



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND AT COLLEGE PARK

COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES • CENTER FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

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Notes:

TRANSMISSION OF JAMES MARGREGOR BURNS' NATIONAL
PRESS CLUB SPEECH. PLEASE NOTE THIS WAS ALSO
SENT TWO WEEKS AGO TO PAM CICETTI. THANKS
FOR YOUR INTEREST.

*****Remarks made by James MacGregor Burns at the 12th Scientific Meeting of the A.K. Rice Institute, 12 May 1995.***

I suppose, in the spirit of this august Scientific Meeting, I should entitle my remarks, "The Anatomy of the First Ladyship: Psychological, Ethical and Attitudinal Aspects of the First Ladyship as a Developing Constitution in a Time of Mass Guilt, Anger, Conflict, Drama, and General Disarray." But what I am actually talking about is the plight of a particular First Lady, Hillary Clinton, as an actual and potential leader, and why it should concern us as students of leadership.

I still remember my own confrontation with the early institutionalization of the First Lady. I had ventured over into the East Wing of the White House to do an interview. I expected to find a First Lady Office and a secretary's office, only to come upon signs indicating the Administrative Office, the Travel Office, the Press Office, the Protocol Office and the like. But still, the First Ladyship was sequestered, out of the channels of power, even though most First Ladies have had for years an active and important set of roles.

Hillary Clinton was not daunted by this history. She knew the score. She insisted that she be positioned in the West Wing, that her Chief of Staff be located with her in the West Wing, with the rest of the offices of the First Ladyship set up in the Executive Office Building across the street, along with the other staff persons who have central roles in the Clinton presidency. Her first job was a crucial one as we all know -- heading up the Administration's task force on health.

In our country nothing succeeds like success, and nothing fails like failure. Just as there is an over-reaction to apparent success, especially in the media, there is an over-reaction to apparent failure. People seem to forget that the greatest achievements of transforming leadership are usually the results of repeated failures and successes. Then, somehow, the Republican victories in last fall's congressional elections were attributed at least in part to Hillary and the health bill failure, even though those victories in fact resulted from a host of fundamental forces in American politics.

The result of the health and election outcomes? Hillary to some degree was silenced, muzzled, muffled. How much of this was her decision, how much was her husband's, or how much was the Clinton pollsters, we do not know. We do know that one solution to the problem was to give Hillary "safe" issues. Of course, what issue today at the White House level is "safe" or "unsafe" is a question in itself. Hillary chose what might have seemed to some men a safe issue but she turned it into something of a campaign -- mammography, the campaign for early detection of breast cancer, hardly a safe issue for women. But Hillary should not be confined to so-called women's issues, of course. She should be free to exert leadership in all key issues affecting humanity.

I'm talking mainly about Hillary Rodham Clinton today, but I want to say a word about the women who earlier occupied the First Ladyship. They all had difficult jobs in part because the job is not and perhaps cannot be as well defined as their husbands'. As I think back to Eleanor and Bess and Mamie and Jacqueline and Lady Bird and Pat and Betty and Rosiland and Nancy and Barbara, I'm enormously impressed by their seeming ability not only to do those demanding jobs but also to hold on to their own individual personalities, too. Indeed, whatever the ups and downs of the presidents, I'm also impressed with the uncanny skill of their husbands

early on to win the hand of such talented women. Most of these husbands somehow married above their intelligence level. I think we've missed a great prescience in all those guys.

But, all of these talented women were sequestered, or imprisoned, in the East Wing of the White House, physically and symbolically. But not Hillary today.

Hillary Rodham Clinton is, in my view, one of the most talented leaders in this country -- not just a talented woman leader, but a talented political leader. She can be ranked with a large number of women abroad who are presidents or prime ministers of their nations. She is potentially more of a transformative leader than Bill -- perhaps on a equal level with Al Gore -- but only potentially, because you cannot be a transforming leader unless you can act freely and powerfully across a long line of policy and action. My high esteem of Hillary, incidentally, is based on extensive research my colleagues and I have conducted at the University of Maryland at College Park's Center for Political Leadership and Participation. Over and over again we have found Hillary, both before the presidency and in the White House, to be the most focused, purposeful, collected, and visionary participant in decision-making situations. She has also seemed to be the most closely attuned to her own values and goals.

I could document this with many examples but, given time constraints, I can only cite one. This I believe is authentic. You know, we outsiders are not privy to the confidential discussions of the top policy-makers; we must rely on good reporting from the inside. What especially do we have on Bill and Hillary's exchanges, even their pillow talk? Well, we have one report on a monentous issue -- whether Bill should even run for president.

I have drawn this from Bob Woodward's book, The Agenda. Many have read about this exchange because it took place on their double bed in Little Rock. The usual reaction is "Wow! Bill and Hillary in bed." But let us analyze it and put the dialouge in playscript form.

The Scene: Governor's mansion guest house, late August 1991, Little Rock, early in the morning, Hillary and Bill in their double bed:

Hillary: "I think you have to do it [i.e., run for president]."

Bill: "Do you really?"

Hillary: "Yeah."

Bill: "Why do you believe that?"

Hillary: "I think you are absolutely the right person to make these arguments."

Bill: "You really think so?"

Hillary: "Yeah, I really think so."

Bill: "What do you think'll happen?"

Hillary: "I think you'll win."

Bill: "You really think so?"

Hillary: "Yes, I really think so."

Bill: "Well, you know, a lot of people think this will be a dry run."

Hillary: "I don't. I think if you run, you win. And so you better be really careful about wanting to do this and making these changes in your life."

Now, if this episode is typical of Hillary's role, who is the strongest leader?

Hillary Rodham Clinton has often claimed Eleanor Roosevelt as her great role model as First Lady, as well she might. Eleanor Roosevelt was not only FDR's eyes and ears and legs, but she reached out to constituencies that FDR needed -- to sharecroppers, blacks, migratory workers, the homeless, and poverty-stricken women and children. She made mistakes -- some of her early trailblazing projects did not work out. But the White House of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt persisted, correcting errors, sticking to their goals, and producing a President-First Lady partnership that still stands as a model of moral and practical leadership.

Hillary Clinton has demonstrated many of the leadership qualities of Eleanor Roosevelt. She is organized and knowledgeable, as well as creative and decisive when action is needed. For twenty years she has played a critical and constructive role in Bill Clinton's gubernatorial and early presidential governance, just as Eleanor did with FDR. She has been the eloquent voice of moral purpose in these twenty years. The Clinton White House is not so overflowing in bold and creative leadership as to allow Hillary to be left in limbo.

Some Hillary-Bashers ask, "Who elected her?," just as fifty years ago some people scorned and denigrated Eleanor Roosevelt. In fact, Hillary has worked so closely with her husband, campaigned with him, shared in key decision-making, and suffered the slings and arrows as he has, as to be both a leader in her own right and a close partner in governance. The American people who elected Clinton and Gore in 1992 knew that they were choosing a talented trio to lead the White House.

Some say to the White House, "Liberate Hillary." Others say, "Let Hillary out of the closet." We simply say, "Let Hillary be Hillary."

--James MacGregor Burns,
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