Australian Citizenship
By Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts
Melbourne University Press, 2004, 288pp, $39.95
ISBN 0 522 85094 4

It must be recorded at the outset that this is the book from which Mr Latham allegedly lifted ideas in a Sydney speech on 20 April 2004. The authors gave the Opposition Leader an advance copy of the book and asked him to launch it (Professor Galligan in letters to the *Age* and the *Australian*, 24 April 2004).

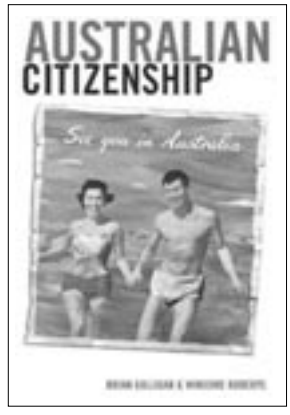
Mr Latham denied the unacknowledged borrowing of ideas and some *citizens* felt compelled to write to the newspapers on the same day as Professor Galligan to record that, frankly, the ideas were not terribly original in any case. One correspondent wrote to the *Australian* congratulating the academics for finally putting to paper what ordinary citizens discovered long ago.

The book has all the hallmarks of a first-year university lecture series right down to the chapter topics. Chapter 1 (read 'Week 1') Australian Citizenship, Week 2 Institutional Framework, Week 3 Migration, Week 4 Multiculturalism, Week 5 Land and Heritage, Week 6 Nationalism and Patriotism, Week 7 Civics and Everyday Life, Week 8 Aborigines, Week 9 Women, Week 10 Religion, study week, examination period, three questions from a choice of 10, go in peace, Amen: the Holy Communion of undergraduate life.

Intuitively then, in the very writing of this book, the authors have encapsulated one type of Australian citizenship. *Credo in unum viam*: attend lectures, read the book, pass the course, progress to second year, finish the degree, attain graduate recruitment and a family and ¼ acre in Western Sydney. It is the realisation of an Aussie battler who will spend a lifetime being at once courted and patronised by the weathercock politicians of this world.

For those who have kept abreast of academic fashion it is almost dated to see chapters on women and aborigines; dated *and* condescending I should think. It recalls the excitement of those many late-1980s scholars who were able to recover from years of dead-white-male neglect by including whole swags of second hand material about women, aborigines and M. Derrida in their articles and lectures.

Notwithstanding the devotion of a whole chapter to women, the authors of *Australian Citizenship* appear to have missed something useful to their argument. A cursory glance at the 'citizenship' entry in the *Oxford Companion to Australian History* would have furnished them with helpful material supporting their position that citizenship is more than mere civics.



In *A Woman's Constitution,* Helen Irving demonstrated that Australian suffragettes claimed political rights on the basis of the 'citizenship' that they already enjoyed. Alas, it seems that the authors of *Australian Citizenship* elected to ignore Irving's telling narrative and missed an opportunity to elaborate on this thesis with politically correct glee in their chapter on women.

Mercifully the authors of *Australian Citizenship* have spared us the bad translations of French and seem in fact on top of the game, having overcome their stale chapters on women and aborigines by including a discussion about the latest chic group of Australia's underprivileged, the new 'boat people' otherwise called refugees, asylum seekers, detainees, illegal immigrants, parents with or without children overboard, or whatever term best sits with one's politics.

Then again, the authors forgot to include a chapter on sexuality, the essential ingredient of truly up-to-the-minute discourse. The only gay in the book is William Gay, poet, whose sickly sentimental federation poem is a favourite of the poetically-challenged political speechmaker:

> From all division let our land be free,
> For God has made her one…

The authors assert that this book is written against the 'official' kind of citizenship that reduces it to 'civics': 'shared political institutions, adherence to abstract values and tolerance of difference.' This does not do justice to Australian citizenship, they argue, because it excludes a sense of history and Australia's unique heritage. This book will demonstrate that 'poets, painters, historians, environmentalists, community activists and educationalists have as much to contribute to an understanding of Australian citizenship as do political scientists and lawyers' (p. xv).

The authors cannot argue that one must include poets, painters and such like alongside political scientists and lawyers but then hardly develop the point, still less quote actual poetry or refer to specific paintings, artists or historians. *Australian Citizenship* presents very little in the way of fresh and detailed elaboration on how Australia's arts and heritage have shaped citizenship historically and today.

Poetry for instance is only used in the hackneyed context of the land. All the same the authors do not deal very much with the challenging images

of Australia presented by some nineteenth century poets. Adam Lindsay Gordon, who wrote about a country 'without songs, architecture, history' where 'songless birds sing' is mentioned only in passing as one who expressed a 'sentiment of attachment' to the wild and savage character of the land (p. 103).

Nor do the authors deal with responses to Gordon, such as the direct poetical retort in C.J. Dennis's *The Golden Whistler*. Ignored too is the famous exchange between Lawson and Paterson about the merits of Australian city and country life.

More troubling is the absence of discussion about twentieth century dissonance from such poets as A.D. Hope who shattered Australia's bush identity myth with a description of coastal occupation:

> Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
> Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

The authors refer to Les Murray as 'Australia's greatest living poet' (a subjective and disputable notion) but proceed to quote not his poetry but his prose!

Similarly, the authors call David Malouf a poet. While some might indeed say that despite elegant essays and celebrated novels, Malouf's poetry is his greatest achievement so far, he might best be described as rather more than a poet. Astonishingly, despite introducing Malouf as a poet the authors do not discuss the man's poetry. In addition they refer to his 1998 Boyer Lecture, but not his recent and more relevant essay on Australia's British heritage (*Made in England. Australia's British Inheritance*, Quarterly Essay 2003).

And what about music, surely one of the most direct indications of nationalism and an important impulse for a sense of citizenship? There is brief mention that 'Waltzing Matilda' is Australia's unofficial anthem and a tiresome retelling of the process by which Australians selected the official national anthem. Otherwise the authors do not discuss music at all.

Not only does Australia have Gordon's songless birds to overcome, but it also has few songs of her own. There is hardly any melody that binds the nation in the way that other countries have national and folk songs that encourage patriotism. This interesting and fertile ground for discussion about nationalism, patriotism and citizenship remains unexplored by the authors.

Australia's poverty of songs provides a palpable signal as to why her nationalism and patriotism has largely been generated through language. As the authors identify, the English language is one of the few unifying devices for native-born and migrant Australians.

On this language point the authors claim some novelty. But, I ask you, what is so new about this argument? Malouf for one has already and recently raised the issue in the 2003 *Quarterly Essay*.

In the same way, the authors' account of the failure of multiculturalism is hardly innovative. The authors assert that multiculturalism, a 'conceptual muddle of prescription and description' (p.96), is an unsound foundation for citizenship. They declare that we must look elsewhere, such as to Australia's land and heritage, for a sense of citizenship that can unify all native and foreign-born Australians. Even Mr Latham has thought about these issues.

For a book about Australian citizenship and history many foreigners and alien notions are employed to mount the authors' case. The chapter on nationalism and patriotism begins with citation of Emerson and Lincoln. In the same chapter the authors inexplicably use Liberty, Fraternity and Equality as subheadings.

The Australian monarchy is hardly mentioned. In fact, over half way through the text the authors apply Galligan's well-established description of the country as a 'federal republic' (*A Federal Republic: Australian Constitutional System of Government*, 1995). Apart from making sparse references to coats of arms, royal tours and Governors-General that seems to be the end of the matter.

Nor is the common law and equity tradition explored. The basic legal system might not be unique to Australia but out of it the nation has forged a special brand. Between the Westminster system and the law come so many of Australia's important values that ought to have been explored by the authors of a book about citizenship.

A modest knowledge of legal history might have saved the authors from the error of describing land as having been 'officially defined as *terra nullius*' (p.99). Land never was so defined. It is simply the case that some people, notably contemporary historian Henry Reynolds, use this old foreign term to explain the colonial approach to land occupation in Australia.

With the exception of a page on patriotic war cries at sporting matches, the authors ignore the role that sport plays in building a sense of Australian citizenship beyond mere civics. Theatre and film are largely ignored. A few landscape artists are mentioned rather than discussed. The novels, magazines, literary circles and historical schools of Australia are to all intents and purposes overlooked.

Are there any redeeming features of the book? In general, *Australian Citizenship* presents an unproblematic and not terribly controversial treatment of the subject. The handling of the topics is quite balanced and sound. Though it has to be said that the authors might have damaged their independence in the

partisan display and consequences of having invited Mr Latham to launch the book.

If my trouble with the text can be reduced to one main difficulty then it is that I am left unsatisfied with the authors' support for their argument that citizenship is more than civics.

I so wanted to believe them but the undistinguished tone, the lack of colour, and the sparse use of sources other than the political all run counter to the claims made in the opening chapter of the book that citizenship is more than this. Unwittingly the authors are clearly more comfortable with the orthodox, 'official' line on citizenship than the brave new world that they would like to see.

Australian Citizenship is an uninspiring text written in leaden prose. I pity the undergraduates for whom this will no doubt become a set text.

Reviewed by
D.J. Goodsir-Cullen

Rebels with a Cause: Independents in Australian Politics
by Brian Costar and Jennifer Curtin
Sydney, UNSW Press, 2004, 96pp, $16.95
ISBN 0 868 406 593,

Not many Australians wanted, or thought they'd get, a House of Representatives in which independents would play a key role following the 2004 federal election. As it turned out, they didn't. But as Costar and Curtin point out in their introduction, independent politicians had been important in the governance of five states and one territory over the previous ten years, and had a significant presence in the Senate during much of that time.

While media attention on certain independents during the campaign was not enough to get them over the line, the three existing independents demonstrated the power of incumbency by being re-elected to the House of Representatives. The potential for them to hold the balance of power at some stage in the future, as their state and territory colleagues have done, remains.

Therefore, a comprehensive study of independent politicians—their motivation, those of their electors, and their impact on governance—would be a welcome addition to the literature. In its limited space, this volume touches on each of these issues, thereby going a small way towards providing such a study.

On the positive side, Costar and Curtin have provided a book that is an easy read and replete with interesting snippets of political history, mostly from the past two decades. The chapter on 'independents past' delves further back over the past century, whetting the appetite for further reading. Few students of today would have heard of the likes of Coles and Wilson in the 1940s, while various fascinating mavericks from Queensland parade through in a sentence or two each.

The chapters on government and governance raise more questions than they answer. Costar and Curtin provide useful accounts of how independents came to hold the balance of power in various state parliaments, but there is little attempt to fathom whether the effects of this were positive or negative. The circumstances surrounding the Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord, and the memoranda of understanding in New South Wales and Victoria are given due treatment. However, it was frustrating that the documents themselves were not reprinted in the book for reference. Their omission, and that of an index, was seemingly in the interests of keeping the book short and simple.

There is some original research in the form of qualitative interviews with a small selection of voters in regional electorates, a focus warranted on the basis of the location of independent members (both currently and historically). We discover views such as 'the Senate is just a remote and intangible thing' while the local independent member Peter Andren is seen as hard working and committed. It seems unlikely, however, that city and suburban voters, including those who vote for major parties, would think much differently. Previous surveys have established an ignorance of the parliamentary system, and the general popularity of local members notwithstanding a cynicism towards