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06/13/94  
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NEW YORK TIMES

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

For Internal Use Only

June 13, 1994

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
CONDUCTED BY M. BURROS  
STATE DINNER, EMPEROR OF JAPAN

Q I had a fabulous trip to Vietnam. But, as you know, I missed the entire (inaudible). It was an incredible trip.

MRS. CLINTON: How long did you get to stay there?

Q Two weeks. Two and a half weeks, actually.

MRS. CLINTON: Did you, really?

Q We went with Germaine Swanson, who is the owner of the restaurant, Germaine. She is a Vietnamese-American woman. She had an incredible life, so it was a very, very emotional event. Because she was seeing people she hadn't seen in 40 years, from the North, because they came from Hanoi. And the people in the South, she hadn't seen in 20 years. So it was just --

MRS. CLINTON: That must have been overwhelming.

Q It was more overwhelming for us. She is -- if I am taking up time telling you, I shouldn't.

MRS. CLINTON: No, I would like to hear.

She is a woman who has had such a hard life. Lost her country, lost her home, had a very sad love affair. Was almost killed by somebody who worked for the family. Almost killed the entire family. Put them in a trench. he was going to machine-gun them all down.

She has shut down her emotions because she feels it's the only way she can cope. So while the rest of us are standing there crying at her reunions, maybe a couple of little tears would come out of her eyes, but not much. I tell you my whole story, it will be in the paper in a couple of weeks.

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She really never broke down until she started to talk about her very sad love affair, a married American, that ended with a child.

MRS. CLINTON: During the Vietnam War?

Q And then she cried. And then she (inaudible). Before that she didn't.

But the country is so beautiful, exquisite. Thirteen hundred miles of coastline. Every shade of green that you can think of. And the people are very, very friendly. It's exotic and romantic. It was an incredible thing.

MRS. CLINTON: Did you see the (inaudible) stone with the heaven and earth?

Q No. Should I?

MRS. CLINTON: I liked it. I like some of this other stuff. I didn't particularly like some of the other stuff. It was so beautifully filmed. When you said that, the scene started coming back through my mind. Just the green and the water. Even the colors of the people's clothes against the green and the rice paddies. Everything is so beautiful.

Q How we ever thought that we could win a war in that country?

MRS. CLINTON: No way. No way. And I was against the Vietnam War because it was futile. I was raised in a Republican family that worshipped Dwight Eisenhower, who said don't ever fight a land war in Asia. And I remember -- I was a Goldwater Republican.

And my father was just a World War II veteran who believed in the good wars. And I remember as early as '64 and '65, before I went on to go to college, my father said, "Why don't they listen to General Eisenhower?" It was just never going to work.

Q Not a chance.

MRS. CLINTON: Not a chance.

Q And it's terrible, but they don't seem to --

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obviously, there have to be some people who hold grudges. But they just love Americans. They really do. So all of these things combined.

MRS. CLINTON: It was nothing personal with them.

Q No, no.

MRS. CLINTON: They knew that we could not win. They knew they had beaten the French, whom they had some bad feelings about, because of the years of colonial rule. But they don't hold anything against us. It was like, look, we have 2000 years of history, and you have 200. You would eventually come to your senses. I mean, I talked to a lot of Vietnamese about this.

Q The French, by the way, they are there in droves, the French tourists. And they all have parties the last night that they are there, their groups. And many of them dress up in colonial costume. They haven't figured out that these people might resent it?

MRS. CLINTON: How was the food?

Q When we found the right places, the food was fabulous. But it was not so easy to find, especially in the North. They have lost their history of cooking. They have lost all their chefs, they have lost everybody who cared about 40 years.

All right, enough of me.

Tell me about your new chef and how you feel about this dinner.

MRS. CLINTON: I am very excited about the dinner. And part of the excitement is because of the chef and his enthusiasm and his adventurousness. We have had several large and small dinners since he has been here, a couple of big lunches, and a couple of huge receptions.

I have never had so many compliments about the food. Both his presentation, his creativity and taste. So that's from our perspective. It's been a real delight working with him, seeing what he is going to produce.

And I am excited about the dinner because it's a

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chance for us to have a very formal affair, but to do it with the same combination of respect for tradition and warmth that we believe should be the hallmark of entertainment at the White House.

And the time we spent earlier today with the Emperor and the Empress was so pleasant. They are lovely people. She is particularly looking forward to eating in the Rose Garden, surrounded by the flowers. We sent some roses over to Blair House. She loves fresh flowers. And I just think it's going to be a great night to relax.

Q You're not worried about the heat?

MRS. CLINTON: The tent is air-conditioned.

Q But it works? I mean, that machine actually works?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, yes, it does. I was just in there checking it out. It does work. I mean, I am sorry that we are going to use it because I would love -- Friday night we had a big dinner in a tent. And the flaps were up, and the breeze was blowing, and it was glorious.

Q Does your husband own a white tie?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q Oh, he actually owns, so he doesn't have to go out and rent it?

MRS. CLINTON: No, he owns it.

Q I suppose I can find out later what you are wearing. But if you'd like to tell me. Unless you don't yet, of course.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, no, I know. I am wearing a navy blue full-length lace dress, which was made by John Anthony in New York. I can get you more details about the dress, additional details.

Q (inaudible) Nancy Reagan used to borrow jewelry.

MRS. CLINTON: I am actually not sure. That I haven't got. I own the dress, and I own the shoes. I have a

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couple of friends who actually sent some things over that they think might look good, but I haven't tried any of it on yet, so I don't know what I am wearing with respect to jewelry.

Q Let's go back to the chef for a minute, if we can. He was just telling me that even though no one may notice it, there is a lot less fat even in food for state dinners.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q Just generally all around.

MRS. CLINTON: That's right.

Q Have you noticed the difference? Has your husband noticed the difference?

MRS. CLINTON: My husband looks so great. He adores this food. He has been losing weight --

Q Really?

MRS. CLINTON: He looks so handsome that I think it is making a difference.

At the dinner Friday night we had a guest, who had never met my husband in person before, and she was just stunned at how good-looking he was, and just kept saying, "He is really handsome."

Q You could have told her that.

So you don't (inaudible) like Dr. Orange suggests in his book --

MRS. CLINTON: No. And you have done a great job in the articles you have written about that.

If you had serious heart disease that is leading you to need surgery, if you are not careful, or if you had surgery, and you want to reverse the effects of heart disease, I think you do that by getting your fat as low as you can possibly get it.

The evidence is now very convincing. And I think

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most Americans can do with a lot less fat in their diet than we currently eat on a daily basis. But there's a happy medium between the more strict regimen that people with heart disease and potential coronary problems should probably be on for their own well-being, and the typical American diet which is much too high in fat.

We are trying to strike that medium, and we are trying to do it in a way that is flavorful and delicious -- beautiful.

One of the guests tonight will be Oprah Winfrey who has done a terrific job in channelling the role of healthy low fat food and regular exercise. Because those two need to go together if they are going to be effective in giving you a lot of energy, helping you to lose weight.

Q Have you lost weight as well?

MRS. CLINTON: I am pretty much the same, I think. As you get older --

Q Tell me about it.

MRS. CLINTON: -- I think you really have to work so much harder at everything.

Q How much input did you have on tonight's menu?

MRS. CLINTON: We started looking at possible menus about six weeks ago, shortly after Walter got here. The menu is mostly his. He went through a couple of variations as we would talk it through, and as he would go back and think through what ingredients would be fresh, and what he could use at this time of year, and what particular preferences as we learned about the Emperor and the Empress might be. It's his menu. But it was reviewed and got approved.

Q You were involved?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure was.

Q But you didn't ask for a tasting?

MRS. CLINTON: No, did not.

Q You don't feel that's necessary?

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MRS. CLINTON: No, I don't.

Q What are the Emperor and Empress's particular -- there are certain things they can't eat, or certain things they don't care for?

MRS. CLINTON: I think there are preferences.

Q And with the pastry chef, did you do the same thing, or you just let him go?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, Roland, he always has something wonderful at the end of the process. I told him I just wanted something wonderful. He could surprise me. But he knows I love cherries. And of course cherries are a connection with Japan. And I can hardly eat enough cherries. That's one of my great favorite foods.

Q (Inaudible) cherries or white cherries?

MRS. CLINTON: (Inaudible).

Q You haven't seen the whole thing yet, have you?

MRS. CLINTON: I poked in.

Q Oh, you did?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q You saw the sushi?

MRS. CLINTON: I haven't seen the sushi part, but I saw -- he was putting it all together. He was putting the stem on. He is just --

Q He is an artist.

MRS. CLINTON: Fred is wonderful.

Q Can I ask you about how you decided on this chef as opposed to the other chefs? What made you go with him?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, we were so lucky. We had a number of great American chefs, lots of young people as well as established chefs. Some of them, after thinking about their own careers and their own needs, decided this wouldn't

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be the best pick for them.

We went through a process where everybody who looked like they had the right set of experience and credentials, was interviewed. And then we did have a meal prepared by a number of them. And they were all terrific. I mean, different in various ways.

But in the end we chose somebody who we thought had both the hands-on experience and the management experience that would really fit in here at the White House.

Q Was the management experience important?

MRS. CLINTON: It is important, I think, especially for an event like tonight. But there are events every week in the White House at various times. Sometimes there are last-minute events that have to be put on.

Probably the first big event that Walter did was a big reception we had. I think it was part of the American Academy --

Q Yes, it is.

MRS. CLINTON: And there were lots of people who had been at the White House many times. And they just raved about the presentation, and the quality of the food.

He had relatively a short period of time to prepare for that. So the management as well as the actual preparation is very important.

Q Because some of these other people who were candidates certainly are good cooks, excellent cooks, but many don't have the management experience. That's why I wondered whether --

MRS. CLINTON: It's a real important factor.

Q If you don't mind, tell me about the --

MRS. CLINTON: We are doing a few things differently tonight. We are doing the receiving line in a different place, which we think will help the guests continue to mix and mingle in the East Room, and slowly come to the receiving line.

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We are going down the stairs, through the room, on the outside staircase, which is just stunning. And I hope Mary gets a chance to actually do that walk because we've got the trees above it, and there is music. So beautiful.

Q So you are using the outside stairs?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, the outside.

Q You are opening one of those wonderful --

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. Through the Blue Room. You walk out onto the balcony, and you see the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, and you've got music playing, and you have these handsome military social aides, and the lights, and the flowers. It is, I think, showcasing the White House at this time of year in a way that we should all like.

We are having dancing in the State Room after the entertainment in the State Dining Room, which I think has happened a few times with presidents in the past. But makes it somewhat more fluid to -- from the entertainment in the East Room, a lot of people to mix and mingle, and then ending up dancing in the State Dining Room.

The entertainment is Rostopovich who is a particular favorite of the Emperor's. He enjoys and appreciates the maestro a great deal. And of course it's his last week in Washington, so it's a really fitting choice for our entertainment for the Emperor and Empress.

Q How do you like the plated service (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think for many occasions it is formally appropriate. Walter has done some beautiful plate services. We had a Senate spouses luncheon which was beautiful. And we are still getting the most effusive notes of thanks and compliments that I had ever seen. Much of it had to do with the way the plates looked as they came in.

Tonight we are (inaudible), doing both, plated and French, which we think fits with this particular dinner and what is being served.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much.

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