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the formula that had worked ever since Gennifer Flowers and the draft. For us, it was now an article of faith that Clinton could overcome personal attacks as long as he kept addressing the "real problems of real people." That meant, however, that the rest of us had to work even harder to keep the hoofbeats at bay.

In June of 1996, it felt like an entire herd was converging on the White House. Ken Starr won convictions of Arkansas governor Jim Guy Tucker and Clinton's Whitewater partners Jim and Susan McDougal, and he named Bruce Lindsey an unindicted coconspirator in the trial of an Arkansas banker with ties to Clinton. Senator D'Amato issued a scathing report on Whitewater recommending that several Clinton friends and staffers be investigated for perjury. Even worse, we created a mess of our own when two midlevel White House staffers mistakenly obtained the FBI files of nine hundred Republicans from previous administrations, including former Secretary of State James Baker. "Filegate" was a bureaucratic screw-up, but with its echoes of Watergate and our 1992 attacks on the Bush administration for examining Clinton's passport file, it had the potential to be our most serious scandal yet.

By now, damage control was a cottage industry in the White House. We had a team of lawyers, nicknamed the Masters of Disaster, whose sole job was to handle Whitewater and related inquiries — responding to grand jury subpoenas, preparing congressional testimony, answering questions from the press. Better them than me. From experience, I'd learned that simply gathering facts to answer allegations could spawn new inquiries and additional avenues of attack, creating a cycle that was the political equivalent of a perpetual-motion machine. Anyone anywhere near the activity risked getting sucked into the swirl and spit out with a tarnished reputation and a ton of debt. At approximately \$100,000, my legal fees were already high enough. Though I talked to our Masters of Disaster frequently, I had steadily disengaged from the daily scandal patrol.

At the end of June, however, I took myself out of early retirement for a farewell run at the "right-wing conspiracy." Maybe Jay Stephens made me do it. My old nemesis was now representing