

THE WHITE HOUSE  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## CLASSROOM | 4-8 Lessons : “White House Welcome”

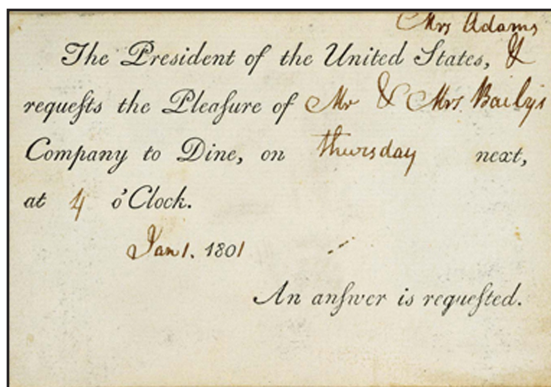
### Section 1. The People’s House

Have you ever been to the White House? If so, you probably toured the state rooms that are open to the public. Every year, hundreds of thousands visit the White House. They walk through eight rooms and three halls, learning how presidents and first ladies have furnished, entertained, and lived in the most famous house in the nation, and probably the world. It is the only home of a nation’s leader that is open free to its citizens on a regular basis. The White House is a symbol, and it is important that all visitors receive a friendly White House welcome.

If you do tour the house, you will probably not meet the president. He works in the Oval Office in the West Wing of the house, and he lives with his family on the top two floors. To respect the president’s privacy, of course, these spaces are off limits to the public. To see the president in his office you must make an appointment.



Students Tour the White House. Bill Fitz-Patrick



The first invitation to dinner at the White House



However, for many years after the White House was first occupied by John and Abigail Adams in 1800, Americans came to White House public receptions, met the president, enjoyed cake and lemonade with the first lady, danced, chatted, and even wandered around a bit. Customs changed with time. The Adamses had very formal receptions. President John Adams (1797-1801) invited only gentlemen to afternoon affairs. He would exchange bows and say just a few words. When all the gentlemen were greeted, Adams would bow once again, and they would depart. In the evenings, Mrs. Adams would hold a less formal reception called a levee. Men and women arrived without a formal invitation, but they were expected to dress and act in a proper manner. They drank tea, coffee, wine, or cold punch, and ate small cakes and fruit. From time to time, President Adams would invite guests to dinner, using a card that he could fill in the day, time and the guest's name.

A president's inauguration was also an opportunity to pay a visit to the White House. After taking the oath of office and giving a speech at the Capitol, the president, congressmen and other citizens would travel by foot, horse, or carriage about a mile and a half to the White House. When the popular war hero Andrew Jackson was inaugurated in 1829, a mob of people forced their way into the White House, looking for food and drink, standing on furniture with muddy boots, and pushing their way through the rooms hoping to congratulate President Jackson. Dozens of glasses, cups, and plates were broken in the commotion, and Jackson actually escaped the crowd and had to spend the night in a nearby hotel - and few even noticed that he had left! The crowd spilled out onto the lawn and continued to drink punch from large tubs.



*Andrew Jackson's crowded inaugural reception. Painting by Louis S. Glanzman, 1960*



*Abraham Lincoln greets citizens at a reception. Harper's Weekly, January 25, 1862*

One of the stranger events at the White House occurred shortly before President Jackson left office. An admirer from New York sent Jackson a huge cheese weighing 1,400 pounds, and Jackson invited the public to come help themselves to a bite — which they did. It only took a few hours for the crowd to devour it, but bits of cheese were ground into the carpet and smelled for a long time after that.



In the 20th century, the crowds at the New Year's Day reception grew larger and larger, as the population of the city of Washington and the number of government employees grew. Finally, the number of visitors at open houses overwhelmed the president. Herbert Hoover (1929-1933) ended the New Year's Day open house in 1933 after shaking hands with 6,000 guests in just a few hours.

But there is still one event every year that is open to the public, especially children, and it began in 1878. A new law forbid children and their parents from using the land near the United States Capitol as a playground. This disappointed thousands, because they used a large hill in front of the Capitol building to roll their Easter eggs. President Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1881) came to the rescue! He invited the children to use the White House lawn for the Easter egg roll. Ever since then (except in wartime) the White House has opened its gates for this occasion.



*Citizens help devour an enormous cheese.  
Perley's Reminiscences*



*Visitors wait in line to meet Warren Harding on  
New Year's Day, 1922. Library of Congress*



*Easter egg roll during Grover Cleveland's  
presidency. Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly,  
April 23, 1887*





## ***Section 2. From Around the World — The State Visit***

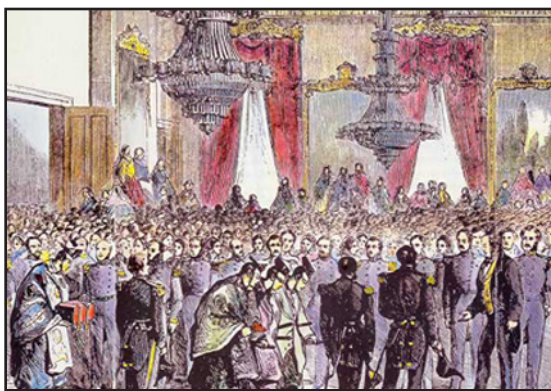
The White House is the place where leaders from other countries come to meet the leader of the United States. This is called a state visit. They can discuss the serious business of living together in a larger world. They might talk about working together by trading farm products, machinery, or technology. In times of war, they might discuss plans to combat enemies, and imagine what the world might look like after the war is ended and how power would be shared. They might exchange ideas about immigration policies, and how people move from being the citizen of one nation to another. Generally, discussions like these are known as foreign relations, and the president of the United States often speaks for our entire nation on these matters.

Because the White House is also a home, the president can greet a king, queen, or president as a guest, too. Special dinners and entertainment are provided to make the foreign leader feel as if he or she is an honored guest. In 1860, just before the Civil War, President James Buchanan (1857-1861) hosted the first representatives, or envoys, from Imperial Japan. Two royal princes and a dozen noblemen came with dozens of their servants. They were dressed in silk robes of their native land, and the citizens of Washington stood outside the White House gate to get a look at them. They walked down Pennsylvania Avenue carrying a box that contained a commercial treaty that would be exchanged with similar documents from the United States.

Later that year, Buchanan greeted Albert, the Prince of Wales and the future King of England. Albert stayed overnight at the White House.



*Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower greet Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1957. Kathleen Revis, The White House*



*The first representatives of Imperial Japan visit the White House. Library of Congress*



The first ruling king to visit the White House was King David Kalakaua of the Sandwich Islands (now known as Hawaii). President Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877) offered a dinner with many courses for the king, but before the monarch would take a bite, three gentlemen from the islands stepped forward and tasted the food first. President Grant was known to like his meat cooked well done, even crunchy. Rare beef or pork upset his stomach, and he refused to eat chicken or duck. Whether Grant served King David charred beef or French food, as was the White House custom, the food-testers probably would have examined the dishes in either case. This was a cultural tradition from the islands. This is one of many examples of how international cultures mixed at the President's House.

The rules of entertaining have always been important, even though they have changed over time. These social rules, called protocol, help make sure that guests receive their proper place of honor at the dinner table, that guests from friendly nations sit next to one another, that enemies are seated apart, that ladies and gentlemen understand how they should dress. Even the order in which guests enter the room is written down before an event.

But in the past the rules were sometimes confusing. President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) faced several problems when Prince Henry of Prussia, the brother of Germany's emperor, came to visit in 1902. Who would be presented first to guests, the president of a democratic nation or a royal prince? Roosevelt made a decision. He arranged for both of them to enter the oval Blue Room at the same time, from doors on opposite sides of the room. They shook hands, introduced one another, and then allowed the guests to enter the room. Roosevelt also wondered if he or Prince Henry should accompany Mrs. Roosevelt to dinner. "How do we do it anyhow?" he asked. His solution was to have a reception just for ladies, followed by a dinner for gentlemen only. It's not surprising that the Roosevelts later became the first president and first lady to hire an official social secretary to help arrange dinners and parties. Later President Calvin Coolidge (1923-1929) established a Protocol Office in the State Department to handle visits from foreign dignitaries. Today, this office has more than 70 staff members to plan state visits.

Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945) and his wife Eleanor loved to entertain. In one particular year, they had 323 guests stay overnight in the White House, served meals to 4,729 people, and welcomed over 14,000 to teas or receptions! One of their famous guests now has a bedroom in the White House named after her: Britain's Queen Elizabeth stayed in what is now known as the Queen's Bedroom. Queens from other countries have also stayed in this room.



*King Kalakaua visits the White House*



In the 20th century, as air transportation brought many more visits from foreign leaders, it became too difficult to put up guests for the night. A building across Pennsylvania Avenue, called the Blair House, became the guest quarters. But the White House continues to be the setting for dinners and other events involving leaders from around the world.



*Theodore Roosevelt toasts Prince Henry of Prussia. Harper's Weekly, March 15, 1902  
New York Historical Society*



*A modern view of the bedroom where Queen Elizabeth stayed in 1939*

