ABSTRACT

POLITICAL (IN)DISCRETION: HILLARY CLINTON’S RESPONSE TO THE LEWINSKY SCANDAL

by Kelsey Snyder

Through an examination of gender, politics, and media during the time of the Lewinsky scandal, this project shows that conversations about the first lady shifted throughout 1998. Just after the allegations were made public, the press and American people fought against the forthright position that Hillary took; the expectations of traditional first ladies they had known before were not met. After facing backlash via the press, the first lady receded to more acceptably defined notions of her actions, based largely in late 20th century conservative definitions of appropriate gender roles. By the end of 1998, consideration of a run for the Senate and increased public support for her more traditional image provided a compromise for Hillary Rodham Clinton’s public image. Having finally met the expectations of the nation, the press spoke less of the first lady in comparison to family values and almost exclusively by means of her political abilities.
POLITICAL (IN)DISCRETION: HILLARY CLINTON’S RESPONSE TO THE LEWINSKY SCANDAL

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Introduction

A mere six years following the Year of the Woman, another young lady was making strides in Washington; Monica Lewinsky broke news headlines in 1998 for her extramarital affair with President Bill Clinton. Many have, however, largely ignored the other important actor in this event: Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC). Her political and public life was deeply affected by the events of 1998, enduring phases where she embodied traditional family values that she had never before displayed as a first lady. Given that she maintained her political life as a Senatorial candidate and eventual Senator, presidential candidate, and Secretary of State following her tenure as first lady in the White House, how did Hillary’s public image as first lady transform following the trying circumstances of the second to last year of her husband’s presidency?

A young HRC once said at the commencement of her undergraduate education, “Many of the issues I’ve mentioned –those of sharing power and responsibility, those of assuming power and responsibility have been general concerns on campuses throughout the world. But underlying those concerns there is a theme, a theme which is so trite and so old because the words are so familiar. It talks about integrity and trust and respect.” These words, spoken by Hillary Wellesley College in 1969 became more poignant later in her life. While news regarding the scandal and the subsequent Starr Report dominated the news in 1998, conversations about the first lady’s appearance were infrequently respectful of the office she held. The staff of the first lady had to think carefully about the public image they put forth of Hillary, because of the press’ representation of events during the campaign in 1992. Through an examination of gender, politics, and power relations during the time of the Lewinsky scandal, this project shows that conversations about the first lady shifted throughout 1998. Just after the allegations were made public, the press and American people fought against the forthright position that Hillary took; she had not met the expectations of traditional first ladies they had known before, and her position in defending her husband as a litigator as opposed to a scorned wife on the Today show broke too much with tradition. After facing backlash via the press, the first lady receded to more acceptably defined notions of her actions, based largely in late 20th century conservative definitions of appropriate gender roles. The

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first lady spoke out less, traveled more (as her traditional predecessor Barbara Bush had,) and was featured far less than her husband in discussions about the President’s defense. By the end of 1998, however, consideration of a run for the Senate and increased public support for her more traditional image provided a compromise for HRC’s public image. Having finally met the expectations of the nation, the press spoke less of the first lady in comparison to family values and almost exclusively by means of her political abilities; these abilities were applicable to any campaign, transcended traditional gender roles, and focused on the idea that Hillary Clinton had enjoyed less scrutiny because of her position in the White House. Ultimately, this version of Hillary’s image, part forthright, uncompromising second-wave feminist, part self-aware, traditional gender role encompassing, persists beyond the purview of this thesis, into much of what is seen today in April 2015 at the beginning of her second presidential campaign.

In pursuing this research I use several types of sources. Since this is a relatively new study to the field of History, I rely heavily on scholars outside the field for the work they have done on gender, the media, and Hillary Clinton in this era. In order to trace the changing conversations about HRC, I rely upon nationally circulated newspapers from the period, primarily the New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, and Wall Street Journal. Three of these papers, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post were in the top twenty largest newspaper groups in 2001 according to a Pew Research Institute study on the State of News Media in 2004, as the fifth, sixth, and seventeenth largest newspapers respectively. According to the same study, with 68 percent of those polled reporting in April 1998 that they regularly read a newspaper, these newspapers, combined with a survey of Time, Newsweek, and Readers Guide referenced at the Miami University Library, provide a basis for what a majority of Americans were consuming with regard to print news. With New York Times’ number of weekday subscriptions (Monday through Friday) in 1998 of 1,110,143, Wall Street Journal of 1,820,186, Washington Post of 808,884, and Christian Science Monitor or 71,790 the stories published, and thus those

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used in this research, were widely accessible.\textsuperscript{4} Because *Time* and *Newsweek*’s pieces focused more on President Clinton and Monica, and less exclusively on Hillary, those sources have been used strategically in combination with the additional newspapers. Public opinion polls from Gallup, the Pew Research Center, and the major news networks are used to inform claims about how the American people were responding to changes in the administration. In addition to news footage obtained from the Vanderbilt Television and News Archive, these sources provide a true cross-section of what news Americans encountered frequently. Additionally, materials from the Diane Blair papers contained at the University of Arkansas archives provide an insider’s perspective to the Office of the First Lady’s response to issues throughout the time in the White House as well as to the Hillary herself. A close personal friend of the Clintons, Mrs. Blair was one of the few people HRC confided in during the events of 1998, and her papers allow for a previously unseen perspective on the advice given to the first lady during this period. Notes of phone conversations as well as unpublished edits on news stories that were intended to go to press allow for readers to understand what those close to Hillary perceived the stakes to be for her public image; while there was merit in pushing the envelope and raising concerns over how HRC was treated by the press, careful consideration had to be given to just what wording was to be used in order to avoid ostracizing those sympathetic to the cause. Combined with the HRC’s autobiography, these sources provide a broader context in which to examine the shifting conversations in 1998.

While a great deal has been written on the Lewinsky scandal, the Clinton presidency, and indeed on Hillary Clinton, these have primarily been written from non-historical perspectives or have focused on different questions and aspects than those that I wish to examine. Because of the recent nature of the events, historians have not been as apt to study this era. One particular book, Colin Harrison’s *American Culture in the 1990s*, has been written on the culture of the 1990s and will serve as my background for the decade. In his book, Harrison takes on the daunting task of boiling down 10 years of events into 200 pages using the categories of Fiction and Poetry, Music and Radio, Film and Television, Art and Architecture, and Digital Culture. While more a reference book than anything else, Harrison’s essential argument is that the 1990s were far more heterogeneous than definitive from prior decades\textsuperscript{5}. Since my research seeks to bring together


multiple fields of interest into one larger study, the additional historiography is somewhat spread out. Robert Bubsy’s *Defending the American Presidency: Clinton and the Lewinsky Scandal* served as my basic historiography on the Clinton Presidency. Importantly, Bubsy noted that Clinton was far from the first President to face a scandal during his time in office. His book goes on to systematically move the reader through the damage limitation strategies employed by the Clinton administration during the scandal. On a related note, I referenced several pieces for historical background on sex scandals. Two edited volumes in particular on the Lewinsky scandal will serve as the basis for my understanding of the affair. *Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and the National Interest* edited by Lauren Berlant and Lisa Duggan as well as *Public Affairs: Politics in the Age of Sex Scandals* edited by Paul Apostolidis and Juliet Williams both brought together essays written about the Lewinsky scandal and its far-reaching effects in the early 2000s. Both books provide perspective on how the American public was affected by elements of gender, class, and public position apparent in the scandal.

I argue that the Monica Lewinsky scandal is one of the most complicated and divisive events that occurred in US national politics during the 1990s, incorporating the rise of conservative family values in the late 20th century, media portrayals of women in politics, and the influence of the elite American political class. Although work has been done in other fields and looking at other aspects of the scandal, limited historical work has been done that examines how Hillary’s public image changed in the midst of the Lewinsky scandal, ultimately continuing on through her own political career. One recently published work has come close but still did not look at the same specific issue that I seek to investigate. Shawn J. Parry-Giles’ *Hillary Clinton in the News: Gender and Authenticity in American Politics* looks at how since the Lewinsky scandal candidates like Hillary have been able to convince the American public of their authenticity. Through her study she steps through issues such as the way the media labeled Hillary in 1998, specifically pointing out an issue that I am interested in but ultimately leaves the door open.

[Hillary] was routinely framed as the scorned wife suffering the consequences of a philandering husband who had an illicit affair with a twenty-one year-old intern named Monica Lewinsky. Yet, nearly ten years later, when rumors spread that Clinton would enter the 2008 presidential contest, that frame would be drowned out by one focused on the politically ambitious Clinton – the woman who had her sights set on the White House and
would do anything to achieve that goal, even if that meant staying married to her habitually cheating husband of more than thirty years.⁶

Because Parry-Giles’ ultimate question is about authenticity, she never answers my question: how does Hillary’s public image transform because of the scandal. Despite the amount of literature that exists surrounding both Hillary Clinton and the Monica Lewinsky scandal, no one has yet sought to specifically answer this question. My goal then is to fill the void in the historiography through this thesis project so as to add to the overall understanding of the 1990s, the Lewinsky scandal, women in politics, women in high-level leadership roles, and Hillary Rodham Clinton during this era.

In order to fully understand the events of 1998, it has been necessary for research to be done into the areas of American political scandal following Watergate and scholarly writing on first ladies. These areas illuminate aspects of the investigation into President Clinton’s actions and subsequent impeachment, providing a historical backdrop suggesting that the American people had precedence for concern starting in January.

Political scandal has been dominant on the minds of Americans at the very least since the resignation of President Richard Nixon over the Watergate scandal in 1974. Following that event, any semblance of American trust in the government following the events of the Vietnam War was changed, something that scholars have been apt to write on. As sociologist John Thompson writes, “In our…post-Watergate age, we could be forgiven for thinking that political scandals are a curiosity of the late twentieth century…It could be said with some justification that, in the late twentieth century, scandal has assumed a significance in public life which outweights the significance it had for previous generations.”⁷ The rise of significance of political scandal, the central topic of Thompson’s book, is investigated from a sociological perspective where he argues, “We can understand the current prevalence of scandal only if we see that this phenomenon, which might seem so ephemeral and superficial to the impatient observer, is rooted in a series of developments which have a long history and which have had a deep and enduring impact on social

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and political life.”\(^8\) This investigation, paired with professor of politics Robert William’s chapter “Political Scandals in the United States,” lays the roots of understanding the Watergate scandal’s legacy for the Clinton investigations during Whitewater. As Williams argues, “Discussions of the decline in public trust in government and politicians are often linked to Watergate, suggesting perhaps that the scandal symbolised [sic] the end of an era of deference and respect in American politics…Contemporary public opinion is now deeply skeptical about the efficacy of political institutions and the motives and trustworthiness of politicians of all parties, and is more willing to believe the worst.”\(^9\) Because of the events of Watergate, Americans were already likely to believe the worst about President Clinton in the 1990s.

The 1970s as a whole were an important historical shift as well for a multitude of reasons, but notably as the tumultuous period time where many baby boomers like Bill and Hillary Clinton came of age. As historian Edward Berkowitz argues, “The scandal that engulfed President Nixon, the recession caused by the oil shock to the economy, and the loss of the Vietnam War all caused Americans to rethink the assumptions that had guided public policy in the postwar era.”\(^10\) As argued throughout his book *Something Changed*, the 1970s were not just the political turning point that was typified by the Watergate scandal. Rather, the 70s were an important cultural turning point as well, where the countercultural movement arose that led to women like Hillary Clinton taking a firm stance for women’s and children’s rights from her college years through the remainder of her life. Further, America’s two party political system was in flux during the pre and post Watergate era, causing cultural issues to become political issues as they so often do. Berkowitz says, “The rights revolution, in turn, led to changes in American politics on both the right and the left. Affirmative action and busing were sixties concepts but seventies issues…As America tacked first left and then right, the debates [over détente, abortion, disability rights, homosexuality, and bilingual education] acquired a particular urgency.”\(^11\) When, in the late 1970/80s and into the 1990s discussions about the role of gender become inherently linked to political parties, there was historical precedence for this. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), first proposed in 1923 and

\(^8\) Ibid., 6.


\(^11\) Ibid., 7.
approved (but never ratified by the states) in 1972 specifically states that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex” was vehemently opposed by men and women on the conservative right. Berkowitz argues that the ERA’s failure to be ratified stems from at least four reasons: first, that the movement for the ERA became entangled with the movement to legalize abortion, second that there was too much time passed during the period of ratification (10 years of debate), thirdly the loss of consensus as conservative opponents like Phyllis Schlafly brought the light the negative aspects of the amendment, and finally that proponents of the amendment underestimated the political skill of their conservative opponents.\textsuperscript{12} As Berkowitz says, “The ERA…started as an issued that enjoyed widespread support and ended as a highly partisan issue. On one side stood liberals such as Bella Abzug; Betty Friedan, the head of NOW; and Coretta King, the widow of the assassinated civil-rights leader…On the other side stood conservatives such as Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic from St. Louis with a gift for political rhetoric.”\textsuperscript{13} Beyond Watergate, then, the ERA proved to be another dividing issue that resonated with Americans in the 1990s when Hillary came to the White House as the initial first lady to represent the generation of women who had come of age in the midst of these cultural and political debates.

Reminiscent of the Watergate-era, during President Ronald Reagan’s time in office he too faced a significant event that scholars, and not those actively involved in the events of the scandal, have recently begun to write about. The Iran-Contra crisis of 1986 became a daily headline issue across the world when two seemingly disconnected events were suddenly associated with one another, which led to the first implementation of an independent counsel investigation per requirements put into place following Watergate. As deputy research director of the National Security Administration archives Malcolm Byrne writes, in the midst of the investigation, “journalists saturated newspaper and television coverage with daily headlines exploring every conceivable angle of the scandal. At the center of public attention throughout the period was the question whether Reagan himself had known about the diversion.”\textsuperscript{14} The amount of television and news coverage that the Lewinsky scandal received just over a decade later comes out of this


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Malcolm Byrnes, \textit{Iran-Contra: Reagan’s Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power}, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2014), 2-3.
tradition, where as the relatively new institution of the Office of the Independent Counsel took the time necessary to complete its investigation, the media sought to engage the public with the information that was available on any given day.

The American people’s fascination with the first lady has existed since Martha Washington assumed that position in 1789. Since that time, innumerable popular press books have been written investigating nearly aspect of the women’s lives from their fashion to their diaries and letters left behind. Scholars since the late 1980s have not just chronicled the women’s lives, noting their important “issue” during their first ladyship – for current first lady Michelle Obama it is school nutrition, for first lady Laura Bush it was childhood literacy – but instead have sought to place the women in perspective of their predecessors and to understand the institution of the first lady as a whole, something that previous scholars had not done. As historian Robert Watson writes, “She is one of the most popular and recognizable figures in the world. In fact, public opinion research reveals that she is more widely known than members of Congress or even the vice president. Yet we know little about many of her predecessors, especially those who served prior to the twentieth century.”

When taking a broad perspective, books like Betty Boyd Caroli’s *First Ladies*, Watson’s *The President’s Wives: Reassessing the Office of the First Lady*, Myra Gutin’s *The President’s Partner: The First Lady in the Twentieth Century*, Lewis Gould’s *American First Ladies: Their Lives and Their Legacy*, and Watson and Anthony Eksterowicz’s *The Presidential Companion: Readings on the First Ladies* largely enhance the reader’s general knowledge of a large number, if not all, first ladies. As Watson argues in *The President’s Wives*,

> The first ladies represent an intriguing group of women responsible for many political contributions to the presidency. These spouses have hosted formal affairs of state, renovated the White House, raised families, supported their husbands through the many challenges of the presidency, and served as leading public figures. They have done all this without pay and often without any prior training, institutional supports, or proper recognition…It is not unreasonable to suggest that as a group, given what they had to do, they were as highly capable and competent as the presidents themselves.

Watson takes the perspective, as others in the field, that first ladies have been understated and under appreciated by scholars and the public for the vast amount of work that they do, and that the historical record need to be corrected in order to reflect all their accomplishments. Other scholars

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16 Ibid., 6.
have taken a more specific approach in their writing by focusing on a specific issue or a woman. The Modern First Ladies series published by University of Kansas features entire books on Grace Coolidge, Lou Henry Hoover, Mamie Doud Eisenhower, Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, and Barbara Bush. Others like historian Catherine Allgor’s *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* and communications scholar Lisa Burn’s *First Ladies and the Fourth Estate: Press Framing and Presidential Wives* more expressly investigate the public images of the first ladies and the power they were able to wield during their time in office. Allgor in particular focuses on these early first ladies’ (and those women who acted in place of a direct first lady when the president was a widower or was single) direct action in the formation of the political atmosphere of the new city of Washington. She writes, “Washington women – both well-known and not – appear as political actors in their own right, using social events and the ‘private sphere’ to establish the national capital and to build the extraofficial structures so sorely needed in the infant federal government.”

Allgor uses these social events as examples of the powerful influence the first ladies had in shaping the new city of Washington, and by proxy the institution of the first lady. This body of work suggests that by the time HRC came to the White House in 1993, the fascination and obsession of the American people and the media with her was far from unusual; on the contrary it was to be expected given scholarly interest, let alone popular press writings.

An important choice that I made throughout the thesis was how to address the first lady. While historians typically refer to historical actors by their last name, in this case Clinton, I found this to be problematic since I also refer to the president periodically throughout the text. I, too, found it inappropriate to refer to her as Mrs. Clinton, as Hillary was an important actress in her own right and I felt that this minimized both her own choice (as she has chosen to retain her maiden name) and inserted a sense of patriarchy into writing. I finally settled on referring to her as either Hillary, Hillary Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton, HRC, or the first lady because these are the ways that those close to the first lady referred to her. In not referring to her by Clinton, or Secretary Clinton, there is no intent of disrespect; on the contrary my intention is to represent the first lady as she would have wanted to be represented. As biographer Sally Bedell Smith noted, “[Hillary] joined the ranks of ‘those shiny divas who need only one name – Cher and Madonna and

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Charro and Ann Margret,” in the words of New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd.”¹⁸ Hillary Rodham Clinton achieved a level of celebrity during her tenure in the White House that made her first name synonymous with the first lady, encompassing the respect that such a position deserves.

Several questions remain unanswered from this work, notably to what extent is an unelected official such as the first lady responsible for responding to public opinion? When Hillary Clinton announced for Senate, significant consideration was given to how that position differed from the unelected control of the East Wing she had wielded for the previous eight years, lending itself to further study. Additionally, how can the later fragmentation of the news media be linked to the divisive sides taken by the press during the Lewinsky scandal? As noted throughout, several news organizations throughout this period entrenched themselves on either side of the battle, and the polarization and fragmentation of the news media continued long after President Clinton left the White House. It is my hope that this thesis, while unable to answer all of the questions the author had, may provide a launching point from which other historians will be able to understand the intersection of gender, politics, and the media at the end of the 20th century and may provide a lens into current political affairs in 2015.

Chapter 1

The Making of a Scandal: Pre-Early 1998

While Hillary Clinton never enjoyed a pleasant relationship with the press corps, predating the 1992 presidential campaign\(^1\), the allegations of the Lewinsky scandal brought to head many issues that had been brewing for the previous six years. It is unsurprising, given the tumultuous relationship between the press and HRC, that Hillary spoke only once to the cameras about the Lewinsky affair during 1998. On January 27 she gave an interview with Today, which was caught up in a whirlwind week of press coverage of the President’s State of the Union address, that changed the way that the American people perceived Bill Clinton’s innocence or guilt on the matter. HRC’s appearance on Today foreshadowed the events that followed later in the year and gave the American people vague comments to dwell on. As she famously said in interview when asked about the ongoing investigation into her and the President’s lives, “The great story here for anyone willing to write about it is this vast, right wing conspiracy that has been conspiring against my husband since the day he announce for president.”\(^2\) While the first lady and those familiar with the lengthy investigation that had been taking place since 1993 understood the underlying tones in the statement, insinuating that the Office of Independent Council was acting on political pretenses by investigating these new accusations just as it had investigated nearly every other aspect of the Clintons’ lives, most Americans did not completely understand the implications at this point. Rather, American viewers saw the statement as an overt attempt to defend her husband by changing the nature of the story from one about his potential errors to the mistakes of others. Following the interview, the Washington Post published a quote from Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center in a piece three days after the Today interview. According to Kohut, women had continued to stand by President Clinton against all odds throughout his tenure in the White House and that it appeared they were prepared to do so again. “‘We would have expected women's support to possibly fold on this issue because of the sexual power dynamic in a relationship between the president and a 21-year-old woman’…”‘But the counter-dynamic is women really like


Clinton. He's less important as an individual than as a leader for women.”

While press stories leading up to Hillary’s interview speculated about the potential truth of the accusations, the stories immediately following her interview convinced sectors of the American public to, at the very least, do as she requested in the interview; “be patient, take a deep breath, and the truth will come out.”

With Hillary Rodham Clinton as the first feminist, baby boomer first lady, the press and American people were unsure of how to receive this new construction of the first lady from the time she took office, thus contributing to the sense of confusion about Hillary that existed in the wake of the scandal breaking. While she broke with tradition, she represented qualities that many Americans identified with. The problem that Hillary faced, however, was that American people had a specific definition of the first lady, and she did not reflect their expectations. HRC shattered former, traditional notions of the first lady through her decision to maintain a career of her own, “cookies and teas” comments, lack of style, and comments about Eleanor Roosevelt, all of which challenged the gendered notions about what it meant to be first lady. The way Hillary interpreted the role of the first lady was a battle that she faced throughout her husband’s time in office, but was particularly challenging during 1998; as she attempted to take on a strong, defensive role, Hillary was confronted with pushback from some of the American public for not encompassing the traditional first lady image that had been presented to them before.

**Hillary Clinton & The Institution of the First Lady**

Hillary Clinton’s life prior to taking over the East Wing of the White House was unique in its own right. Raised in the suburbs of Chicago in the postwar era, Hillary Rodham started her political life as a young woman at Wellesley College as a Barry Goldwater conservative. By the time her four years were over in 1969, Hillary turned to the Democratic ticket like many of her previously conservative peers. As journalist Carl Bernstein, who was integrally involved in the reporting on the Watergate scandal, writes “The evolution of Hillary’s politics during her years at Wellesley – 1965 to 1969 – was characteristic of millions of her generation, especially Midwesterners from conservative families who went off to college in the East and found themselves moving toward (and sometimes beyond) liberalism as they grappled with the three

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great issues of the day: civil rights, the war in Vietnam, and the role of women.”

After her undergraduate years, Hillary Rodham continued on to Yale University Law School, where she met Bill Clinton. Following their graduations, Hillary worked on Children’s Defense Fund, which in combination with her time at the Yale Child Study Center helped to solidify her interests in working for children. After more than a year apart with Hillary working Cambridge, Massachusetts and later in Washington D.C. on the Watergate investigation, she moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas where she began teaching law at the University of Arkansas; notably, it was in this position where Hillary first encountered Diane Blair who would become a lifelong friend and, in addition to her husband, integral advisers to the many Clinton campaigns. Following Bill Clinton’s successful attorney general campaign in 1979, the Clintons moved to Little Rock and Hillary sought employment. As Bernstein writes,

> Upon Bill’s election as attorney general, Hillary faced the question of how to resume her legal career. Given the paltry salaries of Arkansas public officials, and Hillary and Bill’s desire to have children, she was no willing to consider a career she had regarded previously with over contempt: corporate law. Bill, trying to help her find a place in a major law firm, recommended his wife to the partners of the Rose, Nash, Williamson, Carroll, Clay & Giroir – the Rose Law Firm….Rose was the ultimate establishment law firm, representing the most powerful economic interests in the state: Tyson Foods, Stephens Inc. (the state’s biggest brokerage firm), Wal-Mart, Worthen Bank, the Arkansas-Democrat Gazette, and the Hussman media empire in southwest Arkansas.

Hillary held this position at Rose until she and Bill Clinton left Arkansas to campaign for the White House in 1991. While Bill served as attorney general and later governor of Arkansas, Hillary dipped her feet into the issues that she later faced; those in Arkansas did not like that she refused to take her husband’s last name and that she maintained a highly successful career, particularly after giving birth to their daughter. Much of the pushback she later faced on the campaign trail and as first lady started during her time in the southern state.

Hillary’s first lady predecessors set the stage that she acted upon in 1998 by giving the American people the notion of the traditional first lady they yearned for when HRC took to the East Wing. According to Watson,

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25 Ibid., 128.
26 Ibid., 140.
In many ways, the first lady has become the nation’s de facto social hostess. She is expected to preside over functions as diverse as formal state dinners for visiting dignitaries to afternoon receptions for women’s social clubs to the annual children’s Easter-egg roll on the White House lawn. First Ladies have also acted as the chief preservationist, archivist, and tour guide of the White House. A more recent addition to the responsibilities of the presidential spouses includes the role of the campaigner. Because of the nature of politics and society in the United States, the wives must appear in public with their husbands and, at a minimum, give the impression of supporting his campaign and political office.

All of these vastly different activities were expected in the traditional first lady; they were to not only maintain a busy schedule in their official capacity but to also retain a “traditional” home life, where raising young children was the primary concern and conservative ideas about the appropriate role of the wife prevailed. While HRC noted throughout her tenure in the White House that she channeled Eleanor Roosevelt, a liberal and boundary-pushing first lady for her time, Hillary was often compared to Jackie Kennedy and her most recent predecessor Barbara Bush as well. While both Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Kennedy faced trials during their time in the White House, neither deviated as far from image of a traditional first lady as Hillary did in 1998.

Eleanor Roosevelt’s time in the White House was fraught with dissent and difficulty from the outset; she and FDR took office in the midst of the Great Depression, which, in combination with her life experiences, shaped the way Eleanor acted as first lady. As historian Betty Boyd Caroli noted,

Surely such times [the Depression] called out for new approaches, and Eleanor Roosevelt complied on several fronts. She had hinted during the campaign that she and Franklin sometimes disagreed, but the real shocker was her announcement that she meant to keep—even if she became first lady— the job she had held while Franklin had served as New York’s governor. During his four years in the Albany state house, Eleanor had traveled down to New York City to teach three days a week at her school on East Sixty-Fifth Street, and she saw no reason why his transfer to Washington should alter her schedule or stop her from doing what she “enjoyed more than anything I have ever done.”

While working outside the home was a significant change to the notion of the traditional first lady the American people had known, Mrs. Roosevelt’s work was still within the realm of conventional employment for women during her time. Thus, while she sought to break the norm, she was not shattering it. Ultimately, as Caroli says, “Eleanor arranged for a leave of absence from her

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teaching, but she stubbornly continued her other professional activities, including lecturing and writing.²⁹ These public activities aligned the liberal first lady with the traditional notions of what was expected of the nation’s mother; public speaking engagements were permissible for a woman of her status so long as they adhered to the types of topics that Mrs. Roosevelt did. As communications scholar and prominent writer on first ladies Myra Gutin writes, “She took her campaign directly to the people, visiting poverty areas, jails, coal mines, farms, small towns, and major cities. She expressed her concern [about the Great Depression] in continual speeches, lectures, radio broadcasts, press conferences, and books and magazine articles. Americans received the unmistakable impression that here was a vigorous administration dedicated to eradicating the effects of the Depression.”³⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt’s active travelling and public speaking engagements set precedence for first ladies to come by aiding the president as an arm of his policies through active public engagement.

Parallels between Hillary Clinton and Eleanor Roosevelt are abundant, particularly in the way that both women worked alongside their husbands in the oval office. As Watson argues, “Perhaps Eleanor’s main contribution to her husband’s presidency was her function as his eyes and ears. Even though the President sometimes was annoyed with his wife’s ‘nagging’ on various issues – and this increased throughout his tenure in office – the President did respect her opinion, and the first lady felt free to disagree with him and offer her frank appraisal of political questions.”³¹ This is echoed by Caroli, who says Mrs. Roosevelt was well aware of the influence she had over the President, and, while publicly sought to dispel rumors of her active work, wrote many letters indicating her awareness and happiness that she enjoyed such a relationship with FDR. Much like Hillary later worked actively on healthcare legislation, in the words of Caroli, “Eleanor worked through every channel she could find” in order to acquire appointments to important committees for New Deal legislation, and additionally, Mrs. Roosevelt offered opinions that the President later passed as his own.³² Gutin argues, “The First Lady ‘was generally credited with responsibility for the creation of the NYA, the surplus food program for relief clients, the arts

²⁹ Ibid., 190.
and crafts section of the WPA, and resettlement and community projects such as Arthurdale’s” and that she pushed FDR to appoint women to high political office, despite Eleanor’s public denial of influence over the president.33 Eleanor Roosevelt, however, did not completely shatter the image of the first as her successor Hillary did. Mrs. Roosevelt maintained the traditional first lady notion by reserving the majority of her executive branch activism to behind closed doors, thus while breaking the image of a stay-at-home mother of her class standing, she did not go as far as those who followed her did to change the expectations of the American public.

Eleanor Roosevelt, much like her successor, dealt with private elements of her marriage while in the White House. While certainly not the first American president to take on a mistress, FDR may have been the first to have openly lived with his mistress, even allowing her to occupy a wing of the White House and to have Eleanor Roosevelt and his children interact with her on a frequent basis.34 The arrangement between Eleanor and Franklin had far preceded his presidency. The Roosevelt marriage came to a grinding halt in 1918 when Eleanor discovered his first affair.35 Following the forced end of that affair FDR met Marguerite (Missy) Lehand, who would remain with the president until her own untimely death in 1943.36 But much like her earlier European counterparts, Eleanor reached a point at which she was able to at least come to terms with her own marriage’s dissolution despite not being permitted to divorce for political and familial reasons. As noted by Elliot Roosevelt, Franklin and Eleanor’s son, “It was no great shock to discover that Missy shared a familial life in all its aspects with Father. What did surprise us was the later knowledge that Mother knew, too, and accepted the situation as a fact of life like the rest of us.”37 Gutin notes that Elliot Roosevelt said from the time of the disclosure of the relationship forward, “Eleanor became an independent woman with a life of her own. The marriage became a partnership in the truest sense of the word, for Franklin encouraged Eleanor to share his activities and public life” but no longer took FDR as a husband.38 Hillary’s predecessors coped with

35 Ibid., 172.
36 Ibid., 178.
37 Ibid., 174.
extramarital sex inside the White House in their own way, giving her all the more reason to see parallels between herself and the former-first lady Eleanor.

Jackie Kennedy was both traditional and liberal at the same time in terms of her first ladyship; she appeared the exemplary woman of her class status, raising her children and knowing when and where to speak, but she broke boundaries in terms of clothing and decoration that affected the White House to the present day. According to Gutin, “Various adjectives have been used to describe the Kennedy White House years. Words like vibrant, exhilarating, exciting, and exhausting are often employed, while sentimentalists prefer to think of the administration as ‘Camelot.’”[^39] Different from the days of the Great Depression when Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt campaigned for the presidency, Jackie and John Kennedy had to contend with a new aspect of media that changed the way the American people perceived the candidates, television. With the advent of television campaigns came a new role for the candidates’ wives; never before had the wives mattered so much in the run-up to the presidency. Jackie’s image served her well, especially as she was largely absent from the campaign trail due to her pregnancy. As Caroli argues, “If the woman whose husband would be president did not enjoy going to the people, she could perfect another campaign style which made them come to her. By remaining aloof – but glamorous and confident in her aloofness – she stirred up more interest than if she had mingled with crowds and hugged every child in sight.”[^40] While Jackie may not have had much in common with the American people given her elite upbringing, she acted a role that led them to love her and to view her in a traditional light that they loved. She maintained her distance from the public even once inside the East Wing, ultimately contributing the iconic image she is remembered for today. Caroli notes, “Old tensions about whether a president’s wife should stress humility in order to appeal to the people or set herself apart at a royal distance went all the way back to the Monroe administration. Jackie Kennedy quickly took her place in the elitist camp. Within a week of the inauguration, she had begun her campaign to upgrade the taste of the nation.”[^41] Beyond her elitist upbringing however, Jacqueline Kennedy also chose to keep a difference from official events because her vision of the first lady. Gutin writes,

[^41]: Ibid., 223.
Mrs. Kennedy did not see her role as an advisor to the President or as a politician. She stated her feelings on the topic when she told a reporter that the most important role for the First Lady was to take care of her husband so that he could be the best possible President. In another interview, Mrs. Kennedy explained that her official activities took away from her family and, “if I were to add political duties, I would have practically no time with my children and they are my first responsibility.”

This vision of the first lady differed sharply from that of Eleanor Roosevelt; Eleanor deemed political responsibilities as an integral part of the job she was then employed to do, whereas Jacqueline was lukewarm about these responsibilities as best. Mrs. Kennedy did however give the American people a new style, in both White House artwork and in her own fashion; an activity that was viewed as traditional because it was within the realm of the home. Her dedication to the home and herself, however, was not always positive. Caroli notes, “Most Americans…could read in any newspaper that the new president’s wife had little time for the luncheons and teas that typically filled a First Lady’s calendar. Citing obligations to her children, Jackie Kennedy simply refused to go. Sometimes she sent her husband or her secretary or enlisted the vice-president’s wife, but she adamantly preserved most of her time for herself. Her refusals to appear caused considerable embarrassment to those left with the task left of inventing excuses for her.” Reporters, however begrudged by this removal from tradition, refused to publish anything particularly negative about Mrs. Kennedy. The fine line of how much home life was traditional, though, was set in the minds of the press if not the American people and its expectations were not met.

Extramarital sex plagued the White House, too, for Jackie Kennedy. Perhaps the most well known American president for his oval office infidelities prior to President Clinton is John F. Kennedy. Most Americans associate Marilyn Monroe with JFK and his bold manliness, however his liaison with Judith Campbell may have been more problematic for his administration, as Campbell was also the mistress to a known mobster. What was different about Kennedy’s affairs however from those of FDR was the potential for heightened negative media attention in the era of increased television news. This was cause for concern for the President’s staff, as reporters would


be keen to hone in on stories that would lead to increased readership. One such example cited by journalist Shelley Ross, “When JFK’s recklessness was at its peak, [Campbell] visited him in the White House and swam in the pool. JFK even invited her on to Air Force One.”

Given that the White House Press Corps had access to areas surrounding these meeting locations, there was great potential for a leaked story about a Presidential infidelity. Having access to restricted areas and events provided the possibility that the press would find out about what JFK was up to in his “free time,” therefore “outing” the President’s adulterous and less-than-Christian actions in a most public and detrimental way for the administration. With television media’s presence in American life in the 1960s comparable to the Internet in daily American life in 1998, the first Catholic President’s mob-related infidelities had administration ruining potential at the same level as President Clinton’s adulterous liaison.

Barbara Bush, Hillary’s most recent predecessor, most clearly set the expectations for how a first lady was to act. As presidential biographers Daniel Diller and Stephen Robertson wrote, “Mrs. Bush…traveled widely as first lady, visiting sixty-eight countries, and she was very active in her social duties, hosting almost twelve hundred events while attending more than more than eleven hundred other in her four years. These efforts, with her grandmotherly appearance, made her immensely popular, so much so, in fact, that Good Housekeeping named her to its list of most admired Americas for four straight years, and another poll declared her to be the world’s most popular woman.” Her age, 64 when she and George H.W. Bush won the presidency, helped to give the American people a mature image of the first lady; she was one who had already raised her children and had lived a traditional home life while her husband acted as the breadwinner.

According to Watson,

Family life for Barbara Bush was in many ways quite conventional. She had six children… Barbara ran the Bush household, as her husband was frequently away from home. She did not take an active role in his career, but she was supportive and, during his service in Congress, wrote a regular column for his constituents. Barbara also taught Sunday school and supported causes like the United Way.


While these traditional, family based values continued when George H.W. and Barbara Bush came to the White House, she parlayed her supportive role into the job of the first lady via her official duties. According to Gutin,

Mrs. Bush enjoyed the ceremonial part of her position. Her attendance at hundreds of events made her a familiar presence to the American people. Reading to children, celebrating the centennial of the National Zoo, lighting the national Christmas tree, lighting a candle in the White House for AIDS victims, or throwing out the first pitch at a World Series game gave people the sense that the first lady was a good sport, always working, and she traveled everywhere.49

In stark contrast to Jacqueline Kennedy, Mrs. Bush fully embraced the ceremonial aspects of the office of the first lady, despite the hectic schedule that it meant she maintained. This was fresh in the minds of Americans as Hillary Clinton took over the East Wing; influence over the president was acceptable, but it was expected that the ceremonial aspects of the job would take precedence as they did with Barbara Bush.50 While Jackie Kennedy and Eleanor Roosevelt had maintained some traditional elements to their first lady hood, Barbara Bush encompassed all the elements that made up the American people’s expectations; she was a homemaker whose first priority were her children, she was not overly involved in her husband’s career, and she was apt at maintaining a first lady’s traditional calendar of events. All of these gendered expectations became cemented in the image of the first lady from the moment Mrs. Bush took over the East Wing and were passed on to Hillary Clinton in 1992.

The image of the first lady, while encountering some changes along the way, became the notion of conservative, traditionalism that the American people expected by the time Hillary Clinton came to the White House in 1992. Although two of her predecessors had also faced extramarital sex, neither was forced to deal with it in the national, 24-hour news media like Hillary. Thus, after the first baby boomer, first lady broke with the expectations of the American people she again stepped into new territory that the public was uncertain how to interpret, much in the same way they were uncertain how best to deal with the first lady who would not give in to their traditional, motherly desires.


50 Ibid., 59.
The Press & Hillary – A Relationship In the Trenches

Hillary Clinton never enjoyed a particularly pleasant relationship with the press. From the time she was the first lady of Arkansas, she encountered pushback from those who interpreted her actions to be out of character with the implicitly gendered expectations that were cast upon her. The press’ relationship with Hillary can be traced to four specific moments during the 1992 campaign and first term in the White House where she overstepped the line of traditionally acceptable first lady actions, as embodied by her predecessors. As a career driven woman, she faced particularly firm resistance during the 1992 campaign that continued throughout her time in the White House. That campaign took place during the same year in which an unprecedented number of women were elected to Congress, 29 between both the House of Representatives and the Senate, leading to its later reference as the “Year of the Woman.” Hillary’s infamous comments on the campaign trail, “I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas,” and less than refined style added further fury to those who believed HRC was too liberal for the first lady position compared Mrs. Bush, who currently controlled the East Wing. Culminating with her first term channeling of Eleanor Roosevelt’s spirit to help her through difficult times, the press spurned HRC; she had broken with tradition too many times to be the first mother the nation expected.

In the words of Alicia Mundy, then-writer for Mediaweek, “If you’re for her, she’s a cross between Mary Queen of Scots and St. Joan of Arc on the way to their public executions. If you’re against her, she’s an evil witch from Salem who should go down in flames. Either way, it seems that Hillary Clinton just keeps getting burned.” Mediaweek’s representation of how female reporters thought Hillary Clinton viewed her press coverage was likely quite accurate. Hillary had never looked the part of the doting wife by public standards; the fact that she had a fulltime day job was an issue in and of itself. As HRC later said, “While I was working on lawsuits at Rose and taking on child advocacy cases pro bono, I was also learning about the expectations and unspoken mores of life in the South.” From the outset, Hillary was not adhering to the standards that others had of her; she was a lawyer while her husband worked fulltime. Working outside the home in the

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1970s in the south was a hard enough case to make to the general public, let alone at a high paying and prestigious job like Rose Law Firm. As Bernstein writes about the 1978 campaign for Bill Clinton’s initial term as governor, “As would increasingly become the case over the next twenty years, Hillary was seen by many as a polarizing figure. For the first time, she became the object of intense dislike and verbal abuse. Clinton’s opponents criticized him for having a wife with a career – a lawyer to boot – who was so independent-minded that she wouldn’t take her husband’s name.” As Bernstein foreshadows, having an independently successful career and rejecting traditionally gendered notions, such as taking her husband’s last name were issues that prevailed long after the 1978 gubernatorial elections in Arkansas; it became an issue for the entire nation.

Hillary’s career outside the home became the source of criticism in the midst of the campaign; when compared to the doting wife Mrs. Bush, it seemed to hardly need explaining. While Chelsea Clinton was growing up, her mother was not at home full-time caring for her like Barbara had been for the Bush Children. As Bernstein notes, “Hillary took four months off from her job at the Rose Law Firm after Chelsea was born but continued to travel for board meetings and other responsibilities outside the state….Six weeks after giving birth, Hillary went to Memphis and left Chelsea with Peach Pietrafesa, a friend from Wellesley days whose husband had gone to work in Bill’s office.” This early decision to continue to work despite the birth of her child, something many at the Rose Law Firm did not expect to occur, continued as Chelsea’s childhood continued. The nation’s image of the first lady as first mother was threatened by the idea of a first lady who not just worked outside the home, but who was incredibly successful at that work.

Felicity Barringer, then-staff writer for the New York Times, opened a piece in December 1992 discussing the Office of the First lady with the following: “In Victorian households, women’s work was ‘the distaff side,’ a phrase evoking medieval images of bent backs, spinning wheels, and flax. In White Housespeak, generic tongue of Presidential aides of all parties, the equivalent is ‘the East Wing.’ The words connote a bevy of flower arrangers, letter writers and efficient women who know the make of the White House china, the origins of the White House Christmas tree and the foible of the Presidential pets.” Ringing of latent references to Barbara Bush and her many

55 Ibid., 152-153.
56 Ibid., 153.
traditional predecessors, Barringer set up the gendered stage that she compared Hillary Clinton to, showing how her brand of first ladyship was inferior to that of the traditional Mrs. Bush. “While Mrs. Clinton has come to symbolize the strong, independent women of the late 20th century, the office from which she will shape her tenure is born of two traditions. It was created to serve the needs of gentility and elegance, but since the days of Eleanor Roosevelt has often served as a bully pit for smart women with something to say.” While the office provided women like HRC the opportunity to show their intelligence, she was not in need of such an opportunity. Rather, Hillary lacked sufficiently honed gendered skills of “gentility and elegance” that the office was also created to serve. She had limited experience in homemaking because she had spent her adult life working outside the home instead of solely creating an environment for her husband to retreat from the workplace. The press was already leery of what would come from the East Wing, seeing the writing on the wall that this first ladyship would be like none they had known before.

Earlier during the 1992 campaign Hillary was directly questioned about her career, leading to the second moment where she lost the faith of the press in her ability to run the East Wing. In Chicago while campaigning for the Illinois primary, Hillary became a victim of leading press questions. When reporters asked her if her time at the Rose Law Firm was a conflict of interest as they did work for the Governor’s office, and her husband was Governor, the answer turned into Hillary’s personal defense of her profession. As Hillary later recounted the events, “Then came the reporter’s follow-up – about whether I could have avoided an appearance of conflict of interest when my husband was Governor. ‘I wish that were true…You know, I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life.’” As Hillary later wrote, “Thirteen minutes after I answered the question, a story ran on the AP wire. CNN quickly aired one, too, and followed with an afternoon segment that made little reference to the initial question.” One brief moment had become a news story. Hillary had reminded press corps, once again, that she did not, in fact, embody the traditionally defined ideas of homemaking that prior first ladies had. Hillary did not simply appear to break the mold of femininity on the surface; she broke it all the way to its core.

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
Rather than stay home and have cookies and teas with other women, HRC desired to go out into the workplace, in her case a workplace dominated by men, and discuss politics. But it was not simply that Hillary did not stay at home as other, more traditional, women might; rather, it was the level of disdain she appeared to have for those who chose this path that made the news story that day. As Hillary later wrote, “It turned into a story about my alleged callousness toward stay-at-home mothers…Critics were venomous. One letter referred to me as the Antichrist, and another said I was an insult to American motherhood.” HRC had hit a nerve with the American public, as aided by the media in asking the question and reporting on it widely.

The press, already disenchanted with the relatively private first lady, wrote stories that took the “cookies and teas” out of context to paint her in a specific, anti-traditionalist light, which helped the American people to see her in a newly negative way. William Safire, long-time political columnist for the New York Times, famously wrote his essay “The Hillary Problem” following HRC’s remarks. Safire said,

The problem is not that Hillary Clinton, successful lawyer and feminist, is coming across as a cunning political animal, threatening to insecure male voters. On the contrary, she is coming across as a political bumbler by appearing to show contempt for women who work at home….Mrs. Clinton’s…outbreak of foot-in-mouth disease…betrayed ignorance of the fundamentals of campaigning: You do not defend yourself from a conflict-of-interest charge by insulting a large segment of the voting public.

As Safire indicated, HRC did insult many women with her comments. The Washington Post’s March 28, 1992 letter to the editor section of the paper, two days following Safire’s essay in the Times, was wrought with entries from readers who were outright appalled at Hillary’s comments as reported. One woman, Anne Byrnes, wrote “Hillary Clinton’s attitude seems to me to reflect an attitude of society that women such as myself don’t ‘work’ – we stay at home. Let me assure her that I have never worked harder in my life….All that I ask is that the stay-at-home decision of women like myself receives the respect it deserves – at least from a woman who claims to be a children’s advocate and whose husband aspires to be president.” Other readers were more openly outraged than Byrnes, who merely wanted to call attention to the contradictions Hillary and Bill

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Clinton were campaigning on in light of such an offensive comment. Another reader, Nancy Schrank, wrote,

As one of many women who chose to be a wife, mother and homemaker, I would like to explain to Hillary Clinton the benefits of such a career…[In the 1960s and 70s] Children came home after school to eat those cookies and to tell Mom what they learned that day, not carrying a “latchkey” with instructions to call Mom at the office and let her know they made it safely into the (empty) house. …Some of the blessings associated with this career were healthy, non-delinquent children, which I’m sure pales by comparison to “power lunches” or “ego gratification.”

Women like Schrank were more than upset, they were furious at Hillary’s statements. With this one comment, Hillary ostracized the press and the American people. She not only broke the gendered expectations of the first lady by having her own successful career outside the home, but in the way the press reported her remarks Hillary appeared to disdain any woman who did not chose the same for herself.

The “cookies and teas” comment brought to light just how little Hillary had in common with many American women. Shawn Parry-Giles, a communications scholar, argues, “As the campaign progressed, Hillary Clinton’s level of talk seemed to inspire even further indignation, which positioned her as a clear anomaly without historical precedent. Drawing on the cookies and teas stock frame to visually evidence Clinton’s extraordinary outspokenness, Andrea Mitchell of NBC News asserted that ‘even in an age when other candidate’s wives have a full-time career, this political wife is something different.’” Hillary pioneered a new type of potential first lady, and the press was determined to find out if she was fit for America. Just as then-Candidate Bill Clinton had to prove himself to the American voters, Hillary had to prove her worth to the people she would represent. Hillary later wrote, “While Bill talked about social change, I embodied it. I had my own opinions, interests, and profession. For better or worse, I was outspoken. I represented a fundamental change in the way women functioned in our society. And if my husband won, I would be filling a position in which the duties were not spelled out, but the performance was judged by everybody.”

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Office, Hillary was campaigning as the first baby boomer feminist to represent America, thus shattering gendered expectations embedded in the East Wing.

This went beyond the career however. It also went to the heart of appearance, something that had been an issue for her up to and during the campaign and ultimately served as the one point she and her staff were willing to compromise on and largely cede to public opinion. Even prior to her official taking of residence in Fayetteville, Arkansas Hillary’s nontraditional style made a statement to be remembered, where she came in wearing “‘one of those long dark skirts and black stockings and horn-rimmed glasses.’” As Bernstein notes, “Her taste in clothes was something that people who met her over the next twenty years always seemed to comment on.”68 Hillary later wrote, “[D]uring the campaign, some of my friends began a mission to spruce up my appearance. They brought me racks of clothes to try on, and they told me the headband had to go. What they understood, and I didn’t, was that a First Lady’s appearance matters. I was no longer representing only myself. I was asking the American people to let me represent them in a role that has conveyed everything from glamour to motherly comfort.”69 In order for Hillary to move gracefully into the Office of the First Lady, she would have to prove her authenticity on all levels, including in areas that seemed inconsequential at the moment such as her clothing. After the New Year, the press took even greater interest in the impending changing of the guard at the White House and ran special pieces on Hillary in an attempt to learn as much about the relatively private soon to be first lady. Martha Sherrill, a longtime writer for The Washington Post, wrote a two part piece titled “The Retooling Of the Political Wife” on Hillary that outlined the difficulties she faced as a career woman entering an office where it mattered what she looked like. From the time she had been a lawyer, Hillary had resisted traditionally stylish attire and opted for whatever was practical and comfortable. This became the object of scrutiny however when compared to the prim and polished Barbara Bush. As Sherrill wrote,

The headbands – velvets, tortoise-shells and red ones – why did the world come to focus so intensely on the tiptop of Hillary Clinton’s head?...The headbands – why? – came to mean so much, to voters, to the media. Just another reminder, that, no matter what feminists say, the way you look – if you’re a woman – is still an overriding factor?...Some people didn’t know what to make of Hillary Clinton. She confused them. She wasn’t just a mother or a wife or a lawyer. She made people uneasy, nervous. Her hair was sending some message,


but the message was unclear. People had feelings about strong women and wronged wives. And the headbands, well, suddenly they became a cathexis, imbued with powerful, deep, troublesome meaning.  

Figure 1: Hillary Rodham Clinton at the *60 Minutes* interview January 26, 1992, with headband and bangs before makeover.  

Figure 2: Cover of *Newsweek* from December 28, 1992, with Hillary Rodham Clinton, without headband but with bangs.  

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The hair and headbands meant so much more than Hillary, then, understood. They held deeper meaning and took on the angst of the American people who expected their first lady to be primped and prepped for the day, not comfortably tossing her hair behind a headband because it was most convenient. According to Pew Research Institute polling, Hillary Clinton’s approval rating was at a low of 38 percent in March 1992 after the 60 Minutes interview pictured in Figure 1, rose to 57 percent in November 1992 just before the Newsweek cover pictured in Figure 2, and had fallen slightly to 53 percent in June 1996 just before the Time cover pictured in Figure 3, which can be partially attributed to events in the Whitewater scandal. Gallup’s polling numbers reflect these same trends. Ultimately, the first lady’s staff and friends intervened in order to save her from the press and the people’s kiss of death by revamping her image to place her more in line with traditionally defined first lady appearances. Sherrill wrote, “She [Hillary] wanted people to listen to her, listen to her husband, and quit thinking they knew who she was. Her hair was cut shorter and bangs were cut, to avoid having to use the dreaded headband. Later, she…picked out some toned-

73 *Time*, July 1, 1996, [http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19960701,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19960701,00.html).


down clothes on a trip to New Jersey – more subdued colors, smaller earrings.” The “pit crew” of HRC decided that style and image was the one place where they were willing to compromise and listen to the demands of the press and the people; by restyling Hillary in more traditional ways, they avoided further pushback on the trivial issue of how she looked and instead was able to focus on the things HRC was saying that caused resentment instead.

The Office of the First Lady proved to be no more comforting than the campaign trail, however, as once in office Hillary faced a new barrage of attacks that would continue for the duration of her time in the White House. As articulated by a Wall Street Journal staffer quoted in the 1996 Mediaweek piece highlighting the two differing perspectives of Hillary in the media:

I remember talking to many of my regular sources the day after the election in 1992… These are upper-middle-class, educated GOP men, including politicians, who are scrupulous in how they speak to or about their female colleagues and who never say anything casually derogatory to a female reporter. Suddenly, they all turned into rednecks. Jokes they never would have repeated before-about women, lesbians, certainly any First Lady—was all okay with them to let loose once Clinton was elected.

While the press may have fixated on Hillary’s less than cookie-cutter image of the first lady during the campaign, something had gone terribly off track for Hillary’s public image that she had fought so hard to control for the past year.

Following the campaign, conservative men and the conservatively informed press started taking a firm stand against Hillary. The Mediaweek piece reported, “Several female reporters complain that the Journal has a Hillary fixation… When you have editors actively engaged in seeking out gossip about the First Lady innuendo about her personal life—you have to wonder how accurate their so-called news stories are. [sic]” Even fellow reporters began to feel that the types of news pieces that were being written were unfair. From the time of the campaign to inauguration day, something had happened; although some whisperings of man-hating and other stereotypically feminist comments had existed during the campaign, media coverage had not previously stooped to the level of personal insults. In officially becoming the first lady, Hillary had opened herself up to the firestorm of press coverage that accompanied her for the remainder of Bill’s time in office.

78 Ibid.
Hillary later recalled, “I had agreed to grant my first newspaper interview as First Lady to Marian Burros of The New York Times … To me, the story and photo seemed harmless enough, but they inspired a lot of commentary. The White House Press Corps was not happy that I had granted an exclusive interview to a reporter whose beat was not White House politics.”

The fourth moment where Hillary lost the faith of the press and the American people occurred midway into her tenure at the White House, following comments revolving around Eleanor Roosevelt and her admiration for the late first lady. This caused Hillary’s staff great grief, as they continued to wage a war over the legitimacy of the first lady’s non-traditional image. Beginning in June 1996 headlines started to appear insinuating that the first lady was seeking the assistance of clairvoyant so that she could speak with Eleanor Roosevelt. As New York Times writer Douglas Martin reported, “Lately Mrs. Roosevelt has been most in the news as a result of conversations with the First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, says she has with her as an exercise in dealing with First Lady pressures.”

Mary McGrory, writer for The Washington Post, wrote “Hillary Clinton’s worshipful staff is protesting that the scene described by Bob Woodward in excerpts from ‘The Choice’ was not as it seemed. Clinton, say the ladies of her court, did not lean back in her chair and close her eyes to commune with Eleanor Roosevelt because she was under the spell of Jean Houseton, co-director of the Foundation for Mind Research; she was being a ‘good sport.’” Skeptical of believing anything that the East Wing offered when defending their leader, the press was more apt to listen to the questionable writings of those like Bob Woodward because Hillary had already broken so many norms, it would be unsurprising for her to speak to the dead as well. There was no telling what to expect from HRC’s brand of first ladyship.

Those close to Hillary were aware of the way she was being portrayed in the press, and acted when the moment presented itself. Following the discussion of Hillary’s “beyond the grave” conversations, Director of Communications and then-current campaign manager Ann Lewis and close personal friend of the Clintons and specialist in Arkansas politics Diane Blair previewed a news piece that ridiculed the press for its treatment of HRC. Molly Shanley, a professor of political

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science, and Patricia Duane Lichtenberg, then-chair of the 1996 Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal Ceremony and board member of the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill, submitted a piece to Lewis and Blair for their thoughts. Appreciative and acutely aware of the fine line the first lady must walk between aggressive feminist and traditional first mother, Blair wrote “The only modification we suggest is one of tone, i.e. not being quite so defensive about Hillary and women as victims.”82 Blair understood that the original words Shanley and Lichtenberg sent were warranted, that women and Hillary in particular were being cast in a particularly negative light. However, ever the present-minded politician, Blair advised that everyone involved in HRC’s staff, including Shanley and Lichtenberg in this moment, maintain a balanced, non-defensive public perspective in order to keep from damaging the first lady’s delicate position in the public’s mind.

Shanley and Lichtenberg’s piece specifically sought to defend Mrs. Clinton’s admiration of former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. This led to the press’ exploitation, according to Shanley and Lichtenberg, of Hillary’s actions when it began publishing stories insinuating that the first lady had been summoning Eleanor and other dead figures to advise her in the White House. As Shanley and Lichtenberg wrote, “Even in this election year marked by unprecedented personal attacks on the First Lady, the feeding frenzy about Hillary Rodham Clinton’s imagined conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt in the White House solarium is stunning [revealing more about the contemporary press than about Mrs. Clinton.]”83 These bracketed words, those hand written by Blair after the fact, temper the original tone of the piece; while Shanley and Lichtenberg were happy to pass blame to a non-specific group, thus leaving more people responsible for the negative images of the first lady, the bracketed words of Blair narrow the piece to a specific target, the press. Blair knew that, given the desire to market the piece in the New York Times or other national news outlets, by leaving the door too open there was a significant possibility of negatively affecting Hillary’s image while trying to gain sympathy. Blair went on to further edit the piece, removing an entire paragraph including, “It is also a not-so-subtle denigration of the efforts of all women who aspire to positions of leadership, and a not-so-benign substitute of titillation for serious political discussion.”84 This sentence, Blair understood, would kill all possible benefit of

82 Letter and edited article from Diane Blair to Molly Shanley and Patricia Duane Lichtenberg, July 8. Diane Blair Papers, series 3, subseries 3, box 1, folder 3. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
the piece. Despite its truthfulness, and Blair likely being sympathetic to the view it presented in the midst of a campaign, the damage it could wage on the carefully constructed work done to make the first lady appear less aggressive made it impractical.

Shanley and Lichtenberg did, however, pass Blair’s approval when they argued for the inequality the press showed the first lady over her male counterparts in the political arena. They argued, “Why should something that is normal—indeed expected—of men in positions of leadership, and something that Mrs. Clinton has openly and publicly referred to, get converted into stories of secret White House sessions with a suspect spiritual guru? The attempts to marginalize Hillary Clinton—to paint her as a flake and a weirdo—also serve a more insidious purpose.”

Here Shanley, Lichtenberg, Blair, and Lewis were on the same page; the press needed to be called out on their heightened standards for women, particularly HRC, who were acting no differently than men in similar scenarios. There were no stories being written about male political actors channeling their dead idols in times of need. Rather, gendered stereotypes like those Hillary had been up against since the 1992 presidential campaign were being employed. When Hillary did not fit the traditional image of her gender in the first lady role, the press made a story out of it in every way possible; tradition dictated certain gendered standards on Hillary Clinton, ones that she did not embody and therefore was scrutinized extensively for her breaking of the accepted mold.

HRC’s purported involvement in these events taken did not justify the response she received from the media, which overlooked her many accomplishments. As Shanley and Lichtenberg argued, “Hillary Clinton’s long career of working for children’s welfare is overshadowed by her supposed venture into the occult. Eleanor Roosevelt’s efforts of behalf of the oppressed are forgotten.” Although Blair sought to strike the next powerful line, “Caricaturing these women not only trivializes their accomplishments, but serves as a warning to all women who would aspire to leadership and the public eye, ‘Watch out, lady, we can do this to you, too.’”

The overwhelming sentiment of the article stood unchanged. HRC had faced unprecedented scrutiny from the press for no reason other than the first baby boomer, first lady broke with tradition and instead voiced herself as a forthright woman in the political arena from the Office of the First

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86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.
Lady. Hillary’s new definition of the first lady as independent and opinionated challenged the image of the nation’s mother as encapsulated in the role, and became the defining test of her tenure in the White House.

**The Scandal Breaks – Hillary on Defense**

January 21, 1998 started a long week for those in the Clinton administration, with no exception for Hillary Rodham Clinton, when the Lewinsky scandal broke news headlines across the globe. Despite six long years of battling back and forth with the press over various issues ranging from her image to her policy, the newspaper headlines that week hit in a new way. In addition to the President’s State of the Union address to be given that week, cover stories that week included “Sex allegations about President Bill Clinton causing turmoil among Democrats,”88 “Former intern would tell of Clinton affair in exchange for immunity, lawyers report,”89 “Clinton's lawyers scramble to learn details of inquiry,”90 “How a single telephone call was the catalyst for a crisis,”91 “White House acts to contain furor as concern grows,”92 and “Clinton's poll numbers fall, but Americans resist final judgment.”93 The President’s extramarital affairs had made it off Drudge Report and onto the pages of the mainstream press. Hillary once again was in the difficult position of defending allegations pertaining to her husband’s sexual indiscretions. Most notably, just six years prior she had told the nation that she would stand by her man because she loved and respected him on a nationally televised interview despite his adulterous relationship with Gennifer Flowers.94 When interviewer Steve Kroft said that most Americans would find it admirable that the

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Clintons had reached an understanding and agreement about Bill’s infidelities, Bill shot back that this was a marriage and not an understanding or arrangement. Then came Hillary’s oft-quoted words: “You know, I’m not sitting here, some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette. I’m sitting here because I love him and I respect him and I honor what he’s been through and what we’ve been through together. And you know, if that’s not enough for people, then heck, don’t vote for him.”

Hillary later wrote that she meant to refer to Tammy Wynette’s hit song “Stand By Your Man,” not the woman herself, and that because she had not been careful in the words she chose in the moment of the interview she later regretted that moment. Instead of repeating the missteps taken with the press in 1992, Hillary carefully chose her media appearances and attempted to script herself to keep from rehashing the same arguments; Hillary’s battle with traditionally accepted female roles waged on with a new vigor in the wake of the President’s clash with “family values”. In light of his alleged extramarital affair, which inserted sex with a woman outside the confines of marriage thus disrupting the long held notion of the nuclear family, HRC could not afford to further disrupt other family values by being the overtly independent minded woman, which clashed with the postwar images of the faithful wife and mother, as she had in the past.

According to a March 2007 Pew Research Center study, NBC’s Today show had 6.1 percent of households watching its programming, far more viewers than its ABC or CBS morning show counterparts. With more than double the number of morning news viewers than any other network, Today was where many celebrities and politicians chose to give morning interviews. Given these ratings, HRC first responded to the allegations against her husband on this program. On January 27, many Americans woke up to Hillary Clinton on their television screens as they tuned into Today, and saw the first lady in an aggressive and defensive light for the first time since the campaign, thus reinvigorating attacks against her authenticity as a first mother and first lady. In her autobiography Hillary wrote about the Today interview, saying, “The next day was the State of the Union Address, and I kept a long-scheduled commitment to go to New York to appear on the Today show that morning. I would have rather had a root canal, but a cancellation would have

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96 Ibid., 108.
created its own avalanche of speculation.”  

The first lady understood the stakes in this interview; both she and her husband were on trial for their non-traditional actions in the White House, and to back out at a late hour would be as detrimental as a poorly phrased statement like that in the 1992 interview.

Hillary came to the interview projecting a sense of confidence that said she was there for one purpose only; to do the interview she was contractually bound to complete. She was seated across from Matt Lauer for the interview in a serious, yet simple, brown pantsuit and gold eagle pin that spoke to her training as a lawyer; it was an outfit which left little to be argued with and was certainly within the confines of traditional attire. HRC had learned during the campaign that the clothes she wore mattered a great deal, and the suit she wore that day told the American people that while she was the first lady, she meant business and had no intention of discussing anything lighthearted. Further, Hillary showed no intention of veering off her carefully defined course of action for the day. She had come to discuss the State of the Union, likely knowing that the primary focus of the interview would be the allegations against the President. Very soon into the interview, Lauer asked Hillary what the nature of the relationship between President Clinton and Monica was and if the President had spoken to Hillary about this. Hillary took to her defensive mode in her response to this question; she spoke to her experience with scandalous accusations, drawing from not only the allegations that had occurred when they lived in Arkansas but also from the 1992 election and the Whitewater investigation. The first lady further discussed how because the event had just broken into the mainstream news cycles, that they were in the midst of a “feeding frenzy.” This meant that rumors and innuendo were rampant in the media and popular culture, and Hillary’s advice to America was to sit back, be patient, and wait for the truth to come out.  

When pressed for a more specific answer, Hillary refused. She merely reiterated that she believed her husband had told the truth to the American people. Hillary rejected Lauer’s attempt be lead into places in this interview that she did not wish to go, and she did not make the fatal mistakes that she had made previously. She did not comment directly on the nature of the President and Ms. Lewinsky’s relationship beyond supporting her husband’s statements as being truthful. Because she was not willing to answer the questions sufficiently for the interviewer, Hillary became the aggressive

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defender of her husband and was, yet again, not reflective of the traditional and authentic first lady that the American people were longing for.

As the interview progressed, Hillary went from appearing relatively comfortable and in control of the situation, to utterly and completely frazzled; she was carefully treading a fine line between defending her husband from critical accusations and beginning a political firestorm of her own where she was not only too liberal for the American people’s perception of a first lady but also their personal politics. Several minutes later in the interview Lauer noted that James Carville, a trusted friend and advisor to the administration, had said, “This is war between the President and Kenneth Starr.” Lauer then went on to attempt to corroborate what he had heard, saying that, “You have said, I understand, to some close friends, that this is the last great battle, and that one side or the other is going down here.” Hillary, laughing uncomfortably, noted that she did not think that she had been quite so dramatic but that she did feel that given the repeated actors from previous events that there was a larger story here. She went on to say, “The great story here for anyone willing to write about it is this vast, right wing conspiracy that has been conspiring against my husband since the day he announced for president.” Hillary was left with no other option than to respond to the question that misrepresented her previous comments, and opened the door to the next great quote for the media.

By the time Lauer asked the question, “Has your husband though, through some of his actions, possibly made it easier for those people [his right-wing political opponents] to attack him?” Hillary was unable to even remotely hide her discomfort. She leaned her hand into her palm as she started to speak, soon after replacing the same hand under her chin, and then again moved it out of the shot all together. All the while she was recounting yet another story of how the President had been framed, time and time again, by his political opponents when there had been no other tactic left to use against him. If Hillary had been uncomfortable with that question however, it was about to get worse when Lauer forced the first lady to open Pandora’s box and answer the question that the White House would have to defend for the next year.

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
Lauer: Let me take you and your husband out of this for a second. Bill and Hillary Clinton aren’t involved in this story. If an American president had an adulterous liaison in the White House and lied to cover it up, should the American people ask for his resignation?

Clinton: Well they should certainly be concerned about it.

Lauer: Should they ask for his resignation?

Clinton: If all that were proven true, I think that would be a very serious offense. That is not going to be proven true. I think that we’re going to find some other things, and when all of this is put into context, and we really look at the people involved here, look at their motivations, look at their backgrounds, look at their past behavior, some folks are going to have a lot to answer for.\textsuperscript{103}

In the span of one minute, Hillary made the statement that the media would fixate on for decades to come. While acting as her husband’s most credible defender, she had forgotten to not say anything specific. Instead, she had given the media and her right wing critics something to hang their hats on. As Hillary later wrote, “Sure enough, the ‘vast conspiracy’ line got Starr’s attention. He took the unusual step of firing off a statement complaining that I had cast aspersions on his motives…My comment seemed to have touched a nerve. Looking back, I see that I might have phrased my point more artfully, but I stand by the characterization of Starr’s investigation.”\textsuperscript{104} Hillary’s attempt to stay relatively neutral ultimately failed, leaving her appearing as aggressive and quick to act on emotion instead of gentile and poised like former first lady Barbara Bush who she was so often compared against. Instead of appearing calm, cool, collected, and conservative, HRC appeared as though she could not restrain herself from jumping to the head of the defense team for the President, a position that she had taken up during the 1992 campaign as well as in Arkansas. Where there was a strategy to be made to ensure Bill Clinton’s political success, as there was following the 1980 gubernatorial race loss in Arkansas, Hillary Clinton was an integral member of the team; there was little reason to believe based on her defensive reaction to these new allegations that she would take any other position.\textsuperscript{105}


\textsuperscript{104} Hillary Rodham Clinton, \textit{Living History}, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 446.

Having no predecessor’s experience to base her actions on, Hillary struggled to toe the line between the forward and active first lady role she had always played and the traditional first lady Lauer was leading to answer questions as in order to ensure that her public image would not continue to drop.

Hillary later wrote, “There is no training manual for First Ladies. You get the job because the man you married becomes President. Each of my predecessors brought to the White House her own attitudes and expectations, likes and dislikes, dreams and doubts. Each carved out a role that reflected her own interests and style and that balanced the needs of her husband, family, and

Figure 4 & 5: Pew Research Center’s polling on HRC’s favorability.106

country. So would I.”107 Although reflecting on her time entering the White House six years prior, the last few minutes of her NBC interview that morning reflected Hillary’s controversial first lady role better than perhaps any other moment in the last six years. Migrating from a brief inquiry about Chelsea, an attempt to guide the conversation back to personal topics the first lady spoke about to the press on a more frequent basis than the defense of her husband’s alleged infidelities, Lauer finally allowed Hillary to discuss what the interview had initially been scheduled for in the first place; the State of the Union address that was to be given that evening. Finally Hillary was visibly relaxed, as she slipped into her comfortable role of managing the President’s public image on policy, not personal grounds. She talked about the administration’s work and plans for the new millennium as well as the bipartisan child care policy that had been much talked about before the week’s events had occurred. The damage of her appearance, in her inability to control herself, had already been done, and she moved quickly into this new phase of the conversation with an air of confidence reminiscent of how she began the interview. The final question Lauer posed, “Do you think it’s all been worth it?” summed up the week, the previous six years, and the Clintons’ joint political lives succinctly.

I do. It’s been a grueling ordeal but I think about it in two ways. I think the country has been better off because my husband has been president. I think the economy, the crime rate, a lot of the social problems were finally addressed with a smart strategy and we’ve seen the results…. He is on the side of the American people. So when I balance what he’s accomplished and the hope he’s given to people and the way the economy has created opportunities for people against all of the challenges we’ve been through personally, it is worth it. 108

No matter how worthwhile the presidency had been thus far, the impact on Hillary Clinton’s daily life could not be understated; every move she made mattered greatly and even the slightest falter was held against her in the long run when considering her authenticity as a traditional first lady. Though her favorability numbers, as viewed in Figures 4 and 5 show, had been lower in 1996 and 1997, a little more than a month following the Today interview her favorability ratings increased substantially, suggesting that whatever missteps she had made, including her “right wing conspiracy” comments, that the interview had positively shaped public opinion of the first lady.

This moment was HRC’s only interview during the 1998 year specifically addressing the allegations her husband faced. After appearing aggressive and far from the traditional first lady that the American people were used to, Hillary threw herself into the administration’s policy agenda in the coming weeks and months. It was no longer relevant, at that moment, what Hillary had to say about the allegations, for many Americans had assumptions – both positive and negative, as indicated by her favorability ratings, which continued to rise following the Today interview – about the first lady’s appearance on Today and would employ them moving forward to everything she did during her remaining time in the White House. Years after the scandal, Elizabeth Kolbert, a writer for The New Yorker, argued “We assume that female politicians will be purer of motive than their male counterparts, more driven by empathy and issues than by personal ambition." What Today viewers found out, however, was that this particular female politician was driven at least as much by her personal ambition to move past the allegations, whatever her reasons were, as much as any male politician. In that initial public defense Hillary was not just the first lady, but also a lawyer, a wife, a mother, and perhaps above all else an experienced politician. Given her past experiences, she had one opportunity to put the administration’s perspective in the news before it was swallowed by the waves of news stories to follow. In that moment, she put on her defensive gear in the form of a brown pantsuit and went to work. According to Parry-Giles, “Since 1992, Clinton had been portrayed as the colder, harder-edged feminist rather than the warm and graceful woman more consonant with first lady comportment." It should not be surprising, then, in a stressful public interview many saw Hillary in the same cold and calculated way they had always seen her. This perception however fails to take into account the type of role that Hillary had carved out for herself in the White House. Hillary Clinton was not just like Barbara Bush. Instead she forged ahead creating a new conception of the Office of the First Lady for America, and the world, to see. As biographer Sally Bedell Smith writes, “The Lewinsky scandal kept Hillary pinned down in the first months of what Al From, chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council, called

109 The following day, January 28, 1998, Hillary gave an interview on ABC’s Good Morning America. Given that it followed the Today interview, it did not hold the same level of importance. The First Lady had already spoken on the record regarding these matters.

110 See Figure 4.


her husband’s ‘lost year.’ She had big plans to expand her domestic agenda by heading a major initiative on child care and education and to keep raising her profile overseas. Once she assumed control of Bill’s defense, her immediate ambitions were limited to protecting their legacy.”  

Just what the legacy would continue to be following the allegations was what America would have to wait and see.

According to Deborah Tannen, a professor of linguistics, “Women in authority are subject to a double bind, a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don’t paradox. Society’s expectations about how a woman should behave and how a person in authority should behave are at odds. If a woman speaks and acts in ways that are expected of a woman, she will be liked but may be underestimated. If she acts in ways that are expected of a person in authority, she may be respected but will probably be viewed as too aggressive.”  

This paradox ultimately influenced the way HRC chose to address the duration of her first ladyship, particularly the months between January and August, when she withdrew substantially from public view and therefore appeared less aggressive and more traditional, or favorable as indicated by her public opinion polls, to the media and the American people. Once Hillary removed herself from the realm of public interviews, she had little choice over how she was being covered in the news. Between the end of January and the beginning of August 1998, she made 19 domestic trips and seven major international trips and stops.  

This meant that even with what limited effect she had over public perceptions, she had little time to spend on her public image. The trips she took were focused on policy, ranging from fundraising events inside the nation to major international events like the Summit of the Americas in Chile and the China Summit of 1998. While there was considerable personal turmoil within the East Wing of the White House, she was focusing her energies elsewhere for the time being. Hillary directed her energies toward making the daily policy plans of the administration move forward while others dealt with the latest set of allegations.

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Chapter II

Changing Perceptions: The First Lady’s Retreat to Family Values

In spite of Hillary’s both figurative and physical distance from Washington through her extensive domestic and international travel, August 1998 brought the Capitol to a boiling point. Kenneth Starr’s long-awaited report was published early, on September 11, due to the immediate concerns raised from the President’s actions during a deposition for the Jones case. As the nation flocked to the Internet to access the publicly available report, however, the first lady remained silent. How did Hillary’s reaction to the Starr Report effect the public’s perception of her fluctuating role as first lady and Mrs. Clinton? The Conservative movement’s rise in the late 20th century contributed to the power the Republican Party wielded as they championed traditional definitions of “family values” and “appropriate” gender roles, such as the nuclear family with the stay at home mother, in the midst of changing American perceptions about femininity. This offered an example for how Hillary Clinton ought to behave as an authentic first lady and first mother, especially during this trying personal time. Therefore, when, in the midst of the scandal, Hillary took a backseat role in her husband’s defense the press began to equate her more easily with the previous, traditional “mother” first ladies it had known.116 By stepping off the “cliff” of liberal activism and not openly litigating, advocating, or speaking publicly about the scandal, HRC gave the American public the space in which they were able to project their desired image the first lady onto her. Hillary’s less aggressive actions on behalf of the President’s defense during this period cast her in a more positive, less liberal-feminist light that large portions of the American people could empathize with, as evidenced by her approval ratings.117

Conservatism: The Movement Driving Opposition to the White House

Kenneth Starr’s report was just one of many attempts of the Republican Party to influence American conceptions of morality since the 1960s. Beginning in the late 1960s with opposition to the Vietnam War, conservatives started to rally once again and became a formidable foe to liberals

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who were fighting to maintain political power. As historian George Nash writes, “James
Burnham’s contention in 1964 that liberalism was the ideology of Western suicide must have
seemed a bit fanciful, even to conservatives, in that year of Lyndon Johnson, the Great society,
‘consensus,’ and the massive rejection of Barry Goldwater…Conservatives were increasingly
convinced that their hour was approaching and that liberalism as a coherent intellectual and
political force was fragmenting and expiring.”¹¹十八 Although conservatives had been dealt significant
losses in the political realm, with the connection to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s communist
manhunt of the 1950s and the landslide victory of the 1960 presidential election between John
Kennedy and Richard Nixon, as of recent they were ready to get back in the ring and to fight on, as
they believed their time had come once again.

Four years before the Starr Report, however, the Whitewater investigation which predated
the Lewinsky scandal and ultimately led to its discovery and to Kenneth Starr’s Report began.
Professor of politics Benjamin Ginsburg and political scientist Martin Shefter summarize the
Whitewater investigation, which began as an inquiry into whether the Clintons had taken part in
illegal activities while they were still living in Arkansas, and the appointment of Starr as
Independent Counsel as follows.

In 1994 a special counsel was appointed by the Justice Department to investigate charges
that President Clinton and his wife had engaged in illegal activities growing out of their
partnership in Whitewater Development Corporation while Clinton was governor of
Arkansas. The same special counsel, Robert Fiske, also investigated the activities of a
number of Clinton aides accused of making illegal contacts with the Treasury Department
on behalf of the White House. In August 1994 Fiske was replaced by former federal
prosecutor Kenneth Starr…Starr, a Republican who often had been critical of the Clinton
administration, expanded his jurisdiction several times and was, by 1998, investigating
charges that Clinton had an affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, in 1996
and had subsequently pressed Lewinsky to perjure herself.¹¹十九

Starr’s history of dissent with the Clinton administration in addition to his expansion of the initial
Whitewater investigation to include the alleged sexual acts of the President led many Washington
insiders to question aspects of the investigation, including the subsequent Report filed with
Congress, time went on. It appeared that Starr was acting on partisan aversion rather than what the

Studies Institute, 1996), 278.

¹¹十九 Benjamin Ginsburg and Martin Shefter, Politics by Other Means: Politicians, Prosecutors, and the Press from
Office of Independent Counsel (OIC) was intended to do. According to Ginsburg and Shefter, “The idea of the independent counsel was Congress’s response to Richard Nixon’s dismissal of the Watergate Counsel Archibald Cox…Under the terms of the independent counsel provision…Congress could initiate a request for the appointment of a special counsel if its own investigations gave it reason to believe that the president or some other high-ranking executive branch official might have committed some illegal act.” Congress, already having investigated themselves, was a partisan body; the independent counsel was to be independent of that which influenced the body of Congress and thus the investigation that had already taken place. The notion of Starr acting on partisan pretenses directly went against this.

The Starr Report must be understood within this context, as from the 1960s through the modern day, conservatives have continued to battle for the top title in American politics, particularly in areas concerning social and moral issues. When they achieved a position from which they were significantly able to influence large areas of the American population’s perceptions of “family values,” such as in the 1950s when the idea of the nuclear family came to mean the (typically) stay-at-home mother, father, and children, conservatives were at their height. In the late 1960s, when women’s liberation and free love threatened the notion of these family values by encouraging women to work outside of the home even after marriage and of sex outside the confines of marriage, liberal values trumped the conservatives. For Starr and the OIC, the possibility of proving their moral-political superiority presented itself in the 1990s; a conservative president never would have had an adulterous relationship, let alone a relationship of this sort inside the White House, and then lied under oath to cover it up. Starr and his colleagues, then, worked to present themselves as morally superior to Clinton liberals through his investigation and Report. Starr’s own actions though came into question by members of the press. Time’s Richard Lacayo and Adam Cohen reported in a special piece “Inside Starr and his Operation” that there was something questionable about the actions the OIC was taking.

It would be easy to frame the contest between [the President and Starr] as one in which a straightlaced, no-nonsense prosecutor faces off against a slippery, lubricious President. But Starr’s single-mindedness in pursuit of the Clintons has raised questions about his own propriety. A lot of them are being put out there, of course, by the President’s die-hard

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defenders…But you don’t have to be a conspiracy buff to have trouble with how the
Whitewater investigation ended up focused on the President’s pants.\footnote{121} While attempting to show conservative value superiority, however, Starr showed cracks from the outset of his expansion into the investigation into the Lewinsky scandal and thus, was not as successful as possible. As indicated by Lacayo and Cohen, Americans were uncomfortable with an investigation into the President’s sexual activities, particularly by using the wiretapping methods the OIC employed in order to get their evidence.\footnote{122} Thus, moral superiority was contested.

The conservative movement’s previous attempt to prove its moral superiority and cultural relevancy is most readily viewable through its rally to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment. Conservatism was itself fluid, which created a problem for those trying to rally supporters behind its cause. Historian Alan Brinkley has argued, “Conservatism encompasses a broad range of ideas, impulses, and constituencies…Conservatism is not, in short, an ‘ideology,’ with a secure and consistent internal structure. It is a cluster of related (and sometimes unrelated) ideas from which those who consider themselves conservatives draw different elements at different times.”\footnote{123} Since conservatism was not something that was firmly defined, it was able to continually reshape itself to encompass more and new ideas during the battle for relevancy in American culture, particularly the fight for defining “family values” during the late 1970s and 1980s. According to Brinkley, “the most powerful single strain within fundamentalist conservatism through much of the 1970s and 1980s may have been its assault on the efforts of modern feminists to redefine gender roles.”\footnote{124} A redefinition of gender roles, as was occurring in the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment, was perceived as a direct threat to traditionally defined female ways of life and the defeat of this became the life’s work of some like Phyllis Schlafly. During that time conservative antifeminist activists “saw themselves as upholding the deal of the two-parent family – a father, a mother working at home, and children – which they feared was being replaced in the 1970s by single-parent families and cohabitating couples, both heterosexual and homosexual.”\footnote{125} This transcended the 1990s as well, giving guidance to the Republican Party and Starr who saw the “family values”

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\footnote{122} Ibid., 44.


\footnote{124} Ibid., 423.

of the American life threatened by Clinton’s actions, and tried to influence conservations about American life in similar ways as they did two decades prior.

There was one particular face of the conservative movement to protect family and sexual values in the 1970s and 80s through the battle to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), Phyllis Schlafly. The ERA was, in many ways, the potential codification of the conservative movement’s worst nightmare as an attack on family values. As law professor Martha Davis writes about the roots of the ERA,

*Equal Rights for Women* began with the premise that discrimination against women in American society is “deep and pervasive.” Examining the legal structure sanctioned by the common law and the Constitution, the authors rejected the claim that women’s legal equality can be attained through expansive jurisprudence under the Equal Protection Clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments or through piecemeal reform. Instead, they concluded that a new federal constitutional amendment, the ERA, was needed. The basic principle of the ERA, they stated, was that “sex is not a permissible factor in determining the legal rights of women, or of men.”

In the 1970s, the determination was made that women’s legal rights were at risk. Despite the seemingly positive gains the amendment would have given women through a legally binding ban on discrimination on the basis of sex, many conservatives in the 1970s began to see the ERA as a serious threat to their deeply held values. Donald Critchlow, a historian of American political thought particularly noted for his work on conservatism, has written, “For conservatives, this drive for equality [via the ERA] threatened conventional culture, established institutions, and customary social roles…Yet, even as this revolution began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it provoked a backlash unanticipated in its religious and political ferocity, and led to a shift to the Right by the end of the decade.”

The ERA gave conservatives, who later helped to shape the movement against President Clinton, a leg to stand on. As Davis writes, “Decades later, Schlafly still cites *Equal Rights for Women* in her speeches and writings opposing the ERA…Schlafly also continues to decry the impact of the ERA on marriage and male-female relations. ERA advocates, she claims, want ‘to use the power of the U.S. Constitution to force us into a gender neutral society,’ in

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ways that are ‘contrary to our culture.’” Schalfly’s continued fight against the ERA, throughout and following the period of Clinton’s time in the White House shows how closely conservatives held this issue; the ERA threatened to undo the gendered way they had built society. This amendment was a cause they could rally themselves behind and influence conversations not just among politicians, but also everyday citizens and cement themselves as the moral compass in American society.

The conservative movement’s history throughout the latter half of the twentieth century illuminates the path that Starr and his predecessors chose to take that ultimately led them to file a sexually explicit report implicating the President’s lying under oath. In order to discuss this group of influential players in the Lewinsky scandal, and how they ultimately contributed to a turning point in 1998 that Hillary was forced to respond to, one must define the group itself. What is conservatism in this influential period of forty years that came to shape Starr’s motivations? According to Kim Phillips-Fein, a twentieth century political historian,

Generally, scholars of the Right have understood conservatism as a social and political movement that gained momentum during the post–World War II period. It began among a small number of committed activists and intellectuals, and ultimately managed to win a mass following and a great deal of influence over the Republican party. While its ideology (like all political world views) was not systematic or logically coherent on every count, its central concerns included anticommunism, a laissez-faire approach to economics, opposition to the civil rights movement, and commitment to traditional sexual norms. This definition alludes to important aspects of what drove Starr and his colleagues, namely that traditional sexual norms, in this case the nuclear family unit with a gainfully employed husband and a, traditionally although not exclusively, stay at home wife, ruled supreme. As HRC had always worked outside the home, even following the birth of their daughter Chelsea, she had never fit the mold Starr and his colleagues sought to find in the first lady. Through President Clinton’s extramarital relations with Monica Lewinsky, he introduced a new and uninvited member to the traditional family values party as viewed by conservatives. There was no room for sex with anyone except the wife via conservative sexual norms, and the introduction of a mistress meant that not only were sexual norms under siege in this instance, but the family unit was as well.

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Schlafly’s involvement on the defeat the ERA battle was important on two levels. First, she had been a notable voice in conservative politics in recent years. The 1960s had sparked a movement by the Supreme Court to ban prayer in public school, and following this ruling Senator Everett Dirksen, a Republican from Illinois, proposed legislation to overrule the Court by allowing prayer in school. This was legislation that Schlafly had supported, thus making her a notable conservative, political voice in America.\textsuperscript{130} Secondly, as a woman actively involved in activities outside the home, Schlafly embodied qualities that appealed to two groups of American women: those who were already involved in politics through the Republic Party and evangelical Christian women, often who were younger and not involved in politics.\textsuperscript{131} These two groups combined formed a female moral majority that eventually was able to defeat the ERA through numerous tactics and paved the way for conservative Presidential superiority with the reelection of Ronald Reagan and the election of George H.W. Bush. Through their fundraising efforts as well as their ability to testify, as coached by Schlafly, on the negative results of the passage of an ERA, Schlafly was able to mobilize conservative values to overcome the liberal wave that feminists had been riding in the 1960s and early 1970s.\textsuperscript{132} As Critchlow and historian Cynthia Stachecki argued in a 2008 article, the failure of a the ERA is explained within a context of social mobilization that shifted public opinion over time…Opponents of the ERA, working on the community and state levels, effectively won over public opinion to their side, and, in doing so, prevailed upon their state legislatures in battleground states to defeat the ERA. Social science surveys reveal that by 1978 there was a precipitous overall decline in support of the amendment among women in nonratifying \textvisiblespace sic states, plummeting below 40 percent.\textsuperscript{133} According to Critchlow and Stachecki, conservatives had won and were influencing American society more so than their liberal counterparts during this period through their mobilization which ultimately defeated the ERA’s ratification efforts.


\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 220.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 224, 228.

As Nash argues, “By the 1980s it was apparent that, whatever the future vicissitudes of politics, conservatism was no passing spasm of protest. It was too well organized for that.” But by the time the 1990s rolled around and Starr’s immediate predecessor at the OIC was in office, “conservative influence on American culture appeared to be diminishing. If ideas have consequences (as conservatives insisted), then it was painfully clear that conservative ideas were not the only ideas in circulation in the post-Cold War age.” Therefore the conservative movement’s influence over American conversations about “family values” peaked during the 1960s-1980s, and provides the contextual backdrop for how conservatives reacted to liberals in the oval office during the next decade. As they had been busy fighting for, and winning, the battle to protect traditional sexual norms and family values they had been used to being able to exude their moral superiority with little to stand in their way. Once President Clinton entered office, however, they had to find new ways to prove their preeminence over liberal Democrats. To fully understand the Starr Report, it must be read in the context of late twentieth century conservatism as a continuation of the conservative movement’s attempt to exert influence over definitions of gender roles as well as a reaction to its decreasing relevance to American society’s changing values in the post-Cold War era.

**Breaking the News and the Starr Report: The Press’ Response to Hillary’s Reaction**

Instead of continuing to comment on her husband’s innocence or guilt in the months leading up to the public offering of the Starr Report, Hillary Clinton withdrew herself from the press’ inner circle, allowing for more open speculation to occur. Instead of issuing frequent statements, she was working on the administration’s policies and Democratic Party fundraising. Thus the press began to write about Hillary in settings in addition to the scandal, setting Hillary up as a partner to the President with articles between March and June 1998 including “Clinton Woes

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135 Ibid., 340.


and the Watergate Legacy,”138 “The Clintons as Teammates, Dovetailing in Africa,”139 and part of the “Clinton in China” series run by the New York Times, “Hillary Clinton Discovers how Chinese Women Fare.”140 Since Hillary had stepped back and not offered statements as she previously had on the Today show, she was being more openly associated with the President in the press, which was a more traditional way for first ladies to be presented. While still moving about the globe and working on her own, Hillary’s decidedly less-defensively focused actions gave the press the ability to begin painting her in more traditional imagery; while the first lady was more openly participating in activities often associated with the office, such as meeting with dignitaries of foreign nations alongside the President, the American people began to view HRC in a more positive, traditional light as they had known first ladies before her.

Following the Office of Independent Counsel’s (OIC) referral of the Starr Report to Congress, the nation fell into a fervor; as Congress voted to release the entire Report to the public in its original, unedited format the American people read, with great detail, exactly what actions the President had taken with Ms. Lewinsky. As Washington Post senior editor Marc Fisher and feature reporter David Montgomery wrote about the initial public offering of the report. “The oddest mass political act in the history of American democracy began with an electronic storm, a blizzard of attempts to find the Starr report on the Internet. By late afternoon, the details, the explicit stuff –the sex – was everywhere: in solemn readings on television, in breathless recitations on talk radio, in gossip that sizzled across workplaces, shopping malls and neighborhood gatherings.”141 The nation consumed the Starr report in every way possible; whether it was in textual, visual, or audio form the odds were high that those over the age of 13 had heard some analysis of the President’s actions in the days following the report’s release.

But prior to the Report being made public, the media sought public opinion. Published on September 11, the day the Report came out but prior to it being read, the New York Times showed that the nation was not so convinced that the President’s actions were administration-ending, and

that there was no real consensus as to what the consequence of his actions should be. According to Gallup, the week of August 21, 1998 62 percent of those polled approved of the way President Clinton had been handling his job, with only 35 percent disapproving.\footnote{Gallup, “Presidential Approval Ratings – Bill Clinton,” accessed April 19, 2015, \url{http://www.gallup.com/poll/116584/presidential-approval-ratings-bill-clinton.aspx}.} One woman, who worked as a waitress nearby congressional offices, voiced her thoughts on the results of the OIC’s investigation; “‘Clinton will survive, … I hear them all at the bar saying what a joke it is, everybody is laughing about Clinton, saying it’s his wife’s business, nobody else’s.’”\footnote{Francis Clines, “In the Eye of a Hurricane, Awaiting the Final Blow,” \textit{New York Times}, September 11, 1998, A18, Newspaper Source, Factiva (accessed March 3, 2015).} Another everyday-American, a retiree who was visiting the capital, had a slightly different perspective; “I feel sadness, …We’ll be changed by these events with Clinton, by the lack of trust. I grew up in an era when Presidents and Sunday School teachers were role models.”\footnote{Ibid.} For some Americans, even once readily available the Report did not need to be fully digested in order for their opinions to be formed. In the words of \textit{New York Times} columnist R.W. Apple, Jr., “Is it a movie, or a pulp novel, or an adolescent dream about life in the capital? No, it is real life. Or the closest approximation of that in the Clinton years – the Harding era restaged for television – can produce.”\footnote{R. W. Apple, Jr. “Now, the People Will Have a Chance to Judge,” \textit{New York Times}, September 12, 1998, A1, Newspaper Source, Factiva (accessed March 3, 2015).} The reality of Clinton’s oval office had become stranger than fiction, and was more than many Americans could believe.

Even following its release, Americans were divided as to the result of the exceptionally thorough investigation of the President. As the \textit{Wall Street Journal} reported, “A new Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll – conducted after the release of the prosecutor’s report – indicates that by a 2-1 margin, Americans think the president should serve out the remainder of his term. Even among Republicans, there is no overwhelming sentiment yet to remove Mr. Clinton, who enjoys high job-approval ratings despite the scandal whirling around him.”\footnote{David Rogers and Jackie Calmes, “Public View Will Determine President Clinton’s Survival – Lawmaker’s Voters Appear Reluctant to Experience Impeachment Process,” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, September 14, 1998, A14, Newspaper Source, Factiva (accessed March 3, 2015).} While some Americans were in favor of removing him, as the poll indicates, President Clinton still enjoyed public support despite the Report’s publishing. The \textit{Journal} article further argued, “While there is a shared revulsion at the scandal, there is also a yearning for stability – and caution about putting the
country through the trauma of impeachment.” Even among those who were not supportive of President Clinton’s continued tenure, there was backlash for the Report’s public accessibility and its overall topical focus. As the *New York Times* reported, Westfield, NJ residents that were surveyed about the President’s affair believed that his private life, while not something they personally approved of, “should not be of public concern” and that their disillusionment with the President “was rooted in Mr. Clinton’s lies about the affair, not in the explicit sexual details they read over the weekend in Mr. Starr’s report.” As one stay-at-home mother who was interviewed said, “Mr. Starr’s report should never have been put on the Internet.” With the nation split on the outcome of the presidency, as indicated by the President’s 63 percent approval rating the week of the Report’s release and the week following, and the appropriateness of the Report, the nation was, however, united on one key issue: Hillary’s relative absence from the defense of her husband was nothing to be concerned over. As the *New York Times* reported, instead of talking about the scandal with the press on a daily basis the first lady was busy filling her schedule with policy meetings and trips. HRC’s press spokesman for five years, Neel Lattimore, said about why the first lady wasn’t out publicly defending the President, “If she went out there and said, ‘I forgive my husband,’ well, what woman so quickly does forgive and forget? … She will choose her moment.” The American people focused their discussions of the scandal primarily around the President, the person in the White House who was most clearly connected to the Report’s accusations.

Despite what her public image showed, however, the first lady was dealing with turmoil from the scandal and the subsequent Report. Washington insiders often interpreted the events of the Clinton White House as anything but coincidence. As Hillary wrote about the beginnings of the OIC’s investigation into Whitewater, “I didn’t believe it was a coincidence that these attacks should surface just when Bill’s standing in the polls was at the highest level since his inauguration,

149 Ibid.
and I told [the White House Press Corps] so. I also believed the stories were planned for partisan political and ideological reasons.”

When Starr’s report was filed the first day Congress was back in session following a lengthy recess, to which he cited the pressing nature of the impeachable offenses found in his investigation, the political reasons for the timing of the Report can be seen as apparent to those sympathetic to the Clintons’ position. It was also during the beginning of the OIC’s investigation, which ultimately led to the Starr Report, that Hillary began to be most ostracized by Washington. Lawyers like Bob Barnett, who represented the Clintons, advised against talking to the press to invalidate accusations of wrongdoing on her part in the Whitewater deal. “I had been advised that my actions and words could either strengthen or undermine Bill’s Presidency. I wanted to say, ‘Bill’s been elected, not me!’ Intellectually I understood Bob was right and that I would have to summon whatever energy I had left. I was willing to try. But I just felt so tired. And at the moment, very much alone.”

While her later reflections provide only one personal perspective, Hillary’s writings illuminate the way the Clintons’ staffs were working to ensure public image was consistent and, most importantly, not adding to the Starr’s damage. The ability to affect public image was a constant consideration for Hillary and her staff in the middle of 1998; in moments like those cited above she chose to take a less forward, more quiet position in order to help the President’s image.

Prior to the report’s release the tides had begun to turn for Hillary; the press was open to and began to pursue the possibility that there was an organized effort being waged against the Clinton’s, much as Hillary had suggested in her Today interview. Newsweek published a chart detailing the possibilities between what they titled “Conspiracy or Coincidence?” on February 9, which linked 23 “conservative politicians, contributors, media executives, authors, lawyers, organizations, and others who fueled and funded the various scandals investigated by Starr.”

Although prohibited by law, grand jury testimony was consistently being leaked and more and more of the press came to be on Hillary’s side throughout the spring and summer of 1998. By the time Starr’s Report was released on September 11, the news media was more sympathetic than ever to Hillary’s difficult position. The wealth of articles and news pieces that featured discussions

154 Ibid., 452.
155 Ibid., 452.
of Hillary’s perspective spanned the spectrum. Per a survey conducted of Readers Guide, there were more articles written about the first lady August and September 1998 for the first time since February, immediately following her Today interview. These stories were featured in various places, including The New Yorker, which was not specifically written for one particular gender.\footnote{Readers Guide to Periodical Literature, Volume 58, (New York: HW Wilson Co, 1998).}

While the New York Times noted on September 3 that the first lady was focused on her current task at a conference at Belfast with the headline of “First Lady Draws Cheers at Women’s Conference in Belfast”\footnote{Warren Hoge, “First Lady Draws Cheers at Women’s Conference in Belfast,” New York Times, September 3, 1998, A26, Newspaper Source, Factiva (accessed March 3, 2015).}, they began to much more openly discuss Hillary’s demeanor following Report’s release. Three weeks later, the Times writer Elaine Sciolino wrote,

> [I]f Mrs. Clinton really wants to escape from Washington, or from the humiliation and betrayal her friends say she feels, she is not showing it. Nor is she talking about forgiveness, leaving her husband to do all the atoning and confessing on his own for the sex scandal that may doom his Presidency. Instead she is playing her role as First Lady with a no-time-to-waste-hello-goodbye intensity that is both breathtaking and unnerving, struggling to change the subject with talk about health care, education, and family, and fighting to win back disillusioned voters, especially women.\footnote{Elaine Sciolino, “Before Public, Armor is Showing No Cracks,” New York Times, September 21, 1998, A16, Newspaper Source, Factiva (accessed March 3, 2015).}

Sciolino’s piece shows how the media had become far more sympathetic to the first lady than the period surrounding her Today interview; instead of lambasting Hillary for not appropriately standing by her man, or for not kicking the President to the curb for cheating on her yet again, the article instead applauds, however tentatively, the decision of HRC to throw herself head first into policy. Instead of discussing her purely as a woman who had been cheated on by her husband, Sciolino shows the first lady as the politician that Hillary had been acting as since she had arrived in the capital six years earlier. While not fully certain how else to discuss this new, less forward and therefore more traditional and authentic first lady image, Sciolino goes on to couch Hillary in traditional gendered terms. “[T]he First Lady has never looked better, sounded stronger, or even seemed happier. Her popularity rating is high. Her loyalists say that no matter what happens to Bill Clinton, she is a lady with a future. Every day seems to be a good-hair day.”\footnote{Ibid. Another Times piece published a few days later by Adam Nagourney couched the first lady in a similar light, saying that she was strong in her language but also at times appeared “dazed and distant,” or}
“spirited and solemn.” Nagourney was unable to deal Hillary a compliment without also undermining her, attributing any strength she had to weaknesses as well. Sympathy for the Times, and therefore its readers, was inherently tied to gendered analogies. The first lady could not simply be viewed in a positive political light, rather the only way the media and American people could understand this different female image was through the gendered lenses that had been used throughout the late 20th century and the “family values” movement. Women had to be viewed as weaker than men, or intrinsically interested in her fashion and image, in order for a strong appearance to be acceptable in this gendered worldview. The tradeoff for HRC in removing herself from press briefings about her thoughts throughout the Report’s publishing was that the media were left to speak for her without comment or edit.

The newly founded Christian Science Monitor picked up on the contemporary shift in the way Americans were viewing Hillary and argued that the entire nation was in fact at turning point when it came to gender roles. As correspondent Sara Terry wrote, “Public speculation about Clinton – and the increase in her popularity since her husband admitted to having a relationship with Monica Lewinsky – may also reflect cultural shifts in thinking about feminism, and about strong women and the role they play in society.” Terry’s argument, then, points to the diminishing influence of conservative definitions of gender and “family values” in this period. As the feminist scholar Lyn Mikel Brown was quoted in the article, “I think we’re in flux about what it means to be a woman. And the kind of person Hillary Clinton is has pushed that discourse in a way very few women have done. She’s been a Rorschach test for women.” While more established news outlets like the New York Times were only partially willing to transform their depictions of the less forward first lady to new, still flexible gendered terms they too still relied upon the definitions used for a previous generation of first ladies and women in power. Instead, only those like Christian Science Monitor, who were a new in media in 1998, were willing to print different storylines to help the American people embrace the changing conversation they were

161 Christian Science Monitor was founded in 1998. See: http://www.csmonitor.com/About
163 Ibid.
involved in. They, however, were in the minority on this issue as the dominance of conservative
gendered terms still held a tight grasp on much of the media giants like the *Times*.

Network news offered another particularly opportunistic platform from which to decipher the first lady’s response. A June 1998 piece in the *Washington Post* reported that a Pew Research Study indicated “‘watching varied cable news outlets is now just as common as viewing network news programming.’”¹⁶⁴ This meant that in 1998 broadcast network news stations were in the position of having to compete not only with new, purely news networks but also Internet news sources, like *Drudge Report* where the rumors of the Lewinsky scandal originated from, as well as print news media sources. With more competition, broadcast network news stations found themselves in a position of trust when the Lewinsky scandal broke; unlike newer networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC had existed for as nearly as long as television itself and had spent the previous seventy years building reputations as qualified, respectable news agencies. This gave broadcast news networks the leg-up for attracting older audiences, but still required new approaches to garner the younger audience’s attention. With special reports like *Nightline*’s “First Lady, First Defender” aired on August 24 and “The Starr Report: The Capitol on Edge” aired on September 10, ABC was able to capture a significant audience, tying for the 35th most watched programs on American television according to the Nielsen ratings for the week of August 3, with 11 percent of the market share.¹⁶⁵

Following the President’s admission of guilt in Lewinsky affair on August 18, network news was quick to pick up on the nation’s interest. *Nightline* opened its “First Lady, First Defender” special report with a conversation about approval ratings; the first lady was not the President, but her current public rating was at its highest point since she entered the White House, with 64 percent of Americans feeling “favorably” towards HRC as of August 18.¹⁶⁶ This framing of the conversation lead an unsuspecting viewer to conflate Hillary with the President. *Nightline* specifically sought to have viewers attach their changing emotional response towards Hillary with the office of the president because it served the network’s ultimate purpose in the episode; just as earlier the Clinton staffers noticed that HRC could affect the public image of the President,


Nightline recognized that the heightened approval ratings for the first lady provided an opportunity to bring her back into the story of the President’s affair in a way that stayed true to the more traditional embodiment of the Office she held. By discussing Hillary in terms of Bill in this way, where she was an extension of the President much as her first lady predecessors had been extensions of their husbands, she remained within the confines of the institution of the first lady.167

Informed parties that were interviewed for the special report reflected the mixed emotions of the nation toward Hillary following the President’s admission, however these parties, just like the nation, showed sympathy to Hillary in this trying time; her Gallup reported favorability ratings held steady for all of August reflecting the actions, or inaction, she had taken to be acceptable to those polled.168 Two former Clinton insiders, political consultant from the 1992 campaign Mandy Grunwald and President Clinton’s Senior Advisor on Policy and Strategy George Stephanopoulos, appeared on the program to defend Hillary. As former staff, their actions on the program in support of the Clintons were not shocking to viewers. According to Grunwald and Stephanopoulos, Hillary had been strapped with the victim role she hated to have to play. Grunwald indicated that the days following the President’s admission “must be agonizing” for Hillary, going on to say that Hillary would never have purposely misled the nation in her January interviews. She only would have taken such action if she believed what she was saying to have been true, meaning that she had been misled herself. Stephanopoulos, having worked closely with Bill, said that the President probably allowed Hillary to believe the Lewinsky allegations were yet another political ploy that was false without elaborating on the issue, thus excusing Hillary’s January interviews. Stephanopoulos gave the American people their ultimate out for basing their feelings about the President on Hillary by saying in a matter-of-fact tone that people take cues from Hilary to see if things are okay or not. If there was any doubt on the part of the nation that easing their opinion of Bill’s actions because of the strain it had caused, or would typically cause, to someone in Hillary’s shoes, Stephanopoulos made this judgment acceptable. Whether citizens were prepared to give President Clinton the pass or were still processing their feelings on his actions, both Grunwald and Stephanopoulos provided


justification for individuals anywhere on the spectrum willing to take the word of those formerly employed by the Clintons.\textsuperscript{169}

Further giving weight to the rising approval ratings, per CNN’s report that Hillary’s rating went up by four points the week of August 18\textsuperscript{170}, the segment “Partner in Power to Wounded Wife” argued that Hillary being blind sighted by the President’s admission should be viewed no differently than any other event that had occurred since they entered politics together. The title’s overt implication was that HRC had gone from one gendered role, that of the partner, to another gendered role, the wife, implying that she had not been playing the role of the wife while she had been acting as one-half of the co-presidency. Nightline’s framing of the segment in this way set viewers up to see Hillary in a less aggressive light; by showing how the first lady had always been in a gendered position at the White House, it tempered views of her as aggressive and un-ladylike. The segment went on to argue that Hillary had always been a lightning rod for politics, more so than any of her first lady predecessors, and that because many constituents had been unsatisfied with the co-presidency situation that this betrayal of trust allowed the nation to see that while Bill and Hillary Clinton are a cohesive unit, they are not the same person. One part, the President, was inherently more guilty and flawed than the other; Hillary had not betrayed the nation as her husband had. She had continued to work on her agenda that was promised to the American people and was publicly sidetracked by this devastating breach of trust as little as possible. This meant that the public had not seen as much of her personal side as they might desire, but the first lady had never allowed many people into her personal circle, let alone the entire nation. Since the nation was able to divorce Hillary’s actions from those of the President, it made sense that the nation was beginning to view her in a more positive light.\textsuperscript{171} While still actively involved in the administration’s policies and goals in her own way, notably by rallying the Democratic Party during an event which threatened to tear it apart as well as by traveling across the globe as other first ladies had before her, she was not working as the primary defender of her husband, thus a more traditionally accepted position of a first lady.


Much like the image pictured above in Figure 6, Hillary was seen in ways that were more motherly. Separated by their only child Chelsea and pictured with the family dog, the sense was that the Clintons were still a family unit despite the scandal. Hillary’s supportive arm around her daughter’s shoulders suggested that her efforts were being spent on her private life. She was not the lead on major initiatives like health care as she had been previously. Instead, by stepping back into more traditionally viewed roles, Hillary Clinton gained popularity and legitimacy among groups of Americans who had not identified with her previously. The American public was able to see the contradiction between her marriage and her political relationship with the President by not actively informing the public of her inner-most thoughts; the inaction of the first lady provided the opportunity for the media speculate in gendered ways that portrayed her in a more traditionally first mother role.

Giving academic credence to its broadcast, Nightline featured historian Carl Anthony in its final segment of the show. A specialist on first ladies, the broadcast host Chris Wallace sought to find out why Anthony thought Hillary was facing an unprecedented level of suspicion. Anthony reminded viewers that Hillary and Bill are one singular unit, given that the Office of the First Lady is one achieved solely through marriage, because since the President had lied to the American people on at least one known occasion anyone directly associated with him faced a similar level of cynicism. Anthony went on to make excuses for the OFL’s statement on the President’s admission,

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arguing that the office only put out a statement that ended up being rushed and less than nuanced because the American people were pushing so fervently for an official response. As Anthony says, “First ladies are more important to us for what they symbolize than for who they are as human beings.”\footnote{Carl Anthony, “First Lady, First Defender,” Interview by Chris Wallace, \textit{Nightline}, ABC, August 24, 1998. Special Collections, Vanderbilt University Television & News Archive.} Therefore if Hillary appeared to be unattached to the situation in her statement, it should not be viewed as a reflection of her position in society in this particular instance due to the circumstances that led to the statement. Instead, it would only be relevant to use her statement to influence our view of her if she had been able to make it on her own timetable. As Anthony had written numerous books on first ladies, the nation was expected to take his forgiving words towards Hillary’s actions as the end-all, be-all and to move forward without judging her further for being kept as in the dark as the rest of the nation was by her husband.\footnote{Ibid.} Just as \textit{Christian Science Monitor} and \textit{New York Times} were participating in the changing conversation about the first lady’s overall image to the nation, so too was \textit{Nightline}.

A second \textit{Nightline} piece the day following the Starr Report’s filing with Congress virtually ignored any involvement of Hillary in the pending allegations, as if the question had been answered by that point in time. “The Starr Report: The Capitol On Edge” indicates to the nation just how confused they ought to be about the future of Bill Clinton’s presidency, let alone Hillary. When one reporter asked the President if he would be resigning from office, the President’s glare without response indicated not only a resounding “no” but also how tired he was of the entire question. As opposed to the prior \textit{Nightline} piece, this initial segment was the only time Hillary is brought up specifically in the broadcast. Focusing on how there was little the President could do except to wait and see, the segment discussed at length how Hillary had continued making public appearances with Bill that day. The two had gone to a Democratic fundraising event together where Hillary introduced Bill by saying, “I’m very proud of the person I’m privileged to introduce. I’m proud of his leadership. I’m proud of his commitment. I’m proud of what he gives our country and all of us \textit{every day} by his commitment and I’m proud to introduce my husband, and our president, Bill Clinton.”\footnote{Ibid.} Hillary was behind her President, at least publicly, and was calling on

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\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
everyone else around her to do the same during these difficult days; the more traditional first lady was not stepping out in the bold ways that she may have previously.

The segment goes on to further point out how the President and Hillary appeared to be closer in the recent days, with one reporter noting “Observers today noted Mr. & Mrs. Clinton were more affectionate with one another today than they have been recently. There were more smiles between the two of them, more shared whispers. Whether that is also strategy or just the pendulum of marriage is something we as outsiders will probably never know.” Beyond this however, the Nightline piece moved on to discuss only the President and his advisers without mention of Hillary. Even in the final segment where consideration was given to why the White House had not assigned a point man for all things Lewinsky allegation, Hillary’s name was not thrown in the hat. Despite the fact that she had allegedly run the show during the 1992 campaign when discussing how to handle the Gennofer Flowers controversy, she was not being publicly discussed or considered at the present time. Reporters were calling for a Democratic Party heavy weight lawyer to lead the fight in absolving Bill, but were ignoring one of the most prominent lawyers within the Party by not considering Hillary herself. The public via the news over the prior months and weeks had decided that Hillary’s place was completely removed from the realm of Bill’s defense; this was a task far too outside the traditional roles of first ladies for Hillary to take on. Therefore while Hillary may have been the best candidate in the room, she was the one least discussed of all.177

The history of the conservative movement and the creation of the OIC following Watergate in late twentieth century converged with the news media’s reaction to the President’s admission of guilt in August and September 1998 to create an environment replete with animosity. Democrats like Hillary were certain, given the history of the conservative movement, the roots of the Whitewater investigation, and their links to the Republicans, that nothing occurring could be chalked up to coincidence. At the same time, however, Republicans saw the President’s lies as indicative of the moral downfall of American society that had been occurring since the 1960s and ERA in particular. Just as liberals in the 1970s were willing to use whatever means necessary during the ratification of the Amendment, so too were Democrats like Clinton willing to make as


177 Ibid.
many public apologies as necessary to keep voters placated long enough to achieve the policy initiatives the administration had set out to achieve. Hillary Clinton found herself caught up in the middle of this political battle where her public image could either help or hurt the President; while she had spent the previous six years pushing back against the restrictive norms her predecessors had embodied, mid 1998 became a transformative moment in HRC’s public image. Through her time spent focusing on more traditionally accepted first lady roles, such as traveling and spending time with her family, as opposed to leading opposition against her husband’s critics and leading a defense strategy, Hillary appeared to embody many of the conservative values during this period that she had pushed back against previously.

As both politics and the scandal came together Hillary kept to herself. In the absence of guidance from HRC herself, the American people listened to those who were actively aiming to influence the actions of the first lady in this trying time. Where there was silence, the media filled in with plentiful commentary from informed sources and political reporters to guide the public’s view. Although the American people had already been leaning towards viewing Hillary in a new, more sympathetic and traditional light, the media’s approach further guided any stragglers in the “correct” direction of divorcing the President’s lies from Hillary’s defense. In the months to come, Hillary’s approval wore off on her husband and the impending impeachment began to wane on the American public largely because of Hillary’s approach. If the first lady could move on, as she appeared to have through her dedication to policy initiatives that reached beyond the impeachment’s eventual end-date, so too should the nation.
Chapter III

The Compromise: Impeachment and Campaign

With the scandal phase of the Lewinsky affair over, Hillary Clinton and the American nation moved into the final chapter of the event. Following the House Judiciary Committee’s October 8 vote to proceed with impeachment inquiries, the nation was left without an answer to the fate of the President. Despite many Americans saying the President had been performing his job well through their 65 percent approval rating the week of the aforementioned vote, and thus wanting to move beyond the sexual indiscretions of the President, the House chose to forge ahead as it made Bill Clinton the second president in American history to be impeached.

Hillary was also going through another image transition. Having completed important policy work and travel in the fall, she and President Clinton edged closer to the beginning of the lame duck period. The November midterm elections netted Democrats five seats in the House of Representatives and prevented Republicans from acquiring a super majority in the Senate, further indicating the nation’s desire to move past the Democratic president’s shortcomings and to get back to business. But what exactly did “back to business” mean to the nation now that the White House was in its final year, a year traditionally lacking in significant policy achievements? How did the American public envision HRC’s life following her time as First Lady? As heavily noted in the press, this intermediate period of time meant the beginning of a serious consideration of a Senate campaign for Hillary. With the nation now comfortable with a more traditional first lady icon, as evidenced by her highest first lady approval rating of 66 percent in December 1998, Hillary was able to return to a version of her own familiar, strong, female role she had abandoned earlier during the scandal. Her staff could worry less about an occasional passing comment.

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regarding her hopes for the outcome of the impeachment because the American people had decided that the first lady was, in fact, embodying the traditional roles that they had expected of her all along. The months of restrained comment and action during the summer of 1998 allowed the press time to see HRC in the same light as the American people, thus by the time of the impeachment, conversations about the first lady appeared in political terms and were missing the previously first lady specific gendered references to her societally prescribed role; while conversations about her potential candidacy did explore her gender, they were not focusing on a family values idea that the wife’s role was inside the home. The press embraced the political advancement of Hillary Clinton, and discussed her in new gendered ways, which often critiqued her experience first rather than her adherence, or lack thereof, to traditional gender roles. While the impending impeachment hearings were outside of her control, Hillary quietly began the process of reinstating herself in a strong legal role, the role of a New York Senator.

**Washington, D.C. vs. America: No Voice for the Body Politic**

Despite being only the 19th largest city in the United States in 1990, Washington controlled the nation’s conversation before the President’s impeachment, but saw that power and control slip away as the American people had largely moved on to more pressing issues by the time of the impeachment.\(^1\) Washington, a metaphor for the elite American political class which included pundits, news commentators, current and former Washington staffers, and politicians themselves, was unconcerned with what people outside the capital thought. Portions of the American population were minimally effected by the impeachment due to the larger issues in their daily lives; Washington was however, in the words of actor and playwright Anna DeVeare Smith, doing too much talking and not enough listening to the actual concerns of America.\(^2\) Despite the pushback from citizens across the nation, reporters in Washington and at the major news outlets continued to push the impeachment as one of the most important events each day, showing how the press was little concerned for what Americans thought of the historic event that had been going on for nearly a year. Americans may have stated that they were uninterested or bored with the

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impeachment, but their ability to recite details from the daily updates indicated otherwise; the press cut through personal barriers placed against new information on the proceedings and continued to insert itself into daily life.\(^{184}\)

Washington did not just include those on Capitol Hill, those inside the DC beltway, or those working for the national parties. Importantly, Washington also included those like George Stephanopoulos and Mandy Grunwald who spent much of their time as correspondents on news agencies, spreading the views of Washington insiders and those who had a vested interest in Washington politics. While the viewpoints presented on a January 8 program of *Nightline* ranged from various states and levels of celebrities, those like William F. Buckley Jr. and Andrei Condrescu certainly could be included in the larger Washington metaphor. Anyone who spent a significant portion of time speaking publicly on a national scale on the events of national politics, thus keeping the story alive for American viewers, could be considered Washington.

On January 8, *Nightline* decided to not air a normal Friday night special. Instead, as host Ted Kopel told viewers, the night’s episode was predicated upon the assumption that the viewer had already heard enough from people like Kopel and other political commentators, regardless of the network. Instead the night’s episode intended to provide a “fresh take” on President Clinton’s impeachment by interviewing 11 well-known people from American society in order to provide a more representative view of what the nation was thinking nearly a year into the scandal’s coverage. Ranging from rap artist Chuck D and conservative commentator William F. Buckley Jr., to Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream and Romanian-born author and National Public Radio commentator Andrei Condrescu, *Nightline* polled eminent individuals from various walks of life to prove their point: America did not have a single opinion on the matter of the impeachment, and so Washington and the news media heavily reliant on the city was wrong to couch the story in a singular manner.\(^{185}\)

Viewers of the program received a multiplicity of perspectives like they had never before seen on the program, as the only thing respondents could agree on was that everyone had a point of view. While several respondents said they felt as though the events of the scandal and impeachment had little to do with their, or any other American’s, daily life, the sheer amount of

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details that each person was able to discuss indicated the opposite. As Oliver North, a former
general and then-current talk show host, said, the nation had not come to a screeching halt over the
allegations from the Office of Independent Counsel. Rather, life had continued on, relatively
unaffected. For as much as the intimate aspects of the President’s actions enveloped Washington,
suburban America had far more important things to deal with. Katie Roiphe, a self-proclaimed
feminist, echoed this sentiment when she noted that if every American who had sexual
indiscretions were removed from his/her job the nation would completely shut down. Chuck D, a
rap artist, similarly said that there was a very apparent disconnect between what was happening in
D.C. and the American public. “It’s apparent it’s about the haves and have-nots within the D.C.
beltway politic, who care less about public opinion anyway.”186 While corroborated by the views
of several others on the program, what respondents were unaware of in their comments was the
way that Washington had wielded its power of message so effectively over all of America.
Washington reporters may have been assuming that viewers cared deeply about the actions of their
President and the impeachment until the bitter end, but realistically they were ambivalent about the
interest of the nation. Rather, they were satisfied to solely control the conversations of everyday
Americans regardless of the tone those discussions took. Americans in impoverished areas
represented by Chuck D’s comments about “the hood” were unlikely to care about legislative
procedures, however the story of a President’s impeachment reached their neighborhood and
played a role in the way they conceived of the nation’s capital. Even though Deveare Smith may
have felt the sector of the American public was neglected because Washington had not been
listening to its concerns, whether related to the impeachment or not, they continued to chatter on
about the events in Washington and President Clinton’s actions, both with regard to the affair and
his accomplishments as President. Power had gotten to Washington’s head by some standards; it
was controlling American culture and was not prepared to step down until effectively challenged,
much in the same way that Republicans attempted to control the conversation of family values in
America until such time as they were effectively challenged.187

Other contributors felt, however, that Washington’s contributions to American
conversation were valuable and necessary. Some like William F. Buckley Jr., the notable

Television & News Archive.

News Archive.
conservative author and commentator, said that the inundation of information coming from Washington provided Republicans an opportunity to capitalize on the situation. Instead of continuing to pursue impeachment, Buckley argued for allowing President Clinton’s fellow Democrats to make themselves look more and more partisan while Republicans would look principled. In his opinion, this would only do good things for the Republican image in the history books. Others like Calvin Trillin, poet and frequent contributor to The Nation, used the powerful flow of information from Washington to help the American people think about the larger issues at hand throughout the scandal. Writing in early 1998 about Hillary’s active involvement in the President’s defense Trillin provided the following for Americans to consider; “And so it’s up to our Ms. Rodham / To prove Bill’s White House isn’t Sodom. / It’s left to this adroit señora / To show that it is just Gomorrah.” Instead of becoming frustrated with the way Washington was exercising its power and getting Americans to think about current events, Trillin embraced the opportunity to provide thought provoking and satirical commentary for readers of The Nation.

The contributor who embraced Washington’s powerful exercise in controlling American’s concerns, however, was Andrei Condrescu. A Romanian-born American essayist and National Public Radio (NPR) commentator, Condrescu eloquently spoke for those who still hung on every word that came from the capital and its press corps. Condrescu was adamant that every American had something at stake in the impeachment hearings. “Make no mistake, everybody’s private life is on trial. Everybody is part Bill, part Hillary, part Monica, part Ken, part DeLay, part Hyde.” Since, according to Condrescu, every individual American identified with one of the major “characters” in the proceedings, it was senseless to push back against the story Washington was constantly reminded him or her of. But what about the people that other respondents spoke about, those who seemed fed up with this long and drawn out story? Condrescu had an answer for these people as well. “If the viewing public was disappointed so far it’s because all we have heard are speeches. We haven’t seen the nitty-gritty. The Senate cannot cheat the American public by cutting short the grand soap [opera]…We want to see the dress. We will not be satisfied with a perfunctory


parody of a trial…That stain [on the dress] is our national Rorschach test. What do you see in it?"\textsuperscript{191} Condrescu not only calls out those in the nation who may have previously claimed a lack of interest, but brings them back to the story with force. He tells those viewers the reasons why their intrigue has faded and calls Washington to action. By calling on the Senate to draw out the hearings as long as necessary so that the nation gets its fill, Condrescu placates previously uninterested viewers who continued to hear about the impeachment for another month at the same time as giving Washington further reason to exercise power over the national conversation. For people like Trillin and Condrescu, the nation was not yet done with the story of the President’s impeachment and it was up to proponents like themselves to continue to help guide the nation’s thoughts on the story Washington continued to tell.

The disconnect between Washington and the world outside the capital was also present in the print media. As the \textit{New York Times} reported, “most Americans were just benumbed, inoculated by the seemingly endless months of lies, legalisms, and disillusionment with politics, Washington-style.”\textsuperscript{192} While Americans still held particular opinions on the actions of President Clinton, they also had strong thoughts on the way the investigation and the reporting of the impeachment proceedings had taken place, thus spreading their disgust across multiple parties. As a law student at Harvard University was quoted, “‘[The impeachment] strikes me as dangerous….And most infuriatingly of all, it strikes me as completely ignoring the will of the American people.’”\textsuperscript{193} The impeachment proceedings as a whole had, according to the Harvard student, gone ahead against what the American people had willed; they had been ignored by Washington. Another \textit{Times} piece interviewed Americans from the West Coast, who echoed the sentiment that their wishes had been ignored by Washington. When asked for her thoughts on the impeachment, one mall walker said, “‘I don’t think the American people give a damn….It’s boring. I haven’t watched at all.’”\textsuperscript{194} Another individual interviewed, a pollster, said, “‘I can’t tell you how little interest there is, except to those of us who follow it professionally or personally or both…I think it’s the weirdest disconnect that I have ever seen in American politics between the

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elected and the electorate.”

But it was not just the American people who were bored and feeling ignored by Washington. The Washington Post reported on December 12, nearly a month before Nightline’s special report, that the world community was uninterested in the impeachment story because, as a French television editor was quoted, “‘If American’s aren’t interested, why should I be interested?’” With the entire global community detached from the story, Washington’s continued push for the impeachment’s daily significance shows its ability to influence conversations; when the press made a story significant, the people would listen even if they were inclined to disagree with what it was saying. This was the case when new conversations about Hillary Clinton emerged following the impeachment that did not couch her in family values gendered terms, but instead politically gendered terms.

The Press: New Discussions of Hillary

With Washington effectively controlling the national conversation, Hillary was bound to come up in the press once again. While she had stepped out of the immediate limelight compared to others involved in the scandal in the summer and early fall as she focused her public time on policy, not personal matters the press had become fascinated with Hillary once again. As the President’s impeachment hearings waged on, the press wrote about Hillary more as a politician in her own right as opposed to the power couple language that had dominated the news waves earlier in the presidency. Having receded into a more traditional, authentic first lady image, Hillary’s image could compromise on some version of what the public expected. The Diane Blair papers, located at the University of Arkansas and only recently accessed by the press, illuminate one of HRC’s closes friends and adviser’s views on the changing public image. As noted by Blair, “She [Hillary] noted that it is terribly hard for her to play ‘only’ the role she’s playing now, ie, First Wife, First Lady, - when she very much wants to be the litigator, the legal defender.” Since Hillary Rodham Clinton had allowed the press paint her in a specifically gendered light, as a first

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mother and wife, her public image of could now change and come back onto the main stage of political news with a bang.

Hillary did not have to stage a press conference herself in order to change the tone and frequency of the stories written about her. Rather, people close to the first lady, reporters, and fellow politicians started turning the wheels of the news media in favor of the strong Hillary they had denounced not so long before. December 4, nearly two months into the House of Representatives’ impeachment hearings, a member of Hillary’s former staff and a consultant for the Republican Party were both interviewed by *Womenconnect Politics Daily*\(^{199}\) to discuss the first lady’s popularity and future in politics. Former HRC press secretary Lisa Caputo, on how she explained the current favorable view of Hillary in the press, noted that what the first lady had accomplished was to humanize not only herself but also the scenario she found herself in. “People don’t see her as a super-woman so much anymore, [someone] who is an incredibly bright political person, who chaired the president’s healthcare task force and has been involved in policy in the White House. … They now see her as a human being.”\(^{200}\) The nation had moved past the idea that Hillary was purely the cold-hearted politician she had seemed. As Parry-Giles argues, “Since 1992, Clinton had been portrayed as the colder, harder-edged feminist rather than the warm and graceful woman more consonant with first lady comportment.”\(^{201}\) Time away from the press had allowed her image to thaw while her strength remained, becoming for the first time a positive characteristic in the view of the media that reported on it.

Republican consultant Mary Matalin echoed this view of the first lady’s transformation, saying that what had been viewed negatively at the beginning of the scandal was actually what saved both Hillary and the President. “The thing that saved the slandering Clinton was the loyal Clinton, going out there on TV in January and February and standing by her man. He would have been dogmeat if she hadn’t been out there propping him up. … [The public and the media] were so starved for something classy in this sordid administration…And she’s been the one shining

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Matalin pointed out that Hillary’s Today and Good Morning America interviews that so many reporters and correspondents viewed as overly defensive were the President’s saving grace. Without going out to the edge of the cliff as the first lady did in the Today interview, the nation would not have been united behind the President from the outset in the way it was. Further, while some characterized Hillary’s actions during that interview as an overreaction where she showed too much emotion, Matalin made the case that from that point forward the first lady was the beacon hope for those less than pleased with the administration as a whole; if they could find nothing else to see as positive, they could look at the way Hillary had conducted herself throughout an extremely turbulent year and feel placated if not satisfied. Hillary’s public image was able to transition seamlessly with people like Caputo and Matalin and batting for the first lady with the press.

Following Caputo and Matalin’s interview, the press began to publish more and more stories on Hillary calling her to action. Even when Hillary was not being portrayed as the patron saint of the presidency, reporters were writing about her in very different ways than they had since the Clinton’s entered the White House. As NBC’s Andrea Mitchell said, “For the first time in 23 years of marriage, close friends say Hillary Rodham Clinton is no longer the president’s defender in chief. … She is fighting for her issues, women and children, and her role in history. … In fact she was in San Francisco last week talking about preserving historic gardens, completely unaware, friends say, about his latest apology in the Rose Garden.” Whereas the first lady would have previously been criticized more openly for defending her husband and not allowing the numerous legal experts employed by the White House to do the job they were hired to do, here Mitchell calls for Hillary to come back to the defensive position she has played previously. Mitchell goes on to say, “Mrs. Clinton [is] at near record popularity, 54%. So why is she not using that popularity to lobby Congress against impeachment?” As Diane Blair recorded in her personal notes on her December 27 or 28 phone call with Hillary, previously unused outside of this project, the answer is because impeachment was a foregone conclusion. No matter how legitimate the reason, the

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203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

press wanted the strong and firm Hillary they knew from early on in the scandal to return and to leave the more traditional and passive first lady on the sidelines for someone else.\textsuperscript{206} Now was not the time for inaction; due purely to her actions HRC was offered and accepted an opportunity to be the cover story for the December 1998 issue of \textit{Vogue}, making her the first first lady to do so. \textit{Vogue}'s then-editor in chief Anna Wintour said about the history choice, "‘We felt that she had achieved so much under remarkably difficult circumstances and behaved with such extraordinary dignity and courage that I think she was a symbol for American women everywhere. … It is almost through the terrible things that have happened to the Clinton’s this year that she has found her role.’\textsuperscript{207} According to \textit{Vogue}, Hillary earned the honor of the cover story because of her actions, both those that were strong and less traditional as well as her more traditional poise. The balance of these had earned her a place at the top of American leisure press at the end of 1998, therefore giving legitimacy to her stronger and less traditional actions that had been criticized early on. Action was what the American people, as represented by the press, had decided they truly wanted from their first lady.

If action was what the people wanted, then Hillary Clinton and her advisers were ready to respond. The first lady, as reported by the \textit{New York Times}’ Melinda Henneberge on December 20, “went to Capitol Hill this morning and blasted an unfair, politically motivated impeachment process that she said the President would continue to fight.”\textsuperscript{208} Hillary was back in action, as the press had called for and was ready to show that to everyone. “‘She was determined and defiant,’ said Representative Jerrold Nadler of New York. ‘Her message was that they’\textasciiuml{ }ve been pursuing him since the day he came into office.’”\textsuperscript{209} Not only was she acting, but she was getting the positive response for her strong action that she likely would not have gotten earlier in the year. As the Democratic Party was united more behind Hillary than Bill, her return to the defense team was met with accolades from those who had waited too long while she had played to what the rest of the nation had wanted. “And [Rep. Dennis Kucinich, OH.] suggested that at this late date, the two-


\textsuperscript{207} Email message from Sam Popkin to Diane Blair, “HILLARY: NBC Reports She’s Seeking Her Distance,” December 15, 1998. Diane Blair Papers, series 3, subseries 3, box 1, folder 3. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.


\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
for one Presidency has new life. ‘She’s so terrific,’ he said. ‘It’s lucky for America we have a
woman with the strength to lead the nation right now. And everybody understands she is one of the
leaders of the nation right now, as much as the President.’”

Kucinich more openly than anyone else in the Henneberger piece applauds Hillary for stepping back into her role in the co-presidency; a strong female first lady is what the nation needed at the time and so that is what HRC came to do. She had shed the shroud of gendered values that others had pushed upon her and returned to the forthright woman she had always been. As historian Gil Troy writes, “Hillary Clinton achieved a symbiosis with the American public she had never before enjoyed. All of a sudden, she was the Democrats’ most popular speaker, their most prolific fund-raiser, and their sexiest star, with a 65 percent approval. ‘She’s come to realize that the symbolism of her office can be a very effective tool,’ her press secretary, Melanne Verneer, observed.”

As the press continued to discuss the impeachment as dictated by Washington, Hillary became an important aspect of that story once again. The nation approved of her role as the co-president and leaving her days of traditional first lady action behind, as evidenced by her all-time high favorability rating of 66 percent in December. Even Fox News’s Dick Morris, a longtime Clinton adversary, could not resist commenting on the necessary actions of Mrs. Clinton. “She is in day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-by-minute charge of this operation. And you can tell it because of the aggressiveness, the attacks; the throwing of the gauntlet. …1998 was Hillary’s year. She ran the White House during this entire year. She was President of the United States except for certain foreign policy areas like Northern Ireland and the Middle East.”

While not particularly thrilled with how effective her actions had been, Morris noted that the first lady’s return to an outward position of power gained the White House considerable ground. With much of the press speaking in these terms, it is no wonder that much of the nation was saying, “If Hillary doesn’t mind [Bill’s

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211 Gil Troy, Hillary Rodham Clinton: Polarizing First Lady, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 198-199.


indiscretions], why should I?’ … ‘That’s between him, his God, and Hillary.’”

Hillary had clearly handled the personal aspects of the impeachment, and had moved back to policy business as normal as the American public requested.

To Run for the Senate

The press had, prior the end of the impeachment, decided that Hillary had revamped her actions and image appropriately to incorporate the nation’s traditional, family values-based expectations of the first lady and first mother. Instead of writing about her in primarily family values gendered terms, questioning her abilities based on the idea that she was acting outside the prescribed role for a first lady and mother working outside the home, as they had before and at the beginning of the scandal, they instead began to view her actions in light of the political world she operated within. This persisted beyond President Clinton’s acquittal and was present in the way the press presented HRC as a potential candidate for the Senate. Because Washington, the political elite and those who worked within the press corps, decided that HRC was to be written about in terms of her political abilities, albeit gendered political abilities, and not in terms of her gender-prescribed roles, the American people’s individual opinions about the first lady diminished; just as the nation’s opinions on the impeachment were overruled by Washington, so too were they guided to thinking about Hillary in a particular way despite what they might otherwise.

Public statements and private reflection provided conflicting views on Hillary’s career post-White House. In her memoir Hillary Clinton wrote, “I still had no interest in running for Senator Moynihan’s seat, but by the beginning of 1999, the Democratic leadership was in a full-court press to change my mind.”

Given the recent increase in her activism on behalf of her husband and the fact that Democrats had been hinting at an elected office for the first lady following her tenure in the White House for some time, the new lame duck year seemed better than ever to push for a position of her own. But small nudges during polite conversation were apparently not working well enough for some inside the party. On January 3, Senator Robert Torricelli of New Jersey appeared on NBC’s Meet the Press with Tim Russert and made the move that ultimately pushed the Hillary for Senate conversation into overdrive. As biographer Sally

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Bedell Smith writes, “Robert Toricelli, the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, jumped the gun…by announcing on Meet the Press that Hillary would be a candidate.”\(^{216}\) As Hillary had been pondering a candidacy but had made no hard and fast decision, Toricelli’s announcement on national television sent the press into frenzy.\(^{217}\) Everyone and anyone wanted an answer as to whether Hillary would run. The first lady began to seek advice on the matter now that she almost certainly had to take up the issue of the Senate race prior to seeing the impeachment hearings through.\(^{218}\) As Troy writes, “In the final recognition of her position’s limitations, she would have to shirk her duties as first lady to find fulfillment – and succeed – as a senatorial candidate.”\(^{219}\) A run for the Senate became a logical conclusion to a challenging tenure in the White House for Hillary Clinton; she had earned the right to move beyond the tests of her husband’s presidency.

Hillary had to weigh significant pros and cons for the Senate race, no matter how hard the DNC pressed, before making a decision. Although her stated focus was on the impeachment and then the duration of her stay in the White House, much could be gained from this timing of entering politics. According to Linda Feldman of the Christian Science Monitor, “For Clinton, it’s the decision of a lifetime. And it entails very large pros and cons. On the plus side, a run for the Senate allows her to break loose and become a serious political figure in her own right, not just as the spouse of the president. It also allows her to move beyond the humiliation of the Monica Lewinsky scandal.”\(^{220}\) But it wasn’t only the press who were of the opinion that Hillary had much to gain from a campaign. One of the first lady’s advisers said, “‘She would carry the burden of his behavior. Politicians are always looking for signs that they’ve been forgiven – or at least that the public has gone past it. She was a surrogate for him in that.’”\(^{221}\) Therefore, even though she may not be physically located in the White House while running a campaign, she would still be aiding in the efforts of Bill’s presidency. It would also place the first lady back into her preferred, less


traditional role. As the *New York Times* wrote, “Running while her husband is still President would certainly be a dramatic break with tradition, and it also suggests a First Lady who is thinking of building a career and legacy that is separate from and extends beyond the tarnished record of Bill Clinton. Her candidacy would represent a remarkable change in the dynamics of a marriage in which his career has come first.”\(^{222}\) Further, unlike most first time candidates, the first lady had already faced many of her fears that come with running for office. As political scientists Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox note, “Entering the electoral arena involves the courageous step of putting oneself before the public, only to face intense examination, loss of privacy, possible rejection, and disruption from regular routines and pursuits.”\(^{223}\) For the last seven years of her life, the first lady had been subjected to the ebb and flow of the press, with a lack of privacy and intense scrutiny. As she weathered 1998 by not just surviving, but by also exhibiting grace and restraint HRC was better prepared than many other potential candidates for the challenges of a campaign. By taking on a run for the Senate, Hillary would be able to redefine not just her career but also her marriage and what it meant to be married in the 20\(^{th}\) century; despite being one-half of a power couple, the first lady had the opportunity to create a life for herself that did not rely upon her husband in any capacity.

With the impeachment hanging over her head and the Democratic Party’s efforts failing to wane, Hillary turned to close friends and advisers for advice and received mixed signals, forcing her to have to make the decision without definitive support from those closest to her. Diane Blair wrote that during a phone call on January 19, the two spoke about the first lady’s political prospects in New York.

I asked her re NY Senate race – told her what I’d been telling press (that she’s never before expressed desire for office, but I wouldn’t shut that window of opportunity [sic], she’s earned every opportunity that’s come her way; and perhaps if she felt this was only or best way to advance interests of Amer. peop.e. [sic] etc. She liked it. She really doesn’t know. Erskine Bowles was up this week; told her he’d really thot [sic] he wanted to run for Gov. of NCar [sic], but after being there awhile (and polls showing he would do well), decided that’s not what he really wanted. She needs time to think, to get all this behind her, then decide.”\(^{224}\)

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If Hillary was looking for tacit approval from Blair, she does not appear to have received it. Instead she was told to take more time to consider if this was what she really wanted to do with her life and then make a move. Not having much luck with one of her most trusted and closest friends, the first lady sought out Harold Ickes, an expert on New York politics in February to see what he thought her prospects were in a state where she had never had residence. In her memoir, Hillary recounts the day, which coincidentally became the day of Bill’s acquittal, and the weighing of political realities.

I would have to physically cover a state of 54,000 square miles. On top of that I would have to master the intricacies of local politics, of dramatic differences in the personalities, cultures and economies of upstate New York and the suburbs. New York City was its own universe: a cauldron of competing politicians and interest groups. The five boroughs were like individual mini-states, each presenting needs and challenges different from counties and cities upstate and also from the suburbs of neighboring Long Island and Westchester. As our meeting stretched over hours, Harold zeroed in on all of the negatives of entering the race. I was not a New York native, had never run for office and would face Giuliani, an intimidating opponent. No woman had ever won statewide in New York on her own. The national Republican Party would do everything in its power to demonize me and my politics. A campaign would be nasty and emotionally draining. And how would I campaign in New York while I was First Lady? The list went on.\(^\text{225}\)

There was no doubt that a campaign would be tough, and Hillary Clinton was better prepared than most other potential candidates would have been for the list of negatives that Ickes presented her with. She had fought hard in two presidential elections with Bill, let alone the gubernatorial elections in Arkansas before that. As Bedell Smith writes, Hillary was not discouraged however on what could have been one of the most discouraging days. After receiving news that the Senate had voted not to convict Bill, “Without missing a beat, she continued, ‘As you were saying about the Erie County board?’ Now that her husband’s brush with political oblivion was over, Hillary had shifted her focus entirely to her own political career.”\(^\text{226}\) While not having definitive advice one way or another, Hillary’s focus switched from the events of the past year and towards the future.

Following the acquittal, the press began more open conversations about Hillary’s potential candidacy focusing on her gendered political ability and not her gender prescribed, family role. Instead of focusing on her time hosting teas and state dinners, acting as the nation’s mother, HRC’s political abilities were focused on her failed health care initiative she undertook during the


President’s first term and her lack of overt policy experience because she had been working as the President’s wife. As she was considering a run for an elected office, she would have to meet the same expectations as politicians, as opposed to embodying the traditional values of the first lady. This meant that purely family values conversations were no longer relevant to HRC’s actions; female politicians worked outside the home, and therefore comparing Hillary to women who stayed at home to raise their children to forego a career was inapplicable. Instead, the press changed their conversations and the way the American people viewed her in this new role by writing about her absent of family values terminology. The New York Times wrote, the day after the acquittal that, “Democrats have raised questions about whether the numerous investigations into her and her husband’s past would make her vulnerable. And some politicians have questioned whether Mrs. Clinton might be rejected as a carpetbagger, having never lived in the state.”

Hillary’s vulnerability in this case had nothing to do with her status as a wife or mother; it was focused on how she would face up against her opponent Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Vulnerability meant not weakness in a feminine way, but instead weakness in an ease of ability to attack which either sex was open to. Further, her political legitimacy as a carpetbagger came into question because she was not from, nor had she ever lived in, New York; candidates of either gender could face vulnerability on the legitimacy of one’s residency. Instead of discussing HRC as the first lady, embodying family values, the Times focused the nation in on issues that disregarded family values and focused on politics.

The Wall Street Journal, despite declaring in it’s headline that “The First Lady Would Be a Second Rate Candidate,” went on discredit conversations of her political candidacy that couched her simply as a woman without any reference to her ability to potentially win the Senate race. As Pat Caddell, a political consultant, was quoted, “‘The Hillary campaign reminds me of Ted Kennedy’s deflated 1980 challenge of Carter….Her poll numbers are high in part because of her ‘first victim’ status as a wronged woman, but that won’t last.’” While the Journal noted that Caddell was skeptical and Hillary’s potential candidacy, his quote illuminates the Washington perspective on gendered discussions of the first lady as a Senate candidate. While Hillary was enjoying good polling in New York early on, according to Caddell because of the “wronged

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woman” status, this was not enough to carry her through an election. Political issues would take precedence over her personal choice of whether to stay at home and raise their now-adult daughter. The *Journal* went on to further cite the *New York Post* and *New York Observer*’s warnings that, “As a Senate candidate Mrs. Clinton would enjoy ‘no cozy sequestrations of the sort that accrue to all First Ladies.’ Even liberal columnist Joe Conason of the New York Observer, one of the Clintons’ fiercest defenders, says that ‘it would be wise to inspect the underside of the accelerating Hillary-for-Senate bandwagon.’ He cites the endless Whitewater questions she hasn’t had to answer publicly since her ‘pink dress’ news conference of 1994.” While referencing her clothing only so as to draw attention to a specifically iconic interview, the *Post* and *Observer* point out that Hillary had, according to them, enjoyed some freedom from scrutiny while in the White House and that political issues, such as personal finances and not whether or not she held cookies or teas, were issues that would scrutinized heavily in the election. Conversations pertaining to her career or her style were otherwise absent from these pieces. A Senate race differed from the White House in the sense that as long as the candidates appeared clothed for the occasion, whether it was in business attire or formal wear, the clothing mattered less than the ideas the individual put forth. Unlike what Hillary faced from the time she entered the East Wing, there was not a string of predecessors she was expected to live up to as a Senate candidate when it came to appearance. The *Christian Science Monitor* echoed these sentiments, what mattered most was the woman’s ideas not her ability to put together an outfit. “The Hillary-for-Senate boomlet has been fueled more by her celebrity status, and sympathy for her as a ‘wronged woman,’ than by sober appraisal of her potential legislative effectiveness.” The *Monitor*, while openly advocating that HRC should not run for the Senate, points out what the *Journal* pieces did as well, people were focusing on insignificant aspects of the first lady and not her political achievements, which were what truly indicated success as a Senator. As the *Monitor* went on to say, “That effectiveness is not striking, judged on her past performance. For example, her attempt to define and ram through a controversial health-care program in her husband’s first term was a disaster. Mrs. Clinton has an agenda, but has not so far demonstrated the political astuteness and art of compromise to

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successfully implement it.” 231 Time also critiqued the candidate the race. In its February 15 issue Time criticized Hillary for having been out of the loop since the failed health care initiative. 232 Hillary’s credentials as a Senate candidate were not set in stone according to Time. The focusing of the nation on her political inabilities in this case reaffirmed the need to readdress the way they were discussing Hillary as a candidate; family values were out and politics were in.

Ultimately Hillary’s office issued a statement on February 16 acknowledging that she was considering a potential candidacy and would decide later in the year. 233 Only because the nation and the press approved of a compromise was this possible; the first lady was strong on issues at times, but she backed off and was more traditional at others. Following months of conservative action, where she did not openly defend the President as she would have earlier in the scandal and instead focused on policy issues, the nation was convinced that it preferred aspects of Hillary that it had known all along. With the American people’s blessing, Hillary Rodham Clinton stepped out into the political arena again, sparking increased conversations of Democratic Party leaders and press coverage. While forced to take a position on her potential candidacy far sooner than she would have preferred, Hillary redefined what it meant to be in a political marriage at the end of the 20th century. As Troy writes, “Win or lose, by ending on this bold, substantive note, Mrs. Clinton guaranteed that she would be judged more like an Eleanor Roosevelt than a Barbara Bush. Whatever compromises she made shrank to minor sacrifices along the way, deviations from a master plan to be a pioneering and independent first lady.” 234 This independent first lady was a compromise of the first lady that had started off 1998; she was still bold at times, but traditional as well. The press rewarded her compromising strategy by discussing her in less family values gendered ways as she moved into a Senate campaign and instead focused the nation on the important political attributes Hillary was unable to utilize to their fullest potential while acting as the nation’s first mother.

231 Ibid.
234 Gil Troy, Hillary Rodham Clinton: Polarizing First Lady, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 206.
Conclusion

The Road Ahead

Hillary Clinton’s 1999 declaration to run for the Senate opened the door to a new realm of possibilities. While her work on policy had been largely unsuccessful, as the press was quick to point out in its initial discussions of her potential candidacy, the Senate was quite different from the East Wing and provided new opportunities to work on a variety of issues peaked her interest. Most importantly, however, by the time of her announcement, Hillary had found the public image that allowed her to satisfy both the public’s desire for a traditionally grounded first lady and still allowed her the freedom to be assertive and open about her intentions in a way that her first lady predecessors had not. She clung tight-fistedly to her original public image, that of an opinionated and intelligent lawyer, at the beginning of the Monica Lewinsky scandal in January 1998. After this failed her, as it had previously throughout her time on the campaign trail and in the White House, she receded to what the public desired, a traditional first lady who was attuned to the conservative gender definitions prevalent in the late 20th century. Placating the American people by stepping away from the forthright defensive role she had initially taken, and instead focusing on policy and travel (as had other first ladies before her), allowed the press and American people time to see HRC as they never had before. Towards the end of 1998 and early 1999, in the midst of the impeachment hearings, when Hillary’s rumored run for the Senate began to surface, the press spoke for the first time of Hillary outside of family values expectations. Instead, they focused on her political attributes. She had proven her worth as a first lady through her embodiment of family values, clearing the path for substantive discussion of her abilities as politician in her own right.

Hillary’s life did not slow down after she won the Senate race, and has been filled with triumphs that women across the nation have shared in. Eventually, her time in the Senate served as the launching point to her 2008 presidential campaign, which many in the press speculated on in 1999. After conceding to Barack Obama with her famously quoted speech, “If we can blast 50 women into space, we will someday launch a woman into the White House. Although we

weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it...”, Hillary Clinton became the third female United States Secretary of State.\(^{236}\) Now, in April of 2015, the American people have finally received her much anticipated announcement for a second presidential campaign and eagerly wait to see if she can, in fact, launch a woman into the White House, this time straight to the Oval Office.

This project has brought to light issues that can be applied to this second campaign, and the mainstream press has already begun to pick up the themes. As The Atlantic asked in March 2015, what type of opposition campaigning can and should be done during HRC’s potential second presidential campaign? Their conclusion, that it would be unwise to dredge up the issues she faced as first lady, indicates that the nation is perhaps finally prepared to move beyond the gendered expectations Hillary faced nearly 20 years ago.\(^{237}\) Others like NPR have recently discussed the former-first lady’s reactions to inquiries into her private life as the story has unfolded about her use of a personal, unsecured email account as Secretary of State.\(^{238}\) Questions about how best to “oppose” a candidate and what privacy means for a candidate in the 21st century are, in the case of Hillary Clinton, best understood through the intersection of media, politics, and gender as presented in this project. While female candidates have been told they play by the same rules as male candidates, only time will tell if opposition to Hillary would take the form of attacks based on her responses as first lady when she was responding to, and embodying, the American public’s expectations of conservative family values. As The Washington Post reported, HRC recently responded to a question during a press conference on the scrutiny she faces as a woman. “QUESTION: ‘If you were a man today, would all this fuss being made be made [about the use of a personal email account]?’ CLINTON: ‘Well, I will -- I will leave that to others to answer.’”\(^{239}\)


are any indication, the answer is no. Going forth into the 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton faces new challenges of a changing press and media, but also the same, familiar obstacle of gendered expectations that she has responded to before on at least one notable occasion.
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