

NATURALIZATION CEREMONY REMARKS

Judge John M. Gerrard

Congratulations! This day has been a long time coming for many of you.

Citizenship in this country is not an easy thing to achieve. It takes time, perseverance, money, and sometimes personal pain. Thank you for becoming citizens! *(Note: I join you in this celebration today . . . it is truly one of the most important ceremonies I perform and it is one of the things that I most enjoy doing as a federal judge.)*

And in a few moments, I will again congratulate each of you personally when I present you with your certificate of citizenship, and I certainly look forward to that. We need your talents, hard work, and participation in our country.

I realize that for many of you a difficult part of the oath of allegiance you just took is the part where you renounced allegiance to any foreign state or sovereignty. I want to remind you that what you solemnly renounced in that oath is allegiance to the **government** of another land. You did not renounce, nor should you ever renounce, the devotion you carry in your hearts for your native land, its people and culture. I hope you will preserve that always.

And for the benefit of your children and your grandchildren, as well as your own benefit, I hope that you preserve your native language and heritage and culture. Doing so enriches not only the lives of those in your family—doing so also enriches America and all of us living here. For over 220 years, this country has been blessed with a constant infusion of new people from all over the world who brought their languages, their heritages, their culture, and their values with them. Today it is you who so bless all of us.

Now I wish to speak (for a moment) about you as United States citizens, which you now are.

You may hear voices in this land that say there is only one true American religion. But remember why you are here. As an American, you may freely and openly be a Christian, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Muslim, or you may adhere to other religions or to no religion whatsoever.

You may hear voices in this land that say there is only one true American way to think and believe about political matters, economic matters, and social matters. Do not believe it. As an American, you may freely and openly adhere to political, economic, and social views on the right, on the left, or anywhere in between. [Listen openly to all views . . . make up your own mind.] (*That is why I encourage voter registration . . .*)

Simply stated, there is no single American way to think or believe. Indeed, conformity of thought and belief would be contrary to the underlying principles of this great Nation.

It is also important to remember that this Court and the courts of our Nation are here to preserve and protect your rights as Americans to freely and openly think and believe as you wish.

However, we should all be reminded. Every right begets a corresponding duty or responsibility—the duty to so conduct ourselves as not to infringe on the rights of our fellow citizens. In this country, we promise you the pursuit of happiness—we do not promise you happiness. We promise you equality of opportunity—but we do not promise riches. We promise you freedom of speech, but we cannot promise you wisdom. What we promise and what you have received by today becoming citizens of this great country is the opportunity to join with the rest of us in preserving these inalienable rights so carefully set forth in our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution.

I welcome you to citizenship, and I rejoice in the enrichment that each of you bring to the United States of America. But this is the last time we will recognize you as America's *newest citizens*. Because going forward, you have all of the rights, privileges, responsibilities, and benefits of all other American citizens, no matter how long you have been a citizen.

May God bless each of our new citizens, your family and friends here with you today, and those not able to be with you, God bless the country's each of you came from and may God bless your new country, the United States of America.