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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
FIFTH ANNUAL OUR COUNTRY CELEBRATION
FORT McHENRY

9:05 P.M. EDT

Governor Mandel and Mrs. Mandel, Senator Beall and Mrs. Beall, distinguished Members of the House of Representatives, Congressman Long, Congressman Gude, Congresswoman Holt, Congressman Bauman, Congresswoman Spellman, Congressman Sarbanes, Mayor Schaefer, our country's newest citizens, and all of you wonderful people from Baltimore and the great State of Maryland:

We meet here tonight at the twilight's last gleaming. The casement walls and the silent cannons of the Fort McHenry bear a very quiet testimony to the Nation's travail on another night in another age.

We all know that Francis Scott Key enshrined forever those events in 1814 -- the patriotism and the national pride surrounding our flag, our country, and their defense that night, our heritage -- in a song and a verse.

The Star Spangled Banner is an expression of our love of country. We must not be so sophisticated, so blase that we ignore those simple but eloquent moments of our history.

We need to remind ourselves that America is really the land of the free and the home of the brave, and we should be proud of it.

We are honored, every one of us, by those who earlier this evening became our newest United States citizens, and we should give them a special round of applause right now.

They have chosen what often is taken for granted among many of us. The hallmark of our first century was the establishment of a free Government. In the face of the greatest odds, 13 poor struggling colonies became a fledgling Nation.

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Its future, in those dark days and weeks and months, was insecure. In the first 100 years the Western movement accelerated, vast territories were acquired, States joined the Union, Constitutional issues were raised and wars were fought, none more devastating than the one that turned American against American.

Yet, through that horrible ordeal, it was resolved that this Nation would not endure half slave and half free. The Union was preserved.

By our Centennial in 1876, the American Republic had been securely established. Of this, there was no doubt, either at home or abroad.

Our second century has been marked by the growth of the great American free enterprise system. The pioneer spirit which carried us West turned us to new frontiers. Railroads spanned the Continent and became a web of steel linking city to city, region to region, town to town.

The automobile and its assembly line changed forever transportation and our manufacturing process in America. The Wright brothers mastered powered flight at Kitty Hawk. The age of flight was born.

From the first Atlantic crossing by the lone eagle, Charles Lindbergh, to the American astronauts who announced that the Eagle had landed, when touchdown on the moon, America's latest ship was again established.

The telegram. The telephone. The television. All are a great part of the communications revolution of our second century. Science, medicine, agriculture, production, marketing -- these have been just a few of the modern frontiers since 1876.

But now our third century, I believe, should be an era of individual freedom. The mass approach of the modern world places a premium on creativity and individuality.

We see mass production, mass education, mass population. They must not smother individual expression or limit individual opportunity. Individualism is a safeguard against the sameness of society. A Government too large and bureaucratic can stifle individual initiative by a frustrating statism.

In America, and never forget it, our sovereign is a citizen. Our sovereign is the citizen, and we must never forget it.

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Governments exist to serve people. The State is the creature of the populus. These propositions are the foundation stones of our Bicentennial. Today, in the 199 years of our independence, we stand on the threshold of a new American experience.

Let us make the coming year a great year on America's agenda of achievement. As we move to the Bicentennial of American independence, let us think where we will be and what we can achieve by next July 4, by the next decade, by the 200th anniversary of our Constitution and by the year 2000.

Let us resolve that this shall be an era of hope rather than despair. Let us resolve that it shall be an era of achievement rather than apathy. Let us resolve that it shall be a time of promises rather than regret.

The Bicentennial should be a time for each of us for self-examination and individual accomplishment. Quality and permanence should be the measurement of your life and my life and the life of 214 other million Americans in 50 States and our territories.

Let us pursue truths and values that will enhance the quality of life, of you and your fellow Americans. To form a more perfect Union -- and that is what we want -- we need to learn more of our country and more of our good people.

Americans must appreciate the diversity of our lands and the diversity of our citizens. There is a quotation that I learned in my early days 'n Sunday school, that the beauty of Joseph's coat is its many colors, and that is the strength of America.

Boundaries of regionalism and urbanization must dissolve before our will to be one Nation and one people. In the coming year, the Bicentennial must become a true national experience. The American Revolution and its legacy belong to each of the States and our far-flung territories. It belongs to every county, to every city, to every church, to every club and to each and every American citizen.

At every school where the American flag flies, it is my hope that there will be, in the coming year, a concentrated effort in the classroom to study, discuss and portray these past 200 years of our history.

I would urge that every community seek to make its program as meaningful as possible to as many as possible -- old, young, in every walk of life.

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This should stress the history, culture and the achievements and the basic values that are so important that we associate with our way of life.

Yes, the ideas that were forged and fought for in the 13 colonies crossed the Appalachians. They followed the wagons and rode with the Pony Express. They crossed the Mississippi and the Missouri, spanned the plains and the American desert.

They belong as much to the West as they belonged to the East.

Wherever the American flag has gone, so went the concepts of this great Republic. American clipper ships that probably sailed in part from this great Baltimore harbor took the story of America to the far corners of the earth with pride and with success. American jet liners carry it every day across the skies to distant lands.

Indeed, this event does not belong just to Americans. This is a celebration of liberty, freedom, democracy, wherever they exist, and we want them to exist on a global basis at some time in the world's history.

While we cherish the many heritages that enrich our land, we of all people have no history except what we have written for ourselves. We are not Americans alone, by birth or blood, by oath or creed or compact among princes. We are Americans because we deliberately chose to be one Nation, indivisible. For 199 years, with God's help, we have gone forward together, and we will in the future.

Two centuries of sacrifice and struggle, of conflict and compromise, have gained for us an unprecedented measure of political and economic independence.

We have, on this Independence Day of 1975, a free Government that checks and balances its own excesses, and a free economic system that corrects its own errors, given the courage and the constructive cooperation of a free and enlightened citizenry.

This is the amazing history Americans have written for themselves, you and your forefathers, as we begin our Bicentennial celebration.

The young Republic of yesteryear is today a strong and a very great Nation. It still lives by the values of the Declaration, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It influences the destiny of millions beyond our shores. It still remains, in Lincoln's words, "The last, best hope of earth."

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Let us, this Fourth of July, continue to be a Nation of hope. The American people believe in tomorrow, that by dawn's early light our flag will still be there. Let us be one Nation and one people indivisible, for our flag is one and our destiny is one.

Let us be people of value, of liberty, equality and justice, no matter what the cost. That has been our history, and we are proud of it. We have never counted the cost of freedom, and I don't think America every will.

Let us in the final analysis be true to ourselves for then we can be false to no nation or to no people. Let us live, not only for our own progress, but also in harmony and hope for all other men, women and children everywhere in this great globe.

In so doing, the United States and its people serve and honor the promise of Francis Scott Key's words: "Land of the free, and home of the brave."

Thank you and good night.

END (AT 9:20 P.M. EDT)