



CIVILDISCOURSE

An American Legacy Toolkit

■ Module: Citizenship

Overview

Timeframe: 3-4 days / 50-minute sessions

Podcast and Video Alignment

60-Second Civics Podcast:

- [Citizenship at the Founding](#)
- [Citizenship Before the Civil War](#)
- [The 14th Amendment Transforms Citizenship](#)
- [Rights of Citizenship](#)
- [Birthright Citizenship](#)

Beyond the Legacy Video:

- [Citizenship in America](#)

Scholar:

Professor Henry L. Chambers, Jr.
University of Richmond School of Law

American Legacy Text & Additional Texts

Primary Sources:

- [The Chinese Exclusion Act \(1882\)](#)
- [“The New Colossus,” by Emma Lazarus](#)

Instructional Materials:

- [Beyond the Legacy Video Guide: Citizenship](#)
- [Paideia Seminar Plan – The Chinese Exclusion Act](#)
- [Structured Academic Controversy Plan – Citizenship](#)
- [SAC Note-Taking Graphic Organizer](#)

Inquiry Question

What does it mean to be an American citizen?

Objective

Participants will learn about the constitutional underpinnings of citizenship in America by viewing and discussing videos, podcasts, and other media, as well as closely reading The Chinese Exclusion Act, to engage in a civil discourse model to expand their perspectives on the value, purpose, and impact of citizenship today.

Vocabulary

- astride
- brazen
- exile
- pomp
- refuse
- teeming
- tempest

Facilitator Background

The Chinese Exclusion Act

The Chinese Exclusion Act was a significant piece of U.S. legislation passed in 1882, marking the first time a specific ethnic or national group was explicitly prohibited from immigrating to the United States. The law was aimed at Chinese laborers arriving in large numbers, particularly during and after the California Gold Rush and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. The act effectively halted Chinese immigration for ten years and declared Chinese immigrants ineligible for naturalization as U.S. citizens.

This law came about in response to economic fears and racial prejudices prevalent during the period. Many Americans on the West Coast felt that Chinese immigrants were taking jobs away from them by accepting lower wages, contributing to economic instability and tension. Moreover, there was a widespread racial bias, with stereotypes and misinformation about Chinese culture and people adding to the animosity and leading to discriminatory practices and policies.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was initially slated to last for a decade, but it was subsequently renewed and made more restrictive with the Geary Act in 1892, and it was later made permanent. These laws made it incredibly challenging for Chinese immigrants already in the U.S. to bring over family members and nearly impossible for new immigrants to arrive. The laws also significantly increased anti-Chinese sentiment and set a precedent for further restrictive and discriminatory immigration policies.

The Act was finally repealed in 1943 with the Magnuson Act when China became an important ally to the U.S. during World War II. However, the full and more equal loosening of immigration restrictions didn't occur until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The legacy of the Chinese Exclusion Act serves as a reminder of a regrettable period of legally sanctioned racial discrimination in the U.S. It continues to influence conversations about immigration and race relations today.

The New Colossus

"The New Colossus" is a sonnet by the American poet Emma Lazarus (1849-1887). It was written in 1883 and is known for its association with the Statue of Liberty. The sonnet was written as part of a fundraising effort for the construction of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. The statue was a gift from France to the United States, but funds were needed to build the pedestal upon which the statue would



Facilitator Background

stand. An auction of art and literary works was organized as part of these fundraising efforts.

Lazarus was asked to contribute an original work to the auction. Initially, she declined because she did not have a direct connection to the statue or the cause. However, after a conversation with the fundraiser Constance Cary Harrison, she became inspired to write a poem that showed the Statue of Liberty welcoming all immigrants to America. The resulting sonnet, "The New Colossus," was added to the auction, although it did not receive much attention at the time. Lazarus died just a few years later, in 1887, and her poem was largely forgotten.

In 1903, sixteen years after Lazarus's death, her friend Georgina Schuyler happened upon a book containing the sonnet. Schuyler began a campaign to have the poem commemorated at the Statue of Liberty. Consequently, a bronze plaque bearing the text of the poem was mounted on the statue's pedestal.

Additional Resources:

- [The Chinese Exclusion Act \(1882\)](#)
- ["The New Colossus," by Emma Lazarus](#)

Assess & Authentically Engage

Students demonstrate their understanding of citizenship by making real-world connections between the context surrounding The Chinese Exclusion Act and that of the present-day United States and the role of immigration and citizenship today.