For students of American immigration, *Letters from an American Farmer*, a book written in the late 1780s is an essential point of reference, as the author asked a question that still resounds. Crevecoeur’s query, “What is the American...?” struck a deep chord; while that quote from the famous Frenchman is invariably cited, the issue is then immediately left behind. That lacuna is no surprise since the prevailing conceptualizations provide little basis for asking about how Americanization might be studied or explained. The problem is largely one of perspective: the social scientists almost all stand with their backs to the border, looking at processes of boundary making, blurring, and crossing within the country of immigration. Moreover, they do so while embracing values that they understand as universalistic, such as those entailing equal and fair treatment regardless of background, without realizing that eligibility for equal and fair treatment stops at the water’s edge. Consequently, by focusing on the contrast between insiders of long-standing native parentage and outsiders of more recent vintage, standard approaches cut the Americanization process in half, obscuring the starting point and making the tale of how immigrants and their descendants become Americans the story untold. In this paper I will try to recount that untold story, doing so by first developing a conceptual framework for understanding how foreigners get turned into nationals and then providing some illustrative data.