

The Motivations and Challenges of Acquiring U.S. Citizenship

For South Sudanese Refugees in the Greater Phoenix Area

When Language is a Potential Barrier

by

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## ABSTRACT

South Sudanese refugees are among the most vulnerable immigrants to the U.S.. Many have spent years in refugee camps, experienced trauma, lost members of their families and have had minimal or no schooling or literacy prior to their arrival in the U.S. Although most South Sudanese aspire to become U.S. citizens, finally giving them a sense of belonging and participation in a land they can call their own, they constitute a group that faces great challenges in terms of their educational adaptation and English-language learning skills that would lead them to success on the U.S. citizenship examination. This dissertation reports findings from a qualitative research project involving case studies of South Sudanese students in a citizenship preparation program at a South Sudanese refugee community center in Phoenix, Arizona. It focuses on the links between the motivations of students seeking citizenship and the barriers they face in gaining it. Though the South Sudanese refugee students aspiring to become U.S. citizens face many of the same challenges as other immigrant groups, there are some factors that in combination make the participants in this study different from other groups. These include: long periods spent in refugee camps, advanced ages, war trauma, absence of intact families, no schooling or severe disruption from schooling, no first language literacy, and hybridized forms of second languages (e.g. Juba Arabic). This study reports on the motivations students have for seeking citizenship and the challenges they face in attaining it from the perspective of teachers working with those students, community leaders of the South Sudanese community, and particularly the students enrolled in the citizenship program.

## DEDICATION

To Magdalena

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Overview**

There are reportedly 13.9 million refugees in the world and of that number only 69.4 thousand have been resettled (USCRI, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. Because of this, there has been an increasing concern on the part of researchers to focus studies on resettlement, enculturation, assimilation, repatriation, empowerment and identity issues surrounding refugee populations (e.g. Camino and Krufeld, 1994; Krufeld and McDonald, 1998; McKinnon, 2005a, 2005b). Though there are many topics of concern for refugee populations, one that often surfaces as a priority is the acquirement of citizenship in the receiving nation, yet studies that look into the nationalization process for refugees remain scarce (Bloemraad, 2006).

Although a small number of studies (generally surveys) have covered the motivations immigrants have for pursuing citizenship and barriers they face in achieving it (Bittle and Rochkind, 2012; Farkus, Duffet and Johnson, 2003; Fix, Passel and Sucher 2003; Sumption and Flamm 2012), to my knowledge none have addressed the motivations and barriers of particular immigrant communities. A census analysis (Fix, Passel and Sucher 2003) found that low income was a correlate of limited English skills and education, which in-turn results in lower naturalization rates, and that recently naturalized citizens have higher employment rates than non-citizens. This was particularly true for women. They also found that refugees were 1.5 times more likely to naturalize than other immigrants. Nevertheless, this study never asked the immigrants

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<sup>1</sup> While these statistics represent the best measurable numbers, according to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (2006), "statistics for on refugees and other uprooted people remain inexact and controversial"

themselves. It simply relied on data from the 2000 census and it is likely that the respondents to the census were had among the highest levels of English proficiency in their households. Because the immigrants themselves were not interview the authors' explanation that it is like that more refugees seek citizenship because few can return to their countries of origin could not be verified.

Farkus, Duffet and Johnson (2003) conducted a general study on immigrants' perspectives on life in the U.S. and have some interesting findings: However, this study was conducted by telephone and the authors acknowledge that it likely missed many immigrants with limited English, who were particularly poor or had no landline telephones. Bittle and Rockind (2012) conducted a follow up study that included cell phones in order to cover a wider range of the immigrant population, however this did not diminish the exclusion of those with limited English proficiency who would be unlikely to respond to a telephone interview in English.

In addition to those who were likely excluded from census analysis and telephone survey studies, these studies did not look into immigrants who were in the process of attaining citizenship, rather it looked at a random sample of immigrants in general, leaving a need for research into the particular difficulties refugees face such as illiteracy, limited English proficiency, age and trauma.. This is a population that should not be overlooked, since they often face the most challenges in their path toward citizenship.

DeSipio (1987, p.402) argues that "...the social science literature on the naturalization process is weak and few statistically valid generalizations can be made about the effect of specific cultural, economic, political or familial variables on naturalization". In this study, I attempt to expand the current knowledge in this area by



examining refugees from South Sudan during U.S. citizenship classes.

The goal of the present study is two-fold. Firstly, in a general sense, it seeks to better understand the aspects of resettlement embodied by a particular group of refugee immigrants to the U.S.: The South Sudanese diaspora of the greater Phoenix area. Secondly, and more specifically, this research investigates how the U.S. naturalization process and citizenship test influence and affect resettlement and assimilation. Of particular interest to this study are the motivations members of this particular refugee community have for pursuing U.S. citizenship and the challenges they face in attaining it. Examining the motivations and challenges of acquiring U.S. citizenship, I make the case for a better understanding of why refugees seek citizenship and the struggles they face in attaining it in order to better prepare applicants for the U.S. citizenship examination.

### *Research Questions*

The guiding research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1) What are the motivations for citizenship of the South Sudanese diaspora of the greater Phoenix area?
- 2) What are the challenges faced by the South Sudanese diaspora of the greater Phoenix area on the citizenship examination?

### **Refugees and Resettlement Policies**

To begin, it is important to first have an understanding of the conditions and factors that lead to refugee status and some familiarity with the current state of affairs in

refugee migration and resettlement. Based on the 1951 United Nations Convention, a refugee is “A person who is outside of his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution based on his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or return there for fear of persecution” (Article 1). At the beginning of 2013, there were 10.4 million refugees of concern to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2013). The UNHCR sees three durable solution for refugees: 1) voluntary repatriation, 2) local integration into the country of first repatriation and 3) country resettlement. However, none of these solutions are available to millions of refugees.

Country resettlement, has proven to be the most effective and long-lasting solution to the refugee problem, but is also the least common and often a long and difficult process. Of the five traditional countries of resettlement: The U.S., Canada, France, Australia and New Zealand (Stein, 1991), the U.S. receives the most refugees for resettlement (UNHCR, 2013). In 2012, the U.S. accepted 58, 179 refugees for repatriation (Martin and Yankay, 2013).

In the resettlement process, refugees must not only cope with the experiences that led to fleeing their homeland, but also the stresses and demands of relocating to distant and diverse regions of the world and separation from family and friends. Nations vary considerably in their approaches to refugee integration: However, among countries with active governmental resettlement programs, one of three major courses is generally taken: 1) large numbers are accepted with a focus on economic adaptation, 2) moderate numbers accepted with a focus on economic adaptation and 3) moderate numbers accepted with a

focus on cultural adaptation (Dorais, 1991; Lanphier, 1983). Most countries opt for receiving fewer refugees each year but extending the services and programs available to them with the goal of cultural assimilation. Australia and Canada, for example, offer a wide range of programs including extensive English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and mental health services to refugees prior to employment. On the other hand, the U.S. resettlement program focuses on the resettlement of large numbers of refugees with the goal of rapid economic self-sufficiency. For most programs in the U.S. refugees are given three months of assistance before they are expected to become employed and productive members of society. Other nations, such as Germany, choose option two and bring in moderate numbers of refugees for economic reasons, such as to fill labor gaps. According to Besier (1991), all approaches to resettlement are blend of compassion and self-interest with programs such as those in Australia and Canada being criticized for handpicking among the most educated and desired refugee populations (Neumann, 2004) and the U.S. for only offering limited services (Giovagnoli, 2013) and requiring that refugees quickly become self-sufficient by entering the workforce.

### *Refugee and Citizenship Research*

Recent research on citizenship has largely focused on the language ideologies and policies of the receiving nations (e.g., Blackledge, 2002, 2009; Blommaert, 2001; Blommaert, Creve, & Willaert, 2006; Blommaert & Maryns, 2001; Reynolds & Orellana, 2009; Shohamy & Kanza, 2009) and language testing for citizenship (Cooke, 2009; Kunnan, 2009a, 2009b; Milani, 2008; Piller, 2001; Shohamy, & McNamara, 2009). The main findings of researchers on language ideologies is that they are often grounded in the myth that the receiving countries are monolingual monocultural nations (Blackledge,

2002, 2009; Blommaert, 2008) and that learning the majority or official language of the receiving society demonstrates the immigrants' cultural and political loyalty to the accepting nation.

Studies on refugees show that they often demonstrate signs of stress from violence, displacement, encampment and lack of social support that often leads to difficulties adjusting to a new society (Aron, Corne, Fursland and Zelwar, 1991; DeVoe, 1992). Research also shows high levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (63%) and learning disorders (20%) (Kinzie, Chen, Tsai and Riley, 2006), yet immigrants are only accepted as true citizens if they are perceived to actively engage in assimilation, and language tests are often the tools used to judge assimilation on citizenship examinations. The increase in the use of language tests as a means for nations to determine if immigrants will be acceptable citizens has caused experts in various fields to question both the appropriateness and ethics of using such tests to determine who will be good citizens. Testing experts such as Kunnan (2009a, 2009b) argue that they discriminate, because those born in the U.S. become citizens at birth, and have full political and social rights regardless of language competence. Sociologists such as Etzioni (2007) are critics of them because they find no correlation between the tests and civic engagement and Applied Linguists, such as Tollefson (1986, 1989), are critics because there is no evidence language tests help in the employability of immigrants.

### *Organization of Dissertation*

In Chapter One, I introduce the research questions that guide this study as well as

discuss the history and background of what led to a mass exodus from South Sudan to refugee camps in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya and finally to the establishment of South Sudanese refugee communities in countries such as Australia, Canada and the U.S. My particular focus is on the U.S. and more specifically, the South Sudanese community of the greater Phoenix area. Special attention is given to the dire educational situation in South Sudan.

Chapter Two: Part One gives an overview of citizenship tests in general, then gives a history of how the U.S. Naturalization Examination developed over time. This chapter also includes criticism of previous U.S. citizenship tests from stakeholders and researchers on the issue. Chapter Two: Part Two gives a detailed explanation of the current U.S. Naturalization Test including the setting, the type of test, what is tested for, sample questions, assessment guidelines etc. It concludes with some scholarly criticism of the present citizenship test and how it is applied.

Chapter Four discusses the limited research on the motivations and challenges of acquiring U.S. citizenship and covers the findings of the present study. In Chapter Three I discuss the methodology and design of the study as well as the sets of research questions used in the interviews with participants, and Finally, Chapter Five offers a discussion of the findings in this study along with the limitations, significance and implications of my research and directions for further research

## **Rationale**

### **The Sudanese Conflicts**

The conflict in Sudan has gone on since England and Egypt relinquished power in 1956 and it became an autonomous, though deeply divided, nation (UNMIS, 2007). The country (as of 2011, two countries) has had an ongoing conflict between Northern and Southern Sudan for power and resources for over fifty years. The first civil war was waged between 1955-1972 and the second between 1983-2005. Over two million Sudanese (1 out of every five South Sudanese) died as a result of the second civil war and over 4 million have been displaced (80% of South Sudanese have been displaced at least once, many multiple times).

Once the largest country in Africa, Sudan has been plagued by civil war for all but eleven years of its independence. The second civil war not only brought widespread violence, but also famine and disease. With the arrival of automatic weapons to the Janjaweed<sup>2</sup> (the Northern Arabic-speaking nomads) from the northern government in Khartoum, the conflict against the agricultural African tribes to the south escalated into a full-scale war for land, power and wealth (Matelits, 2004). In response to the aggression from the north, the south began to organize itself into two armed groups: The Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). By 2004 the war had clearly become an ethnic and religious war (Hanson, 2007). Despite a peace agreement in 2006 and independence of South Sudan in 2011, fighting in Sudan persists and 5-6 million Sudanese remain internally displaced: the largest internally displaced population (IDP) on Earth (USCRI, 2009). Nearly a million South Sudanese have sought refuge in neighboring Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, and in 2000 the Australia, Canada and the U.S. began accepting them

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<sup>2</sup> From the Arabic words for "man", "gun" and "horse."

(McKinnon, 2005b). Many South Sudanese have also been internally displaced and many others have found their way into refugee camps in nearby countries to await resettlement. According to the 2010 Census, the U.S. is home to more than 40,000 of these resettled refugees, who represent more than ten southern Sudanese ethnic groups (Irin, 2012).

### **Impact of War on Education and Literacy**

The years of civil war and upheaval have also had an incredible impact on education, and millions of South Sudanese missed out on school during the war (Brown, 2006a; Irin, 2012). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2012) believes that South Sudan has the worst literacy rate in the world. Mali and Niger are the only countries that even come close to the low adult literacy rate of South Sudan, which according to 2009 statistics, sits at just 27%, and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) claims that less than 2% of the population has completed a primary school education. What literacy does exist is not quite functional literacy, which the UNESCO and other organizations define as a level of reading, writing, and calculation skills sufficient to function in the particular community in which an individual lives such as being able to complete basic transactions and understand the packaging of foods and medicines. Rather, in South Sudan it is often just the understanding and ability to write basic numbers and a tiny common vocabulary. (Brown, 2006a)

There is also a dearth of schools, equipment and trained teachers and complicating matters further is that there are nearly 70 languages spoken in South Sudan. A further challenge to teachers and students has been a switch over the last decade from using Arabic, which is associated with their foes to the north, as the language of instruction, to teaching in English. Because of this, attendance in school remains low and

dropouts are common. (Brown, 2006a; Irin, 2012). The South Sudan office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2012) reports that 70% of children between six and 17 years old have never set foot inside a classroom, and that only one in 10 children complete primary school.

### **Dire State of Education for Women**

According to Brown (2006b), the situation in South Sudan is even direr in terms of gender inequalities and violation of girls' rights to education. South Sudan has in terms of percentages fewer girls going to school than any country in the world. UNICEF claims that less than one percent of women have completed primary education and only one in four schoolchildren is a girl. The scarcity of female teachers (only 7%) is said to reinforce this gender imbalance. Estimates from UNICEF (2012) put the illiteracy rate for women in South Sudan at that around 90%. Some of the reasons girls rarely attend school in South Sudan include domestic duties, early marriage and safety concerns. However, the primary reason is that many communities in South Sudan have negative attitudes towards female education. Brown (2006a) argues that there are many educated South Sudanese in western nations, particularly educated women, who could return to South Sudan and bring with them new skills and new attitudes towards education for women. He warns that, if care is not taken, gender-based discrimination will be further entrenched. Aid agencies also stress education for women as a driver of development and peace (Irin, 2012). According to a representative of the UNICEF, "an educated adult, especially an educated woman—and when we are looking at who is illiterate, most of them are women living in rural areas—they are much more likely to advocate for the education of their children" (Irin, 2012, p. 2).



## **South Sudanese Refugees of the Greater Phoenix Area**

According to the Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development (LBCLD, 2013) the journey for many South Sudanese refugees of the second Sudanese civil war began in 1983 when the north began to systematically attack and burn villages in the south. This was the beginning of a genocide in which whole families were often killed and those who were not killed, many of them young girls, were taken as slaves to the north. Many of the boys, mostly between the ages of seven to ten, were outside the villages tending cattle when their villages were attacked, so ran into the African bush to hide from their attackers. They knew they were no longer safe in Sudan, so thousands made their way on foot toward the Ethiopian border. After several years in Ethiopia, they were no longer welcome and again made a long journey on foot, this time to refugee camps in Kenya where many spent nearly ten years before receiving asylum in western nations. Some of the boys had walked distances of two thousand miles surviving before reaching Kenya. These south Sudanese refugees came to be known as the Lost Boys (after the orphaned ‘lost boys’ of Peter Pan) of Sudan by aid workers, because they had walked for so long (the average was three months) and had lost all contact with their families (Robbins, 2003). It is estimated that only one-half of the Lost Boys survived the journey to Kenya as many succumbed to disease, dehydration, starvation, enemy soldiers and even wild animal attacks. According to the aid group Save the Children (2013) this group of refugees had some of the most “severe emotional and psycho-social needs” (p. 2) and were the most war-traumatized ever examined.

The U.S. through the United Nations High Commission for refugees began to bring children from the camps to the U.S. in late 2000, and the greater Phoenix area

received 1,300 Lost Boys, most of whom had spent a great deal of their lives in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya (McKinnon, 2005a). The Phoenix area now has one of the largest concentrations of South Sudanese refugees in the U.S. (Scott, 2012) and the number is estimated at between 4,000 and 5,000 (Clancy, 2006). According to Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR, 2006), the Lost Boys non-profit organization has been one of the most successful refugee resettlement organizations in U.S. history, claiming that 89 percent of male refugees were employed. Though resilient, the South Sudanese community has not been immune to the challenges resettling in the U.S. The female employment rate was last measured at a meager 39 percent.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE U.S. NATURALIZATION EXAMINATION

“They became to be known as citizenship classes” –Raymond F. Crist, Commissioner of Naturalization (1930)

#### **Citizenship Tests**

Social scientists have traditionally viewed citizenship tests from three distinct perspectives. The first perspective is that they are a means of immigration control, a view that emphasizes that nations employ citizenship examinations in response to populist and nationalist pressures to limit immigration from particular countries or regions (Etzioni, 2007). Another perspective views these examinations in a broader context of the tension states face between civic integration policies and immigrant anti-discrimination policies. From this viewpoint citizenship tests are seen as a way to ensure immigrants internalize Western liberal values and acquire the skills and knowledge to become industrious in the workforce (Joppke, 2007a; Joppke, 2007b). A third perspective is one that emphasizes the “thickening of citizenship,” that is, becoming active participants in the democracy (Etzioni, 2007: 358).

Naturally, citizenship tests can be used to simultaneously control for immigration, integrate citizens, and solidify what it means to be an active participant in society. Regardless of the intended purpose, the implementation of naturalization tests often represents a governmental reaction to popular (sometimes xenophobic) sentiments that pressure the state to limit immigration (Wright, 2008). Research on the history of naturalization is not well established in the U.S. and the bulk of studies that do exist rely

on aggregate statistics and governmental records and documents (Schneider, 2001). Even the year the first citizenship tests appeared in the U.S. is unclear. The U.S. was (by most accounts) the first nation to administer citizenship tests (possibly 1887)<sup>3</sup>, yet the year and even decade they began to be implemented is contested.

Before conducting any study on the motivations immigrants have for seeking U.S. citizenship and the barriers they face in attaining it, it is crucial to understand how these barriers came to be. After all, citizenship tests are a rather new phenomena associated with western democracies and are a departure from traditional rights to citizenship such as *jus sanguinis* (Latin: right of blood), in which citizenship is passed on based on blood, race and language; and *jus soli* (Latin: right of soil), in which citizenship rights are given to anyone born within a nation's territory. Though the U.S. still applies both these rights to citizenship in naturalization law, the circumstance that first generation immigrants to the U.S. were neither born on U.S. soil and had no right U.S. citizenship through blood, required some significant changes to naturalization law and as the U.S. became increasingly multicultural gave way to new barriers to citizenship. These historical changes, the reasons for them, and how the current citizenship requirements and examination came to be, will addressed in the following section.

## **History of the U.S. Citizenship Examination**

### **Background**

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<sup>3</sup> The U.S. does indeed seem to be the first to impose such tests, but not at a Federal level. Naturalization was conducted at the county level of states and individual judges decided how they would conduct these interviews. It appears that these tests could have begun as early as the beginning 1800s with the passing of the Naturalization Acts of 1802. I tried to follow the trail of references of the author claiming 1887, but the sources listed did not give that date.

Every year more than half a million immigrants apply for U.S. citizenship. The naturalization examination is likely the most high-stakes test an immigrant will ever face. The long and difficult process of meeting the many requirements of citizenship and passing the test's English language and literacy portions as well as the civics portions gives individuals access to many benefits not available to permanent residents. As citizens, they will have the right to vote, it qualifies them for certain federal government jobs, gives them freedom to leave and return to the U.S. without restrictions and can speed up the process of reuniting them with close family members living abroad. With the passage in 1996 of both welfare reform and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) that based public benefits and selected rights on citizenship, it is also increasingly the gateway to a social safety net and to residential security (Ewing, 2012; Fix, 2007; Fix, Passel, and Sucher, 2003). Because of these factors obtaining U.S. citizenship "is more than an administrative process; it is a life-changing event" (Naturalization Delays, 2008, p. 3). And although data are scarce, about one applicant in three fails the civics test, the English test, or both<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, very few public policies promote naturalization (Chenoweth and Burdick, 2007). Immigrants are not sent notices when they become eligible for citizenship (Jacoby, 2003) and relatively little public funding is designated for English language or civics courses to help permanent residents pass the citizenship examination (Chenoweth and Burdick, 2007; Fix, Passel, and Sucher, 2003).

The U.S. Naturalization Test assesses the applicant's proficiency in English and knowledge of U.S. history, civics, and government as part of the Naturalization process

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<sup>4</sup> Kunnan (2009, p. 113) cites a study commissioned by the Immigration and Naturalization Service that found that out of 7,843 naturalization applications, 34% were denied due to failure on the English, the civics test, or both.

in which U.S. citizenship is granted to foreign citizens after they have completed the requirements set by U.S. Congress. The argument for imposing citizenship tests has historically been to ensure that applicants for naturalization could speak English and have an understanding of U.S. government and constitution and therefore have the skills to be “good” citizens (Gales, 2009; Park, 2008; Pickus, 2005): However, Etzioni (2007) claims that, though citizenship tests appear to merely determine whether a person is qualified to be a citizen, the vast majority of the citizens in countries that require citizenship tests become citizens based on the geographic location in which they were born and are not required to have, nor are they tested on any other qualifications to become citizens. Thus, he claims that:

Citizenship tests, rather than establishing qualifications for citizenship, are instead very often used as a tool to control the level and composition of immigration. This can be gleaned from that (a) it is almost exclusively immigrants or their children who are subject to these tests and that (b) historically, citizenship exams have been introduced or modified in line with changing attitudes towards immigration in those nations that utilize them. (p. 353)

The correlation between economic downturn and negative attitudes towards immigration in the U.S. has been well documented (Esapenshade & Hampstead, 1996; Palmer, 1996; Quillian, 1995; Wilkes, Guppy & Ferris, 2008) and when the history of legislation in the U.S. directed at immigration and citizenship requirements is taken into account, it

becomes clear that these laws and policies are not merely meant to establish qualifications for citizenship, but rather to address public concerns about limiting immigration and controlling who can become a U.S. citizen. This is true to varying degrees throughout U.S. history, as will be established in the following section that provides a brief history of immigration and naturalization legislation.

### **History of Immigration and Citizenship Testing Policy in the U.S.**

Since the 1798 Alien and Sedition Act, the U.S. has passed nearly fifty acts, governmental programs, or pieces of legislation aimed at immigration policy and citizenship requirements and there have been at least fifteen acts that restrict U.S. entry or citizenship based on race, ethnicity or beliefs (Bausum, 2009; Martinelli, 2008). Testing for citizenship has increasingly become a means of controlling who becomes a citizen and ensuring that those who apply for citizenship have what various interest groups believe are the qualities necessary for full participation in U.S. democracy and society. However, beliefs on what makes a good citizen have never been uniform, and today are as conflicting as ever. This has led to current citizenship testing policies that appear to be a compromise between the various stakeholders.

### **The Early Years (the 18<sup>th</sup> Century): Open Doors (kind of)**

The first motion on immigration was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1790 (1 Stat. 103). This act imposed the first restrictions on citizenship by restricting it to “free white persons” and imposing a uniform federal regulation that set the residency requirement at two years. The racial restriction was implemented at the time to exclude

African American and Native American men, in addition to women, from voting. It was later used to also exclude Asians. (Park, 2008) The act stated that:

Any alien, being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof, on application to any common law court of record, in any of the states wherein he shall have resided for the term of one year at least, and making proof to the satisfaction of such court, that he is a person of good character, and taking the oath or affirmation prescribed by law, to support the constitution of the United States (1 Stat. 103).

Though women were included in the act, the right of citizenship did “not descend to persons whose fathers have never been resident in the United States....”(1 Stat. 104). Thus, citizenship was inherited exclusively through the father and excluded women from passing on citizenship to their children (Hymowitz & Weissman, 1978). Despite these early restrictions on citizenship, in the early years of American history the U.S. openly encouraged and promoted immigration in order to establish settlements on its vast open lands (Center for Immigration Studies, 2006). However, the encouragement of immigration was not necessarily the encouragement of citizenship, because in 1795 Congress repealed the 1790 Act and increased the residence requirement and mandated that those who sought citizenship must declare their intention at least three years prior to naturalization. Fearing foreign influence, in 1793, Congress added four more laws in what was called the Alien and Sedition Act. These laws gave the president unprecedented



powers to act against enemies in the U.S. and made the path to citizenship more difficult. (Ewing, 2012; Gales, 2009; Park, 2008)

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of many new immigration and naturalization acts and the establishment of the office of immigration (Gales, 2009; Kunnan, 2009a). The fundamentals of the naturalization process were first established with the Naturalization Acts of 1802. These acts introduced a waiting period of five years of residency, a declaration of intention, an oath of allegiance to the U.S. and the Constitution, and the testimony of witnesses attesting to the character of the immigrant applying for citizenship (Schneider, 2001). For over 100 years after this, states made their own citizenship policies and laws and citizenship examinations were administered in county courts with almost no federal oversight. Local courts administered the process, and judges were the ones that decided if citizenship should be granted. There were some judges who “transformed hundreds of petitioners into newly minted Americans in a single day” (Schneider, 2001, p. 54). However, while there was not yet any requirement for civics knowledge, other judges interpreted the Naturalization Acts in a different way, believing that anyone swearing allegiance to the U.S. and taking an oath to support the Constitution must understand it, so they tested citizenship applicants for civic and government knowledge (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, 1916, p. 10).

### **The age of “good moral character,” self-sustainability and Chinese exclusion**

In 1849, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the regulation of immigration was a federal responsibility and, thus, was the beginning of many congressional acts aimed at controlling immigration to the U.S. and setting requirements for citizenship (Bausam, 2009). Naturalization judges were still responsible for determining if prospective citizens' had fulfilled the citizenship requirements and exercised the right to test their knowledge of civics and the English language in any way they thought was appropriate, which resulted in much inconsistency and large numbers of immigrants failing early tests (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, 1916, p. 10). With considerable numbers of immigrants failing exams and having to reapply, or failing and not seeking citizenship again, early testing procedures proved to be costly and inefficient (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, 1917, p. 5; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, 1916, p. 11).

There was also some liberalizing of conditions for citizenship. The most significant change being the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment introduced in 1865 that abolished slavery and the subsequent 14<sup>th</sup> amendment (1868) that overturned the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dread v. Sanford* ruling that those of African descent, regardless of whether they were slaves or freed, could never be citizens of the U.S. (Kunnan, 2009a; Park, 2008).

However, in an effort to control the influx of immigrants from much of Europe due to famine, civil unrest, persecution and lack of economic opportunity, a number of new provisions and restrictions were added including the requirements of "good moral character," allegiance to the Constitution and the exclusion of "convicts, lunatics, and

persons who were likely to become public charges<sup>5</sup>” (Jenks and Lauck, 1912: 43).

Prostitutes were soon added to the list, and a little more than a decade after guaranteeing equal protection, due process and consent, further legislation was introduced that restricted who could be granted citizenship in the U.S. (Ewing, 2012; Gales, 2009; Kunnan 2009a).

In response to a xenophobic uproar in the U.S. due to the large number of Chinese contract laborers brought to the U.S. (who worked under near slave-like conditions of indentured servitude), Congress reverted back to restrictive immigration policy and passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The act imposed several harsh restrictions on Chinese immigration including suspending the immigration of all Chinese workers to the U.S. for 10 years, barring Chinese immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens, and providing for the deportation of Chinese immigrants unlawfully present in the country. The law was renewed for another 10 years in 1892, and again in 1902 with no ending date. (Bausam, 2009; Ewing, 2012; Kunnan 2009a, 2009b; Schneider, 2001)

### **The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Testing for Literacy, Setting Quotas and “Americanization”**

The increased rates of immigration in the early 1900s, particularly from Eastern and Southern Europe, raised concerns among much of the voting public as well as their elected representatives. Citizens were particularly alarmed by the perceived threat to employment, safety, and culture that this flood of immigration posed. There were also

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<sup>5</sup> Persons who could not support themselves financially.

major concerns about fraudulent citizenship practices at the county level, particularly before elections (USCIS, 2007). Schneider (2001) claims “the fear that new voters were not ready for the duties of American citizenship had always accompanied the debate about naturalization, but it was not until the early twentieth century that lasting reform on the Federal level was attempted to amend the perceived problems” (p. 55). Previously, most immigrants to the U.S. had come from England, Ireland and Germany, but the new wave of immigration brought nearly 6 million Hungarians, Italians, and Russian Jews and the question of how to integrate them into American life and prepare them for citizenship became a primary concern. Based on a series of lectures in 1887 by economist Edward Bemis who proposed the U.S. adopt a literacy test as a way to “filter out idle, vicious, and other undesirable aliens” (Higham, 2002, p.101) by blocking the entry of illiterate immigrants, a literacy test was introduced by anti-immigrant groups to primarily exclude eastern and southern European immigrants in a “respectable” (p. 101) way. The goal of the proposal was to reduce immigration from those countries by 50 percent, and in 1886 it passed by a large majority in the House; however, President Cleveland vetoed it because of its exclusionary nature. In the following years, there were three more attempts to pass the bill and all were vetoed (Higham, 2002).

### **The English Language Requirement**

In 1905 a commission appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt examined the U.S. naturalization law and recommended some revisions. Most importantly they revived the proposal to implement literacy tests for prospective citizens. They claimed that some immigrants could not read the Constitution they swore support to and concluded that, “no one be admitted to citizenship who does not know the English language” (Higham, 2002,

p. 101). In the report to the President they posited that, “If the immigrant does not know our language he does in effect remain a foreigner, although he may be able to satisfy the naturalization laws sufficiently to secure citizenship” (Naturalization Common, 1905, NO. 59-46, at 11).

The first law to address these concerns was introduced in 1906 when Congress passed the Naturalization Act, which for the first time formalized forms, fees, and procedures for naturalization. It restricted the authority to grant or deny citizenship to federal courts and centralized the process of administrative supervision over naturalization under one new federal agency, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization under the Department of Commerce and Labor. Prior to this act both state and federal courts had the authority to confer citizenship and there was considerable variation in the process and conferral of citizenship. Each court employed its own standards for naturalizing applicants and no central federal agency provided guidance in enforcing the naturalization statutes. (Gordon, Mailman & Yale-Loehr, 2008). The act also introduced the first English language requirement for citizenship stating that, “no alien shall hereafter be naturalized or admitted as a citizen of the United States who cannot speak the English language” (34 Stat. 596).

Specifically, Congress mandated that applicants must sign their petitions in their own handwriting and “speak English” along with demonstrating adherence to the principles of the constitution (Gales, 2009; Kunnan, 2009a, 2009b; Perea, 2008). The Naturalization Act of 1906 was the legal departure point for the English requirement for citizenship. In the following years further attempts to expand the literacy test to include reading and writing skills was vetoed by presidents Taft and Wilson because of the

xenophobic ideology behind the use of literacy tests for citizenship (Higham, 2002).

### **The Bureau of Naturalization**

Until the creation of the Bureau of Naturalization, there was little Federal oversight in citizenship testing and naturalization process. A few representatives thought that the Bureau of Education should be responsible for citizenship preparation and testing, rather than the Bureau of Naturalization, but the general opinion was that immigrant education was a Federal rather than a state issue. Since states carried out citizenship education at their own expense, overseeing and supporting that work was a Federal matter (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Thompson, 1920; Wheaton, 1920). According to Wheaton (1920) in some cases, “immigrants themselves petitioned the U.S. Bureau of Education for facilities in which to conduct evening school classes in English and civics and funds to hire instructors to teach those classes” (p. 573), but because of limited funding the new Bureau of Naturalization was only able to “provide leadership in the form of advice and organizational facilities” (O’Brien, 1961, p. 161). Courts still administered the majority of citizenship testing and private organizations and public education programs still prepared immigrants for citizenship. The Bureau of Naturalization’s only real responsibility was to develop standards of civic knowledge and organize the naturalization process for greater efficiency (Higham, 1963, p. 236): Therefore, at the turn of the century (1890-1910) organizations began to emerge throughout the nation to assist in the assimilation and Americanization of immigrants and help with citizenship preparation (Schneider, 2001).

The Immigration Service was introduced during an unprecedented rise in immigration to the U.S. From 1900 to 1920, nearly 24 million immigrants arrived during

what is known as the “Great Wave,” and Congress continued to strengthen national immigration law with acts such as the Immigration Act of 1907. Two commission reports on the causes of massive emigration out of Southern and Eastern Europe and conditions among immigrants in the U.S. influenced the writing and passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, which, among other provisions, required that immigrants be able to read and write in their native language. The test was to exclude aliens over sixteen years of age, physically capable of reading, who could not read English or some other language or dialect (Gales, 2009; Higham, 2002; Kunnan 2009a). This bill became the first literacy requirement for immigration, and Immigration Service then began administering literacy tests<sup>6</sup>. The test required any prospective citizen or immigrant over the age of 16 to read between 30 and 80 words in common use in any language. The result was a significant reduction in the number of immigrants from Italy, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Greece and Ireland (Hing, 2004; Kunnan, 2009a). Hing (2004) recounts the story of Ms. Friedman, a twenty-three-year-old from Poland who spoke Yiddish and arrived in New York in 1923. Her story illustrates how the literacy test was practiced:

Ms. Friedman was asked by the immigration inspector: “Do you read any other language than Yiddish?” “No,” she replied. As part of her entry examination, her literacy was then tested using a printed slip in Yiddish, the English translation of which was: “Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”

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<sup>6</sup> A similar literacy test was also used in several states to determine eligibility for voting. The result was the exclusion of a large number of African Americans in southern states and nearly a million Yiddish speakers in New York. It wasn’t until many years later, in 1965, that the Voting Rights Act banned literacy tests as a requirement for voting in all states. (Del Valle, 2003)

Although she was able to read a large majority of the words, she could not explain their meaning. Ms. Friedman was denied admission. (p. 51)

The fear of unchecked immigration coincided with First Red Scare, a period during the early 20th-century history of the marked by a widespread fear of Bolshevism and anarchism. At its climax in 1919-1920, when strikes occurred in many U.S. cities concerns over the effects of radical political influence in American society and the alleged spread of communism and anarchism in the American labor movement fueled a general sense of paranoia. Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were seen as much more likely to engage in these types of activities (Murray, 1971). Murray claims that the first "Red Scare" was "a nation-wide anti-radical hysteria provoked by a mounting fear and anxiety that a Bolshevik revolution in America was imminent—a revolution that would change church, home, marriage, civility, and the American way of Life" (p. 29). Because of these fears, ideologies that promoted restricted immigration policy came to the front.

The pervasive response to these concerns of increased diversity was to try to promote assimilation into what the majority believed defined American identity: English-speaking, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon. The Americanization movement that emerged during these years focused on assimilating new immigrants into American society (Handlin, 1982; Hartmann, 1967; Higham, 1998; Hill, 1919). Between 1917 and 1922, more than 30 states passed Americanization laws, requiring those unable to speak or read English to attend public evening schools (Pavlenko, 2005). This movement included both proponents of nativism (opposition to any foreign influences) and progressives genuinely



concerned with improving the impoverished health and working conditions of recent immigrants (Olneck, 1989). Americanization efforts focused on providing classes in English civics primarily to adult, male immigrants. In addition, groups pushed for legislation to limit immigration in general or exclude certain groups from entering the country.

The outbreak of World War I reduced immigration from Europe during the conflict but mass immigration resumed upon the war's conclusion, and Congress responded with a new immigration policy: The National-Origins Quota System passed in 1921 and was revised in 1924. Immigration was limited by assigning each nationality a quota based on its representation in past U.S. census figures. Also in 1924, Congress created the U.S. Border Patrol within the Immigration Service. (Ewing, 2012) The hysteria against non-Anglo immigration culminated in 1924 and a quota of 150,000 immigrants per year was imposed for the first time (Kunnan, 2009a). By basing the quota system on a census prior to 1910, the countries with very few or no immigrants included in that census were not allowed entry. The aim was to reduce "the Italian quota from 42,000 to about 4,000, the Polish from 31,000 to 6,000, the Greek from 3,000 to 100" (Higham, 2002, p. 319). A year after the quota went into effect, the immigration commissioner claimed in a report that all immigrants now looked and spoke like Americans (Aleinkoff and Martin, 1991). Also in 1924, Congress created the U.S. Border Patrol within the Immigration Service.

There were still serious concerns that the Naturalization process was inconsistent and was not serving its purpose. A major problem was that "few established and well-approved standards existed, and public agencies of various kinds were endeavoring to

treat the problem each in its own way” (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Naturalization, 1916). There were several emergent interest groups that attempted to “Americanize” and assimilate new immigrants, but these groups also varied widely in their primary motivations as well as their methods and content teaching, because no standards existed. Furthermore, according to a study by Paull (1918), even though many organizations were offering a variety of citizenship classes, they were failing to reach the majority of immigrants, and Thompson (1920) wrote in a report that few immigrants beyond the compulsory age of school attended any of these classes. Because of this, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization focused the next two decades on trying to establish and define and standardize citizenship-testing policies as well as increase the role the Federal government played in the naturalization process of immigrants (Schneider, 2010).

Higham (2002) claims that they were two opposing, yet often overlapping beliefs about Americanization efforts. One was a liberal democratic movement driven by progressives that underscored cohesion and integration, and the other was a nativistic movement that advocated “100% Americanism”<sup>7</sup> (p. 247). He argues that WWI pushed the shift from progressive to nativist views regarding citizenship stating that they turned “from sympathy to fear, from cosmopolitan democracy to zealous nationalism” (p.247).

These two visions for Americanization are evident in a Congressional hearing regarding the Naturalization process in 1930. Crist (1930), the Deputy Commissioner for Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, insisted that the government should do more to support citizenship classes and, in fact, at one point had appointed 35 individuals to

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<sup>7</sup> Hartmann (1967) also argued for this dichotomous view of Americanization.

engage in facilitating and promoting them; however these activities were found to be beyond the authority of the law, because the federal government was encroaching on what should have been a local and state responsibility, education, and Crist was forced to end his pursuits. Nevertheless, Crist continued to argue for the implementation of citizenship classes throughout the states. Because the Bureau could not take a direct approach, Crist (1941) recommended that they take on an advisory role and work together with local and state governments, public schools, various private organizations, the courts, and the general public, all of which he believed were “ripe for this undertaking” (228). He believed that these groups together under the supervision of the Bureau could be “connected in a concerted effort for the enlightenment, education, and uplift of the entire resident foreign population of this country,” and that, with the help of these groups the Federal government could take an “active and leading part ... in the education of the alien body “ (p. 228). Crist’s vision was not only to help applicants prepare for the citizenship examination, but also “for the duties and responsibilities of American citizenship “ (p. 228). This also led the Bureau to work with educators and superintendents from around the country to create a standardized citizenship education textbook. By calling on input from professional educators from across the states, the Bureau could avoid criticism that it was infringing on state responsibilities for education.

One of the major reasons Crist (1930) wanted the Bureau to take a more active role in citizenship preparation was due to the problems that had arisen after the Naturalization Act of 1906. He recounts a story that highlights some of these problems:

In 1907-1910 these older people would come up for citizenship only to find

themselves denied because they would not be able to evidence any knowledge of government under the constitution. There were no facilities in the community where they lived to acquire an education. They would be the only ones in the family left, the children having become citizens either by naturalization or by birth. The father and mother were the only two of the family left. The father wanted to become a citizen so that his wife could also become a citizen, but he could not by reason of educational deficiencies become a citizen. That was a tragedy, and made me feel that something should be done to remedy the condition. (p. 9)

Crist goes on to describe how he had received many reports from throughout the country that expressed the same concerns about these types of situations and requesting citizenship schools to prepare immigrants for naturalization. At this time, he reported that English language and citizenship classes were being held in 300-400 cities across America.

The Red Scare of this period fostered fear about who was conducting these classes and whether those being naturalized were really being Americanized. For example, Ramey (Republican, Illinois) asked in this hearing “Who instructs them? Is it done by public school teachers? We had a fellow in our county who conducted one of these schools and he was as near red as anybody I ever saw” (p. 6). He later asks, “How many of those being naturalized really mean what they say” (p. 7). This is evidence of the concern that unwanted immigrants were somehow making their way into America.

On the other hand, there were also concerns about the English language

requirement for elderly applicants. Rutherford (Democrat, Georgia) stated that he could “See how a young person could comply with this requirement but an older person coming here with another tongue would find it hard to pick up the English language (p. 6)” and Cooke (Republican, New York) asked:

Would it not impose a hardship upon certain people seeking naturalization and who no longer have the flexibility of mind to enable them to acquire knowledge easily. They have not had much education abroad, and they come here ignorant, yet they are in many cases good citizens. It seems to me this is not a test of the sincerity of the citizen, because those who cause the most trouble here are usually able to comply with a condition such as you have in mind. We have many substantial people who come here who are not well educated. If you will pardon a personal reference, I am the son of foreign-born parents. I do not suppose my grandfather and grandmother learned anything like this in school, yet those folks made fairly good American citizens. Is it not going to be difficult for the older person coming here to comply with this? I am wondering whether discretion should not lodge in the court rather than have a mandatory provision to govern all cases. (p. 5)

Because of these concerns, Crist’s goal of requiring a higher level of English for citizenship were not achieved at that time.

Thomson (1920) writes that, at that time, there were two major approaches to citizenship classes. One approach emphasized “training in a few facts concerning

government and Constitution designed especially for men filing petitions for naturalization” and the other that focused on “general instruction in civic and social studies which is often given in connection with lessons in English” (p. 351). Contrary to what Crist’s goals for citizenship classes were, the Bureau of Naturalization’s goal of creating a test that was both efficient (inexpensive to the government) and fair, led the agency to advocate for the former rather than the latter. This was when citizenship classes began to emphasize “teaching by the book, lecturing, note taking, question-and-answer recitation, memorizing, essay writing, and examination passing” (Butts, 1980, p. 66).

### **The Mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The most important change to U.S. citizenship requirements came in 1952 with the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, which consolidated the multiple immigration laws of previous years into one comprehensive statute. Even though the law formally eliminated race as a basis of immigration to the United States, it maintained a racist bias through the national-origins quota system that set the annual quota for each country outside the western hemisphere at one-sixth of one percent of the number of persons of that ancestry living in the United States in 1920. This ensured that immigrants from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Germany were greatly favored in terms of the number of immigrants allowed to enter the U.S. (Ewing, 2012). Furthermore, the law required both English language and U.S. government and history knowledge for citizenship. The act required applicants for citizenship to have:

- (1) an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write

and speak words in the English language: provided, that the requirements of this paragraph relating to the ability to read and write shall be met if the applicant can read or write simple words and phrases to the end that a reasonable test of his literacy shall be made and that no extraordinary or unreasonable condition shall be imposed upon the applicant; and

(2) a knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, of the U.S. (INA, 312, U.S.C. 1423)

Del Valle (2003) claims that Congress “clearly linked the inability to speak or understand English to political suspicion (p. 93)” when it passed the literacy provision. The Immigration and Nationality Act not only kept the quota system, it added to a list of unwanted characteristics that would exclude an individual from immigration to the U.S. such as those affiliated, in the past or present, with the communist party, anarchy or any other subversive ideology. The act reflected the McCarthy era in which the senator stirred-up fear among Americans regarding communists through the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

In the 1960s, the U.S. experienced a shift toward more liberal policies as the civil rights movement began to take root. Then a senator, John F. Kennedy (1964) stated that under the immigration policy of that period the famous words of Emma Lazarus on the Statue of Liberty should have been changed to:

‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free’—as

long as they come from Northern Europe, are not too tired or poor or slightly ill, never stole a loaf of bread, never joined any questionable organizations, and can document their activities for the last two years (p. 124)

Immigration policy was liberalized under President Kennedy, and The Immigration Act of 1965 was passed one year after the Civil Rights Act. President L. B. Johnson claimed that act sought to “correct the racially-based immigration system established in the 1920s that favored those from Northern Europe by abolishing the Natural Origins Quotas” (American Immigration Law Foundation, 1999 p. 18). However, numerical restrictions on immigration were maintained and set at 170,000 per year for the Eastern Hemisphere and, for the first time, 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere. The Act shifted the preference of immigrants of Northern European countries to the immediate relatives of citizens and permanent residents. (Aleinkoff & Martin, 1991; Ewing, 2012; Gales, 2009)

### **The Modern Era (late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century)**

Since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, the United States has enforced the educational requirements to different degrees over time. When the act was first implemented, immigration officers informally enforced the requirements. The standardized form of the test did not come until the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 that offered amnesty to nearly six million undocumented residents, but also tightened the educational requirements for citizenship. The primary purpose of this was to assess the applicant's' English language abilities and knowledge of U.S. civics, history,



and government. (Gales, 2009; Kunnan, 2009a). In 1991, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS; Now the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)) contracted six private testing services to administer the standardized naturalization examination and by 1996 there were over 1,000 testing sites operated by these organizations and various subcontractors. This arrangement came to an end after various news organizations exposed widespread fraud by many testing centers throughout the nation. The INS then resumed control of citizenship testing, and it has remained the duty of the INS (later the USCIS) since then.

The standardized Naturalization Examination that debuted in 1986 consisted of three sections to test English language knowledge:

- 1) Speaking: An informal conversation took place between the officer and the applicant on either the application paperwork or other topics.
- 2) Reading: The applicants were required to read one sentence (any sentence).
- 3) The applicants were required to write one sentence from about 100 sentences provided and dictated by the officer (the applicant was given three chances).

For the civics, history and government part of the examination the applicant was required to provide six correct answers to 10-12 questions selected randomly from the one hundred questions in the *Federal Textbooks on Citizenship*. (Gales, 2009; Kunnan, 2009a)

There proved to be a few significant problems with the test. First, each officer

used different sentences to test the reading and writing ability of students, some substantially more challenging than others. Second, officers used different material to test listening and speaking. In some cases history and civics questions were used and in other cases questions about daily life, current events, or even sports were used as topics in informal conversation to test English language ability. According to Kunnan (2009a):

The level of difficulty of the sentences dictation test varied in topic, length, complexity. Some sentences were three words; some were 10 words (“I work very hard”; “Oath of Allegiance”; “Martha Washington was the first lady in the United States”); and some words were more difficult to spell (allegiance, president, television). (p. 43)

Another problem was that applicants did not know what constituted a pass or fail on the reading, writing or speaking tests. Finally, the civics, history and government parts of tests were criticized for promoting the memorization of facts rather than an understanding of the subjects. (Aizenman, 1998; Kunnan, 2009a; Kunnan, 2009b)

Some examples that highlight the inconsistencies in test administration include a testing site in Atlanta, Georgia that had no stated minimum passing score for the civics test, a site in Arlington, Virginia that required an applicant to answer seven out of twelve questions correctly (58%) and a site in Miami, Florida which required the applicant to answer seven questions correctly out of ten (70%) (Miller & Muldoon, 1996). The questions being asked during the English language citizenship tests were also irregular. Some agents asked applicants about daily life or sports. Others were asked to name their

current governor's wife and his or her birthdate (Aizenman, 1998; Kunnan, 2009a; Kunnan, 2009b). The officers' manual also allowed for due consideration on the part of the officer conducting the exam. It stated:

In choosing subject matters, in phrasing questions, and in evaluating responses, due consideration shall be given to the applicant's education, background, age, length of residence in the United States, opportunities available and efforts made to acquire the requisite knowledge, and any other elements or factors relevant to an appraisal of the adequacy of the applicants knowledge and understanding (Miller & Muldoon, 1996, p. 26).

This created even more ambiguity as far as testing practices were concerned; however, in spite of the criticism of the test itself, and the obvious inconsistencies in the testing practices for the citizenship examination, no real effort to change the test or establish nationwide standardization was made until the early 2000's when a redesign plan was formed (Kunnan, 2009a).

Along with more requirements for citizenship, a couple of laws were passed in 1996 that seriously impacted immigrants. One was the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act that established new grounds for inadmissibility to, and deportation from the U.S., by expanding the definition of what an aggravated felony was for immigration purposes. The definition of an "aggravated felony" in the new law included non-violent crimes and could be applied retroactively, that is, to offenses committed long before passage of the new law. It also mandated the detention of non-

U.S. citizens who were newly defined as “aggravated felons” and formed an “expedited removal” process to hasten the deportation of immigrants without a formal hearing. Furthermore, it issued three- and ten-year bans on re-entry to immigrants unlawfully present in the U.S. The other law was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act that made most permanent residents ineligible for means-tested public-benefit programs for five years after receiving their green cards, and ineligible for Medicare and Social Security for ten years after getting their green cards. Under the law, unauthorized immigrants were barred from any kind of public-benefit programs. (Ewing, 2012; Fix, 2007)

With respect to the citizenship test and its implementation, two major concerns surfaced in the 90s: 1) its substance or “meaningfulness” to prospective citizens; and 2) the need to better standardize the process of administering the test. In 1997, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform and its Report to Congress advocated to prioritize the standardization of the test and to emphasize making the substance more “meaningful.” A bipartisan panel, referred to as the Commission, was given the responsibility of reviewing and evaluating the implementation of citizenship examinations and the impact of U.S. immigration policy from 1990-1997. The Commission recommended ten changes to the naturalization process including improving the processing of fingerprint fees, revising the naturalization oath, and establishing clear waiver guidelines, but the Commission stressed that the most essential amendment for both on the substance of the exam as well as test administration was to improve “the mechanisms used to demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history, civics, and English competence” (U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1997, p. 12).

The Commission also urged that the government emphasize adult education, stating that:

Education for basic skills and literacy in English is the major vehicle that integrates adult immigrants into American society and participation in its civic activities. Literate adults are more likely to participate in the workforce and twice as likely to participate in our democracy. Literate adults foster literacy in their children, and parents' educational levels positively affect their children's academic performance. (p. 43)

In terms of substance, the Commission criticized the test for inadequately assessing applicants' meaningful knowledge of U.S. history and civics, and their ability to communicate in English. They believed that applicants could pass the test by simply relying on "memorization of discrete facts rather than on substantive understanding of the basic concepts of civic participation" (p. 46). The Commission was also concerned that test administration varied by INS district office claiming that:

INS district offices vary significantly from each other in the methods by which they administer the test and in the threshold number of correct answers needed for passage. In some cases, examiners scale the tests to the perceived educational abilities of applicants. The lack of uniform standards governing whether an applicant has satisfactorily fulfilled the requirements is disturbing. Such inconsistencies pose undue confusion for qualified legal residents and undermine

public confidence in the naturalization process. (p. 46-47)

Winn (2001) studied the interaction between naturalization interviewers and immigrant applicants in 67 separate interviews and found that testing procedures were:

Not clearly operationalized, the English speaking and listening requirement is tested incidentally throughout the interview. The test of English writing is given in the form of a sentence dictation, and sentence selection is entirely at the interviewing officer's discretion. Applicants have the right to be dictated up to two sentences, and interviewing officers vary as to whether or not they will accept a minor spelling error. The English reading test entails reading aloud a sentence or short passage from the application for Naturalization, the list of one hundred U.S. history and government questions, or a basic reader.

(p. 266)

Anecdotal information collected from prospective citizens taking the test suggested that the test might consist of any of the following type of questions: The applicant may be asked to write a sentence in English (such as "Today is a beautiful day"), read the civics questions aloud and answer the questions in English ("Who was the first President of the United States?"), or answer questions on everyday matters in English ("Where do you live?") (Kunnan, 2005, p. 785).

Because of these concerns, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform (1997) suggested standardizing test procedures and recruiting experts in the fields of education,

pedagogy, standardized testing, and other stakeholders to assist in the development of new history/civics and English standards and tests. Furthermore, they advocated separating the English reading, writing, and comprehension components of the exam from the personal interview, because, “Often, applicants are nervous about making a mistake during the interview and demonstrate less English proficiency than they may have (p. 47).”

The Commission also voiced support for the English language exemptions granted to legal permanent residents aged 50 years or older who have lived in the U.S. for at least twenty years and to those 55 years or older who have resided in the U.S. for at least fifteen years. But they also expressed some concern, claiming that; “A more predictable and standardized testing process also must include consistent and rational exemptions for elderly legal permanent residents” (p. 48). They wrote in their report that it made “little sense to confer such exemptions on long-term legal residents, yet not on more recent elderly legal residents who have had less time to acquire English proficiency” (p. 48). The commission called for a thorough review of testing exemptions and urged Congress to consider, “additional, narrowly-tailored exemptions to the English requirement for qualified elderly immigrants who have resided in the U.S. for fewer years than required by the current exemptions” (p. 48). Few of the recommendations in the Commission’s Report to Congress were ever implemented (Ewing, 2012).

At the same time, the Commission was engaged in examining the naturalization process, the INS had begun efforts to redesign the test as well and when the Commission’s Report to Congress was released, the INS had already hired a private consulting firm to help redesign the citizenship test (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997),

though the Office of Field Operations did not officially launch the redesign effort until 2000 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2000).

### **Redesigning the Citizenship Examination**

The INS ceased to exist under that name in 2003, when most of its functions were transferred from the Department of Justice to three new entities under the Department of Homeland Security: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as part of a major government reorganization following the September 11 attacks of 2001 (USCIS, 2004). The responsibility of citizenship testing was taken over by the USCIS and due to the general dissatisfaction with the old Naturalization Test a contract to redesign the test was soon issued to a private company (Kunnan, 2009a). Not long after this, the project was taken away from the private company, and the Board on Testing and Assessment (BOTA) of the National Research Council (NRC) was hired to help redesign the test and ensure that the new naturalization test was based on quality testing standards (NRC, 2004; Ulewicz, 2005; Elliot et al., 2006; Kunnan, 2009a).

BOTA agreed to act as an independent reviewer for the project and hired experts in the fields of demography, English language acquisition, history, measurement, political science and sociology to form what was called the Committee on the U.S. Naturalization Test Redesign (hereinafter, the Committee). The primary goals of the Committee were, first, to help ensure the validity, reliability, and fairness of the redesigned tests and administration procedures and, secondly, to assess the processes used to develop the new testing practices. The BOTA committee report offered a list of numerous



recommendations for the new test and its administration that members believed were necessary before it could be utilized by USCIS testing centers. The report relied on the *Standards for Education and Psychological Testing* (1999), which is a set of testing practices developed jointly by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) to help ensure validity, fairness and responsibility in testing. (NRC, 2004; Ulewicz, 2005; Elliott et al., 2006).

The first recommendation of the Committee was that an advisory panel including experts in psychometrics and test development should be created to supervise technical aspects of the test redesign. The three responsibilities of this panel would be 1) to help establish a content framework and test specifications; 2) to ensure that the chosen test specifications were consistent with the content framework; and 3) to offer advice when important test redesign decisions were needed (Elliott et al. 2006; National Research Council, 2004; Ulewicz, 2005). The recommendation for this advisory panel of experts was made after BOTA discovered that “too many major decisions about the redesign effort were being made by a small number of USCIS and testing contractor staff” (Elliott et al. 2006, p. 23).

The second recommendation called for a detailed redesign plan for the test with the assistance of the advisory panel and oversight and review by the Committee (National Research Council, 2004). Based on the Committee’s conclusion that the redesign “program lacks a clear statement of purpose of the tests, with no clear operationalization of the constructs” and that “the project lacks a coherent research and test development plan for collecting necessary data to build a valid, reliable and fair test” (National

Research Council, 2004, P.13), it proposed that the plan should follow the *Standards*, which had clear outlined steps for test development and would help ensure that the redesigned citizenship test was fair, reliable and valid (AERA, APA, & NRC, 1999; NRC, 2004; Ulewicz, 2005). Furthermore, the Committee recommended “a clear, transparent and publicly accountable process to develop the content frameworks given the vague and contentious nature of the legislative language defining the constructs, i.e., “reading and writing simple words and phrases” or “understanding the fundamentals of history” (Ulewicz, 2005, p. 4).

The USCIS was preparing to begin a pilot study of test items and test procedures for the new test when the report was published, and the Committee recommended that the pilot study be put on hold until the suggestions laid-out by the panel of experts and the test’s compliance with the *Standards* could be implemented (NRC, 2004). Ulewicz (2005) claimed that the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations would “take into account the practical, financial, legal and political constraints that limit both the types of tests that USCIS can propose and the length and cost of the process for developing those tests (p. 2).” As far as the committee members were concerned, it was assured that they would “represent a breadth of related expertise in testing, American history, political science, immigration policy, language assessment and adult education (p. 2).”<sup>8</sup>

In 2005, after the NRC submitted their recommendations, the Office of Citizenship took control of the test redesign project and decided not to renew the NRC’s contract and, therefore, the Committee would not submit their final report on recommendations for the citizenship test redesign. The Office of the Inspector General

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<sup>8</sup> For a list of the committee members see Ulewicz, 2005.

(OIG), agreed with the Committee's recommendation to create an open, transparent, accountable, and technically sound redesign process. However, the OIG also supported USCIS' decision to find an alternative to the test development plan suggested by the Committee because the time and cost of maintaining an advisory panel to oversee the project would simply delay the redesign process: Therefore, the USCIS would "continue naturalization test redesign on its own" (OIG, 2001, p. 9) and promised that it would redesign the citizenship exam:

...to create a test and testing process that is standardized, fair and meaningful. A standardized and fair naturalization test will include uniform testing protocols and procedures nationwide to ensure that there is no variation between offices. A meaningful test will encourage civic learning and patriotism among prospective citizens. A revised test, with an emphasis on the fundamental concepts of American democracy and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, will help to encourage citizenship applicants to learn and identify with the basic values that we all share as Americans. (USCIS, 2007, pp. 1)

## **Current Test and Testing Practices**

### **Current Requirements for Citizenship**

In general, in order to gain U.S. citizenship, an adult lawful permanent resident must reside in the country for at least five years (three years if married to a U.S. citizen),

be of good moral character, and pass a basic English proficiency and U.S. civics test (Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), 1952)<sup>9</sup>. Typically, applicants submit documents supporting their qualifications for citizenship by filing an N-400 Application for Naturalization. Applicants are subsequently fingerprinted and a criminal background check is performed using both USCIS and FBI databases. If an applicant passes the background check, he or she is scheduled for an interview with a USCIS adjudicator. The adjudicator performs two tasks during the interview: (1) verifying the accuracy in the N-400 application; and (2) testing the applicant's ability to read, write, and speak English and administering an oral U.S. civics test. If an applicant fulfills the requirements for citizenship, including passing the English and civics test, he or she receives U.S. citizenship after taking a formal oath of citizenship in a public ceremony administered by the USCIS or an eligible federal court (INA, 1952)<sup>10</sup>. (Migration Policy Institute, 2008)

### **The New Test**

The new citizenship test has been touted by the USCIS as more “standardized, fair and meaningful” than the previous one, and the USCIS claims that they created “test forms at the same level of difficulty” as the former exam, but with “fairer” vocabulary (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, USCIS, 2007).

Previous concerns from stakeholders were generally about the inconsistency in how the test was administered in different district offices and by individual adjudicators within an office. There were never any concerns or complaints by service organizations

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<sup>9</sup> Sec. 312, 316, 324, 334

<sup>10</sup> Sec. 337

that the test was not meaningful, nor was there a call for a redesigned citizenship test (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2007). Stakeholders were mainly concerned that a newly designed citizenship exam might affect vulnerable populations like the elderly, the disabled, and immigrants who are low-income, low-literate, and/or had limited English proficiency, because previous studies had shown that 60 percent of the nearly eight million legal permanent residents who were eligible to naturalize but who had not done so, were limited English proficient (LEP) and 1.4 million had less than a ninth grade education (Fix, Passel & Sucher, 2003; Kunnan, 2009a; IFC International, 2011; Migration Policy Institute, 2012). Because of these statistics, those working with vulnerable groups were worried that a redesigned exam might prove more challenging for them and exceed the requirement that applicants must only read and write simple words and phrases in English (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2007).

One of the requests by stakeholders was that the USCIS ensure that new test's failure rate was not higher than the old test's failure rate. Citizenship service organizations succeeded in this request, and the USCIS is committed to the objective of designing an examination at the same difficulty level as the previous test. The problem with this goal, as the Office of Inspector General (2007) reported, was that "without detailed information on current test performance, there is no established baseline against which to compare the new tests' degree of difficulty" (pp. 6). Nevertheless, citizenship service organizations continue their advocacy for the new exam to be fairly administered and implemented. Specifically, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Education Fund (2008) has made it a priority to observe adjudicators to ensure they are 1) sufficiently trained on the new test, 2) following scoring guidelines

for the exam's reading and writing sections, and 3) fairly administering the speaking portion of the exam. Achieving these goals has been difficult to ascertain since the USCIS has not released detailed information on the language assessment training of its officers nor have they been transparent regarding how they determine English proficiency.

During the redesign process, the USCIS claims that it considered the perspectives of multiple stakeholders including professors and experts in U.S. history and government, community based organizations, USCIS officers, adult learning experts and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. After taking into account these various perspectives, the USCIS decided that the basic format of the English language test would be kept the same. English speaking and listening skills would be determined by applicants' answers to questions asked from their application (N-400). Applicants would still be given three chances to read and write a sentence in English correctly, but the sentences would be from vocabulary lists based on U.S. history, government and civics.<sup>11</sup>

The law does not specifically define at what level English should be spoken. The Immigration and Nationality Act simply states that:

No person shall be naturalized as a citizen of the United States upon his own application who cannot demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language: Provided, that the requirements of this paragraph relating to the ability to read and write shall be met if the applicant can read or write simple

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix II for a copy of the Application for Naturalization (N-400).

words and phrases to the end that a reasonable test of his literacy shall be made and that no extraordinary or unreasonable conditions be imposed on the applicant (INA, 1952: Sec. 312).

English as a second language (ESL) experts recommended that the redesigned test and the accompanying study materials should be at the high-beginning level (Kunnan, 2009a) from the Department of Education's (2013) National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education. According to the NRS, individuals at the high-beginning level of ESL should have the following language skills:

- Listening and Speaking: Individual can understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary, spoken slowly with some repetition. Individual can respond to simple questions about personal everyday activities, and can express immediate needs, using simple learned phrases or short sentences. Shows limited control of grammar.
- Reading: Individual can read most sight words, and many other common words. Can read familiar phrases and simple sentences but has a limited understanding of connected prose and may need frequent re-reading.
- Writing: Individual can write some simple sentences with limited vocabulary. Meaning may be unclear. Writing shows very little control of basic grammar, capitalization and punctuation and has many spelling errors.

- Functional and Workplace Skills: Individual can function in some situations related to immediate needs and in familiar social situations. Can provide basic personal information on simple forms and recognize simple common forms of print found in the home, workplace and community. Can handle routine entry level jobs requiring basic written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge or experience using computers.

(p. 166)

One of the major concerns for the USCIS was how to reconcile the legal requirement that applicants need only to speak, read, and write English at the “ordinary usage” level with the civics portion of the test, because the law states that applicants cannot be naturalized as a citizens if they cannot demonstrate “a knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government of the United States” (Sec. 312(a)(2)) and this required applicants to demonstrate knowledge about complex U.S. civics items. Furthermore, the English listening and speaking test required answers to linguistically and conceptually difficult questions about their application for citizenship (N-400). Nevertheless, the USCIS rolled out their new test by their deadline of 2008. The new test would consist of four primary parts: 1) an English speaking and listening test, 2) an English reading test, 3) an English writing test, and 4) a civics test.



## **The Four Parts of the Current U.S. Citizenship Examination**

### **Speaking and Listening Test**

An applicant's ability to speak and understand English is determined by a USCIS Officer during the eligibility interview on Form N-400, the Application for Naturalization<sup>12</sup>. According to a sample interview video created by the USCIS, a great deal of the interview focuses on the N-400 form:

A large part of the naturalization interview involves reviewing the form N-400, Application for Naturalization, asking you questions about the information you provided on the application and reviewing the documents you submitted to support the application. When the officer reviews the form N-400 with you, the officer is also testing your ability to speak and understand the English language, one of the requirements for naturalization. If you do not understand something you should ask the officer to repeat the question or explain the question in other words. (USCIS, 2010, Min. 6:06-6:38)

As far as testing guidelines for USCIS officers are concerned, a memorandum was sent out stating that:

USCIS Officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until the Officer is satisfied that the applicant either fully understands the question or does not

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<sup>12</sup> Regulations (8 CFR 312.5) state that applicants who fail the English literacy and/or civics test during their first examination will be rescheduled to appear for a second opportunity to take the test.

understand English. If the applicant generally understands and can respond meaningfully to questions relevant to the determination of eligibility, the applicant has demonstrated the ability to speak English. (p. 1)

## **Reading Test**

An applicant must read aloud one out of three sentences correctly to demonstrate an ability to read in English. The sentences from the English reading portion of the naturalization test are composed of words from the [Reading Test Vocabulary List](#) (see [Appendix III](#)). The content focuses on civics and history topics. The reading list contains 64 items (words, names or short phrases) in eight subsections: People (2), civics (14), places (3), holidays (7), question words (6), verbs (12), function words (9) and content words (11). For example, a USCIS officer might ask the applicant to read one of the following sentences:

- George Washington is the father of our country
- The president lives in the White House
- What colors are on the American flag?

The USCIS testing guidelines (USCIS, 2009) gives this general description of how the USCIS reading test is scored:

Pass:

- Reads one sentence without extended pauses
- Reads all content words but may omit short words that do not interfere with meaning

- May make pronunciation or intonation errors that do not interfere with meaning

Fail:

- Does not read the sentence
- Omits a content word or substitutes another word for a content word
- Pauses for extended periods of time while reading the sentence
- Makes pronunciation or intonation errors that interfere with meaning

## **Writing Test**

An applicant must write one out of three sentences correctly to demonstrate an ability to write in English. The sentences from the English writing portion of the naturalization test are composed of words from the [Writing Test Vocabulary List](#) (see Appendix III). The content focuses on civics and history topics. The writing list contains 75 items (words, names or short phrases) in eight subsections: People (3), civics (14), places (9), months (7), holidays (7), verbs (10), function words (10) and content words (15). For example, a USCIS officer might ask an applicant to write one of the following sentences:

- Lincoln was president during the civil war
- Citizens elect the president
- Thanksgiving is in November

A general description of how the USCIS's guidelines for scoring the writing portion of

the exam is as follows:

Pass:

- Has the same general meaning as the dictated sentence
- May contain some grammatical, spelling, punctuation, or capitalization errors that do not interfere with meaning
- May omit short words that do not interfere with meaning
- Numbers may be spelled out or written as digits

Fail:

- Writes nothing or only one or two isolated words
- Is completely illegible
- Writes a different sentence or words
- Written sentence does not communicate the meaning of the dictated sentence
- Writes an abbreviation for a dictated word

## **Civics Test**

There are 100 possible civics questions on the naturalization test. During an applicant's naturalization interview, he or she is asked up to 10 questions from the list of 100 questions. To my knowledge, no publicly available information explains how USCIS officers select the 10 questions, nor whether their discretion to select questions is at all limited. Applicants must correctly answer at least six of the 10 questions to pass the civics test. The civics test is divided into three sections and each of these sections has three subsections:

## American Government

1. Principles of American democracy
2. System of government
3. Rights and responsibilities

Example question:

- What does the Constitution do?

## American History

1. Colonial period
2. 1800s
3. Recent American history and other important historical information

Example question:

- Why did the colonists fight the British?

## Integrated Civics

1. Geography
2. Symbols
3. Holidays

Example question:

- Why does the flag have 13 stripes?

(USCIS, 2013)

Since the civics portion of the exam is based on less subjective right/wrong answers,

USCIS scoring guidelines for this part are rather simple:

Pass:

- Provides a correct answer
- Provides an alternative phrasing of the correct answer

Fail:

- Provides an incorrect answer
- Fails to respond

### **Concerns about the “New” Citizenship Test**

The new test has not gone without debate and disagreement (Allen, 2006; Preston, 2007; Rothstein, 2006; Tomson, 2007). Some see it as a clear barrier to citizenship with no real assessment qualities (Han, Starkey, & Green, 2010; Kunnan, 2009a; Kunnan, 2009b; Winn, 2005), yet others see it as a process that helps immigrants integrate into U.S. society and become more active citizens (Blackledge, 2005; Cameron, 2002). The exam can be viewed as a test that merely measures how well immigrants have memorized the content of the study guides (Brown, 2005; Kunnan, 2009a; Kunnan, 2009b), but the USCIS claims that it is “an important instrument to encourage civics learning and patriotism among prospective citizens” and that it only requires a low level of English proficiency (USCIS, 2008, p. 3). Scholars dispute both these assertions by the USCIS (Cameron, 2002; Etzioni, 2007; Kunnan, 2009a; Kunnan, 2009b; Piller, 2001; Shohamy & McNamara, 2009).

Most of the criticism of the U.S. Naturalization Test has been related to the general validity of the examination. For example, McNamara & Shohamy (2008) have posited that the English and civics parts of it have content that is inappropriate,

specifically that it makes “substantial and unacknowledged literacy demand on those applying for citizenship” (p. 94). Elliott, Chudowsky, Plake, & McDonnell (2006) argue that it is subjective, and Etzioni (2007) that it discriminates against the poor and uneducated. Kunnan (2009a, 2009b) writes that the test is irrelevant to the naturalization process and unfair. Based on his analysis, he claims that “the Naturalization Test cannot claim that it can assess the English language ability and knowledge of U.S. history and government of applicants for citizenship as the qualities of test construct, content, administration, scoring and reporting are all questionable” (p. 95).

These concerns all broadly relate to the Naturalization Test’s validity, but they do not address the test’s reliability. Winke (2011) investigated the reliability<sup>13</sup> of the U.S. Naturalization Test’s civics component by asking 414 individuals to take a mock U.S. citizenship test comprising of civics test questions. Winke found that the test items varied widely in difficulty and could not reliably measure civics knowledge. She claims that the “data revealed that test scores contain construct-irrelevant variance that undermines the overall reliability and validity of the instrument” (p. 317).

Given these criticisms, it is unclear how the new examination is a departure from the previous one in its “fairness.” Balancing “due consideration”<sup>14</sup> for the individual case against the primary goal of standardizing the exam endures as a difficult task for the USCIS. The USCIS claims to employ a standardized weighting technique to ensure that

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<sup>13</sup> To my knowledge this is the only quantitative study of the citizenship exam. Winke applied Rasch analysis to the data. The analysis estimated how difficult test items are, whether they were interchangeable, and how reliably they measure civics knowledge. In addition, she estimated how uniformly difficult the items are for noncitizens ( $N = 187$ ) and citizens ( $N = 225$ ) and how accurate the cutoff score was.

<sup>14</sup> The USCIS (2008) says officers make a determination on whether to exercise due consideration on a case-by-case basis and that they can “Exercise due consideration through the choice of subject matter, the phrasing of questions, and the evaluation of applicant responses as provided by regulation. The choice of subject matter will be drawn from the list of civics questions and answers (100 items) available to the public (p. 2).”

the questions asked during the civics test will be of the same cognitive and language level for all applicants, yet the application of weighing techniques removes an examiner's ability to exercise "due consideration" by adapting the test to suit the distinct case. Furthermore, the speaking and listening test has no standardized form and is entirely in the hand of the adjudicator; thus, cannot serve the effort toward standardization, nor is it transparent how the USCIS managed to resolve the legal requirement that applicants must only speak, read, and write English at the "ordinary usage" level with the need for advanced English vocabulary and knowledge of complex political matters to understand questions from the N-400 form, on which it is based. The transparency that was supposed to be a key part of the redesigned citizenship examination remains a concern. No data has been released on the performance of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, low-literacy, and low English proficiency on the new test.

Many stakeholders also remain concerned that the study materials and suggested activities appear to be at an advanced NRS level, three levels higher than the high beginning level that was recommended for the exam. They are particularly troubled by the language of the N-400, Application for Naturalization form on which the speaking and listening test is based. Griswold (2011), for example explains that:

The topics of the naturalization interview, however, hardly fall under the category of "ordinary usage." On the contrary, they involve cognitively challenging material that may require sophisticated language skills and the knowledge of specialized vocabulary on the applicants' part. (p. 407)

Kochman (1991, p. 48) found that both immigrants and natives described the language on the N-400 "intimidating" and "scary" and claims that the technical jargon on



the form is diametrically opposed to the concept of “ordinary English”. In addition to difficult technical jargon are words that are rarely used in modern Standard American English. For example, the pledge of allegiance at the end of the N-400 form (see Appendix IV), which prospective citizens must vow to uphold contain the words ‘abjure,’ ‘fidelity,’ ‘potentate,’ (which Microsoft Word does not recognize as a word) and heretofore.

Furthermore, because there is no clearly defined criteria of what level of English proficiency to prepare their students for, citizenship teachers must determine, to the best of their abilities, the English skills necessary to pass the citizenship examination. This is problematic for even the most experienced teachers, but more so when the majority of citizenship classes are taught by inexperienced or untrained volunteer teachers.

Though there have been few studies that have looked into how citizenship interviews are conducted, one study of 63 naturalization interviews by Baptiste and Seig (2007)<sup>15</sup> that took place from 1999 to 2000, established that interviewers used almost no eye contact, did not make clear transitions between topics and failed to explain the reason for repeated questioning during citizenship interviews. This caused applicants to fear they had given wrong answers. This suggests that beyond the factors that already take the English language component of the citizenship examination out of the realm of “everyday English” for immigrants, such as that it is conducted in an official government building and by government agents who have the power to deny citizenship, it also is conducted in a manner that does not represents how language is actually practiced. This supports

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Data (audio recordings of seven interviewers) from M. Winn’s (2000). Unpublished Master’s Scholarly, Negotiating borders and discourse: a study of interaction in the US naturalization interview from the Department of Second Language Studies at University of Hawai’i at Manoa, Honolulu.

Shohamy's (2009) view that because language tests for citizenship stipulate standard criteria for correctness they "present unrealistic linguistic goals and criteria detached from the ways in which second language adult learners use new languages" (p. 51). Other language testing experts (i.e., Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Kunnan, 2009a) claim that both the old and redesigned tests are unable to meet the standards set and recognized by the language assessment community as necessary assessment procedures to determine English proficiency.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined some of the considerable concerns about using tests to determine eligibility for citizenship, including testing for language skills, particularly where vulnerable groups are involved. The little research that does exist shows that a large number of those eligible for U.S. citizenship do not apply for it, and that a significant portion of that number are economically disadvantaged, elderly, have low levels of literacy or have low English proficiency (Chiswick and Miller, 2005). Elderly refugees may often face all these disadvantages. Thus, it can be said that, though the new citizenship test was not designed to be more challenging for applicants, neither was it designed in consideration of the most vulnerable groups. It was simply designed to be more economical to conduct and more standardized and streamlined to avoid backlogs of applicants and public scrutiny.

This chapter has covered several issues at the heart of citizenship testing. First, by looking at the origin and evolution of citizenship requirements in the U.S., it has established that naturalization regulations were not simply imposed to ensure that immigrants were adapting to life in the U.S., but more importantly as means to ensure

that the “right” type of people were becoming U.S. citizens. Secondly, it has shown how the English language requirement for citizenship became a key component of the naturalization examination when other forms of exclusion were abolished (most notably gender and ethnicity).

It has also addressed scholars’ concerns about using language tests for citizenship. They argue that the U.S. naturalization examination lacks both validity (Elliot, Chudowsky, Flake, & McDonnell, 2006; Etzioni, 2007; Kunnan, 2009a, 2009b; McNamara & Shohamy, 2008) and reliability (Winke, 2012) and that it places unnecessary and substantial demands on underprivileged immigrants (Griswold, 2011; Shohamy, 2009).

What these studies have not focused on is how these factors affect specific immigrant communities. Determining how citizenship testing policies directly influence refugees’ lives requires more than analyses of policies or telephone surveys of immigrants to the U.S., it requires a prolonged look into specific immigrant communities through qualitative research. In the following chapter I outline the present study, which attempts to do just that.

## CHAPTER 3

### MOTIVATIONS AND BARRIERS OF CITIZENSHIP

#### **Introduction**

There is little doubt that citizenship can have a major impact on immigrant families both in terms of assimilation into society and access to political and social enterprises (Sumption & Flan, 2012). Furthermore, the use of citizenship tests has increased throughout western democracies as a means to both filter-out unwanted immigrants and to ensure that those who enter new societies are prepared for life in those countries. This has led many researchers to question how citizenship tests are being created and used.

As was established in the previous chapter, the idea that immigrants seeking citizenship in a new nation must adopt the political and cultural values as well as the language of the receiving country is not new. As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> in the U.S., the so-called “Americanization” movement began to advocate that immigrants not only pursue legal citizenship, but also first and foremost assimilate linguistically and culturally (Dixon, 1916; Hartman, 1968) and adhere to American democratic values (Gavit, 1922). Though the U.S. is largely seen as a multi-cultural nation accepting of immigration, advocacy of assimilation, particularly linguistic assimilation, has not abated. The majority of states (31) have now declared English as the official language, most of these in the last twenty years.

Recent research on citizenship has largely focused on the language ideologies and policies of the receiving nations (e.g., Blackledge, 2002, 2009; Blommaert, 2001; Blommaert, Creve, & Willaert, 2006; Blommaert & Maryns, 2001; Reynolds & Orellana,

2009; Shohamy & Kanza, 2009) and language testing for citizenship (Cooke, 2009; Kunnan, 2009a, 2009b; Milani, 2008; Piller, 2001; Shohamy, & McNamara, 2009). The main findings of researchers on language ideologies is that they are often grounded in the myth that the receiving countries are monolingual and monocultural nations (Blackledge, 2002, 2009; Blommaert, 2008), that learning the majority or official language of the accepting society indicates the immigrants' cultural and political loyalty, and because of this, they are only accepted as true citizens if they actively engage in assimilation and language learning. Researchers in linguistics and sociology have questioned the ethics and validity of using language tests for citizenship, claiming that they are discriminatory, because natural born citizens do not have to prove they speak the language through testing (Kunnan, 2009a, 2009b). Other experts explain that no correlation exists between language proficiency and the potential civic engagement (Etzioni, 2007) or the employability of immigrants (Tollefson, 1986, 1989).

Nevertheless, the implementation of citizenship examinations, and particularly language testing is likely to continue as governments try to control immigration by setting standards for naturalization.

### **U.S. Naturalization Rates and Comparisons**

According to research polls, U.S. citizenship is highly valued by immigrants and 90 percent see citizenship as either "necessary or practical" or "a dream come true" (Farkas, Duffett & Johnson, 2003, p. 29). However, studies show that millions of those eligible for citizenship do not apply. As of 2010, nearly two-fifths of the U.S.' 40 million foreign-born immigrants held U.S. citizenship. Of the remaining non-citizens, an estimated 44 percent were undocumented, and therefore not eligible for citizenship, and a

further 18 percent were legal permanent residents (LPRs) but had not yet been in the country long enough to be eligible for naturalization. Only about two-thirds of immigrants eligible to have U.S. citizenship had done so in 2010; this figure is significantly higher than in the 1990s, but is still far behind comparable estimates of 80 percent in Australia and 89 percent in Canada (Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011; Picot and Hou, 2011; Sumption & Flamm, 2012).

In 1970, both Canada and the United States had similar naturalization rates of about two-thirds of all foreign-born immigrants, but by 2006, that percentage had shrunk to just 46% in the U.S. and grown to 79% in Canada<sup>16</sup>. Some of the decline in the U.S. citizenship rate can be attributed to the rise of the percentage of unauthorized immigrants. However, even after adjusting for this increase in immigrants not eligible for citizenship, there was still a significant divergence in the citizenship rates between the U.S. and Canada, especially between 1970 and the mid-1990s (Picot and Hou, 2011). In the U.S., only 50% of immigrants who had been in the country for ten years or more had naturalized compared to 67% in the United Kingdom, 81% in Australia<sup>17</sup> and 89% in Canada. Higher naturalization rates in these countries are attributed, at least in part, to the admission of fewer immigrants and more active efforts to promote citizenship, as well as to differences in immigrants' major countries of origin (Bloemraad, 2006; Picot and Hou, 2011).

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<sup>16</sup> Data from Canada refers to immigrants who are 25 years and older.

<sup>17</sup> See also Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). *Population Flows: Immigration Aspects 2009-2010 Edition*

[www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/popflows2009-10/](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/popflows2009-10/)

## **Barriers to Citizenship**

The new citizenship exam has a high passage rate (nearly 92% by the second attempt) and unlike some tests of the past, the new citizenship exam appears to be ideologically neutral in terms of its design. That is, there are no overt attempts to exclude specific immigrant groups. However, neutral in design does not equate neutral in impact. A more in depth look provides added complexities., in a 2003-2004 study by the USCIS of the old citizenship test found that pass rates significantly differed among various immigrant subgroups (Weintraub, 2011). The study found that passing rates were particularly low among the elderly with only 46% passing on the first attempt (the average first attempt passing rate on the old exam was 86%). Refugees and asylum seekers also showed lower passing rates on the old exam at about 74%, and immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean also showed lower levels of success. While no racial differences were found, there were immigrants from some countries that had lower passing rates. For example, applicants from the Dominican Republic had a passing rate of 69.9% and Vietnam 75%. (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2007)

There are also those who question the use of tests to prove immigrants are worthy of citizenship while natural born citizens need not. Studies show extreme ignorance on the part of many Americans on U.S. civics. For example, a recent survey (Romano, 2011) of U.S. citizens showed the following dismal statistics of civics knowledge: one third did not know when the Declaration of Independence was adopted, or who the U.S. enemies were during WWII<sup>18</sup>. The participants of this survey would have likely done much better

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<sup>18</sup> Sixty-three percent don't know how many Supreme Court Justices there are; 65% don't know what happened at the Constitutional Convention; 67% don't know the economic system of the U.S.; 70% don't know that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land; 73% don't know that we were fighting communism during the cold war etc., etc. For a full list see Romano, A. (March, 2011). How

had they studied the list of one-hundred civics question provided by the USCIS for prospective citizens, but it does raise questions to the accuracy of the USCIS' claim that the memorization of civics facts will somehow result in more active or participatory and that the material is meant to "prepare applicants for a life of engaged citizenship, not to pass a test" (Harnett, 2013; p. 1).

Furthermore, scholars such as Winke (2011) claim that the real issue is that the exam is not a well-designed standardized test. She posits that the exam does not clearly articulate a goal, the questions have not proven to be effective, and the cut-off pass/fail score is not justified. Winke tested the exam questions on both U.S. citizens and immigrants. Winke's premise was that, before immigrants study for the test, they should get the questions wrong that U.S. citizens would naturally get right. In other words, the exam should prove that an immigrant has the knowledge of an average U.S. citizen. Winke found that this was not the case. She argues that questions such as "who wrote the Federalist Papers?" should not be part of a well-designed test since most Americans would not know this. She found that only ten of the one-hundred test items worked well for the stated purpose of the test.

The following section covers research indicating that the primary barriers to naturalization include low English proficiency, lack of knowledge about the application process, time to study for the naturalization examination and the cost of the application process, which at \$680 is higher than most other economically developed countries.

### **Linguistic Barriers**

Linguistic barriers impede citizenship applicants throughout all stages of the



naturalization process, from the initial stages of understanding what the requirements for citizenship are and filling out the application forms to the final stages of going to the naturalization interview and taking the citizenship tests.

### **English language proficiency.**

Several studies show that deficient English language skills and length of education are the most common barrier to U.S. citizenship (Bonilla, 1991; Fix, Passel & Sucher, 2003; Irvine, 1991; Irvine, Weber & Kochman, 1991; Passel, 2007). One study found that sixty percent of the nearly eight million legal permanent residents who were eligible to naturalize but who had not done so, were limited English proficient (LEP) and 1.4 million had less than a ninth grade education (Fix, Passel & Sucher, 2003). Another study found that 55 percent of immigrants who would otherwise eligible to naturalize and about 67 percent of immigrants who would soon be eligible to naturalize has limited English proficiency (Passel, 2007). A study of Hispanic immigrants (Irvine, Weber & Kochman, 1991) found that while 56 percent of those surveyed had initiated the naturalization process (by taking English and civics classes and obtaining naturalization forms), only 34% had successfully completed it, and the primary reason for quitting the process was that they “lacked sufficient English to understand the forms” (p. 8). The Migration Policy Institute (2012) claims that not only do many individuals who have not applied for citizenship have low English proficiency (60 percent), but a large portion of them are also low income (41 percent) and/or have low levels of education (25 percent). Others have reported substantially lower passing rates (by at least 10%) for elderly applicants and refugees (Kunnan, 2009a; IFC International, 2011).

The only study to examine U.S. citizenship testing practices from an applied

linguistic perspective (Winn, 2005) found that 16 percent of the 67 participants observed failed the citizenship exam. All failures were on the basis of English proficiency.

According to Winn, this happened even though the examination was administered sympathetically and applicants were given additional opportunities to demonstrate their English ability. Winn claims that this is representative of the broader base of applicants, where the failure rates among applicants varied between 5 percent and 18 percent annually throughout the 1990s and where limited English proficiency was the cause of failure in approximately three quarters of the cases. Given that there were over a million applicants each year throughout those years, the English language requirement for citizenship is clearly a significant barrier to citizenship.

Bloemraad (2006) claims that many immigrants will never arrive at the point of taking the citizenship test, because they lack the confidence in their language skills to pass the exam, and their low level of English proficiency makes it difficult to navigate the complicated application process for naturalization. Non-citizens report much lower levels of English proficiency with four times as many not speaking English and twice as many not speaking English well when compared to naturalized citizens. According to a study by Passel (2005), an estimated 55 percent of legal permanent residents eligible for citizenship were Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 72 percent of Mexicans eligible for citizenship were LEP. The English language barrier is believed to be an important contributor to the significantly lower naturalization rates among Mexican legal immigrants.

### **Lack of knowledge/difficulty of the application process/documents**

A survey of immigrants about the naturalization process by Gonzalez-Baker, Placencia, Freeman and Orozco (2000) found that lack of knowledge about the application process also was a significant barrier to citizenship with 14 percent of respondents in this survey claiming that they had not applied for citizenship because they did not know how to go about it. Bittle and Roch (2009)<sup>19</sup> also found that there was a significant minority who found the application process difficult. In a survey they asked participants: “In your experience, how hard is it to get information and answers about immigration and naturalization issues from the government? Is it easy or hard?” In responses, 26 percent of immigrants claimed that it was “somewhat difficult” and 13 percent that it was “very difficult” (p. 16). This indicates that there are many immigrants who have difficulties accessing information on the naturalization process. Furthermore, both immigrants and natives alike have described the language of the N-400 (Application for Naturalization form) as “intimidating” and “scary” (Kochman, 1991, p. 48), and 30 percent of applicants had sought aid in completing application forms..Kochman suggests that it is likely many more needed similar assistance but were deterred by the fees of private legal assistance (Irvine, 1991).

Van Hook, Brown and Bean (2004) found significantly higher naturalization rates among the spouses of naturalized citizens. These rates were even higher than those of the spouses of U.S. born citizens, which suggests that having someone in the family with knowledge of the application process and procedures may increase naturalization rates by offering the expertise in meeting the administrative requirements. This may also be related to the lack of time many respondents (21 percent%) cite as a barrier to citizenship

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<sup>19</sup> The report was based on six focus groups and a national telephone survey of 1,138 foreign-born adults. Margin of error was 4%.

(Gonzalez-Baker et. al., 2000), because they often work odd hours, have multiple jobs, lack childcare services etc.

## **Costs**

Some stakeholders also see the increase in application fees as a deterrent to citizenship (Emanuel & Gutierrez, 2013; Migration Policy Institute, 2008). Since 1990, application fees have risen from \$60 to \$680 (including a mandatory \$85 “biometric fee” to cover fingerprinting) and in the last decade alone fees have nearly tripled. In 2007, in anticipation of a fee increase from \$330 to \$595, a surge of 1.4 million immigrants applied for citizenship compared to just 525,000 in 2008. This is seen as evidence that the costs associated with citizenship at least to some degree influence naturalization levels (Emanuel & Gutierrez, 2013). According to the Migration Policy Institute (2008), “The impact of the fee increase cannot be overstated since applicants faced an 80 percent base fee increase from \$330 to \$595.” Emanuel and Gutierrez (2013) claim that at the current cost of \$680, “an employee earning the federal minimum wage would have to work for more than two months to pay for an application for himself or herself, a spouse and two children” (p. 2). Furthermore, the application fees are lost if applicants are denied citizenship. Immigrants with low education levels and limited English proficiency may not want to risk their family’s income on their ability to pass the citizenship examination<sup>20</sup>. In addition to the primary fees, immigrants must also often pay for English and citizenship to prepare for the citizenship test, for someone to assist in the preparation of documents and application and even for application photographs (Gelatt

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<sup>20</sup> Sumption and Flemm (2012) note that because of these substantial fee increases, immigrants with higher incomes are better able to afford it: Therefore, they represent a higher percentage of naturalized citizens.

and McHugh, 2007; Irvine, 1991). All these costs combined can be prohibitive to naturalization for those already struggling financially and, therefore, biased toward immigrants with better financial standings.

From the limited research addressed above, it is clear that at least the following factors present considerable challenges for those seeking U.S. citizenship: being elderly, having low English proficiency, lacking knowledge in how to navigate the process (perhaps due to little or no formal education/literacy?), and financial constraints. What has not been studied is the influence that the combination of two or more of these factors have on U.S. citizenship application and examination rates (for example, if someone is poor, elderly and LEP).

### **Motivation for Citizenship**

Motivations for acquiring citizenship have not been widely studied, but there have been a number of surveys that suggest political and social rights, especially the right to vote, are the most notable motivations for naturalization, along with the desire for a sense of belonging. However, citizenship is also thought to provide economic benefits, including access to job opportunities that are not open to permanent residents. There are numerous government jobs and licensed professions that require citizenship (the vast majority of immigrants holding public-sector jobs are U.S. citizens). Private employers also often discriminate against non-citizens or see citizenship as a sign that the immigrant has integrated into U.S. society<sup>21</sup>. (Bittle & Roch, 2009; Borjas, 2002; Sumption &

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<sup>21</sup> Employers are allowed to prefer a U.S. citizen over a permanent resident on the basis of citizenship status if the two individuals are equally qualified in every other respect; they are also allowed to discriminate against better-qualified, permanent residents who have been eligible for naturalization for at least six months but have not applied for it and in cases where the employer has three or fewer

Flamm, 2012)

### **Political and social rights (especially the right to vote)**

A recent study by Bittle and Rochkind (2009) on life for immigrants in the U.S. found that the top consideration for seeking citizenship was obtaining political and social rights. Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed identified the right to vote and “better legal rights and protections” as primary motivations for naturalization (p. 24). A previous study by Farkus, Duffett and Johnson (2003) also found that the right to vote topped the list of motivations for citizenship with 76 percent of those surveyed claiming that it major reason to become a citizen.

### **Economic Benefits**

The economic benefits of naturalization cannot be ignored: Naturalized citizens fare better financially and in the labor market than non-citizens. Some of this can be explained by the fact that naturalized citizens have more of the characteristics associated with economic success such as higher levels of education and English ability, as well as having spent more years in the labor market: However, Bittle and Rochkind (2009) claim in a report<sup>22</sup> that financial concerns have increased over the last several years and now play a greater role in immigrants’ attitudes. While almost all immigrants see the U.S. as an improvement over their birth countries, 6 in 10 (63%) see the economy as the most important problem in the U.S. and many more cite finding a job and securing government assistance as major motivations for pursuing citizenship when compared to previous surveys of immigrants<sup>23</sup>.

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employees. See 8 U.S.C. §1324b, [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1324b](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1324b).

<sup>22</sup> The report was based on six focus groups and a national telephone survey of 1,138 foreign-born adults. Margin of error was 4%.

<sup>23</sup> See Farkas, S., Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2003). Now that I’m here: What immigrants have to say about life in the U.S. today.

The impact of recent welfare reform has also affected immigrants' motivation to gain citizenship (Borjas, 2002; Passel & Fix, 2002). Passel and Fix (2002) claim that the welfare reform of 1996, titled the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was not only an overhaul of the U.S. welfare system, it redefined the requirements for immigrants to access public benefits. In fact, an entire title (Title IV) of the act was directed at immigrant provisions and related domains such as immigrant integration and immigration policy. Because of the reduction of public benefits, half of immigrant families were poor in 1999 and poor legal immigrants were far more likely to be uninsured, and their children food insecure, than their citizen counterparts (Capps 2001)<sup>24</sup>.

There were two major provisions in PRWORA: 1) The majority of un-naturalized immigrants who arrived in the U.S. before August 22, 1996 were to be dropped from the Social Security and food stamp rolls within a year,<sup>25</sup> and 2) Immigrants who entered the U.S. after August 22, 1996 would be prohibited from receiving most types of public assistance. The ban would be lifted when immigrants become U.S. citizens. (Borjas, 2002). According to Borjas:

It seems that immigrants quickly learned that the naturalization certificate held the key to many types of public assistance denied to non-citizens. The national origin groups most likely to receive public assistance in the pre-PRWORA period experienced the largest increases in naturalization rates after 1996. This response

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<sup>24</sup> This is based on Capps (2001) analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

<sup>25</sup> Though this provision of the legislation was never fully enforced.

by immigrants served to further neutralize the potential impact of PRWORA on immigrant welfare use. (p. 7)

Borjas posits that a major flaw with PRWORA is its explicit link to attaining citizenship prior to gaining access to welfare benefits. He argues that it does not constitute good social policy, because many immigrants will become citizens simply to gain access to welfare benefits rather than the desire to participate in the U.S. political system. Though Borjas may be correct in pointing out this flaw with PRWORA, research shows that immigrants do not primarily seek citizenship for welfare benefits (Bittle and Rochkind, 2012; Farkus, Duffet and Johnson, 2003; Fix, Passel and Sucher 2003; Sumption and Flamm 2012)

### **Sense of Belonging**

Scholarly work on citizenship has focused very little on empirical research as far as how it relates to giving immigrants a sense of belonging. While there have been some significant theoretical contributions to citizenship research, there is little understanding as to how people view their own citizenship and place in a given community (Jones and Gaventa, 2002; Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox, 2003). Scholars argue that citizenship is much more than just rights and responsibilities. It is about the feelings and experiences one has of belonging and recognition. Yuval-Davis (2004, p. 215), referring to the communitarian understanding of citizenship as a way of belonging to a community, suggests that:

belonging is not just about membership, rights, and duties . . . Nor can it be



reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need of people.

This may be particularly true for refugee immigrants who have not had a chance to belong to any place because they have lived and grown up in camps on the borders and boundaries of other societies.

### **Summary**

The previous section pointed to some of the most significant motivations and barriers to citizenship. However, the decision to naturalize and prepare for the citizenship examination should not just be seen as an individual's cost versus benefit analysis, but rather a decision that is strongly influenced and shaped by communities and institutions (Bloemraad, 2006). The extent to which immigrants' friends, relatives and local community promote and support citizenship acquisition is thought to be a significant motivation to naturalize (Sumption & Flamm, 2012) and increases the likelihood that legal residents naturalize (Bloemraad, 2006).

Although studies show some common threads among immigrants, they also indicate that some groups have unique perspectives on citizenship. For example, Bittle and Rochkind (2009) found that Mexican immigrants were more likely to express happiness with their life in the U.S., yet also significantly more likely to perceive discrimination against immigrants. They were also more likely to be low-income and faced more language barriers. Muslims, on the other hand, were less likely to cite discrimination as a problem and far more likely to say the U.S. will be their permanent

home. These variations make it important to examine the motivations and barriers to citizenship among specific immigrant communities, in order to get a better understanding of its needs.

The following Chapter reports on the methodology of the present study. This research was gathered from many personal interviews with South Sudanese seeking citizenship as well as with community leaders and teachers in a citizenship preparation program.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Overview**

This chapter will outline the methodological, ontological and epistemological approaches that inform this study. Given the holistic and emic nature of interpretive qualitative (naturalistic) research, it is important to take into account all relevant micro and macro contextual influences that stand in a systematic relationship to the behavior and events one is attempting to explain (Davis, 1995). Johnson (1992) claims that “the purpose [of these studies] is to understand the complexity and dynamic nature of the particular entity, and to discover systematic connections among experiences, behaviors and relevant features of the context” (p. 84). Therefore, my research demanded going beyond the classroom and the students to include the South Sudanese community, USCIS officers and larger historical and sociopolitical factors that influence the motivations and challenges of acquiring U.S. citizenship. This contextualization was partially accomplished through fieldwork and partially through the examination of relevant documents.

Another methodological issue that is relevant to designing and conducting interpretive qualitative research is that they are cyclical. Many other forms of research follow a linear path in which data is first collected, next analyzed and finally reported. However, interpretive studies, such as the one I conducted, take on a cyclical process involving collecting data, analyzing the data and forming hypotheses, then conducting more focused data collection to test those hypotheses. (Davis, 1995) As is common in this process of data collection and analysis, my study changed directions a few times in terms

of the questions being asked and the theoretical perspectives I brought to this study. In this sense, the study was emergent rather than preordained. This is because meaning was determined to such a great extent by the context. As Davis (1995) explains:

A study begins as a broad conceptualization of the theoretical issues that are germane to the questions being asked. As the inquiry proceeds, it becomes increasingly focused; salient elements begin to emerge, insights grow, external theories appropriate to interpretations are determined, and the study's internal theory begins to be grounded in the data obtained. (p. 445)

Another important factor I considered in my research was the establishment of research credibility. As with many qualitative researchers (Duff, 2012), I recognized it was impossible to carry out research that was free from objectivity or personal values, because of the different ways individuals perceive, interpret and remember an event or behavior. However, steps were taken to enhance the credibility of my research. One way I enhanced the reliability of my study was by relying on multiple sources of data through prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Davis, 1995). I accomplished this by spending one day at the Lost Boys Center or at other community events every week for a period of eighteen months. I had been involved with the South Sudanese community for over three years, so I had already developed a relationship of trust with many of the participants and learned much about their culture. This helped with the reliability of participant interviews.

An essential procedure I used to ensure credibility was triangulation.

Triangulation was accomplished by relying on multiple sources of data and various methods of research (Friedman, 2012). In this study, I combined observations with interviews from multiple sources along with the collection of relevant documents.

Regardless of the criteria being used for research, Friedman warns that establishing the quality of research is not necessarily accomplished by simply relying on multiple sources of data or methods to validate the data. She claims that, “Qualitative researchers must always be careful not to read more into the data than the data can support; claims that are not firmly grounded are speculation, not analysis (p. 194).” This is a caution I kept in mind throughout data analysis.

IRB approval was granted for this study that included several sets of open-ended questions for USCIS officers, instructors, students (before and after test questions) and community organizers. In addition to the open-ended questions is a language background questionnaire, which had to be adapted as to not identify participants in the study (See Appendices I-IV). The questionnaire was used to provide information on the linguistic and educational levels of participants in this study.

### **Research Location**

The data for this study was collected over a period of 18 months in 2011–2013 at a South Sudanese community center in the greater Phoenix area. The citizenship school at the center operated on an open-enrollment basis. Regular attendance was strongly encouraged and recorded, but could not be administratively enforced. The students attending these classes faced the challenges of inconsistent low-income employment, often involving unconventional schedules and working hours, and were thus unable to attend classes every week. Regardless of these hurdles, most students were dedicated to

their preparation for citizenship and attended the classes as regularly as they could, many for several consecutive terms and a few attending classes for more than two years.

To meet the demands of the complex enrollment and attendance circumstances, the program offered a flexible curriculum with repetition of topics; however, in each term the students practiced answering questions from the N-400 naturalization application form, studied for the civics test, and worked on the literacy skills that would be tested during the naturalization interview. There was no English proficiency requirement as a prerequisite for enrollment and no students were rejected based on their low English proficiency; however, teachers often suggested that LEP students attend additional ESL classes.

The classes at the center were taught by three (varying) instructors and were held twice during the week (Wednesdays and Thursdays) and twice on the weekend (Saturdays and Sundays). Most students attended only weekends or weekdays, depending on their work schedules, but several students attended all classes. In addition to the instructors, the participants included 12 South-Sudanese students of varying linguistic and educational backgrounds, two center managers, a pastor and a deacon from a Dinka church and one USCIS officer.

## **Participants**

### *USCIS Officer*

I was able to briefly interview a manager at the USCIS center in Phoenix, Arizona. No recording device are allowed within the building, so I was only able to jot down a few answers and she did not allow me to question her for long.

### *Teacher Participants*

Four teachers participated in this study. Three were seeking advanced degrees in ESL and one an advanced degree in social work. Only one had extensive teaching experience.

#### *Community Leader Participants*

The two community leaders that participated in this study were from the original group of Bost Boys given asylum in the U.S. One was Dinka and the other Nuer, but both were from the same state in South Sudan. Their stories of survival had been featured in many articles and interviews, so in many ways they were not only community leaders, but also the representatives of the South Sudanese community. Because the South Sudanese community of the greater Phoenix area is not only among the most populous, but also the most organized, they often represented it on a national level.

#### *Church Leaders*

I briefly interviewed the pastor and deacon of a Dinka church in Phoenix, Arizona. Mostly, we talked about the logistics of setting up citizenship classes after the service on Sundays. They did not want to be audio-recorded and thus no formal transcripts were made. I was, however allowed to observe several services and after church activities that helped me better understand the community and their culture. Most of the student participants were members of this church.

#### *Student Participants*

All the student participants immigrated to the U.S. as adults. All had resided in the U.S. for at least five years (a requirement for U.S. citizenship) and most for longer.

**Languages.** Three native languages were spoken among the participants, with 12 participants being native speakers of Dinka and one a speaker of Nuer. Dinka and Nuer are closely related Western Nilotic languages. There was also one speaker of Fur, the

Nilo-Saharan language spoken by the people of Darfur. In addition to their native tongue, all participants also had at least some knowledge of an Arabic pidgin known as Juba Arabic, a lingua franca of South Sudan. Although the particularities of enrollment and attendance made the use of a standardized English test impracticable as a measure of language proficiency, long-term observation revealed a wide range of linguistic abilities among the learners, from the need to rely on more proficient classmates in conducting even basic personal interactions in English to a high level of oral fluency.

**Literacy.** Of the 12 student participants only two had extensive schooling in literacy prior to their arrival in the U.S.. The native of Darfur had learned to read and write Arabic in a Koran school and the young Dinka woman born in Ethiopia attended a boarding school in Kenya where she learned basic reading and writing in Swahili and English. The other 10 participants had no, or very limited, previous education in reading or writing in any language prior to attending ESL classes in the U.S..

**Ages.** The majority of the students attending citizenship classes at the Lost Boys Center were elderly. Only two of the student participants in this study were under fifty: one was 48 and the other 23. They were also mostly female. Only one male student participated in this study and he was only one of two male students who attended citizenship classes at the center during the span of this research.

### **Data Collection**

All students, including those joining the classes after the beginning of the term, received a thorough explanation of the goals and structure of the study and were invited to participate in the study if they wished to do so. It was explained that there were no consequences for not participating in the study and that they could quit the study at



anytime. They were also informed that they did not have to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with, or they simply did not want to answer.

I had been teaching a citizenship class for a few years at the center, and this allowed me to establish a relationship with several of the managers and teachers and a strong rapport with many students. I conducted semi-structured ethnographic interviews with class participants, asking them about their backgrounds, their motivations for applying for citizenship and, their perceptions of the benefits of U.S. citizenship, their views on what was the most difficult part of the naturalization examination, etc. Interviews were also conducted with the teachers, which allowed me to gain insights into the specifics of teaching citizenship classes to ESL learners with low literacy and low English proficiency and into the teachers' perceived challenges that students faced.

Interviews were first conducted individually with all participants. I first interviewed the USCIS officer, then each teacher, then both the center managers (separately), and then each student. In the second round of interviews I also included interviews of two or three students combined to provide more discussion. This was only done with the student participants, though. Interviews with the other participants remained individual. (See Appendix F)

Though some studies have shown that refugees are often reluctant to answer questions from, or are distrustful of, outsiders asking them repeated questions (e.g. Camino and Krulfeld, 1994), many of the participants in this study seemed more than forthcoming in their interviews. Several of them were honest to the point where information had to be excluded from the study to protect the identities and activities of these individuals. This may speak to me having a good relationship with members of the

South Sudanese community, but more likely demonstrates the good-naturedness and openness of the South Sudanese refugee community.

Prior to introducing the participants in this study, I will revisit the research questions of concern to this study

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the motivations for citizenship of the South Sudanese diaspora of the greater Phoenix area?
- 2) What are the challenges faced by the South Sudanese diaspora of the greater Phoenix area on the citizenship examination?

Though the research for this study was ongoing and cyclical, based on suggestions by my committee, after the initial round of interviews some questions were added or adjusted to give another dimension to the study. Some participants were included in both rounds, and others only participated in either the first or second rounds. The following lists participants by their pseudonyms. For brief backgrounds on these participants see the following chapter.

#### **ROUND ONE**

##### **Participants (13)**

Teachers (4): Asiana, Miriam, Sandra, Slavania

Students (7): Achok, Alek, Adom, Bethany, Mohamed, Sarah, Elizabeth

Community Organizers (2): Johnny, Carl

USCIS Officer (1): Manager

## ROUND TWO

### **Participants (8)**

Students (5): Achok (3rd interview), Alek,(3rd interview), Mary, Ayen, Adut

Pastor (1): Deng

Deacon (1): Bol

Community Organizer (1): Johnny (2nd interview)

This chapter covered the methodology and research questions of this study as well as an introduction to the location and general profiles of the participants interviewed. The following chapter thus discusses the motivations and barriers for seeking citizenship from the participants interviewed. Prior to introducing the motivations of the South Sudanese refugees in this study for seeking U.S. citizenship it is important to understand the motivation and challenges immigrants have for naturalization that have been addressed in previous studies. These motivations and challenges will be discussed in the next chapter and the will lead to the finding from the present research.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

The first section of this section offers brief backgrounds for the participants in this study and some explanation of their current situations. The following section then reveals the major themes that are apparent in the experiences of students, teachers and community leaders associated with the Lost Boys Center in Phoenix, Arizona. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

#### **Participant Backgrounds**

##### **Student Backgrounds**

All of the represented student participants are active members of the Lost Boys Center in Phoenix, Arizona. The overwhelming demographics for this group of citizenship students were: Female, elderly and Dinka. Only two participants were under the age of fifty, only one was male and only one was not from the Dinka tribe (the male participant). The Dinka are the largest tribe of South Sudan and make up a large majority of South Sudanese community in the greater Phoenix area.

***Achok.*** Achok is a 65-year-old Dinka woman who has lived in the U.S. for 7 years. She lost two sons and her husband in the civil war. She worked as a police officer in the capital of Sudan, Khartoum (prior to South Sudanese independence), so speaks Arabic. She is LEP and has only begun to read or write (in any language) since attending ESL classes in the U.S. She currently earns her living by doing janitorial work for a small non-profit organization and lives with her son, who is unemployed. She also has family in Australia and Canada. After two and a half years of attending citizenship classes, she

passed the exam on her first attempt.

***Alek.*** Alek is 57-year-old woman and a pillar of the Dinka community in Phoenix. She lost her husband and a son during the civil war. In a community where orphans are the norm, she is seen as a mother figure. She lives with a son here in Phoenix, but has daughters and grandchildren in Australia and South Sudan. She has lived in the U.S. for seven years speaks English well, but has not learned to write and becomes stressed during writing activities. She had worked as a baker's assistant for a small business, but was let go during the economic downturn because there was not enough business. She currently works in housekeeping for a large hotel. She passed the citizenship examination during the time this research was carried out.

***Adom.*** At 70, Adom is the oldest of the students interviewed. She lost her husband during the war and while this study was being conducted, one of her sons in a conflict in South Sudan. She is unemployed, but does some cleaning for the Lost Boys Center. She speaks Dinka and a little pidgin Arabic, but has had considerable difficulties learning English. In the six years she has attended ESL classes, she has only managed to learn a handful of English words and remains largely illiterate. She lives with one of her sons in Phoenix and has children in Australia. Adom was the first of the students to receive citizenship, but this was due to a waiver of the citizenship examination, because a doctor written a letter indicating she had a severe learning disorder.

***Bethany.*** Bethany is 48-years-old and moved to the U.S. with her two daughters 13 years ago when her husband was killed in a conflict. She speaks English very well and can also read and write. She had worked as an in-house caretaker for elderly patients, but due to an injury is currently unemployed. She stopped attending citizenship classes after a

several weeks. She may or may not have taken the citizenship examination.

***Sarah.*** At just 23, Sarah is the youngest of all the students and is seen a daughter to the elder Dinka women. She moved to the U.S. just three years ago to live with her husband, but already speaks and reads English well and is quickly learning to write. She was born in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, and then moved to a camp in Kenya. She speaks Dinka, Swahili and Arabic as well as some Nuer (another major language of South Sudan). She is a very bright woman who currently works at Wal-Mart, but calls the work there “mindless.” She attends community college ESL classes and is currently in the process of getting her General Educational Development certificate. She wants to become a nurse where she can use her mind more. She easily passed the citizenship examination after a few weeks of citizenship classes.

***Abel.*** Abel is 54-years-old and the only male student among the participants and is a native of Darfur. He speaks Darfurian and can also read and write Arabic, which he learned at a Koran school. He has lived in the U.S. for five years, but his wife and two daughters remain in Darfur. He has been regularly attending ESL classes at a community college as well as attending all the available citizenship classes at the Lost Boys Center, but has struggled with the citizenship test. Though he had done well on practice tests at the center, he failed the U.S. citizenship examination twice and ended up having to pay the fees again. On his third attempt he passed the exam and became a U.S. citizen, enabling him to expedite refugee status for his wife and daughters in Darfur.

***Mary.*** Mary is a 45-year-old Dinka woman who spent eight years in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya prior to her arrival in Phoenix nine years ago. She is considered one of the “lost girls,” one of the few women who arrived with the first group

of South Sudanese refugees. She attends community college and works in housekeeping at a large hotel. She speaks English well, but has difficulty reading and “never learned writing.” She did not pass the citizenship examination during the time frame of this study.

***Ayen.*** Ayen is a 67-year-old Dinka woman who works as a graveyard-shift janitor at the airport. She is also a widow with a son who died in the Sudanese conflict. She has children in Canada and Australia. She has lived in the U.S. for 8 years and has taken many ESL classes; however, she speaks very little English and cannot read or write. She attended citizenship classes after her night shifts at the airport and would often fall asleep during class, because she was so tired. She passed the citizenship examination on her second attempt during the time frame of this study.

***Adut.*** Adut is a 55-year-old Dinka woman who spent many years in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Egypt, before receiving asylum in the U.S. She has been living in the U.S. for 8 years. She can communicate in basic English but cannot read or write it. She works in housekeeping.

### **Community Leaders**

***Johnny.*** Johnny is one of the original orphaned Lost Boys. He is Nuer and speaks the Nuer language as well as Juba Arabic. He is also fluent in English and had a B.A. and M.A. in social work from a U.S. university. He has been a South Sudanese community leader for over ten years.

***Carl.*** Carl is also one of the original orphaned Lost Boys. He is Dinka and speaks the Dinka language as well as Juba Arabic and English. He also attended university in the U.S. receiving a B.A. and an M.A. He has worked as a director at the Lost Boys center

for over ten years.

### **Church Leaders**

**Deng.** Deng is the 56-year-old the pastor at the Episcopal Dinka church in Phoenix, Arizona. He had five brothers and four died during the civil war and the other of natural causes. He had been an evangelist in Sudan before coming to the U.S. as a refugee in 2000. He attended college in Denver and received his master's degree in religious studies.

**Bol.** Bol is the deacon at the Episcopal Dinka church in Phoenix. He is Dinka and was also among the first group of Lost Boys to come to the U.S.. He is a friend of Johnny and Carl.

### **USCIS Officer**

**Manager.** I was able to briefly speak with the manager of USCIS field office in Phoenix, Arizona.

### **Applicants' motivations for citizenship**

The primary motivations of the student participants in this study for seeking citizenship were fairly consistent with all claiming that the right to vote was either the primary reason or a very important reason to acquire U.S. citizenship. Freedom/ease of travel was also seen as very important for this group of South Sudanese refugees, primarily for the purpose of family reunification/visitation.

Interestingly, teachers in this study were quick to cite economic concerns as the primary motivations for their students seeking citizenship, yet the students themselves did not seem to see these as top priorities for obtaining citizenship. In fact only one student



participant cited social security benefits as a motivation for citizenship, and this was only in the third interview.

## **Teachers**

When teachers in this study were asked the question:

In your experience, what are the primary reasons permanent residents apply for citizenship?

They all cited reasons that were related to relieving the economic hardships faced by the South Sudanese immigrant community by providing them access to health benefits, social security and other financial resources. This was seen as particularly true for the elderly community members who made up the majority of citizenship classes attendees.

For example, Asiana stated:

Okay, well, the number one reason I would say is they would have more access to benefits and resources that American citizens have. You know, especially in the refugee population that we were working with, poverty was really prevalent, especially among the older refugees, you know. Maybe not with people like Johnny and the younger group, but Abel, Achok, Bol, Ayen all those older guys are at a point where they do kind of have to prioritize work, because their resources, their funding that they get is very minimal and runs out very soon. So, work becomes the number one

priority. And, you know, they are not eligible, not being citizens, to have any type of government assistance...I mean they do have some, and I don't really know all the fine details of what exactly they were getting, but at the end of the day they were living very poorly. So, I know that was my number-one reason I did [unintelligible].

Miriam also claimed that economic security was the primary reason her students sought U.S. citizenship along with not having to renew their Permanent Resident cards so often. Slavania offered the following explanation:

There are some restrictions for non-citizens in terms of, um...there are some programs, I think like food coupons and things like that, but...they are limited, yeah. So, I would say those are the main reasons.

## **Students**

While teachers put a great deal of emphasis on the economic benefits of U.S. citizenship, only one student, Bethany, mentioned this as a motivating factor. Bethany had recently suffered an injury to her leg leaving her unemployed and without medical and social benefits. This made receiving those benefits through naturalization a greater priority to her than to the other applicants (who did not mention them at all), yet even for her they were not the only motivation for acquiring citizenship, as can be seen in this interview:

I: Your Green Card expires? So, instead of trying to renew it you are applying for citizenship?

E: No, I become citizen for benefits, for vote, for everything.

I: Yeah there are a lot of benefits

E: I was comfortable for Green Card, but you know if I think my future. That's why.

I: It's been fine up till now with your Green Card?

E: Yeah, I don't have any problem. Just I work if I have a problem for my leg, I don't have any benefits.

This suggests that, though citizenship is often necessary for immigrants to fully access the social benefit programs that offer them financial relief in case of health problems, even in cases such as Bethany's, who was dealing with medical and financial concerns due to an injury at the time, it not the only nor the principal reason for seeking citizenship. Bethany saw citizenship as having a whole range of benefits and rights that would help her in the future, including voting.

### **Community Leaders**

Community organizers also saw access to economic social welfare programs as a primary reason South Sudanese refugees sought U.S. citizenship; however, they drew a clear distinction between the elderly refugees being taught at the center and the younger South Sudanese who they considered to be more politically motivated. Johnny explained that there were very different motivations between the younger and older South Sudanese community members for seeking citizenship:

For the group that you are working with, the people that you help out, you know, they need it more than the young people, because many of them can have a disability and sometimes they can be denied [benefits] if they are not citizens. If you came after seventeen they cannot give it, so it's happening to some and that's what motivates them to make sure they get their citizenship, so they can get them. And that's a very different motivation than the younger generation.

When Johnny was asked to clarify if he meant that the younger generation wanted citizenship because they wanted to participate as politically active Americans, while the older generation wanted some type of economic security, he responded:

Security! That's it! And that's where the money comes to pay rent. Because the government gives them like seven hundred dollars, or whatever it is, for Social Security or disability or whatever it is. And they qualify for Medicaid, you know Medicare.

Another community leader, Carl, reiterated the generational differences in the motivations for gaining citizenship. In Carl's view:

It depends on the classes, because the younger generation, they want to be a part of the American system very quickly. The older population, they are fearing that if they don't get citizenship, when the [?] expire, they will not be able to get

benefits that the citizens get, like social security and all that...The ones that you are teaching here are mostly aiming for that.

While both Johnny and Carl saw clear political motivations for seeking citizenship, they saw this as limited to the younger generation (their generation) and not as the primary motivation for the students being taught at the center who were mostly elderly. Never the less they make it quite clear how important the right to vote is to the South Sudanese community. Johnny even mentions how some members of the community get discouraged after failing the citizenship exam and being unable to vote. He states:

Yes, that's right, voting. Yeah, exactly, I mean the president's voting is coming up. The election is coming up. And people can hear your voice. So, there are a lot of things. I could go on and on about things that are beneficial from getting citizenship. Even though some people, you know, they just get discouraged and are like "No, fuck it," you know? Because this is a democracy and that is how you practice democracy in this country.

Carl also cited the importance of voting, and goes further into the importance of political activity to the South Sudanese saying:

Another driving factor is, you know, there are active people in politics in America and they want to be a part of it. In that part of the world South Sudanese, or

Sudanese as a whole, they like politics, they talk about politics, and they want to be a part of politics, so most of the people who are into that want to get citizenship, so when they talk about politics they can also vote. So, that's another factor.

All the elderly applicants also cited the desire to participate in society by voting as the primary goal for citizenship, yet foremost it was seen as a motivator for younger applicants by the center managers and was only mentioned as motivation of citizenship by one teacher who was referring to what one of the managers had told her. She explained:

Well, I actually asked one of the managers of the center there and he said that, well some of them do it because they want to vote.

## **Students**

### **Voting**

When students were asked what the primary reason they were seeking citizenship was they all first cited voting as a reason, though many did not elaborate further. For example Sarah answered, "To vote, yeah, like now I cannot vote, because I am not a U.S. citizen." When she was asked if that was an important factor in deciding to seek citizenship she responded, "Very important."

Achok also quickly responded to the question saying, "I want the citizen in

America. I wanna vote” and Elena, “Why? I need citizen because of vote.” Alek also cited voting as the primary motivation for obtaining U.S. citizenship, but added that freedom of travel was also important. She responded, “I want to be a U.S. citizen so that I can vote, so that I can be free to travel and go back to Africa. So that I can be a member of U.S. citizen too.” She was not alone. Second to voting, freedom to travel was viewed as the most important benefit for being a U.S. citizen to the South Sudanese citizenship students interviewed. This was another interesting difference between the responses from teachers and students. Not a single teacher mentioned ease of travel as a motivating factor for students seeking citizenship, and yet all the South Sudanese in this study cited it as one of the greatest motivating factors for seeking citizenship.

### **Ease of travel/To visit family**

Both of the center managers, Johnny and Carl, saw ease of travel to visit family in Africa and other refugee receiving nations as a primary benefit of citizenship. For them, freedom to travel without restrictions was seen as a major freedom obtained through naturalization. Johnny stated that:

They can travel whenever they want to, when they have money. So, with a passport they can go back and forth to the Sudan or the rest of the world for business or just for vacation. Now, just not having it makes them sit here in one place. And the world is bigger than that. You can travel, but you have to get a passport.

Carl also saw unrestricted travel as a primary motivation, though he saw it as more important for younger South Sudanese:

The younger generation it's all the freedoms that come with being American. You can leave when you want to go to Sudan without asking anybody, while if you are not a citizen you have to apply for travel documents and it takes three months before it comes. And also it expires and you have to re-apply, and you pay money for it.

He used his own personal experience of why he sought U.S. citizenship to explain his response:

Well, I think number one for the young population—it depends on the individual—but really the consensus of the whole community is that flexibility of travel. If you want to go to Sudan you just get your money and you jump on the plane That's number one and that's the driving factor for a lot of people becoming citizens. Like myself, when I applied for citizenship I was here for four years and six months and still I was waiting for [unintelligible]. But, I put in my application because I was preparing to leave in December of that year, which was December of 2006, to go back to South Sudan, so that was my driving force. I could have done it with travel documents, but would not give me the flexibility. So, that's one driving factor.



Students seemed to support Carl and Johnny's claim that unrestricted travel rights were an important consideration for South Sudanese seeking citizenship. Sarah, who was interviewed three times, mentioned ease of travel to visit family in every interview. In the first interview she said, "It would make my thing easy to travel. Especially travel." She repeated the same motivation in her second interview saying, "Because I want to be a citizen of the U.S.. It would make my thing easy to travel, especially to travel." And then adding, "Going-back-travel: that's the most." In the final interview with Sarah she explains why travel is so important to her:

S: My father is in Sudan. He is working on the military, my dad.

I: Oh, is he a Soldier?

S: Mm, hum, yeah

I: And you never met him?

S: No. He was living with us when we were in Kuwabi in Kenya. He was living with us. Then he moved to Sudan for the job only.

I: So you saw him when you were in the Sudan?

S: No. I used to know him because he was with us for the whole years. He just went to Sudan, I think, about three years ago. Yeah, for the job. And my mom and all my sisters and brothers in Kenya, Nairobi.

I: Have you visited them?

S: Yeah, when I get citizenship. I have to work on it.

I: That's a good reason to get citizenship?. For travelling? To see your family?

S: Yeah. It's too expensive though.

When Sarah was asked if her family could visit her in the U.S. she dismissed this possibility saying, “They can’t. Un-uh, it’s not easy.” When it was suggested that it would be easier to bring family over when she became a citizen, she asked with urgency, “How? Do I need put papers in?” She was told that it might take awhile and she responded, “I know” with some sadness.

Sarah was asked about how her friend (and mother figure), Alek, felt about recently getting her citizenship the following conversation took place:

I: so you know Alek, right? How does she feel about getting her citizenship?

S: Very good, you know she’s going to Africa very soon.

I: Is that why she wanted her citizenship?

S: Yeah that’s why she wanted her citizenship, so that she could go be with her kid.

I: oh, she has a son there?

S: Yeah

I: How many kids does she have there?

S: I don’t know. She has her brothers and sisters. So, she will be leaving I think in some months.

I: Really?

S: Before December.

I: So she’s very excited that she has her citizenship?

S: She’s very excited, yeah.

I: Has it been many years since she saw her family?

S: Yeah, she has been here for a long time. I don't know how many years.

I: Yeah, like 6 or 7?

S: No, like since '99.

I: '99? Wow!

S: Yeah, '99.

I: So like 13 or 14 years?

S: Yeah

I: So she hasn't seen her son since then?

S: No.

Here, again, the priority of gaining U.S. citizenship for the purpose of visiting family members is clearly established. When Sarah was asked, "When you get your citizenship do you think you will visit your family?" she responded happily "Yeah, definitely (laughs). Definitely" and went on to talk about her family:

S: I am second to the oldest.

I: Second to the oldest? So you have an older brother or sister?

S: I have an older brother and a little one who's like ten years old.

I: A little one who's a sister?

S: No a little boy, my sisters are like 11 and 13.

I: And your older brother?

He's like 24, 26, no 25, because he was like born in 1986.

I: He's like two years older than you?

S: Three years older.

I: And you have a ten-year-old brother?

S: Yeah

The idea of family reunification was a constant throughout the interviews, some simply expressed the desire to visit family abroad and others a desire to try and bring family members, many of whom still reside in refugee camps, to the U.S. For example, Alek simply stated that she wanted to get U.S. Citizenship, "Because I need to bring my family here," while, Johnny, expressed the following:

J: Exactly, and also some of them bring their loved-ones back from back home, from refugee camps.

I: By becoming citizens, because they can request other people to come?

J: Yes. Yeah. Because they say, "look at him, he is working, let him bring his family-members, and they've been sitting in a camp over there." They are like, "oh, they're good citizens," because they've become an example. And we become involved around the world, because it makes you to be like you are a part of society.

Others participants also desired to bring family to the U.S. but expressed doubts about the reality of doing so, at least in the short term, as is evident in the following interview with Sarah:

I: And do you think you will try to bring your family here?

S: It's not easy

I: But if you are a citizen you can make a request

S: I know, but I don't know how my husband filled them out. You know when you are doing the form there is place that asks if you want bring any relative here and if you fill it out they will call that person and bring them in for an interview or something. But I don't know how he filled it out.

I: Yeah, but you can do that later.

S: Yes, you can do it later, but it takes time. It's not like how you do it on the paperwork.

I: But is that something you will think about?

S: Yeah, maybe...

In addition to the ease of travel and the possibility family reunification thought to come with citizenship, some also felt citizenship made them more of a member of society or more "American." For example, Sarah explained:

S: I want to be a U.S. citizen so that I can vote, so that I can be free to travel and go back to Africa. So that I can be a member of U.S. citizen too.

I: so you can be a member of society?

S: Yeah. Society too.

I: Is that important to you?

S: Yeah, very important.

I: are you excited to be a citizen?

S: Yeah, very much

### **For a sense of belonging/home**

Sarah's excitement about the possibility of becoming a U.S. Citizen also reflects what one of the teachers and the center managers claimed: that citizenship offered South Sudanese refugees more than just benefits or rights, it gave them a sense of belonging and being at home, and for some, pride in nationality. For example, Sandra, one of the teachers interviewed, explained that, "With the Sudanese, U.S. citizenship is something to be proud of."

Johnny pointed out that the South Sudanese often had long journeys, spending years in refugee camps in several countries before arriving in the U.S., so finally being naturalized was to finally have a home and a sense of pride in belonging somewhere and being a part of something. He said:

To finally have a home, exactly. You can say, you know, "I am finally a U.S. citizen." And it's so proud. And, more than anything, I tell our folks that life, you know, you take it for granted for whatever we went through, whatever, but you can't stop this from being your current home. You might have to go to Sudan, but at the end of the day, *this* is your home. And at the end of the day...because we went through Ethiopia, Kenya, these other countries and we would feel we were not welcomed, because we were there illegally. We had no papers and we couldn't leave the camps. If we went anywhere else we would pay the price. We

would get thrown into jail. Many people got that. Because if you get discovered and they know you are here illegally, you have to pay fines. Like in Kenya, they were truly hostile and treated us horrible. They put us in jail in Kenya, but they want money of course, but we would pay our own way, but maybe if you showed them the proof maybe things would be... Yeah, so finally, it's nice to finally, you know finally, we're finally home, you know?

Carl expressed the same sentiment saying that:

Also, a lot of us grew-up in refugee camps, some in Kenya, some in Egypt, some in somewhere in a camp and so getting citizenship finally give you a, finally gives you a...a home. Like, you are an American. You are not a refugee, and you are not like, "I will move tomorrow," so you feel like it gives you a sense of belonging.

### **Challenges of the Citizenship Examination**

English language issues proved to be the most challenging part of citizenship test preparation and completion. All respondents believed that the difficulties related to speaking, listening, reading and particularly writing English for the citizenship examination were huge hurdles. The high level of English required to answer interview

questions from the U.S. Naturalization form was seen as far beyond the “minimal understanding of ordinary English” required by law. By comparison, the civics sections such as U.S. history and government were not a major concern for participants in this study as they could be easily memorized and repeated, though there were some concerns that students did not really understand or retain the information studied.

For teachers, the lack of transparency on what specifically was involved in the spoken English language test also proved to be a source of frustration and a challenge to effectively teach for the citizenship test. This was compounded by the fact that students were unable to clearly explain why they had failed the exam or what they should work on to pass it. It was also cited a cause of anxiety for applicants.

### **Language Challenges**

Language challenges fell into several subgroups including writing, reading, listening/understanding, and speaking.

#### *1. Writing*

All groups reported that writing was the primary challenge of passing the citizenship examination. This was, of course, of even greater concern to those who had very limited literacy education.

#### *2. Reading*

Reading was also reported as a challenge, but was not seen as such a major stressor/difficulty as writing was.

#### *3. Listening/Understanding*



A USCIS manager cited the inability to understand the questions asked by the interviewer as the primary reason applicants fail the citizenship examination. Teachers also reported that listening skills were an issue for students. The students themselves expressed some concern about being able to understand what was being asked in the interview, but not to the same degree as other linguistic concerns.

#### *4. Speaking*

Speaking did not appear to be a major concern for participants. Some expressed concern that USCIS officers might have difficulty understanding their accents, but also felt confident in English language use outside the interview room, such as at work.

### **USCIS Officer**

#### **The English Language Test**

When the USCIS manager was posed the question:

Based on your experience, what part of the citizenship examination presents the most difficulties for applicants/students?

She responded that:

Yes, all these things can present difficulties for applicants, but it all boils down to being able to understand. It's okay to be able to read and write and literacy does have an effect. But, understanding what is being asked is the key. You wouldn't believe it, but hundreds fail the exam because when they are asked to raise their

right hand they respond with “red, white and blue.” We give them a second chance, but...I feel really bad for them. Being able to understand is the key. I hope this helps. And continue to do your great work, there needs to be more people doing what you do.

The USCIS officer explained that she was very busy and could not respond to further questions.

## **Teachers**

### **English Language Test**

Teachers were also concerned with the English language test and a few mentioned the complex language that was used on the Naturalization Application form on which the test is based and the uncertainty of how the language exam is administered. When asked what the most difficult part of the citizenship examination was Slavania answered:

S: I would say the speaking portion, right? Because the speaking portion is based on the questions from the application form, the Naturalization Application form, and they are very legalistic and have very complex language.

I: And you can't just memorize them? For the test, or...?

S: Well...I guess you *could*, I mean you *could* technically memorize them, but because the language is so complex, I don't know if...yeah, cause some of them are just yes/no questions, I guess you *could*....argue that they are memory based, but still...

I: You have to understand the questions?

S: Right, yeah, you have to understand the questions, so...maybe that's the

(unintelligible)? For the teacher to kind of simplify the language

I: But then you simplify the language and you get there and it's not simplified...

S: It's not simplified, yeah...so, that's, yeah, that's an issue because, well, uh, supposedly the interviewees are supposed to, kind of, I mean state it in a way, uh yeah, on the website. Actually, the naturalization law says that the language used on the test has to be the high-beginning level and I guess the interviewees are also supposed to also simplify the language, but it's questionable if they actually do that...yeah.

Miriam also confirmed that the English language test was the greatest challenge for students and Asiana stated that:

Well, uh, definitely English. That was their biggest hindrance. You know they are not completely naïve to, you know, how government and how the economy and things like that work. Like, they get it once I can explain it to them in elementary level wording and phrases and descriptions, they got it. It was just that it all came down to vocabulary and English. For sure.

Sandra, too, claimed that the English language test required a high level of English vocabulary. She posited that:

Based on my experience, the test requires learners to have a good command of academic lexis. This must be taken into account when teaching English L2 learners. For example, the learners need to know that *supreme law* means *highest*

*law.*

## **Pronunciation**

When teachers were asked the question:

Do you find that pronunciation is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Some teachers found it difficult to answer because they were unsure of what occurs during the English language exam. For example Slavania said:

S: See, it's kind of hard to answer that...because, you know, you don't really know what happens at the actual examination...so...

I: You don't really know how well the examiner understands or not?

S: Yeah, I mean when I was teaching it, if the student didn't understand it, you repeated it in a slower way and, you know, you enunciated. But on the actual test I don't know if they do that, but for the students that we worked with, I don't know if pronunciation is such a big issue.

Asiana was also unsure if pronunciation was a significant challenge to her students, but seemed to view other language issues such vocabulary knowledge as a greater challenge responding, "Uh, let me try and think about that. Um, well isn't that kind of like hand-in-hand with...I mean I would put less emphasis on that, I mean obviously its hand-in-hand with overall language, but I would say overall definition was

more of a factor than pronunciation.”

Sandra saw pronunciation as a problem for low-level students, but seemed to attribute it to L1 influence claiming that:

With respect to my Sudanese learners in the beginning and elementary stages of learning English, yes. The most interference seems to be caused by multisyllabic words in English. The learners seem to have more difficulty both hearing all of the syllables and articulating them. I tend to attribute this difficulty to the fact that words in the Dinka language consist of no more than two syllables. The less proficient learners do experience greater communicative difficulty because of issues with phonology.

### **Understanding/listening**

Teachers viewed the inability to understand the questions being asked during the English language exam as a significant barrier of the citizenship examination. When they were asked:

Do you find that the ability to understand questions is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Teachers responded that this was certainly an issue for their students. Slavania responded that:

S: Yeah, I think that's definitely a problem. Yeah, I wish I had the questions here, but, yeah, I mean some of the questions are really long and like I said they have some really advanced formal vocabulary, so I would say that's definitely a problem. I mean even I don't understand some of the questions on the N-400, the Nationalization form, there are like some super, even archaic words. The Oath of Allegiance is super hard.

I: Explaining "oath" itself is...I'm still doing that.

S: Oh yeah, gosh. So, yeah...It's really hard.

Miriam claimed that the inability to understand the questions on the exam was a very real problem for her students and Sandra that, "If the reference is to lexically and grammatically complex questions relating to the citizenship test, they would be overwhelmed by those." Asiana responded that:

You know what, actually yes, because I remember specifically there were a couple of lessons right in a row there after I started where we had a lesson not on anything that had to do with the citizenship test, we had a whole couple of lessons based on who, what, when, where, how and what those interrogative words mean. So yes.

## **Literacy**

All the teacher participants also saw illiteracy as a significant barrier to passing the citizenship exam. Teachers were asked the question:

How much do you think literacy impacts the ability to be successful on the citizenship examination?

All responded that lack of literacy or low-literacy greatly impacted an applicant's performance on the exam. Slavania pointed to specific examples claiming that, "Well, literacy, for students like Achok, who is pre-literate, and has great difficulties in learning how to even write, it's really major...a major obstacle." Sandra also claimed that it was a challenge saying that "It has a significant impact for both groups of my learners, as it would likely have for any person who has possibly had limited or no access to formal education," and Miriam gave a similar explanation claiming that "Very much so. If you've never had to learn anything before, this proves to be a huge challenge."

Asiana also saw literacy as challenge, but one that could be overcome by having students just memorize and practice the limited vocabulary for the reading and writing tests, even if they did not really understand it. She answered:

Well, it depends on how far you want to go into that. Yeah, they can just study the exam and get really good at comprehension and reading and understanding and even writing the answers to just the exam questions, and, yeah, if you're are just teaching them the, what twenty or whatever questions? I can't remember, but if you just want to keep it within the realm of those questions, then I mean, you know their overall literacy level is extremely low, but (ha) look at Achok, she even eventually passed. But, as a whole, at the end of the day do I really think that

they really even understood half the stuff? No. I think they memorized half of it, you know?

### **Reading and Writing**

As far as the reading and writing portions of the exam were concerned, the teachers seemed to rely on having students simply memorize and then drilling them on the reading and writing vocabulary lists provided by the USCIS.

### **Reading**

When teachers were asked:

Do you find that the reading portion of the citizenship examination is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Slavania reiterated her answer from the literacy question:

Yeah, like I said, the population that I worked with, some of them are pre-literate, so definitely for them it could be hard. Because, even though the sentences are from a limited pool, so technically you could teach them, but if... it would technically have to be like memorization, right? They are not really learning how to read or write, it's just...

Asiana had a similar response:



It's like what I said before, yeah they can read that same question over and over and over, and okay they get it. But, I mean going beyond the realm of what's on the citizenship test, which is you know...

## **Writing**

In response to the question:

Do you find that the writing portion of the citizenship examination is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Slavania said, "Right, yeah. I would say that presents even more difficulties than the reading portion." Asiana responded that:

Basically, no matter what level they were on, all of the students I taught, out of the ones that you knew, I would say that every single one of them was relying mainly on memorization. I will say this, they understood it though. I will say this: comprehension and memorization. They understood things to a certain level. I do think that, and especially when we got really involved in lessons, then you know, like I said they did understand it. They did get it. Whether or not they remembered it later, I don't know. It probably was a little more memorization, but they did get it, you know.

She also expressed some frustration about what the exam expected from applicants and

teachers were expected to teach them, commenting “How are you supposed to teach someone who is at a, whatever, elementary level literacy, reading and writing? How do you explain to them, you know, what *legislation* means?”

## **U.S. Civics**

When teachers were asked if students had significant problems with the civics portions of the U.S. citizenship examination, they all seemed to agree that this was the least challenging part of teaching for the test. While a few acknowledged that it was difficult for students to fully comprehend the ideas and concepts contained in this part of the exam, they felt it was much easier to teach the required responses because they were drawn from a limited list of 100 questions that with time could be memorized. Teachers were asked first about the history portion. Typical responses were like this one from Slavania:

Well I think that's like, well because the test is such that you *can* memorize those things, so I think that's the least problematic. Especially since our students came from societies that are, uh, what's the word...more oral, right? So, I don't think that's a major issue.

Asiana commented that she felt that the education on these issues at the center was very poor overall and did not really teach the students well:

Let me just say something really quick. I think that the education at the center

overall was really crappy. I mean, for example the history. Or even the comprehension, whatever. When we actually took field trips and we went to like the capital building and when they actually got to see things and like understand be more hands-on, they did get stuff better. So, it's hard to like, you know put so much...you know it was so shitty when it came to the education part.

However, when asked if this portion of the examination was difficult for students, she admitted that is probably the area students did the best in:

Oh, the history? I, um, no. The history, I think was actually, for me I could tell was where they probably did the best. I think why, is that it peaked their interests most. I think a lot of things they can actually relate to or I think that they understood war, and the division of states, and gaining freedom. I think that they actually really took to that the most. And we did often try to relate it back to like things that they could relate to. So, yeah, definitely I think history was best out of all of it.

When asked if she felt the same way about the government part (as opposed to the history part) of the civics test she responded:

No, not the government portion. I was just going to say that. And you know I think why is that, you know those terms are just so out of their league. And, not to mention maybe I was not the most qualified teacher. How are you supposed to

teach someone who is at a, whatever, elementary level literacy, reading and writing? How do you explain to them, you know, what *legislation* means? So, I think that the history came easier than the government part, surprisingly. But, it was just how you taught it. Now, if you gave them an elementary third-grade lesson on government then they understood it. But, with the citizenship questions themselves and the vocabulary it uses. It was over their heads, definitely.

She also claimed that students tended to learn things that were chronological and contextualized were much easier than things that were not:

Yeah. And I'll tell you, the things that they understood the best about the civics and government were things that were in order. That was what they definitely most understood. So understanding, you know, like, 'who is the president?' 'Who is the vice president?' And then, like, listing all the positions in the president's Cabinet, or doing things like that. They understood things that they could put in order. And see a level of superiority. They understood that. Or even like general State or local laws. Things like that, they really took to that.

### **Most difficult part of teaching citizenship classes**

When teachers were asked what the most difficult part of teaching for the citizenship examination was, some teachers, such as Slavania, said that while the test was not difficult for students with a good command of English and some writing skills, for others it would take years to prepare for. She responded:

Well the most difficult part is...like it depends on what type of student you get. If they have some literacy abilities already, I wouldn't say that it's...It depends on their English of course, but it's not that difficult. But for students like Achok, who's preliterate, or someone whose proficiency is very low, I would say that it would take years to properly prepare them for that. Because, like I said, the language on the test is very advanced and having just high-beginning knowledge, I don't think that's really realistic, because you would have to...

I: Because they say "everyday English," but it's not?

S: No, and it's not everyday English.

I: The test, I mean the application, is not in everyday English by any means.

S: No

Asiana claimed that even just explaining some basic concepts and vocabulary proved to be a huge challenge of teaching low-English proficiency students:

Well, first off, lack of resources that the center had. And hurdling over the language barrier, that was number one. Half the time I would have to have someone translate what I was saying to them. And once we got on a roll and once I found, once I discovered that I need to teach at an elementary level and be very picture oriented. And be very, you know, if I'm going to be discussing, like...I'm trying to think of an example. You know if I'm going to be discussing anything, I have to bring it down to a level, something relative that they know. They understand, you know, like, their jobs at Walmart, so I have to take whatever

we're talking about in the realm of like civics and the country and apply it to their world of work. So that's definitely language and literacy.

Some teachers mentioned that they regretted how these classes were taught and Miriam said that:

If I were to do it again I would focus more on, like I would try to follow the principles of adult learning, you know, and try to use more context when teaching them the history and civics principles. Use more context and try to use more authentic materials. I don't know.

Though she realized students were not really learning the material from citizenship classes, she felt a dilemma, because of the pressure applicants often feel to quickly become citizens and admitted that if she taught the way she wanted "It would take a lot more time, yes." When she was asked when she felt a student was ready to take the naturalization examination, she responded:

Oh, Gosh! Yeah, it's been a problem because some students...uh...because they're so eager to pass the test, they apply even before...before they are ready or they know what the test is like, so you have a very limited amount of time and try to cover as much as you can, but, you know, they will go to the interview with very limited knowledge of, you know...So, that's a good question because I don't think many of our students were ready for the interview. I mean it would take a

lot more time, but...

Another teacher had similar regrets about her teaching methods, but said she felt it was the only way to help many of the students pass the exam. When asked when she knew they were ready to take the exam, she responded:

Honestly, when they had it memorized. I mean, I hate to say it. I would have liked it to be, you know at a higher level of comprehension, but at the same time, you know, I wanted them to pass. Ohhhh yes, a lot of it was memorization. Whether or not they had it memorized.

However, she noted that she made a clear distinction between those who had a better understanding of English and could understand the material being taught and those who simply needed to be taught to pass the exam:

I will say this. There definitely was a balance. I did not go in there wanting them to simply memorize it. We did focus a lot on comprehension, but at the end of the day I had to be somewhat realistic. I mean, Achok, is like sixty-four years old. She's been here taking these classes for how long? Really, how much more do I think she is going to improve? It kind of got to a point where you gotta do what you gotta do, you know? I will say this, and maybe this isn't necessarily right either, but I did kind of do it on a case by case basis. I mean Laz and Bethany for example, they're younger, and their English is much better than Achok's. I

definitely expected a bit more from them.

Even with a focus on the memorization of answers for those with limited English knowledge, teachers admitted, and lamented, that they really had little idea of how students would actually perform during the citizenship interview. When discussing a student who had failed the test twice and was required to pay the \$680 fee again, one teacher said:

Right, well he said that the first time he failed that he asked the interviewer to repeat the question and he only did it once and the next time he refused to repeat it or whatever, so...and also that a problem, because if you only repeat the question and he doesn't understand the wording there's no use in repeating it. He's supposed to rephrase it. So, there's a lot of factors that you can't control and you can't really predict. So it's hard to predict how they are going fare on the interview.

Some teachers also reported that these challenges would come up during mock interviews when questions from the application were presented to students in manner that replicated the actual interview. For example, Asiana said:

Yes. You know what? That's where a lot of the, you know, that's why we had the who, what, where, when, how, because of the interview questions. Because I would ask them, you know, "where do you work?" and they would say,



“tomorrow at six o’clock.”

She claimed that it was in these mock interviews that it became obvious that many students did not really understand many of the questions being asked or the terms on the application for citizenship and said:

A: Yes, that’s what shook them up the most. That was exactly what it was. Was differentiating what type of question it was. That was the number one thing when it came to the mock interviews. Like, they would just hear “work” and they would just blurt out the first thing that came to their head and it had nothing to do with, you know, like I said, “I’m asking where you work, not when,” so that was like...I’m trying to think of what the other interview questions are. And with those interview questions it was like comprehension too. There were a lot of things that they just did not know. I mean they did not know, like, that ‘you were never a prostitute.’ They didn’t know what a prostitute was. You know what I mean? You know there were a lot of vocabulary words too.

I: Like “have you ever been a member of the communist party” or a “totalitarian regime?”

A: Yeah, exactly.

### **Center Managers**

When Johnny and Carl, the center managers, were asked about the biggest challenges South Sudanese had with the citizenship exam they were quick to point out the

difficulties the illiterate applicants, particularly the elderly ones had passing it. Johnny first mentioned the challenge they faced preparing to answer a hundred questions. He felt they should be able to choose twenty questions to be tested on from the one hundred. But mostly he felt it was far too difficult to require the elderly illiterate applicants to have an English writing test. He stated:

The group you work with they've never had to work in their whole life, so for them to give them a sentence [to write], how're they gonna know...uh...'the first president is like Washington,' their not gonna remember the whole thing. Their just going to remember the name, the name. 'He was the first elected..., whatever, you know its just going to get very difficult and very confusing, rather than just saying the name of the person. That they will remember. President Barack Obama, that they would know. President Barack, so they know that. Yeah, how are they even going to start? What letter? I mean, first of all they don't know any letters. Even with just the name of the president they would have problems, you know. So, they could do a little bit better.

Johnny went on to describe how even writing very simple sentences is often extremely difficult for these students. He went on to say:

Yeah, it's like even "I'm going home," that's hard for them. They don't know that. To tell them to spell "I'm going home now," they don't know that. Even what letter to start off, they don't know.

Carl mentioned that one of the greatest challenges of the test was you did not know what would be asked during the USCIS interview. He explained, “The thing about it is when you prepare for it you don’t know what is gonna come. Some people may spend time collecting information that may be relevant, but sometime when it comes to the test they don’t come.” He also emphasized the differences between the older and younger applicants explaining that “The written part is the most difficult for the older population. For the younger generation it’s all about the history: memorizing who is what, especially in the past.” He went on to say that many of the younger generation had some education growing up, so it was easier for them than for the older applicant who had often never set foot in a classroom until arriving in the U.S.

Both Johnny and Carl felt that illiteracy had an enormous effect on immigrants’ ability to pass the citizenship examination. Johnny said:

Yes, it has an impact on how they can do the exam. Because, there’s like so many immigrants right now, you know, Sudanese, worldwide, people don’t speak the language, they’ve never written anything in their own language. It’s actually getting people who could be good citizens, to not get citizenship. It’s affecting people. It’s affecting them, and then they just give up. They don’t want to go do it again. And it costs money.

He went on to explain on the previous test they would give older applicants a visual test that was much simpler to complete:

J: How are you going to tell them to write when it's so hard? I know a couple years ago they started having an age limit, fifty-five or something. They would give you a visual, a video or something and you would just point, but now like Ayom and Achok, they have to pass. It's crazy.

I: So, they don't do that anymore?

J: No, they don't do the video. I think that could be an easy way, because they could recognize a picture. You have to think about them at a different level, like a young, you know, child.

I: And they don't use writing at their work.

J: Right, so it discourages a lot of the elderly from even trying. Even the young guys, they give-up, because they don't write English either. I know some guys, they just give-up, you know they don't want to become citizens. They're discouraged.

I: It's not worth it? Too much stress?

J: Yeah, too much stress. They say they're just going to apply for a Green Card every year, every ten years. Now, if they try to go and travel it's difficult: They don't have a passport, so they have to do travel documents and that's very difficult.

Carl also explained how much a role literacy played in preparing for the citizenship examination, saying:

Yeah, it plays a lot. For the literate population it's a piece of cake. They don't have a lot of struggle with it and they don't take it seriously, they don't take it like

people who are illiterate that think, “Oh, I’m gonna fail. I’m gonna fail.” Even if the people who are literate fail, they don’t come with that intention when they come to the interview. They always think that they will do all right and then when the questions are thrown at them later on, they realized they are not prepared and then they fail. I know people who have failed it and they are well educated, but they just took it for granted.

When the Johnny was asked if he thought literacy would impact the reading and writing portion of the exam for applicants he said:

Yes, both. Yes, very much. Illiteracy affects writing more than speaking, because somehow, with all the immigrants, they pick-up the speaking quickly, but the writing part is always not there. So, when you are preparing for this interview, we prepare you by kind of putting you to writing, to kind of understand the right thing, but it doesn’t catch on quickly like the oral part. So, that’s a disadvantage because you take it like at the time that you are taking it.

He explained that besides making it difficult to pass the exam, literacy skills impacted the application process because:

Today you cannot file an application in hard copy. A few years ago you could file a hard copy, so you could take it home and someone could write it out for you. So, it is really hard for people who don’t know how to write to do it.

## Students

Students were also quick to cite language related issues as primary concerns for passing the citizenship examination. Writing was a major concern for all of the students, even those who were quite proficient in English. When students were asked what friends or family who had taken the test had told them was the most difficult part of the exam was they all reported that they were most concerned about not being able to perform some of the English language tasks. For example Alek responded that “Problem another people, she don’t understand English this good. She didn’t speak English.” When she was asked if this was because her friend did not understand the questions, she said, “Yeah, what you say.” Her friends had told her that the language portion would be the most difficult, and she clearly believed this herself, because when she was asked what she believed was the most challenging part of the test she said:

A: It’s hard some you don’t know the language.

I: The language?

A: Yeah

I: Like on the paperwork and everything?

A: Yeah, the paperwork. The lot of people she don’t go to school in Sudan.

Alek, again, mentions the fact that they have no previous education from the Sudan and this seemed to impact not only their ability to perform on the test but also their confidence to take the exam. Because when she was asked if she was worried about

taking the exam she said, “Yes, I’m worried. I’m gonna try.”

### **Writing**

However, the south Sudanese community seemed to not only share the fears of taking the U.S. citizenship examination, but also the joys and friendly (or not-so-friendly?) competition that motivated students to pursue citizenship. Achok, for example saw another Dinka woman, who was granted as test waiver due to a learning disability come back from voting for president and was so envious that she spent every day writing over and over again the sentences from the exam. She took every class at the center and an additional ESL class at a community college and she eventually passed the exam. The following conversation shows not only how difficult the writing exam is, but also how unclear the content of the test is.

Achok begins by explaining that the most difficult part of the test is writing:

A: Writing. The girl was asked to write Abraham Lincoln. (speaking Dinka to Sarah)

I: Is that what they asked you to write?

S: No one of the ladies in the community failed the test

I: Ah, right. You told me.

But when Achok was asked what the USCIS officer had asked her to write during the exam things become less clear. She responds:

A: “We” and “have” and “senator”

I: Senators? They asked to write, “we have one-hundred senators”?

A: Aye, one hundred senators

I: So they asked you to write, “we have one-hundred senators”?

A: Aye, one hundred senators. Write one hundred senators: And Washington D.C.  
and Alaska and United States.

I: So they asked to write two sentences?

A: No eight! Eight writing.

I: Eight?

A: Aye, eight

I: Just one sentence?

S: Just like one, by one, by one. She had to write Alaska, she had to write  
Washington...

I: Ahhh...just words?

A: Aye

S: Just words, but the big sentence is “we have one hundred senators.”

I: But she had to write words like Alaska and Washington and...

A: Zip code and the state.

I: Zip code? Your zip code?

A: Aye, zip code me, and zip code in the state. P-h-o-e-n-i-x and zip code and  
eight, five, zero, zero, seven.

Here, with help from Sarah’s translating it seems that Achok was asked to write the



sentence “We have one hundred senators,” but was also asked several singular words including Alaska and Washington along with the city and state she lived with and her zip code. That being said, she very well may have mistaken the answers that were part of the written exam with those from the N-400 form on which the English speaking and listening test language is based, because there are no numbers except ‘one hundred’ as part of the official written test.

This illustrates exceptionally well how difficult and confusing it is for teachers preparing students for the exam, because students often do not know why they failed the exam, and it is difficult for them to explain it to the teachers so they can help them. The USCIS does not provide information on why the applicant failed the exam other than a checked box indicating they failed the English test.

Achok talked for some time in Dinka laughing at the woman who had failed the test, apparently because she could not write “Lincoln.” She acknowledged that Lincoln was a difficult word, but also showed she could spell it saying:

A: Aye, l-i-n-c-o-l-n. Very difficult! She failing on the writing.

I: Has she taken the test again yet?

S: No, she has to go back in April. April when?

A: (Speaking in Dinka)

S: She has to go back in April 15 and try again.

A: And the no questions and the no reading. In the writing.

S: Just the writing

A: Aye the writing

She went on to explain that writing was not taught to rural women and very little to women in the cities in South Sudan. “No writing in the country,” she said, “A little bit in the city.” Though she had passed the exam she was very excited about it, and when she was told what a great job she did and how proud we were that she passed the exam she said “No, again. No write again. No go back,” explaining that she was done writing and would not be coming back to the classes. “No more.” Sadly, it seems that Achok had worked hard for over two years to learn a couple sentences of writing that would not be useful for anything but passing the exam and was so frustrated by the difficulty of it that she had no desire to continue to write in the future for her it was “No, again. No write again. No go back. No More.”

When Sarah was asked what she believed was the most difficult part of the exam she replied “Writing. They always complaining about writing. Yeah, they say the writing part” and later told the story of a lady from her community who had failed the test. “You know that lady who failed that thing? She is younger than her (Achok) and she failed the test. Writings!” When I explained how hard Achok worked (for over two years) to pass the exam Sarah explained “Yeah, she is very old and by that time if they don’t know their ABC’s it’s very hard. She doesn’t know nothing.”

Sarah also pointed to some peer pressure from Achok saying, “And that’s what she told me: If you go, if you let it fail you, I will laugh at you. That’s what she told me (Laughing).” She said the same thing about another woman, “You know Alek? You know mom Alek? She always talk to me if you fail it, huh, I will go and tell everyone ‘she fail it.’” Sarah went on to explain how difficult it was for Alek to pass the writing test. She

said that when she came to the written part of the exam that she was so nervous that she just wrote anything. She said, “Coming to writing she say she don’t know how to write. She just write anything. Like ‘hath’ she write ‘hath and had.’”

Whenever Alek had to practice the writing part of the exam in class, she became extremely stressed and panicked and in interviews expressed doubt that she could pass the exam. For example when asked what she felt was the most difficult part of the exam she responded:

A: The writing. I don’t do the writing good. I practice. I wanna try. Maybe I get one, maybe I don’t.

I: No, I think you will. I think you will.

A: Yeah.

I: But, It’s one sentence, right?

A: Yeah, I’m gonna try one sentence.

I: So, one sentence.

A: But, it’s a little bit hard...Maybe I’m gonna get it a little bit.

I: It’s a little bit difficult, maybe?

A: Yeah.

## **Reading**

Reading was also a difficult task for many of the participants. For example Alek said, “The reading is hard for me. I wanna try.” When asked if she was a little nervous she responded, “Yes, nervous is me,” but “Yeah, I wanna do it.” She also worried that

she would be asked questions she did not know stating, “They gonna ask me some questions maybe I don’t know. I worry about this.” When she was asked to clarify if she meant that she might not be able to understand the meaning of the questions she said, “Yeah, I’m gonna understand some and maybe some I don’t understand.”

Pronunciation was another concern for some of the participants, Elizabeth said, “Yeah, like my tongue. He don’t say the words good.” When she was asked if she meant her accent she responded “Yeah. My accent, because my accent is no good for the words.” Because of this she was concerned she might have problems during the citizenship interview and test.

Though the participants viewed their English ability as an obstacle to passing the citizenship examination, it was not seen as a major problem at their jobs. For example Alek said, “Speak a little in work in housekeeping. He don’t, she don’t. Speak a little bit is okay. Yeah, no problem. No problem. Yeah, I good. I good for customer.” Unlike her lack of confidence for taking the citizenship exam, Alek had plenty of confidence in her ability to interact with customers at her job saying, “Yeah, if some somebody ask me. I gonna speak with somebody. No problem.” She explained that there was no need for reading and writing at her job and that much of the housekeeping language was in Spanish. She also said she no longer attended ESL classes because she was too busy with work and wanted to focus on taking the citizenship. She said, “Because I work right now. I don’t have time...I need to become a citizen.” It seems she viewed the English skills necessary to pass the naturalization exam as independent of the language skills necessary for her work or those taught in ESL classes.

Sarah also explained that she did not use English very much at her job, because

her job was to restock shelves and not really interact with customers like the jobs at the front of the store. She lamented that her job did not really require much or any real thinking skills.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Much scholarly research on refugees has focused on the upheaval and disorientation they experience in their effort to resettle in a new nation (Ferris, 1987). In this study, however, I chose to examine the motivations refugees have for becoming official citizens of their adopted country through naturalization and the challenges they face in achieving that objective.

U.S. naturalization applicants often face considerable challenges in their efforts to become full participants in American society. Despite their economic and cultural contributions, they often find themselves excluded from the political engagement that truly makes them feel like members of their adopted nation and helps them take part in decisions that impact their lives and shape their prospects in their new home country. The English language component of the citizenship examination appears to be a notable factor in this exclusion. Results from this study show that many of the participants, even though they were legal permanent residents, had taken multiple ESL courses and maintained adequate language skills to live and work in the U.S. during the minimum of five years required to apply for citizenship, felt that their English language skills were inadequate to pass the exam that would ensure them a place and a voice in their new country.

Citizenship teachers, who offer up valuable time and often valuable resources to teach citizenship classes also face considerable challenges and dilemmas in their efforts to help their students navigate through the naturalization process and become U.S. citizens. In addition to the educational challenges of teaching in an environment with very limited resources, low attendance rates and limited classroom space, and of teaching to students with low incomes, little education and often little literacy and limited English abilities, there are ethical considerations that often weigh on the consciences of volunteer citizenship teachers. On the one hand, teachers want to impart information that will be valuable to refugees as they continue to adapt to life in the U.S. On the other hand, stakes for gaining U.S. citizenship are often high for refugees, particularly for those trying to reunite with family, and the sooner they become citizens, the sooner they will be able to achieve their settlement goals. This causes a dilemma for teachers who feel conflicted by the methods (particularly memorization) they use to teach citizenship classes, because they don't impart lasting knowledge, yet seem to be the only way to pass the exam for many students.

### **Research Questions Revisited**

There were two primary questions that I attempted to explore through this study:

Q1: What are the motivations for taking the citizenship examination?

Q2: What are the challenges of the citizenship examination?

### **Motivations**

**Political engagement.** Addressing the first research question, this study indicates that the primary goal for attaining citizenship by the student participants was the opportunity to be more politically engaged, most importantly for the chance to vote. Interestingly, when teachers were asked what the primary motivations their students had for seeking citizenship they all listed economic factors. This shows a divergence between what teachers believed were the primary motivations of citizenship and the primary reasons students actually sought citizenship. This may have some important implications for the teaching of citizenship classes and for future research as citizenship applicants may view increased participation and voice in their adopted nation and its politics as more important to their wellbeing than simply more access to economic resources.

It also indicates that teachers were unaware of the primary motivations students had for pursuing U.S. citizenship. This may be because teachers saw the students as poor refugee students, and by all economic indexes this would be true; however, the students themselves may see their situation in the U.S. as a significant improvement over life in rural Sudan or refugee camps and therefore are more focused on democratic participation in their new home.

Concepts of what success is in their country of resettlement may greatly vary depending on the type of immigrant. De Jong and Fawcett (1981; Fawcett, 1986), who proposed the value-expectancy model of migration decision-making, suggest that migrants' decisions to locate to a given nation are likely to vary given the type of migrant they are. This would make refugees likely to have very different expectations from those of skilled migrants and, therefore, what they believe are successful settlement outcomes. They also posit that immigrants' views of what constitutes settlement success are likely

to be correlated with their pre-immigration goals and expectations. Subsequently their success is measured by whether they have been met.

Another study from Australia (Australian Survey Research Group, 2010) also found that the meaning of successful settlement deferred from immigrants and the receiving country and society. The study reported that refugees see “living well” as “living comfortably in Australia,” while the government defined it in terms of economic and social participation and well-being. The refugees in this study were viewing successful settlement from their own perspective. It is understandable that refugees might consider successful settling in terms of personal happiness and community connectedness in their receiving nation, considering their own broken communities and families.

These other studies may help us understand and explain why teachers, seeing the poverty of the students, all cited economic concerns as the primary motivation for citizenship, yet the participants did not. The South Sudanese immigrants in this study come from mostly rural areas and, while they may be extremely poor by U.S. standards, they likely view their current economic situations as considerably better than in South Sudan. It may also explain why political participation and freedom of travel were seen as so important to the South Sudanese participants, since they had met their economic goals, yet were not yet able to fulfill their other goals.

This supports what some surveys (Bittle and Rochkind, 2010; Farkus, Dufett and Johnson, 2003) have suggested; that democratic participation is the leading motivation for citizenship, and flies in the face of what others (i.e. Bojas, 2012) claim is the driving motivation of citizenship applicants; economics. It also casts doubt on the USCIS’s claim that the content of the new citizenship examination will result in more active or



participatory citizens, since the participants of this study are seeking citizenship for that very purpose.

**Family visitation/reunification.** As mentioned above, another significant finding from this particular group of South Sudanese refugee participants was the importance of citizenship in facilitating family visitation and reunification. This was another factor that was widely cited by student participants as a notable motivation for citizenship, and one that teacher participants failed to note. One explanation for this is that some refugees, with complicated paperwork and perhaps unreliable documents, find it very difficult to travel abroad without an American passport. Many South Sudanese do not have clear birth certificates or Sudanese passports. One participant informed me in an interview that, because she was born in a refugee camp with no recognized government, her name was simply recorded and documented by the camp church. The U.S. government did not recognize this document when she applied to join her husband in the U.S. Her husband had to travel from the U.S. to Sudan and acquire documents showing she was born in South Sudan, though she had never been there. This indicates how difficult it may be for refugees without U.S. passports to travel. Furthermore, South Sudan became an independent nation during the course of this study, rendering Sudanese passports void for those who had them. Ease of travel has not been cited as a primary motivation for citizenship in any previous survey or study to the author's knowledge, yet it was the second most cited motivation for applying for citizenship among students at the Lost Boys Center. For some, it was the primary motivation. For example Alek's principal purpose for attaining U.S. citizenship was to travel to see her daughter who had recently had a child.

For those separated from immediate family members by war and unrest it is not surprising that family reunification becomes a primary motivation for citizenship. Abel, for example, attended all the citizenship and ESL classes offered at the Lost Boys Center in addition to ESL classes at the local community college, because he wanted to improve his English to pass the citizenship test. His primary motivation was to bring his wife and daughters to the U.S. from the Darfur province of Sudan. He had not seen his family in over nine years, having first spent five years as a refugee in Egypt and then another four years in the U.S. He was an extremely motivated learner and yet his motivation did not translate to success on the citizenship examination. After a year of citizenship classes he took the English language exam and failed. He rescheduled the exam, took an additional six months of citizenship classes and failed again. After the second failure he was forced to pay the \$680 citizenship fee again. It wasn't until the third attempt, after two years of intensive ESL and citizenship classes that he finally passed the English language component of the citizenship examination.

### **Sense of belonging/normalcy**

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003), who studied the resettlement experiences of refugees in Australia, define resettlement as “a process during which a refugee, having arrived in a place of permanent asylum, gradually re-establishes the feeling of control over his/her life and develops a feeling that life is ‘back to normal’” (p. 62). Both Johnny and Carl, the community leaders, both viewed U.S. citizenship as helping them feel that things were finally back to normal and that they finally had a home after years in camps. For example Carl said, “Also, a lot of us grew-up in refugee camps, some in Kenya, some in Egypt, some in somewhere in a camp and so getting citizenship finally give you a,

finally gives you a...a home. Like, you are an American. You are not a refugee, and you are not like, “I will move tomorrow,” so you feel like it gives you a sense of belonging.” Johnny shared the same sentiment saying, “Yeah, so finally, it’s nice to finally, you know finally, we’re finally home, you know?” Given their designation as Lost Boys, the need to have this sense of permanent belonging through citizenship is understandable.

## **Challenges**

### **Transparency/understanding the process**

One problem this study highlights, though not surprising, is that teachers are unable to predict, no matter the quantity of preparation, the chances that their students will be successful on the U.S. citizenship examination, particularly where those without previous literacy or education are concerned. This is because of the lack of transparency on what transpires during the citizenship interview and the lack of communication on the part of USCIS officers on what applicants must work on to pass the English language examination test. In the cases of both Abel and Adut, neither understood the reason they had failed the exam. They were simply given a paper with an X on the box indicating they had failed the speaking portion of the exam.

This is why I tried on several occasions to interview the USCIS officers who conducted the exams: I wanted them to provide more clarity on what transpires during the exam. It would have been beneficial to be informed of exactly what applicants are

expected to know, and, in cases where applicants had failed exam, an explanation of why they had failed. However, transparency does not seem to be a goal of the USCIS.

### **English language**

The English component of the citizenship test proves challenging to many students in this study. In a study of 391 adult immigrants to Canada, d'Anglejan and Renaud (2006) found that higher levels of illiteracy and classroom anxiety, coupled with greater age, were related to learning difficulties. Most participants in this study fell into all three of these categories. Though some expressed confidence in using English at work, the English for the citizenship test intimidated them. Alek, for example said she was great with guests at the hotel where she worked and that speaking English was not a problem at work. When she was asked if she continued to attend English language classes, she responded that she didn't because she was too busy taking citizenship classes, which suggests that the English needed for U.S. citizenship is viewed different from that needed in other aspects of daily life. This is not surprising when the language from the Application for Naturalization is viewed.

**N-400.** The language of the Application for Naturalization form was a considerable concern to teachers, because the spoken English language test is based on applicants' responses to questions on it. Many teachers expressed that they themselves had difficulty understanding some terms on the form and questioned how those with limited literacy or education were expected to understand them. Furthermore, they claimed that words on the form do not fall under the requirement to know "words in ordinary usage," since some of them are rarely used in Standard American English and, as one teacher put it, seemed "archaic."

**Understanding.** The USCIS officer claimed that not understanding the question being asked was the primary reason applicants failed the exam. She explained that applicants would often be asked one question, but give answers to another. Though she expressed some sympathy for those that fail, she explained that they could give them only one more chance and then they would fail the exam. Though some teachers saw memorization as the only way for some of their students to pass the exam, they also admitted they did not really understand the questions and this became clear when questions were asked in a different order than usual. Abel, for example, could easily provide answers to all the memorized questions, yet failed the English test twice. This may be where what teachers perceive as a solution to learning difficulties, fails to be a viable solution to passing the English language exam.

One factor that may play a role is the setting, which may be unfamiliar and stressful to the test taker. Studies show high levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (68 percent) and learning disorders (20 percent) among refugees (Kinzie, Chen, Tsai and Riley, 2006). Studies also indicate that they experience high levels of stress due to their experiences of violence, living in camps, separation from family and lack of a support system (Aron, Corne, Fursland and Zelwar, 1991; DeVoe, 1992). Furthermore, Camino and Krulfeld (1994) claim that refugees are often untrusting of questions by government representatives. All these factors may have a detrimental effect on a refugee's ability to perform successfully on the citizenship examination. Many of the student participants expressed some anxiety or apprehension about the citizenship exam, however it is difficult ascertain how these factors play out during the citizenship interview as they are conducted in private and the USCIS has refused to comment on this. Nevertheless, given

the high stakes of and the official setting in U.S. government offices by U.S. naturalization officers, taking the test may cause anxiety to those with limited education or literacy and who have little experience navigating government agencies or taking tests.

**Writing.** In addition to difficulties in understanding the naturalization process, students, teachers and community leaders alike viewed the writing portion of the English language component of the citizenship examination as a significant barrier to citizenship. This had much to do with the type of students attending the citizenship classes, who on average were elderly with little or no literacy. Nevertheless, even the younger applicants with high levels of English language competence expressed anxiety about the writing test, even though it consists of writing only a single sentence.

### **Limitations**

According to Camino and Krulfeld (1994) most refugee communities do not trust inquiries by outsiders who ask many questions. Though I spent a considerable amount of time with members of the South Sudanese community, teaching them in classes and attending social gatherings and church services, and though I felt like I was able to incite openness from the participants in this study, I acknowledge I was not truly an insider. Therefore, it is possible that responses may have differed if the interviewer were by a member of the South Sudanese community.

Another limitation is that I was unable to gather much suitable information from the USCIS officers who administer the citizenship tests. Though, I visited the Phoenix field office twice, then drove to the field office in Tucson, no one would agree to respond to my questions, other than the five minutes given to me by the Phoenix manager on my first visit.

The small number of participants is also a significant limitation to this study and though multiple interviews and prolonged observation was used to diminish this limitation, the results from this study cannot necessarily be applied to other citizenship classes. Furthermore, this study was limited to participants in a citizenship program who were mostly elderly Dinka women and thus the challenges and motivations for citizenship may differ greatly for this group and other immigrant groups.

### **Overall Significance**

Despite the limitations of this type of study, findings indicate some important themes could be established.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

This study had three sets of findings with major implications:

1. Teachers may be unaware of students' motivations for pursuing citizenship
2. Democratic participation and family reunification are the primary goals of citizenship.
3. The English language exam is extremely intimidating and difficult for some immigrants, particularly the elderly with no or limited literacy in their L1.

One implication for teaching citizenship classes may be for teachers not to view refugees from the perspective that Nyers (2006) describes as 'states of emergency' or in desperate need of 'fixing.' Viewing refugees in this way may blind teachers to the motivations their students have for seeking citizenship, and thus, limit the ways in which teachers can help students achieve their goals for citizenship. Rather, viewing refugees as having distinct motivations and challenges for citizenship may help instructors tailor

classes to suit the students' purpose for citizenship. For example, if the goal for citizenship is to vote, than teachers might help students understand the process of voting in the U.S. rather than simply memorizing what month we vote for president or how many years a senator elected for. As one teacher explained, her students seemed to understand things better when they were contextualized.

Taking the view that refugees are in desperate need, because of poverty or lack of access to social programs, may also lead teachers apply rote memorization of answers to interview questions as a way for students to more quickly pass the citizenship examination. However, this intention may not achieve the intended result, as could be seen with Abel, who knew the memorized questions well, but failed the exam twice. This was also cited as problem by the USCIS officer who claimed that many applicants failed the exam simply because they gave the answer to a different question than the one being asked. Another contributor to the problem may be that applicants wait until just a short time before their citizenship interview before enrolling in citizenship classes, which a couple of the teachers cited as a problem, because many students needed much more learning than could be taught in a month or two.

It may also be the case that some teachers lack the experience and professional training to clearly recognize and respond to the needs of particular students. For non-profit organizations such as the Lost Boys of Sudan, where exclusively volunteer teachers teach citizenship classes, the quality of teaching may vary considerably from teacher to teacher. This is an important point to highlight since few citizenship classes taught by professionally trained ESL teachers are offered in the Phoenix area and most are offered



by various non-profit or religious organizations using untrained volunteers to instruct them.

How students perceive the English language test may also influence learning. Some participants in this study viewed themselves as competent, if not perfect, English users, with no trouble completing their work due to lack of language skills, yet at the same time felt nervous about the English language exam. Low levels of literacy among the participants may have played a role in this anxiety of the English on the exam and yet not at work. All the student participants admitted that they did not need to read or write at work. When one of the participants finally passed the Naturalization examination, after practicing writing various sentences with words from the writing test (see Appendix D) on a daily basis for over two years, said she was done and she would never have to write again. Another participant said she was no longer taking English language courses, because she was too busy and her priority was passing the citizenship exam. The views of these participants indicate that they consider the English for citizenship as distinct from the English they use in their everyday lives or that is taught in English language courses.

Perhaps one way to both avoid the tendency for teachers to have students memorize answers to possible questions from the citizenship test, and for students to view the citizenship Exam as relevant to their daily lives, is to introduce citizenship material in entry level English classes. Since the primary motivation for participants in this study and in other studies (Bittle and Rochkind, 2010; Farkus, Dufett and Johnson, 2003) is the right to vote, it seems logical to prepare immigrants early for eventual political participation. Though the competence in English and knowledge of U.S. civics that is required for citizenship has little bearing someone's political engagement (Etzioni,

2007), showing immigrants how voting can influence their daily lives may help them make connections to the testing materials. It would also help avoid the rush to memorize materials shortly before taking the Naturalization examination. In addition, it may ease some of the tension teachers feel about, on the one hand, wanting students to really learn the material being taught and, on the other, wanting students to pass the exam and gain U.S. citizenship.

Though preparing for and taking the citizenship examination proved to be very challenging for the participants in this study, the motivations for attaining citizenship outweighed them. This may not be the case for all immigrants. Future studies might look into why immigrants who are eligible for citizenship and are not seeking it. It may be that these individuals feel that the stress and difficulties of preparing for the citizenship examination, particularly where literacy is an issue, outweigh the benefits they perceive to gain from naturalization.

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APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL

**To:** Karen Adams  
LL

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 06/15/2012

**Committee Action:** **Exemption Granted**

**IRB Action Date:** 06/15/2012

**IRB Protocol #:** 1204007761

**Study Title:** English Learning Language for the US Citizenship Examination

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

## APPENDIX B

### N-400 APPLICATION FOR NATURALIZATION



Print clearly or type your answers using CAPITAL letters. Failure to print clearly may delay your application. Use black ink.

**Part 1. Your Name (Person applying for naturalization)**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

**A. Your current legal name.**

Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Full Middle Name (If applicable)

**B. Your name exactly as it appears on your Permanent Resident Card.**

Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Full Middle Name (If applicable)

**C. If you have ever used other names, provide them below.**

Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Middle Name

**D. Name change (optional)**

Read the Instructions before you decide whether to change your name.

1. Would you like to legally change your name? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. If "Yes," print the new name you would like to use. Do not use initials or abbreviations when writing your new name.

Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Full Middle Name

**Part 2. Information About Your Eligibility (Check only one)**

I am at least 18 years old AND

A. ☐ I have been a lawful permanent resident of the United States for at least five years.

B. ☐ I have been a lawful permanent resident of the United States for at least three years, and I have been married to and living with the same U.S. citizen for the last three years, and my spouse has been a U.S. citizen for the last three years.

C. ☐ I am applying on the basis of qualifying military service.

D. ☐ Other (Explain)

  

**For USCIS Use Only**

Bar Code

Date Stamp

Remarks

Action Block



**Part 3. Information About You**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A \_\_\_\_\_

A. U.S. Social Security Number

\_\_\_\_\_

B. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)

\_\_\_\_\_

C. Date You Became a Permanent Resident (mm/dd/yyyy)

\_\_\_\_\_

D. Country of Birth

\_\_\_\_\_

E. Country of Nationality

\_\_\_\_\_

F. Are either of your parents U.S. citizens? (If yes, see instructions)

☐ Yes☐ No

G. What is your current marital status?

☐ Single, Never Married☐ Married☐ Divorced☐ Widowed☐ Marriage Annulled or Other (Explain)

\_\_\_\_\_

H. Are you requesting a waiver of the English and/or U.S. History and Government requirements based on a disability or impairment and attaching Form N-648 with your application?

☐ Yes☐ No

I. Are you requesting an accommodation to the naturalization process because of a disability or impairment? (See instructions for some examples of accommodations.)

☐ Yes☐ No

If you answered "Yes," check the box below that applies:

☐ I am deaf or hearing impaired and need a sign language interpreter who uses the following language: \_\_\_\_\_☐ I use a wheelchair.☐ I am blind or sight impaired.☐ I will need another type of accommodation. Explain: \_\_\_\_\_**Part 4. Addresses and Telephone Numbers**A. Home Address - Street Number and Name (Do **not** write a P.O. Box in this space.)

Apartment Number

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City

County

State

ZIP Code

Country

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. Care of

Mailing Address - Street Number and Name (If different from home address)

Apartment Number

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City

State

ZIP Code

Country

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

C. Daytime Phone Number (If any)

( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Evening Phone Number (If any)

( ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address (If any)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 5. Information for Criminal Records Search**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

NOTE: The categories below are those required by the FBI. See instructions for more information.

**A. Gender**☐ Male ☐ Female**B. Height** Feet  Inches**C. Weight** Pounds**D. Are you Hispanic or Latino?**☐ Yes ☐ No**E. Race (Select one or more)**☐ White ☐ Asian ☐ Black or African American ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander**F. Hair color**☐ Black ☐ Brown ☐ Blonde ☐ Gray ☐ White ☐ Red ☐ Sandy ☐ Bald (No Hair)**G. Eye color**☐ Brown ☐ Blue ☐ Green ☐ Hazel ☐ Gray ☐ Black ☐ Pink ☐ Maroon ☐ Other**Part 6. Information About Your Residence and Employment****A.** Where have you lived during the last five years? Begin with where you live now and then list every place you lived for the last five years. If you need more space, use a separate sheet of paper.

Street Number and Name, Apartment Number, City, State, Zip Code, and Country	Dates (mm/dd/yyyy)	
	From	To
Current Home Address - Same as Part 4.A		Present

**B.** Where have you worked (or, if you were a student, what schools did you attend) during the last five years? Include military service. Begin with your current or latest employer and then list every place you have worked or studied for the last five years. If you need more space, use a separate sheet of paper.

Employer or School Name	Employer or School Address (Street, City, and State)	Dates (mm/dd/yyyy)		Your Occupation
		From	To	

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**Part 7. Time Outside the United States***(Including Trips to Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean Islands)*

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

- A. How many total days did you spend outside of the United States during the past five years?  days
- B. How many trips of 24 hours or more have you taken outside of the United States during the past five years?  trips
- C. List below all the trips of 24 hours or more that you have taken outside of the United States since becoming a lawful permanent resident. Begin with your most recent trip. If you need more space, use a separate sheet of paper.

Date You Left the United States (mm/dd/yyyy)	Date You Returned to the United States (mm/dd/yyyy)	Did Trip Last Six Months or More?		Countries to Which You Traveled	Total Days Out of the United States
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		

**Part 8. Information About Your Marital History**

- A. How many times have you been married (including annulled marriages)?  If you have never been married, go to Part 9.

- B. If you are now married, give the following information about your spouse:

1. Spouse's Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Full Middle Name (If applicable)

2. Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)

3. Date of Marriage (mm/dd/yyyy)

4. Spouse's U.S. Social Security #

5. Home Address - Street Number and Name

Apartment Number

City

State

Zip Code



**Part 8. Information About Your Marital History(Continued)**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

C. Is your spouse a U.S. citizen? ☐ Yes ☐ No

D. If your spouse is a U.S. citizen, give the following information:

1. When did your spouse become a U.S. citizen?

☐ At Birth☐ Other

If "Other," give the following information:

2. Date your spouse became a U.S. citizen

3. Place your spouse became a U.S. citizen (See instructions)

City and State

E. If your spouse is **not** a U.S. citizen, give the following information:

1. Spouse's Country of Citizenship

2. Spouse's USCIS A- Number (If applicable)

A

3. Spouse's Immigration Status

☐ Lawful Permanent Resident☐ Other

F. If you were married before, provide the following information about your prior spouse. If you have more than one previous marriage, use a separate sheet of paper to provide the information requested in Questions 1-5 below.

1. Prior Spouse's Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Full Middle Name (If applicable)

2. Prior Spouse's Immigration Status

☐ U.S. Citizen☐ Lawful Permanent Resident☐ Other

3. Date of Marriage (mm/dd/yyyy)

4. Date Marriage Ended (mm/dd/yyyy)

5. How Marriage Ended

☐ Divorce☐ Spouse Died☐ Other

G. How many times has your current spouse been married (including annulled marriages)?

If your spouse has **ever** been married before, give the following information about **your spouse's** prior marriage.

If your spouse has more than one previous marriage, use a separate sheet(s) of paper to provide the information requested in Questions 1 - 5 below.

1. Prior Spouse's Family Name (Last Name)

Given Name (First Name)

Full Middle Name (If applicable)

2. Prior Spouse's Immigration Status

☐ U.S. Citizen☐ Lawful Permanent Resident☐ Other

3. Date of Marriage (mm/dd/yyyy)

4. Date Marriage Ended (mm/dd/yyyy)

5. How Marriage Ended

☐ Divorce☐ Spouse Died☐ Other

**Part 9. Information About Your Children**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

A. How many sons and daughters have you had? For more information on which sons and daughters you should include and how to complete this section, see the instructions.

B. Provide the following information about all of your sons and daughters. If you need more space, use a separate sheet of paper.

Full Name of Son or Daughter	Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)	USCIS A- number (if child has one)	Country of Birth	Current Address (Street, City, State and Country)
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		

Add Children

Go to continuation page

**Part 10. Additional Questions**

Answer Questions 1 through 14. If you answer "Yes" to any of these questions, include a written explanation with this form. Your written explanation should (1) explain why your answer was "Yes" and (2) provide any additional information that helps to explain your answer.

**A. General Questions.**

1. Have you ever claimed to be a U.S. citizen (in writing or any other way)?
2. Have you ever registered to vote in any Federal, State, or local election in the United States?
3. Have you ever voted in any Federal, State, or local election in the United States?
4. Since becoming a lawful permanent resident, have you ever failed to file a required Federal, State, or local tax return?
5. Do you owe any Federal, State, or local taxes that are overdue?
6. Do you have any title of nobility in any foreign country?
7. Have you ever been declared legally incompetent or been confined to a mental institution within the last five years?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

**Part 10. Additional Questions (Continued)**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

**B. Affiliations.**

8. a. Have you ever been a member of or associated with any organization, association, fund, foundation, party, club, society, or similar group in the United States or in any other place? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- b. If you answered "Yes," list the name of each group below. If you need more space, attach the names of the other group(s) on a separate sheet of paper.

Name of Group	Name of Group
1. <input type="text"/>	6. <input type="text"/>
2. <input type="text"/>	7. <input type="text"/>
3. <input type="text"/>	8. <input type="text"/>
4. <input type="text"/>	9. <input type="text"/>
5. <input type="text"/>	10. <input type="text"/>

9. Have you ever been a member of or in any way associated (either directly or indirectly) with:
- a. The Communist Party? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- b. Any other totalitarian party? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- c. A terrorist organization? ☐ Yes ☐ No
10. Have you ever advocated (either directly or indirectly) the overthrow of any government by force or violence? ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. Have you ever persecuted (either directly or indirectly) any person because of race, religion, national origin, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion? ☐ Yes ☐ No
12. Between March 23, 1933, and May 8, 1945, did you work for or associate in any way (either directly or indirectly) with:
- a. The Nazi government of Germany? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- b. Any government in any area (1) occupied by, (2) allied with, or (3) established with the help of the Nazi government of Germany? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- c. Any German, Nazi, or S.S. military unit, paramilitary unit, self-defense unit, vigilante unit, citizen unit, police unit, government agency or office, extermination camp, concentration camp, prisoner of war camp, prison, labor camp, or transit camp? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**C. Continuous Residence.**

Since becoming a lawful permanent resident of the United States:

13. Have you ever called yourself a "nonresident" on a Federal, State, or local tax return? ☐ Yes ☐ No
14. Have you ever failed to file a Federal, State, or local tax return because you considered yourself to be a "nonresident"? ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Part 10: Additional Questions (continued)**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A. \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Good Moral Character.**

For the purposes of this application, you must answer "Yes" to the following questions, if applicable, even if your records were sealed or otherwise cleared or if anyone, including a judge, law enforcement officer, or attorney, told you that you no longer have a record.

15. Have you ever committed a crime or offense for which you were **not** arrested? ☐ Yes ☐ No
16. Have you ever been arrested, cited, or detained by any law enforcement officer (including USCIS or former INS and military officers) for any reason? ☐ Yes ☐ No
17. Have you ever been charged with committing any crime or offense? ☐ Yes ☐ No
18. Have you ever been convicted of a crime or offense? ☐ Yes ☐ No
19. Have you ever been placed in an alternative sentencing or a rehabilitative program (for example: diversion, deferred prosecution, withheld adjudication, deferred adjudication)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
20. Have you ever received a suspended sentence, been placed on probation, or been paroled? ☐ Yes ☐ No
21. Have you ever been in jail or prison? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If you answered "Yes" to any of Questions 15 through 21, complete the following table. If you need more space, use a separate sheet of paper to give the same information.

Why were you arrested, cited, detained, or charged?	Date arrested, cited, detained, or charged? (mm/dd/yyyy)	Where were you arrested, cited, detained, or charged? (City, State, Country)	Outcome or disposition of the arrest, citation, detention, or charge (No charges filed, charges dismissed, jail, probation, etc.)

Answer Questions 22 through 33. If you answer "Yes" to any of these questions, attach (1) your written explanation why your answer was "Yes" and (2) any additional information or documentation that helps explain your answer.

22. Have you ever:
- a. Been a habitual drunkard? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  - b. Been a prostitute, or procured anyone for prostitution? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  - c. Sold or smuggled controlled substances, illegal drugs, or narcotics? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  - d. Been married to more than one person at the same time? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  - e. Helped anyone enter or try to enter the United States illegally? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  - f. Gambled illegally or received income from illegal gambling? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  - g. Failed to support your dependents or to pay alimony? ☐ Yes ☐ No
23. Have you ever given false or misleading information to any U.S. Government official while applying for any immigration benefit or to prevent deportation, exclusion, or removal? ☐ Yes ☐ No
24. Have you ever lied to any U.S. Government official to gain entry or admission into the United States? ☐ Yes ☐ No



**Part 11. Your Signature**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

I certify, under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America, that this application, and the evidence submitted with it, are all true and correct. I authorize the release of any information that the USCIS needs to determine my eligibility for naturalization.

Your Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

**Part 12. Signature of Person Who Prepared This Application for You (If applicable)**

I declare under penalty of perjury that I prepared this application at the request of the above person. The answers provided are based on information of which I have personal knowledge and/or were provided to me by the above named person in response to the exact questions contained on this form.

Preparer's Printed Name

Preparer's Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Preparer's Firm or Organization Name (If applicable)

Preparer's Daytime Phone Number

Preparer's Address - Street Number and Name

City

State

Zip Code

**NOTE: Do not complete Parts 13 and 14 until a USCIS Officer instructs you to do so.****Part 13. Signature at Interview**

I swear (affirm) and certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that I know that the contents of this application for naturalization subscribed by me, including corrections numbered 1 through \_\_\_\_\_ and the evidence submitted by me numbered pages 1 through \_\_\_\_\_, are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Subscribed to and sworn to (affirmed) before me

Officer's Printed Name or Stamp

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Complete Signature of Applicant

Officer's Signature

**Part 14. Oath of Allegiance**

If your application is approved, you will be scheduled for a public oath ceremony at which time you will be required to take the following Oath of Allegiance immediately prior to becoming a naturalized citizen. By signing, you acknowledge your willingness and ability to take this oath:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;

that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic;

that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;

that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law;

that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law;

that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and

that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me God.

Printed Name of Applicant

Complete Signature of Applicant

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**Part 9. Information About Your Children**

Write your USCIS A-Number here:

A

A. How many sons and daughters have you had? For more information on which sons and daughters you should include and how to complete this section, see the instructions.

B. Provide the following information about all of your sons and daughters. If you need more space, use a separate sheet of paper.

Full Name of Son or Daughter	Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)	USCIS A- number (if child has one)	Country of Birth	Current Address (Street, City, State and Country)
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		
		A		

Add Children

Go to continuation page

**Part 10. Additional Questions**

Answer Questions 1 through 14. If you answer "Yes" to any of these questions, include a written explanation with this form. Your written explanation should (1) explain why your answer was "Yes" and (2) provide any additional information that helps to explain your answer.

**A. General Questions.**

1. Have you ever claimed to be a U.S. citizen (in writing or any other way)?
2. Have you ever registered to vote in any Federal, State, or local election in the United States?
3. Have you ever voted in any Federal, State, or local election in the United States?
4. Since becoming a lawful permanent resident, have you ever failed to file a required Federal, State, or local tax return?
5. Do you owe any Federal, State, or local taxes that are overdue?
6. Do you have any title of nobility in any foreign country?
7. Have you ever been declared legally incompetent or been confined to a mental institution within the last five years?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

APPENDIX C  
READING VOCABULARY

## Reading Vocabulary Summary

### PEOPLE

Abraham Lincoln

George Washington

### CIVICS

American flag

Bill of Rights

capital

citizen

city

Congress

country

Father of Our Country

government

President

right

Senators

state/states

White House

### PLACES

America

United States

U.S.

### HOLIDAYS

Presidents' Day

Memorial Day

Flag Day

Independence Day

Labor Day

Columbus Day

Thanksgiving

### QUESTION WORDS

How

What

When

Where

Who

Why

APPENDIX D  
WRITING VOCABULARY

## Writing Vocabulary Summary

### PEOPLE

Adams  
Lincoln  
Washington

### CIVICS

American Indians  
capital  
citizens  
Civil War  
Congress  
Father of Our Country  
flag  
free

freedom of speech  
President  
right  
Senators  
state/states  
White House

### PLACES

Alaska  
California  
Canada  
Delaware  
Mexico  
New York City

United States  
Washington  
Washington, D.C.

### MONTHS

February  
May  
June  
July  
September  
October  
November

## APPENDIX E

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS for STUDENTS

## **Interview I (Pre citizenship examination)**

Why are you applying for U.S. citizenship?

If you have had friends or family take the citizenship examination, what have they told you is the most difficult part of the test?

What do you think is the most difficult part of the citizenship examination?

Are you worried about any particular part of the citizenship interview?

Do you think you have enough knowledge of the U.S. history portion of the examination?

Do you think you have enough knowledge of the U.S. government portion of the examination?

Do you think you have enough knowledge of the civics portion of the examination?

Are you comfortable with the English speaking portion of the citizenship examination?

Are you comfortable with the English reading portion of the citizenship examination?

Are you comfortable with the English writing portion of the citizenship examination?



Are you worried about what kind of questions the USCIS officer will ask?

Are you worried you may possibly not understand the meaning of some of the questions?

Are you worried you might not be able to pronounce some words well enough to demonstrate your knowledge of English?

How important do you think speaking English is for your current job?

Do you speak English at work?

Do you read or write in English at work?

Are you currently enrolled in any English classes?

**Interview II (post citizenship examination)**

Why are did you apply for U.S. citizenship?

If you have had friends or family who have also taken the citizenship examination, what have they told you is the most difficult part of the test?

What do you think was the most difficult part of the citizenship examination?

Were you worried about any particular part of the citizenship interview?

Did you have enough knowledge of the U.S. history portion of the examination?

Did you have enough knowledge of the U.S. government portion of the examination?

Did you have enough knowledge of the civics portion of the examination?

Were you comfortable with the English speaking portion of the citizenship examination?

Were you comfortable with the English reading portion of the citizenship examination?

Did the USCIS have trouble understanding any of your responses?

What did the USCIS officer ask you to read?

Were you comfortable with the English writing portion of the citizenship examination?

What did the USCIS ask you to write?

What kind of questions did the USCIS officer ask?

Were there some questions you did not understand?

How important do you think speaking English is for your current job?

Do you speak English at work?

Do you read or write in English at work?

Are you currently enrolled in any English classes?

## APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS for TEACHERS/USCIS

OFFICERS/COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

In your experience, what are the primary reasons permanent residents apply for U.S. citizenship?

Based on your experience, what part of the citizenship examination presents the most difficulties for applicants/students?

Do you find that pronunciation is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Do you find that the ability to understand questions is a significant problem for applicants/students?

How much do you think that literacy impacts the ability to be successful on the citizenship examination?

Do you find that the reading portion of the citizenship examination is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Do you find that the writing portion of the citizenship examination is a significant problem for applicants/students?

Do applicants/students have significant problems with the U.S. history portion of the examination?

U.S. Do applicants/students have significant problems with the government portion of the examination?

Do applicants/students have significant problems with the civics portion of the examination?

**USCIS officers only**

What do you look for when assessing an applicant's ability to speaking everyday English?

Are there certain guidelines to follow when assessing applicant's ability to adequately speak English?

Are there certain guidelines to follow when assessing applicant's ability to adequately read simple English?

Are there certain guidelines to follow when assessing applicant's ability to adequately write simple sentences in English?

For applicants who do not pass the citizenship examination, what do you believe is the primary reason?

Do you receive any special training in language assessment?

**Teachers Only**

Based on your experience, what is the most difficult part of teaching English for the Citizenship examination?

What areas do you think you focus most on during a citizenship course?

Do you give mock-interviews? If so, how do you set these up? What type questions do you ask?

How do you determine when a student is ready to take the citizenship examination?

If you have had students who have failed the examination, what do you believe was the primary reason?

**Community Organizers Only**

What do you believe are the primary benefits of members of your community becoming U.S. citizens?