

# Introduction

Citizenship has been a defining element of American life from colonial times to the present. As with one's class, sexuality, gender, and race, an individual's citizenship standing has been a meaningful vector of identity in America. The right to work, the right to vote, the right to travel, the right to free speech, and the right to an education are just a sliver of the many freedoms historically predicated upon one's naturalization status in the United States.

In the nation's earliest days, citizenship was a fluid, free-floating idea, one that had yet to be cemented into law. Citizenship instead referred to the cultural practices expected of individuals inhabiting the geopolitical boundaries of the United States. At that time, central to the concept of citizenship was the freedom for "all individuals to pursue their actions and activities without risk or arbitrary or unjust political interference" (Hall and Held 1989, 177). At best, citizenship was ambiguous, with "members of the founding generation" leaving "few explicit definitions of what they meant by citizenship" (Kerber 1997, 834). In more recent times, citizenship has not only connoted certain beliefs and behaviors peculiar to those residing in America; it has also transformed into a legal condition determined by a complex nexus of economic and social interests of the American empire. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the first legal provision that explicitly forbade a group of people from entering the United States based on their racial and ethnic identity that was passed after Chinese immigrants were no longer desired for their labor, is a good example of how politics and culture are intertwined. And while the legal and cultural expectations of American citizens have been historically unstable, one thing has remained constant: people and groups occupying all echelons of society—from state institutions to individual noncitizens desiring social and legal inclusion—have always contested citizenship.

This book promises a fresh attempt at teasing out these multiple meanings by looking at how different groups residing in America have constituted and articulated what it means to be an American using material culture as a medium of social action. I oscillate back and forth from the institutions imparting ideals about American citizenship to the individuals on the receiving end of such ideological instruction. As I assert in later chapters, the vantage point that historical archaeology affords permits a reading of citizenship that is multiscalar in methodology, nuancing previous studies of American citizenship that prioritize historical documents and court rulings over individual and communal responses. Inspired by globalization and transnationalist studies that look at how local identities and practices are informed by the global and the local, this mutually constitutive approach captures how national and regional Americanization and citizenship efforts enacted by corporate and federal entities were negotiated and retooled by, to use Scott's (1994) oft-cited phrase, "those of little note."

One might wonder how historical archaeology can intervene in debates on what has constituted American citizenship, a subject that tends to be dominated by documentary data. This book etches out a route to employing an archaeology of citizenship by showing how archaeological data can be elicited to explore how multiple interest groups have defined citizenship in the past. Throughout the course of American history, what people do and do not purchase and consume has served as a cornerstone of citizenship and marker of American identity. Archaeologists see the residues of these consumer transactions in their assemblages, permitting an unrivaled perspective from which we can discuss how goods were used by historic peoples to express their feelings regarding American nationality and citizenship.

With the exception of a few groundbreaking studies (e.g., Mullins 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2011a, 2011b), historical archaeologists have understated the novel role citizenship played in shaping American consumption patterns. This book takes seriously the social and legal category of citizenship by looking at how it has historically and recently impacted the lives of nonnaturalized and naturalized Americans. As I argue throughout this work, because consumption has been linked with one's display of patriotism and national identity, citizenship should be framed as a lens through which we can theorize and interpret the consumer decisions historic Americans made.

## Theorizing Citizenship

What constitutes citizenship and who counts as a citizen? This is perhaps one of the most contested questions in contemporary America, with many of today's politicians calling for the selective, intentional exclusion of Mexican nationals while conversely ignoring Pacific, Atlantic, and Canadian borders that surely welcome "illegal" immigrants as well. Although political pundits are currently making public arguments that citizenship should be unilaterally restricted, the United States continues to sustain "corporate interests that exploit the cheap labor of vulnerable immigrants" (Ong 1999, 9). The H-2 guest worker program is a prime example of this form of state-sanctioned "illegal" immigration, where Mexican nationals are imported into the United States and held captive by the American employers who hire them. Likened to a modern form of slavery, this program allows companies to treat employees as they see fit, forcing them to work long hours and placing them in harsh and what most would consider uninhabitable housing. Workers objecting to these conditions "face deportation, blacklisting, or other retaliation" (Southern Poverty Law Center 2007, 1). Hence, state and federal policies are rife with social contradiction, making the regulation of immigration much more a cultural project than a legal or economic one.

The exclusion of specific groups via legal means is certainly not understudied, with a canon of work branching across nearly all academic disciplines that trace the lineage of racially and ethnically based exclusionary laws, acts, and statutes. Rather, the lacuna in citizenship studies lies in its failure to grasp how legal measures were actualized, enforced, and experienced beyond their legal meanings. This book sees citizenship as a process rather than a static, legal state of being with which we have come to associate "citizenship." It aims to capture how people choose or choose not to adopt certain behaviors and goods expected of American citizens. Unlike other fields, historical archaeology unveils these choices by calling upon archaeological data anchored to discrete periods of time. The discipline can attend to "vernacular notions of citizenship" (Rosaldo 1999, 260) constructed by marginalized populations frequently left out of or invisible in the historical records. Archaeology's diachronic emphasis is needed in citizenship studies because it illustrates that a group or individual's decision to partake in consumption can vacillate over time depending on a pastiche of sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors.