

*“For you are the makers of the flag...”*

Naturalization Ceremony

June 8, 2012

Hyde Park, New York

*Marcus J. Molinaro*

*Dutchess County Executive*

Here in the hometown of one of America’s finest presidents, you have chosen to become an American. Here in Hyde Park, where President Roosevelt took his place in American history...you begin your American history. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this special day.

As together we confront the challenges of our day, it might be helpful to recall the words of President Roosevelt during the similar challenges of his:

“The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something...”

In his address to Oglethorpe University in 1932, Roosevelt goes on to implore:

“We need enthusiasm, imagination and the ability to face facts, even unpleasant ones, bravely... Yours is not the task of making your way in the world, but the task of remaking the world which you will find before you. May every one of us be granted the courage, faith and the vision to give the best that is in us to that remaking.”

And that, perhaps is the story of the American. We toil in the making and remaking...

(On June 14<sup>th</sup>, we will celebrate Flag Day)

In speaking of our American Flag, then-Secretary of the Interior Franklin Knight Lane, said vividly:

“I swing before your eyes as a bright gleam of color, a symbol of yourself, the pictured suggestion of that big thing which makes this nation. My stars and my stripes are your dreams and labors. They are bright with cheer, brilliant with courage, firm with faith, because you have made them so out of your heart. For you are the makers of the flag and it is well you glory in the making.”

Beneath the bright and vivid colors of our banner, America has struggled to find its place in the world and fulfill the very promise it symbolizes.

When we confronted the unfinished business of America’s declaration that “all men are created equal,” it was this flag that triumphed over slavery and indentured servitude. When women rose up to fight for their equality, this flag led the marches and protests. When the nations of the world found themselves in great struggle against tyranny and unspeakable atrocities, our flag helped to provide strength and comfort and victory to a world at war.

Dictators, oppressors, tyrants and potentates have come to know that the colors of this banner and the people who pledge allegiance to it represent hope and freedom and liberty.

When a people marched for equality and sought to be “free at last, free at last” the colors of America’s flag were made brighter and more vibrant.

The flag we pledge allegiance to today has been posted above the gravesites of America's finest and bravest. Heroes from every generation and upon every corner of the earth have given their lives in defense of what this flag represents. Leaders, soldiers, firefighters and police officers have been laid to rest wrapped in the warmth it provides.

Americans mourned as Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy, lives ended too soon, traveled the countryside on the way to their final resting place with our flag draped upon their coffins. And on that dark day in September 2001, when evil rose up and burned a scar on our collective soul, Americans turned their tearful eyes to a symbol we had seemingly forgotten.

Our flag, though, is not so proud as to demand unquestioned loyalty. Its very purpose acknowledges our right to question, challenge and protest the very government it symbolizes.

And it is what it symbolizes that we, through your determination and accomplishment, celebrate today.

There is nothing unique about the physical construct of our flag or the dye used to shade its colors. Its uniqueness is found in the spirit of a free and hopeful people who understand that we are flawed yet strive to be better.

Our creativity and shared resourcefulness; our compassion and decency; our history and aspirations all embodied within. Our flag, while a brilliant symbol of a proud nation, exists because of you. Your stories, experiences and lives, now, as Americans, make it bolder and more wonderful. Your standing before all of us; before your friends and families; in the shadow of one of America's greatest presidents, pledging allegiance adds to the chapters of history and future hopes of this great nation.

Whether flying above a cemetery, waving beyond centerfield, or standing silently on the moon, the American flag has provided us inspiration to do greater things.

The flag of the United States has neither been created by rhetoric, nor by sentences in a declaration or the ink used to pen the bill of rights. It has been created by the experiences of a great people. Nothing has been written upon it that did come from our lives, and now yours, as Americans. Our flag is the "the embodiment, not of a sentiment, but of a history."

Considered a champion of the common man, Interior Secretary Lane, offered this poignant description of our flag: "I am whatever you make me, nothing more. I am your belief in yourself, your dream of what a people may become... I am the clutch of an idea, and the reasoned purpose of resolution. I am no more than you believe me to be and I am all that you believe I can be. I am whatever you make me, nothing more."

You are now Americans. You are now a part of this rich history. You are its hope for a robust and prosperous future. You are the makers of the flag; and may you find glory in the making.

May God bless you and may He continue to bless the United States of America.