

U.S. Citizenship Privilege Checklist

Sometimes people are asked to consider their white, male, straight, class, etc. privilege, but rarely are people asked to consider what it means to have the privilege of U.S. citizenship. Below are a few advantages to consider- though they extend far beyond what is listed here. These privileges may resonate with you to various degrees depending on the intersectionality of your identities, life experiences, and where you hold societal power.

1. Most, if not all of the time, I am able to surround myself with people who share a common or collective history, who understand the norms of U.S. society, who speak the same language that I do, and who understand my culture.
2. I am not worried on a daily basis about being “discovered” and deported along with, or away from my family.¹
3. I don’t have to worry that a small misstep could lead to my deportation, even if I currently have legal authority to be in the U.S.
4. I can apply for a passport that will allow me to travel back and forth to most countries in the world.
5. I can think nothing of crossing the border to visit Tijuana, Mexico, for a day of shopping and sightseeing, while Mexican citizens must qualify economically to obtain even a tourist visa to enter the U.S., and there are a great many who do not qualify.
6. If I want to get a driver’s license, it’s a simple matter of bringing along my birth certificate, social security card, insurance card, and taking the test. There’s no need to worry about whether I have the proper documents to get a driver’s license. Usually, a long line is all I have to worry about.
7. Once I have my driver’s license, I know that I can use it to travel domestically across the U.S. without the fear of TSA asking me for my passport or further documentation.
8. If I apply for a job, I do not have to worry about what to write under “Social Security Number.”

9. When Social Security and Medicare are taken out of my paycheck, I have a reasonable hope that someday either my dependents or I will receive the benefit of those taxes.
10. I can go into any bank and set up a checking account without fear of discrimination, thus knowing my money is safer than on my person or elsewhere.
11. If a police officer pulls me over, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my perceived immigration status.
12. I can be reasonably sure that if I need legal, medical advice, or help, my citizenship status will not be a consideration.
13. I can vote in any local or national election on policies or for people who will make laws affecting my way of life and my community.
14. I may consider running for political office to serve my community.
15. I, or a member of my family, can apply for financial aid to the institutions of higher education that are supported by my family's tax dollars.
16. I have not been forced to ask myself what would compel me to risk my life to enter the U.S. Whether crossing a barren desert for days without food or water, traveling over seas in the hull of ship, or any other dangerous form of transport, I have not been forced to leave my family, my home, and my roots behind me to enter a country that not only feels hostile to me, but is also difficult to understand at times.
17. If am treated violently or inappropriately by a federal entity, I have some hope of legal recourse.
18. I can choose whether or not I take part in discussions surrounding how my lifestyle or the actions of my government have impacted the lives of those in other countries.
19. If I decide to organize politically or speak out about my country's unjust policies, I am likely to be addressing systems that I was raised around and understand. Also, those in power are more likely to listen to me and credit my arguments than a non-citizen.
20. I qualify to apply and receive state and federal insurance to help cover my health care.
21. I qualify to apply and receive state and federal loans to help pay for my education.
22. I can ask for help or services (police, firefighters, doctors, etc.) without the fear of deportation.

¹ "Family" in most discourse on immigration policy is not used to describe unmarried, non-blood, and queer familial relations. Here we recognize the inherent value, legitimacy, and importance of these relationships regardless of state sanction.

Adapted from Coloradans for Immigrant Rights, American Friends Service Committee:

http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Citizenship_Privilege_Ally_Basics_CFIR.pdf