



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Mayor Rahm Emanuel

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Chicago Theater

As prepared for delivery

Honored guests, Clerk Mendoza, Treasurer Summers, Members of the new City Council, neighbors and friends.

I want to thank the residents of the City of Chicago for the opportunity to serve our city for another four years. More importantly, I want to take this opportunity to thank Amy, my first love and our city's First Lady as well as our three children, Zachariah, Ilana, and Leah for their love, their support, and their patience.

I want to thank my parents for giving me a good education and the values that have guided me throughout my life.

I also want to thank President Clinton for being here. It was a privilege to work for him but also to have learned so much from him. I am honored to call him both a friend and a mentor as well.

I want to thank Mayor Daley – who has served Chicago with passion and dedication throughout his time in public life.

I want to also congratulate the members of the new City Council. We have a lot of important work to do together.

Four years ago, I was privileged and humbled to take the oath of office as the 55th Mayor of the City of Chicago.

In my Inaugural Address, I told the people of Chicago that it was time to take on the challenges that threatened our future: from strong schools to safe streets to stable finances, to the urgent need to create more jobs and economic growth.

While we have made progress in each of these areas, we have more work to do.

Each of these issues will receive plenty of attention on a daily basis over the next four years. That we can be assured of.

They will be the subject of major stories, press conferences, and commentary. And I will continue to spell out specific ideas on how to address them, just as I have done over the past four years.

This includes continuing to address our pressing pension and fiscal challenges. While we address these challenges from the past head-on, I will not lose sight nor the will to continue to build a stronger future.

Building that stronger future for Chicago requires us to focus on a difficult subject that is too often ignored in our civic conversation. It is ignored precisely because it is so hard to talk about.

So today, as we inaugurate the stewards of our city for the next four years, I want to use this moment to shine a spotlight on preventing another lost generation of our city's youth.

We all know who they are, although it is easier and sometimes more convenient to ignore them.

Many are born into poverty. Many come from broken homes. And many have been on their own from early on.

As a result, many of them drop out of school and are jobless. I have met these young men and women throughout the city. Many of them lack the spark of hope in their eyes that we would never accept in our own children.

But I have also met and talked to young men and women who are changing the direction of their lives with help from mentoring programs like One Summer Chicago, After School Matters, and Becoming a Man – known as BAM.

I first encountered the youth participating in BAM during a visit to Harper High School in February of 2013. I participated in the BAM circle. Since then, I have become a believer in BAM's work because I have seen its lasting impact.

I told President Obama about it. Nine days later, when the President was visiting Chicago, I joined him at Hyde Park Academy where he sat in his own BAM circle.

I have met participants in a similar program for young women called Working on Womanhood – or WOW – at Bowen High School.

BAM and WOW work with young men and women on basic values and behaviors that most of us take for granted – things we learned from our families, from our teachers, from our coaches, and from our mentors.

BAM has had remarkable success. Participating youth are far less likely to enter or re-enter the criminal justice system. And they stand a far better chance of staying in school and reaching graduation day.

But it touches only a small fraction of the young men looking for role models and families in their lives.

The faces of these lost and unconnected young men are often invisible – until we see them in a mug shot as the victim or perpetrator of a senseless crime.

Their existence is avoided rather than confronted. They live in the shadows of our cities – and in the recesses of our minds. But we must make them ever-present in our conversation.

Too many of them become the victims of their circumstances. They lack connection to the values and experiences that most of us treasure: a parent's affection, a teacher's praise, a coach's encouragement, and an employer's appreciation.

They have to make their own way in life, and their options are limited.

But what we know is that their circumstances do not have to define them. In each of them is the spark of the Divine.

Because of their circumstances, we often fail to recognize their humanity and their potential. And worse, they often fail to recognize it in themselves.

Therefore the question for all of us is how to provide these young men and women with a sense of godliness, a sense of purpose, and a sense of their potential.

Some argue that the answer is more money for more government programs. Others argue that the answer is better values through more parental involvement and spiritual guidance.

It is time we stop talking past each other and join together for solutions. The young people that we are losing cannot wait for an endless political debate to be resolved.

As someone who has dedicated much of his life to public service and believes in government as an affirmative force, I readily admit that government is no substitute for involved parents or other role models. Government is not set up to provide a moral compass to our lives.

Nonetheless, many of us have supported these programs over the years because we have seen their impact.

From Head Start to quality early childhood education. From neo-natal care to nutritional support. From the children's health insurance program to Obamacare. From strong schools to strong after-school and summer jobs programs.

While they are not a replacement for involved parents, at best, they provide working parents with the confidence of knowing that their children are safe and supervised by responsible adults who care about them.

The adolescents I am addressing are often untouched by government programs. Their school is the street and their teachers are the gangs.

When young men and women join gangs in search of self-worth, we as a city must and can do better. When young men and women turn to lives of crime for hope, we as a city must and can do better. When prison is the place we send young boys to become men, we as a city must and can do better.

And when too many of our neighborhoods see a sign on the American Dream that says “Do Not Enter”, we as a city must and can do better. We cannot afford to deny another generation of adolescents the values, expectations, and opportunities that the rest of society and the rest of our city share as a common foundation.

We see broken families and broken communities, broken politics and broken spirits across the land – and too often, we turn the other way. These problems did not originate in Chicago, but because of our unique history of civic engagement, Chicago is uniquely positioned to point the way to the solution.

But the answer will not be found alone in the programs i have mentioned. Above all, these young lives cry out for hope, purpose, and faith.

These disconnected youth must believe that there is a place for them, too – in a family, a place of worship, a school, or on any porch or in any office in our city. They deserve the chance to prove that they are not defined by their circumstance or station. They may have been born in poverty, but poverty was not born in them.

They deserve to know that we can see their value and potential. And, even more important for their own success, they must learn to see it in themselves. They deserve a city that has great expectations for them – something beyond an endless cycle of poverty, violence and despair around them.

This is our challenge as a society – and as a city. No longer can we tolerate leaving so many young people behind.

I do not pretend to have all of the answers. The solution though starts in each of us.

Over the next four years, I will do everything in my power to spark hope in the eyes of every Chicagoan. We will keep increasing wages and attracting more jobs. We will continue working to make our streets safer, our schools stronger, and provide more opportunities for our families.

We will work harder than ever to restore trust where it is broken and opportunity where it is lost.

But today I challenge every citizen of this great city: You must do your part, too.

Be a role model for the young people in your life. Share the values that made you who you are with someone who wants to grow up to be like you. Give an adolescent who was born without a prayer his first prayer at getting ahead. Find a way to let young men, invisible for too long, see hope, belief, and expectation in your eyes.

I hope you will join me this Friday by participating in our citywide Night of Faith and Action to reclaim our streets for our families.

I am confident that we can do these things – even in a time of fiscal challenges.

We all need to do more for our young people who are economically and spiritually hungry.

And we must come to realize that this is not just a problem for certain communities. Anything that stunts the hopes and opportunities of thousands of young Chicagoans undermines our entire city's future.

The truth is that years of silence and inaction have walled off a portion of our city. It is time to stop turning our heads and turning the channel. It is time for each of us to start breaking down those walls.

We cannot abandon our most vulnerable children to the gang and the gun. They have the potential and the desire to be so much more.

So let me say a word to young people growing up in Chicago:

We owe you a better chance – and you owe it to yourself and your family to make the most of it. We will never give up on you, so do not give up on yourself.

Some may say that these children cannot be saved or it is their fate in life to fail.

I refuse to accept that we cannot help these children create a stronger future – and neither should you. Because I have seen successes along the way.

We can be inspired by the examples of these young men, themselves – young men like Marcus Norris.

When he was nine years old, Marcus was sitting in his house, watching TV. A random gunshot came through the window and knocked out four of his teeth.

For the next nine years, Marcus went through life too embarrassed to smile. He never told his teachers what had happened to him. When Marcus joined BAM, his mentor, Timothy Jackson, finally got Marcus to share his secret. Timothy took it upon himself to raise money for dental surgery for Marcus.

Already, Marcus was able to smile for his graduation photo. And he will be wearing a big smile at his upcoming graduation ceremony at Fulton High School. His dream is to enter a college culinary program and one day to become a chef.

Marcus – all of Chicago is smiling with you today.

Or we can take a page from the young men of Phillips Academy, a Chicago public high school with 600 students in Bronzeville.

Seven members of the football team were homeless. Yet, despite these odds, the Wildcats became the first team from CPS to make the state title game in 32 years.

Or we can look to the young men at Urban Prep Academy. Just the other day, I went to Urban Prep to celebrate their sixth straight year of having 100 percent four-year college acceptance for their students.

This year, they have six Gates Millennium Scholars, making them the school with the most African American male Gates Scholars in the country.

To all of those cynics who only show up when there is a basketball shot or a gunshot, either in triumph or in tragedy, the young men of Urban Prep prove you wrong. They prove why you should never bet against the children of the City of Chicago.

These and other stories are about unremarkable people doing remarkable things. They should persuade us that there is nothing wrong with Chicago that cannot be fixed by what is right with Chicago.

With a little show of love, a little attention and support, we can help our young people to make better choices in life.

So today, as stewards of our city's future, let us rededicate ourselves to that purpose. With Spring upon us, let this be our season of renewal.

A generation of children needs our city to stand up for them. For those children, and for our city, let us today answer that call.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless Chicago.