**Andrew Tisch**

**Keynote Address**

**Independence Day at Monticello**

**July 4, 2018**

1. **Introduction**

Thank you, Leslie.

We are here to celebrate two important moments in history:

* The first is the birth of our great country, which officially happened 242 years ago; and
* The second will happen in just a few minutes, when you become our newest citizens.

While each of you took a different journey to get here, before the morning is over, each of you will be able to say:

“I am an American.”

And there is no place I’d rather be, than here, today, celebrating all of you. And no better ceremony than the one here at Monticello -- the oldest, continuous swearing-in of new citizens outside of any courthouse -- in its 56th year.

I am so honored to be among the first to welcome Nita from Bhutan, Carla from El Salvador, Sami from Iraq and Joseph from Romania.

And each and every one of the 67 of you from 35 countries!

More than 100 years ago, my grandfather Avraham Tichinsky traveled from the Ukraine to America on a steamship called the SS Belgravia. He spoke no English. Young Avraham arrived at Ellis Island and took the same oath of citizenship that you will take later this morning.

Avraham and his family moved to Brooklyn and he studied hard. Fourteen years later, he attended the City College of New York, where he became captain of the basketball team in 1918. When the crowd cheered, it was easier to chant: “Go Tisch” rather than “Go “Tichinsky.” The Tisch nickname stuck and became our family name. Because Avraham could shoot hoops, I stand before you as Andrew Tisch instead of Andrew Tichinsky.

We gather at a time when some Americans are questioning the value of immigration and of immigrants.

This isn’t the first time our nation finds itself at this same crossroads. While America is a nation of immigrants, we have a long and troubling history of barricading the doors to new arrivals. Fortunately, we have an even longer and more glorious history of tearing down those barricades -- because the truth is we need and want immigrants.

You make America bigger, better and stronger.

Thomas Jefferson, who lived in this great house, once, said America was a “refuge,” a place where those suffering from oppression could participate in the right of self-government.

Soon, you too will have that privilege -- joining us as citizens, as brothers and sisters, under one flag.

1. **The Mosaic**

Over the last two years, I’ve been keenly focused on the topic of immigration.

With my co-worker and friend, Mary Skafidas, who is on the stage today, we just published a book called *Journeys: An American Story.* It features a collection of essays on the American immigrant experience, as diverse as our country.

Many refer to our country as a “melting pot,” a soup of many different ingredients combined and homogenized to create a certain, desirable flavor.

However, we see America as a “mosaic,” with tiles of many different

colors, shapes, sizes and textures. The grout that holds us together is the common desire for freedom, justice and opportunity. Without this grout, we would be nothing more than a pile of stones.

1. **Stories of Arrival**

The stories we share in our book illustrate how immigrants have built and strengthened the culture of our country. Many of our storytellers came seeking opportunity, some for love and others fleeing violence.

A young man named Ahmed Ahmed, told us of escaping Somalia in the early 1990s. His family went from living in a 12-bedroom mansion in Mogadishu to a hovel made of sticks and cloth in a refugee camp. Ahmed’s family called him the “lucky baby” because soon after he was born, his family was sponsored and granted asylum in the United States—a privilege his mother considers the greatest day of her life. His arrival in today’s America would be much more difficult, needless to say.

Hard work and determination got Ahmed to Cornell University—my alma mater. And today, he is studying at Oxford University, as a Rhodes scholar.

There is also Michael Bloomberg—the entrepreneur and former mayor of New York City, whose creativity led to a new way of processing data and information that has transformed the world. Michael traces his ancestors back to the ghettos in Russia. Their towns are listed in the Valley of Lost Communities at the holocaust museum and are remembered because every Jewish person in those towns perished during the horrendous Nazi occupation.

For so many, America was the refuge that Thomas Jefferson spoke of, a beacon of freedom in a sometimes-evil world.

However, the history of America -- our history is far from perfect. For millions of people, over hundreds of years, America represented not a chance for freedom, but the end of it.

Our book includes a story from Ben Freeman, who traces his ancestry back to Sally Hemings, the slave of Thomas Jefferson, whose life is celebrated here at Monticello.

Another essayist, New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, tells us that, as a boy, he “came to know that his family’s journey to this land wasn’t in any way similar to the pilgrims.” He knew of no courageous explorers, no people seeking religious freedom, no escape from persecution or famine. His ancestry came from slavery and generations of unimaginable suffering and subjugation.

Yet Senator Booker grew up with grandparents and parents who loved this country…who “saw connections between their struggles and the heroic aspiration of the early colonists and the freedom fighters, the abolitionists and the suffragettes, as well as the refugees and the immigrants who made America march, stumble, stride and jump forward.

1. **Stories of Perseverance**

The journey to America is only the beginning of the challenge. Once you get here, you have to assimilate and adjust to a foreign culture, all while finding a way to feed and house your families. Something I’m sure you can all relate to.

And the same is true for many of our essayists. When US Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao came from Taiwan to America as a child, she didn’t speak a word of English. She would sit in the back of the class and copy everything on the blackboard even though she had no idea what the words meant. Each night, her father would translate the day’s lessons for her. That’s how she learned to speak English.

What Mary and I saw over and over again in the stories was the theme of sacrifice -- great sacrifice that would seem so difficult for many of us.

There were immigrants who themselves would never get to live the American dream. But they made sure their children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews had a chance to grasp it.

Mary shares the story of her Aunt Lella, who came to America as an undocumented immigrant from Greece, in the early 1970s. She lived in the shadows, in fear of deportation for 16 years, until she finally got a green card.

She never became a citizen, but Mary calls her an American hero.

Aunt Lella worked her entire life in a garment factory, always saving, never spending. And the money she left Mary’s family when she passed away enabled Mary and her cousin to graduate from college without any debt.

Mary’s American story might never have been written if not for her Aunt Lella.

I imagine many of you here today have an Aunt Lella somewhere in your family history…someone who sacrificed and scraped with the hope that newer generations would have the chance to soar and to take advantage of opportunities that they never had.

1. **Impact of Immigrants**

But those people who toiled and struggled for their families did much more than that. Immigrants have literally built America from the ground up including the railroads, bridges, highways and much of the infrastructure that we use today.

And beyond the hard labor, there was the brainpower to fuel the economic engine.

Consider this, forty percent of all Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children:

* Companies such as -- Procter and Gamble, Apple, Pfizer, Tesla, Google, GE, Intel, eBay and IBM.

The company I am privileged to chair, Loews Corporation, traces its history to 1946. That’s when my grandfather, Avraham, you remember him, the basketball player —by then he was known as Al Tisch— he and my grandmother Sayde gave a life-changing loan to my father Larry and my uncle Bob.

With it, my father and uncle purchased a run-down resort in New Jersey called the Laurel-in-the-Pines Hotel. From this one investment, Bob and Larry built a business empire that today is a Fortune 500 company, employing more than 18,000 people in industries ranging from hospitality and insurance to energy and packaging, with revenues of over $13 billion annually.

That opportunity could only happen here. That’s the promise, the magnificence and the glory of America.

Immigrants creating economic benefits and leaving their marks on our collective culture through customs, food, language, art and history—each new group adds more stones to our national mosaic for future generations to cherish.

1. **Conclusion**

To the soon-to-be-citizens in the audience – to you Edgar from the Philippines, Mustafa from Jordan, Angela from Mexico, and Linda from Ghana. Let me say to you directly:

I am honored that you chose to come to this great country and to become an American.

Now to be a citizen takes responsibility so, I’d like to leave you with my Top 10 list of things I hope you will do as a new American. And it’s a worthwhile list for the thousands sitting here today and those of you watching the livestreaming of this ceremony:

1. Love your new country.
2. Be an ambassador of goodwill. Tell all your friends and family in the “old country” about how great America is.
3. Be a tourist. Monticello is a great place to start. You should also go see the Statue of Liberty, Constitution Hall, the Smithsonian, the Grand Canyon and other historical sites. Get to know America.
4. Never be afraid to do the right thing. This country is built on a system of checks and balances so that “right” prevails. If you believe you are right, our constitution gives you the ability to prove your case.
5. Tell your story. Family histories get passed down from generation to generation, so do your part to keep your legacy alive.
6. Know your neighbors. Try to weave yourself into the fabric of your community. Chances are your neighbor’s story is just as interesting as yours.
7. Give back. Join an organization to help make this country even better, whether religious, civic or philanthropic – participate!
8. Make your voice heard. There’s nothing more American than joining or fighting for a cause and working for change.
9. Demand excellence from your government. Hold your government officials to high standards and demand that they work together, smartly and responsively. And take a moment to thank a member of the military, a police officer, a teacher—or other civil servants who protect us and enrich our lives in so many ways.
10. It’s the last one and the most important. The most sacred principle in our democracy is “one person, one vote.” So never forget to do your civic duty and always, vote!

Every true American success story starts the same way yours started-- with a person passionate enough to want a better life and courageous enough to seek it. So, to you, America’s next generation of entrepreneurs, builders, teachers, doctors, artists or basketball players, Congratulations. I hope you will do great things and will add to the rich mosaic that is the United States – and yes, the United Peoples of America.

Thank you.