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I thank you very, very much. Merry Christmas.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. on the steps of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

Remarks at the White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy
November 28, 2000

The President. Well, thank you very much, and welcome. I want to, first of all, say how honored we are to have all of you here. This is a remarkable assemblage, and I want to thank Hillary and Secretary Albright and all the others who have worked so hard to put this meeting together today. And I thank those of you who have come from around America and from around the world to be here. And I thank, especially, Senator Leahy and Representative Leach and the members of the diplomatic community who have come.

This is a topic that I care a lot about. I think I should begin by saying that Secretary Albright just spoke to you eloquently, wearing a bolo from the Navajo Nation. I spent—I was just, not very long ago, on a Navajo reservation in northern New Mexico. But it represents a very distinctive and important part of America's culture, the first Americans.

This conference, I think, comes at a rather pivotal time in human history, because we all think we know what we mean when we talk about cultural diplomacy. You know, you send your artists to us; we send our musicians to you. We all make nice, and everybody feels better. But the truth is that the world is also full of conflict. Indeed, I was seeing Mr. Lithgow out there, and he may have thought that in the last 2 weeks he has returned to the "Third Rock From the Sun." [*Laughter*]

Let me say what I mean by this. The end of the cold-war, bipolar world and the emergence of a global information society have given rise to two apparently contradictory forces. And what we came here to talk about sort of falls in the middle.

First, you see, as we all get to find our own way at the end of the cold war, the emergence of a huge number of different racial, religious, ethnic, and tribal conflicts within and across national lines that might commonly be called culture wars, if you use culture in a broader sense and not just the sense that most of us use the word.

And secondly, you see how, if they're having a crisis in Russia or an earthquake in China, immediately we all know about it, all around the world, because we live in a global information society. And that means that our musicians, our artists, our movies—particularly here in America, which has been an entertainment capital of the world—go across the world rapidly. And other countries worry about whether we're going to blur all the distinctions between our various cultures and render them meaningless so that they won't have independent power to inform, to enlighten, to enrich our own societies and those around the world. Now, these are not exactly new questions, but they are being felt with increasing force because of the end of the bipolar cold-war world and the emergence of the most globalized society the Earth has ever known.

You can put me, as usual, in the optimistic camp. I still believe that the role of culture, in the sense that brings us here today, will be fundamentally positive, because it will teach us to understand our differences and affirm our common humanity. And that is, after all, the great trick in the world today. Since we don't, you know, have to draw sort of a line in the dust and say you're on one side or the other, the way we did for 40 years after the end of World War II, it is very important that we understand and appreciate our differences and then recognize that, as important as they are, somehow we have to find a way to elevate our common humanity.

That's where cultural diplomacy comes in. And I have certainly benefited from it, in terms of my life as President, probably more than any person who ever held this office, in no small measure because of the time in which I was privileged to serve. But I can think of, just in

my lifetime, a few examples I might mention that I think are important.

I think it's not an exaggeration to say that Glenn Miller and other American jazz bands had a pivotal effect on the morale of our European Allies in World War II. I think it's probably not wrong to say that Elvis Presley did more to win the cold war when his music was smuggled into the former Soviet Union than he did as a GI serving in Germany. [*Laughter*] I think it's worth noting that on the morning of Poland's first free election in 1989, voters woke up to find their whole country plastered with posters of my favorite movie, depicting Gary Cooper in "High Noon" with a Solidarity pin where his sheriff's badge should have been—[*laughter*]—and the gun in his holster airbrushed out. One look and the people knew that the time had come to stand for freedom, nonviolently.

When I was on my state visit to the Czech Republic, Václav Havel took me to the jazz club where he used to gather and plot the Velvet Revolution. And I played with some of the Czech musicians who had been allies of his in that great struggle.

A few years ago in Bosnia, we needed to find a way to teach children how to avoid landmines, so we choose the universal medium of Superman comics. During the darkest days of that war, when books were burned and libraries were shelled, American artists, authors, and performers like the conductor Charles Ansbacher, who is in our audience, traveled to Sarajevo to show their Bosnian colleagues that they were not forgotten.

Even then, cultural diplomacy was a giant step ahead of traditional diplomacy. In 1992, when the time finally came that we could reach out to a democratic South Africa, our path there was forged by the Dance Theater of Harlem.

So cultural diplomacy does have the power to penetrate our common humanity. And I say that not just in terms of the stars but in terms of the way people generally feel. And I was recently on our trip to Nigeria; the First Lady of Nigeria dragged me out onto the dance floor to dance to Nigerian music. And when I was in India, I went to a little village in Rajasthan—Nayla—and the village women got me in the middle of their dancing, and they showered me with thousands of petals of flowers. And I understood, in a way that I never could have read from a book, how they related to the world and what role music and the arts had in their lives.

So I think this is very important. I also don't buy the fact that we know more about each other's culture means that we're all going to be diluted. I think that American culture has been enriched by the rest of the world, and hopefully we've been a positive force on the rest of the world.

In our country, we have the architecture of I.M. Pei or the plays of David Hwang, who is with us today and who reminds us that American art, in many ways, is the art of the rest of the world. Doctor Sam-Ang Sam and his wife, Chan Moly Sam, have also joined us today. They escaped from Cambodia during the reign of the Khmer Rouge and brought to America the gift of Cambodian court dance. It was threatened in the land of its birth, and it is now part of our culture, as well. With the support of foundations like Rockefeller, Ford, and the NEA, they are now returning home to introduce a new generation of Cambodians to their old culture.

I say this to point out that our country really does benefit from this sort of cultural interchange, and I think we can benefit others if, from time to time, we provide a safe haven for cultural preservation. I think this is more important now than it was in the past because of the way the world works, as I have said. I know there are some people who believe that our culture has become too pervasive in the rest of the world. I've encountered this anxiety in every part of the world, from people who don't share our political system's views to those who just worry about the trade impact of American movies or records or other kinds of—or CD's. Many people are absolutely sure that because of globalization, pretty soon their children will be speaking American English, every television will be tuned to MTV, and every French movie will have a happy ending. [*Laughter*]

And in some parts of the world, these kind of fears have fueled a lot of bitterness about the process of globalization. But we can't turn this globalization off. You know, people want to know more about each other. And now they have the means to do it. The Internet is the most powerful means of communication in all of human history.

And I think that globalization, in the end, will be a force for diversity, not uniformity. A week ago I was in Vietnam, where many people are wondering how to open their doors while

protecting their traditions. I pointed out that globalization is not just bringing the world into Vietnam, but it also is bringing Vietnam to the rest of the world. Films about life in Vietnam are winning awards over the globe. Paintings by Vietnamese artists command fortunes at international art shows. Fortunately, we were able to find some wonderful ones in Vietnam that don't yet require a fortune to buy. [*Laughter*] Old Vietnamese poems are published in America in English, Vietnamese, and in an ancient script that never before has come off a printing press.

Consider the Nobel Prize in literature, for those who think the world is becoming homogenized. Of the first 80 prizes given out after 1900, only 5 went to authors outside Europe and North America. Seven of the last 20 prizes have gone to Asian, Latin American, and African authors, including our panelist Wole Soyinka, not simply because the good people of the Nobel Committee are trying to cast a wider net but because we actually do know more about one another than ever before.

And what about this business about language being homogenized? Well, if you get on the Internet, you will find people all over the world chatting in Welsh, downloading fonts in Bengali, ordering courses in intensive Cherokee. With advances in translation and voice recognition technology, before long it will be possible for people to communicate instantaneously on the Internet or even on the telephone in their own languages. Thanks to the Internet, people with similar interests and outlooks can now be dispersed around the world and still form a community. I tell somebody all the time, I've got a cousin in Arkansas who regularly plays chess with a man in Australia. I don't know how they work out the time change, but this is the kind of thing that is happening. And it will open the avenues for more cultural, even subcultural, diplomacy.

Now, we have some obligations here. We have to do more to close the digital divide so that the poor of the world can participate more readily in this sort of cultural interchange, and we are working very hard on that. We also have to work hard in America to make sure that our contributions reflect the diversity of our culture. We have supported public/private partnerships in recent years, for example, that have sent Andy Warhol exhibits to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Navajo textiles to Latin America, and the art exchange between regional museums in America and France that Elizabeth Rohatyn has recently organized.

And I do want to support the legislation that has been introduced by Representative Leach, who is here, and Senator Biden to create an endowment to support State Department cultural exchange programs, on top of the funds we're already providing. This will become more and more important.

So I've already said more than I meant to, but I care a lot about this subject. I think you should see this for what it is. It's an opportunity for us to learn more about each other, to understand each other better, to reaffirm our common humanity, and in so doing, not to blur the cultural lines but to highlight them in a way that promote peace and reconciliation and, therefore, put a real roadblock in the path of those who would like a 21st century dominated by culture wars, instead of cultural celebrations.

Thank you very much.

Hillary has to go, and we're giving her a cultural excused absence. She's going to sign copies of her new book. [*Laughter*]

[*At this point, Secretary of State Madeline Albright made brief remarks.*]

The President. Well, I think we should basically talk about the first issue that I mentioned, which is preserving diverse cultures in a global economy. I don't buy the argument that we're all going to become homogenized, but I do believe that nations and groups within nations have to work hard to protect their cultures. So I would like to ask you, Highness, to make a few remarks on this subject and thank you for your work.

[*Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, made brief remarks. The discussion then continued.*]

The President. If I could just follow up a little bit on the Middle East to illustrate your point. One of the most successful things that's been done in the Middle East in the last 10 years is this Seeds of Peace program, which brings together Israeli children with children from all the Arab societies surrounding it. And they do things together; they work together. And if you talk to these kids, you know, the sea change in their attitudes that have been affected about each other, and their understandings of one another because of the way they have lived

and worked together, even for brief periods of time—often, I might add, in the United States; they come here a lot and spend time here—is really stunning.

And the flip side of that, to make a particular cultural point, is the profound alienation which occurs when people believe that their cultural symbols are off limits, one to the other, and when even sometimes—in the case of the Palestinian textbooks, what they say about the Israelis is almost designed to create a cultural divide that will maintain solidarity within the society but then makes it harder and harder to create peace and also maximizes misunderstanding.

The one thing that I think ought to be thought about, in view of all these cultural conflicts that I mentioned earlier around the world, is that the most dangerous thing that can happen in trying to—if you're trying to preserve peace and get people to make progress—is when both sides feel like perfect victims, and therefore, every bad thing that happens they believe happened on purpose. They cannot ever admit the possibility of accidents. People do screw up in politics. So bad things sometimes happen not by design. But if you believe that—but if you see this, you realize how desperately we need some cultural coming together, some means of reaffirmation. And so anyway, the Middle East is a classic example, in both good and bad ways, of the point you just made.

I'd like to call next on Rita Dove, who was our Poet Laureate a couple of years ago, and she was a Fulbright Scholar in Germany. She's lived in Israel; she's lived in Ireland and who knows where else—I think France. And I think she has a unique sort of perspective on this. So I wanted to give you a chance to say whatever is on your mind about the subject.

[*Ms. Dove made brief remarks.*]

The President. I don't think I can improve on that. I would like to now ask Yo-Yo Ma to make a few remarks. But before I do, I want to say how much I personally appreciate all the times we've shared these last 8 years and the fact that you have chosen—even though many people believe you're the greatest living classical musician, you have chosen to spend an enormous part of your life in the act of cultural diplomacy as a part of your work, playing with Chinese musicians, with Kalahari bush people, or something that I particularly appreciate, your work with Mark O'Connor on the "Appalachian Suite," which I think is one of the most important pieces of American music in many, many years, uniting the strains of classical music with American hill country music from—which is an important part of my heritage. So you've actually, in a way, made a life of cultural diplomacy, without calling it that, and I'm very grateful to you.

[*Cellist Yo-Yo Ma made brief remarks. The discussion then continued.*]

The President. Well, first of all, I agree with what you said, and I think your remarks lead me naturally into the next question, which is, what is the responsibility of the United States, first of all, to promote our culture around the world and to help to deal with something that His Highness, the Aga Khan, mentioned in the beginning, which is that there are a lot of countries with which we might have cultural exchanges whose artists, whose musicians, whose craftspeople literally can't make a living doing what they do best? And that's something that I think I'm going to think a lot more about. There are no royal courts to support such people anymore—[*laughter*]—and not every country has an economy which will support them.

So I would like to call now on Joan Spero to speak because she has had an unusual career. She was our Under Secretary of State in my first term. She's been a vice president of American Express and is now president of a major foundation and, I think, has a unique perspective on the roles that private foundations, big corporations, and the United States Government can and should play in this whole area.

So, Joan, would you mind?

[*Joan E. Spero, president, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, made brief remarks.*]

The President. That was very good. Let me just say one sort of followup point on that. I really believe that our Government and our foundation community have an obligation to try to deal with this point that you made earlier about the capacity of people in developing countries to make a living at their art, whatever it is.

And you mentioned that, but there are all kinds of things we can do to help people market their music, their acting skills, their crafts work, their whatever, in ways that get—first of all, bring them to the attention of a larger audience and, secondly, get more of whatever income can

be generated from their activity back to them in their communities than would otherwise be the case if they were—we waited for traditional things to develop. And you know, I think this is very important.

One of the things that I have learned because I've had the chance to be President and go to so many countries and listen to so many people is that most of us who get where we are are there in part by accident, and there is somebody else with a heck of a lot of talent somewhere else that never even gets noticed.

And I think it's very, very important that we think of how we can use our money and organizational and media access capacities to bring the largest number of people possible to the attention of the larger world, because I think that has a very important diplomatic impact. I think that the more people from otherwise isolated groups and cultures are in contact in a positive way with the rest of the world, the less likely we are to have debilitating wars and conflicts and isolation. So that's something I want to think some more about.

I wonder if any of you on the panel or maybe Congressman Leach, who is a sponsor of this bill, or Senator Leahy, if any of you have any specific—specific points you want to make about things we ought to be doing here before we wrap up this section? Anybody else? Wole?

[*Wole Soyinka, recipient, 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, made brief remarks. The discussion then continued.*]

The President. Maybe I will just close by following up on what you said, Wole. I believe that this should definitely be a two-way street; we ought to be putting out and taking in here. And I don't have much else to say. I never learn anything when I'm talking, only when I'm listening. [*Laughter*] Once in a great while when you're talking, you learn something because you didn't really know what you thought until you brought it out, but not very—[*laughter*].

I want to thank all of you for being here. This is quite a luminous group we have in the White House today, and we might have had any number of you also on this panel. And so I want to urge you to please fully participate in the remainder of events. Please make the most of it and try to come out of this with as many specific areas of concern as you can.

I thank His Highness, the Aga Khan, for starting out, because he said, "Look, here are three things you need to really work at, and I think we need to be thinking about this." And I will do my best to put it in the position to be acted upon in the weeks and months ahead. And again I want to thank Senator Leahy and Representative Leach for being here, because they're—along with Senator Hillary—are our sort of lines of continuity to the future American Government. [*Laughter*]

But this was very interesting to me and quite moving, and I think we ought to close by giving our panelists another hand. [*Applause*]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to actor John Lithgow; President Václav Havel of the Czech Republic; Charles A. Ansbacher, principal guest conductor of the Sarajevo Philharmonic and conductor laureate of the Colorado Springs Orchestra; Stella Obasanjo, wife of President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria; Sam-Ang Sam, musician, and his wife, Chan Moly Sam, dancer, Apsara Ensemble; Elizabeth Rohatyn, co-founder, French Regional and American Museum Exchange; and violinist Mark O'Connor. The transcript made available by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of First Lady Hillary Clinton, Secretary Albright, Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, Mr. Soyinka, Ms. Dove, Mr. Ma, Ms. Spero, and Minister of Culture Giovanna Melandri of Italy.

Remarks at an "Invitation to the White House" Reception

November 28, 2000

Thank you very much, and good evening. Hillary and I are delighted to welcome all of you here, and I want to especially thank Carter Brown and Carl Anthony, who I will recognize shortly. I also want to thank Neil Horstman, the White House Historical Association, and the