

Good afternoon, and congratulations on becoming American citizens.

It is my profound honor to stand before you in this sacred place, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, as we celebrate your official entry to American citizenship. President Kennedy once said, “Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.” Today, you join that proud tradition.

Looking around this room, I know that each of you has had their own odyssey to get here, and I know it was anything but easy. But you’ve made it, and here in this land of dreamers, this land of strivers, this nation of immigrants, your stories are now a part of our collective American narrative. While your road ahead may still bring challenges, I truly believe there is no better place to pursue your dream than the United States of America.

Like many of you, my own family came chasing the American Dream. My father came to America from Moldova, and my mother from Belarus, both arriving at John F. Kennedy International Airport when they were young, carrying little more than hope and determination. I stand before you today as the living result of their courage, their sacrifice, and this nation’s promise.

Over the past two years, I’ve had the privilege of interviewing immigrants from all walks of life, documenting their journeys to America. I’ve listened as they’ve described leaving behind everything familiar—homes, friends, family—to venture into the unknown. I’ve heard stories of hardship that would break most spirits, and witnessed resilience that defies imagination.

What strikes me most is how these stories, though unique in their details, share common themes: courage in the face of uncertainty, sacrifice for the sake of loved ones, and an unwavering belief that in America, tomorrow can be better than today.

One woman I spoke with, Estee, fled Cuba because her father was on Castro’s kill list. She came here as a young girl, and now speaks with pride about the US, saying that “in America, you are the only one that stops yourself. No one will stop you.”

I also spoke with Izak, who fled Syria with nothing and is now a doctor serving his community. When I asked him what America meant to him, he said, “The American dream means to be free and control your own destiny.”

These stories are powerful not just because of where they started, but because of what they became—through hard work, perseverance, and an unwillingness to give up. In America, success isn’t promised, but it is possible. This country doesn’t guarantee outcomes, but it guarantees the freedom to strive, to fail, and to try again. That’s what makes it exceptional.

These stories, your stories, remind us that citizenship isn't merely a legal status. It's a commitment to certain ideals: that all people are created equal, that they are endowed with inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today, as you take your oath, you don't simply receive these rights, you become their guardians.

The document you receive today doesn't erase your past or require you to forget where you came from. America doesn't ask you to abandon your heritage, your language, your traditions, or your stories. In fact, it's quite the opposite. What makes America unique is precisely that we are enriched by the cultures, traditions, languages, foods, music, and perspectives that each new American brings. Today is the day you join this American Mosaic.

Kennedy recognized that American citizenship represents a covenant—both between yourself and your government, and between you and every other American who shares in this nation's promise. This bond connects you to the factory worker in Michigan, the teacher in Texas, the farmer in Iowa—people you may never meet but with whom you now share a common purpose. Your voice joins theirs in our democracy. Your traditions add new threads to our cultural tapestry. From this day forward, your aspirations and America's future are inseparably linked.

As new citizens, you join a nation still in progress, still striving to fulfill its promise. Your presence, your stories, and your contributions will help shape what America becomes. This country has always depended on those willing to work hard, embrace opportunity, and believe in a better tomorrow. And now, you are a part of that tradition.

You remind us that America is, at its best, a place where dreams take root and flourish, where hard work is rewarded, where differences are celebrated, and where each generation builds upon the achievements of those who came before. Today, you add your chapter to that ongoing story, and this country is better because of it.

Looking out at your faces today, I see America's future. I see determination, hope, and possibility. I see my parents' journey continued through yours. And I feel a deep gratitude that you have chosen to make this country your home.

So on behalf of all Americans, born here or naturalized, I offer you not just congratulations, but profound thanks. Thank you for the courage it took to leave behind what was familiar. Thank you for the perseverance it took to navigate our immigration system. Thank you for the faith you've placed in our shared future.

Today, America is stronger because you have become a part of it.

Welcome, my fellow Americans.