

~~6-3-98~~  
Chicago Pictorial  
Principal's Luncheon

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
ANNUAL CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS PRINCIPALS' LUNCHEON  
CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER**

**JUNE 3, 1998**

as delivered

Thank you. Thank you very much. I am just delighted to be here for many different reasons to see this beautiful room filled with all of you who are on the front lines of improving public education and doing such a tremendous job for the children of Chicago.

As the mayor said, I've been in a number of your schools -- not nearly enough -- and I hope I will be able to visit more in the next several years. And I've seen the changes; I've seen them slowly but surely, really taking root. I know that the work that is being done in all of the schools represented here can only happen because there are leaders like you in those schools, and in this public education system.

I take nearly any invitation I am given to come back to Chicago. Especially during the NBA Playoff season. (Laughter) I have to say though, Sunday night I thought I was going to lose ten or twelve years off my life. I don't know about you, but when I watch a sporting event on television--that I have any emotional investment in--I have to get up and leave the room from time to time. I've become convinced that in some totally bizarre way that the reason we're not scoring is because I'm watching. (Laughter) So rest assured that I'll leave the room a lot in the next days.

But it is great to be here to help celebrate the accomplishments of this city and, particularly, the accomplishments of this school district. I want to thank the extraordinary Commissioner of Culture, Lois Weisberg. I don't know that she's gotten exactly the credit she deserves for all the work she does, but I try to give it to her every time I'm in Chicago, and in this Cultural Center, and doing anything in the city that Lois has had any role in. She's made such a difference. She celebrated my 50th birthday here at the Cultural Center. I could have gone without having a celebration of my 50th birthday. But, between my friends--some of whom are here from my school days in Park Ridge both elementary, junior high, high school, and in between--Lois, who celebrates everybody's birthday, takes any occasion to do so. Which, I happen to think is a fabulous idea to promote the celebratory aspects of living in this city. She's done a very, very good job. (Applause)

I'm also always pleased to be with Maggie Daley. Maggie Daley has been such a voice for children, and for the arts, and has really spear-headed one of the most influential and creative projects that I know of anywhere in the country, called Gallery 37. (Applause) It has made an extraordinary difference not only in the lives of individual children and artists, but also in the artistic landscape of this city and other places. If you come to the White House, and come to my office sometime, you'll see a lot of the benches that the young people who work at Gallery 37

make and decorate. I'm always proud to point out that they were made in Chicago.

I too am very impressed by, and grateful for, the leadership of this city by the Mayor. It is so exciting for me every time I am with the Mayor because he has about a million ideas a minute. I always feel that he could, on his own, probably supply the power for a small city for a year, because the electricity and the energy is just coming out. But I so enjoy that, because we do know how to solve our problems. We do know what makes sense. We do know that as tough as things are, we can make a difference. Who would have thought that 5 years ago we'd be able to say that crime has fallen 5 years in a row? Well, the President and the mayor thought so. That's why they adopted strategies like community policing, instead of just ringing their hands and talking about how bad things were. (Applause)

Who would have thought that we would have, in my opinion, the most successful Democratic convention ever in 1996 because the city was as beautiful and hospitable as it is now. (Applause).

But the real crown jewel in what you, and the mayor, and this city is doing, is what you've done in the schools. I want to pay a special word of thanks to everyone who is associated with the school board, with the school's administration, but particularly to all of you. Because that's really why I'm here. Because I know that we're lucky to have a President who cares about education. And Chicago is very lucky to have a mayor who cares about education and who can recruit talented people to come and work on this problem. But none of the progress that we are seeing could have been possible without each of you. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

You've given a lot of us around the country hope. I go to a lot of cities that are still trying to figure out how to make heads or tails about the problems they have in their schools. And I'm always saying, look at the decisions that they're making in Chicago. Look at how they're facing up to their problems. Look at the results that they are beginning to get. It didn't happen overnight, but they didn't point fingers at each other. They didn't spend their time in anarchy, engaging in the blame game. They rolled up their sleeves and they decided to do what needed to be done.

You have proven that we can adopt sensible strategies that will once again make our public schools the kinds of institutions we can be proud of, because of the products they are producing and the children's lives that are being turned around.

It's happening all over the city. In fact, Paul Valance told me at lunch today that some of the biggest turn-arounds are happening in those areas of the city that have the poorest kids. I want to commend you, because I am sick and tired of hearing people in education elsewhere in the country say to me, "Well what do you expect? Look at the kids we get." That is a cop-out. That is an absolute cop-out. (Applause)

A hundred years ago we took people from all over the world that were flooding into this

city and cities like it. We took people who were coming up from the South who had been slaves, and the children of slaves, and who had never been educated. We started putting them in public school, and maybe they only went to the sixth grade, or the eighth grade, or the tenth grade. But, nobody made excuses for them. Nobody sat around and said, "Poor old Joe. He's just come over with his parents from the boat. Or poor old Mary, she's just one generation from the fields." We had a belief that if we worked hard enough, and if we worked together and if we didn't give up on any kid, we wouldn't make geniuses out of them. They weren't all going to be Nobel Prize winners, or Pulitzer Prize authors, but they'd find a place in this society. And they'd lead honorable, respectable lives, and they would raise kids, and they'd make a contribution.

And then times changed on us, and we lost a little bit of control. We couldn't quite figure out how we were going to do the work that needed to be done when the economy was changing so fast. Because there used to be a lot of jobs; I remember growing up here there were jobs in the factories on the south side. There were jobs in the meat packing plants. There were all kinds of jobs, where you didn't need a whole lot of education, where a strong back, and a willingness to work would get you there. But all that began to change and the public education system didn't keep up with it, at first. And how could it? It was overwhelmed by the changes. With the economy moving so quickly, and jobs disappearing so fast, and the demand for more education coming at such a rapid rate, how were we going to meet the obligations to the next generation of children?

I understand--and I think we all do--why we lost our way for awhile there. Because it was difficult to figure out exactly what we were doing in terms of educating. For what? For what kind of future?

But finally it dawned on us. That there weren't going to be many, if any, jobs left for good, hard working decent people, who were willing to get up at the crack of dawn and work, 8, 10, 12 hours a day. There just weren't going to be those jobs, and we had to do something to enable everybody to be as well prepared as possible.

And I'm beginning to see the country and the people kind of catch up with that awareness as well. We're seeing a lot of success, for example, in people moving off of welfare. Because, a lot of people are recognizing that they've got to set an example for their children. They've got to go to work. They've got to encourage their children to go to school. We're seeing a lot of people who never thought that their kid needed to go to college, all of a sudden recognizing that they do need to get as much education as possible.

So the circumstances were poised for the hard decisions that needed to be made, but we had to have leadership. We had to have people at all levels of the education system. We had to have leaders in the business and labor community. We had to have political decision makers, citizens and parents who all reached a new consensus about the importance of education.

That's what I think is happening now. And I believe Chicago is leading the way in

forging that consensus. And I'm always telling people, we'll go see what they're doing in Chicago. And when I travel around the country, and people talk to me about things like vouchers for schools, I say, "Go to Chicago!" We don't need vouchers, we just need a public education system that works for every single child. (Applause)

So now that we have a strategy, and you all are leading the way here in the country by what you're doing in Chicago. What does that mean, and where do we go from here?

Well, we need to do more to give you the tools to do the work that you know needs to be in each of your schools. The President has an education agenda that he's worked out with people like the Mayor, and the people who are involved in running the Chicago schools. He knows that we have to reduce class size, and we have to repair school buildings and build new ones. We have to insure safer schools. We do have to set high standards. We have to do what needs to be done to expand after school programs and pre-school programs so the kids are both prepared and able to get the extra help they need.

Now this agenda--particularly the President's call for 100,000 more teachers, which echoes the call he made in 1993 for 100,000 more police. Because how are you going to make the streets safer if you don't have more police on the streets? And how are you going to lower the class size and give a lot of these kids more attention, as you know better than I, if you don't have the teachers to do the job? And its not just a Chicago issue, it's an American issue, which is why the federal government should step in and help provide the funding for 100,000 more teachers. (Applause)

And what kind of message does it send to a youngster, if we're telling this young person, maybe a first generation American, or certainly a child of hard working people who never went to college, or a child of somebody who has just gotten off of welfare. What does it mean if we say, we really believe in education but, by the way, we really want you to attend that school that's fallen down around your ears? That school that hasn't been repaired, the one where the toilets don't work, we want you to go there. We want you to believe we care about you and your education.

Well, most kids I know are smarter than that and most teachers deserve better than that. We need to do more to make the infrastructure of our public education system the best it can be and we certainly need to do what is required to make our school buildings safe, and accessible, and available to people, not just during the school day but to the neighborhood during the off school hours as well.

The President has proposed such a plan. So there is some very important work that the federal government can do if the Congress would focus on real education reform and quit trying to design ways to undermine the viability of the education system with these voucher plans. If the Congress would adopt a real education agenda, then the United States government could be a better partner to the city schools here in Chicago and around the country.

We also need to recall what it was about the education that many of us received that stood us in such good stead. My husband and I have talked about this a lot. He went to school in the public schools of a state that never got off the bottom in terms of per capita spending for children. But the elementary school and the high school that he went to, they had art classes, they had music classes, they had band, they had a full range of sports and recreation activities, they had clubs.

A lot of kids education -- and mine, going to a suburban Chicago school district -- didn't just happen during the academic classes, it happened when the music teacher was introducing us to opera, or the art teacher was attempting to show me how to get some sense of perspective which I've never gotten to this day. So, we knew there was a lot going on that was beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. And so much of that has been cut out in the first years.

When the budget has had to be tightened, what's gone? After-school programs, recreational programs, art programs, music programs. I think that we have missed such an opportunity with a whole group of children, to find their talents, to give them something to believe in themselves. (Applause) And even to take people like me, who have no talent, but to expose us to the talent of other people, to develop in someone like me an appreciation for those who can create, for the students who go to Gallery 37 that sculpt and paint, and do what I saw them do when I visited.

And I think one of the challenges we face as we're moving along the reform agenda, and we're seeing test scores go up, is to not lose sight about what a well rounded education means. What the full range of exposure for all of our children should mean.

I have a wonderful quote I heard recently from the choir director of a youth choir in Oakland California. When he was justifying his efforts before the school board to get additional funds to enroll more kids in his choir because the choir had taken off, and more kids wanted to get in. He said, "You know a child can be in a gang, or a gang of singers."

We've got to create safe places where the children can find their own identities again: maybe on the sports team and on the field, and maybe in a choir as well, or maybe sitting quietly and practicing an instrument, or trying to draw something that a teacher has already modeled. And I think that it's so critical in these days when so many kids have so much going on in their lives. You know. You know what they bring to school. And, it's not just poor kids, it's all kids. There's just so much going on around them that they have to sort out.

Even if they come from stable two parent families, they see a whole lot of stuff on TV that I wish they wouldn't see. They're are exposed to a whole lot more than I was ever exposed to until I was well into adulthood. How can they make sense of all that? And then, you've got teachers standing in front of classrooms of kids, and I've had a good friend of mine that has taught for years and she calls it the "remote control phenomenon." She said, "I stand up there

and what worked 20 years ago no longer works." She said, "I feel like these kids are just mentally clicking me off. Running through the remote control looking for a better channel."  
(Laughter)

Well what can you expect when the first thing a child is able to do--remember when we used to learn about and talk about hand-eye coordination, when we worried about learning how to tie their shoes so they could develop their mental capacity--well now they just learn to use the remote control. It amuses, it entertains them, it doesn't ask anything from them. So then we expect them to go to a school, and sit in a classroom, and not be mentally using the remote control.

That's why we have to get them engaged in learning, and I've seen wonderful examples of that in many of the classrooms of your schools that I have visited. I've seen hands-on programs in the sciences. I've seen kids working with blocks and other materials to do math problems, that were well beyond what I thought a first or second grader could do.

I've seen lots of interactive learning going on. And I think that's one of the roles that the arts has to play because you have to be involved. You can't just watch and expect that picture to show up on that paper. You can't just sit there and pretend that you're listening, when you have to play that instrument. You have to participate.

So there are many reasons why we have to look for ways to bring the arts back into our schools. But we've also learned something. It's not just a nice idea or nostalgia for people in my generation thinking about what we had when we were in public school. It's not even one of my favorite films, "Mr. Holland's Opus," that made me think of all those years back with all those plays, and performances, and variety shows that we used to do.

It's also because we now have very significant and compelling research that arts education can be a powerful force in boosting academic performances, particularly when it's moved into the core curriculum of a school. A four year study involving an elementary school in Dallas, Texas, has proven what educators, and cultural supporters, have been saying for years. That integrated arts curriculum can dramatically improve academic success. A recent North Carolina study demonstrates that math learning is enhanced by these hands-on visual experiences. We know that when it comes to SAT scores, students of the arts continue to outperform their peers who don't have such programs in their schools.

I can remember back in 1983, when my husband asked me to work on education reform in Arkansas. I went and visited lots of schools, and I just could not believe that so many of the students didn't have in 1983 what I had in 1963. They didn't have the libraries, they didn't have the arts programs. They didn't have the exposure that I'd grown up taking for granted. As a result, they didn't have the tools at their disposal to manipulate information, to think about, to make synthesizing ideas work as they learn things, and weren't able to add to their academic accomplishments.

A study a few years ago called "Coming Up Taller" that was released by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities--on which Maggie Daley has so well served--offered compelling evidence that the arts provide young people, particularly those from homes and neighborhoods where there is little exposure to the arts, with creative alternatives to destructive behavior.

The study reported many research studies, and anecdotes, but I particularly like the ones where an individual student will all of a sudden find an opportunity to be in an artistic program during school, or after school, and all of a sudden caught fire. The kid who'd never been interested before all of a sudden was.

I've gone around and visited some of those programs like Gallery 37, and others in other cities, and I have seen with my own eyes what a difference it can make. We also know from educational psychology that people learn in different ways. Some people are visual learners, some people are auditory learners. Some people are kinesthetic learners, some people learn by doing. Some people, in a way, have an absorptive ability with their whole body. Some of them become our greatest athletes if they're given the chance to develop the discipline.

We are all different and introducing the arts, particularly for young people who don't have the outlets for that kind of expression otherwise, really demonstrates clearly that we can capture something, light a fire in some of those kids.

We also know that the future work world--this information age that we are now a part of, that looks like its only going to continue to accelerate in its development--prizes exactly the skills that the arts themselves use, skills like creativity and innovation. If you go and talk to companies like GE or Microsoft, they are encouraging their employees to be exposed to the visual and performing arts, because they want people to be creative and come up with new ideas and think about how to do things differently.

So its not only that it will help a child--and particularly an at-risk child that perhaps might get hooked into academic learning--but it will also help prepare a child for the world of work as well.

I think that the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education is a very good way of beginning to make sure that we have the arts well represented in our schools here in this city. I also applaud the partnership between the Chicago public schools and Columbia College--which is training 900 high school math and science teachers to use art, music and dance to enrich the teaching of their subjects. Albert Einstein once said, "The gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing knowledge," and imagination, that we have to trigger in everyone, for them to feel that they have a real claim on their own future.

A few weeks ago, I went to one of the toughest neighborhoods in Washington, where the student body, and the school across from the housing project, was predominantly very poor and

disadvantaged. I went to something called a poetry slam. I don't know if any of you have seen such a thing, but they are projects that are funded by the Americorps Writer's Corps--where young writers and poets are sent into the classrooms in some of our toughest neighborhoods where they work with young people in helping them to write their own poetry and where they have contests, like sports contests. It's like going to the Olympics, because you have one school represented by their four best poets, and the other school represented by their four best poets. Then you have an audience of people who hold up cards like an ice-skating contest ranking the kids from one to ten.

It has the excitement of a sporting contest. Who could have thought that these kids would have labored over these poems. And the poems were so evocative, they told stories about their lives. There was one young girl who got up and told a poem about the homeless man she has to walk by everyday on her way to school. Another talked about what went on in his housing project, and the noise that sometimes just made him feel like he was going to shatter into a million pieces. One had a poem about the legacy of Duke Ellington. One student said, "I'm so good at music, that when you hear my song, you'll sing it for the rest of your life." (Laughter)

Every one of these young people talked about how being in this poetry program had helped them put their anger on paper, instead of taking it out on their fellow classmates in the hallways, or on the streets. That it gave them a confidence that they hadn't had before.

This program was funded by, as I said, Americorps and the National Endowment for the Arts, because they believe, and my husband and his administration believe, that art is not a luxury, it's a necessity. And, that as we know more about the challenges we're going to face in the future, it should be an integral part of our lives, and particularly of our education system.

So we at the federal level do what we can to try to promote arts projects like the Writers Corps, arts programs, and provide funding for local projects every chance we can get. But I also in the next two years intend to embark on a national campaign to get arts education back into our schools. (Applause)

I think as our nation moves toward the end of one century--and the beginning of a new millennium--its time for us to decide about the legacies we want to leave for future generations. Earlier this morning Maggie Daley and I were at the Art Institute, where the Sara Lee Corporation announced a magnificent gift. Twelve paintings from their private collection to the Art Institute, one to the Contemporary Art Museum here in Chicago, and other museums around the country. I sat, and I looked at those works--most of them 19th century, early 20th--and I thought, just think in a 100 years, somebody could be making a contribution to the Art Institute of work that was done by Chicago artists who got their start in the Chicago public schools. (Applause)

And when Sara Lee made that announcement, the Chief Executive, John Bryant said that it was going to be a Millennium gift to America. I said how pleased I was because, last summer,

the President asked all of us to think about the gifts we can give to America for the Millennium.

You give gifts every day in your schools. You give gifts that may not make headlines, but as the mayor said, will be remembered in the hearts of students and teachers and parents in years to come.

I remember those gifts. I have with me today one of my favorite teachers from high school. A math teacher, that was not my favorite subject, but he was one of my favorite teachers. (Laughter)

And I remember extremely well how he conducted himself, how he encouraged us, he was our class sponsor, he was always there in our corner trying to make sure we behaved in an appropriate manner. But I remember, and thousands of hundreds of thousands of people remember your legacies, and we have to think about how we will build on that and what gifts we will give.

I want to leave you with some words of Rita Dove, who was our poet laureate a few years ago. Recently at the White House, as part of our Millennium Celebration, we had our present poet laureate, and our two former poet laureates, of whom one was Rita Dove. She served from 1993 to 1995. She said,

"If children are unable to voice what they mean, no one will know how they feel. If they cannot imagine a different world, they are stumbling through a darkness made all the more sinister by its lack of reference points. For a young person growing up in America's alienated and disparate neighborhoods, there can be no greater empowerment than to dare to speak from the heart--and then to discover that one is not alone in one's feelings. Once hope and self esteem have been engendered, the work of redefining the future can begin."

Well, thank God for our poets like Rita Dove, and thank God for our artists who help us give voice to what we feel. And thank God for all of our teachers and our principals who do what you do everyday to try to light that spark in our children. I hope that you will find in the next years even greater satisfaction because you'll see you're better supported in the work you do. You'll see the results of your hard work, and you too will feel that the gifts you're giving to the future are well respected and appreciated, and that you are part of building what we need to have as we move in to the Millennium. Thank you very much.