

QUESTION: I am a U.S. citizen. What documents do I need to travel to the United States? I was born in the United States, but my parents took me to live in Mexico when I was 10 years old. I'm now 18, and I want to travel to the United States to live with my stepmother and brother. I have my U.S. birth certificate. Is that enough documentation for the U.S. border officers to admit me to the United States?

ANSWER: You could show up at a U.S. entry post with just your birth certificate and eventually get admitted, but only after a great deal of inconvenience. That's because the law now requires U.S. citizens entering from Mexico and Canada by land to show both proof of citizenship (such as a U.S. birth certificate) and a photo ID from a U.S. federal, state, provincial, county, territory or municipal authority. Previously, an oral declaration of citizenship was sometimes sufficient. My guess is that your best bet is to get a U.S. passport. You can apply at a U.S. consulate in Mexico.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the agency that guards our borders and admits people to the United States, cannot keep a U.S. citizen from entering the United States. That's true even if the U.S. citizen doesn't have the required documents. However, the CBP can certainly prevent entry until the person's U.S. citizenship is confirmed. That could take minutes, or it could take days or even weeks. Unless you have an extremely urgent need to come to the United States now, get a U.S. passport before trying to enter. Readers should note that to travel to the United States by air, you need a U.S. passport or other U.S. government-issued travel document. For more information, go to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Web site: www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/crossingborders.

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