

MY TURN



HILLARY CLINTON TARGETS THE PRESIDENCY
DOUG HENWOOD

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OR Books

New York • London

Published by OR Books, New York and London
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First printing 2015

Cataloging-in-Publication data is available from the Library of Congress.
A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-68219-032-6 paperback

ISBN 978-1-68219-033-3 e-book

This book is set in the typeface Minion. Typeset by AarkMany Media, Chennai, India.

“My two cents’ worth—and I think it is the two cents’ worth of everybody who worked for the Clinton Administration health care reform effort of 1993–1994—is that Hillary Rodham Clinton needs to be kept very far away from the White House for the rest of her life. Heading up health-care reform was the only major administrative job she has ever tried to do. And she was a complete flop at it. She had neither the grasp of policy substance, the managerial skills, nor the political smarts to do the job she was then given. And she wasn’t smart enough to realize that she was in over her head and had to get out of the Health Care Czar role quickly. & Hillary Rodham Clinton has already flopped as a senior administrative official in the executive branch—the equivalent of an Undersecretary. Perhaps she will make a good senator. But there is no reason to think that she would be anything but an abysmal president.”¹

—Brad DeLong, undersecretary of the Treasury in the first Clinton administration, 1993–1995, writing in 2000
DeLong didn’t respond to multiple queries about whether he still believes this

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book originated as an article for *Harper's* magazine.² I'd like to thank the publisher, Rick MacArthur, whose idea it was for me to write the piece; James Marcus, the editor who worked with me on it; Camille Bromley, who fact-checked it; Giulia Melucci, who publicized it; and others whose names I didn't learn but who helped as well. They have been wonderful to work with in every respect.

I'd also like to thank Colin Robinson of OR Books, who asked me to expand that article into this broadside. This is my third book with Colin, who is not only an excellent publisher but also a very good friend. For assistance on the Haiti portion of the story, I'd like to thank Greg Higgins and Nikolas Barry-Shaw. And many thanks as well to Sam Miller for research (and friendship).

The Hillary literature is vast but uneven. Some of the plentiful right-wing critiques are unhelpful and unreliable, and I've mostly avoided them for reasons of credibility (doubting theirs and protecting mine). On the sane side of the spectrum, though, I want to single out three books as particularly fine sources: Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta's *Her Way*, Carl Bernstein's *A Woman in Charge*, and Gail Sheehy's *Hillary's Choice*.

With its sleek dimensions, this book may look footnote-heavy, but Hillary's defenders are fervent. When my *Harper's* article appeared, Correct the Record, an HRC front group run by her former enemy-turned-ceaseless-defender David Brock, posted a widely ignored 9,000-word refutation of it—a voluminous response to a 6,000-word piece. (The refutation now looks to have been taken down, but Michelle Goldberg wrote about it in her profile of Brock in *The Nation*.)³ Similarly, but less volubly, Joe Conason—who apparently performs his strenuous Hillary apologetics purely out of love—also wrote an instant refutation, focusing largely on a few hundred words I wrote about Whitewater, which were entirely correct and survived the magazine's rigorous fact-checking, and overlooking the rest of the damning story.⁴ Conason couldn't get over the fact that I'd quoted Dick Morris, who admitted he has some strange beliefs, but who also has a sharp political mind. (Conason & Co. find Morris thoroughly disreputable, forgetting, or perhaps remembering, that he was on the Clinton payroll for 2 years.) No doubt these grunts in the Hillary army will be scrutinizing this book for errors, and that's why I've provided plenty of footnotes for their interns to work with. I look forward to their reviews.

On a happier note, I'd like to thank my wife, Liza Featherstone, who is the love of my life and a crucial part of everything I do. I hope our son, Ivan, will inherit a world where people better than Hillary Clinton rise to prominence.

AN AUTHOR'S NOTE ABOUT THIS BOOK'S COVER

As this book was entering production, we circulated the cover to get people talking about it. We never imagined how successful that strategy would be.

The Washington Post and *Cosmopolitan* both wrote about the cover. On Twitter, former Obama speechwriter turned screenwriter Jon Lovett called it “gross.” *Nation* pundit Joan Walsh called it “disgusting.” *Salon* writer Amanda Marcotte diagnosed “issues with women” (the author’s, apparently, not the artist’s). Writing in *New York* magazine, Rebecca Traister proposed that the image shows how “a competent professional woman...can be so intimidating that her menace is being portrayed as a violent threat.” The *Right* even took notice, with the cover featured on the front of *Drudge* and a link to an MSNBC.com story about the controversy (one of several meta-stories about the cover’s reception). The *Drudge* link described me as a “lib,” which is a cruel slur.

Tweets and think-pieces about the cover quickly became a subgenre of a larger argument that tried to portray tough criticism of Hillary as sexist—inevitably so, given its incorporation into a dominant patriarchal discourse, regardless of the author’s intent. One of the cover’s critics who also read the book—the only one of the commenters who did, as far as I know—conceded that there’s nothing sexist in it, but identified the fundamental problem as my inability to see the election of a woman president in itself as a significant feminist goal in itself.

It would be a good thing to have a woman president after the 43 bepenised ghouls and functionaries who’ve occupied the office. (OK, there were a few who weren’t half-bad — you wouldn’t need more than one hand to count them.) But, as I argue in this book, if you’re looking for a more peaceful, more egalitarian society you’d have to overlook a lot about Hillary’s history to develop any enthusiasm for her. The side of feminism I’ve studied and admired for decades has been about moving towards that ideal, and not merely placing women into high places while leaving the overall hierarchy of power largely unchanged. It’s distressing to see feminism pressed into service to promote the career of a thoroughly orthodox politician—and the charge of sexism used to deflect critiques of her.

It was also distressing to read interpretations of Sarah Sole’s painting on the cover that were, as the writer Tracy Quan put it in a radio interview, “middlebrow,” “philistine,” and “moralistic.” When I first stumbled on Sarah’s work—scores of paintings and collages involving Hillary in various poses ranging from the amorous to the violent—via Facebook a few years ago, I was drawn to it despite my lack of fondness for its subject. Sarah explained that she had a real libidinal fixation on Hillary. At first I thought that she had some sort of ironic relation to that fixation but she eventually convinced me that she really didn’t. When it came to thinking of cover art for this book I suggested her work to Colin Robinson, the “R” in OR Books, precisely because of its power and its capacity to stir interest. He also thought it would be interesting to have a cover exist in some sort of tension with the book, a point I lost on some of its critics, who seem more comfortable with straightforward agitprop. Colin agreed and selected the gun-toting image.

Just how is the cover sexist? To me, it shows Hillary’s ruthlessness and especially her hawkishness—features of her history that will be detailed in the following pages—though spiced up with Sarah Sole’s libidinal obsession. To Hillary’s defenders, making that point is inevitably sexist, a position that would make nearly any serious criticism of her impossible. Her hawkishness is well—established

from her eagerness to get on the Armed Services Committee on arrival in the Senate, to her vote for the Iraq war, to her out-hawking Defense Secretary Robert Gates while serving as our top diplomat, to her call for bringing in “the hard men with the guns” to solve the problems of Syria, a country already overwhelmed by men with guns.

But the Hillary camp reads the cover as expressing anxiety about powerful and ambitious women. (That’s certainly not the artist’s intent, but of course art has a life of its own beyond what its creator thought it meant.) I am fine with powerful and ambitious women. It’s what they do with that power and ambition that concerns me. In Hillary’s case, she’s largely used it to support the existing order rather than challenge it. I do wonder, though, whether the suggestion of Hillary’s bellicosity reminds some of her supporters of something they’d rather not think about her.

There’s no doubt that Hillary has been the target of all kinds of vicious sexist attacks during her decades in public life. They’re vile, and have no place in any political critique. I can’t stop people from appropriating the cover or the book to some misogynist agenda, but I won’t miss an opportunity to condemn those who do, because it’s a distraction from the indictment of her long record that follows.

Doug Henwood, November 2011

INTRODUCTION

To answer Sarah Palin's question (from a 2010 speech), "that hopey, changey stuff" is not working out so well.⁵ We avoided depression after the 2008 crash, but the job market remains sick. The headline unemployment rate looks good, but that's because so many people have dropped out of the labor force and aren't counted as jobless. It would take the creation of over eight million new jobs to get back to the share of the population that was employed before the Great Recession hit. It's not seen as eccentric to talk about global capitalism having fallen into structural stagnation—though the rich are doing fine. Incomes are distributed more unequally than they were in 2008, when Obama was elected, and the poverty rate is higher. Obama has, if anything, governed more secretively than Bush. He prosecuted whistleblowers more intensely and kills alleged terrorists that Bush would merely have tortured. The climate crisis gets worse, and the political capacity even to talk about it, much less do anything about it, seems yet unborn. In a move that perfectly captures what Walter Benn Michaels calls the left wing of neoliberalism, Obama went to Alaska and announced that the federal government would henceforth call Mount McKinley (named after the hard-money imperialist president) by its native name, Denali (something the state has done for 40 years)—and, two days later, allowed Shell to drill more deeply than ever before in the waters off Alaska. Shell changed its mind with the collapse of oil prices, but Obama was happy to let them have their way.

These aren't the complaints Sarah Palin would make, of course. But people who voted for Barack Obama in 2008 were imagining a more peaceful, more egalitarian world, and haven't gotten it.

And who was the front-runner going into the 2016 campaign? Hillary Clinton, who is hardly the first name that comes to mind when one thinks of transformative change.

The case for Hillary boils down to this: she has experience, she's a woman, and it's her turn. Even ardent supporters seem to have a hard time making a substantive political argument in her favor. She has, in the past, been associated with "women's and children's" issues, but she supported her husband's signing the bill that put the end to welfare. "We have to do what we have to do, and I hope our friends understand it," she told their long-time advisor Dick Morris.⁶ Morris, who now is a right-wing pundit for the Fox demographic, credits her for backing two of Bill's most important moves at the center after the electoral debacle of 1994—"the balanced budget and welfare reform."⁷

As wacky as it sometimes appears on the surface, American politics has an amazing stability and continuity about it. According to Gallup, just 29% of Americans have either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the institution of the presidency, and only 7% do in Congress. Nor do they have much faith in other institutions, like banks, the health care system, the media, big business, or organized labor.⁸ But the leading candidate for the presidency is one of the original architects of the New Democrat strategy back in the 1980s. That itself was a consolidation of the Reagan revolution—an acknowledgment that movement conservatism had come to set the terms of American political discourse.

Obama himself said as much during the 2008 campaign, when he declared that "Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that, you know, Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not. He put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it. I think they felt like, you know, with all the excesses of the 60s and the 70s, and government had grown and grown, but there wasn't much sense of accountability in terms of how it was operating.

The “excesses of the 60s and 70s” included things like feminism, gay liberation, the antiwar movement, wildcat strikes, and a militant antiracist uprising. I find those all to be good things, but I know that some people disagree.

Later in those comments, in an interview with a Reno TV station, Obama said that “the Republicans were the party of ideas for a pretty long chunk of time there over the last 10, 15 years, in the sense that they were challenging conventional wisdom. Now, you’ve heard it all before.” Though he didn’t claim the status—“I don’t want to present myself as some sort of singular figure”—he did suggest that the times were changing, and he was the agent of that change.

But they didn’t and he wasn’t. Coming into office with something like a mandate to reverse the miserable policies of the Bush era, Obama never tried to make a sharp political break with the past, the way Reagan did from the moment of his first inaugural address. Reagan dismissed the postwar Keynesian consensus—the idea that government had a responsibility to soften the sharpest edges of capitalism by fighting recession and providing some sort of basic safety net—as the tired policies of the past. Appropriating some of the spirit and language of the left about revolution and the promise of a shining future, Reagan unleashed what he liked to call the magic of the marketplace—cutting taxes for the rich, eliminating regulations, squeezing social spending, and celebrating the accumulation of money.

While it’s easy to dismiss Reagan’s appeal to freedom as propaganda for the corporate class and a blueprint for the upward redistribution of income—because that’s exactly what it was from a ruling class POV—it’s also unfair to Reagan. He really believed in the liberating power of unfettered markets. He emerged from movement conservatism, a coherent political philosophy. In that sense, Obama was right about Reagan.

From the point of view of the American elite, the 1970s were a miserable decade. Corporate profits were depressed, inflation was rising, financial markets were sputtering, the United States had lost the Vietnam War, and the working class was in a state of rebellion. CEOs felt besieged; in a 1977 survey of *Harvard Business Review* subscribers, almost three-quarters saw some form of socialism prevailing by 1985.¹⁰

By the end of the 1970s, feeding off popular discontent, elites led a rightward turn in our politics. Paul Volcker, appointed to the chairmanship of the Federal Reserve by Jimmy Carter in 1979, engineered a deep recession. The following year, Ronald Reagan was elected president, proclaiming a new order in which government was the problem that had to be kicked out of the way to let the marketplace work its magic. He fired striking air traffic controllers, setting the precedent for open warfare on unions, and remade fiscal policy into a scheme for making the rich richer at the expense of everyone else. Wages stagnated, and employment became considerably less secure. Workers who in the 1970s were slacking off on the job or going out on strike would no longer dream of misbehaving. The “cure” worked. A strange and unequal boom took hold that lasted into the early 1990s. After the caretaker George H.W. Bush administration evaporated, Bill Clinton took over, and with a few minor adjustments, kept the boom going for another decade. Profits zoomed, as did financial markets; 1980 (and 1995) turned out to be rather different from what the executive class had feared in 1975.

But a contradiction lay beneath it all: a system dependent on high levels of mass consumption for both economic dynamism and political legitimacy has a problem when mass purchasing power is squeezed. For a few decades, consumers borrowed to make up for what their paychecks were lacking, but that model broke down with the crisis of 2008. Today, we desperately need a new model of political economy—one that features a more equal distribution of income, investment in our rotting social and physical infrastructure, and a more cooperative ethic. When one meditates on this constellation, Hillary Clinton does not play a promising role.

In what follows, I’m going to spend some time on the early phase of Hillary’s life and career. I think that these stories are an important antidote to liberals’ fantasies about her as some sort of gre

progressive. I'm going to spend less time on analyzing her current policy proposals because, based on her record, there are few reasons for receiving them with anything but profound skepticism.

Although this is a polemic directed at a prominent figure, I also want to make clear from the first that Hillary is not The Problem. (I should also say, because most truths are not self-evident, that all the misogynist attacks on her are grotesque.) By all orthodox measures she is a highly intelligent and informed senior member of the political class. *That* is the problem. Hillary is a symptom of a deep sickness in the American political system, produced by the structural features designed to limit popular power that James Madison first mused about in *The Federalist Papers* and that the authors of the Constitution inscribed in our basic law. Those inhibiting Constitutional features include the division of power among the branches, judicial review, and the deeply undemocratic structure of the Senate, all supplemented with a variety of schemes over the decades to limit the franchise. Add to that the quasi-official status of a two-party Congress, the ability of the rich to buy legislation and legislators, and the gatekeeping role of the media and you have a system that offers voters little more than the choice of which branch of the elite is going to screw them. And this doesn't even get to the increase in presidential powers over the last few decades, a structural problem that is far larger than the inhabitant of the office.¹¹

While it's sometimes fashionable to complain that our democracy has been taken from us, things have always been pretty much this way. It's this system that produces the likes of Hillary (and Jeb and Marco, and all the rest, with oddballs like Donald occasionally crashing the party). And it's why this book doesn't end with a call to arms for an opposing candidate, since anyone likely to be elected is going to be from the same mold. Hillary is undeniably good at politics, even though she lacks her husband's charm. But she is basically a standard-issue mainstream—or, as we used to say in boldface times, bourgeois—politician. This book is meant to refute all the extravagant claims from her supporters that she is more than that. And explain why her aura of inevitability going into the campaign, substantially diminished by the fall of 2015, was her major asset.

It may seem odd, in introducing a book devoted to a presidential candidate, to demean the political importance of presidential elections, but that's what I'm about to do. That's not to say the office isn't important. Of course it is. Although the president's room for maneuver is constrained by other branches and levels of government, not to mention ruling class power, it is still the most important political position in the world. The U.S. president is essentially the chief executive of the global elite. The international lines of command aren't as clear as they once were; it's hilarious to hear presidential candidates compete over who'd be the toughest on China, a country to which our Treasury owes \$1.2 trillion.¹² But there's no more powerful single office anywhere in the world, and elites have a lock on it.

Anyone who wants seriously better politics in this country has to start from the bottom and work their way up. So while I may have some good things to say about Bernie Sanders and his campaign, magical interventions from the top won't change much. If, by some freakish accident, Sanders ever got elected, the established order would crush him. We'll never find salvation, or even decency, from above.

A note on usage: most of the time I refer to Hillary Rodham Clinton by her first name alone. Aside from its brevity, it distinguishes her from her husband, whom I mostly call Bill. It is also how she has been branding herself since her first run for the Senate—as the quirky but often sharp Dick Morris, who's known her since 1978, put it, “symbolically independent of Bill and the tarnished Clinton name.”¹³

1. FROM PARK RIDGE TO LITTLE ROCK

Hillary Rodham spent her early years in Park Ridge, Illinois, a dry (as in drink-free), WASPy suburb of Chicago. In her childrearing book, *It Takes a Village*, she says she “grew up in a family that looked like it was straight out of the 1950s television sitcom *Father Knows Best*. Hugh Ellsworth Rodham, my father, was a self-sufficient, tough-minded small-businessman who ran a plant that screen-prints and sold drapery fabrics.”¹⁴ This description of her father seems generous about a man who, by Ga Sheehy’s rendition, was emotionally abusive and impossible to please. She describes a supportive village surrounding her in childhood: “Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all pitched in if illness or some other misfortune strained the family.”¹⁵ As Carl Bernstein notes in his biography of Hillary: “She does not mention such misfortunes as her father cutting his brother down from a noose.”¹⁶

Hillary has a long history of being economical with the truth—which is why Bernstein says of her voluminous but minimally informative memoir *Living History* that its “principal value...is as insight into how Hillary sees herself and wants the story of her life to be told. It is often at variance with news reporting, other books, and with newspapers and periodicals as well.”¹⁷

One can forgive Hillary’s reticence about sharing the unpleasantness of her childhood. But her early environment resembled the world of Thomas Hobbes more than that of 1950s TV. As Ga Sheehy reported, Hugh Rodham was a gruff, “authoritarian drillmaster,” a political reactionary who demanded austerity, discipline, and self-reliance. Displays of emotion were regarded as signs of weakness.¹⁸ Her mother, Dorothy Howell, had a rough childhood. Born to a 15-year-old mother, Dorothy had parents who split up when she was eight and disappeared from her life. She was left in the care of what Sheehy describes as a “demeaning” grandmother who then fobbed her off on strange people who worked her for room and board.¹⁹ Hillary told a college classmate that her parents’ fights were so distressing that she felt as if she was losing the top of her head.²⁰ It was an atmosphere that demanded toughness and self-reliance.

Young Hillary picked up the conservatism of her father and her surroundings. In junior high, she fell under the influence of a history teacher, Paul Carlson, a follower of the frothing anticommunist senator Joe McCarthy. As Carlson told Sheehy, the young Hillary was “a hawk.”²¹ A few years later, though, she found another guru, one she’d stick with for years—a young new pastor at the First Methodist Church of Park Ridge named Don Jones. (Hillary has always been very much a Methodist.) Jones was a dashing intellectual who helped open Hillary’s mind. He got the church youth reading D.H. Lawrence and e.e. cummings, listening to Bob Dylan, and talking about Picasso. He took his flock to the South Side of Chicago to meet some black youth.²² But despite this new affiliation, she hadn’t given up on the reactionary Carlson—she joined his discussion club to get a taste of his roster of hard-right speakers.²³ In April 1962, Jones took her to hear Martin Luther King Jr. speak in Chicago, and then meet him backstage. She was moved, but not enough to stop her from campaigning for Barry Goldwater—a man whose candidacy was the overture to the right’s long rise in American politics—in 1964.²⁴ Though it’s sometimes occluded by rhetoric and gestures, like the austere Protestantism, that conservative political streak never went away.

Then she was off to Wellesley. In Sheehy’s words (quoting from letters to a high school friend): “Her first order of business was to choose an identity. That’s right, choose. Over Christmas vacation

in her sophomore year, by her own count, she went through no fewer than ‘three-and-a-half metamorphoses.’ Hillary Rodham was fully conscious of selecting her preferred personality from a ‘smorgasbord’ spread before her: ‘educational and social reformer, alienated academic, involved pseudohippie,’ political leader, or ‘compassionate misanthrope.’”²⁵

A few years into college, she began feeling seriously alienated from “the entire unreality of middle-class America.” But she was not about to become a student revolutionary: identifying herself as an “agnostic intellectual liberal [and] emotional conservative,” she would “work toward change by keeping her peers in line as they protested,” as Sheehy put it.²⁶ Or, in the words of the then-president of Wellesley, she was all about “effecting change...from within rather than outside the system.”²⁷

Hillary wrote her undergraduate thesis on the founder of community organizing, Saul Alinsky (Curiously, Barack Obama has a reputed history as a community organizer in the Alinsky tradition. Chicago activists can’t recall much of significance that he did, but it has yielded him some large unearned cred on the left and thoroughly unearned antipathy on the right.) Her advisor, Alan Schechter, told Bill Clinton’s biographer David Maraniss that she “started out thinking community action programs would make a big difference,” but came around to thinking that they were “too idealistic and simplistic; that they might make a marginal but not a lasting difference,” because they needed outside money and help.²⁸ Hillary has never been one for organization from below.

There’s a foretaste of the future Hillary in this characterization of Alinsky’s thinking from her thesis: “Welfare programs since the New Deal have neither redeveloped poverty areas nor even catalyzed the poor into helping themselves. A cycle of dependency has been created which ensnares its victims into resignation and apathy.”²⁹ While there’s an element of truth to this, Alinsky’s remedy was for poor people to claim political power on their own behalf (leaving aside the question of whether his organizing techniques could accomplish that). Hillary, though, would support welfare “reform” in the 1990s, throwing single mothers onto the mercies of the low-wage job market. Though her support for welfare reform was partly an act of political cynicism—she thought it would get her husband votes—there was plenty of the moral astringency of the old English workhouse about it too.

During Hillary’s senior year, a movement arose to have a student speaker at graduation, and Hillary emerged as the consensus candidate for the job. Her remarks, though enthusiastically received, meander all over the page when read as a text 45 years later. What stands out, though, is the remarkable passage:

We are, all of us, exploring a world that none of us even understands and attempting to create within that uncertainty. But there are some things we feel, feelings that our prevailing, acquisitive, and competitive corporate life, including tragically the universities, is not the way of life for us. We’re searching for more immediate, ecstatic, and penetrating modes of living.³⁰

That is not the Hillary we know today. But, as odd as it sounds, years later, her husband would say this to the National Association of Realtors in 1993: “I used to save a little quote by Carl Sandburg. Sandburg said, a tough will counts. So does desire. So does a rich, soft wanting.... I see that and think you do too.”³¹ Who knew that under all that duplicity and ambition, they’re just a pair of Romantics?

The practical Hillary nonetheless overruled the ecstatic and penetrating Hillary—she rejected the organizing job offered by Alinsky to go to law school. He said, “Well, that’s no way to change anything.” She responded: “Well, I see a different way from you. And I think there is a real opportunity.”³² And it was on to the Yale Law School.

While it's widely known that Hillary and Bill met when they were students at Yale, it's less known that their first date essentially involved crossing a picket line. Bill suggested they go to a Rothblat exhibit at the university's art gallery, but it was closed because of a campus-wide strike by unionized employees. Bill convinced a guard to let them in, after he cleared away the garbage blocking the entrance.³³ Hillary was impressed—not for the first time—by his powers of persuasion. Soon after, Bill “locked in on’ her,” as Maraniss put it.³⁴ Hillary found him “complex,” with “lots of layers.”³⁵

By Yale Law standards, one friend recalled to Maraniss, Hillary was a conservative—though she opposed the Vietnam War and dressed like a hippie, she still believed in the fundamental institutions of American life.³⁶ She had no patience for the utopianism of the time.

The year after she graduated from law school in 1972, she wrote a paper for the *Harvard Educational Review* on the legal rights of children. She'd gotten interested in the topic after hearing Marian Wright Edelman—the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi bar—lecture at Yale. After the lecture, she approached Edelman, asking to work with her at her D.C.-based public interest law firm, where Hillary then spent the summer of 1970 working on issues related to the conditions of migrant farm laborers and their families.

Although the right would later denounce her article as a radical anti-family screed, it was anything but. Hillary concluded that the state had to intervene in the case of actual harm to children, but the governing standard had to be strict. Offensive but not objective “medically diagnosable harm” should not trigger intervention.³⁸ It was the first in a series of legal articles on children and families, an early instance of what she would later describe as a life-long interest in such issues. Her relationship with child welfare—and to Marian Wright Edelman—would change dramatically when Bill signed the child welfare reform bill 20 years later, and a different view of poor children (and their mothers) became more expedient.³⁹ Edelman called it a “moment of shame,” and her husband, Peter Edelman, resigned from the Clinton administration with an open letter of protest.⁴⁰

Soon after his graduation, Bill returned to Arkansas—first for a stint as a law professor, and then to run for Congress. John Doar, who was putting together the legal team for the Nixon impeachment case, offered Bill a job, but Bill suggested that he instead hire Hillary, who was by then working for Edelman's Children's Defense Fund. Bill was taking the long view. Maraniss cites a conversation Bill had with Arkansas politician David Pryor: “[A]ccording to Pryor, Clinton put the question in terms of his friend Rodham and his relationship with her. ‘He talked to me about Hillary going to work for the Watergate committee,’ Pryor recalled. ‘He asked, “Is that a good idea?” It was a career consideration. He knew that his career would be in politics and the question was whether Hillary's connection with the Watergate committee might have political ramifications.’”⁴¹

Hillary took the job. She became friends with Bernard Nussbaum, one of Doar's top assistants who'd later become Bill's White House Counsel. She told him—and anyone else who'd listen—that Bill was destined to be president someday. Nussbaum thought that was ridiculous. Hillary exploded at him: “You asshole.... He is going to be president of the United States.”⁴² (Hillary apparently often swears like a longshoreman, one of the more endearing things about her.) But expectations were also high for Hillary. A couple of years earlier, when she was working on the McGovern campaign, her colleagues thought she had a great political career ahead of her.⁴³ Bill himself thought she could be senator or governor someday.⁴⁴

So what to do after the impeachment committee dissolved? She could go back to the Children's Defense Fund. She could go to Washington and work at a law firm, get a feel for politics—a route complicated by her having failed the D.C. bar exam (something she kept secret for 30 years).⁴⁵ Or she could relocate to Arkansas, where she'd visited a few times, to be with Bill⁴⁶. Moving to the sticks

made her nervous, but she headed there anyway, joining Bill while his 1974 Congressional campaign was underway. Bill lost, but he'd made a name for himself, almost beating an incumbent against long odds.

He immediately began thinking of the next race. His eye was on the governorship, but he calculated that attorney general might be a more achievable first step. Hillary was teaching law and running a legal aid clinic. They spent lots of time together, but marriage was still an open question. She had political ambitions, and worried that she'd be seen as a bad feminist if she acquired family obligations. She took a trip east and asked her friends about the wisdom of marrying Bill. When she got back to Arkansas, Bill greeted her with the news of a house he'd just bought and a marriage proposal. She accepted.⁴⁷

During the attorney general campaign, Bill alienated the state's unions by refusing to support the repeal of Arkansas' right-to-work law. It was the first in a long line of gestures with which he aimed to distance himself from traditional liberal politics.⁴⁸ He won this election handily—though everyone was aware that the office was just a stepping stone.

The young couple moved from the relatively bohemian Fayetteville to the more formal Little Rock. Hillary went from the legal clinic to the Rose Law Firm, which represented the moneyed interests of Arkansas. It did not hurt her prospects at the firm that her husband was the state's chief legal officer, albeit one not long for the job. Less than a year after the election, Bill's chief of staff called in a neophyte political consultant from New York, Dick Morris, to evaluate his next step—governor or senator? Morris counseled a run for governor. It was the beginning of a 20-year association, interrupted by occasional storms, between the wily psephologist and the two Clintons.

While Hillary was at Rose, her allegiances began to shift. The community organizing group ACORN, then based in Arkansas and very much in the Alinsky tradition, got a ballot measure passed that would lower electricity rates for residential users in Little Rock and raise them for commercial users. Business, of course, was not pleased, and filed a legal challenge, with Rose representing them. Wade Rathke, the founder of ACORN who'd been a friend of Hillary's, was shocked to see her arguing the business case in court. And not only did she argue the case—she helped, too, to craft the legal strategy, which was that the new rate schedule amounted to an unconstitutional "taking of property." This is now a common right-wing argument against regulation. Hillary was one of its early architects.

A few years later, she handled a case for Rose on behalf of Coca-Cola. Coke had been sued by a worker who claimed that he was disabled and had been improperly denied retirement benefits. Taking this assignment stood in stark contrast with Hillary's attitude earlier in the decade, when she criticized the hotshot D.C. lawyer Joseph Califano for defending Coke's treatment of migrant farm workers in characteristically pithy terms: "You sold out, you motherfucker, you sold out."⁴⁹ Hillary had evidently come a long way from defending children, or her summer internship during law school at radical law firm in Oakland where two of the partners were Communists.⁵⁰

Bill won the 1978 election and embraced as one of his signature programs the improvement of Arkansas' miserable road system. He chose to finance it by raising car license fees—which proved enormously unpopular, and was a major reason he lost his bid for re-election two years later (Arkansas governors served only two-year terms in those days.) With the help of Dick Morris, Bill began plotting his comeback almost as soon as the ballots were counted. Morris' polling discovered that the people of Arkansas generally liked Bill, but saw him as someone who'd been led astray by the countercultural types who populated Yale and Oxford (where Bill was a Rhodes scholar after graduating from college). Morris advised him to offer a public *mea culpa* on the car tax, which he did. And Hillary, who'd been sticking with the surname Rodham like the 1970s feminist she saw herself as, now took the Clinton name.⁵¹ Bill went on to recapture the governorship. As a result of the

experience, he, Hillary, and Morris together decided that the best way to conduct politics was through permanent campaigning.⁵² Policy and polling would be inseparable.

This model of governing depended on finding reliable enemies who could be relentlessly attacked. Bill, with advice from Morris and close support from Hillary, chose the teachers' union. A court had ruled the Arkansas education finance system unconstitutional. It was certainly woefully unequal, with teachers in some districts paid so poorly that they qualified for Food Stamps.⁵³ Raising taxes was a political challenge, however, so Clinton proposed balancing a one point increase in the sales tax with a competency test for teachers, something that the teachers' union vigorously opposed. Morris had discovered that the Arkansas public was not at all fond of the union. Tying the test to the tax increase allowed Clinton to present himself as doing it all for the kids, and not a special interest group. Morris celebrated the maneuver as a politically crafty break from the ways of the Old Democrat left.

As Carl Bernstein put it in his biography of Hillary, the teachers' union "was not exactly the antichrist, and in fact had done some pretty good things in a state where the legislature had typically accorded more attention to protecting the rights of poultry farmers to saturate half of Arkansas' topsoil with chicken feces than providing its children with a decent education."⁵⁴ But setting up the union as the enemy paid rich political dividends. Clinton got the tax increase and the competency test. These measures did not, however, lead to any improvement in Arkansas' educational performance. A review of the reform efforts by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation found "a serious, large-scale demoralization of the teaching force. They feel constrained by what they perceive to be a stranglehold of mandates, needless paperwork and limited encouragement."⁵⁶ The problems of Arkansas' educational system were so deeply structural, rooted in the state's poverty and backwardness, that tackling them required a wholesale overhaul of the state's entire political economy. The Clintons weren't about to take that on.

Instead, they were laying the groundwork for the creation of what would eventually hit the national stage as the New Democrat movement, something that took institutional form in the Democratic Leadership Council that was set up in 1985. Support for teacher testing and the right-to-work law were effective ways to show the Clintons' distance from organized labor. Bill went light on environmental enforcement and spread around tax breaks in the name of "economic development." Tyson Foods, the major producer of the chicken shit referred to by Bernstein, got \$8 million in tax breaks between 1986 and 1990, at a time when the company's budget was twice that of the entire state.⁵⁷ Hillary was on Bill's side throughout all of this and was a close collaborator in the education reform operation. She co-wrote Bill's 1991 keynote speech at the DLC's national convention, which turned out to be a major hit. It was an early declaration of New Democrat principles—the promotion of "personal responsibility" as the solution to social problems, the evocation of the beauties of free trade and fiscal discipline, the excoriation of "government monopoly," the treatment of "citizens like...customers." The movement beyond the presumably obsolete categories of left and right, and promises of enhanced "opportunity" for all. Those promises of opportunity would recur throughout his presidency, but were never backed up with much in the way of budget allocations.⁵⁸

But Hillary wasn't just doing political work for the Clinton enterprise; she was also busy defending the leading lights of Arkansas Inc. at Rose and serving on various corporate boards—most notoriously, the viciously anti-union Wal-Mart. (In her defense, she did encourage the firm to begin a recycling program.)⁵⁹ In her six years on the Wal-Mart board, from 1986 to 1992, Hillary did not utter a single word of opposition to the company's hostility to unions, nor is there any evidence that she challenged the company's notorious discrimination against women in pay and promotion. On the contrary, at a 1990 stockholders' meeting she expressed her pride in the company, and founder Sam Walton used her presence on the board to deflect criticism of the company's sexist practices.⁶⁰ Who

asked in 2008 by ABC News about Wal-Mart's hardline anti-labor stance, she could only respond by retreating into generality, saying that unions "have been essential to our nation's success."⁶¹

Connections between Rose and the state of Arkansas would later cause the Clintons no end of problems, and not just for the circus that came to be known as Whitewater. The state did all kinds of business with Rose, from routine bond issues to more complex litigation.⁶² Having the state do business with a law firm that employed the governor's wife seemed a little smelly to many. But, no matter—the Clintons would soon be leaving town. Ambitions as expansive as theirs couldn't be satisfied in the Ozarks.

2. FIRST LADY

The Clintons had outgrown Arkansas. Bill contemplated running for president in 1988. He decided against it, in part because he was terrified that one or more of a wide variety of paramours would come forward with their stories.⁶³ But he eventually found his nerve and plunged into the 1992 campaign. An internal campaign memo from March of that year, reported by Jeff Gerth and Don Voigtlander in their book on Hillary, listed more than 75 potential problems for the candidacy. Among them were, of course, Bill's many affairs, but about two-thirds of the sore spots involved both Bill and Hillary, or Hillary alone. Eighteen of the problems were related to Hillary and her work at Rose.⁶⁴

Despite these difficulties, the Clintons ran a successful campaign. Ross Perot divided the anti-George H.W. Bush vote and Bill won the election with 43% of the vote. It was the next stage of what they'd years earlier called *The Journey*—their joint venture to change the world. As Gail Sheehy put it: "Eight years of Bill, eight years of Hill. That was the dream. It was Hillary's private slogan, shared with one of her closest intimates, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason. Early in his 1992 presidential campaign, I asked then Governor Clinton if he was concerned about being upstaged by his wife. He was unfazed: 'I've always liked strong women. It doesn't bother me for people to see her and get excited and say she could be president, too.' 'So, after eight years of Bill Clinton?' I teased. 'Eight years of Hillary Clinton,' he said. 'Why not?'"

The inauguration would set the tone for the presidency. Despite their rhetorical efforts to declare an end to the greed and materialism of the 1980s, the event was a model of excess that cost \$200 million.⁶⁵ The greed and materialism of the 1990s were upon us.

The presidential couple settled into what seemed at first like a co-presidency, with Hillary exercising an influence that no previous First Lady ever had. This caused trouble right from the start. Always suspicious of the media, she shut off reporters' access to the West Wing of the White House. The move ended up alienating the press to no good effect.

More substantively, Hillary was given responsibility for running the health care reform agenda. It was very much a New Democrat scheme. Rejecting a Canadian-style single-payer system, Hillary came up with an impossibly complex arrangement called "managed competition." Employers would be encouraged to provide health care to their workers, individuals would be assembled in health care cooperatives with some bargaining power, and competition among providers would keep costs down. But the plan was hatched in total secrecy, with no attempt to cultivate support in Congress or among the public for what would be a massive piece of legislation—and one of which the medical-industrial complex was not at all fond. (The industry's hostility was somewhat mysterious; they feared price controls and bureaucratic meddling in their freedom to do business, but it's not as if Hillary or Bill were out to expropriate them.) At a meeting with Democratic leaders in April 1993, Senator Bill Bradley suggested that Hillary might need to compromise to get a bill passed. She would have none of it: the White House would "demonize" any legislators who stood in her way. Bradley was stunned. Years later, he told Bernstein that "[t]hat was it for me in terms of Hillary Clinton. You don't tell members of the Senate you are going to demonize them. It was obviously so basic to who she is. The arrogance.... The disdain."⁶⁶ (You have to love Bradley's assumption that senators should be deferential to.) Health care reform was a miserable failure. It never attracted popular support and went nowhere in Congress. Most of the blame for the failure fell, justifiably, on Hillary.

In an attempt to move on, Hillary now reinvented herself as an “advocate.” As she wrote in *Living History*, “I began to focus on discrete domestic projects that were more achievable than massive undertakings such as health care reform. On my agenda now were children’s health issues, breast cancer prevention, and protecting funding for public television, legal services and the arts.”⁶⁷ She campaigned for changes in adoption laws and for a bill to guarantee that newborns and their mothers wouldn’t be kicked out of the hospital sooner than 48 hours after the birth.⁶⁸ It was all very high minded, and good for her image, but of limited impact.

She did, however, support one of the most controversial moves of the Clinton years: welfare reform. In *Living History*, she describes it as a “plan that would motivate and equip women to obtain a better life for themselves and their children.” She wrote that she’d hoped that welfare reform would have been “the beginning, not the end, of our concern for the poor.”⁶⁹ This statement is rich in its disingenuousness. The whole point of welfare reform was disciplining the poor, not helping them. Hillary is no naïf and must have recognized that as the political consensus. Still, she bragged that “[b]y the time Bill and I left the White House, welfare rolls had dropped 60 percent from 14.1 million to 5.8 million, and millions of parents had gone to work.” Of course, that was during the strongest economic expansion of the last several decades—gains that were undone in the recessions and weak expansions that would follow. Later, as senator, she supported George W. Bush’s proposal to expand the work requirement for recipients of the surviving welfare program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—one of the few Democrats to do so. Advocates for the poor were shocked, showing signs that they were poorly informed about her political history.⁷⁰

A 2014 analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found the following about the new welfare regime, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: fewer families were drawing benefits despite increased need; the value of those benefits have eroded to the point where beneficiaries cannot meet their basic needs; it does far less to reduce poverty than its predecessor, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which welfare reform abolished; and almost all of the early employment gains for single mothers have been reversed.⁷¹

Living History was written with the help of three ghostwriters, who were thanked in the acknowledgments. The ghostwriter of her earlier book, *It Takes a Village*, wasn’t mentioned at all, and Hillary even claimed that she’d written it all herself. When *Village* was announced, the *New York Times* reported that “The book will actually be written by Barbara Feinman, a journalism professor at Georgetown University in Washington. Ms. Feinman will conduct a series of interviews with Mrs. Clinton, who will help edit the resulting text.” Feinman even suggested the title, citing an African proverb of dubious provenance. In a 2002 article for a writer’s journal, Feinman—then using her married name, Barbara Feinman Todd—said the book was jointly produced with its editor, exchanging drafts “round-robin style.” Several years after the book was published, she told a Washington magazine that Hillary was responsible for Simon & Schuster’s delay in paying Todd the final installment of her \$120,000 fee. She quoted the publisher as saying, “It’s the White House that doesn’t want you paid.” The non-acknowledgment and withheld installment were widely reported at the time, and an embarrassed Simon & Schuster finally wrote the check.⁷²

No survey of Hillary’s time as First Lady would be complete without a review of the scandals—and not just Bill’s dalliances. The most famous was Whitewater, a word it pains me to type. A Vincent Foster, Hillary’s good friend and fellow partner at Rose who came with her to Washington, said in a handwritten note discovered after his suicide, it was “a can of worms you shouldn’t open.” It’s not much fun re-opening it either.

Democrats love to say that there was nothing to Whitewater. While it is certainly true that it was not what Republicans made of it during the impeachment days, neither was it nothing. A sleazy but

well-connected pal of the Clintons, Jim McDougal, came to them in 1980 with a proposal to invest a piece of undeveloped riverfront land in the Ozarks that he hoped to turn into vacation houses. They took up the offer—but paid almost no attention afterward.⁷⁴ Had they done so, they might have found that the scheme was not working out. A few years after the land purchase, McDougal bought himself a savings and loan (S&L) that he grandly renamed Madison Guaranty, which he used to fund his real estate ventures, Whitewater among them.⁷⁵ Speculators operating on borrowed money are always dangerous—doubly so when they’ve got their own bank to draw on. And Madison Guaranty, like hundreds of other S&Ls in the early 1980s, was bleeding money. By 1985, a desperate McDougal hired Rose to handle its legal affairs. That was malodorous in itself, since Madison was regulated by the state, and a Rose partner was the governor’s wife. But the Clintons were also investors in McDougal’s schemes.

The details of the Whitewater scheme are of far less interest than the way Hillary handled it: with lies, half-truths, and secrecy. She initially claimed during the 1992 campaign that she hadn’t represented clients before state regulators, which was patently untrue. She then revised that initial position, saying that she’d “tried to avoid such involvement and cannot recall any instance other than the Madison Guaranty matter in which I had any involvement, and my involvement there was minimal.” (Madison wasn’t the only instance where she had an “involvement.” Another was the Southern Development Bancorporation, which paid Rose over \$100,000 in fees and received \$300,000 in state investments.)⁷⁶ On the *Diane Rehm Show*, Hillary said that she’d provided the *New York Times*, which broke the Whitewater story, with “every document we had” about the case. This, too, was completely untrue.⁷⁷

Hillary initially claimed that the Rose billing records for the Madison case, which were under multiple subpoenas, had disappeared. But they suddenly reappeared, discovered by a longtime personal assistant in a room in the residential quarters of the White House. When asked about the mysterious reappearance, Hillary responded, “I, like everyone else, would like to know the answer about how those documents showed up after all these years.”⁷⁸ The records showed that rather than having a trivial role in representing Madison, she’d actually billed for 60 hours of work.⁷⁹

A prominent legal journalist of my acquaintance, a loyal Hillaryite, explained the fate of the billing documents this way: “They were lost, Doug, and then they were found.” There are many dimensions to the Clinton magic.

3. SENATOR

This is a short chapter; there's not a great deal to say about Hillary's Senate career. Aside from her enthusiastic vote for the Iraq War, it's hard to think of her as much more than a seat warmer. In the language of the Senate, she was seen as a workhorse, not a showhorse. There's certainly not much to show for all the work.

At first, Hillary's candidacy for the Senate was seen as a long shot. She set her sights on the New York seat of Daniel "Pat" Moynihan, who was retiring. Whatever his many political problems—like being a pivotal figure in the transformation of the understanding of poverty from a problem endemic to the U.S. economy to cultural pathologies endemic among the poor themselves—Moynihan was nonetheless a substantial figure. Hillary, in contrast, was widely seen as a carpetbagger who knew little of New York and had shown scant interest in it before one of its Senate seats became available. And she could not shake the bad karma from her role at the White House.

She entered the election while she was still First Lady. This required the Clintons to buy a house in Westchester, so she could have a nominal New York residence, which they did two months after she announced, in July 1999, that she was contemplating a run. The location of the announcement was Moynihan's farm, which was supposed to signal his approval. In fact, he'd had troubles with both Clintons dating from the days of health care reform, when the administration, perceiving disloyalty, sprayed him with some hostile leaks. As Carl Bernstein wrote, Moynihan "would make life difficult for the Clintons for years." But he appeared to be mostly over it by 1999.⁸⁰

Although Hillary portrayed herself in *Living History* as at first reluctant to run, only finally deciding to do so on the basis of popular acclamation, Gerth and Van Natta portray her as anything but halting. Her ambition was always intense, certainly no less intense than her husband's. She wanted to be known for her own accomplishments and not as "former First lady" and "derivative spouse."⁸¹

To counter the carpetbagger problem, Hillary went on a "listening tour" of New York, visiting a number of the state's 62 counties, the earliest of her conspicuous exercises in tapping into the *vox populi*. Though there were gaffes, like donning a New York Yankees hat and pretending to be a longtime fan when she wasn't, for which she was widely ridiculed, the tour turned out to be a success, convincing the locals that she was like them. All of this was undertaken before she officially announced her candidacy in February 2000. On her campaign merchandise she was simply "Hillary," the first time she'd branded herself without one or two other names.

Her first Republican opponent was New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, a mean-spirited Republican hardliner. That didn't stop her from trying to take positions to his right. In an interview with the *New York Times*, the first in-depth one of the campaign, "[s]he went out of her way to not support her support for the death penalty, welfare restrictions and a balanced budget," as the paper's account put it.⁸²

When a diagnosis of prostate cancer forced Giuliani out of the race (which came at the same time he left his wife for another woman, enough to ruin a candidacy on its own), he was replaced by a much weaker candidate, Long Island Congressman Rick Lazio. Hillary beat him comfortably, by 13 points. She would have no trouble getting re-elected in 2006.

Surprisingly, or maybe not, one of her first tasks on arriving in the Senate was making friends with Republicans. In his book, *Clinton, Inc.*, Daniel Halper, a smart, non-frothing conservative, writes:

Thus what Hillary Clinton pulled off with her Republican Senate colleagues was nothing short of masterful. I spoke to many, if not all, of Senator Clinton's biggest opponents within the Republican Party during her time as First Lady. On or off the record, no matter how much they were coaxed, not one of them would say a negative thing about Hillary Clinton as a person—other than observing that her Democratic allies sometimes didn't like her.⁸³

She buddied up to John McCain, and attended prayer breakfasts with right-wingers like the atrocious Sam Brownback of Kansas (who once described her as “a beautiful child of the living God”).⁸⁴ She befriended Republicans who'd served as floor managers of her husband's impeachment. Even Newt Gingrich had good things to say about her.⁸⁵

She didn't attend just any prayer breakfasts—she buddied up to the Fellowship, aka the Family, a secretive fundamentalist organization based in Arlington that has long been a gathering place for the political and corporate elite to pray and network. She had been involved with the organization as First Lady and then graduated to its Senatorial branch. Though there are Democrats in the group, it is laced with right-wingers, and as Kathryn Joyce and Jeff Sharlet reported, has a long history of supporting bloody dictators in the name of free enterprise. Its mission has traditionally been to harness a love of Jesus to the running of the world for profit. While there's no doubt a large dose of political expediency in Hillary's association with people that many of her liberal supporters would find appalling, it's also a sign of her residual deep hawkishness and religiosity. As Joyce and Sharlet write, she supported government funding for religiously provided social services before George W. Bush ever did.⁸⁶ Her opposition to gay marriage, which history finally forced her to renounce in 2013, was part political calculation, part Midwestern Methodist.

Hillary cast her vote for the Iraq War without having read the full National Intelligence Estimate, which was far more skeptical about Iraq's weaponry than the bowdlerized version that was made public. This was very strange behavior for someone as disciplined as Hillary, famous for working late and taking a stack of briefing books home. Senator Bob Graham, one of the few who actually did take the trouble to read the NIE, voted against the war in part because of what it contained. We can never know why she chose not to read the document, but it's hard not to conclude that she wanted to vote for war more than she wanted to know the truth.

Hillary even accused Saddam of having ties to al-Qaeda—essentially siding with Bush and Cheney to a degree that no other Democrat, even Joe Lieberman, approached. Most of Bill's foreign policy advisors rejected such a position as nonsense. Kenneth Pollack, a prowar National Security Council veteran who'd also advised Hillary, told Gerth and Van Natta that the Saddam/al-Qaeda link was “bullshit.... We all knew that was bullshit.”⁸⁷ It took Hillary years to admit her vote was a “mistake.” After the war went sour, Hillary argued that the Bush administration hadn't pursued diplomatic approaches fervently enough—even though she voted against an amendment that would have required the president to do just that before any invasion.⁸⁸

Another vote Hillary now regrets is the one she cast in favor of the 2001 bankruptcy reform bill. Big finance had been lobbying to reverse American law's traditional indulgence of debtors for years. They wanted to make it much harder for people with onerous credit card debt to “discharge” it—have it wiped away forever—by a fairly simple bankruptcy filing. They finally got one through Congress at the very end of Bill's presidency. It was mostly written, Elizabeth Warren told me back when she was still a professor at Harvard Law School, by a law firm for the credit card industry, Morrison Foerster of San Francisco. (The firm is nicknamed, and uses as its internet domain, “MoFo.” Not your usual elite legal *politesse*.)

Hillary asked Warren to brief her on the bill. Warren, a long-standing opponent of creditor

friendly bankruptcy reform, quickly convinced her that it was a horror that would hurt poor and middle-income people badly, single mothers prominently among them. Hillary went back to the White House and lobbied her husband to veto the bill. He did—it was one of the last acts of his term in office, along with pardoning Marc Rich. ⁸⁹

Two years later, though, Hillary was in the Senate, “representing Wall Street,” as she reminded us in the first 2015 Democratic debate. Another version of bankruptcy reform came up and this time, forgetting everything she learned from Warren, Hillary voted for it. When asked to explain the vote during the 2015 campaign she said that enough changes had been made to the bill to justify her vote—a position almost none of the anti-bankruptcy reform advocates took—and then pointedly noted that then-senator Joe Biden, a dear friend of the credit card industry who was once known as the senator from MBNA (a major card issuer based in Biden’s home state of Delaware, now part of Bank of America), urged her to vote for it. ⁹⁰ Now that Biden isn’t running, she probably won’t do this again, but you never know.

But other than warmongering, defending creditors, and eagerly making friends with the opposition, her Senatorial accomplishments were minimal. Hilary Bok, a professor at Johns Hopkins who used to have a blog under the name “hilzoy,” compiled a list of the successful bills that Hillary had sponsored; there were mostly about minor issues such as the renaming of post offices in the memory of local worthies or the use of low-energy lightbulbs in public buildings. A couple of her bills promoted the use of electric vehicles and the use of heat pumps to conserve modest amounts of energy. ⁹¹ Alarmed by the “silent epidemic” of “pornographic and violent” games, she urged an investigation of the video game industry by the Federal Trade Commission and also introduced a bill to tighten regulations on the sale of “mature” video games to minors. It went nowhere. ⁹² (In *It Takes a Village*, she praised the work of Tipper Gore and William Bennett against gangsta rap and decried the pervasive violence of popular culture; unsurprisingly she didn’t apply this critique of violence to her foreign policy preferences.) She also cosponsored a bill to criminalize burning the American flag, a strategy she saw as a compromise between those who think flag-burning is a form of free speech and those who want a constitutional amendment to ban it. ⁹⁴

A survey on Congress.gov of the legislation she sponsored or cosponsored provides further evidence of its profound insubstantiality: a resolution “honoring the victims of the bombing of Pan Am flight 103,” a bill to allow taxpayers to designate a portion of their refunds to help homeless veterans, a bill to require country of origin labels on dairy products, and so on. Few of these bills were anywhere. Almost all of her Senate record, the Iraq vote aside, was the legislative equivalent of being against cancer. In fact, she introduced a resolution expressing “support for the goals and ideals of Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.” ⁹⁵ You just can’t argue with that.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Hillary ran her Senate office in a manner that those accustomed to her way of working would easily recognize: secretively and with a penchant for skirting rules. She’d begun building the world now widely known as “Hillaryland” during her time as First Lady, and by the time she got to the Senate it was well established. Its inhabitants were, and still are, a tight circle of confidants and advisors, tightly lipped and intensely loyal to the boss. As a Senate source said to Gerth and Van Natta, “If you are disloyal or indiscreet, there will be a price for the disloyalty. There is a fear of retribution that permeates the group.” Hillary used Senate email servers for political fundraising, which is illegal, and

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