

ARTnews

THE CLINTONS' CHOICE

Art in the White House

Bill and Hillary's first date included a stop at a Rothko show. Two decades later, they live amid an outstanding art collection built over 200 years. On a private tour of the works the couple chose for the family residence, the first lady spoke exuberantly about

the role of art in their lives—and the nation's

BY MARY LYNN KOTZ

WHEN BILL AND HILLARY CLINTON moved into the White House, they asked for easels. And more easels.

They set them up in the Map Room and had the curatorial staff bring in all the paintings from the White House basement. One by one, on the dozen or so easels, they looked at the American Impressionists, 19th-century landscapes, Cézanne and Glackens still lifes, Robert Henri's portrait of a gypsy girl, and many other paintings in the White House collection that hadn't seen the light of day in years.

In an exclusive interview with ARTnews, Mrs. Clinton spoke with great feeling about the 450-work White House art collection. "When we first got here, my husband and I looked through the book on the collection [William Kloss's *A Nation's Pride: Art in the White House*] and tried to find everything in it," explains Mrs. Clinton. "What we couldn't find on the walls, we brought in here to study. I think we've pulled out every painting that's been in storage," she continues. "We've tried to find a place for everything, but the only one I despair of is Whistler's *Nocturne* (ca. 1870-77). There doesn't seem to be a wall where it gets enough light."



"I like it because of the composition and the emotion," says Hillary Rodham Clinton of George P. A. Healy's 1859 study of John Tyler. "And of course my husband likes it because Tyler is crumpling up the newspapers!"

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The first lady with one of her favorites—Mary Cassatt's *Young Mother and Two Children*, 1908.

Seated on a red brocade sofa in the newly redecorated Map Room, the first lady is both relaxed and animated talking about art. Many of her favorites in the White House collection are paintings by women, or those that feature women as subjects, such as Lilla Cabot Perry's *Boy Fishing* (1929) in the West Sitting Hall and Mary Cassatt's *Young Mother and Two Children* (1908). The president, she says, responds more to paintings that have historic meaning for him, such as William Tolman Carlton's *Watch Meeting—Dec. 31st, 1862—Waiting for the Hour* (1863), a scene of slaves gathered around a table studying a large pocket watch on the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation's enactment. "Look at them," President Clinton exclaims to visitors at every opportunity, "just waiting for that moment of freedom."

The president's favorite White House painting, which he has hung prominently in the Oval Office, is *The Avenue in*

terms for the Civil War. On another wall hangs Theobald Chartran's *The Signing of the Peace Protocol Between Spain and the United States, August 12, 1898* (1899). It commemorates the agreement signed by President McKinley in the Treaty Room that ended the Spanish-American War.

Mrs. Clinton says that her husband is also particularly fond of *Morning on the Seine, Good Weather* (1897) by Claude Monet in the West Sitting Hall. "It is such a peaceful, beautiful scene. He'll just sit and look at it as he talks on the phone. And," she adds, "I think the fact that it was given to the White House in memory of President Kennedy has extra meaning for him." During the Johnson Administration, the painting, a gift of the Kennedy family, was given a place of honor on the State Floor. During the Nixon Administration, however, it was sent down to the ground floor, to hang in relative obscurity in the dim light of the Vermeil Room, where

it stayed for nearly 20 years until Barbara Bush brought it upstairs to prominence in the family quarters.

Moved by the Clintons to more visible positions on the State Floor were the portraits of Franklin D. Roosevelt by Frank Salisbury and Harry Truman by Greta Kempton. Each president places more prominently the portraits that are personally or politically attractive to him. And the White House collection, which has grown through 43 administrations, offers plenty to choose from. The art is cared for by the Office of the Curator, established by Jacqueline Kennedy, who also began the White House Historical Association.

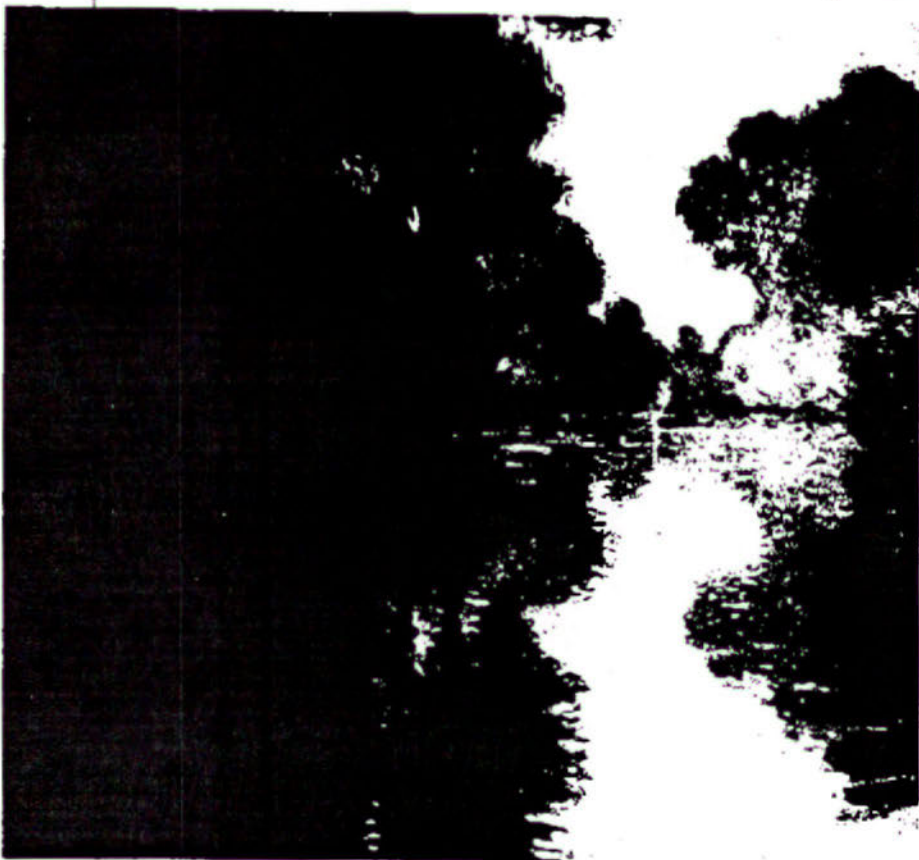
"So many touches to the house, so much of the art was either brought to the White House or inspired by the Kennedys," reflects Mrs. Clinton. Mrs. Kennedy's primary project was to restore the White House to its early-19th-century grandeur by inviting donations of art and furnishings. The collection, therefore, became a repository for 19th-century art.

The curators and Mrs. Clinton, though, are painfully aware that as the 21st century approaches, the

White House collection is lacking in 20th-century art. The "youngest" painting is a 1952 John Marin oil, *The Circus No. 1*, which Mrs. Clinton has placed in her office in the West Wing, but there is nothing from the 1930s or '40s.

"We would love to have some modern American artists represented," says Mrs. Clinton. "We're really the beneficiary of other people's generosity. We would be honored to have in the White House paintings by 20th-century artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe or Thomas Hart Benton, for example. So if there's anyone out there reading this who would like to make a contribution..." she laughs.

Mrs. Clinton's Chicago childhood, along with her undergraduate education at Wellesley College from 1965 to '69, gave her a lot of exposure to modern art. "The most overwhelming experience I ever had with a piece of modern art



Claude Monet's *Morning on the Seine, Good Weather, 1897*, which the president always stares at when he's on the phone in the West Sitting Hall.

the Rain (1917), one of Childe Hassam's patriotic American flag paintings. "Our first real excitement was hanging the Hassam in the Oval Office," says Mrs. Clinton. This president's taste for history can be seen in the other works of art he chose for that space: Rembrandt Peale's *George Washington* (1823), the *City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard* (1833) by George Cooke, and *The Three Tetons* (1895) by Thomas Moran. The sculpture includes a Frederic Remington bronze, *The Bronco Buster* (1895), and a small early-20th-century cast of Rodin's 1880 *The Thinker*, on loan to the president from Mr. and Mrs. B. Gerald Cantor.

For the old Treaty Room, his private study, the president chose *The Peacemakers* by George P.A. Healy, an 1868 painting of Abraham Lincoln with Generals Sherman and Grant, and Rear Admiral Porter meeting to discuss peace

THE PRESIDENT RESPONDS *most readily to the historical subjects in the collection, while the first lady is drawn to paintings by or with women*

was when I was a sophomore in high school and saw Picasso's *Guernica* for the first time," she recalls. "That was a stunning experience! I saw it in the context of a discussion about values, and war, and the role that art and artists can play in heightening your sensibilities to the human experience." At Wellesley, she continues, "I had several friends who were art majors, and we spent a lot of time in Wellesley's Jewett Arts Center and museums in Boston. There's that wonderful Gauguin in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, *Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?* That was a perfect piece of art for someone in college. We'd sit in front of it, waiting for it to tell us the answers! There was also a big yellow piece by Jules Olitski, *Julius and Friends* (1967). I loved that painting, and I named the first car I owned—which was a yellow car—for it, 'Julius,'" she says.

It was abstract art, she reports, that kicked off her romance with Bill Clinton at Yale University Law School. "On our first date—which was not really a date—we stood in line to register for classes, and after we finished we went out for a Coke," she says. "We started talking, went for a long walk—and we ended up in front of the Yale University Art Gallery. It was closed. But my husband had been there a week or two before, and he wanted to show me the Mark Rothko exhibition inside and a Henry Moore exhibition in the sculpture yard. He found a worker, who said it had to be closed because of a labor dispute. And so my husband said, 'Well, if we pick up the garbage, will you let us in?'" The future president and first lady proceeded to pick up all the trash that had accumulated—and then had a leisurely private viewing of the Rothko and Moore exhibitions.

Last spring, when the president spoke at the Andrew W. Mellon Dinner at the National Gallery in Washington, he recalled, "I first came here as a young student at Georgetown. Later when I was a governor and came [to Washington] for stuffy old meetings, on occasion I would sneak away from wherever we were convening and come here—and think I would never do anything remotely as important as paint

some of the things that hang on these walls."

The Clintons still try to work in museum visits when they can. Last year, when asked by her husband and daughter what she'd like for Mother's Day, Mrs. Clinton replied, "To see the Barnes Collection." Her wish granted, the first family had an impromptu tour of "Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation" at the National Gallery of Art. During their D-Day commemoration trip to Europe last June, the Louvre was held open until 2:30 A.M. for their visit, arranged by Ambassador Pamela Harriman, and architect I. M. Pei took them on a private tour.

As of this writing, the Clintons are still waiting for an opportune moment—"after hours, so we won't disturb the flow of people going through"—to see "Willem de Kooning: Paintings" at the National Gallery. "We will go," she says. "I love that de Kooning painting upstairs," she adds, referring to *Untitled XXXIX*. "The colors are in perfect harmony with the decor in the second-floor center hall."

The painting came to the White House as a result of a conversation between the first lady and her designer from Little Rock, Kaki Hockersmith, who redecorated the family quarters, the Lincoln Sitting Room, and the Treaty Room. "We talked about the policy against works of art by living artists," Mrs. Clinton recalls. "It's a very sensible policy, but it did seem a shame that we

didn't have any art by a modern master that we could display." Finding that the policy does not exclude a living artist from loaning works directly to the president to display in the family quarters, Hockersmith made inquiries through a collector friend, Rita Pynoos. Pynoos and Hockersmith then went to the de Kooning warehouse in New York to look at the stored paintings. Lisa de Kooning, the artist's daughter, offered to lend *Untitled XXXIX* (1983).

The Mosquito Net (1912), by John Singer Sargent, is another favorite of the Clintons, and it is regarded by art historians as one of the painter's finest works. "There's another Sargent I love in the National Gallery—the young woman dressed in white, leaning on the couch like this..." Mrs. Clinton assumed the pose of Sargent's model in *Nonchalant*



The president's favorite White House painting is Childe Hassam's *Avenue in the Rain*, 1917.

BARBARA KENNEDY/WHITE HOUSE



Willem de Kooning's 1983 painting *Untitled XXXIX*, on loan from the artist's family, hangs upstairs in the Clintons' private residence.

(1911). "Sargent usually did full frontal portraiture, but he also painted those [reclining pose] pieces, which I think are really well done." Sargent's White House lady is also reclining. The portrait of a sensuous, mysterious woman in white, veiled in a mosquito net, hangs in the Green Room, in view of the 19th-century presidents on the wall.

Mrs. Clinton remarks that she and the president both think that the George P. A. Healy study of *John Tyler* (1859), in the Blue Room, is a "magnificent portrait. I like it because of the composition and the emotion," says the first lady. "And of course my husband likes it because Tyler is crumpling up the newspapers!"

"It's wonderful to live with the art that's been collected over the years. I'm just grateful to everybody who has lived in this house," exclaims Mrs. Clinton, noting that she likes the way the Bushes arranged the family quarters, and also referring to the contributions of previous first ladies who worked to preserve and enhance the executive mansion. "One of my favorite paintings is the Mary Cassatt, of the young mother and child. I've seen pictures of it forever, but I never knew where it was. And [here] you find it on the second floor of the White House!"

When Lady Bird Johnson, who had accepted the painting as a gift to the White House in 1965, came to visit Mrs. Clinton recently, she stepped out of the second-floor elevator and exclaimed, "Ah, there it is!" Mrs. Clinton told Mrs. Johnson how much she appreciated the painting and the two spent a moment discussing Mary Cassatt.

From the easels in the Map Room, Mrs. Clinton found her favorites of the early 20th century and placed them in the private family quarters. High on the list is Thomas Eakins's *Ruth* (1903)—a stunning portrait of a pensive, preadolescent child in a white dress, wearing a pink ribbon in her hair—which hangs in the second-floor corridor.

When the Clintons moved in on January 20, 1993, they

brought art from their own collection, which had been with them in the Governor's Mansion in Arkansas—"our idiosyncratic little collection of stuff that we have accumulated over the years," laughs Mrs. Clinton. "a pot-pourri of pieces. We have paintings from friends of ours—and a Will Barnett lithograph, Thomas McKnight's *Constitution*, and a Picasso plate.

"We've never collected, as such," she explains, "but we have acquired things that we've bought or received as gifts—or given each other as gifts over the years. I gave my husband for Christmas a life-size portrait of Chelsea when she was four. That would be his favorite thing!" That portrait, by Arkansas painter Oviya Goolsby, is in the family sitting room upstairs. Works by Arkansians Barry Thomas and Doris Mapes, and Maryland painter Greg Mort are also in their collection.

Mrs. Clinton has also introduced American crafts from all over the country into the White House. These works, selected by Michael Monroe of the Smithsonian, are currently on display.

"We've tried to elevate the role and visibility of American artisans," says Mrs. Clinton, "because there is some very fine work being done. We look at some of the things that were given to the White House as gifts or were purchased during the 19th century—and they were crafts of their time," she continues, "so I think it's important that we appreciate the artistry of crafts of our time."

Using the White House as a "bully pulpit" to focus on the arts is a goal of the Clintons. Mrs. Clinton believes that the attention paid to all the arts from the White House can stimulate a rekindling of support throughout the country. The president's appointment of actress Jane Alexander as head of the National Endowment for the Arts was hailed as the first appointment of an artist to that position. Alexan-



For his study, Clinton chose Theobald Chartran's *The Signing of the Peace Protocol between Spain and the United States, August 12, 1898, 1899*.

MRS. CLINTON SAYS THAT *Picasso's Guernica*, which she first saw as a sophomore in high-school, had a lot to do with pointing her toward social activism

der's indefatigable cross-country cheerleading for local support of the arts is encouraged and applauded by the Clintons. Last October, Mr. Clinton awarded a National Medal of Arts for visual art to Robert Rauschenberg, and both Clintons spoke at the White House ceremony, where a special medal was also given to collectors Walter and Leonore Annenberg for their contributions to art and education.

"We've tried to use the White House more publicly to support art and artists this past year," says Mrs. Clinton, "everything from the Arts and Humanities dinner, which we hosted, to awarding the American Academy of Rome's prizes, to celebrating [as host head of state] the Praemium Imperiale—the Japanese arts prizes that are equivalent to the Nobel Prizes of the arts."

Despite the Clintons' honoring the arts and artists, some arts organizations and artists are disappointed that administration support has not taken the form of more dollars for arts funding. The National Endowment's \$170.2 million budget has not increased appreciably in a dozen years—nowhere near the rate of inflation. In rebuttal, the White House points out that the endowment budget survived, while 100 other programs didn't. That budget, however, was cut by 5 percent by the Senate and 2 percent by the House last summer. "We don't have enough money to do a lot of what we want to do in many of the areas including the arts, but we can use the White House as a showcase and as a motivator to encourage people to become more supportive of the arts," Mrs. Clinton contends.

Arts support for Mrs. Clinton comes very personally—in the role of arts in education. "When the education legislation—Goals 2000—was passed by the Congress and signed into law by President Clinton in March 1994, six original goals were met, and then two were added. One of them had to do with adding arts to the curriculum—and that's something we feel very strongly about," she says.

"Even when my husband was a governor and doing accreditation standards for schools in our state, we required that students take a semester of art before they graduated. We really believe that if you don't have some exposure to art or to art appreciation—it can be either active or scholarly interest—you're really not as well educated as you need to be. And through the new education legislation [by the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, arts, history, and geography, the bill states] we want to promote that. I think we've really seen a cutback in arts courses for children just at the time when we need it most! I hope, through the legislative effort that the president has accomplished, we will be able to elevate the role of the

arts again and provide more funding for training people to be arts instructors and to have more traveling scholars or artists in residence—the kinds of things that could make a difference in a child's life."

And she points out the difference art has made in her life. *Guernica* had a lot to do with pointing her toward social activism. "I am still very moved by visual arts that have some social content," she reflects. She talks about the effect of the artist Matushka—photographed nude with a searing scar



John Singer Sargent's *Mosquito Net*, 1912, regarded by art historians as one of his finest works, hangs in the Green Room.

where her breast had been—on raising awareness about the epidemic of breast cancer.

After her time as a White House tour guide, the president's wife, relaxed and congenial in the Map Room—Franklin Roosevelt's top-secret communications center during World War II and a place Mrs. Clinton likes for holding small meetings—says, "This is fun. We should talk some more." Then, on her way to her next appointment, she turns to Betty Monkman, associate curator of the collection. "What happened to *Boys Crabbing*?" she asks, referring to William Ranney's delicate 1855 painting of a morning on the New Jersey shore, with four boys on a pier fishing for crabs. The painting had hung over the mantel, before being replaced by President Roosevelt's wartime maps.

"That one is in storage," Monkman replies.

"I want to bring that back out because I like it so much," says the first lady.

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HEADLINE: Henry O. Tanner's Painting 'Sand Dunes At Sunset, Atlantic City' Is First Black-American Art In White House

BODY:

Acquiring Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting Sand Dunes at Sunset, Atlantic City, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton achieved a two-year goal of securing the work of a famed Black-American artist for the White House.

The 58- by-30 inch oil canvas is described as "a landscape with a view across the cool gray of a shadowed beach to dunes made pink by the late afternoon sunlight." It was unveiled at a ceremony at the White House by President and Mrs. Clinton and will hang in the Green Room.

Tanner, a native of Pittsburgh, was born in 1859 to AME Church Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner, a second-generation free man, and his wife, Sarah, who was born into slavery but escaped as a child via the Underground Railroad.

Tanner's birth marked the year that radical abolitionist John Brown was hanged. He reportedly was given the middle name Ossawa for Ossawatimie, the Kansas town where Brown led his first slave revolt. Tanner originally trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. But after he faced years of racism as a student, painter and photographer, he left for Europe in 1891 at the age of 31.

Tanner spent more than half of his life in France. "His works remind us that talent has the power to transcend prejudice," said Mrs. Clinton. "It is a deep honor for the President and me to honor Tanner's contribution to both African-American culture and the cultural life of our nation. We are so proud to add this painting to the White House permanent collection."

The painting was obtained from Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter, grandniece of the artist, by the White House Endowment Fund for \$ 100,000.

GRAPHIC: Picture 1, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter, grandniece of artist Henry Ossawa Tanner, applaud White House unveiling of Tanner's painting Sand Dunes at Sunset, Atlantic City.; Picture 2, Racism in America forced Tanner to seek refuge in Europe where he settled in France and studied at the Academie Julian in Paris.; Picture 3, President Clinton enjoys the unveiling ceremony with Dr. Alexander-Minter. Her uncle's painting is the first by a Black-American artist to become part of the White House collection.

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THE SCOOP

Hillary's crafty way of collecting art

Plus: Edward, earl of the silver screen; Manheim as model

MSNBC

June 29 — Some people in the art world are outraged that Hillary Rodham Clinton solicited some artists' work for "permanent display" in the White House and now plans to turn the pieces over to the Clinton Library.

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John Hancock

The works were to 'be displayed in a prominent location in the White House at various events throughout the years.'

IN 1993, HILLARY Clinton's social secretary, Ann Stock, approached more than 70 of the country's top artisans, asking them to donate a specific piece or series of pieces for a collection that would become the first permanent White House Crafts Collection. The pieces would form part of a traveling exhibit, Stock told the artisans, and then, unless the artists wanted them back, they would "be displayed in a prominent location in the White House at various events throughout the years." Artists such as David W. Levi and Wendell Castle donated pieces ranging in value from \$600 to \$20,000. (A discussion of this exhibit can be seen at nmaa-ryder.si.edu/collections/exhibits/whc/whcmain.html)



AP file

After the pieces were in hand, however, the first lady was informed that the White House has a policy that prohibits it from accepting works by living artists (except for those who paint the portraits of the presidents and first ladies). Faced with this dilemma, the Clintons decided a perfect home for the pricey art would be the Clinton Library. "Eventually, they will probably go to the Clinton Library," admitted Julie Mason, a spokeswoman for Hillary Clinton. When pressed, Mason admitted that was the only existing plan for them. When asked if the artists were given the option of having their pieces returned to them, Mason said that option was given to them at the time the pieces were solicited. "We asked if they wanted them back after the tour," she said, "and so far, no one has said yes." That offer, however, was made when the artists thought the pieces would go on display at the White House. "It's an outrage," says a source close to one of



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the artists. "It's too awkward to ask a sitting first lady — and maybe a senator — to give back your artwork. It would be incredibly unseemly, given the circumstances.

Nancy Reagan got in trouble for getting a few free dresses. I find this much more serious."

Edward, earl of the screen



Reuters

Last week, The Scoop told you that Earl of Wessex, the title bestowed upon Prince Edward, hasn't been used for nearly a thousand years. We were wrong. It was used fairly recently: in the film "Shakespeare in Love." And that, according to one report, is precisely where Prince Edward got the idea for the title.

Wessex was once a part of England, but the locale hasn't appeared on maps in centuries; it was, however, a favorite phantom location in novels by Thomas Hardy and more recently, it was used in the Academy Award-winning romantic comedy: The loutish Count of Wessex (Played by Colin Firth) is engaged to Viola (Gwyneth Paltrow) before she falls in love with the young Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes).

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Prince Edward wanted a noble title as a wedding present but the queen had decided against giving him his first choice of titles, the Duke of

Cambridge, because

her advisors felt that the title of duke — the highest peerage — was too senior for Edward, who is only seventh in line to the throne. They also worried that the title would go against the current mood of royal reformation, according to royal watchers.

"Prince Edward with Sophie Rhys-Jones got the idea for his new title, the Earl of Wessex, after seeing the fictional character of Shakespeare in Love," according to the Calgary Herald. "He proposed the title — dormant since the death of King Harold in 1066 — to the Queen after royal courtiers had dithered for months."

The inside joke may help explain why Sophie Rhys-Jones agreed to "obey" Edward in her marriage vows. In Shakespeare in love, when discussing his pending marriage to Viola, the Count of Wessex asks, "Is she obedient?"