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**THE 'CITIZENS' AND 'CITIZENSHIP' DEBATES:
'VERNACULAR CITIZENSHIP' and CONTEMPORARY
AUSTRALIAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Simon Maher

Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History.
University of NSW 1999

Faculty of Arts, Department of History and Politics

2006

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ABSTRACT

‘Citizens’ and ‘citizenship’ have become ‘buzz words’ in contemporary times. Within Australian academia the subjects have attracted an unprecedented level of interest. Typically the focus is on ‘formal’ definitions and ‘official’ forms of citizenship found within Government legislation. This focus is problematic because it is possible that it overlooks the existence of ‘informal’ and ‘unofficial’ understandings of citizenship.

This thesis challenges the approaches that concentrate on ‘official’ versions of citizenship. It argues that an ‘informal’ understanding of citizenship has developed in the minds of the Australian community. This citizenship consists of a range of ‘popular’ and ‘informal’ ideas that comprise what might be called, ‘vernacular citizenship’. It argues that they have developed from the mid to late 1840s, and continued their influence into the Federation era.

This thesis analyses these ‘popular’ ideas which appeared in a variety of discourses in colonial and early Federation Australia, drawing upon publications such as the *Citizen* and the *People’s Advocate*, as well as the speeches of politicians such as Daniel Deniehy, and the textual works of W.G. Spence and Joseph Furphy. It argues that these sources carried a collection of ‘citizenship’ ideas sharing a thematic compatibility. This bundle of ‘common ideas’ provided the foundation for the understanding of ‘vernacular citizenship’ to develop, playing an instrumental role in shaping the ways that political matters have been imagined in Australia.

As well, the thesis explores the intellectual ancestry of these ideas, and explains why they have proved influential in shaping a ‘popular’ understanding of citizenship in Australian history. In presenting this case, it examines the historical background of the citizenship debates, as well as analysing contemporary discussions, thereby providing a means for understanding the full intellectual legacy of the citizenship debates and their implications.