

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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2012

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

Stories of
INNOVATION
in
**HIGHER
EDUCATION**





NEW from Kettering Foundation Press

Democratizing Deliberation

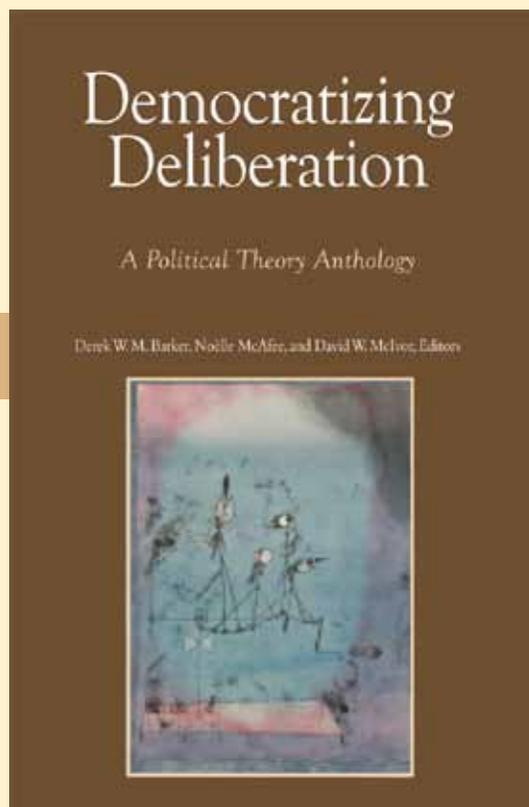
A Political Theory Anthology

Edited by Derek W. M. Barker, Noëlle McAfee, and David W. McIvor

Democratizing Deliberation brings together recent and cutting-edge political theory scholarship on deliberative democracy. The collection reframes deliberative democracy to be sensitive to the deep conflicts, multiple forms of communication, and aspirations for civic agency that characterize real public deliberation. In so doing, the book addresses many of the most common challenges to the theory and practice of deliberative democracy.

Kettering Foundation Press | 2012

\$15.95 • 184 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-41-2



To read excerpts and purchase this book, visit www.kettering.org.

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

Connections is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799. The articles in *Connections* reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its directors, or its officers.

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Design and Production

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Illustrations

Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

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Turning *the* Tide *on* POVERTY:

Shifting the University-Community Relationship through Cooperative Extension

Alice Diebel

Within higher education, many institutions have an explicit civic mission; however, the dominant expressions of this mission may be to disseminate technical knowledge to a passive public. A key question for Kettering's research is whether a more democratic understanding of this public mission might be possible and what it looks like when it is expressed differently. One of Kettering's key research initiatives focuses on the land-grant university system, specifically cooperative extension programs. Cooperative extension is particularly well situated to study and affect the university-community relationship because nearly every county in the country has an extension office that "extends" the university to the community. Extension is intended to focus on the serious issues that affect people's daily lives and often operates important programs such as 4-H; however, these programs may not address a community's serious issues. Perhaps more important, an historic mission of the land-grant system is that it would be a "people's university" focused on building strong communities and providing education that people can use to that end. That is, these universities were

created to help citizens learn to work together for the public good and take hold of their collective futures.

The Kettering Foundation has studied the relationship between land-grant universities and their communities in a shared research exchange with the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC). The SRDC is a regional collaboration of 29 land-grant universities in 13 states. In 2007, it conducted a survey of constituents; one of the top needs people expressed was fostering civic-minded communities. The SRDC website describes people's concerns with civic life and how the SRDC works to address these problems:

Many Southerners rarely feel a sense of ownership for what takes place in their communities. Family and work demands, community problems with no easy solutions, uncertainty on how to get their voices heard, citizen apathy or alienation, entrenched leaders that oppose change—all are factors that tear away at the civic health of a community. Reviving and expanding the civic activeness of local people, institutions and organizations is a critical prerequisite for gaining traction and support for

the tough choices that rural communities must make today. What the people of the rural South want are innovative ways to get involved, to share their insights and to make a difference.

The SRDC works with land-grant faculty and key partners to launch efforts that strengthen and facilitate people's engagement in the lives of their communities. An important companion piece is research that uncovers key factors contributing to, or inhibiting, the emergence of civically active communities.

SRDC's approach to community development through civic engagement suggests a different relationship between citizens and the land-grant university. In a series of workshops and research reports, we have asked SRDC to reflect on its work. Some of the research questions we are considering include: How does cooperative extension understand the role of citizens and politics in local communities? What assumptions does extension make about the role of citizens and communities? How are decisions made? What are the implications of that understanding on the approach extension uses to engage the community?

A research report by SRDC reveals how a network of universities can collaborate in a way that meets both the needs of communities for self-rule and the needs of the university to develop research-based programs. The stories of civic work included in the report offer a rich view of the challenges and successes



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deliberative exchanges have made in these rural communities, all of which have a poverty rate above 20 percent.

The SRDC used deliberative politics to build the capacity of citizens in rural communities to tackle pervasive problems. Building on ideas from the Kettering network of dialogue and deliberation practitioners like National Issues Forums and Everyday Democracy, the SRDC created study circles of community members who deliberated on approaches to addressing poverty: a program called Turning the Tide on Poverty. Extension agents with an interest in this work approached community members from a variety of backgrounds for six weeks of deliberation and choice work. These meetings helped the participants identify the serious issues that they wanted to

Participating in the Tide program helped citizens recognize that they can act on problems in their communities; in this case, poverty. According to the SRDC report, people in these communities

had become accustomed to outside organizations coming in to provide programs and services to assist local residents. In fact, this history became a significant barrier in launching Tide in some communities as many residents found it difficult to grasp that this project was the sole responsibility of local residents, not the work of an outside entity. As such, it is possible that some community members were cognizant of the history of dependence on the outside world for success, but were willing to join hands locally to help bring about important changes.

Communities that have citizens who realize they could address their problems—even under very difficult circumstances—have been the most successful. For example, as a result of citizen engagement in Clearview, Oklahoma, people have worked together to bring in broadband access, provide smoke detectors for citizens, develop a community garden for hunger relief, and identify local resources for public

use. Citizens in Neshoba County, Mississippi, have developed a public clothing closet, a food pantry, and a volunteer corps to link citizens with resources. These initiatives are more than just volunteerism.

In all areas of their communities, citizens are beginning to focus on the same, overarching problem, involving people with different talents and interests to come together in new ways. Such efforts shift the relationships and networks in the community.

Less-than-ideal relationships between the participants in the Tide program and traditional community leaders were a motivating factor for citizens. Some people had very negative views of the leaders, describing them as “corrupt,” “self-serving,” or even “tyrannical.” According to the study, in some communities, there was an inverse relationship between the long-term sustainability of the effort and the perception of the leadership.

People found that by coming together with other people they could tackle difficult challenges with or without these leaders. In an ideal world, traditional leaders would be supportive of and reciprocate civic initiatives, but while mistrust of government might paralyze some people and prevent action, these citizens stepped up to make sound choices and take action.

Further, the capacity of the extension agents has changed. They see this sort of engagement work as distinct from their more traditional, research-based, extension program activities. They recognize their roles as facilitators of public relationships involved in big issues over longer periods of time and as community developers in terms of civic life, not just economics. They have also begun to see themselves not as

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address and develop action plans that might begin to improve the lives of people in the community.

One of the main results of this research is that citizens in these communities discovered their capacity and commitment to take action, particularly on the problem of poverty. For some people, this was the first time they had taken any community action. Others gained the confidence to address community needs in the future. They also became more aware of their community’s strengths, resources, and needs; understood each other better; and felt personally committed to doing more in their communities. Public deliberation plays an important role by helping citizens begin to understand issues more fully and also begin to see *each other* differently—and for the better. Citizens recognize they are not so different in what they care about, and they begin to recognize that they might be able to work together. These are clear indicators of building democratic capacity.



Turning the Tide on Poverty



educators for one-off events but instead as colearners, collaborators, and facilitators in the community. The role of facilitator is distinct from the role of guiding programs. A facilitator helps the community decide what problems it wants to tackle and discovers resources to tackle them. A prepared program already contains what will be shared and learned, and the fit may or may not address citizens' concerns.

Finally, the perception of cooperative extension is worth noting. After the first year of this initiative, the researchers interviewed extension administrators to see if they thought differently about their role as experts. The researchers asked, "When the university works with the community without answers to the problems that have not yet been clearly identified, then what is the role of the university?" They found that the expert model became more complicated. One administrator reported, "The agents do not have to be experts in everything related to subject matter because someone else in the community may have it." The Tide program reveals the value of public knowledge to address community concerns, with the university as an agent to help public knowledge become shared, coherent, and effective. Focus groups held before the initiative got started revealed that the administrators were nearly unanimous in their view that the role of the agent was to educate citizens using unbiased university research. After the initiative, the understanding clearly changed; the

administrators report that the agents enter communities as facilitators to help the community find its own answers.

However, some administrators struggle to balance such open-ended and uncertain initiatives in a research institution. Some administrators were afraid of the spread of misinformation in communities because the work was not drawing on hard science. They were also concerned about how the impacts of the agents' work would be measured by *their* bosses and the communities that support them. Agents felt support from their leaders, but the response was mixed. Some administrators are convinced of the value of this work, while others do not see it as appropriate for the university to deal with political issues or with programs that have uncertain outcomes. The majority of agents recognize the value of civic engagement for issues beyond poverty; for example, one community is now tackling violence. As one extension agent explained, "My extension administrator has said this work once scared him but he's learned that it has potential."

Perhaps the fundamental challenge to all universities doing work that focuses on community change is that the endeavor is explicitly political, but most universities profess to be apolitical. Civic engagement introduces a different way of address-

ing community problems, disrupting the established relationships and typical ways things get done. Extension agents saw this work differently from their usual activities. One agent reported, "Most groups we work with are homogenous. These aren't. They are diverse in race, income, all that." And another said, "[Tide] takes us outside of the groups we usually work with. That's a good thing. We have groups we like to work with and call on, our volunteers. This process causes us to connect to others."

In the Kettering Foundation Press book *A Different Kind of Politics*, David Mathews writes about the divide between higher education and the community in his essay, "Ships Passing in the Night?" Mathews points out the very different understandings of what it means for a university to be "civically engaged." The university often sees its role as providing technical assistance or professional advice described in apolitical terms, but the university cannot solve many of these public problems without civic engagement. What citizens seem to want is for

The capacity of the extension agents has changed. . . . They have begun to see themselves not as educators for one-off events but instead as colearners, collaborators, and facilitators in the community.

the community to be stronger, more resilient, and self-reliant. The civic engagement work reflected in the Tide program may be of concern to technical assistance providers because it disrupts politics-as-usual in these small communities. What better role for the *public* university than to extend its resources to the community and build the capacity of people to work together? After all, civic engagement is all about knowledge and learning, which are key roles for the university to play.

Alice Diebel is a program officer at the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at diebel@kettering.org.



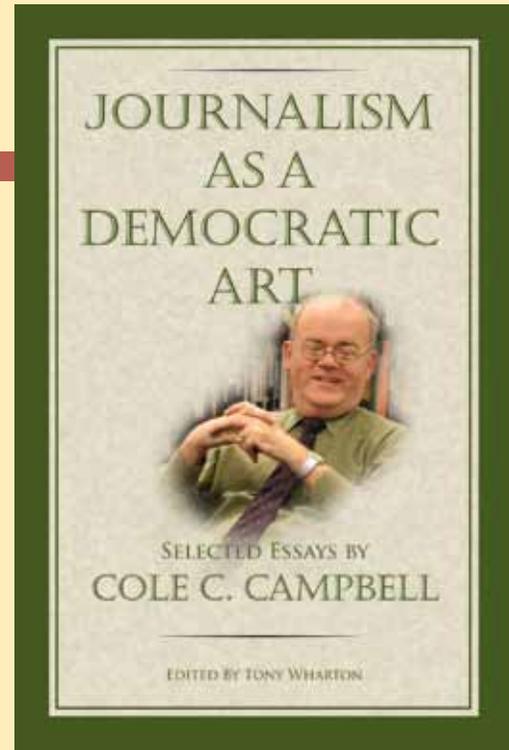
NEW from Kettering

Journalism as a Democratic Art: Selected Essays **by Cole C. Campbell**

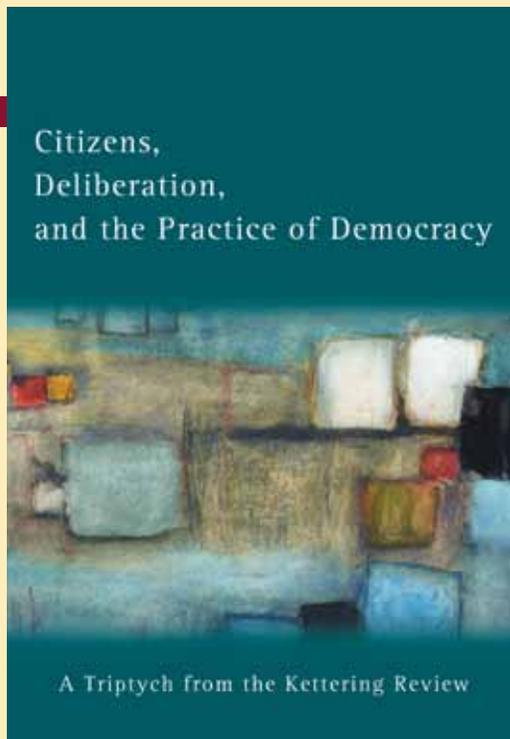
Edited by Tony Wharton

Journalism as a Democratic Art expresses at its heart Cole Campbell's belief that "people expect the press to help their communities solve problems." As one-time editor of the Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk, Virginia, and then the Post-Dispatch in St. Louis, Missouri, Campbell worked to align his profession with that belief, often facing considerable resistance from other journalists.

Campbell's essays address a variety of subjects, including a partly finished dictionary for journalists; timely essays written in the months after Hurricane Katrina and 9/11; and an interview by Jay Rosen, longtime professor of journalism at New York University.



Kettering Foundation Press | 2012
\$15.95 • 196 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-40-5



Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy: A Triptych from the Kettering Review

Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy brings together writing by 19 leading thinkers on the contemporary challenges of democracy. These provocative essays, first published in three issues of the Kettering Review to celebrate 25 years of the National Issues Forums, challenge readers to rethink conventional notions of democracy, public deliberation, and citizenship.

Kettering Foundation Press | 2012
\$15.95 • 236 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-44-3

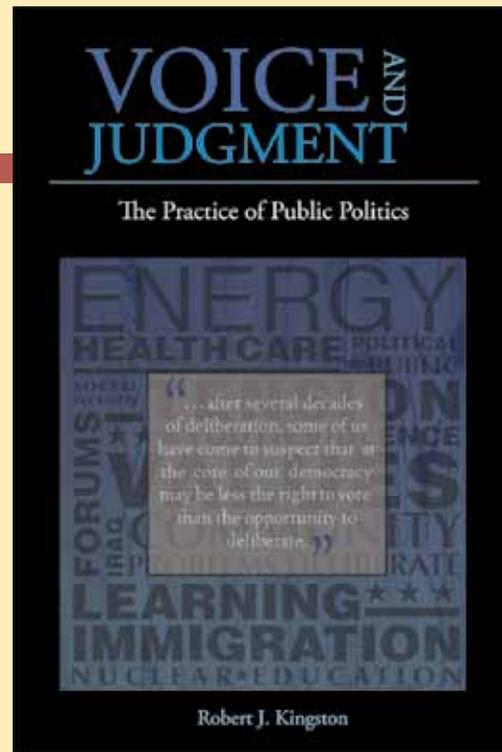
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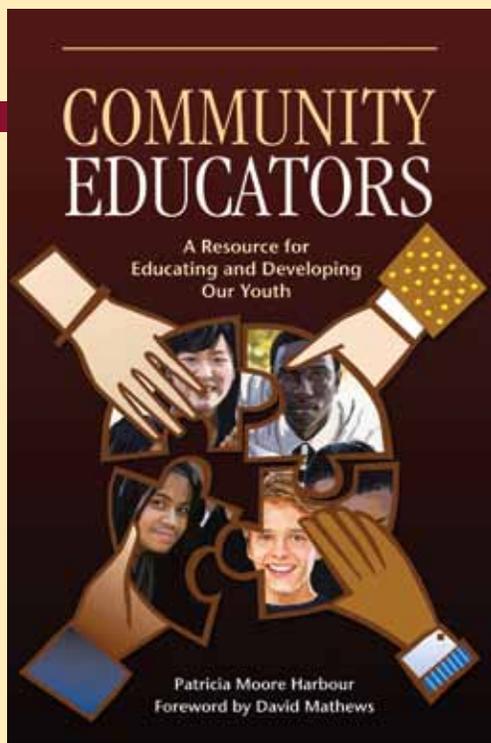
Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics

By Robert J. Kingston

"We are victims of argument and instruments, from time to time, of circumstance or the influence of others' whims. Our civic movement, however, is from a state of anxiety, puzzlement, blame, defensiveness, or anger, toward the place where contraries meet, where unavoidable tensions remind us that no life is lived without risk . . . or collaboration. A deliberative public begins with opinions but shares experiences; it recognizes shared concerns or 'values' in unexpected, sometimes unfamiliar circumstances; it responds to the divisive with restraint. . . . Public deliberation reveals not a verdict but the making of a 'public,' the formulation of a public will that can be described and put to use."



Kettering Foundation Press | 2012
\$15.95 • 272 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-42-9



Community Educators: A Resource For Educating and Developing Our Youth

By Patricia Moore Harbour

Community Educators asserts that the relationship between education, community, and democracy are inseparable and illustrates that education is broader than just schooling. Current thinking about education is challenged and reveals how the public participates in the education and development of youth. This book is a call for action and responsibility—both individual and collective—to transform education beyond simply reforming schools.

Kettering Foundation Press | 2012
\$15.95 • 184 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-41-2



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444 North Capitol Street NW, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 393-4478

6 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016; (212) 686-7016

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