

Shortly before Hilary Clinton's new book, entitled *It Takes a Village*, appeared in bookstores, a rumor began to circulate that the book had been ghost written -- that is, written entirely by someone else than Mrs. Clinton. In response to this rumor, the White House Staff invited several reporters to Mrs. Clinton's private study and showed them the manuscript of the book, which included many legal pads covered with her handwriting. Several weeks later, however, the White House issued a statement that although the book substantially reflects Mrs. Clinton's work, she wrote it with the assistance of a veteran writer, Barbara Feinman, who specializes in reshaping and rewriting the work of other authors. The White House indicated that Ms. Feinman collaborated with Mrs. Clinton on about eight chapters of the book. Ms Feinman's name, however, appears nowhere in *It Takes a Village*.

Assuming that Ms. Feinman agreed not to have her collaboration acknowledged in Mrs. Clinton's book, was it, morally justifiable to publish the book without such an acknowledgment? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The practice of having unacknowledged "ghost writers" to write all, or a substantial portion, of a book to be marketed as the sole work of another person is morally unjustifiable, even if the arrangement results from a fully voluntary agreement. Such a practice clearly involves deception, given the normal presumption when a person's name appears as sole author of a book that the person wrote it by himself or herself. Furthermore, it is difficult to think of any relevant factors that could justify the deception involved in ghost writing because, apart from the inherent deception involved in the practice, it has the added bad consequence of fostering general cynicism, which adversely affects every public figure who writes a book, including those like Mrs. Clinton, who, apparently, wrote most of her own recent book. Possibly Mrs. Clinton sought to deal with this problem by not acknowledging Ms. Feinman's assistance, so as to avoid raising cynical doubts in the minds of the public about the extent of her own contribution. This is not a sufficient reason, however, to justify the deception involved in not acknowledging Ms. Feinman's assistance.

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