



*These are my sons, Lalo and Christian. They were both born in Peru. We adopted them, and now they're US citizens, and their lives are different. Here you have freedom to express yourself, and opportunities for more education. Once you have education, you can do whatever you want in life. In many other parts of the world that's not the case. : Kathy*



*My family photo album has pictures going back to my great-great-grandparents. There's one image in particular, of a family picnic at Como Park. We used to start those picnics at breakfast and stay till dinner. That day, my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were all there, and we kids were running around them. All those generations together in one place - that would be my proof. : Monica*



*I brought a picture of my family - my father, mother, children, husband, and brother - standing outside the West Wing of the White House. For my father, who was a coal miner at 14 in Dominion, Nova Scotia, to be at the White House with his son, who works at the Pentagon - that says something about how far you can travel in this country. : Sheila*



*This is my entire family together, sometime in 1968. The fact that our family is still intact - all alive and all healthy - is proof that we live in a country that takes care of its own. And knowing that now, after all these years, my father's granddaughter has Obama for her president - well, that's America. And we all did it. : Denise*



*What's more all-American than a letter sweater? I don't know of any other culture that uses such a thing. Seriously though, I have this photo of my grandfather's barber shop, taken around 1922. It represents how proud I am of his presence in history, his prominence in his time and place. : Jim*



*Without the documents, how do you prove that you are who you think you are? All the pictures I have are just records of my life - they don't really prove anything. Take this photograph - you can see me at age 6, in the Brownies. But it still doesn't prove that I'm an American. : Connie*



*I'm a product of the American culture. And it is a culture. But it's not stagnant - it's an evolving culture. That's probably the result of the free flow of ideas here - the way that we're able to think whatever we want to think, go where we want to go, pursue whatever we want to do with our lives. And we're free to celebrate our individual religions and traditions and cultures within that larger culture. : Vince*



*I would say that I'm a teacher in a public school in NY State, and that's already proof of citizenship. But the way I see it, becoming an American citizen is an obligation - for example, to work for the state. Really being American - well, most of us originally came from other parts of the world, so being American shouldn't require forgetting those roots. : Patricia*



*I emigrated to the U.S. from Germany and I've been here since 1964. I know the nuances of the culture and of the language, which I now teach to students from other cultures. My family is here, my children and grandchildren. My house is here. I've put down my roots, and I feel very grounded in my past, present and future. : Doris*



*I am Puerto Rican and American at the same time. Puerto Rican is my race, my culture. American means opportunity - the chance to study and to encounter other cultures. : Erica*



*What makes me feel American? I like American food - pizza, McDonalds, rice, Coca-Cola. I like American clothes. I like how much there is to learn. And I like how much people fight here, because I like a good fight. : Nekondo*



*If I didn't have the documents - the passport or whatever they were asking for - I think I'd just do what they said. Get out. Why should I fight back? It's great here - we feel so much safer than we did in Africa, and I've been able to learn so much - but it's still not my country. : Omar*



*I would play my trumpet - the Star-Spangled Banner, naturally - and then I would tell the story of how this country afforded me the opportunity to receive a top-notch musical education, paid for solely by my sweat. : Andy*



My social security card, my I-94 card, my resident card - I carry them all with me wherever I go. So if anyone says that I'm not an American, I'm ready to show them the documents to prove that I am - any time, any place. : Fato



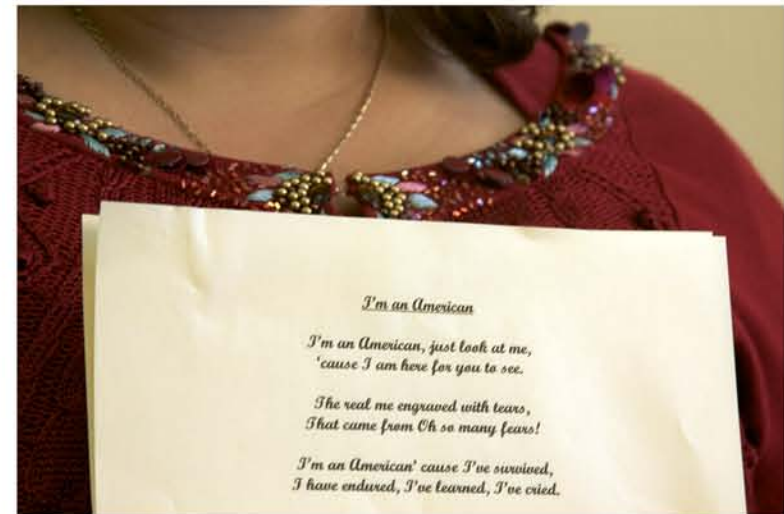
I would ask for a blood test, because it could be compared to the files at my doctor's office. Once I prove who I am, that's enough to prove that I'm an American. : Amber



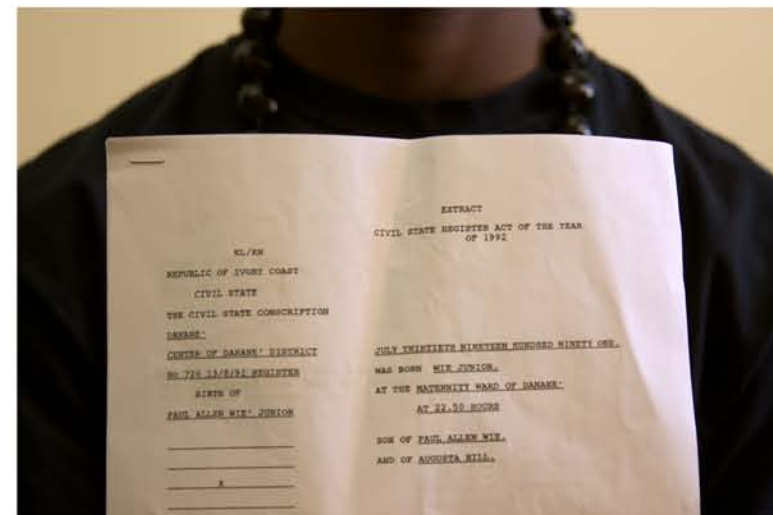
People say if you become an American, many doors open for you, and I think it's true. If you're an American, you have your pick of jobs, your choice of places to go, and that's what I want. : Raubena



A lot of the immigrants who come to America come because their countries may be destroyed. They come here looking for a new life, and they definitely get it. : Jabr



Just my voice, my speech, and my ability to adapt would be proof, not only that I'm an American, but that I can manage to be whatever I think I can be. In my life, I've gone from not speaking any English to teaching it to other people. But becoming American is not just about learning the language. America is a place of constant change, evolution, transformation. So becoming American means entering into a constant state of change, while still staying true to yourself. If you can adapt, it's a great thing; if not, it can be horrible. : Camille



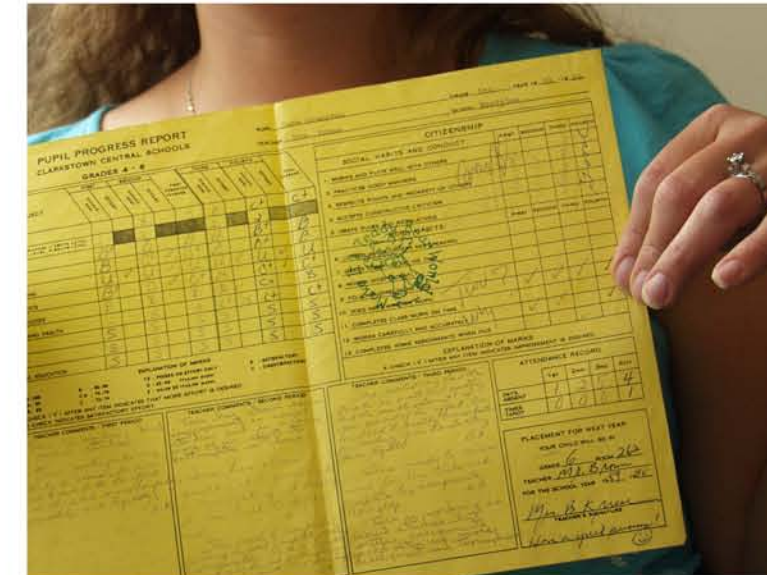
The thing about America is that everybody here (except the Native Americans) isn't really from here. They're all immigrants. So my birth certificate - which is from the Ivory Coast - shows that I am a member of American society because I'm an immigrant too. : Paul



As a registered nurse, I went to UB to get my school nurse teaching certificate, and I still have that. I have library cards, all kinds of membership cards, a driver's license, tax records, my high school graduation certificate, the contract from my first school job. I've saved all those things. I don't know why, but I always have. : Josephine



I would show this certificate, signed by then-President Clinton, that recognizes my time with the Peace Corps in Kyrgyzstan from 96-98, because it proves that I served the United States as an overseas volunteer. : Patrick



My driver's license, my divorce papers, my marriage certificates, my employment records - you have to file a copy of your birth certificate when you get employed or married. Or I would call my family, my friends, people who could say where I was born and where I was raised. I have my report cards from kindergarten all the way through senior year - that shows that I lived here for all those 13 years, and that I was brought up as an American. : Tera



*This is a picture of me in a demonstration - the End the Arms Race demonstration. In a lot of countries you can't do that. And I think that is being an American. : Connie*



*I would start with my Board of Elections card. I'm very proud of having the right to vote, and also to question our politicians when there are issues that I disagree on. I'm kind of known for doing that - for speaking my mind and writing letters. Strongly worded letters. : April*



*Freedom of speech is what I affiliate with being an American. We get to do a lot of things that people in other countries don't. But we still have a long way to go. Free healthcare should also be a national right. : Ros*



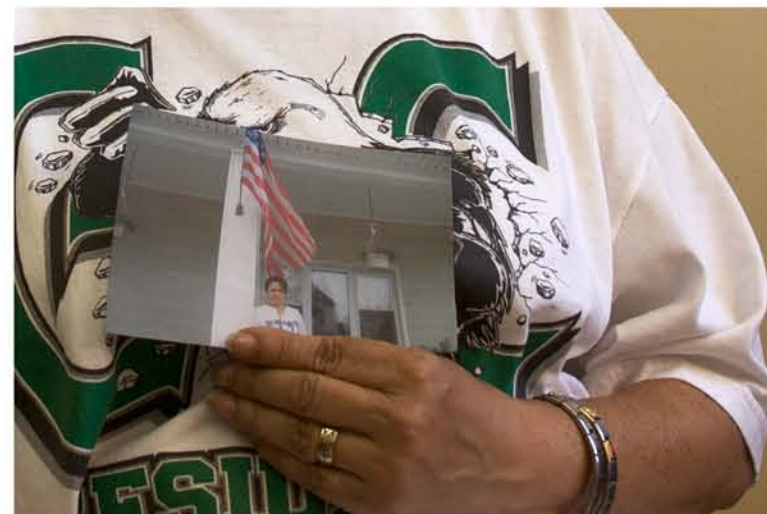
*This is the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, and one of the only Western countries that doesn't have universal health care. So if I could have my health insurance card, and/or a bill for health insurance, that would be enough to say, "Hey, I'm from the US." : Don*



Maybe because we're second-generation Americans, we take our citizenship for granted. It's easier to prove your heritage, because those are the traditions we learn and aspire to. As Americans, we're just American. We don't even know what our culture is. We've always had all these rights and choices, and we never think about how fortunate we are. : Lorraine



This flag means that I'm 100% Puerto Rican. That's where I was raised. That's who I am. : Jose



I would probably say that I'm proud of the American flag, and when we salute it in the morning, I want everyone to respect it. So I guess that, even though I'm Puerto Rican, that makes me consider myself an American. : Luz



Obviously, I'd empty out my purse first. But then I'd start telling stories, finding memories. What I have here is a TY Beanie Baby named Rescue. He was brought out after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, in order to honor the heroes who lost their lives that day, and provide some funds to the victims' families. Rescue, and the flag you see on him, represent for me that moment of American unity and patriotism in the wake of terrible events. : Jennifer



When we came here, I got a new life. I learned a new language, met a lot of people. Now there are lots of things about me that would tell someone I'm American. For example, this necklace - that's American style. We wouldn't wear this in my old country. : Jamal



*This is a picture of my grandfather's family, shortly after they emigrated from Russia. Just a few years later he would be an officer in the US Navy. To me, this seems to be a country where migration and change are part of the story. American history is so transient that when you try to establish what it means to be American, you can't just say, "Well, my great-great grandfather is here too." You can figure out where you're from, but it's kind of like a puzzle, understanding how all the little pieces fit together. And I like that. : Rachel*



*I would make a list of people who know me, with all my siblings' phone numbers, and depend on them to identify me. But I prefer being independent, and I'd be pretty upset about being asked to prove anything. I think we're more free than that. : Doris*



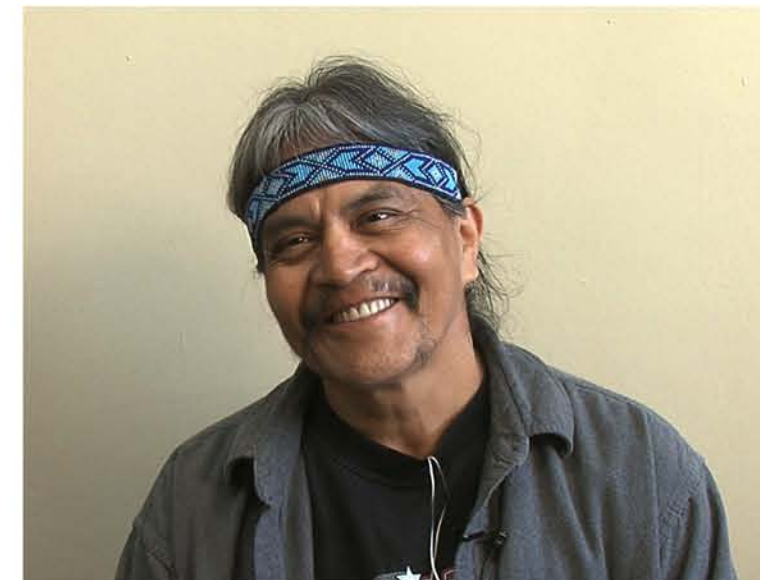
*I would point to my students, because so many people say that to be an American, you must speak English - so what better to do than teach English to all of the immigrants coming in? For a lot of my students, coming to America presents the opportunity for more or better education than would have otherwise been possible or accessible for them. : Jessica*



*Living in Buffalo, we cross to Canada all the time. At the border, they usually ask three questions, one of which is "Where were you born?" Pre-9/11, I would just say I was born in Buffalo, even though I wasn't - it was easier and there were hardly ever problems. Now what I do is carry my little bit of citizenship paper - my naturalization certificate, which shows me at the age of 9 in my Girl Scout uniform. Before 9/11, most people would laugh when I pulled this out - after all, I'm not 9 any more - but nobody laughs now. : Bedrije*



*My grandmother taught me this beadwork. It reminds me of my Native roots and of the traditions I was brought up with. : Lana*



*A lot of people will come up to me and say, "You're a Native American." And I'll say, "No, I'm a Seneca Indian." And then I'll look at them and say, "Were you born in America? Well then, you're a native American." And there's a lot of Indians now who look at it that way. : Kenny*



*Through the years, I've met many people who don't understand that Puerto Ricans are American citizens, or who just assume that because we all speak Spanish, we're all the same. I've had encounters where someone said, "I'm going to call immigration on you," and I had to say, "Go ahead. What are they going to do? They'll come in and tell me I can be right where I am." I would just sit there thinking, what do I have to prove? If I say I'm Puerto Rican, that should be enough. : Vivian*