

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Washington  
The Bicentennial Speeches of  
Gerald R. Ford

---

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO BE DELIVERED AT THE  
HONOR AMERICA PROGRAM

KENNEDY CENTER

---

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.

more

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 Shews, 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!

# # # #

[7-4-76]

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Washington

The Bicentennial Speeches of  
Gerald R. Ford

---

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO BE DELIVERED AT THE  
VALLEY FORGE STATE PARK

VALLEY FORGE, PENNSYLVANIA

---

Embargoed for release until 9 p.m., E.D.T., July 3, 1976.

They came here in the snows of winter over a trail marked with the blood of their rag-bound feet.

The iron forge that gave this place its name had been destroyed by the British when General Washington and his ragged Continental Army encamped here, exhausted, outnumbered and short of everything except faith.

Yet we gather here today, the 200th anniversary of our independence, to commemorate their sacrifices even before we celebrate the glorious Declaration.

Americans will remember the name of Valley Forge as long as the spirit of sacrifice lives within their hearts.

Here the vein of iron in our national character was forged. In the 18th Century, the colonial American was far more free and prosperous than his European cousin. Englishmen regarded us with some envy as appropriate subjects to share their grinding tax burdens.

After Concord Bridge and Breed's Hill, the British generals were somewhat impressed with our marksmanship and fighting spirit, but they still dismissed Washington's militiamen as "a rabble in arms."

Many years later, when he was 91, a veteran of Concord was interviewed and asked why he took up his rifle against his King. Did he feel intolerably oppressed?

Nope. Never paid a penny for one of them stamps. Never drank any tea. Never heard of Locke; only read the Bible and the Almanac. Well then, what did all the fighting mean?

"Young man," the aging Revolutionary said firmly. "What we meant in going for those Redcoats was this: We always had governed ourselves, and we always meant to."

"They didn't mean we should."

Without Jefferson's eloquence, those are the words of the American people's Declaration of our independence. That was the straight talk that brought some 11,000 ordinary Americans, farmers, workers, tradesmen, shopkeepers, into this valley of sacrifice in the bitter winter of 1777.

Uncounted hundreds were never to leave.

They did not die amid the furling banners and fearful sounds of battle. They weakened slowly and quietly succumbed to cold, sickness and starvation.

Yet their courage and suffering -- those who survived as well as those who fell -- were no less meaningful than the sacrifices of those who manned the battlements of Boston and scaled the parapets of Yorktown.

In the battle against despair, Washington and his men kept freedom's lonely vigil. The leader and the led drew strength and hope from one another. Around the winter campfires that dotted these fields the flame of liberty was somehow kept burning.

more

Something happened at Valley Forge.

That ragged, starving Army here emerged and changed in a way that can be sensed but never fully described. They suffered, they trained, they toughened, they buried their dead, and they stayed. They stuck it out.

When Spring melted the snows and green returned to this beautiful countryside, a proud and disciplined fighting force marched out of this valley on the road to victory, into the pages of history, unaware of the greatness they had done and oblivious to our gratitude.

As Abraham Lincoln noted long afterwards at another sacred site in Pennsylvania, nothing we can say here today can further consecrate or hallow this ground. But we can rededicate ourselves to the spirit of sacrifice shown at Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Argonne Forest, Anzio Beach and Iwo Jima.

Not all sacrifices are made in war. There are also sacrifices of peace.

The sturdy wagon trains that have returned here, the wonderful people who drove them and those along the way who rededicated themselves to the great principles of the Declaration of Independence, offer heartwarming proof that our American adventure has really just begun.

Our Bicentennial is the happy birthday of all 50 States, a commonwealth and self-governing territories. It is not just a celebration for the original thirteen colonies. Americans are one people, and we can still hear them saying:

"We always have governed ourselves, and we always mean to."

The earliest English settlers carried the Bible and Blackstone's Commentary across the Atlantic among their few precious possessions, and established their own self-governments on a strange and hostile coast. American families in prairie schooners like these took with them on the overland trails the principle of equality and the God-given rights of the Declaration of Independence.

Their restless search for a better life was begun in the spirit of adventure. But it was the spirit of sacrifice that sustained them. They too suffered cruel winters, savage attacks, blazing deserts and bloody feet. Many were buried beside the trail. But many more stuck it out, dug in and built permanent settlements, where women stood the same sentry duty as the men. In the West, the Declaration's promise of legal and political equality for women was first broadened.

The American pioneers knew that in their new wilderness homes they would not be colonials, ruled by a distant government. They had assurance that, in due course, they could govern themselves as full citizens of equal States. This political guarantee made all the risks and sacrifices worthwhile. Their children and future generations would have all the rights of Washington, Jackson and Lincoln.

And so do we -- and more.

As we continue our American adventure, the patriots of Valley Forge and the pioneers of the American frontier, indeed all our heroes and heroines of war and peace, send us this single urgent message: Though prosperity is a good thing, though compassionate charity is a good thing, though institutional reform is a good thing, a nation survives only so long as the spirit of sacrifice and self-discipline is strong within its people.

Independence has to be defended as well as declared; freedom is always worth fighting for; and liberty ultimately belongs only to those willing to suffer for it.

If we remember this, we can bring health where there is now disease, peace where there is strife, progress where there is poverty and want.

And when our Tricentennial celebration rolls around, 100 years from now, grateful Americans still will come to this shrine of quiet valor, this forge of our Republic's iron core.

# # # #