

## Storied Citizenship: Imagining the Citizen in American Literature

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### Abstract

“Citizenship” has seen an astounding revival as an analytical category, not only in Political Theory and the Social Sciences but also in Literary and Cultural Studies. Through “storying” citizenship (Chariandy), works of literature can productively negotiate established “civic myths” of citizenship (Thomas), i. e., stories about normative national membership; moreover, they point to contradictions, inclusions and exclusions, and shifts in understandings of what constitutes a citizen in a globalized world. This introduction provides an overview of important issues and approaches that have shaped “citizenship” as an analytical category in American Literary Studies in the past fifteen years. Focusing on the (largely neglected) systematic distinction between “citizenship” and “the citizen,” it highlights the necessity of scrutinizing how literature imagines and narrates particular kinds of citizens and how such images tie in with, counter, or modify long-standing normative models of the citizen—in short, how literature “stories” citizenship and the citizen as potentially both normative and emancipatory concepts of political belonging and participation.

**Keywords:** storied citizenship; civic myth; proliferation of citizenship; Cincinnatus

From the Early Republic until well into the nineteenth century, the Roman Consul and Dictator Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (c. 519 to c. 430 BC) provided an important model of “the citizen” in American political discourse.<sup>1</sup> As the Roman historian Livy tells it, Cincinnatus became a legend during the early days of the Republic for his selfless devotion in times of crisis and for giving up the reins of power when the crisis was over. As the story goes, he “came from his plow” (Harvey 32) to assume complete control over the state as its dictator and led the Romans in their fight against the Aequi in 458 BC. After his victory, Cincinnatus immediately relinquished his power and returned to his farm. He assumed the dictatorship a second time a few years later to subdue a

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Heike Paul for her helpful critical feedback on this introduction.

plot by Spurius Maelius, a wealthy plebeian who tried to buy the loyalty of the poor and establish himself as king of Rome. Having resolved the crisis, Cincinnatus again resigned his commission, after twenty-one days. As a result, in the folklore of Roman republicanism, Cincinnatus became a civic hero, the farmer who left his land and property to lead the Republic out of danger, and then returned to his everyday life as soon as his objective was completed. For generations, this narration served as a symbol of the ideal Roman citizen.

Historical accuracy aside, Cincinnatus's example found a lasting echo in American republicanism; it was strongly invoked, for instance, in the early iconography of George Washington as the "American Cincinnatus" (Wills). The Cincinnatus figure can be seen as a crucial example of the long-standing model of the "citizen as soldier," as Brook Thomas's contribution to this volume argues. The figure is a clearly gendered and usually racialized model of the 'good' citizen, and by way of its linkage between military service and citizenship, the image strongly resonated in the struggles of many ethnic minority groups for citizenship rights and the recognition of minoritized individuals as full citizens (Salyer; Saldin). The United States largely adopted a model of what James Wood has called the ideology of "liberal militarism" (405), in which standing armies are viewed as a potentially tyrannical threat to the republic and "military service in time of war [is] a responsibility of citizenship" (407); as Ricardo A. Herrera highlights, American soldiers—at least until the first year of the Civil War—saw themselves as "active participants in the republican experiment through their military service" (21). Even after the Civil War, the citizen soldier's submission to a military structure of command was not regarded as oxymoronic; rather, the "liberal faith in the capacity of free men [sic] to reason" became "the foundation for its wartime counterpart—faith in the capacity of citizen soldiers" (Wood 405). The "citizen as soldier" thus exemplifies the ideological link between citizenship and the citizen, the status and the actor, as well as the implied norms at work in race, class, gender, age, ability, and other categories of social identification and stratification, but it is not the only model of the citizen. The citizen as a believer, i. e., as a Puritan, was foundational in early American history and was updated later by a more nuanced and unattached model of the "religious citizen" (Winandy 838), the "worker citizen," and the "parent citizen," which are all significant for understanding modern citizenship (Isin and Nielsen). Conceptualizations of the citizen have served as important notions of civic belonging and responsibility, even when, at least formally, citizenship was not a stable category of political status in the United States and Canada. Citizenship and its holders were specified in the Constitution of the United States only after the 14th Amendment was ratified, and there were no Canadian citizens before the Citizenship Act in 1947, only British subjects. Nevertheless, in both countries, conceptualizations of the citizen functioned as crucial metaphors of national consolidation

in public debates and in literature long before legal codification (see Adamoski, Chunn, and Menzies; Hyde), and, despite their codification, these conceptualizations continue to function in this fashion. Given their variable narrative forms in public discourse, Political Theory, and literature, they may even be seen as negotiations of a “civic myth,” i. e., as a way to explain “why persons form a people, usually indicating how a political community originated, who is eligible for membership, who is not and why, and “what the community’s values and aims are” (Smith qtd. in Thomas 5). Like all types of myths, civic myths are characterized by both the continuity of a core, which makes them recognizable across time, and a variability that makes them adaptable to different historical contexts and political agendas (see Blumenberg). Though citizenship is a powerful legal and political concept with immediate effects on individuals and communities, it “is inhabited by contradictions that generate civic myths, which, in turn, help give meaning to the practices of citizenship within particular cultures” (Thomas 6). Central manifestations of such civic myths are historically contingent and support competing models of the citizen: the parent citizen or the worker citizen, but also the self-reliant citizen, the economic citizen, and the critical citizen, amongst others. These models, by far, exceed the realms of public politics and therefore highlight the trans / formative potential of imagining and narrating models of membership and belonging within and across nation-states.

The revitalization of “citizenship” and “the citizen” as relevant analytical categories in the social sciences, particularly in the 1990s, thus highlighted the importance not only of legal and political arrangements and citizenship regimes in practice but also of contestation of the meanings of citizenship and of what constitutes the citizen, as well as the strong symbolic and metaphorical implications of citizenship for national belonging. In the much-cited article “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman argue that

the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its ‘basic structure’ but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens: for example, their sense of identity and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves [...]. Without citizens who possess these qualities, democracies become difficult to govern, even unstable. (352-53)

Kymlicka and Norman thus highlight the important role of individual citizens as political and civic agents for democracy. The political understanding of citizenship varies considerably in different traditions of thought. The relationship between individuals and the polity, or the balance between individual and collective interests, rights and obligations, and status and practice, for instance, is narrated differently in liberal and republican discourses; e. g., while liberal notions of citizens tend to pre-

sent them primarily as rights-bearers, republican concepts tend to emphasize their obligation to the community (see Honohan). These major traditions in Western thought about citizenship were formulated mostly within or regarding *national* frameworks. Since the 1990s, and in the context of the increasing emphasis theorists put on processes of transnationalization and globalization, conceptualizations of citizenship and the citizen have increasingly proliferated into diversified subcategories that have conceptually loosened the traditional link between citizenship and the nation-state. These proliferations drew attention to citizenships (in the plural) as segmented, pertaining to practices and fields of practices (e.g., environmental or economic citizenship); to identities and subject positions (e.g., queer, gendered, and racialized citizenship); and to scopes of application (e.g., cosmopolitan, global, diasporic, and transnational notions of citizenship). Accordingly, they also emphasized different conceptions and constructions of the citizen and emphasized citizens' relations to the state, each other, or the non-citizen to different degrees. As Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen assert in *Acts of Citizenship*: "The trinity that defined modernity—worker-citizen, warrior-citizen and parent-citizen—has expanded to include ecological-citizen, aboriginal-citizen, market-citizen, consumer-citizen, cosmopolitan-citizen, global-citizen, intimate-citizen, youth-citizen and many more" (1).

These and other proliferations reflect the desire to capture agency, rights, and responsibilities not only within but also—in the context of the transnationalization and globalization debates that have taken place since the 1990s—across nation-state boundaries; moving away from notions of the citizen as a supposedly unified public subject, they sought to instead incorporate facets of lifeworlds, relations, and actions that could not be comfortably incorporated into established notions of the political sphere (e.g., Collyer). As Saskia Sassen has argued, the pressure of globalization on nation-states has resulted not only in citizens' rights claims being brought before supra-national institutions and explicitly connected to questions of human rights but also in an understanding of citizenship as "a normative project whereby social membership becomes increasingly comprehensive and open ended" (12), which has implications for how we understand the citizen. The deconstruction of unified notions of modernity in, for instance, Feminist Studies, Critical Race Studies, and Postcolonial Studies (and more recently in Queer Studies, Environmental Studies, and Health Studies) gives one cause to question whether aspects of the citizen such as gender can be categorized as "private" in a liberal sense or as clearly embedded in a national framework. Instead, the citizen is to be conceptualized as multiply relational: The complexity of identity, which is relational and intersectional, creates citizens whose identifications and potential scopes of action become as varied as their lifeworlds, communal embeddedness, and decision-making processes.

The astounding scope of these proliferations can arguably be seen as the outcome of the theoretical debates and the social activism, par-

ticularly since the 1970s and 1980s, which displaced but not entirely debunked the above-mentioned “trinity that defined modernity” (Isin and Nielsen 1) that had so clearly provided a dominant model for understanding the relationship between the individual and the state as well as between citizens. However, different meanings and implications of these models were neither uncontested nor exclusive; on the contrary, they were the object of fierce political struggles and many attempts to normalize and redefine them, not least because “the citizen” continued to provide a potent symbolic claim to collective belonging. Citizenship was, after all, not exclusively a legal concept, and the citizen not exclusively a merely formal member of a polity; holding the legal status of a citizen does not equal holding what Lindsey N. Kingston calls “functioning citizenship” (17). “Citizenship” and “the citizen” symbolize belonging to and active participation in a polity, and, conversely, exclude non-citizens (Isin), which make them important categories not only in political or legal debates but in other intertwining arenas of democratic public deliberation.

One such arena is literature. Literature has implicitly and explicitly addressed questions of belonging, rights, and recognition in the past and in the present. Picking up on Brook Thomas’s adoption of Rogers M. Smith’s concept of citizenship as a “civic myth,” we might say that literature continues to “work on myth” (see Blumenberg), i. e., literature explores the myriad manifestations and models of the citizen and how they are utilized politically and culturally in different historical constellations and contexts. In the sense that David Chariandy gives to the verb, they “story” citizenship:

[W]e inevitably tell stories about citizenship. Of course, this does not mean that we have the ability to conjure up citizenship through individual imaginative inspiration or the intercession of some fitful muse, but rather that we narrate not only our identities and practices as citizens *but also citizenship itself* in ways that inevitably reflect our sidedness and desires. (327; emphasis in original)

If citizenship as a civic myth is broadly conceived as a “cultural narrative” (Thomas 6), we can use the concept of “storied citizenship” to specifically denote narratively emplotted or argumentative texts. These stories of citizenship, which focus on individual citizens in complex relations to others, to society, and to the state, can thus provide important insights into how literature renegotiates civic myths and, by doing so, broader societal debates about belonging, identification, recognition, and rights.

In the wake of the New Social Movements in the last third of the twentieth century and the formation of new academic fields, such as Gender Studies, Ethnic and Critical Race Studies, and Queer Studies, citizenship seemed to offer an overarching concept of belonging and rights claims. The *de facto* unequally allocated access to full citizen participation (complicating voter registration and/or impeding access to the ballot, but also the effects of economic inequalities, all of which

disproportionately affect racial minority groups and particularly African Americans), the disenfranchisement of those convicted of a felony, and the political instrumentalization of citizenship revocation demonstrate the unequal distribution of access to the democratic process and citizen rights. Questions of citizen rights also emerged in contexts not immediately connected to the political process: The continuing struggle for marriage equality, for example, highlights how images of the 'good' citizen are still shaped by heteronormative assumptions. Citizenship is clearly not only a process of increasing inclusion, as Thomas H. Marshall had argued in 1950, but built on processes of othering and exclusion (Isin). Thus, to make citizenship an important concept of political activism and academic analysis—seeing it not only as the legal status of membership but as a category of substantial participation—is a plausible and symbolically powerful strategy.

At the same time, approaches highlighting the potential of civic myths to criticize hegemonic citizenship regimes and to reimagine citizenship and the citizen have also been met with skepticism. The normalizing, even homogenizing and potentially coercive, aspects of citizenship (for instance with regard to Native American nations) and its exclusionary logics (for instance in the context of migration, where to be a citizen conceptually requires someone to be the non-citizen, as Isin has stressed) have been criticized, so that citizenship has also been viewed as antithetical to inclusion and emancipation. In his critical discussion of citizenship as a revitalized analytical category in the context of Canadian literature, Chariandy asks the legitimate question of how “we in the social sciences, and especially the humanities, come to bet upon ‘citizenship’” (334), despite the discrepancy between the universal claims implied in the concepts and political practices of racialization, and despite the implicit (or at times explicit) normative components of citizenship and the citizen that tend to subsume different cultural models of affiliation (e.g., in Indigenous communities) under a particular standard of membership and belonging. As a preliminary reply to this important question, Chariandy identifies the hope that citizenship (he discusses diasporic citizenship in particular) might produce “a different and more ethical Canada” (Walcott qtd. in Chariandy 334). Thus, citizenship and the citizen as both political and analytical categories are positioned in a field of tension not only between national and transnational affiliations, identifications, and challenges but also between coercive and emancipatory potential.

Not surprisingly, the adoption of the analytical categories of citizenship and the citizen in Literary and Cultural Studies has led to a strong metaphorization of citizenship as belonging, but also as a counter-hegemonic subjectivity potentially opposing state norms and laws. And, in contrast to Kymlicka and Norman's work in the social sciences, which identifies “increasing calls for ‘a theory of citizenship’ that focuses on the identity and conduct of individual citizens” (353), the focus on individual citizens in Literary and Cultural Studies tends to emphasize their

rights more than their obligations. The important role of literature in the imagination of citizenship and the citizen has received significant attention in the past fifteen years, which was obviously influenced by the “revival” of these concepts in Political Theory and the Social Sciences. In addition to developing different theoretical concepts to capture the specific link between citizenship and culture—such as literary citizenship (Pennee) or cultural citizenship (Rosaldo; Boele van Hensbroek)—two central directions can be identified that conceptualize the contemporary importance of literary production for the societal negotiation of citizenship and the citizen. On the one hand, literature can be understood as an instrument of civic education because it showcases the complexity and conflicts of different lifeworlds, teaches empathy, and triggers critical self-positioning and self-reflexivity (see, e.g., Nussbaum; Pennee; Rosaldo); on the other, literature can be seen as an instrument of social and political criticism because it negotiates the complexities and contradictions of citizenship as a status and practice and as a basis of rights claims. In this latter and more prominent line of inquiry, literature is seen as responding and referring to debates about citizenship in larger societal contexts, at times affirming hegemonic, exclusionary, or oppressive models of citizenship, but more often formulating a fundamental critique of citizenship regimes and/or engaging a language of citizenship in order to assert rights, recognition, and belonging (see, e.g., Thomas; Cho; Chariandy; Tan; Batzke). In short, literary texts provide specific manifestations of more broadly conceived societal narratives of citizenship and the citizen, and as such can be regarded as partaking in these debates by means of imagination and narrative (Sarkowsky).

Notably, despite this multifaceted debate about citizenship in Political Theory, Sociology, Law and Legal Studies, Cultural Geography, and Literary Studies, little systematic attention has been paid to the distinction between “citizenship” and the “citizen.”<sup>2</sup> Maybe this is because the distinction seems too obvious: A citizen is a member of a political entity, and this membership is citizenship; accordingly, a citizen is a person who enacts or is entitled to enact citizenship, a bearer of citizenship rights, a person called upon to fulfill the obligations of citizenship. But as the complex discussions of the citizen and citizenship in both the Social Sciences and Literary and Cultural Studies show, an analytic distinction between the citizen and citizenship can be helpful in conceptualizing more pointedly the discrepancies between an individual’s formal status as a member of a political community (e.g., the nation-state), the *de facto* treatment of citizens as members of that community, the possibilities for participation that those citizens have access to, and the collision of different models of the citizen.

Such discrepancies, which find ample reflection in literature, will be at the heart of this volume. As we will argue, varied constructions of the citizen are crucial to literary negotiations of citizenship and thus must not only “be understood in terms of abstract categories of membership

<sup>2</sup> Both Brook Thomas (in *Civic Myths*) and Kathy-Ann Tan (in *Re-configuring Citizenship*) focus on types of citizens, but they do not explicitly address the analytical distinction between citizenship and the citizen.

and rights but also in terms of the historical narratives that frame [their] initial conceptualizations” (Bhambra 102). Framings “that prescribe what norms, values, and behavior are appropriate for those claiming membership of a political community,” argue De Koning, Jaffe, and Koster, “invariably imply models of virtuous and deviant citizens, favoring particular subject-citizens over others, and suggesting ways to transform the latter into the former” (121). These models, of which the Cincinnatus myth is an example, “story” the citizen and draw on specific cultural traditions, namely, the Greek polis and its political concept of citizenship and the Roman Republic and its legal notions (Pocock ref. in Thomas 6); their selective conceptual universalization in Western modernity not only simplifies the historical narrative of citizenship in contemporary multicultural nation-states, such as the United States and Canada, but also “rarely addresses the (racialized) [as well as gendered] exclusions that were also constitutive of them” (Bhambra 102). But such models frequently meet with adaptation, modification, and resistance, as well. For instance, in John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1957), the Japanese American protagonist, Ichiro, seeks to come to terms with his refusal to join the U.S. Army in light of his family’s internment; the citizen whose rights have been blatantly violated by the state struggles with the demands of the “citizen as soldier” who is expected to put aside personal grievances and desires for the national interest. In *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), by Esi Edugyan, the protagonist Samuel, an immigrant from what is now Ghana, struggles to live up to a model of the “entrepreneurial citizen” as self-sufficient, hard-working, and innovative; he has fully integrated this model into his self-image and his expectations of who he is, but his attempts collide with the overwhelmingly strong racialized image of the ‘real’ Canadian citizen as “white.”

In both examples, the distinction between different models of the citizen foregrounds the complex and often contradictory interplay between universalized political status, individual experience, and practice, and the pervasiveness of particular images of the citizen as manifestations of specific civic myths (see Smith; Thomas). Isin conceptualizes the deconstruction of such myths as forms of “activist citizenship” that set out to “writ[e] scripts and creat[e] the scene,” rather than to “follow scripts and participate in scenes that are already created” (“Theorizing” 38), and the contributions to this volume show how literary texts and the way in which they rework models of the citizen can help rewrite (or affirm) such cultural scripts—often by way of explicit dissent, disobedience, or even resistance and thus by highlighting the tensions that can exist between democratic institutional processes and practiced democracy. If in social reality this is exemplified by the protests that have taken place in the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the debates about American democracy in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election, literary texts such as the examples above or more recent ones such as Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen* (2014), Anna Deavere Smith’s *Notes*

*from the Field* (2015), or Rachel Kushner's *Mars Room* (2018) find different aesthetic forms to explore such tensions. Literary texts, then, present a complex negotiation of different, sometimes contradictory models of the citizen; they do not fall easily into categories of affirmation or resistance of normative frameworks but seek to reimagine and calibrate the civic myth of the citizen at the intersection of different demands, desires, affiliations, expectations, and identifications and the citizen at an agent who creatively responds to such constellations.

The list of proliferated conceptions of the citizen is, as the previous discussion has made clear, extensive, potentially even inexhaustible. Thus, this volume does not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of models of the citizen as negotiated in literature but to focus on select case examples: the "citizen as soldier" (Thomas), the "temperate citizen" (Fagan), the "Puritan citizen" (Drescher), the "reproductive citizen" (Batzke), the "citizen as property owner" (Schneck), the "citizen as parent" (Essi), and the "Indigenous citizen" (Sarkowsky). Each of these examples illustrates both the longevity of established models and their adaptability, variability, and shifting functions in specific historical contexts. By showcasing specific formal strategies that allow literary texts to address questions of belonging and alienation, inclusion and exclusion, and relations between individuals and communities, they thus make it possible to evaluate the efficiency of citizenship and the citizen as important aspects of literary texts in different historical periods and as categories of literary analysis in the present. However, not all seven contributions focus on all of these aspects to the same degree. While Brook Thomas's, Abigail Fagan's, and Michael Rodegang Drescher's contributions analyze how established models of the citizen were renegotiated in literary texts of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, respectively, Ina Batzke and Peter Schneck trace the influence of similarly established models on contemporary literature. Cedric Essi and Katja Sarkowsky continue this questioning of the citizen as a category of literary analysis in the present, but they also focus on formal strategies, as their analyses concern renegotiations of the citizen in contemporary autobiographical texts. These slight procedural, chronological, and thematic differences guide the structure of this issue.

Brook Thomas, whose contribution opens this thematic issue, takes the aforementioned model of Cincinnatus as a starting point for tracing the well-established civic myth of the citizen as soldier. As already discussed briefly at the beginning of this introduction, the "citizen as soldier" is certainly one of the oldest models in the narratives of citizenship in Western nations. Critics usually trace this model's "intellectual genealogy to the ancient city states of Greece and Rome" and to figures such as Cincinnatus, "describ[ing] its modern realization in Europe and North America" (Bhambra 102); the citizen thus understood not only embodies prominent notions of hegemonic masculinity but also links them to ideals of self-sacrifice for the community. Historically, the will-

ingness to risk or even to sacrifice one's life for the nation has been one of the conditionalities of citizenship; it was regarded as the ultimate duty of citizenship and as the indisputable proof of loyalty (for a critical discussion see, for instance, Burk), which in both U.S.-American and Canadian history made military service a crucial issue for ethnic minorities and an important topic in ethnic minority literature. Thomas traces such observations about the "citizen as soldier" in the literature of the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly literature of the Civil War and Reconstruction. As a still clearly gendered and, as Thomas shows, heavily racialized model, in this time period the "citizen as soldier" not only provided a narrative matrix for American distrust of standing armies but was adapted for different purposes and contexts, not least to renegotiate the position of African Americans or immigrants as citizens. Drawing on works by Walt Whitman, Hamlin Garland, and William Dean Howells in particular, Thomas demonstrates how a seemingly hegemonic model of the "citizen as soldier" could thus function as not only a stabilizing instrument of normativization but also as a tool for claiming African American citizenship.

The citizen as soldier is thus a foundational myth of modern white male citizenship that not only embodies gendered and racialized notions of the citizen in U.S. history but also highlights the centrality of the citizen's expected 'virtues,' which mark individuals (in contextually specific ways) as 'good' or 'bad' citizens. Historically, citizenship has been linked to "right action," and such links range from conditionality of citizenship to recent formulations of "social norms of citizenship" to create the "right kind of [democratic] culture" (Baron 233). Notions concerning how individuals are expected to behave in public and private are integral to the different models of the citizen. Temperance has been one important component of "right" behavior in both the United States and Canada. Abigail Fagan's contribution focuses on this significance of temperance for the related but differently emphasized norms of the citizen and on processes of othering that sanction violations of this model. In the Early Republic and the Antebellum period, argues Fagan, "the drunkard" acted as the constitutive other to burgeoning notions of who is or can be an American citizen. In contrast to the first contribution, Fagan thus looks at representations that define the citizen *ex negativo*, and she points to different discursive strategies deployed by writers during this period, from temperance as making the citizen to intemperance as unmaking them. Temperance discourse lays bare the underlying tensions of liberty, Fagan concludes: (free, white) men and women were capable of performing the U.S.-American citizen as long as they also demonstrated self-control.

That the civic myths of the citizen and their ascribed virtues often explicitly draws on established models is also highlighted in Michael Rodegang Drescher's analysis of the function of the "Puritan citizen" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. As Sacvan Bercovitch has

argued, “the Puritan myth prepared for the re-vision of God’s Country from the ‘New England of the type’ into the United States of America” (136), and as such, it served as a framework for later conceptualizations of American citizenship. Drescher understands Hawthorne’s reimagining of the Puritans as an active device for changing an established model of the citizen. In a time of conflict, “works that would offer national origins, common values, and a shared destiny” (Drescher in this volume) were called upon, and Drescher reads *The Scarlet Letter* as answering this call by transforming and adapting the “Puritan citizen” model to Antebellum needs, offering a distinct resignification of the Puritan myth via a semiological process of rewriting and revision. Drescher’s strong focus on the civic myth of the Puritan as citizen and its functional adaptability also stresses the different emphases and interests that distinguish such a line of inquiry from the myth and symbol tradition in American Studies.

Who belongs to a political community and on what grounds are central questions of modern citizenship; together, Thomas’s, Fagan’s, and Drescher’s contributions emphasize different possibilities for textual negotiations of these questions and the specific narrative forms they deploy—a narrative resignification of a process of reproducing citizenship and its changing conditions. This latter aspect links the first three essays to Ina Batzke’s contribution, in which she argues that “reproduction” is not only a metaphorical but also a crucial and very literal term for understanding both citizenship and models of the citizen—and the question of who ideally produces the citizenry (see also Roseneil et al.). Historically, individual behavior and social norms, as also explored by Fagan, were important aspects of ‘fitness’ for citizenship that exceeded questions of individual choice to indicate larger questions of social, even national health, that infamously included notions of social and racial “hygiene,” and made the family a target of body politics of the state as well as social reform movements. Expressed in direct terms: “How can good citizens be (re)produced?” (Chunn 360). In her discussion of the “reproductive citizen,” then, Batzke links the traditional connotations of reproduction as “furthering the nation by offspring that resembles the current citizenry” and its exclusion of racial and ethnic ‘others’ to the twenty-first-century renewal of this concept in the notion of the “new reproductive citizen” in the context of reproductive technology. In her reading of two utopian and feminist reimaginings of reproduction, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915) and Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling* (2005), Batzke shows how, despite their significant differences, both texts ground their reimaginings in limiting constructs of sameness and normalization that stem from an era of eugenic politics of reproduction deeply rooted in racial fantasies about reproducing a predominantly white nation.

Batzke’s contribution thus also draws out a discursive connection between historical notions of the reproductive citizen from the early twentieth century and contemporary versions of this idea, attending to

the longevity of the link between reproduction, questions of citizenship, and civic myths of the citizen. Peter Schneck retraces a similar longevity—but also variability—for the concept of the “citizen as property owner.” Citizenship and property, historically linked in terms of the latter being a prerequisite of the former, emerge as a more complex dual constellation in which citizenship is understood as a form of property “owned” by the citizen (see Shachar and Hirschl 254) and the citizen as a property owner. Schneck is interested in the historical foundation of a way of thinking (conceptualizing and legitimizing) citizenship through property and the citizen as an owner of property and also in the conceptual role played by the figure of the migrant in such conceptualizations as a precarious but also threatening dialectical presence *vis-à-vis* the citizen in the legal and literary imaginary of the United States. In light of this nexus, he analyzes David Guterson’s 1995 novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* and argues that through its particular emplotment, the novel insists on a deeper connection between the transfer of ownership (or the denial of such transfer) and citizenship (or the denial of civil rights). As Schneck shows, however, the novel appears to keep the negotiation and dispute of this transfer out of official legal proceedings and protocols and instead subjects it to a “more liberal, and mutually satisfying” interpretation of the “laws” of collective membership, defined not by the state but by the people.

The final two contributions, by Cedric Essi and Katja Sarkowsky, focus on autobiographical texts written in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They inquire into the construction of the citizen through generic questions involving life writing as narrative self-construction and strategic self-presentation. Life writing is a crucial genre for the analysis of how self-conceptions are formed based on available models of the citizen and selfhood, but also for the reconceptualization of the citizen. Through an analysis of multiracialism in what he calls “interracial family memoirs,” Cedric Essi showcases diverging figurations of the “citizen as parent” model. Amongst others, he turns to multiracialism’s key figure of the devoted white mother via an analysis of both the 1996 and 2016 edition of Jane Lazarre’s *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons*. He examines the autobiographical texts as a twofold project in which rendering white motherhood visible and legitimate in public is intertwined with the use of memoir as an anti-racist intervention. Essi argues that both endeavors are ultimately enabled by naturalizing hegemonic ideals of motherhood that are couched within the culturally resonant script of the Puritan conversion narrative. In much the same fashion as Drescher, Schneck, and Batzke, Essi explores how a specific, centuries-old model of the citizen can still be powerfully—and controversially—reimagined in contemporary thought.

Such reimaginings thus not only attest to the longevity and variability of specific models of the citizen across centuries, but also to the

weight of citizenship and the citizen as metaphors of belonging, which has resulted in the proliferation of terms discussed above. In the final contribution to this volume, Katja Sarkowsky first considers the complexities of Indigenous citizenship in Canada and the United States in order to then read contemporary Indigenous life writing as a forum for negotiating models of the “Indigenous citizen” within and across nation-states, and often in defiance of them. On the one hand, her reading of three autobiographical texts by Indigenous political leaders of different tribal-national backgrounds highlights the different community-oriented agendas of a seemingly individualist genre. On the other hand, it identifies how each text draws on different generic conventions to outline notions of “Indigenous citizens” as locally, nationally, and internationally embedded agents who redefine citizenship as an activist practice in a globalized world.

No matter the genre or time period, literary texts tend to display, test, explore, and construct a broad range of interpretations of the citizen, and the contributions to this volume seek to investigate important facets of this scope. Some of them recontextualize established notions such as the “citizen as soldier” or the “citizen as parent” in new frameworks or highlight previously undiscussed aspects of these models. Others analyze some of the proliferations indicated earlier, e. g., by Isin and Nielsen (2008), in order to show how they tend not only to complicate established notions of the citizen, but also to illustrate the centrality of such proliferations to historical and contemporary understandings of citizenship. As case studies, they draw attention to hitherto neglected accounts of either established models of the citizen or of the proliferations of these models. They address the complexity that is the condition for the emergence of various and varied ideas of citizenship and their potential impact upon politics, both highly problematic and potentially emancipatory; they also illustrate the role of literature in the constitution, affirmation, modification, or deconstruction of these models. Taken together, the contributions in this thematic issue thus accomplish three interlinked goals. First and foremost, they expand an understanding of the dynamic sense of citizenship in the United States (and, to some extent, Canada) and its “storied-ness” by focusing on models of the individual citizen as a part of the citizenry and their exploration in literary works. Second, and more broadly, they probe literature’s engagement with and potential contribution to contemporary debates about citizenship. Last but not least, though the arguments in the essays are linked to specific time periods, they expand an overall understanding of the citizen and point to the problematic and unproblematic potential of the civic myth to shape contemporary discourse.

The ongoing relevance of this potential, which has acquired a renewed urgency, is painfully apparent in the current moment: While concepts of the citizen, agency, belonging, and rights resonate strongly with many of the pressing social and political concerns addressed by activists and artists in the past decades, the precarious status of undocumented migrants, the

disproportionally devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on minority communities, the intensified Black Lives Matter protests against unceasing police brutality and explicit anti-Black<sup>3</sup> violence, and the open resurgence of white supremacy actively supported by many elected politicians (including former President Trump) in the past months have, once again, highlighted that citizens' rights, even once won, cannot be taken for granted but must be asserted and claimed. Notions of the citizen are currently being renegotiated, challenged, and rethought in and through different, crucially interconnected arenas: democratic institutions, grassroots activism, the media, and cultural production. Literature very rarely has a discernible effect on political processes. But, as Toni Morrison wrote in 1993, literature "allows, encourages ways to experience the public—in time, with affect, in a communal space, with other people (characters), and in language that insists on individual participation" (101). How it can imagine, critically examine, and project ways of being—or not being—a citizen is explored in this collection of essays.

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<sup>3</sup> We are aware that capitalization of racial designations and related terminology is a contentious issue. While the capitalization of both "Black" and "White" sought to capture the constructedness of racial categories, recent discussions in the context of the resurging of violence against African Americans have challenged guidelines to capitalize both terms. To reflect these ongoing discussions, we did not adopt coherent capitalization guidelines for the contributions in this thematic issue, but instead let the authors decide.

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