

Three years from now, I'm going to come home. We're going to have a library. We're going to have a lot of fun. I'm still going to be a citizen. I'm still going to care about this. And I want you to care about it.

Audience member. We all want to hammer 'em—

The President. So thank you for being here, but hammer 'em—hammer 'em. That's a good idea.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. on the grounds of Ray Winder Baseball Field. In his remarks, he referred to Bynum Gibson, chair, Arkansas State Democratic Party; and John Miller, Arkansas State representative.

Remarks at a Candlelight Vigil Honoring the Little Rock Nine in Little Rock

September 27, 1997

Thank you very much, Leta. Dr. and Mrs. Titus, members of the board, Tiana Mitchell, and students and faculty. Let me say, I thought Tiana did a fine job representing the students here and spoke very well.

Hillary and I are delighted to be joined by a number of members of our administration, including Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater, Bob Nash, and Janis Kearney and Carroll Willis. And there may be others here, but I thank them all for coming.

I know there are a lot of officials out there. I see Senator Walker and Mayor Hays, and I'm sure there are others. I thank you for coming. Thank you, Daisy Bates. Reverend clergy, thank you for coming. And especially, of course, to the Little Rock Nine, I'm delighted to see all of you. We're really getting to be old friends now. *[Laughter]*

And you just heard an address from the person I have picked to be chief of the Presidential speechwriting division for the remainder of my term in office. That was a terrific job, not only because he spoke so well but because of what he spoke. And I want to come back to that in a moment.

I love Philander Smith. I used to jog by here most every morning. If it wasn't too early, usually the students would be out walking around and say hello to me. I've seen the physical improvements in the campus, and they're very impressive, and I congratulate you on them. You know Carroll Willis and Lottie Shackelford and my great friend the late Mahlon Martin all were graduates of Philander Smith, so I have been

personally benefited by this school. And I thank you for that.

But I have to say a special word of appreciation to the choir, because the choir was the first choir from an historically black college to sing at the Presidential Inauguration—mine, in 1992. And I thank you very much for that. They've been back to Washington quite a few times since, and it's always a better place when they're there.

Let me say, tonight especially we have come, I would hope, to do two things. Nothing we can ever do, I think, will equal the emotional impact that the ceremony the day before yesterday in front of Central High School had not only on our State but, I think, on the entire country. I was in Texas yesterday and person after person after person came up to me, just overwhelmed by what they saw on the television and by the sight of the Little Rock Nine walking through the front doors, unimpeded.

As I understand it, the first thing we wish to do, and one which Dr. Roberts has already spoken about, is to acknowledge that there were others who may never have gotten their names in the newspapers, who had a lot to do with the way these young people turned into successful adults and were able to carry on their courageous struggle: parents and family members who were threatened with the loss of their jobs; neighbors who gave them everything from money to food to transportation; and of course the faculty here at Philander Smith who volunteered to tutor them, an extraordinary gift. And I would say to all of you who were involved

in that, they all turned out pretty well, and I thank you for that.

The second thing that I would like to respectfully suggest is that as we participate in this candlelight vigil, I would like to return to something I said at the end of my remarks. I think it is important, very important in life, perhaps the most important thing of all, obviously, to have a reconciled heart, to do things in the right way for the right reasons. But at some point it's also important that you do the right things, that the things you are doing make sense and move forward in our eternal struggle to open up genuine opportunity and make genuine advances. We can do better.

After the ceremony on Thursday, just for example, I stayed outside quite a long while. And I know a lot of people had to go in, it was very hot, but there were so many people there who had stayed there, and I wanted to shake their hands and listen to them, and there were especially a lot of young people there. And I shook hands, I'll bet, for an hour at the ceremony. And one young man came up to me and said—he appeared to be a high-school-age student—and he said, “Mr. President,” he said, “I like this, and I like what you’ve said. But what are we going to do about all of us who are being dragged into these gangs, and how are we going to save kids’ lives and keep them from doing that?”

So that’s as good a place to start as any. If we have the right attitude about this and we know that one thing we have to do is to open up genuine access to educational opportunity and make sure whatever educational opportunity any child has in this district, it is excellence personified, how are we going to get all the children there in a position to take advantage of it?

I’ve worked hard in the last 5 years to make our streets and our neighborhoods and our schools safe. But we’re still losing too many of our kids to gangs and to guns and to drugs. We are. You know, in the generation where we grew up, one of the reasons they did so well is that their parents and their grandparents and their neighbors instilled in them a code of conduct which meant if they ever got the least little chance, they would make the most of it. If they ever got the least little chance, they would make the most of it.

How many of our children today are not given that? And are all their neighbors doing every-

thing they can to make sure that if they get the least little chance, they’ll make the most of it? Are all of us who are interested in volunteering in the schools equally willing to walk the neighborhoods? Are we equally willing to walk on a street that is unfamiliar and walk into a home that we may not know and do what it takes in a personal way to try to rescue our children?

I spent a day in Boston not very long ago, and I went up there for a particular reason. There has not been a child—not a child—killed by a handgun in the city of Boston for almost 2 years—2 years. Now, it’s a bigger city than Little Rock, with a lot of tough neighborhoods and a lot of poor neighborhoods and a lot of problems. But the police there walk the streets, and they walk with parents groups and citizens groups. And the probation officers, they make house calls. And the police officers, they make house calls. Instead of waiting to bust the kids when they get in trouble, they go to the homes and sit down and visit with the parents and say, “Your child needs help. I’m here to help.”

And they have a delightful group of people that wear T-shirts, and they call themselves—no offense to the pastors in the audience—Streetwalkers. [Laughter] And they’re proud of the double meaning because they’ve turned it on its head, because they’re walking the streets to save people’s lives, not to waste people’s lives.

I say that to make the point that what we owe the Little Rock Nine is to do our part in this time to deal with the new problems of this time and the unresolved problems of their time, so that when our time is done, at least our kids have something else to worry about. At least our kids have something else to worry about.

I’ll never—one of the wiser men I ever met in public life was a former Secretary of State, United States Senator, and Governor of Maine, Edmund Muskie. And when he was still living, in 1983, Hillary and I went to Maine to a Governors’ meeting. And we were having a very relaxed conversation, and I said, “Mr. Secretary,” I said, “of all the jobs you ever held, which one did you like the best?” He said, “I think I liked being Governor the best, because I was close to people and their problems and their hopes and dreams.” And I said, “Well, how do you define success for a Governor?” He said, “Success is whether you leave the person who comes after you a new set of problems

or whether they're dealing with the same old problems." He said, "Look," he said, "the Bible teaches us that human nature is inherently flawed and that there will be problems till the end of time, but if you leave your people who come after you the same old problems, then you haven't done your job. Leave it up to God to figure out what the next generation's problems are going to be. Don't saddle them with yours."

And so I say to you, that's what I hope you will think about. Think about the kids in the gangs. Think about whether they could have made it if there hadn't been any neighbors to support them, if there hadn't been a Philander Smith to tutor them, if they had had to worry about going home and getting run over by somebody who just made a big drug sale, if they were estranged from people who were in a violent gang.

Hillary and I have been with children in cities in this country, little children, who said their biggest fear in life was being shot going to and from school. We used to have fire drills when I was in school, and then we used to have drills about what we would do if there were an alert from the Soviet Union dropping a nuclear weapon. These kids used to have gun drills, and they practiced dropping themselves on the floor in case they heard gunshots. Now, that's the problem of our generation. We dare not give that to the next generation.

And I could just tell you, the reason I wanted to have this dialog on race is that I think that our racial diversity is the biggest advantage

we've got going into the future if we can get our hearts right, if we can think right, but if we can do the right things.

So my pledge to the Little Rock Nine, and I hope yours will be, is that we can't promise to leave our children with no problems, but let's promise them that we'll get rid of the ones that they're facing today. And they'll do just fine.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:45 p.m. on the lawn of the Administration Building at Philander Smith College. In his remarks, he referred to Leta Anthony, president, Leadership Roundtable, and director of the candlelight vigil program; Myer L. Titus, president, Philander Smith College, and his wife, Constance; Tiana Mitchell, student government president; Arkansas State Senator Bill Walker; Mayor Patrick Henry Hays of North Little Rock; Daisy Bates, publisher and founder, Arkansas State Press newspaper and advocate of the Little Rock Nine in 1957; the late Mahlon Martin, first minority director of the Arkansas State Finance Department; and Carroll Willis, director, communications services division, and Lottie Shackelford, vice chair for women's advocacy, Democratic National Committee. The President also referred to the Little Rock Nine: Jefferson Thomas, Ernest Green, Minnijean Brown Trickey, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed-Wair, Elizabeth Eckford, Melba Pattillo Beals, and spokesperson Terrence Roberts.

Remarks on Presenting the National Arts and Humanities Medals

September 29, 1997

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the White House. I thank the Members of Congress for coming, the members of the councils who stood up and were recognized. I also want to thank the First Lady for that very nice speech and unusual introduction. [Laughter]

The spin that was put on my going to the opera at home was slightly different than the one you heard. It went more like, "I've been trying to get you to do this for 5 years now.

I know you will like this if you go. And besides, it's 'Carmen,' it's your kind of thing." [Laughter] And then afterward I said, "Gosh, I just loved that, and I thought Denyce Graves was great, and it was fabulous." And she said, "I told you. I told you. I told you." So I was glad to have the sort of sanitized version presented to you. But I thought, in the interest of openness, I should tell you the whole story. [Laughter]

Let me again say to all of you, you are very welcome here in the White House. And let me