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Political Science

**Sixteen Scandals: Twenty Years of Sex Lies and Other Habits of Our Great Leaders**
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Politics is funny. So, twenty years ago several disenchanted Republican Senate staffers performed some satire for an office party. It was the beginning of the Reagan era, and the staffers were working in subcommittees responsible for energy policy, the spread of nukes, government bureaucracy. They had gusto, gall, and a mental health strategy: to make the madness of their workaday lives laughable—and to change the world. They believed that "comedy, as part of a free vibrant press, serves as a check and balance on the excess of power."

Soon the troupe decided to take their court jester status seriously. They quit their jobs and became a national touring act, laughing and educating the public about the blunders and scandals of the day. Known as the Capitol Steps, they became famous for their seasonal specials on *National Public Radio*.

In the two decades since, they have sung songs like "Super-frantic-unproductive-nothing-legislation," "Bomb Bomb Iraq" (a parody of "Barbara Ann") and more recently, "Enron-Ron-Ron" and "Don't Go Faking You're Smart," a duet between Laura and Dubya to the tune of "Don't Go Breaking My Heart."

American political humor is part of a long tradition. In these post-9-11 days the president's press spokesperson, Ari Fleisher, has warned comedians to "watch what you say, watch what you do." For some this is a call to action. Laughter is subversive, and so is making fun of the unthinkable. Hence, a song about bombing through the Muslim holy season: "Who will drop a bomb during Rama-dan-a-dan? Who will stop the fun of their fundamental sing-song?"

The authors are co-founders of The Capitol Steps and have been the troupe's principal writers, director, and producer ever since. They wrote a small original paperback on the 1992 presidential campaign, *Fools on the Hill*. This book-and-CD set is not just a rehashed marketing

opportunity. It is juicy with anecdotes about unfortunate episodes from regimes (and shows) past and current—a behind-the-scenes history of how the Capitol Steps came to be.

What is humor but laughing at the woes of others? But wait, this is us! The authors believe that Americans can still laugh despite all the bad news and hard times because there are some people who still have time for a sex scandal or two. Even a person with purely serious musical tastes will not be able to resist the fifty-two-track CD, which takes foolery and musical theatre to new heights of hilarity.

Recommended for news junkies, liberals, conservatives, and anyone willing to look on the bright side of the dark stuff in politics.

*Holly Wren Spaulding*