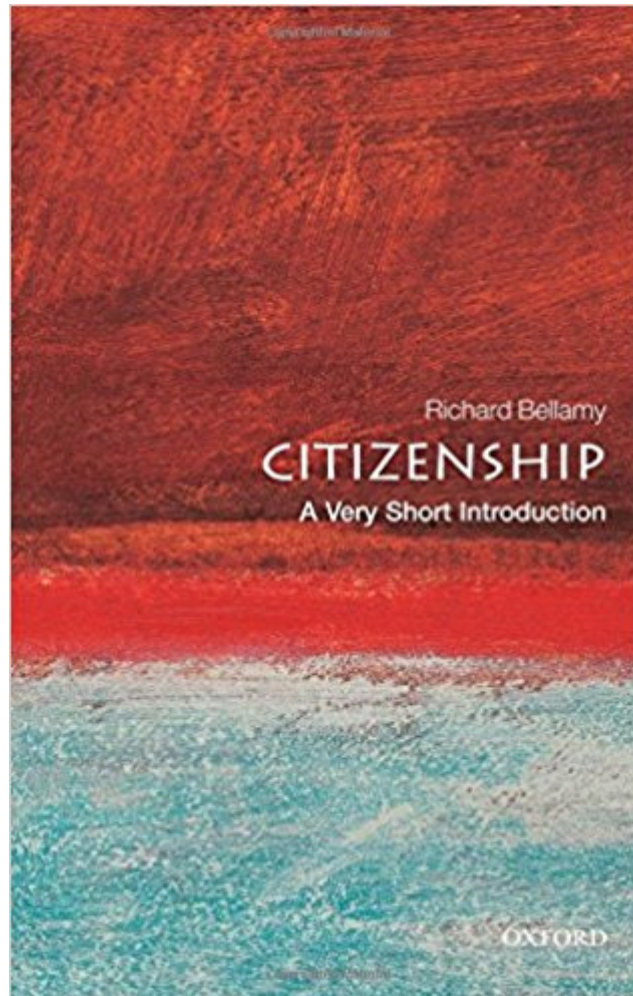




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Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Interest in citizenship has never been higher. Politicians of all stripes stress its importance, as do church leaders, captains of industry and every kind of campaigning group--from those supporting global causes, such as tackling world poverty, to others with a largely local focus, such as combating neighborhood crime. In this brilliant, compact introduction, Richard Bellamy offers an eye-opening look at an idea that is as important as it is rare--the prospect of influencing government policy according to reasonably fair rules and on a more or less equal basis with others. Bringing together the most recent scholarship, the book sheds light on how ideas of citizenship have changed through time from ancient Greece to the present, looks at concepts such as membership and belonging, and highlights the relation between citizenship, rights, and democracy. Bellamy also examines the challenges confronting the very possibility of citizenship today, the impact of globalization, the desirability of "global citizenship," the teaching of citizenship in schools, citizenship tests for immigrants, and the many different definitions and types of citizenship in modern society. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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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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