

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
C-SPAN Interview with Steve Scully
The White House, Washington
July 13, 1998**

Scully: Mrs. Clinton, four days traveling to Historic Sites and two years talking about American history. What's behind the effort; why are you doing this?

Mrs. Clinton: We are doing it for several reasons. You know when Bill and I started talking about the fact that we were going to have a turn of the century and millennium while he was still president, we began to think about ways that we could use that time to highlight some of the issues and concerns that we thought America had about where we were going and where the future is and what time and direction we should take. It struck us both that one of the real challenges we have as we move through this time, is to carry what's best of our past into the future with confidence together, as one nation as one America. So, out of that came the White Millennium Council. It has a number of different programs, but one of its most important is the Save America's Treasures Program which is what this tour is all about. And that really came out in my concern that as I traveled around the country and as I talked to the people, I realized that there are so many parts of our past--documents, monuments and sites--that have deteriorated. And there were many devoted people, in every community, struggling to save, but there wasn't any real strong national awareness of how important it is that we really value the past in order to learn from it and to carry those lessons forward. So that's how we began to think about it and formed a partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has done such great work around the country. Then this tour is a way of getting out into the country and talking about some of these issues with people and illustrating both some of the success stories and some of the challenges. I am just really excited to be able to do this.

Scully: So this began, what, a couple of months ago?

Mrs. Clinton: It began with an announcement at the National Archives when the President announced the start of the Millennium Council and the Save America's Treasures as a separate program of the Millennium Council was announced a few months ago.

Scully: And, in doing all of this, what have you learned?

Mrs. Clinton: I've learned how much we have to value about our past and how grateful we all should be because of all the work that so many people did for us. Not only political leaders like George Washington and his Revolutionary War Headquarters that we are on our way to visit, but also, scientists and innovators, like Thomas Edison, whose laboratory I'm going to see or authors like Edith Wharton or labor leaders like Kate Mullany. I'm going to visit both their homes. So, I think that it's a way for me--and I hope other Americans--to take stock of all that's gone on before and to say to ourselves there's so much to be done; we really are custodians, caretakers of that mess.

Scully: How did you select these sites and are there more on the way?

Mrs. Clinton: There are definitely more on the way. And you know, this was kind of serendipitous. We had this wonderful announcement at the Smithsonian about the effort to save the Star Spangled Banner--probably the most well known icon of United States history--and when we knew we would start in Washington, and I knew that I was going to end in Seneca Falls where we're celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Declaration of Sentiments, we began to look at a map and talk to the National Trust and other Historic Preservation experts and say what could I see on the way from Washington to Seneca Falls that would really be indicative of the many opportunities and challenges we face in preserving the past and saving our treasures.

Scully: I was scanning through...(inaudible)...and I was wondering when Chelsea was growing up did you talk history, is it something that you were interested in?

Mrs. Clinton: We did; we talked history all the time. We visited historic sites, and we are great museum goers as a family. We have always enjoyed doing that. Having a child then for us reading aloud historic stories, talking about historical sites, visiting them together we are all very interested in American history.

Scully: How do we do as a country.....(inaudible)... compared to say, Canada....(inaudible).....

Mrs. Clinton: You know, I don't really know how to make that comparison. I am not an expert on that. I think what it is fair to say that we've done a lot of things right: we have this fabulous National Park system that is the envy of the world, but is under funded. It is not being taken care of as it should. There are many aspects of the National Parks system that need attention for maintenance repair and preservation. We have many different agencies of the federal and state governments around our country that have been devoted to historic preservation but they all have more needs they can possibly meet. And one of my goals for this whole effort is to try to increase both public and private support for saving America's treasures, and to make it not something that is elitist or just for profits of people who call themselves preservationists, but for every American.

I really believe that in most places that I have visited--and I have been fortunate to visit every state in the country--and in many places in every state there is something worth saving that tells something about their past and points them in the direction of the future. It's not some kind of nice thing to preserve because it's historical but it really says to people you know, this is a monument to people who really made a difference who came from this community, this is the house where somebody lived who really changed history in this state, here are the documents what we should study because we can get lessons about where to go from here. So, I'm hoping that although we've done a lot of good things for preservation in our country over the years and have a lot to be really proud of, there is so much work to be done and there's a lot of more to be done in increasing public commitments and private commitments too.

Scully: A hundred years from now what do you want preserved of for Hillary Clinton? What people will learn about?

Mrs. Clinton: I have no idea; I think it will be interesting though because you know my husband will have a library, and there'll be a lot of documents. And just as we find from the stories from today when we go back and look at the full range of people's thoughts and their interactions, they will learn more about the lives and that will happen to me and my husband and me as well.

Scully: When you look at past First Ladies, when you look at Ladybird Johnson, you think of the Department, if you think of Barbara Bush, you think of literacy project and even with Nancy Reagan you probably think....(inaudible).... Just Say No drug campaign; when they think of you what do you think about?

Mrs. Clinton: All the things I've done because I can't put a value or prioritize one above the other, and the order I did it seems to be too much, children's issues or Health Care, or economic opportunity for poor people or trying to help build democracies in civil societies around the world; this work on the millennium particularly saving America's treasures, talking about ideas and values that are important. I have.... (inaudible).... give one particular thing that is all I have worked on, I just can't....(inaudible)....to try to do that. I don't know anybody who...(inaudible).....

Scully: Do you have a pet project, one thing that you...(inaudible).....

Mrs. Clinton: No I don't, You know today I am excited about the tour that we're about to have, The White House Millennium Council Save America's Treasures worked very hard on that. But next week, I'm probably going to be working on making sure charter schools in the District of Columbia work and that children have real choices in the public school system. I don't weigh one higher than the other, I consider it all part of what I want to do, make a contribution to make our country stronger and more confident in the 21st century.

Scully: I want to go back to the public/private parties who target companies helping out in the funding of the Washington Monument. You announced that Ralph Lauren is helping out to conserve of the Star Spangled Banner; how does that all come about? What's your role?

Mrs. Clinton: Well a lot of people have worked very long hours to make all of this happen, and I've tried to be encouraging. I've spoken directly to people I've included people to make contributions to the Save America's Treasures program, the National Trust. I've spoken to individual donors and contributors about the importance of this work. So, I will continue to be front and center to do everything I can to make the millennium celebration in our nation really meaningful, and not just where you are going to spend New Year's Eve but instead, how you are going to think about our country. Even though we've have some very big, generous gifts from Ralph Lauren, there will be more announced on the tour that are significant. I want every American to think about what he or she can do you know from the classroom to boardroom each one of us can make a contribution. It may be pennies collected from kindergarten class or a multi-million dollar contribution from a large corporation, but all of it together is what I am looking for. That kind of wonderful community that Americans have around important events and occasions. I'm hoping that we'll have that about saving our treasures and looking to the future.

Scully: When Hillary Rodham was a student you remember about the....(inaudible).....

Mrs. Clinton: You know I have so many-I remember singing the Star Spangled Banner, and the Pledge of Allegiance, when I was a child in grade school; we did it every single day. It was a really important lesson because we had to be told what it meant. We had to be told how to pronounce big words like "indivisible," but that was history lesson every day. I wish children would do it every day in school now. I think that those opportunities for unity among all of our diverse populations are too few and far between. I was lucky because I had excellent teachers in my public schools. They emphasized American history and we studied all aspects of American history. I can remember being in fourth grade and writing a long report about the discovery and settlement of California by the Spaniards and the ...(inaudible).... the wonderful highway...(inaudible)... that went up in that state. So, we all learn about different aspects of American History. I think that in the absence of a commitment to teach American history and to certainly get below the surface, and I'm not talking about the only one sanitized version, you know having the debates about what were the sources of the Civil War, and time we went through in the 20th century that were difficult like the Great Depression and the McCarthy era and all the rest of them. But study American history, learning how great this country is and how valuable the lessons are still today that we're really taught by our founders is something that really every American should be taught.

Scully: But do you ever think that you also are to be in American History

Mrs. Clinton: You know I don't.

Scully: That people will learn about you in generations ahead?

Mrs. Clinton: You know it is something that I....(inaudible).... That no one would think about. You know when you ask me about what people will think about and remember, I just don't think that way. I'm thinking more about when I leave here talking about writing about what I've seen and the decisions I know have been made, and maybe filling out some more of the details and providing some information that might not otherwise might not be available. So, I see myself as a participant, certainly living in this house and being married to someone like my husband who just eats breathes and thinks about history all the time and adores every minute that he's here because he feels like he's learning something. So, I am very conscious of history but I'm not very aware of what role I'm playing in it, or how people see that role, I think I'll leave that for future generations.

Scully: In our remaining moments, we're sitting here at the presidential library reading a program looking at the White House and one viewer called up and wondered if there is a Clinton Legacy here in this White House.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I hope so. I hope that it is both a tangible and intangible legacy. You know, on the tangible side, we been fortunate to do some work in the house. I hope that others will enjoy seeing our new program. It was a great gift to the nation and I want to thank you. By the time we leave we will have been responsible for overseeing the renovation and redecoration of

the East Room, and Center Hall, the Grand Foyer and the Blue Room and now we're starting on a major decoration of the State Dining Room which is a bad year. We've also done quite a bit of work on the second floor in a number of rooms. So, there's a lot of tangible evidence of how we live and what we value and the kind of style that we thought was appropriate for a house. And intangible, we've had more open houses; more people than ever before. Literally thousands and tens of thousands of people who have been invited to events in the house and on the lawn, we try to strike the right balance between an informal welcoming style and keeping the elegance and dignity of this house. So I hope that that is remembered, and it is certainly something that both Bill and I care very much about(inaudible).....

Scully: You have been First Lady five and a half years, is the job what you expected?

Mrs. Clinton: No I don't think that I really knew what to expect, and I have to say that I have been so grateful to have the chance to live here and be here. Sometimes people come up to me and say "won't you be so glad when this is over" and I find myself saying, no I want every day here, I enjoy every day the challenges and the opportunities have been beyond anything I ever could have imagined. But did I know what to expect? I had no idea, and I don't think that even people who are close to Washington and the White house have a much more intimate knowledge of it than certainly Bill or I did before we arrived also knew what to expect. It's too much; it's too big; it's too overwhelming and circumstances always change.

Scully: I know we've asked you this before but is there a moment that you reflected on at the time that you've lived at this house something you will cherish?

Mrs. Clinton: There's so many of them, I just can't even begin to count them all and one of the things that I am hoping to find time for, and probably not until I leave, is to write about all our White House moments and share them with the American people because they run from the ridiculous to the sublime, to the wonderful to the tragic and everything in between. I am writing, well sort of helping to compile this book about letters from children to Socks and Buddy. I wanted to do that because those are some of the sweetest moments because you know these pets of ours mean so much, not only to children adults as well, but children in great numbers write to them and talk about their lives and what to know how to be in touch with them. They feel a connection because this little cat and dog live in the White House. I see that in so many ways, large and small every single day. People who walk in, they could be from the most humble of backgrounds or in their own eyes, the most exhausted but they all feel a sense of awe when they walk in this house and Bill. I still feel it every single day and occasionally I'll look at him and say you know I just can't believe that we are so fortunate to be able live here. For me, it is just a whole visual image that I run through my mind of people and faces.

One of the most touching moments is when we have Make a Wish Children--children who are close to death--they are suffering from internal diseases. Their last wish is to meet the President, visit the White House and be able to pet Socks or Buddy and these children come. They're so brave and their families are so brave. They come into the House and even the Oval Office and...(inaudible)...or one of the other rooms in the house. And, for a moment, they forget and their families forget the incredible stress in their life, and just being able to do that, it's not one of

those things that you can write about in the history book. But for me it has been one of the mostexperiences I've had

Scully: Two final points. How do you deal with critics?

Mrs. Clinton: You know my husband loves to quote....(inaudible).... If I think somebody is a critic and is well meaning and motivated by good faith I pay attention because I think that is important. But there are so many other agendas that I disregard much of it.

Scully: You're vacationing in August, will the history books be packed up?

Mrs. Clinton: Lots of history books, they're always packed up. You know we move with a small library no matter where we go. Anyone whose every traveled with us knows that. It is one of our favorite ways of relaxing. Bill has been reading a lot of biographies of some of our founding generations. He has a big stack that we're going to take starting with a wonderful biography about John Marshall, Daniel Webster, you know we just love to read about

Scully: What part of history do you not know a lot about that you are wanting to change?

Mrs. Clinton: Its funny you should ask that because Bill and I have decided that we didn't know very much at all, or thought we should know more about the period between about the end of the war of 1812 up to about 1850-55. More of the beginnings of the war and when Lincoln was on the national stage and all, so we've been reading a lot about that period--the Jacksonian period and some other presidents during that time. So we're focusing on that. I have also been paying a lot of attention to the turn of the century between the 19th and 20th century. You know there are parallels between what happened at the end of the 19th century and what is happening that the end of the 20th century. You know we went from agrarian to industrial society. Now we're moving from a post industrial society to an information age. People felt both exhilarated and fearful about changes going on in their lives; there were lots of worries about immigrants at the turn of the century and there are worries as we see in the headlines today about immigrants in our country. They was a need to take stock of how our policies were which led to the progressive era. I think we have to be very conscious about the inequity in the incomes in our country, and the lack of health insurance for millions of Americans and in this century. So I've looked at and read something about what people were thinking and doing in the last century that I think is relevant today

Scully: And when this is all over, this whole project?

Mrs. Clinton: Well I hope that it will run through the year 2000. I hope that we will be able to say, in some very specific ways that we increased public resources--federal, state, and local--devoted to state preservation and other important related issues like our National Parks...(inaudible)... That we've dramatically increased private resources going into preservation, that we've enhanced American awareness and understanding of our history, and, perhaps, given a nudge to more interest in history among children and in our classrooms, but that more than anything, we've used this project to learn about what we need to do for the future. That we've

really take stock and ask ourselves, what are the lessons that we really want to take with us as we move into this new time? How are we going to live together? How are we going to make sure that Americans will remember when that Star Spangled banner was flying over Fort McHenry the War of 1812 and 1814? There were a lot of people who weren't sure this nation would survive, but what was it that has always enabled us to keep moving forward? How do we translate that into the future? I think, most important, how do we do it as one nation, as one America, as a community, despite our differences and our diversity. I think that history will teach us how to do that. I think that it will give us some good guidelines; maybe a push in the right direction

Scully: Mrs. Clinton, thank you very much.