

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**Hillary Rodham Clinton's Remarks  
at Madison West High School  
Madison, Wisconsin  
October 9, 1996**

Thank you all, thank you so much, I am delighted to be here and I want to thank everyone associated with my visit particularly your principal, Libby Burmaster, thank you very much. I want to thank your student body president: Nate France, who did an excellent job introducing the mayor. I also want to thank Jazz West for being part of the pre-program this afternoon and wish them well. And I am particularly pleased to be here with your mayor, I have to admit that I have only been in town for a few hours but I have already gotten, I think, three copies of Money Magazine naming Madison the best place to live in the United States and I'm very impressed but I've always known about Madison having grown up in the Chicago area, but one of the strongest criteria that is used in determining quality of life, it should come as no surprise, is the quality of schools and education that is available and between having one of the great research universities in the world you also have one of the greatest public school systems in the entire country, so I am delighted to be here to pay tribute to you for that and I also am particularly grateful to your mayor for the work that he has done over many years of public service on behalf of working families and children and all who are benefitted by having a community such as this that really does try to think about the future in constructive and productive ways and plan for a future that will be available to all who are willing to take responsibility and reach for it. And I must say that I hope that the citizens of this congressional district will send your mayor to Washington where he can continue the kind of common sense approach to solving problems that is so evident here in Madison, he would be a great addition to the Congress.

I am also very pleased to be, I guess, I'm told, the first event that is inaugurating this new auditorium; it is a very nice renovation job and I know that you will have many important activities here in the coming years but I am particularly pleased to be here today to talk to you about some of the issues that are really at stake in this upcoming election because in many ways they affect your futures and the future of my daughter more than they affect mine. And sometimes people ask me: why do you go to high schools, which I like doing, or university campuses, or even to elementary and junior high schools so often? And I guess I do it for a lot of reasons. One because I really think that talking with young people and listening to them and having a chance to learn more about what is on their minds, is important for all adults not just those of us who are privileged to be in a position like I'm currently in. But I also have another feeling about it and that is that as the mother of a teenager and as someone who spends lots of time talking not only to her and her friends but to young people all over the county there is such a

disconnect between the way American young people are portrayed in the media and what I know to be the case. And I am a little bit tired of seeing only the headlines and the stories about kids who get into trouble or cause difficulty, because the vast majority of young people I know and that I read about and that I know what you are doing around our country suggests to me that this is the finest generation of American young people that we've ever had in our country and I think all of you should know that about yourselves because I think its harder growing up today than it was when I was trying to do it. I think there are a lot more challenges and questions and there always have been, certainly as we go back throughout history, but today there are so many more issues that people have to deal with as you go through school and go out into the world of work. And one of the primary objectives that this school system and school has been attempting to meet is to help prepare you for the responsibilities that you will face. Now that is not only good for each of you individually, it is good for the entire community of Madison and the state of Wisconsin and for our country because investing in your education, as the mayor said, benefits not only individuals but the rest of us as well, and as I think about what lies ahead for all of you and for all the other young people whom I know and admire, I see clearly that we have enormous possibility ahead of us in this country. Whether or not we take advantage and build on that possibly rests with each of us.

My husband is fond of talking about building a bridge to the twenty-first century but he's not talking about it only in terms of what he or the Vice President or a member of congress or the Mayor can do. He's really asking all of us to be bridgebuilders. He's asking that each one of us do what we can to make it possible for all Americans, particularly young Americans to have access to the opportunities that are needed to build a life for the twenty- first century. He's also asking that we take responsibility for ourselves and our families, and then thirdly he's challenging us to build a greater American community where our differences are respected and where we are united in our efforts to solve our problems together. There isn't any better example of this than education, and when I look at what I see as the opportunities and challenges that await all of us I know that education is a life long experience now. It doesn't start before you get to school, it doesn't start when you get to school, it starts before you get to school and it doesn't end when you finish school in a formal way. If you look at what prepares young people for education it starts with families and parents who read to their kids, expose their children to opportunities beyond their home, take advantage of what this rich community and university have to offer. And it goes beyond that though, to make sure that young people who might not have that kind of preparation have access to programs like Headstart so they too, are ready and able to compete in this school system. The President has also made it clear that we need to do all we can to insure that every third grader can read because we know that if you do not read by the third grade you are not likely to be successful in school, that some things happen that really get

kids discouraged and they start falling further and further behind. And so he's called on all of us to be bridgebuilders to work with teachers as volunteers to try to create a national commitment to ensuring that all children can read. He's also said we need to make sure every classroom in America, whether it's in a school district like this one or in the poorest most remote district in Wisconsin or anywhere in America, has access to the information highway. We cannot allow technology to divide our students into the haves and the have-nots, we need to make sure that every single young person, no matter where that boy or girl goes to school, can be part of the information age because we know that that will help determine what kinds of futures they are able to make for themselves. So the President wants to see every classroom wired by the year two-thousand but even if we do all of that and we respect our teachers and we lift them up and give them the status they deserve and not tear them down and not tear down the public schools. Even if we do all that we will still have young people graduating from high school who will not be able either to go to college in the first place or finish college because of financial obstacles. We need to make sure that we allow every single person who is willing to work hard for an education to attain that education without regard to financial considerations. And it's not only in the interest of the student and that student's family, it is good for America. And to that end the President has three specific proposals. First, we need to create IRA's where you can put money in tax free and take it out tax free in order to pay for an education; secondly, we need to implement what he calls the Hope Scholarships which are designed to enable every single American to attend at least two years of community college to get the skills that they need through a tax credit of fifteen hundred dollars a year. Finally, as the parent of a child who will go off to college next year, I particularly like my husband's proposal that we allow every family to deduct up to ten thousand dollars a year including post graduate professional expenses. If we make this investment in education, starting before school and going through graduate school, then we will be prepared for the twenty-first century because we will continue to have the best educated population in the world, flexible and ready to meet what ever comes our way. If we turn our backs on the public schools, if we walk away from student loans and Pell grants and work-study money, and if we walk away from proposals to try to make it possible for every family to afford college, then we will slowly but steadily and surly undermine the educational infrastructure of this country. And it will have a domino affect. It might not immediately affect West High because of what you already have here, but it will eventually. It will begin to eat away at our capacity to provide for as many Americans as possible the tools that are needed to be competitive to make a living, and so we have to remain committed to public education, and we have to remain committed to enabling every young person who is willing to work hard to go as far as he or she can. That's what the President means when he talks about providing opportunity. But nobody can make anyone be responsible, your teachers and your parents here in this school.

can do everything possible to provide the highest quality education but nobody can make any one of you study or take advantage of it. That has to be something you decide to do and we need as best we can to create conditions in which people are responsible for their own lives, they are willing to be responsible for their families, for their neighborhoods and their communities because it is not just a question of individual advancement that is at stake. Yes, if all of you individually succeed as so many of you will and as most people from this high school in the past already have. You have a very high college going rate you very high rate of national merit semi-finalists and I could go on and on with the wonderful things about this school that the students have already demonstrated, and so if each of you individually is successful that is good, that is important but that is not sufficient for a community or a country to be successful. It is not enough for individuals to be economically and educationally secure if they care nothing about the larger community responsibilities that are always part of life, if they don't respect people who have different backgrounds or different points of view. So that part of what is at stake in our investing in education in America is the hope that through that process more and more Americans will themselves feel they have a stake in this country and it's future and be willing not just to work for themselves and their immediate family but for the betterment of all, because the alternative is stark everyday you can pick up the newspaper or turn on the TV and you can see the alternative you can see societies that are torn apart over race or religion or ethnicity. And very often, leading the charge on behalf of intolerance, hatred and violence are well educated people. I saw that first hand when I went to Bosnia last spring, many of the people who were responsible for that horrific war were educated people they not only had college degrees some of them had graduate and professional degrees. But they didn't have a sense of a greater obligation to a community that was peaceful and productive with the result that they fomented dissention and eventually strife. And when I went to Bosnia I went first to Tuzla the base headquarters for our American forces and I met with a group of Bosnian civilians: Muslims, Croates, and Serbs and I just listened. I listened as doctors and nurses told me what it was like to treat patients under bombardment, I listened as teachers told me how they tried to keep track of their students and kept learning that one had been maimed or another had been killed or another had disappeared. I listened as women told me of the days when the knocks on the door came and they opened their house to see neighbors surrounded by strangers who had come to take away their husband or their father or their son and they had never seen him again. I saw the pain in their eyes and I heard it in their voices as over and over again these educated people said to me: how could this have happened, what went wrong? And one man said: Mrs. Clinton, I want you to thank the President and the American people for at least giving us a chance to try to have normal peaceful life again, he went on to say, but you know in addition to thanking you specifically for what America military forces are

doing here, I want to thank you for what America represents because we look at America and we look at all that you have done and we know that you have people from many, many different countries living together and we hope someday we can try to be the same. I knew what he meant as I got into one of those big Army helicopters and flew out to two American outposts camp Alesia and Camp Bedrock. And as I got out of the helicopter and I walked toward our soldiers who were gathered to greet me I saw exactly what he was talking about because what did I see? I saw men and women in uniform, I saw black and brown and white faces, I began to shake hands and I heard the accents of every region of our country. And as I spoke with these young soldiers I heard even more I heard from one young man how he said I didn't really know why I was coming but I'm glad I'm here because I have seen what a difference it can make to try and bring peace, he said maybe it's just little things but we clear a mine field and all of the sudden a farmer comes back to plant or next to a house that was bombed out we see a line of wash and we know that it's inhabited again or we hear the sounds of children playing in the roads it's making a difference. And another young man said, you know Mrs. Clinton, these folks all look alike and they can't get along, he said, you know in the neighborhood I come from you can tell who's different from each other but we try to get along and that's what were doing here. When I came home I told my husband that I wished I could have taken every American with me, I was privileged to take my daughter with me because it was her spring break and I wished I could have taken all of her friends and every American teenager to see first hand what happens to an educated society that has no sense of the common good, no commitment to an obligation to respect those that are different and to help those across all the lines that divide human beings and it reminded me forcefully that when we have elections and when we have political debates and when we have conversations, as you I'm sure are having at school now, there is more at stake than individual programs or policies. What we're really talking about is what we want to see in our country and what we hope for our children. I think about that a lot because I want my daughter not only to have all the opportunities her father and I had and that we can try to provide for her but I want her growing up in America knowing that everybody else is being given an opportunity to succeed as well. And that people who are responsible will be able once again to know that the American dream is within their grasp. So when the President talks about building that bridge to the twenty-first century, he often says he wants to build it big enough and wide enough and strong enough for every American to walk across. And I hope each of you in your own way will be bridgebuilders as well, and that if you are helping to build that bridge to the future you will be part of an optimistic, confident, hopeful America. One on which we can count on the future being open, available, and ready for those who are willing to work hard to make it. I wish all of you the very best as you go forward into that future on your own. Thank you all very much.