

Summary: We the People

One Country, Many Cultures

Immigrants come to this country for different reasons. Most hope to improve their situation. Some are escaping discrimination or war. Some want jobs or an education. Some come because of a natural disaster in their homeland, such as an earthquake.

Millions of immigrants have come to North America for thousands of years. Early groups, such as the Anasazi, developed complex civilizations before Europeans ever arrived. European explorers came to the Americas in the late 1400s. Colonists soon followed. These European settlers began to farm, start businesses, and build towns. Soon they needed many more workers, so Europeans brought people to America by force. Beginning in 1619, slave traders shipped enslaved Africans to the American colonies. Their hard labor helped build the country.

In the second half of the 1800s, Chinese immigrants came to the United States. They worked in mines or to help build the transcontinental railroad.

Rights and Responsibilities

Many U.S. citizens have struggled for their rights. African Americans, women, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, and other groups have fought against discrimination. Today, citizens have the guarantee of equal opportunity. This guarantee means that it is against the law for the government or a private institution to discriminate against them because of their race, gender, religion, age, or disability.

Good citizenship means doing more for the good of the people than what is required by law. A citizen's rights come with responsibilities. Citizens should help decide who will run the government and what actions it will take. In a democracy, government receives its power from the people. In a republic, the people also hold power, but they rule through elected representatives. To make a democracy work, every citizen is responsible for participating in the political process. The political process includes lawful ways that citizens can bring about change in government. By taking part in this process, U.S. citizens demonstrate their patriotism.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

immigrant *noun*, a person who chooses to move to another country

equal opportunity *noun*, a guarantee that government or private institutions will not discriminate against people based on race, religion, age, or gender

citizenship *noun*, the responsibilities and rights of a citizen

republic *noun*, a nation where the power belongs to the citizens, who govern themselves through elected representatives

political process *noun*, legal activities, such as voting, by which citizens influence government

patriotism *noun*, love and support for one's country

After You Read

REVIEW Why have people come to the United States? Draw a box around the paragraph that tells why immigrants have come to the United States.

REVIEW Do you think U.S. citizens have greater responsibilities because they have more rights? Circle the sentences about rights and responsibilities that could help you with your answer.