Coup de Starr

Like so many observers of the mysterious Starr Ship that President Clinton seemed to sink so gracefully on television, I was mystified by the marauding pirates' inability to go for any loot other than details of his indecorous sex life, a matter of no great interest to anyone but partisans of the far right and a press gone mad with bogus righteousness. But along with mystification over the pirates' obsession with whether or not a blowjob is sex (neatly finessed by Clinton because the wise judge in the Paula Jones case had forgotten to include lips in her court's menu of blue-plate delights), I had a sense that I had, somehow, been through something like this once before. Where had I stumbled over the notion that a presidential election could be overthrown because of sexual behavior that is not a crime, at least beyond the city limits of Atlanta, Georgia? Sex as politics. Politics as sex. Sex Is Politics. Then I remembered. In January 1979 I had written a piece in Playboy with that title, because something new was happening in American politics back then.

The ERA and gay rights were, at that time, under fire... At that time! Clinton's support for women and gays, at the beginning of his first term, was more than enough to launch the Starr Ship. But twenty years ago, the right had already vowed that so-called valence issues would be its principal choice of weapon. Or, as a member of the Conservative Caucus put it then, with engaging candor, "We're going after people on the basis of their hot buttons." In other words, sex, sex, sex. Save the Family and Save Our Children were the slogans of that moment, and one Richard Viguerie was the chief money raiser for the powers of darkness. "Viguerie is not just a hustler," I wrote in Playboy. "He is also an ideologue." He was thinking of creating a new political party. "I have raised millions of dollars for the conservative movement over the years," he said, "and I am not happy with the result. I decided to become more concerned with how the money is spent." Viguerie was working with a group called Gun Owners of America.

Another of Viguerie's clients is Utah's Senator Orrin Hatch, a proud and ignorant man who is often mentioned as a possible candidate for President if the far right should start a new political party... "I want," says Viguerie, "a massive assault on Congress in 1978. I don't want any token efforts. We now have the talent and the resources to move in a bold, massive way. I think we can move against Congress in 1978 in a way that's never been conceived of!"

I duly noted that this sounded like revolution.
As it was, the bold, massive move against Congress did not take place until 1994, thanks to the twelve-year Reagan/Bush snooze, capped by Clinton's political ineptitude. But now that the Man from Hope has gained a personal, if temporary, victory against our would-be revolutionaries, I suggest that before the obligatory Capitol Reichstag fire, a charge of treason be brought against Kenneth Starr. Since all sovereignty rests with We the People, Starr's attempt to overthrow the presidential elections of 1992 and 1996 constitutes a bold, massive blow at the American people themselves: a unique attempt in our history and one that must be swiftly addressed in order to discover just who his co-conspirators are and how best to undo their plots. Yes, Hillary, there was—and there is—a right-wing plot with deep roots. Meanwhile, Senator Orrin Hatch, do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you Moroni? GORE VIDAL

Random House will be publishing The Essential Gore Vidal in January.

Vintage Galbraith

John Kenneth Galbraith turns 90 on October 15 and, despite a still-hectic lecture and travel schedule, is busily putting the finishing touches on his forty-third book. It's a collection of sketches of the public figures he's worked with or known personally over the past six decades, from Presidents Kennedy and Johnson to Jawaharlal Nehru and Eleanor Roosevelt. Slyly attuned to our fin de siècle infatuation with celebrity, he told me when we last spoke that his working title was Name Dropping.

Galbraith, of course, is a bit of a celebrity himself. As the century's best-known Harvard professor, president of both the American Economic Association and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, ambassador to India, economics editor of Fortune and World War II price czar, he's enjoyed the careers of a dozen illustrious men in a single life. More important, he has left to succeeding generations a body of work that still speaks with indelible power and authority—and is a recurring challenge to much of what passes for economic wisdom nowadays.

Conservatives and the more mathematically entranced among his colleagues will no doubt demur, as they have for half a