



Ⓐ **CITIZENSHIP:** Ⓐ
THE STATE'S WAY OF
SAYING IT OWNS YOU

Ⓐ **PERRY DE HAVILLAND** Ⓐ

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE WORLD

Joshua Marshall has been discussing why he does not approve of dual-citizenship in several interesting posts. Not surprisingly I see it in very different terms to him. It is not one of those things that I feel I must 'take him to task' over because I do understand his view and realise that the root of our disagreement lies much further up the causal chain than the issue of 'citizenship'. I see our difference of opinion as springing not so much from error but rather from radically different views of the world itself. He wrote:

To my mind, this isn't a conservative view. It's a liberal one. One of the things that makes us all equal as citizens is the fundamental reality that makes us citizens: membership and allegiance to this political community, this country. That's what allows an immigrant citizen to be just as much an American as the guy whose ancestors came on the Mayflower.

He is quite right that the way he reasonably describes 'citizenship' is indeed 'liberal' (in the American sense of the word: i.e. what Europeans call 'democratic socialist'). The 'political community' Josh describes is not civil society at all. Civil society is something to which people like me

have no problem belonging and which does not require the permission (citizenship) of the state thus to do. No, what Josh is talking about is 'The State' because state and society are *not the same thing*. That is because civil society is *not* a 'political' community at all (i.e. a community in which *politics*, which is *entirely* about the use of force, governs the interactions), but rather a community which works by affinity and economic interaction rather than legislation.

GLOBALIZATION, TECHNOLOGY, TRADE AND CULTURE

In a sense I suppose it's not a very big deal. But doesn't this trivialize what it should mean to be a citizen of one of those countries? It sounds less like a civic, national identity than a sort of heritage knickknack or heirloom. Citizenship isn't just about having a standing right of residency or something you have because you have some attachment or family connection to a particular country. I think it's something more than that – particularly in the context of American citizenship.

Josh is also quite right that dual-citizenship trivialises what it *does* mean to be a citizen of one of those countries. His objections mirror those of Marx with his disdain for 'rootless cosmopolitans'. When a person sees political rather than social interaction as the core of society, then a person who stands outside, indeed above, the political structure in question is surely a threat to the authority of the *political* order. Yet globalization, technology and trade are indeed inexorably producing a larger and more culturally influential cosmopolitan class, not just a 'Jet Set' of people who work in banking and broking, but also a more broadly based group who have 'emigrated' yet retain close and *active* ties across the oceans in ways that were previously either too expensive or technologically impossible to maintain. In past times, a family moving from India or Jamaica or China to a new life in Britain or North America or Australia, would

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

have only the slow and remote link of written mail sent by ship to stay in contact.

However in this era of global communications, it is a simple matter of picking up a mobile (cell) phone whilst out shopping to call your similarly equipped cousin 'in the old country'. I have myself moved continents several times in my life and yet have never thought of myself as an 'immigrant'. It was just that I moved to a place, acquired a house, worked there for as long as it suited me, and then ... went somewhere else because that suited me better now. Britain, Ireland, South Africa, India, USA, Canada... so what? Each has their own cultures yet that Anglosphere metaculture (and not just the language) is more similar than dissimilar on so many levels. So when Josh says "It sounds less like a civic, national identity than a sort of heritage knickknack or heirloom", well yeah ... that really is all that we are talking about. A heritage knickknack.

The Brits with their flavour of popular culture, Marmite, localised curries, irony intensive humour ... the Yanks with their u starved spelling, shopping malls in the middle of nowhere, high fat diets, dynamic business culture ... these are interesting and also trivial, because compared to the shared cultural connections and similarities that are *Anglosphere* in nature and essentially trans-national, these other things are just the result of localised quirk rather than the rapidly evolving commonality of assumptions of the emerging cosmopolitanism.

Although I have mentioned before on this blog that I reject the moral validity of the very concept of 'citizenship', as a practical matter I think that because the state likes to insist on the importance of citizenship, well, the more the merrier then. The Smorgasbord approach to nationality is very appealing to 'rootless cosmopolitans' of the rapidly developing Anglosphere meta-culture, for exactly the reasons why Marx (and presumably Joshua) dislike it. Gaining the perspectives of not just Britain or America but Britain *and* America ... and Israel and China and Slovakia and India and Croatia and Italy and Australia and Turkey... this is the 'cosmopolitanisation' process at work and also does wonders to export Anglosphere values of severalty, contract, technological civilisation and *civil* society to the rest of the world via the web of family and relationships, rather than the directed, force backed arbitration of what 'culture' should be than exclusionary states bring.

HOW THE US STATE SEES ITS PEOPLE

American civil society is something I admire and which spreads the values conducive to liberty as no other society currently does ... but American *citizenship* particularly (more than any other advanced nation's citizenship) is rather like being branded like livestock. To have that brand means that, unlike almost every other state on earth, the US government will always claim a pecuniary interest in the private property that you acquire, even if you live outside the USA and make your living outside the USA and keep your assets outside the USA. Unlike other countries, which by and large lose interest in you the moment you step outside their borders, the USA actually makes itself your super-owner. The USA do not just claim a territorial monopoly on the means of force, it actually claims to own part of your labour regardless of where you are. It owns your labour not because you are in America, but because you are a citizen. That is the *reality* of how the US state actually sees its

people (i.e. that citizens are the property of the state) even though that is not how most US citizens perceive the nature of the 'relationship'. Yet that is what I think the truth is beyond the perception: The USA does not just control land and what people do on that land (all states do that), it actually claims ownership of the anointed inhabitants themselves regardless of where they are.

The basis of the club and our membership in it is our fundamental equality. And the essence of that equality, as I see it, is that we've all thrown in our lots together. Some of us who were born here do it implicitly others who are newcomers did explicitly. But we've all committed ourselves to this group, this enterprise, this club, this nation. If some of us are American citizens and others of us are citizens of this and another country then we're not quite equal anymore. The basis of our equality and citizenship is challenged.

Indeed. But then I do not regard myself as 'equal' to other people. And nor does anyone else if they are being sensible. I regard myself as interacting within the frames of reference of a society and *that*, the shared understandings, the common axioms, the cultural shorthand ... *that* is the basis for my ability to engage fellow members of this society, not some coloured bit of cloth or weird handover-heart declaiming and certainly not some damn bureaucrat or judge's imprimatur of 'citizenship'. Nor have I 'thrown my lot in' with anyone nor given them the right to presume that I have. When the state requires me to give my monies to others in tax, if I do so it is the vote of force, not some implied social contract. I have thrown my lot in with my friends and business associates, the ones *I* choose, and their citizenship means less than nothing to me when I judge the value of my relationship to them.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE A CITIZEN TO BE A MEMBER OF A SOCIETY

In much the same why that if ever marry again, I will not even tell the state because I refuse to accept it is anyone else's business, so too I urge people to regard their passports as an imposition, not a privilege. Treat your national passport as a way of getting to stand in the shorter line at the airport and not some sacred document. You do not have to be a citizen to be a member of a society, regardless of what the state says. If I can find a way to marketize citizenship, that might be my next entrepreneurial venture. Hmm ... maybe: "Free American Passport with all purchases of fitted kitchens over \$5,000: order a fitted Italian marble bathroom at the same time and we will throw in a Italian citizenship and 1,000 Frequent Flyer Miles!" Yes, I like the sound of that.

The article above was first published on March 26th 2002, as a posting on **Libertarian Samizdata**, the weblog (www.samizdata.blogspot.com), which is edited and run by Perry de Havilland (in association with the Libertarian Alliance).

The articles by **Joshua Marshall** to which this article provided links from Samizdata are to be found on "Talking Points Memo" (the weblog written by Joshua Marshall – www.talkingpointsmemo.com), on March 25th 2002 (6:18 PM EST), and March 21st (7:59 PM EST).