

strength and greatness are derived from the rich heritage and diversity of our people, from the richness of our artistic and intellectual traditions. For more than 200 years, our freedom has depended not only upon our system of government and the resolve of our people but upon the ferment of ideas that shape our public discourse and on the flow of creative expression that unites us as a people.

Today we are on the eve of a new century. The arts and humanities are more essential than ever to the endurance of our democratic values of tolerance, pluralism, and freedom and to our understanding of where we are and where we need to go. At a momentous time in our history like this, when so much is happening to change the way we work and live, the way we relate to one another, and the way we relate to the rest of the world, we cannot fully understand the past nor envision the future we need to pursue without the arts and humanities.

It is, after all, through the arts and humanities that we unleash our individual and collective imaginations. And imagination is, in the end, the animating force of a democracy committed to constant renewal, the force that allows us to conceive of a brighter future and a better world, that allows us to overcome new challenges and grave difficulties. By imagining a better America and acting to achieve it, we make our greatest progress.

That is why we must sustain our Nation's commitment for the arts and humanities to build that bridge to the 21st century I am so committed to. We must have our theaters, our orchestras, our dance troupes, our exhibits, our lectures, our scholarship. We must have them all to strengthen and preserve our culture and instill in our children the democratic ideals we claim to cherish. And we must have them so that our young people can imagine what their lives might be like if they were better. For all the speeches I might give, the children struggling to overcome difficult circumstances, simply seeing the powerful example of the Harlem Boys Choir is probably more persuasive than any words I could ever utter.

Today the average American spends about 80 cents to support Federal funding of the arts and humanities, about as much as it costs to buy a can of soda pop in a vending machine. In some places it costs more than that. [*Laughter*] This tiny investment means that from Providence to Portland, from Minneapolis to Miami,

from Dallas to Des Moines, Americans of all walks of life can share in the great artistic and intellectual life of our Nation.

In America, we should all be able to enjoy art, ideas, and culture, no matter what our station in life. And our children should be able to be exposed to them, no matter what their station in life. For children, Federal support of the arts and humanities is particularly critical. Think of how often we hear stories about children who, unable to find safe outlets for their ideas, their emotions, their enormous physical energy, travel instead down the wrong road to destruction and despair. But across our Nation, Federal support to the arts and humanities has enabled tens of thousands of those children to see their first play, their first ballet, their first Monet. What a transforming experience it can be when a young person discovers his or her own gifts for music, for dance, for painting, for drama, for poetry, photography, or writing.

One man who knows firsthand about the power of art to change young people's lives is the artist who designed the medal that some of our honorees will receive today. Bob Graham is one of our Nation's finest sculptors. After the Los Angeles riots, he decided to hire inner-city gang members as assistants and apprentices in his studio in southern California. These young men have recharted their futures and found that instead of feeling alienated by society, they are now valued for the contributions they are making to society.

The earlier we start developing these creative impulses for artistic and intellectual potential, the better off our children and we will be. As Hillary wrote in her book, we know a great deal more today about the importance of providing such stimulation for children in the very first years of life. We know how important it is for children to hear words, listen to stories, develop their imaginations. That's one reason I'm challenging all of our people to work with us toward a goal of making sure every boy and girl in our country can read a book independently by the third grade.

Perhaps no one has done as much to show the power of the written word on children, not to mention on their parents, as Maurice Sendak, one of our honorees today. I'm delighted that he will join Hillary tomorrow at the Georgetown University Medical Center to read to children who are getting their checkups there. And I thank them both to help to kick off a national