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Book Reviews

Living History. By Hillary Rodham Clinton. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003, pp. 562. ISBN 0-7432-2224-5.

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Living History reads like a story. It is a well written prose that captivates the reader's mind from beginning to end. Hillary commences by giving a vivid description of her family, their background, all the factors that influenced their outlook towards life and the values they impressed on her. She gives the reader a clear insight into her youth, and family without passing judgment on any of the characters or revealing any trace of bitterness. Hillary discusses how her faith and a certain Rev. Jones from Drew University in particular affected her values and attitude.

From Rev. Jones she learnt that a Christian life was "faith in action"; from the Methodist youth fellowship sessions, she learns about art and literature, and visited Black and Hispanic Churches; and through Rev. Jones' "liberalizing" experiences, she slowly opens her eyes to the world and views beyond those of Park Ridges' (where she grew up) and her parents'. Her life at Wellesly girls' school and subsequently at Yale saw Hillary turn into an independent, active and serving citizen of America who was already supporting the cause of desegregation and better treatment for children with abusive parents. Hillary met Bill Clinton, a Rhodes Scholar, in the autumn of 1970. For Bill, Hillary quickly became the person he loved and despite many rejections, he repeatedly proposed marriage to her. They were married on October 11, 1975 and five years later their daughter, Chelsea, was born on February 27, 1980.

Bill Clinton's first electoral victory was as Attorney General of Arkansas in 1976. For Hillary, this victory entailed the struggle to

find suitable employment and still remain the independent individual she always was. Hillary had just settled into her teaching job at the University of Arkansas and was enjoying it but Bill being Attorney General entailed moving houses and this meant she could no longer teach at the University of Arkansas. She joined the Rose Law Firm in 1976 and ended up becoming a partner at the Rose Law Firm.

In 1992, Bill became the President and she began her life as First Lady of the United States of America. She had her own opinions, interests and profession. For better or for worse, she was outspoken. Hillary represented a fundamental change in the way that women functioned in her society. She was labeled and categorized because of her positions and mistakes and above all, because she had become a symbol for women in her generation.

Bill Clinton began his presidency avowing to tackle the huge political challenge of reforming health care and appointed Hillary as the chair of the President's Task Force on National Health Care Reform. The reform proposal for health care presented in 1994 faced severe opposition and the Clinton Administration conceded defeat and health care faded with barely a whimper. Nevertheless, Bill signed a series of bills that Hillary had worked on including some regarding women, children and vaccination. Bill used his presidential prerogative to extend patients' rights to more than eighty-five million Americans and their dependents enrolled in federal health care plans and to those covered by Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Health System. He also took on the tobacco lobby and began seriously addressing HIV/AIDS in the US and around the world.

By mid-1993, Hillary faced what is known as the Whitewater scandal. The name Whitewater came to represent a limitless investigation of the Clinton's lives that cost the taxpayers over US \$70 million for the Independent Counsel investigation alone, which did not turn up any wrong doing on their part. The purpose of the investigation was only to discredit the President and the Administration and to slow down its momentum. Whitewater signaled a new tactic in political warfare: investigation as a weapon for political destruction. Amidst all the political challenges and agenda Hillary became entangled in as the First lady were the trips which she accompanied Bill Clinton. She writes about her travels to the Middle East with Bill in 1996. Despite giving a vivid description of the

Presidents and First Ladies of Egypt and Jordan, she talks mainly about their characters, or the cuisine, the attire and other trivialities. Never does she delve into the political situation in these countries and their dire need for reform or gradual democratisation and establishment of human rights and civil liberties. She applauds Queen Noor of Jordan's American birth, Princeton education, poise and outspoken nature yet speaks nothing of the multitude of women in Jordan who are subjected to gross denial of human rights and blatant inequality.

Bill Clinton then becomes the first President to address the joint session of Parliament in Amman and yet again we hear no mention of democracy, human rights or reform. In trying to understand the cautious approach Hillary takes, one could probably say that the importance of maintaining stability in the oil rich, strategically important yet politically volatile populations of the Middle East remains in the best interest of the US and hence influences the Clinton Administration, just as it did all other preceding American administrations, to desist from politically criticizing their leaders. Later when they both travel to Israel and Palestine, Hillary discusses the historical signing of the Camp David Accords by Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in 1993. In writing of the behind the scene rehearsal of that historical handshake, she says, "...Bill and Yitzaq engaged in a hilarious rehearsal of the handshake, with Bill pretending to be Arafat as they practiced a maneuver that would prevent the Palestinian leader from drawing too close."

One cannot help but wonder at Hillary's derogatory depiction of the Palestinian First Couple while she glorifies and endears their Israeli counterpart, especially in the light of her being a self professed liberal who has in all other dimensions sought to accommodate diverging views and people from a diverse catalogue of cultures. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Hillary, through her book, sought to appeal to and maintain the votes from the Jewish populace of New York where she is presently Senator-elect.

In March 1995, Hillary took her first extended trip overseas without Bill Clinton but with her favourite travel companion, Chelsea. From Pakistan to India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and most parts of South Asia, Hillary examined, talked about and explored ways to help advance women's issues and rights. Though her efforts are

plausible and it is apparent that she sincerely cares for women's issues abroad, Hillary honestly but rather insensitively explains the reason behind her efforts: "...when women suffer, their children suffer and their economies stagnate, ultimately weakening potential markets for US products."

Hillary's explanation seems to *dollarise* humanity, and it would have been appreciated if she had instead noted that regardless of any benefit to the US, the US being the beacon of democracy and the traditional Champion of Human Rights, has every reason to encourage this effort in South Asia. She writes about the amazingly contradictory settings in these countries that have female presidents yet their women suffer gross denial of human rights. She describes in detail and applauds the micro-finance efforts to help female entrepreneurial efforts like the Gramin Bank's efforts in Bangladesh and its success in giving women their livelihood and independence. Similar efforts have been made in Indian states as well like SEWA in Gujarat. Hillary speaks of Women's rights as Human Rights and dedicates a whole chapter to explain her role in advancing women's rights globally. she had been chosen to attend the UN Conference on Women's Right in China as the Honorary Chair of the US delegation. Hillary's twenty one minute speech at the conference was immediately dubbed as probably being her finest moment in public life by *The New York Times* and became a manifesto for women all over the world.

Throughout the book, Hillary describes the Republican Party as one plagued by conservative ideas with lots of money at their disposal to achieve their political end games. They are deeply angered by a democratic victory and tried every dirty trick in the book to weaken Bill's presidency and derail his policies and agenda. She reveals the power of the media in the hands of the Republicans that was skillfully and blatantly used to undermine Bill's presidency, invade their privacy and turn public opinion against them or simply divert the focus of Americans from the important issues she and the President were working on.

A Living History portrays Hillary as indeed the great woman behind Bill Clinton, a companion he could not have done without and a true partner. Her love for her Country and President is undeniable and mostly enviable. She traveled vastly on the

President's behalf to Eastern Europe, Ireland, and Africa. Her strength is demonstrated in what came to be known world wide as the Monica Lewinsky Affair.

Hillary vehemently refused to believe any media stories and through her unwavering faith in her husband's innocence, dismissed the allegations as another malicious attack on the President. After years of enduring false charges, partisan investigations and frivolous lawsuits, she was sure that this was yet another one. Catching whiff of the story through the media was hurtful enough but to actually have Bill later admit to her the occurrence of "an inappropriate intimacy" between him and Monica in a "brief and sporadic" affair, was a devastating betrayal that would take her months to reconcile with and shook the very roots of their marriage.

Hillary could not believe Bill would do anything to endanger their marriage and family. She writes that despite her heartbreak and disappointment, her long hours alone after Bill's confession, made her admit to herself that she loved Bill. Bill had been her husband, best friend, partner in all of life's trials and joys and a loving father to their daughter. The reader gets a feeling that the unbearable loneliness of separation from Bill, among other reasons, was what eventually convinces her to give him a second chance and try to make her marriage work. Despite it all, she remained loyal to her country's President and describes the investigations and Senate's move to impeach Bill as an ever-escalating political war in which she was clearly on Bill's side.

With the favourable end of the impeachment trial and after endless requests from her friends and political allies to run as Senator for New York, Hillary finally agrees. Having had vast experience in campaigning, running for political office and all the dirty tricks political rivals threw at her through Bill Clinton, she was prepared to try run for Senator. Hillary finally won the New York election and became Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. She would now shed her surrogate, behind-the-scene role and become her own person with her own title and duties to her country. She would use her voice and vote on behalf of the values and policies she thinks best for New York and the United States of America.