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# ***ON THE EDGE:***

## ***The Clinton Presidency***

**NOTED WASHINGTON POLITICAL COMMENTATOR,  
ELIZABETH DREW, OFFERS AN INCISIVE AND  
REVEALING ACCOUNT OF BILL CLINTON'S FIRST  
EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN OFFICE**

*"Taut, compulsively readable...her report rings true in its portrayal of an indecisive, garrulous, reckless, self-indulgent, defensive, hot-tempered, but unusually intelligent president eager to tackle big domestic issues."*

*-Publishers Weekly, Starred Review 9/26/94*

President Bill Clinton assumed office with a promise of change. He brought with him a team of untested but enthusiastic aides from his presidential campaign. Armed with an ambitious legislative agenda, which included health care reform, deficit reduction, tax relief for the working poor, education and training, and a promise to break congressional gridlock, Clinton stepped into the Oval Office amid optimism about his presidency. But, writes noted political commentator Elizabeth Drew, "One of the most distinctive things about the Clinton Presidency in the crucial first eighteen months was the aura of danger. His Presidency was constantly on the edge - because of his past and what came to be called his 'character,' and because of the legislative gambles he took." She also demonstrates how startlingly unready to govern the Clintons were.

In **ON THE EDGE: The Clinton Presidency** (Simon & Schuster: November 12, 1994; \$24.00), Elizabeth Drew chronicles the ups and downs of an administration as it tried to carry out its campaign commitments of changing the direction of the country while meeting with unexpected difficulties - many of its own making. From Supreme Court nominations to foreign policy entanglements, troubles with the press to struggles with Congress, Drew delivers the first in-depth, full scale treatment of Bill Clinton and his presidency to date.

# ***ELIZABETH DREW***

A chronicle of an administration in turmoil, **ON THE EDGE** includes:

- \* A look at the inauguration and the transition. Drew details the political jockeying behind each of the key Cabinet appointments and looks at the heavy price Clinton paid in delaying his choice of White House staff and in choosing a staff with no experience in serving in a White House. The Clintons didn't think they needed the help of more experienced people. Most damaging was that there was no real plan for what the new administration would do after it got to Washington. "We just weren't ready," said one senior White House official, "emotionally, intellectually, organizationally, or substantively."

- \* A review of the troubles faced in the first few days of the administration such as the Zoe Baird nomination for Attorney General and the controversy over gays in the military. Clinton's choice of Baird, and the subsequent controversy over her hiring of illegal immigrant employees, and delayed payment of Social Security taxes for them, brought Clinton's judgement into question before his term really got started. It also demonstrated that congressional Democrats weren't going to roll over for the new Democratic President. The gays in the military issue also indicated Clinton had little authority over his military commanders, and in fact was held in contempt by some.

- \* A look at the Clintons' difficulties in adjusting to living in the White House. For all his pleasure in showing it off, Clinton and his wife were unhappy with the lack of privacy and with its formality -- though they were careful not to complain publicly, lest they seem ungrateful for what to many was a palace. The Clintons' marriage is a complex one, with the Clintons needing each other more than generally understood.

- \* The unique role of Hillary Rodham Clinton, and her unprecedented impact on the White House, as well as on national policy. From the tremendous power she exhibited in the formation of the Justice Department and other domestic appointments, to the unannounced decision that she would be essentially in charge of domestic policy (economic policy excluded), to her handling of her husband's Health Care initiatives, Drew details the day to day impact of the most "hands-on" first lady in American history.

- \* Details of the serious tensions between Secretary of State Warren Christopher and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, over numerous foreign policy issues -- and the disputes between Christopher and Vice President Gore over several issues, including Bosnia. The Somalia debacle was brought about by a series of unthought-through and casually taken decisions, without a single meeting of the top national security advisers, with only fitful attention on the

part of the president -- who thought the policy had been changed before the last fateful attempt to capture Mohamed Farah Aideed. The backs and forths on Bosnia were caused by the rivalries in the top foreign policy team, and presidential indecision. At one point, Clinton proposed introducing ground troops.

\* The firing of Les Aspin as Defense Secretary was brought about by the need for a head to roll after Mogadishu, and was influenced by Colin Powell, Warren Christopher, and Mrs. Clinton. Bobby Ray Inman threatened to leave town while the President went through days of last minute indecision. There were reasons other than his publicly stated ones for Inman's withdrawal.

\* A review of the administration's mishandling of the stimulus bill, and the long-term impact of the loss of that bill, as well as of Clinton's abandonment of the Btu tax.

\* A detailed examination of the unprecedented role played by the consultants - Carville, Begala, Greenberg, and Grunwald - in the Clinton administration. Previous presidents had pollsters and other outside political advisers, but never before had a group of political consultants been such an integral part in a presidency -- on foreign as well as domestic policy.

\* A review of Clinton's successes such as the large expansion of Head Start, NAFTA, the Brady Bill, National Service, more affordable college loans, a larger tax break for the working poor, and the awakening of the nation to focus on reform of the health care industry. Also, an account of how the health-care proposal was formed and what went wrong.

\* Decisions on how to handle Whitewater divided the President's advisers, and were heavily influenced by Mrs. Clinton's antipathy to Washington and the press. The differences between the president and his wife on this were not as large as generally portrayed. The impact on the Clintons of the allegation that Clinton had used state troopers for numerous assassinations nearly ruined Christmas at the White House, and caused serious strains in the family quarters.

\* Changes in the Clinton regime generated by Leon Panetta after taking over the job as Chief of Staff. As Panetta saw it, one of the first and most important orders of business was to try to restore Clinton's Presidential stature. Panetta also tackled two wide-ranging problems: the management of the White House (which was generally tightened up), and foreign policy (which was made part of the White House and less of a separate entity). Clinton, aware that his

Presidency was in serious trouble was willing to listen to advice.

**ON THE EDGE** concludes with a review of recent events: the Whitewater hearings, which were more damaging to the administration than expected; the continuing problems caused by the Paula Jones suit; a narrowly averted collision with North Korea over its handling of nuclear reactors; and Clinton's shifting policies on Cuba and Haiti. Drew also details the political maneuvering and behind the scenes bargaining sessions conducted on behalf of Clinton's crime bill (which passed after a bumpy start and was touted by the White House as yet another glorious chapter in the legend of the "Comeback Kid"), and his plans for a comprehensive health care program (which was ultimately shelved when it became clear a bill would not be forthcoming in 1994).

Drew, who interviewed every high official in the White House, Cabinet officers, Capitol Hill staff and others, provides a penetrating analysis of a president who has accomplished a great deal while fighting a war between his ambitions and his flaws. "This book," writes Drew, "is intended to help contemporary Americans, as well as future historians and others, understand this most complex man and his -- to many people -- perplexing presidency."

**About the Author:**

**Elizabeth Drew** is a much-honored writer who appears frequently on NBC Television's "Meet the Press" and other public affairs programs. She is the author of seven books including *Washington Journal: The Events of 1973-74*, *Politics and Money: The New Road to Corruption*, and *Senator*. Drew lives in Washington DC.

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