

## Remarks at PBS's "A Celebration of American Creativity: In Performance at the White House"

October 14, 2015

*The President.* Well, good evening, everybody.  
*Audience members.* Good evening.

*The President.* Welcome to the White House. You all look very sharp. [*Laughter*]

Tonight we honor the 50th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Humanities with a celebration of one of our most precious gifts: American creativity.

I want to begin by thanking tonight's performers. We have an unbelievable lineup: Ms. Carol Burnett, Buddy Guy, Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, Audra McDonald, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Keb' Mo', Smokey Robinson, and Trombone Shorty, Esperanza Spalding, James Taylor, Usher. This is an eclectic bunch. [*Laughter*]

But that's what tonight is all about. In 1965, a year that President Lyndon Johnson signed into law some of America's most important achievements—Medicare and Medicaid, the Voting Rights Act, the Immigration Act—he also signed a law creating the National Endowment of the Arts and the Humanities. And he did this because he believed in a Great Society that, in his words, "serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community."

Creativity. It's always played a central role in the life of our Nation. It's our artists who hold up a mirror to our society, reminding us of our common purpose and our collective obligations. Our music, in particular, has always been an honest reflection of who we really are: a reflection of our successes and our shortcomings; of our diversity, our imagination, our restlessness; of our stubborn insistence on blending the old with the new, tradition with experimentation.

We have lofty expectations of ourselves, but we don't often do lofty in our music. American music is grounded in the stories of real people living real lives, telling their stories. Whether jazz or blues, country or rock and roll, Broadway or hip-hop, it's rooted in records of slavery and segregation, and Dust Bowl and Depres-

sion, winning wars and coming home, working and losing that proud factory job; tales of hometowns and the 'hood; always tales of falling in love and having your heart broken.

In America, we turn life into lyrics. "Listen to the lyrics," Buddy Guy once said. "We're singing about everyday life: rich people trying to keep money, poor people trying to get it"—[*laughter*]"—and everyone having trouble with their husband or wife!" [*Laughter*] Except me. [*Laughter*]

By the way, people sometimes ask me what the biggest perk of being President is. Number one is the plane. [*Laughter*] Number two is Buddy Guy comes here all the time to my house with his guitar. [*Laughter*] And then, Esperanza brings her bass, and stuff happens around here. [*Laughter*]

But that quintessentially American creative spirit—sowed in our own soil, defined by our own experience, flavored by each new wave of immigrants that reaches our shores—that may be our greatest export: the American soundtrack. To believe that, you've just got to watch the way that people around the world who weren't born in the U.S.A. fall in love with it. It gives you a sense of the chords we touch through our music, through our art, through our creativity.

And that's what you'll hear tonight, across performances and genres: a road trip through a sprawling map of American music. You'll hear it in the "12-bar, bent-note melody" of Chicago blues and Delta blues, in New Orleans jazz and Nashville country, in the Motown of Detroit and the show tunes that gave Broadway its lights. And you'll hear it, loudly, in the rock and roll and hip-hop that parents keep telling their kids to turn down, until, then, we become the parents. [*Laughter*]

America, that is who we are. And somewhere out there right now is the next Esperanza Spalding picking up her first bass or the next Audra McDonald singing into her hairbrush; the next James Taylor strumming his first chords.

It might not sound so good yet. They're still learning how to play; maybe they're annoying their neighbors. They might not have quite enough experience for the depth of lyrics that you'll hear tonight. But music has taken hold of their souls. And our task is to make sure that no matter who they are or where they come from or what they look like or what their story is, this country is one that cultivates their talent and gives them the chance to tell it. That's got to be true from school music programs to the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. We've got to support our artists and

celebrate their work and do our part to ensure that the American creative spirit that has defined us from the very beginning will thrive for generations to come.

So, with that, it's my great pleasure to welcome to our stage our first performer, Keb' Mo'.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:47 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musicians Dana E. "Queen Latifah" Owens, Lana M. "MC Lyte" Moorer, Kevin "Keb' Mo'" Moore, Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, and Usher T. Raymond IV.

## Remarks on United States Military Strategy in Afghanistan and an Exchange With Reporters

*October 15, 2015*

Good morning. Last December, more than 13 years after our Nation was attacked by Al Qaida on 9/11, America's combat mission in Afghanistan came to a responsible end. That milestone was achieved thanks to the courage and the skill of our military, our intelligence, and civilian personnel. They served there with extraordinary skill and valor, and it's worth remembering especially the more than 2,200 American patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan.

I visited our troops in Afghanistan last year to thank them on behalf of a grateful nation. I told them they could take great pride in the progress that they helped achieve. They struck devastating blows against the Al Qaida leadership in the tribal regions, delivered justice to Usama bin Laden, prevented terrorist attacks, and saved American lives. They pushed the Taliban back so the Afghan people could reclaim their communities, send their daughters to school, and improve their lives. Our troops trained Afghan forces so they could take the lead for their own security and protect Afghans as they voted in historic elections, leading to the first democratic transfer of power in their country's history.

Today, American forces no longer patrol Afghan villages or valleys. Our troops are not engaged in major ground combat against the Tal-

iban. Those missions now belong to Afghans, who are fully responsible for securing their country.

But as I've said before, while America's combat mission in Afghanistan may be over, our commitment to Afghanistan and its people endures. As Commander in Chief, I will not allow Afghanistan to be used as safe haven for terrorists to attack our Nation again. Our forces therefore remain engaged in two narrow, but critical, missions: training Afghan forces and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of Al Qaida. Of course, compared to the 100,000 troops we once had in Afghanistan, today fewer than 10,000 remain, in support of these very focused missions.

I meet regularly with my national security team, including commanders in Afghanistan, to continually assess, honestly, the situation on the ground, to determine where our strategy is working and where we may need greater flexibility. I have insisted consistently that our strategy focus on the development of a sustainable Afghan capacity and self-sufficiency. And when we've needed additional forces to advance that goal or we've needed to make adjustments in terms of our timetables, then we've made those adjustments. Today I want to update the American people on our efforts.