

Non-citizenship

A Proposal to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a John E. Sawyer Seminar on the Comparative Study of Culture from the University of California, Santa Cruz

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Project Summary and Rationale

Non-citizenship is a year-long seminar commencing in the fall of 2016 that brings together scholars in the humanities and humanistic social sciences to rethink the categories of citizen and non-citizen, their connections, and their fissures. Our primary goal is to foster a dialogue about belonging and rights, to shed light on the historical development of the category of the non-citizen, and to produce knowledge for a world being remade by human mobility.

The movement of people is one of the most pressing issues of our time. As American lawmakers debate the fate of the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, armed conflicts in Syria, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan have provoked refugee crises on a scale unseen since the Second World War. A record number of migrants, primarily from Africa, packs the immigrant processing and holding center on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa. Saudi Arabia has stepped up deportations of foreign workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. And the top court in the Dominican Republic has ruled that the descendants of undocumented Haitian migrants, even those born on Dominican soil decades ago, are ineligible for Dominican citizenship.

Migration is a global issue, not simply a U.S. or North-South one. By comparing places and periods, *Non-citizenship* seeks to understand how the movement of people and their incorporation, marginalization, and exclusion challenge older notions of citizenship and alienage. The questions motivating this collaboration include: What does modern citizenship—a category dating back to the eighteenth century—mean in a world of citizens and non-citizens, such as undocumented immigrants, guest workers, permanent residents, refugees, asylum seekers, and those who are stateless? What happens when non-citizens are prohibited from becoming citizens? And what are the rights and obligations of denizens, citizen and non-citizen alike?

This Sawyer Seminar proposal situates the study of migration and citizenship in the humanities by historicizing and theorizing *denizenship*. A denizen, in the word's most general sense, is an inhabitant. The term emphasizes an individual's or people's relationship to a particular locus. In political theory and migration studies, denizens dwell in the territory of the nation-state, so they are not external aliens, but they are not formal citizens either. Often, they are barred from becoming citizens. In the United States, free and enslaved blacks were denizens prior to the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. Today's denizens include H-1B visa-holders in Silicon Valley (foreign workers); Somalis, Salvadorans, and Liberians with Temporary

Protected Status (migrants who are unable to return to their homelands due to ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or life-threatening pandemic); and “DACAdmented” students, undocumented youth who arrived in the United States before the age of sixteen and who are temporarily exempt from deportation under the auspices of the 2012 executive action Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In other epochs and places, especially in countries where citizenship is not determined by place of birth, but by parents’ citizenship or right of blood, denizens have been and are religious and racialized minorities, indigenous peoples, and the stateless.

Engaging both the general and academic meanings of denizenship, this seminar highlights the coexistence of citizens and non-citizens in a given physical, juridical, and social space. Residential segregation notwithstanding, citizens and non-citizens frequently live and work in close proximity to one another, with the latter group providing vital services to the former. For example, non-citizen workers play an essential role in the agriculture and construction industries in multiple regions of the world. In many countries, they perform the intimate labor of caring for children and the elderly. In some cases, citizens and non-citizens live under the same roof. The Pew Research Center estimates that in the United States, at least 9 million people are in mixed-status families that include at least one unauthorized adult and at least one U.S. citizen child. While ensconced in the workplace and household, non-citizens are by no means inextricable social actors. Quite the opposite, many are vulnerable to deportation.

The precarity—in other words, lack of predictability or security—with which many non-citizens live serves as an instructive lens for studying the co-emergence of the categories of citizen and non-citizen. As we trace the historical links and ruptures between denizenship and citizenship, we aim to elucidate the ways in which those categories produce and reconfigure one another. Where certain non-citizens—for example, DACAdmented students in the United States and unauthorized migrants who are able to document their integration in Spain—are “less illegal” and more enfranchised than other non-citizens, citizens with little or no job security or prospect for regular employment face increasing precarity and even disenfranchisement. When denied the right to vote or access to public services, these nominal citizens are, in fact, reduced to denizens. Juxtaposing both spatial and social mobility, this seminar endeavors to shed light on the tiered membership—what we call the spectrum of belonging—that structures many societies in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, we seek to sharpen our understanding of the ways in which the mobility and regulation of non-citizens affect and transform citizenship and the social contract.

By bringing together scholars and cultural workers from a variety of disciplines and fields, *Non-citizenship* strives to overcome the insularity of academia, to achieve greater analytical rigor and clarity, and to imagine fresh ways of thinking about the growing global issue of non-citizenship. The discussions it engenders will extend our understanding of modern citizenship into and for a twenty-first-century world in motion.