

BECOMING AN AMERICAN CITIZEN



If you were born in the United States, then you are an American citizen. If you were born in another country and immigrated to the United States, then you have to apply for citizenship. This process is called **naturalization**. Immigrants who become citizens are called naturalized citizens. They have the same rights and responsibilities of citizenship that all Americans do.

How did immigrants become American citizens in the 19th century?

After the American Revolution, each state decided what the process was for immigrants to become American citizens.

Usually, the immigrant filled out a form called a **declaration of intent**, which said he wanted to become an American citizen. Each state's form was different, but the forms asked the immigrant's name, address, and country he had originally come from. (Only men could become American citizens; women had the same immigration status as their husbands or fathers.)

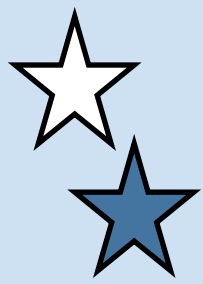
The immigrant had to live in the United States for a certain number of years, although the law kept changing. At one point, immigrants had to live in America for 2 years before becoming a citizen, but at another point, immigrants had to live here 14 years before they could apply for citizenship!

At the end of that period, the immigrant appeared in court with witnesses who would testify that he was an honest, hardworking man. If the judge agreed, then the immigrant would swear an oath of allegiance and get his citizenship certificate. He was then an American!





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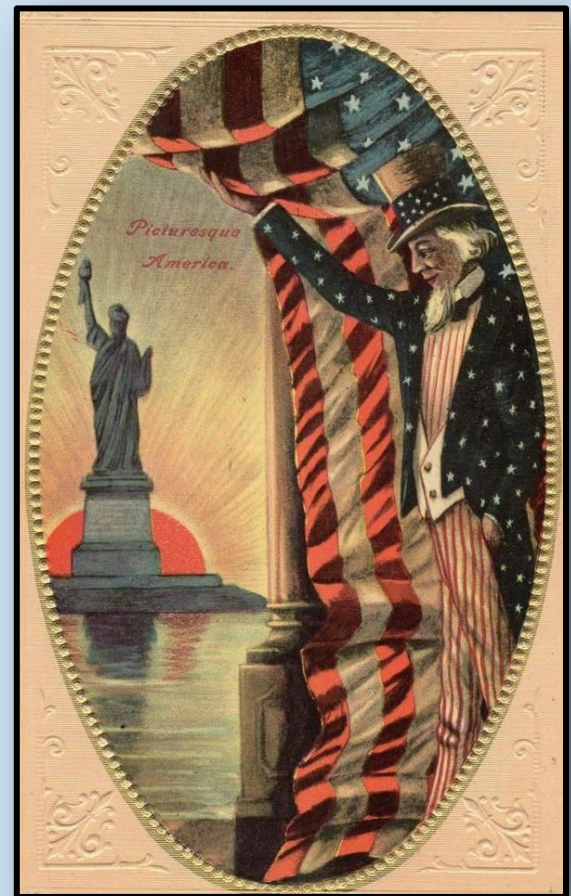


After 1906, the U.S. government took over the process that allowed immigrants to become citizens. The process didn't change much, but people applying for citizenship had to fill out a long form and provide lots of information about themselves, including the names and birthdates of their wife and children, the date and place of their birth, and a description of their job or profession. Immigrants also had to say where, when, and how they arrived in the United States.

In **1917**, a new law required that all immigrants applying for American citizenship must be able to read.

After the U.S. government passed a new immigration law in **1924**, the process became much more complicated. Immigrants had to apply for a visa before they could apply to become citizens. People applying for citizenship today must:

- Be 18 years old
- Live in the United States for at least 5 years
- Have a permanent home in the United States
- Have a good moral character
- Pass a test about American history and government
- Read, write, and speak English
- Take an oath of allegiance to the United States



Who could become American citizens?

When America first became independent in 1776, the only people who were considered citizens were **white men**. Once a man became a citizen, his wife and children were considered citizens as well.

In 1870, **African-American men** were recognized as American citizens. All African-American men living in the United States in 1870 became citizens, and African-American men who arrived in the United States after 1870 could apply for citizenship.

In 1922, **women** were recognized as American citizens. Before that, women had the same immigration status as their husbands.

In 1924, all **Native Americans** were recognized as American citizens.

In 1952, **Asian-Americans** living in the United States were recognized as American citizens. Asian-Americans who immigrated to the United States after 1952 could apply for American citizenship.



Are children American citizens?

Yes! Children born in the United States are American citizens. Children born in other countries and living in the United States have the same immigration status as their parents.



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