

SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ANDREW CARD JR.
PUERTO RICO CITIZENSHIP COMMEMORATION
MARCH 1, 1992
PUERTO RICO

Thank you Major-General Miranda-Marin (representing Governor Colon); Former Governor Luis Ferre; Major Sorentini.

It is a distinct pleasure to return to Puerto Rico. And it is indeed an honor to be with you today on this very special occasion -- the 75th anniversary of the granting of United States citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico. With your renowned hospitality and lush geography, I clearly understand why Puerto Rico has earned the nickname of "La Isla del Encanto."

Given the bounty of this land and its strategic location, one can easily see why Columbus -- and others seeking to establish a place for themselves in the New World -- came to settle on this beautiful island.

It is appropriate that this visit to Puerto Rico is my first trip as Secretary of DOT. My very first trip here -- way back in 1967 -- was also, in a sense, under the charge of DOT. I was a cadet-midshipman on the SS Claiborn as it made its cargo run to Ponce, Mayaguez and San Juan. Since then, I have traveled often to this island -- visiting almost every community.

In fact, Congressman Robert Lagomarsino -- the Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee with jurisdiction over Puerto Rico -- and I helped celebrate U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans in Bayamon on March 1, 1987: the 70th anniversary. And I would be amiss if I didn't pass along greetings and best wishes from Congressman Lagomarsino -- who is well known for his work on the behalf of Puerto Rico.

He also asked that I convey his considerable admiration for Dr. Miriam Ramirez de Ferrer for organizing this event and her dedicated efforts for the people and nation of Puerto Rico.

When Miriam asked me to join you for this celebration I unhesitatingly agreed. For this day holds more than the simple celebration of U.S. citizenship: it honors the long standing relationship and trust held between the governments of this Island and the United States. And it honors the close and mutual respect of each other's people and unique culture.

One cannot help but be moved by the unfeigned loyalty Puerto Rico has shown to the United States since citizenship was first bestowed seven and one-half decades ago. In particular, the heroism and gallantry of the people of this island have been demonstrated time and time again -- beginning with World War I, and

continuing through the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam and of course during Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf.

We solemnly honor the valor, courage and sacrifice of these veterans -- these men and women who stood ready at a moment's notice to lay down their lives for the principles of justice and democracy. We cannot, and must not, forget our indebtedness to these soldiers. And let me here offer a special salute to the members of the 65th Infantry Regiment who are with us today to receive special honors.

This outstanding record of Puerto Rico's commitment to the United States takes on a special meaning when one considers that this island's unswerving dedication has continued in spite of judicial pronouncements some 70 years ago -- when the Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. Constitution applied only in part to Puerto Rico.

Moreover, we must remember and take note that in enacting the law to grant U.S. citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico, our Congress did not expand the Constitution in full as it had done earlier in other territories and trusts.

Yet, Puerto Rico has remained loyal to the principles and values of the U.S. and her Constitution -- the principles of democracy, individual rights and equality.

Indeed, you have become a beacon of liberty that shines throughout the Caribbean.

You, the people of Puerto Rico, have continuously shown your zeal for and support of our constitutional form of government. In fact, one of the things I admire most about Puerto Rico, is the intense involvement of her people in the democratic processes.

Our President, George Bush, has traveled throughout Puerto Rico and is deeply aware of the unique commitment shown by the people of this island to the democratic process. He has seen your passion for freedom and political participation. It is also something he sees often and first-hand as Commander-in-Chief.

President George Bush also knows well of the spectacular growth that has occurred throughout the Island over the past 75 years since U.S. citizenship was granted.

Operation Bootstrap, which transformed this island from what was once called the "poorhouse of the Caribbean," to one of the richest islands in the region, remains a sterling example of what can occur when a people unite to press forward for economic change and development.

Of course, problems still exist here -- as they do on the mainland -- but we have made major gains in meeting the challenges of poverty, illiteracy and drug abuse. Because of the determination and commitment of the Puerto Rican people, the future does indeed look bright for this Enchanted Island.

Before closing, let me personally thank the City of Guaynabo for hosting this event and commend Mayor Junjior Cruz and the President of Puerto Ricans in Civic Action for their leadership in sponsoring this non-partisan civic event -- this ceremony, which has brought together individuals regardless of their differing political views to commemorate that which we all cherish: United States citizenship.

The people of Puerto Rico should be particularly proud of the dedicated efforts of Dr. Miriam Ramirez de Ferrer, who continues to advance the citizenship rights of her people. From within the White House, I have witnessed first-hand Miriam's unselfish devotion. She is an effective and tireless advocate for her homeland.

Thank you also, Mayor Cruz and Dr. Ramirez de Ferrer, for being with us today on this special event. And thank you again, the people of Puerto Rico, for your long-standing loyalty and commitment to our constitutional democracy, our nation and our President.

Let me now share with you a proclamation written and signed by the President for this 75th anniversary celebration. It reads:

[READ PROCLAMATION]

Thank you again for the invitation to be here on this very special day

Good afternoon.

#