

### Remarks at the White House Bicentennial Dinner

November 9, 2000

Good evening, Mrs. Johnson, President and Mrs. Ford, President and Mrs. Carter, President and Mrs. Bush, distinguished guests. It has been said that an invitation to the White House to dinner is one of the highest compliments a President can bestow on anyone. Tonight Hillary and I would amend that to say that an even higher compliment has been bestowed on us by your distinguished presence this evening. In the entire 200 years of the White House's history, never before have this many former Presidents and First Ladies gathered in this great room.

Hillary and I are grateful beyond words to have served as temporary stewards of the people's house these last 8 years, an honor exceeded only by the privilege of service that comes with the key to the front door.

In the short span of 200 years, those whom the wings of history have brought to this place have shaped not only their own times but have also left behind a living legacy for our own. In ways both large and small, each and every one of you has cast your light upon this house and left it and our country brighter for it. For that, Hillary and I and all Americans owe you a great debt of gratitude.

I salute you and all those yet to grace these halls with the words of the very first occupant of the White House, John Adams, who said, "I pray to heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but the honest and wise rule under this roof."

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to join me in a toast to Mrs. Johnson, President and Mrs. Ford, President and Mrs. Carter, President and Mrs. Bush for their honest and wise service to the people while they inhabited this house.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:20 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The dinner was hosted by the White House Historical Association. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

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Well, Mr. Sidey, we just saw the first example of your comment about doing without Air Force One. President Bush is having airplane trouble and will stay with us for the remainder of the evening. *[Laughter]* Actually, I've commiserated with all these people about what our new life is about to be like. And I understand that the worst part of it is that I will be lost for the first 4 months because no one will be playing a song anymore. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Lady Bird Johnson and President and Mrs. Ford, President and Mrs. Carter, and President and Mrs. Bush, for being here.

I thought that joke about Harry Truman living with his mother-in-law was particularly apt, since my mother-in-law is upstairs at this very moment. And she has agreed to let me live with her for the next 2 years, when I'm in Arkansas trying to build my library.

I, like previous speakers, would like to acknowledge President and Mrs. Reagan and say that we miss them and wish them well. I'd also like to acknowledge a person who's been a particular friend of Hillary's and mine these last 8 years, who suffered two losses in her family recently and could not be here tonight, with whom we care very much about, Margaret Truman Daniel. And we're thinking of her and wish her well.

I would like to thank Senator and Mrs. Robb for being here and for their service to America. And I'd like to thank you, General Eisenhower. Thank you for coming. We're honored to have you here. And Ethel Kennedy, thank you for coming; and other members of Presidents' families.

One of the most interesting things, to me, about living here these last 8 years is watching the threads of American history weave their way through the families of Presidents. The other day we had an actual ceremony here commemorating the 200th anniversary of the opening of the White House. And someone played John Adams and came up with his one footman and the horses and the old 18th-century carriage and got out. And then we had a little reception for all the