

Dr. James Garbarino, author of Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them

In the Lost Boys, Dr. James Garbarino focuses on boys in prison, and the factors that led them to commit the crimes that landed them there. He speaks of a societal condition in which children are exposed to more violence than ever, and that some children are more susceptible to its dangers. Add to that a decrease in time parents spend with their children, increased access to violent weapons, and video games which dis-connect children from the notion of crime and killing, all of which create an environment of "social toxicity."

On "Social Toxicity" and Blame

- "The conditions of social toxicity are there across society---the gun culture, kids being awash in imageries of violence, the decline of adult time with kids," [The Atlanta Journal, May 31, 1998]
- "Where do you point the finger? You'd need at least two handfuls of fingers." [American Journalism Review September, 1998]
- "There's evidence that from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, that the percentage of American kids who were sufficiently troubled to need professional mental health services doubled from about 10 percent to about 20 percent. During that same period, the exposure of children to a whole variety of toxic influences in terms of the virulence of graphic, sexualized, and violent imagery increased dramatically over that same period.....We have data on declining adult supervision in children, adult time spent with kids. We have a whole variety of things, including what David Grossman (ph) has talked about -- the new generation of video games that mimic military training to desensitize kids to the actual act of shooting." [Talk of the Nation, 8/12/98]
- "Well, I think there are at least a couple of things. The first is that the capacity, the physical capacity, even the psychological capacity of children to do things that have profound consequences ought not to blind us to the fact that we're still talking about children and very young adolescents who think and feel like other children and very young adolescents. We know that you could put a nine-year-old in a car and he might physically be able to drive a car, but I don't think many of us would want nine-year-olds driving cars. The crime that they commit needs to be understood not in terms of its consequences, but in terms of who it is that's -- that's committing it.

So I think we need to always be thinking about what is it in the lives of children and young teenagers that brings them to this point? And when it's an individual kid, we typically find an experience of victimization at home or in the community. We find experiences of trauma, coupled with the fact that

our culture is offering children scenarios of what to do with rage; what to do with the feeling of injustice all the time.

And these kids aren't inventing the scenarios that they are living out. They're borrowing them from images that are presented to them on a regular basis. And that combination of troubled individual kids and these horrible scenarios is very dangerous. When you get more than one kid together, you have the added element that sometimes the sum of their parts is very different from them individually.

I'm sure a lot of people remember the book "In Cold Blood." It was very clear that horrible murder that was committed in Kansas -- that neither of the perpetrators, in that case adults, would have committed that crime alone. But together, it was a kind of awful chemistry between them, and I think actually all three of the cases you've mentioned -- the recent one of the two boys just this past month, and the case from last year or two when the boys dropped someone off the roof -- have all of those elements in it of at least one troubled boy provoking a situation with another boy, and then living out one of these scenarios. But they're doing it like children watching "Titanic" or some other melodramatic scenario, only in this case it's obviously a very lethal one." [Talk of the Nation, 8/12/98]

Mental Health

- "I spend most every week -- I sit down with a youth who's either in prison or on trial for murder. And one of the striking things about it is how often, how terribly often you can see in their childhood by the time they're eight or nine-years-old a discernible definable mental health problem that isn't addressed well at all.

We're still only responding with professional intervention to something like a third or a half of kids with identifiable mental health problems in childhood. And it's very clear that overwhelmingly kids who end up killing or committing very severe acts of violence come from that population. The most common diagnoses is the diagnoses of what's called conduct disorder, which really means that the kid has gotten wrapped up in a pattern of very negative anti-social destructive behavior. And typically what happens is kids are suspended because of that or they're moved to another school rarely do they get effective mental health intervention. And that's the group from which most of the severe chronic violent juveniles come.

By the time they've ended to be 15 they've added on problems of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder because of victimization experiences, they've added on depression, a lot of them have anxiety disorders. That's puts a different slant on this idea that these are just kids who show up and turn

bad. They come out of a long period of developing problems and they're typically troubled kids who's experience has not been a positive one and has culminated in these terrible events. [Talk of the Nation, 8/12/98]

- I think it's an important part of this issue that is only beginning to be understood. As you say it's often not seen in those terms in childhood, but I'm struck talking with boys now who are 13 to 18 about their early relationships how often this pattern of disrupted and broken relationships of kids who were and felt rejected and who never really made that connection so they're not under the same control -- emotional controls that other kids are. Because as you point out if a kid has not got that basic attachment, that different emotional rules apply to them, they don't feel bound and governed in their feelings by the sense of connection.

John Bulby (ph) the British psychiatrist who really coined the word attachment, I remember speaking about a boy who had this Reactive Attachment Disorder who very calmly through a cat in the fire without a sense that this was another living being. And that sense of non-connection is certainly one of the most dangerous characteristics of a boy -- again particularly boys, that we could find in a child. And that's one reason why, as you point out, the kids that we're most concerned about, that everyone ought to be most concerned about, are the boys who show cruelty to animals, fire setting, the sense of treating the world -- the alive world, as if it were simply objects. And I think it'll become one of the common themes as we explore this further in the years to come. [Talk of the Nation, 8/12/98]

- "Unless we do something to intervene...children identified as aggressive at age 8 will tend to be aggressive 30 years later." [The San Francisco Chronicle APRIL 21, 1999]

On Guns

- "Well I think they [guns] play at this point in our history, in this point in the evolution of childhood and adolescence, they play a very central role. Because they provide the means, very efficient means, to turn adolescent fantasies or childhood impulses into mayhem. Imagine those boys in Jonesboro with the same fantasy without the access to the guns; trying to implement that fantasy. And you know, it doesn't work.

What's really shocking is the prevalence of guns as a central symbol in the life of children. For example, I remember interviewing eight-year-olds in Chicago, in a suburban part of Chicago, and finding that one out of every three said he or she could get a gun if they needed one. A recent survey found that two-thirds of high school students said they could get a gun in an hour if they needed one.

Now, the question is: Why do they think they need one? I speak with children and they say they need a gun partly because it makes them feel safer, because they don't think the adult world is taking care of them. And two, because it is such a loaded symbol of power in the culture, particularly for a boy who feels shame or a boy who feels humiliated; a boy who feels diminished. Here's a very clear symbol of power that's readily accessible. So I think it's a very dangerous combination in America in the 1990s." [Talk of the Nation, 8/12/98]

- "Even if a 12-year-old then had access to a gun, he would have been less able to point it at a human being and shoot. An increased dose of violence and things like point-and-shoot video games break down children's inhibitions the same way they break down soldiers'," [The Boston Globe, May 21, 1998]



Record Type: Record

To: Christine N. Macy/WHO/EOP

cc:

Subject:

Number of incidents of violent deaths on schools between 1994 and 1998 is 173; and 85% of those violent deaths were from guns. (from the Department of Education).

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Littleton, Colorado)

For Immediate Release

May 20, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE FIRST LADY
TO THE COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Dakota Ridge High School
Littleton, Colorado

4:37 P.M. MDT

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you, Heather. Thank you, Dr. Hammond. Thank you, Mr. DeAngelis. And most of all, thank you, the students of Columbine.

You know, when we walked in, I saw the cheer that was going from one side to the other side, and the chant, "We are Columbine!" that went back and forth, and the enthusiasm and the energy that was behind that cheer. But to me, it was more than that. It was a real statement about who you are and, indeed, who we all are. Because in a very real way, what happened here at Columbine has so deeply affected the rest of our country, that we are all Columbine.

We have suffered and wept and prayed and hoped, and, yes, cheered, as lives have been mourned, as those who are injured have healed, as parents and citizens have come together to ask, "where do we go from here?"—and as all of you who are the students of Columbine have shown us over this last month, your courage and your grace, your kindness and your love.

We have just spent time with the families of those who lost someone they loved. It's not the first time that my husband and I have done that. We've listened to and looked into the eyes and held the hands and felt the hugs of men and women and children who have suffered the evil and the tragedy that intervenes unexpectedly—a bombing of an embassy, a shooting down of a plane or an accident that lost lives. And we've always been moved by and felt deeply the pain that others were suffering.

And no tragedy is ever like any other tragedy, because every person is unique, and everyone who is lost was a gift of God that should have been cherished and who has to be remembered.

But what happened here at Columbine a month ago has had an impact unlike any that I have ever seen or felt. It has pierced the heart of America. And what we are all looking for and what I always hope we can find from a tragedy like this, is how we move forward together, to do what we can to help prevent this ever happening again.



Now, of course, even today, yet another school was terrorized by a shooting. Thankfully, no one was killed—but it should never have happened.

So as we meet here, as we imagine, as hard as it must be, what this past month must have been for you—the losses, the questions, the glare of the world’s spotlight—I think we all know that there are no words that are adequate to your experience. But I hope you know that the way you’ve conducted yourselves, and your story and the stories of those killed and injured have been an inspiration and a motivation for many people whom you’ll never meet.

We’re inspired by the strength of the students and the teachers; by your determination to return to school to finish out your year with your friends and your classmates. We’re inspired by your refusal to let violence and hatred win.

We’re inspired by the courage of the families, who have faced a moment that every parent prays will never happen. We’re inspired by the words we heard today, as well as what we’ve heard in the past month as to how so many of you are looking for opportunities to reach out to make sure that here in this community and as far as the ripples can go, the messages that you feel you want to communicate to each other will be heard.

We heard those messages today, listening to parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, a wife, children. And the message had many different sounds to it, coming from different voices. But what struck me was how clearly those who have been most wounded want to turn this into something positive for others. That is what we have seen from the Columbine community.

And it has inspired reactions literally around the world. One family told us of receiving a letter from France, written completely in French—they couldn’t read it, but they knew what it said. I know of the young boys and girls around the country who have been writing letters and drawing pictures to share their feelings. And I know here, in Jefferson County, the services that have been offered, and the way people have been trying to knit together more help.

Many of you will be graduating—and I congratulate you. It wasn’t so long ago that our daughter graduated, and I remember the conversations around our kitchen table and listening to her friends as they were planning their summer plans, or thinking about college, or going to work. And I know you’re thinking about all of that as well.

But perhaps more than others, you may also be thinking about what kind of community, and country, you want to raise your own children in someday—and how we will take what happened in Columbine, and not only never forget it, but use it to make more opportunities for others to live the kind of lives we would have wished for those who were lost.

Imagine what our country could accomplish if everyone acted as your principal described you, as a family—members of the human family, as well as the Columbine family; the American family—members of a community and a nation that was really committed to making sure that we helped each other, we cared about each other, we reached out to one another.

Imagine, as we heard from your principal, what it would mean if more parents, in this community and around our country, thought about what more they could do to spend time with their own children, to listen to your concerns, your dreams, your fears, your aspirations.

And imagine what could happen if more young people talked more openly with one another, as

well as with their parents and other adults, looking for ways to heal the wounds that all of us carry just from life's everyday experiences. And imagine if every adult in America began looking at his or her personal life, professional life and public life with the view toward making sure that whatever we do is good for children.

There is no more fitting monument or tribute to those who died than to promise ourselves that we will do everything we can to prevent it from happening anywhere else—but more than just preventing something bad from happening, that we will commit ourselves to try to make positive differences in the lives of those around us.

We cannot roll back the clock and undo the tragic events of a month ago. But we can fight the bitterness and hopelessness that weaken our resolve to remain part of one community. We can reach out, where children are taught to care and not to hate. We can offer a kind word to people. We can try to bridge the differences that too often come between us. And we can look for ways at all levels of society to make the changes we know we have to make.

I hope that we'll be able to reach a better understanding of what we need to do to care for our young people. And I hope that if we all feel that we are Columbine, as the cheer goes, we won't give up until we do make it better for everyone.

I want to introduce now someone I know is resolved to do what he can, who has spoken out consistently on behalf of the needs of young people and families, who has tried to speak out against hatred and talk about how we need to reach out and help each other. And as I do, I want to just leave you with the words of a poet who means a lot to my husband and me—the Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney.

In one of our favorite poems, coming out of the terrible Troubles that he's written about and experienced in Northern Ireland, where bombs and guns have been too much the experience of children, he writes: "So hope for a greater sea change on the far side of revenge. Believe that a further shore is reachable from here. Believe in miracle and cures and healing well."

I believe in miracles and cures and healing well. I believe that each of us has the responsibility to do what we can to reach that farther shore. And I introduce now someone who believes that with all of his heart—the President of the United States. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Do that cheer for me one more time.

STUDENTS: We are Columbine! We are Columbine! We are Columbine! We are Columbine! (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Doctor Hammond; Mr. DeAngelis; President DeStefano and the state legislators, county commissioners; Attorney General Salazar; especially Governor Owens, thank you for being here. To all the officials who are here; most especially to the students of Columbine and the students who are here from Chatfield and Dakota Ridge. And Heather Dinkel, thank you for standing up

here in front of this big crowd and making a fine talk. Weren't you proud of her? She did a good job representing you today. (Cheers and applause.)

I want to say a special word of thanks to the families who met with Hillary and me before we came over here for telling us the stories and showing us the booklets commemorating the lives of their very special children. I also want to thank the fine young people who still are hospitalized with whom I spoke by telephone yesterday—two of them, Patrick Ireland and Sean Graves, are here today. They left the hospital to be here. (Applause.)

I know there are some other people here who are also still injured who have come. I thank all of you for coming. This has been a long, hard month for all of you, and as Hillary said, it's been a hard month for America.

You heard her say that part of our job in these last six years, more than we ever could have imagined when we moved to Washington after the election in 1992, has been to be with grieving people—after the Oklahoma City building was blown up, and the embassies were blown up, and our airmen were killed in the bombing in Saudi Arabia, and so many other occasions; several times after violence in schools. But something profound has happened to your country because of this. I want you all to understand that. I'm not even sure I can explain it to you.

One of the incidents of school killing last year occurred in my home state. It's a small state. I was governor there 12 years. I knew the people involved; it was heartbreaking. One of the mothers of one of the children who was killed still works with us for safer schools and safer childhoods. And all America grieved. But I think they thought, oh, this is terrible, I wish somebody would do something about this.

But somehow, when this happened here—maybe because of the scope of it, and I think mostly because of you—how you reacted, all of you, the relief workers, the law enforcement people, the family members who were brave enough to speak—there was a different reaction. People thought, this has happened in my neighborhood; what can I do?

I say that because you have a unique chance—a chance—to make sure that the children of Columbine are never forgotten. (Applause.)

But, first, you have to deal with you and your lives. You're all left with searing memories and scars and unanswered questions. There has to be healing, there have to be answers. And for those things that will not heal or cannot be answered, you have to learn to go on with your lives.

I hope you have been comforted by the caring not only of your neighbors, but of your country and people from all around the world. All America has looked and listened with shared grief and enormous affection and admiration for you. We have been learning along with you, a lot about ourselves and our responsibilities as parents and citizens.

When America looks at Jefferson County, many of us see a community not very different from our own. We know if this can happen here, it can happen anywhere. And we see with admiration the fundamentally strong values and character of the people here, from the students to the school officials, to the community leaders, to the parents.

I think most Americans have looked at you and thought that, among other things, that, God forbid, if something like this should ever happen to us, I hope we would behave as well. I hope

we would also hold on to our faith as well.

I am impressed that you are moving forward. Most of the children have returned to school, even returned to sports and other activities. I am proud of all of you who are, in your own way, going back to living your lives, looking toward the future, to commencement or college, or a summer job, or just getting back to the ordinary business of life, which takes an extraordinary effort now. But I have to say, I think what's impressed me most is the way, in the midst of this, you have held on to your faith.

One of the greatest moments of grief in my life occurred 15 years ago, when Hillary and I had to go to the memorial service for a young man who was a senior at Yale University—a Rhodes Scholar, on the football team, the editor of the newspaper, the leader of his class academically. This young man happened to come from an African American family in our hometown, and a poor family at that. His father was a minister in a very small church. And we had the service in the high school auditorium.

His father was lame and he walked with a pronounced limp. And he gave his son's eulogy, walking down in front of us with his limp, saying, his mother and I do not understand this. But we believe in a God too kind ever to be cruel, too wise ever to do wrong, so we know we will come to understand it by and by.

In the Scriptures, St. Paul says that all of us in this life see through a glass darkly. So we must walk by faith, not by sight. We cannot lean on our own wisdom. None of this can be fully, satisfactorily explained to any of you. But you cannot lose your faith.

The only other thing I really want to say to you is that throughout all your grief and mourning, and even in your cheers and your renewal and your determination to get on with your life and get this school back together and show people what you are, there is something else you can do, and something I believe that you should do—for yourselves and your friends, to make sure they will be remembered. Every special one of them.

Your tragedy, though it is unique in its magnitude, is, as you know so well, not an isolated event. Hillary mentioned there was another school shooting in Atlanta today. Thankfully, the injuries to the students don't seem to be life-threatening. But there were several last year which did claim lives.

We know somehow that what happened to you has pierced the soul of America. And it gives you a chance to be heard in a way no one else can be heard—by the President and by ordinary people in every community in this country. You can help us to build a better future for all our children, a future where hatred and distrust no longer distort the mind or harden the heart. A future where what we have in common is far more important than what divides us. A future where parents and children are more fully involved in each other's lives; in which they share hopes and dreams, love and respect, a strong sense of right and wrong. A future where students respect each other even if they all belong to different groups, or come from different faiths, or races, or backgrounds. A future where schools and houses of worship, and communities, are literally connected to all our children. A future where society guards our children better against violent influences and weapons that can break the dam of decency and humanity in the most vulnerable of children.

One thing I would like to share with you that I personally believe very much: these dark forces that take over people and make them murder are the extreme manifestation of fear and rage with which every human being has to do combat. The older you get, the more you'll know that a great deal of life is the struggle against every person's own smallness and fear and anger—and a continuing effort not to blame other people for our own shortcomings or our fears.

We cannot do what we need to do in America unless every person is committed to doing something better and different in every walk of life, beginning with parents and students and going all the way to the White House. For the struggle to be human is something that must be a daily source of joy to you, so you can get rid of your fears and let go of your rage, and minimize the chance that something like this will happen again.

Because of what you have endured, you can help us build that kind of future, as virtually no one else can. You can reach across all the political and religious and racial and cultural lines that divide us. You have already touched our hearts. You have provoked Hillary and me and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore to reach out across America to launch a national grass-roots campaign against violence directed against young people. You can be a part of that.

You can give us a culture of values instead of a culture of violence. You can help us to keep guns out of the wrong hands. You can help us to make sure kids who are in trouble—and there will always be some—are identified early and reached and helped. You can help us do this.

Two days from now, you're going to have your commencement. It will be bittersweet. It will certainly be different for those of you who are graduating than you thought it was going to be when you were freshmen. But, as I understand it, there will be some compensations. Even your arch-rivals at Chatfield will be cheering you on. When you hear those people cheer for you, I want you to hear the voice of America, because America will be cheering you on. And remember that a commencement is not an end; it is a beginning.

You've got to help us here. Take care of yourselves and your families first. Take care of the school next. But remember, you can help America heal, and in so doing you will speed the process of healing for yourselves.

This is a very great country. It is embodied in this very great community, in this very great school, with these wonderful teachers and children and parents. But the problem which came to the awful conclusion you faced here is a demon we have to do more to fight. And what I want to tell you is, we can—together.

I close here with this story. My wife and I and our daughter have been blessed to know many magnificent people because the American people gave us a chance to serve in the White House. But I think the person who's had the biggest influence on me is the man who is about to retire as the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

He is 80 years old, he served 27 years in prison. For 14 years, he never had a bed to sleep on. He spent most of his years breaking rocks every day. And he told me once about his experience. And I asked him: How did you let go of your hatred? How did you learn to influence other people? How did you embrace all the differences in, literally, the centuries of oppression and discord in your country and let a lot of it go away? How did you get over that in prison? Didn't you really hate them?

And he said: I did hate them for quite a long while. After all, look what they took from me -- 27 years of my life. I was abused physically and emotionally. They separated me from my wife and it eventually destroyed my marriage. They took me away from my children and I could not even see them grow up. And I was full of hatred and anger.

And he said: One day I was breaking rocks and I realized they had taken so much. And they could take everything from me except my mind and my heart. Those things I would have to give away. I decided not to give them away.

I see here today that you have decided not to give your mind and your heart away. I ask you now to share it with all your fellow Americans.

We love you, and we need you.

Thank you, and God bless you. (Applause.)

END 5:08 P.M. MDT

May 9, 1999

BRIEFING ON STATISTICS RELATED TO YOUTH VIOLENCE

**FROM: NEERA TANDEN
RUBY SHAMIR**

The following are statistics on factors that may contribute to youth violence. The first section is a synopsis of several studies on media violence and its effects on children's behavior. The second section, on the state of the nation's children, notes that feelings of depression and isolation appear to be growing. The third section includes statistics on gun violence.

Media and Violence

There have been numerous studies on the effects of television violence on children. The vast majority of these studies, which cover a range of settings and issues, have concluded that violence on television promotes aggressive behavior in children.

Impact of Media Violence

Studies on the effects of television violence on children have taken place in a range of settings and the vast majority of them have concluded that violence on television leads to aggressive behavior.

- The 1972 Surgeon General Report said "We know that children imitate and learn from everything they see – parents, fellow children, school, the media; it would be extraordinary, indeed, if they did not imitate and learn from what they see on television." Experiments carried out for this report revealed that violence on television causes children either to mimic directly the actions they view, or it may instigate aggressive behavior. Other studies found that if an actor is rewarded for violent behavior, children are more likely to imitate it.
- In 1992, the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that "they (young children) do not possess an instinct for gauging a priori whether a behavior ought to be imitated...up through the ages 3 and 4 years, many children are unable to distinguish fact from fantasy in television programs..."
- According to the American Psychiatric Association, ignoring consequences of violence or depicting the consequences unreasonably sets in motion a destructive encoding process. Viewers become desensitized and fearful and begin to identify with aggressors and the aggressors' solutions to various problems. The violent behaviors and attitudes thus encoded, aggression is now all the more likely in personal situations.
- Studies have shown that television violence has a particularly negative effect on children who have a tendency towards aggressive behavior. However, it is important to note that television

violence affects youngsters of all ages, both genders, all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence. Dr. Leonard Eron of the University of Chicago has said that television violence creates a vicious cycle in which televised violence causes children to become more aggressive, and these more aggressive children in turn, watch more violence on television to justify their own behavior.

- Recent studies have measured the longer-term effects of television violence by tracking subjects from childhood to adulthood. Dr. Eron led a study in 1960 that tracked 870 youth in New York and found that a boy's early childhood aggression in elementary school was statistically related to aggressive anti-social behavior 10 years later. A 22-year follow-up with the same group of children found that their early violence viewing related to their adult criminality at age 30.
- NOTE: There has been no major research on video games or the Internet. The proposed Surgeon General's report would include new research on the effects of these new media.

Violent Programming Content

- The level of violence in prime time television has remained at approximately five violent acts per hour, while the level of violence in children's Saturday morning programming is much higher at about 20 to 25 violent acts per hour. [Big World, Small Screen, 1992]
- Children witness 8,000 murders and 100,000 other assorted acts of violence by the time they graduate from elementary school, and an estimated 200,000 acts of violence, and 16,000 simulated murders, by the time they are teens. [AMA Fact Sheet from Center for Media and Public Affairs, 1992]
- According to the 1996 National Television Violence Study, a three-year study financed by the cable industry, the majority of television programs (57%) contained some violent content.
- The National Television Violence Study also found that perpetrators of violent acts on television go unpunished 73% of the time and that 25% of violent acts on television involve the use of a handgun. Children's programs posed special concerns because they were least likely to depict the long-term consequences of violence (5%) and they portray violence in a humorous fashion 67% of the time.

State of the Nation's Children

Children and Depression

The National Mental Health Association (NMHA) cites a number of studies and statistics on childhood depression. The NMHA also marked May 6 as Childhood Depression Awareness Day to bring attention to childhood depression.

- The rate of suicide for five to 24 year olds has nearly tripled since 1960, making it the leading cause of death in adolescents and the second leading cause of death among college

age youth. (AACAP, 1995)

- As many as one in every 33 children and one in eight adolescents may have depression. (U.S. Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), 1996)
- Once a young person has experienced a major depression, he or she is at risk of developing another depression within the next five years. (CMHS, 1996)
- Two-thirds of children with mental health problems do not get the help they need. (CMHS, 1996)
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds (approximately 5,000 young people) and the sixth leading cause of death for five to 15 year olds. (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), 1995.)

Youth Attitudes

As you know, the Ad Council produced a study entitled “Kids These Days: What American Really Think About the Next Generation,” covering a range of issues. The study, a collection of surveys, found that young people today face a moral crisis because parents are not sufficiently engaged in the lives of their children. The study further noted that parents do not feel that they are able to spend enough time with their children, because they must work harder.

The study had a special focus on teen’s attitudes. Teenagers described themselves as happy and said that they have warm relationships with their parents and other adults. Many, however, noted that they have a lot of free, unstructured time and said that their environs are filled with hazards and potential trouble.

Statistics on Gun Violence

Gun Violence

Gun violence is also on the rise, as the firearm injury rate is ten times higher than the polio epidemic in the first half of the century. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that by 2003 the leading cause of death from injury will be from gunshots.

- In 1996, 4,643 children and teenagers were killed by firearms in murders, suicides, and unintentional shootings.
- Gunshot wounds are the second leading cause of death for all people aged 10-34.
- According to a February 1997 report by the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of firearm deaths among children 0-14 years old is nearly twelve times higher in the United States than in 25 other industrialized countries combined.

Gun Ownership

According to a 1996 Department of Justice report:

- There are approximately 200 million guns in private hands even though only 25 % of all adults in America own guns.
- 20% of all gun-owning households had a loaded, unlocked gun in the home, a figure that was significantly higher among households that had a handgun, as opposed to a long gun. Further, the study found that 53% of long guns and 57% of handguns are usually kept unlocked.
- 26% of all guns and 55% of handguns are usually kept loaded. Loaded guns of either type are more likely to be unlocked than are unloaded guns. The result is that one in three handguns, and one in six long guns, is kept loaded and unlocked.

Gun Control Briefing
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton,
the President and others

The White House
April 27, 1999

MRS. CLINTON: (Applause.) Thank you all. Thank you. Please be seated. And good afternoon. It's an honor to join the president in welcoming all of you to the White House this afternoon. We are especially honored to be joined by a very large number of senators and representatives from both parties who are here on the stage for this event; also Secretary Rubin and Attorney General Reno, Secretary Riley, Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder, Undersecretary of the Treasury Jim Johnson. And you will hear in just a few minutes from Senator Feinstein, Senator Chafee, Representative Conyers, Representative McCarthy. Also in the audience is Mayor Paul Helmke from Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Bob Walker, president of Handgun Control, Inc.

We have come together in the wake of a terrible tragedy that has put our entire nation in mourning and that was reminded all of us once again that everything in life pales in comparison to our ability to keep our children safe and out of harm's way. Today our thoughts and prayers remain with the families and friends and the citizens of Littleton as they bid emotional farewells to their beloved children and a dedicated teacher. Yet, even in the midst of this terrible tragedy, we also see the people of Littleton pulling together to pray and comfort and sustain each other, and many of the rest of us are gathering strength and hope from their example.

There are many people here today, out in the audience and on this stage, who have worked tirelessly to create the safe schools and communities that we all want for our children. I particularly want to thank Attorney General Reno and Secretary of Education Dick Riley and Secretary Bob Rubin because they have worked together tirelessly to try to create better conditions to provide for the safety of our children.

I also want to thank all the members of Congress who are here, who have proved that ending the violence and limiting access to firearms can be and should be a bipartisan goal.

There are many others in this room who are on the front lines in creating safer communities—religious groups, advocates for gun control, victims' groups, child advocates, law enforcement, community, and parent organizations—and we thank you all for coming. You represent literally thousands, if not millions, of your fellow Americans.

All of us here are searching for answers to what happened in Littleton. I don't know that anyone will ever be able to explain fully the events of a week ago. Nor, I doubt, can we create a perfect set of solutions that, if followed, would have prevented what happened at Columbine High School or would stop forever acts of violence that occur in our communities around our country. But that does not mean that we are either hopeless or

helpless in the face of this tragedy. Instead, we have to work together to come up with the best possible solutions that we can craft, that we believe will make a difference for our children. We come here to say simply that there are some tough things we must be willing to say and some tough steps we must be willing to take if we are to stop the violence.

Now I hope that everyone does know that the vast majority of America's schools are safe. But we also know that these schools in our country are not islands cut off from the rest of society. No school security system or metal detector can keep out the culture of violence that dominates the lives of so many of our children.

When our culture romanticizes and glorifies violence on TV, in the movies, on the Internet, in songs, and when there are video games that you win based on how many people you kill, then I think the evidence is absolutely clear; our children become desensitized to violence and lose their empathy for fellow human beings. Studies show what many of us have believed; that such exposures causes more aggression and antisocial behavior. So today we must fully acknowledge, once and for all, that America's culture of violence is having a profound effect on our children, and we must resolve to do what we can to change that culture. It will take strong leadership. I remember well when the president convened the 1996 White House Conference on Children's Television, where television industry leaders joined him in agreeing to air more educational children's shows and also to work with the administration to establish a rating system to help parents navigate what's appropriate and what's not for their kids.

And soon we will have the V-chip available for every home in our country. But it will take more than strong leadership from the media and entertainment world to stop the culture of violence that surrounds our children. Kids need more caring, responsible adults in their lives, yet when single parenthood and two working parents are on the rise, too many of America's children are growing up alone. Parents are the central figures in their children's lives, but parents need help. They need help from the larger community, and that means all of us—teachers, police, counselors, community and religious leaders, elected officials. All of us have to help parents find the help they need, and we have to work together to keep our children and our communities safe. We also know that we have to do everything possible to ensure that young people do not have easy access to weapons. We now know that includes not only firearms but bomb-making materiel.

Now any one of us who hasn't become completely amnesiac about our own growing-up years know that children will have disagreements and arguments. They sometimes will even have fights among themselves. Part of growing up is learning how to control one's impulses, which is often difficult for young people. But there is a very big difference between a schoolyard fight that many of us can remember and what happens today, with the access to the arsenal of guns, rifles, and bombs that the two young men in Littleton were able to bring into their school.

It is criminal how easy it is for children in America to obtain guns. Just last year 6,000 students were expelled for bringing guns to school, and Littleton is the latest tragic example of how the availability of those guns can turn a sense of alienation, of rage, of

not belonging, of not fitting in into a deadly encounter. Every day in America we lose 13 precious children to gun-related violence. Every two days, therefore, we lose the equivalent of a classroom of students.

“Guns” and “children” are two words that should never be put together in the same sentence, and this president and this administration have been working hard and successfully to try to keep them apart. I think we all in America should take pride in the passage of the Brady bill, which has denied handguns to 250,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers. And since the crime bill was enacted, 19 of the deadliest assault weapons are harder to find on our streets. We will never know how many tragedies we’ve avoided because of these efforts, but we do know how much more remains to be done.

Today we will hear about further steps that we hope all of us are willing to take to make our schools and communities places in which all citizens can live in safety, free from violence and fear.

In a few minutes, the people of Littleton, Denver and, indeed, all of Colorado will be stopping whatever they do for a moment of silence on behalf of those who lost their lives. I think it would be appropriate here in the White House that we join them, and that we not only use that moment of silence to remember the victims of this tragedy and the perpetrators, but that we think about all of the other children in America who tell us, often, that they’re scared, they’re scared to go outside, they’re scared because they know people who bring guns to school, they’re scared because of what they see happening around them. Our first obligation is to try to make our children free from that kind of fear. So if we could just take a moment, in solidarity with the people not only in Colorado who have suffered this loss but people throughout our country on behalf of our children.

(Moment of silence.)

Thank you.

It is now my great honor to introduce someone who has shown remarkable courage in standing up to the gun lobby, who has really put her strongest convictions on the line and become an outspoken advocate of gun control, who knows firsthand the terrible consequences of handgun violence. Please join me in welcoming Senator Diane Feinstein.

SEN. DIANNE FEINSTEIN (D-CA): (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you very much.

Let me thank the first lady, I think, for her very stirring words. And during that moment of silence, ladies and gentlemen, I thought that America really is at a very pivotal time in our history. If we don’t stand up now and say, “Enough is enough,” when will we stand up?

I think at this time we’re all looking for answers, and I suspect that no one answer is going to be found to be all abiding. I think we’re going to find, as the first lady just

suggested, that it is a combination of a number of different factors. The difficulty parents have today in America. The difficulty in having any precise parameters to what is right and what is wrong. To have evolved into a culture of kind of instant gratification. And where we see the promulgation of a culture of violence surrounding us. And when the society is literally awash with guns.

Sure, there are some regulations. But are they adequate? Hardly. To get anything through this Congress is extraordinarily difficult. And I want to just thank the president and the first lady for stepping forward at this time and presenting to the Congress a package of very precise and very targeted statutes which could make a substantial change.

As for me, I have watched this issue for a long time. I have watched us lose leaders. I have watched us lose family members. And from the day that a man by the name of Patrick Purdy walked into a Stockton school yard some 20 years ago, I have seen the permeation of violence and guns down to a five-year old in Memphis, Tennessee, who last May took a gun to school to kill his teacher because that teacher had given him a timeout the day before. A five-year old, even before the so-called “age of reason,” picking a gun off his grandfather’s dresser and taking it to school to shoot his teacher. The way they found it is because they found some of the bullets and traced it to the weapon. And the arrest statement says he wanted to shoot his teacher, and other kindergartners as well. That to me is the depths of societal woe, and we must begin to think very seriously about it.

For me, since I have been in the Senate, I have tried to concentrate on two issues, one of them being assault weapons and the other being bomb making, since of group of sheriffs in California met with me and said, “You know, it’s possible to unload a handbook from the Internet and learn how to steal the equipment, break into the labs and build some of the most explosive bombs.” Nothing therein has any legal application, all illegal application. For three years, we’ve gotten it passed in the Senate, to have it deleted in conference. And I hope that this year—we’ve worked on it with the Justice Department—that there will be a bomb-making amendment that will pass this that will provide an opportunity that when there is knowledge that this can be used in a criminal way, that it be illegal to post it on the Internet. (Applause.)

In 1994, with the president’s support and the Justice Department’s support, the Senate passed an amendment which would prohibit the manufacture of 19 specific types of assault weapons. The thrust of that legislation was to dry up the supply of these weapons of war over time, weapons of war because these weapons, unlike a pistol, you don’t have to aim precisely, you can hold at the hip. They have light triggers. You can spray-fire. And they have big enough clips so that you can kill large numbers of people before anyone can get to you to disarm you.

These are the weapons that are the weapons of choice for the grievance killers, for the drive-by shooters, what the gangs use and what the drug cartels use. They were all made for military purposes, not for civilian purposes. The fail-safe of that legislation was to prohibit the manufacture, the sale and the possession of clips, drums or strips of more than 10 bullets. That’s in the legislation. And subsequent to passage of the legislation, it

is illegal to manufacture these anywhere in the United States.

Aha, but there's a loophole, and that loophole is that it allows for the foreign import of clips, drums, or strips of more than 10 bullets made in some 20 different countries. Consequently, since 1984, these clips have been rolling into the United States. In the last six months alone, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is approving permits for 8.6 million of these, some of them as big as 250,000.

Well, about a year and a half ago, we explored whether the president could use his executive authority to ban the importation, and the Justice said no, it will take legislation.

So I've introduced legislation, which came to a vote in the Senate last year, got 44 votes. We will reintroduce it, hopefully sooner rather than later, because the thrust of this, again, is to dry up the supply of these big clips over time and make them less available to people. Mr. President, I want you to know that I fully support the measures you've submitted to the Congress. I am hopeful that we will be able to take immediate action. I think the people of this nation deserve no less, want no less. And it is my very strong feeling that a dominant majority of the people of this nation will support your targeted measures, and I certainly know that's true for California. So thank you both very, very much. (Applause.) And now, if I may, it's my great pleasure to introduce someone from the other side of the aisle that I deeply respect. Senator John Chafee has approached his career in Washington with one overarching goal: to operate through consensus and cooperation, wherever and whenever possible, in order to get things done. And this is the case when it comes to enacting reasonable and common-sense measures to limit gun violence. He was an early proponent of the Brady law, which imposes a waiting period of three days for handgun purchases, and he sponsored laws also to ban a range of assault weapons. He is now an original co-sponsor of a bill to make permanent the Brady waiting period. He is also an original co-sponsor, with Senator Boxer, of the Firearms Rights, Responsibilities, and Remedies Act.

This bill would provide that any person or entity harmed by gun violence, including city and county governments, has the right to sue gun manufacturers, dealers, and importers. He's also a sponsor of the Durbin-Chafee Children's Access to Firearms Prevention Act. This bill encourages adults to take steps to ensure gun safety in homes with children. It will provide penalties for parents who leave guns around the house without safety locks. He's a man—I think, a giant—in the Senate; a very fine United States senator, and I am just delighted he's here today. Would you warmly welcome Senator John Chafee from the great State of Rhode Island. (Applause.)

SEN. JOHN CHAFEE (R-RI): Thank you. Thank you. Well, thank you very much, Dianne, for that very, very kind introduction. And I think we all owe a big round of applause to Dianne for the work she's done in connection with these. (Applause.)

Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton, I want to first thank you for all the leadership you've given in this effort. And it's going to take—we've got to be buckled down for the long haul here. It's not going to be easy, but with your leadership, I'm confident that we can achieve the results that we all seek. I appreciate your asking me to be here with you

today to talk about the shocking and deplorable problem of gun violence in our nation's schools. Reporters and commentators alike refer to "school violence." I can't help thinking to myself, this isn't about schools. It's about guns. This is about the insanely easy access Americans, including American children, have to guns. This is about the distorted interpretation of the Constitution that convinces otherwise rational citizens that it's their inalienable right to be armed to the teeth. It's the strangest way they've got that figured out. (Laughter.) Too many of us shake our heads and say there's nothing we can do. Too many of us are quick to blame society or the media or Hollywood or the Internet, but too few of us are willing to do what needs to be done to ensure that guns stay out of the hands of children. Now is the time for passage of the Child Firearms Access Prevention Act, which Dianne touched on, which would hold adult gun owners liable if their weapons are used by a child to harm himself or someone else. (Applause.) Now is the time for passage of the Child Safety Lock Act, which would require a safety lock to be sold with each new firearm. Now is the time for a permanent waiting period before the purchase of a handgun and of legislation that forbids unlicensed sellers to peddle their wares at gun shows without conducting any background checks. (Applause.)

Let us not blame everywhere, but where it most belongs, with the gun industry and with the government that protects it. When we look at gun violence in other industrialized nations, listen to these statistics. They're shocking. Our culpability is clear. According to the Center for Disease Control, U.S. children are 12 times more likely to die from firearm injuries than our children in the 26 other industrial nations combined. In all those other nations combined, the child has one-twelfth of the chance of dying from firearms injury compared to a child in the U.S.

To those who say there's something terribly wrong with an American culture, a culture that breeds the sort of children who are capable of wreaking such carnage, I say it isn't our American culture that's wrong; what's wrong is our love affair with guns. (Applause.)

Now it's my honor to introduce John Conyers, the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee. Among his many distinctions, which include being a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, Mr. Conyers is the second most senior member of the House of Representatives. He is now serving his 18th term. John Conyers.

REP. JOHN CONYERS (D-MI): (Applause.) Thank you very much. I want to thank the president and the first lady for their courage and leadership in the wake of the Littleton tragedy. On all fronts, the president and the first lady and all of us here today, in the administration, and especially the Congress, continue to show us what leadership really means when the going gets difficult.

Now, the tragedy in Colorado was one of unprecedented proportion, but the sad truth is that each and every day, in every city and state, we experience firearm tragedies that snuff out lives that are just beginning. Each day in America, there are nearly two dozen firearm homicides. That amounts to a couple hundred a week. That's nearly 10,000 a year. And it doesn't include the 18,000 gun suicides that we experience each year.

That comes to a total of 35,000 gun deaths in the United States annually. Ladies and

gentlemen, it's got to stop. We can do better, and that's why we're called to this place today. Those numbers compare to two handgun murders in New Zealand a year, 15 in Japan, 30 in all of Britain—all countries that have meaningful gun control.

Now the best guess is that there are over 250 million guns in America, nearly one for every citizen of this country. Our streets are swimming with these weapons of death and destruction. Handgun murders are the leading cause for the death of African American men ages 15 to 34. And overwhelmingly all the data shows that in non-recreational settings, firearms are almost always used aggressively, not defensively.

The major political impediment to passing meaningful measures to keep guns out of the hands of the criminals is the National Rifle Association, who, in my judgment, has a choke hold on so many of the members of the Congress—the NRA, who makes a killing selling guns.

Tomorrow in the House we plan to mark up the juvenile justice bill, and in the Judiciary Committee we will use all of the procedural rules at—that I have to try to get a vote on some of the issues that have been discussed here today. Let's start tomorrow trying to pass the measure that President Clinton has put forward. (Applause.)

The families of Littleton want to hear from us. The families of tens of thousands of murder victims in America want to hear from us. And it's an outrage, and I call upon the chairman of the Judiciary Committee and the speaker of the House to schedule this proposal for action on the House floor before the Memorial Day recess. We want action now. (Applause.)

Yes, we can mourn and honor the victims of Littleton with words, or we can mourn and honor those victims with action. I know which one of the two choices that I will make, and everyone here, and I think that if we don't move now, we're losing a tremendous movement, a feeling in this country that I don't think I've ever noticed before that now is the time for the feelings of most Americans to be actualized in federal legislation.

And now, my friends, I want to introduce a member who has distinguished herself, from New York, Carolyn McCarthy. We consider her to be the conscience of the Congress on guns, and we present her to you at this time. (Applause.)

REP. CAROLYN MCCARTHY (D-NY): Mrs. Clinton, President Clinton, thank you for bringing us all here together today.

Last Tuesday, I was sitting in the Educational Committee and someone from my staff came up to me and just tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Congresswoman, another school shooting." You have to understand, when you are a victim, the feelings that go through you. I thought of when my brother told me that my husband was killed on the Long Island Railroad, and told me that my son was fighting for his life. I thought of Suzanne Wilson, who lost her daughter last year in Jonesboro. I thought of all the other school shootings that we've seen in the last year and a half. I thought of all the committee hearings that we've had in the last year on how to deal with this issue.

And then I thought of all the victims in the last number of years that have lost someone. And here we are, talking about what can we do. I have to tell you it's extremely frustrating, because we are faced with silence all the time. We're hearing from the other side already: "There is nothing we can do." I'm sorry, you have heard of so many proposals; there IS something we can do. There has to be something that we can do. (Applause.) All of us here, every single one of us here—and, believe me, a lot more—are willing to fight for the American people. We're willing to fight for our children.

But you know what's going to happen? We'll go to committee, and there will be silence as the shootings go on. When we go to the speaker of the House and beg for a debate on the floor, there will be silence, and the shootings will go on. We will fight for you, but I have to tell you, the American public's voice has to be heard. We have to hear from you. (Applause.) "It's not going to work." Is that what you want to keep hearing? "It's not going to work. You can't do it." Please.

We're burying our children in Colorado, and tomorrow we'll be burying 13 more, and the day after that we will be burying 13 more—every single day. Do we have to have a larger mass of killings for America to say, "Enough is enough"? Please don't let that happen.

Please, I'm asking everyone out there, call your representative. Let's hear from you. Give us the strength to keep fighting. Give us the power to win, because I have to tell you something I've learned in the very short time since I've been here in Congress: When enough people outside of Washington start calling into Washington, wow, people start listening. "Gee, maybe we should look at this." Think about HMOs. Why are we even talking about it in Congress? Because the American people are demanding it.

I'm a nurse. Let's talk about what it's costing our health care. Because we've seen homicides go down—and that's wonderful—can we talk about the billions of dollars it's costing us because more of our young people are surviving? I know Secretary Riley would like that money for his education. I know the president would like that money for health care. We can do this, people. We can do this, but you got to help us. I don't want to hear at the next violent shooting, "We can't do anything." I've heard it too many times in the last two years. We have to have your voices. Don't say that Congress can't do anything. You can make Congress do something. President Clinton was there for my family when my husband was killed, and he tried to make this a safer nation, and he has. And I want to thank him for calling me or taking my call the night of last Tuesday, because I have to be honest with you; I didn't want to hear about another shooting. And I said to the president, "We have to do something." When he responded, the pain that was in his voice was so real, because he does feel the pain of the families and the children that have died, and he has seen too much. And I want to thank him for his dedication.

This is not an issue that politicians really like to push, believe me.

But the president has been on the forefront, and I want to thank him for helping me to initiate all the bills that are here and all the initiatives that we're going to take. And I'm certainly going to be fighting for the Children's Safety Protection Bill, because that's my

job. No, all of us. The large-capacity clips, some say that wouldn't work. Well, tell that to the three young people that died on the Long Island Railroad if there was only 10 clips -- 10 bullets in a clip instead of the larger clips. Child safety locks. Tell that to Catherine Murphy, who lost her daughter, son, because somebody didn't lock their gun.

Mr. President, it's my pleasure to introduce you. And thank you again for your leadership.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much, Carolyn, John Conyers, Senator Chafee, Senator Feinstein, all the many members of Congress who are here. I thank the attorney general, the secretary of the Treasury and the secretary of Education. I'm glad to see my old friend Mayor Helmke and Bob Walker and others here. We have, I think, over 40 members of Congress here and two senators who went back to the floor to fight for this issue to be put on the floor today. I would like to do two things. First, I want to tell you specifically what we are proposing, and I'll do that. But secondly, I would like to tie what we are proposing to all these culture arguments, and talk about, if you will, at least two cultures that exist in America, and say that I think this in the end is going to come down to what our conception of America as a community is and what our responsibilities to one another are.

I want to begin by saying that a lot of people have made remarkable contributions, I think, to this effort to get us to look at the violence of our culture and how it makes the most vulnerable of our children, without regard to their income or their social status, closer to the line of taking violent action, and how it complicates family life for everyone. I want to thank Hillary for what she's done. I also want to thank Al and Tipper Gore, who have done enormously important work on this for years to try to help us deal with the TV issues, the ratings, the V chips, and now the new efforts we've been making with the Internet community to give parents some more control over that, and the efforts we'll have to make to train the parents to figure out to do it, since their kids all know more about it than they do. But this is very important stuff. In June, Tipper Gore's going to host our White House Conference on Mental Health, and the attorney general and Hillary and I were just talking about some of the things we can do to help to make sure that all of our schools have the adequate mentoring and mediation and even mental health services our kids need. All this is very important. And we have to deal with that.

But if you believe that we have special cultural challenges, it seems to me that that's an argument that we ought to bend over backwards to try to remove the opportunities for bad things happening if we have more kids that are vulnerable to doing those things, not an argument that we ought to say, well, we should walk away from that and just try to make sure everybody individually in the whole country never does anything wrong.

And what's the real problem here? The problem is we have another culture in our country that I think has gotten confused about its objectives. We have a huge hunting and sport shooting culture in America, and unlike many of you, I grew up in it. I was 12 years old the first time I took a 22 and shot it at a can on a fence post in the country. I know about this. We always talk about the NRA. The NRA has been powerful not only because they have a lot of money but because they can influence people who vote. And

in that culture, people believe everybody should be personally responsible for their actions; if you just punish people who do wrong more harshly, fewer people will do wrong; and everybody tells me I've got a constitutional right to keep and bear arms, so don't fool with me; and every reasonable restriction is just the camel's nose in the tent; and pretty soon they'll come after my shotgun and I'll miss the next duck hunting season. And we smile about that, but there are some people who would be on this platform today, who lost their seats in 1994 because they voted for the Brady bill and they voted for the assault weapons ban, and they did it in areas where people could be frightened.

And the voters had not had enough time, which they did have within two more years, to see that nobody was going to take their gun away. So we have more than one cultural problem here, and I want to make a plea to everybody who is waiting for the next deer season in my home state to think about this in terms of what our reasonable obligations to the larger community of America are.

Do we know for absolutely certain that if we'd had every reasonable law than the ones I'm going to propose here, that none of these school violence things would have happened? No. But we do know one thing for certain; we know there would have been fewer of them, and there would have been fewer kids killed in the last several years in America. We know that for certain. (Applause.) We know that.

And cultures are hard to change, and cultures should never be used to avoid individual responsibility. But we—when we get to where we change, then we wonder—we look back, and we say, “How could we have ever done it otherwise?” Let me ask you something. Next time you get on an airplane, think about how you'd feel if the headline in the morning paper right before you got on the airplane was, “Airport metal detectors and x-ray machines abolished as infringement on Americans' constitutional right to travel.” Think about it. That's the headline in the morning paper. Then right next to it there's another headline: “Terrorist groups expanding operations in the United States.” And you read the two headlines, and you're getting on the airplane, exercising your constitutional right to travel, which is now no longer “infringed” by the fact that you might have to go through the metal detector twice and take out your money clip or take off your heavily metaled belt, and that somebody is x-raying your luggage as it gets on the airplane. It's unthinkable now, isn't it?

This will become unthinkable, too, that we should ever reverse these things, if we ever have enough sense to do them. (Applause.) Now—but we still have a cultural and a political argument that says to defend Americans' rights to reasonable hunting and sports shooting, we have to defend the indefensible as well. This is—it doesn't make any sense at all unless you're caught up in this sort of web of distorted logic and denial. But Carolyn McCarthy may have made the most important point here. You know, we're all in here preaching to the saved. You wouldn't be here if you didn't agree. But somebody needs to call these members that grew up where I grew up, that lived in the same culture I did, that belong to both parties, and say, “Hey, we've got to make this like airport metal detectors and x-ray machines. This is about our community. This is about our responsibility to our children. This is about protecting our children and the vulnerable

children themselves from people who are about to go over the line, here.” And this is crazy that we’re living in a society that takes no reasonable steps to protect the larger community.

So it’s not just the culture of violence that has to change; it’s the culture of hunting and sport shooting that has to stop financing efforts to frighten their members who are good, God-fearing, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens out there into believing that every time we try to save a kid’s life it’s a camel’s nose in the tent, you know? (Applause.)

I have had to go through those metal detectors as many as three times back when I had a real life -- (laughter) -- and I was traveling around because I had all kinds of stuff in there. You know, and every time I started to get a little aggravated, I’d think, “Boy, I don’t want that plane to blow up.” (Laughter.) You know? Make me go through a dozen times if you want to, and the person behind me.

Now, we’ve got to think about this in that way. These are the folks we have to reach. When there are no constituents for this movement, the movement will evaporate. When people from rural Pennsylvania and rural West Virginia and rural Colorado and Idaho start calling their congressmen and saying, “Hey, we can live with this. We can live with this. This is no big deal, you know? I mean, we’re just out there doing what we do. We believe—we’ll gladly put up with an extra hassle, a little wait, a little this, a little that, because we want to save several thousand kids a year.”

That is my challenge to you. (Applause.) That is what is going on. Now here are the things we want to do. A lot of you won’t think they’re enough, but you remember the culture. You change the culture, we’ll change the laws. You change the message, we’ll do it. And none of them have anything to do with anybody’s legitimate right to hunt.

First of all, we ought to strengthen the Brady law. (Applause.) It’s kept 250,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers from guns. The states now have the Insta-Check system, which is good. The mandatory waiting period has expired; that’s bad, because we need it, in addition to the Insta-Check system, to give a cooling-off period to people who are in a fit of rage. It’s important.

The law that we would present, the act, will also prevent juveniles who commit violent crimes from ever buying a gun. It would apply the Brady law’s prohibition to juvenile violence.

It would require Brady background checks on anyone who wants to buy explosives -- very important. (Applause.)

And it would abolish, at long last, as Senator Feinstein said, a dangerous loophole that was likely exploited in Littleton, which allows people to buy weapons at gun shows without any background checks at all. (Applause.) Now—now you need to go make this case on this gun show deal. I don’t know how many of you have ever been to one of these gun shows. I’ve been to gun shows in rural America, and people walk around, you know, and they got their—they’ve got their cars, and they’ve got their trunk open, and people walk in and say, “This is nice, and that’s nice, and this is a hundred-year-old rifle,” and blah, blah, blah. And then they say, “Aww, this is just too much hassle, you know.” And

the people pay cash, and you know, nobody, you know—so it's going to be a hassle for them. It's worth it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's right.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: It's worth it. (Applause.) And we're sorry; it's worth it. You don't have to pretend it won't be a hassle. Tell them you know it will be a hassle. It's worth it. People's lives are at stake here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Amen.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: What they started—what these shows started out doing, which was a good way for people who lived in rural areas—started out in primarily rural areas, who enjoy hunting and are interested in different kinds of weapons, to have an interesting experience on a weekend afternoon, has turned out to be a gaping loophole through which criminals and deranged people and other people get guns they could not otherwise get.

And so we have to say—we haven't asked you to abolish your gun shows, but we've asked you to undergo the inconvenience necessary to save more lives. We don't have to be insensitive, we just have to be determined. But I'm telling you, if we don't do something about this gun show loophole, we're going to continue to have serious, serious problems. And it's very important. (Applause.)

The second thing we've got to do is to strengthen the assault weapons ban, to close the loophole that allows dealers to sell older high-capacity ammunition magazines manufactured abroad. Now, I bet you when Senator Feinstein was talking about this, you thought, "Now, who in the world could be against this?" I actually had a conversation with a member of Congress who said to me—serious, a good person, who's a really good person—when we were doing this back in '94, a really good person, this person I was talking to, who told me—

(laughter) -- let me tell you—I just want you to understand what the argument was—he said, "But you've got to understand, we've got people who use these bigger magazines for certain kinds of sport contests." And I said, "Well, so what?" (Laughter.) But he said, "They'll beat me if I vote for this." I said, "They'll beat you if they think all you're doing is making their life miserable because some Washington bureaucrat asked you to do it. If you can explain to them that it's worth a minor alteration in their sporting habits to save people's lives, they won't beat you." But my point is, you've got to help these people. See, you hear this, and you think, "God, this is a no-brainer, this is a hundred-to- nothing deal, who in the wide world could ever be"—you have to understand, there is another culture out there, and almost everybody in it is God fearing, law abiding, tax paying, and they show up when they're needed, and they don't like this because they don't understand that if they do what you're asking them to do, they can save a lot of lives.

And we have got to fix this. This is just pure mathematics you're going to have fewer people die if you get rid of these magazines. So you need to go out there where the problem is and debate your fellow citizens and discuss it with them. It's important.

The third thing the legislation would do is to raise the legal age of handgun possession from 18 to 21 years. (Applause.) It would also strengthen our zero tolerance for guns in schools, which, as one of the previous members said, had led us to 6,000 suspensions or expulsions last year, by requiring schools to report to the police any student who brings a gun to school and requiring that the student get counseling.

That, I think, is very important.

The provision holding adults criminally responsible would only apply but—this is quite important—but it would apply if they recklessly failed to keep firearms out of the reach of young people. This would mandate a steep increase in penalties for adults who transfer guns illegally to juveniles; it would require child safety locks to be sold with all new guns. (Applause.) Finally, it would crack down on illegal gun trafficking, doubling the number of cities now working with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to trace every gun seized by the police. I know this is very important to Congresswoman McCarthy. (Applause.) It would require that dealers submit information not only on the guns they sell, but on used guns which are often very hard for law enforcement agents to trace. It would significantly increase penalties for gun runners caught trafficking large numbers of firearms. It would establish a national system, as soon as it's feasible, to limit handgun purchases to one a month, following the lead of Virginia. (Applause.) You know, I've got to say, this is very interesting. When we were going over the list of things we wanted to propose, some people said, "Well, that might be a loser because it sounds to people who care about this like that's too many, and, you know, what is this?" You know, the states that have had big problems in the past with lots of illegal gun purchases and guns then being used for illegal purposes—Virginia did this and it really helped them. This was a big deal. And, I just talked to Senator Robb about this a couple of days ago, and he said, "You know, all I can tell you is it's working in our state." So I would ask you to seriously consider what this might mean for our efforts to control the law enforcement aspects of this.

So, these are the things that I wanted to say. But I hope you'll remember what I said to you about the culture. We do have to keep working on the culture. Hillary's right about it, Al and Tipper Gore are right about it. We've got a lot of responsibilities. We've got to keep working on the services that kids—we've even got to work on making, helping parents actually communicate with their children.

One senator called me the night before last and said he'd had a town meeting in his state with children. And he asked how many of the school children had actually talked with their parents about what happened in Littleton, and only 10 percent of the kids raised their hand. And one child said, "I had to go and turn off the television and tell my parents we were going to talk about it." She said, "They're just scared. You know, they're scared. They didn't know how to talk about it." So there are all these cultural issues. And then there's this big cultural issue of the gun and sport hunting culture.

And I hope that—a lot of my folks at home might take offense at what I said today, but I'm trying to help explain them to you. And I felt comfortable taking on these issues, and I thought maybe I was in a unique position to take on all these gun issues all these years

because of where I grew up and because I understand how people think who don't agree with this. But I'm telling you, we've got to keep working until people start thinking about this stuff the same way they think about x-rays and metal detectors at airports. That's the goal. It—we have to redefine the national community so that we have a shared obligation to save children's lives, and we've got to get out of this crazy denial that this won't make a difference. This—it's crazy, it won't make—just because it won't make all the difference doesn't make—mean it won't make a difference. It will make a difference. (Applause.) And so—so I implore you to remember what these members have said. I implore you to go out and get people going at the grass roots, as Carolyn McCarthy said. We need help. We can pass all this if the American people want it bad enough. We can pass it all if the American people want it badly enough. And we don't need to go through another Littleton for the American people to want it badly enough. You can help make sure that happens.

Thank you. (Applause.)

Gains in technology have enabled us to learn, work, and grow in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago and modern media has brought culture, entertainment, and education to a wider audience than ever before. With this great power, there also comes an enormous responsibility to ensure that parents have the tools they need so that the television shows and movies children watch, the music they listen to, and the video games they play reflect the values that parents want to pass on to their children.

Numerous studies have shown that children can develop or enhance violent tendencies as a result of viewing violent programming. Further studies have also found that many young children are unable to distinguish fact from fantasy and therefore do not possess an instinct for gauging whether a behavior ought to be imitated.

Our Administration has worked hard to give parents the information they need to make the right choices for their kids. Since I became President, this Administration has garnered a breakthrough agreement from the television industry to create a content-based voluntary ratings system that, with the V-Chip, will enable parents to choose the programs their children watch. We have also adopted clear and concrete rules to encourage the development and promotion of more educational television, and are working to make cyberspace a safer place for children.

I want to commend all these industries for adopting the ratings systems. Through these efforts, the entertainment industry has made some strides to improve the choices parents have, but there is no legitimate reason that material rated for adults should be marketed to children.

Therefore, today, I am calling on the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice to conduct a study on the marketing practices of the motion picture, television, recording, and video game industries with regard to material rated for adults to determine whether and to what extent these industries market these materials to children. The study will examine whether such content is advertised or promoted in media outlets in which minors comprise a substantial percentage of the audience.

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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 roommate 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 DeLanie (phonetic) sisters—Sadie and Bessie DeLanie (phonetic)—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. ^{look?} ~~They lived, at the time when they were both living a few years ago, in Mt. Vernon, New York. I went and made the~~ ^{see} ~~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

talk about

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~~ ^Q 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 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 been 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 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."

de (g)und 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 the **Detokeful** (phonetic) 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.

but 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, *has* 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.

each other 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~~ ^{was} 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 of 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 be 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!

**Virgil I. Grissom Junior High School
Reporter Q&A Regarding Youth Violence
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**Queens, New York
April 29, 1999**

The following is Mrs. Clinton's response to a reporter's question about what she thinks needs to be done to address the problem of youth violence that has come to national attention since the killings at Columbine and other schools over the last several years.

Mrs. Clinton: Well, I understand why with any killing we would be worried. I still, more than a week later, find it very hard to read the coverage and watch it on the television. The pain, the suffering and the anguish that the people of Littleton—particularly the students and teachers and family members of Columbine—have gone through is just beyond description.

But I also think that there are ways we can respond to and address the obvious problems that we have seen in a number of these school shootings. I've spoken about that before, and I will be speaking about it again tonight and in the future. But briefly, I don't think there is any one single strategy that will answer this terrible problem. I think we've got to move on several fronts. I think we have to be aware that we've got a problem. We cannot be in denial. We have a lot of young people who, for all kinds of reasons, are really disoriented and alienated from our society, from their families, from their schools. So we have to be willing, first of all, to say, "Let's work on this together. Let's not feel helpless and hopeless, but let's try to come together in a united way to address this issue."

And when we do that, I think that we're going to need a national campaign against youth violence. And it will have many strategies. We do need to look at our mental health services. We have to do a better job of identifying and intervening and working with children on a continuing basis. And that's a very complex problem. It's complex because a lot of schools don't have the resources they need to identify and follow up with kids. A lot of parents don't have the financial resources, even if they are referred for help. And a lot of people in the mental health profession don't feel that they have the understanding of the larger public about what these issues are. And that's one piece of it.

The second, very important piece, is this culture of violence, which I spoke about last week in Niagara Falls and which I wrote about in 1995, and which I feel very strongly about. And there is something for a lot of sectors of society to do when it comes to that. Certainly the people in the entertainment and media industry have to exercise more responsibility, but it is not just their responsibility. Those of us who are viewers and consumers have to exercise responsibility, particularly when it comes to children. Because there will be—if there's a market for the kind of video games that these young men played, or a market for the kind of horrible movies that they watched—people are going to make them. Whether they're made by big-name studios or the

small independents, they're going to be made. I wish they'd be more responsible. I want more conversation. I want more efforts to try to figure out what we can do to try to persuade them to follow the lead that the President and the Vice President and Tipper and I have been urging. But there's gonna be work that needs to be done on that front, and also on the sides of consumers and parents exercising more responsibility—turning off the television sets, not buying or letting your kids use those video games. All of that has to happen.

The third piece is guns. We cannot talk about this problem without talking about access to weapons. You've got firearms, and now we have to start worrying about materials for making bombs and the instructions that can get in the hands of not only high school students, but also elementary and junior high school students. The President outlined some steps that need to be taken about further gun legislation. I would urge the Congress to do just that.

And I was very heartened to hear some voices of people who in the past have been very strong allies of gun owners and the gun lobby, saying in the last 10 days that they just do not believe that these automatic weapons and these high-caliber, multi-magazine weapons are what we mean when we're talking about the rights of sportsmen and hunters. So I'm hoping that we will see some increases in sensible gun legislation like the President outlined at the White House.

And then finally, I think everybody has to search his or her heart about how we take care of our children. I mean, ultimately, that is what this is all about. What kind of time do you spend with your kids? How much do we really listen to them? How willing are we to take time out from our adult activities to figure out ways to rearrange schedules, maybe forgo some material possessions, to be able to really get back into our children's lives and to be supportive of those members of the community—like our teachers—who are on the front lines day in and day out.

So there is no easy, one-time fix for any of this. It's a problem that really has to be addressed, and everybody has a role to play. I don't think finger-pointing does any good. I think instead we ought to be working to bring people together in a unified way to ask ourselves the hard questions. And to think of ways we can address them.

And I will just end by saying that we've seen progress when we've worked together in the last six years. I am delighted, as I know everybody in America is, that the crime rate has gone down for six years in a row. Well, it went down because we had legislation, we had community response, we had leadership, we had a unified approach.

And today we were just delighted to see the results of our efforts with teen pregnancy. For the last six years, teen pregnancy rates have gone down. Birth rates to teens have gone down. Now part of that has to do with our addressing it, creating what we call the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. But a lot of it has to do with a unified response by a lot of people dealing with a very challenging problem.

So I think there are things we can do. And as we mourn and sympathize and feel the anguish of the people in Littleton, let's not let those children die in vain. Let's get ourselves organized, and unify, in a positive way, to address these complex issues. But there are things we can do to

address each one of them.

So that's probably a much longer answer than anybody could have expected this morning, but it's really been on my mind, as it's been on the mind of every American. I just can't talk to anybody without it coming up. I can't think about any other issue without worrying and considering what we can do.

So there's a lot of work ahead of us. But I'm confident that if we don't just wring our hands, or if we don't just walk away in denial, we can make some real progress on this.

Thank you all very much.