

God Bless America

Frank Sinatra considered Kate Smith – known professionally as The First Lady of Radio and The Songbird of the South – as the best singer of her time, and he said that when he and a million other guys first heard her sing *God Bless America* on the radio, they all pretended to have dust in their eyes as they wiped away a tear or two.

The link at the bottom of this Perspective will take you to a video showing the very first public singing of the song. But before you watch it, you should know the story behind the first public performance of the song

The time was 1938. America was still in a terrible economic depression. Hitler was taking over Europe, and Americans were afraid we'd have to go to war. It was a time of hardship and worry for most Americans.

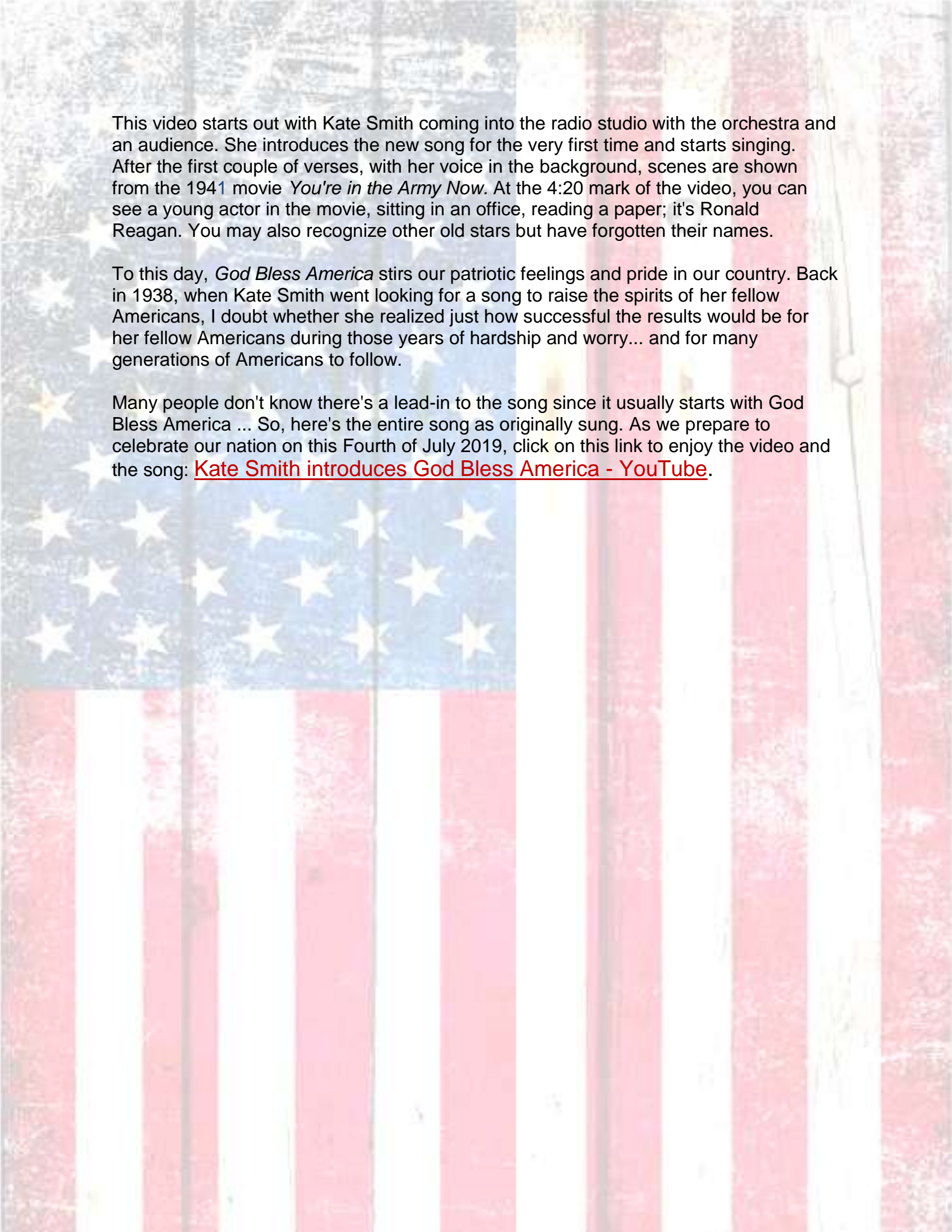
This was the era just before television, when radio shows were huge. American families sat around their radios in the evenings, listening to their favorite entertainers, and Kate Smith was one of the biggest of her time.

Kate Smith was also patriotic. It hurt her to see Americans so depressed and afraid of what the next day would bring. She had hope for America and faith in her fellow Americans. She wanted to do something to cheer them up, so she went to the famous American songwriter Irving Berlin (who also wrote *White Christmas*), and asked him to write a song that would make Americans feel good again about their country.

When she described what she was looking for, he said he had just the song for her. He went to his files and found a song that he had written, but never published, 20 years before – in 1918. He gave it to her, and she worked on it with her studio orchestra. She and Berlin were not sure how the song would be received by the public, but both agreed they would not take any profits from *God Bless America*. Any profits would go to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in New York City.



(more)



This video starts out with Kate Smith coming into the radio studio with the orchestra and an audience. She introduces the new song for the very first time and starts singing. After the first couple of verses, with her voice in the background, scenes are shown from the 1941 movie *You're in the Army Now*. At the 4:20 mark of the video, you can see a young actor in the movie, sitting in an office, reading a paper; it's Ronald Reagan. You may also recognize other old stars but have forgotten their names.

To this day, *God Bless America* stirs our patriotic feelings and pride in our country. Back in 1938, when Kate Smith went looking for a song to raise the spirits of her fellow Americans, I doubt whether she realized just how successful the results would be for her fellow Americans during those years of hardship and worry... and for many generations of Americans to follow.

Many people don't know there's a lead-in to the song since it usually starts with *God Bless America* ... So, here's the entire song as originally sung. As we prepare to celebrate our nation on this Fourth of July 2019, click on this link to enjoy the video and the song: [Kate Smith introduces God Bless America - YouTube](#).