

COLORADANS FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

A project of the American Friends Service Committee 

Citizenship Privilege

Sometimes we are asked to consider our male, white, class, etc. privilege, but rarely are we asked to consider what it means to have the privilege of U.S. citizenship. Here 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 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.*
3. I don’t have to worry that a small mis-step could lead to my deportation, even if I currently have legal papers 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. If I apply for a job, I do not have to worry about what to write under “Social Security Number.”
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. If a police officer pulls me over, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my *perceived* immigration status.
11. I can be reasonably sure that if I need legal, medical advice, or help, my citizenship status will not be a consideration.
12. I can vote in any election on policies or for people who will make laws affecting my way of life and my community.
13. I may consider running for political office to serve my community.
14. I, or a member of my family,* can apply for scholarship aid to the institutions of higher education that are supported by my family’s tax dollars.
15. 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.
16. If am treated violently or inappropriately by a federal entity, I have some hope of legal recourse.
17. 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.
18. 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.

* On our use of the word “family”- “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.

Strengthening the Movement for Immigrant Justice!

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Being A Strong Ally in the Immigrant Rights Movement: Basic Tactics

Many non-immigrants want to know how they can support immigrant rights work. Immigrants repeatedly describe the support they need from citizen allies as necessary and important. This document focuses on the commitments and attitudes needed to be as respectful and effective as possible when offering that support. The first step is respecting the leadership of immigrants. Successful organizing is constituency led, meaning those most affected by, for example, immigrant repression, are the best equipped and positioned to define the strategies and terms of their liberation. Here are some general guidelines, but every situation is different and calls for critical thinking.

1. **Learn to identify the role of race and citizenship privilege in your relationships with immigrants.**

Racism and citizenship privilege are pervasive in our society.

One of the privileges of being a citizen, particularly a white citizen, is not having to see or deal with this reality all of the time. When you interact with immigrant friends or acquaintances, ask yourself how your citizenship status, as well as your racial/ethnic identity may be affecting the relationship.

2. **Notice how racism in the anti-immigrant debate is denied, minimized and justified.**

Resist the argument that anti-immigrant sentiment is not about race. Learn to recognize and articulate how coded racism is at the core of the anti-immigrant debate. Notice how images and symbols are used, what fears are activated, what stereotypes are exploited, and what cultural groups are assumed to be inferior or superior.

3. **Notice who is at the center of attention and power.**

Notice who speaks, and how often. Pay attention to what is said, as well as whose ideas are deemed most credible. Notice who isn't present. Be aware of code words for race or status, and the implications of the policies, patterns, and comments being expressed.

4. **Understand the connections between anti-immigrant stances, racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of injustice.**

The more we know about other struggles for social justice, the more we can find common goals, work together in coalition, and share victories.

5. **Understand and learn from this country's history of anti-immigrant sentiment.**

Notice how anti-immigrant sentiment has changed over time and how it has subverted or resisted challenges. Study the tactics that have worked effectively against it.

6. **Learn something about the history of people who have worked for justice.**

There is a long history of both allies and people from oppressed communities fighting for justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain us. We can end injustice if we work together. Build support,

establish networks and work with already established groups.

7. **Take a stand against injustice.** Take risks. It can be scary and difficult, but it can also be empowering. Calling out injustice may bring up feelings of inadequacy, indecision, or fear of making mistakes, but is ultimately a key part of our responsibility as allies. It is also a critical step in initiating the dialogues and movement of thought integral to change. Intervene when you see or hear racism and anti-immigrant sentiments. You will never get it right 100% of the time, but the more you try, the better you will get. Try to take criticism, feedback, and suggestions with grace.

8. **Be strategic.** Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Look for the source of power and larger patterns. Don't confuse a battle with the war. Anti-immigrant sentiment is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.

9. **Refrain from calling names or being personally abusive.** Since power is often defined as power over others - the ability to abuse or control people - it is easy to become abusive ourselves. However, we usually end up abusing people who have less power than we do because it is less dangerous. Attacking people doesn't address the systemic nature of injustice and inequality.

10. **Support the leadership of immigrants in the movement.** Do this consistently, but not uncritically, because no one needs to deal with paternalism when they are busy organizing. Don't assume that organizing isn't going on just because you don't know about it. Use the privilege you have as a citizen to work beside immigrants on common goals, but watch out for any savior mentality. Never speak on behalf of immigrants; immigrants are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves. You can look for opportunities to lift up the voices of immigrants and expose anti-immigrant sentiment for what it is. This can help remove barriers to the success of the immigrant rights movement.