

## THE WHITE HOUSE

### REMARKS AT MILLENNIUM EVENING THE PERILS OF INDIFFERENCE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM A VIOLENT CENTURY

In The East Room

April 12, 1999 - 7:37 P.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Welcome to the East Room and the White House for our 7th Millennium Evening, "The Perils of Indifference: Lessons Learned From a Violent Century.

We're honored to have so many members of Congress, ambassadors, religious leaders, historians, human rights activists, and so many other concerned citizens for what I know will be an unforgettable evening.

Before we begin, I would like to thank our sponsors, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Sun Microsystems. Sun is helping us to bring this event to millions of people around the world via satellite and the Internet. And I also want to thank Pioneer New Media for donating these screens, and the Library of Congress and the United States Holocaust Museum for lending us the extraordinary displays in the Grand Foyer.

And I especially want to thank our guests of honor, Elie, Marion and Elisha Wiesel. When my husband and I look back at our years in the White House, one of the highlights are the times that we've been able and been privileged to spend with Elie and Marion. We always feel enriched by our experience.

We didn't know them before, except through his writings. But for those of us who have ever read those writings, especially "Night," we can never forget the description of the horrors inflicted on him as a young boy -- a boy of great religious convictions who tells us his God was murdered. A boy of 14 who is forced to ask, "Was I awake? How could it be possible for them to burn children and for the world to remain silent?"

It was more than a year ago that I asked Elie if he would be willing to participate in these Millennium Lectures that we had not yet even started, but which we were planning. I never could have imagined that when the time finally came for him to stand in this spot and to reflect on the past century and the future to come, that we would be seeing children in Kosovo crowded into trains, separated from families, separated from their homes, robbed of their childhoods, their memories, their humanity. It is something that causes all of us to pause and to reflect, as we will this evening, how could this be happening once again at the end of this century.

On any day in the last 40 years it would have been a tremendous honor to hear this man speak at the White House about the need never to give in to silence or to resign ourselves to indifference. But there would not have been a more important day than now, here, on the eve of the Days of Remembrance and in the midst of the crimes against humanity being perpetrated in Kosovo.

When I invited him here I explained that we were planning a series of Millennium Evenings designed to mark this specific turning point in history by honoring the past and imagining the future. And in many ways, our previous evenings have been celebrations of that past -- the founding ideals of our republic, jazz music, poetry and scientific discovery that have defined us as individuals and America as a nation.

But honoring our past and learning from it means looking not just at our noblest achievements, but at our greatest failings; not just at what makes us proud, but at those darkest impulses that have marred this century.

We know that the Nazis were able to pursue their crimes against humanity precisely because they were able to limit the circle of those defined as humans. The mentally ill, the infirm, gypsies, Jews -- all were identified as lives unworthy of life. And this process of dehumanizing comes from the darkest regions of the human soul, where people first withdraw understanding, then empathy, and finally personhood. Now, this phenomenon of indifference, this human capacity for evil we know too well is not unique to that time and place in Nazi Germany.

Many of us in this room have personal experiences that are much more recent and fresh, about what it means to face that evil and that indifference today. I can remember sitting in a room in Tuzla, shortly after the Dayton Peace Accords, talking to a group of Bosnians. They were Serbs and Croats and Muslims, although I could not tell the difference. They explained how men and boys were put into camps and executed; how women were raped; how children were turned into orphans.

One of the people I was talking to said, you know, when it started in my village, I went to one of my neighbors and I asked, we've known each other; we've been at each other's weddings, we've attended the funerals of our loved ones together. Why is this happening? And the response she was given from that old friend was, well, we read in the newspaper that if we didn't do this to you, you would do it to us. It was the message of hatred that Milosevic and his allies were communicating in order to turn Bosnia into a killing field.

What are we to do today, when leaders hijack holy traditions, even history; not to lift people closer to God or their own human potential, but to push them further apart? What do we do about those who try to constrict the circle of human dignity by convincing us that our differences -- race and religion, gender, ethnicity and tribal origin -- are more important than our common humanity? If this violent century teaches us anything, it is that whenever the dignity of one is threatened, the dignity of all is threatened as well; and none can or should remain silent.

Imagine how different life would be today for the people of Kosovo and in so many other troubled parts of our world if the evil that was allowed to run free had been stopped by those who stood up and broke the silence, that indifference did not in any way paralyze those who could have taken action.

In 1999, it isn't enough to refuse to commit crimes of hatred, stereotyping one another, going along with the crowd. It isn't enough to look deep into our own hearts and say we find them free of hatred. We have to do more. Every time we let a religious or racial slur go unchallenged or an indignity go unanswered, we are making a choice to be indifferent, a choice to constrict the circle of human dignity; a choice, I believe, to ignore history at our children's peril.

When Elie Wiesel accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, he remembered asking his father how the world could have remained silent. And he imagined what that same young boy would ask him today. Tell me: What have you done with my future? What have you done with your life? And I tell him, Elie says, that I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget.

You have done that. You have taught us never to forget. You have made sure that we always listen to the victims of indifference, hatred and evil. You have been among those in our world to whom we look to for conscience. You have been the voice of the voiceless -- from Soviet Jewry

to the people of South Africa under apartheid, to the people of Yugoslavia today. You have been a teacher.

When that young boy asks Elie Wiesel what he has done with his future, we can point to numerous awards and honors, including, of course, the Nobel Peace Prize and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, or we can hold up the more than 40 books or the service as the Founding Chair of the United States Holocaust Memorial. But that is not his real legacy. His real legacy is what he has given to us and how he continues to prod each of us to understand the peril of indifference.

When he was forced to leave his home more than 50 years ago, he went into the backyard and buried the watch he had received on the occasion of his bar mitzvah. In 1997, he went back to that spot. He took the same number of child-size paces he had taken as a boy. He dug into the ground with his fingernails -- and the watch was still there. That must have been a bittersweet moment. The watch had lasted all those years; but his family, his village, the life he had known, so many friends and relatives were gone.

But just as that watch was still there, Elie Wiesel is still on watch -- on watch for us -- to help us keep our memories alive despite the passage of time, for teaching us the lessons that transcend time, about the perils of indifference.

It is my great honor to introduce a friend, a teacher, a voice for justice and freedom, Elie Wiesel. (Applause.)

MR. WIESEL: Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, members of Congress, Ambassador Holbrooke, Excellencies, friends: Fifty-four years ago to the day, a young Jewish boy from a small town in the Carpathian Mountains woke up, not far from Goethe's beloved Weimar, in a place of eternal infamy called Buchenwald. He was finally free, but there was no joy in his heart. He thought there never would be again.

Liberated a day earlier by American soldiers, he remembers their rage at what they saw. And even if he lives to be a very old man, he will always be grateful to them for that rage, and also for their compassion. Though he did not understand their language, their eyes told him what he needed to know -- that they, too, would remember, and bear witness.

And now, I stand before you, Mr. President -- Commander-in-Chief of the army that freed me, and tens of thousands of others -- and I am filled with a profound and abiding gratitude to the American people.

Gratitude is a word that I cherish. Gratitude is what defines the humanity of the human being. And I am grateful to you, Hillary -- or Mrs. Clinton -- for what you said, and for what you are doing for children in the world, for the homeless, for the victims of injustice, the victims of destiny and society. And I thank all of you for being here.

We are on the threshold of a new century, a new millennium. What will the legacy of this vanishing century be? How will it be remembered in the new millennium? Surely it will be judged, and judged severely, in both moral and metaphysical terms. These failures have cast a dark shadow over humanity: two World Wars, countless civil wars, the senseless chain of assassinations -- Gandhi, the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Sadat, Rabin -- bloodbaths in Cambodia and Nigeria, India and Pakistan, Ireland and Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Sarajevo and Kosovo; the inhumanity in the gulag and the tragedy of Hiroshima. And, on a different level, of course, Auschwitz and Treblinka. So much violence, so much indifference.

What is indifference? Etymologically, the word means "no difference." A strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness, dusk and dawn, crime and punishment, cruelty and compassion, good and evil.

What are its courses and inescapable consequences? Is it a philosophy? Is there a philosophy of indifference conceivable? Can one possibly view indifference as a virtue? Is it necessary at times to practice it simply to keep one's sanity, live normally, enjoy a fine meal and a glass of wine, as the world around us experiences harrowing upheavals?

Of course, indifference can be tempting -- more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person's pain and despair. Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbor are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction.

Over there, behind the black gates of Auschwitz, the most tragic of all prisoners were the "Muselmanner," as they were called. Wrapped in their torn blankets, they would sit or lie on the ground, staring vacantly into space, unaware of who or where they were, strangers to their surroundings. They no longer felt pain, hunger, thirst. They feared nothing. They felt nothing. They were dead and did not know it.

Rooted in our tradition, some of us felt that to be abandoned by humanity then was not the ultimate. We felt that to be abandoned by God was worse than to be punished by Him. Better an unjust God than an indifferent one. For us to be ignored by God was a harsher punishment than to be a victim of His anger. Man can live far from God -- not outside God. God is wherever we are. Even in suffering? Even in suffering.

In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred. Anger can at times be creative. One writes a great poem, a great symphony, have done something special for the sake of humanity because one is angry at the injustice that one witnesses. But indifference is never creative. Even hatred at times may elicit a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it. Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response.

Indifference is not a beginning, it is an end. And, therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor -- never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees -- not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own.

Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment. And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil.

In the place that I come from, society was composed of three simple categories: the killers, the victims, and the bystanders. During the darkest of times, inside the ghettos and death camps -- and I'm glad that Mrs. Clinton mentioned that we are now commemorating that event, that period, that we are now in the Days of Remembrance -- but then, we felt abandoned, forgotten. All of us did.

And our only miserable consolation was that we believed that Auschwitz and Treblinka were closely guarded secrets; that the leaders of the free world did not know what was going on

behind those black gates and barbed wire; that they had no knowledge of the war against the Jews that Hitler's armies and their accomplices waged as part of the war against the Allies.

If they knew, we thought, surely those leaders would have moved heaven and earth to intervene. They would have spoken out with great outrage and conviction. They would have bombed the railways leading to Birkenau, just the railways, just once.

And now we knew, we learned, we discovered that the Pentagon knew, the State Department knew. And the illustrious occupant of the White House then, who was a great leader -- and I say it with some anguish and pain, because, today is exactly 54 years marking his death -- Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on April the 12th, 1945, so he is very much present to me and to us.

No doubt, he was a great leader. He mobilized the American people and the world, going into battle, bringing hundreds and thousands of valiant and brave soldiers in America to fight fascism, to fight dictatorship, to fight Hitler. And so many of the young people fell in battle. And, nevertheless, his image in Jewish history -- I must say it -- his image in Jewish history is flawed.

The depressing tale of the St. Louis is a case in point. Sixty years ago, its human cargo -- maybe 1,000 Jews -- was turned back to Nazi Germany. And that happened after the Kristallnacht, after the first state sponsored pogrom, with hundreds of Jewish shops destroyed, synagogues burned, thousands of people put in concentration camps. And that ship, which was already on the shores of the United States, was sent back.

I don't understand. Roosevelt was a good man, with a heart. He understood those who needed help. Why didn't he allow these refugees to disembark? A thousand people -- in America, a great country, the greatest democracy, the most generous of all new nations in modern history. What happened? I don't understand. Why the indifference, on the highest level, to the suffering of the victims?

But then, there were human beings who were sensitive to our tragedy. Those non-Jews, those Christians, that we called the "Righteous Gentiles," whose selfless acts of heroism saved the honor of their faith. Why were they so few? Why was there a greater effort to save SS murderers after the war than to save their victims during the war?

Why did some of America's largest corporations continue to do business with Hitler's Germany until 1942? It has been suggested, and it was documented, that the Wehrmacht could not have conducted its invasion of France without oil obtained from American sources. How is one to explain their indifference?

And yet, my friends, good things have also happened in this traumatic century: the defeat of Nazism, the collapse of communism, the rebirth of Israel on its ancestral soil, the demise of apartheid, Israel's peace treaty with Egypt, the peace accord in Ireland. And let us remember the meeting, filled with drama and emotion, between Rabin and Arafat that you, Mr. President, convened in this very place. I was here and I will never forget it.

And then, of course, the joint decision of the United States and NATO to intervene in Kosovo and save those victims, those refugees, those who were uprooted by a man whom I believe that because of his crimes, should be charged with crimes against humanity. But this time, the world was not silent. This time, we do respond. This time, we intervene.

Does it mean that we have learned from the past? Does it mean that society has changed? Has

the human being become less indifferent and more human? Have we really learned from our experiences? Are we less insensitive to the plight of victims of ethnic cleansing and other forms of injustices in places near and far? Is today's justified intervention in Kosovo, led by you, Mr. President, a lasting warning that never again will the deportation, the terrorization of children and their parents be allowed anywhere in the world? Will it discourage other dictators in other lands to do the same?

What about the children? Oh, we see them on television, we read about them in the papers, and we do so with a broken heart. Their fate is always the most tragic, inevitably. When adults wage war, children perish. We see their faces, their eyes. Do we hear their pleas? Do we feel their pain, their agony? Every minute one of them dies of disease, violence, famine. Some of them -- so many of them -- could be saved.

And so, once again, I think of the young Jewish boy from the Carpathian Mountains. He has accompanied the old man I have become throughout these years of quest and struggle. And together we walk towards the new millennium, carried by profound fear and extraordinary hope. (Applause.)

I conclude on that.

THE PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, we have all been moved by one more profound example of Elie Wiesel's lifetime of bearing witness.

Before we open the floor for questions, and especially because of the current events in Kosovo, I would like to ask you to think about what he has just said, in terms of what it means to the United States, in particular, and to the world in which we would like our children to live in the new century.

How do we avoid indifference to human suffering? How do we muster both the wisdom and the strength to know when to act and whether there are circumstances in which we should not? Why are we in Kosovo?

The history of our country for quite a long while had been dominated by a principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations. Indeed, for most of our history we have worn that principle as a badge of honor, for our founders knew intervention as a fundamentally destructive force. George Washington warned us against those "entangling alliances."

The 20th century, with its two world wars, the Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Panama, Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo -- it changed all that; for good or ill, it changed all that. Our steadily increasing involvement in the rest of the world, not for territorial gain, but for peace and freedom and security, is a fact of recent history.

In the Cold War, it might be argued that on occasion we made a wrong judgment, because we saw the world through communist and non-communist lenses. But no one doubts that we never sought territorial advantage. No one doubts that when we did get involved, we were doing what at least we thought was right for humanity.

Now, at the end of the 20th century, it seems to me we face a great battle of the forces of integration against the forces of disintegration; of globalism versus tribalism; of oppression against empowerment. And this phenomenal explosion of technology might be the servant of either side, or both.

The central irony of our time, it seems to me, is this: Most of us have this vision of a 21st

century world with the triumph of peace and prosperity and personal freedom; with the respect for the integrity of ethnic, racial and religious minorities; within a framework of shared values, shared power, shared plenty; making common cause against disease and environmental degradation across national lines, against terror, organized crime, weapons of mass destruction. This vision, ironically, is threatened by the oldest demon of human society -- our vulnerability to hatred of the other.

In the face of that, we cannot be indifferent, at home or abroad. That is why we are in Kosovo.

We first have to set an example, as best we can -- standing against hate crimes against racial minorities or gays; standing for respect, for diversity. Second, we have to act responsibly, recognizing this unique and, if history is any guide, fleeting position the United States now enjoys, of remarkable military, political and economic influence. We have to do what we can to protect the circle of humanity against those who would divide it by dehumanizing the other. Lord knows we have had enough of that in this century, and Elie talked about it.

I think it is well to point out that Henry Luce coined the term, "The American Century," way back in 1941. A lot of terrible things have happened since then, but a lot of good things have happened as well. And we should be grateful that, for most of the time since, our nation has had both the power and the willingness to stand up against the horrors of the century. Not every time, not every place, not even always with success; but we've done enough good to say that America has made a positive difference.

From our successes and from our failures, we know there are hard questions that have to be asked when you move beyond the values and the principles to the murky circumstances of daily life. We can't, perhaps, intervene everywhere, but we must always be alive to the possibility of preventing death and oppression, and forging and strengthening institutions and alliances to make a good outcome more likely.

Elie has said that Kosovo is not the Holocaust, but that the distinction should not deter us from doing what is right. I agree on both counts. When we see people forced from their homes at gunpoint, loaded onto train cars, their identity papers confiscated, their very presence blotted from the historical record, it is only natural that we would think of the events which Elie has chronicled tonight in his own life.

We must always remain awake to the warning signs of evil. And now, we know that it is possible to act before it is too late.

The efforts of Holocaust survivors to make us remember and help us understand, therefore, have not been in vain. The people who fought those battles and lived those tragedies, however, will not be around forever. More than a thousand World War II veterans pass away every day. But they can live on in our determination to preserve what they gave us and to stand against the modern incarnations of the evil they defeated.

Some say -- and perhaps there will be some discussion about it tonight -- that evil is an active presence, always seeking new opportunities to manifest itself. As a boy growing up in my Baptist church I heard quite a lot of sermons about that. Other theologians, like Nieburh, Martin Luther King, argued that evil was more the absence of something -- a lack of knowledge, a failure of will, a poverty of the imagination, or a condition of indifference.

None of this answers any of the difficult questions that a Kosovo, a Bosnia, a Rwanda present. But Kosovo is at the doorstep or the underbelly of NATO and its wide number of allies. We have

military assets and allies willing to do their part. President Milosevic clearly has established a pattern of perfidy, earlier in Bosnia and elsewhere. And so we act.

I would say there are two caveats that we ought to observe. First of all, any military action, any subsequent peacekeeping force, cannot cause ancient grudges and freshly opened wounds to heal overnight. But we can make it more likely that people will resolve their differences by force of argument rather than force of arms -- and in so doing, learn to live together. That is what Rumania and Hungary have done recently, with their differences. It is what many Bosnian Croats, Serbs and Muslims are struggling to do every day.

Second, we should not fall victim to the easy tendency to demonize the Serbian people. They were our allies in World War II; they have their own legitimate concerns. Any international force going into Kosovo to maintain the peace must be dedicated also to protecting the Serbian minority from those who may wish to take their vengeance.

But we cannot be indifferent to the fact that the Serbian leader has defined destiny as a license to kill. Destiny, instead, is what people make for themselves, with a decent respect for the legitimate interests and rights of others.

In his first lecture here, the first Millennium Lecture, the distinguished historian, Bernard Bailyn, argued how much we are still shaped by the ideals of our Founding Fathers, and by their realism -- their deeply practical understanding of human nature; their understanding of the possibility of evil. They understood difficult moral judgments. They understood that to be indifferent is to be numb. They knew, too, that our people would never be immune to those who seek power by playing on our own hatreds and fears, and that we had more to learn about the true meaning of liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness.

Here in this house we have tried to advance those ideals with our initiative against hate crime, the race initiative, AmeriCorps, the stand against the hatred that brought us Oklahoma City and paramilitary groups, the efforts to forge peace for Northern Ireland to the Middle East.

But our challenge now, and the world's, is to harmonize diversity and integration, to build a richly-textured fabric of civilization that will make the most of God's various gifts, and that will resist those who would tear that fabric apart by appealing to the dark recesses that often seem to lurk in even the strongest souls.

To succeed, we must heed the wisdom of our founders about power and ambition. We must have the compassion and determination of Abraham Lincoln to always give birth to new freedom. We must have the vision of President Roosevelt, who proclaimed four freedoms for all human beings, and invited the United States to defend them at home and around the world.

Now, we close out this chapter of our history determined not to turn away from the horrors we leave behind, but to act on their lessons with principle and purpose. If that is what we are, in fact, doing, Kosovo could be a very good place to begin a new century.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

We have hundreds of questions -- I know. Ellen, do you want to describe what we're going to do?

MS. LOVELL: Well, I think, Mr. President, you have a question for Mr. Wiesel. And then I'm going to begin the questioning from the room and Mrs. Clinton will take the questions from the Internet.

THE PRESIDENT: I would like to ask you a question about what you think the impact of the modern media and sort of instantaneous news coverage will be. It is obvious to me that we built a consensus in the United States and throughout Europe for action in Bosnia in no small measure because of what people saw was going on there. It is obvious to me that the support in the United States and Europe for our actions in Kosovo have increased because of what people see going on.

And I think I worry about two things, and I just would like to hear your thoughts on it. Number one, is there a chance that people will become inured to this level of human suffering by constant exposure to it? And number two, is there a chance that even though people's interest in humanity can be quickened, almost overnight, that we're so used to having a new story every day, that we may not have the patience to pay the price of time to deal with this and other challenges? A lot of these things require weeks and months, indeed years, of effort. And that seems to be inconsistent with, kind of, rapid-fire new news we are used to seeing. MR. WIESEL: Mr. President, usually, in this room, people ask you questions. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: That's why I like this. (Laughter.)

MR. WIESEL: What you said is correct. The numbness is a danger. I remember during the Vietnam War, the first time we saw on television, live, the war in Vietnam -- usually, of course, the networks broadcasted during dinner. So we stopped eating. How can you eat when people kill each other and people die? After two weeks, people went on eating. They were numb. And it's a danger.

But, nevertheless, I don't see the alternative. Except I hope that in the next millennium, the next century, those who are responsible for the TV programs, for the news programs, will find enough talent, enough fervor, enough imagination, to present the news in such a way that the news will appeal to all of us day after day. I do not see an alternative. We must know what is happening.

And today we can know it instantly. If the American people now are behind you, it is because they see it on television and they see it in newspapers. They see the images. They see the pictures of children on the trains, as you said -- in the planes. So how can they remain indifferent? And, therefore, I am -- the risks are there, but I have faith that we shall overcome the risks. But we must know.

MS. LOVELL: I'd like to call on Marcus Applebaum. Marcus is a junior at Laurel High School in Prince George's County. And he and the other students who are here with him take part in a program coordinated by Lynn Williams of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. And the program is called, "Bringing the Lessons Home." Marcus.

MR. APPLEBAUM: I need help to know what do I say to my grandmother. She's a survivor who's having a lot of trouble understanding what's going on with -- I met a group of German students in the museum over the summer. And I believe it's important for us to come together and talk about what has happened in our history. So they've been invited to my house to come and stay with me for the summer. And my grandmother is having a hard time understanding this. And I would like to know -- I love my grandmother very much, but I'd like to know how I can help her to understand, to help forgive.

MR. WIESEL: Forgive whom? Not your friends; they are young. I don't believe in collective guilt. Only the guilty are guilty. Even the children of killers are not killers; they are children. By definition, a child is innocent unless that child does something terrible. And, therefore, I will speak to your grandmother and say, look, don't see in them Germans; they are children. And I am

sure that your grandmother, after a while, will understand.

MS. LOVELL: Mrs. Clinton, let's go to the Internet.

MRS. CLINTON: This is from Justin Kiefer in Lufton, Indiana. And it's for Elie Wiesel: Some people worry that the world will forget the Holocaust when all of the survivors die. Do you also worry about this, or do you feel that the world will never be able to forget the Holocaust?

MR. WIESEL: Oh, I am worried. I am worried what will happen when the last survivor will be around. I would not like to be that survivor. The burden of knowledge, the burden of memory, the weight on his or her shoulder will be so heavy that I worry over the possibility of that person losing his or her sanity.

Now, it's true that what every survivor can say no one else can. The witness which is ours is unique. All the other people, the historians and the novelists and the journalists -- all together, I don't think they have -- they have the will, they have the desire, but to say something that the survivor can say, no, they cannot.

So what will happen 20 years from now? I believe this is the most documented tragedy in recorded history. Never before has a tragedy elicited so much witness from the killers, from the victims and even from the bystanders -- millions of pieces here in the museum what you have, all other museums, archives in the thousands, in the millions. So anyone who will want to know will at least know where to turn.

And here and there, I believe that somehow truth has a tremendous force. Sometimes it takes centuries, but it emerges, it surfaces. And then, the world will remember.

MS. LOVELL: Chief Joyce Dugan, of the Eastern Band Cherokee Nation, is here.

CHIEF DUGAN: Good evening, Mr. Wiesel, President and Mrs. Clinton. I am Joyce Dugan, principal Chief of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, located in North Carolina.

While Indian nations in this country did not suffer a Holocaust of the magnitude that your people did, we did suffer a holocaust in a sense, when we, too, endured the forced removal from our homelands. We endured a Long March across thousands of miles, under armed guard, in extreme weather conditions, losing many of our people.

None of us wants to dwell on those past mistakes, those that even happened in this country, for if we dwell on them, the memory will eat at our souls and destroy us. However, we must remember them so, hopefully, we can prevent such acts from being repeated, even in this country.

Unfortunately, throughout this world there are those in power who continue to make the same mistakes over and over in their treatment of others, because of their culture, their race, religion, their political beliefs. Even more unfortunate, as was mentioned earlier, is that it has become commonplace throughout this world, and we have, indeed, become indifferent and tend to view it as someone else's problem.

My question to you is, what must we do as a nation and what can we do as individuals to overcome this indifference so that we don't have to resort to military action, to awaken awareness and to instill compassion?

MR. WIESEL: Thank you. A few years ago at Boston University I had a course on the suffering of minorities and I brought some Native Americans to my class, and we spent hours just

discussing with them. I wanted to know mainly what happened to their anger. After all, they're entitled to their anger. We came here and we simply displaced them, we took over their land. Where is their anger?

And after the discussion course was over I said to them and I said to myself, suffering, my dear lady, does not confer any privilege. It all depends what we do with it. And in truth, your community has shown us a way, many ways, that was -- even if there was anger, there was not hatred. What we should do is listen to one another. I love to listen to your communities' tales, legends, myths. They are so beautiful. There is so much beauty in your past. Let's listen to it. And when we listen, we are not indifferent.

MRS. CLINTON: I think that's a really interesting question, though, because at the first Millennium Lecture that the President referred to, Bernard Bailyn made a point of saying that too often, we overlook, we ignore, we turn our backs on pieces of history that are discomforting, that are painful -- whether it is the story of Native Americans, the story of slavery, the story of immigrant struggles -- at least when I was growing up, those were not hot topics in the teaching of American history. And as a result, a certain sense of truth was conveyed that wasn't a complete story about America.

So I think that Elie's point's a very good one both on a personal level, in terms of listening to one another and hearing about one's experience, but it has to go beyond that into a much more socially aware sense of how we all have to do more to convey the truths and the histories of each other, and particularly in a diverse country such as ours.

But it would be the same in a country such as Yugoslavia, where there are different truths, all of which make up the history of the people sharing that land, and to try to create some acceptance of, some awareness of each other's story and some respect for the suffering that each person and the person's past might bring.

THE PRESIDENT: I'd just like to say one thing specifically, Chief. First of all I'm glad you're here, and I'm glad you're here for this. I think that Hillary and I have spent more time on Native American issues, and with Native American leaders, than any previous administration, at least that I know anything about. And, with all respect, one of the things that I think is killing us in this country -- still, is a big problem -- is a phenomenal amount of ignorance on the part not just of schoolchildren, but of people in very important positions of decision-making, about the real, factual history of the Native Americans in the United States.

And you can almost find no one who understands the difference in any one tribe or another. And you can almost find no one who understands that, yes, a few tribes are wealthy because of gaming, because of the sovereignty relationship, but also the poorest Americans are still in Native American communities. And I think this disempowerment, this stripping of autonomy and self-respect and self-reliance, and the ability to do things that started over a century ago, still, in subtle ways, continues today.

And from my perspective, I've been terribly impressed with a lot of the elected leaders of the tribes all across the country. And I think that we really have a huge job to do to not have kind of a benign neglect -- or not benign, a malign neglect -- under the guise of preserving this sovereignty relationship. We need to recognize what we did, and what is still there that's a legacy of the past, so that we can give the children of the Native American tribes all over this country the future they deserve.

I think it's a huge issue, and I still think ignorance is bearing down on us something fierce. And I

thank you for being here.

MS. LOVELL: Well, this next question really relates to what you just said.

MRS. CLINTON: This is from James Mott in Ilion, New York, and it's also for Mr. Wiesel: I have taught about the Holocaust for many years as part of my English curriculum. I was wondering what advice could you give American teens today to help them understand that racism, prejudice and ethnic cleansing are all wrong, but things that are still too prevalent today.

MR. WIESEL: Oh, it's enough to listen to a witness -- that is why the witnesses are here -- to tell them, look, that is not the right way; that hatred is not only destructive, it's auto-destructive, it is self-destructive. Hatred brings what? More hatred. There is nothing good in it.

And the main lesson really is look at the consequences. It began with words. It ended in a hell. So tell your -- children should know that. It begins with words, but look how it ended.

MS. LOVELL: Odette Nyiramilimo is here from Rwanda . She's a physician practicing in Kigali and she is a survivor of the Rwandan massacres. Dr. Nyiramilimo, I know you have a story to tell and a question to ask.

DR. NYIRAMILIMO: Thank you, Mr. Wiesel, for sharing your experience with us this evening. Thank you, Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton, for hosting this evening today. As you heard, I'm a Tutsi survivor of the monstrous genocide in Rwanda. I have experienced firsthand the real value of not being indifferent to human injustice and atrocity.

My family and I were trying to flee Kigali. We took our car, but to avoid road blocks we had to abandon it and go by foot towards the border of Burundi. But we did not make it. A mob attacked us in a swamp. They killed my sister and many others. We tried to hide everywhere we could, and by chance, we managed to leave that swamp and retreat back to our home in Kigali.

Now, when I look back, one man, a soldier, decided our fate. He came to our house where we were simply waiting to be killed. He asked for our identity papers. My husband showed his false Hutu identity, and myself -- I had destroyed my Tutsi identity cards, but I lied that I had lost it in the market the day before. Then he looked to us and decided to help us. He took us, one by one, to the safety of a hotel in town. And my family, my husband and my children, we survived like that.

Much later, I had the chance to go back and thank that man. Then, I asked him: Why did you help us? Didn't you know that we were Tutsis? And he said: Yes, I knew you were Tutsi. But I looked at you trembling and looked at your children and the fear into their eyes, then how couldn't I help you?

Ultimately, my husband, my children and I were the survivors. But unlike the survivors of the Jewish Holocaust, who could go and have -- to other countries, Rwandan survivors are remaining in country, living with their killers, day after day.

Now, my question is this, Mr. Wiesel: How can governments and individuals around the world who, by their indifference in 1994, allowed the genocide to happen in my country, now could do to show that they are not still indifferent to our fate?

MR. WIESEL: Madam, I wish I had an answer. I don't. Why are we so involved, so nobly, in Kosovo? Why were we not in Rwanda? I am -- as you know, Mr. President, I am not in high councils of your government, so I don't know the real reason. Maybe Mr. Berger knows more,

surely more than I. But one thing I can't understand. I know one thing -- we could have prevented that massacre. Why didn't we? I don't know. Maybe that because we didn't then, we're doing it now. It's also possible.

THE PRESIDENT: I think we could have prevented a significant amount of it. You know, it takes -- the thing about the Rwanda massacre that was so stunning is it was done mostly with very primitive weapons, not modern mass killing instruments; and, yet, it happened in a matter of just a few weeks, as you know.

And I want to give time for others to ask their questions, but let me say I have thought about this a great deal -- more than you might imagine. And we went to Kigali when we were in Africa and we talked to a number of survivors, including a woman who woke up to find her husband and six children all hatcheted to death, hacked to death. And she, by a miracle, lived and was devoting herself to the work of helping people like you put your lives back together.

One of the things that made it, I think, more likely that we would act in Kosovo, and eventually in Bosnia, is that we had a mechanism through which we could act, where people could join together in a hurry, with NATO. And one of the things that we are trying to do is to work with other African countries now on something called the Africa Crisis Response Initiative, where we send American soldiers to work with African countries to develop the ability to work with other militaries to try to head these kinds of things off and to do it in a hurry.

I can only tell you that I will do my best to make sure that nothing like this happens again in Africa. I do not think the United States can take the position that we only care about these sorts of things if they happen in Europe. I don't feel that way. And I think that we will, next time, be far more likely to have the means to act in Africa than we had last time in a quicker way.

MS. LOVELL: This question is for Mr. Wiesel, but it really could be for all of you.

MRS. CLINTON: This is from William A. Hackney, in Tombul, Texas: Who determines exactly what human rights are? Is there a list? (Laughter.) Are human rights different in various locales?

And that's a very good question because, oftentimes, on the news or in speeches, people refer to human rights, but many, many people around the world don't know that there is a Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted by the United Nations that was very heavily influenced by Eleanor Roosevelt. It was a very important statement by all of the nations of the world about what human rights are.

So that is one short answer, that there is something we call the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But perhaps the President and Mr. Wiesel would like to be more specific about that.

MR. WIESEL: Human rights today have become a secular religion. And I applaud it. I think it's one of the most beautiful things that's happen today, except, if we think about it, Mr. President, it gives us, I think, a kind of duty to think about, to reflect on it. Why? Why are there so many organizations for human rights today? There are 2,000, more. The best of them -- among the best is IRC, of which I'm a member, and -- Committee and Amnesty. There are good organizations. Now, in the '30s, maybe there were 10, not more. Why are there so many today?

One of the reasons, it is sad to say, it is because individuals lost their faith, their confidence in government. And they say, since governments don't do it, we shall do it. And therefore, you have so many NGOs and so many private people, especially young people, who join these organizations. They say, we shall work. And wherever you go, you find them. I went to

Cambodia, I found the IRC. I went with them. Wherever you go, you find these organizations, and they are great.

Now, what is human rights? Human rights, really, again, as the First Lady said, there is a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we've just celebrated the anniversary in Paris; I was there. It's very simple. The other is not my enemy. The other is my ally, my kin, my friend. And whatever happens to that other involves me. The worst thing is, I have no right to stand by whenever the other is being humiliated. Humiliation is probably the worst that can happen.

One is humiliated because of poverty, because of disease, because of injustice, helplessness. You mention AIDS, the disabled. We cannot save everybody. We can't even help everybody. But we can try to begin somewhere -- anywhere. And the first task is to prevent the humiliator from being humiliated.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me just say -- there was another part to that question. The young man asked a very good question. The only thing I would say is you should get a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. You should read it. You will find that it also says, in addition to what Mr. Wiesel says, that all people should have certain rights against government. They should have the right to speak their mind. They should have the right to dissent. They should have the right to organize. They should have the right to chart their own course.

And then the last question you ask is a very important one. He said, is human rights, are they different from country to country. And the truth is that to some extent they are, but that's not because people can use their own culture or religion as an excuse to repress women and young girls, for example, the way the Taliban does in Afghanistan. It's because countries should be free to go beyond the baseline definition if they choose.

For example, we have an Americans with Disabilities Act, which we believe is sort of a further manifestation of the basic human rights. So we don't want -- when you say they're the same in all countries -- no, countries normally, when they have more wealth or more advanced democracy, find new ways to manifest those rights. And to that extent, they can be different from country to country.

Countries do have different religious and cultural institutions, but the whole purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was so that no country could get away with oppressing the basic humanity of any person on the grounds that they were somehow different from some other country. That's the most important point to be made. That's why there needed to be a Universal Declaration.

MS. LOVELL: Judy Cato, Maryland Commissioner on Aging, and better known to her senior residents as manager of Counsel House, and I know you have some concerns about indifference in our domestic lives.

COMMISSIONER CATO: Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Wiesel, ladies and gentlemen, there are no words to describe how excited and honored I am to be here with our President and First Lady, both of whom I adore.

Mr. Wiesel, in keeping with your lecture on indifference, I am very concerned about the families of our elderly being indifferent and in denial about the needs of our elderly. They put them in clean, safe housing like Counsel House, and forget them.

Studies show that intergenerational involvement is beneficial for all generations. But every day, I

see the elderly I work with wait and wait and wait to see their children and their grandchildren, only to be disappointed. The elderly then become very lonely and depressed. They feel useless and begin to withdraw within themselves.

As medical research and science cause us to live longer, we must be concerned that our elderly population will continue to increase. Indifference and denial has a negative effect on our personal and family lives. Mr. Wiesel, how do you think we can overcome this increasing family problem?

MRS. CLINTON: It's very important as we get older that we address this issue. (Laughter.)

MR. WIESEL: Where I come from we used to respect old people. I had a grandfather, a grandmother -- for me, they were so important. I was looking forward twice a year to see them when they came during the holidays. And it was a celebration for me, literally -- I was so excited. Although they lived seven kilometers away from my town, but I saw them only twice a year, I was so excited -- more than when I go to Paris today by Concorde. Believe me, it was so special.

Today, what is happening? Science is making progress. Medical technology is making tremendous progress. People live longer. But the moment they live longer, we throw them away. At best, we send them to Florida. At best. (Laughter.) We don't want to see them. I would have kept my grandfather in my home all year long.

What should we do? I think we should teach our children to respect the elderly. But I would -- if I had power what I would do, I would organize in every community that children in kindergarten, almost, once a month they should go to old-age homes, with little tape recorders and speak to them, and ask them to tell a story, sing our songs. It's good for both -- the children because they will learn something about the future, and the old people because they will give their past to the young people. What you need is imagination, and, of course, some measure of compassion. MRS. CLINTON: This question is from Mary Jane Halliard, in Orlando, Florida, and it's also for Mr. Wiesel: I just finished reading 'Night,' the first book in your trilogy. My granddaughter is 12 years old and in the sixth grade. She is very bright, and for extra credit her teacher has recommended that she read 'Night.' I do think everyone should read it, but not at such a tender age. I've had nightmares about it, and I'm 62. How you survived and didn't go crazy is a miracle. At what age do you think a child should read your trilogy?

MR. WIESEL: There is no age, really. I don't know how old Chelsea was when she read -- she was 12, probably when she told you, when -- she was the one who actually told you to read me. (Laughter.)

It's really the parents, or the teacher must decide, and, actually, the child, herself or himself, must decide. We must be guided by the children. We should not impose reading, any reading about the Holocaust, on children. We should not do it. It must come from the child. At one point the child will say, tell me about it, what happened, and why did it happen? And then we should be ready with the book, other books, and answers. But not before that. Otherwise, it's counterproductive. The child will resent it, and why make a child resent such reading?

MS. LOVELL: I'd like to recognize Azizah al-Hibri, who's a Professor of Law at the University of Richmond. She's also the founder and President of Qura'ma, (spelling) Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights.

PROFESSOR AL-HIBRI: Thank you, Mr. Wiesel, for your insightful discussion on the nature

and consequences of indifference. In Kosovo, our country has chosen to stand up for its ideals, and for the human rights of individuals not even its own. It did so, thanks to the courageous leadership of our President, who refused to look away, even though he has just been through a very difficult year.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your courage. And I thank Mrs. Clinton for your active interest in relief efforts.

As persons of faith, Mr. Wiesel, Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton, you must share my frustration at the fact that so many of the atrocities in this world have been committed in the name of religion. All three Abrahamic religions -- Islam, Christianity and Judaism -- teach love, kindness and compassion. But each has used -- each has been used as a tool of oppression and suffering.

Both Muslims and Jews believe that saving a single life is like saving the life of a whole people. Christians believe in loving one's enemy. Yet, until the recent events in Kosovo, the world has exhibited profound indifference to Muslim suffering, especially the suffering of women and children in various parts of the world.

Given this shameful record, one cannot but wonder, where are our Abrahamic principles being practiced in the world today? More importantly, how can we help our children develop a peaceful and caring world view that better approximates the values of our faiths?

MR. WIESEL: Before answering -- Ellen, how many minutes do we have?

MS. LOVELL: We have time. MR. WIESEL: We have time? Okay. All right. What you said, of course, is correct, but some religions did less than others. Forgive me, but the Jewish religion is a religion, and because of maybe social and political and historic circumstances, we didn't have the power for 2,000 years even to impose our religion on others, or to speak on behalf of our religion and -- we didn't do that. We couldn't, and maybe we wouldn't.

Now, in general, the problem with religion is when it becomes fanatic. As everything else, nationalism may be good, patriotism may be good, but if it goes beyond, then it becomes fanaticism. And fanaticism produces exactly what you said -- killing, violence, hatred -- because then, the person who believes in God believes that only he or she has God's ear; that only he or she has the right to speak in God's name; that only he or she knows what God wants, only he or she has the power and, therefore, the right to impose his or her belief on others. In other words, that fanatic person wants to be the jailer of all of us. They would like us to be their prisoners. They actually would like God to become their prisoner.

Therefore, I believe one of the most important duties that we have today is to fight fanaticism. The real threat hanging on the 21st century, Mr. President and Hillary, is fanaticism. Imagine fanaticism combined with power, what it would do, what it does already in certain countries, as you mentioned -- the Taliban or the Iranians. Imagine with nuclear power, bacteriological power. So we must fight fanaticism.

How does one do that? I know only word. I am a teacher. I believe whatever the answer is, education is its major component.

THE PRESIDENT: I would like to just offer a couple of observations, if I might.

First of all, I think one of the most hopeful signs I have seen to deal with this whole issue of religious fanaticism in the last few years is the enormous support of Jews in America and throughout the world for the Muslim populations of Bosnia and Kosovo. I think it doesn't answer

all the questions of what should be the details of the resolution between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it doesn't solve all the problems, but everybody should see that this is a good thing. I think that the American Jewish community was maybe the most ardent community, earliest, for the United States stepping forward in Kosovo. And I think we have to see that as a good thing.

Secondly, I think this whole question of the treatment of women and children by the Taliban has aroused a vocal opposition among members of the Muslim community around the world who feel that they can say this and not be betraying their faith. I think this is a good thing.

Now, I would just like to make two other points, one of which is to agree with Elie on this one point. I agree on education, but education for what? There are a lot of geniuses that are tyrants. What is it that we're going to educate.

I believe that every good Jew, every good Christian and every good Muslim, if you believe that love is the central value of the religion, you have to ask yourself, why is that? The reason is, we are not God, we might be wrong. Every one of us -- I might be wrong about what I've been advocating here tonight. It's only when you recognize the possibility that you might be wrong or, to use the language of St. Paul, that we see through the glass darkly, that we know only in part, that you can give the other person some elbow room.

And somehow, one or two central scriptural tenets from Judaism, from Islam, from the Koran and from Christianity, need to be put in one little place and need to be propagated throughout the world -- to preach a little humility, if you please. Otherwise, we'll never get there.

The second point I wanted to make is this: A lot of these people that are saying this in the name of religion, they're kidding. They know perfectly well that religion has nothing to do with it. It's about power and control, and they're manipulating other people. And when it is, if it's someone who practices our faith, we've got to have the guts to stand up and say that. And it's hard, but we have to.

MRS. CLINTON: I just would follow up on that, because I think that the point about standing up and speaking out when you believe your faith or your religion is being misappropriated, misused, is critical.

Because if one looks at the central tenants of the great monotheistic religions, there's so much similarity in, as you were pointing out, the role of faith in our lives, the meaning of love, our relationship with God and our relationship with one another and the duties that our faith imposes upon us. And what happens too often is what we've been talking about tonight in more of a political context, also in religion -- that when it is time to stand up, we often say, well, they're a little extreme, but I don't want to be mistaken as someone who might be undercutting the faith, so I won't speak up against those fanatic Christians or those fanatic Jews or those fanatic Muslims, because then, they might turn and say that I'm not a good Christian or a good Jew or a good Muslim.

And I think there is a really important opportunity in this next century for people of faith -- particularly Jews, Christians and Muslims -- to come together in more of an alliance that does speak out against fanaticism wherever one finds it.

It is very hard to find support in the Scriptures, the Old Testament, the New Testament or in the Koran that support many of the misuses of power that are used against people of the same or similar religion. Yet, we often don't hear that in a united voice. And one of the efforts that Bill and I have been trying to make over the last six and a half years is to reach out in our own

country and reach out around the world to people of good faith who recognize and accept the perils of indifference and who are willing to stand against intolerance and speak out, as much as they are able.

So it's a very critical point you raise and it will be increasingly important in the years to come. And I think there's a real opportunity of these three great faiths to form a more united front on behalf of this stand against fanaticism.

THE PRESIDENT: I would like to make one more point which I think is very important in the dealings between the West and the Islamic countries, generally -- and I will use Iran as an example.

It may be that the Iranian people have been taught to hate or distrust the United States or the West on the grounds that we are infidels and outside the faith. And, therefore, it is easy for us to be angry and to respond in kind. I think it is important to recognize, however, that Iran, because of its enormous geopolitical importance over time, has been the subject of quite a lot of abuse from various Western nations. And I think sometimes it's quite important to tell people, look, you have a right to be angry at something my country or my culture or others that are generally allied with us today did to you 50 or 60 or 100 or 150 years ago. But that is different from saying that I am outside the faith, and you are God's chosen.

So sometimes people will listen to you if you tell them, you're right, but your underlying reason is wrong. So we have to find some way to get dialogue -- and going into total denial when you're in a conversation with somebody who's been your adversary, in a country like Iran that is often worried about its independence and its integrity, is not exactly the way to begin.

So I think while we speak out against religious intolerance, we have to listen for possible ways we can give people the legitimacy of some of their fears, or some of their angers, or some of their historic grievances, and then say they rest on other grounds; now, can we build a common future? I think that's very important. Sometimes I think we in the United States, and Western culture generally, we hate to do that. But we're going to have to if we want to have an ultimate accommodation.

MRS. CLINTON: But I would also add -- this is something we talk about a lot --

THE PRESIDENT: You can tell we're obsessed with this. (Laughter.)

MRS. CLINTON: -- is this whole issue of history, and that's something that we've touched on, but haven't directly addressed. You know, occasionally, when Bill and I are either entertaining people from other countries here, or traveling abroad, we'll get together at the end of the day and trade notes and stories about what occurred. And we're often struck by how different the conversation is with people from other countries and cultures.

I remember asking the wife of a president from a country I won't name how things were in her capital. And she started the conversation by talking about the Crusades. (Laughter.) And half an hour later we were in the 18th century. (Laughter.) And it is very hard for Americans -- we are often accused of not having any respect for our own history and not knowing it very well, and so being almost too present- or future-oriented. It's very hard for us to understand the grip that history has on people.

So the difficult challenge -- and Bill is saying we've got to understand where people are coming from, but we also have to somehow think of how we can create conditions in which people can

be freed from the grip of history in a way that allows them to build a better present and a better future. After a certain point you can only be dragged down if you are constantly relitigating or reliving or refighting the past. And so how do we move forward on that front, as well?

MR. WIESEL: We forgot one point. A sense of humor. (Laughter.) The best answer to fanaticism is a sense of humor. The fanatic doesn't have a sense of humor. (Laughter.)

MS. LOVELL: I'm going to recognize Ativa Desusa (phonetic.) He's a student at the University of Maryland. He moved here from Trinidad at age 10 and he's been part of the "Bringing the Lessons Home" program for four years.

MR. DESUSA (phonetic:) Thank you. Good evening, Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Wiesel. My question this afternoon is -- because I am from Trinidad and I've been here since I was 10 years old, so it's most of my life now, I've had the opportunity to experience this country, one, as an immigrant and, two, as an African American male living here. And my question is: Given the influx of immigrants into this country in recent history and, as we can see, coming in over the next few years where basically America's minority will soon become its majority, can we achieve a global society in both social and economic terms? And, if so, how do we, one, as the leaders, and two, the youth, get there?

MR. WIESEL: I listen to you and -- I came here, I was older than you, but I came as a refugee, as a stateless person, and here I am. I think of themes for novelists, my life is for a novel. Can you imagine coming from where I come from and be here in the White House with the President of the United States, when some 50-odd years ago, I couldn't get a visa anywhere -- and 60 years ago, I belonged to those who were not even considered human beings. But here I am. When I think about it, I'm always filled with wonder, a sense of wonder -- gratitude, also, to this nation, to the humanity it represents.

I think what we should teach -- again, teaching -- our people is to accept the stranger who is no longer the stranger, and see in him or her the messenger, with so many stories, with lessons, with memories, with all kinds of experiences that are not ours. But we receive them, and make them ours.

It's a matter of communication, which means education. I come back to it again and again -- we must educate. I don't know any other way. Educate, to begin educating from kindergarten, and then in elementary school, and then the colleges, and then the media. The media, I think, often, too often, forget that their task also is to educate the reader, or the viewer. It's education. Nothing else can substitute education.

THE PRESIDENT: I would just make two points. I think, first of all, I think given the fact that we're living in an age of globalization, where, whether we like it or not, more and more of our economic and cultural and other contacts will cross national lines, it is, in fact, a very good thing that sometime in the next century there will be no single majority racial group.

But I should also tell you that before, we had large numbers of African Americans coming who were not here -- direct descendants from slaves, but others coming, like you did, from the Caribbean. And before we had large numbers of Hispanics, a hundred years ago, Irish immigrants to this country were treated as if they were of a different racial group. So we've always had these tensions.

But I think if we can learn to live together across our racial and religious lines, in a way that not just respects, but actually celebrates our diversity, that does it within the framework, as I said, of

a common fabric of shared values and shared opportunity, I think that will be quite a good thing for the 21st century. I think it will make America stronger, not weaker. So I look forward to that.

The second thing I want to say is I think that to get there we're going to have to more broadly find a way to have more economic and educational balance in the share of wealth, in the share of knowledge, across all of our racial and ethnic groups. There is no easy way to achieve that. But I am convinced that -- and I see your colleague, Mr. Silber, out here, who's thought about this a great deal in his life -- I'm convinced that lowering standards for people who come from poor backgrounds is not the answer.

I think we should raise standards and invest more resources in helping people achieve them. And then I think we need to provide the incentives in every neighborhood, in every Native American reservation, in every rural area, that made the economy work elsewhere. It will never be perfectly done, but we can do a much, much better job of it. And unless we do a much better job educationally and economically, then we won't have all the benefits from our racial diversity that we could otherwise enjoy.

MRS. CLINTON: I also think that, in addition to the educational and economic challenges that we have to address as a society, which are the really critical ways that we will enable people to live together peacefully and in prosperity in the future, there are some things individuals can do. And oftentimes in conversations like these, some people think, well, I don't run a school, I don't even have kids in school; I have my own work to do; I can't worry about how we try to upgrade opportunities for others; so there's really nothing for me to do. And, in fact, I think there is a lot for individuals to do.

One of the consequences of the President's race initiative is that we were reminded once again how often people just don't spend time with others who are unlike themselves in any meaningful way.

We actually went around and did some discussions with people and we would ask: How many of you have ever had a meal in the home of someone of a different race? And there would be very few hands that went up. We would say: How many of you have ever worked on a common community project with somebody of a different race? How many have ever visited a house of worship of somebody from a different religion?

So there are many ways that, on an individual basis, we can do more to break down the barriers of indifference and otherness. And they're not big things, they don't grab headlines. But I remember being so struck by the woman who used to be my chief of staff, named Maggie Williams, who is an African American woman, who, in the process of talking about this one day, said how she remembered when her mother, who was a teacher, became friends at the workplace at a school with a woman who is a white teacher. And they were determined to try to model this kind of behavior, so they were going to eat dinner at each other's house. And it was a simple thing and some people made fun of them for doing it.

And Maggie said, you know, my family didn't want to go, my mother made us go. We'd never been in a white person's house before, we didn't know what to expect. She said it was the beginning of breaking down a lot of my own stereotypes.

So it's not just what whites feel about blacks. It's what blacks feel about whites; it's what Hispanics from different kinds of backgrounds feel about each other. We can just go group by group.

And so the more we can break that down, so that then you can say to children and young people, this doesn't -- being tolerant doesn't mean you have to like everybody. There are people just in the course of human life you're not going to like, but you will show respect to everyone. You will have a feeling that that person has as much right to his or her beliefs and her or his place in America as you do. And it's that kind of education -- not just what goes on in a classroom, but what happens in a home, what happens in a religious upbringing -- that is really important to how we deal with this in the future.

MS. LOVELL: Well, last we'll hear from Father Drew Christianson, Senior Fellow at Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University and Counselor for the U.S. Catholic Conference.

FR. CHRISTIANSON: Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, thank you for this wonderful Millennium Evening, and thank you for an extraordinary seminar. And I hope when you leave the White House you both will teach, because you're wonderful teachers.

Mr. Wiesel, thank you for sharing your wisdom and giving your witness once again this evening. At the end of your talk, your very last phrase was go into the new millennium with an extraordinary hope. The question I have for each of you is that given the carnage and inhumanity we've seen in this century, and even, somewhat unexpectedly, in this decade, whence comes that extraordinary hope?

MR. WIESEL: It comes from hopelessness. Albert Camus, the French philosopher, said, where there is no hope, we must invent it. And there was no hope.

In truth -- hope in what? Faith in hope. Culture? Do you know that over in Auschwitz, "Arbeit Macht Frei," which was their famous -- infamous, "Arbeit" -- do you know where it comes from? From Hegel, the great philosopher. One of the greatest philosophers in Germany. Hegel.

So why should we believe in them? The Einsatzkommanders -- the leaders, the commanders, all of them, or most of them, at least, had college degrees, and some of them had Ph.D.'s and M.D.'s. That's culture? That's education? For what? And we say it's because there was no hope, we must invent it. It's all in our hands.

But since this is the last question, I don't like answers, but I like stories. So I'll tell you a story. (Laughter.) The story is, how to fight indifference, really, is to assume it and to take it as something that belongs to me, and for me to deal with it.

The story is that once upon a time there was an emperor, and the emperor heard that in his empire there was a man, a wise man with occult powers. He had all the powers in the world. He knew when the wind was blowing what messages it would carry from one country to another. He read the clouds and he realized that the clouds had a design. He knew the meaning of that design.

He heard the birds. He understood the language of the birds, the chirping of the birds carried messages. And then he heard there was a man who also knew how to read another person's mind. I want to see him, said the emperor. They found him. They brought him to the emperor. Is it true that you know how to read the clouds? Yes, Majesty. Is it true you know the language of the birds? Yes, Majesty. What about the wind? Yes, I know. Okay, says the emperor. I have in my hands behind my back a bird. Tell me, is it alive or not?

And the wise man was so afraid that whatever he would say would be a tragedy, that if he were to say that the bird is alive, the emperor, in spite, would kill it. So he looked at the emperor for a

long time, smiled, and said, Majesty, the answer is in your hands. (Laughter.)

It's always in our hands.

MS. LOVELL: Well, Juan and others, so many stories that won't get told tonight, but thank you.

And Mr. President, your final remarks.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there's much to say, except to thank you again for once again giving us your witness and for the powerful example of your life. We thank your family for joining us. And I thank all of you for caring about this.

I believe there's grounds for hope. I think the history of this country is evidence. I think the civil rights movement is evidence. I think the life and triumph of Nelson Mandela is evidence. I think evidence abounds.

What we all have to remember is somehow how to strike the proper balance of passion and humility. I think our guest tonight has done it magnificently, and I thank him. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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