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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO BE DELIVERED AT NATURALIZATION PROCEEDINGS

DADE COUNTY AUDITORIUM  
MIAMI, FLORIDA

I am proud to participate in these proceedings which tell 1,178 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 the good order and happiness of the United States." As President, I am proud to welcome you as Americans who now share our common bond -- and our common glory.

These proceedings are special and unique because every single one of you is giving the United States of America the finest Bicentennial gift that you could possibly bestow. You offer 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. You have chosen well. I congratulate you.

Just as there was no courtroom in Miami big enough to accommodate 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 treasures for granted. These treasures are not our great cities and material achievements but the freedom and dignity which the American philosophy accords to every citizen.

Although you have been citizens for only a few minutes, you can teach us many things. You can explain the real meaning of America to those who see only bad in our own 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 thousand miles and as close as 90 miles, would dearly love to have just a fraction of our freedom.

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Many of you come from places where people are denied the right of free choice . . . from places where churches and synagogues are open, but only for tourists . . . from places where free elections are promised, but never held . . . from places where free speech exists only as a slavish echo. Let those of you who are now able to vote join fully in our self-governing society. The American ballot box is not only our right but our responsibility. You are now free to exercise all the rights of free Americans. You also have all the responsibilities that go with them.

To qualify for naturalization, you have shown an understanding, as required by law, "Of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, 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 solve. 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 strength and 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 the many peoples who bring us their best. America has given millions a home; but in return we welcome and are enriched by the many special qualities that have made our nation unique.

I am proud to have supported the legislation that permitted the naturalization of some 65,000 new Americans in Florida since 1970. And 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, in your auditorium, onto your streets that your President is actually your employee. In America, every citizen -- in a 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 local residents who are not yet citizens, but who want very much to be. 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 celebrations of new citizenship. Accordingly, I am directing the Attorney General to place a high priority on reducing this backlog. I am asking the Attorney General to transfer 10 additional immigration and naturalization service examiners to Miami, within the next two weeks, to deal with this priority situation.

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 this process.

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I am directing the Attorney General to take all possible administrative actions 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. American will remain true to our heritage as a sanctuary for the oppressed.

Just as American citizenship involves responsibilities 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 aggression in this hemisphere. By its aggression, the present government of Cuba, has violated a fundamental principle of international law -- a principle enshrined in the United Nations charter.

My 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 a great gateway to Latin American, Florida will reflect this growth with more jobs and more opportunities.

As American 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 rule, and the government responds. I believe in America.

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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 argument, 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 we honor today. For you I see a future full of hope. 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 opportunities, and the soundness of the 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.

Let us continue to be a nation of hope. Americans believe in the future because of what we 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.

American remains, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "The last, best hope on earth."

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