

Remarks of

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*Can I Make A Difference?  
Your Call to Civic Engagement: Locally and Globally*

Good Morning Women of Bennett College. Thank you for the invitation to be with you today. How fortunate you are to be educated at this historic institution. How fortunate I am to be here, meeting with you in the historic Annie Merner Pfeiffer Chapel.

*"Loving your country must mean accepting your responsibility to do your part to change it. If you do, your life will be richer, and our country will be stronger."* Senator Barack Obama, July 2, 2008, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

*"The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward...the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."* President Barack Obama, Inauguration Speech, January 20, 2009, Washington, DC.

Citizen participation is steeped in the history of Bennett College and embedded in the design of the ACES program. Bennett College is preparing you to be an informed and active citizen in today's world. The ACES program seeks to develop your spirit of community participation. But your preparation for today's world did not start with Bennett and it will not end here. It started before your earliest memory and will continue every day for the rest of your life.

Bennett has invested in your development to be an informed citizen with the expectation that you will invest in your future development as a citizen of the world. The challenge for you is to find your community spirit, and to nurture and develop the unique You who believes that Yes, I can and "Yes, we can" bring change for the betterment of all.

*"It is not the individuals that matter but the collective (we)... In life, every (one) has twin obligations – obligations to his family...and to his people, his community, his country. In a civil and humane society, each (man) is able to fulfill those obligations according to his own inclinations and abilities."* The Honorable Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*.

America is the greatest Democracy on earth. It provides the values, the hopes and the tools we need for a civil society. Democracy and civil society are fundamentally intertwined. The strength of a Democracy is supported by civil society. Civil society is

dependent on effective citizenship. Effective citizenship is fostered by an educated and informed citizenry, which is committed to be engaged in our communities.

We seek change but not just for the sake of change. Rather, we seek change in America to strengthen our Democracy. We seek change for the betterment of our citizens at home and our neighbors around the globe.

*“...our two nations (Liberia and the United States) have shared a common past. It is time to think about new ways to build together for the future – not only to rebuild Liberia, but also to work, in partnership, for a global community that enjoys all the blessings we seek for ourselves. And...if we truly seek a peaceful and just world, we must systemically enhance women’s access to – and participation in – decision-making processes. But while women assume their rightful positions of leadership, both domestically and internationally, we must not forget that the poorest and least educated people everywhere are women and children.”* The Honorable Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, Africa’s first elected female head of state, October 18, 2006, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Global poverty is a glaring and persistent example of a change we need. Poverty undermines Democracy. We cannot afford to have Democracy weakened anywhere in the world. The solutions to poverty are many but it takes the human resources of a committed citizenry to achieve the solutions. I submit to you that yes, you can make a difference to help eradicate poverty and bring about a world of change.

It does not matter if you work in government or the corporate sector. It does not matter if you work in the nonprofit sector or at home. What matters is that you commit to make a difference in every way that you can. It does not matter if you achieve this commitment through a paid job or as a volunteer. What matters is that you discover and articulate your passion. Embrace that passion and put it to work for the betterment of our world. Conduct a self assessment and discover the unique You who will contribute to the betterment of human kind – at home and across the globe.

This is, perhaps, the ideal time to find your place in civil society. The challenges we face today are enormous. They are almost overwhelming. But you aren’t afraid to tackle problems because you are a Bennett Woman. You know that the opportunities for positive social change and economic growth are everywhere. Financial resources may be limited right now but our human resources are many. You know that people make the difference and yes, you know that you can make a difference because you are a Bennett Woman.

I stand here knowing that beginning today, America and indeed the world will be dependent on your leadership, your ideals, your values and your commitment to a better universe. We need you to proceed to the future with unlimited vision. We need you to accept and embrace the challenge to make a difference – at home and across the globe. Yes, you can make a difference. You are a Bennett Belle.