

# CONNECTIONS

www.kettering.org

2007

A Year's Review  
from the Perspective  
of Citizens

WHAT IF?

IMAGINE THIS

COULD IT BE THAT?

MAYBE THE QUESTION WE SHOULD BE ASKING IS...

Introducing the  
**READERS' FORUM**  
See page 33

# What You Need to Know about *Connections*

**W**ith this issue of *Connections*, the Kettering Foundation introduces three significant initiatives for the newsletter.

The first is a decision to change *Connections* from a biannual publication to an annual. This new schedule corresponds with Kettering's review cycle, which goes like this: each year, Kettering focuses its research through a particular point of view, or, as we say at the foundation, lens. The foundation's research has three fundamental foci: citizens, communities, and democratic institutions. This reflects Kettering's hypothesis that democracy requires the following:

- citizens who can make sound decisions about their future;
- communities of citizens acting together to address common problems;
- institutions that are legitimate in the eyes of citizens and that support a democratic society.

By publishing *Connections* once a year, it will serve as a record of the foundation's research focus over the previous 12 months. Therefore, as you'll find throughout the following pages, this issue of *Connections* reflects the foundation's research over the last year—through the lens of citizens.

The second initiative is the addition of a new section, the "Readers' Forum." As its name implies, the new section



features reactions and comments by *Connections* readers, who were invited to review drafts of many of the articles that appear in this newsletter. With the help of our colleagues Connie Crockett and Alice Diebel, we interviewed 13 people from around the country about how their experiences relate to these articles. This feedback is organized into three articles related to the

foundation's hypothesis about democracy, as noted above. The "Forum" is described in more detail on page 33.

To make the new section a true "Readers' Forum," the foundation has devised a new way for readers to react to—and even to read—*Connections*. This is the third initiative: the creation of a new discussion area on the foundation's Web site, [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org). On the Web site you'll find a new section devoted to this issue of *Connections* and comment areas where readers can participate in a forum around the ideas expressed in the articles published in this issue.

The addition of both the print and online "Readers' Forum" is an attempt to help readers better connect to *Connections*—and the Kettering Foundation. But remember: the online forum will only be as good as you our readers make it.

—Deborah Witte and Bob Mihalek

# CONNECTIONS

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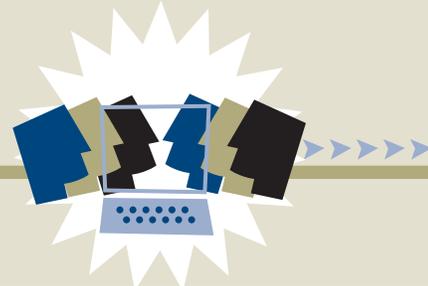
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# Books Worth Reading

## *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule Is Giving Way to Shared Governance . . . and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*

By Matt Leighninger  
Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press,  
2006

The vitality of the American commonwealth has always been rooted in civic agency. U.S. citizens have cared about schools and government, parklands and civic rituals to the extent they participate in their making and sustenance.

In *The Next Form of Democracy*, Matt Leighninger shows that a new chapter in our commonwealth may be dawning after decades of privatization and the gating of our imaginations as well as of our neighborhoods.

Leighninger, who has spent more than a decade working with communities across the country, writes from the frontlines of a fledgling citizen movement. *The Next Form of Democracy* is infused with a democratic faith in people and in practical civic experiments at the heart of the democratic tradition.

Through storytelling, itself a crucial method of democracy building, Leighninger analyzes civic efforts like Kuna Alliance for a Cohesive Community, a citizen-based initiative in a booming suburb of Boise, Idaho, and well-known civic experiments such as Neighbors Building Neighborhoods in Rochester, New York.

Leighninger sees engagement as a new politics, mingling practical self-interests with civic concerns. "In communities throughout North America," Leighninger writes, "the skills, capacities and frustra-

tions of ordinary people are spilling over into the political process. . . . Despite their disgust with politics, or perhaps because of it, citizens have become a stronger, more vocal force in public decision making than at any time in the last 100 years." This politics is also driven by officials' self-interests. "Practitioners in planning, education, law enforcement, human relations, environmental protection, housing, economic development and public health are realizing that they need more support if they are going to succeed."

*The Next Form of Democracy* is an in-depth look at the citizen movement from the vantage of governance—patterns of interactions between government and citizens. Leighninger develops an insightful critique of the dominant roles of citizens, such as voter, volunteer, powerless outsider, and association member.

However, he reproduces a major flaw in contemporary democratic theory, the separation of citizenship, located in civil society, from work. Thus, for instance, in his extended discussion of schools, he contrasts "citizens," understood as residents of places, with "educators." But teachers were once understood as citizens—indeed, as leaders in the life of communities—precisely because of the civic qualities and authority derived from their work. We once had citizen businessmen and -women, citizen doctors, citizen politicians, citizen clergy, and citizen college professors, along with civic bricklayers and civic bus drivers.

The strength of American democracy as a society and not simply a state was its

## THE NEXT FORM OF DEMOCRACY

*How Expert Rule Is Giving Way to Shared Governance . . . and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*

MATT LEIGHNINGER

Foreword by U.S. Senator Bill Bradley



grounding in myriad publicly productive efforts, which in turn rooted many institutions in civic culture. We need to renew a broad understanding of the citizen as the cocreator of democratic society if we are to see the regrouping of professions and institutions needed for broad civic revitalization. In this process, building democratic governance is an aspect of the larger task of developing civic agency, our collective capacities for powerful, productive public action.

Leighninger cites the famous 1903 remark by W.E.B. Dubois that the problem of the 20th century "is the color line." Racism has not disappeared as a public question; indeed, it feeds other forces that divide the citizenry and weaken our capacities for cooperative public action. Today, most people feel powerless to transform those forces that erode the commonwealth. The central problem of the 21st century is the development of civic agency that can tame such forces, address our common challenges, and revitalize our common world.

## Books Worth Reading

*The Next Form of Democracy* is an extremely helpful contribution to this public work.

—Harry C. Boyte

Harry Boyte is codirector of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota. His next book, copublished by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Kettering Foundation, is *The Citizen Solution*. He can be reached at boyte001@umn.edu.

### *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*

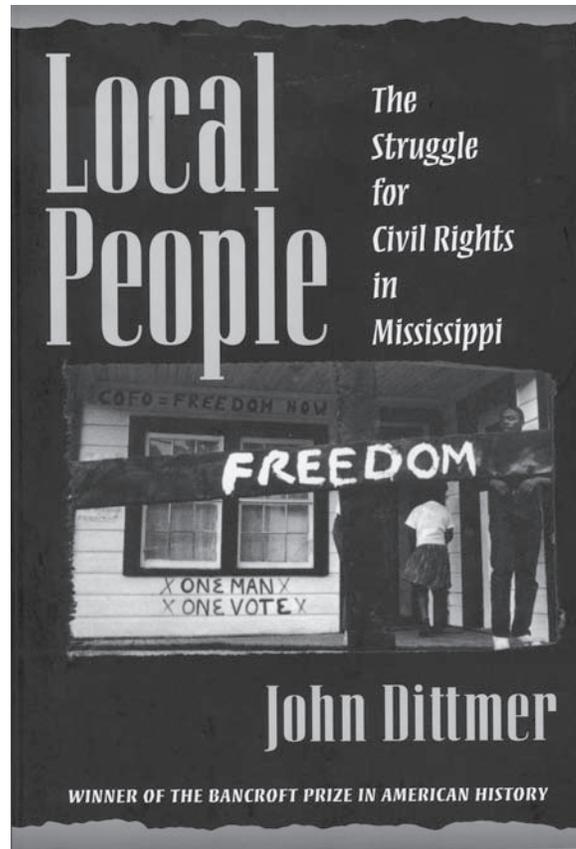
By John Dittmer  
Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995

**L**ocal *People* is a historical narrative inspired by the banding together of citizen leaders to overcome the injustices of the Jim Crow South. John Dittmer presents the peoples' fight for civil rights and the Mississippi suffrage movement with true conviction.

Dittmer's book features civil rights leaders who lacked national media attention or who have been broadly categorized in other history books. By focusing exclusively on the Mississippi story, localized leadership and the strength of grassroots efforts is unveiled. Civil rights were won in individual states, particularly in the South, where Jim Crow laws and terrorist actions by supremacist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, kept all citizens from enjoying equal rights. Dittmer recounts the horrific lynching of Emmett Till and others who were falsely accused of sexually assaulting white women or committing other similarly heinous crimes. Each story serves as a reminder of the inhumane treatment blacks in the Deep South faced on the grounds of racial superiority from whites. Countless examples of false imprisonment and deplorable treatment of nonviolent demonstrators bear witness to the endurance required of citizens whose actions and voices whites attempted to keep quiet.

Early in the book, desegregation of schools is discussed in response to the *Brown* decision. School desegregation, like voting rights, was a hot topic issue for Mississippians. Fostering a collective voice for African Americans on the subject of school equality was one of many challenges these citizen groups faced. For example, the African American clergy favored the continuance of all-black schools, which they saw as a way to preserve their heritage and teach black citizenship. Citizens first came to realize that maintaining the status quo of segregation of schools and other public places would only prolong the treatment of blacks as second-class citizens. The clergy were one of the last to rally in support of desegregation. Dittmer tells another story of how religious leaders in Mississippi failed to mobilize until a peaceful group of civil rights marchers were falsely arrested and held without charges in a prison-camp arrangement.

In *Local People*, there are previously untold stories about the disillusionment of the citizen activists who stifled progress at various points of the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Community leaders like Dave Dennis and Bob Moses of the Council of Federated Organizations for example, grew discontented and depressed in the mid-1950s after years of civil, lawful demonstrations were retaliated against by violence and murder. Citizen organizing groups were failing to achieve any advancement in voting and civil rights for African Americans. Citizen groups became disenchanted due to internal fighting and external pressures. Racial tensions between civil rights workers derailed the work of the Mississippi rights movement. Racial tensions within the Student



Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), along with general feelings of defeat, led to a decrease in college student volunteers traveling to Mississippi during the summer to advocate civil rights. In tandem with the racial tensions, sexual discrimination caused factions within the SNCC project. Racial and sexual discrimination within civil rights advocacy groups is commonly excluded from history books, perhaps for fear it would make the citizen leadership look weak. On the contrary, Dittmer reveals the perseverance required to achieve equality of rights. Coalition-building groups like the SNCC and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People face the same barriers as all communities in terms of finding common ground. John Dittmer's work serves as an unpleasant reminder of the cruelty that governments and citizens can bring upon other citizens and the injustices of the American tradition. *Local People* is a well-told historic recollection of the rollercoaster battles citizen advocacy groups faced in securing

The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is a research foundation rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to "the problems behind the problems."

The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Seven major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research organization supported by an endowment. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's Web site at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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*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 trustees, or its officers.

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#### **Design and Production**

Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

#### **Illustrations**

Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

#### **Acknowledgments**

Boyle, Phillip. "Do School Boards Matter?" *PRISM*, Spring 2004, pp. 19, 21.  
©2004 Colorado School Board Association. Reprinted with permission of the Colorado School Board Association.

Cook, Brian J. *Bureaucracy and Self-Government: Reconsidering the Role of Public Administration in American Politics*, pp. 134-135.  
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Wolfe, Alan. *Does American Democracy Still Work?* pp. 15-16, 47-48.  
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Urschel, Jane W. "Fed Up! Can School Boards Reconnect with Communities in Order to Govern Education and Learning?" *PRISM*, Spring 2004, pp. 16-17.  
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Kettering Foundation  
200 Commons Road  
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