



Federica Pipoca Bianco

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I have lived in the US for over 10 years. I held a green card for 7. Last Friday I became a citizen of the United States of America. I come from Italy, a wealthy country. By no means American citizenship was a matter of life or death like it may be for others: it was a choice. I lived here for long enough to be American as much as I am European.

And at nearly no other time in history, this could have been a more heartfelt, deeply-thought choice, and such an emotional roller coaster.

I was studying the constitution, while religious bans were being proposed, and ultimately put in place. I was studying the civil rights movement, as people of colors across America were ostracized and punished for protesting racial bias in policing that is killing them. I marched with the American People to preserve the values that most Americans share as dear, and core to their identity: values of brotherhood and solidarity.

The words "defending its constitution" in the oath I just pronounced, had nothing abstract or rhetorical to them: religious freedom needs defending, the principle of equality needs defending, democracy needs defending, and I have committed to that in my oath.

During the ceremony, we received a copy of the constitution, a booklet about the meaning of immigration in America, a passport application form and a few more items. As the master of ceremony was describing the content of this package he pointed out that a welcome letter was included in our package, a letter, welcoming me as a new citizen, signed President Barack Obama. That was a gift that brought tears to my eyes. As he said that the letter was signed by Barack Obama, the room broke into a spontaneous applause. I am so grateful for that, for a message that honestly welcomed me, as a new citizen of the United States of America, from a President that understood and appreciated that diversity has always been, and continues to be at the heart of what the United States is.