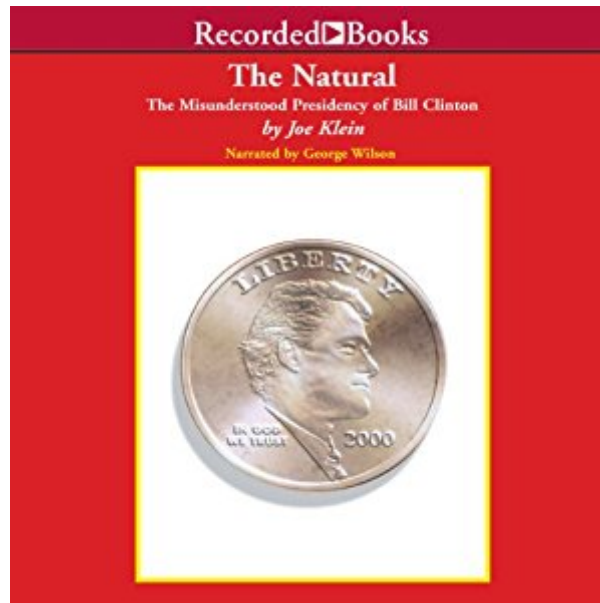




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The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency Of Bill Clinton



Synopsis

Based on "Eight Years", Joe Klein's critically acclaimed article that first appeared in The New Yorker, this is the first book to deal with both sides of Bill Clinton-the personal flaws and the policy successes. Primary Colors, of which Klein was the "anonymous" author, spent 25 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list. His previous books include The Running Mate, Payback: Five Marines After Vietnam and Woody Guthrie: A Life.

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Customer Reviews

It is nearly impossible to think objectively about Bill Clinton, the man or his administration. In THE NATURAL, Joe Klein, the once-anonymous author of PRIMARY COLORS, gives us a concise, balanced history of the Clinton presidency. He provides a fair account of Bill Clinton: we are not spared his self-pity or the scale of his appetites and indulgences, but we also see the seriousness and vision he brought to the nation's leadership. The Clinton administration had a rocky beginning, noted for its naïve political blunders. Remember Travelgate? How about the mere possibility of universal health care? The Clintons relied heavily on their friends, who were not always the wisest or most capable choices. One of the strengths of THE NATURAL is its portrayal of key relationships. We learn a lot about the former president through Mr. Klein's account of his complex marriage and Mrs. Clinton's formidable, imperfect influence. He also describes the similarities and differences between Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich, who led the failed Republican revolution and masterminded

one of the nastiest, most counter-productive political arenas in American history. It is unfortunate that Bill Clinton's comprehensive understanding of economics will not be what history remembers about his presidency. Mr. Klein points out that balancing the budget was a tremendous gamble and the budget surplus Clinton left the next administration was unprecedented. His sound policies --- welfare reform, Internet commerce, the earned income tax credit --- provided a base for financial prosperity that we are unlikely to see again. One of the melancholy notes of the book is the sense of squandered talent and opportunity. What else might Bill Clinton have accomplished if he had not been so distracted?

This book isn't likely to please either Clinton's critics or defenders. Joe Klein essentially argues that Bill Clinton was a man both of many virtues and many flaws, and I think that is a fair assessment of this book as well. On the one hand, this is perhaps the first attempt at a fair and reasoned understanding of who President Bill Clinton was. Most books on Clinton have either been poorly documented and badly researched attacks on him, or well documented and better researched books explaining how poorly documented and badly researched that first wave of books was. In other words, books like Conason and Lyons superb *THE HUNTING OF THE PRESIDENT*, provided a massive amount of documentation correctly the scurrilous attacks of Clinton's previous critics. These books, however, primarily say much, much more about Clinton's attackers and the attackers of the attackers rather than about Clinton himself. The great virtue of *THE NATURAL* is that Klein attempts to focus primarily on Clinton himself. Bill Clinton disappointed Joe Klein. Clinton was, in Klein's estimation, enormously knowledgeable, intelligent, well intentioned, and insightful. Why, then, was Clinton not a great president? Klein has several answers to this. First, Clinton was never really tested as president. There was never a serious crisis facing the US during his eight years in the White House, nothing comparable to 9-11 or Pearl Harbor or the Cuban Missile Crisis. Therefore, there was a sense in which he was never tested. Klein does, however, point out that Clinton does not, perhaps, get the credit he deserves for his role in providing the US with eight of the most peaceful years in US history. Second, Klein shows a number reasons that Clinton was ineffective as president, Monica Lewinsky aside.

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