

CONNECTIONS

VOLUME XV

ISSUE 1

August 2004

- Exploring the Public-Academy Relationshippage 2
- The Civic Mission of Higher Educationpage 7
- Revitalizing the University of Minnesota's Civic Missionpage 8
- The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Building Civic Responsibilitypage 11
- The New Engagement: From Community Relations to Community Partnershipspage 13
- The Public Practice of Scholarship and the Production of Knowledgepage 17
- Apple IPM in Massachusetts: Public Scholarship in Actionpage 18
- College Students as Citizenspage 22
- Fraternal Futures: Empowering Students to Shape the Future of Greek Organizations.page 23
- Increasing Student Civic Engagement through Balanced Democratic Dialogue.page 25
- June Board Summarypage 28
- An Update on Public Journalismpage 29
- The Footbridge Forumpage 31
- New Stories for Television: Promoting Public Judgment in Colombia.page 32
- Books Worth Readingpage 34



Books Worth Reading

Smart Communities: How Citizens and Local Leaders Can Use Strategic Thinking to Build a Brighter Future

By Suzanne W. Morse

California: Jossey-Bass, 2004

Hardcover \$34.00 ISBN 0-7879-6516-2

This book paints an evocative picture of the meaningful change that can occur within communities when citizens are prepared to make tough decisions based on “vision and persistence.” Suzanne Morse leads us through a myriad of communities’ change processes, using the language of possibility, hope, and optimism. The narrative of these 14 communities captures the real and complex challenges, experienced over a decade, as they sought to envision new ways of working together.

Morse charges that it is the “divisiveness of partisan politics and the bureaucratic maze of public policy implementation [that] have made Americans leery of entering the arena of community problem solving.” Consequently, her book creates a conceptual map of “the strategic elements that every community needs to make decisions that create a better future for everyone.” She concedes that too many communities function in non-strategic ways and fall into a future shaped by little more than happenstance.

The author’s concept of community change as a calculated and deliberated process uses, to great effect, Peter Senge’s notion of “high leverage points.” In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990) suggests “tackling a difficult problem is often a matter of seeing where the high leverage lies, a change which — with minimum effort — would lead to lasting, significant improvement.” Morse’s book presents many wonderful examples of what high leverage points offer when integrated into the strategic thinking and planning of communities. The positive results experienced by “communities that were having success” pointed to seven *key* high leverage points: (1) investing right the first time, (2) working together, (3) building on community strengths, (4) practicing democracy, (5) preserving the past, (6) growing leaders, and (7) inventing a brighter future. Though seemingly simplistic in nature, they are significant for communities to think and act strategically.

The book is “organized for action,” with a chapter devoted to each of the key leverage points. Appropriate research is used to frame the discussion, and examples of how communities successfully applied each leverage point are included at the end of every chapter. Lest potential readers think that the book is proffered as simply a “how to” in the process of making smart decisions, Morse cautions her readers that “the illustrations are less about good programs than about the insights that influenced the decision-making process.” In many respects, this is the strength of the book. She draws from the real-life practices of communities over a ten-year period, and though these communities experienced failure as well as success, she concerns herself with the “actions that resulted in successful outcomes.” In other words, she is characterizing meaningful civic change as hopeful, possible, and a process that can (and perhaps ought) to be met with optimism.

Smart Communities appeals to a broad readership from public administrators to elected community officials to ordinary citizens. Building on community strength is vital to the endeavor of making changes, and this book shines the light on the practices of the principal actors — that is, citizens — and their need to “want to” change as opposed to simply knowing “how to” change.

— Marian Glancy



Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life

By Theda Skocpol

Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003

Hardcover \$29.95 ISBN 0-8061-3532-8

trends in a judicious, unsentimental light. A historian and social scientist with impeccable credentials as an advocate of the liberal welfare state, Skocpol set out to counter the anti-statist, communitarian influence of work done by her Harvard colleague Robert Putnam, author of the controversial bestseller *Bowling Alone*. Many of her findings do unsettle the proverbial small-is-beautiful, government-is-the-problem wisdom that some have distilled from Putnam's work. But careful readers will find, as they have with Putnam, that Skocpol transcends many common ideological polarities and delivers a fresh, illuminating perspective on changes in the American political community.

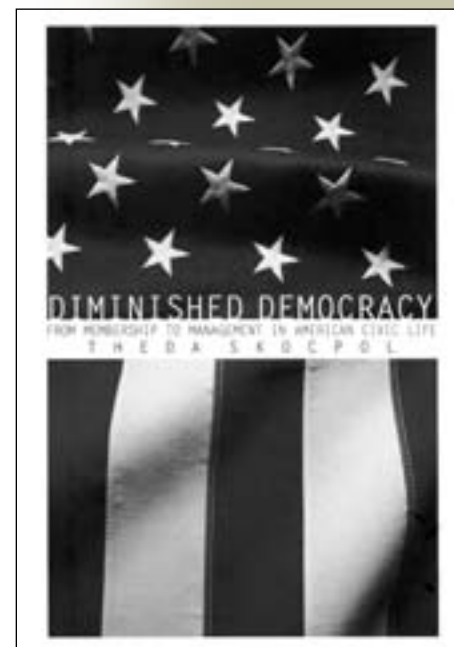
Skocpol documents the "civic transformation" of the latter twentieth century as the decline of cross-class mass membership federations and the rise of professionally managed elite advocacy groups. What surprises Skocpol is how these federations crossed boundaries of economic class, facilitating the massive citizen coalitions that powered major social welfare legislation such as the GI Bill and Social Security. Many of these federations are defunct or in decline today, too often ritualistic, segregated, or otherwise incompatible with the cosmopolitan culture fostered by their own success. Meanwhile, the professionalization of courts, legislatures, and bureaucracies required ever-increasing expertise from groups seeking influence in government. Amateur members were replaced by professional managers. Alternative funding sources, such as direct mail solicitation and foundation grants, supplanted the old "interact or die" model, which required a federal structure, myriad local chapters, membership dues, and personal contact.

Although for Skocpol it would be unthinkable to return to a discriminatory, gratuitously patriotic culture, she says "optimists [about the replacement of old civics with new forms] are surely overlooking the downsides to our recently reorganized civic life. Too many valuable aspects of the old civic America are not being reproduced or reinvented in the new public world largely run by professional trustees and memberless organizations." The book identifies several dismaying trends, including a decline in the affiliations of politicians with broad-based associations and the failure of "upwardly tilted" professionalized associations to mobilize wide, representative sectors of the population. Here, Putnam and Skocpol very much agree: today's advocacy groups require political interest *before* joining and do not offer the supplemental social and recreational motivations that draw citizens into political life. Democracy is "diminished" because there remains little organizational infrastructure to support broad public consensus on specific policies.

Skocpol's tentative recommendations for "reinventing American civic democracy" warn of the unintended consequences of the usual reform efforts. Attempts to make public life more civil through depoliticization will continue to backfire. Barring nonprofits from partisan activity, crippling political parties, and punishing politicians for any engagement with organizations constitute a century-old "Mugwump" formula for *disconnecting* citizens and governments, leaving a small, educated, wealthy elite in control. Instead, Skocpol encourages associations, the media, and the government to take steps to embrace political conflict, treat internal associational politics as news, and "unfetter" associations in political fundraising and public policy-making. For civic health, the size and scope of government is not nearly so important as how it is politically connected to its citizens.

— Neil Carlson

Scholars, commentators, and citizens have long noted a dramatic change in the nature and tone of American politics and culture since the 1960s, but it has been notoriously difficult to put one's finger on the proper diagnosis, to separate fact from fancy, nostalgia, and jeremiad. Theda Skocpol's study settles important questions of fact and reveals surprising historical



The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is an operating foundation — not a grant-giving 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 — the study of what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required for strengthening public life. Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research corporation supported by a \$250 million endowment.

How to Order Kettering Foundation Publications

To request a *KF Publications Catalog*, call 1-800-600-4060, send a FAX to 1-937-435-7367, or write:

Kettering Foundation
 Order Department
 P. O. Box 41626
 Dayton, OH 45441

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

Phone (_____) _____

For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s Web site at www.kettering.org.

Connections is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799.

Unless expressly stated to the contrary, the articles in Connections reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its trustees, or officers.

Those who contributed to producing this issue include:

Editor...

Ilse Tebbetts

Program staff...

Maxine Thomas

John Dedrick

Deborah Witte

Graphic Design

& Desktop Publishing...

Long’s Graphic Design, Inc.

Copy Editor...

Betty Frecker

Assistant to the Publisher...

Valerie Breidenbach

Publisher...

Kenneth A. Brown

LGD-0881-KF-15500-MP-07-04

*Kettering
 Foundation*

© Copyright 2004 by the Kettering Foundation

200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799 (937) 434-7300

444 North Capitol Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001 (202) 393-4478

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

Kettering Foundation
 200 Commons Road
 Dayton, OH 45459-2799

Nonprofit
 Organization
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Dayton, OH
 Permit No. 638