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INTERVIEW OF
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
BY JOE KLEIN

Q (In progress) -- and family disintegration increased. Do you think that poverty changed fundamentally in the '60s? And, if so, how?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I agree that the culture of poverty in this country has become institutionalized to an extent that is surprising to me and many others. Senator Moynihan has been sounding the alert on this for decades because he saw the trends developing more than other observers.

But the way I think about it is that poverty has been with us since the beginning of time and in many cultures there is a permanent underclass with all the problems that that suggests. It is contrary to the American ethos and history of progress that we would see that developing and becoming institutionalized in our country.

I don't know whether you place that in time in the 1960s, the 1970s, whether there were roots of it that predated that but there's nothing new about poverty. There is nothing new about having poor people in our midst. What is very new is that we now have the institutionalization of that culture of poverty in ways that are difficult to reconcile with the whole concept of upward mobility, change, the American Dream. And, so, those observers, including Senator Moynihan, who point that out as one of our major problems are absolutely right.

Q In your mind what does that mean? In Moynihan's mind that means that there is a kind of chronic dependency that even if in some cases in the hardest core transgenerational, welfare dependent cases, even if jobs were available, people might not be able to work them because of the dysfunctioning.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, he and I talked about that most recently last week. We had a long telephone conversation. He sent --

(Gap in tape.)

-- because I think there is a convergence of factors and that his concerns about people's ability to function in this society at this point in time are really well-founded. My concern is, though, that we are faced with not just those individuals who are part of that culture being rendered redundant or dysfunctional but that because of changing global and national conditions, economically and with respect to other institutions, we're seeing a growing number of people who wonder what their quest is and wonder what their role in society is. And it is not just those who are trapped in the underclass, it is seeping into other segments of society as well, although they are the most obvious subjects of concern because of all the other problems.

Q When a lot of the programs that we have to address poverty like welfare and some of the -- programs were formulated in the 1930s, it was clearly a different form of poverty; it even was in the '60s during the Great Society. Do you think that there has to be a fundamental rethinking of the kind of programs that you use to

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address the problem of dependency? I'm separating out dependency from, you know, from the people who have been laid off by IBM --

MRS. CLINTON: But they're now one step away from dependency, too. Not in a --

Q Aren't they just part of a different culture and will find the next job that comes along?

MRS. CLINTON: This is really a complicated issue for me because what we are seeing is a growing segment of the population who are really locked into unacceptable conditions both because of their own personal circumstances but also because of changes in society, particularly in the economy over which they and we have had little control or at least success in trying to manage.

One of the reasons that my husband ran for President is that he saw not only the most visible example of the breakdown in our capacity to support people so they could become fully functioning -- whether it was breakdown of the family, breakdown of the job market, breakdown of the intermediary associations like immigrant associations, political organizations, churches -- all those things that used to help facilitate people from a position of dependency or at least less than full functioning into becoming full members of our society.

But what my husband saw was that not only did we have that most visible problem, we had changes in the economy such that people who had always thought of themselves as independent, fully functioning, fully participating people were, through changes in their lives, changes in the economy, et cetera, beginning to feel also a victim. And that is the underlying condition that often leads to dependency and the inculcation of that in generations to come.

So, for him, and I agree with that, focusing on the middle class was not just a political statement, it was a values statement; because if you don't have a strong and thriving middle class, you don't have ladders out of poverty for people. It's one thing to go into some of our most devastated neighborhoods and preach at people and -- them and try to reverse the dependency and change programs that would send different signals; it's another thing to then lift your head up and say, now, what will we do with these people when other people, who are better off economically, better off educationally, they finished high school, for example, are finding themselves one step away from being impoverished financially with all that that entails.

Q It's still a different question than the one I was asking, and that is, specifically directed at the underclass and the culture of poverty that you acknowledge exists. How do we address that? How do we as a society address the 15-year-old mother on welfare? What do we owe her? What does she owe us? Can we demand a set of -- a behavioral standard from her?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure. I mean, I've been talking about that since 1973 and 1974. I'm one of the first people who wrote about how rights and responsibilities had to go hand-in-hand. I mean, nobody in the political campaign seemed to understand that that was what I was saying -- the people who actually read what I wrote.

Q What sort of responsibilities?

MRS. CLINTON. Well, responsibilities to be focused on the kind of development of behaviors and attitudes that will enable a person to be a responsible citizen. And part of what I have advocated for 20 years in a lot of different forums is that we have not done a good job in instilling responsibility in our children. But I think it's a much bigger and more complicated issue than to

just focus on those people who are locked into generational dependency. I think if all we do that, we then don't understand fully a lot of the changes in behavior and in institutions in our society that have pushed those people further into dependency and which have, unfortunately, made a lot of other people who should know better less responsible than they need to be.

So I am one of those people who for decades now have said we need to create conditions that will create more responsibility in individuals.

Q Well, you have someone in your administration, Andrew Cuomo, who has a program for homeless women and children -- predominantly women and children -- where there's a very strict set of rules -- a five page set of rules. And if the rules are broken, you're kicked out. Do you think that sort of standard is too harsh?

MRS. CLINTON: No, no. I mean, I've advocated highly structured inner city schools. I've advocated uniforms for kids in inner city schools. I've advocated that we have to help structure people's environments who come from unstructured, disorganized, dysfunctional family settings. Because if you do not have any structure on the outside, it is very difficult to internalize it on the inside. I've advocated parenting programs for two decades now, because I view the family as the principal inculcator of values.

Part of the reason, Joe, that I took a special year at Yale Law School to study family and child development is because I knew that we were not adequately addressing the severe social problems that I was concerned about in a legalistic manner if all we did was to look at institutions of the law separate from the inculcation of values, particularly among children.

And so part of what I've done for 20 years is to try to figure out how we do that. And I have not fallen easily into any camp like -- this is the dogma that we have to adopt, because I don't think there is any camp out there. I think we are piecing together a different set of approaches to try to deal with what has been the breakdown of internal control, of internal responsibility.

But my point is that if all we do is think about it in terms of people who are already impoverished, we miss some of the bigger social trends that have gone out that feed into that. And I want to keep them together, because I think the same message about responsibility should not go just to the 15-year-old welfare mother, but should also go to the college student who cheats. It should also go to the business person who is irresponsible with respect to polluting our environment.

Now, you can see more clearly the intense need for responsibility in some settings, but I think we have to send a single social message and then adopt remedies that deal with different people, depending upon where they all.

Q Clearly when we're supporting someone, and have a responsibility for their welfare, we have a right to intervene --

MRS. CLINTON: I agree with that.

Q I want to come back to that in a little bit. But let me go off on one other area -- general area, and that is the question of affirmative action and racial preferences. What are your general feelings about that? Do you feel that it's been a good idea? Do you think it's helped women, blacks? Do you think it at a certain point becomes redundant?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I hope it does. Yes. I hope that we can get to the point where we truly are color-blind. We're a long,

long ways from that right now. And I think that appropriately applied policies where people begin with what I call affirmative thinking -- which is the way I wish this whole debate had been framed -- are still important, so that we all break out of our own stereotypes and preconceptions about who is or is not an appropriate person for certain kinds of roles in society. But I believe very much in trying to move us toward a point where we can again have some common consensus about where America's going and a real fundamental belief that we have a fair society in which all people are given a shot if they're willing to do their part. And that I'm very much --

Q To write it into law?

MRS. CLINTON: Write what into law?

Q I mean, do you think that programs like set-asides and so on that are written into law are appropriate?

MRS. CLINTON: I think the existing framework we have now is appropriate. I don't think it should go any further, and I think that we should move toward a time when we can eliminate it.

Q Well, where do you draw the line between diversity and quotas? What is what?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you don't have --

Q Well, let me ask it even more specifically. Do you think that when some women's groups say that one out of the four top Cabinet positions has to be a woman, should be a woman, is that a quota or is that a call for diversity?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know. I can't speak for them, so I don't know what they mean by that. But I think it's important if you're in a position of leadership in today's society to open your mind to the possibility of all different kinds of people doing jobs that historically they have not been seen as doing. And I think that is something that is good for all of us, because there's a lot of talent out there -- a lot of talent that, frankly, was shut out of decision-making for the last 12 years. There are a lot of good ideas that have come up through people's individual experiences that have been affected by their gender or their ethnic or racial background. I think we'll be stronger for having the kind of thinking that breaks through stereotypes and looks for well-qualified, meritorious people who have in the past not been perhaps viewed as someone who could meet a certain job requirement.

Q Realizing that a glass ceiling probably does exist in private enterprise, do you think it still exists in the political world? Or are women now moving -- making adequate progress toward the top?

MRS. CLINTON: I think women are making a lot of progress and I'm excited by it. I think that the changes that occurred this year in the political system, particularly with the excellent races that women ran for the Senate and the House, are really positive and will go a long way toward moving us eventually to a point where this discussion will become ancient history.

Q Do you think that, in this particular case, though, do you think that you've been having the problems that you've been having in selecting an attorney general because of a need, a focus, on women?

MRS. CLINTON: No.

Q Let's move on. You've been associated with the Children's Defense Fund forever.

MRS. CLINTON: A long time.

Q I know you disagreed with your husband on ABC. Have you disagreed with the Children Defense Fund's position on any significant issues?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes.

Q Which ones?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, but I don't talk about disagreements with any group that I'm ever a member of a board, whether it's in the public or the private sector. I believe strongly that when you're part of an organization, you voice your opinions and you thrash it out as hard as you can inside, and then once a decision is made you support it or you withdraw from the organization.

So any disagreements I've ever had with CDF or with the corporate board I've been on or any organization I've ever been affiliated with I don't talk about.

Q What was the disagreement? I heard the disagreement from your husband's side. What was the disagreement on the day care bill? How did you see that?

MRS. CLINTON: I think it was an honest disagreement about the best way to implement what everyone agreed was needed, which was a more systematic, effective network of child care provided for poor and working parents. And there were disagreements over how much regulation was needed in order to provide a quality affordable child care system. It was a regulatory disagreement, I think is fair to say.

Q How do you feel about the notion of a guaranteed income, which has been very much at the heart of what Marian Wright Edelman has been talking about?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, she and the Rockefeller Commission and a lot of other groups that have looked at problems of children, which have gotten worse since the 1960s, believe that at root they are a function of poverty, and that what could be done to help eliminate a lot of the bad social effects that we're now living with as a society is rooted in doing something to provide income support for families.

And I think that's a very important argument to make. I don't agree that we're at a point where that is either necessary or desirable. My view is that we have had for the last 12 years an increase in poverty largely because we have had a poor economic strategy in this country, which has prevented poor people from taking advantage of upward mobility which my family and most families up until then had been able to rely on.

Q I was just in Los Angeles where you have a lot of poor people from various ethnic groups taking advantage of upward mobility. In fact, the statistics are given, by a Latino professor of health at UCLA, say that in South Central Los Angeles 84 percent, or thereabouts, of Latinos -- there's an 84 percent work force, labor force participation rate, while for blacks it's 55 percent. What do you make of that?

MRS. CLINTON: I don't know the statistics; I'm not going to comment on it. But what I make of that is that poor people, like everybody else, want to work by and large -- a majority want to work. A vast majority in most instances. But that what we have to face -- and it is not an either-or argument. We don't excuse behavior that is self-destructive and harmful to society.

When we say that, the jobs that have been created in the last 12 years have been jobs for which it has been more difficult for full-time workers to rise above the poverty level if they did not have adequate education, whether they be new immigrants or longtime residents of our country; and that one of the reasons there are so many women in the work force now of all stages of income is because the standard of living that we're living with in America has dropped due to the stalling of economic opportunity.

And I think we have to understand the inner-relationships between those two big facts. There's a behavior-responsibility-cultural piece of this which is essential to understand. But there is also an economic and political piece. And to try to have an argument that only focuses on both is the age-old problem of what we've been living with for 12 years, where the Republicans took one position and the Democrats took another position, neither of which was an adequate explanation for what was happening in our country.

Q But the issues that you've been dealing with and the issues that we're talking about are ones that existed for a quarter of a century -- are patterns that have existed for a quarter of a century. And if you're going to address the problems of poverty and also the problems of poor children you're going to have to address those issues.

Do you think that in the area -- that there's too much emphasis being placed on getting women who are on welfare to work, and not enough emphasis being placed on having them be good mothers and create stable homes? Is there -- are we in danger of endangering homes by emphasizing getting them off into the work force?

MRS. CLINTON: No, because the majority of women with small children now work. And I think it's in some ways unfortunate that so many women feel compelled for economic reasons to be in the job market. But I don't think any group of women should be exempt from doing what they can do to help support themselves and their children.

And if we have a health care system that is not an impediment to independence, and if we have a welfare system that does not engender dependency, then we can go a long way toward providing the conditions for a lot of women within the two years that my husband has talked about, to be either moved off of welfare or into the public service jobs.

Work is an essential component of self-respect and responsibility and so long as it is available to people and they are equipped to perform it. And so our systems have to be altered so that we can move that into more of a realistic possibility for a lot of the people who find themselves now for whatever combination of reasons out of the job market.

Q Moynihan's also talked about moving the whole welfare system from HHS, where it's essentially a check that you get in the mail, to the Labor Department, where the emphasis would be on putting people to work. Do you think that that's a meaningful or a change that you think at all worthy?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that what the President wants to do is to come up with a new welfare system. Where it is housed bureaucratically isn't as important to him or to anyone who he has talked with about it as the fact that it works better.

Q So that's an open question?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, but I don't think it's something that anybody's looking to do. I mean, what we want to do is to get the system to work right, wherever it's housed. Bureaucracies have their own inertia no matter what they're called. So what we're trying to do in his announcements about welfare reform in this administration is to come up with new approaches to it that make it work better.

Q I know that you're just getting started on health, but I'm wondering -- I'm sure that when you first started getting started on education that there were schools that you saw that were models. Do you have a model in mind in health? Is there a program you could point to and say, that's the direction we want to go, or is it just too early for that?

MRS. CLINTON: It's too early, and I'm not sure that there is any model that exists for America, because America has its own set of needs and concerns about health care that have to be addressed. So, I don't know that there is any one model anyone can point to. But there are pieces of a system that have to be addressed; and one which ties right into your earlier questions is that individuals are going to have to also be responsible to take care of themselves and to have an understanding of what causes health as opposed to illness. And I think that's a piece of the whole responsibility, he thought that the President talked about.

Q Actually, we were talking about this in South Carolina. Do you think that we've placed too much emphasis on holding together poor, unstable families? Do you think that -- how would you rate holding together an unstable family versus foster care versus something more structured?

MRS. CLINTON: I think it's very hard to have a hard and fast rule about that because I believe strongly everything possible should be done to keep families together. I think that it's good for the families and it's particularly good for the children if a family can be supported, strengthened in whatever way is necessary --

Q But in the course of doing that, have we not paid enough attention to the rights of children, to the needs of children, for structure as well as nurture?

MRS. CLINTON: No, I think that we have tried to strike a very difficult balance. I've seen that most particularly in the area of child abuse, which I've been involved in for more than 20 years. When a child is abused physically or sexually, something has to be done to protect the child. But psychologically it is often very damaging to the child for the child to be removed from the family even though it's an abusive family, because depending upon the stage of development, the child may believe that he or she has caused the separation with the family.

There are a lot of very difficult issues that have to be looked at when you're trying to decide what is in the best interest of the child, which is our legal standard for making a lot of these decisions. That's why I think, although courts struggle with this and physicians, social workers and ministers and others who are brought into these decisions try to determine what is best, there is no general rule that you can often impose no matter what the conditions because each family has to be given the help and the respect it deserves before it is broken up.

Q Once again on the day care situation, do you think that the problems that your most recent nominees for attorney general have had says anything about the day care system in this country?

MRS. CLINTON: Probably, but I haven't analyzed that.
(Laughter.)

Q And again on the welfare piece of it, what happens -- I think the question that a lot of people raise when you talk about moving to work from welfare in two years, what happens with people who don't want to comply, people who don't want to go to work? What kind of sanctions do you impose? Do you impose sanctions?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think you have to. And what happened in Arkansas is that as the program that was instituted under the Family Support Act began applying, people who refused for whatever reason to participate had their benefits cut, or faced other kinds of sanctions. I think you have to look at that.

Q What about the argument -- your husband made the argument during the campaign when, like the New Jersey plan came up and others came up, that only hurts the children.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, the benefits that were cut were the adult benefits. And there is a real problem with maintaining within the minimal standard of living --

Q -- (inaudible) --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, it's a signal. I mean, it's a behavioral signal. Very few people, if they believe they are going to suffer consequences, will persist in that behavior. And so what we have to figure out how to do is to have a system that offers enough encouragement and assistance in real terms, not the kind of charades that we've seen over the last 12 years, but also carries with it sanctions so that the message is loud and clear, certain behavior is no longer going to be tolerated. And I think you will then see there is a very small group of people who are left after you make those changes.

For those people we will have to look very hard at dealing with their behaviors and their child-rearing practices. But let's first get that group isolated and let's be sure that we get the best possible help and support and encouragement and incentives to those who we think we can actually help.

Q To do that, though, to have those kind of incentives, you're going to have to be offering some half-decent jobs or meaningful jobs, not just fetching coffee or leaning on rigs -- and especially in the public sector. Aren't you going to run afoul of the unions in the public sector and other interest groups that don't want to see this happen?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that if we can get the economy moving again, which is at the core of this entire discussion, from my perspective, we will see opportunity again for people.

Q Not answering the question.

MRS. CLINTON: No, but it is answering the question. I think that if you have to move people into jobs there has to be jobs for them to move into. I don't think anybody is arguing that you want to displace existing workers by people who are welfare that you are trying to move. You have to increase the job pool. And I think that is at the root of making sure that welfare reform and --

Q But there are a lot of jobs -- the sort of jobs you'd move these people into are jobs that are not being done because state and local budgets have been cut back, like cleaning up parks and doing that sort of work. And unions would make the argument, those are our jobs.

MRS. CLINTON: I think, Joe, first of all, we've got to get to the point where we've got a pool of people that you can

actually move into those jobs. And I would make the argument that as you lower your welfare costs you are creating more opportunities for state and local governments to be able to shift to be able to support more people.

As you have a health care system that is a rational system that doesn't rely upon mandates from the federal government, that lock people into Medicaid budgets that crowd out other investments and other job-creating opportunities, you will be creating jobs.

All of this is part of a piece, and you can focus on one specific set of issues, like how a certain group will react. We can't do that in a vacuum. I mean, unless you move these pieces together we can't have the progress we're looking for.

Q Let me give you another piece that we haven't talked about yet. When we talk about the nature of poverty changing, probably the most dramatic change is that in the 1930s, as you know, the poorest segment of the population was the elderly. Now they're the most wealthy and children are the poorest. Do you think that the elderly are taking a disproportionate percentage of the nation's wealth?

MRS. CLINTON: No, no. I don't think they're taking a disproportionate percentage. I think what has happened, though, is that we have a system to care for the elderly. It's Social Security and Medicare. It has provided a safety net. And I am delighted, because I have two older parents, that it is there and people can have that personal security that comes from a system that works.

What we haven't done is figure out how to provide that same kind of system for children. That's what I've been talking about for more than 20 years. And it's in everyone's interest, including the elderly that we do a better job in creating a system that will produce responsible citizens that will be able to keep our economy going and provide the support that all of us, particularly those of us who are aged, will need.

So instead of pitting any group against a group, we ought to say to ourselves, well, how did it happen that we went from one segment of the population being the most disadvantaged to now at least having a level of security that we can all be proud of, when we have allowed another segment to deteriorate the way we have. Because again, it is an interlocking system. The more poor children we have, particularly those in the most disorganized setting, the less likely it we will be able to continue to provide security in the most basic sense for the elderly or anyone else. It's that --

Q Because of crime?

MRS. CLINTON: Because crime, because of declining productivity, because of a declining tax base. I mean, you know, you can list all of it. The personal security is at the root of everything that I think we have to be focused on. Personal security on the streets and in your home, personal security -- not worry about being sick and facing catastrophe. Personal security in some jobs that we can hold out to people, not the same job with not the same stability that we've had in the past, but nevertheless, a job that can keep you above the poverty level if you work 40 hours a week, which we can now promise people. Personal security in the sense that you fit into this society and that there is something happening that will enable you to improve yourself if you are responsible.

You can go down the line in nearly every issue we look at, whether it's instilling responsibility and self-esteem in children who are living in our inner cities, who are at great disadvantage of not being able to function effectively in our

society; or personal security to our older citizens who lock themselves behind their doors because of those same children.

We are all in this together. I mean, when the President talked about how there is no "them" there is only "us", that is not just rhetoric. That is a statement of value. That is a political statement that he hopes people will begin to understand. Because we cannot pull out one piece of our society, hold it up to scrutiny and say, well, here's what we're going to do about X, Y, or Z because we are all interlocked, we are all interdependent in this kind of society which we find ourselves.

So when he talks about any particular subject, he is really talking about it in relationship to all the others. That is one of the hardest messages he's had to deliver all year long and is continuing to face in his presidency. But if he can convince Americans that no one of our problems can be dealt solely with in isolation, and that each of us has a role and a responsibility to play, to improve ourselves, to be better citizens, to take care of one another, then we can have a real honest shot at dealing with the most difficult and intractable problems that are in our midst.

(Interruption in tape.)

Q -- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation -- the first year of life in granting a proposal that would put young women into a kind of halfway house for the last two months of the pregnancy and the first year of the child's life. I haven't seen the data on it but it sounds like an interesting --

MRS. CLINTON: Well, you know, I've come up with lots of programs like that -- worked on and worried about for more than a decade and how you use government to support people in their own lives at the grassroots to make the decisions that will change their behaviors, give them opportunities and to build a society of upward mobility again. And we do not want some top-down, bureaucratically driven system that will stifle that kind of opportunity and remove responsibility from people by substituting for it somebody else's decision-making.

Q To do that, though, you're going to have to experiment in a lot of different ways, right?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, but there have been a lot steps --

Q And you're going to have to get hammered for the experiments that don't work. Are you ready to live with that?

MRS. CLINTON: But you know, Joe, there have been a lot of experiments. There have been experiments in a lot of states and cities; you've covered them, you've written about them. What we haven't done is figure out how to replicate on a large scale the experiments that worked. I've supported experiments that in Arkansas. I've have visited experiments all around the country that do exactly what the President wants to have happen.

Q The question is -- I was talking to the President about this three weeks ago -- the question is whether you can institutionalize inspiration or whether these are just one-shot deals, like District Four in East Harlem just a product of Tony Alvarado's inspiration? Is this microenterprise thing just the product of this one woman, or can you institutionalize it?

MRS. CLINTON: I believe what you can do is institutionalize the incentives that will move institutions and individuals toward approaches that work. And that's behind a lot of

what the President was thinking about and telling members of the Cabinet to think about.

We know a lot about what works with a lot of the problems that you've been concerned about for a long time. We have done a lousy job in replicating what we know works. If you go back to the 1920s and the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service, that was not just an agricultural program, that was a behavior modification program, where people went out to provide technical assistance on the grassroots level to granges and farm bureaus, as well as individual people living in the country, so that they learned how to eat a healthier diet; they learned how to rotate crops; they learned how to be better homemakers. This was a massive effort that we undertook to change behavior.

Now, why is it we have lost the lessons that we learned from a program like that? We still have a Cooperative Extension Service, but it's not doing what it needs to do in terms of changing behavior in the new world that we find ourselves in. But there was a program, there were incentives for people to become responsible and do things differently.

So part of what the President's trying to think about is how do you create a welfare reform program, an economic program focusing on microenterprise; a health care reform program. Go down the line of everything -- job training, worker skills, education -- that he has talked about for a decade, and intensely in the campaign. There are programs which we know work that change people's behavior and that provide new institutional supports for people where they live, which in the aggregate will have the macrochanges we need in society. How to replicate that, how to provide incentives and technical assistance for it, and how do we de-bureaucratize our existing systems to support that.

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