

letter in a special box with the Perle and Goebbels photos side-by-side.

AN EVIL EMPIRE?

When web surfers tire of reading about the president's Nazi tendencies, they can turn to the history of the Bush Crime Family, or what is sometimes known on the web as the BFEE, or Bush Family Evil Empire. The website Bushbodycount.com tells the story of hundreds of deaths in which the president and his relatives were allegedly implicated. "This is a list of bodies, a roster of the dead, who might have been called Witnesses had they not met their untimely ends," Bushbodycount says. The site accuses the president, as well as George H. W. Bush, of involvement in dozens of suspicious deaths, beginning with the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Bushbodycount tells readers that "an internal FBI memo reported that on November 22 [1963] a reputed businessman named George H. W. Bush reported hearsay that a certain Young Republican had been talking of killing the president when he came to Houston." The site refers to an old, discredited story from *The Nation* that came out during the 1988 presidential campaign alleging that the elder Bush had been in the CIA in 1963. "George H. W. Bush has denied this," Bushbodycount concludes in classic conspiratorial style, "although he was in Texas and cannot account for his whereabouts at the time."

Of course, not all the deaths with which the Bushes were allegedly involved were so momentous. For example, Bushbodycount connects the Bush family to the death of Mark Lombardi, a New York conceptual artist whose work took its inspiration from the Iran-Contra, Whitewater, and savings-and-loan scandals (one of his pieces included an image of Neil Bush, the president's brother). "On the evening of March 22, 2000," Bushbodycount writes, "Mark Lombardi was found hanging in his loft, an apparent suicide," another potential "witness" — to what is not clear — who met an untimely end. A similar fate awaited J. H. Hatfield, author of the George W. Bush biography *Fortunate Son*, a book that achieved momentary notoriety for its allegation that Bush had used cocaine. But Hatfield's fortunes fell after the charge was debunked and his role in an alleged credit-card-fraud scheme, as well as his imprisonment for a 1987 car bombing, came to light. "He was found Wednesday, July 18, [2001] in a motel room, an apparent suicide," Bushbodycount notes. With his death, Hatfield joined Bushbodycount's "silent voices," those "daring souls who kept the candles of democracy burning while their ignorant neighbors were helping the George Bush clan extinguish the fire."

All this might seem silly were it not for the fact that similar scandal-mongering was taken quite seriously during the Clinton years. The notorious 1994 video *The Clinton Chronicles* tied Bill Clinton to a series of "mysterious" deaths — "Since August 1991, an alarming number of Clinton associates have died of unnatural causes," it said — and helped spawn a small industry of Internet "Clinton body count" lists. Condemning *The Clinton Chronicles* and tying its unfounded accusations to the mainstream political opposition became a standard part of White House defense strategy in times of scandal. For example, in her famous "vast right-wing conspiracy" appearance on the *Today* show in January 1998, then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton complained about the "mean-spirited give and take of American politics right now," which included, she said, "accusing my husband of committing murder, of drug running." A few years earlier, Clinton operative George Stephanopoulos, speaking to the *Washington Post*, angrily said of the president's enemies, "They're accusing him of murders. . . . That's unheard of." The paper reported that Stephanopoulos "senses a conspiracy of sorts — a campaign of 'manufactured hate.'" And Bill Clinton himself often mentioned the accusations in an effort to show how unreasonable his opponents had become. "I've been accused of murder and all kinds of things," he said at a 1999 news conference.