



THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEW Podcast Episode of *the 1600 Sessions*

“Entertaining at the White House”

A Conversation with historian and author Jennifer Pickens

December 3, 2019 (Washington, D.C.) — The White House Historical Association’s new podcast episode of *the 1600 Sessions*, [“Entertaining at the White House,”](#) released today features a conversation with historian and author Jennifer Pickens about her new book, [Entertaining at the White House: Decades of Presidential Traditions](#), and the entertainment styles of recent Presidents and First Ladies. From diplomatic dinners to holiday gatherings, the White House has always played a central role in the nation’s official entertainment.

“At a White House state dinner, everybody from the First Lady down to the horticulture team is touched by the occasion,” said Jennifer Pickens. “Jackie Kennedy wasn't new to entertaining or to Washington by any means, but I think she uniquely knew she wanted the White House to change. Before the White House always used sort of a horseshoe or E-shaped table, that was very formal. And Mrs. Kennedy really wanted to give it more of an intimate feeling, so she would have these round tables set up. She brought in a French chef, and really did concentrate on the food.”

Pickens discusses elements that have made for successful White House events over the years - from the food to the entertainment, noting Nancy Reagan’s track record for hosting a large number of formal occasions. “When a visiting head of state would come or anyone else would come to the White House, she really did her research and she knew what she wanted that dessert to be. And gave them plenty of time to know that expectation. She got into every detail. A lot of people of course don't know, one of their most famous dinners was in honor of Prince Charles and Princess Diana, right after the wedding. And everyone's very familiar with the iconic photo of John Travolta dancing with Princess Diana. But what most people don't realize, that did not happen by happenstance. Mrs. Reagan planned that out, executed it, and had made sure everyone was on the same page and the President's Own Marine Band even, you know, practiced and rehearsed Stayin' Alive before the Prince and Princess arrived.”

The 1600 Sessions

In this podcast series, White House Historical Association President Stewart McLaurin interviews luminaries, historians, and eyewitnesses to history about America’s most famous residence and office—the White House. Each episode includes a prominent guest or guests to discuss varying facets of White House history, including insights from former staff and many other topical issues.

The 1600 Sessions is available on iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, and Stitcher. To hear the full episode, visit The1600Sessions.org.

For media inquiries, please contact press@whha.org.

About The White House Historical Association

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy envisioned a restored White House that conveyed a sense of history through its decorative and fine arts. In 1961, the White House Historical Association was established to support her vision to preserve and share the Executive Mansion's legacy for generations to come. Supported entirely by private resources, the Association's mission is to assist in the preservation of the state and public rooms, fund acquisitions for the White House permanent collection, and educate the public on the history of the White House. Since its founding, the White House Historical Association has contributed more than \$50 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit www.whitehousehistory.org.

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