

Learning Gateways • Has America Always Welcomed Immigrants? Glossary of Terms

admission or admitted: The lawful entry of an alien into the United States after inspection and authorization by an immigration officer

alien: A foreign national; a person who is not a citizen or national of the United States

consulate: A U.S. government office in a foreign country that issues U.S. visas and passports; a similar office of a foreign country government, located in the U.S., that issues visas for travel to that country

Department of Homeland Security (DHS): A government entity to which the functions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service were transferred on March 1, 2003. DHS was created under by combining more than 20 federal agencies under the Homeland Security Act of 2003. Its primary goal is “creating a more effective, organized and united defense of our homeland” by integrating departmental functions, bolstering federal support for state and local emergency preparedness, streamlining and strengthening information sharing among various government entities, establishing private sector partnerships, and improving immigration practices

deportation or removal: The expulsion of an alien from the United States based on a violation of immigration laws

foreign-born: A person born outside the United States to non-citizen parents

green card: A permit allowing an immigrant to live and work indefinitely in the U.S.

lawful permanent resident: A foreign national who has obtained the right to reside permanently in the United States. Individuals usually qualify for permanent residence on the basis of ties to close family members or a U.S. business

naturalization: A process by which individuals may obtain U.S. citizenship. With some limited exceptions, generally only permanent residents and non-citizen nationals are eligible for naturalization

non-citizen: (See “alien”)

non-immigrant: A foreign national who is admitted to the United States for a temporary period and a specific purpose (such as tourism or study)

refugee or asylee: A person who is outside his or her country of nationality or last residence who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. A person obtaining refugee or asylee status in the United States is entitled to remain in the United States, and may apply for permanent residence

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undocumented person (also sometimes called “unauthorized” or “illegal” alien): A person who lacks U.S. government authorization to enter or remain in the United States.

U.S. citizen: A person who owes permanent allegiance to the United States, and who enjoys full civic rights (for example, the right to vote in elections and to run for elective office)

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS): A bureau of the Department of Homeland Security responsible for the administration of immigration benefits and services, such as processing applications for residency and citizenship

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP): A bureau of the Department of Homeland Security responsible for patrolling the borders and monitoring the movement of goods and people into and out of the U.S.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): A bureau of the Department of Homeland Security responsible for handling deportations, investigating immigration law violations and enforcing customs laws within the interior of the U.S.

U.S. noncitizen national: A person who owes permanent allegiance to the United States, but who does not enjoy full civic rights. For example, citizens of Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and other U.S. territories are nationals, but not citizens, of the U.S.

visa: A document issued by a government that establishes the bearer's eligibility to seek entry into that government's territory. A visa can be for a temporary period, such as for study or tourism (nonimmigrant visas), or for lawful permanent residence (immigrant visas). U.S. consulates abroad issue visas to foreign nationals, permitting them to travel to the United States and request admission at the border. U.S. citizens need visas to travel to foreign countries for certain purposes.

Xenophobia (from the Greek, pron. zee-no-FO-bee-ah: xeno: stranger; phobia: fear):
Fear of strangers and foreigners

This handout was originally developed for the ABA Division for Public Education 2007 National Online Youth Summit, Coming to America: Immigration, Law, & American Identity. For more information about this annual program, see www.abanet.org/publiced/noys/home.

*Note: Glossary taken from ABA Commission on Immigration. See:
www.abanet.org/publicserv/immigration/glossary.shtm.l*