Madeira School
Washington, DC
May 10, 1999

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

# The Madeira School Lecture Series
# Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

**Washington, D.C.**
**May 10, 1999**

Thank you! Thank you so much. I am delighted to be here. I apologize for being somewhat delayed. We had a convening at the White House this morning about youth violence, and I will talk about that in a minute. It was an incredible gathering. People actually talked and listened to each other, and it went on for about two hours longer than it was planned. I very much regret keeping you waiting, but I'm delighted that I could come and be a part of this inaugural lecture series.

It is also a great pleasure for me to be here at a place that I know has so many connections, not only to my life, but to the lives of so many people whom I know and care about. Betsy [Griffith, headmistress of the Madeira School] has given you her version. I will give you mine in a minute. But I learned in preparation for today that the president of the board of directors—Sarah [Pettit Daignault]—whom you have just heard, is a former classmate and roommate of a woman who works on my staff. And I rode out here with a friend of mine who is a journalist and is married to Bob Morgenthal (phonetic), whose sister was here at Madeira. So I feel very much a part of the Madeira family, being surrounded as I am by so many people who are involved with, and are committed to, this school.

It is also always a thrill for me to follow in the footsteps of Eleanor Roosevelt. In fact, I do that quite a lot. Everywhere I go, just about, she's been there first. I'm always honored and somewhat reassured that I am following in her footsteps. I've been to farms in Iowa and factories in Michigan where Mrs. Roosevelt paid a visit a half century or more ago.

And I remember visiting the remarkable Delaney sisters—Sadie and Bessie Delaney—who immortalized "Having Our Say." I read that, and I was so taken with them that I called them up and I asked if I could come see them. They lived, at the time when they were both living a few years ago, in Mt. Vernon, New York. I went and made the arrangements, and went to see them—two of the most elegant women you can ever imagine. I mean, there they were, at the time, I think 102 and 105, or something. They had beautifully manicured fingernails and they were dressed to the nines, and they sat in their front room telling me stories about their family and their father's passage from slavery to freedom. And I thought to myself, "This is just incredible. Here I am in the presence of all of this history."

It wasn't far into the conversation when I said, "You know, I'm so honored to be here and to have a chance to visit you." And Bessie said, "We're glad to see you too. You're our second First Lady." Then I turned to Sadie and I said, "Now Sadie, when did Mrs. Roosevelt come?" And so then proceeded one of those conversations that I have been privileged to witness.

So, in preparation for today, I summoned up Mrs. Roosevelt, as I often do, in similar circumstances. She was thrilled that I was coming to meet you. She had very pleasant memories of having been here. She enjoyed the caroling and the Christmas play. She also was a little concerned about her niece Elizabeth, who had terrible grades but was a delightful girl, and so Mrs. Roosevelt wanted me to be sure that I urge you all to take your studies more seriously than her niece did.

This is such a treat for me, to come here and be part of a ceremony honoring a remarkable woman who has joined the first ranks of educators in our country, at a school that has always been in the forefront of girls' education, ever since its founding. And to be part of this lecture series is not only a delight for me personally, but it is part of my very strong belief in the importance of girls' education.

I wanted to come to honor Betsy. I wanted to come because I've been trying to find time to come to Madeira ever since I moved into the White House, as I told Betsy and John before. But I particularly wanted to come because I think that the commitment to girls' education, which is exemplified here, is something that I want to be a part of reinforcing. I'm privileged to travel around the world on behalf of our country—with my husband or on my own—and one of the themes of those trips has been girls' education, and the opportunities that education offers young women.

I've heard it said that women's colleges and girls' schools offer "not equal opportunity, but every opportunity." That is certainly truer today than it has ever been in the course of human history. As we stand on the brink of this new century and look forward into this millennium that awaits, I think that one of the greatest changes that has occurred in the last thousand years—and with increasing momentum in the last one hundred years—are the opportunities and roles available to women. It is up to each of us to determine how we exercise these new responsibilities and take advantage of these opportunities.

Well, someone who can demonstrate clearly how to go about doing that is your headmistress. I have admired and liked her ever since we met. She has the same infectious laugh, great smile and fabulous hair from her first days at Wellesley when we were both freshmen. I also was a Young Republican, as she was, and she and I had many conversations about politics and about our concerns for our country. That was a very active time, with the war going on and with civil rights revolution occurring, and it was the beginnings of a greater recognition of what was ahead for women. So it was a very fruitful time to be involved, not only in college and academic discussions, but in reaching out in the world—as both Betsy and I tried to do—to put some reality in our lives when it came to public and political issues. I've always admired Betsy's passionate advocacy on behalf of a range of issues and her inspirational leadership here at Madeira, but not just on a large scale—inspiring young women and those who care about women's education—but also in quieter and more informal ways as she has been a great friend, counselor, and supporter to many of us.

When I knew that I was going to be speaking at Seneca Falls last year for the 150th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Sentiments that was created there, I knew that the one person that I needed to talk to was Betsy. And she dropped what she was doing, came to the White House, sat with me and some others, and provided great counsel and good advice about how to frame the past 150 years of progress and advancement on behalf of women here in our country. And, specifically, in a larger picture of, "What are the challenges that lie ahead?" Well, she was in a unique position to do just that for me and for many of us, because her leadership here has put her right in the middle of what it means to be a young woman in the world today. I know that she and I both look back at our experience at an all women's college at the defining time in our lives. Where we, and so many others, were taught that we were valued, that our ideas counted, that we could and should place no limits on what we wanted to make of our own lives.

I remember leaving Wellesley and going on to Yale Law School. And in the early fall, when I was in New Haven, I received a questionnaire that the college was putting out. It was what many women's schools were going through at the time: "Should we remain a women's college? Should we become co-ed? Should we change our mission?" And I, like many of my friends, would complain about the lack of men on the campus, the difficulty of getting from Cambridge back to Wellesley, and all of the things that would bother us about being in one of the most beautiful settings, other than Madeira, that I've ever seen. But I found, when I was filling out that questionnaire in my dorm room at Yale, that it was almost as though I were possessed. I got to the question, "Do you think that Wellesley should go co-ed?" and this spirit sort of took over my arm. I began looking down as I was writing, "No, Never! Remain a women's college with a mission to educate women for leadership in the world." And that is what I believe today. And that is what Betsy has stood for in her leadership here.

A well-known scholar and biographer of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and now a major part of what I hope will be a very successful PBS series that will bring the work of the early women's rights advocates to a broader audience, she has also be a passionate activist working on everything from the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to getting more women elected. She's also highly organized. She's the kind of person who you just have to accept will be your friend despite the fact that her basement is neat. Her lists are fulfilled and crossed out. She's not one of these people, like I am, who makes lists of lists and then forgets where all the lists went. But, in addition to organizational ability, she is creative, active, and contemplative all at the same time. In short, your headmistress, and my friend, embodies the multiple roles that so many women play in America today.

If you were to take a snapshot of her at one moment in her day and then another at a later moment, you would see her involved in different activities. It would cause, in the minds of some, confusion. "Well, what is she? Is she a mother?" Yes. "Is she a step-grandmother?" Yes. "Is she a wife?" Yes. "Is she a scholar?" Yes. "Is she an administrator?" Yes. "Is she a community worker?" Yes. "Is she an activist?" Yes. She is all that, and more. And that is what we have to be grateful for in today's world: that if we are permitted, we are able to fulfill so many of our own aspirations in the space of one relatively short lifetime. So I want to honor her for her commitment to these issues that engage us in today's world, for her commitment to

girls' education and to this fine institution, and also for her being a pioneer who has demonstrated with grace, elegance, and good humor, that this is what a woman's life looks like today. And by doing so, she has helped break and damage stereotypes and myths that deserve to be left behind.

She has also taken seriously the promotion of citizenship and leadership. Public service is an honored tradition at Madeira. In preparation for coming here, I read a letter that Miss Madeira had sent to her girls. And, I wish that we could emblazon this in the sky so this could be read not just by the students of Madeira and the extended Madeira family, but by all of our young people and by the rest of us as well. Listen to what she said, "When we choose a democratic way of life to live under, we must remember that we have chosen the most difficult form that has ever yet been invented—and unless a very large majority of people . . . take an active and vigorous part in the life of the society, it will not function properly, and it will not last."

I'm grateful that that is part of the credo of this school. I only wish that it was better understood and applied outside of the grounds here. You are doing your part at Madeira through the co-curriculum program—enabling people to work with future homeowners at Habitat for Humanity or watching government work in the halls of Congress. You're learning what de Tocqueville called those "habits of the heart" of service and citizenship that have always marked the American experience. And it is these responsibilities, both those close at home—whether you are a student and doing your best to study and learn and ponder what you want to do individually, or whether through your collective action here at this school as you work together on behalf of causes and events that you care about. And then ultimately, there are broader responsibilities that as women leaders you will take on once you leave here.

I want to talk about that today because there are so many involvements that demand our attention. One of the challenges of being a woman today is that, because of all of these roles that we're capable of playing, one has to be very careful to make sure that you do not lose yourself in any one role, that you maintain that energy, that focus, and that grounding that enable you to feel not only successful about what you do, but about who you are. As we look at the world today, we can see that we are being challenged on many fronts—about who we are and what we believe, and what we will do to face the problems that surround us.

As I look out at you and see all of your faces and the possibility of potential that is reflected on each of them, I can't help to think about the conversation that we had at the White House this morning about what happened at Littleton, and why that has become such an extraordinary, unforgettable, unshakable event. Why are we so concerned, and even obsessed, by its meaning? It is not the first time it happened. That, in and of itself, gives us pause. But, it is the cumulative effect of years and years of wondering what we were doing as a society. Were we giving the kind of attention, care, love and discipline that our children need? How will we do better? This underlies a lot of the concern and conversation about what happened at Columbine High School.

I know that you have talked about that here. You met in small groups and in large groups with counselors. You've sent your prayers and support to the students and the families there. I'm sure that on Mother's Day yesterday, those of you lucky enough to see your daughters or to see your mothers probably hugged just a little bit longer and held on just a little bit tighter, as we all do when something strikes us so close to home. Because the truth is that we do have some hard questions to ask ourselves. And there is more than enough responsibility and action to go around. We have to do a better job of defining it. How will we exercise both our citizenship and our leadership?

This morning in the East Room of the White House, the President convened a broad cross-section of Americans. There were gun manufacturers and advocates of sport shooting and other uses of weapons. There were media representatives from the television networks, the cable stations, the interactive video games, and the Internet. There were parents' groups like the PTA and Mothers Against Violence. There were citizens' groups like the YWCA and the Boys' and Girls' Club. There were experts and researchers who had studied violence and charted its course, and who could describe to us how it has steadily gotten worse over the last 30 years. There were elected officials, police officers, and educators. There were Americans of all walks of life, many different ideologies and political points of view. But it was an extraordinary gathering because there wasn't any finger-pointing. There wasn't any acrimony, personal attack, or insult. I think, much like the terrible tragedy at Oklahoma City took the sting out of so much of the irresponsible, anti-government rhetoric, that after Littleton it is very hard to cartoon one another. Instead we sat around for hours, listening.

The religious leaders were among those who pointed out that much of the problem in modern society, whether it is evidenced in violence or alienation, can be traced to a sense of spiritual emptiness, a belief in very little. Maya Angelou, who was there, memorably said that the worst thing in the world is a child who goes from knowing nothing to believing nothing. Too many of our children take that journey. So we listened, and we understood very deeply that there wasn't one answer. There were many, many answers and many different kinds of calls to action. We acknowledge that we might not ever fully understand what motivated those two young men—or indeed any other young person who turns weapons on others and himself—but that not understanding does not relieve us either of concern or responsibility. We are neither helpless nor hopeless. There are steps that we can take to try to prevent the violence. But not only to prevent the violence, as important as that is, but to do more to give young people something to say yes to, and to do more to view the lives of young men and women with more meaning and more hope.

If this were just a problem that were confined to one segment of our society, then we could concentrate all of our energies, perhaps, as if an illness broke out in a certain city or we had some other kind of tragedy that occurred in one geographical area or among a certain population. But as we were reminded today—by not only the experts that research such matters, but by a very impressive minister from Boston who has been one of the architects of that city's response to ending violence among children there—what affects and afflicts us as a society knows no boundaries. It cuts across racial and ethnic lines. It's in the inner-city and it is in the

suburbs. It's in the richest and the poorest of our families. It's in the culture that we all live in, that we make decisions in, and that we have to contend with.

So when we think about citizenship and leadership, I hope that we pay a lot of attention to what we do to give young people, like yourselves, the belief that it is important for you to be involved in the world around you, to understand what happens, and to be willing to take the steps available to you to make a difference. Now what does that mean? Well, it means many things on many of different levels. It means, to those of you who are parents and those of you who hope one day to be mothers, that we have to be more conscientious as parents. We have to be willing to listen to our children. We have to pay more attention to what they need.

One young woman at the meeting this morning was a senior at the local high school here and a peer-mediating counselor with her fellow classmates. She said something very telling. She said, "You know, I'll probably get in trouble with some of my friends for saying this, but I think that kids really do want parents to pay attention in their lives, to ask them questions about who their friends are, where they are going, and what they are doing. And even if we do act like we don't like it, we really do want it." For a lot of parents, we have to be reminded that there are necessary limits and safeguards that are within our responsibility to create and impose so that our children are better able to navigate safely to adulthood.

If we are business leaders, then we have some hard questions to ask ourselves. Clearly, if we are in businesses that directly relate to these problems we're discussing—like the gun manufacturers today and the big media companies—we bear an extra responsibility. And I was very proud this morning when the gun manufacturers who were there said that they would support some of the President's proposals for sensible gun control. They said, "You know, we're parents too and we think that people do have to exercise responsibility, but we could do more to make it easier for parents to keep guns safely away from children." And Sarah Brady, who has been one of the fiercest advocates of gun control, said that she was honored to be in the room with the gun manufacturers. Because for the first time, people were not hurling invectives at one another, but were trying to decide what it is that we can do to make sure that guns have safety locks, for example.

The media companies that were there are finally facing up to the fact that they cannot escape their share of the responsibility for shaping the culture in which we live. I was very proud when one of the presidents of one of the major news networks said that he does have to accept the fact that if you're in the television or entertainment industry, you cannot any longer say, "What we put on the screen does not affect behavior." Because why would you then go out and convince advertisers to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy time to advertise something which you hope will affect behavior? So we're beginning to see some cracks in the walls of deniability. That, in itself, is a big step forward, but it has to be followed by action.

Yet there are other ways that every business can take a role in accepting responsibility. One of the most common complaints that I hear all the time from working parents is that they have no time for their children—especially if they are single working parents. I was in a large junior high school in Queens last week and I met with a group of parents—a small group, but

one struggling to engage more parents in the lives of their middle school kids. And these parents said to me, "Well, we're the lucky ones because we can take the time off to come to a parent-teacher conference because I work myself or I work for my brother and he lets me off." But most of these parents don't get any time off. Everybody's always telling them, "Get to know your kid's teachers. Come to the school for the parent-teacher conference." But they can't because there's no time off. It may sound like a little thing, but what sort of signal does it send in terms of responsibility if we say to parents, "You should do a better job with your children. You should be involved in their schooling. But, by the way, don't do it on our time." Which means don't do it at all, given the schedule that the schools usually run. So there are creative ways for all of us to do a better job in helping to support and empower parents, and to give them the tools that they need to make better decisions for their own children.

We also have to look at schools and education. Our schools have gotten so big. The school that I was in last week was built for 1,500 kids. Now imagine 1,500 7th and 8th graders. But there are 2,000 there. And they were starting construction that week because they were going to add; they're going to shoehorn in another 500. There is no way that children can be made to feel special and valued, that they can be given the attention and support that they need—especially if they are vulnerable or susceptible to the culture, and therefore more likely to be prone to aggression which nobody will ever notice.

I remember that one of the saddest comments to come out of the Littleton massacre is when the principal of that large high school said, "You know, I never knew about this Black Trench Coat Mafia." Well, how could he? Those were just a very small group of kids in a very large institution. We're going to have to do some serious thinking about how—in a world that is so fast moving, with so many things going on; with a lot kids feeling a little disorientated and dislocated to begin with, with a lot of the institutions that used to be there in a rock solid way for kids—the family, the church, the local neighborhood—no longer being as steady and as stable as they used to be—how on earth can we do a better job to create the school in a way that will involve young people?

Betsy said that 88 out of 300 of you ran for student office. Now, you could be just a bunch of political junkies like Betsy and me, but it also says something about how you feel involved in your community—the community that is Madeira. Right now, most of our schools are no longer communities. Too many kids are passing through them anonymously. So we're going to have to change the way we think about how we build, construct, and organize our schools. We're going to have to create a climate that is open to discussions of values, of spirituality, of faith, and of a lot of the things that at the end of the day, make life worth living.

One of the people there, a senator, said, "You know, it's a simple idea, but perhaps we could have a national day of reconciliation the day before Thanksgiving." He was almost apologetic talking about it. "You know, it's a simple idea, but if we could just get people to stop for one day and reach out to family members that they haven't talked to in years, look deep inside themselves and see if they harbor any hatred, prejudice, or bigotry toward other people and try to rid themselves of that—it may be a simple idea, but it might work." I thought that it was a great idea, and I thought that it was really worth considering, but I understood his

hesitancy. We're not only a culture of violence, but we're a culture of cynicism and conflict. We really need to work on our own hearts. Those "habits of the heart" are not just about how we associate with one another in political and public endeavors, but how we should treat each other in our daily lives. But say that in today's prevailing culture and be immediately "dissed" by somebody. There will be a hundred of those "talking heads" that say that you're simplistic and that you don't know about reality, and make fun of you. We know that. But I think that it is about time that we are willing to stand up to that cynicism as well. Children and other living things don't thrive well in the climate of cynicism.

So it was a very rich and, I hope, productive discussion—one that in multiple forms is taking place all over the country. I have never had people talk to me more about anything that has happened. I've never had my friends call me. Friends that I knew from high school and college called to make sure that I knew what they were thinking. One of the other themes that came through loudly and clearly was that we have too many children—as Tipper Gore is always pointing out—who are depressed and who need help and often can't get it. So, while we're working on the underlying causes of these feelings of alienation and depression, we have to do more to get the young people the services that they need so they don't spiral down and out because they can't get the help that would make a difference.

So there is indeed a lot of work to be done. But I was encouraged because at the end of the meeting, there was a general agreement that we would launch a national campaign to prevent youth violence. And we would model on two successful campaigns during the last six years. The first was the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. We marshaled people from all over the country to come together and be part of the solution. We have been very gratified that teen pregnancy rates, both of married teens and unmarried teens, has fallen every year in the last six years. We still have a long way to go, but we're at least now, for the first time, headed in the right direction.

We also fought about Mothers Against Drunk Driving. I can remember, it wasn't so long ago, when there wasn't a big stigma attached to drinking and driving. There used to be movies with a lot of funny scenes about people getting very drunk and not being able to drive well and sometimes having silly scrapes and accidents. But behind all of that laughter and embarrassment, there was a lot of death, anguish, and injury. The Mothers Against Drunk Driving said, "Enough! Enough! We're going to change the culture. We're going to have designated drivers. We're going to convince people that if they choose to drink, fine, but just don't get behind a lethal weapon if you do so." So we know, through grassroots activism and personal responsibility, we can begin to change this culture.

You are at a point here in your lives and in your education where you have so many opportunities available to you. I wish each of you to have courage and energy to follow through on whatever your choices might be. That is one of the great causes of the last years for me: to do all that I could to create respect for the choices that women make with their lives. And also, recognition that the choice that you make in your 20s may not be the choice that you make in your 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and—as we live longer—all the way up to your 80s and 90s. There may be periods of time where you are a full-time mom and homemaker. And there may be periods of

time when you're absolutely committed to your career with no thought of marriage or motherhood. And then, out of the blue that can change—both by choice and by chance. So whatever those choices are, you're at least here in an atmosphere where you are being well-equipped and empowered to be able to make them. But I hope that you are not satisfied by just the choices for your own lives, but that you do all that you can—by making good choices for yourselves—to help make good choices for your community and for your country. Here, you're a part of a community. In too many places in America now, we don't have that sense of community. One of our jobs will be to rebuild that. You can bring with you from this place strong ideas about how that is done.

Tomorrow I leave for a trip to Ireland. I go first to Galway, Ireland, and then to Belfast to continue to work in bringing women together as part of the peace process in Northern Ireland. For so many years during the troubles, the headlines were all grabbed by the bombs and guns, the insults and the acrimony. But under the surface, there were a lot brave women who made the choice to cross sectarian lines, to have a cup of tea with somebody, to bring together a couple of women to try and put together a peace march. I met with those women and looked into their eyes—women whose families had been decimated by the violence. I thought to myself, how many of us would have had that kind of courage—to cross those barriers, to been seen with someone from a different religion—if you know that it might cost you your life or the life of a loved one? Long before the Good Friday Peace Accords were signed last year, ordinary citizens, many of them women, began to reach out to one another to build trust and lay the groundwork for peace. I think about them a lot, because what they did is a real example of what needs to be done not only here, in the Balkans, in the Middle East, in Africa, but wherever people commit themselves to give in and find conflict that we see too much of. Thankfully, we don't live with that kind of daily, weekly, or monthly fear. But we live with something else, don't we? We live with some sense of wonder and waiting about what might happen to our children.

Saturday I held an event with parents and family members of people who had been killed by gun violence. And one of the fathers who had lost his son at Columbine came. Tom Mauser was his name. He talked about what it was like when he heard at work about what was happening there. He rushed home to be with his wife and they waited to hear about their son. They got word that they should go to a holding area in a nearby community building to wait with other parents who were waiting. And then later they were told to go into a smaller room with parents who were still waiting. And Mr. Mauser said, "You know, the worst part of it for me was being in that waiting room. And then I finally was told that my Daniel was dead. I came here today to say that we have to do whatever it takes, because we could all be in that waiting room."

Well my hope is that every generation of Americans has always responded to whatever the challenges were. It is time for us to leave that waiting room—not to be satisfied about being on the sidelines, not to take heart from the fact that we ourselves are safe, or we think we have the means to escape whatever is happening in the culture, and put up the biggest wall around our houses to keep all of those evil forces at bay. That, in the end, does not work. What does work is to use the lessons of citizenship and leadership that you learn here everyday and to carry them out in a country and a world that desperately needs you.

I look forward to hear what happens, coming from Madeira, and I look forward to working with everyone in the country who wants to get out of the waiting room and get into a position of responsibility—in our homes, our businesses , our churches, everywhere we gather. That, I think, is the proper commitment that we owe ourselves and the future. I'm told that here at Madeira you take a terrifying jump on the zip-wire. I understand that that passes for character building. Well, I'm sure that it does. It stretches your boundaries and your expectations. Madeira, it has been said, teaches you to step over the line that you've drawn for yourself.

Well, I think that that is not only a good slogan for the students, the faculty, and the family of Madeira, but that is a good slogan for all of us. If we can gather the courage to step over the lines that we too often draw for ourselves and go forth into our world, that is the kind of tribute that we can pay to the work of Betsy Griffith, Eleanor Roosevelt, Miss Madeira, and so many others who are urging us to take our place in that long line of people willing to be citizens and leaders for America.

Thank you very much!