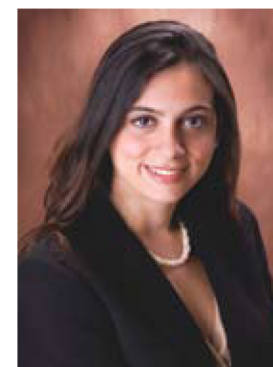


# The Naturalized American



By Paula F. Montoya, Attorney

I have been a permanent (green card) resident of the United States for five years, and I am considering applying for U.S. citizenship. What are the benefits of becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen?

Though permanent (green card) residents are granted some of the same rights as U.S. citizens, permanent residents are disadvantaged by not having the more substantive rights that U.S. citizens hold invaluable. Many permanent residents have told me that becoming a citizen rids you of an emotional, unsettling hollowness that permanent residents carry inside themselves, knowing they don't have the same rights as citizens. Once a citizen, they say, you experience an immediate sense of completeness, personal enrichment, a drive to achieve larger goals and increased self-esteem. It opens doors to greater opportunities, benefits and control over your personal life and assets for both you and your family.

One primary benefit that U.S. citizens have over permanent residents is their priority to bring family members permanently to the United States. Citizenship enables you to petition for your spouse, parents, married or unmarried children and siblings. Furthermore, children born abroad may gain citizenship without applying for a visa.

Citizenship includes the right to vote, increasing participation in the prosperity of your community and country; convenience of traveling with a U.S. passport; assistance from the U.S. government when abroad; eligibility for federal jobs or public office; financial advantages in estate planning; and eligibility for public benefits.

Like most countries worldwide, the United States accepts dual citizenship. If you are trying to obtain U.S. citizenship and desire to maintain citizenship in your home country, contact your local consulate, embassy or an immigration attorney for information or limitations regarding dual citizenship.

What are the benefits of becoming a U.S. citizen? Imagine Inigo Martinez, a young Spanish citizen who held a green card for six years and applied for his U.S. citizenship. After becoming a citizen, he brought his entire immediate family from Spain, fulfilled his dream by joining the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), made his vote count in national, state and local elections, and eventually became the elected official for his community. Inigo was able to maintain dual citizenship while showing patriotism and commitment to his new country.

The application for citizenship may look simple and easy to complete; however, it can be complex, especially if you have been a green card holder for many years and are a frequent traveler. To apply, you must have been a resident for at least five years (in certain cases, three years). Avoid complexities and contact an immigration attorney to assist you in the naturalization/citizenship application process.

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