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JANUARY 10, 1977

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE
REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
MEDAL OF FREEDOM PRESENTATION
CEREMONY AND LUNCHEON

THE STATE FLOOR

12:20 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Distinguished honorees, ladies and gentlemen: Betty and myself are delighted to welcome all of you to the East Room of the White House today and it is a great privilege and pleasure for us to participate in this auspicious occasion where we have the opportunity of honoring such an outstanding group of men and women on this occasion.

Some of you we know personally. Others we are meeting for the first time, but you are all here because of your great contributions to American life.

It is a particular privilege for me because honoring extraordinary Americans on behalf of their fellow citizens is one of a President's most enjoyable duties.

The Medals of Freedom you are about to receive are the highest civilian honor that our country can bestow. Of course, excellence has its own reward not only to those who strive for it, but also to the free society which encourages it.

You are men and women who have used that freedom to achieve extraordinary excellence. Your outstanding accomplishments have made our lives better and set stirring examples for others to follow.

As we move from the Bicentennial year into our third century, America must remain a place where men and women are encouraged to create, innovate, to explore and to set the very highest standards, whatever their vocation.

Our country and all mankind will always need people like you whose energy, whose imagination, reveal our country's greatest potential.

With those remarks, let us proceed with the presentations.

MR. O'DONNELL: I. W. Abel. (Applause) Steelworker, social reformer, union organizer and labor statesman, I. W. Abel has forged a distinguished record of wise and firm leadership that exemplifies the very best tradition of the American labor movement. His many achievements and his unfailing concern for people have earned him not only the gratitude, but the esteem and respect of fellow citizens. (Applause)

John Bardeen, represented by his son, William Bardeen. (Applause) A physicist of genius, John Bardeen has combined

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formidable and unique scientific insights with the mathematical ability to carry them through. His discoveries have revolutionized electronics and communications, changing each of our lives for the better. We are proud to honor him as a creative master in the finest traditions of science and technology. (Applause)

Norman Borlaug. (Applause) Revolutionary scientist and eloquent prophet, he performed miracles with grain and saved untold millions from starvation. His work has pushed back the shadow of hunger on this planet and given us precious time to force its final retreat. (Applause)

General Omar N. Bradley. (Applause) Military hero, courageous in battle, and gentle in spirit, friend of the common soldier, General of the Army, first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he embodies the best of the American military tradition with dignity, humanity, and honor. (Applause)

Admiral Arleigh Burke. (Applause) Combat commander, innovative naval strategist and tactician, inspiring leader, first three-term Chief of Naval Operations, he made the sea a place of victory in war, a mighty fortress in peace. (Applause)

Bruce Catton. (Applause) Man of letters, preeminent historian of the War between the States, he made us hear the sounds of battle and to cherish peace. He made us see the bleeding wounds of slavery and hold man's freedom dear. (Applause)

Joe DiMaggio, represented by his brother, Dominick DiMaggio. (Applause) Superb athlete, coach, author and businessman, Joe DiMaggio stands tall among the ranks of genuine American heroes. Known and revered around the world as the "Yankee Clipper," he contributed many years of style and splendid ability to the sport which has come to be known as our national pastime. His character and grace both on and off the playing field have been a continuing source of inspiration to Americans of all ages. (Applause)

Ariel Durant. (Applause) Writer, historian and philosopher, Ariel Durant has combined a sensitive and sweeping vision with unique literary talents. Her life-long collaboration with her husband, Will, has helped make history accessible, popularizing but never cheapening its lessons. The style and substance of her writing have made the past more vivid and enriched our lives in the present.

Will Durant. (Applause) Writer, historian and philosopher, Will Durant has provided an open window into the lives and thoughts of past ages. In collaboration with his wife, Ariel, he has helped lead us through the past to the meaning of the present. An eloquent apostle of social order and individual freedom, he is an enemy of chaos, a friend and invaluable guide to the millions of grateful readers. (Applause)

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Judge Henry J. Friendly. (Applause) Honored student and servant of the law, man of intellect and wisdom, he brought a brilliance and a sense of precision to American jurisprudence, sharpening its focus and strengthening its commitment to the high goal of equal and exact justice for every American citizen. (Applause)

Lady Bird Johnson. (Applause) One of America's great First Ladies, she claimed her own place in the hearts and history of the American people. In councils of power or in the homes of the poor, she made government human with her unique compassion and her grace, warmth and wisdom. Her leadership transformed the American landscape and preserved its natural beauty as a national treasure. (Applause)

Archibald MacLeish, represented by his nephew, Roderick MacLeish. (Applause) Poet and playwright, teacher and statesman, Archibald MacLeish has combined the vocation of man of letters with that of public spokesman. A poet of realities as well as dreams, his eloquent words are matched by his sensitive social conscience. He seeks truth inspired by love of his fellow men and of his country. We are proud to recognize his stature as a humanist, and artist, and an American. (Applause)

James Albert Michener. (Applause) Author, teacher and popular historian, James Michener has entranced a generation with his compelling essays and novels. From "Tales of the South Pacific," to "Centennial," the prolific writings of this master storyteller have expanded the knowledge and enriched the lives of millions. (Applause)

Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller. (Applause) Patriot, philanthropist, patron of the arts, diplomat, Governor of New York, Vice President of the United States, his long years of service to his country have yielded governmental, economic, social and cultural contributions beyond measure. (Applause)

Norman Rockwell, represented by his son, Jarvis Rockwell. (Applause) Artist, illustrator and author, Norman Rockwell has portrayed the American scene with unrivaled freshness and clarity. Insight, optimism and good humor are the hallmarks of his artistic style. His vivid and affectionate portraits of our country and ourselves have become a beloved part of the American tradition. (Applause)

Katherine Filene Shouse. (Applause) Katherine Filene Shouse has given her country half a century of invaluable voluntary service. A pioneer in job training for women, she herself is an outstanding example of what good taste and intelligence, pragmatism and persistence can accomplish. A working patron of the arts as well as a giving one, her keen interest and involvement have enriched immeasurably our nation's cultural life. (Applause)

James D. Watson. (Applause) Scholar, teacher author and scientific pioneer, James D. Watson has challenged the mysteries of life itself and charted a new path in mankind's endless search for truth. His intellectual courage and relentless pursuit of scientific knowledge have earned him the respect and admiration of his country and a permanent place as one of the great explorers of the 20th Century. (Applause)

Arthur Fiedler. (Applause) Violinist, conductor and musical innovator, Maestro Fiedler has bridged the gap between popular and classical music and given millions around the world a greater appreciation of America's rich cultural heritage. His spirit and zest for living have made an immeasurable contribution to the quality of American life.

Mr. President, that concludes the presentations. Lowell Thomas, who is on his way, has been delayed because of inclement weather.

THE PRESIDENT: We all regret that Lowell Thomas, because of inclement weather, couldn't make it. He is on his way and hopefully he will arrive before the luncheon is over.

But let me again congratulate each and every one of you. I regret that Irving Berlin, Alexander Calder, the late Alexander Calder, and Georgia O'Keefe were unable to be represented here today.

We will of course present their medals to them or to their families at a later date.

In closing, let me voice our country's deep gratitude and great appreciation, not only to you, but to all of those who helped you achieve what you have accomplished. Each of you has friends, co-workers, teammates, families who share in your achievements and in our pride today.

Again, congratulations and very best wishes.

Now, Betty and I will join the honorees in the Grand Hall so that the other guests may meet them and after which, we want you all to join us in the State Dining Room.

Thank you very much.

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(AT 12:40 P.M. EST)