DISPATCHES
FROM THE
WAR ROOM
In the Trenches with
Five Extraordinary Leaders

STANLEY B. GREENBERG
BIL L CLINTON

Act I

THE FIRST CALL comes from Frank Greer, a comrade in arms, from my earliest battles—battles who is doing the advertising for Bill Clinton's campaign for reelection as governor of Arkansas. Clinton wants me to join the campaign. He has just won the Democratic primary, but unimpressively. In the polls, he is barely ahead in the general election and if he loses this November, there is no tomorrow, no Bill Clinton campaign for president of the United States.1

Then Gloria Cabe, Clinton's campaign manager, calls. The governor has heard about my focus group work with Reagan Democrats, the disaffected middle-class voters angry with their own party for ignoring them. Working in suburban Detroit, I spotlighted their grievances and helped put them back on center stage. Will I come to Arkansas to work on the race? You will only do the focus groups because Dick Morris is doing the polling, she says.

Shit. Normally that would have stopped the conversation. Morris is the kind of slimy character that keeps me from calling myself a consultant. While I share as much information as possible in my work and invite discussion, I'm told he prefers to keep the process mysterious. He brings no discernible principles to politics that might set boundaries on his work. As one of the few consultants who cross the party divide, even to help design Jesse Helms's racist campaign against Harvey Gantt, he's a pariah among Democrats. That's before I get to the more basic problem that I almost never do focus groups alone without a more reliable representative survey of voters to confirm the findings. Focus groups with forty or sixty people are only slightly more reliable than anecdotes.

But we all know that Morris would be anathema in any national race. Frank and I have been talking about Clinton for many months. The chance to work on a presidential race for someone this intriguing is too compelling. With barely a pause, I accept Gloria's offer.

I don't know what Dardanelle, Arkansas, looks like. Our two-hour drive from Little Rock puts us there after dark and we go straight to a hotel whose small ballroom, usually host to local dances or Chamber of Commerce meetings, will tonight host two focus groups of voters—all people who voted for Bill Clinton in the past but who are uncertain whether he should have another term now. They are gathered at the end of the room in a circle on folding chairs with Marcia Hale, the former political director of the Democrats' congressional campaign committee who works for me now and will moderate the discussion. A bit closer to a city, they would gather in a more sterile conference-like room off a mall or an in office building, around a table, encouraged to speak their minds, but nothing is holding them back tonight anyway. I am usually behind a one-way mirror, looking for giveaway facial expressions and body language. But tonight I'm hidden behind an accordion room divider with Frank and Gloria, peering out to get a feel for the back and forth and watching a closed-circuit TV, whispering lest our banter disturb the group.

On our way back to Little Rock, Gloria says Clinton wants to hear the results tonight. Tonight? It's going to be after midnight when we get back. I need time to look over my notes and digest what I've heard. Besides, I'm a morning person. I do some of my best work before the sun rises. But Gloria insists that we go straight to the mansion.

At the mansion Gloria leads me into the living room where people are seated on the sofa and in big comfortable chairs. Getting up to greet me, the governor and Hillary tell me how delighted they are to see me again. I sit down and catch my breath, all eyes on me as I start to panic, struggling to form coherent sentences. My lips are not moving. I gather up my nerves and say to Clinton, "I just can't do this now. I need some time and some sleep." To my relief he agrees and suggests we reassemble at 7 A.M., hardly his best time.

Back in my room at 1 A.M. I cover the bed with the postcards each participant wrote to the governor at the end of the group, telling him something he ought to do. Then I shuffle the papers into piles—doubts about Clinton, hopes for Clinton—trying to make sense of it all and jotting notes on what seem to be distinctive patterns. At least now I'll have something to say. Relieved, I move the papers to the floor and fall asleep.
At 7:45 a.m. the phone rings. Frank says the governor is waiting. Fuck, oh fuck, how did I sleep through the 6:30 wakeup call? Unshowered and unshaven I arrive at the mansion an hour late, much to the bemusement of Clinton's advisors. The governor, with unexpected time to wear off his morning puffiness, is as alert as he was last night and just as eager to hear what I learned. Thank God for that.

As I lay out the various responses I heard in the groups—that Clinton is too interested in national office and not focused on change in Arkansas—the governor engages one point after another, not resisting but drilling down to try to understand the nuances of the voters' thinking. Amid the discussion I couldn't help but think that here was a man who clearly loves campaigns, the battles, the courting of voters to create a special bond. He is also political to his bones: this is where he finds meaning and purpose in life. This isn't the conventional calculus of a politician running for office, but a person totally engaged with politics and life. And I'm hooked. What a joy to work with someone like this.

I propose that we run the campaign under the banner "Don't turn the clock back," though beginning with a series of positive, uplifting spots showing Clinton at work on Arkansas's problem. Frank embraces that idea, delighted that he will get to do some sunny commercials. But we draw opposition from Morris. He always wants to operate on the dark side and hunches to attack the opposition. He reminds me of the short guy in the mob movie who tries to prove he is the toughest and most loyal by jumping at the chance to do the hit, his look implying that the others lack the nerve to get the job done and thus do not serve the boss well. When Clinton endorses the idea of starting positive, Morris is clearly disappointed the campaign will skip this first opportunity to kick the shit out of our opponent. I imagine he thinks winning through intimidation creates a kind of fear that greatly increases the power of the leader and perhaps, too, the power of the advisor.

Clinton's campaign wins the election with 57 percent of the vote.

GETTING THERE

How did I become part of the inner circle contemplating a race for the presidency of the United States? Clearly I passed some test in Bill Clinton's campaign for reelection as governor of Arkansas. That, coupled with my work bringing Reagan Democrats back to the party, according to Clinton's memoir, earned me an invitation. But as I thought about it, that was the shorthand for the longer story of my life that looks linear only upon looking back at it.

My family was not political. More accurately, everybody was an FDR-Harry Truman Democrat like all Jews, except for the few socialists and communists. But with McCarthyism ascendant, our politics was repressed. My father, a brilliant man who had a deep understanding of numbers and physics, was a self-taught engineer without a college degree, the result of the family exhausting its money bringing relatives over from Russia. I was born in Philadelphia and lived there five years while my father took night classes, tried and failed at owning a series of grocery stores, and worked an assembly line at Westinghouse. In 1950 the family—my brother and I, my parents and grandparents—moved to Washington so my father could take an engineering job with the American Instrument Company, a manufacturer of precision instruments with many defense contracts that required a security clearance.

I grew up in many different neighborhoods of the segregated and very Southern Washington, beginning in an all-black, working-class neighborhood near the Tivoli Theater. I could jump the fence to get to school and my grandfather could walk to the Orthodox synagogue. Later we moved to a lower-middle-class, aspiring Jewish neighborhood called Riggs Park. Our house was right across the street from the tenplex that my parents, Sam and Yetta Greenberg, helped found. They became the presidents of the congregation and sisterhood and argued with the rabbi about everything. In the sixth grade, my mostly Jewish class was moved intact to an all-black school, as part of the city's desegregation plan after the Supreme Court's decision for Washington, D.C. I was pretty fearless, partly because I was short and fast and partly because my palms from my old black neighborhood protected me. I volunteered to be a school monitor and told a puny even more fearless black kid not to piss on the boy's room floor and was surprised both by his swift punch and his teacher's lack of action. I danced with the only black girl in our class when she was left sitting alone and I helped raise funds to buy our black teacher a clock radio at the end of the school year. I was surprised when she broke into tears.

In high school, we moved to the suburbs where I attended Montgomery Blair High School. Only in my senior year did I begin to really read books and hang out with the so-called brainy kids from the more affluent neighborhoods. I thrived in an experimental class on American civilization that combined history, geography, and social sciences. I took to drama and school plays and was surprised with the rest of the college-bound crowd that our classmate Goldie Hawn opted to go to Broadway. My speech class introduced me to debate and earned me a "goodness, a very sharp mind" from the teacher. It was the first time I realized that maybe my older brother, the scholar and quarterback, hadn't gotten all the good genes.

As a high school senior my growing political awareness and a streak of teenage rebellion created an explosive relationship with my parents. I started attending a Unitarian church, I put a copy of Salvador Dali's Last Supper on my bedroom wall, and I threatened to join thenickers from my school in
front of an all-white café next to the American Instruments building. The summer before going to college in 1963, I got a minimum wage job at one of American Instrument Company's factories in Laurel, Maryland, where nearly all the workers hailed from Appalachia, mostly West Virginia. It didn't take long for me to get in trouble when, during a lunch break, I asked my fellow workers whether they had ever considered forming a union. Somebody rattled and I got a stern lecture by the manager at the factory and then again that night at supper. When a contingent of civil rights marchers from New York City came right down Highway 1 in front of the factory, heading to the March on Washington, my white colleagues all lined up on the road to jeer them. I conspicuously remained behind with the small group of blacks who worked in the shipping department. That summer, I volunteered every night at the NAACP offices on U Street to prepare for the march and Martin Luther King.

In college, I quickly immersed myself in the Young Democrats at Miami University in little Oxford, Ohio, a membership that could endanger your security clearance in that part of America. I began writing a weekly newspaper column and helped organize a controversial program, called "Voices of Dissent," that brought speakers from polarized perspectives, including art editor of National Review and the head of the Communist Party in New York. That earned the displeasure both of the state legislature and the alumni association. Foolishly, I ran for president of the student body a year earlier than usual and lost to mainstream candidate Mike Oxley, who later became the chairman of the House Banking Committee and famous for the Sarbanes-Oxley bill that focused scrutiny on corporate governance. I led the protest over women's exclusion from off-campus housing, but also worked inside as a student senator to hold hearings and rewrite the university's by-laws on housing to grant equal rights to women. The protest was energizing, but the real victory was won in the process.

In the summer of 1964 I spent most of my waking hours working as a volunteer for the national Young Democrats in Washington, writing their position paper defending Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam War. I went as volunteer to the Democratic convention in Atlantic City, where I saw Robert Kennedy's stirring speech on the first night and then cheered Hubert Humphrey's selection as vice president. The Young Democrats also brought me my first close brush with the world of the powerful. I was dating another volunteer whose close circle of friends included Beth Jenkins, daughter of the White House chief of staff, and Luci Johnson, the daughter of the first family. Implausible as it seems now we double-dated with a full Secret Service detail in tow and spent hours lounging on the couches in the Solarium atop the White House residence. Two years later I was picketing the White House in protest over the Vietnam War.

As a Harvard graduate student in 1968 I became heavily involved with a group of government department graduate students who, at the invitation of Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign, converted an American voting behavior project into a targeting and scheduling program for the campaign, processing the results of each primary and predicting in real time the type of counties where an RFK appearance would shift the most votes in the primaries to come. That work came to a crashing end the night of June 5 at the end of Sirhan Sirhan's .22 caliber pistol in the kitchen pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Too depressed and inattentive to carry on with the project, we left the computer center to dispose of our long trays of punch cards. Only after many extensions were we able to manage a final paper.

For my generation, the choice between Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy revealed your political heart. "Clean Gene's"'s antiwar campaign took with him the young, new suburban and professional classes, while the rougher-edged Robert Kennedy, increasingly attuned to injustice, appealed to both blacks and white blue-collar Catholics. Kennedy's death left the country to George Wallace's "law-and-order" campaign and Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy." The failed effort to unite the struggles for civil rights and for empowering workers left Democrats in the wilderness for more than two decades. I have spent most of my professional and political life in disparate settings and disparate ways trying to re-create a multiracial majority opposed to inequality and private excess and finding ways to build a society where equality and community mattered. I am not sure I understood what I was doing along the way, but I frequently pause to think about Robert Kennedy and what might have been.

I married very young to a fellow Miami graduate, Pam Russell, and to our surprise the union quickly produced twins at the beginning of my second year in graduate school. They were wonders in their own right, but they also likely kept me out of the draft, the consuming issue for the educated class in those years. To support my suddenly large family, I turned a part-time job at a start-up Cambridge research company into a full-time effort to live up to my billing to clients as an "expert" in the emerging field of survey research. It wasn't as audacious as it sounds since I did have some experience. My mentor in political science and senior year advisor at Miami, Herb Waltzer, had urged me to conduct a mail survey of students. That led, in turn, to a summer job before graduate school with Ichiel de solle Poole at MIT, using an unheard of new software that allowed me to personally analyze a survey on student housing using a freestanding computer terminal. Thus are "experts" born.

My work in opinion research soon began to accelerate. I headed a major project for Johnson's War on Poverty, to make sure the opinions of poor people played a central role in the conference on welfare and poverty.
ultimately, I wrote a doctoral thesis under James Q. Wilson who taught me about civility and urban policy and pushed me to write my book about the politics of poor white, Latino, and African-American neighborhoods. This all won me an offer of an assistant professorship at Yale after my third year, though I spent a good part of my first year visiting five poor neighborhoods, meeting and interviewing community leaders, trying to understand the history of the neighborhoods, particularly the origins of the people who had migrated there. I increasingly used in-depth interviews to understand how people lived and thought about their lives and to find patterns within all the complexity of their responses that might not be evident to the casual observer. I was greatly influenced by my Yale colleague Bob Lane and his in-depth work with working-class men in New Haven and the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, who wrote about how working-class voters in Western democracies came to accept capitalism despite all its inequalities.

All the while I built a high barrier to keep separate my academic work at Yale and my political campaign work. I loved both and I think my work in both arenas benefited substantially from what I was doing in each. Few at Yale paid any attention in 1972 as I battled for McGovern delegates and ultimately headed up George McGovern’s general election campaign in New Haven. I did, however, get the attention of local liberal Democrats who recruited me for the 1975 primary challenge to the New Haven mayor, a direct assault on the Democratic machine controlled by the party boss, Arthur Barbari. Amid all this, Jonathan Greenberg was born in New Haven. Like his sisters, he, too, was a wonder, even absent the draft. Still, all the changes and pressures took a toll and my marriage was one victim.

As the scope of my academic work began to expand, I spent time in South Africa, Alabama, Israel, and Northern Ireland to research a book on the impact of capitalism and markets on race and ethnic relations. At the heart of the book was my struggle to understand the trade unionists that I came to know as they fashioned tactics and weapons, including discrimination, to help their members. These people were social democrats, sometimes spirited socialists, yet they were dividing their societies along ethnic or racial lines. Many were clearly racist, but even the racists within their world were working to lift up and secure something for their members.

The high barrier between academia and politics began to crumble with my marriage to Rose DeLauro. As campaign manager for Chris Dodd’s first Senate race in 1980, she enlisted me as the “volunteer” pollster and our base-ment was taken over by a dozen callers each night, Dodd hovering over them to listen for tidbits and taking a big chance on my talents. I later handed over the basement to Local 34 of the Federation of Hospital and University Service Employees. DeLauro and I met at Yale.
building to hear me repeat my presentation. When I was finished, the group sent a delegation upstairs to share what they had heard with Paul Kirk, the party chairman. Kirk hated my work. Racial tensions were already high and Jesse Jackson was threatening to run for the Democratic presidential nomination. Kirk later told reporters that he found my conclusion "inflammatory." 

Kirk shut the Democratic establishment's door in my face, but others were open to the idea that white workers had issues that should be heard and that Democrats should entertain a new political formula. Al From, the intense leader of the Democratic Leadership Council, a group of mostly Southern moderate Democrats, embraced me. While the members of the DLC were more concerned with bringing home white Baptists and building a white-black coalition in the South, they were also thinking about how the party could regain its footing nationally. They were attracted both by my lack of ties in the nation's capital as well as by my willingness to blunter along, saying the unthinkable without knowing who I was offending. It was the beginning of a close decade-long relationship with the DLC.

In 1988 I helped elect Joe Lieberman to the U.S. Senate in an upset victory over the popular Lowell Weicker. Joe, a close political friend in New Haven, ran as a crusading attorney general, fighting to win rebates from the big supermarket chains overcharging consumers, against a gas tax hike, and willing to talk about his faith. Lieberman's comfort with my Macomb County findings helped him carry the old blue-collar towns along the Naugatuck River, towns that other state Democratic candidates had been losing over the past decade.

With that upset victory, it now occurred to at least a few political observers that the professor might just be on to something that would help beat Republicans.

In late spring of 1991, when Clinton was formulating his plans for a presidential run, The American Prospect asked me to write a review essay on the wave of new books by prominent journalists that together chronicled the gloomy crisis of the Democratic Party. The exercise was cathartic for me. Not only did it give me a place to crystallize conclusions from years of research but also a chance to assert my growing confidence that the Democrats, with the right candidate, could rebuild a national party grounded in middle-class values that could complete Robert Kennedy's mission.

With one exception, the various authors I reviewed believed the outlook for the Democrats was bleak. The party, they said, had become trapped by a "rights revolution" that seemed to put individualism and groups before community and showed an unseemly hostility to the military and family. That was a posture that Republicans were becoming increasingly skillful in attacking. Yet the national media lost interest in debates over what I called the "middle-class crisis." The angry voters had given up on the Democrats and embraced the Republicans. That answer, I said, is pretty clearly no. Despite the tumbling Jimmy Carter, the pinched and parsimonious Walter Mondale, and a Michael Dukakis unable to strangle his wife's murderer, I said, these Reagan Democrats check in year after year to see if Democrats "get it yet."

The book makes clear, I said, that the primary challenge for Democrats is to rediscover the forgotten middle class and to reinvent the party as one that puts the values and interests of the great majority of working people at the center of its politics. "Safety nets that protect only the poor," including welfare programs, are "bad politics," I said, but worse, demonstrably ineffective in alleviating poverty on their own and a "moral trap," asking those just above the poverty line to finance child care and health insurance benefits that they themselves lack. I considered that I might have crossed a line and might lose some of my liberal friends with this, but a growing band of left intellectuals urged me to move into this "no-go" area. I said that the party had to end its "moral agonism" about work and family and "defend the principle of reward for work and the social and moral worth of a strong family." The broad majority of the country hungered for leaders and for a party that honors work and recognizes the role of a middle class that carries the burdens of society.

I also noted that Reagan Democrats believed the Democratic Party had become blind to "middle-class America's deep frustration with the ascendency of the wealthy and the corporations." Yes, the great majority think the middle class is "squeezed," but less to pay for programs for the poor and more to pay for tax breaks for the rich. Perhaps, I suggested, a party less tied to those interests would be able to better see reality.

I urged Democrats to "challenge the conservative hegemony" and define the Reagan-Bush years for what they were, unequal and self-indulgent, a time when "American leaders stood by while the notion of common citizenship gave way to private advantage, at the expense of the middle class." Democrats, I said, should run against this era, as Republicans ran in election after election against Jimmy Carter's pessimism.

Finally, I called on Democrats to defend social insurance programs, like Social Security, but with "a rationale for the government's role in society." Why wouldn't the country be distrustful and cynical about government when Democrats do not make the case for attacking problems collectively? The answer, I said, is "revitalizing politics and empowering Americans," particularly in health care where initiatives can address the vulnerabilities faced by the middle class.

The advice I offered in that review was yet to be seasoned by Bill Clinton's deep appreciation of Americans' skepticism about government and the need to change government in fundamental ways. He no doubt wrote some sharp critique of my essay.
comments in the margins of the draft of the article I sent him. My education would come later.

Clinton's journey to the 1992 presidential campaign began on August 19, 1946. He was born in the Julia Chester Hospital in Hope, Arkansas, to Virgina Blythe, a widow. His father, William Jefferson Blythe Jr., was killed at age twenty-eight in an auto accident as he drove from Chicago to Hope to fetch his pregnant wife and take her to their new home in Chicago. William Jefferson Blythe III was only four years old when his mother married the local Buick dealer in Hope, a fun-loving rascal named Roger Clinton.

What is clear among the twists and turns of his early life took is that he is a man from humble origins and a man of the South who grew up in a world of contradictions between black and white, love and violence in his family, and Baptist churches and gambling parlors in Hot Springs. His beloved grandfather ran a grocery store in Hope and worked a second job as a night watchman at a sawmill. Race was the great divider in the South in those days, yet Clinton's grandfather treated his black customers no differently than his white ones. There was no "nigger talk" in his household and Bill was the only white child who played with black children. When Roger Clinton moved his family to Hot Springs, Bill found himself surrounded by diversity. While blacks and whites were segregated in the small town of 35,000, the hot springs for which it was named attracted visitors and retirees as well as gambling and other vices. There were Catholic churches—Bill went to a Catholic school for a time—as well as Greek Orthodox churches and synagogues alongside the Baptist churches where Bill went, mostly without his parents except at Easter.

Although his family was not particularly political, Bill Clinton exhibited an early taste and talent for politics in high school when he campaigned intensively to win election as a senator at Boys State, the American Legion's national effort to build civic virtues among the young. Victory in that campaign carried him to Boys Nation in Washington, D.C., in 1963 where he distinguished himself from other Southern representatives by refusing to vote with them against civil rights and speaking of the "shame" that his state bore for its resistance to racial equality. Clinton's long stride carried him to the front row of a reception for Boys Nation delegates in the Rose Garden and the first handshake with President John F. Kennedy.

After college at Georgetown and a year as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, Clinton arrived in New Haven in the summer of 1970 to attend Yale Law School at the same time I moved there to begin teaching political science. Amazingly, we never crossed paths. With a casual commitment to his classes, Clinton immediately volunteered to help the antiwar U.S. Senate candidate and sitting Democratic primary, then agreed to coordinate Duffy's losing fall campaign in the 3rd Congressional District, including New Haven. Two years later, Clinton headed up the George McGovern primary campaign in the 3rd Congressional District. In the general election, I took over the New Haven campaign, while Clinton went to Texas as McGovern's state director, truly a fool's errand.

During the McGovern campaign, Clinton met with Arthur Barbari, head of the entrenched local party machine in New Haven. Clinton proposed a deal: he would keep his eight hundred antiwar canvassers off the street if Barbari supported the liberal McGovern. Barbari offered to let Clinton make his case directly to the party meeting at a local Italian society. Bill brought Hillary Rodham, his fellow student and girlfriend at Yale, and after some initial taunts of "commie" and "fag," he carried the room. 10 Three years later, I would take a different approach when I helped the liberal reform candidate Frank Lode, aided by his chief of staff, Rosa DeLauro, defeat the incumbent mayor, a total surprise and near-fatal loss for the Barbari machine.

From Hope to Oxford to New Haven, Clinton demonstrated an amazing ability to move comfortably in language, style, and bearing through very different worlds. He is as comfortable in a church pulpit as in a Wall Street conference room. And while his own life is full of contradictions, he is supremely talented at bringing combatants together to settle what no one else could before.

Clinton's first run for public office in 1974 was improbable. Six months after he and Hillary were married, the twenty-seven-year-old Arkansas law professor turned down an offer to join his new wife on the staff of the House Judiciary Committee as it began the Watergate inquiry and instead climbed into his 1970 Gremlin and set off to run for the House of Representatives. His quest took him from door-to-door, from cafes to country stores, across the most Republican, poorest, and whitest congressional district in Arkansas just two years after McGovern's crushing defeat barely left a Democrat standing. The Republican who held the seat, J. P. Hammerschmidt, clearly felt safe. A local Democrat could hope to win or maybe a third of the vote in the district that had given Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and McGovern in 1972 barely a quarter. But Clinton began his political career with the question that I, too, was asking: how do you bring back the poorest and the powerless, the voters who should be Democrats, to their natural party? In Arkansas's mountain counties, where poor farmers eked out a living in the thin soil, the median income was only $2,000. But the hollers were rich in Baptist churches, one of Bill Clinton's favored venues.

Clinton ran as a populist, a champion of the forgotten little man, battling against big, powerful private interests. He told the voters his economic advisors were the "small farmers, small businesspeople, working people, retirees, ..."
and almost anyone you can imagine." Those advisors told him to go in relentless pursuit of tax relief for middle- and lower-middle-income people and to oppose at every turn gas tax increases while seeking higher taxes on corporations and closing loopholes that encouraged companies to invest abroad.

He combined his battle for the little people against the big corporations with passionate attacks on big federal bureaucracy and wasteful spending. Clinton called for breaking up the federal education bureaucracy, taking limousines away from federal bureaucrats, and relieving small business of government paperwork. And while they were at it they should balance the budget, too.

In the end Clinton lost with 48.5 percent of the vote. His biggest margins came from the bottom up, in the counties with the lowest income and education. George Wallace had carried four of the six counties in 1964.

Two years later Clinton tried again, making a run for attorney general. This time he had around him an aura of inevitability and swept the field, a feat he repeated two years later when he was elected governor with 63 percent of the vote. He built his statewide standing battling the utilities, the symbol of big monopoly power in Arkansas.

Then came the shock, a surprise defeat in 1980 at the hands of Frank White. As governor, Clinton had proposed a 40 percent increase in school funding and a $1,200 a year increase in teachers' salaries, created a network of rural health clinics, and undertaken the first major road-building program in over a decade. To finance his ambitious investment program for Arkansas, Clinton proposed a penny increase in the gasoline tax and a tax on tags for cars and trucks, with the highest fees for the most expensive cars. But the legislature had other ideas and shifted the fees to passenger cars to be taxed by weight. With working and rural people driving older, heavier cars, Clinton's 'car tax' became a tax on the little people, one they had the privilege of paying in person at the county revenue office on their birthday.  

It only dawned on Clinton late in the campaign that he might lose to White. Returning from a campaign trip he reported to friends that people felt betrayed, that 'I kicked them when they were down.' Sure enough, those people in the rural and poorest white and Wallace counties swapped his ascendency abruptly in November 1980, a cautionary lesson for this very smart student of America.

Clinton also learned a lesson about the need for an aggressive and intense campaign. In his first run for the governor's office he had hired Dick Morris as pollster, described by Clinton as "a brilliant, abrasive character, brimming with ideas about politics and policy." Morris was roundly despised by the campaign staff, but apparently provided Clinton with the creative tension on which he thrived. In his campaign against White, though, Clinton gave in to pressure from his staff and replaced Morris with a more established national Democratic pollster. After his stinging defeat, Clinton would not be denied. When he set out to recapture the governor's mansion he had Morris back at his side. In his first ad, the candidate reminded people "my daddy never had to whip me twice for the same thing" and that he learned from his defeat that "you can't lead without listening.

Though more modest after his defeat, Clinton was no less a populist. He waged an unrestrained class warfare, focused almost exclusively on the utility companies and their rate increases that kept jobs away from Arkansas and hurt people when they were down. When Governor White cut back on the monthly prescriptions for the elderly, Clinton ran an ad with the tagline, "Frank White. Soft on utilities. Tough on the elderly." Clinton advocated investment in education to spur economic growth, but there was no talk of a car tax or any new taxes. After winning easily with 55 percent of the vote, Clinton returned to his 1974 theme of investment and accountable government. He raised taxes for education, but this time it was accompanied by a mandated rise in measurable performance and competency tests for teachers, bitterly opposed by the Arkansas Education Association but supported by 62 percent of the public. In 1984, the year of the Reagan landslide in the South and the defection of Catholics in suburban Detroit, Clinton won with 63 percent of the vote. His near fatal defeat at the hands of the humble voters of the South and his subsequent resurrection taught him a lesson with biblical force: Democrats could be redeemed only by struggling on behalf of the middle class. Government could be used to invest in people to create opportunity, but only if it is an accountable government, one that requires high standards and demands responsibility.

After a decade of self-education that left him with a well-developed view of the path back for Democrats, Clinton became involved in 1985 with the creation of the Democratic Leadership Council, a group focused on cost-effective government, creative new ideas on social policy, and commitment to a strong national defense. Members of the DLC were sometimes referred to as New Democrats. But Clinton, in My Life, viewed Robert Kennedy as the first New Democrat. "He believed in civil rights for all and special privileges for none, in giving poor people a hand up rather than a handout; work was better than welfare." Clinton, too, chose Kennedy over Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and was eager to follow this path.

AUDITIONING

When Clinton set his sights beyond Arkansas to the nation, he knew he would be confronting a sitting president still popular from his victory in the