

Book Review: The First Gentleman
By Bill Clinton and James Patterson

It's year three of Madeline Wright's first term as President of the United States. Re-election is around the corner, and a monumental piece of pending legislation called the Grand Bargain could change the country's financial fortunes for years to come by saving Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare while bringing down the national debt. *If* it's approved.

But all of that is secondary to the murder charge that's been leveled against Cole Wright, former star tight end for the New England Patriots and the current First Gentleman. Did he kill Suzanne Bonanno, his girlfriend and Patriots' cheerleader, 17 years ago?

That's the framework for "The First Gentleman," the latest collaborative novel from former President Bill Clinton and renowned author James Patterson. I have not read their previous joint efforts but will tell you this one is right on the money.

The pot begins to stir when Garrett Wilson, an investigative journalist with two successful non-fiction works under his belt, and his partner and girlfriend attorney Brea Cooke begin following up on a lead that links the First Gentleman to Suzanne's 17-year-old unsolved murder mystery. Their goal is to uncover the truth and co-author a sure-to-be best-selling new book.

Wilson and Cooke quickly learn that there are people, powerful ones, who do not want the past disturbed. Sources they connect with soon turn up at the morgue. Wilson and Cooke receive threats and are physically assaulted. Then suddenly the publisher pulls the plug on the book.

Undeterred, they persevere. They believe they're onto the story of the century. Despite the odds stacked up against them, they continue working to unearth the truth about what happened to Suzanne Bonanno, and what was the First Gentleman's involvement.

The pacing, as is the case in most Patterson novels, is frenetic though artfully controlled. Chapters are short, keeping readers engaged. And there are sufficient twists and turns to keep you on the edge of your seat (or couch, or wherever you're reading) until the very end.

There is one lengthy section comprising pages where President Wright details the elements of the Grand Bargain before Congress, and it reads like a State of the Union address that – despite many of the positive ideas it endorses – can be a bit tedious to read.

Overall, though, “The First Gentleman” is a first-rate mystery novel that, whether you are a James Patterson fan or not, should be on your to-be-read list. A full five stars for this highly entertaining novel.