

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 3, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
HONOR AMERICA PROGRAM

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

8:12 P.M. EDT

Thank you very much, Bill Marriott. May I express my appreciation and the gratitude of the American people for the wonderful job that you and your associates with the Honor America Committee have done for the last few years.

We are most appreciative of a wonderful job and such a tremendous effort, and let me say on behalf of all of us, thank you very much.

There are times for solemn ceremony 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, to sing our country's praise with grateful hearts.

Laughter and liberty go well together. Ragtime and jazz, marches as well as hymns and spirituals, set the beat of the American adventure. We have exported America's happiness to the world with our gramophones, our movies and our own talented performers.

Americans sang on riverboats, danced around wagon trains, joked as they marched into battle. We took all of 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 put 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 has 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.

MORE

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, nickles and dimes, and then at the last moment Dad would come through with a couple of bucks for sky-rockets.

Then, of course, there would be the big flag to hang out 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. (Laughter)

There would be a picnic and softball games, the endless wait until it got dark enough for the roman candles, 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.

Here we are on the eve of our 200th, the greatest Fourth of July any of us will ever see. We are 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 the 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 songs and in stories. Two hundred years ago today John Adams wrote his wonderful 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 illumination from one end of this continent to the other.

So, break out the flags, strike up the band, light up the skies, let the whole wide world know that the United States of America is about to have another happy birthday, going strong at 200, and in the words of the immortal Al Jolson, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

MORE

Thank you very much.

Now, Betty and I will return to our seats to join you in the enjoyment of this Bicentennial celebration. But first, I have one 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. There is no doubt in my mind that introducing him is a lot easier than following him. (Laughter)

So, ladies and gentlemen, I present my very good and very dear friend, Bob Hope.

END (AT 8:19 P.M. EDT)