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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
NATURALIZATION PROCEEDINGS

DADE COUNTY AUDITORIUM

10:28 A.M. EST

Judge Fay, distinguished members of the Judiciary, my former colleagues and very good friends from the Congress, Congressman Pepper, Congressman Burke and Congressman Frey, Reverend McCormick, the newest citizens of our very great country, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me join Judge Fulton in congratulating and complimenting the fine singing group, the New Direction singers, for their meaningful and wonderful rendition of songs that mean so very much to all of us.

I am very proud and extremely honored to have the opportunity to participate in the proceedings which tell 1,121 eloquent stories of you -- new Americans of many origins who have today become citizens of the United States of America.

You have demonstrated, as required by our laws, that you are attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States and well disposed to good order and happiness of the United States.

As President, I am extremely proud to welcome you as Americans who now share our common bonds and our common glory. These proceedings are special, very uniquely, because every single one of you is giving the United States of America the finest Bicentennial gift that you could possibly bestow.

You offer to us yourselves, your love, your patriotism, your courage, your energy, your determination and your ability. You are showing the world and all of your fellow citizens how much you believe in America.

You have chosen United States citizenship in preference to that of any other nation of the world. You have chosen well, and I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart.

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Just as there was no courtroom in Miami big enough to accomodate all of you, there are no words expressive enough to tell what it means to be an American. America is easier to experience than to describe.

Too many Americans now take our national treasure for granted. These treasures are not great cities or achievements, but the freedom and dignity the American philosophy accords to every American citizen.

Although you have been citizens for only a very, very few minutes, you can teach us many things. You can explain the real meaning of America to those who see only bad in our Nation and only good in nations with other systems. You can tell those who take America for granted that millions of people in other lands as far away as 9,000 miles and as close as 90 miles would dearly love to have just a fraction of the freedom we have in America.

Many of you come from places where people are denied the right of free choice; some places where churches and synagogues are open, but only for tourists; some places where free elections are promised, but never held; some places where free speech exists only as a memory.

Let those of you who are now able to vote join fully in our self-governing society. The American ballot is not only our right, but our responsibility. You are now free to exercise all of the rights of free Americans. You also have the responsibilities that go with them.

To qualify for naturalization, you have shown an understanding, as required by law, of the fundamentals of history and the principles and form of governments of the United States.

After 200 years, there is still something very wonderful about being an American. This continues to be the land of miracles.

We continue to change, to grow, to improve ourselves, to solve economic problems and employment problems and to believe that there is no problem that Americans cannot and will not solve.

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The United States of America remains the one nation which more than any other in the world symbolizes man's quest for political freedom, religious liberty and economic prosperity.

Our 200 year old Republic is kept free by the moral faith of our people and by the infusion of new strength and new faith which you, our newest citizens, give us today.

A nation of immigrants, we have thrived on constant renewal by many peoples who bring us their very best. Americans have given millions and millions a home, but we in return welcome and are enriched by the many special qualities that have made our nation unique.

I am proud to have supported -- as I am sure my former colleagues in the House did likewise -- the legislation that permitted the naturalization of some 65,000 new Americans in Florida since 1970. I am prouder still to be here on this inspiring occasion when so many people from so many lands entered this auditorium as so-called petitioners for naturalization, but will go home as citizens of the United States of America.

You will realize as you walk out of your court session, it is your auditorium, onto your streets, that your President is actually your employee. In America, every citizen in a very, very real way is the boss. We have 215 million bosses because the President has to answer to every citizen.

Today, I want to answer the concerns of some of the local residents who are not yet citizens but who want very desperately to be one. It is a fitting Bicentennial objective to help newcomers become naturalized.

Too often this objective is frustrated by red tape and procedures that create a backlog of applicants when there should be more frequent celebration of new citizenship.

Accordingly, I am directing the Attorney General to place a high priority on reducing that backlog. I am asking the Attorney General to transfer ten additional Immigration and Naturalization Service examiners to Miami within the next two weeks to deal with this very high priority situation.

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There are about 71,000 Cuban refugees, 35,000 of them in this immediate area who are technically eligible for permanent resident alien status, but they must wait too long for their turn under the immigration quota system. I will speed up that process.

I am directing the Attorney General to take all possible administrative action and, if necessary, to seek additional legislation to assure that Cuban refugees can be awarded permanent resident status without being delayed by the immigration quota system. We are dealing with human lives which have already suffered enough disruption.

America will remain true to our heritage as a sanctuary to the oppressed, Just as American citizenship involves responsibility as well as rights for the individual, the nations of the world must live up to their international responsibilities if they wish to be treated as members of the world community.

The Fidel Castro regime of Cuba, by sending an expeditionary force of 12,000 soldiers to intervene in a civil war in Angola is acting as an international outlaw.

Fidel Castro has committed a flagrant act of aggression. We are firmly committed to the principles of non-intervention and collective security against the aggression in this hemisphere.

By its aggression, the present government in Cuba has violated a fundamental principle of international law, a principle enshrined in the United Nations' Charter. This Administration will have nothing to do with the Cuba of Fidel Castro. It is a regime of aggression, and I solemnly warn Fidel Castro against any temptation to armed intervention in the Western Hemisphere. Let his regime or any like-minded government be assured that the United States would take the appropriate measures.

With continued peace, this hemisphere faces a new era of opportunity. The spirit of hemispheric friendship is strong. I can foresee new economic progress, greater cooperation and expanded trade.

As the great gateway to Latin America, Florida will reflect the growth with more jobs and more opportunities. As America enters its third century, we look inward as well as outward. To be strong externally, we must be strong internally. Our strength is based upon the freedom of the individual. To keep the individual free, we place a premium on creativity and individuality. Together we challenge the massive conformity of the modern world. Americans are determined to control institutions and not be controlled by them.

I believe in a country where the people will rule and the government respond. I believe as you do in America. America builds unity from diversity and makes advantage out of adversity. That is why today's proceedings are so much a part of the finest American process. A refugee child who landed on a fishing boat ten years ago is today a medical student.

Another who fled because authorities in his homeland permitted no arguments today argues cases in a Miami court as an attorney. Yet another who arrived with an empty stomach now runs a fine restaurant.

Such events are a tribute not only to America, but to the new Americans that we honor today. For you, I see a future full of great hope, and I am dedicated to the good life available to all of our people under a free Government that checks and balances its own excesses.

I am dedicated to the opportunity and the soundness of our dollar under a free economic system that corrects its own errors, and I am convinced of the courage, the capacities and the constructive cooperation of free citizens in all our lands.

Let us continue to be a nation of hope. Americans believe in the future because of what we have achieved in the past. Our resources are rich, our genius unchallenged, our freedom unequalled and our opportunities unlimited.

Our fate is in our own hands, and I know, therefore, that our fate is in good hands. America remains, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "The last, best hope on earth."

Thank you very much.

END (AT 10:45 A.M. EST)