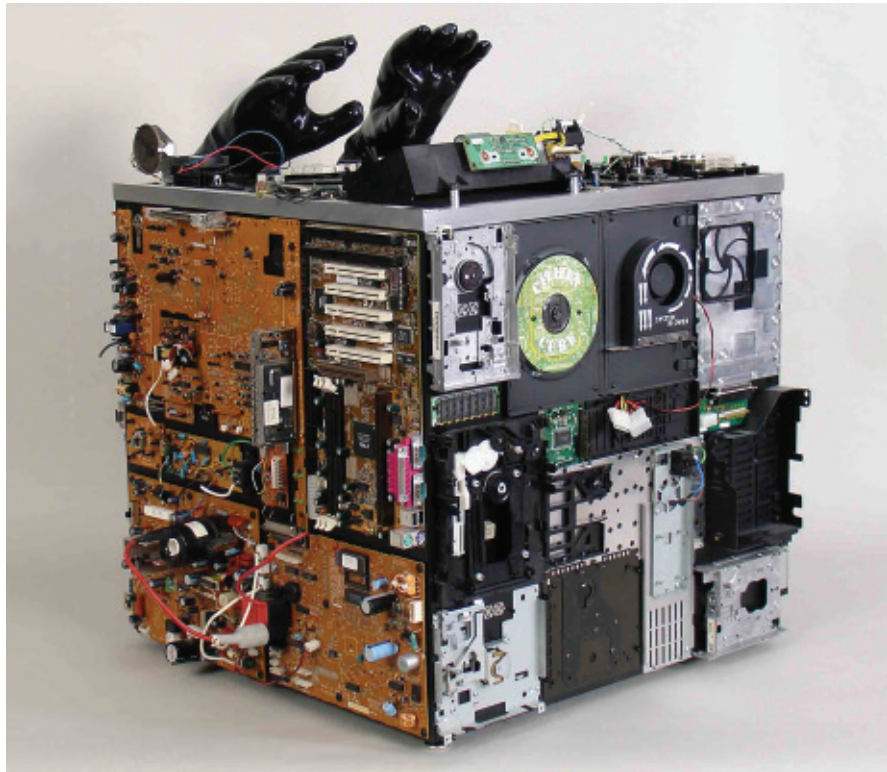


The Promise of Citizenship



Citizen Cube, by Brenda Guyton, a sculpture made of found computer parts. What ideas about citizenship are evident in this sculpture?

Any group of people—a society—that has ever had the luxury of being able to think about its existence eventually arrives at a general understanding of how the world is and how the world ought to be. Such an understanding can be called an ideology. Ideologies grow out of the honest and serious contemplation of several fundamental questions:

- *What are humans like, and why do they act as they do?*
- *What is the nature of society?*
- *What is the role of the individual in society?*

Do you remember these questions? They opened *Perspectives on Ideology*. Now that you have completed this course and have worked and shared with others while encountering the many ideas, stories, concepts, perspectives, and ideologies found in this book, you may have some tentative answers to these questions.

You have had the opportunity to explore how your identity—your essential self—prepares you to embrace an ideology, a belief about how the world should be. You have examined a group of ideologies that concern the place of the individual in society, as well as those that focus on collective beliefs and values. You have had the chance to assess the viability of the principles of different ideologies, especially liberalism. Finally, you have been asked, in response to this assessment, to consider what your citizenship means in light of the issues you have explored and the questions listed above.

To What Extent Should We Embrace an Ideology?

A central part of being “Canadian” is living in a democracy. This means that everyone in Canada—both individuals and collectives—has a stake in considering what would be best for Canada and the world.

We can shape our future.

This course and this book are grounded in the idea that the beliefs and values of individual citizens and groups *matter*. Therefore, we must all be equipped with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to make informed and responsible decisions. Canadian citizenship demands that we thoughtfully consider our own identities, the perspectives of others, and the impact of our decisions and our actions on others and the world around us. Canadian citizenship requires that we all take part, that we all play a role, and that we all practise “engaged, active, informed, and responsible citizenship.”

These thoughts are echoed in the Inaugural Address of President Barack Obama to his country on 20 January 2009:

Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted, for those that prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things—celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor—who have carried us up the long rugged path towards prosperity and freedom...

We honor them, those brave Americans who at this very hour patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains, not only because they are the guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service—a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves.

And yet at this moment, a moment that will define a generation, it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all. For as much as government can do, and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child that finally decides our fate...

What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility—a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

**—Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States,
Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, 20 January 2009.**

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/>

Michael Ignatieff, speaking at the University of Ottawa in 2006, said

In understanding Canada's place in the world, we need to think of ourselves not just as defenders of our own sovereignty, but as stewards of the global commons...The 21st century will be convulsed by vast global flows of labour and capital. As a result, all societies are becoming multicultural. All societies are opening to the world. All societies are struggling with the challenge of maintaining stable and democratic political orders among peoples from different faiths, ethnicities and national origins. Canada is uniquely placed to show the world how to do this better...

When I was in the classroom, I always knew I was not just in the business of teaching a subject. I was teaching hope and self-belief, the key engines of productivity...Our society lives by the promise of opportunity equally distributed to all. We know how far short we fall. Aboriginal Canadians, visible minorities new to our country, and the working poor lack opportunity, security and skills...Let us commit ourselves to a Canada where no one goes hungry at night, where no one is denied a world-class education because of their race or ancestry; where we bet the future of our country on the proposition that if we can unlock the hidden talent of every citizen, we will always pay our way in the world...

My Canada is held together by a spine of citizenship, common rights, responsibilities and common knowledge so that we truly feel we are one people.

—Michael Ignatieff, “Canada in the World”,
Ottawa Citizen, Thursday, March 30, 2006.

[http://www2.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?
id=5164baa5-0041-4d92-9344-233607ff1529&k=26279](http://www2.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=5164baa5-0041-4d92-9344-233607ff1529&k=26279)

President Obama’s appeal to American citizens to accept responsibility for themselves, their country, and the world is equally an appeal to all citizens of all liberal democratic countries. Michael Ignatieff’s comments also appeal to this idea about citizenship. It is an appeal for each citizen to embrace an ideology. To embrace an ideology means to act on the basis of that ideology.

The question for all of us remains: ***To what extent should we embrace an ideology?***

To what extent should we be willing to make the commitment and fulfill the promise of citizenship?

To what extent will you take responsible actions to achieve the kind of society and the kind of world in which you want to live?