

Starr Chamber overexposes itself

by Edward and Nancy Spannaus

With great fanfare, special prosecutor Kenneth Starr sent Susan McDougal, one of the three former associates of President Bill Clinton who was convicted in the Whitewater trials, to prison on Sept. 9. Shackled in chains and leg irons, McDougal was hauled off to prison for contempt of court, because she refused to give testimony against the President and First Lady before a grand jury.

Starr may have overexposed himself this time. By coming down so hard on Mrs. McDougal, he has shown his political animus, if not desperation, to get "information" that will lead him to the real targets of his investigation, President and Mrs. Clinton.

According to news reports, the offices of both Whitewater special prosecutor Starr, and of the federal judge who ordered her to jail, were bombarded with calls of protest, after McDougal was taken to jail in Faulkner County, Arkansas. McDougal's lawyer's office has also been receiving numerous calls from people who support her, and are horrified at what the special prosecutor is doing.

In the days following McDougal's jailing, Starr's office began issuing more leaks about alleged illegalities committed by Mrs. Clinton, concerning legal records from about a decade ago. These types of improper and unethical leaks to the media, are obviously designed at this point to try to dampen the growing public sympathy and support for Susan McDougal. This kind of character assassination, using the press, has been a consistent *modus operandi* of the Whitewater investigation, which was instigated by political operatives working with British Intelligence.

McDougal spills the beans . . . on Starr

While it is not unusual for prosecutors, including federal prosecutors, to try to coerce testimony from people, in order to get what they want against their political targets, the action is usually not caught in the public eye. And it is highly unusual to attempt to coerce testimony *after* conviction and sentencing.

In the case of Susan McDougal, however, a spotlight has been shone on the prosecution's thug tactics.

McDougal was convicted in the Whitewater trial, along with codefendants Jim Guy Tucker, the just-resigned governor of Arkansas, and McDougal's former husband, James.

The trial itself was the result of Starr's inability to get Tucker and the McDougals to collaborate with him in his witchhunt against the Clintons. After the convictions, Starr renewed his pressure for such collaboration, in exchange for leniency in sentencing. This didn't work for Governor Tucker, but it did succeed in the case of James McDougal, who is currently talking to federal prosecutors, in anticipation of a lighter, more comfortable prison sentence.

Starr, however, was set on getting the cooperation of Susan McDougal. After she was sentenced to two years in prison, he demanded that she cooperate, and then summoned her to a grand jury to testify against the Clintons.

Speaking to national TV audiences on both "Prime Time Live" (Sept. 4) and "Larry King Live" (Sept. 6), Susan McDougal exposed the pattern of threats and intimidation she had gotten from the office of the independent counsel.

On ABC-TV's "Prime Time Live," McDougal told host Diane Sawyer: "They want anything that can be used against the Clintons. There is not one thing the independent counsel wouldn't do, wouldn't use, wouldn't try to get me to say to hurt them." "Starr and his staff hound you, they twist your words," she added. "I told them from the beginning I never saw Bill or Hillary Clinton do anything illegal."

McDougal told "Larry King Live" two days later, that she had decided to go to jail, rather than be intimidated in such a way. She said she feared that, if she were to go in and testify, she believed prosecutors would hit her with perjury charges, if she did not tell them what they wanted to hear, in order to falsely implicate the Clintons.

When host King asked her if she was scared about going to jail, she said that "I'll get to scared, . . . but right now I am really angry. . . . I can't believe this is happening in America."

Starr is stung

Starr's office issued a press release after McDougal's TV appearances, on Sept. 7, accusing McDougal and her attorney, Bobby McDaniel, of making "outrageous and unethical" attempts to deceive the public. Starr denied that he had offered a specific sentence reduction, if she collaborated—although McDaniel says he has witnesses to the offer of probation. When McDougal declined to cooperate, Starr's assistant Ray Jahn recommended a sentence of 20 years in prison.

After McDougal was sent to prison, her attorneys filed a motion with the federal court, seeking her release, on the grounds that keeping her in jail is not going to force her to change her mind.

Starr asked the court to deny McDougal's motion, saying that the notion that she had already had "sufficient time to reflect upon her position," should be rejected outright. "Her motion should be denied and her incarceration—and her reflection—should continue until such time that she complies with the law," Starr said.