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Introduction

While some believe that the term originated in 17th century England when it was customary to float a small piece of toast on a drink and others believe that it was the Roman Empire practice of using a burnt piece of bread to mitigate the caustic taste of wine, the custom of toasting can be traced in most cultures as far back as recorded history. From ancient warriors drinking to their gods to Norsemen saluting each other to modern leaders paying ceremonial tribute to whole peoples, toasting has evolved into accepted, if not expected, modern practice.

The tradition of accompanying a toast with the “clanging” of glasses has similarly evolved over time. One theory is that since Ancient Greeks often spiked beverages with poison, by “clanging” full glasses together, one could slyly blend the contents of the overflowing cups insuring that any poison taint both goblets. Unless suicidal, the perpetrator would somehow avoid consuming the deadly mixture, and so would the intended victim.



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Toasting

When toasts are offered¹, they should be kept short (three to four sentences are about right), simple, upbeat and flattering. Original humor (that works, preferably) can make a toast memorable. Though you may want to appear to be spontaneous, it will serve you well to prepare your remarks in advance. Always remember to be yourself and conclude on a positive note inviting all to share in the occasion by drinking or “clanging” glasses and drinking.

Do not bang cutlery on crystal to get attention. Crystal often breaks and you will be greatly embarrassed. By standing at your place, you should gain enough attention to quiet attendees automatically. If guests are so rapped in conversation, simply begin your toast by asking for everyone's attention.

Some factors to consider when preparing a toast include properly and graciously honoring the occasion, guest of honor and the other distinguished guests assembled, using foreign pronunciation correctly, being mindful of any language difficulties participants may have and checking sight-lines and acoustics to insure that everyone can see and hear.

¹ On occasion, a welcome speech introducing or celebrating the moment and the guest of honor obviates the need for toasting.



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When they are offered, toasts are usually given during or immediately after the dessert course with either champagne, sparkling wine or dessert wine. A conscientious host will have a non-alcoholic alternative for any non-drinkers².

It is the prerogative of the host to propose the first toast which is followed, in turn, with a response from the guest of honor. Remember, never toast the guest of honor before the host and guests should check with the host before making toasts of their own. If dessert has been served and the host has not offered a toast, a guest may check privately with the host and propose a toast.

Responding

The individual(s) being toasted should remain seated and not drink at the conclusion of the remarks. It's like saluting or applauding ones self. A man should rise, say "Thank you," or propose reciprocal toast, as appropriate; a woman, while perfectly free to rise and make a toast of her own, has the additional social option of remaining seated, smiling and nodding in the direction of the speaker with or without raising her glass.

² Sparkling apple cider is a widely used alternative.



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Never refuse to participate in a toast. Guests need not empty their glasses with each toast, a small sip is perfectly acceptable. Be mindful of the moment; it is extremely discourteous not to participate in the spirit of the occasion.

No Alcohol

People who do not consume alcohol, for whatever reason, should not turn glasses upside down or wave-off the wait staff. If a host has not made non-alcoholic arrangements, simply feign a sip or raise an empty glass, do not sip from your water goblet.

International Customs

No surprise, every culture has different traditions so it is wise to check before utilizing an international custom to insure proper use. Not all toasts necessarily translate well, especially if they are idiomatic or poetic. It's a good idea to stick to safe topics like friendship, the enjoyment of life and health.

The strongest and most formal toasting traditions are found in the eastern European, Germanic and Scandinavian countries. Here a host may begin the meal with a toast of welcome in addition to the toasts offered toward the end of a meal.



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Asian countries also have a strong tradition of toasting. In fact, China, Korea and Japan all have a similar toast, but with a different pronunciation. The Chinese say ganbei, pronounced 'gon-bay', which literally means dry glass or bottoms up. In Japan, the word is kampai, pronounced 'kahm-pie'. Drinking customs also differ. In Korea, the glass is emptied and the last few drops are shaken out, then it is passed to the guest and the host refills the glass. A glass is never refilled until it is completely empty in Korea, whereas in Japan the glass is constantly refilled so it is never empty.

To Your Health - International Toasts

Chinese	Ganbei (Gon-bay) Dry glass or bottoms up
English	To your health
French	A votre santé
German	Prosit
Hebrew	Le Chayim
Irish	Sláinte
Italian	Salute
Japanese	Kampai (kahm-pie)
Polish	Nazdrowie
Russian	Na zdorov'e
Spanish	Salud
Swedish	Sköäl



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Ceremonial Toasts

Ceremonial or diplomatic toasts at official functions can be lengthy “mini-speeches” that require significant planning and notice to those who are expected to respond. Every word, gesture and nuance will be studied and analyzed since these toasts are viewed as snapshots of policy and relationship as can be seen from the exchanges President Clinton had with President Jiang of China (Example A) and Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom (Example B) at the White House.

It is polite to have an interpreter present. Don't rely on the guest of honors' or invitees ability to speak your language fluently.

At official events, a toast is not “made” to the guest of honor unless that person is a Chief of State or Head of Government. By way of a toast outline, welcome the guest of honor and accompanying spouse, note the history and present nature of the relationship between the two nations, express the desire for continued progress and cooperation between the peoples of the two countries and conclude by inviting the other guests to drink to the Chief of State or the Head of Government and the people of the guest of honor's country. A thoughtful gesture is the injection of some phrases in the language of the guest of honor.



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It is considered good form to forward a copy of the ceremonial remarks to the guest of honor before the event so that an appropriate reply can be drafted. You may, in fact, receive the proposed reply in advance and have the ability to resolve any “difficult” issues that may surface before the function ever begins.

Since these types of events often generate significant media interest, record the remarks and have prepared texts available for release. If the occasion warrants, you may choose to invite the press to attend for the remarks portion of the event.





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Example A

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 29, 1997

REMARKS OF PRESIDENT CLINTON
AND PRESIDENT JIANG ZEMIN
IN EXCHANGE OF TOASTS

The East Room

9:00 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. President Jiang, Mrs. Wang, members of the Chinese delegation, Ambassador and Mrs. Sasser, distinguished guests, friends all, Hillary and I welcome you to America's house.

Mr. President, in your lifetime you have witnessed the sweep of a remarkable century, both in China and abroad. And in your different occupations you have lived a rich sampling of the human enterprise. While you lead China toward the future, we know you also are a student of the past, with an interest in our history, from Thomas Jefferson to Mark Twain. Not many heads of state can recite the Gettysburg Address, Mr. Lincoln's powerful hymn to the sanctity of our union and our guarantee of freedom.

China has played an important role in our history. In 1784, shortly after America's independence, the first American merchant ship landed in China. The Chinese officials knew we were not European, so they simply called us the "new people." And though we were unfamiliar, the Chinese allowed us to trade freely with them. So one of the oldest societies on Earth, China, extended the hand of friendship to the world's youngest nation.

The two centuries since then are a tiny fraction of recorded Chinese history. Long before the United States was even born, China was a stronghold of creativity, knowledge, and wealth. From the printing China invented to the poetry it produced, from medicine and mathematics to the magnetic compass and humanistic philosophies, many of China's earliest gifts still enrich our lives today.



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Now the Chinese people are dramatically building on this legacy. Economic reform over the past 20 years has transformed China's landscape and its people's daily lives -- lifting millions from poverty, giving more people education, shelter, choice of work, and a chance to provide for their children, bringing the Chinese people closer to the rest of the world and into a greater leadership role in the community of nations.

Now on the verge of the new century, both our nations seek to continue this progress, to contribute to China's growing prosperity, to encourage its democratic development, to support its emergence as a responsible global power and partner.

Surely a new world is dawning on the other side of the millennium. From Shanghai to San Francisco, a community is emerging that can become "Pacific" in every sense of the word. Communication and commerce cross even the world's widest ocean in only a matter of seconds, making all of us neighbors.

Let us make the most of these new realities. Our commercial and cultural relationship is strong and growing stronger. Our people travel back and forth, teaching and learning from each other. Mr. President, we Americans are proud that your son received a part of his education at one of our universities, and we want more of our young people to study in China. We want to work even more closely to promote peace, to fight drugs and organized crime; to build prosperity, to protect our environment for future generations.

We must press ahead on these fronts and more. I hope some day, Mr. President, the children of both our nations will say of us that our decision gave new meaning in our time to President Lincoln's call for a new birth of freedom. The United States has benefitted already beyond measure from the contributions of Chinese Americans, whose unique culture and values of family, education and hard work have strengthened the fabric of our society. Already, China has enriched America's history. Now, Mr. President, let us work together with confidence to enhance our common destiny.

The ancient text, the I Ching, in English is called The Book of Changes. It tells us leaders plan in the beginning when they do things; leaders consider problems and prevent them. With this summit we have considered problems, taken steps to prevent some of them, and we have begun to plan together for a future not of problems, but of progress for America, for China, for the world.



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It is in that spirit that I ask you to join me in a toast to the people and the President of the People's Republic of China.

(A toast is offered.) (Applause.)

PRESIDENT JIANG: Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton, ladies and gentlemen. Allow me first to extend, on behalf of my wife and my colleagues, and also in my own name our hearty thanks to you, Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton, for hosting this grand banquet tonight in our honor. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the government and people of the United States of America for the warm hospitality accorded us.

Twenty-five years ago, in a display of extraordinary vision, wisdom, and political courage, leaders of China and the United States reopened the door to exchanges between the two countries. Since then, many public figures and prominent personages from various circles in the two countries have made positive contributions to the establishment, improvement, and development of China-U.S. relations. I would like to pay my high tribute to them.

In the past 25 years, China-U.S. relations have on the whole moved forward, despite twists and turns. Our bilateral cooperation, which has expanded in scope and become increasingly diversified, promises a huge potential and good prospect. A friendly relationship between China and the United States not only benefits the two peoples, but contributes significantly to peace, stability, and prosperity in the Asia Pacific and the world at large.

This morning, President Clinton and I reached agreement on the goal of the future development of China-U.S. relations -- namely, with a view to promoting the lofty cause of world peace and development, China and the United States should strengthen cooperation and endeavor to build a constructive, strategic partnership oriented towards the 21st century. This marks an important step forward and a new beginning in the development of China-U.S. relations.

As two great nations, China and the United States have a major responsibility for the future of the world. Owing to differing national conditions, it is natural that we may not always see eye to eye with each other. In our view, differences in national conditions can precisely be the driving force for better mutual understanding, increased exchanges and greater efforts to draw on each other's experience. As for differences in



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views and positions, they can well be resolved gradually through dialogue between equals on the basis of mutual respect.

Differences that cannot be resolved for the time being can be put aside while concentrating on seeking common ground. What we have in common has outweighed what we differ, as we share broad common interests in, among others, the maintenance of world peace and security, the promotion of global economic growth and prosperity, and the protection of the living environment of mankind. This is the very important basis for developing a friendly relationship between our two countries.

American poet, Longfellow, once wrote, "But to act that each tomorrow finds us farther than today. Act, act, in the living present." We should go along with the trend of the times and respond to the will of the people and continue our march forward toward the establishment and development of a constructive strategic partnership between our two countries.

Now I would like to propose a toast to the heirs of Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton -- to the heirs of all our friends here, to the friendship between our two peoples and their well-being, and toward peace and prosperity.

Thank you. (Applause.)

END 9:20 P.M. EST



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Example B

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 5, 1998

TOAST REMARKS
BY THE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER BLAIR
The State Dining Room

9:11 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, good evening and welcome to the White House. To Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair, members of the British delegation, to all our distinguished guests, let me say that the bad news is you have to listen to two brief toasts; the good news is it comes at the beginning of the dinner. We are delighted to have all of you here.

Tonight, in honor of the Prime Minister's visit, I would like to go over some of the highlights of the so-called special relationship between the United States and Great Britain. It began rather early in our history, this special relationship. (Laughter.) In 1785 Thomas Jefferson, soon to be our first Secretary of State, insisted that the United Kingdom was an evil empire whose time was running out. (Laughter.) "The sun of her glory is fast descending to the horizon," he said, with uncharacteristic myopia.

In 1814 marauding English soldiers gave new meaning to the term "global warming" when they torched the White House where we sit tonight -- (laughter) -- along with much of the surrounding countryside. My predecessor James Madison was lucky to escape with a very few belongings -- and a chastened view of our defense capabilities.



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But, Mr. Prime Minister, we are a forgiving people. And we learned a valuable lesson on that night in 1814 -- from now on let's get these guys on our side. That's been the core of our foreign policy ever since. (Laughter.)

When we think over the challenges of the 20th century, it's extraordinary what our two nations have been through together; decade after decade, staring down the darkest threats in the history of human kind. We would not have survived this turbulent century without the grand alliance joining our peoples. Through common values and a common language, we have forged an uncommon friendship.

Let me take this opportunity to announce that in honor of your visit, the place where you and Cherie are staying will now be forever known as Blair House. (Laughter and applause.)

Tonight, we look forward to a new millennium and a 21st century alliance for peace, prosperity, and progress. We have a rare chance to bring fruition to a century's worth of partnership. We can define the new century before it begins, escaping the 20th century's darkest moments and seizing the new century's most brilliant possibilities. We can stand together against tyrants. We can help peace flourish from Bosnia to Northern Ireland to the Middle East. We can continue to open our minds, our hearts, our societies to new ideas and new possibilities.

Mr. Prime Minister, you are breathing new life into politics and restoring faith in ancient principles of liberty so dear to every citizen of your realm. Throughout our history, our peoples have reinforced each other in the living classroom of democracy. It is difficult to imagine Jefferson, for example, without John Locke before him; difficult to imagine Lincoln without knowing that he read Shakespeare and Bunyan on the frontier.

In the new century, we must continue together undaunted. In the words of the Anglo-American poet, W. H. Auden: never beleaguered by negation, always showing an affirming flame. One of our most stubbornly affirmative Presidents, Harry Truman, felt that way. It's a rather closely guarded secret that this hard-nosed Missourian was shamelessly devoted to 19th century English sentimental poetry.

When he graduated from high school in 1901, at the dawn of the new century, Harry Truman copied his favorite poem onto a piece of paper. Throughout his life, he kept it with him, which required him to recopy it at least twenty times. Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" may seem an unusual choice, but the poem resonated with Truman's optimistic vision of the future, a future that then, as now, was limitless.



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With a new century beginning, "Locksley Hall" still holds the promise of a better life for those of us glimpsing the new world just over the horizon. "For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see, saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that could be." We must realize the promise of that poem.

Our alliance is strong. Our personal friendship is strong. It is a pleasure and an honor for Hillary and for me to reciprocate the hospitality that you, Mr. Prime Minister and Cherie, showed to us last May. And so I ask you all, ladies and gentlemen, to join me in raising a glass to my good friend, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, to Cherie, and all the people who are here with them, who represent the best promise of our tomorrows.

(A toast is offered.)

Thank you. (Applause.)

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Mr. President and ladies and gentlemen - Bill, thank you for that wonderful introduction and I look very much forward to going to Camp Blair tomorrow night. (Laughter.) We've had a marvelous time here and just a wonderful and warm welcome, and I would like, if I might, to begin by paying tribute to your President -- to his determination, to his statesmanship, and to his courage. Bill, I am pleased to call you a good colleague, and I am proud to call you a good friend.

And as I saw that high school earlier today, when I witnessed the enthusiasm of those young people as they greeted you, I know I am not alone in supporting you; I know the American people support you, too. (Applause.)

Can I also pay tribute to the First Lady as well, who is admired the world over, as we saw indeed in Britain last September at the funeral of Princess Diana, which was a difficult and hard time for us, how she represented America with such dignity and grace. And within the past few days, the whole world has seen those qualities of dignity and grace again. Thank you for all that you have done. (Applause.)

As I say, we have been greatly touched by our wonderful welcome, but just in case we thought we should -- or might get above ourselves, I was intrigued to come across the following letter in the White House when I was with my staff earlier today. It's a very interesting thing that apparently happens for all visiting dignitaries. It's called a pronunciation sheet. (Laughter). It's for the names of those that are difficult for people



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to pronounce. And as head of that pronunciation sheet, The Official Visit to Washington, D.C., of the Right Honorable Tony Blair, Prime Minister.

And then it's got a number of little boxes where you got to answer things. It's got members of the official British delegation -- the honorable Tony Blair, Prime Minister: pronunciation Blair. (Laughter). Form of address, Mr. Prime Minister. Then, it's got the box marked English speaking, answer yes. (Laughter).

Well, we've come a long way, I know. We're getting the hang of your language as well. (Laughter). I mean, I know, look, we've only been in nine months -- this is the thing. I don't know -- some of you may have heard that the British minister that shortly after the election went to this great rally and said that the policies that the Conservative administration for 18 years have brought us, our country, to the edge of a precipice and now is the time for a giant step forward. (Laughter). You know, we've been trying to recover from that ever since.

But one thing, since we got our colleagues from the media here, I must defend them against the accusation that they've only been interested in trivia, because the very first question I got when I was on the news programs this morning here in America was, "Will you be raising with the President the four originals stuffed models of A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore, Piglet, and Tigger. (Laughter). Not yet, we haven't -- no -- but we'll get 'round to that in time. I would just like to say -- yes, seriously, that's what they asked. (Laughter.) And the British ones as well.

Mr. President, you talked about the relationship between our two countries over a period of time. And you talked, of course, about how we'd stood together through the two world wars of this century. And I know, in fact, that it was with Winston Churchill that the whole idea arose of visiting dignitaries coming and staying in Blair House. That is apparently because Churchill came to stay for a day and ended up staying a month. (Laughter.) So I think Eleanor Roosevelt said that after that in the White House they should move across the road to Blair House. (Laughter.)

Churchill, who was one of the great Englishmen of this century, who -- I just came across something that was written about him the other day when there was a very -- Churchill was a very sort of strong character, as you know, and there was a young guy who had just come into Churchill's government -- this was in wartime Britain as part of the coalition -- and came bouncing into Churchill because he'd been prevented from going in the House of Commons by the Sergeant at Arms. And he comes in to Churchill and he says, Mr. Prime Minister, it's absolutely disgraceful, I've been stopped by the Sergeant at Arms of going into the House of Commons. He said, I



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don't think they knew who I was. And Churchill turned to him and said, and who were you? (Laughter.)

Those great days of America and Britain standing together, they will be remembered and recalled through a whole period of time. And one thing I wanted to share with you this evening was what was written in the great biography of Churchill by Martin Gilbert, when he described the circumstances in the 2nd world war, when Britain desperately needed the help of America, and when it wasn't certain that that help would be given in the way that we wished, when there was a little turbulence in Congress over whether it should happen or not, when people were discussing the best way forward to help.

And Harry Hopkins, who was the emissary of the American President, Roosevelt, went to see and to stay with Churchill. And he went 'round Britain, and on the last evening before he left to go back to America to take home a message to America, he gave a speech to the dinner. And sitting next to Churchill, he said, I suppose you wish to know what I'm going to say to President Roosevelt on my return. And then Harry Hopkins said he would quoting a verse from the Bible: Wither thou goest I will go, and whither thou lodgest I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

And Hopkins paused, and then he said, "Even to the end," and Churchill wept. And that was right at the most difficult, hardest, most poignant moment of our relations this century.

And so it's easy to see why, for anyone from Britain proud enough to be British Prime Minister, who comes here, we feel that sense of our common history. But what binds us together, you know, is more than our history. And it's greater than our language. And it's deeper than our mutual self-interest.

It is a genuine, shared understanding of what drives and motivates the human spirit; the striving to do and to be better; the great values of freedom and progress and justice that are the values that have motivated the best in my country throughout the ages and motivate the best in America today.

And when we look around our world and we see that crises are no longer confined to one nation -- a national crisis becomes an international crisis, when we see that global economic change drives through forces of difficulty for people that they've never contemplated before, and when we see the social change that comes in the wake of that economic change, then those shared values are more important than ever before.



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And that shared understanding more vital to our future than ever before because there are no problems that are solved simply by nations alone today. There are problems that face us all and must be solved by us as nations together. So our relationship -- the relationship between Britain and America -- yes, it is a relationship founded on a magnificent past, but it is a relationship today every bit as important for our future.

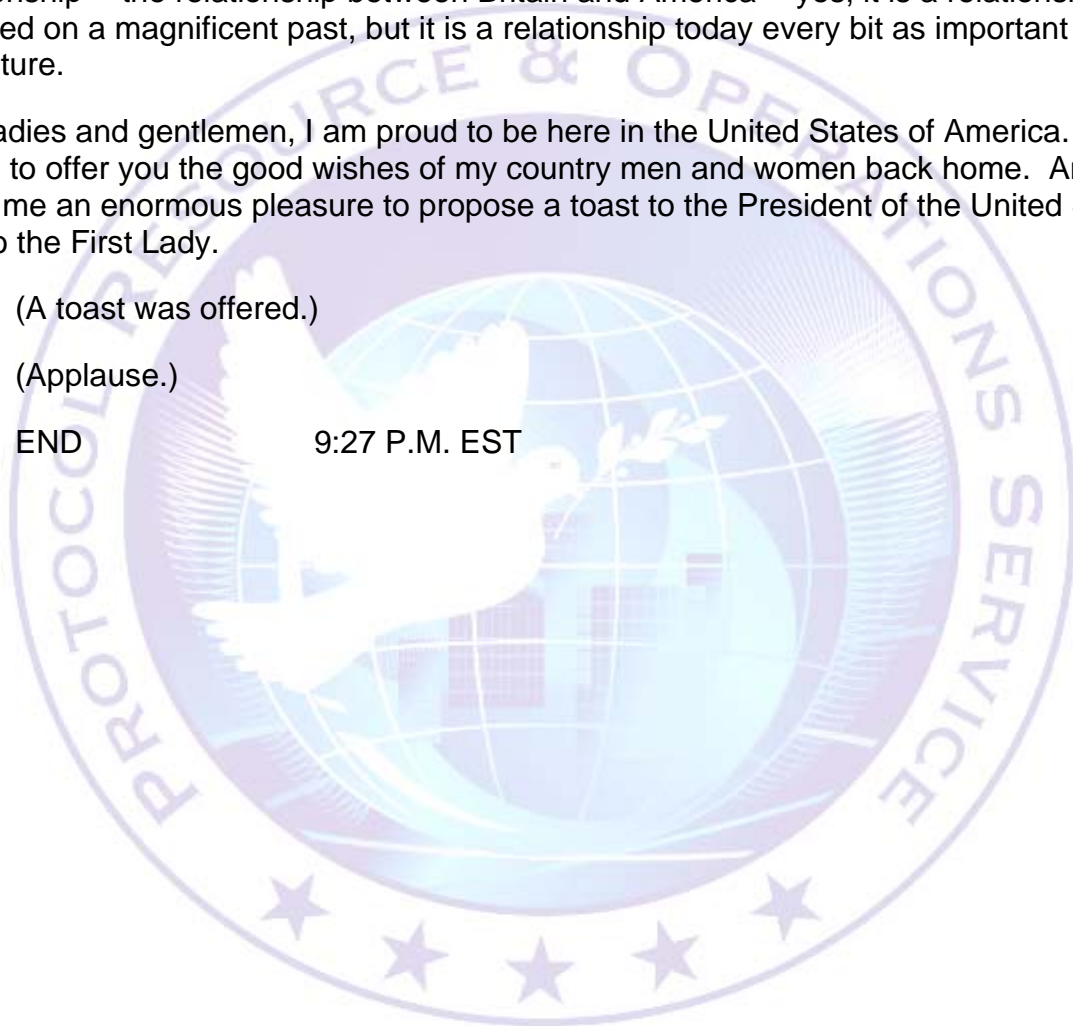
Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to be here in the United States of America. I am proud to offer you the good wishes of my country men and women back home. And it gives me an enormous pleasure to propose a toast to the President of the United States and to the First Lady.

(A toast was offered.)

(Applause.)

END

9:27 P.M. EST





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The Night the White House Rocked: Clinton's Turn Up the Volume At Dinner for Britain's Tony Blair

By: Roxanne Roberts and Lonnae O'Neal Parker
The Washington Post; Friday, February 6, 1998; Page B01

It's been a tough couple of weeks for President Clinton. But there's nothing like company to shore up sagging spirits. And last night's star-studded White House dinner for British Prime Minister Tony Blair was just the ticket.

The guest list included Sir Elton John and Stevie Wonder, who teamed up for an after-dinner performance. "It's a bit like playing a wedding reception," John said. Barbra Streisand and her fiancée, James Brolin, were there, plus John Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, Tom Hanks, Harrison Ford, Steven Spielberg, Ralph Lauren, Tina Brown, Anna Wintour, Carol Channing and (whew!) Warren Buffett.

Clearly, it was Clinton's party.

"I'm really pleased the American people have shown great support and good judgment in this matter," Streisand said. "I wish the people who do these illegal leaks and the media who exploit them would show similar respect for the right to privacy and the presumption of innocence. After that, it's no one's business what anyone does behind closed doors."

Not to mention that "he's the most fun president we've ever had -- I think we can all agree about that," said Brolin. "The fact is, the job is getting done and he's enjoying himself."

With 240 guests, it was the largest official Clinton administration dinner held inside the White House. Several guests who originally declined the invitations later scrambled to accept, a testament to Clinton's popularity and the collective star power.

"I can't say we campaigned to come tonight, but we would have," said Sony President Howard Stringer. "It's the ultimate Brit night out."

After dinner, he was even more impressed: "If it gets any cooler than this I'll be frozen."



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Even a "not too social" fellow like Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott couldn't refuse. "My wife would kill me if I tried to skip an event like this," he said.

This is the first real baby-boomer White House dinner: Clinton, 51, and Blair, 44, both have boyish good looks, Oxford educations, wives who supported (emotionally and financially) their political careers and a passion for popular music.

And so it was no surprise that they bonded so quickly. The Clinton's went to London shortly after Blair's victory last May, but this is the prime minister's first official visit to Washington.

The official agenda: Iraq, Bosnia, Northern Ireland and NATO expansion. The unofficial agenda: proof that it's business as usual at the White House. Pundits speculated that Blair was serving as a "human shield" for Clinton, a charge the prime minister flatly denied. "I don't regard myself as doing a favor at all," he told ABC television earlier this week. This visit had been scheduled before the allegations of hanky-panky with a former White House intern hit the headlines.

The mere presence of John and Wonder was enough to assure a memorable evening. "Two of the world's greatest entertainers are here," said presidential pal Harry Thomason. "So being in the entertainment business, how could you go wrong?"

"Everyone's really buzzing," said designer Lauren. "It's really exciting."

"I'm excited," said presidential adviser James Carville. "It's fun to call everybody afterward and tell them what it was like."

This was the second White House dinner in a row for Spielberg, who was a guest at October's fete for China's Jiang Zemin. There, he said, he felt like Forrest Gump. This time, "I brought Forrest Gump," he said, pointing to Hanks.

As one might expect with such an array of star power, there was quite a display of fashionable attire. Hillary Rodham Clinton's gold lace gown by Pamela Dennis complemented the gold dinner suit of Cherie Blair.

Bessette was sleek and elegant in a black fitted gown. Streisand designed her own empire-waist burgundy velvet dress. Diane von Furstenberg fluttered in a navy ostrich boa. But it was Channing, who has traded her trademark blond hair for a salt-and-pepper do, who caught everyone's eye with tinted glasses, rhinestones and a



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gaudy, sparkling choker.

The toasts before dinner were long on charm and laughs and short on diplomatic pontificating. Clinton began by acknowledging the "uncommon friendship" between the two nations. "In honor of your visit," said the president, "the place where you and Cherie are staying will now forever be known as Blair House" -- a line that drew a big laugh from the guests.

Blair's tribute began on an equally lighthearted note, but the prime minister went on to affirm his friendship with Clinton: "Bill, I'm pleased to call you a good colleague and proud to call you a good friend. I know I'm not alone in supporting you. I know the American people support you, too." There was sustained applause from the audience, then Blair went on to praise the first lady as well. To reflect the "warm" relationship between the two countries, Hillary Clinton decorated the East Room in tones of gold, peach and terra cotta. She selected a menu of honey-mango glazed chicken, grilled salmon fillet "mignons" with portobello mushrooms, and marinated fresh mozzarella (a favorite food of Blair) served with roasted artichokes and basil tomatoes. All the wines were from Napa Valley but had ties to England.

Dessert was a spectacular chocolate basket filled with strawberry mousse, served with fresh strawberries and chocolate figures of London's Big Ben.

After dinner, the guests swept into a tent erected over the West Terrace for the entertainment. Wonder sang for the Clinton's at the 1997 inaugural gala, but John was performing at the White House for the first time.

"I've loved Stevie Wonder since I was 9 years old -- he's my hero," said Melissa Mathison, screenwriter and wife of actor Harrison Ford. There was a rumor that the two rock-and-roll leaders -- Clinton with his saxophone and Blair strumming a guitar -- might join the musical legends on stage. But the White House sadly announced no instruments had been requested for what would have been a historic jam session.

"It's a pretty high-powered battle of the bands either way," Hanks said.

The hour-long concert began with John performing "Your Song." After he finished, the singer said he was so nervous that he had forgotten to greet the distinguished guests and proceeded to do so. He then launched into a series of his greatest hits: "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues," "Daniel," "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" and "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me."



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After John introduced him as "one of the all-time great musicians," Wonder took to the piano. He paused. "Just looking at everybody," the blind musician kidded.

He launched into a version of "Overjoyed" by saying, "This song probably describes how I feel about this night. Check it out."

Wonder tried to inject a little life into the audience by asking them to clap while he sang "For Once in My Life." Throughout his performance, he teased, prodded and cajoled the crowd of luminaries.

"Snap your fingers, shake your head. Do some thing!" he pleaded.

"You guys sound like a library meeting."

After "I Just Called to Say I Love You," a selection which elicited some snickers from the press corps, Wonder continued with "Sir Duke," "Isn't She Wonderful" and, in honor of Mrs. Blair, "My Cherie Amour," which drew an appreciative laugh from the audience.

Sir Elton joined Wonder on stage for the final song, which Wonder introduced by saying that "love was wonderful, but when you can't get the love, this is what you ask for." The two then jumped into a rousing rendition of "Money Money."

They received a standing ovation, of course. Clinton added his appreciation. "Thank you, Sir Elton," he said. "I wish I could give Stevie a knighthood."

But the party wasn't over yet! The president, first lady and guests danced to "My Girl," "Mustang Sally," "Heard It Through the Grapevine" and "In the Mood." The Clinton's had such a good time they stayed until 1 a.m.

"It's like the wildest wedding I've ever been to," said Hanks, as the party drew to a close. "Good band, good food."

A good time for the president -- for a few hours, at least.