

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Small Group Ministry Session
Earning Citizenship
R. Haines, UU Fellowship of La Crosse. October 20, 2016

Opening Words: People born with U.S. Citizenship are granted constitutionally defined rights without effort or expense on their part. Citizenship is available for a limited number of other people who invest money and effort into the process.

Check-in Share a bit of yourself, a thought, an event in your life, or something intended to be meaningful to these friends with whom we gather again. Please respect the confidentiality of what is shared within this bonded group.

Topic: Citizenship by Naturalization, pros and cons.

Citizenship in the United States is a status that entails specific [rights](#), [duties](#) and benefits. [Citizenship](#) is understood as a "right to have rights" since it serves as a foundation for a bundle of subsequent rights, such as the right to live and work in the [United States](#) and to receive [federal assistance](#).

The two main routes to citizenship are [birthright citizenship](#), in which a person is presumed to be a citizen if they are born within the territorial limits of the United States or to a parent who is a citizen, and [naturalization](#), a process in which an immigrant applies for citizenship and is accepted. These two pathways to citizenship are specified in the [Citizenship Clause](#) of the Constitution's 1868 [Fourteenth Amendment](#) and detailed by Federal statutes.

Applicants for naturalization study for and must pass a simple citizenship test. In 2006, the government replaced the former trivia test with a ten-question oral test designed to "shun simple historical facts about America that can be recounted in a few words for more explanation about the principles of American democracy, such as freedom". It is reported that some citizens by birthright cannot pass the test.

For more details, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizenship_of_the_United_States#Pathways_to_citizenship

Ponder the article by Judge Denny Chinsept from the NY Times, September 16, 2016 (page 2) and respond to one or more of the following:

1. What are some of the values of US Citizenship?
2. Is it too easy or too difficult for an immigrant to earn citizenship?
3. Is it too easy or too difficult for a birthright citizen to maintain all the rights of citizenship?
4. To vote, a citizen must be at least 18 years of age and meet the requirements of his or her State of residence. Should there also be a requirement to demonstrate current knowledge of the rights, duties and privileges of US citizenship? Would mere attendance at a one or two-hour class, with no test, be sufficient? If not, what more might be required?

In view of our time limits, let's listen to each other but not engage in discussion, other than to request a clarification.

After each of us have spoken, let's hear amendments of your original responses, again without discussion.

Closing Words:

Thanks to all for coming today and for sharing your thoughts with the rest of us. I hope we are wiser and our time was well spent in each other's presence while listening to and expressing some thoughts on this topic.

Me, My Grandfather and Citizenship Day
By DENNY CHIN. September 16, 2016, NY Times

My grandfather immigrated to the United States from China almost 100 years ago — on Nov. 16, 1916. Because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and subsequent similar legislation, there was no open door to the American dream for him. He was able to enter only by buying a piece of paper representing that he was the son of a United States citizen.

My grandfather worked as a waiter in Chinese restaurants in New York for many years. He returned to China only twice — once in the 1920s, when he married my grandmother, and once in the 1930s, when my father was born. Both times he left his family in China to return to the United States. He could not bring his wife or son with him, because of the immigration laws, but he could better support them here in America. He shared a railroad apartment in Chinatown with other Chinese men, and every month, like them, he would buy a money order at the post office and send it home to his family in China.

In 1947, something remarkable happened: My grandfather became an American citizen.

Today I see his journey from a special perspective. I am a federal judge, and like many of my judicial colleagues, I have been able to play a personal role in the process as immigrants from all around the world have become American citizens. *(edit.....)*

When my grandfather was naturalized as a citizen, he had been separated from my father for many years. But because he became a citizen, when the immigration laws were reformed in the 1950s, my grandfather was able to bring his family here. By then, my father was a young man in Hong Kong, with a family of his own. My parents and their three children — including me — were able to join my grandfather in America.

My parents spoke little English. My father worked as a cook in Chinese restaurants and my mother as a seamstress in garment factories. They understood the importance of education, and thus my siblings and I worked hard in school. My parents also appreciated the importance of citizenship, and they became naturalized in 1965. And because I was only 11 years old that year, I became an American citizen as well, by operation of law.

I was appointed a federal trial judge in 1994 and served in that capacity until I was elevated to the federal appellate court in 2010. I now sit in the magnificent Thurgood Marshall United States Court House in Lower Manhattan, in chambers once occupied by Justice Marshall himself when he was a judge on our court in the 1960s. I know that none of this would have happened if my grandfather and parents had not worked so hard for so long, had they not become United States citizens.

My grandfather's naturalization certificate hangs on the wall in my chambers. On the back, it states that he was sworn in as a new citizen in "open court," in the very courthouse, I believe, where I sit now.

One of the things I have missed since becoming an appellate judge is the naturalization ceremony. When I served as a Federal District Court judge, I performed the naturalization ceremony regularly. I would naturalize some 200 immigrants at a time, from dozens of countries around the world. And when I performed that ceremony, I would take my grandfather's naturalization certificate into the courtroom, and I would show it to the new citizens and tell them the story of my grandfather.

When the ceremony was over, I would shake the hand of each new citizen. I was most inspired by the elderly, some hobbling, some wheelchair-bound, who still appreciated the importance of becoming an American citizen.

On this Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, I will be thinking of my grandfather and of the many new citizens I was privileged to swear in over the years, and of the principles of liberty, justice and equality that have made our country so great.

Denny Chin is a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.