

Independence Day Message from U.S. Ambassador Fay Hartog Levin

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Independence Day brings the opportunity to reflect on the origins of America and what it means to be an American both at home and abroad. As I look back to our origins and the events of the last 235 years, I am filled with gratitude and pride in what we, as a nation, have achieved. I am particularly proud that America always was and, always will be, an open nation with a highly diverse population from across the world. This is our strength and our future, and also our past.

The story of the American people is a story of immigration and diversity. The United States has welcomed more immigrants than any other country -- more than 50 million in all -- and still admits almost 700,000 persons a year. In the past many American writers emphasized the idea of the melting pot, an image that suggested newcomers would discard their old customs and adopt American ways. Now, Americans have placed greater value on diversity, ethnic groups have renewed and celebrated their heritage, and the children of immigrants often grow up being bilingual.

The steady stream of people coming to America's shores has had a profound effect on the American character. It takes courage and flexibility to leave your homeland and come to a new country. The American people are known for their willingness to take risks and try new things, for their independence and optimism.

Immigrants also enrich American communities by bringing aspects of their native cultures with them. Many black Americans now celebrate both Christmas and Kwanzaa, a festival drawn from African rituals. Hispanic Americans celebrate their traditions with street fairs and other festivities on Cinco de Mayo. They enrich our literature, arts, diplomacy, sciences, education and cuisine.

President John F. Kennedy, himself the grandson of Irish immigrants, summed up this blend of the old and the new when he called America "a society of immigrants, each of whom had begun life anew, on an equal footing. This is the secret of America: a nation of people with the fresh memory of old traditions who dare to explore new frontiers...."

This is our strength, not only at home but in world affairs, as these groups bring a multiplicity of voices and approaches to the conduct of both domestic and foreign policy.

As 2050 approaches, I am certain in the knowledge that America will remain strong, vibrant and dynamic, and hopefully, will continue to attract the most courageous, enterprising and optimistic future Americans the world has to offer.