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## Hillary Clinton: Return of the PR Robber Baron

By Fraser Seitel

At the turn of the last century, muckrakers like Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell wrote extensively about the disdainful robber barons of industry who cared little about informing the public.

*"The public be damned,"* famously blustered railroad baron William Henry Vanderbilt, *"I don't take any stock in this nonsense about working for anybody's good but our own."*

Ironically, Vanderbilt's most un-public relations like response helped trigger the origins of modern-day PR. Indeed, it wasn't long thereafter that the Pennsylvania Railroad brought in a former journalist, Ivy Lee, to help defend the company to the public and the press after a deadly train crash in Pennsylvania.

Lee, of course, went on to work for John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the modern practice of PR was born.

What triggers this stroll down PR memory lane is the response of presumed Democrat Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton to the mounting accusations -- largely raised in the new book, *Clinton Cash* -- of illicit if not illegal funding of the Clinton Family Foundation, charges of play-for-pay foreign government payoffs for foundation gifts and out-and-out grubbery in charging outrageous fees for Clinton family speeches to groups looking for favors.

What makes these latest Clinton allegations different from all the other Clinton allegations is the novel PR response to them by the candidate and her confreres in the Clinton camp. In three words, the strategy is:

Zero. Nada. Fuggedaboutit. Or, stated more prosaically, *"The public be damned."*

Specifically, rather than deigning to answer all -- or even any-- of the mounting charges of malfeasance, impropriety and downright greed, the Clinton campaign has largely ignored the controversy and gone about its business. The candidate hasn't addressed the issue, and campaign staffers have parried all questions with a blanket, *"There's nothing new here."*

In other words, in an approach reminiscent of the robber barons, Team Hillary has adopted a PR strategy of "radio silence," thumbing its collective snoot at all the nosy reporters and their prying questions.

Compare this response to that of *"Back off, Man, I'm a"* Dr. Mehmet Oz, after the half physician/half Oprah was accused of blatant quackery by a group of 10 doctors urging Columbia University to fire him.

Rather than ignoring the firestorm, Dr. Oz stormed into the belly of the beast with a publicity blitz of his own, accusing his critics of "conflict of interest."

Some PR executives, including the president of the Public Relations Society of America, denounced the embattled doctor for a publicity offensive "that just served to call more attention" to his problems. In other words, these practitioners argued, he should have said nothing.

Hmmmmmm.

Isn't the whole point of PR to provide the public with your side of the story so that they might be informed enough to draw their own judgments as to your guilt or innocence?

And isn't it the job of the PR advisor generally to counsel in favor of disclosure?

Or, conversely, is it more prudent – even beneficial -- for an accused to withhold information so that people are left in the dark about the matters at issue; in other words, let "*the public be damned?*"

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