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DECLARATIONS

Stuck in Scandal Land

As long as she is in public life, Hillary will protect and serve herself.



Hillary Clinton PHOTO: REUTERS



By

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Doesn't the latest Hillary Clinton scandal make you want to throw up your hands and say: *Do we really have to do this again? Do we have to go back there?* People assume she is our next president. We are defining political deviancy down.

The scandal this week is that we have belatedly found out, more than two years after she left the office of secretary of state, that throughout Mrs. Clinton's four-year tenure she

did not conduct official business through the State Department email system. She had her own private email addresses and her own private Internet domain, on her own private server at one of her own private homes, in Chappaqua, N.Y. Which means she had, and has, complete control of the emails. If a journalist filed a Freedom of Information Act request asking to see emails of the secretary of state, the State Department had nothing to show. If Congress asked to see them, State could say there was nothing to see. (Two months ago, on the request of State, Mrs. Clinton turned over a reported 55,000 pages of her emails. She and her private aides apparently got to pick which ones.)

Is it too much to imagine that Mrs. Clinton wanted to conceal the record of her communications as America's top diplomat because she might have been doing a great deal of interesting work in those emails, not only with respect to immediate and unfolding international events but with respect to those who would like to make a positive impression on the American secretary of state by making contributions to the Clinton Foundation, which not only funds many noble causes but is the seat of operations of Clinton Inc. and its numerous offices, operatives, hangers-on and campaign-in-waiting?

What a low and embarrassing question. It is prompted by *last week's* scandal—that the Clinton Foundation accepted foreign contributions during Mrs. Clinton's tenure as secretary of state. It is uncomfortable to ask such questions, but that's the thing with the Clintons, they always make you go there.

The mainstream press is all over the story now that it has blown. It's odd that it took so long. Everyone at State, the White House, and the rest of the government who received an email from the secretary of state would have seen where it was coming from—a nongovernmental address. You'd think someone would have noticed.

With the exception of the moment Wednesday when a hardy reporter from TMZ actually went to an airport and shouted a query at Mrs. Clinton—it was just like the old days of journalism, with a stakeout and shouted queries—Mrs. Clinton hasn't been subjected to any questions from the press. She'll slide, she'll glide, she'll skate. (With TMZ she just walked on, smiling.)

Why would she ignore regulations to opt out of the State email system? We probably

see the answer in a video clip posted this week on BuzzFeed. Mrs. Clinton, chatting with a supporter at a fundraiser for her 2000 Senate campaign, said: “As much as I’ve been investigated and all of that, you know, why would I . . . ever want to do email?”

But when you’re secretary of state you have to. So she did it her way, with complete control. It will make it harder, if not impossible, for investigators.

The press is painting all this as a story about how Mrs. Clinton, in her love for secrecy and control, has given ammunition to her enemies. But that’s not the story. The story is that this is what she does, and always has. The rules apply to others, not her. She’s special, entitled, exempt from the rules—the rules under which, as the *Federalist* reports, the State Department in 2012 forced the resignation of a U.S. ambassador, “in part for setting up an unsanctioned private e-mail system.”

Why doesn’t the legacy press swarm her on this? Because she is political royalty. They are used to seeing her as a regal, queenly figure. They’ve been habituated to understand that Mrs. Clinton is not to be harried, not to be subjected to gotcha questions or impertinent grilling. She is a Democrat, a star, not some grubby Republican governor from nowhere. And they don’t want to be muscled by her spokesmen. The wildly belligerent Philippe Reines sends reporters insulting, demeaning emails if they get out of line. He did it again this week. It is effective in two ways. One is that it diverts attention from his boss, makes Mr. Reines the story, and in the process makes her look comparatively sane. The other is that reporters don’t want a hissing match with someone who implies he will damage them. They can’t afford to be frozen out. She’s probably the next president: Their careers depend on access.

But how will such smash-mouth tactics play the next four, five years?

Back to the questions at the top of the column.

Sixteen years ago, when she was first running for the Senate, I wrote a book called “The Case Against Hillary Clinton.” I waded through it all—cattle futures, Travelgate, the lost Rose law firm records, women slimed as bimbos, foreign campaign cash, the stealth and secrecy that marked the creation of the health-care plan, Monica, the vast right-wing conspiracy. As I researched I remembered why, four years into the Clinton administration, the *New York Times* columnist William Safire called Hillary “a congenital liar . . . compelled to mislead, and to ensnare her subordinates and friends in

a web of deceit.”

Do we have to go through all that again?

In 1992 the Clintons were new and golden. Now, so many years later, their reputation for rule breaking and corruption is so deep, so assumed, that it really has become old news. And old news isn't news.

An aspect of the story goes beyond criticism of Mrs. Clinton and gets to criticism of us. A generation or two ago, a person so encrusted in a reputation for scandal would not be considered a possible presidential contender. She would be ineligible. Now she is inevitable.

What happened? Why is her party so in her thrall?

She's famous? The run itself makes you famous. America didn't know who Jack Kennedy was in 1959; in 1961 he was king of the world. The same for Obama in '08.

Money? Sure she's the superblitz shock-and-awe queen of fundraising, but pretty much any Democrat in a 50/50 country would be able to raise what needs to be raised.

She's a woman? There are other women in the Democratic Party.

She's inevitable? She was inevitable in 2008. Then, suddenly, she was evitable.

Her talent is for survival. This on its own terms is admirable and takes grit. But others have grit. As for leadership, she has a sharp tactical sense but no vision, no overall strategic sense of where we are and where we must go.

What is freezing the Democrats is her mystique. But mystique can be broken. A nobody called Obama broke hers in 2008.

Do we really have to return to Scandal Land? It's what she brings wherever she goes. And it's not going to stop.

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