In their chapter ‘Education for active citizenship’ Susan Pascoe and Sue Ferguson characterise the thirty years between the mid-sixties and the mid-nineties as a period in which ‘there was little systematic, co-ordinated civics and citizenship education in Australian schools’. The fact that I went to school in the middle of this period might explain why I found this book such an education. It was giving me the course on citizenship that I had never had.

But even those people lucky or unlucky enough to study civics at school will find something to interest them in this collection. The book contains papers that were delivered at a conference held at the University of Melbourne in 1999 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the legal creation of Australian citizenship. Two years later it is equally topical. In 2001 Australia is not only celebrating the centenary of federation, the Australian government is also using the navy to repel asylum seekers with unprecedented force, while changing the very shape of the Australian territories for the purposes of the Migration Act. Discussions of the meaning and responsibility of Australian citizenship have never been more timely.

Kim Rubenstein explains that this collection uses the term ‘commemorate’ rather than ‘celebrate’ because the book seeks to take a ‘probing and critical look’ at Australian citizenship. In this it succeeds. The first chapter, by the Rt. Hon. Sir Ninian Stephen, contains what might be called ‘the authorised version’ of the history of Australian citizenship: the ‘almost fully’ democratic creation of the Constitution; the citizenship ‘bestowed’ on Australians without violence or struggle; the role citizenship has played in welcoming immigrants to the Australian community; the way in which citizenship ‘is the key to so much that is at the heart of being Australian’. The rest of the book then successfully challenges and problematises this straightforward version of history.

Sir Ninian himself recognises that there are gaps in the celebratory story. He notes that the fully democratic character of the creation of the Constitution was marred by the exclusion of indigenous people and, in all but one state, women. Part Two of the book, ‘Individuals and Citizenship’, looks at these exclusions and what Australian citizenship has meant for women, for indigenous Australians, and for immigrants. A central theme running through the book is the difference between legal, cultural and substantive concepts of citizenship. Helen Irving’s chapter on ‘Citizenship before 1949’ argues that the notion of citizenship was used by Australians long before the Australian Citizenship Act 1948 (Cth), and that white Australian women who were unable to vote still constructed themselves as ‘citizens’ in the debates leading up to Federation. Conversely, Marilyn Waring, in her chapter ‘Less than equal — women’s experience of citizenship’, argues that although women now have legal citizenship, they are not fully substantive citizens without equal representation in Australian parliaments.

In discussing the citizenship of indigenous people the same distinction between legal and substantive citizenship is made. John Chesterman and Brian Galligan discuss the difficulty in determining when indigenous Australians actually became Australian citizens. There are three possible dates: 1948, when Australian citizenship was legally created; 1962, when all indigenous Australians were given the right to vote in federal elections; and with the 1967 referendum, the date popularly given. Whichever date is used, as with the citizenship of women, questions about the substantive citizenship of indigenous Australians remain.

The difference between legal and cultural citizenship is exemplified by the experience of British subjects in Australia. Between 1949 and 1969 Australian citizens were also British subjects and between 1969 and 1984 they retained the status but not the title of British subject. As James Jupp points out, this connection between Australian citizens and British subjects has made the experiences of British and non-British immigrants very different. British immigrants have always been assumed to share ‘cultural’ Australian citizenship. They have not been expected to become citizens in order to become cultural Australians in the ways that other groups of immigrants have. British subjects remain the largest element in Australia unwilling to take out Australian citizenship, but remain untargeted by the most recent citizenship campaign.
Part Three, ‘Globalisation and Citizenship’, looks beyond Australia to questions of citizenship more generally in a globalised world. What does citizenship mean when goods, ideas, finance, people and pollution flow across borders? As more and more decisions are made at a supra–national level, is it time to consider global citizenship? Stephen Castles suggests that the workings of international non–government organisations provide one model of such global citizenship.

Gary L. Sturgess argues that we are currently witnessing the fragmentation of concepts of citizenship, with people able to cope with both a variety of memberships and with governance that goes beyond the nation–state. He also warns that nation–states can be expected to find this process highly threatening and that, as far as they are aware of it, they will resist it.

The interesting grab–bag of articles in Individual, community, nation will force the reader to reconsider the meaning of Australian citizenship, and in 2001 that can only be a good thing.

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A former Labor Minister recently fulminated against economically unprofitable courses, courses ‘usually called something or other “studies”’. In this climate it is perhaps fortunate for Yvonne Sherwood that she is based at the University of Glasgow, rather than an Australian university, because her study of the biblical book Jonah quite happily, even profitably, exists at an intersection of no less than three ‘something or other “studies”’: Cultural, Biblical and Jewish.

Jonah is one of the shortest books in the Hebrew Scriptures, four chapters long. It begins with the word of God coming to Jonah, telling him to go to the people of Ninevah and cry out against their wickedness. Instead Jonah takes ship to Tarshish, the biblical equivalent of travelling on the Titanic. God sends a storm and to quiet it the sailors throw Jonah overboard. Jonah is swallowed by a big fish and spends three days and nights in its belly. The fish then spews Jonah onto dry land, and Jonah goes to Ninevah and proclaims its imminent destruction. The people of Ninevah repent, and God decides not to destroy them after all. Jonah, angered by God’s decision, leaves the city and sits down to watch what will happen to it. God causes a big plant to grow to provide Jonah with shade, but on the next day sends a big worm to attack the bush and cause it to wither. Jonah is also angered by this and asks to die. God responds by asking why, if Jonah is concerned for this plant, he, God, should not be concerned for a city of one hundred and twenty thousand persons and also many animals. And there the book of Jonah ends, without waiting for Jonah’s reply.

Sherwood provides a genealogy for this short, strange book, a history of the way it has been interpreted and used. She begins with four mainstream, or academic and Christian, interpretations. The first, the reading of the Church Fathers, picks up a saying of Jesus recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, that the only sign the current generation will be given is the sign of Jonah. Jonah and Jesus are then read as typological twins, although twins who resemble ‘Danny de Vito and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Hollywood movie’. Since Matthew and Luke gloss Jesus’ saying differently, the Church Fathers are free to interpret Jesus and Jonah’s twinship in a variety of ways. Despite this freedom, the twin reading is soon overtaken by a reading that sees Jonah as a stereotypical Jew, unable to understand the universalism of God’s love that reaches even to the Ninevites. In this reading the Hebrew Scripture is ‘not merely the Old but the Exhausted, Paralysed, Infirm Testament, given to senile mutterings’. The third reading, ‘knocked out on John Calvin’s anvil’, looks at the monster within the self or the state and warns against disobedience. The fourth reading uses Jonah to provide biblical biology in the wake of The Origin of the Species, as Jonah and the whale becomes Jonah and the canis cacharis or white shark.

Of these four readings Sherwood argues that the second, anti–Semitic reading has flourished longest, as it enables Christian theology to deal with tensions in its relations with Judaism. The core of Sherwood’s book is summed up in her statement that, ‘after the Holocaust