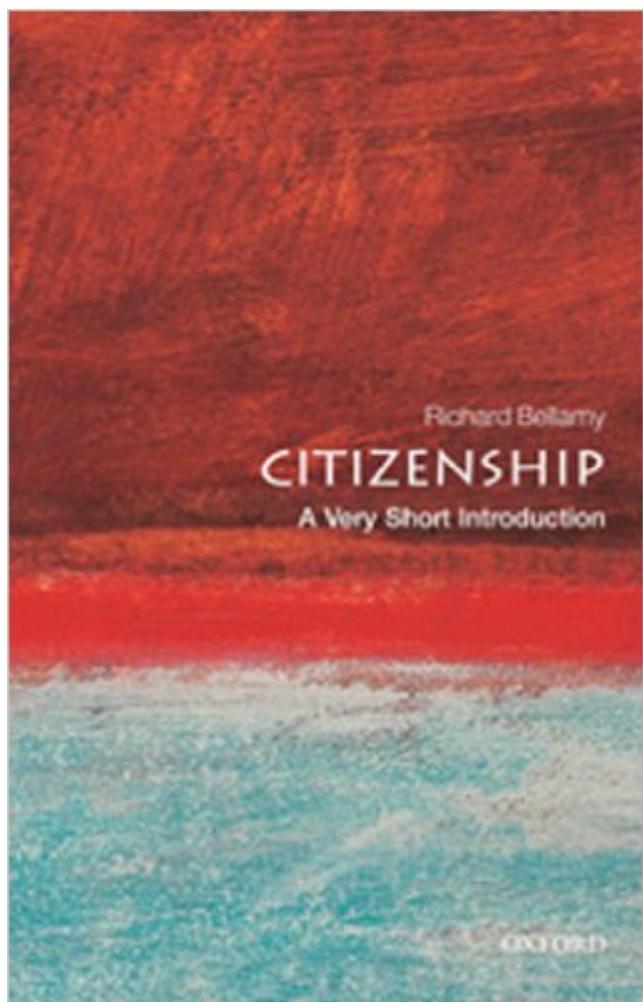


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Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

Interest in citizenship has never been higher. But what does it mean to be a citizen of a modern, complex community? Why is citizenship important? Can we create citizenship, and can we test for it? In this fascinating Very Short Introduction, Richard Bellamy explores the answers to these questions and more in a clear and accessible way. He approaches the subject from a political perspective, to address the complexities behind the major topical issues. Discussing the main models of citizenship, exploring how ideas of citizenship have changed through time from ancient Greece to the present, and examining notions of rights and democracy, he reveals the irreducibly political nature of citizenship today.

ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

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Customer Reviews

Written for the "A Very Short Introduction" series of Oxford University Press, Richard Bellamy's "Citizenship" (2008) offers a challenging introduction to the nature of citizenship and to why it is important. Bellamy, Professor of Political Science and Director of the School of Public Policy at University College, London, has written widely on citizenship, political philosophy, and government. Although a "short introduction", Bellamy's book is difficult and learned. It also presents Bellamy's own informed understanding of citizenship rather than rehashing the literature for beginners. Due to its brevity, the book does not develop its arguments as fully or clearly as it might. Bellamy has the lecturer's habit of outlining and presenting his points (i.e. this is so for three reasons, 1, 2.3) and not elaborating. The book also includes a great deal of repetition and cross-referencing from chapter to chapter which tends to make it ponderous. Thus, Bellamy's study is not an easy "very short introduction" but rather requires close reading and attention. With its difficulties, the book offers an insightful understanding of citizenship. Bellamy argues that citizenship is closely connected to participation in government and to democracy. The crux of modern citizenship, for Bellamy, is the right to vote. He points to a growing apathy and skepticism about democracy and voting in developed countries such as the United States and Great Britain and seeks to combat this regrettable tendency by explaining the value of citizenship. In his opening chapter, Bellamy offers an exposition of the nature of citizenship which he expands upon in the remainder of the work.

That the subject of citizenship, itself, might serve as a field of academic inquiry caught me by surprise. I think citizenship is vital for understanding our predicament in 21st century America. Unfortunately I didn't get time to finish reading this book so I feel constrained to give it five stars and comment on what I read (the first 50 pages) which was well-written, insightful, instructive. If and when I finish this book, I'll update this review. Richard Bellamy sees three components to citizenship: (1) membership -- who is a citizen? He thinks citizenship is linked with democracy, since democracies require broad acceptance, legitimacy, trust, and solidarity among citizens to function properly. (2) rights -- I was somewhat confused about his sense of this term, but I like his idea that citizenship is a "right to have rights" although I think there's more to it than that. I have a sense of a right as a sphere of possible future action that others acknowledge you can do, and the boundaries

between spheres I think of as "laws".(3) participation -- citizenship means taking part in the political process in an equal way with others. He writes: "Citizenship is a condition of civic equality. It consists of membership in a political community where all citizens can determine the terms of social cooperation on an equal basis. This status not only secures equal rights to the enjoyment of the collective goods provided by the political association but also involves equal duties to promote and sustain them -- including the good of democratic citizenship itself." He sees the same problems with citizenship that I see: "...increasing numbers of citizens do not bother participating.

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