

**July 4<sup>th</sup>: A Celebration of Citizenship**  
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Each year, on July 4, we celebrate not only the birth of our country but also a powerful and revolutionary idea: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights—that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

In commemorating the birth of our nation, we are also celebrating the institution of citizenship along with its rights and its obligations. The honor of being a citizen of the United States of America is particularly meaningful for me because I am a first-generation American. I was born in Tabriz, Iran. At my own naturalization ceremony thirty years ago, I spoke on behalf of the new citizens of the United States. Today, I would like to share these remarks again in recognition of our nation’s 234<sup>th</sup> birthday.

America’s newest citizens are immigrants from dozens of countries, from many cultures, many continents. We are of many religions, colors, and races. We speak many languages and were born into different social and economic backgrounds. But what we all share is Woodrow Wilson’s notion that democracy exists for the purpose of reducing inhumanity and maximizing hope. We share Franklin Roosevelt’s view that the strength of American democracy incorporates the freedom from want and from fear. We share the vision of Walt Whitman that democracy is the essence of the American spirit; a kind of training school for helping men and women to live lives of noble aspiration. And we share the vision of James Madison of a country enriched by diversity and proud of its motto, *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one. This is a land where faiths, cultures, races, and hundreds of ethnic groups coexist.

We have come to America not only to enjoy its benefits but to contribute to its development and welfare. We know America is not perfect but we see it as perfectible. For us, America is not just an actuality—it is a potentiality. These are among the reasons that we have worked so hard to become citizens of the United States.

Above all, we share Thomas Wolfe’s abiding faith that, “The true fulfillment of our spirit, of our might, and immortal lamp is yet to come...” that, “...the true discovery of our own democracy is still before us—and that all these things are certain, as certain as the morning and as inevitable as the noon.”

Vartan Gregorian is President of Carnegie Corporation of New York, a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to do "real and permanent good in this world."