

Star Spangled Banner Event
Washington, D.C.
7/13/98

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Star Spangled Banner Event
National Museum of American History
Washington, D.C.
July 13, 1998**

Thank you so much. Thank you Dr. Spencer Crew for all of your work and leadership. I'm delighted to see so many gathered today for this significant announcement. I want to thank all of you for being here. I cannot think of a better place to kick off our tour to Save America's Treasures.

It took the skill of a flag maker in Baltimore -- Mary Pickersgill and her twelve-year-old daughter -- to weave this flag together. I remember reading about how her daughter later said that some nights they stayed up as late as midnight to try to get it done. It had been commissioned by the War Department during the War of 1812.

It took the courage of a young nation to ensure that when Francis Scott Key looked up, the Star Spangled Banner still waved proudly.

It has taken the commitment of generations to ensure that today, as we heard from the young students, that that pledge of allegiance to a flag still represents the best of America, as Denise Graves reminded us.

I want to thank our hosts, Spencer Crew, and the entire staff of the museum. Dr. Crew's leadership resulted in a study of the flag's preservation needs and an innovative plan to restore it in full view of all who visit. I also want to express my appreciation to Secretary Michael Heyman and the entire Smithsonian family for providing an American classroom for people of all ages. Long after we graduate from school it is often our cultural institutions, such as our museums and our libraries, that continue to teach us, and teach us especially about our history, about the artifacts, the art, and all that represents the best of our nations past, present, and future. I want to say a special word of thanks to Denyce Graves, who comes from this Capital city, but is now not only a national, but an international treasure at the Metropolitan Opera.

There are many of you in this audience who have contributed to the preservation of the flag -- individuals, foundations, and groups, and we want to thank all of you for your contributions. Now some of you may know that in 1813 it cost \$405.90 to create this flag. Now all of us know that a few years have passed since then, and it will cost quite a bit more to preserve it. Our entire nation owes a debt of gratitude to all of you who have stepped in to fill this important need. I also want to thank Rebecca Rimel and the PEW Charitable Trusts, not only for the generous gift of which Dr. Crew talked about, but for her commitment and the Trusts' commitment to save many of the treasures of our national legacy, from the Star Spangled Banner to the Library of Congress, to Independence Hall in Philadelphia. I want to pay special tribute

this morning to Ralph Lauren.

I first met him when he organized the fashion industry in support of breast cancer research. He has been a leader on so many fronts, and we are so grateful for his extraordinary generosity and commitment. You know, the phrase "Ralph Lauren" has sort of become an adjective. People say something is very "Ralph Lauren" if it has a certain American style or design. Well, perhaps after today, it will also come to symbolize another aspect of the American way: good citizenship.

When the President announced our Save America's Treasures project during the State of the Union, he talked about how chapters of our American history, our story as a nation, like the Star Spangled Banner, were literally deteriorating before our eyes, and he called on all Americans to help.

Well, the next day, Ralph picked up the phone and called. He, like most of us, hadn't known of the condition of the flag, but once he heard, he did want to join in helping to save it. He said he'd been blessed by our nation and wanted to give something back. And today he has. He is joined this morning by his family, his wife Ricky, and his children Andrew, David, and Dylan. And I want to thank the entire Lauren family and the corporation for this extraordinary commitment not just to America's past, but to America's future as well.

We've created a Millennium logo that some of you may see that people are wearing now, and on that logo, you see this great symbol of our national heritage, the Stars and Stripes, the Red, White, and Blue, all creating a pathway to tomorrow. As much as things have changed since the War of 1812, when this flag proclaimed victory to all who could see, we still have much to celebrate and much to work toward as we move to the future.

We are connected to each other by shared values, shared experiences, and shared hopes, woven through our history and our flag. It is time, as we look toward the new century and the new millennium, to think about what these values mean to us. The flag -- and the freedom it represents -- belongs to all of us. How will we use that freedom? How will we take some time to study and save our past, not as a history lesson to be read about and put back on the shelf, but as a living reminder of what each of us can do to meet our own challenges in the country we are blessed to live in today.

That was the idea behind the White House Millennium Council. We knew as we were talking about this in the White House that the year 2000 will bring all kinds of celebrations and markings of occasions. We know there will be room for lots of fun and great New Year's Eve parties, and there may even be products like millennium toothpaste or potato chips and everything else you can imagine. But we hope that it would not just be a passing moment, but a time for reflection about what defines us as a nation. What does it mean to be an American as we approach the 21st century? How do we, as Secretary Heyman so eloquently said, "Think about those shared values, that sense of justice and equality, and carry that forward together?"

Today the President and I kick off our Save America's Treasures program, starting here at the Smithsonian in front of the most valuable icon in our history. We're going to ask every American to help preserve the artifacts, the documents, the monuments, the sites that tell the American story. Now some of them are well known, such as the Star Spangled Banner or Fort McHenry, where I will be later this afternoon in Baltimore. Others are less well known, such as William Seward's home, where I will visit, where he hid runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad. But all of them, in every community throughout our land, are part of our nation's memory and should be a part of our nation's future.

I'll be visiting the homes of women who changed the face of history from Kate Mullaney, who started a women's labor union; to Edith Wharton, who memorialized in her writings much of what was happening in our history at a certain time; to Harriet Tubman, the former slave whose bravery was an example to all who cared about abolition. I'll visit Thomas Edison's laboratory tomorrow morning, where boxes and boxes of his work have been sitting unopened for years, to draw attention to the creative genius, the scientific research, the others who have contributed in so many ways to making America what it is today.

The White House Millennium Council, under the leadership of Ellen Lovell, who is here with us today, has formed a partnership. That partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, under the leadership of Dick Moe, who is also with us, will take us on this first tour from place to place through Maryland and New Jersey, and to Massachusetts and New York.

We'll be calling on Americans to think about what each of us can do. Perhaps there's a monument in your town square, covered in graffiti or falling apart; maybe a cemetery overgrown with weeds; or a historic building, threatened by development; a library lacking in resources; a piece of art tucked away; historic photographs yellowing in a county clerk's file cabinet. We have the chance to find and save America's treasures. And we're hoping every one of us, from the children we saw today to those who inhabit our corporate boardrooms, will think of what each can do to help save what we value from the past so that we can give our own gifts to the future.

There is a great tradition of preservation in this country. By 1850 we had already established George Washington's headquarters at Newburgh as our first state historic site, which I will be visiting. What they knew then and what we have continued to learn through successes and failures, such as the destruction of the beautiful Penn Station in New York, is that we can never own our nation's past, we're the caretakers of it, and we have a responsibility to future generations to be good ancestors.

I'm told that a group of young children walking through this museum one day took a look at the flag and spontaneously started singing the Star Spangled Banner. I think about the lessons that generations of young children have learned here standing before this flag, and I hope that generations to come through the next millennium will have the same opportunities.

When this flag was commissioned, the man who commissioned it, Lieutenant Colonel George Armistead, did so because he imagined the future with confidence. Now when you think about it, there wasn't maybe much objective basis for that confidence. We were once again in a war with Great Britain, their great troops and fleets were on our shores, we'd lost a battle, the British had broken through the lines, they had taken Washington -- I see our mayor, Mayor Barry, here today -- they had marched into Washington, they had burned the White House. There wasn't much reason to think confidently about the future. And yet Americans have always been confident and we have worked to make that confidence real. And just as our former leaders, such as that Lieutenant Colonel and so many others, imagine the future with confidence, so must we.

In this time of great blessings, it is not time to rest on our laurels. It is time to pass onto our children, grandchildren, and all the children to come, the stories from individual families to the ones we read in the history books that made us who we are today. No one has worked harder or cared more about creating the kind of American future that will enable us to live with confidence than our next speaker.

I know that because I see it at work every single day. Just ask him about American history and be prepared to hear a very long dissertation because he reads it, he studies it, he lives it, he makes it. And because of his confidence in our future, and what we should do as Americans to ensure the kind of hopes and dreams we take for granted, it is my great honor to introduce the President of the United States.