

Thinking about Citizenship

In the market domain, goods and services are--quite properly--commodities to be bought and sold. But votes, honours, government policies and justice belong to the public domain. They must not be commodified. By the same token, the measuring rods that assess efficiency in the market domain--"throughput", productivity, added value, monetary return on capital--have no place in the public domain. Academics do not become more efficient when the staff-student ratio falls and lectures are overcrowded; the value of a stay in hospital is not enhanced if low-paid contract nurses, with little commitment to the job, replace established nursing teams.

The public domain is both priceless and precarious--a gift of history, always at risk. It can take shape only in a society in which the notion of a public interest, distinct from private interests, has taken root. Unlike the private domain of love, friendship and personal connection and the market domain of buying and selling, the values and practices of the public domain do not come naturally. They have to be learnt and then nurtured.

'The Public Domain Is a Gift of History. Now It Is At Risk': Ideals of Service, Equity and Civic Duty That Once Counted Even in Private Firms Are All but Gone. Money Rules and the Patronage of "Old Corruption" Is Back. Contributors: David Marquand - author. Magazine Title: New Statesman. Volume: 132. Issue: 4671. Publication Date: January 19, 2004. Page Number: 25+. COPYRIGHT 2004 New Statesman, Ltd.; COPYRIGHT 2004 Gale Group

The Greeks referred to those who lived outside the realm of public life and politics as idiot - $i[\delta]i[\omega]i[\tau]i[\alpha]i$. In our unthinking acceptance of the idea of race, whose birth and development Ivan Hannaford here chronicles, we in the modern age may be guilty of a kind of collective idiocy. Genuine public life - not to mention a genuine solution to racial problem - becomes impossible when a society allows race or ethnicity to displace citizenship as one's badge of identity.

The Idiocy of Race. Contributors: Ivan Hannaford - author. Magazine Title: The Wilson Quarterly. Volume: 18. Issue: 2. Publication Date: Spring 1994. Page Number: 8+. COPYRIGHT 1994 Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; COPYRIGHT 2002 Gale Group

The scene with which The Good Citizen opens could have been lifted straight from a Norman Rockwell painting. On Election Day 1996, in a garage festooned with American flags, voters come to cast their ballots for President as well as for a slew of state and local offices and enough ballot propositions to intimidate all but the terminally conscientious. Some parents bring their children, who beam when handed an "I Voted" sticker. Several nearly blind people bring friends along to help them read the ballot. One elderly voter laments that his wife is missing her first presidential election because she has Alzheimer's. Thirteen hours later, in this San Diego precinct and more than 25,000 others in California alone, the event that Michael Schudson calls "today's central act of democratic citizenship" is over. Nothing--not even the race to the shopping malls for post-Christmas bargains--involves so many Americans doing the same thing at the same time.

To the exhausted volunteers, it's a day well spent. But something's wrong with this picture. No volunteer is younger than 50, and the 50-year-old is Schudson himself. The number of people who do appear at the polling station doesn't begin to match the figures on the rolls. Some prefer the "bowling alone" convenience of the absentee ballot to the neighborliness of the polling place. More people aren't bothering to vote at all, turned off by Tweedledums versus Tweedledees, the attack ads and soundbites that substitute for substance. When people don't vote--and fewer and fewer eligible voters show up at the polls--they're indicating that politics is irrelevant.

Especially to the twenty-somethings, who have grown up on a political diet of hacks, clowns and endless scandals, it's all a big yawn.

THE GOOD CITIZEN: A History of American Civic Life. Contributors: David L. Kirp - author. Magazine Title: The Nation. Volume: 268. Issue: 9. Publication Date: March 8, 1999. Page Number: 25. COPYRIGHT 1999 The Nation Company L.P.; COPYRIGHT 2004 Gale Group

More young Americans can name the reigning American Idol and the city where the cartoon Simpsons live than know the political party of their state's governor.

That's one of the more troubling findings of "Citizenship: A Challenge for All Generations," released in September by the Alliance for Representative Democracy, a partnership of NCSL's Trust for Representative Democracy, the Center for Civic Education and the Center on Congress at Indiana University.

The report is based on the results of a national survey, which found that 15- to 26-year-olds (and there are 40 million of them in this country) don't understand the ideals of citizenship; they are disengaged from the political process; they lack the knowledge necessary for effective self-government; and they have limited appreciation of American democracy.

Whatever Happened to Civics? Today's Young People Are Way Too Disengaged from the Political Process, According to a Survey by the Alliance for Representative Democracy. Contributors: Nicole Moore - author. Magazine Title: State Legislatures. Volume: 29. Issue: 10. Publication Date: December 2003. Page Number: 32+. COPYRIGHT 2003 National Conference of State Legislatures; COPYRIGHT 2004 Gale Group

With the politically enabled decline of education in the United States at all levels, students even at the collegiate level have little knowledge of the history of their own country, let alone a knowledge of the intellectual foundations of Western culture that have shaped this nation. This bodes ill for an appreciation of what it means to be an American citizen. . .Citizenship. . .is more than legal status; in its larger sense it is a sentiment or state of mind, an awareness of a shared identity with others to whom one is related by nationality, if not by blood. It entails a sense of belonging to a community for which one bears some responsibility. Citizenship implies public-spiritedness. Like patriotism, it has to be cultivated. No one is born loving his country.

On Patriotism. Contributors: Walter Berns - author. Magazine Title: Public Interest. Issue: 127. Publication Date: Spring 1997. Page Number: 19+. COPYRIGHT 1997 The National Affairs, Inc.; COPYRIGHT 2002 Gale Group

Democratic citizenship was the great invention of the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The polity became sovereign within its borders; the sovereign was gradually rendered accountable to its people. In the twentieth century, the great challenge to the ideal of democratic citizenship was totalitarian fascism and communism. In the next century, the more subtle struggle will be to keep democratic citizenship alive and well in the face of a far more oblique and insidious challenge from its complement and rival organizing system--democratic commerce.

The End of Citizenship?. Contributors: Robert Kuttner - author. Magazine Title: The American Prospect. Volume: 11. Issue: 3. Publication Date: December 20, 1999. Page Number: 4. COPYRIGHT 1999 The American Prospect, Inc.; COPYRIGHT 2002 Gale Group