mr. Clinton. What is happening here?

Earth to media: you don't get it, do you? Let me attempt to vault your defensiveness and total lack of self-awareness to clue you in. We all think this sex stuff is great fun. We love Monica's reference to earning her "presidential knee pads." We chortle over the ridiculous spectacle of a "special prosecutor" trying to test semen stains on some dress for presidential DNA. Only in the drug clouded imagination of Franz Kafka can we come up with more absurd scenarios. But you see, we know this stuff is entertainment. It has nothing to do with anything serious. We also know that you will try to hook all of this frivolity onto something of cosmic importance -- perhaps the "character" issue. No, that won't work; not when Thomas Jefferson was fathering a brood of children by Sally Hemingway -- does anyone want the complete list of presidential idiosyncracies? There seems to be little correlation between presidential performance and personal puritanism. We know that. We elected a president to do a job, not a minister to lead us to heaven.

Well, you are left with the "suborning perjury" handle to give your unseemly tabloid frenzy the patina of substance. Problem: you do not know what you are talking about. Perjury has to concern a "material" fact. Not every lie is prosecutable perjury -- even under oath. How in the world can Monica or Clinton's testimony about an affair in 1996 be remotely "material" to the allegations of Paula Jones concerning events years before; indeed, filed years before. In 20 years of litigation, I have never gotten such a clearly irrelevant fact into evidence. The court would have to be incompetent to even allow the evidence, and counsel for Lewinsky and Clinton would have to be walking malpractitioners not to bar it categorically. So if it is not even admissible, how can it be "material" -- as in "matter," to the proceeding in which it is offered? Answer: it can't and it won't. No perjury, no real handle, folks.

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Sorry media, but your disingenuous excuse to retain some semblance of professional dignity has no merit. Oh, maybe this politician is lying. Gee, what a shock! But I don't see a lie here to cover up unlawful bombing in Cambodia. You all do not need a real list (as in important) of presidential lying; you have a longer one than any of us can create. The only substantive story you have is what the heck is this special prosecutor doing, and what is he smoking, and why is he apparently inhaling?

There are lots of important matters out there: welfare reform jeopardizes the health and safety of millions of children as it will evolve over the next five years, child labor is an important story outside of Kathy Lee Gifford "gotchas" – and on both of these counts, the President should be hounded with at least 1% of the attention we are giving Ms. Lewinsky and his purported sexual urges. Our educational system is in disarray, we need to triple community colleges and technical education to occupy our international employee niche. Agreed, some of this does not jump ratings up, but we appreciate some substantive message from any of you at this point. We are well aware of the media cultural biases dictating story selection: celebrities, petty ironies, a contest or conflict, disgrace, sexual anything, heroic rescues, cute animal stories, et al. Only you lack the self awareness to recognize your own professional bias. It is not liberal or conservative; it is boy bites dog, or "is it a mini-morality play?" It has less and less to do with humanly defensible criteria for story selection.

We also know that our public policies are determined more by what we choose to talk about and debate than what we think about any topic. What or who is on the table determines outcomes. If you are talking about children, we who work for them win. Especially since you are our critical card -- they do not have money or votes, only you to put them on the public table. If you talk so extensively about OJ, Hugh Grant, Clinton's sexual "did he or didn't he?", at some point you move serious issues from public attention. And politically weak children, lacking campaign finance influence, but representing our future and highest ethical sensibilities, are usually the biggest losers.

We know what is important and what is not; and you continue to insult us hourly through your assumption that we are shallow and stupid. We also know that you can, in concert, sometimes take an issue and by the mere force and relentless drumbeat of your coverage, make a silly subject significant. It can become a form of manipulated public psychosis (the splitting of oneself from reality) -- through the creation of a false and often ridiculous world. So here is some advice many of us civilians would offer. Stop talking, stop trying to justify your ridiculous criteria for selecting what you talk about. Listen. America is trying to tell you something. Go ahead and talk about Clinton's sexual life. Go ahead and pique us with "who is lying?" Go ahead and emote shamelessly. But stop the pretension, stop trying to garb all of this as serious journalism. It is fun and frolic, and we are not going to do anything with the information, whatever it may be. So cut out the pompous "crisis," "will he resign," "will they impeach," and all the rest of the self-serving and self-created hype.

Finally, let's stop following each other around like sheep and stick some necks out to spend more time talking about the people's business and real public concerns. Another two weeks of "Mediagate," and the major institution irreparably damaged will be neither the presidency nor the special prosecutor, but you.

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