

9/21/94
National Heritage
Fellowship Reception

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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September 21, 1994

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP RECEPTION

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so much, Jane, and thank all of you for gathering here today to honor these extraordinary people. This is a great pleasure for me, because I am one who, although not talented myself, am very grateful for the extraordinary range of talents and abilities and skills that are brought to bear on our collective cultural life together.

It is so exciting to be part of this National Heritage Fellows presentation, because, all too often, our traditional arts and those who practice them and who bring joy to their communities and are able to carry on traditions that would otherwise be lost, are not recognized and acknowledged; and so I am very, grateful to have been invited to be part of this.

Each of the awardees has been judged by a panel of their peers. They have been judged to be outstanding practitioners of artistic traditions that are bodily parts of our nation's cultural life. Each is an inheritor of the best of our cultural past, someone who has upheld the highest standards of achievement forged by generations of people who came before.

The folk arts that they represent are also the cornerstones of our (inaudible). Through their (inaudible) traditional art, the National Heritage Fellows have authorized me to (inaudible) for the future as well as the monuments of our past.

Their high aspirations, creativity, determination, and hard work prove in the most vivid way the truth of that old saying, that strong roots (inaudible) roots. They also represent something which is too often overlooked and even occasionally disregarded, and that is the very rich collective, multi-stranded traditions that made up our country and made up the arts which are so critical to the

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definition of who we are as a people.

They offer us a vision of ourselves as Americans and our richness as a democratic people who are strengthened by the multitude of people with (inaudible) and have brought their own traditions to America.

The President wasn't able to join us this morning, but he has written each of the awardees a letter expressing his congratulations for their achievements, but also adds this paragraph:

"One of the greatest strengths of our nation is its rich and diverse cultural heritage. As a (inaudible) traditional artists, you have met (inaudible) standards of excellence in your craft. Your extraordinary skills are helping to ensure that the splendid legacies of our past are preserved and carried forward for generations of Americans to come."

The President and I are grateful for each of the contributions that our honorees have made and will continue to make, and I'm hopeful that their contributions will be not only honored (inaudible) today, not only recognized in this wonderful booklet that's been put together by NEA, but will really be appreciated for what they represent -- a way of demonstrating the diversity in art and culture but, even beyond that, the diversity of human experience, human aspiration, that is really at the core of the American experience.

We are grateful and appreciative and thankful that they have brought these gifts to all of us. Thank you (inaudible). (Applause.)

(End of tape.)

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