

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 1976

Office of the Vice President
(Washington, D. C.)

REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
AT THE
GEORGE WASHINGTON INAUGURAL CEREMONY
WASHINGTON MONUMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C.

(AT 12:45 P.M. EDT)

Thank you.

Reverend Elson, Secretary Reed, thank you, sir. Presidential Assistant, former Congressman John Marsh; Connie Wirth, former Director of the National Parks; Gary Everhardt, Director today; Fred Bradley, first president of the National Washington Monument Society; Captain Witliff, 3d Infantry, U. S. Army; distinguished Dean, and members of the diplomatic corps; distinguished members of Congress; distinguished members of the Cabinet; and I would like to especially welcome the distinguished members of that great production, 1776, who are here and assisting in the enactment of this uniquely historic occasion.

I would like to say, parenthetically, that Happy and I have seen 1776, which is one of the great plays of this century, twice already. And it is one of the most thrilling enactments in the history of our country, and I congratulate the cast.

I would also like to express appreciation to the Army band and to the Army choir, which have given the beautiful renditions, and to congratulate the members of the Old Guard of the Continental Army and the Drum and Fife Corps.

To all of you friends who are here today, I would just like to say Happy, and Mark and I are thrilled to join you on this beautiful and historic occasion. We are grateful to the National Parks for having organized it.

What took place on this day 187 years ago was more than the inauguration of a new leader. It was the birth of a new Nation. And, the birth of that Nation could not have happened except for the life of that leader.

Historians agree and his contemporaries already knew that without George Washington's towering moral influence, without his unbreakable faith, when there was every reason to lose faith, without his undoubting conviction that America was a unique Nation under God's special blessing, the likelihood that this Nation would have survived its infancy is highly doubtful.

This 187th anniversary of Washington's inauguration as our first President offers an ideal opportunity to ask how did America survive to become the greatest, freest land in human history, and why it was that Washington had the faith to know it would survive. It is important to know why America succeeded so well in these first two centuries, so that we can carry this imperishable lesson into the next century of our nationhood.

MORE

Through his courage, his example, his wisdom and his unshakable faith, Washington had led America through a successful war of independence. He had led America through the darkest hours of the Revolution that winter at Valley Forge. He had led his ragged army to final victory over British professionals and mercenaries at Yorktown. And, with independence secure, he had gone home to his beloved Mount Vernon for a long-postponed, richly deserved retirement as a Virginian squire.

But from this contented retreat, Washington saw something which troubled him. He saw the fruits of the Revolution withering away under the dissension and disunion of that loosely formed government under the Articles of Confederation. He recognized that the very vitality, the diversity, the individuality which provided America its greatest potential strength were without unity, becoming its greatest weakness under the rivalries of the Confederation.

And so he left the ease of Mount Vernon, and, as he said in his inaugural address, responded to the summons of his country, and I quote: "Whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love."

Washington took up the arduous duties of presiding over the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in that memorable summer of 1787. And he gave his indispensable support to the Constitution hammered out during those hot summer days. Without his support, the new Constitution scarcely would have won approval. And it was the adoption of the Constitution which truly transformed 13 separate, sometimes squabbling states into a single nation, united in purpose and destined to greatness.

What Washington and our other Founding Fathers achieved nearly two centuries ago, is what still gives America its strength and its vitality, the Federal idea of encouraging diversity within a framework of unity. And it is this acceptance of numerous centers of initiative, of fresh thinking and of responsibility, spread among thousands of communities in the now 50 State governments, all unified under the stars and stripes, that is the foundation of our freedom and strength today.

When we look back on the mountainous challenges which Washington and our other Founding Fathers faced, when we look at what this Nation subsequently survived and achieved, how can we doubt? How can we recall our history without knowing that we are the luckiest people on earth, because we have built the greatest nation on earth and because we have preserved our freedom? How can we remember what our ancestors went through, without facing the problems of today with the same faith, confidence and determination, and recognition that we are the same kind of people, and that we have the same tough genes in our national character?

And recognizing that fact, we ought to recognize also that there is no problem that we cannot overcome. There is nothing wrong with America that Americans cannot right.

As Washington said in his first inaugural address, which we are marking here today, ours was a noble "experiment

entrusted to the hands of the American people." And, beyond question, the United States of America has been the most successful experiment in human history. Our sacred duty is to keep it so.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

END (AT 12:55 P.M. EDT)