



# Bill Clinton: An American Journey: Great Expectations

*Nigel Hamilton*

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## **Bill Clinton: An American Journey: Great Expectations** Nigel Hamilton

Bill Clinton, forty-second president of the United States, is the quintessential baby boomer: on the one hand blessed with a near-genius IQ, on the other, beset by character flaws that made his presidency a veritable soap opera of high ideals, distressing incompetence, model financial stewardship, and domestic misbehavior. In an era of cultural civil war, the Clinton administration fed the public an almost daily diet of scandal and misfortune.

Who is Bill Clinton, though, and how did this baby-boom saga begin? Clinton's upbringing in Arkansas and his student years at Georgetown, Oxford, and Yale universities help us to see his life not only as a personal story but as the story of modern America.

Behind the closed doors of the house on the hill above Park Avenue in Hot Springs, the struggle between Clinton's stepfather and mother became ultimately unbearable, causing Virginia to move out and divorce Roger Clinton. Dreading confrontation, Bill Clinton excelled in almost every field save athletics. But the fabled success of the scholarship boy would be marred by the decisions he came to make regarding Vietnam and military service—choices that haunt him to this day.

We watch with a mixture of alarm, fascination, and awe as Bill Clinton does so much that is right—and so much that is wrong. He sets his cap for the star student at Yale, young Hillary Rodham, seducing her with his dreams of a better America and an aw-shucks grin. Wherever he goes, he charms and disarms—young and old, men and women...and more women. He becomes a law professor straight out of college; he contests a congressional election in his twenties—and almost wins it. He becomes attorney general of his state and within two years is set to become the youngest-ever governor of Arkansas, at only thirty-two.

Yet, always, there is a curse, a drive toward personal self-destruction—and with that the destruction of all those who are helping him on his legendary path. His affair with Gennifer Flowers strains his marriage and later nearly scuttles his bid for the presidency. He is thrown out of the governor's office after only one term and suffers a life-shaking crisis of confidence. Though with the stalwart help of a female chief of staff he regains his crown, it is clear that Bill Clinton's charismatic career is a ceaseless tightrope walk above the forces that threaten to pull him down—the most potent of them residing in his own being.

Imbued with sympathy, deep intelligence, and the storyteller's art, this extraordinary biography helps us, at last, to understand the real Bill Clinton as he stumbles and withdraws from the 1988 presidential nomination race but enters it four years later, to make one of the most astonishing bids for the presidency in the twentieth century: the climax of this gripping political, social, and scandalous journey.

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