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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT AMERICA'S MILLENNIUM GALA
The Lincoln Memorial
Washington, D.C.
December 31, 1999

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we celebrate. The change of centuries, the dawning of a new millennium, are now just minutes away. We celebrate the past. We have honored America's remarkable achievements, struggles, and triumphs in the 20th century. We celebrate the future, imagining an even more remarkable 21st century.

As we marvel at the changes of the last hundred years, we dream of what changes the next hundred, and the next thousand, will bring. And as powerful as our memories are, our dreams must be even stronger. For when our memories outweigh our dreams we become old, and it is the eternal destiny of America to remain forever young, always reaching beyond, always becoming, as our founders pledged, a more perfect union. So we Americans must not fear change. Instead, let us welcome it, embrace it, and create it.

The great story of the 20th century is the triumph of freedom and free people, a story told in the drama of new immigrants, the struggles for equal rights, the victories over totalitarianism, the stunning advances in economic well-being, in culture, in health, in space and telecommunications, and in building a world in which more than half the people live under governments of their own choosing, for the first time in all history. We must never forget the meaning of the 20th century, or the gifts of those who worked and marched, who fought and died, for the triumph of freedom.

So as we ring in this new year, in a new century, in a new millennium, we must, now and always, echo Dr. King, in the words of the old American hymn, "Let freedom ring."

If the story of the 20th century is the triumph of freedom, what will the story of the 21st century be? Let it be the triumph of freedom wisely used, to bring peace to a world in which we honor our differences, and even more, our common humanity. Such a triumph will require great efforts from us all. It will require us to stand against the forces of hatred and bigotry, terror and destruction. It will require us to continue to prosper, to alleviate poverty, to better balance the demands of work and family, and to serve, each of us, in our communities.

It will require us to take better care of our environment. It will require us to make further breakthroughs in science and technology, to cure dread diseases, heal broken bodies, lengthen life, and unlock secrets from global warming to the black holes

in the universe. And, perhaps most important, it will require us to share -- with our fellow Americans and, increasingly, with our fellow citizens of the world, the economic benefits of globalization; the political benefits of democracy and human rights; the educational and health benefits of all things modern, from the Internet to the genetic encyclopedia, to the mysteries beyond our solar system.

Now, we may not be able to eliminate all hateful intolerance, but we can develop a healthy intolerance of bigotry, oppression, and abject poverty. We may not be able to eliminate all the harsh consequences of globalization, but we can communicate more and travel more and trade more, in a way that lifts the lives of ordinary working families everywhere, and the quality of our global environment.

We may not be able to eliminate all the failures of government and international institutions, but we can certainly strengthen democracy so all children are prepared for the 21st century world and protected from its harshest side effects. And we can do so much more to work together, to solve the problems and seize the opportunities of this ever smaller planet we all call home. In short, if we want the story of the 21st century to be the triumph of peace and harmony, we must embrace our common humanity and our shared destiny.

Now, we're just moments from that new millennium. Two centuries ago, as the framers were crafting our Constitution, Benjamin Franklin was often seen in Independence Hall looking at a painting of the sun low on the horizon. When, at long last, the Constitution finally was signed, Mr. Franklin, said: "I have often wondered whether that sun was rising or setting. Today I have the happiness to know it is a rising sun."

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