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***Sex Scandal America: Politics & the Ritual of Public Shaming***

**David Rosen**

**SEX SCANDAL AMERICA**

A new book, ***Sex Scandal America: Politics & The Ritual of Public Shaming (The Key Publishing House, Inc., September 2009)***, written by culture critic David Rosen, reflects on four centuries of the major sex scandals to rock the nation, from its early Puritan days as a colony to today's end of the culture wars. It more than catalogues the long list of affairs of the politically powerful, rich, and famous – it reveals how America's sexual mores have changed since the nation's founding. It also reveals why Americans love a good sex scandal.

*Sex Scandal America* ties these scandals to the deeper changes in sexual culture occurring during the various phases of the country's social evolution. Most importantly, it assesses the role of political scandals as a form of public shaming. The book shows how, over the last 400 years, scandals have changed as a ritualized spectacle, evolving from a morality tale to an entertainment distraction.

“What qualifies as a sex scandal changes over time, but what doesn't appear to be ending anytime soon, is America's unquenchable thirst to consume the revealing details of how a politician, business tycoon, all-star athlete, or Hollywood celebrity sabotages his or her career with a sex scandal,” says David.

*Sex Scandal America* puts the sex scandal into historical perspective, helping us see what was considered taboo behavior in each era of America's formation and growth.

“Sex scandals have occurred in America since the days of Pocahontas,” writes David. “Historically they have served as a form of public spectacle with two increasingly contradictory social functions. First and foremost, a scandal is a morality tale, intended to punish or shame the perpetrator. Second, over the last century, the scandal has changed, become a form of entertainment, intended to distract or fascinate the public. The shift in the social function of the scandal is a measure of how moral values of the secular marketplace have mostly replaced the power of religious tradition. In our new 21<sup>st</sup> century America, with a new president, Congress, and historical reality, the role of the scandal will likely persist but have far less moral – and entertainment – sway over political and cultural life. America has too many more important issues to deal with than to concern itself with whom is sleeping with whom; but truthfully, everyone enjoys hearing about a good scandal!”

## David takes a well-researched approach to sex scandals and shares with us:

How to put into perspective the affairs of such presidents as Bill Clinton, JFK, Warren Harding and Thomas Jefferson – and other major politicians, Republicans and Democrats, men and women:

- The role of scandal in the sexualization of politics.
- What sex scandals tell us about the evolution of the American sexual culture.
- How our nation's wars have tended to impose limitations on the nation's sexual culture.
- How forbidden sex has been remaking America and why for four centuries we've obsessed over adultery, illegitimate children, premarital liaisons, interracial encounters, obscenity, and sodomy.
- Why Americans love a grand sex scandal.
- Why our entry into World War 1 marked a watershed moment in the sexual radicalization of America.

David believes that the once-powerful Christian Republican moralist movement is in retreat as reflected in Barack Obama's election. He predicts a new sexual culture will result and that the following are likely to happen:

- The repeal of numerous federal restraints imposed by the Bush administration on women's choice.
- Some states might legalize same-sex marriages and more will adopt same-sex unions.
- The Christian Right's failed abstinence-only teen sex ed policy will be scrapped and teens will get a more-informed, sex-positive education.
- The military might drop its policy of "Don't Ask/Don't Tell."
- The decriminalization and/or regulation of prostitution.
- A greater commitment to fight HIV and AIDS.
- The FCC may permit more explicit materials for adults.

"The 30-year culture wars are over – for now," asserts David. "The forthcoming change in America's sexual culture will likely take a variety of forms. We'll see a lowering of teen pregnancy and the unmarried birth rate, an increase in commercial sex, a growth of popularity for 'fetish' play, and unfortunately, a rise in sexual violence as a result of the deepening economic crisis. Too often men act out their rage in hard times."

*Sex Scandal America* employs a loosely structured historical framework to tell the tale of our nation's sometimes darker, sometimes funnier and often sleazier moments of public spectacle. It follows the earliest colonial settlers through the Revolution generation, assessing the scandals involving Pocahontas and the Puritans, George Washington, Jefferson, James Buchanan and Francis Wright, the foremost free-love advocate of the antebellum era.

It then focuses on the period of American modernization, from the traumatic post-Civil War years through the Great Depression and the end of World War II, recalling the scandals of Harding and Roosevelt, Henry Ward Beecher and Harry Kendall Thaw as well as Mae West, Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, Jack Johnson and Charlie Chaplin. The half-century between the end of World War II and Clinton’s impeachment in 1998 marks the era in which scandal evolved from a moral injunction to an entertainment sport, involving not only presidents Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, but also enators Ted Kennedy, Bob Packwood, Gary Hart and Charles Robb, among many others.

To help set the historical stage, it discusses more celebrity-oriented scandals involving actors Rock Hudson and Montgomery Clift, sexologist Alfred Kinsey, and, least we forget, religious leaders Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart and Paul Crouch. Finally, the shame of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the pedophile scandals involving the Catholic Church, is reconsidered.

The coming years will also, undoubtedly reveal a new chapter in America’s sex scandals, and the role they play in political and popular culture.

**About the author:**

David Rosen, a culture and media critic based in New York City, is the author of the provocative new book, ***Sex Scandal America: Politics & the Ritual of Public Shaming.***

He is also the author of the groundbreaking book, *Off-Hollywood The Making and Marketing of Independent Films* (Grove, 1990), originally commissioned by the Sundance Institute and Independent Feature Project. It is considered a “bible” of American independent filmmaking.

David regularly contributes to publications and blogs about sexuality, pop-culture and the media. He has written for *Counterpunch, Sexuality and Culture, Z-Magazine, Filmmaker Magazine, Mediachannel The Hollywood Reporter and San Francisco Focus,*

He earned a B.A. in Philosophy from City College and an M.A. in American Labor Studies from Rutgers University.

David resides in New York City.

