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## Don't Mourn for Dole

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Twenty years ago this week Jimmy Carter won the presidency when the final tally of Mississippi's votes showed that black Democrats had allowed him to edge out Gerald Ford and go over the top in accumulating an electoral college majority.

That day heralded a seeming rebirth of a new Democratic Party, a party that ethically stood in the starkest possible contrast to the Republican woes of Watergate and to Ford's own politically devastating pardon of the disgraced ex-president Richard M. Nixon. It was a contrast that gave genuine meaning to Carter's pledge that the United States deserved a government as good and as honest as its people, and in those early days -- before "Billygate," before the troubles of Bert Lance and Hamilton Jordan, and long before the final ignominy of the Iranian hostage crisis -- Carter's resolute sincerity seemed truly uplifting rather than just preachy.

Now Bill Clinton has succeeded where Jimmy Carter failed -- in winning reelection to the presidency as a Democrat for the first time since Franklin Roosevelt did so (for the third time) in 1944. But Clinton's is a victory where the tables seem utterly turned from the partisan world of 1976. Now, in complete contrast to what Carter stood for 20 years ago, the Clinton administration and its loyal troopers at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) call to mind not Carter's uplifting promises but the steely eyed stonewalling that characterized both the Nixon White House and its minions at the memorably named "CREEP," the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

Whitewater, "Travelgate," "Troopergate," and even Craig Livingstone and his 900 oddly obtained FBI background files are all now in danger of falling out of the top five, if not the top 10, of presently percolating Clinton administration scandals. Now there's the John Huang trifecta -- soliciting campaign funds from Korean corporations, laundering other campaign funds through Buddhist temple-goers and representing Indonesia's multi-millionaire Riady family, and its troubled U. S. bank, throughout the upper reaches of the U. S. government while ostensibly working as a Commerce Department political appointee. It vies for the top spots with former White House aide Mark Middleton's financial solicitations in Taiwan and the Riady family's oddly solicitous concern for the financial well-being of former Clinton Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell, currently in federal prison.

Once citizens -- and prosecutors -- begin sorting out all the pieces, it's possible that the full story of the Riadys' contacts with Hubbell will blossom into a full-fledged reenactment of the events that made Herbert Kalmbach and Jeb Stuart Magruder front-page names two decades ago. John Huang's contacts with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) on behalf of the Riadys'

Lippo Bank may prove even more troublesome than the intriguing stories of hard-to-find Buddhist campaign contributors. But Huang's status as the most curious agent of our present-day "CREEP" represents the first time since the FBI's pursuit of the Communist Party USA's "underground" operations in the early 1950s that an American political party has been reduced to hiding top-ranked officials in "safe houses" in order to keep them away from investigators and the courts.

This is not only depressingly sad to anyone who grew up a Democrat believing that Jimmy Carter's approach to public ethics signified an essential difference between the two parties. It also, almost inescapably, is going to get far worse, whether or not -- in the most extreme scenario -- independent counsel Kenneth Starr early in 1997 indicts first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton for obstruction of justice.

But it's the arrogant stonewalling that represents the ethical nadir of the Clinton White House and the many narrow careerists who've tied their names and reputations to the public well-being of Bill Clinton. More glaringly in this new context of DNC overseas fund-raising and the Huang-Riady-Lippo triangle than with previous questions about Whitewater documents, Vince Foster's files, or Craig Livingstone's hiring, the White House's across-the-board belief that resolute stonewalling is the best policy comes through loud and clear -- to however few Americans are interested in listening.

Time may tell that the real historical parallel for this presidential election of 1996 is not 1976, though, but 1972. Think for a moment, if you believe Bill Clinton today is a far more fortunate man than Bob Dole, about Richard Nixon and George McGovern back in November of 1972. Nixon's electoral triumph was as overwhelming as any in American history; McGovern's defeat -- or rejection -- was even more stark than those than had been suffered by Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Alf Landon in 1936.

But in retrospect there's little doubt that subsequent history treated George McGovern far more kindly than it did Richard Nixon, and little doubt too that in retrospect George McGovern was a far more honorable loser than was Richard Nixon a fortunate victor. So don't mourn too much for Bob Dole. He may have lost, and lost big, but the tag of "loser" is no mark on one's honor or character; it may be far worse -- as the lesson of 1972 reminds us -- to be a victor who wins in ways that time and again violate the principles that Jimmy Carter tried to make the hallmark of the modern Democratic Party 20 years ago.

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