

SENATOR ROBERT MORGAN
COMMENTS: WELCOMING MARTHA AND GEORGE WASHINGTON TO THE
NATION'S CAPITAL
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
JULY 3, 1980

I want to thank Charles Blitzer, Assistant Secretary for Art and History, for calling and inviting me to make a few remarks. This is truly an historic occasion as we gather to place a star in the already brilliant crown of the National Portrait Gallery.

I wish so much, as I am sure you do, that the Secretary of the Smithsonian, our friend Dillon Ripley, were here to greet you today. Having observed Dillon preside so graciously over many events here on the Mall, I know this occasion would be enhanced by his presence and by his well-chosen words and quiet oratory.

In his absence, I hope that those of us here who are associated with the Smithsonian, either as members of the staff, the National Portrait Gallery Commission, or the Board of Regents, can adequately convey to you the depth of our excitement and pleasure that such a mutually beneficial compromise could be struck. The citizens of the city of Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts-- the citizens of this entire nation and the world can all rightfully claim to be victors in the short skirmish which preceded today's combination love feast and welcoming party.

In view of the intense conflicting interests, I think it is indeed amazing to note what persons of good will can accomplish when working together for the commonweal, ~~as long as they have the money required.~~ And I want to say to Marvin and Charles and all those involved in the negotiations on behalf of the Smithsonian that we are delighted they decided to take just the portraits. We don't think we could have come up with another million dollars for the frames!

On April 9 of last year, in the heat of the public debate concerning the sale of the portraits, I made a statement on the floor of the United States Senate in which I tried to put the matter in perspective for my colleagues. I will not bore you by reciting at length from those comments, but I did sum up with this statement:

"We did not covet these portraits and did not set about to entice George and Martha to move their residence to Washington. However, if for reasons personal to the Athenaeum and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts they must be sold and the money cannot be found in the Boston area for their purchase, they could find no more fitting home than the National Portrait Gallery."

We assure you today that the National Portrait Gallery will provide a "fitting home" for these precious works by Gilbert Stuart-- these priceless gems of American history and portraiture. And in this new home their vista will be expanded. Here they will have a window on the world and the stream of visitors will be endless. I expect that their return to Boston every three years will in effect be welcome relief from the hustle bustle of Washington, the Smithsonian and the National Portrait Gallery.

We welcome you today, and we welcome this new partnership between the National Portrait Gallery and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. There is no doubt in my mind that it will be a cordial and mutually beneficial relationship and that as a result, over the years our respective institutions will be drawn closer together and a new spirit of professional fraternalism will grow and flourish.