



Fact Sheet

September 17, 2008

CITIZENSHIP DAY

Citizenship Day is celebrated on September 17 in remembrance of the signing of the Constitution in 1787. It has been celebrated in some form since 1940, when Congress designated the third Sunday in May as “*I Am an American Day*.” In 1952, President Harry Truman signed a bill formalizing the celebration of Citizenship Day on September 17. In 1956, Congress requested, and President Dwight Eisenhower proclaimed, the week beginning September 17 through September 23 as Constitution Week.

Celebrating a Nation of Immigrants

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Throughout our history, immigrants have come here seeking a better way of life and have strengthened our nation in the process. For more than 200 years, the United States has remained strong because of our citizens and the common civic values we share. Each year, hundreds of thousands of immigrants become citizens in naturalization ceremonies across the country. Applicants for naturalization take the [*Oath of Allegiance*](#), declaring their fidelity and allegiance to the United States, our Constitution and laws.

Citizenship Statistics

2001-2007: More than 4.4 million individuals have been naturalized during the new millennium, including nearly 780,000 people in the first 10 months of fiscal year 2008. During this decade, the leading countries of birth of new citizens are Mexico and India.

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed an executive order calling for expedited naturalization for all members of the U.S. armed forces who served honorably on active duty since September 11, 2001. To date, nearly 41,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have become naturalized citizens under that order.

1991-2000: This period witnessed the largest number of naturalizations of any decade in our nation’s history, approximately 5.6 million individuals. In 1996, more than 1 million individuals became naturalized citizens. The late 1990s also marked another shift in naturalization demographics, with Mexico yielding the most naturalized citizens, followed by Vietnam and the Philippines.

1981-1990: Almost 2.3 million people were naturalized during the 1980s. Nearly half of those individuals came from Asia. Together, Canada and Mexico accounted for more than one quarter of the remaining new citizens.

1971-1980: The United States welcomed approximately 1.5 million new citizens during the 1970s. The Philippines, Cuba, and China were the leading countries of origin. This trend represented a shift from the 1960s, when the largest number of new citizens came from Europe. Some 66,000 members of the U.S. military were naturalized during this decade.

The oldest available statistics show 7,941 people naturalized in 1907, followed by 25,975 in 1908.