

The 'media food chain' and the 'burial' hoax

by Edward Spannaus

A totally contrived and fraudulent attack on President Bill Clinton was launched recently by a right-wing magazine published by the George Bush-linked Sun Myung Moon organization. The article, entitled "Is There Nothing Sacred?," was printed in *Insight* magazine, affiliated with the Moon-financed *Washington Times*. It charged that "dozens of big-time political donors or friends of the Clintons" had been given waivers to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

The *Insight* hoax said that unidentified Pentagon sources had reviewed the confidential waiver lists, and that "far more than Lincoln Bedroom sleepovers and Presidential kaffeeklatsches were exchanged for large donations to the Clinton-Gore campaign or DNC [Democratic National Committee]." It continued: "In fact, Clinton & Co. may have 'sold' not only burial plots for recently deceased but also future rights to those hallowed grounds without regard for the deceased's status as a veteran."

On Nov. 18, a press release and advance copies of the *Insight* article were faxed out to news media and the talk radio circuit, where it was quickly picked up by the likes of Gordon Liddy, Rush Limbaugh, and Oliver North. Soon, inflamed veterans and veterans groups were screaming that Clinton was "selling" cemetery plots in "hallowed ground" for contributions.

London's Hollinger Corp. jumped into the fray with an article in the Nov. 20 *Daily Telegraph* which opened: "A fresh scandal is brewing in Washington on suspicion that burial plots in the hallowed ground of Arlington National Cemetery have been given away by the government as favors to political adherents." On one Clinton-bashing Internet site, comments such as the following were posted under the *Daily Telegraph* article: "There are many veterans who despise a draft dodger, and I hope there are even more who do not like the national cemetery soiled by campaign money"; "What do you expect from someone who has admitted a 'loathing' for the military. He is a traitor to our country."

Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson put out a press release saying: "This action goes way beyond selling sleepovers in the Lincoln Bedroom, coffee parties in the Map Room, or Air Force One joy rides. This is sacred land reserved for those who risked their lives in the fight for freedom — not fat cat contributors."

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) also retailed the line that Clinton was selling burial plots the same way he'd

sold the Lincoln Bedroom; Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), among others, called for a Congressional investigation.

Lies given legitimacy

Out of respect for the privacy of the individuals for whom waivers had been granted, and their families, the Clinton administration initially refused to disclose the names. On Nov. 20, White House spokesman Mike McCurry scolded the press corps, saying: "This is a story that appeared, largely uncorroborated, with anonymous sources, in a conservative right-wing publication. It was picked up on the hate-radio talk circuit and inflamed yesterday. And now we're sitting here talking about whether an article that, as near as everyone can say . . . has no basis in fact, and we're trying it as if it has some legitimacy. And we've got members of Congress reacting to the same phenomenon and treating it with a degree of legitimacy."

The next day, Army Secretary Togo West held a press conference in which he released the entire list of 69 names of persons for whom waivers have been granted. Most were relatives of veterans already interred at Arlington. Others were veterans who didn't meet the cemetery's precise criteria, and four were civilians who, the Army said, had performed distinguished service to the nation.

There was only one large campaign contributor on the list. This was M. Larry Lawrence, a former ambassador to Switzerland, who said he had been wounded in the course of being thrown off a ship under attack in World War II, after he had enlisted in the merchant marine at age 18. He had died while serving as a U.S. ambassador, and he thus qualified for a waiver on two separate grounds. West said that neither he nor anyone else involved knew, or even cared, that Lawrence was a campaign contributor.

After reviewing the list, the American Legion's executive director acknowledged: "It seems clear that the anonymous accusations regarding unqualified burials at Arlington were unfounded."

White House spokesman McCurry said that President Clinton and everyone in the White House were "outraged that members of Congress would assist in the dissemination of lies, distortions, baseless allegations, even when they were in possession of information that would have made it possible for them to know the truth. . . . It was a calculated, partisan, political effort to destroy the reputations of people now in government, and in the process of doing so, besmirching the honor of people who are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. And it's an outrage, and it's an outrage that that kind of behavior has accomplices in an otherwise free press."

Referring to what the White House has identified as the "Communication Stream of Conspiracy Commerce," McCurry then continued: "And we've seen this for five years now. It's the hate machine that basically figures out a way to get stuff into the mainstream discussion by using various avenues. And you laugh at us when we make this suggestion. We just had a perfect case history of how this works."