

June 1, 1976 - The Bicentennial God Bless America Festival

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Preparation for the Bicentennial God Bless America Festival began early on June 1, with setting up the stage, the lighting and sound systems, and putting up the decorations. Early in the afternoon, the ushers took their positions. Eleven busloads of parents attending the National Parents Conference arrived at about four o'clock and other members took their seats shortly afterwards.

First came the winds.... Huge gusts of wind, a precursor of the coming rains, foiled the inflation of a seventy-foot hot air balloon which was to have sailed above the Stadium. The ripcord of the balloon gave way, causing it to expel its air. Like a deflating rubber balloon, it travelled erratically across the field, its wind destroying many decorations. Forty-foot Styrofoam letters spelling "God Bless America Festival" were uprooted from the ground and blown across the field in eight-foot-high pieces.



Thousands of hearts sank as a driving thunderstorm then ripped across the Stadium at 5 o'clock, pounding the remainder of the decorations and soaking the stage. Then came the memorable moment when members joined in singing "You Are My Sunshine." The parents stood steadfast in the rain. Many remained on the front lines with the cheering section, singing "You Are My Sunshine" and waving their American and God Bless America flags, given out at the gates. As the rain subsided, the Go-World Brass

Band played to raise the spirit. All of their music was lost under several inches of mud, so they miraculously performed their music from memory. As the band played; the Technical Missionary Corps cleared the remains of the Styrofoam letters and used the music stands like snow shovels to sweep water from the stage's carpet. They were able to put back in half an hour what had taken two hours to assemble earlier. "The sound system suffered the most from the rain," said production coordinator Michael Leone. "We ran a sound check on the equipment just before the rain and had to quickly unplug it in the rain. After the rain, there was almost an inch of water inside the system. We had to turn it back on again without having enough time to do another sound check. The blinking lights surrounding the stage were also filled with water. The employees of the sound system company wanted to quit when the rain came, but when they saw that we were determined to continue, they changed their minds. They were also affected by the contagious spirit of everyone singing and the determination of the stage crew."



As seven o'clock approached, a large crowd had gathered in the Stadium. Meanwhile some of the field decorations had been replaced. At 7:30, after preliminary performances by the Go-World Brass Band and Sunburst, the National Anthem opened the program.

Outside a number of fringe groups took advantage of the audience to draw attention to their causes, as they did at Madison Square Garden.

But, the show outside did not stop anyone from enjoying the bigger one inside. The Stadium turnstile count was 40,000. About 5,000 people came in before the count, so about 45,000 people came to the Bicentennial God Bless America Festival. The audience enjoyed "America the Beautiful" and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" by the New Hope Singers International and the New York City Symphony, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by the orchestra, and the Fan Dance by the Korean Folk Ballet.

A variety of people attended Yankee Stadium. The Unification Church of Canada brought over 800 people by bus, including a Canadian television network. Over 600 people came by bus from Washington, D. C. The Unification Church International was represented by their top leaders from around the world and a group of parents, including Mr. Kamiyama's father. Leaders and members from Korean associations across the country also came. From the New York area, ethnic groups came in scores. Several hundred people came from Eastern European ethnic groups, including Poles, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, etc.

Black organizations represented included the Community Parents' Association (500 people), Teen World (110 people), the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Association, and several neighborhood associations. Spanish-speaking groups included the Hunt's Point Athletic Federation (250), the Hunt's Point Community Corporation, the Hunt's Point Housing Action Center, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and the El Barrio

Chamber of Commerce. Asian groups included the Chinese Benevolent Association, the Chinatown Service Center, and the Association of Free Chinese. The Golden Scar and Andrew Jackson Senior Citizens' associations came. Other groups with representatives present included the Lions Club and the Knights of Columbus.

Mr. Salonen welcomed the guests and introduced Reverend Moon: "Here at the door of our third century as a nation, we are challenged to a vital task. We are facing not a military or governmental crisis but a crisis of the spirit -- a crisis which calls upon us to live up to the ideals that made this nation one nation under God and extend it to our brothers and sisters around the world, to create one world under God.... The example shown in America of nationalities working together side by side should be a model for nations working together around the world. We believe that with the blessing of God we can do that.... This evening I would like to share with you the source of our enthusiasm. Reverend Moon has come to America because he feels God's love for this land so deeply.... "

Yankee Stadium was a major event for the world's media. At least 200 different media were represented by over 250 people. Among them were 38 American newspapers, 11 magazines and 30 international print media, including press and wire services. Nine U.S. and six international photographic agencies were present; 22 national and international radio stations came, and 18 U.S. and six international TV crews were represented. Among the more famous media present were: AP, UPI, Time, Newsweek, Agence

France Presse, Expressen, France Soir, Paris Match, the Korea Times, and BBC.



The program was concluded by the grand finale -- "God Bless America" -- by the New Hope Singers International and the New York City Symphony with a dazzling solo by Rayford Perry. Thousands of multicolored helium balloons mixing in mid-sky with white God Bless America balloons brought the event to a spectacular climax.



After the program, we remove every poster in New York