



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 12, 1992

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Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton
Spelman College
Atlanta, GA
October 12, 1992

Thank you Maya Angelou. That was a wonderful introduction. Well, after all. What do we expect? She is from Arkansas, you know.

And I'm so glad, Maya, that you decided you would get up at 5:00 o'clock in the morning and to be with us. I think we ought to do this, Dr. Cole, maybe once a month or so just to keep our spirits up and the energy going and this activity.

It is a pleasure for me to be here at the best regional liberal arts college in the south. And there are no qualifiers. There are no asterisks. Just the best.

And it's a special pleasure to be with your president, who is someone I've followed and watched with such great admiration and gotten to know over the last years. Who has been able to show us what it's like to--in the words of her friend, Marion Katherine Batemon--"composed a life." Because in the composing of her life, she has shown how you can bring all the strands together and end up not only with the serenity and integrity that she lives, but with the leadership she displays. Not just for Spelman but for all of education and for this country and we owe you a real debt, Sister President.

There are a number of my friends and others who have joined me. Friends who have been with me and my husband on the causes and issues we care about for a very long time. One in particular, I would like to recognize. A woman of great courage and great commitment, Jean Young.

I would like to thank Rev. Norman Rates and Norman Raybon for the music and for the invocation.

I know Henrietta Turnquist is here. I believe my friend, Veronica Biggins is here, who is a member of the Board of Trustees for

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Spelman. And I also believe that Cynthia McKinney, the next Congresswoman from this area is here as well. And I was just told before I came that the next sheriff, Jackie Barrett couldn't be here. But we've got to give a round of applause to the extraordinary accomplishment that demonstrates.

You know, there is a wonderful line at the end of Maya Angelou's absolutely unforgettable, I Know Why The Cage Birds Sings. Some of you may remember it. It's when the mother says, "You don't have to think about doing the right thing, if you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking."

I wrote that down years ago and carry it around in a little book that I have that reminds me from time to time when things get hard what's really at stake. My little book contains scripture. It contains quotes from my favorite authors. It contains words of wisdom that I've collected from those who have taught me; those who have gone before; those who still have lessons for all of us who are willing to listen.

And I think we're at a point in our country, now where doing right has to be our primary goal. And how do we know what that is in a time of confusion with the kinds of statistics both Johnetta and Maya referred to where we know that within yards of this great college, people are perishing for lack of hope because of violence; because of neglect.

How do we, then define doing right? I think we go back to where all of us started from. We know what it is. It's just that we have lost our way and too many of us have lost our will to do it. And part of the mission of Spelman has always been to provide the kind of base that will enable women to go forth and do it.

What I have hoped throughout this campaign is that we could begin slowly to knit our country back together.

It is only the blind or hypocritical who would say that we have not been divided because we have. And we have in many instances, been divided deliberately for political reasons. Setting race against race; ethnic group against ethnic group; gender against gender; region against region; age against age.

Sometimes so subtly that we weren't even sure it was happening until after it had been done. But then we began to see the results.

We saw the increase in violence. But not just violence against one another--violence to ourselves. The rise in teenage suicide; the rise in drug abuse; the rise in the kind of hopelessness and despair that often knows no name. It is around us.

But here in Sister's Chapel, we know there is a much more powerful

force than that. We can see it flooding into these great windows. We know it because we're in a place where others have come before, often at more difficult times, and they have told us not to lose heart but to have courage and to do right.

So, what is our challenge today? Particularly, what is the challenge facing those of you who are here at Spelman and those of you here today who are thinking about this great college for your future education?

You know it's the same challenge that faces us on the other side of that age gap---all of us together: to create a new resolution that commits first of all, our energies combining both our heads and our hearts to one another.

I owe much of what I believe and much of what I am as an adult to those of them who came before me including, my great friend and mentor, Marian Wright Edelman. Not only an alumnus of this college but a member of the Board of Trustees for many years.

She has helped to give direction and shape to my life. And I feel being here in some small way pays tribute to her.

I first heard about Marian when I was leafing through a Time magazine in the fall of 1969. And there was a very short article about this young Black woman who had graduated from Spelman College, gone to Yale Law School and then gone to Mississippi to work on behalf on Civil Rights at a time when, not only was it dangerous, but there sure weren't that many women lawyers doing that.

And then I read about how she had---after the assassinations of the 1960's---decided that she wanted to commit herself to furthering Civil Rights by particularly focusing on the needs of children. And in one of those strange twists of fate that enters all of our lives if we're open to hear and to see them. I saw a small sign on a bulletin board a few weeks later, saying this person's name I had just seen for the first time was going to be at Yale and was going to be speaking. And I went to hear her. I listened to her speak. And I knew right then, she was someone from whom I could learn.

That she was trying to do what I had only begun to think about. Taking the blessings that I had been given; taking my education and beginning to put it together in a way that would make a contribution on behalf of all people. Not just for me but for those who were there waiting for just a helping hand...a kind word...some sense that they too, could achieve their God-given potentials.

I went up to her after she finished speaking and said, "I want to work for you this summer." She said, "I have no jobs." I said, "Well, I have to have some money. I don't have enough to get

through school without making some. If I can figure out how to be paid, would you put me to work?" She said, "Why would I refuse an offer like that?"

So, I went out and I got what was then called a Law Student's Civil Rights Research Council Internship Grant. That was back in the days when there were folks around who actually thought it was a good thing for young law students to learn about Civil Rights work and would actually pay us a pittance to do so during the summer.

So, I went to work for Marian in that summer of 1970. And from that experience--working on behalf of migrant laborers, particularly children; working to determine how to stop the spread of segregated academies; working to further educational opportunities for all children who are often in the early 1970's, shut out of schools all together--the world opened up to me, and gave me a vision of what it ought to be because of the work of people like Marian.

That vision is something that has changed somewhat. Some days the rainbow doesn't break through quite enough; looks a little gray as I carry it around in my head. But it's always there. And it's that vision we have to recreate in this country. Not just for each of us. But for all of our people.

The challenges ahead of us are going to be difficult ones. We did not get into our situation overnight, we will not get out of it quickly.

But there is so much we can do with the kind of energy that is in this room. The kind of energy we heard from song and from word and from prayer.

How then do we go about focusing that energy in order to achieve that vision so that we know without thinking that we are finally doing right again?

We begin by recognizing that every person is worthy of dignity and respect and we stand up against disrespect, intolerance and discrimination and hate wherever we see it and we call it by name.

It is only by once again reaffirming our basic common values that we can lay a ground work for action. We do it by recognizing that each person in this society deserves an opportunity. They in turn, have to accept responsibility. That's the kind of mutual obligation sharing that we should be striving to see in place again.

We do it by starting with an economy again that actually gives legitimate opportunity to all Americans. That economic approach has to be inclusive; has to reach out; has to say that we will invest in our people; has to promise two years of additional

training for high school graduates who do not go on to college so they can get good jobs instead dead-end jobs.

And that approach has to promise a National Service Trust Fund so that any young person who wishes to go to Spelman or Morehouse or Clark/Atlanta or any other university will be able to have the funds to do so. And to pay back that opportunity offered by our country either with a percentage of their income when they go to work, or better, and more in the tradition of Spelman, with two years of national service back here at home. Take the college education and pay it back by working with the homeless; by serving with the elderly; by doing what needs to be done to solve our problems.

That is the kind of new energy that can only flow from a new vision of who we are and what we can do together that is so desperately needed in our country.

Service is an old-fashioned word with a rich tradition. Johnetta said that over forty percent of the students here at Spelman are already engaged in service. Service changes what you see and how you feel. Service makes you grow. There is nothing new about that.

But somehow during the 1980's we lost our way. Service for others became the province of the losers--the people who didn't understand how the game was played; who couldn't make it any way.

You remember what the 1980's were like. We elevated an honored greed and selfishness. We turned our backs on what was happening all around us. We walked away from our children and our young people in pain. That was the era that denied the importance of service that only gave "lip-service" to it. It is time to reinvigorate what we mean by that.

We are not talking about marginal service that maybe we do in our spare time if we have it. We're talking about infusing our lives with the idea of service. We're talking about going back and actually living by the Golden Rule. We're talking about trying to lift one another up, not so that we can just feel good about ourselves but because we know it will make our lives together so much better.

The women that Johnetta pointed out who are the presidents of the Tenants Association, they are fighting for their homes and their children and their futures because they know that the kind of society that would turn its back on them, will eventually turn its back on anyone.

We also know that until we have a political system that is truly responsive to all Americans, we will have a level of alienation and cynicism that will turn off a lot of people.

I'm sure there are people in this room that haven't voted--even though they're over eighteen--for a couple of elections, if ever. As we travel around this country, we meet people at every stop who say they have never voted.

We met a 78-year-old women in Georgia during our bus trip who was registering and voting for the very first time. I got on a train in New York to go to New Haven and a man got on in Harlem and came by to say hello to me. And in the course of our conversation, I asked him for his vote and he said as a matter of principle, he doesn't vote.

So, we know there are many reasons for many people either to forget to vote or choose actively not to vote. But you know, they do vote by their not voting. They vote for the status quo. They vote for the vested interests. They vote for the way things are and have been. And then they lose--as far as I am concerned--any right to question what goes on around them.

People have literally been dying all over this world for the right to vote. And it's too much trouble for a lot of our fellow citizens to get up from the couch and to go to register. It's too much trouble if there is a little rain in the sky to get up and vote on the day of the election.

And yet we know, that unless all of us not only vote but carry out the empowerment that voting represents, we do not have a voice. And all of the concerns that we might carry in our hearts will just stay right there.

So, the kind of political changes that we need, as simple as it may sound, have to start with the vote.

Then we have to recognize that our system has been taken over in too many ways by people who do not want change. They do not want the faces I see in front of me assuming rightful positions of power in this country.

Now, they may never say that. But, you know, as my daddy always said, "Actions speak a whole lot louder than words."

So, part of what is at stake in this election is what kind of country we will have and how inclusive and broadly based the power in it will be.

My husband has never been afraid of including people. He actually thinks you learn something from other people. He actually believes that there are people in this room, right at this moment, who know something more than he does about a variety of subjects. And that we will all be the richer for broadening the language and reach of our political system. But we cannot do that if we do not have leadership that actually believes that is a good that should be

sought.

So, there is a lot at stake. Everyone in this room should recognize that this is a watershed election. But the people who have the most at stake are the people who are sitting here in these two rows from the elementary school and children like them all over this country.

If you think about the challenges facing us, those of us who are adults, they may seem daunting. But if you think about the challenges facing children, what is going on in a country when every thirteen seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Every three hours a child is murdered. If you think about that, everything else pales by comparison.

We have been turning our backs on millions of our children. And what we need now is a new resolve that we as adults will take responsibility for ourselves and our children. That we will no longer walk away from their needs.

You know, a year in the life of a two year old is half of her life. Four years, or the length of a presidential term, in the life of an eight year old is half of his life.

Our children do not have time to wait. They do not vote. They do not lobby. They need us. They need our heads, our hearts, our souls, our hands.

And what I hope you will see is a great, great renaissance of caring in this country--a new commitment to all that you are taught here at Spelman and all that your mothers and grandmothers have stood for in years before.

In order to do that, we need new leadership in our country. But it's not just leadership of two men, it is leadership by millions of men and women.

Bill Clinton and Al Gore cannot change this country. They can propose policies. They can push through changes that on paper appear good. But the only way this country will begin moving back toward the vision that I carry, and that I hope you share, of a country living up to its ideals, committed to one another, is if all of us are part of the change this election represents.

That's what is at stake for men, for women, for children. And that's why it's an honor to be at a place like Spelman that has for generations committed itself to excellence and leadership. The two qualities we need now more than ever. Thank you very much.