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THE KENNEDY CENTER

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

immortal
THE ~~GREAT~~ AL JOLSON / YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET!

END OF TEXT

AND NOW, BETTY AND I ^{will} ~~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,

^{very} I PRESENT MY GOOD FRIEND -- BOB HOPE.

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