

What is Citizenship? What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens?



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What is Citizenship?



- Citizenship is a relationship between an individual and a country to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection.
- People who are born or choose to be citizens of a nation must defend the laws and pledge allegiance to that nation.
- Each nation determines the conditions under which it will recognize persons as its citizens, and the conditions under which that status will be extended or withdrawn.

Who is a citizen of the United States?

- Unlike European countries where citizenship is based on “Blood and soil”, in the United States with multiethnic, multi-religious inhabitants from the start, citizenship is based on the shared secular ideas of liberty and justice.
- “Citizens” are either born in the U.S. (“Jus Soli”) or acquire citizenship by being born to parents who were citizens or by naturalization.
- Initially individuals were “citizens” of the state they lived in. There was no definition of United States citizenship in the Constitution, only a process for naturalization.

**Excerpt from Letter from
General George Washington,
Dec. 2, 1783**

“...The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and respected Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.”

Source: Michael Lemay and Elliot Robert Barkan, eds. *U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Laws and Issues: a Documentary History*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999.

What is “naturalization”?



Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a lawful permanent resident after meeting the requirements established by Congress.

The requirements have changed over time.

Early Naturalization Acts



- The first Naturalization Act in 1790 required **two years** of residence in the United States and one year in the state of residence (in order to address one's good character) prior to applying for citizenship
- Length of time required for residency was expanded to **five years** in the 1795 Naturalization Act and to **14 years** in the 1798 Naturalization Act (along with the Alien and Sedition Acts) repealed in 1802
- Only “free white persons” could become citizens
- Not changed until 1868 when the 14th Amendment made it clear that citizenship included “all persons” including those of African descent.

The Fourteenth Amendment



“Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States, and of the State wherein they reside.”

Who is a citizen?



- You are a United States citizen if you were born anywhere in the United States or its territories, including Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- If you are born in another country and immigrate to the United States, you are “resident alien, not a citizen”. If you enter the U.S. legally, you can become a legal permanent resident.
- If you were born in another country and become a legal permanent resident (obtain a green card), you can become a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Refugees

- A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. (Refugee status is determined by the United Nations.)
- When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.
- The U.S. accepts a limited number of refugees each year. The president in consultation with Congress determines the authorized number of refugee admissions each year.

Who can you become a naturalized citizen?



- A lawful permanent resident (including refugees) living in the United States for five years qualifies for naturalization after passing the “Citizenship” exam.
- Minors (under age 18) are ineligible to obtain U.S. citizenship through naturalization. However, a minor child of a naturalized citizen becomes a citizen of the U.S. when the parents do.
- Foreign nationals with criminal backgrounds will not be allowed to become U.S. citizens.

Citizenship Exam



- Includes an English reading and writing component as well as a civics exam
- At the naturalization interview, the USCIS Officer will ask up to **10 random** civics questions. The applicant must answer 6 questions correctly to pass
- Practice tests with 100 questions are available at <https://my.uscis.gov/prep/test/civics/view>
- Questions such as: The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?

What are the rights of citizenship?

- U.S. citizens (including naturalized citizens) have the RIGHT to:
 - Vote
 - Serve on juries
 - Run for office (Serving on a jury is often seen as an obligation but women and African-Americans fought to have this right.)
 - Register for the Selective Service (if you are male and between age 18 through 25)
 - Equal protection and due process
- Legal permanent residents who live in the U.S but are not citizens do not have these rights.(The 14th Amendment only protects citizens.)

What are the responsibilities or obligations of citizenship?

- U.S. citizens have a RESPONSIBILITY or OBLIGATION to:
 - Follow the laws, including paying taxes
 - Register for the Selective Service (if male aged 18-25)
 - Be informed about public issues
 - Support our democratic form of government and not work against the country's national interests (e.g., for a foreign country).
 - This is what “pledging allegiance” means.
- Legal permanent residents must also follow the laws, including paying taxes, but may be deported for committing serious crimes.

What is responsibility?

- What is a responsibility?
 - A duty or obligation to do something or to refrain from doing something
 - What might be examples?
- Usually there are *rewards or benefits* that come from fulfilling responsibilities and *penalties or punishment* for failing to fulfill responsibilities.
 - What might be examples?

What are the sources of responsibilities?

- Promises
- Assignments
- Appointments
- Occupation
- Law
- Custom
- Moral principles
- Citizenship
- Identify a responsibility you have from each of these sources

What are the consequences of fulfilling responsibilities?

- Benefits to others:
 - Predictability
 - Security
 - Efficiency
 - Fairness
 - Community spirit
- Benefits to person fulfilling the responsibility:
 - Independence
 - Self esteem
 - Acceptance and approval
 - Gains in knowledge, skill and experience
 - Increased recognition, status of payment

Why is it important to fulfill your civic responsibilities?

- “No man is an island.”
 - A saying from a sermon by 17th century English author John Donne
 - Expresses the understanding that no one is self-sufficient; everyone relies on others.
- Society cannot function unless each individual has a responsibility towards the betterment of the larger society.
- Democracy depends on ALL people—not just elected leaders—recognizing and fulfilling their civic responsibilities.