

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom September 9, 1996

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the White House. It's a great pleasure for Hillary and for me to welcome all of you here, but especially our distinguished honorees and their families; Members of Congress who are here, Senator Lugar, Congresswoman Collins, Congressman Conyers, Congressman Delums; Secretary Christopher, Secretary Shalala, and Secretary Cisneros.

We're here to award the highest honor our Nation can bestow on a citizen, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. President Harry Truman established these awards as a tribute to those who helped to win the fight for democracy in World War II. President Kennedy elevated the medals to honor contributions by citizens to all aspects of American life.

Although we confer these medals today on worthy individuals, we recognize even more than individual achievement. We honor the American values that unite us as a people: opportunity and responsibility; a community in which all have a part; determination, dedication, and loyalty; faith, courage, and country. We are honoring renewed faith in the freedom that has brought this Nation this far and the freedom that will sustain us into the next century.

William Faulkner once said that we must be free not because we claim freedom but because we practice it. The 11 men and women we honor today have raised the practice of freedom to new heights. I would like to introduce each of them to you now.

As the Archbishop of Chicago, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin is one of our Nation's most beloved men and one of Catholicism's great leaders. When others have pulled people apart, Cardinal Bernardin has sought common ground. In a time of transition in his church, his community, his Nation, and the world, he has held fast to his mission to bring out the best in humanity and to bring people together. Throughout his career, he has fought tirelessly against social injustice, poverty, and ignorance. Without question, he is both a remarkable man of God and a man of the people.

Fifteen years ago, James Brady was at President Reagan's side when a would-be assassin nearly killed them both with a handgun he had

purchased at a gun shop. But Jim Brady is living proof that courage and determination were stronger than the assassin's bullet. Since that day, Jim and his wonderful wife, Sarah, who is with us today, have waged a moral and political battle to save lives and keep handguns out of the hands of criminals. His life is a testament to bravery, and every American family and every American child is safer because of it.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that Millard Fuller has literally revolutionized the concept of philanthropy. Twenty years ago he founded Habitat For Humanity to provide decent homes for disadvantaged people. To fund his plan he didn't ask people for their money; instead, he asked for the sweat of their brows. In return, he gave them something no tax deduction ever could, tangible proof that they had improved someone else's life with a home.

Hillary, the Vice President, Tipper, and I, like so many Americans, have all swung hammers for Habitat For Humanity, and I was honored to sign a law passed earlier this year to provide the first Federal support for land and infrastructure for Habitat. It's an interesting testament to Millard, to his wife, Linda, to all the wonderful people at Habitat that the three people who testified in favor of the law were Millard Fuller, Henry Cisneros, and Newt Gingrich. They did a good job at bringing America together, and we are all the beneficiaries of Millard Fuller's vision.

Physician, scientist, and educator David Hamburg has devoted his life to understanding human behavior, preventing violent conflict, and improving the health and well-being of our children. At Stanford he did pioneering work in the biology of mental illness and went to Tanzania to rescue four biology students who had been kidnaped there. He has worked to avoid all kinds of violent conflict, from nuclear war to ethnic strife. He has used his presidency of the influential Carnegie Corporation to support efforts for better parenting, strong families, and stronger childhoods, focusing especially on early childhood and adolescence. He is a truly remarkable man and a genuinely effective humanitarian.

Ten years ago I had the honor of recognizing John Johnson for his contributions as a native of our native State, Arkansas. John rose from poverty in Arkansas and Illinois to become one of the world's greatest pioneers in media, founding the landmark magazines *Ebony* and *Jet*. He gave African-Americans a voice and a face, in his words, "a new sense of somebody-ness," of who they were and what they could do, at a time when they were virtually invisible in mainstream American culture. A humble man despite becoming the most influential African-American publisher in history, he continues to inspire young African-Americans to succeed against the odds and to take advantage of their opportunities.

Speaking of opportunity, hardly anyone has ever done more personally to give people who didn't have it, opportunity, than Eugene Lang. In 1981 he made a simple promise to pay the college tuition of every student from his East Harlem alma mater who graduated from high school and wanted to go to college. Since then, his "I Have A Dream" Foundation has opened the doors of college for thousands of young people who seize the opportunity he offered. He has helped to make the most of their God-given abilities. We are all the beneficiaries of Eugene Lang's innovative vision, and it is a great tribute to him that since 1981 other philanthropists, many State governments, and now, I hope, our National Government, have joined him in trying to guarantee the dream of a college education to all people. He began it, and we are all in his debt.

Jan Nowak has dedicated his life to the fight for freedom. In World War II, he risked everything to carry vital information to the Allies. After the Nazis' defeat, he saw his native Poland once again in the grip of oppression, and he vowed to break it. For 25 years he was a dominant voice in Radio Free Europe, the great beacon of hope that brought so many people through the dark hours of communism. He continued to fight until the day he saw freedom triumph over tyranny. In America, his commitment to the ideal of democracy continues to inspire us all, and I can tell you that his inspiration is still felt in his native Poland where the people will never forget what he did and what he stood for.

Paz y respeto, peace and respect: These are the values that define the life and work of Antonia Pantoja. Her efforts to create educational

and economic opportunity for all Puerto Ricans have made her the most respected and beloved figure in the Puerto Rican community. Through *Aspira*, the educational program she helped to found 35 years ago, she still dares young Puerto Ricans to dream and to work to achieve their dreams. Her dedication to her people and, therefore, her contribution to our country is unsurpassed.

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus 40 years ago, she ignited the single most significant social movement in American history. When she sat down on the bus, she stood up for the American ideals of equality and justice, and demanded that the rest of us do the same. When our descendants look back in time to trace the fight for freedom, Rosa Parks will stand among our Nation's greatest patriots, the legendary figures whose courage sustained us and pushed us forward. She is, and continues to be, a national treasure.

Ginetta Sagan's name is synonymous with the fight for human rights around the world. In World War II, she paid dearly for her dedication to the cause of freedom. For more than a year, she was imprisoned and tortured but not broken. Instead, she devoted her life after the war to saving others from the ordeal she had endured. Through her tireless work with Amnesty International and her Aurora Foundation, she has drawn the world's attention to the plight of prisoners of conscience and of their families. Amnesty International has created a fund named in her honor designed to help stop torture and especially to stop the persecution of women and their children. She represents to all the triumph of the human spirit over tyranny.

Morris Udall represents everything a lawmaker should be: dedicated to seeking common ground; committed to improving the political process; and singularly possessed, as no one in my adult lifetime has been, of the one trait no Member of Congress should be without, an extraordinary sense of humor.

Mo was fond of quoting Will Rogers, who once advised us that in life you ought to get a few laughs and do the best you can. Well, he got a lot of laughs, and he did better than most. He set a standard few could match by his passionate commitment to preserve our national resources and to leave our children a safer environment. His life is an inspiration and more. His work is a gift to all Americans, and we

are especially grateful that his son could be with us today.

Now it is my great honor and privilege to present to each of you the Presidential Medal of Freedom with great respect for your work, your dedication, the example you have set for all your fellow Americans.

I ask now the military aide to read the citations.

[At this point, Lt. Col. Michael G. Mudd, USA, Army aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals.]

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, we're going in for a reception now. But I wanted to say one thing. Rosa Parks was delayed in Detroit just as many of these people were delayed trying to get here because of the traffic. So we will have another time to give her her medal. We're sorry she couldn't be here. We're delighted everyone else is here. Please come in for the reception.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:16 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Remarks After Surveying Flood Damage Along the Potomac River and an Exchange With Reporters

September 9, 1996

The President. Good afternoon. I have just completed a tour by helicopter of flooded areas in nearby Virginia and Maryland, along the Potomac and the C&O Canal with Interior Secretary Babbitt and FEMA Director James Lee Witt.

Let me first say that our thoughts and prayers are with the people who have suffered losses along our Eastern States because of the effects of Hurricane Fran. Lives have been lost; homes and businesses have been destroyed or badly damaged.

For many of our people, the effects have been truly devastating. I want to reassure the people who have suffered that we will provide quick action to help in their urgent time of need. We will do whatever we can to help them get back on their feet.

Virginia has been severely affected. We can see the flooding along the Potomac, but it has also occurred along the Dan, the James, the Roanoke, the Shenandoah, and the Rappahannock Rivers. On Friday, the day after Virginia Governor George Allen requested a disaster declaration, I authorized FEMA to provide 100 percent funding for direct Federal assistance to help with the cleanup of all counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In addition, based on visits to the affected areas by Director Witt, additional assistance is being made available to several cities: Danville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Waynesboro, and to Augusta, Halifax, Madison, Pittsylvania, and

Rockingham Counties, through FEMA's individual assistance programs.

Today five additional counties have been added to that list: Mecklenburg, Page, Rappahannock, Shenandoah, and Warren. This will give help to individuals, including temporary housing, family grants, and low-interest loans. Residents in Virginia counties designated for the individual programs should call FEMA's hotline to receive help.

The FEMA number is 800-462-9029. That's 800-462-9029. In North Carolina, where many lives have been lost, 24 counties have been declared eligible for the individual assistance programs as a result of Hurricane Fran. More than 4,000 people have already registered for help in the State of North Carolina.

FEMA will continue to assess the damage from storms, high winds, and flooding until we're sure that the needs of all the affected populations are met in Virginia, North Carolina, and in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

In disasters such as this, it takes all of us coming together to help our fellow citizens get back on their feet. Many have offered donations. A hotline has been set up for those donations as well. That's 800-747-8920. 800-747-8920. The American Red Cross is also helping to get aid to people in need.

Back in the winter, severe snowstorms caused terrible damage along the C&O Canal, as I saw