

A Teenager's View on Monticello's Naturalization Ceremony

by M. K. Nagle - July 25, 2015

“Indeed, we are blessed -- all of us -- to have had founders here in America who had the foresight to create a Constitution that gives us all the right to search for a better life. A life of dignity. A life of freedom.”

- Muhtar Kent, Chairman and C.E.O. of the Coca-Cola Corporation

I have had the amazing opportunity to work two consecutive summers at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson. On the 4th of July I attended the naturalization ceremony where 75 new citizens were sworn in. As an intern, we had more work cut out for us than usual as NBC's Today Show was broadcasting the ceremony and had setup a tent with a full camera crew...my day started at 6:30am!



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Although it was hot and steamy, typical for a Charlottesville summer day, the excitement could be felt as Monticello's West Lawn was packed with over 1,000 friends and families here to support and cheer for our new U.S. citizens. The Honorable John Charles Thomas, who was the first African-American to serve on the Supreme Court of Virginia, signaled the commencement of the naturalization ceremony by reading the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence, and you could really feel the presence of Jefferson on the mountaintop. I was liberated by the reading of the declaration, and I was truly proud to be an American living a life filled with freedom and justice. Speeches were made by the attending judges and justices, by Leslie Greene Bowman President of the Monticello foundation, and by Muhtar Kent, a

Muslim American, who gave a riveting speech about what it is like to be a United States citizen. As with all special events, we had a “moment” when the microphone died in the middle of Natalie Ross singing the Star Spangled Banner, but being a professional from Broadway she just started from the top when handed a new, working microphone and the audience cheered.

Then each new American’s name was read aloud from the steps of Monticello and they received their citizenship and a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Although this was my second summer being part of this Independence Day tradition, I had to fight back tears when the individuals from countries across the world from India, to Bulgaria to Argentina stood up and thanked America for making them citizens and giving them a chance to live the American dream. I think those of us from my generation don’t often think about what it would be like to be our age in another country where they would be stifled and controlled from following their ideas. Seeing the citizens filled with pride and newly found nationalism is without a doubt the best way to spend Independence Day.

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