

Millennium Remarks

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY  
ON WHITE HOUSE MILLENNIUM EVENT

The National Archives

9:34 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much, Governor John Carlin. And I want to thank, on behalf of all of us, the World Children's Choir and their artistic director, Sandra Harnes (phonetic). I learned that their credo is to sing together to create friendship, peace, and health for themselves and the planet, and I want to thank them for contributing to this event this morning.

I'm also very pleased to welcome distinguished ambassadors and members of the Cabinet and heads of many independent agencies here, because we are gathered to announce an important effort that will involve not just those of us who are here in this wonderful hall, but Americans and literally people all over the world.

A few years ago most of us gave us little thought to the approaching millennium. We didn't spend time conjuring what it would be like to drop the 19 from the calendar and our computer and replace it with a 20. Rarely did we see references even to 2000 in advertising or on web pages or in political speeches.

Recently, however, there's a growing excitement about the idea that we will be living in a rare, historical moment -- the conclusion of a century and the birth of a millenium. No matter where we are in the country, the celebrations of the millennium will reflect the creativity, diversity and raw energy of Americans. And I have no doubt that such celebrations will include everything from the most solemn event to the most exotic. Thousands of Americans have already booked reservations on cruise ships and at hotels for New Year's Eve in 1999. Companies are devising projects to be completed in the year 2000. Computerized clocks are busily counting down the remaining seconds of the 20th century. And from Boston to Cincinnati to Anchorage to Beverly Hills to Times Square in New York, communities are planning their own festivities to usher in this new era.

When the millennium finally arrives, either at midnight

on January 1, 1999, or January 1, 2000 — depending on which expert you believe — none of us will find ourselves suddenly transformed. We won't be trading our earthly jeans and t-shirts for space attire, and we hope that the only bolts of light in the sky will be the fireworks that we've been planning. But, still, the coming of this new century and millennium presents us with a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the past, on where we've been, on who we are, and what we hope to become.

When the President and I first began to talk about how as a country we could mark this turn of the calendar, you might guess that we came back to one idea — what it meant to build a bridge to the 21st century. When the President talked about that bridge, he didn't mean, of course, a real bridge, but he did mean one that would metaphorically be constructed by the gifts all Americans would give to the future — gifts that will help rekindle our spirit of democracy, renew our commitment to citizenship, and unleash the full

creative and intellectual potential of the American people as we chart our common future.

I'm especially pleased to be here for this announcement in this great repository of American democracy, because starting now we will be talking about ways to honor the past and imagine the future. The National Archives is a fitting place to announce a special White House effort to recognize the important milestone ahead of us. Beginning this year and lasting until 2001, the White House will lead a national Millennium program for the American people to appreciate our common heritage and rejoice in our creativity.

As a living museum of our nation's history, the White House provides a unique venue for showcasing our nation's art, culture, scholarship, scientific explorations, and technological discoveries. Over the next three years, the White House will sponsor a range of cultural and scientific activities that reflect the optimism and faith in our capacity to build a better future. Among them are a White House lecture series, co-sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, that will feature prominent men and women, not just from America but from around the world, who can provoke our thinking about the past and the future; and an American cultural showcase that will spotlight our finest artists and their talents. As of today, you can even log on to a new Millennium program website on the White House home page to learn more about the activities that are being planned.

Other special commemorative events will coincide with the 200th anniversary in the year 2000 of the first occupant at the White House, John Adams; the 200th anniversary of the first meeting of Congress; and the 200th anniversary of the creation of the Library of Congress.

Around the nation's capital, some of our leading cultural institutions are working on their own millennium projects. The Library of Congress is putting part of its collection online for students, teachers, and citizens everywhere. The Smithsonian will

expand its Festival of American Folk Life on the Mall in the summer of 2000, and will feature children from all over the world making and playing with toys unique to their countries and cultures. And some of you have already enjoyed a free performance on the Millennium Stage at the Kennedy Center. And these performances are part of a run-up to the Center's yearlong artistic festival in 2000.

Each of these activities offers citizens a chance to learn about our nation's history, to remember it, and even help to shape it. And each is a reminder that our nation's history is part of our own personal history, too.

Building a future worthy of our children depends on what all of us do in our families, workplaces, communities, and nations. We do that every day, I know, but now we will be able to reflect on our past and count the blessings we enjoy as citizens of a free and democratic country. I hope we will all be inspired to give our own gifts to the future, whether by helping to build a new park, cleaning up a river, restoring an old theater, raising money for a library, saving family papers and photographs, encouraging children to interview their grandparents, volunteering in our communities — all of these are measures of ourselves as citizens in a democracy.

As the President said in his State of the Union address earlier this year, our economy is measured in numbers and statistics, and it's very important, but the enduring work of our nation lies in our shared values and our soaring spirit. By giving our own gifts to the future, we can make sure that when the new millennium finally comes, we won't just be celebrating a new year, we will be celebrating the enduring strength of our democracy, the renewal of our sense of citizenship, and the full flowering of the American mind and spirit.

I hope all Americans will join us at the White House, either literally or figuratively, in the years ahead in helping to celebrate this milestone. And I'm particularly pleased that the chief bridge-builder for our nation is here today to talk more specifically about what we will be planning and doing in the years to come.

So it gives me great personal pleasure to introduce the President of the United States. (Applause.)

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9:43 A.M. EDT