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"I AM AN AMERICAN DAY" HIGHLIGHTS WORK OF WPA EDUCATION PROGRAM

Thousands of the men and women who will take part today in the nation-wide observance of "I Am an American Day" have gained their objective of citizenship through the assistance of WPA naturalization classes.

More than 4,000 classes, with average monthly enrollments aggregating over 75,000, are operating throughout the country solely for the instruction of aliens in the requirements, duties and privileges of American citizenship, according to Acting WPA Commissioner Howard O. Hunter. It is estimated that approximately 20 percent of the million aliens who have been naturalized since 1935 have prepared for their examinations in these classes, he said.

Today has been designated by Presidential proclamation as "I Am an American Day", Mr. Hunter pointed out. Under the auspices of the Department of Justice and other interested agencies, appropriate ceremonies will be observed in all parts of the country in recognition of those who have become citizens during the past year, whether by naturalization or by coming of age. Local celebrations will be augmented by several nation-wide broadcasts originating in Washington and Hollywood.

Throughout the week WPA adult education classes, and naturalization classes in particular, will welcome visitors as a part of the program for acquainting the public with all phases of naturalization work, Mr. Hunter said. Classes will be found operating both day and night in almost every community in which there are foreign populations.

"The WPA Adult Education Program has been one of the most important forces in the training of aliens in the responsibilities and obligations of American citizenship," according to Major Lemuel B. Schofield, Special Assistant to the Attorney General in charge of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. "Its facilities have been made available in every part of the country and its teachers have shown a uniformly high degree of proficiency and sincerity.

"Our naturalization examiners generally regard the completion of a WPA naturalization course as helpful in establishing that an applicant for citizenship is familiar with the requirements for citizenship and with the American form of government."

Instruction in naturalization is one of the major phases of the WPA Adult Education Program, Mr. Hunter pointed out. The program as a whole conducts an average of nearly 50,000 separate classes monthly; employs 29,000 persons, the majority of whom are teachers, and furnishes instruction in a wide variety of subjects to an average of over 900,000 persons each month. Courses provided vary all the way from basic instruction in reading and writing for illiterate adults, through many fields of general academic and vocational interest to specialized instruction in Spanish for the entire officer personnel of the Army Air Corps. Classes are given free of charge, but on a regularly scheduled basis, as one of the many public services of the WPA Community Service Program.

Literacy classes, which over the past five years have taught more than 1,500,000 adults to read and write, form an important part of the naturalization work done by WPA. A great many of the 4,700,000

aliens now living in this country are unable to use the English language effectively. The rudiments of reading and writing are first taught them in these classes, and by the time they have attained a reading proficiency equivalent to that of the fifth grade, they are ready to progress to a study of American history, civics and government.

Literacy education has been much improved by WPA teachers through the development of a series of texts, using simplified vocabularies, geared to adult interests. Previously, adults learning to use the language for the first time were obliged to make out with primers devised for children. This embarrassing factor alone, according to some educational authorities, was responsible for many grown people who sincerely wanted to become literate refusing to attend adult education classes.

There are no specific educational requirements which the applicant for naturalization has to meet other than the ability to write his name. However, he must satisfy the naturalization examiner that he is "attached to the principles of the Constitution," and an understanding of this document presupposes the ability to read it.

WPA naturalization classes not only help the alien to read and understand the Constitution but they familiarize him with many other phases of the American form of government and the responsibilities of American citizenship. They provide, moreover, a sympathetic forum in which the foreign-born have an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the things that puzzle them in America. Many naturalization classes have developed in this way into social and cultural centers for foreign language groups which materially speed the integrating process whereby they become Americans.