

Citizenship For 6,000 In Ceremony In Queens

The New York Times

June 15, 1991, Saturday, Late Edition - Final

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Distribution: Metropolitan Desk

Section: Section 1;; Section 1; Page 25; Column 5; Metropolitan Desk; Column 5;

Length: 747 words

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Body

In the largest naturalization ceremony in New York City since 1954, more than 6,000 people from 100 different countries crammed a Queens auditorium yesterday and pledged allegiance to the United States.

The pipes and drums of the New York City Police Department Emerald Society band brought roars of approval from the crowd. And when the keynote singer did not arrive to sing the national anthem, half a dozen immigration lawyers improvised a chorus and asked the 6,050 new American citizens to sing along.

The hourlong swearing-in ceremony was the largest since 1954 when 9,000 new Americans were sworn in at the Polo Grounds in upper Manhattan. The crowd yesterday was a result of immigration housekeeping. In one fell swoop, the Immigration and Naturalization Service cleaned up a backlog caused by the increasing numbers of qualified applicants in the Eastern District of New York, which encompasses Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, immigration officials said.

Auditorium at St. John's

"We figured 9,000 would wipe out our backlog but we couldn't find a place to do 9,000," said Charles Troy, a spokesman for the I.N.S. Officials did not want to risk inclement weather by having the ceremony outside. The largest auditorium they could find held 6,000 people and was at St. John's University in Hillcrest, Queens.

Such ceremonies are not uncommon in other parts of the country. Joe Flanders, an information officer for the I.N.S. in Southern California, said, "We average ceremonies with 7,000 to 8,000 people, two or three times a year."

Most of the immigrants yesterday were from Brooklyn and Queens, two boroughs that have come to embody a changing New York City, reshaped in the last decade by a large immigrant influx. The New York City branch of the I.N.S. interviews an estimated 60,000 immigrants a year, Mr. Troy said. Most become citizens.

Immigration requires all citizens to hold resident green cards for at least five years before becoming American citizens. Yesterday's crowd was a mixture of races and religions and reasons for becoming citizens. Becoming an American made it easier to get a job and travel and made it possible to vote, they said. They all planned to celebrate: dinners with family, a barbecue bash in upstate New York, a date with a new boyfriend.

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"Most probably came here through other family members," Mr. Troy said. "They may have come for economic reasons. When they become citizens it's easier under immigration laws to turn around and petition for other immediate relatives."

As the thousands poured into the auditorium dressed as if they were going to a fancy reception, they were all given miniature American flags. The largest representation was 547 people from Guyana. The next largest groups were from China, Barbados, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic.

Dressed in a brown suit, holding an American flag, Iftikar Aziz Nazmi, 27, had trouble letting his not-yet so nimble English express his emotions. Mr. Nazmi, a printing product manager in Brooklyn, left Bangladesh six years ago and is the first of his family -- seven siblings and his parents -- to get **citizenship**. His father had worked in the United States embassy in Dacca for 38 years before coming to this country, he said.

"Today, I am finally free," he said. "Sometimes I miss Bangladesh. But today I am an American. I am a passport holder."

Yesterday evening, the entire family planned to go out to dinner.

Won Ju Kim believes his greatest privilege will be to vote. A native of Seoul, South Korea, Mr. Kim, 31, arrived as a student eight years ago. Since then he has moved from Illinois to Brooklyn where he works in a Korean importing business. Aside from economic incentives, his reasoning for becoming an American is simple and straightforward. "I can now do what I believe," he said. "My life is more wide open."

Victoria Eugenia Nieto left Barranquilla, Colombia, when she was 25. She did not speak English, had few friends and no job. She did not even know how to drive a car. Now, six years later, she works at Macy's at Roosevelt Field on Long Island as a sales associate.

Miss Nieto said she brought her values from Colombia and that she will never forget where she came from. First thing yesterday morning, she called her father in Colombia to tell him the news. "Tonight," she said, opening her eyes wide and laughing, "I have a date! We're going out for sushi."

Graphic

Photo: Palia Arviv, an immigrant from Israel, and her son, Rachal, during the naturalization **ceremonies** yesterday in **Queens**. (Dith Pran/The New York Times) (pg. 26)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: **CITIZENSHIP** (93%); IMMIGRATION (92%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); CITY GOVERNMENT (89%); POLICE FORCES (78%); NATURALIZATION (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (77%); SINGERS & MUSICIANS (77%); INTERVIEWS (76%); PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS (72%); FAMILY (64%); PETITIONS (60%); RELIGION (50%)

Company: STATEN ISLAND TERMINAL (56%); STATEN ISLAND TERMINAL (56%); ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY (83%); ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY (83%)

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Organization: ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY (83%); ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY (83%); ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY (83%); ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY (83%)

Industry: SINGERS & MUSICIANS (77%); PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS (72%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, NY, USA (96%); NEW YORK, USA (94%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (95%); BARBADOS (79%); DOMINICAN REPUBLIC (79%); CHINA (79%)

Load-Date: June 15, 1991

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