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THE BLACK WOMEN'S
BUSINESS OWNERS LUNCHEON

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 8, 1995

**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
at the Black Women Business Owners Annual Award Luncheon**

Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you so much Alexis, who is a great friend and a wonderful person to be around. She and Maggie Williams, my Chief of Staff and I rode over from the White House and I think laughed the entire way. I can't tell you about what, but it was funny.

I am so pleased to be here. I must say Nicole I thought you did a marvelous job and I don't know if Mayor Barry is still here, but Mayor you've got a speechmaker in the audience here. And I was pleased to be able to hear you deliver that. And Shirley thank you for blessing us with another one of the examples of your gifts and talents. And Mary thank you for your work, day in and day out on so many important issues. And thank all of you for supporting this organization and its goals. And for recognizing the women who will receive these very well deserved awards for the work they have done demonstrating their abilities, their competence, their willingness to exhibit the kind of courage it takes day in and day out, to make a mark to do what you feel you were intended to do.

I'm so pleased that I could join these women and this organization in celebrating accomplishments of African-Americans in America especially this month. I hope that all of us are duly aware of how many other women these women represent. Because when I look at the title, "Black Women of Courage," of this program, I think of the literally thousands and thousands and thousands of black women who get up every day and with extraordinary courage face what life puts in front of them -- and take care of their families, and do their work, and tend to their children, and take care of older relatives, and hold up our churches, and maintain our schools, and set examples for all of the other women to follow.

And any time we have an occasion like this where we pause to honor those who are before you I think all of us must know that they stand for so many more whose names may not be known outside their own families, or outside their own communities, but who exhibit what I think we mean by courage. And so with that thought in mind I want to share a story with you that illustrates the kind of courage that is present in so many women and particularly black women in American today.

We keep a lot of books in the office of my staff. Books that people bring in they want to share with other members of the staff. Books that people send us. And there is a particular book that we've been passing around called In the Spirit. Some of you may have read it. It is Susan Taylor's book. I'm sure all of you know who Susan Taylor is. And this collection of

And so as we think about the celebration of African-American History Month and as we remember the words of that great negro spiritual -- "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," please welcome our First Lady of the United States Hillary Rodham Clinton.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you so much Alexis who is a great friend and a wonderful person to be around. She and Maggie Williams my Chief of Staff and I rode over from the White House and I think laughed the entire way. I can't tell you about what, but it was funny.

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columns and inspirational writings is a real blessing for people who themselves are looking for a little guidance. Wanting to know how someone else made their way. And Susan Taylor's essay that particularly strikes me in her book is the one where she talks about her own personal transformation. Where she talks about how she was a young single mother she saw nothing but failure in her future. And how one day after her marriage broke up she was on her own with a small child feeling that she didn't know how she was going to make it from day to day. She was walking from Manhattan to her home in the Bronx when she passed a church. For reasons she could not explain she was drawn into the church even though as she says in her essay she was not dressed to go to church. She was in blue jeans and a leather jacket. Although I think that as Shirley so eloquently sings to all of us to remind us Jesus doesn't care whether you're in a leather jacket and jeans, he's just pleased if you walk through the door.

And she went through that door and she sat down and began to listen to that sermon. Now it was a sermon like so many sermons are all over the country on a Sunday and sometimes the sermons don't strike our hearts but every once in a while they do. And that day that sermon struck Susan's. The minister was preaching about the importance of being positive and thinking positively about your life. If God loves you why don't you love yourself? I've often said in some of the chances I've had to teach Sunday school classes that Jesus was the first great psychologist. "Love your neighbor as yourself" means you've got to start by loving yourself. And Susan Taylor heard those words and they clicked. They inspired her. They liberated her. They encouraged her by giving her courage to go forth. And from that day she had a better sense of how to face adversity. How to think about the positive things in her own life. How to think of that beautiful child that she had. All of the things that she might be able to do with herself if she opened herself to faith and possibility. And as we know Susan Taylor is a success story -- the editor in chief of "Essence" -- one of the most respected journalists in our nation. And I don't tell her story to really trumpet Susan's success, but to remind us that it is a story that also can be told about thousands and millions of women day in and day out. Because it is a story about having faith in God and having faith in ourselves. And it is the untold story of women all over our country that make decisions that they too are going to be positive in the face of adversity. They too will persevere. They too will have courage as they face life's challenges.

These stories are obviously not ones of painless journeys. They are about taking responsibilities and taking advantage of opportunities. They are even about, as Nicole reminded us, fighting for opportunities if they don't currently exist. This merging of responsibility and opportunity that we witness so often in the lives of successful women is also at the root of what Mary was referring to when she talked about what this President hopes to accomplish for our nation. The President

talked in the State of the Union the New Covenant -- an idea that her has been talking about now since 1991. This New Covenant is not just a contract -- one of those legalistic documents where its a quid pro quo -- its a different kind of relationship. The New Covenant not only calls for a new, more effective government, it not only asks that we build a new economy that rewards people for the work they do, its also says each of us must take responsibility -- and that responsibility to ourselves, our families, our children, and our children -- I've got my husbands disease -- I'm sure that will be a headline -- is really rooted in our basic values as a people.

And so as the president said when he fights to build a new economy that creates new jobs -- now two million more women have jobs than had before he became president. Millions of working mothers are getting a tax break to help their earnings go further which is one of the most important things we can do. we've taken a lot of steps in the last two years to help women owned businesses and particularly minority owned businesses. And the SBA has worked very hard to promote womens businesses -- to give women the capital that they need to be able to go into business, expand their business, make the investments. And there are a number of innovative approaches to increasing the number of minority owned businesses. And it's really a testament to this president and this administration that they believe in the importance of women in business. And that small business loans to women increased 86 percent from 1993 to 1994. Small business loans to women now represent 20 percent of the total SBA loan volume. And it will continue to go up assuming we are able to continue the programs that the president and the SBA have started.

And not coincidentally the number of black women owned firms continue to grow from 158,000 in 1987 to and estimated 200,000 today. These are the kinds of positive steps that an economic initiative like the presidents can bring to pass that if we focus on what we can do to make this economy grow for everybody, not just for those already at the top, then there will be these result. And it's so important, even in this changed political climate to continue to emphasize opportunities for investments and programs to help investments in small businesses. And I hope you will stand behind that proposition as we move forward in the next months.

It is also important to recognize the economic successes that we've been able to point to in the last two years also must be matched by positive changes in our social life as well as a nation. Women, as we all recognize, are more likely to have to juggle professional demands with family obligations. And you all know, those of you who have tried to do that balancing act, whether you are a wife or mother, or whether you are the primary caretaker of an aging relative you know how difficult and stressful that balance is. So we've got to do more to help women fulfill their responsibilities as workers and family members.

And this past year the President had the Labor Department through the Womens Bureau conduct a survey about what women needed to be successful both at home and in the workplace. Over 250,000 women responded to that survey which we call Women Count. And there are lots of pieces of advice in it about what we need to do that we are beginning to try to implement. But there's also an underlying theme which is that women's health and family responsibilities must be recognized. So that, for example, we are helping to immunize all of our children. More of our nations two year olds are receiving vaccines against major childhood diseases. Headstart has been expanded, as has WIC school nutrition programs. Medical researchers are finally getting the research they need to do research into women's diseases something that was not done previously. And this president has a national campaign against womens diseases principle breast cancer and other diseases that we know are sapping the strength not only of the women themselves but of their productivity in our country.

There are also unprecedented efforts to curb violence against women in the streets and in the homes. The Crime Bill which was passed which was a very good balance of prevention and punishment contained some of the most comprehensive efforts that we have ever adopted, not only to make our streets safe and punish criminals, but to move against domestic violence which is a problem which is too often hidden in our society. And with your help we will continue to work toward affordable high quality health care for all Americans. So the government, the economy those are the two major pieces of what the president has tried to strengthen and promote in the past two years. Yes we need a leaner government, but we don't need a meaner government. There is a role for government. Yes we want to reduce the tax burden but not willy nilly on people who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, but targeted tax cuts for people to be able to afford to send their children to school after high school. For people to have IRA's where the money goes tax free into an account that can then be withdrawn for health expenditures. For taking care of an older relative. For buying a home. Yes we need to have better lifetime learning for our citizens. That means let's consolidate all of the job training programs and let's give the power of training to the individual who is unemployed to make the choice about where to go to get the training and education that is needed. And yes, let's raise the minimum wage and give people a decent opportunity to make a living in this society.

But his third part of the President's New Covenant the part that really each one of us has to take responsibility for, that has to empower us means that we have to look for ways to give people the tools to be successes in their own lives. In Mary Walker's letter inviting me to join you here today, she noted that the president has done more for women than any other administration and has appointed more women to major positions than I think a lot of administrations lumped together. I believe that . . . this president is the first president to appoint an

African American woman and an African American man as assistants to the president. In fact, I think we've got three women and one man -- that about the only place where you get that ratio -- who have been appointed assistants to the president. No president in history, much to my absolute amazement had ever done that before. And thank goodness there is another obstacle that has been removed and we won't have to think about anyone else ever having to do that again.

Well there is much that I could say to you about what this president stands for, what he has worked, for what he will continue to work for. But I also must say that we know the atmosphere has changed. And many of the goals and objectives that not only this president stood for but going all the way back to President Roosevelt stood for are in danger of being undone. Now nobody is against making the government more efficient. Giving people the tools to become self sufficient -- that's what this president ran for president on, that's what he has stood for, that's what he has advocated. But I think we must be very careful as decisions are made about cutting government and changing direction that we understand exactly the impact of those proposed changes will be on real people. Not abstractions, not statistics but real people who live their lives everyday looking to do better tomorrow for themselves and their children. In the months to come your voices will be needed because this is not a partisan issue. Having a national commitment to children is not a partisan issue. Having a national commitment to encouraging people to take advantage of education and to be responsible is not a partisan issue. Providing issues to women is not and should no be a partisan issue. And there are many others in a long litany that I could give you that go beyond partisanship.

But now is the time for you with your voices in your networks to begin speaking out about what we mean when we talk about the New Covenant and how we can restructure government and the economy so that individuals will begin to have more opportunity, the government will be more responsive, and then how each of us can become better citizens.

And really at bottom what it takes is courage. Personal courage, political courage. Each of you who has ever started a business or run for office knows what your stomach feels like when you make that first decision. But it's that courage that will get you over the fear, and it's that courage which will get us beyond a lot of the partisan rhetoric that is attempting to undo much of the progress that we have come to take for granted in our country as we move toward not only the end of a century, but the end of a millennium.

In Dust Tracks on a Road, Nora Zeale Hurston wrote, "Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to jump at the sun. We might not land at the sun, but at least we would get off the ground." I've always liked that. I don't expect to land on the sun. If any of you have seen me jump I mean, you know, there's a

new movie our there "White Women Can't Jump" an I will be the star. But at least I know that even if I get just an inch off, I will be off the ground. And no telling where we can fly to if we get off the ground. But we sure won't get anywhere if we hunker down, and if we guard our own personal accomplishments and try to make sure nobody else gets to share in what we've achieved because we got there first. So it's not only that we have courage today, it that we have courage on behalf of all those who come after us. If we can remember that even in tough times the glass is half full rather than half empty we can push through those church doors event if we have blue jeans and leather jackets on, we cane start those businesses, expand them, invest for the future, run for office, take on tough challenges, then we can make a difference. We will get of the ground in the great continuing struggle to make America what it deserves to be. Thank you all very much.