

even brighter days ahead for the American economy.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:58 a.m. on December 5 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on

December 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception December 7, 2003

Thank you all very much. Good evening, and welcome to the White House. Laura and I are pleased to have you all here, and we are so honored to be a part of this annual tradition. We especially welcome the 2003 Kennedy Center honorees and their family and their friends.

Every year, the Kennedy Center pays tribute to five outstanding artists. Each group of honorees is an interesting mix. [Laughter] This year, for example, we have a director whose best films are known to all. We have an actress who has created characters we all remember, who, I'm told, still does a mighty good Tarzan yell. [Laughter] And the three musicians with us are among the most recognized in the world. They're not known to have performed together—[laughter]—but the sight of all three on the same stage is a picture to remember.

The Kennedy Center Honors recognize great contributions to American culture. Each of the honorees is here because of their hard effort and superior performance through an entire career.

Only one honoree was born in Texas. [Laughter] That person is Carol Burnett, who spent her early years in San Antonio. Young Carol went off into the world, and the world took a liking to her from the start. She is today one of the most recognized and warmly regarded entertainers in America.

For her first performance in acting class at UCLA, the teacher gave Carol Burnett a "D-". [Laughter] But Carol found, as have I—[laughter]—that one bad grade or two—[laughter]—is not the end of the road. [Laughter]

By the end of her freshman year, she was named "Most Outstanding Newcomer." Within a few years, she became a star on Broadway and a television favorite on the Winchell-Mahoney Show and the Garry Moore Show. In the sixties and seventies, Carol's own variety show ran 11 years and received more than 20 Emmys. Every week, Carol performed one of the most difficult feats in all of show business, playing it straight with Tim Conway. [Laughter]

To this day, millions of Americans can instantly recall sketches and characters from the Carol Burnett Show. Whether she was playing Eunice or the Scrub Woman or Starlett O'Hara in "Went With The Wind"—[laughter]—viewers could always sense the person behind the character, the sweetness, the sincerity, and the wonderful spirit of Carol Burnett.

Through the years in such performances as "Same Time Next Year," Carol has also shown the depth and range of her talent. In her good life, she has been a beloved entertainer, a devoted mom, and a faithful friend. She is a cheerful and graceful presence in American life, and America honors Carol Burnett.

All great performances in front of a camera involve an artistic vision behind the camera, and few have spent more years at the top of the directing profession than Mike Nichols. His name on a production signifies quality, intelligence, and high artistic standards. His credits include some of the most memorable films of the last two generations. "The Graduate" was a hit movie and a triumph that has held up over time.

The best directors are always extending themselves, and Mike Nichols has turned his gifts to films as varied as "Catch-22," "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and "Working Girl." He is equally respected for his career on Broadway, first as a performer, then as director of the original "Odd Couple" and "Barefoot in the Park." The medal Mike Nichols wears this evening is the latest in a collection of other well-deserved honors, including the Oscar, the Emmy, the Tony, and the Grammy.

A movie critic once said that Mike Nichols' greatest talent may be his ability to bring out the best in performers, and that is another reason why Mike Nichols is among the finest.

Mike has summed up his career this way: "I have been in love with movies all my life. Directing them is like getting to marry this girl you followed around for years and years." I don't know how long he followed around Diane Sawyer—[laughter]—but she is here to share in this very proud moment.

And Mike's parents, who brought their little boy to America from Nazi Germany, would also be proud of their son. And tonight we are really proud to honor this fine man, Mike Nichols.

During this evening's reception, we will hear music from the Marine Band. I suspect that these fine musicians are thrilled to be in the presence of one of the greatest violinists of his age or any other.

As it happens, Laura and I were guests in this very room when Itzhak Perlman performed for President and Mrs. Reagan. That audience, like every audience to hear

this man, was captivated by his music and charmed by his presence. According to a review of a recent concert in Minneapolis, "Perlman maintained an intimate rapport with the audience. For instance, he kept them updated on the score of the World Series between pieces." [Laughter] He was clearly having fun, and so was his audience.

The sound of a violin first called to him over the radio when he was just 3 years old. The Perlmans gave their boy a toy fiddle. He soon exhausted the possibilities of that instrument. Armed with a real violin, he was onstage with orchestras in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and by the age 10 had given his first solo recital. America first came to know him 3 years later, when in 1958 he played "Flight of the Bumblebee" on the Ed Sullivan show. From that day to this, Itzhak Perlman has had a unique hold on the respect and affection of all who love classical music. He has played with every major orchestra in the world. He's collected more than a dozen Grammys, enthralled listeners with a repertoire stretching from baroque to contemporary, and touched millions of filmgoers with the pure and haunting solos in "Schindler's List."

Critics have written of Perlman's technical mastery, the rich tone and faultless intonation. And all who have seen him play are struck by the apparent ease with which he plays the most demanding of instruments. This good soul has been given a singular talent, and in sharing it he has brought much beauty into the world. For that, we are all honored to be in the presence of Maestro Itzhak Perlman.

Speaking of soul—[laughter]—James "Butane" Brown is in the house. Of course, he goes by other titles. Some men are too cool to only have one nickname. James Brown has been called "Mr. Dynamite," "Soul Brother Number One," and of course, "The Godfather of Soul." Many names fit him, but there's no one else like him. And in a career of more than 50 years,

he has earned the reputation as a live performer with no equal and as an institution of rock and roll.

He grew up in Georgia, knowing many of the toils and struggles of an earlier time. He worked hard and took his own path. He received guidance along the way from many sources, from his Aunt Honey, who raised him, to the first preachers and gospel musicians he heard. He joined a band that called itself "The Famous Flames." It took only a short while before the name was changed, by general agreement, to "James Brown and the Famous Flames." [Laughter] When you hear the title of a James Brown song, right away you can picture him singing it: "I Feel Good," "Please, Please, Please," "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," "Living in America."

Since he first achieved fame in the 1950s, James has posted 98 entries on Billboard's Top 40 R&B Singles Chart, more than any other performer. Bonnie Raitt has described James Brown's place in music history this way, "You couldn't even list how many people have been influenced by him. In the Mount Rushmore of musical figures, he definitely would be on it."

Of course, on that Mount Rushmore of music, the sculptor would have to pay particular attention to the hair. [Laughter] James is the first to tell you that the look is important to his success. Here's what he says, "Hair is the first thing, and teeth are the second." [Laughter] "Hair and teeth, a man got these two things, he's got it all." [Laughter]

The truth is, James Brown was being awfully modest. Along with the look, this man is blessed with incredible talent, undeniable stage presence, and the discipline of a true professional. He's still on the road and living it up—living up to that other nickname, "the hardest working man in show business." Our congratulations to James Joe Brown, Junior.

We are delighted to welcome our final honoree to the White House. Loretta Lynn even mentioned the White House in one

of her songs. Since I don't have a band right here and since I can't sing—[laughter]—I'll just say the words, and you can imagine Loretta singing them: "The White House social season should be glittering and gay, but here in Topeka the rain is a-falling, the faucet is a-dripping, and the kids are a-bawling"—[laughter]—"one of them a-toddling, and one is a-crawling, and one's on the way." [Laughter]

Many of Loretta Lynn's songs are about the challenges, the dreams, and the joys of everyday life. She's known them all, and she has sung about them with style and feeling. More than four decades after she first sang at the Grand Ole Opry, there is no better known voice in country music and no lady more admired than Loretta Lynn.

Her song and the film "Coal Miner's Daughter" tell a true story that began in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky. Loretta grew up believing, in her words, that "from the Holler down to the mine was the whole world."

Her world changed when she met a soldier named Mooney Lynn. He made a strong impression on people. See, Mooney was the kind of man who wore a cowboy hat with a label inside that said, "Like hell it's yours." [Laughter] But as Loretta remembers, "I wasn't scared of Mooney. He was real nice. I was scared because I had never seen a car before." [Laughter] They married and moved away and were living in the State of Washington when Mooney got an idea. He knew that the voice singing lullabies to their children was better than any he had ever heard from a jukebox or in a saloon. And just maybe if Loretta cut a record, radio stations might play it.

That notion has been proven correct in more than 70 record albums, 27 number one singles, and 80 chart hits, from "Coal Miner's Daughter" to "Love is the Foundation" to "Don't Come Home A Drinkin' With Lovin' on Your Mind." [Laughter]

Loretta has received every top honor in country music and is loved for her own

songs and for her wonderful duets with the late Conway Twitty. Her appeal has been explained this way, "She's straightforward, down home, innocent, and perfectly charming. Everyone loves her." And this evening, that unanimous opinion is expressed once again, and the Nation pays tribute to Loretta Lynn.

Americans are grateful to these Kennedy Center honorees because you have all given us wonderful memories. You have given

your peers a high mark to aim for. Each of you in your own way has given America a body of work that reflects so very well on our Nation. Thank you for contributions to America. May God continue to bless you. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:05 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musician Bonnie Raitt.

Remarks on Signing the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003

December 8, 2003

Good morning. Thanks for the warm welcome. In a few moments I will have the honor of signing an historic act of Congress into law. I'm pleased that all of you are here to witness the greatest advance in health care coverage for America's seniors since the founding of Medicare.

With the Medicare Act of 2003, our Government is finally bringing prescription drug coverage to the seniors of America. With this law, we're giving older Americans better choices and more control over their health care, so they can receive the modern medical care they deserve. With this law, we are providing more access to comprehensive exams, disease screenings, and other preventative care, so that seniors across this land can live better and healthier lives. With this law, we are creating Health Savings Accounts. We do so so that all Americans can put money away for their health care tax-free.

Our Nation has the best health care system in the world, and we want our seniors to share in the benefits of that system. Our Nation has made a promise, a solemn promise to America's seniors. We have pledged to help our citizens find affordable medical care in the later years of life. Lyndon Johnson established that commitment

by signing the Medicare Act of 1965. And today, by reforming and modernizing this vital program, we are honoring the commitments of Medicare to all our seniors.

The point man in my administration on this issue was Secretary Tommy Thompson, and he and his team did a fabulous job of working with the Congress to get this important piece of legislation passed. Tommy, I want to thank you for your leadership.

This bill passed the Congress because of the strong leadership of a handful of Members, starting with the Speaker of the House, Denny Hastert. Mr. Speaker was joined by Senator Bill Frist, the Senate majority leader of the Senate, in providing the leadership necessary to get this bill done. I want to thank you both.

I appreciate the hard work of the House majority leader, Tom DeLay, in seeing that this bill was passed. I also appreciate the hard work of the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Chairman Bill Thomas, for his good work. The chairman of the Finance Committee in the Senate, Senator Chuck Grassley, did a noble job, and he was joined in this task by the ranking member of the Finance Committee, Senator Max Baucus of Montana.