

08/11/93  
BARNES, FRED

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Internal Transcript

August 11, 1993

INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY  
BY FRED BARNES

The Map Room

MRS. CLINTON: Will you share that tape with her, because she'll kill me that I started without her being here with her tape recorder. She had me so well trained, Fred.

But there has to be a basic assumption that individuals will be responsible for their own behavior, they will be responsible for their behavior toward other people. There isn't any other way to make a family work, a workplace work, a society work. And, yet, that doesn't just mean that individuals are off there on their own without any kind of network of caring or connection. I mean, it's a reciprocal relationship. I mean, part of the way you raise children, it seems to me, is for them to be responsible, and part of the way you instill responsibility is from the right combination of love and discipline.

And so it's not an either/or, like, you know, let's create these selfish automatons who are responsible only for themselves, because I believe out of a true sense of individual responsibility comes responsibility for others. But it has to start with that.

I mean, I did a lot of Sunday school teaching in my life, and one of my favorite classes used to be about how, if you really took seriously "Love thy neighbor as thyself," it started from the premise of loving yourself. The way you love yourself in kind of a religious sense is to value yourself, to be responsible for yourself, to know that you are a creation of God and to be respectful of that. From that, then, you can move out toward caring for other people. And we have gotten this whole issue of personal responsibility kind of off the track in the last several decades, it seems to me.

Q Is that a legacy of the '60s where we've gotten into excessive individualism or --

MORE

MRS. CLINTON: I think it's probably too easy to say it was just the '60s. I think it's modern times of which the '60s were a part. It is the whole movement toward scientific and rational thought at the expense of any faith or religion. It is the decoupling of family and work so that we don't really know what people do for a living and how it's related to putting bread on the table. I mean, it's the redundancy of human labor, when you get automation and, you know, robots doing the work that men and women used to do. I mean, there's an increasing sort of level of alienation as you go back and look at the development of modern society.

So whether it's the '60s with certain excesses there or some other particular point in history, it's been a cumulative process. And there are a lot of people who talk about it far more eloquently than I do. You know, Havel has talked about this, I think, better than anybody in the political school. And there are a lot of very thoughtful philosophers and theologians, and even some political scientists in this country who are -- think about it.

Q Like who? What political scientists --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think Sandler at Harvard. I think that Bob Coles at Harvard. I think that, you know, if you go back and look at the works of Neiver or Von Hoffer, I think if you -- you know, even look at some of the journalists that I may not always agree with, but Christopher Lash, somebody who's struggling with the cost of -- that we pay for a modern society.

Q Did you read "The Culture of Narcissism"?

MRS. CLINTON: I'm reading it. I'm reading it.

Q It's an interesting book.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, and I mean, it's a lot of what I'm talking about and in a much more thoughtful way than I could say in a brief interview. You see, I think all of these issues are what -- are at the root of trying to make sense out of what's happening in our world today. And there may not be any quick or easy way to say it. I mean, you can read Havel's speeches and sometimes say, what does he mean? What's he talking about? What does he mean when he says, we don't need facts so much as we need understanding. You know, that's a kind of cryptic thing. But if you think about it, there's something there to it.

So we're sort of -- and I know I took some hits from people who read the Michael Kelly piece -- you know, I mean, that's pretty abstract. Well, a lot of this is hard to talk about. A lot

MORE

of it doesn't any longer have a vocabulary. It's sort of considered kind of out of fashion to talk about these issues.

When I was a little girl, one of the people I really admired was Margaret Chase Smith, just because she was out there. And she stood up against the dangers of McCarthyism and -- I thought was a pretty courageous woman. And I heard an interview with her the other day that -- I don't know when it was taped; sometime in the last several years. And she was asked, well, what's your -- what is your philosophy of life after all these years -- you know, one of those kinds of questions. And I think I'm pretty close to exactly what she said. She said, I must believe in myself, I must believe in my fellow man, I must believe in God or life has no meaning. I mean, that was pretty bottom-line.

Q You agree with her?

MRS. CLINTON: Absolutely agree. I agree with that 100 percent. And I think that yet if you -- you know, in today's times, kind of given the sort of cultural pressures that everybody is under, saying something like that sounds either hopelessly abstract or hopelessly old-fashioned. I happen to think it describes the human condition as well as I could. I mean, if you don't believe in yourself, you can't believe in fellow beings. That's kind of back to my old Sunday school lesson.

If you don't believe in God, how do you ever get to the point of believing yourself. I mean, to me those are all sort of -- kind of reinforcing beliefs that form a kind of core of individual responsibility. Then, you are able to go out into the world and be an actor -- whether you're a United States senator from Maine or raising children or whatever you might do.

Q You talked in the speech about the reconstruction of civil society with institutions of family, friendship networks, communities, voluntary organizations. In that reconstruction, what role does religion play?

MRS. CLINTON: I think it plays an essential role because I believe in the central role of faith and religion in my life. And I think that oftentimes, the religious voice is the voice crying in the wilderness and the one that needs to be heard about eternal values, about fundamental truths, so that there's always a role for religion to play in kind of bringing us back to the big issues in our lives. And without that, you can get so caught up in the day-to-day that you forget what the point of it all is.

Q What is -- I haven't figured this out myself, and you may not be the one to ask, although you're involved -- what do

MORE

you think the source of your influence is? Obviously you're married to the President, but we've had many first ladies before, and, yet, you seem to have more impact on policy -- and not just because of the Health Care Task Force that you're the head of; I mean, there's something more than that, whether it's -- the closest I can come to it is, it's -- the ideas that you have put forth that have been -- obviously, ideas have power. Maybe you have another explanation.

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know that I've had any more influence than some of the other women who have been in this position. I mean, I think that Eleanor Roosevelt, just to pick one, was obviously extremely influential. The second Mrs. Wilson -- I mean, you can kind of go through history.

Q Well, the second Mrs. Wilson -- particularly after her husband had a stroke. That's --

MRS. CLINTON: But she kind of held it together in lots of ways. And I've been reading a lot about first ladies. And so -- so there are -- people come to this with different life experiences. But there wasn't the intense media coverage of any of those women. So that maybe their influence is only now seen in an historical perspective as opposed to the kind of day-to-day coverage that people in public life get now. But I hope it has something to do with my ideas, because I don't really have any interest in having it -- do it with my personality. I don't think that's a very good basis for people to make judgments about issues that could affect their lives or the lives of their families.

To me, this whole health care issue is very important because there are so many aspects of it that I care deeply about. And the ideas that are motivating my belief in the need for change are ones that I hope will stand on their own regardless of who is advocating them. But they will have that kind of influence on their own because of their merit.

Q John Kasich says, a congressman, that you're an ally of his as an enemy of the status quo. Do you agree with that?

MRS. CLINTON: I like him a lot.

Q Has he got you pegged correctly on that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I don't know. I've never thought of it that way before. But I do think that in our country at this point in history, business as usual and the status quo are not in the best interest of the country. And what I admire about John in the conversations I've had with him is that, even though I may not always agree with his positions, he believes in ideas. He cares about

MORE

issues. He wants to move the debate forward. And he's willing to take intellectual risks to do that. And I admire that.

Q One thing I forgot to ask I see here in my notes -- on balance, would you say the '60s were a good influence on the country or a bad influence?

MRS. CLINTON: I think on balance, on big issues, like civil rights, a very good influence. I think on some cultural issues, kind of a mixed bag -- some bad and some good.

Q And on what cultural issues was it a bad influence on?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that, you know, the excesses of the '60s that we are still living with to some extent, hurt a lot of people and undermined individual responsibility in many ways. But I also think that almost the reverse side of that coin is that it forced some people to be individually responsible in some very painful ways. I mean, a lot of people took stands on the Vietnam War that were against even their parents or against the establishment. People took stands with respect to civil rights that were very difficult.

So I think it was a very tumultuous, dynamic decade. And that it is -- it is still even too close to us fully to appreciate whatever its historical significance will be over time.

Q That's what -- people don't agree on it --

MRS. CLINTON: That's right.

Q -- that's for sure. No question about that. One thing you've been accused of is -- as you know, the stories about you and rumors circulating around town, but --

MRS. CLINTON: Apparently it's a cottage industry.

Q It is a cottage industry. (Laughter.) But --

MRS. CLINTON: Can I get a slice of it? I mean, you know -- (laughter).

Q It preceded you, it just accelerated. And that is that you're prejudiced against entrepreneurs, that you --

MRS. CLINTON: That's just absurd.

MORE

Q That you don't think people -- that anybody needs to make more than a couple hundred thousand dollars a year, say.

MRS. CLINTON: It's just absurd. I don't know where -- I can't even imagine who sat in what corner and made that up based on what. My father was a small businessman, made a really good living for us. I grew up in that environment. I'm a big supporter of entrepreneurial talent. I was fortunate enough to be on the Wal-Mart board, the greatest entrepreneur of the 20th century.

Q That's true.

MRS. CLINTON: So I don't know where that kind of stuff comes from.

Q He certainly was a great entrepreneur. And so was the -- you were on the TCBY --

MRS. CLINTON: TCBY, another good story.

Q -- that did awfully well. What was your reaction to the whole Travelgate business, as you saw it unfold, obviously a flap that was not helpful to the image of the White House? What was your take on that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I was confused by the whole thing -- still am because I just -- I didn't understand it from start to finish. I don't really have anything to add to that.

Q Did you give your politics of meaning speech from no notes -- I mean, basically off the cuff?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, I guess I did.

Q It's very hard to do. When did you acquire that ability? That's very impressive. I've given speeches, I could go for about 30 seconds.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know that particular speech, was under such difficult circumstances for me. And until really -- I don't know, maybe Sunday, I wasn't even sure I was going to go. But my father was stabilized, and so I went back to -- I came back here. I was supposed to go to throw the first ball at Wrigley Field, but I couldn't do that. I just couldn't.

But -- and, really, until Sunday I thought I wouldn't go to Texas, either. But, then, my friend, Liz Carpenter who got me involved in this, called and said if it were at all possible, I needed to come because there were going to be a few people there.

MORE

And I said, you know, Liz, I just don't know if I'm up to it. I don't want to disappoint you, but maybe I could reschedule it. And she said, Hillary, we're going to have like 9,000 or 10,000 people. I thought I was going to speak to -- have you ever been to the LBJ School?

Q I have.

MRS. CLINTON: I've been there. You know, I've been in those auditoriums. You know, about 200 or 300 people. I thought, you know, I can deal with that and we can reschedule it. And then she dropped that on me. So I didn't really think much about it until I got focused on doing it, which was Monday night or Tuesday morning. And I think it was pretty much spontaneous. But I thought about these things a lot. But, of course, if I had sat down and written it, I probably would have said some things differently. That's what I felt like talking about.

Q There was a quote that Michael Kelly I wish I had brought -- I have a copy of the Wellesley speech -- but he mentioned the one where you talked about the prevailing acquisitive and competitive corporate life is not for us -- this was in the Wellesley speech --

MRS. CLINTON: Right, right.

Q That may be a source of the rumors you are --

MRS. CLINTON: That I'm anti --

Q Anti-entrepreneur.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know, but Fred, I have a very different take on this, because, see, I think a successful entrepreneur and a successful business, over the long run, is one that has values that are rooted in pride of doing a good job, rewarding loyalty, taking care of your customers -- you know, these kind of old-fashioned values again. And a lot of the slash-and-burn business techniques are now being shown up for the short-term failures that seemed to me obvious even then.

I just think that we have a short memory in this country. And sort of relearning the lessons of what built this kind of economy, which was tough and hard-fought and bare-knuckled -- we had robber barons and all the rest of it -- but that there was an evolving process. And we are now at a point when any CEO I talk to tells me you've got to have teamwork, you've got to respect your workers, you can't treat them like they were your leftover stepchildren from some other universe.

MORE

So, to me that's what's at stake. I want everybody to be successful. I just happen to think that trying to create environments in which you optimize everybody's opportunity to be successful, it's better for the whole enterprise.

Q So this isn't something you necessarily believe anymore?

MRS. CLINTON: No, it is -- I mean, carried to an extreme that -- where you kind of get the Martin Gecko mentality --

Q Right.

MRS. CLINTON: -- that's not the way to build a long-term successful corporate culture, in my view.

Q Made a good movie, though.

MRS. CLINTON: It was a good movie.

Q One other thing I wanted to ask you from the "Politics of Meaning" speech, we've talked about social values equally must be recognized for the role they play in how children feel about themselves and act in the world. Which values are you referring to there?

MRS. CLINTON: You know, whether one condones discrimination and prejudice, or whether you try to deal with individuals as individuals. Those are very strong messages that children get. Whether you condone violence, whether it's on TV or in the movies or in the neighborhood, that sends strong messages to children. You know, those kinds of prevailing social values that impact how children feel about themselves and how they feel about their place in life.

Q What is government's role in all this, in the reconstitution of the various things -- you mentioned earlier in the speech and in creating and protecting social values?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, government cannot substitute for family or for any other important institutional support for child-rearing. But government can either do or fail to do things that can interfere with the important job that families have. And I'll just give you an example from our most recent experience here in Washington. And part of the reason my husband believes so much in the earned income tax is because it sends a very clear signal to people who work that they are going to be rewarded for that work and not penalized, so that we can begin to remove the excuse that has too

MORE

often been around that you're better off on welfare than you are working in some minimum-wage job.

We'll, you're not better off. You shouldn't be better off. The government shouldn't do anything that makes you better off. And so we have to begin to reverse any government policies that in any way undermine family stability and individual responsibility.

Now, the government can either be the friend of the family or can be the foe of the family. The government cannot be neutral by the distance of government, whether you have a tax system that helps families or hurts them, or whatever you might do.

So my plea has been that what often passes for either liberal or conservative rhetoric, carefully analyzed, can be seen to have a detrimental impact on what I view is the primary role of society, which is to support families, to do the best possible job in rearing productive, responsible children, to carry on the traditions of that society.

Now -- so, government doesn't substitute. All during the campaign, I used to quote -- and I gave a speech at -- where was that place we were -- Chautauqua about this -- I used to quote this wonderful thought from the Catholic bishops' work on strengthening families and children about how -- it's such a fallacy to say that children are either only the result of their parents, or only the result of society and government. Because the truth is, although the family is and should be, and will always be the primary influence, the values of both will impact the family's ability to do its job.

I thought the bishops had it absolutely right. So my plea has always been where government can strengthen families or get out of their way, that's the proper role that it should play.

Q You know, one of the -- for another story I was doing, I did a nexus search on childhood immunizations and asked it for how often the word "parents" were mentioned in there. I mean, it seems to me that one of the problems where we're having only half the kids getting immunized, young kids, is that the parents -- I mean, even middle class parents don't take them. But, yet, that's never mentioned.

MRS. CLINTON: I mention it a lot. It is something that I've talked about a lot, because -- for years, I have advocated tying welfare benefits to parental responsibility --

Q Why don't they do that? Why don't they require -- for AFDC require --

MORE

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we may get around to doing that.

Q -- require -- I mean, they do it for school -- you have to get all your shots -- why not do it for that?

MRS. CLINTON: I really -- see, I believe that, and I've said that for years. And it's something that I feel strongly about because when it comes to early childhood and when it comes to public health, we can expect things that maybe you can't expect and shouldn't expect in other areas of family life. So, yes, I really agree with that. And I also think that there needs to be a reassertion of the need for parents to be responsible at all income levels. And there needs to be kind of a national conversation about that -- not in a condemnatory way --

Q What will they specifically talk about in that conversation?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, talk about the things that we just talked about, how it's a parental responsibility to get your children immunized. And we're going to try to make it as possible as we can in terms of making the vaccines available, making the places available, but then ultimately you're responsible for doing it.

Q Right.

MRS. CLINTON: And we need to tie that to not just school entrance, but to earlier -- going to a day care center if you're going to take your child there -- welfare benefits, whatever it needs to be. We need to be saying that, as has been working successfully in some schools, parents need to enter into kind of an understanding with their child's school that they're going to be active participants in their child's schooling. And some of the schools that have tried things like -- even contracts where the parent says I'm going to show up for the PTA, I'm going to show up for the school conference -- then we have to make it possible for parents to do that. So the school may have to change the hours it does it. Or, employees might have to give somebody an hour off to get to the parent-teacher conference. The family and society have to work hand-in-hand to support the child in today's world.

Q How would you -- you know, you would be a perfect person to lead this national conversation that -- I know you've given speeches, but, I don't know, have you thought about there being some vehicle for your doing that on a regular basis that --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I'd like to, but, really, this health care assignment is pretty --

MORE

Q That's right.

MRS. CLINTON: -- pretty much taken up all of my time. And, yet, there are many opportunities in there to talk about individual responsibility and parental responsibility, and I intend to do that. Part of what I hope I can help stimulate as we move toward looking at health care legislation is not just what the Congress will do to make the legislation possible, but what the individual has to do to take responsibility for his or her own health.

Q I wanted to ask you about your roles, having the Health Care Task Force. What does that require in terms of time? I know you've chaired meetings and spoken a lot, and --

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. I have --

Q How much has that taken away from other things that you might otherwise have done?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, it has taken away from nearly everything I might otherwise have done. It has been an enormous time demand. And in some ways, more than I probably anticipated originally, because there was a hope that we could have gotten this legislative debate started earlier. But with the budget bill kind of taking up all that time, it's really taken more of my time than I would have thought.

But, I don't know, I guess we've kept track of them, but literally hundreds of meetings. I've had to read so much to educate myself to be as comfortable with what I was saying as possible, so it's been a very big time commitment.

Q Have you kept a list of the number of meetings and so on?

SPOKESPERSON: As of August 10th, Mrs. Clinton alone has had somewhere in the neighborhood of 114 of these with members of the Congress.

MRS. CLINTON: And that's just with members of Congress.

SPOKESPERSON: That's just her alone. I mean --

Q What about speeches -- she must have done on this. Health care groups and so on.

MORE

MRS. CLINTON: Dozens. But, then, in addition to the members of Congress, I bet I've had another 150 meetings with nurses, doctors, businesspeople.

Q That's what I meant, yes, with outside groups.

SPOKESPERSON: Not to mention meetings with members of the task force have had, like the working groups.

SPOKESPERSON: You have about five minutes.

MRS. CLINTON: I'm having a good time. I haven't gotten to interview him yet.

Q Maybe don't.

MRS. CLINTON: John McLaughlin does, doesn't he?

Q After a -- actually, we did a McLaughlin Group thing today in Orlando for the Hospital Association, where you were, I gather, very well received. At least that's what the --

MRS. CLINTON: I felt very good about it.

Q That's what the hospital official said when your name was raised. Actually I talked to the leaders of the group. They were very -- in the first place, they were incredibly flattered that you were there, and they thought that was a great coup, and it was.

MRS. CLINTON: They had -- but, see, there's a group -- the American Hospital Association and the Catholic Hospital Association, the American Nurses Association, some of the physician groups, like the Academy of Family Practice and -- I don't know --

Q All of these groups are fairly liberal. I know -- the pediatricians -- they were -- when they did a poll in their group -- they were lobbyists. They were for Mondale in '84, for instance.

MRS. CLINTON: But what I really respect about them, particularly the ones who have actually sat down and tried to work through the details about how we get from our dissatisfaction with our current system to something that we think is better, they have a tremendous amount of thoughtful suggestions.

When I first saw the Catholic Health Association's health care plan, which they have been working on for two years, even before the presidential election, I was stunned at how close it was to what I think is workable. And these are people that are on the

MORE

front lines. So when I met with their delegation, we talked real specifically about how you had to begin to provide a funding stream so that people who are either uninsured or underinsured don't wait until the last minute to go to the emergency room where they get the latest, most expensive care, and how the Catholic Hospital Association is trying some models that they think could work on a national level.

So they've really thought about this. It's not sort of abstract theorizing, it's on the front line, how do we do a better job.

Q Are you more liberal than your husband?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, gosh -- and I don't mean to --

Q I'm sure you've been asked this many times.

MRS. CLINTON: Have I been? Maybe I have been.

Q Certainly this year the subject has come up.

MRS. CLINTON: The subject has come up. I don't know what that means anymore. Because from my perspective, it is a really outdated and pretty unuseful label, just like I think conservative is anymore. I think that my husband and I are both pragmatic, that what we're interested in and always have been, is solving problems. And where we think a solution lies doesn't fall easily on the political spectrum as it has been defined in the past. But, then, I would argue that the political spectrum of the past is kind of preventing us from breaking through to understanding what we need to do today to deal with our problems.

Q Really? How is that?

MRS. CLINTON: I think this whole debate about welfare reform, which my husband has been talking about for years and which I have supported for years, it's not a liberal or a conservative debate, it is looking at the facts, which have been pointed out as long ago as Pat Moynihan about what generational welfare dependency would do to any population. It is being honest about how we have, in a sense, patronized millions of Americans, and how we have to deal with the underlying causes of welfare dependency and we have to have some new thinking about how to do it.

I think that the whole debate about (TAPE TURNS OVER) look at every model from the United States, and from my perspective, you can pick among what are their strengths to come up with something that will work here, and it doesn't have any easy label to apply to.

MORE

Q Well, conservative, generally, however, are for less government intervention and liberals are for more government intervention; at least more than conservatives. Don't you think that's a yardstick that's still relevant?

MRS. CLINTON: I always think about that old story about how the fella who curses government intervention gets in his car and drives on the federal highways to go pick up his Social Security check and to maybe stop by and visit his favorite program which was built from government funds. I mean, when you strip it away, it's like some of the members of Congress last week who yelled and screamed about no government intervention, and then went and voted for huge flood aid. Well, I mean, those labels break down real quickly when you talk about actual, practical life experience for people. So, was the GI Bill liberal? Was it conservative? Was Social Security liberal? Was it conservative. Is Medicare liberal? Is it conservative?

So, from my perspective, we have to sort of strip those blinders off, and we have to start saying to ourselves: Look, how do we take what we know about the world today, the global economic changes, the family changes and the like, and how do we get back to some understanding of what values we want to promote, and what do we think are the best ways to do that? I don't think that falls easily into any previous category.

SPOKESPERSON: We've got to go.

Q Let me ask one more thing. What do you like least about Washington?

SPOKESPERSON: Probably the constraints that we've suffered as a family in being mobil and kind of getting around to just be normal people. It's very hard on us, because we're used to putting on some old clothes and going for a long walk, or stopping in at a restaurant, having friends over, going over to their house. That's been --

Q I know when you stop in for a restaurant, because it's always in the paper.

SPOKESPERSON: Yes, I know. I know. That's been the hardest part. It just really interferes with how we like to live and how we like to be with other people. Our favorite things are just to kind of go and hang out with people and go to places that are public places and kind of see what's happening. Kind of sit and drink a Coke and watch people walk by, and visit our friends. That's been the hardest part.

MORE

We didn't have anything like that kind of limits on us in Arkansas, so it's been -- even though he's been in public life all these years, we had a normal life. So that's been --

Q Hard here.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, it is. It is hard. I think it does a real disservice to whoever the president is, because I have so much sympathy now for people who have been in this house for the last several administrations. Because, really, I guess maybe there is no getting around it because of security issues and kind of constant 24-hour media coverage. But if you don't let any person, let alone a president, with all the responsibilities that he has, have some time to feel like he's in touch with what's going on with real people, it changes how they see the world. And I don't think that's good for the individual or for the country.

Q Well, thank you very much.

MRS. CLINTON: Thanks. Thanks.

Q I appreciate your time. I learned a lot.

END

MORE