

# White House Correspondent's Dinner: Wealth, influence, hypocrisy

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The White House Correspondents' Dinner is always a thoroughly distasteful affair, and this year's event was no exception.

A ticket to the dinner is highly prized—a chance to rub shoulders with other Washington insiders and Hollywood celebrities as they bask in the glow of their self-importance and wealth. Over the past decade the event has morphed into a parody of itself, with politicians and journalists walking the red carpet with actors who play politicians on TV, alongside models, singers, sports figures, media moguls and millionaires.

Observing the proceedings, one would never have known that only 40 miles northeast of the nation's capital 2,000 demonstrators were protesting in the streets of Baltimore over the death of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man who suffered a spinal cord injury in police custody and died a week later.

Obama's remarks, well received by the media, exemplified the hypocrisy of official Washington. He dispensed jokes and one-liners to his elite audience just two days after he made a White House appearance to declare his grief and regret over the drone killing of an American and Italian hostage in Pakistan, in a performance which the *New York Times* praised for its "candor and remorse."

After boasting of the economic recovery he had supposedly overseen, Obama made light of the suffering of tens of millions of Americans whose living standards have been devastated as a result of his policies. Noting that "this is still a time of deep uncertainty," he said, "For example, I have one friend—just a few weeks ago, she was making millions of dollars a year. And she's now living out of a van in Iowa."

The reference was to Hillary Clinton, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee.

Adopting a serious pose, he offered a toast to the journalists in the audience, declaring, "Investigative journalism, explanatory journalism, journalism that exposes corruption and injustice and gives a voice to the different, the marginalized, that's power."

As everyone in the hall was well aware, Obama has presided over the most ferocious attacks on serious journalism of any American president. His administration has launched more prosecutions of whistleblowers than all previous administrations combined.

It has spied on reporters from the Associated Press and other news outlets, and carried out a witchhunt against journalists and others who have sought to bring to light the crimes of American imperialism internationally, as well as its attacks on democratic rights at home.

The fate of Julian Assange, holed up for years in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, Edward Snowden, facing death threats and forced to seek asylum in Russia, and Chelsea Manning, locked away in prison for decades, testifies to the attitude of both Obama and the White House press corps to freedom of the press and the right of the people to know.



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