

Good morning. I am David Ferriero, Archivist of the United States, and I have the honor to be among the first to formally congratulate you on becoming new citizens.

I also have the privilege to welcome you to the Rotunda of the National Archives. As you look around you, you'll see that this is where we display the nation's founding documents --- the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They are known collectively as the Charters of Freedom.

You studied them as you prepared for your citizenship exam, and now you will enjoy all of the rights, and freedoms they guarantee.

Over to my right is the Declaration of Independence, the same piece of parchment that our Founding Fathers signed that hot summer of 1776 in Philadelphia. The men who signed it risked their lives, their families and all they owned, because the King of England viewed them as traitors.

Behind me is the Constitution, which remains the foundation of our federal system of government. The Constitution's Preamble sets out the reasons and purpose for the Constitution, and it contains perhaps the most important words in any of our founding documents, words that capture the essence of our democracy: "We, The People."

At the Archives, we take great care to preserve that manuscript you see in that case, so that it remains as it was two hundred years ago. But the Constitution itself is very much a living document.

It has been amended 27 times. Several of those amendments explicitly extend freedoms and rights to people who had been excluded from full participation in our democracy when the Constitution was adopted in 1787.

There are amendments to abolish slavery, make former slaves citizens, and grant them the right to vote. There is the amendment to grant women the right to vote and another granting 18-year-olds the right to vote.

It is this document, and its amendments, upon which the United States Supreme Court has based so many landmark decisions that have changed the course of American history.

To my left is the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Those amendments were added to the Constitution exactly 220 years ago ... today.

Those ten amendments spell out the basic personal rights and freedoms that are guaranteed to every American and which you all exercise every day --- including freedom of speech, religion, and the press; the right to petition the government; the right to bear arms; and the right to due process of law and a speedy and fair trial.

I hope you all get a chance to examine these three documents closely before you leave today. And I urge to exercise the rights and responsibilities contained in them by becoming active participants in the issues of our own day.

Ceremonies like this one took place all across the United States this year, they have been a fundamental aspect of who we are as a nation and since about the time the Bill of Rights was adopted.

The people who made the journey to citizenship you have just concluded include parents, grandparents, and other forebears of millions of Americans. They include famous political leaders -- Members of Congress, Governors, and Cabinet Secretaries... artists like Isabelle Allende, scientists like Albert Einstein, athletes like Dikembe Mutumbo, and business pioneers like Google co-founder Sergey Brin.

They also include not so famous people like my own grandparents, who came here from Naples, Italy and Cork, Ireland more than a century ago. All of them, like you here today, help make the United States the most vibrant, creative, and diverse democracy in history.

With us today is a man who has much in common with you. Like all of you, he was not born here. Like many of you, English was not his first language. In fact, I think it was his third, after French and German.

Chef Roland Mesnier was born in the village of Bonnay, France, the seventh of nine children. He began his career as a pastry apprentice at the age of 12, and then traveled to Germany as a pastry cook. At the age of 32, he arrived in the United States as Executive Pastry Chef at the historic Homestead Mountain Resort. Three years later, two life altering things happened to him: he was hired by Rosalyn Carter as White House pastry Chef...and he became a U.S. Citizen.

He worked more than two decades in the White House, preparing desserts for Presidents Reagan, Bush 1 and Bush 2, and President Clinton. He retired from the White House in 2004 as the longest-tenured chef in White House history. He has been anything but retiring in the years since, writing a book, "Dessert University," receiving the French Legion of Honor Medal, and hosting events, appearing on television, teaching classes, and giving speeches.

We are very lucky to have him with us today.

Please welcome Roland Mesnier.