The Life and Career of Hillary Rodham Clinton

Clinton’s activities in high school and college hinted at what her career would later bring. At Maine South High School in Illinois, she participated on the student council, on the debate team, and in the National Honor Society.

After meeting civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1962, Clinton was inspired to pursue a life in politics. When she was a senior in high school, Clinton volunteered on the campaign of Republican candidate Barry Goldwater for the 1964 presidential election. Following high school, Clinton started her undergraduate education at Wellesley College and immediately began making a name for herself there.

Immersing herself in politics on campus, Clinton served as the president of the Wellesley College chapter of the College Republicans. When she graduated with departmental honors and a degree in political science in 1969, Clinton became the first student from Wellesley College to give the commencement address to the graduating class. According to the Associated Press, her speech brought her a standing ovation that lasted for seven minutes. LIFE magazine also published an article about her because of her bold criticism of the speaker who addressed the crowd before her, Senator Edward Brooke.

In 1970, Clinton began studying law at Yale Law School, where she continued to excel and build her political and legal career. At Yale and in her community, she was involved in many organizations and clubs supporting the betterment of others.

Clinton joined the board of editors for the Yale Review of Law and Social Action, volunteered at the Yale Child Study Center, and took cases for and counseled the poor at the Yale-New Haven Hospital. Because of her extraordinary dedication to law and children, Clinton was awarded a grant to work at the Children’s Defense Fund in Cambridge, MA, in the summer of 1970.

Before graduating from Yale Law School in 1973, Clinton got more involved in politics as she worked for Senator Walter Mondale’s subcommittee in Washington, which focused on migrant workers. With the subcommittee, she researched related problems concerning housing, sanitation, health, and education. She also campaigned in the Western United States for Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern in 1972. Clinton continued working for the Yale Child Study Center, completing a year of postgraduate study on children and medicine.

Once she completed law school, Clinton remained active on various political and children’s-rights committees, and she began teaching at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville School of Law, where Bill Clinton, whom she had begun dating in 1971, was also teaching. The couple wed in 1975, and they moved to...
Little Rock, where her husband began campaigning for a seat in the U.S. Congress. Clinton started practicing in the intellectual property department of the Rose Law Firm in 1976.

In 1978, Clinton became the First Lady of Arkansas when her husband was elected governor of the state. She also made partner at her firm the following year—a great accomplishment, as no other woman had ever been named as a full partner at the firm before.

After giving birth to her only child, Chelsea, in 1980 and during the 12 years that she spent as the First Lady of Arkansas, Clinton continued to bring about many improvements to the state’s education and child welfare programs. She also co-founded the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and served on various boards, including the Arkansas Children’s Hospital Legal Services and the Children’s Defense Fund.

When her husband was elected President of the United States, Clinton became the First Lady of the United States in 1993. Once he landed in office, her husband made her the head of the Task Force on National Health Care Reform. In addition to assuming this position—which coined the phrase "two for the price of one"—Clinton played a powerful role in the decisions her husband made as president.

During her two terms as the First Lady of the United States, Clinton continued to work tirelessly for the benefit of women’s and children’s welfare and rights. At the close of her husband’s second term as president, Clinton moved with him to Northern New York State. There, she was elected to the United States Senate in 2000. Clinton was also reelected by New York in 2006.

After meeting with tremendous success and popularity while serving as a first lady and a senator, Clinton announced her candidacy in the 2008 presidential election.