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Amer. Booksellers Assoc.

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY  
AMERICAN BOOKSELLERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION  
CHICAGO, IL

MRS. CLINTON: ...I am from Chicago and always glad to come back. I want to thank you for this invitation. I've never done anything like this before, never written a book before. I've read a lot, and am so grateful for what all of you do every day in making books available, and supplying the opportunity for people to adventure far beyond their own lives.

I want to say that when we first moved into the White House, we were overwhelmed by the experience. But we did notice there were not enough bookshelves, and that was the first thing we did was build more bookshelves. (Applause.) ---And we thought we wanted to get enough until (inaudible) showed up with 500 more books for the White House collection which we were very pleased to see.

I am here, in very good company, as you've already heard this morning. I am thrilled to be here with Studs Terkel. He is someone, whom, I, growing up here, have admired, and read, and enjoyed and listened to.

And I am also told that Allison gave an incredible speech this morning about the importance of books. (Applause.) And it is always a great pleasure for me to be anywhere with General Powell whom I admire so much, and enjoy being with, and don't get to see enough these days.

I suppose that those of us who are voracious readers, but have never written any book, approach an effort like this, as General Powell is doing, coming from his career in life, and as I'm attempting to do with great (inaudible) and humility. It is hard even to imagine that one could see one's book in one of your stores.

But because I believe so passionately in books, because I believe so passionately in what we are attempting to do in our country today, I want to take my hopes and dreams for the

children of this country, and do what I can to try to communicate clearly about who we are, and where we're going and why it is so important, especially as we enter the twentieth century's end, to pay attention to the most important people in our lives, our children.

The book that I am writing is going to be called, "It Takes a Village," after the old African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child.

Because for the last 25 years I have been drawn to my own feelings and my own sense that the community that was America that many of us took for granted, despite all of its flaws, its imperfections was not working in fundamental ways. And it's difficult to ascribe any one reason for that. In fact, I think it does a great disservice to us as a people to attempt to do so, to say all of our problems are because of fill-in-the-blank. Life is not that simple, and certainly we know, the challenges we face come to us on many different levels, personal, political, economic, social, local, and so for us, as we define ourselves, and our most important responsibilities, as to who we are as a people. I think focusing on what we do for our children and what our responsibilities are, bringing it back to a very personal level, as well as a more general one, can perhaps get a national conversation going.

I find it particularly ironic that often times those who are denying our problems, or who are bemoaning the loss of civility and the loss of character in our country would themselves turn a blind eye on the basic needs our children have.

If one looks at the life-cycle of a child, and one thinks about what we try to do for our own children, I think it is incumbent upon us, as a nation, to try to ensure that every child has the same opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential. (Applause.)

And for me, that challenge became even more sharply defined in the last few months. Some of you know that I had a fabulous opportunity to travel to South Asia with my daughter. So I was able both to visit places for the first time, and to do so with her eyes as well as my own. I met people who were struggling against overwhelming odds to build better lives for themselves and their children. I shook the hands of leaders of these young democracies who had paid the ultimate price in the assassination of mothers, and fathers, and brothers and sons, and who themselves had suffered exile and imprisonment and torture. And what we all talked about, and what we had in common, across all the lines that divided us was our belief that we could and had an obligation to do what each of us was able to do to create a better future for our own children.

When I returned home after that trip, I must say, I was a little bit surprised and disappointed to rediscover how here in our own country, the debate about what we owe one another, how we will recreate this village, this community, this sense of belonging for ourselves and our children is too often engaged in by people shouting at one another, too often resulting in not shedding any light on the problems we face, but generating heat and hate.

If we lower our voices, if we share our ideas, if we genuinely search for solutions to the problems that we see all about us, if we break down those challenges into bite-sized chunks that individuals themselves can digest so they feel invested and empowered in their own lives, with their own children, their own families, their own neighborhoods, I have no doubt that much that we bemoan today, we can move beyond together.

I decided to write a book about children, because not only have I worried over these issues for 25 years, worked on them, been involved in heart-wrenching cases, like the kind of adoption case that has just fixated the attention of Chicago with Baby Richard, where I too have defended adopting parents against both insensitive state bureaucracies and parents who biologically bore the children, who did not take responsibility for them, coming back and attempting to claim them.

I have seen the kind of changes that can happen with mothers and fathers themselves were not parented well, if somebody, somewhere, takes the time to intervene and give them the support they need. I have watched as not only research has proven, but common sense has shown that if you take children from the same distressing circumstances, and you follow them over time, and one turns out well, and the other takes the wrong path, the single biggest determinant as to why the first child overcame his or her circumstances, is that someone, somewhere along-the-line took it upon themselves to help that child, to intervene -- another family member, a minister, a teacher, a coach, a businessperson. Somebody cared enough to try to provide what every child needs, at least one adult who's crazy about that child. (Applause.) The people around that child, like a village, supported that growth and development.

And as a mother, I've learned a lot of lessons, some of them very idiosyncratic, and I have a lot of strange theories about child-rearing -- which I will share with you, and I'm sure will become more fire for those who churn out their attacks on me. But for example, I'll go ahead and risk it, (Laughter.) I think every little child should have to learn how to tie his or her own shoelaces. Now, the reason I say that, and the reason I've taken a stand against things like "velcro"-covered shoes (Laughter.) until you learn how learn how to tie your own shoelaces, is there is a connection between the small motor skills and the brain

development that you short-circuit if you don't give tasks like that to children.

Now that's a very simple, little thing that may not make a whole lot of difference in the great scheme of life, but I think it's important. So that'll be there as well as all of the old stuff people talk about -- the burdens of poverty and hunger, inadequate health care, broken families and violence and all of that. But what I hope is that this will help us have a national conversation. I would be so pleased if people started talking positively about what all of us can do for all of our children. (Applause.) (inaudible.)

Although I am somewhat daunted by this prospect of actually writing a book and actually going into the bookstores that I've spent so many happy hours in, in my life, and now I've been somewhat deprived of being able to wander around.

It is not the book itself. It is the hope that the book will help all of us be reminded that in order for America to be a good, decent, strong, confident, society in the next century, we have to begin now caring for our children, as though we were, despite our vastness and our diversity, a village in the very best sense of that word.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

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