



## The betrayal that should haunt Hillary Clinton: How she sold out working women & then never apologized

As Clinton's campaign lambastes Bernie Sanders for perceived sexism, we should take a hard look at her own record

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Hillary Clinton holds the great promise of becoming the first woman elected to the presidency. Recently, many of her partisans have accused her main opponent, Bernie Sanders, of sexism. Sanders, defending his gun control record, said that “all the shouting in the world” wouldn’t stop the violence; Clinton responded that “I haven’t been shouting, but sometimes when a woman speaks out, some people think it’s shouting.”

In the second incident, Sanders campaign manager Jeff Weaver, poking fun at their underdog status, joked that Clinton would “make a great vice president.” He continued: “We’re willing to give her more credit than Obama did. We’re willing to consider her for vice president. We’ll give her serious consideration. We’ll even interview her.” In response, Emily’s List President Stephanie Schriock tweeted that the comment was a “condescending insult by a team who knows better. Hillary is possibly most qualified ever to run & Americans know it.”

Those two smears don’t convince as sexist. By contrast, examine Hillary Clinton’s comments defending welfare reform, [assembled by BuzzFeed](#), in the late 1990s and early 2000s: Clinton wrote that “too many of those on welfare had known nothing but dependency all their lives.” She suggested that women recipients were “sitting around the house doing nothing.” She described the “move from welfare to work” as “the transition from dependency to dignity.” Or a “substitute dignity for dependence.” Put more simply, she stated, “these people are no longer deadbeats—they’re actually out there being productive.”

In sum, she has frequently validated a pathologization of poor black women that has often served as a pretext for Republican assaults on the social safety net. She has not repudiated these remarks.

Indeed, Clinton has long embraced welfare reform, a policy more hostile to women than almost any other enacted recent decades. Passed by a Republican Congress, the bill was signed in 1996 by President Bill Clinton, eager to make good on his pledge to “end welfare as we know it.”

What that meant was a five-year federal limit on receiving welfare. States, which henceforth received funding as a block grant, were incentivized to set even set even stricter limits. States that kicked people off the rolls could spend the money elsewhere, [and they have](#). States could also evade job participation requirements by kicking people off the rolls. Whether the gutting of welfare was a cynical political calculation (Clinton’s penchant for “triangulation”) or derived

from deep-seated belief likely has made little difference to the poor women, often black women, cut off from government aid.

In 1996, the number of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children was 4.5 million, according to Fred Block and Frances Fox Piven. In 2009, as economic crisis set in, just 1.7 million families were accessing Temporary Aid to Needy Families, AFDC's eviscerated replacement. That's a cut of 62 percent. According to a recent Harper's story by Virginia Sole-Smith, "For every hundred families with children that are living in poverty, sixty-eight were able to access cash assistance before Bill Clinton's welfare reform. By 2013, that number had fallen to twenty-six."

TANF block grants were not set to adjust for inflation and, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the program's buying power has declined by more than a third since 1997. As welfare reform shredded the social safety net, other Clinton Administration policies buttressed corporate and Wall Street power. The shift from good-paying manufacturing jobs to horribly compensated cashier work in the service industry accelerated. Wall Street went on to tank the global economy. When the bottom fell out, there was little to catch poor people falling hard to the ground. As Ron Haskins, a Brookings Institution senior fellow who played a key role in welfare reform, put it, "any mom who does not have the ability to maintain her household and work at the same time is going to have trouble."

And so they have, as Sole-Smith's story describes in painful detail.

In the 1990s, for what it's worth, Sanders condemned welfare reform efforts as combining "an assault on the poor, women and children, minorities, and immigrants," and "the grand slam of scapegoating legislation" that "appeals to the frustrations and ignorance of the American people along a wide spectrum of prejudices."

Clinton's paternalism should not surprise. The entire enterprise of welfare reform was paternalistic, premised on the idea that poor people, especially poor black women, are poor because they don't want to work; in reality, poor people, especially poor black women, are mostly poor because there aren't enough jobs, too many of those that exist pay horribly, and childcare is too expensive. Rampant job discrimination and segregation in housing and education sets poor people on a path to economic marginalization. What follows is political demonization.

"Nearly half of welfare recipients were non-white, so the attack on welfare fit nicely into the larger Republican effort to discredit the Democratic Party by associating it with blacks and liberalism," write Block and Piven.

Welfare reform was a harsh repudiation of the notion that women's work caring for children was just that: work. Reagan invented the idea of the welfare queen. But it was the Clintons who actually took welfare away.

Maybe Hillary Clinton "evolved" on this issue, in the same way that she has changed her mind on gay marriage, the war in Iraq, along with (kind of) criminal justice and free trade? But she hasn't. During the 2008 primary, Clinton was still backing welfare reform.

“Welfare should have been a temporary way station for people who needed immediate assistance,” she told the New York Times. “It should not be considered an anti-poverty program. It simply did not work.”

Conservatives hope she sticks to her guns.

“The big question will be for Hillary Clinton,” Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, writes in the National Review. “Welfare reform was her husband’s legacy achievement. But today’s Democratic party has moved far to the left. Will Hillary ditch Bill’s reform, or will she stand by her man and leave herself open to an attack from Bernie Sanders?”

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The specter of welfare reform continues to haunt American politics.

In July, according to the New York Times’ Eduardo Porter, Arizona “became the first state to cut poor families’ access to welfare assistance to a maximum of 12 months over a lifetime. That’s a fifth of the time allowed under federal law, and means that 5,000 more people will lose their benefits by next June.”

Today, Paul Ryan and others on the right have taken inspiration from Clinton’s block grants because they are an ideal vehicle to gut a safety net entitlement.

“Mr. Ryan has proposed to turn Medicaid into a block grant to the states,” writes Porter. “Last year, he put forth an ‘opportunity grant,’ a block grant to replace just about everything else the federal government provides lower-income people — not just the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, known as TANF, but also food stamps, housing assistance and energy aid — into one dollop of money. The main exceptions would be Social Security and the earned-income tax credit.”

And so Clinton now deflects her record on welfare reform and wants to turn the discussion to purportedly perceived slights against her as a woman. It will apparently be a consistent theme of this campaign. The Clintons are experts at abstracting gender from the question of gender justice. The same goes for race. In 2008, the wife of America’s “first black president” brazenly stoked racist sentiment in her failed efforts to stop Obama.

Clinton getting a free pass as a feminist only makes sense if, for some reason, reproductive rights are a litmus test in a way that anti-woman policies that harm poor women and leave middle-class women unscathed are not. So-called welfare reform is an issue that isn’t going away. And it shouldn’t. It was Bill Clinton’s signature domestic policy achievement, a domestic policy that defined his administration in the same way that healthcare reform has defined Obama’s. And in today’s economy it is doing a lot of damage.

Reproductive rights are important, especially since most every Republican wants to eliminate them. But no Democrat deserves accolades simply for embracing them. Any real debate on abortion in the Democratic Party has long been over. Democrats, however, still have serious differences on policies that impact poor women of color. Those differences merit careful scrutiny.

The notion that Hillary Clinton is a feminist choice because she is a qualified woman is a really very caricatured identity politics. And it plays too easily into conservative hands. Witness Jonah Goldberg, openly suggesting that conservative support for Ben Carson, a black man who embraces many bigotries, is in part due to the fact that a black candidate inoculates them against charges of racism. Stay tuned for more of this from the Fiorina campaign. And more from Clinton too.

As Sam Stein writes at The Huffington Post, Sanders remains a long shot. But the establishment is beginning to panic.

“The guy has been a socialist his whole life and now decides he is a Democrat and therefore the Democratic Party has got to move to that extreme?” said Bill Daley, a former Obama chief of staff and longtime Wall Street executive. “I think it is a recipe for disaster.”

Wall Street warning of disaster. Imagine that.

Daley made his comments at a briefing by Third Way, a pro-business Democratic outfit started by Clinton administration alumni. Red baiting will be one theme of this race. In September, the Clinton super PAC led by David Brock, former right-wing hatchet man and current Clinton proxy warrior, lamely attempted to tie Sanders to the late Hugo Chavez. The Clinton disinformation campaign will be multifaceted, alternating between insincere charges of sexism and attacks on Sanders as a dangerous leftist when it suits her.

Clinton and her partisans are instrumentalizing baseless accusations of sexism to protect a candidate with a sexist and racist policy record. It is an attempt to shift a contest that is fundamentally about issues like economic inequality and warfare-without-end into something that it is not. It's quite possible that Hillary Clinton will evolve on the issue of welfare reform. No one, after all, has ever accused the Clintons of ignoring public opinion.