



“Unwilling Expatriates” Study Guide Questions

“Unwilling Expatriates” is an article about how women in Renton were affected by the 1907 Expatriation Act, which tied the citizenship status of women in the U.S. to their husbands’ citizenship status after marriage. As a result, American-born women who married non-citizens between 1907 and 1922 lost their American citizenship.

This activity is designed for readers in 7th grade and above. Questions can be used for discussion or as writing prompts. [You can find the original article from September 2017 on the Museum’s newsletter page.](#)

1. How did the 1855 Naturalization Act pave the way for the 1907 Expatriation Act with regard to how women’s citizenship was treated?
2. What caused an influx of Italian immigrants to the U.S. around the turn of the century? How did Americans at the time react?
3. How were American men who married immigrant women perceived differently than American women who married immigrant men?
4. Ida, Mary, and Theresa Delaurenti were all U.S. citizens who married Italian immigrants. While Mary and Theresa lost their U.S. citizenship after marriage, Ida’s status as a U.S. citizen did not change. What was the reason Ida’s marriage was treated differently from that of her sisters?
5. How did the 1907 Expatriation Act affect voting? How did suffragists incorporate the Expatriation Act into their arguments in support of giving women the vote?
6. The Cable Act went into effect on September 22, 1922. How did the Cable Act counteract the 1907 Expatriation Act? In what ways was it effective and ineffective at doing so?
7. Describe the process expatriated women in Renton went through to regain their citizenship. Was their experience different or similar to that of immigrant women?
8. What role did Peter Prins play in Renton’s immigrant community?



Essay Question: Give two examples of women of British descent who were expatriated as discussed in the article. What were their experiences? In what ways do you think they were at an advantage compared to their Italian American peers?

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you are living in Renton sometime between 1907 and 1922. Your cousin Amelia, who lives in Seattle, has recently married an Italian immigrant to the U.S. and lost her citizenship status. She writes you a letter asking for advice on how to regain her citizenship. Write Amelia a letter back, and include your responses to the following questions: What steps does she need to take to regain U.S. citizenship? What are some resources you can provide her with? Who do you think might be helpful to her cause?



Answer Guide for Parents and Teachers

1. How did the 1855 Naturalization Act pave the way for the 1907 Expatriation Act with regards to how women's citizenship was treated?

Under the 1855 Naturalization Act, women who married U.S. citizens could automatically become U.S. citizens themselves. This set the precedent for women's citizenship hinging on their husbands' status as citizens. The 1907 Expatriation Act took it a step further by revoking U.S. citizenship of women who married non-citizens.

2. What caused an influx of Italian immigrants to the U.S. around the turn of the century? How did Americans at the time react?

Between 1890 and 1914, Italy was in an economic depression which caused a quarter of its residents to flee. The number of Italian immigrants to the U.S. greatly increased. For example, the number of Italian residents in Renton increased from one in 1889 to 267 in 1910. Americans who were already living in the U.S. were wary of the new arrivals. While Italian immigrants were not subjected to the racist laws that barred immigration from Asian and other countries, they were also not generally viewed in a sympathetic light. Some Americans debated whether Italians could really be considered "white."

3. How were American men who married immigrant women perceived differently than American women who married immigrant men?

American men who married immigrant women were praised. It was thought that they would teach their immigrant wives how to be good American citizens. American women who married immigrants were considered almost treasonous, as exemplified by federal hearings on the 1907 Expatriation Act ten years after its passing, in which one committee member stated that a woman's loss of citizenship through marriage was "a good example to our American girls to marry American boys."

4. Ida, Mary, and Theresa Delaurenti were all U.S. citizens who married Italian immigrants. While Mary and Theresa lost their U.S. citizenship after marriage, Ida's status as a U.S. citizen did not change. What was the reason Ida's marriage was treated differently from her sisters'?

When Ida married Joseph Baima, he had already gone through the naturalization process and become an American citizen. Because of this, Ida maintained her citizenship status. Ida's sisters' husbands had not yet gone through the naturalization process, and Mary and Theresa lost their citizenship after marriage as a result. Mary and her husband George were both listed as aliens in the 1920 census.

5. How did the 1907 Expatriation Act affect voting? How did suffragists incorporate the Expatriation Act into their arguments in support of giving women the vote?

Prior to 1907, some states in the U.S. allowed women to vote. Losing their citizenship due to marriage under the 1907 Expatriation Act meant that some women lost their ability to vote. On the other hand, immigrant women who married a U.S. citizen and automatically became citizens were granted the right to vote. Suffragists incorporated peoples' wariness of new immigrants into their cause, arguing that allowing all American women to vote would mean that, from their point of view, more "real" Americans would be voting.



6. The Cable Act went into effect on September 22, 1922. How did the Cable Act counteract the 1907 Expatriation Act? In what ways was it effective and ineffective at doing so?

The Cable Act counteracted the 1907 Expatriation Act by stopping women from losing their citizenship through marriage. However, it did not restore citizenship to women who had already lost it. These women had to go through the naturalization process to regain their citizenship.

7. Describe the process expatriated women went through to regain their citizenship.

A wife could bypass making a Declaration of Intent and avoid any immigration quotas on her husband's country of origin, if her husband was deemed eligible for naturalization and was willing to go through with the process. The wife then filled out a Petition to Naturalize, which included the date they had taken up residence in the U.S. (her birthdate) and the names of two American witnesses who could vouch for her. English was usually her first language and she had the advantage of having a long history of friends and family who might vouch for her. But she still had to pass a citizenship test and many required special classes, having been out of school for many years. As naturalized citizens, these women still did not have all the protections granted to birth citizens—their citizenship could be revoked at any time.

8. What role did Peter Prins play in Renton's immigrant community?

Peter Prins was the founder of the Renton Americanization School, also known by the nickname "Mr. America." He was a Dutch immigrant who became an American citizen in 1912. By 1936, his Americanization School's picnic had become an annual tradition which was reported on in the *Seattle Times*. Matilda Giovanelli Delaurenti was one of Prins's students, and he appears as a witness on her Petition for Naturalization.

Essay Question: Give two examples of women of British descent who were expatriated as discussed in the article. What were their experiences? In what ways do you think they were at an advantage compared to their Italian American peers?

SAMPLE ANSWER: Ruth Burrows was a 4th-generation American of British descent who came to Renton in 1894 with her father, Fay Burrows, who ran a fishing resort on the Black River north of town. In 1918, Ruth married Joseph Venishnick, an immigrant from Austria. Her marriage to an "alien" caused her to lose her citizenship. Despite the fact that she was described as "the daughter of a Pioneer family," the federal government had revoked her citizenship.

Another example is Ethel Rowe. She was born to English parents in Pennsylvania in 1887. In 1907, she married James McDonald, a Canadian, in Renton. She lost her citizenship two months later as a result of the 1907 Expatriation Act.

Although women of British descent, like Ruth and Ethel, who married non-U.S. citizens lost their citizenship under the 1907 Expatriation Act, they were generally viewed more in a more sympathetic light by the American public than those of Italian descent. Because of narrow ideas about what a "true American" looked like, often women like Ethel and Ruth were held up as examples of why the law was cruel. Suffragists at the time would have likely argued that women like them should not lose their right to vote through marriage, as they were "real" Americans. On the other hand, outcry in favor of Italian immigrants was muted.



Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you are living in Renton sometime between 1907 and 1922. Your cousin Amelia, who lives in Seattle, has recently married an Italian immigrant to the U.S. and lost her citizenship status. She writes you a letter asking for advice on how to regain her citizenship. Write Amelia a letter back, and include your responses to the following questions: What steps does she need to take to regain U.S. citizenship? What are some resources you can provide her with? Who do you think might be helpful to her cause?

This creative essay offers students a chance to consider all the steps women needed to take to regain their citizenship once it was lost as a result of the Expatriation Act of 1907. It also allows them to use their imagination and creative writing skills to exercise empathy by putting themselves in someone else's shoes and framing their answers as a letter to a family member. Encourage students to reread the article to gain a deeper understanding of what steps women needed to go through in order to regain their lost citizenship, including: paperwork required by the federal government, citizenship classes, and lining up witnesses to support their efforts.

Supplemental Resources (all available at no cost)

General Resources - The 1907 Expatriation Act

[Immigration History's Expatriation Act of 1907 Page](#) contains an excerpt of text from the Act, accompanied by a brief explanation and some discussion questions. It is part of a larger series of lesson plans that cover a broad range of topics in American immigration history.

["When Saying 'I Do' Meant Giving Up Your U.S. Citizenship"](#) is an article with accompanying photos and historical documentation written by Meg Hacker for the National Archives' *Prologue*. It explains how women around the U.S. were affected by the Expatriation Act of 1907. It also brings up other laws which affected women's citizenship status, including bills leading up to the act of July 2, 1940, which finally offered women a way to regain their citizenship without having to undergo naturalization.

["That Time American Women Lost Their Citizenship Because They Married Foreigners"](#) by Tanya Ballard Brown is a short article that discusses the Expatriation Act of 1907, with special attention to social attitudes at the time as well as how those affected by the Act were impacted further during World War I.

Interested in knowing more about women in your family? <https://blog.genealogybank.com/the-1907-expatriation-act-did-your-female-ancestor-lose-her-american-citizenship.html>

Critical thinking questions: Based on your reading, how would you describe overall U.S. attitudes towards women and immigrants around the turn of the century? How did the First World War affect the status of American women who married German citizens? Between 1922 and 1940, what other legislation was passed to help reverse the effects of the 1907 Expatriation Act that were not addressed by the Cable Act?

Immigration and U.S. Citizenship – Historic Challenges, Barriers and Laws

[The Digital Public Library of America's Immigration since 1840](#) contains a wealth of primary source documents relating to immigrants to the U.S. and the discrimination they often faced, including laws and



quotas meant to restrict immigration. Documents are divided by topic, and topics covered range from Ellis Island to the challenges of assimilating into American culture, from the 1800s through modern times.

[Assimilation](#) is a clip from the PBS documentary *The Italian Americans* that focuses on some of the difficulties Italian immigrants to the U.S. faced when they arrived in the U.S., including demands from social workers and teachers to abandon cultural practices from their home country in order to assimilate with their contemporaries of British descent. King County Library System has the entire documentary available for free on DVD [as well as for streaming online from home with your library card.](#)

[Chinese Immigrants and the Chinese Exclusion Act](#) gives a synopsis of how prejudices against Chinese laborers in the U.S. led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which blocked Chinese immigrants. It also discusses how it affected foreign relations with China, and concludes with the Act being repealed in 1943.

[“We’ve got to learn from that’: Seattle volunteers shed new light on dark history of Chinese exclusion”](#) is a *Seattle Times* article and accompanying video that discusses volunteer efforts to process over 50,000 files in Seattle’s National Archives related to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Critical Thinking Questions: What led to the passage of laws that restricted immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries? What lessons can we learn about immigration from our country’s past? How do you think these lessons might apply to the present day?