T.H. Marshall, social rights and English national identity
Bryan S. Turner


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In this inaugural essay in the Thinking Citizenship Series, Turner evaluates the important contributions of T.H. Marshall to the study of citizenship. Marshall’s model of citizenship remains one of the best descriptions of the development of social rights in twentieth century Britain and an important framework for understanding the connection between civil liberties and social rights.

Keywords: citizenship; social rights; entitlements; T.H. Marshall

Introduction: the legacy and context
I first became seriously interested in Thomas Humphrey Marshall (1893–1982) largely as a result of an intellectually embarrassing incident. In 1974 or thereabouts the elderly but astute Everett C. Hughes was staying as a guest in my house in Lancaster, England. I was complaining to him that Britain had not really produced a significant sociologist in the post-war period with the same stature as American intellectuals such as Seymour Martin Lipset, Talcott Parsons or James Coleman. Hughes came back at me without a pause – ‘But you have T.H. Marshall!’ This repost made me want to read Marshall on citizenship more diligently and as a consequence I came eventually to write Citizenship and capitalism (1986). Perhaps in this short article on Marshall to launch the new Thinking Citizenship Series I can at the same time acknowledge my debt to Hughes. This opening might also be the opportune moment to recognize that the analysis of the ethnic division of labour in Quebec in French Canada in transition (Hughes 1943) is worthy of close attention from any student of citizenship.

Marshall’s famous essay ‘Citizenship and social class’ first appeared in 1950. Although Marshall went on to make other valuable contributions to the study of social policy (Marshall 1965) and to welfare institutions (Marshall 1981), his place in the history of sociology remains largely dependent his study of citizenship. In fact one might argue that Marshall had one significant and comprehensive idea which he explored somewhat repetitively. His essays on citizenship appeared in two influential volumes, Citizenship and social class and other essays (1950) and Sociology at the crossroads and other essays. Class citizenship and social development (1963) is essentially the Crossroads collection with an introduction by Lipset. Marshall, who retired at the age of 62, wrote most of his work on social policy and administration in retirement. He developed the idea of the ‘hyphenated society’ in The right to welfare and other essays which refers to the institutional mixture of democracy, welfare state...
and capitalist economy (Marshall 1981, p. 123). He recognized therefore that there were inherent tensions between citizenship, welfare and capitalism, since in citizenship there is the implicit principle of a redistribution of resources to offset the negative consequences of an unregulated market. In a capitalist society, the market place is indifferent to the vagaries of life that the worker must inevitably endure, including industrial accidents, unemployment, work-related illness and the social irrelevance that attends the ageing person.

His lectures, originally given as the Marshall Lectures at Cambridge in 1949, were a significant contribution to the theory of social, as opposed to individual, rights. His analysis of the development of citizenship was primarily addressed to British history and his primary intellectual impact has been on British sociologists. For example, Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) in Class and class conflict in an industrial society took Marshall’s analysis of the amelioration of the condition of the working class as a consequence of their social rights as a major sociological criticism of Karl Marx’s theory of capitalism. Marshall has continued to have a lasting impression on British social science through the work of Jack Barbalet (1988), Bernard Crick (2000), and Maurice Roche (1992). These British interpretations of Marshall were eventually published in Citizenship today (Bulmer and Rees 1996). Marshall had a definite but more limited impact in the United States on Lipset (as I have noted), on Talcott Parsons in The Negro American (Parsons and Clarke 1967), and on Reinhard Bendix (1964) in Nation-building and citizenship. Marshall’s view of social rights had less consequence in America for a number of obvious reasons. As Lipset (1977) pointed out, one aspect of American exceptionalism is that it did not fully develop a socialist party or sustained working-class involvement in a programme of socialist reform. Furthermore, when American sociologists consider citizenship they are typically more concerned with such issues as migration, immigrant rights, race and ethnicity. By contrast, Marshall’s theory was specifically focused on social class, the welfare state, and the transformation of post-war capitalism. These differences between American and British sociology have persisted, although for obvious reasons British sociologists have been increasingly forced to address ethnicity, multiculturalism and social rights (Parekh 2000).

Marshall did not write as a political theorist, being primarily interested in the sociology of social rights. We may define social citizenship as the bundle of rights and obligations that define the identity of members of a political community, thereby regulating access to the benefits and privileges of membership. Thus social citizenship involves membership, a distribution of rewards, the formation of identities and a set of virtues relating to obligation and responsibility. The sociology of citizenship may be distinguished from political philosophy by the fact that sociology is less concerned with such formal rights such as the right to elect a government and more concerned with the social and economic conditions that permit the effective enjoyment of entitlements. Such a perspective directs attention to the substantive contents of rights rather than to individual liberties and freedoms from oppression. In short, it has sought to understand the conditions that make active citizenship possible. In this sense, citizenship establishes the institutional conditions for equality, the rights to enjoy what Marshall called a ‘modicum’ of a civilized life. This understanding of ‘the right to have rights’ and to membership of society is an essentially modern conception.

There are two important paradoxes with respect to the enjoyment of citizenship. First, by its very nature it is an exclusionary right; it creates a border between those that have such privileges and those who fall outside the membership. We might say that the three principal markers of citizenship are income tax, pension and a passport. These indicate the presence of a set of contributory rights and duties that have an exclusionary force. Second, citizenship is typically inherited from our parents rather like a property right and therefore the benefits of citizenship are acquired arbitrarily whether I deserve them or not. Hence the criteria of citizenship membership are a deeply contested aspect of modern politics.
The social can be characterized as the endless oscillation of two dimensions: scarcity and solidarity (Turner and Rojek 2001). If classical economists assumed that scarcity was a consequence of natural scarcity, then classical sociology argued that scarcity was a product of social inequality, recognizing thereby that scarcity could not be solved without some degree of cooperation arising from social solidarity. Marshall’s theory of citizenship attempted to show how, through a redistribution of resources, citizenship mitigated the inequalities of social class and provided the basis for shared identities and social solidarity through common membership. The ‘socio-economic element’ of the range of citizenship rights has been effectively defined as ‘the right to a certain share of resources, the right to share to the full in the social heritage, and to live the life of a civilized being commensurate with the standards prevailing in the society in question’ (Dasgupta 1993, p. 104).

The concept of citizenship has passed through several stages in modern sociology from the idealism of T.H. Green before the First World War to the development of welfare policies after the Second World War associated with Richard Titmuss, William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes (Bulmer and Rees 1996). Existing commentaries on Marshall often fail to locate him in the social and intellectual milieu around Keynes (1883–1946). Keynes and Marshall moved in the same social circles and Keynes writing to his wife Lydia in April 1925 reported that he had discussed his theory of money with fellow economists while staying at Marshall’s house at Hawse End on Derwent Water in the Lake District (Moggridge 1992, p. 437). In intellectual terms, Marshall’s account of citizenship can be regarded as an aspect of Keynesian strategies (Keynes, 1936) for alleviating unemployment, thereby staving off social unrest after the War. The third wave of interest in citizenship theory is the product of a variety of contemporary social forces: the problems of European integration, the neo-liberal transformation of the welfare state, the politics of gay and lesbian liberation, new social movements to protect the environment, the conflict between aboriginal rights and white-settler societies, and finally the challenge of medical technologies (new reproductive technology, stem-cell research and cloning) to traditional relationships between parenting, household formation, work and the state. In many respects, these new problems cannot be easily addressed within a Marshallian framework. This raises the question: if we are in a post-Keynesian policy environment, are we also in a post-Marshallian model of citizenship?

Marshall was to some extent a product of Cambridge economics – and more generally of Cambridge college life. He had become a Fellow of Trinity College in 1919. There is a tradition in Cambridge social theory from Frederic W. Maitland’s history of urban citizenship in his Township and borough (1997) of 1898 to Alfred Marshall who in Principles of economics in 1890 argued that economics should be situated in the framework of historical and contemporary institutional affairs and that the alleviation of the social problems of the poor ought to be the practical outcome of the study of economics. Although critical of the grand claims of Comtean ‘grand theory’, his comparative method and admiration for Alexis de Tocqueville pointed in the direction of political sociology. In Principles of economics ([1890] 1920), Marshall, seeking an alternative to the notion of political economy, embraced the notion of ‘social economics’ as synonymous with ‘economics’. ‘Social economics’ is equivalent to ‘economic sociology’ (Swedberg 1998, p. 179). This version institutional economics was continued by Keynes through his work on the business cycle, investment and employment. This development of institutional economics in the Moral Sciences at Cambridge can be seen as the intellectual foundations on which Marshall constructed his sociology of citizenship.

Marshall and the theory of citizenship

Because the Marshallian theory of social rights has been discussed more or less continuously for half a century, there is no need to re-describe the theory in detail here. There are in any case many useful
summaries of the argument (Isin and Turner 2002). It is sufficient to say that he divided citizenship into three parts, namely, civil, political and social rights. The civil component embraced the achievement of individual freedoms and included such elements as freedom of speech, the right to own property and the right to justice. The rights to participate in the exercise of political power, in particular the rights to free elections and a secret ballot constituted the political component. Finally, the social component is the right to ‘a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being’ (Marshall 1950, p. 69).

Borrowing overtly from Maitland’s *The constitutional history of England* (1908, p. 105), Marshall claimed that these three aspects had evolved from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, becoming firmly established through various institutions that had evolved to articulate these rights. Alongside these three sets of rights, there existed institutions that gave them social expression, namely, the courts of justice, parliament and councils of local government, and the educational system and the social services. Because Marshall was primarily interested in social rights, the core of the theory is in fact an account of the emergence of welfare services as an amelioration of the condition of the working class.

The sociological importance of Marshall’s contribution is his contention that citizenship modifies the negative impact of the market by a (modest) redistribution of resources on the basis of rights and as a consequence there emerges a more or less permanent tension between the principle of equality that ultimately underpins democracy and the actual inequalities of opportunity, wealth and income that characterize a capitalist society. Therefore in hyphenated societies, there is a contradictory relationship between capitalism and citizenship, or more generally between scarcity and solidarity. In the post-war period, citizenship in Britain came to institutionalize the ideals and aspirations of post-war reconstruction as an expression of social Keynesianism. Put simply, citizenship is a status position that mitigates the negative effects of social class position within capitalist society.

One additional paradox of citizenship as a status is that differences in status entitlement can also become a cause of status inequality. Status entitlements in a bureaucratic welfare system promote status competition over scarce resources. Marshall recognized this problem in his discussion of the relationship between equality of opportunity and equality of condition in his view of educational attainments and social mobility. Social mobility on the basis of educational certification was intended to remove hereditary privilege, but in practice educational certificates meant the ‘right to display and develop differences’ (Marshall 1950 [1964], p. 94). Citizenship as a principle of social membership and inclusion must at the same time function through social struggles over entitlements as the basis of social exclusion – one obvious illustration is the current debate over the criteria to define migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom (Bloch 2002).

Marshall’s paradigm has come under attack from variety of perspectives, especially from the Left where critical observers have been convinced that citizenship has not modified the basic structure of inequality in capitalism. Citizenship has not significantly damaged property rights and hence citizenship is at best reformist and at worst a strategy for incorporating the working class (Mann 1987). There is a similar argument from feminism that modern citizenship did relatively little to improve the position of women in society (Siim 2000). These arguments against Marshall appealed properly to empirical evidence of continuing inequality in modern capitalism, thereby claiming that citizenship had not changed the balance between market and society. In Britain, demographic and epidemiological evidence suggested that little had changed. The findings of the Black Report (Department of Health and Social Security 1980) on health inequalities relating to social class and region were the principal focus of this debate (MacIntyre 1997). However, in this aspect of my article, I shall concentrate more on the theoretical problems of Marshall’s approach rather than on the substantive arguments against his position.
First, the theory failed to provide a coherent and consistent analysis of the causal mechanisms that produced an expansion of citizenship. Jeffrey Alexander (2006, p. 19) notes correctly that Marshall relied ‘on the mechanisms of social evolution – which must, perforce, be shrouded in obscurity – to explain why solidarity must develop and justice prevail’. One possible causal explanation of the growth of social rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the consequence of working-class struggles over economic rights relating to employment, the right to form unions and to strike, sickness benefit and retirement. In these respects, there have been important differences between the American and British historical experience. Whereas in Britain, the main social factor behind the growth of citizenship rights has been class inequalities and the absence of adequate access to such basic resources such as housing, education and social security, the American experience has been formed by large-scale migration, ethnic diversity, racial segregation and the aspiration for social improvement. The American experience has been about the success and failure of civic ideals in a context of racial division and mistrust (Sklar 1998). The second aspect of this causal narrative in both America and Britain has been the unintended consequences of modern warfare on demands for rights. In his *Income distribution and social change*, Richard Titmuss (1962) argued that mass warfare stimulated critical social inquiry and weakened the values and institutions that were resistant to social change, forcing society into a period of self-reflection. The idea of a comprehensive health system gained widespread acceptance during the war years leading to a national health service that offered free treatment at the point of delivery to all citizens. The British welfare state after the Second World War and the civil rights movement in America after the Vietnam War were both consequences of the mass mobilization of society. It is unlikely that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will have the same unintended positive consequences, partly because they cannot be brought to a successful conclusion. Rather than producing more transparency in government, such wars appear to produce greater secrecy and obfuscation.

The second major criticism of Marshall has been that he treated citizenship as a uniform and coherent concept and failed to show any real interest in the comparative study of different forms of citizenship in terms of distinct historical trajectories. For example, citizenship has assumed very different forms in Europe in relation to different patterns of capitalist development and there is the wider and more pressing issue about the relevance of western notions of citizenship to China, Japan and Southeast Asia. Revolutionary struggles and the destructive consequences of warfare have often produce active involvement, but we need to devise new means for national self examination and citizenship formation in a period when the nature of combat has changed. The victims of modern violence are typically civilians and genocide is unlikely to produce the positive effects described by Titmuss (Shaw 2007). Modern low intensity or ‘new wars’ which often include the use of child soldiers are unlikely to have the positive consequences that were associated with the wars against fascism in the twentieth century (Kaldor 1999).

Third, one important weakness Marshall’s account of Britain was the absence of any understanding of ethnic and racial divisions in relation to national citizenship. In general his theory was as blind to race and ethnicity as it was to culture. Marshall assumed a somewhat homogenous society in which regional, cultural and ethnic divisions were not important in comparison to social class divisions. Of course, he also wrote in a political context where the unity of the United Kingdom was not an issue. These have been highly contentious constitutional matters and Marshall could be accused of being insensitive to the vision of Great Britain as an island of several distinct peoples – the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish. He also failed to include any significant discussion of the religious, cultural and class divisions that have for example made the realization of political rights in Ireland so difficult. More recently, the cultural
and constitutional problem of Englishness within the devolution of government in modern Britain was hardly imaginable in Marshall’s time (Crick 2000).

Finally, as a theory of entitlement, Marshall’s approach had little or nothing to say about duties and obligations. As such the theory assumed a relatively passive citizenry in which the state protected the individual from the uncertainty of the market through a system of universal social rights. The question then is: how do these social rights become effective forms of entitlement rather than merely formal claims? Citizenship as a status position is not in itself sufficient to guarantee effective entitlement and active citizenship has developed in the past on the basis of three critical foundations: work, war and reproduction. Participation in these three arenas has given citizens an effective and collective leverage over resources.

### Three routes of effective entitlement

Historically, citizenship has been closely associated with the involvement of individuals (typically men) in the formal labour market and therefore work was a fundamental basis of citizenship and the welfare state as described in Beveridge’s *Full employment in a free society* (1944) and *Voluntary action* (1948). Individuals and social groups achieved effective entitlements through gainful employment which was essential for the provision of adequate pensions and superannuation in later life. These entitlements typically included a range of benefits: unemployment benefits, insurance cover, retirement benefits and health care. Citizenship for (male) workers characteristically evolved out of industrial struggles over conditions of employment, remuneration and retirement, and in Britain, these class conflicts were institutionalized through reformist trade unionism and through various compromises (typically referred to as a form of social contract) between government, employers and workers. The citizen as worker is a basic element in the actual capacity of ordinary people to claim the benefits that are associated with their formal rights.

Second, service to the state for example through military service has historically generated a range of entitlements for the citizen. War-time service has typically resulted in special pension rights, health provisions, and housing for returning service men and their families. In Australia, soldiers’ associations have played an important role politically in securing benefits for these returning combatants. Although war service has been important in the development of the evolution of social security, these benefits normally flow from successful rather than unsuccessful wars. In the United States and Australia, the aftermath of the Vietnam War was socially very different from the aftermath of the Second World War. In general terms the worker-citizen and the soldier-citizen are two social roles that have been critical in defining entitlements and masculine identity.

Third, people achieve entitlements through the formation of households and families that become the reproductive mechanisms of society through the birth, maintenance and education of children. These social contributions increasingly include care for the ageing and elderly as generational obligations continue to be satisfied through the private sphere. These services to the society through the family provide entitlements to both men and women as fertile adults who are replenishing the nation. These familial and parental entitlements become the basis of family security systems, various forms of support for mothers, and health and educational provision for children. Although the sexual activity of adults in marriage is regarded in law as quintessentially a private activity, the state and church have emphatically taken a profound interest in the conditions for and consequences of lawful (and unlawful) sexual activity. Securing heterosexual reproduction has been a principal feature of the regulatory activity of the modern state, because the values and norms of a household constituted by a married heterosexual couple provide the dominant ideal of social life.
These conditions of effective entitlement also established a pattern of active participation in society that in turn contributed to civil society through the creation of social solidarity. Active citizenship developed alongside work-related associations (such as working men’s clubs, trade unions, guilds and professional associations). These ‘intermediary associations’ (Durkheim 1992), namely, forms of association that mediate between the state and the individual, provide moral regulation of society. Such community associations – chapels, gardening clubs, women’s meetings and charitable associations – have long been recognized as an important aspect of communal cohesiveness. While in general mass warfare in the twentieth century was destructive of traditional society, one unintended consequence of these conflicts was the production of a multitude of associations that provided support and services to ex-soldiers. Ceremonials of male solidarity such as ANZAC parades and other rituals of remembrance in Australia kept alive the comradship of war and in Britain the ‘Dunkirk-spirit’ continues to provide a dominant framework for service and sacrifice. Finally, parenthood has traditionally provided social linkages to the wider community through women’s groups, child-care associations, school-related groups, neighbourhood groups, and church-based groups such as the Mother’s Union. The growth of post-war active citizenship can be seen to have a direct connection with such collective activities that contribute to social solidarity and hence to the cohesion of civil society.

In summary, these foundations of active citizenship and effective entitlement suggest that we should regard Marshall’s social rights as contributory rights in the sense that these activities – work, public service and parenthood – make significant contributions to the community for which individuals and their families are rewarded through a range of benefits. These rights can then have an exclusionary consequence for individuals who cannot for various reasons – poor health, mental illness, poor education, disability or impairment – make long-term sustained contributions. This feature is important and alerts us to the underlying assumption of rights talk which is that the carrier of rights is a rational, mentally active, and able-bodied individual. This raises important questions about the relationship between rights and vulnerability (Turner 2006), but to raise these questions is to go well beyond the philosophically modest parameters of Marshall’s immediate concerns over working-class participation in society.

**Social rights and human rights**

Many sociologists have concluded that the Marshallian model of citizenship is now redundant because the world we live in is increasingly global and we need models of citizenship that can better cope with multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, migration and the modern diaspora (Ong 2005). Human rights appear to offer an attractive bundle of entitlements and liberties in a global world, contrasting sharply with the national character of citizenship. Human rights of course have also their limitations in this context. Hannah Arendt (1951) criticized the notion of inalienable universal rights that are assumed to exist independently of any state, but she noted that once the rights of citizenship had been removed, there is no political authority left to defend people as human beings. Human rights that cannot be enforced by a sovereign authority are simply abstractions. Ultimately the fundamental ‘right to have rights’ is only meaningful for people who already have membership of a state. Her arguments against such abstract human rights were compatible with the political position of Edmund Burke who, against the background of the French Revolution, claimed that the rights of an Englishman were more definite and real than the abstract Rights of Man. In other words, an effective state is an important guarantor of rights and human rights can generally only be enforced through a system of states that promise not to violate human rights and also to enforce them.
One problem with human rights is that we experience them as important but often as remote forms of legal protection against threats to our safety and security. In general people only exercise their human rights when they are confronted by a crisis that is a threat to their life. Human rights are associated with victims and not with active, dynamic citizens. Whereas we need the social solidarity of citizenship as a condition of democracy, there is no global community within which to have an experience of our human rights, apart from the abstract community of humanity. It may be possible to experience human rights through activity in an international NGO operating at a local level, but these local experiences of participation are not open to everybody. Where is the concrete solidarity of the global civil sphere? Craig Calhoun’s recent *Nations matter* claims that nationalism is not inevitably a moral mistake and he insists ‘Nationalism is not a moral mistake’ on what is a fundamental sociological argument that ‘nationalism is a reminder that democracy depends on solidarity’ (Calhoun 2007, p. 166), and that solidarity is typically nationalist. Furthermore nationalism is not always pernicious and it has been combined successfully with democracy and citizenship. Calhoun’s admonition is important, but where nationalism becomes caught up with religion, as, for example, in post-communist Poland, it makes the creation of an inclusive (secular) community especially difficult to achieve (Zubrzycki 2006).

**Conclusion: citizenship and the sense of belonging**

In his influential *The idea of nationalism* (1944), Hans Kohn stressed the important relationship between nationalism, liberal democracy and cosmopolitanism, making the now famous distinction between civic (or good) nationalism and ethnic (or bad) nationalism. Ordinary people typically need a sense of belonging and identity, and a sense of being rooted in a particular territory. The ideal of cosmopolitan governance needs to take these nationalist sentiments seriously when considering the possibilities of a more united world. The political task is how to achieve cosmopolitanism that does not ignore or suppress deeply felt cultural differences. Various intellectual traditions have emerged that attempt to address the conundrum between the particular and the universal in terms of multiculturalism (Charles Taylor), constitutional patriotism (Jurgen Habermas), patriotism (Maurizio Viroli) and postnational or multicultural citizenship (Will Kymlicka). Citizenship is and must remain an important ingredient in these solutions, because it provides important ingredients for viable civil societies – solidarity, commitment, loyalty and identity to an actual community.

Marshall’s model of citizenship remains important because it is descriptively one of the best accounts we have of the growth of social rights in twentieth century Britain. Second, it provides a theoretical framework within which civil liberties and social rights can be seen as necessary not antagonistic elements of citizenship, and it reminds us that no civilized society can exist without common patterns of membership leading to social solidarity. Finally, within the post-war British context, his work on citizenship was a reminder that Britain, albeit in a partial and inadequate fashion, had become more civilized by the standards that had been set out in George Orwell’s bitter exposure in 1937 of poverty in northern Britain in his *The road to Wigan Pier* (1986). We need a vision of citizenship in a world where citizenship is being eroded and the roots of common identity are being transformed by global economic changes that tend to fragment civil society.

**References**


