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Charlottesville, VA 22901

February 26, 1993

Mr. Brian Lamb
President, C-SPAN
400 N. Capitol St, NW
Washington DC 20001

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Dear Mr. Lamb,

For several weeks now I have been intending to send you the enclosed article. I watched with great interest your program about the connection between America and Oxford, especially the Rhodes Scholarship. The footage of Oxford's towers and colleges was superb, even despite the gloomy weather.

I "went up" to Oxford (Merton College) in [REDACTED] to read Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Alas, I was not a Rhodes Scholar, but many of my best friends during my two years were those we called "Rodents" including several non-Americans. (I did know Susan Billington, by the way.) In my experience, the qualities most prominently found in Rhodes Scholars were intellectual curiosity and keen internationalism (by which I mean an interest in, and appreciation of, the diversity of world's peoples, places and perspectives). In this respect Bill Clinton is an entirely typical Rhodes Scholar.

I enclose an article from a small magazine published by Merton College called Postmaster (October 1992 issue) in which then-Governor Clinton reflected on his Oxford days. Portions of this material were used in a Washington Post story I saw last fall (and which inspired your coverage?). The speculation about how Oxford might have shaped now-President Clinton's views can be put to rest: he speaks for himself in this interview!

Thank you for C-SPAN and for the Oxford story.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]

Bill Clinton at Oxford

Bill Clinton, the governor of Arkansas, is the first Oxonian to win a major party's nomination for the presidency of the United States. He has great affection for the University and considers his time at Oxford (1968-70) one of the highlights of his life.

Clinton obtained his undergraduate degree at Georgetown University and then attended University College as a Rhodes Scholar. He graduated from Yale Law School in 1973 and joined the law faculty of the University of Arkansas. After almost winning a congressional seat in 1974, Clinton was elected attorney general of Arkansas in 1976. He won the governorship in 1978 at the age of 32. Except for a two-year hiatus following his unsuccessful bid for reelection in 1980, he has occupied the governor's office ever since.

When I told Governor Clinton's staff that Mertonians wanted to know more about his experiences at Oxford, he kindly granted your *Postmaster* correspondent an exclusive interview. (The *New York*



Governor Clinton with *Postmaster's* correspondent

Times and *Washington Post* would have killed to get one-on-one sessions with the Democratic presidential nominee, but their reporters had to make do with stale press releases. Those newspapers could not compete with a publication as prestigious and influential as *Postmaster*.) Here is a lightly edited transcript of our conversation:

Postmaster: When were you at Oxford, and what subject did you read?

Gov. Clinton: I was there from October of 1968 through June of 1970. I started off studying PPE, and I thought for sure that I'd be drafted before I finished my term of study. After my first year, I switched to a graduate degree in politics, but I never finished it. Because of the uncertainties of the draft, I think my class of Rhodes Scholars had the lowest percentage of people getting degrees of any class in recent history. The Rhodes Trust offered to pay for a third year of study so I could finish the degree, but I decided that I should go to law school and get on with my life, so I never did the third year and never received a degree. I wonder if they would give it to me now. I'd love to go back.

Postmaster: Did Oxford live up to your expectations?

Gov. Clinton: Oh, it exceeded my expectations. It was more beautiful, more steeped in history, more hospitable to what I wanted to do at that point in my life: just take some time to read extensively and think and be totally taken out of the routine that had dominated me for years. I just loved it. I have wonderful, wonderful memories of my time in Oxford. The first two weeks I was there I bet I walked fourteen hours a day. I visited all the colleges, went in all the churches, walked through all the parks, trying to get myself oriented. I still remember coming home all those nights, sore and exhilarated. It was simply incredible. I remember it like it happened yesterday.

Postmaster: Tell me about the kinds of books you read at Oxford.

Gov. Clinton: I read a lot of political philosophy, and I did a lot of work on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. One term I had a tutor at Pembroke named Zbigniew Pelczynski (formerly a lecturer at Merton — Ed). Extraordinary fellow: I loved him; I thought he was terrific. I really enjoyed my tutorials with him. Over and above that, I read more serious fiction than at any other period of my life. I probably read 300 books a year the two years I was at Oxford. I read just about everything I could get my hands on. I was constantly in motion with a book. I travelled a lot, and when I travelled by train, I was always inhaling books. I remember I went to Spain in the spring of '69, and I read several books about the Spanish Civil War.

Postmaster: Did any of the political philosophy you read influence your later conduct in public office?

Gov. Clinton: Not specifically, but it did strengthen my belief in the importance of politics. Today the work I do is in such disfavour with the American people that it's almost impossible to remember what it was like growing up in the '50s and '60s, when public service was an honorable calling. In my senior year at Georgetown, and then in the two years I spent at Oxford, public service acquired a deep philosophical underpinning for me. Now people tend to look at public service as something superficial and short-sighted, self-seeking, negative, but to me it never was that.

Postmaster: Did your experience at Oxford influence your views on foreign policy?

Gov. Clinton: I think it confirmed my earlier opinion, formed while working for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under Senator Fulbright, that America had to be involved in the rest of the world, had to be engaged. It made me an internationalist in that sense.

Postmaster: Did you ever go to the Union and hear any of the British politicians speak?

Gov. Clinton: I went to the Oxford Union quite a lot. Often I went there to hear visiting American politicians. I remember seeing Allard Lowenstein, who is now dead, speak in a great debate on policy in Vietnam. I also remember hearing Harold Wilson, who had a great line in one of his speeches. He had sunk low in the polls, and the politicians in his party were thinking about dislodging him. Wilson said, 'I've heard all these rumours about changes in the Labour Party. I want all of you to know that I know what is going on. I am going on.'

Postmaster: Did you form any opinions about British politics? Do you remember any British politicians whom you thought you should emulate?

Gov. Clinton: No, none that I thought I should emulate, but I was very interested in British politics. I was interested in the differences between the parliamentary system and the system we have. I was also interested in the problems the British system faced. Our divided government sometimes gives us trouble, but the Labour Party was having terrific problems governing when I was there. If they pleased their constituents, the economy would get out of hand, and if they disciplined the economy, their constituents would get out of hand and taken them out of office. Senator Fulbright used to say that we would be better off with a parliamentary system because then we'd never

have a division between the executive and Congress like we've had in America for the last twenty years. Right now in our country's history this divided government has been quite bad for us. It has produced paralysis, the dominance of special interests, and the explosion of debt without investment. But one of the things I learned in England is that there is no such thing as a perfect political system.

Postmaster: What did you think of the British style of politics? How does it differ from the American style?

Gov. Clinton: The British have a lot more rhetorical flourish. That's the thing I was so interested in at Oxford: the premium that was put on articulate and quick-witted speaking, even among university students. I remember that I was so impressed when I first went to an afternoon tea and heard the young men and women talking about this and that, just being clever about something. I remember being impressed by how well they all spoke, and what an emphasis there was on it.

Postmaster: What was your impression of the English class structure?

Gov. Clinton: I thought then, at least, England was still a little too class oriented. A lot of working people were class conscious in a way that working people in America weren't. It may be different now. I haven't spent much time there in the last twenty years. I've been back several times, but I haven't actually lived there. When I was an Oxford student, however, I ate lunch in the market almost every day, and I spent a lot of time talking to ordinary citizens, not just university people. I was always struck by the distinctions of class. The education system tended to reinforce that. That's something I thought was not a good thing.

Postmaster: Was the Oxford tutorial system beneficial for you?

Gov. Clinton: Yes, I thought it was especially good for an American because it required you to do serious writing every week. In our educational system, there's too much emphasis on rote and too little emphasis on writing and thinking. In the British system, by the time a person got to the university, the emphasis was all on writing and thinking. I thought it was very good discipline. I wish now that my circumstances had been a little different and that I had gone all the way through one program and had actually gotten the degree. But my life was just too disrupted, and I couldn't do it.

Postmaster: What was your overall opinion of the British?

Gov. Clinton: Very positive. I thought they were very generous, good people who were tough as nails. I could really see how Churchill had

rallied them and why they had survived for two years without winning a battle. Once I had lived there, I could see the underlying toughness that's often lost in their polite manners and their well-spokenness. So I was very impressed. I liked England; I was a real Anglophile when I was there.

John Pagan (1973)

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Editor's note: John Pagan went up to Merton as a Marshall Scholar in 1973 and did an M.Litt. in Modern History. He is now a professor of law at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and an Arkansas state senator. During part of 1991, while the Senate was in recess, Pagan returned to Merton to work on a D.Phil.