

What Makes America Great

"This is America... A brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky." These are the words of former President George H. W. Bush, spoken to the Republican National Convention in 1988. More than 30 years later, his description still holds true. Since its inception, America has been among the most diverse nations on the planet, with people across backgrounds, ethnicities, and beliefs uniting behind one commitment - to forge, out of the societies of the past, a New Nation - free, democratic, and modern. To this day, America's melting pot has led to the cooperation that is key to solving challenges, inspiring the world, and shaping the future of humanity. These people, Bush's "thousand points of light" all culminate in the illumination of our global beacon of democracy and progress, and the shining of our lamp beside the golden door to freedom and opportunity. This - our nation's commitment to the principle that a diverse society leads to a more perfect Union - is what makes America great.

I am the son of 2 immigrants. My mother and father came to the United States at the turn of the Century. They left their home country, and chose to set out in pursuit of the American dream. Just like millions of other immigrants, they sought greater economic opportunity, social freedom and liberty, and a chance to be an American. Since the earliest English settlements in Jamestown and Plymouth, promises of religious freedom, civic liberty, and economic success have caused those (who are willing) like my parents, to flock from all across the globe to the United States. They have come for the promised American dream, that anyone who will follow our moral principles - hard work, civic engagement, and a commitment to democratic values - is accepted into our society, to help make America great.

In the last year, I have had the immense joy of watching my father, and a few months later my mother, both become Naturalized US Citizens. Walking into that courthouse, and seeing all the different people who were about to enter American society that day, impressed on me a deep sense of patriotism. It seemed that people had come from all walks of life - economic statuses, professions, backgrounds - and all parts of the world. That room truly was a microcosm of humanity, and that is precisely what makes America great. America has always been about welcoming those seeking a better life, introducing them to the fabric of our country, and allowing them to contribute to our pursuit of a greater society. Immigrants help America succeed through advances in the sciences, arts, industry, and global trade, thereby allowing America's influence to spread all over the world. Since 1776, America has been engaged in the great

experiment of diversity, and we have proven to be a symbol of what happens when humanity works in common cause.

Some might say that this experiment is precisely why America is not great. These people tend to point at failures in America's past. Many dark periods of American history do exist, when America has strayed from its guiding mission of being an open and free society for all. Even modern day tensions and polarizations exist, across racial, religious, and ideological differences, leading naysayers to criticize an optimistic view of America. Yet, don't all experiments fail at some point? The true greatness of a nation is not the goodness or evil of the events of its history, but the courage to continually progress on, as America develops and marches on towards our collective prosperity.

I am reminded of a quote by President Ronald Reagan: "You can go to Japan to live, but you cannot become Japanese. You can go to France to live and not become a Frenchman. But... Anybody from any corner of the world can come to America to live and become an American." The people I witnessed becoming naturalized citizens in that room, including my parents, are a living testament to this belief, and what, in my mind, is the great story of America. We are a symbol of what happens when humanity as a whole unites in common virtue. Different people, different backgrounds, different beliefs, from all different parts of the world - all strengthened by a resolve to work together. E Pluribus Unum - out of many, one. Out of many different people, one common spirit and vision of a democratic society. And **that** is what makes America great.