

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*

With 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. 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

CONTENTS

4 Politics from the Perspective of Citizens

David Mathews

Citizens and Local Politics: Transforming Community

7 The Paradox of Place in American Federalism

Lara Rusch

10 International Democracy

Kenneth A. Brown

Citizens and Bureaucratic Systems: Gaining Influence

12 Public Administrators and Citizens: Solving Community Problems Together

Alice Diebel

16 Public Agencies and Citizen Engagement: Getting Beyond the Customer-Service Model

Phillip Lurie

18 The Persistence of Power: Changing the System When the System Won't Listen

Kenneth A. Brown

Citizens and Local Boards: Opening Doors

19 Citizen Boards: When Local Isn't Enough

Paloma Dallas

23 Public Engagement in Five Colorado School Communities

Alice Diebel

Citizens and Collective Action: Demonstrating Results

25 Democracy's Challenge: Reclaiming the Public's Role

John Doble with Janay Cody

28 Deliberation and Public Action

*Elena Fagotto, Archon Fung,
and Libby Kingseed*

30 Sources of Deliberation

Edited by Libby Kingseed

What Others Are Saying

31 Who Cares About the State of Democracy ... and What Is It They Care About?

Edith Manosevitch

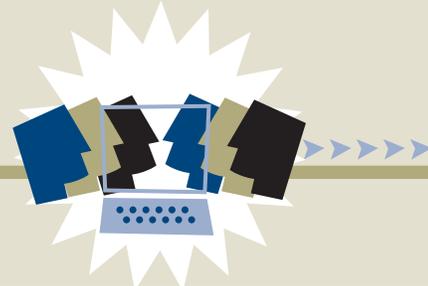
READERS' FORUM

33 Readers' Forum: Your Connection *Bob Mihalek and Deborah Witte*

34 What Citizens Can Do ... and Can't *Deborah Witte*

35 Local Boards and Citizens: A Mixed Relationship *Bob Mihalek*

37 Putting the Public Back into Public Administration *Deborah Witte and Bob Mihalek*



Books Worth Reading

40 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,
reviewed by Harry C. Boyte*

41 Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi

*By John Dittmer,
reviewed by Caitlin Bortolotto*

42 Profit with Honor: The New Stage of Market Capitalism

*By Daniel Yankelovich,
reviewed by Matthew Johnson*



Citizens and Local Politics

Transforming Community

The Paradox of Place in American Federalism

By Lara Rusch

This essay summarizes concepts from Martha Derthick's Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

“Historically, the place-based community, often defined as a unit of government, had played a preeminent part in American politics and governance.” (152) In the current era of rapid communication and globalization, we are challenged to think creatively about the relationship of place to democratic governance. *Keeping the Compound Republic*, historian Martha Derthick’s compilation of essays on federalism, tells the history

of the balance of power among levels of government in the United States, particularly between Washington, D.C., and the states.

The intent of this summary is not to review the book, but to help contextualize the Kettering Foundation’s current focus on the citizens’ perspective. Derthick’s discussion of federalism shows how the landscape of intergovernmental interaction has changed and helps us imagine what that means for citizenship in multiple, overlapping political communities.

In the colonial period, local governments “did the things that connected people to the polity on a daily basis.” (45) From before the nation’s founding and into the early 20th century, towns and counties were the most salient govern-

ments to most citizens. While administering schools, poor relief, road construction, and police protection, localities raised more tax revenue and spent more than the federal and state governments combined. (13) While the developing states “created a framework of law within which local governments functioned, they did not closely supervise its application.” (45) Even the states’ constitutional agreement on a national identity could not immediately change the predominance of local governments in civic life—though their compromise created an inherent tension.

Derthick argues that American federalism is a paradox that grew out of an early, critical bargain. This bargain was an arrangement among Americans who could not decide whether they were one national community or many local communities. They opted for both: “Americans moved paradoxically both to centralize and decentralize.” (5) The framers of the U.S. Constitution compromised between a federation of states and a unitary national government, dispersing power and allowing for both intergovernmental collaboration and competition for the people’s favor. (4) Though the Constitution was weighted to the national, the framers’ notion of a *compound republic* conveys their ambiguous intent. Believing the task of governance too much for one sovereign state “they sought to assemble

Citizens and Local Politics

majorities of two different kinds: one composed of individual voters, the other, of the states as distinct political societies.” (3)

Much of Derthick’s book describes government’s increasing support for individual rights and representation, which played out in debates over national versus state or local control. As the 19th century waned, the states gradually asserted themselves over localities in response to national trends in education and specialization. Professions developed, creating state education agencies and charity boards to impact schools and local relief efforts. What began as states gathering information and offering advice, later became federal “grants-in-aid with conditions attached” in the Progressive Era. (15) These grants were deliberately delocalizing. For example, the Social Security Board “pressured states to establish statewide standards of needs and assistance, such that benefits would no longer vary among local places.” (16) Merit systems and professionalization distanced welfare workers from attachments to place. State and local employees became more responsive to national bureaucracies, as they were prohibited from local partisan activity.

In the New Deal, Congress claimed broad powers to spend and regulate local government. While embedding a belief in national responsibility for common ills, President Roosevelt also honored federalism by expanding intergovernmental cooperation to implement social welfare programs. The “middle tier”—the states—



became the heavy lifters of implementation, enabling more ambitious national programs.

But Derthick argues that the most profound changes in federalism were to come in the civil rights era. In multiple cases during the 1960s, the Supreme Court rejected the local polity as “an entity meriting representation in the state legislature.” Whereas state senates had typically

represented local governments, court decisions favored the majoritarian “one person, one vote” doctrine over the representation of other governments. The Supreme Court required that districts be roughly equal in population so that the ratio between citizens and their representative was the same. One long-term outcome has been a redistricting process in which incumbents try to maintain their edge by dividing local places, including county lines. (19)

Even more transformative was the new importance of descriptive categories over place-based identity in federal law. In order to challenge the oppressive use of racial distinctions in law and practice, Congress altered local social structures and regulated relations between citizens and governments. Given localities’ disregard for individual worth based on race, Congress shifted the federal balance of power “for the sake of constitutionally guaranteed individual rights. In a clash between individual rights and a set of institutions that dispersed government power, rights won.” (151-152)

Derthick’s advocacy for federalism does not amount to an argument for states rights as typically understood. While

Martha Derthick, *Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 152.

Historically, the place-based community, often defined as a unit of government, had played a preeminent part in American politics and governance, most particularly and fundamentally in the design of representative arrangements. The institutions of federalism had protected the place of place in the American political system. In modern society, the territorial community is exposed to many technological, sociological, and economic insults. As the institution of federalism weakened, the territorial community lost governmental protection, and this contributed to diminishing its importance relative to all the other types of groups that form and make claims to political favor.

Citizens and Local Politics

decentralized power has often protected the privileges of local elites, she reminds us that centralized power is no protection from the “omnipresent peril of concentrated privilege.” (4) Inequality and prejudice have persistently found new avenues of expression, despite the rights revolution.

The “place of place” in American life was reorganized by many factors more influential than deliberately delocalizing policy. Numerous wars and superpower status, economic development, the interstate highway system, and urban renewal all stimulated the geographic and social mobility of U.S. citizens. Suburbanization and the proliferation of municipalities enable the creation of exclusive communities. Derthick describes this as the *social form* of federalism, “a leading ground of the continuing American battle between liberty and equality.” (84-85) Private governments, known as “common interest developments,” increasingly supply utilities and other services to consumers, replacing local governments that are struggling financially. People are inventing private settings in which to practice local politics.

What is the impact of these changes on citizens’ relationship to their governments, and on their role in government? The growing complexity of intergovernmental relations and the increase in federal regulation of local activity complicates political accountability. When Congress shares funding responsibility with the states, and when enactment takes place in multiple levels of government, it is unclear who is accountable for policy outcomes. States and localities are required to follow federal mandates without discussion of local priorities. Which community’s values should be upheld in the evaluation of a program and how will conflicting values be weighed?

Federalism was meant to increase opportunities for self-rule. In response to the question, should we be one community or many? federalism says, yes! Consider the alternatives: If we are only one national community then we cede local influence and cultural specificity to whatever has been hashed out on a national stage, where nationally approved values are interpreted in ways unfamiliar to our experience. If we are many communities and not unified in any principles,

we have little redress to our community’s mores, hierarchies, and boundaries.

Derthick’s understanding of federalism is valuable because it presents the decisions of community membership as a political endeavor. In contemporary scholars’ search for human connection and social capital, the word *community* is often framed in terms of its support and intimacy, or conversely in terms of its “dark side”—the coercive aspects of that bonding. But having to act within and among different communities of scale (to choose among values and policies that affect you and others) sets in relief the politics inherent to building any community. Within the institutions of political communities “people define the objectives of their collective life, whether through deliberation—the democratic ideal—or through a struggle among power holders.” (10) The benefit of *Keeping the Compound Republic* is maintaining a conversation about these trade-offs at every level of political community.

Given that the national government’s influence has grown tremendously, U.S. citizens clearly value a national community, while they also value aspects of national heterogeneity that localism maintains. An increasing interest in environmental localism, and in regional or metropolitanwide governance, suggests a revival in appreciation for place-based community. The refraction of federalism in every possible issue multiplies venues for citizen action on policy. At the same time, it is more difficult to grasp the locus of a problem or how many steps would be needed to solve it. Citizens may chase solutions up a federal ladder and discount each other or themselves as political actors.

The national government’s expenses have grown with its influence. Derthick argues that a key government failure is its failure to balance means and ends: it is overly ambitious. As Daniel Yankelovich and Isabella Furth write in the Fall 2006 issue of the *National Civic Review*, politicians tend to point at citizens for “wanting it all,” while citizens say they want workable solutions. What is the proper role of citizens in balancing the means and ends of government? What kinds of citizen involvement would help government work within the people’s means? Has the

Daniel Yankelovich and Isabella Furth, “Public Engagement in California: Escaping the Vicious Cycle,” *National Civic Review*, Fall 2006, p. 11.

Building Bridges Between Citizens and Leaders: Ten Rules for Leaders on Heeding the Public Voice

1. If leaders and the public are out of sync, leaders must take the initiative.
2. Frame issues from the public’s point of view rather than that of the experts.
3. Address the public’s concerns, not those of the experts.
4. Let the public know that leadership is listening and responsive.
5. Consider only one or two issues at a time.
6. Don’t rely on open-ended discussion; formulate a limited number of choices.
7. Highlight the values implicit in choices.
8. Help people move beyond wishful thinking.
9. When values conflict, encourage pragmatic compromises over ideological purity.
10. Use dialogue to build trust.

movement away from the place-based community affected that balance and citizens’ role in it?

There appears to be no turning back from a national community, but there could be a truer connection between what the nation agrees is valuable and our capacity to achieve it.

Lara Rusch is a predoctoral research associate with the Kettering Foundation. She can be reached at rusch@kettering.org.

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.

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.

Editors

David S. Frech
Bob Mihalek
Deborah Witte

Copy Editor

Lisa Boone-Berry

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.
©1996 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted with permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derthick, Martha. *Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism*, p. 152. ©2001 Brookings Institution Press. Reprinted with permission of the Brookings Institution Press.

Frederickson, H. George. *The Spirit of Public Administration*, pp. 231-232.
©1997 Jossey-Bass. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Wolfe, Alan. *Does American Democracy Still Work?* pp. 15-16, 47-48.
©1997 Yale University Press. Reprinted with permission of the Yale University Press.

Urschel, Jane W. "Fed Up! Can School Boards Reconnect with Communities in Order to Govern Education and Learning?" *PRISM*, Spring 2004, pp. 16-17.
©2004 Colorado School Board Association. Reprinted with permission of the Colorado School Board Association.



© Copyright 2007 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

www.kettering.org

Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799

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