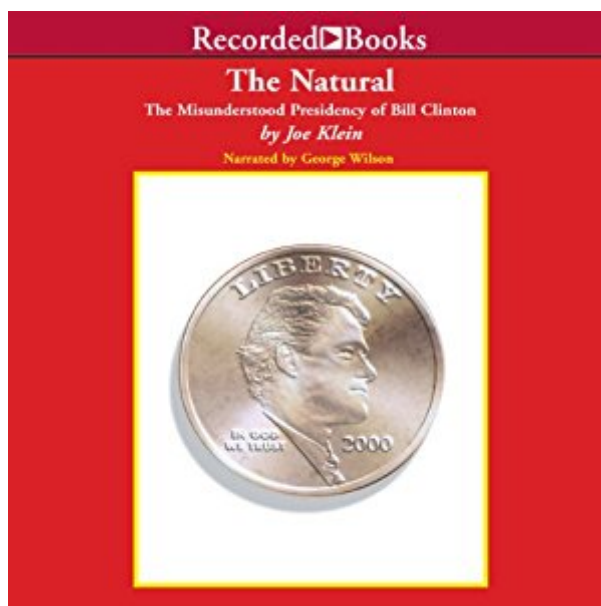


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The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency Of Bill Clinton



Synopsis

Based on "Eight Years", Joe Klein's critically acclaimed article that first appeared in The New Yorker, this is the first book to deal with both sides of Bill Clinton-the personal flaws and the policy successes. Primary Colors, of which Klein was the "anonymous" author, spent 25 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list. His previous books include The Running Mate, Payback: Five Marines After Vietnam and Woody Guthrie: A Life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This short, fast-moving book on Bill Clinton forsakes a historian's detailed and measured treatment to get at the essence of this man's presidency. Because it's more like a magazine article than a doorstop, you're likely to actually read it, maybe in one sitting. The book has become timely again, in light of Hillary Clinton's presidential bid. The "Hillaryland" liberal faction split the White House of her husband, elected as a "Third Way" moderate. Her premature insistence on addressing health care was the most grievous policy error of her husband's presidency. And Hillary's unbelievably complicated proposal, concocted in secret, showed no political sense. Aides described how Hillary could drive Bill, with a phone call, from a good mood to a staff-chastising tantrum, and how they distinguish those tantrums by the tone of his shouting. She comes across as the more conspiratorial and paranoid of the two, an uncompromising liberal true-believer pursuing a scorched-earth policy against enemies. Sort of like, uh, that president she helped impeach, Richard Nixon. You wonder how she, and this country, would fare with her in the Oval Office. Klein does not see this as a sham

marriage, though. While ever aware they might be playing him, he sees them as devoted to each other. One of his best chapters describes how Washington's culture of political warfare began with Watergate, intensified through the endless Iran-Contra investigations and the attack-ad era and culminated in the Gingrich speakership and the relentless Whitewater, Paula Jones and Lewinsky investigations. Clinton failed his potential for several reasons. The placid Nineties were too tame for a truly great presidency. After the healthcare miscalculation, he never seized another opportunity to remake major domestic policy. And the impeachment scandal fatally distracted him in 1998 when he had the budget surplus and standing with Congress to make a real mark by fixing Social Security. Like a charcoal sketcher, Klein has a fine eye for quick but telling detail. He sees Clinton as needy of praise and human contact. He'd keep dazed listeners awake into the wee hours, talking more and more intensely, unwilling to let the moment go. Klein describes bowling with him one midnight just before the New Hampshire primary, after the candidate enters but finds the emptied-out joint devoid of hands to shake. Klein, awaiting his turn in the lane, would find Clinton standing so close he pressed up against him, seeming to crave human contact. Clinton's intense but flawed humanity is what makes him interesting, and endlessly so.

He had & still has a pronounced love-hate relationship with President Clinton. It seems that Clinton feels the same towards him. Mr. Klein, in turn is impressed with the president & all his talents: his communications skills, grasp of facts, connection with people & vast intellect. He is equally disappointed by Clinton's shortcomings of self absorption, sense of entitlement & foolish personal behavior. Those weaknesses disgusted him (as they did all of us). Mr. Klein also gets some rips at Newt Gingrich, George W. & Al Gore. In fact, Mr. Klein does not have much good to say about any "boomer" politicians. They have not the sense of honor, integrity, perhaps gravitas of Lloyd Bentsen, George sr. or Bob Dole. But Clinton bested them all one way or the other. Clinton could not control his appetites & that diluted everything he tried to accomplish. It made him an "average" president. In short, a great opportunity for him & America was lost. This is a very well written book. As the years past there will be better biographies (including Clinton's own). But it now has the advantage of being one of the first. Mr. Klein's skill with the English language & his vocabulary make him a very good writer. Read or listen to this one before it becomes history.

Slim and definitely not sine ira et studio, but if you read nothing but this and Primary Colors you'll learn all you need to know about the Clintons. In fact don't bother with Hills and Bills memoirs: too long, too tedious and those folks can't write. Joe Klein can.

'The Natural' is Informative, tightly written and much more objective than Clinton's autobiography. It's a great book that treats the ex-president fairly, not as a cartoon villain or a hero, but as an intelligent, interesting, but also deeply flawed man.

Joe Klein writes a good and informative book about the Clinton Presidency. At times the structure of the book seems a bit illogical, but what it lacks here is made up for in terms of anecdotes and good analytic work by Klein.

Joe Klein surely didn't want to upset the republicans, when he wrote this book. If he's President Clinton's friend, President Clinton doesn't need anymore friends like him. Would a friend write Primary Colors about his friend, then keep silent?? How kind of you Mr. Klein, to write The Natural. Please Mr. Klein don't do us anymore favors. Leave our President Clinton alone. Be a friend to the man who resides now in the White House. I should have known after Primary Colors, I was wasting my money on this book. Live and learn.

This is for the most part a balanced history of our 42nd president. The spin is there, but it isn't on the facts. Klein presents the events well but tries to claim a greatness to Clinton based on intelligence and personality (sound familiar?), not accomplishments. Excuses abound and Klein frequently cites the lack of a crisis such as 9/11 as reason Clinton is not viewed more favorably and hypothesizes how great Clinton would've been in a similar situation. That's great, but it could've been's don't make a good president. He also gives Clinton credit for Welfare Reform as an accomplishment when all he did was reluctantly sign the legislation. The reform was created by the much insulted Gingrich Congress, as the author does state but then seems to forget. Klein clearly does not like Republicans but the experienced reader should be able to look beyond the cheap shots and focus on the facts presented. Even though I am a conservative, I have always wanted to like Clinton. This book reinforces why I do not.

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