

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At 164th Celebration of National Flag Day
Monrovia City Hall
Wednesday, August 24, 2011

(Delivered extemporaneously and transcribed)

As I look at all the young faces here, it puts me back into the time I was in your place, when I was going to high school like you. Let me tell you what a day, what one day in my life, at your age, was like.

Got up in the morning about 5:30; first thing you do, you make up your bed. You're lucky if you got mattress, because plenty time you got the straw one, you have to stir that straw to make sure it was smooth. After that, you go down and you have prayers. Your mother and father made sure you had prayers in the morning. Then you do your share of the cleaning up. You got to do some sweeping; some people have to pull water, whatever it is; then you get dressed for school.

By 7:00, I see the people from CWA; that's where I was going. 7:00, that first bell rings. 7:15, the second bell rings. If you finish your chores at home, then you start on that walk to be able to get to school. And if you go, and your Ma finds your bed not made up, she sends you back to go and make it up.

7:15, that second bell rings; 7:25, they had what they called the hand bell, and if you still walking to school, you start to run, because by 7:30, that door is closed and if you not there, you go back home. And when you go back home, you going get your beating, because you didn't finish up to get to school on time.

And so, then, when you go to class, the first thing you do is to go inside the auditorium. You go into the auditorium, again there's a small prayer and your pledge allegiance to the flag. You had to do that before you got into the classroom.

Then you go into the classroom, of course, one class to the other. Discipline, paying attention! I remember one time I had chewing gum in my mouth, chewing, chewing, chewing. The teacher stood there

and looked there and said, who chewing gum in here? Of course, you try to hold it under your tongue so nobody can see it. And so what he said was, “a gum-chewing girl and a cud-chewing cow, seems to me there’s a difference somehow: it’s the intelligent look on the face of the cow.” Wow! I don’t eat chewing gum anymore, because every time I want to take chewing gum, I think about the cow going like this....

Midday, you go and break; you go to the cafeteria. In the afternoon, you do some volleyball; you do some physical education and all of that. Then you get back home to have your lunch, and in the afternoon you’re going either to music class, or to typing class, or to some kind of class to make sure that the whole body, the character, is made. That’s what the old people did to us; that’s what got us where we are today.

There were no video shops, there were no hatai shops. Those are the modern things that you enjoy, and they have their own values – the opportunity to sit and talk. But some of those old-fashioned values, we need to bring them back.

You know, if you made noise in class, they sent you to the office and you go sit in the office. Sometimes, you got to pump tire. You know what they call pump tire? I don’t know if I’m able to do it self, but you put your fingers like this, and you go down and come up. Or they said pick pin; that one, you had to stand on one foot and put one finger on the ground. But those things made us strong, they really did.

The other day, many of you know, the President of Botswana visited us and he and I were talking and talking about discipline in the schools. He said, “Well, in Botswana, we still use the cane. We still cane students.” I said wow! Today, in today’s world, you still canning students? He said, “Yes.” I said, but how about the human rights people, they don’t jump down on you? He said, “The medical people told us not to cane anymore on the back because, you know, you could harm the child. But we still cane on the buttocks and today, the very human rights people you’re talking about, they call Botswana the most exemplary State in Africa.”

I didn’t say we will do it, oh. I didn’t tell them anything; I’m just talking about discipline. He also told me, “You know, we still got death sentence on the books.” I say, we too, but the human rights

people in all the Scandinavian countries are after us. We must make sure we abolish capital punishment. He said, "Well, in Botswana, you take a life, we stand to take yours." Oh! That one, they don't like that one! We're on the books, but we are very judicious about it, we don't believe in that too. But it just to show you that the best performing country in Africa, by any measurement, is a country that instills discipline, and that we ask when there's an infraction of the laws of the rules of the land.

To you: for your own progress, for your own future, for your own professionalism, some of those old standing habits, like respect for others, like preparing your lessons, by making sure you go to school on time, and in school you apply yourself with discipline. Those are the things that build character. Those are the things that set you up in a place where you will achieve what you want to in this world. Those are the things that will make you successful where you can compete, not only in Liberia, but anywhere in the world, and you can be what you want to be.

God bless you!