Background: Spanish Kings and Queens at the White House

June 13, 2018 (Washington, D.C.) — The White House and the Spanish Royal Family have maintained a close relationship for decades, with many Presidents and First Ladies hosting the King and Queen for official and private visits.

As background for the upcoming White House visit of King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain on June 19, 2018, below is a brief history of past visits from the Spanish Royal Family.

- On January 26, 1971, President Richard Nixon welcomed Prince Juan Carlos and Princess Sofía to the White House. After welcoming them on the South Lawn, President Nixon met with the Prince, Ambassador to Spain Robert C. Hill, Ambassador of Spain Jaime Arguelles, and Chief of Protocol Emil B. Mosbacher. A dinner in their honor was held that evening in the State Dining Room. After dinner, guests were treated to an East Room performance by Brazilian musician Sérgio Mendes and his band, Brasil 66.

- On June 2, 1976, during the Bicentennial celebrations of 1976, President Gerald R. Ford and First Lady Betty Ford hosted King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofía of Spain. The president told the King: “Many, many American towns and cities, Your Majesty, bear Spanish names. Much of our architecture reflects the distinctive quality of Spanish artistry. Many thousands of American families proudly bear names reflecting their Spanish ancestry.” Among the menu items was mousseline of red snapper, wild rice amandine, and hearts of lettuce salad with Bel Paese cheese. During his visit to the United States, the King addressed a joint session of Congress and afterwards visited New York City.

- On February 15, 1980, President Jimmy Carter briefly met with King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía at the White House during a private visit.

- On October 13, 1981, President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan held a State Dinner in honor of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía. Following a meeting
earlier that day between President Reagan and the King, the president told the King, “You’ll be particularly welcome not only here in Washington but in those many parts of our country where Spanish culture and language have contributed so enduringly to our own history and heritage.” Likewise, the King responded to President Reagan, “I want to express again to the President and Mrs. Reagan our gratitude for the invitation and for the hospitality we are receiving. Our visit to Washington couldn’t have started better. I’m not referring to the weather, but to the most cordial and personal relationship that has developed in this, our first visit.”

- On September 25, 1987, President and Mrs. Reagan hosted of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia for lunch at the White House as part of their ten-day visit to the United States.

- On October 6, 1991, King Juan Carlos visited President George H.W. Bush at Camp David. The King and Queen were in the country to view the “Circa 1492” art exhibit at the National Gallery of Art featuring artwork from the era of Christopher Columbus.

- On February 23, 2000, President William J. Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton hosted a State Dinner in honor of King Juan Carlos of Spain. During his remarks, President Clinton noted, “Five years ago, I welcomed them [King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia] to the White House on the occasion of their son’s graduation from my alma mater, the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. On that day, the King and Queen also received honorary doctorates. The King joked that day that the reason the university had given him the degree was that if his son started bragging about his masters, he could always say, “Yes, but I am a doctor.”

- On March 28, 2001, President George W. Bush met with King Juan Carlos at the White House to discuss U.S.-Spain cooperation within NATO. Both First Lady Laura Bush and Queen Sofia were present as the group convened on the South Lawn of the White House.

- On February 17, 2010, President Barack Obama met with King Juan Carlos over lunch at the White House during a working visit to discuss issues of the day.

- On September 15, 2015, President Barack Obama met with King Felipe of Spain in the Oval Office. The Spanish King was in the United States in part to celebrate the 450th anniversary of St. Augustine, Florida.

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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 $47 million in fulfillment of its mission. To learn more about the White House Historical Association, please visit www.whitehousehistory.org.

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