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The thinking citizenship series

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EDITORIAL

The Thinking Citizenship Series

When thinking about citizenship, a small number of names get the most attention (if not citation), such as Max Weber or T.H. Marshall. Often it is not obvious to think about Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault or W.B. Dubois as having made significant contributions to developing ideas about citizenship.

In this issue we are pleased to inaugurate an exciting new series of essays we are calling Thinking Citizenship. The series features interpretive essays on prominent thinkers who have made a distinctive and original contribution to developing ideas about citizenship in modern social and political thought. It aims to include both the obvious and not so obvious contributions toward thinking about citizenship, but with a theoretical and political coherence that avoids an all-encompassing arbitrariness.

What is called citizenship? Attempting to define citizenship definitively is probably a serious intellectual mistake because we (almost) all know that citizenship is a contested site of social struggles. As such, there is no royal road to defining citizenship. The object is perhaps not to define citizenship but to elucidate what it is about. Citizenship is about political subjectivity. Not one or the other but both: political and subjectivity. Citizenship enables political subjectivity. Citizenship opens politics as a practice of contestation (agon) through which subjects become political. Understanding citizenship as political subjectivity requires political, sociological and critical imagination. For example, when T.H. Marshall considers social rights he has already an understanding that these rights came about as a result of social struggles and these struggles involved, as Arendt herself would have put it in her most-cited and provocative phrase, 'the right to have rights'. Before a subject can struggle to claim rights that subject must have already won the right to wage that struggle in the first place. But that subject must have already also accepted that the right to have rights brings with it obligations. So then citizenship as political subjectivity is the right to have rights and obligations. The series will therefore explore how this political subjectivity is forged through social struggles over identity, inclusion, resources and memory. Thinking about citizenship involves thinking about political subjectivity in that it both gives an account, and always creates an image, of the citizen with the right to have rights and obligations. If citizenship is about political subjectivity, what binds the thinkers included in this series together is that each approaches the formation of citizenship as the right to have rights and obligations, albeit from different perspectives. The Thinking Citizenship Series aims to capture this binding thread on citizenship as political subjectivity and the political sociological imagination that each thinker brings to bear on it.

In this issue, we are pleased to inaugurate the Thinking Citizenship Series with two essays: 'T.H. Marshall, social rights and English national identity', written by Bryan S. Turner, Co-Chief Editor of Citizenship Studies, and 'Talcott Parsons on full citizenship for African Americans: retrospective interpretation and evaluation', written by Victor Lidz. In the near future, we will be featuring essays on, for example, Etienne Balibar, Bernard Crick, Ralf Dahrendorf, John Locke, Jacques Rancie`re, Judith Shklar, Baruch Spinoza, Mary Wollstonecraft, Iris Marion Young, and many others. We hope the series will stimulate a debate on the ongoing significance of citizenship as a concept that defines and redefines the possibilities for political subjectivity. In a time of unprecedented political and economic crisis, as we seek new ways of thinking citizenship, we want to present our readers critical traditions that engaged it.

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