The original documents are located in Box 35, “7/3/76 - Remarks During the Honor America Program at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Concert Hall” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice
The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.
PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS AT THE KENNEDY CENTER

HONOR AMERICA

JULY 3, 1976
THERE ARE TIMES FOR SOLEMN CEREMONIES, AND THERE
WILL BE MANY REVERENT THANKSGIVINGS ALL OVER AMERICA THIS
WEEK AND NEXT, BUT WE AMERICANS ARE UNCOMFORTABLE
WITH TOO MUCH SOLEMNITY. WE LIKE TO MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE
UNTO THE LORD, AND TO SING OUR COUNTRY'S PRAISE WITH
GRATEFUL HEARTS.
LAUGHTER AND LIBERTY GO WELL TOGETHER. RAGTIME

AND JAZZ AND MARCHES AS WELL AS HYMNS AND SPIRITUALS

SET THE BEAT OF OUR AMERICAN ADVENTURE. WE HAVE EXPORTED

AMERICA'S HAPPINESS TO THE WORLD WITH OUR GRAMOPHONES.

OUR MOVIES, OUR OWN TALENTED PERFORMERS.
AMERICANS SANG ON THE RIVERBOATS, DANCED AROUND THE WAGON TRAINS, JOKED AS THEY MARCHED INTO BATTLE, ALL ALONG OUR 200 YEAR JOURNEY. WE TOOK ALL THE ARTS OF THOSE WHO CAME TO JOIN THE AMERICAN ADVENTURE AND MADE NEW ARTS OF OUR OWN. NO NATION HAS A RICHER HERITAGE THAN WE DO — FOR AMERICA HAS IT ALL.
THE UNITED STATES IS PROBABLY THE ONLY COUNTRY ON EARTH THAT PUTS "THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS" RIGHT AFTER LIFE AND LIBERTY AMONG THE GOD-GIVEN RIGHTS OF EVERY HUMAN BEING.
WHEN JEFFERSON WROTE THAT, HE PULLED OFF AN
HISTORIC SWITCH. FOR A LONG TIME ENGLISH LAW HAD USED
THE PHRASE "LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY" TO DESCRIBE THE
MOST PRECIOUS THINGS THAT COULDN'T BE TAKEN AWAY FROM
ANYBODY WITHOUT DUE LEGAL PROCESS. BUT JEFFERSON DROPPED
"PROPERTY" IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND SUBSTITUTED
"THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS."
LIKE ANY GOOD POLITICIAN, JEFFERSON KNEW HOW TO
SAY EXACTLY WHAT HE MEANT WHEN HE WANTED TO. SO LIFE
AND LIBERTY ARE PLAIN ENOUGH TO EVERYBODY, BUT JEFFERSON
NEVER DID SAY WHAT HE MEANT BY THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.
IF WE HAVE LIBERTY, HOW EACH OF US PURSUES HAPPINESS IS
UP TO US.
HOWEVER YOU DEFINE IT, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA HAS BEEN A HAPPY NATION OVER THE PAST 200 YEARS.

NOBODY IS HAPPY ALL THE TIME, BUT MOST OF THE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HAPPY MOST OF THE TIME. EVEN IN OUR DARKEST HOURS, WE HAVE MANAGED A LITTLE FUN.
I knew what happiness was when I was a boy.

It was the Fourth of July. For weeks we would save up our pennies, nickels and dimes and then at the last moment Dad would come through with a couple of dollars for skyrockets. You'd wake at the first crackle of sidewalk salutes and rush to the window to see if the weather was good.
THERE'D BE THE BIG FLAG TO HANG ON THE FRONT PORCH, AND

THE ICE CREAM FREEZER TO TURN, AND THE FIRST BIG SPOONFUL

THAT GAVE YOU A HEADACHE.
THEN THERE WERE PARADES, AND BANDS, AND THOSE
LONG SPEECHES — THIS WON'T BE ONE. THERE WOULD BE A
PICNIC, AND SOFTBALL GAMES, AND THE ENDLESS WAIT UNTIL IT
GOT DARK ENOUGH FOR THE ROMAN CANDLES, AND SPARKLERS
FOR THE LITTLE ONES, WHO REALLY LIKED THE LIGHTNING BUGS
BETTER.
WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER, YOU WENT TO BED HAPPY

BECAUSE YOU KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN ALL OVER AGAIN THE NEXT

FOURTH OF JULY. AND HERE WE ARE ON THE EVE OF OUR

200TH - THE GREATEST FOURTH OF JULY ANY OF US WILL EVER

SEE.
WE ARE A HAPPY PEOPLE BECAUSE WE ARE A FREE PEOPLE.

AND WHILE WE HAVE OUR FAULTS AND OUR FAILURES, TONIGHT IS NOT THE TIME TO PARADE THEM. RATHER LET'S LOOK TO OUR THIRD CENTURY AS THE CENTURY IN WHICH FREEDOM FINDS FULFILLMENT IN EVEN GREATER CREATIVITY AND INDIVIDUALITY.
TONIGHT WE SALUTE THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS AS WE
LISTEN TO OUR EXCITING PAST IN SONG AND STORY.

TWO

HUNDRED YEARS AGO THIS VERY DAY JOHN ADAMS WROTE HIS
WIFE ABIGAIL THAT HE EXPECTED THE GLORIOUS ANNIVERSARY OF
INDEPENDENCE TO BE OBSERVED DOWN THROUGH THE AGES "WITH
SHOWS, GAMES, SPORTS, GUNS, BELLS, BONFIRES AND
ILLUMINATIONS FROM ONE END OF THIS CONTINENT TO THE OTHER."
SO, BREAK OUT THE FLAGS, STRIKE UP THE BAND,
LIGHT UP THE SKY, AND LET THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD KNOW THAT THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IS ABOUT TO HAVE ANOTHER HAPPY
BIRTHDAY, STILL GOING STRONG AT 200, AND IN THE WORDS OF
THE GREAT AL JOLSON, YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET!

END OF TEXT
AND NOW, BETTY AND I ARE GOING TO RETURN TO OUR SEATS TO JOIN YOU IN THE ENJOYMENT OF THIS BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION. BUT FIRST, I HAVE ONE LAST VERY SATISFYING TASK TO PERFORM. THE NEXT PERSONALITY YOU WILL MEET IS A GENTLEMAN I HAVE INTRODUCED ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AND WHO HAS INTRODUCED ME ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AND THERE IS NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT INTRODUCING HIM IS A LOT EASIER THAN FOLLOWING HIM. AND SO, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I PRESENT MY GOOD FRIEND -- BOB HOPE.