

What Citizenship Means to Me

Citizenship is defined as 'the status of a citizen with its attendant privileges, rights, and duties', but this is a shallow definition. What are these privileges, rights, and duties? Why are they important? The answers to these questions are what make the definition of citizenship meaningful and individual to each country and person. To me, citizenship is the privilege of living in a country I can proudly love and support; the rights to free religion, speech, press, and others; and the duties to protect our rights, our country, and its history.

There are many privileges American citizens enjoy that people in other countries didn't have when our government was created and do not have even now. America has grown to become a world power with a high standard of living because of the principles it was founded upon that give its citizens the freedom to advance themselves without government intervention. "Perfect freedom is as necessary to the health and vigor of commerce as it is to the health and vigor of citizenship." (Patrick Henry) We have the opportunity for high-paying jobs, advanced and speedy medical treatment, and more. An important part of citizenship is having a patriotic mindset and taking pride in your country and its leaders. This is not something anyone can force you to do, it is part of our culture and must be taught from parent to child to keep it alive. Patriotism is a large part of active citizenship; it shows that you love your country and are willing to give it your support. Our privileges are not free; it's the responsibility of the people to defend their privileges when necessary. People show their support in many ways, such as flying the United States flag on their property. You respect the flag to show that you respect the country it represents and the lives lost fighting under it.

Throughout its history, countless people have come to America seeking a better life and a brighter future for themselves and their families. When people are forced to leave their country

because of famine or war, they look to our country and the privileges and rights they can have if they come here. They make becoming an American citizen the goal not only for themselves, but for their children who will then grow up as citizens. It's important to value your citizenship just as these immigrants do, and not take for granted how privileged you are to have been born as an American citizen.

Every American citizen has the rights outlined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and we have had them for almost two hundred and fifty years. Our Founding Fathers believed that each person has "unalienable rights" that cannot be taken away, and they founded America on those principles. Your rights allow you to live a free life; you can do anything within your rights so long as you don't infringe upon any other person's rights. Throughout history, people weren't allowed to express displeasure about their leaders, and people who did were imprisoned, tortured, or executed for treason. People in the British Colonies struggled with an oppressive government, and to remedy this, the American Constitution guarantees that no unalienable rights will be infringed upon. "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." This ensures that the government cannot take action against people for speaking against them, whether it's an individual person, a group, press, media, or any others. It also ensures that the people can always peacefully petition the government, which further allows the people to spread ideas the government might disapprove of without repercussions.

I believe the Second Amendment is our most important right, because it ensures that the people will always have a way of fighting when "it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve political bands which have connected them with another". This right ensures that we have the ability to attain and protect our other rights when the need arises. The Third and Fourth Amendments ensure

that the government does not infringe on the peoples' right to property without just cause verified through law. The Third Amendment protects us from soldiers quartering in our homes without our permission, which puts a restraint on the military to ensure they do not collect more power than required. The Fourth Amendment bans unreasonable searches and seizures, protecting us from having our property unjustly stolen by the government under the guise of upholding the law.

It's the responsibility of each citizen to ensure that their rights are not infringed upon. When you feel that you aren't allowed to voice your opinions, even in a calm and logical manner, for fear of being retaliated against, or that you cannot freely meet to practice your religion or petition the government for fear of being arrested, your basic rights are being infringed. In order to ensure that we remain a free country, each citizen needs to protect their individual rights; it is their duty. If we didn't have these rights, or if only a privileged few had them, our country wouldn't have been able to grow as it has.

The right to vote for our leaders is one of the most impactful parts of citizenship; it determines the future of our country. We have always elected the leader we wanted, and have always been able to express our views and opinions on the candidates freely, allowing us to make an educated decision about who we vote for. When people research those running for office, they choose the candidate whose policies are best for them and their livelihood. It is our right as citizens as written in the Constitution to choose our own leader instead of having one appointed for us.

Protecting our rights is vital for our survival as a free country; therefore, we need a strong army. The American military has relied on volunteer citizens to support it since before we were a country; only in extreme circumstances during war is there a draft to require people to serve. "Every good citizen makes his country's honor his own, and cherishes it not only as precious but as sacred. He is willing to risk his life in its defense and its conscious that he gains protection while he gives it." (Andrew Jackson)