Definition: **citizenship** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

(1611) 1: the status of being a citizen 2 a: membership in a community (as a college) b: the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community

Summary Article: **Citizenship**

From *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*

Citizenship is both a legal status and a social identity. Legally, citizenship refers to an individual's political status, rights, and obligations in a nation, for example, the right to political representation or participation in the judicial process in that nation. Socially, citizenship refers to an individual's membership in a political organization or community. Whereas legal citizenship is closely linked to nationalism, the social conception of citizenship focuses on individual or group political ideology. In both, however, notions of morals, good standing, and social responsibility elements of so-called active citizenship are central to what it means to be a citizen.

**Legal citizenship** comprises several types. For example, in the United States, citizenship occurs through birth, naturalization, or, rarely, through an act of Congress and presidential assent. Any person born in a U.S. territory or from U.S. citizen parent(s) automatically becomes an U.S. citizen. In other countries, such as Japan, citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis* (bloodline) rather than birth. Subsequently, only those with biological Japanese parents or ancestors may automatically receive Japanese citizenship. In contrast to citizenship through birth or bloodline, in most countries, the naturalization process is lengthy and citizenship awarded only upon fulfillment of a set of cultural and financial requirements. These requirements measure the applicant's degree of social, moral, and financial responsibility and, thus, worthiness of citizenship status.

Only legal permanent residents who have resided in the United States continuously for a minimum of 5 years, with no single absence of more than 1 year, can initiate the naturalization process. Exceptions are for non-U.S. citizens who have served in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001. These individuals can apply for expedited naturalization, which shortens by 3 years the time period non-U.S. citizen military personnel normally must wait before they can apply for citizenship. Also, expedited naturalization allows applicants to apply without being physically present in the United States during the application process. Nonmilitary applicants must be physically present in the United States for at least 30 months out of the preceding years. All applicants must be persons of “good moral character” for the preceding 5 years (1 year for military applicants and 3 years for applicants married to U.S. citizens). The government defines “good moral character” as lack of a criminal record. Noncitizens are ineligible for naturalization for criminal offenses ranging from murder conviction to involvement with terrorist organizations and for noncriminal activities including alcoholism or testing HIV-positive.

Nationalism is a central element of naturalized citizenship. Applicants must demonstrate proficiency in the English language and a fundamental knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and the principles and form of U.S. government. They must also show “attachment to” (i.e., a willingness to honor and obey) the principles of the U.S. Constitution. Taking the Oath of Allegiance legalizes this attachment.
During this oath, applicants officially renounce any foreign allegiances and commit themselves to serve in the U.S. military (e.g., during a draft) and perform civic services (e.g., jury duty) when needed. Whereas some nations—such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States—allow dual citizenship, most require applicants to surrender one in favor of the other. Whether citizenship is achieved through birth or naturalization, in both instances U.S. citizens have both legal rights (e.g., of political representation) and legal obligations (e.g., jury duty). To date, however, only U.S. citizens by birth may run for presidential office, a stipulation that reflects a deterministic (biological) view of nationalism and citizenship.

Supranational citizenship extends the idea of national citizenship to an international level, as in, for example, the European Union (EU). The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 grants EU citizenship to citizens of all EU member countries and entitles them to supranational legal benefits, such as freedom of movement within the EU, the right of residence within any EU member nation, and the right to vote in EU elections. However, supranational citizenship is not a substitute for national citizenship; rather, both coexist. Last, honorary citizenship is, on rare occasions, bestowed upon non-U.S. citizens of extraordinary merit through an act of Congress and presidential assent. To this date, only six individuals have been awarded honorary U.S. citizenship, among them Winston Churchill in 1963 and Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu (Mother Teresa) in 1996.

The legal definition of citizenship focuses on legal and political rights, representation, and obligations. Social citizenship also involves rights and obligations, but within a social context; it can be used to indicate membership in a particular political community, for example, the lesbian and gay community. Within this social context, citizenship refers to identity politics, political ideology, and the perceived responsibilities that are associated with these politics, such as engaging in political activism or a particular lifestyle. Another form of social citizenship is corporate citizenship. Corporate citizenship does not refer to a corporation's legal status but to its perceived contributions to (particularly the betterment of) a society. Corporate citizenship, like its legal counterpart, is synonymous with social responsibility, and it incorporates notions of “good” and “active” citizenship.

While legal citizenship is more deterministic in nature than is social citizenship, as witnessed in the birth-citizenship requirement to run for presidential office, ultimately both are socially constructed. Legal citizenship requirements and definitions of socially and morally responsible behaviors are culturally and historically specific. Therefore, the main purpose behind legal citizenship is the construction of national identity by forming ingroups and outgroups. Similarly, citizenship of political communities differentiates a specific community’s ideological thought or lifestyle from others in a society. Ultimately, citizenship is as much a legal as it is a social concept and is often used in both contexts. What links the two conceptions together is the centrality of ideas such as social responsibility, political rights, and identity politics.

See also
American Dream; Assimilation; Civil Rights; Identity Politics

Further Readings
- Aleinikoff, Thomas A.; David A. Martin; Hiroshi Motomura. 2005. Immigration and Nationality Laws of


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