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REMARKS AT 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF SENECCA FALLS
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Imagine. Imagine for a moment that you are Charlotte Woodward, a 19 year-old living in Waterloo. Every day, you sit for hours, sewing gloves together. Working for tiny wages. With no hope of going to school or owning property...you suffer in silence. But then one day, you read about a women's rights convention that gives voice to all that's plagued you. You run from house to house, and find other women have heard the same news. Some are excited. Others amused or shocked. And six or so agree to come with you...for at least the first day.

When you leave early in the morning in your horse drawn wagon, you fear no one else will come. And, at first, the road is empty. But suddenly, as you reach new cross-roads you see more and more wagons and carriages all going towards the Wesleyan Chapel. And, as you get closer, you eventually form one long procession.

In it, are women like Rhoda Palmer, who later, at the age of 102, becomes the only woman who signed the Declaration of Sentiments to cast her ballot in an election. There are girls like Catherine Fish Stebbins, who at 12 had already gone door to door collecting anti-slavery petitions. She also kept an anti-tobacco pledge on the parlor table and asked all her young male friends to sign. A woman truly ahead of her time.

Imagine the courage it took for them to come that morning. Ordinary men and women from less than 50 miles away. Rich and poor. Sisters and brothers. Husbands and wives. Friends and neighbors. Many involved in the abolitionist movement. Just like those who have taken pilgrimages before and after, all were trying to reach a promised land, a place where women could enjoy "all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens."

“Who were we?” Frederick Douglas asked. And he answered this way: “We were few in numbers, moderate in resources, and very little known in the world. The most we had to connect us was a firm commitment that we were in the right, and a firm faith that the right must ultimately prevail.” 150 years later...this time by car and plane, by train and foot, and yes, by bus, we too come from different directions, arriving in one procession with a common goal. And when they ask who are, let us say:

We are citizens, who in July, 1998, have gathered at Seneca Falls, and those who we speak for today in homes, workplaces, and communities across America. We are citizens who desperately need child care we can afford and trust. We are citizens, who worry every time our children leave the house that they will become victims of senseless violence.

We are citizens who wonder whether we'll ever be able to succeed both at work and at home...whether we'll ever find balance in our lives. We are citizens who live without quality health insurance.

We are citizens who live paycheck to paycheck, having to make terrible choices between heating bills and grocery bills, between care for our parents and our children. We are citizens of every generation... some of us have worked hard to forge new roles for ourselves...struggling against barriers to education and jobs...and doing our best to remove them. Some of us are young, well educated, but still don't know if we'll ever make it to the top. Still don't know whether its possible to have it all...especially at the same time.

We come from every race. Every religion. Every background. Every state. We come partly in celebration. Partly in determination to move closer to fulfilling the promises of those who cleared the road that led us here. To make sure every American has the ability and opportunity to fully contribute to our nation in the 21st century.

For the last three days, I've traveled across the East Coast, asking each one of us to help save the monuments, artifacts, papers, and sites that tell our nation's story. And not just as a history lesson to read about and put back on the shelf. As we approach the Millennium, we have a tremendous opportunity to think about the history, culture, and values that define who we are as a nation – and to make a commitment to live by them now and pass them on to future generations. And that includes the stories of women, each of which is woven into a quilt, each of which must be told and retold.

Yesterday, I visited places that I hope will become part of every American's memory and future. I hope every American learns the story of Kate Mullany. How she organized the first long-lasting women's union and managed to achieve almost parity with men's wages. I hope every American learns the story of Harriet Tubman. A woman, born into slavery, who decided, that she had a right to either liberty or death. And she fought for liberty...in the underground railroad and on behalf of former slaves, especially the oldest and the youngest.

I hope every American learns the story borne here at Seneca Falls, and tirelessly protected by the Park Service, the community, and descendants of the Convention. That they visit Kate McClintock's house, where the Declaration of Sentiments was written. And that they stand at the Wesleyan Chapel and read and feel their immortal words inscribed on the wall: "All men and women are created equal."

You can imagine how well that went over with some people at the time. The women were called "mannish women," "old maids," and "fanatics," all attacked personally by those who disagreed with them. Sound familiar? One paper said these rights would bring "a monstrous injury to all mankind." And one cartoon, printed years later, summed up some people's deepest fears. It showed husbands scrubbing dishes and tending to crying babies.

[From the start, people have tried to kill off feminism by demonizing, marginalizing, or mischaracterizing it. One magazine, which wrote the most recent obituary of feminism, even put the dagger in the hands of Ally McBeal. But, like Mark Twain, rumors of its death are greatly exaggerated.]

If Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott were here today, we would take great job in telling them how far we've traveled. Women today vote. We face no legal barriers to education, property, or most employment. When we walk through the Hall of Fame here, we see pioneers in professions once open only to men: astronaut Sally Ride, scientists [tbd], and now, Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright.

If Stanton and Mott listened to the political debate today, they would be amazed at how closely it resembles the issues they talked about at Seneca Falls and in their daily lives. In a letter to Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes "Come here and I will do what I can to help you with your address, if you will hold the baby and make the puddings." [The true meaning of "juggling" work and family.]

Yet, in the last few elections, when we talked about issues like child care, health care, family leave, and education, some thought this marked the end of the world. They even derided this trend as the feminization of politics. What an unfortunate term. Don't fathers care if their children are learning and growing in safe places during the day? Don't husbands care if their wives get proper pre-natal care and timely breast cancer screenings? Don't brothers care if they can take time off when a parent or child is sick. Don't uncles care if their young nephews are doing drugs and putting their lives and future in danger?

And don't all of us benefit when none of us are blocked from fully exercising our rights and responsibilities? The participants at Seneca Falls understood this. And that's why so many came with members of their families. It wasn't just about women. They all stood to gain. And it's the same today. Instead of the feminization of politics, I prefer to think of it as the humanization of politics...Because it's about nothing less than how we get along, the choices we make, the concerns families discuss at the kitchen table and before they go to bed at night. This is our unfinished business...as we redefine what it means to be a woman of our day...and a full citizen of our time.

In a speech written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and given by Susan B. Anthony on July 4, 1876, she says: "We ask justice. We ask equality. We ask that all the civil and political rights that belong to citizens of the United States, be guaranteed to us and our daughters forever." If we were forced to write a Declaration of Sentiments for 1998, what would we say about our ability to live up to that challenge? What are our grievances?

We might say that, 150 years after women demanded equal pay for equal work, you can't achieve full citizenship when women still earn 76 cents on a man's dollar. Almost 80 years after we won the right to vote, we can't achieve full citizenship when we represent only 12 percent of Congress and [tbd] percentage of women didn't even bother going to the polls in 1996. We can't achieve full citizenship when women are still the exception at the top of Fortune 500 companies, the media, and academic institutions.

We might say we can't achieve full citizenship when more than 40 million Americans live without health insurance – a quarter of whom are children. When [tbd] percentage of women live in poverty. When about 5 million children are latchkey kids every day. We can't achieve full citizenship for all when children are surrounded by too much violence, drugs, and AIDS and too few safe places to go after school.

Lucretia Mott didn't just doubt she'd see woman suffrage in her lifetime. She thought demanding it would make them seem ridiculous. But the women of Seneca Falls did something important. They dared to dream about what the end of the road might look like. So too must we.

Today, let us imagine at the end of the road a young boy and a young girl walking side by side with all the blessings and responsibilities of citizenship. They will both live free from fear and poverty. They will grow up in a nation that nurtures and values them for what they think and do, not how they look. They will have access to a good education. They will fill our State Houses, Senate and all professions in equal numbers. They will finally receive equal pay for equal work. They will have on-site child care, flex time, and enough hours to spend with their family. And health care and retirement security in their later years.

They will both be supported in the choices they make – whether it's to be parents, workers, or both. And they will be good citizens – always using their power to vote...always working to improve the lives of those who live around them and those who will come after them.

I cannot promise that we here will see that day. Of all the signers, only Charlotte Woodward lived to see win the right to vote in 1920. But, I hope 150 years from, they will celebrate our vision and all we did to move us closer to realizing it...just as every generation has worked to perfect our democracy. I hope they will say that today's gathering...like the Seneca Falls Convention...was a catalyst for action by all. Not just the government. But also businesses, religious organizations, the media, foundations, and individuals who came, like the wagons and carriages that inspired Charlotte Woodward 150 years ago, from different directions to reach the end of the road.

We know how to get there. We know we can reach the end of the road if we join across lines of race and class, and speak to each other's differences and common cause. We know we can reach the end of the road if women support each other in the choices we make. If we admit that there's no one cookie-cutter model for being a successful and fulfilled woman today. That we can choose full-time motherhood or no family at all. Or like most women do something in between.

We know we will reach the end of the road if men and women work together in this fight. How can we ever forget the impassioned and persuasive plea Frederick Douglass issued in defense of our right to vote? And how can we ever forget the young legislator from Tennessee, Harry Burns, who was the deciding vote in ratifying the 19th amendment. He was planning on voting "no." But, then he got a letter from his mother, with a simple message: "Be a good boy, Harry, and do the right thing." He did. Tennessee became the last state to ratify. And the rest is history.

We know that reaching the end of the road depends upon passing on our history and never ending struggle for full citizenship to the next generation. Stanton understood that when she wrote a letter to her daughters with a special gift enclosed: She wrote: "Dear Maggie and Hattie, this is my first speech. It contains all I knew at that time. I give this manuscript to my precious daughters, in the hope that they will finish the work I have begun."

And they did...Her daughter, Harriot Blanch, was the chief strategist of the suffrage movement in New York. Harriet's daughter, Nora Barney, was one of the first women to be civil engineers. Nora's daughter, Rhoda Jenkins, was an architect. Rhoda's daughter, Coline Jenkins-Sahlin, is an elected official in Greenwich, Connecticut. And her daughter, Elizabeth is 13 and wrote a chapter about the six generations of Statons in a book called "33 things every girl should know."

Rhoda, Coline, and Elizabeth are all here...and so are the family members of Lucretia and James Mott, Jane and Richard Hunt, Martha Wright, Mary Ann and Thomas McClintock, Amy Post, Charles Hoskins, and Susan Quinn. Could all of you stand?

As we leave here today, one procession and fan out back to our own homes and communities, I hope each of us, will find a way to honor the men and women who fought for our full citizenship by passing on their history and fulfilling their vision. Perhaps no one explained why this is so important better than the students at the Geneva City Schools, where fourth graders learned about the women's rights movement by pretending to be the characters of people involved in it.

Emma Lawler, a 10 year old, explained what she learned his way, "I think that women now should know what life was like back then. There were no freedoms for women and their lives were controlled by men. Our project made us realize that today we can do anything we want to do and become anything we want to be."

May children of every race, religion, gender and background have that dream. May all of us work to fulfill it. Thank you very much.