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Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office

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JEAN HOUSTON/THE CHOICE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

STATEMENT OF FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

JUNE 24, 1996

On Sunday, June 23, The Washington Post ran a front page excerpt from Bob Woodward's latest book, The Choice, which recounts meetings I had with Jean Houston and Mary Catherine Bateson and suggests that Ms. Houston is my "spiritual adviser." While I have had a number of conversations with Jean Houston, it is simply not true that she is my spiritual adviser.

For more than three years, I have met with a wide range of contemporary thinkers, including Roman Catholic cardinals, bishops, nuns and priests; Protestant clergy and lay leaders; Jewish rabbis; Muslim clerics; theologians, ethicists and religious activists; historians, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists; professional communicators, management consultants and motivational speakers; business and labor leaders, writers, artists, poets and entertainers, and many other Americans from all walks of life who have interesting ideas or insights into what's happening in our country today.

Mary Catherine Bateson and Jean Houston are two of many people who have been generous in sharing their ideas with me. Mary Catherine Bateson, the daughter of anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, is herself a distinguished field anthropologist and author of a now classic book on women's lives, Composing a Life. Jean Houston, who has published more than a dozen books, has served as a consultant to major corporations, as well as worked with the international children's organization, UNICEF.

Both women were helpful to me in discussing their work in foreign cultures as I prepared for a trip to South Asia in the spring of 1995. They were also helpful when I returned from South Asia and was facing the task of writing my book about the challenges of raising children in the modern world. One of the many meetings I held at the time about the themes of my book included Jean Houston and Mary Catherine Bateson.

During the hours of free-wheeling discussion, Jean Houston suggested that I imagine a conversation with Eleanor Roosevelt, who grappled with the difficult social issues of her day. This was an interesting intellectual exercise to help spark my own thoughts; it was a brainstorming session for my book -- not a spiritual event. In fact, in previous public speeches, I had used the device of an imaginary conversation with Mrs. Roosevelt as a way of discussing what Mrs. Roosevelt would think about the problems of contemporary society and how she would approach her role as First Lady.

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Statement by the First Lady

Imagine my surprise when what I have been doing since 1993 in front of large audiences was now being reported as a sensational revelation.

The bottom line is: I have no spiritual advisers or any other alternative to my deeply held Methodist faith and traditions upon which I have relied since childhood.

And I do wonder what Eleanor Roosevelt might think of all this.

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For further information, contact Lisa Caputo at 202-757-5000.

For Immediate Release

February 21, 1993

REMARKS BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT FIRST LADIES OF SONG EVENT

New York City, New York

10:51 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much, and thank everyone from Frankie and James Roosevelt and the extended Roosevelt family and -- Stone, and all of the first women of song and theater who were here tonight, for making us all feel so good about our country and about someone who, on a continuing basis, inspires us and prods us. Thanks aslo to the first ladies of New York City and New York, Matilda Cuomo and Joyce Dinkens who were here with us tonight, and all of us who try in whatever way we can to do what these days should be done.

As I was sitting here this evening I thought about all of the conversations that I have had and might have with Mrs. Roosevelt this year. (Laughter.) It's one of the saving graces that I have hung on to for dear life. (Laughter.) The early conversations were I'm sure not very satisfactory to her because, early on as the campaign would go and things would happen, I would shake my head and I would say, "Why me?" (Laughter.) And I wouldn't get any answer at all.

A little while later, after some more time had passed and I had read even more and more -- actually devoured more and more about Mrs. Roosevelt, I realized that that was not a question that she would ever give an answer to. One did what one was expected and did it in in the best way possible.

So my conversations turned to really requests for information -- how did you put up with this? (Laughter.) How could you go on from day to day with all that would happen and the kind of attacks and criticism that would be hurled your way? Again, I have to confess, it was not a very satisfactory conversation, because as you can see by looking at this wonderful, wonderful monument that will be erected, she listened calmly and looked at me very serenely, in my mind, but didn't say very much.

And then one day I had a wonderful revelation. And that was when I learned that even before President Roosevelt was inaugurated, newspapers were editorializing against Mrs. Roosevelt. They were saying she should keep her opinions to herself, that her husband had been elected President and no one in America wanted to hear a thing that she had to say. Actually, one of the most incredible editorials to that effect happened right here in this city, if I recall.

And so it struck me that what was really happening to me wasn't anything very new at all. That it was an ongoing story of what happens often as we relive history because we failed to learn from it, and that what we all must do in the best way we can -- take those lessons to heart.

So I began having much better and more satisfactory conversations with Mrs. Roosevelt. (Laughter.) Because I began to talk with her about what she was really interested in and how she could help me. And now the conversations that I've had for the past

month have been especially gratifying to me. Because she has said on several occasions as I have shaken my head over some problem or another, or as I watch my husband work very hard on the economic plan or some other important issue -- she's probably shaking her head, I said in my mind, "I thought that would have been solved by now." (Laughter.) "Since it's not, then you are just going to have to get out there and do it and don't make any excuses about it."

So from my perspective, what Mrs. Roosevelt has done is what she is still doing -- she says far better than I what I feel. I was struck tonight that perhaps what I should do is just take all these wonderful quotes we heard, write them down on notecards, and when I'm ever asked a question, shuffle through them and just hand them over. (Applause.)

But mostly I'm grateful because you will have this monument. I will, I hope, someday have a small replica of it and will -- because I hope that's one of the things which come from this. -- that I can put on my desk or in the window of my study; and when I feel a little discouraged or a little down, think about this woman who, although born to privilege, did not have much of what I have taken for granted -- a warm and loving and supportive family, an education that went on beyond my 17th year, an opportunity to see many things and have many experiences. But I don't feel that I was as well prepared in many ways as she was, pursuing these responsibilities. And I only hope that as the years go by, my heart and my mind will expand and grow, so that some day I will feel worthy of being mentioned in the same sentence with her.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

10:58 A.M. EST

TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

An extraordinary woman is coming to the White House next week: Mary Robinson, the President of Ireland. She is also a mother, a human rights lawyer, a law professor, a force for reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics, and a voice for women all over the world.

I met President Robinson last year when Bill and I were in Dublin. I admire her efforts to legalize contraception and to help women win the right to sit on juries when she was a young legislator in the Irish Senate. In outlining her philosophy, she has quoted the early feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft, who said 200 years ago: "I do not wish women to have power over men but over themselves."

President Robinson's message about women's empowerment echoes the thoughts and words of many other women I have spoken with around the world during the past three and a half years.

Whether they are scholars, poets, historians, journalists, political activists or stay-at-home mothers, women have much to teach each other about the choices and challenges we face as we try to lead integrated lives.

As the writer Deborah Tannen has pointed out in her books about communication and gender, women need to talk, and often they need to talk to each other. It is that need for conversation and direct communication that distinguishes most women from most men.

As women, talking can be our greatest friend. That's why I'm so excited that President Robinson will be in the United States, spreading her message of humanity and opportunity for the people of Ireland and for women everywhere.

It's also why I feel so fortunate to have had face-to-face discussions about women's lives with everyone from the Prime Minister of Norway, to the Empress of Japan, to a destitute mother of 10 children in a dusty village in rural Pakistan.

When the best-selling author Mary Pipher visited me recently at the White House, we talked about our lives and the pressures confronting teen-age girls today.

The poet Maya Angelou teaches me about literature and life, particularly from the perspective of an African-American woman who grew up in Arkansas and is now a citizen of the world.

TALKING IT OVER 6/4/96

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Rose Styron, the writer and human rights activist, always provokes my thinking about the obligations we owe to men and women whose names are unknown, yet who are suffering for the cause of freedom and democracy.

Historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Blanche Wiesen Cook both have shared their thoughts about Eleanor Roosevelt, someone I wish I could have talked to in person about the role of First Lady. In fact, I occasionally have imaginary conversations with Mrs. Roosevelt to try to figure out what she would do in my shoes. She usually responds by telling me to buck up or at least to grow skin as thick as a rhinoceros.

Mary Catherine Bateson, an anthropologist and the daughter of Margaret Mead, has written many books, including one called "Composing a Life." She and I have spent hours discussing the ways in which women in different societies attempt to fulfill their responsibilities to their families, jobs and communities.

Jean Houston, an expert on philosophy and mythology, has shared her views with me on everything from the ancient Greeks to the lives of women and children in Bangladesh.

I've even had the pleasure of sitting across the dinner table from Ann Landers, asking advice on matters both trivial and not-so-trivial.

But of all the women I've had the chance to meet, I've probably learned the most from those you've never heard of -- women who have never written a book, appeared on television or been the subject of a newspaper article. From a poor barrio in Managua, Nicaragua, to a grassy field in Indonesia, I've met women who find comfort and unity in telling each other about their children, jobs, families, health, education and all the issues that touch their lives.

I don't always agree with what I hear. What's important is to have the chance to listen to women whose perspectives and ideas may differ from my own so that I can broaden my understanding of women's lives and roles today.

Whoever is doing the talking, the stories we share contribute to our history as women and our understanding of our own time.

I hope we will all make time to talk things over with each other.

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June 4, 1996

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WOODWARDS, THE CHOICE [Jean Houston]	

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Parties

FR: Lisa Caputo

RE: General Response Regarding First Lady Portrayal in Bob Woodward's The Choice

o The First Lady meets with all kinds of people from all walks of life all the time.

o As she stated in her June 4, 1996 syndicated column "Talking It Over," "I don't always agree with what I hear. What's important is to have the chance to listen to women whose perspectives and ideas may differ from my own so that I can broaden my understanding of women's lives and roles today."

o What Mr. Woodward talks about in his book reflects a brainstorming session Mrs. Clinton, members of her staff, Jean Houston and Mary Catherine Bateson had to exchange ideas for Mrs. Clinton's book released earlier this year IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

MARY McGRORY

Not Messianic, Maybe, but Messy

What may most gall Hillary Clinton in the current hullabaloo over her imaginary conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt is the implicit invitation to compare her with Nancy Reagan.

Nancy Reagan, as is well known, consulted an astrologer about all of President Ronald Reagan's comings and goings. The talk show hosts had a field day, and the consensus was that fired chief of staff Don Regan had more than gotten even with the first lady by spilling the beans about a White House on tiptoe for the okay on Reagan's schedule from a star-gazer.

Nancy Reagan cared about bone china and designer clothes. She was bullied into anti-drug activity by her husband's handlers who feared the Marie Antoinette look-alike. There is probably no one that high-minded Hillary Clinton would less like to be mentioned in the same breath with, but the New York tabs are headlining "Hillary's Guru" as if this were another episode in the continuing soap opera about first ladies who get guidance from exotic sources.

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 Houston, codirector of the Foundation for Mind Research; she was being "a good sport."

Unfortunately for Clinton, the gathering—which was attended by Houston's colleague, Mary Catherine Bateson, several Clinton staffers, and Barbara Fineman, Woodward's former researcher—the proceedings were taped. Taped? you ask unbelievably with a member of the Nixon impeachment staff the principal figure? Yes, but for the benefit of Barbara Fineman, a writer-researcher who was at the time helping Clinton with her book, the subsequent best-seller, "It Takes a Village." No one asked the obvious question: "How would we like to see this on the front page of The Post?"—which is of course where it ended up. The chief topic of discussion was Clinton's just-completed trip around South Asia. Houston suggested the imaginary conversation with Eleanor Roosevelt, Hillary Clinton's idol and role-model. Clinton issued a press release yesterday, explaining that Houston is not her spiritual adviser. Besides, Clinton said she is always

having talks with Eleanor Roosevelt in her head and has confessed as much to large audiences.

Bob Woodward is the Holy Terror of American journalism, a past master of the black art of getting people to say things they shouldn't—also called interviewing. He and Carl Bernstein achieved immortality by stalking Richard Nixon right out of the White House. His depiction of a desperate Hillary Clinton, thrashing about for solace after the crushing rejection of her health plan and the massive Democratic defeat of November 1994, was something the White House did not need at this time.

White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta put the most humane light on it, when he appeared on "Face the Nation": "All I can tell you is that the first lady is a human being. She reaches out, talks to friends . . . talks to others. In the job she's involved with, along with the president and all of us for that matter, we have to draw strength from wherever we can. . . . I can't tell you how many Hail Marys I've said."

The question is whether Houston was wholesome company for Hillary Clinton, who has delusions of grandeur to begin with and does not need to be told that she is more significant to women than Joan of Arc, as her psychic visitor suggested. Clinton was plainly feeling sorry for herself, a state she is often in to judge from her statements of complaint about a press obsession with her hair. Jonathan Freedland in the Guardian says, the first lady "spends too much time looking in the mirror and not enough looking out the window."

She certainly does not need to be fawned on. She needs a friend like the fabled Ed Lahey, a reporter for the old Chicago Daily News who, when a colleague began to keen and whine, would say gently, "Remember, honey, there are 2 million people in this country who work in steam laundries."

President Clinton has so many woes these days—the indefensible White House liberties with the FBI files, another Whitewater trial and the shadow on his closest aide, who has been named an unindicted coconspirator—that the disclosure of a wifely seance in the White House solarium is a mere mosquito bite. He can take comfort from polls that show him that the voters still prefer him to the Republican candidate in the curious contest between messy and mean that is unfolding. So far, messy beats mean, but it's getting to be a question of how much longer.