



## On the Meaning of Citizenship

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Two nights ago I crossed an ocean to enter this country but, thanks to Ambien, I don't remember much of it. I don't remember much of Customs and Immigration either. I wasn't there long enough for it to have made an impression. I slid my passport into a scanner, pressed the pads of my fingers on some backlit glass, and a machine spit out a piece of paper before I could lose my train of thought. Did my ride know I got in early?

I passed long lines of people speaking foreign languages on my way to get my bag. The officer standing between me and the arrivals hall said "welcome" in the same way I used to greet customers who entered the Gap at Woodfield Mall where I worked while home from college.

Later that day, I was listening to people on the radio talking about who belongs here and who doesn't. Who followed the rules and who didn't. Who is "legal" and who is "illegal". The tone felt so presumptuous and I couldn't put my finger on it until I remembered how the gates of entry swung wide for me that morning. How thoughtless that act of citizenship was.

The truth is I did absolutely nothing to earn or deserve my citizenship; it was gifted to me at birth because of a decision my great-grandparents made. I didn't have to work for it, sacrifice for it, or travel to get it. It was given to me before I even knew to dream of it, before I knew what dreams were. It's self-evident that there are millions of people in this country that did much more than I did in order to be a part of it.

Before I sit in judgment, I must first admit that my Ambien was their sleepless nights, my fingerprints were the labor of their hands and the welcome I received with the entitlement of a consumer was the very same thing that made them cry. Before we talk about what it means to earn the right to be here, we should express gratitude for the gift most of us did nothing to deserve.