

History of the Citizenship Question

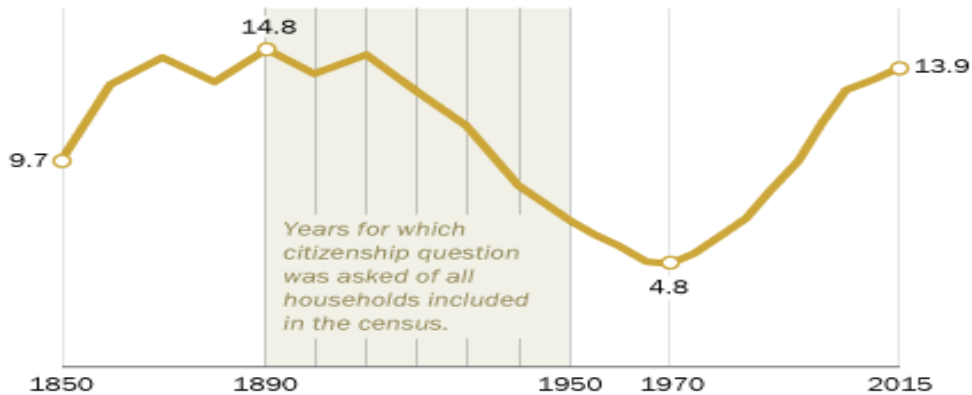
Directions: read the following passage and study the chart to respond to the questions on the next page to Think-Pair-Share with a partner. Be sure to preview the questions prior to reading the passage.

A citizenship question was asked in each decennial census of the total population from 1890 to 1950 (the 1820, 1830 and 1870 census questionnaires also included some form of a question about citizenship). Until 1920, it was only asked of adult men; women and children automatically had the same citizenship status as their husbands or fathers. The question was not asked in the 1960 census. Since then, the citizenship question has been asked of only a sample of households, either on the census long form or the American Community Survey, which replaced it in 2010.

The government's interest in asking about citizenship coincided with a rise in immigration to the U.S., ultimately peaking at nearly 15% of the population in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As explained by the Pew Research Center in their

U.S. census began regularly asking about citizenship during an era of high immigration

% of the U.S. population that is foreign born



Source: Gibson and Jung (2006) for 1850 to 1890. Edmonston and Passel (1994) estimates for 1900-1955; Pew Research Center estimates for 1960-2015 based on adjusted census data.

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[September 28, 2015 post](#): “Fifty years ago, the U.S. enacted a sweeping immigration law, the Immigration and Nationality Act, which replaced longstanding national origin quotas that favored Northern Europe with a new system allocating more visas to people from other countries around the world and giving increased priority to close relatives of U.S. residents.

Just prior to passage of the 1965 law, residents of only three countries—Ireland, Germany and the United Kingdom—were entitled to nearly 70% of the quota visas available to enter the U.S. ([U.S. Department of Justice, 1965](#)).⁴ Today, immigration

to the U.S. is dominated by people born in Asia and Latin America, with immigrants from all of Europe accounting for only 10% of recent arrivals.

The 1965 law undid national origin quotas enacted in the 1920s, which were written into laws that imposed the first numerical limits on immigration. Those laws were the culmination of steadily tightening federal restrictions on immigration that began in the late 1800s with prohibitions or restrictions on certain types of immigrants, such as convicts, in addition to a ban on Chinese migrants and later virtually all Asian migrants.”