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The press on Brill on the press; Hooray for Hollywood; Hooray for the CIA; Operator, get me China; Life after Webb Starr unbowed, Clinton's favorite flicks, the star-struck CIA and more
Timothy Noah; Julian E. Barnes; Ted Gest; Marianne Lavelle; Kenneth T. Walsh; Marci McDonald; William J. Holstein; Gordon Witkin; Gary Cohen

The press on Brill on the press

Starr unbowed, Clinton's favorite flicks, the star-struck CIA and
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Like every other reporter in **Washington, Whispers** can't resist playing "gotcha" with Steven Brill, who wrote a much-discussed magazine article lacerating the media's Lewinsky sex-scandal coverage. Brill quoted with apparent approval CNN president Rick Kaplan's views on Monicagate excesses. But he somehow neglected to mention that Kaplan is a longtime friend of President Clinton's who (**Whispers** groupies will recall) told CNN staffers last fall to limit use of the word scandal in reporting on Clinton's 1996 campaign fund-raising. Brill's castigation of Kenneth Starr for talking to reporters made **Whispers** wonder whether the 21 other independent counsels ever dished. Here's what its survey found: Five independent counsels, including Starr, acknowledge talking to the press. Eleven claim they did not--or will not (but may of course be fibbing). The other six couldn't be reached; one of the six, James McKay, was accused of improper leaks during his investigation of Lyn Nofzinger and Ed Meese.

Incidentally, Brill's brouhaha doesn't seem to have dampened Starr's prosecutorial zeal. Last week, Bell Atlantic notified Robert Weiner, the spokesman for the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, that Starr had subpoenaed his phone records. Weiner's bit role in the scandal, Monicagate connoisseurs will recall, consisted of being questioned before the grand jury on phone calls he and his wife made to the Columbia, Md., Democratic Club to (he says) "congratulate" officials for their press release saying Linda Tripp

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uld be prosecuted under state law (for surreptitiously tape recording Monica Lewinsky). Weiner says Bell Atlantic told him Starr's office asked the company not to notify Weiner of the subpoena, but Ma Bell rejected this request on advice of counsel. Legal experts say this prosecutorial secrecy is extremely common in violent-crime cases, but less common in nonviolent cases. Bell Atlantic won't comment on any specific subpoenas, but company spokeswoman Sandra Arnette says, "It is our policy to notify a customer in the event we receive a subpoena, unless the subpoena specifically states not to."

Hooray for Hollywood. Who cares what the American Film Institute thinks are the best U.S. films of all time? Whispers wants to know what inveterate film buff President Clinton thinks are the best films of all time! It's widely known that Clinton's favorite movie is High Noon and that Clinton, like all other Homo sapiens, adores Casablanca. But here, for the first time anywhere, are the commander-in-chief's Top Five Picks: 1.) High Noon; 2.) Casablanca; 3.) Gone With the Wind (this one's a tad politically incorrect, but at least it's not The Birth of a Nation); 4.) Schindler's List (this one is arguably too politically correct); and 5.) The Bridge on the River Kwai (presumably President Clinton can explain what happens in this film's famously incoherent final 15 minutes).

Hooray for the CIA. Still smarting from a public and congressional castigation for failing to predict India's nuclear tests, CIA brass hope to be rehabilitated by the Showtime cable channel. Showtime is filming a movie called The Agency at Langley, for which the CIA has agreed to provide 60 staffers as extras. When the call went out for volunteers to spend a Saturday strolling through the CIA lobby before the movie cameras, the response was so great that some departments had to hold a lottery to pick who could appear. (None of those chosen, thank goodness, were undercover operatives.) Whispers can't be more specific because--get this--the CIA says the precise number who clamored to be in the movie is classified.

Operator, get me China. Iridium LLC, a satellite communications company based in Washington, D.C., may have a more intimate link with a controversial Chinese military-related group than does Loral Corp. (which is currently getting barbecued by the New York Times and others for allegedly transferring too much rocket know-how to China). This is a little complicated, but bear with us: Iridium's Chinese partner, Iridium China (Hong Kong) Ltd., is managed by mainland-born Wang Mei Yue. Wang Mei Yue also happens to be head of China Aerospace International Holdings Ltd. (CASIL) in Hong Kong. CASIL is part of China's defense industrial complex, and is also where Liu Choying, the daughter of a top Chinese military official, was employed as a vice president; she is the figure who allegedly

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reled money to the Democratic Party. There are other ties between CASIL and Iridium besides Wang: According to the South China Morning Post of Hong Kong, three officials from CASIL sit on the board of Iridium China. Iridium, which is ringing the globe with 66 low-flying satellites for mobile telephone use, needs a Chinese partner to build and complete its global network linking 239 countries. Whispers can't help wondering whether some of that satellite know-how is flowing from Iridium China to CASIL and somehow improving China's military communications network. Iridium, Iridium China, and CASIL all declined comment.

Meanwhile, Whispers hears that in early June, representatives from the Treasury and Justice departments got together to discuss the results of an investigation by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC). The OCC reported that over the past year or two, hundreds of millions of dollars had moved from Chinese banks to American banks, with no seeming explanation; the amounts of cash, and the techniques used to move the money, have made investigators suspicious. Those at the June meeting speculated that the funds could have been stolen from the Chinese government, and there was also chatter about possible tie-ins with the investigation of Chinese contributions to the Democratic Party. Whispers has no idea whether any of these suspicions are justified but would be glad to hear from anyone who knows what it's all about.

Life after Webb. Congressman Dan Burton's investigative committee is poking into the political donations of Mark Jimenez, a Florida businessman suspected of funneling South American money to the Democratic National Committee. Several of Jimenez's employees recently pleaded the Fifth Amendment when asked about their political contributions.

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"Why do you write such scathing articles about me?" "I don't know."

Monica Lewinsky and Maureen Dowd, meeting for the first time at a restaurant near Dowd's New York Times office

"There are always going to be leakers. The question is what do guys like you and me do about them?"

Steven Brill, talking to a reporter about his magazine's attack on Kenneth Starr's talks with the press (which Starr says weren't leaks)

"It tickled me to death. We may need to have a rejoicing ceremony."

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T. E. Smith, mayor of Bay Springs, Miss., where former Sunbeam
.irman Albert Dunlop closed two plants, on Dunlop's firing

"There was no kind of ethnic cleansing."

Slobodan Milosevic, president of Yugoslavia, denying widespread
reports of violence against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo

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Drawing: Frankly my dear ... uh, you gonna finish that jelly doughnut?
(Richard Thompson for USN&WR); Drawing: A little wobbly on 'nonpartisan' too.
(Tom Toles for USN&WR)

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

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