

Harriet Tubman Home
Auburn, New York
7/15/98

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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Thank you. I am so honored and privileged to be here today. The first thing that I would like to do is to thank the Thompson Memorial Youth Group for that wonderful performance, thank you all very much. Clearly the life of Harriet Tubman is very real to all the people we saw performing on the stage and I understand that some of them are descendants of this remarkable woman. I want to thank the Mayor and the city of Auburn for making me feel so welcome and for giving me that plaque and key to the city; Mayor, I really appreciate that. I want to thank Reverend and Mrs. Carter and the entire church for helping to plan this event and being so instrumental in reviving and continuing the memory of Harriet Tubman. I want to thank Bishop Walker, who is the Bishop of this region and who himself is the chairman of the Harriet Tubman Home and for all the work that you do, Bishop, and that the church supports you in doing.

One of the reasons I am here and why we chose to make this stop on our Save America's Treasures Tour is because I wanted to bring more attention to this remarkable woman, to her life and accomplishments, and to make sure that the sites and objects that are linked to her are preserved for all of us for the future. I believe that this region of New York, this region of our country, is especially important to a very particular special part of our history.

I just came from the Seward House and I just cannot tell you how impressed I was with those of you who support Secretary Seward's legacy and what you have done to maintain his memory and his accomplishments. But one of the very special aspects of the story that I learned in visiting the house was the relationship between Harriet Tubman and the Seward family. And how the Seward home served as a stop for runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad.

So this is a special place indeed. Harriet Tubman's story is one of personal triumph and extraordinary courage as we saw enacted by the young woman who did such a good job in demonstrating to us the kind of feelings and thoughts that went through Harriet Tubman's mind.

As she once said, "I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to: liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other." Now think of what that means for young woman, a young slave woman, deprived of education but having that yearning in her soul that is universal among all human beings, who understood that she deserved and merited a life that was better and different than the one she was consigned to. But what courage it must have taken for her to even have thought these thoughts, let alone to have acted on them. It was that deep reserve of faith in her God and in her own resilience that gave her the courage to be the Moses of her people.

I have heard so many stories and in preparing for being here with you today, I have reread and learned more stories. About how she would use the North Star and the moss on the side of a tree to point her in the right direction. How she sometimes had to put her fleeing slaves back on a train bound for the south just to elude her pursuers. How she once bought a couple of live chickens to use as a decoy to save herself and her passengers from harm. How she loved to escape on the first leg of her journey in a horse and carriage, knowing that most slave owners could not imagine that their slaves would be so bold.

When she found her own freedom, she never forgot where she came from and she went back time and time again to lead others to freedom as well. But we know her service did not end with the Civil War. Unable to read herself, she raised money for black schools in the South for freed slaves. Childless herself, she cared deeply about the plight of newly freed black children and raised money for their clothing. Once torn from her own home, she spent the last years of her life establishing this home for others -- the old, the poor, the destitute. She spoke for all of them, and today she continues to speak to all of us. Because above all, Harriet Tubman is a symbol of the enduring story of this nation.

As we celebrate a fantastic time in history and as we recognize how fortunate we are to live at the turn of the century and the turn of the millennium, we have much to be grateful for and many blessings to count. But we should be hearing the voice of Harriet Tubman in our ears. We too should think about how best to educate our children, how best to ensure that every child, black and white, rich and poor, boy and girl, has a chance to pursue his or her own American dream.

We should recommit ourselves to the dream that kept Harriet Tubman moving north through all those dangers and perils. A dream that America really was one nation that was united by our vision of a free and equal society. And we should celebrate our diversity and reach across the barriers that divide us to make sure that we are always one America. No matter what our race, or religion, or background, we are all bound together by a common strand to this story of freedom. And when we stand together, we become greater than the sum of our many different parts.

The link that Harriet Tubman has to all of us was brought home to me in a very personal way the other day. One of the young women working on this tour for me is named Stephanie Jones. When she came to this house to prepare for our visit, she was amazed to see on the wall a picture of her relatives. Unbeknownst to her, it turns out, they had been caretakers of this house during the 1950's, confirming once again that no matter who we are or where we come from, we are all linked together and we are all tied to our past.

Unfortunately, the documentation and artifacts and other tangible artifacts that will continue to remind us of Harriet Tubman's life and accomplishments are not still with us in the numbers that they need to be. They don't match the power of her legacy. That is one of the reasons I came here, to raise awareness throughout our nation of this very special site. And to

perhaps encourage Americans across our country to think of contributing to making this site what it can be.

That is why I am very pleased today to announce a gift from a long time Civil Rights activist, a gift given in honor of another very great African American woman, Marian Wright Edelman--the director of the Children's Defense Fund--whose most revered heroine has always been Harriet Tubman, and this gift from a woman named Bitsey Folger, from Washington DC, is for 10,000 dollars for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Ms. Folger's gift will go for the restoration of this Harriet Tubman home and site. And she hopes, and I do as well, that it will be matched by small gifts and large, from pennies from kindergarten children to gifts from corporate boardrooms, that will enable this site to represent to all to us what it should.

The reason we want to preserve historic sites and artifacts is not just to have a tourist attraction, although that is very important; that will create jobs and economic opportunities for people who will come here, but it is to make sure that the story of Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad will always live in the minds and hearts of Americans. I know this community is coming together for that purpose. Because we have a great challenge not only to preserve this site but to preserve her spirit. And rekindle her passion for justice and freedom in every generation.

Harriet Tubman's motto was simple: "Keep going." Now that is a motto that all of us can use from day to day. Isn't it? As she would lead slaves through the dark and often treacherous path to freedom, she would say, 'Children if you are tired, keep going; if you are scared, keep going; if you are hungry, keep going; if you want to taste freedom, keep going.'

Well luckily for us, we in this crowd are fortunate, we are free. Now we may be a little tired from time to time. But we are free. How will we use our freedom? Will we....it away in pursuit of pleasure and just living from day to day -- not for a cause as the Reverend says -- but just because. Or will we attach ourselves to some greater mission, the education of our children, their well-being an understanding of how we are all bound together so that we can build a united and strong and confident America in the future.

I'm betting that we're all ready to keep going. Keep going on behalf of our families; keep going on behalf of our communities; keep going on behalf of our country. And if we do keep going it will be because of people who helped us along the way before. Each one of us can probably think of a personal friend or relative or employer or teacher or creature who helped us keep going. And each one of us can pass our mind back to some one in history whose inspiration and example can help us keep going.

This Save America's Treasures Tour is not just about the past, it is indeed to help all of us think of ways to honor the past, but the purpose of that is so that we can better imagine the future. The kind of future that will offer opportunities and dreams to all children. And that will provide the kind of society that will assist all of us in understanding what we must do to prepare

ourselves to fulfill those dreams.

So as we stand and sit here together on this beautiful, hot, July afternoon, I cannot think of a better message to spread through communities to convey to our children as we come together to meet the challenges of tomorrow, than to "keep going" like Harriet Tubman; and her spirit, like the north star, will guide us forward.

Thank you all very much and God bless you.

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Mrs. Clinton: Hi, how are you? Good. Yes sure go ahead.

Interviewer: inaudible question

Mrs. Clinton: The trip has just been fantastic. You know, I hoped that we could draw attention to a lot of the sites and documents and memorials that are an important part of American History. And I think that the people coming out demonstrate that there's a real interest in our millennium theme to honor the past and imagine the future. And this last stop at the Harriet Tubman Historic Site here in Auburn New York was a very special one.

Mrs. Clinton: You know, American History is the history of all of us and we are, as any one who takes a look at America today, a very diverse nation. All of us have contributed in some way to American History. So I wanted to be sure, that when we're talking about saving America's treasures, that is an inclusive concept because it is not only the Star Spangled Banner for example that we need to save because of what it means to our history, but we need to save sites that are associated to people like Harriet Tubman, who was a great historic figure who contributed to how we became the America we are today

Yes you know, I had not personally visited any of the sites other than the Smithsonian so this has been a tour of discovery and adventure for me as well as the people with me, and the press who are covering this tour. Your absolutely right that I have learned so much. I've learned a lot about Thomas Edison's inventions; I learned a lot about the architecture of Newburgh New York; I've learned a lot about Edith Wharton's home, the Mount; and the colonial theater in Pittsfield, Massachusetts; labor leader named Kate Mullany who started the first women's labor union in Troy New York, Secretary Seward who was the Secretary of State for Abraham Lincoln and a great abolitionist and a great friend of Harriet Tubman. All along the way I have learned not only those facts but so many more about those facts and about American History and about how much of our history and historical figures are connected together.

Well I think that the arts and culture and historic preservation is important for every American. You know, I know many Americans from all different races and backgrounds who enjoy jazz or who enjoy ballet and its not a color line that divides them. So I am hoping that as we move toward a new century and a new millennium that we will develop a greater appreciation of the role that the arts and culture play in our lives today and that is a lesson that we should be imparting to every American that there is nothing exclusive about caring about American history. In fact the more inclusive we make American history and arts and culture the more we achieve the goal of moving toward a more perfect union we can each appreciate each other's background and culture and where there isn't any kind of color or religious or other kind of line dividing any

American. That is what this Treasures Tour is really emphasizing and that is how in many ways our lives have been changed by Thomas Edison, Edith Wharton, or Harriet Tubman. And we should recognize the contributions of all the American's that came before and be respectful of the contributions that so many Americans are making today.

No I just had a great time and I hope that Americans all over the country of every background are thinking of ways they can honor the past and imagine the future and perhaps save a treasure in their community or family that means a lot to them that they would hate to see lost for future generations.

Well it may be the next time April. OK? Alright. Bye bye.