

RESPONSE TO ADDRESS OF WELCOME
AT CITIZENSHIP RECOGNITION CEREMONY
HELD ON FRIDAY, MAY 19, 1950

BY
RALPH R. ATLAS

Your Honour, Reverend Brackeen and Fellow Citizens:

I would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation for this wonderful Recognition Ceremony. For us, the new citizens, this is a solemn and memorable occasion. It gives added significance and meaning to what we feel in our hearts, and I am sure that we will cherish the memory of this ceremony for a long time to come.

We are here today, a group of brand new citizens. We came from different places and environments. Some, like myself, came from countries where there is a tradition of freedom and democracy and felt immediately a kinship of spirit in our new environment. Others came from places where personal freedom is limited or non-existent; to them the spirit of this country was a revelation. We all made our adjustments and took advantage of our new opportunities. We practiced our skills and professions and earned a decent living; we made new friends and acquired new customs. Now we cheer Ralph Kiner and boo the Dodgers; we listen to Jack Benny or (according to preference) to the New York Philharmonic; we get involved in an argument about the merits of the "T" formation or the relative chances of the major political parties in the forthcoming elections. In short, we feel very much at home.

And today, we became American Citizens. Friends, let me assure you, it is a privilege which we will not take lightly. There are numerous advantages in being an American citizen. We live under a system of government based upon the dignity and freedom of the individual which derives its authority from the people in the broadest sense of the word. In this rich and vast land the individual has great opportunities to better himself. This is our new home. Are we to be like that fortunate tenant in a big and richly appointed mansion who feels no obligation to maintain and preserve it, because he only lives there?

Any democracy depends for its success upon the active participation of its citizenry. Like the proverbial chain, it is not stronger than its weakest link. Indifference and neglect of the citizens will endanger the system. This holds doubly true for the American Heritage of living in freedom together.

We are well aware of what the alternative might be. For us the memories of the recent holocaust are still too vivid. We still remember how, through indifference, millions of innocent lives perished by fire and unspeakable torture, because of their religion and origin. Even now, other millions are wasting away in exile forced to endure hunger and hard labour because of their personal beliefs and opinions.

We, the New Citizens, are fully aware of our duty to safeguard our newly acquired privileges. We pledge ourselves to good citizenship:

- a. To be active in the affairs of the nation, the state and the community.
- b. To respect the law and pay the taxes.
- c. To bear malice towards none and avoid prejudice based on class, race or religion.
- d. Lastly--to work and thrive for peace, but, when called upon in time of emergency, to protect and defend our new home, the United States of America.