

## Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in New York City January 8, 1998

Thank you very much. The good news is this is the only speech I have. [Laughter] And I wrote it in the car on the way over from the airport. I want to thank Steve for what he said and for the extraordinary effort he's put in, in a very difficult and challenging year, as head of our National Democratic Party. I thank Craig and Jane for having us in their home. I have not been in this magnificent historic old building in, oh, about 10 or 11 years. And I'm a very schmaltzy person so I get all choked up when I come here. I keep imagining whether I'm standing someplace where John Lennon was, and all that. [Laughter] Thank you very much for letting us come here. Thank you, Judith Hope, for leading the New York Democratic Party.

And I think what I would like to do today is just talk in kind of a larger sense about where I think we are at this moment in history and why what you're doing here matters. And I'd like to begin with two, maybe, apparently, unrelated things.

The first is, you know we're 2 years from a new century in a new millennium, something that only happens every 1,000 years. I expect all the predictions of doom and the end of time to be rising up, and maybe there will be a lot of wonderful, glowing predictions as well. But the time just begs for historic drama. And the good news is you have it, because of the globalization of the world economy and society, because of the explosion in information and science and technology. People are fundamentally changing the way they work, the way they live, the way they relate to each other and the rest of the world. And that is changing everything else in ways that are, more often than not, quite positive, but sometimes quite troubling.

We have a lot of people in the finance community here today. Everybody is trying to calculate what is going on in Asia: Is it going to keep going on; is it going to stop; is there something the United States can do to stop it; regardless, what impact will it have on us? There is a level of interdependence in the world today and a scope and speed of change in the world today that has hitherto been unknown to the

American people, and that is changing things. And that will shape the new—in that sense, we already have a foot in the 21st century.

The second thing I'd like you to think about is that—we have a lot of very distinguished actors here today. Hillary and I went to the premiere in Washington the other night of "Amistad," the new movie about the slave ship. It culminates in the work of John Quincy Adams helping a young American lawyer to get these slaves freed so they could be free to go back home to Africa before the Civil War. And they won a case in the Supreme Court on a unique point of property law. But it's a very moving picture, I think.

Why do I mention that? Because at that moment in our history, John Quincy Adams, a man who was a one-term President, got the living daylights beat out of him for reelection by Andrew Jackson, an American hero, and then was humble enough and dedicated enough to go back and serve nine terms in the House of Representatives, where he died in service in his early eighties—a unique American story. John Quincy Adams was the embodiment of the Nation's opposition to slavery, and to something called the gag rule which, believe it or not, was imposed by the Southerners on the Congress before the Civil War so that you weren't even supposed to be able to bring up petitions opposing slavery on the floor of Congress.

Now, at that moment, Adams was the symbol for our country of the idea that the National Government ought to take a stand against slavery, to strengthen the Union and to, in effect, apply the guarantees of the Constitution to the present moment—in other words, to acknowledge that we were wrong when we started as a country and we said that black people were only three-fifths human and they didn't really count as citizens.

What's that got to do with this time? In every period of profound change in the whole history of the country, the debate is always the same. The debate is between those who believe that the period of change requires us to come closer together as one nation and to extend the fundamental principles on which we were founded to the new moment—and there have been four