

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP RECEPTION
September 27, 1995

*As prepared,
not
delivered*

Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. I want to thank the Blind Boys of Alabama for their great singing. I would also like to acknowledge Dan Sheehy, the NEA's Director of Folk Arts, for his leadership and dedication over the years to our great national heritage of folk art and traditions. Thank you, Dan.

*file
Heritage*

Last year I had the honor of giving out the NEA's National Heritage Fellowship awards to the Blind Boys and other great American artists at a ceremony on Capitol Hill. I was so moved and impressed by the spirit of that day, and the accomplishments of the award recipients that I decided the White House should be the next setting for this very special ceremony. So, for the first time in the fourteen years the NEA has awarded these fellowships, I have the pleasure of welcoming you all here today.

Our great democracy was born with the right of individual expression at its very core. And it is individual expression and achievement that we celebrate now. Today's fellowship winners bring their very souls to their work, something deep from within that moves their particular form of expression to a level of creativity and artistry beyond all others. They have embraced many traditions, some relatively new to our country. Others having roots in the ancient cultures of the Americas or in the culture brought to this land by the

first settlers. Together they offer us insight into what it means to be an American: to be a part of a culture that has been shaped, strengthened and enlivened by the many traditions of its people.

In these challenging times when some may seek to divide us, when some question the value of public support for the arts, we must remember that art is not a frill or extravagance. Art is a vital part of our national character. Art, in all its forms, unites our people, for it speaks the common language of our intellect, our emotion, and our spirit. If public support for the arts disappears, those most affected will not be the richest Americans, but the millions of citizens who rely on the NEA to bring the arts to their local schools and communities. The artistic achievement we celebrate with these Heritage Fellowships is not the preserve of some "cultural elite." It is born of the people, it is shared with the people, and it is the people who honor these great artists today.

Thirty years ago this Friday, artists and patrons gathered here in the White House for a special ceremony creating the National Endowment for the Arts. I hope that we, as a people, can be inspired again to renew our faith in government and its commitment to the arts. And so it is with great pleasure that I introduce the Honorable Jane Alexander, Chairman of the Arts Endowment, to help present this year's National Heritage Awards.

Arts for Our Sake

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

This is an ominous time for those of us who care deeply about the arts in America. A misguided, misinformed effort to eliminate public support for the arts not only threatens irrevocable damage to our cultural institutions but also to our sense of ourselves and what we stand for as a people.

One of the great successes of the arts in America is that they are not the preserve of any "cultural elite." Through museums, libraries, schools, dance companies and concerts, the arts are truly part of the

Cutting support for the N.E.A. will hurt children.

Public domain, accessible to all and capable of encouraging every person's artistic expression and sensibility.

The National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with individuals, corporations, foundations and other patrons of the arts, has helped trans-

Hillary Rodham Clinton is honorary chairwoman of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. This article is based on her remarks at the Metropolitan Museum of Art earlier this month.

form whole communities by bringing the arts and artists to millions who otherwise might never have had the opportunity to explore first-hand our shared artistic heritage.

The President has shown that we can balance the budget over the next 10 years without undermining our commitment to the arts. The N.E.A. budget accounts for less than 0.02 percent of the Federal budget. Eliminating this small but vital agency would have grave consequences for local economies. Federal support for the arts helps attract tourists, stimulate business, expand the tax base and improve the quality of life — a huge return on a small investment.

Despite a 30-year bipartisan commitment to the arts, there are those who argue that public support is a luxury we can no longer afford. They mistakenly suggest that the arts are enjoyed only by a small, wealthy minority. But if public support for the arts disappears, those most affected will not be the richest Americans but the millions of citizens who rely on the N.E.A. to bring the arts to their local schools and communities.

I find it ironic that those who talk the loudest about America's loss of civility, character and values (particularly those arising from Western civilization) are often the first to recommend obliterating the agencies responsible for promoting and arts programs that make Sophocles, Shakespeare, Mozart and O'Keefe available to our children.

They fail to appreciate what every generation of Americans has intuitively known — that the artistic imagination is critical to our civilization and our democracy. They forget the prescient words of John Adams: "I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study

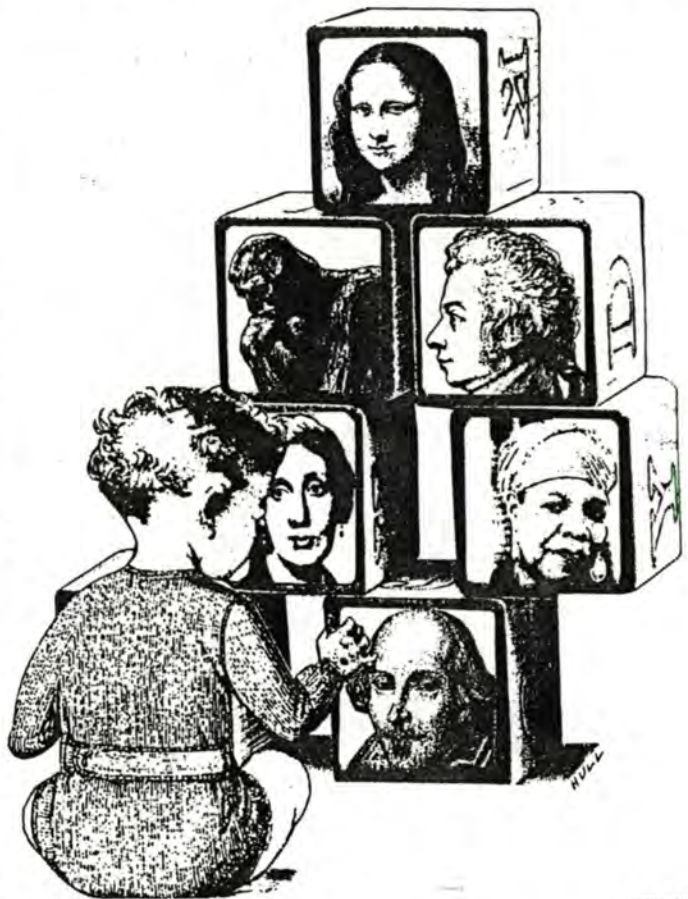
mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy . . . in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music."

The power of the arts is not simply to provide pleasant esthetics but to help move us forward as a democracy. Human expression, as conveyed through the arts, enables us to under-

stand better the complexities of life and gives us a bridge to the world preceding and surrounding us. Most important, exposure to our cultural traditions enriches the lives of our children.

Too often, we see children who, instead of discovering the joys of painting, music, sculpting or writing, express themselves through acts of frustration and even violence. The arts offer an alternative to the more disturbing elements of our popular culture, and a safe haven that allows children to explore their creative potential, transporting them beyond the bounds of their difficult circumstances. Their exposure to the roots and diverse richness of human civilization will enhance their understanding of their own heritage and the world in which they live.

Clearly our nation faces difficult choices. But as the rhetoric heats up over the role of government in our society, I hope we will remember that public support for the arts is a down payment on our future. It is an investment in the values we claim to honor and in the cultural traditions in which democracy has flourished for 218 years. Now is no time to turn our backs on that legacy or its promise. □



Cathy Hull

First Lady Defends Federal Arts Role, Presents Fellowships

By Jacqueline Trescott
Washington Post Staff Writer

On the eve of the 30th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts, Hillary Rodham Clinton yesterday gave public funding for the arts and humanities a resounding endorsement.

Speaking from the East Room, Mrs. Clinton spoke of cultural richness and "individual expression" at the presentation of the NEA's annual National Heritage Fellowships. A dozen of the country's practitioners and innovators of traditional arts and crafts, such as ornamental ironwork and Navajo basket weaving, were honored.

"In these challenging times when some may seek to divide us, when some question the value of public support for the arts, we must remember art is not a frill or extravagance," Mrs. Clinton said. "Art is a vital part of our national character. Art in all its forms unites our people, for it speaks the common language of our intellect, our emotion and our spirit."

See HERITAGE, C2; Col. 4

HERITAGE, From C1

It was the first time in their 14-year history that the Heritage Awards were presented at the White House, a strong symbolic gesture of support for the strapped NEA. The arts agency has undergone a year of political attacks from Republican leaders on Capitol Hill, who called for killing the agency or stripping it down to the bare bones. And as negotiations over the new federal budget draw to a close, Congress has cut an unprecedented 40 percent of the NEA's funds. To survive, the agency is drawing up a major reorganization, including layoffs.

In addition to the budget cuts, Congress severely curtailed the distribution of individual grants. At one time even the Heritage Awards, which are based on citizen nominations and carry a one-time award of \$10,000, seemed to be on the chopping block, but they survived.

Hillary Clinton indicated she and other arts supporters were willing to continue the fight. "I hope we as a people can be inspired again to renew our faith in our government, which is, after all, all of us, and its commitment to the arts," she said, also disputing the critics' position that the arts serve mainly a privileged class.

"If public support for the arts disappears, those most affected will not be the richest Americans but the millions of citizens who rely on the NEA to bring the arts to their local schools and communities," she said. "The artistic achievements we celebrate with these Heritage Fellowships is not the preserve of some cultural elite. It is born of the people, it is shared with the people and it is the people who honor these great artists today and every day when they bring pleasure, when they provoke and when they force us to ask questions about who we are and where we are going."

Those honored came from all every corner of America. The recipients are Bao Mo-Li of Flushing, N.Y., a Beijing-style opera performer; Mary Holiday Black of Mexican Hat, Utah, a basket weaver; Lyman Enloe of Lee's Summit, Mo., a master fiddler; Donny Golden of Brooklyn, an Irish step dancer; Wayne Henderson of Mouth of Wilson, Va., a guitarist and guitarmaker; Bea Hensley of Spruce Pine, N.C., a blacksmith; Nathan Jackson of Ketchikan, Alaska, a woodcarver and metal-smith; Danongan Kalanduyan of San Francisco, a master of Filipino *kulintang* music; Robert Jr. Lockwood of Cleveland, a blues musician; Israel Cachao Lopez of Miami, a co-creator of the Afro-Cuban mambo; Nellie Star Boy Menard of Rosebud, S.D., a quilt-maker; and Buck Ramsey of Amarillo, Tex., a preserver and performer of cowboy culture.