

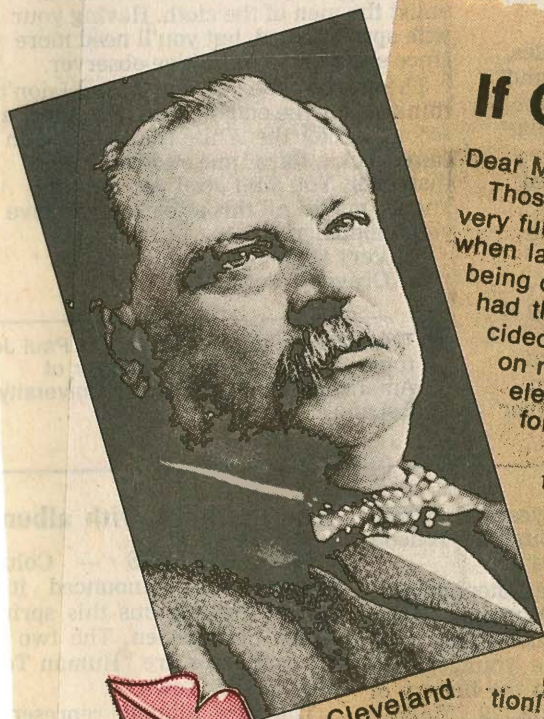
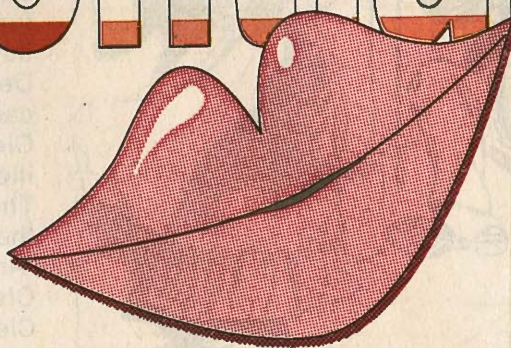
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THE NEWS-JOURNAL

Daytona Beach, Florida

Saturday, February 1, 1992

# Presidential Affairs



Cleveland



## If Grover could give advice

Dear Mr. Clinton:

Those of us who live beyond the grave do not, unfortunately, get very full news accounts. I just heard about your tabloid troubles — when last I heard, you and your fellow Democrats were accused of being colorless! The problem as I see it is not that you might have had that scandal with Gennifer Flowers, but that you never decided how to handle it. I should know: A scandal put its shadow on my campaign in 1884. It blew over, and I went on to win the election. So, from my experience, I may have a lesson or two for you.

You and I have a lot in common. We're both Democrats fighting uphill battles in an age of Republican domination. I know what you're thinking: We've got our differences, too — not the least of which is the last 100 years! I would have thought with all your century's talk of liberation, that your, u-hum ... well, alleged "affair" with Gennifer Flowers would not make much news. I'm actually glad to see that our great country still has the moral fiber to be shocked at alleged indiscretion! So maybe our two centuries are not so different after all.

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## Letter

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all. But our individual cases do, I'll admit, have some big differences. History never does exactly repeat itself — and neither do scandals.

Mine all started, at least the public part, on July 21, 1884 — just before the Democratic Convention. A tabloid called the Evening Telegrapher in my home town of Buffalo, N.Y., ran a screaming headline: "A Terrible Tale." In sentimental and biting detail, the article stated that I had had a "connection" with a Buffalo woman named Maria Halpin, and that she had borne my illegitimate son. Not an easy thing to explain in morally proper Victorian America. And you think you have problems!

My friends and advisors thought I was through. They asked me desperately what we should do. My first response was the same as yours: Ignore it, maybe it will go away. Ah, we politicians never learn! The public eye does not ignore once it sets its gaze on something as compelling as a salty story. So, I braced myself, and told my advisors, "Tell the truth." And was the story true? I, like you, do not believe in laundering my private affairs in public. But I never denied the story, and I persuaded some ministers and others with high moral standing and public reputation to speak for my honorable actions in this delicate situation.

I'll be as frank now as I was a century ago, and so, I'll hope to sort out the truth for the vicious exaggerations. I met Miss Halpin in the latter part of 1873. She had been widowed for three years and was working in a dry goods store to support her two sons. By the spring of 1874, she was with child and could no longer work. I



In the Chicago religious magazine Ram's Horn, artist Frank Beard drew this cartoon during 1884 presidential campaign, poking fun at the scandal surrounding Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland's illegitimate child. The caption under the drawing read: 'Another voice for Cleveland.' Cleveland won the election anyway.

did not know if I was responsible, but I could have been, and that was damning enough. I consented to support her until the child was born on Sept. 14, 1874. Then I continued to support both mother and child — it was the only honorable thing to do. That's the whole bald truth.

You're probably itching to say that your situation is different. I'll say — and I had the harder lot! But you're right, neither I nor Miss Halpin was married at the time. We hadn't broken any sacred covenant of marriage as you might have, my friend. Also, she was about my age and a simple-living person. Gennifer Flowers is a professional woman and a former TV personality and, you must admit she is a

bit of a showman — or how would you put it in the late 20th century? A "show-person." You people love your celebrities, but you know, when it comes to trust and moral confidence, you still look down on them as much as we scorned our dancing girls.

There's another difference that helped my situation — my opponent. The outlandish corruption of the Republican James G. Blaine had already become a major campaign issue. He was buying votes and taking payoffs and cozying up to big businessmen with their fat contributions — but his personal life was clean! To put it bluntly, in their wisdom, the American people decided they'd rather

have a man with a small private sin than one with large public ones.

My lessons offer some advice that I think you could learn from. And I don't just mean not getting yourself into scandal! Why we're all full of temptation and corruption; the great man is the one who can handle the scandals honestly and morally. And you know in our great democracy, the leader who can handle them well is all the more important because he can serve as a model to all the rest of us mere mortals.

Lesson #1: Be honest. I never denied the story, and that deflated a lot of critics right away.

Lesson #2: Don't tempt fate. When I admitted my sin, I invited further scrutiny because I knew that reporters couldn't find anything more than what I had already claimed. If there is more, you say it; don't let them find it.

Lesson #3: Get public support. The biggest turnaround for me was the words of ministers who spoke for my honorable action. They gave me a kind of certification or sanction in the public eye. And for that, you have to go to objective, acknowledged experts. With financial problems, get an economist to speak; in matters moral, enlist the men of the cloth. Having your wife speak helped, but you'll need more since she's not an objective observer.

These aren't the last words, and I don't think this is the end of your race. I lost my second bid for the White House and then came back a third time and won bigger than ever. You ain't dead yet, and who knows, maybe all this attention will give your campaign a boost.

Very truly yours,  
Grover Cleveland

■ The above letter was written by Paul Jerome Croce, assistant professor of American Studies at Stetson University, DeLand.