

CIVIC AWARENESS

TERM	DEFINITION
Citizenship	The qualities of being a good citizen involve participation in the democratic process by voting and selecting government leaders; respecting the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others; and obeying federal and state laws.
US citizen	A resident of the United States having the legal right to live in the country, enjoying the full protection under the laws of the United States, and having the privileges of voting and representation by elected officials.
Naturalized Citizen	The process by which full US citizenship is granted to a foreign national after he or she has lived in this country legally for at least five years and has successfully completed a test demonstrating knowledge of English and an understanding of US history and government. Naturalized citizens enjoy all rights and privileges under state and federal law, however are not eligible to run for the office of President of the United States.
Immigrant	A person who comes to the United States to take up permanent residence. Approximately 13% of the national population is currently made-up of people who were born elsewhere and have settled in this country.
Democracy	The system of government where power is vested in the people, who rule either directly or through freely elected representatives. In the United States, citizens are guaranteed the right to vote for the election of governmental representatives who, in turn, exercise power on behalf of the people they represent.
Declaration of Independence	The Declaration of Independence formally stated the desire of the thirteen original American colonies to be free from rule by Great Britain and to become an independent nation. Written by Thomas Jefferson and adopted by the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, the Declaration is the founding document of what would become the United States of America.
Pledge of Allegiance	The oath taken by citizens pledging to be loyal to the United States of America and to support the nation's system of government. The Pledge was written by Francis Bellamy and first published and adopted in 1892. The importance of the Pledge is its reinforcement of the fundamental roles liberty and freedom play in shaping the United States of America.
National Anthem	During the British attack on Ft. McHenry in Baltimore on September 13, 1814, Francis Scott Key, an attorney from Maryland, watched the relentless shelling for 25 hours from a ship under British scrutiny in the harbor. Writing about the attack, Key described how "...by the dawn's early light," he saw only the American flag flying above the fort. Key recorded his thoughts and set his words to the tune of a popular British song. Later, Key's work became known as "The Star Spangled Banner" and it became America's official national anthem in 1916. The flag which flew over Ft. McHenry and was memorialized by Key is still on display in the Washington's National Museum of American History.
Equality	Being equal in terms of status, opportunity, and rights under the law.

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Stars and Stripes	The official flag of the United States. It is comprised of fifty white stars against a blue background, one for each state in the union, along with thirteen red and white stripes representing the thirteen original British colonies. The flag was first adopted in 1777 and contrary to popular legend, it was not designed and sewn by Betsy Ross in Philadelphia. Originally, the flag had thirteen stars representing the colonies, but additional stars were added as other states joined the union. The last star was added in 1959 and represents Hawaii, the fiftieth state.
US Constitution	The US Constitution is arguably the most important document in American history. In many respects, it forms the foundation of American government to this day. Following the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787 in order to establish the national government. Led by George Washington, 55 delegates from the various colonies debated issues that culminated in the principals, scope, and structure of American government, established the fundamental laws governing this country, and guaranteed all citizens certain basic and inalienable rights. The Constitution was ratified by the delegates and signed in September, 1787. Two years later, the Constitution was ratified by a majority of the original colonies and became the law of the new United States of America on March 4, 1789.
Bill of Rights	The Bill of Rights consists of the first ten amendments to the Constitution and represents the fundamental foundation of individual rights guaranteed to all American citizens. The amendments were drafted by James Madison and ratified in 1791. Most importantly, the amendments provide for freedom of religion, speech, the press, assembly, the right to bear arms, freedom from self-incrimination, the right to a trial by jury, the ability to petition the government for redress, or a remedy, of grievances, freedom from unreasonable search and seizures, and guaranteed protection for all citizens by the due process of law.
Amendments	Amendments to the Constitution are proposals to add an improvement or corrections to the original document. Doing so requires the approval of two-thirds of the Senate and House of Representatives in order for the proposal to be sent to the states. In order for the proposal to become an amendment, three-fourths of the states must approve the proposal. In addition to the Bill of Rights, 17 other amendments have been approved. Most notably among them are the 13th Amendment- ending slavery in the United States, the 14th Amendment- defining citizenship and protection of all citizens by the due process of law, the 19th Amendment granting women the right of women to vote, the 22nd Amendment- limiting the president term to 8 years, and the 24th Amendment- eliminating the poll tax by states as a means of denying citizens the right to vote.
Civil Liberties	The freedom of citizens to exercise rights guaranteed by the Constitution and existing law without interference by the government. This protection of all citizens is a hallmark of American government.
Civil Rights	The right of citizens to be free from unequal treatment under federal and state law because of their race, gender, disability, ethnicity, and social status. The most important example of this effort to protect citizens from unequal treatment occurred during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement to remove discrimination against African-Americans based on their race.