



# DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

---

---

## **“We the people”: Reflections on the Privileges and Responsibilities of U.S. Citizenship**

**MAKAN DELRAHIM**  
Assistant Attorney General  
Antitrust Division  
U.S. Department of Justice

**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery at  
United States District Courthouse**

**Washington, D.C.**

**March 12, 2019**

Good morning.

Thank you Judge McFadden for that kind introduction.

And, thank you for inviting me to be with you today. This is the third time in my life that I've had the honor of giving remarks at a naturalization ceremony. The first invitation came from then-Chief Judge Thomas Hogan, a wonderful jurist whom I admire greatly. The second invitation came from my dear friend and former colleague, Chief Judge Beryl Howell. Today, I humbly accept Judge McFadden's invitation to offer thoughts on the meaning of U.S. citizenship.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to congratulate Judge McFadden on receiving his nomination and judicial commission almost two years ago. Prior to beginning his judicial service, Judge McFadden was a fellow lawyer at the Justice Department who, in his capacity as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Criminal Division, prosecuted the first ever criminal case under the United States' female genital mutilation statute. He is a consummate public servant who displays a deep commitment to the rule of law and unwavering faith in the Constitution. Admittedly, I feel a particular kinship towards his Honor because one of his earliest civil cases after taking the bench was an antitrust one. After reading his well-reasoned opinion in *F.T.C. v. Tronox*, I know that the American consumer will always benefit from his fairness, incisive analysis, and regard for the pursuit of justice.<sup>1</sup>

Congratulations to all of you on reaching this final step in the naturalization process. Becoming a U.S. citizen is a momentous occasion and one that you will remember for the rest of your lives. I can personally attest to that.

The federal courthouse in Washington, D.C. is a wonderful setting to discuss the joy and honor of U.S. citizenship. After all, the courts are an integral part of the independent judiciary – and the crown jewel of our constitutional republic. It is, in my view, what makes our country unique.

In the United States, citizenship is the vehicle by which the Constitution's fundamental rights flow to the People. One cannot fully grasp the meaning of citizenship or the United States without first having a deep appreciation for the Constitution itself.

---

<sup>1</sup> See *F.T.C. v. Tronox Limited, et al.*, No. 18-cv-01622-TNM (D.D.C. Sep. 12, 2018) (granting FTC's motion for preliminary injunction challenging the merger of two top suppliers of chloride process titanium dioxide).

Drafted in 1787 and ratified in 1789, the Constitution begins with three important words: “[w]e the people.” Those words boldly signify that our Republic was formed on the idea that power is vested principally in the people.

As President Ronald Reagan once said, “Almost all the worlds’ constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which We the People tell the government what it is allowed to do. We the People are free.”

The Constitution is the supreme law of the United States. It establishes the framework of our government and confers both rights and duties to those who are bound by it. It also enshrines our core values, among them self-government and individual liberty.

At its core, U.S. citizenship means a fidelity to the Constitution – a conscious, solemn commitment to America’s enduring principles and ideals. That is why the Oath of Allegiance, which all of you will recite today, calls upon you to “support and defend the Constitution and [the] laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic” and to “bear true faith and allegiance to the same.”

As former Attorney General John Ashcroft once said, “How best to nurture and defend liberty is the unending challenge of any self-governing people.” In the United States, we know that freedom, nurtured and protected through the rule of law, has made America exceptional.

The Constitution was designed to protect the rule of law – the principle that all persons, institutions, and entities are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated.

As Rod Rosenstein, the Deputy Attorney General of the United States, recently remarked, “The rule of law is indispensable to a thriving and vibrant society. It shields citizens from government overreach. It allows businesses to invest with confidence. It gives innovators protection for their discoveries. It keeps people safe from dangerous criminals. And it allows us to resolve differences peacefully through reason and logic.”

Let me now describe what citizenship and the promise of America have meant to me.

I know firsthand that becoming a U.S. citizen is a momentous occasion. I became a citizen in 1992 when I was in law school here in Washington, D.C.

I was born in Tehran, Iran. Although anti-Semitism was a fact of life for my Iranian-Jewish family, my life changed forever when the Shah was deposed and a hostile revolution took hold.

My father, older sister, and I were forced to flee when I was ten years old, while my mother and younger sister, who went back and were to return in a matter of weeks, remained trapped in Iran for five and a half more years.

We began anew in Los Angeles in 1979. As many of you know, Los Angeles is a diverse place that is home to people of different religions, ethnicities, nationalities, and ideologies. Los Angeles will always be home and I am forever grateful to the community that embraced me and my family. I still visit my elementary school and take my kids to the place where I grew up.

Soon after arriving in the United States, I learned English and my family embraced American life. Some of my fondest memories of our early years in the United States include working at my dad's gas station. I pumped gas, changed oil, tuned up cars, and sold tires.

Those experiences taught me much more than just how to work on a car.

My father, and others in my family who worked hard to feed their families, embodied the American entrepreneurial spirit and I am grateful that my father made the American dream possible for myself and my sisters. He taught me the value of hard work, resilience, and dedication. He went through much hardship, but persevered. Like many of you, I strive to teach my three children these lessons of grit each day.

My story is not unique. What is unique is this country. I am sure my story sounds a lot like many of yours in the audience. For as long as the United States has existed, hard-working immigrants have helped shape American life. Albert Einstein, Charlize Theron, Hakeem Olajuwon, Eddie Van Halen, Wolfgang Puck, Salma Hayek, and Liam Neeson are all immigrants who achieved the American dream and, in different ways, made life more enjoyable for us.

Another thing they have in common is they all became naturalized U.S. citizens, just as you are doing today.

My life experience reaffirms that we live in the greatest country in the world. In September 2017, I was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as the Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust at the U.S. Department of Justice. The same U.S. Senate where I once had the honor to serve as Chief Counsel to its Committee on the Judiciary.

Each day, I have the privilege of going to work at the Main Justice Building. It is the headquarters of the Justice Department on Pennsylvania Avenue and sits across from the National Archives, where you can see the original Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

The Main Justice Building is a place where American history, honor, and duty are actually and figuratively preserved for all of time. The desk of former Attorney General Bobby Kennedy sits in the Antitrust Division's suite. There are portraits of each Attorney General hanging in the hallways. Our walls are covered in beautiful painted murals depicting scenes of law and justice. I walk the halls of the Justice Department with the knowledge that great prosecutors, including some of my own legal heroes, such as Robert Jackson, once walked the same hallowed halls.

The talented men and women of the Antitrust Division fight for free markets and promote sound antitrust policy through vigorous law enforcement and advocacy. U.S. competition policy is premised on the idea that the antitrust laws, when vigorously and properly enforced, are the greatest protectors of free markets. Those are the same free markets that many of you have left your countries to find to help achieve an entrepreneurial dream or an improved lifestyle.

Free markets and economic opportunity are significant reasons why the United States is able to attract the best, brightest, and most motivated people, like you, from around the world. Americans uniquely have the freedom to choose what they want to be.

In some countries, a person's future is determined by the class in which he or she was born or the inefficiency of a planned central economy. In the United States, we are committed to liberty. We believe you can be whatever you want and that your character, work ethic, and integrity are more important than the place where you were born. The great trustbuster and former U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt once said, "We should keep steadily before our minds that Americanism is a question of principle, of purpose, of idealism, of character; that it is not a matter of birthplace, or creed, or line of descent."

My life story reflects the hope and promise of this country and that the American dream is alive and well. There are few other places in the world where an immigrant fleeing violent regime change and religious intolerance could grow up to work in the White House, the U.S. Senate, and the Justice Department.

The founding of America was a bold and improbable experiment. It reflects the hope and promise of creating a government by ordinary people that affords its citizens liberty, democracy, opportunity, and equality. As James Madison noted, "The happy Union of these States is a wonder; their Constitution a miracle; their example the hope of Liberty throughout the world."

Many of you left your homes in order to pursue a better life for yourselves and for your families. Some of you may have fled violence, war, or instability and you may have been subjected to persecution for who you are, how you look, or what you believe.

In a few minutes, each of you will take the Oath of Allegiance and complete the long legal process of becoming a U.S. citizen. In so doing, you will become a part of the great American enterprise. Your citizenship makes you a part owner, a shareholder.

As such, you should enjoy the rights and benefits of citizenship, but also recognize the responsibilities that come with it.

It is our moral imperative to make this country better than we found it – not just for ourselves but for our neighbors and future generations to come. Participate actively in our democracy. Grow your ideas. Seize the American opportunity to innovate. Start businesses. Get involved in your communities. Join the ranks of the brave soldiers who protect our country every day. Care deeply and passionately about the American people.

Do the right thing and have moral courage – even when it's hard.

As former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy once said: “Few men are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change.” Moral courage is an imperative for all of us, but especially for those of us entrusted by the public to represent their interests in government and ensure that justice is done.

Above all, remember your obligation as an American to keep the Republic, guard the Constitution, and preserve the rule of law.

In closing, let me just say what a privilege it is to stand before all of you today and be a part of this important occasion.

I want to congratulate you and your families, and all of the American citizens in the audience who are so fortunate to welcome you as citizens of this great country.

I thank you and I thank his Honor, Judge McFadden, for this privilege.