



On Independence Day, Weathering the Storm

A powerful storm on the morning of July 4 threatened to spoil the party.

As thunder rumbled and heavy rain poured down, it appeared more than likely that Monticello's 42nd annual Independence

Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony would have to be moved indoors or postponed.

But shortly before the scheduled 10 a.m. start, the rain stopped, the skies cleared, the ceremony began, and Thomas Jefferson Foundation President Daniel P. Jordan was able to employ one of his favorite lines: "Thomas Jefferson once wrote, 'The sky is

always clear' at Monticello."

The rainstorm's only impact, aside from some damp clothes and soggy ground, was that the Charlottesville Municipal Band was unable to perform, its members the victims of wet instruments and soaked sheet music.

Seventy-three adults from 40 different countries took the oath of U.S. citizenship that day on the steps of Monticello before a crowd of more than 1,200. In addition, two previously naturalized children received citizenship certificates at the event.

Prior to the naturalization ceremony, W. Richard West, Jr., founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, spoke about the similarity of the experiences of Native Americans and new American citizens. A member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma



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The group of new citizens included 73 adults from 40 different countries.

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Independence Day

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and a peace chief of the Southern Cheyenne, West described how his native heritage taught him about humanity and personal freedom, concepts woven into Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.

Emphasizing the importance of America's rich cultural history and diversity, West said: "The demographics of the United States will change dramatically and materially within a generation, requiring that all American citizens respect and honor anew cultural difference and the vast benefits that diversity can bring to America's future – just as it has in enriching this country's past cultural heritage."

One of the newly sworn U.S. citizens, Egypt native Aliaa Khidr, told the Richmond Times-Dispatch: "It speaks to the soul of the fabric of the United States that we each come from different places."

Since 1963, nearly 2,500 individuals have been sworn in as American citizens at the Monticello ceremony, which is presided over by the U.S. District Court, Western District of Virginia.



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Umbrellas came in handy before the ceremony.

- KIM CURTIS

Kim Curtis is a communications assistant at Monticello.

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org