

**Hillary Rodham Clinton**  
Closing General Session Speech  
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Hello. Thank you all so much. Thank you. I am so, so excited to be back here in Chicago for this occasion. Not only because this is the city I was born in and raised in, but because I really owe a lot to libraries and librarians. And any chance I can take to come and say thank you, I am so glad to do.

I want to thank Dr. Julie Todaro [ALA president, 2016–2017] for her leadership. I saw her backstage, and I said, “The phrase *madam president* is still one of my favorites.”

And I want to congratulate ALA’s new president Jim Neal, who’s taking the helm at such an important moment. I’d also like to thank Jon Anderson, president and publisher of Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing, because in a minute I will say a word about the children’s version of *It Takes a Village* that will come out this fall. But mostly to be back here with librarians, authors, educators, people who come together every single year to learn from each other, swap stories, debate the fine points of archiving and internet privacy. And of course try out some new apps. And then go home with heavy suitcases bursting with books. What could be better than that?

And it’s because you love books, and I’m so happy to be in such a gathering of people who love learning, who love to communicate about that, and I thought much over the last few weeks as I’ve been working to finish my most recent book, which will explore what happened in the 2016 election and what we need to know about ongoing threats to our democracy. So it will also give readers an idea of what it’s really like to run for president, especially if you’re a woman. And there’s a lot to that, not just hair and makeup.

But ultimately it’s about resilience, how to get back up after a loss, and I think that’s something we can all relate to. It is the most personal book I’ve written. I am looking forward to sharing it with you and readers, because I know it doesn’t have all the answers to every problem we face as a country, but I think it’s important that we begin a conversation about who we are and what we stand for and the values we hold dear. You probably get a lot of questions about that. And I want to

share three reasons today why I believe we need you. We need libraries and librarians now more than ever.

First, reading changes lives. Whether it's old-fashioned books or e-readers, wherever it is. I can remember the first time I got a library card. I was so excited. As a little girl I was always reading something, from *Nancy Drew* to *Little Women* to James Michener, and when I got that library card, it felt like I'd been handed a passport to the world.

And over the years my love of reading has seen me through good times and hard times. After this election, one of the things that helped me most—aside from long walks in the woods and the occasional glass of chardonnay—was once again going back to the familiar experience of losing myself in books. I finished Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels. I devoured mysteries by Louise Penny, Donna Leon, Jacqueline Winspear, Charles Todd. I reread old favorites like Henri Nouwen's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, poetry of Maya Angelou and Mary Oliver. I was riveted by *The Jersey Brothers* and a new book of essays called *The View from Flyover Country*, which turned out to be especially relevant in the midst of our current health care debate. And I've enjoyed making my way through the growing stack of books people have sent me, often with notes that say things like, "This one helped me; I hope it will help you."

Now, 20 years ago, I wrote a book of my own called *It Takes a Village*. And I did it because I thought we needed a debate about what it is children need to grow and prosper, how we can help create villages that help support parenting and families. I believe more fiercely than ever in that message. You see, I don't think anyone can build a business or heal a community or lift a country or really do anything in life worth doing all by ourselves. I really do believe we are stronger together.

Now that may not have carried the day this past election, but I think it does stand the test of time. We have to come together in our communities, in our villages, if you will. And we have to set priorities about what's really important—not the passing fancy on reality TV—but what's really important to us as human beings, as Americans. And so I am thrilled that *It Takes a Village* will be published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers as an all-new, full-color picture book with illustrations by the phenomenal Marla Frazee, and I have a copy right here.

I'm obviously excited for you to read it, but I have to confess I'm most looking forward to reading it with my grandchildren because some of my most treasured memories are of Bill and me reading to Chelsea when she was little, and now we

love watching her and her husband, Marc, read some of those same books to Charlotte and Aidan. You know: *Curious George* and *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* and so many others. I have to do a shameless plug for my daughter's own wonderful children's book, *She Persisted*, about 13 American women who overcame the odds stacked against them.

Now, we know that scientists can literally watch the synapses and neurons firing when parents read, talk, and sing with their children. It helps our youngest learners start to understand words, build vocabularies, develop their brains. But every day economic pressures on parents often translate to less time reading and talking and singing with the children in their homes.

And statistics show that only about one in three low-income children are read to on a daily basis in their first 2 years of life. We know what that means. By 4 years of age, children in lower-income families have heard 30 million fewer words than their more affluent counterparts. Think of that. Thirty million fewer words. And because they hear fewer words, they often learn fewer words. That means they begin school with smaller vocabularies and then struggle to catch up. Coming to school without words is like coming to school without having had dinner the night before or breakfast in the morning. It makes it harder for kids to develop their creativity and their imagination, to learn, to excel, to live up to their own God-given potential. And it *can* have lifelong consequences. So reading is not just a nice thing to do; it's how we help give our children the best possible start in life. And if we're serious about raising curious, empathetic, brave citizens, that starts with raising readers.

Books really do help us understand one another, help us consider perspectives we may not have thought about before, shatter stereotypes, mark important conversations about all kinds of issues. And years of data suggest that reading fiction builds empathy. It helps us put ourselves in others' shoes. One study even found that young people who read the Harry Potter books—which first came out 20 years ago this week—were more compassionate toward immigrants, refugees, and members of the LGBT community.

And so it's impossible for me to overstate the impact on children who see themselves in the pages of a book and are introduced to people unlike themselves in the pages of a book, and then are inspired to dream a little bigger.

I know I certainly remember scanning my history books for every sentence—and it usually was just one or two—about women in history. Harriet Tubman or Abigail

Adams or Amelia Earhart. And that's why I was so thrilled to learn about little [11-year-old Marley Dias](#), who noticed there were no characters in her books who looked like her. And she started the campaign known as [1000 Black Girl Books](#) and launched a national conversation. Marley and organizations like We Need Diverse Books are doing crucial work.

But as influential as reading is, putting the right books in the right hands is only one part of your job. So that brings me to the second reason. We need libraries more than ever because they are places for communities to come together. You see this every day. Libraries are one of the few places in America shared by people of every income, race, background, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, everybody is there. And at a time when 70% of teachers decide that homework requires the internet, and you have 5 million kids who don't have access to the internet at home, the library becomes an irreplaceable resource for those children. And so it is stunning to think about everything that goes on in a community library.

A few years ago I visited the Queens Library in Flushing, Queens, New York. And part of the reason I did was because Queens County, which is one of the boroughs of New York City, is the most diverse place in our country. And it was packed with people from all over the world looking for information in dozens of different languages. There were resources for veterans and voters, summer reading programs and coding camps. There were papers and primary source documents that made history come alive. It was thrilling to me to see people using the library as they were.

The library is a place for aspiring entrepreneurs to work, to delve into data and resources to help get their businesses off the ground. You can drop by so many local libraries for résumé writing workshops and job training sessions. And so now more than ever, libraries are a place where immigrants and refugees can come to learn English, to know their rights, to get advice. And for a young person growing up in a small town, the library can be a lifeline, a place to feel supported and to know they're not alone.

When an elementary school in Wisconsin recently canceled an event in support of a transgender student because they received threats from a hate group, it was the local public library that stepped up to host a reading [I Am Jazz](#) for 600 people. What a powerful message that sent. Because as librarians you go above and beyond every single day to serve the needs of the people living in your communities.

I know that many of you read the story this weekend of a 33-year-old young adult librarian in Philadelphia, who became trained to administer naloxone, which is the drug antidote that can help reverse [heroin overdoses](#). So when someone collapses near her library, she is the person they call. She has saved six people's lives since April. And how smart it was for the library system in Philadelphia to know that because of where libraries are situated and who comes to libraries, training librarians to be literal lifesavers made sense. Now that's an extraordinary story, but I bet everyone in this room can point to a time when you may have found yourself in the role of conflict mediator, therapist, or social worker.

I can remember my library growing up in Park Ridge, and the librarians were often the only adults beside your teachers and your parents and the parents of your friends that you knew. And so you trusted them to give you advice about what you would like to read. Our elementary school always had one of these reading programs where you had the segments of the caterpillar. And you'd read a book and then you'd get a sticker or they'd color it in. Or maybe the wings of a butterfly—the same sort of thing. And the librarians were so encouraging: “Well you've got like 10 more segments to go. What do you want to read today?”

The third reason why we need libraries is because we need critical thinkers more than ever. Long before fake news and alternative facts were familiar terms, librarians were teaching media literacy. In libraries and classrooms across the country, you helped learners of all ages sort out truth from fiction and how to build an argument based on rational evidence. As my predecessor in the senate from New York, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, used to say, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not his own facts.” Or to borrow a quote from one librarian's media literacy lesson, quote, “Be careful what you read on the internet,” unquote, Abraham Lincoln, 1868.

So as librarians I just want to say what you know, you are guardians of the First Amendment and the freedom to read and to speak. You stand up to censorship by highlighting banned and challenged books, because we should all be reading books that challenge us. The work you do is at the heart of an open, inclusive, diverse society.

I believe that libraries and democracy go hand in hand. That's why it's so hard to believe that in 2017 in America, libraries are actually under attack from our own government. I'm told that even here at this conference, some of you had to duck out of sessions to call Congress and urge them not to eliminate federal funding for

libraries. The administration has proposed doing so in the budget, and that is not only shortsighted, it is deeply disturbing. It's like something out of *Fahrenheit 451*, a book you can't keep on your shelves lately.

And it's not just libraries, it's also the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. That would have a disproportionate adverse impact on rural and underserved communities.

And that's why as librarians, once again, you have to be on the front lines of one of the most important fights we have ever faced in the history of our country, the fight to defend truth and reason, evidence and facts. And you have to help us wage that fight one book at a time, one library at a time, one person at a time.

I am here today because of great public schools, great educators, the Park Ridge Public Library, the encouragement I received throughout my childhood, not just at home but in school and at the library—to be exposed to a great wealth of great books. In 1st grade, Miss Taylor read us *Winnie the Pooh* every single day from September to June. I remember that the poems Mrs. King taught us in 6th grade to teach us about nouns and verbs. And later my youth minister at our Methodist church opened my eyes to the wider world by sharing excerpts from Dostoyevksy, Niebuhr, and T. S. Eliot.

Every one of you could probably tell similar stories, and so could millions of the rest of our countrymen and women. So please, know how important what you do day in and day out is. Sparking someone's love of learning, changing the course of a life, standing up for the freedom to read, to learn. Nothing is more important than that in a free society.

So even when it's hard, even when it feels thankless, please know you are making a difference. I think we are facing some very challenging times, and we all have to rise to the occasion. This goes far beyond any kind of political party or partisan feeling. It really does go to who we are as Americans. What we stand for. The values that we've inherited and that we will pass along. So I thank you. I thank you for believing in the work you do. I thank you for standing up against assaults on the right to read, to learn, even that which is unpopular and maybe even unpalatable. Don't give up. You not only are standing on behalf of those with whom you work and those you serve; you're really standing up for tens of millions of others who need your advocacy, your voice, your quiet commitment. I'm with you. I know how important this work is, and I look forward to supporting you in the years to come.

Thank you all very much.