



Starr: A Reassessment

Mr. Benjamin Wittes

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How is Kenneth Starr's extraordinary term as independent counsel to be understood? Was he a partisan warrior out to get the Clintons, or a saviour of the Republic? An unstoppable menace, an unethical lawyer, or a sex-obsessed Puritan striving to enforce a right-wing social morality? This volume is designed to offer an evaluation and critique of Starr's tenure as independent counsel. Relying on lengthy, revealing interviews with Starr and many other players in Clinton-era Washington, "Washington Post" journalist Benjamin Wittes arrives at an understanding of Starr and the part he played in one of American history's most enthralling public sagas. Wittes offers a portrait of a decent man who fundamentally misconstrued his function under the independent counsel law. Starr took his task to be ferreting out and reporting the truth about official misconduct, a well-intentioned but nevertheless misguided distortion of the law, Wittes argues.

At key moments throughout Starr's probe - from the decision to reinvestigate the death of Vincent Foster, to the repeated prosecutions of Susan McDougal and Webster Hubbell to the failure to secure Monica Lewinsky's testimony quickly - the prosecutor avoided the most sensible prosecutorial course, fearing that it would compromise the larger search for truth. This approach not only delayed investigations enormously, but it gave Starr the appearance of partisan zealotry and an almost maniacal determination to prosecute the president. Wittes provides in this account of Starr's term a reinterpretation of the man, his performance, and the controversial events that surrounded the impeachment of President Clinton.

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