



# Fact Sheet

September 2007

## CITIZENSHIP DAY / CONSTITUTION WEEK 2007

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America consists of 52 words:

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

With the words, 'We the People,' our founding fathers established the basic purposes of our government, forming a country that for 220 years has protected the rights and secured the liberties for all citizens. Citizenship Day and Constitution Week is a time to reflect on our Constitution, and the rights and responsibilities guaranteed to every citizen. The week of September 17 was selected as Constitution Week to commemorate the events of September 17, 1787 when the United States Constitution was signed by 39 delegates from 12 states at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Citizenship Day itself has its roots in President Woodrow Wilson's efforts in 1915, where as part of what he called National Americanization Day, the President himself, cabinet members, administration officials as well as prominent public figures such as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, gave speeches at naturalization ceremonies throughout the nation.

Citizenship Day has been celebrated in some form since 1940, when Congress designated the third Sunday in May as "I Am an American Day." Later in 1952, President Harry Truman signed a bill formalizing the celebration of Citizenship Day on September 17. The week beginning September 17 is Constitution Week, when we reflect on the enduring importance of this great document. Each year the President signs a proclamation declaring September 17 as Citizenship Day and the start of Constitution Week and calls upon all citizens of the United States to rededicate themselves to their country and the principles upon which it was founded.

### **Celebrating a Nation of Immigrants**

Citizenship, whether by birth or naturalization, is the cornerstone of this nation's values and ideals. Each year, hundreds of thousands of immigrants complete the naturalization process and participate in naturalization ceremonies across the country. These naturalization ceremonies are conducted by a federal court or by a local U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office, and may involve a handful of people or several thousand. Regardless of the ceremony's size or venue, the applicants for naturalization share a common experience as they take the *Oath of Allegiance*, declaring their fidelity and allegiance to the United States, its Constitution and laws.

U.S. citizenship represents a commitment to the shared civic values that unite all Americans. USCIS is charged with promoting instruction and training about citizenship rights and responsibilities and the development of educational materials for immigrants interested in becoming citizens. In supporting and promoting civic education for our immigrants, USCIS provides new immigrants and future citizens with the foundation needed to embrace the common civic values that continue to make the United States a nation united in diversity.

## **Citizenship Statistics**

The average annual number of persons naturalizing increased from less than 120,000 during the 1950s and 1960s to 210,000 during the 1980s, 500,000 during the 1990s and to 625,000 during 2000 to 2006

**2000-2007:** More than 4.5 million individuals have been naturalized during the new millennium. From October 2005 to September 2006 (fiscal year 2006) more than 700,000 individuals became United States citizens. USCIS has naturalized more than 33,750 members of the U.S. Armed Forces since September 2001.

**1991-2000:** In 1996, naturalizations peaked at more than one million, for a total of 1,044,689. The late 1990s also marked another shift in naturalization demographics, with Mexico yielding the most naturalized citizens, followed by Vietnam and the Philippines.

**1981-1990:** Almost 2.3 million people were naturalized during the 1980s. Nearly half that number hailed from Asia. Together, Canada and Mexico accounted for more than one quarter of the remaining new citizens.

**1971-1980:** The United States welcomed almost 1.5 million new citizens during the 1970s. The Philippines, Cuba and China were the leading countries of origin. This trend represented a shift from the 1960s, when the largest number of new citizens came from Europe. Some 66,000 members of the U.S. military were naturalized during this decade.