

books

‘We can’t be monogamous. It isn’t in our genes’

Larry Flynt believes in free speech, responsible sex and gay marriage. He’s also made millions from hardcore porn. He tells **Tim Teeman why even presidents can’t stay faithful**

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

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‘CRAMMED WITH MEMORABLE CHARACTERS AND WELL-CRAFTED SUBPLOTS’

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MARIE CLAIRE

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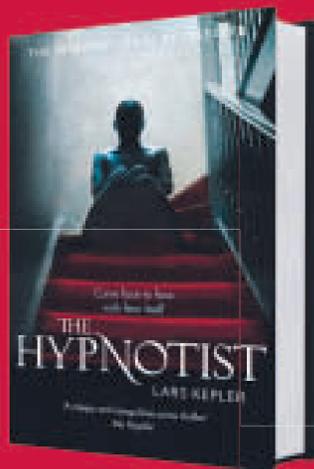
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‘THE THRILLER THAT’S TAKING EUROPE BY STORM ...

FEROCIOUS, VISCERAL STORYTELLING THAT WRAPS YOU IN A CLOAK OF DARKNESS.

IT’S STUNNING’

DAILY MAIL



Don't expect Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former head of the IMF charged with the sexual assault of a New York hotel maid, to stand trial or stick around, says Larry Flynt, the multi-millionaire porn magnate, advocate of freedom of speech and observer of the sexual transgressions of the powerful. "He's 62. Think of the jail time if he's found guilty. I think he'll skip the country at the earliest opportunity and return to France. I don't know if he's guilty, but when a man has that much power, the question is: what lies behind his behaviour? Well, synonymous with extreme wealth and power is a huge ego, and the need to feed this ego with constant sexual conquests."

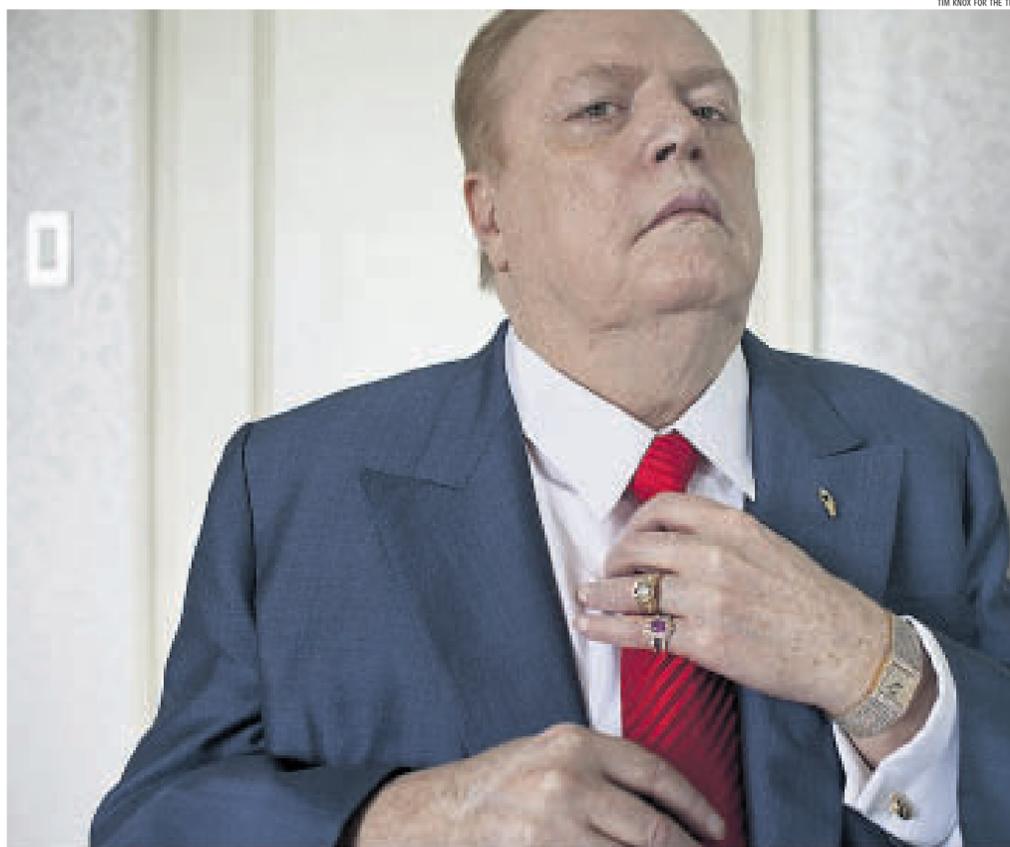
That priapic knot is also the focus of Flynt's book, *One Nation Under Sex*, which exposes the sex lives of American presidents, past and almost present, from Abraham Lincoln's predilection for sharing his bed with men to marriages such as those of the Roosevelts and Kennedys, with infidelity rife on both sides (Jackie Kennedy's conquests included Marlon Brando, William Holden and Bobby Kennedy, JFK's brother). While Flynt has been travelling around America promoting his salacious tome (co-written with the academic David Eisenbach), the country has been gripped by two sex scandals: Strauss-Kahn and Arnold Schwarzenegger's love child.

"Arnold's maid was in his house for years. That child cannot be the result of one-off sex," says Flynt, proprietor of Larry Flynt Publications (most famously the publisher of *Hustler* magazine) and with a fortune of about \$1 billion. "Women, especially, hate him. I don't think he can redeem himself."

In a New York hotel suite Flynt, 68, sits in his gold-plated wheelchair, which he has had since 1978, when he was shot and paralysed from the waist down in an attempted murder. "I saw Nat King Cole's gold wheelchair in a museum and thought, 'If I have to be paralysed, I want one.'" He has a smooth face and short ginger hair and speaks in a frail growl. He was recently in hospital for a urological problem and had surgery, "but it's no big deal". A stroke that he had years ago after overdosing on pain medication may explain his blurred speech. But he is no complainer, is unapologetic about pornography, dryly funny (claiming that Woody Harrelson, who played him in the movie *The People vs Larry Flynt*, "made a better me than me") and blush-inducingly open when talking about sex, whether it's losing his virginity, his rejection of monogamy or his battery-operated penis implant.

His latest book is a riot of prurient history, so when Flynt says that the Kennedys' sexual indiscretions depressed him, "because I grew up during Camelot", I snort: "Come off it, you go into them in huge detail." He also published nude photos of Jackie in *Hustler* in 1975. "I was hoping to make a lot of money, and I did," he concedes. "It's about capturing an icon in a way you'd never expect. I could make millions with nude pictures of the Queen."

Although he writes about Bill Clinton's sex scandals, Flynt, a Democrat, asserts: "If you've fought two wars and balanced the budget, you should be able to sleep with whoever you want, but a certain discretion is required." What about cheated-upon



SURVIVOR Larry Flynt, 68, was shot in 1978. He is paralysed from the waist down and uses a gold-plated wheelchair

wives and partners? "I don't think human beings were intended to be monogamous," he says. He never has been. "It doesn't appeal at all. I don't think monogamy is in our genes. I've always been the Energizer Bunny. Sex has been a major, pleasurable part of my life." Were his wives OK about his promiscuity? "No, that's why I've been married five times. My current wife [Elizabeth Berrios] is more tolerant." What if they weren't faithful? "I don't know how I'd react, but how can I expect them to be something I'm not? I've never demanded fidelity, but they've never said, 'Larry, I want to sleep with someone else.' Monogamy is more feasible for women. Men are such dogs."

Flynt was born and raised in poverty in Kentucky. "We didn't have two food stamps to rub together. That explains my success. The only way was up." His father was an alcoholic. "He came back from World War Two and drank till he was 60. He was violent and abusive to my mother but not to me." Flynt first joined the Army, then the Navy. He lost his virginity at 15 to a prostitute in Georgia. He began empire-building in 1965 with a collection of bars. *Hustler* began in 1972 and mushroomed to include clubs, videos, shops and a casino.

Flynt remembers his secretary in the early days saying to him, "That's 18", refer-

ring to the 18th would-be porn model he had had sex with: "If they're in there longer than ten minutes, I know you've f***ed them." He had lots of sex: "The more you get, the more you want." Did he ever catch any diseases? "Never. In the Navy, a medic advised us to drink five beers before sex, so we would urinate any nasty stuff out, and to wash everywhere with hot soapy water. It worked and became such a habit that with my second wife I would wash after sex, which she found embarrassing."

His fourth wife, Althea, was his true love: "We were inseparable." A drugs and alcohol addict, she contracted HIV in 1983 through a blood transfusion, Flynt says, and developed Aids. "We had a completely open marriage. She liked girls as well as guys." After the diagnosis of her illness they "abstained" from sex. She drowned in 1987. "It was awful. I was so deeply in love with her that the whole process of her dying was numbing." Flynt is HIV-negative.

Althea is "still the love of my life", Flynt says. Berrios understands. "I love her, but not like Althea." Did he share Althea's bisexual leanings? "No, I'm a very uptight

‘Wealthy men such as Strauss-Khan need to feed their egos with sexual conquests’

and a son), but has a relationship with only one, Theresa, 40. "The others spend their weeks trying to figure out how I screwed up their lives." One daughter, Tonya, wrote a book claiming that her father had forced her to perform oral sex on him, which Flynt denies; he says that he has taped evidence of her admitting that she was mistaken. She told him that he "ruined" her life. "I told her, 'Here's a solution: for ten bucks go to the courthouse and change your name'. I don't miss being a parent. They're motivated by money and I don't give them any."

"When I started *Hustler* I hoped to get 5 per cent of the pornography market," he recalls. "In less than a year I had a third." Money "buys you freedom". But despite the private jet and Hollywood home, Flynt is most proud of his free-speech campaigning, which began in the early 1970s and in the late 1980s led to a landmark case against him brought by the tele-evangelist Jerry Falwell in which a judge ruled that public figures who had been parodied had no grounds to sue for "intentional infliction of emotional distress".

After one obscenity case in 1976 Flynt was sentenced to 25 years in prison (which he did not serve): "Which was when I realised that freedom of speech is not freedom for the thought you agree with, but the one you hate the most." The sentiment was not shared by his would-be assassin, Joseph Paul Franklin, who shot him after *Hustler* featured an interracial coupling. "The shots rang out, then I was on the street. It

‘The greatest right any nation can afford its people is to be left alone’

felt like a hot poker and ripped up my intestines. For a month it was touch and go whether I would live, but I accepted my paralysis easily and quickly. I resolved that I wouldn't spend my life dwelling on something I couldn't change. I don't think about being in a wheelchair until someone brings it up. I decided not to feel sorry for myself or be angry at the world, and to move on."

Chronic pain led Flynt to become addicted to morphine, cocaine, sleeping pills, uppers and downers. "There are two kinds of addiction: physiological and psychological. I was physiologically addicted to drugs. When the pain was dealt with, I quit." As for sex, although he has had a battery-operated penis implant removed "after an infection", he still has sex: "And [I] enjoy it. Some people talk about growing old gracefully and it's horseshit. I feel like I'm in my thirties. People say you can't take your money with you; if that's so, I'm not going to go."

Flynt's legacy, he hopes, will be "that I fought to expand the parameters of free speech". He wishes that America would "become more like Europe", where the Church is detached from politics and "where it's more laid-back about sex. In France and Spain they take three-hour lunch breaks, which means they can have mistresses." Flynt concludes that "the Government has no business in your bedroom" — whereas he, of course, has.

One Nation Under Sex is published by **Palgrave Macmillan** at £16.99. To order it for £15.29, call 0845 212134

Erica Wagner
Literary Editor



I am perfectly aware that there are those among you who would see my name up top there and think that it ought to be replaced by that of King Canute — you remember, he's the one who tried to hold back the tide. If you do remember, it might just be because you read the story in a book: something that will be hard to do, soon, if you happen to be a pupil at Wellington College.

You couldn't make it up, could you? That's right, a tip-top independent school is to chuck out more than 80 per cent of its library books. In their place will be an e-reading "research and innovation centre". There will be iPads rather than hard covers, cosy chairs instead of bookshelves, a café and an "aptitude centre" with opaque glass walls. An "archive" of a couple of thousand books will remain, artefacts of a past way of life.

I know the times they are a-changin'. Look, I'm learning to love my Kindle, and I never thought that day would come to pass. E-book sales have just surpassed hardback sales on Amazon, we're told. This is indeed a brave new world.

But I'm not really talking about sales, here, am I? I'm talking about a library, which — while it's only one library at one private school — seems an exemplar of an idea, current in some quarters these days, that libraries are fusty, old-fashioned places that need to be spruced up. One senses that Wellington College is somehow embarrassed by its huge stock of books, these antique instruments of learning. And yet people love their libraries: the threat to public libraries across the country — hundreds are set for closure to save more than £6 billion over the course of two years — has caused an outcry. "Libraries are one of the places people go when school fails them," Sir Terry Pratchett has remarked (he credits his own success to Beaconfield Library).

Libraries have to keep up with the times as much as any of us: but looking at my local Idea Store in Whitechapel I think that it's perfectly possible for libraries to do so without losing their souls — or their books. I admit that I winced, back in 2005, when I heard that the word "library" was being ditched. I felt sad, too, for the closure of historic Whitechapel Library. But the Idea Store is a roaring success and does a thriving trade in books; the old Whitechapel Library has become, of course, the wonderful Whitechapel Gallery. Not all change is bad.

But getting rid of books almost entirely in favour of their digital equivalents? I'm not so sure. For one thing, what happens when there's a power cut? Getting rid of books may look like progress: or it could herald a new Dark Age. I'm not sure that's what the folks at Wellington College had in mind.



Where you see this symbol, order books at discounted prices, with free p&p, from **The Times Bookshop**; call 0845 271234 or visit thetimes.co.uk/bookshop

Getting rid of books in favour of their digital equivalents? What if there's a power cut?



Erica's week

I met

That intrepid traveller Paul Theroux at the Charleston Festival. charleston.org.uk

I read

Siddhartha Mukherjee's remarkable book, *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*. (Fourth Estate).

I enjoyed

Terry Gilliam's brilliant production of Berlioz's *Faust* — taken originally from Goethe's text — at the ENO. eno.org