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ARTS & HUMANITIES CEREMONY

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For Immediate Release

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
AND THE FIRST LADY  
AT THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON  
THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES CEREMONY

The East Room

4:56 P.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you and please be seated.

It is a great pleasure for the President and I to welcome all of you to the White House. We are very pleased and proud of this committee and are grateful to all who agreed to serve, and are particularly grateful to Dr. Brademas for taking on the job of being the chair; the distinguished vice-chairs; and everyone who has been willing to take their time for this commitment.

We believe this is an important day for those of us who care deeply about American culture. It's important not only because this committee has so much potential to do good in ways that will affect the lives of Americans, but also by focusing particularly in providing hopeful and productive outlets for our children.

We want to support and nurture our artists and humanists and the traditions that they represent. And we want also to bring those traditions alive for literally millions and millions of children who too often grow up without opportunities for creative expression; without opportunities for intellectual stimulation; without exposure to the diverse cultural traditions that contribute to our identity as Americans.

Too often today, instead of children discovering the joyful rewards of painting, or music, or sculpting, or writing, or testing a new idea, they express themselves through acts of frustration, helplessness, hopelessness and even violence.

We see too clearly how an erosion and breakdown of our most cherished institutions has resulted in a fraying of the whole social fabric. We see it most tragically in children killing children.

We know that the arts have the potential for obliterating the limits that are too often imposed on our lives. We know that they can take anyone, but particularly a child, and transport that child beyond the bounds that circumstance has prescribed.

We hope that among the many contributions this committee makes it will be thinking and offering ideas about how we can provide children with safe havens to develop and explore their own creative and intellectual potential.

The arts and humanities have the potential for being such safe havens. In communities where programs already exist, they are providing soul-saving and life-enhancing opportunities for young people. And I am delighted that as one of its major endeavors this

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committee will be considering ways of expanding those opportunities to all of our children.

Doing what we can here in the White House and throughout the administration to promote and nurture the arts and humanities is one of the great pleasures that has been ours in the last 20 months. The President believes so strongly in the role that arts and humanities has played in individual lives and in our collective life as a nation. As a child, he found so much joy and challenge in music and in the other art forms. And together, we have tried in our own lives and with our own daughter to provide that kind of exposure and opportunity.

So it is with great pleasure and particular joy, in front of this group on this day, for me to introduce the President of the United States. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, the First Lady and my old friend John Brademas, and to all of you who have agreed to serve, and your friends and supporters who are here.

I thank you for coming. Before I make the remarks that I want to make to you, I believe in view of the events of the last few days, and particularly the events of the last 24 hours, I should make a short statement about the situation in Haiti.

The deployment of our forces there is now going quite well. As a result of the agreement we have reached last weekend, we now have 8,500 United States troops who have entered Haiti peacefully without any resistance. The multinational force, which was enhanced today by the decision of Australia to join will soon be in a position to carry out its overriding mission: to ensure the transfer of power from the de facto military leaders to the democratically-elected government of Haiti by October the 15th.

I must also tell you how strongly we condemned yesterday's police violence there. Such conduct cannot and will not be tolerated. General Shelton, our Commander on the ground, has met with the Haitian military and police officials today and made clear our policy to them.

During this transition period, the Haitian military will carry out basic police functions. Our Armed Forces cannot and will not become Haiti's police force. But we can work to see that the Haitian military and police operate in a responsible and professional manner. Today, we are deploying on schedule 1,000 United States military police who will monitor the Haitian police, and by their own presence help to deter violence. In the days ahead we will reintroduce into Haiti human rights monitors who were expelled several weeks ago, and bring in police monitors as part of the multinational force.

Today is only the second day of this mission. The situation in Haiti will not change immediately. But today is better than yesterday. And yesterday was better than the day before. We will keep going. We will make steady progress. We will restore democracy.

As we move toward the 15th of October, we will also work to moderate the conduct of Haitian security forces without assuming the responsibilities. Then after the democratic government returns to power, the coalition will help it to devise a long-term plan of police and military reform, including retraining people so that they can perform to their fullest capabilities in an appropriate manner for a democratic society.

We went into Haiti to help stop the senseless, tragic terror that has plagued the nation since the democratically-elected

government was forced from power. The habits of violence will not be shed overnight. But during the coming weeks, we will work to help stop the violence and to begin the process of reconciliation.

I thank the American people for their understanding and increasing support for this endeavor. And, again, let me say my special word of appreciation to our troops there and to their families and all those who have supported them. (Applause.)

Now, let me thank you all again, all of you who've agreed to serve on the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities, to underscore the vital partnership that must exist between your government and the private citizens who do the work of the arts and humanities in our nation. I want to thank the First Lady for agreeing to be the honorary chair, although this is a job she wanted, unlike some of those I've asked her to take on. (Laughter.) You couldn't have a much more appreciative or informed friend.

I am also very, very pleased that John Brademas has agreed to serve as the chairman. I have known him for many years since his distinguished career in the United States Congress and through his brilliant presidency of New York University. I think he is one of our nation's most outstanding citizens and will certainly be one of the most eloquent advocates imaginable for the cause you are here to further. (Applause.)

He also happens to have been an original cosponsor of the bill that created the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, and he wrote the bill that established the Institute of Museum Services. He also promised to give me free congressional lobbying advice on the side in return for this appointment. (Laughter.)

I have charged the President's Committee with advancing public understanding of the arts and humanities, which is so important to our democracy, and to establish new partnerships between the federal agencies and the private sector.

As a sign of our commitment to the arts and humanities today, we have here with us members of the Cabinet and the administration, including Secretary Riley, Sheldon Hackney, Jane Alexander, Joe Duffy, and a number of other government officials.

I appointed as all of you can see an extraordinary group of Americans to this committee -- artists, scholars, writers, thinkers, leaders in the corporate world and the philanthropic community, committed citizens, activists recognized in their communities -- people who represent outstanding achievement and a commitment to the cultural life of our nation -- a commitment to keep it alive and to make it more accessible.

By this time next year, I want you to deliver to me a report on the progress we're making in furthering America's cultural life. For 200 years the arts and humanities have helped to bridge American differences, learned to appreciate differences that helped Americans to learn to appreciate differences, one from another, and to build strong and vibrant institutions across our country. You must help us explore ways to do this better.

The most disturbing thing to me about American life today is not the problems we have, although we have problems of plenty, it is the lack of unity among Americans and the lack of optimism we feel in dealing with those problems.

Just a couple of weeks ago, a distinguished international panel of economists said that the United States was the most productive country in the world. They said that for the first time in almost a decade because the remarkable resurgence of our

economy, because of the number of jobs we're creating, because we accounted for almost all the job growth and three-quarters of the economic growth in the seven great industrial nations of the world in the last year and a half, and because we are taking on a lot of our biggest challenges -- bringing our government deficit down three years in a row for the first time since Mr. Truman was president -- the only country of all the advanced economies to do that. And yet, so many Americans still feel that we're kind of adrift and falling apart from one another.

Maybe even more important as you look toward the 21st century -- isn't it interesting that in the last year and a half the South Africans wanted us to spend \$35 million and send our best people to South Africa to work on making that election a success. The Irish and the English have been fighting for eight centuries now. They wanted the United States to be involved in the process of reconciliation that is now taking hold in Northern Ireland. After decades of brutal struggle, the Israelis and the Arabs working together to make peace in the Middle East want the Americans to be centrally involved.

Even in the moment of our greatest tension a few days ago in Haiti, one of the military leaders said, well, if the President is determined to do this, and the world community is absolutely determined to go ahead, we want the Americans here. Why is that? We have Haitian Americans, Jewish Americans, Arab Americans, Irish Americans, English Americans. You think of it -- this diversity we have which cuts across racial and religious and philosophical and regional and income lines, it is the source of our great strength today in a world that is ever more interdependent.

And people look at us and say, you know, with their all their problems -- yes, their crime rate's too high; and, yes, they're too violent; yes, too many of their kids drop out of school; and, yes, there's too much income inequality, especially for working people -- but you know, they pretty well get along. And people from all different kinds of backgrounds wind up pursuing their chosen path in life and living up to their God-given potential. And they're adaptable -- they work their way through the changes that time and circumstance are imposing on them. That's what others think about us.

We somehow have to begin to think that about ourselves again. And I cannot help but believe that the arts and humanities must play a central role in that task. How we imagine our own lives and our own future and how we imagine ourselves as a country will have as big an impact on what it is we ultimately become as anything in the world.

I said the other day, I will just say again, a lot of you have been involved in various enterprises, great business enterprises, great arts enterprises, great entertainment enterprises. Just imagine how you would function if everyday in all the important years of your life you showed up for work and two-thirds of the people you were working with thought that your outfit was going in the wrong direction and nothing good could happen. (Laughter.) Imagine what would happen if the National Gallery of Art were given the most priceless collection of impressionist paintings uncovered after having been thought destroyed for 50 years, and two-thirds of the people said, I don't believe they're impressionist paintings. (Laughter.) I know Monet -- he was a friend of mine. That's not him. (Laughter.) Don't bother me with the facts. (Laughter.) You're laughing because you know that it's true, don't you? (Laughter.) There is a grain of truth in this. Somehow we have to not sweep our problems under the rug and not sweep our differences under the rug, for that is also what makes America great.

But we only find energy for dealing with our problems and the heart and the hearing to deal with our differences when at least we have a realistic appreciation of where we are, what we're

doing and where we're going. And I feel so good about the work we've done to move America forward in the last 20 months, but we'd all have to admit we've still got a lot of work to do in bringing America together in giving our people a realistic feeling about where we are in the world and where we're going. You can do that. You can make a huge difference. The arts and humanities have always helped to do that work.

So I urge you to continue in this work. I urge you to make your progress report to me. I urge you to remember what we are trying to do in our schools in helping to improve our children's education with the arts and humanities. I urge you to work to expand private philanthropy. We all know that the government in this country provides a crucial measure, but only a tiny measure of the support that the arts and humanities need.

I urge you to promote international cultural exchange and understanding, not only because we need desperately to know more about others throughout the world, but because I believe that we'll learn a lot more about ourselves if we just come in contact with people from other walks of life and other paths of the world.

Thanks to phones, faxes, internet, E-mail, CNN, we can see the power of our cultural traditions as they are exported around the world. And sometimes they come back to us. We had the only -- we're the first White House to communicate with huge numbers of people from all over by E-mail. And I'm trying to do a sociological analysis now of whether there's a difference between the E-mail communication and the mail communication -- or the female communication. (Laughter.)

I am very hopeful that you will make a remarkable contribution to this country. I went over this list of people with great care. I tried to get a very different group of people. I tried to imagine all the different things that I hope that this committee could deal with and all the different challenges I hope you could assume. If I haven't done a good job, it's not your fault it's mine in picking you, but I think you're pretty special.

Let me say in closing that I hope that in addition to the schools, you can think about how we can increase access to the arts and humanities all across America to people who might otherwise be isolated from them -- people who are homebound, people who live in very isolated areas, people who now don't even know how to speak the language that would be necessary to ask for something that might change their lives forever. I ask you also to think of that.

We've faced a lot of challenges as a country, but I'm actually pretty optimistic about it based on the objective evidence. What remains is whether we can develop a vision that will sustain us as a people as we move through a period of change without a known big enemy into an uncertain future. It requires courage, but courage comes from having something inside that you can connect with what you see outside.

You can help us as we work our way through this in this remarkable time in our country's history. I hope you enjoy it. I thank you for serving. And I thank you for being here today.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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5:12 P.M. EDT