

**Pueblo of Acoma**  
**Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico**  
**May 21, 1999**

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

**Pueblo of Acoma**  
**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

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Thank you very much, Governor [Tortalita]. For all the officials, lieutenant governors, other governors, chairmen of the council—all who represent the people of Acoma and the other pueblos. And particularly to the people who are gathered here and who have given me such a warm welcome.

I am honored to be in this beautiful and sacred place. (Applause.) I know how deeply those of you who live here feel about your community. I could see it when I visited the school and saw the children learning their native Pueblo language. I could see it as I toured the old pueblo and visited the mission. I know that living in the oldest continuously inhabited community in the entire United States is a great privilege and I salute you for it. (Applause.)

Today we celebrate the work that we are doing together to highlight and recognize America's treasures. You have heard from Peter Chapin, who represents the Cornerstones partnership group that has worked so hard to save adobe churches all over New Mexico. You've heard from Dick Moe, who has, as the head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, also worked very hard to raise public awareness of the treasures we have. And I'm glad that we could be joined today by Kevin Gover, the Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.

I know that many of you have worked for many years to ensure that the culture and traditions and history of Acoma are preserved for your children and your children's children and for generations to come. That's especially important as we celebrate the end of a century and a millennium. After all, at the time of the first millennium, you were the only Americans here. (Applause.) And when we talk about "Saving America's Treasures," we have to begin by saving the first Americans' treasures. (Applause.)

One only has to walk into that beautiful church and to know that it was built with the hard labor of hundreds and hundreds of men—men who worked day and night to build that church because they were ordered to do so. But something happened there. And when the rebellion occurred, you saved that church, didn't you? You understood its importance and significance for yourselves and for generations to come.

I think of the words of the poet Simon Ortiz, who was born in this very place. Some of you may know his writings. Here is what he said:

We must ensure that life continues.  
We must be responsible to that life;  
With that humanity and the strength

Which comes from our shared responsibility  
For this life, the people shall continue.

We can see clearly here how the circle of life continues passing down from one generation to next the lessons that have been learned.

I saw, for example, the powerful movements of the traditional buffalo dancers. I heard with great loving description how they had trained. And how they knew they were doing the same steps that had been done so many times, so many years before. I see it in the extraordinary pottery that you are so well known for—the designs, the meaning, the workmanship, the artistry. Again, continuing traditions, but not just continuing exactly what had been done before but adding on to them, making them yours, investing them with new meaning.

When the President started the White House Millennium Council, he and I knew that we wanted to be sure to take this time of a changing century and millennium to think about who we are as a people; to consider the traditions that we do value. And so we adopted a theme. It's on the plaques that we gave to each of the representatives of the pueblos: "Honor the past; imagine the future." Well, every day in so many ways, you honor the past. But you also live in the present and are imagining and are building a better future.

I want to thank the Governor for taking this opportunity to discuss the needs that this community has, particularly the need for education. Because it is very important that we do all we can to make sure that every child born here has the best education that he or she can obtain. (Applause.) We also know that there is a lot of work that has to be done in order to make life better in this community. Whether it is economic development or health care, there is much that we should be working on together. And I will take your message, as I'm sure the Assistant Secretary shall, back to Washington, Mr. Governor, and be sure that the people there hear your words as you delivered them to me. (Applause.)

I'm very pleased that we are gathered here to honor one of the great treasures of the United States. This church, which you have guarded and taken such good care of, really is something that represents not only your history and culture, but the diversity of American history and culture. As a nation we owe you a debt of gratitude for helping to preserve this extraordinary church. And to thank you also for maintaining the documents and historic pieces of art that it holds. I stood in the sanctuary of that church and I was just overwhelmed at its beauty. And I could see in my mind's eye the many festivals and events and important occasions that have taken place there. And I could understand just a little bit why you have worked so hard to keep this treasure alive.

To help you, I am pleased to announce today a \$75,000 gift from the Cornerstones Community Partnership to the Pueblo of Acoma to help address the preservation needs of this extraordinary church and convent. (Applause.) This will be the first major restoration effort since the church was constructed over 350 years ago. And it will be a unique collaboration because it will bring together the elders and the young. It will have those of you that have been working so hard for so long being helped by young people who will be trained and given the skills to do this work.

It will reinforce the traditions and the culture that are at the heart of this community. What Cornerstones believes is the same that this community believes: that you must invest in your young people, you must give them the tools so that they can build better lives for themselves.

Last evening I was privileged in Santa Fe to meet some of the young men and women who are working with Cornerstones projects around New Mexico. I met one young man who has been working on a church and learning while he did his GED—gaining new confidence, emerging as a leader, being hired by Cornerstones and now running crews that train other young people to preserve adobe. That is what I hope will happen here many, many times over. So that the elders and the young together will deepen the traditions and the values that this community and this church represent.

I'm very pleased to be a part of making this announcement. And I want to add that my husband remains committed to doing what he can in his remaining time as president to make possible greater investments in young people—particularly young Native Americans. (Applause.) We will continue to invest in Tribal schools, to boost economic development, and work to improve the well-being of families. I'm very proud of the President's strong commitment to preserving and strengthening the government-to-government relationship. We have a lot of work to do today in order to make good on all of our hopes and dreams.

Tomorrow is a historic day in New Mexico and in the United States as the remains of more than 2,000 Pecos Pueblo Indians and burial objects will return to rest in their ancestral lands. (Applause.) I know how much this means to you and how long you have waited for this day. I want you to know how grateful the President and I are, as well, that this day has finally come to pass.

Today we pay tribute to all those ancestors—everyone who has come before to help create this extraordinary place that inspires so many of us today. And yet we do not just look backwards, do we? We face the future with the kind of energy and commitment that led those ancestors to establish that pueblo on that mesa. Think of how hard that was. When I think of the challenges that face us today as we move into this new century, they are not of the physical kind that confronted your ancestors and so many others. But in some ways they are even harder, aren't they? Because they require us to use our minds to be creative, to work together, to build new relationships which sometimes are just as hard as building a church.

So while we honor the past, let us bring those values that we honor to the present. Let us build on them and then let us work to imagine and create a better future—a future where the boys and girls that I saw in the school and that I walked between as they danced, will always know who they are and where they came from, but will be able to make choices and fulfill their responsibilities to build better lives for themselves and their families. That is my hope and my wish, and I am grateful that you have shared this day with me. I will never forget it. Thank you very much. (Applause.)