

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

CONNECTIONS

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2012

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

Stories of
INNOVATION
in
**HIGHER
EDUCATION**





NEW from Kettering Foundation Press

Democratizing Deliberation

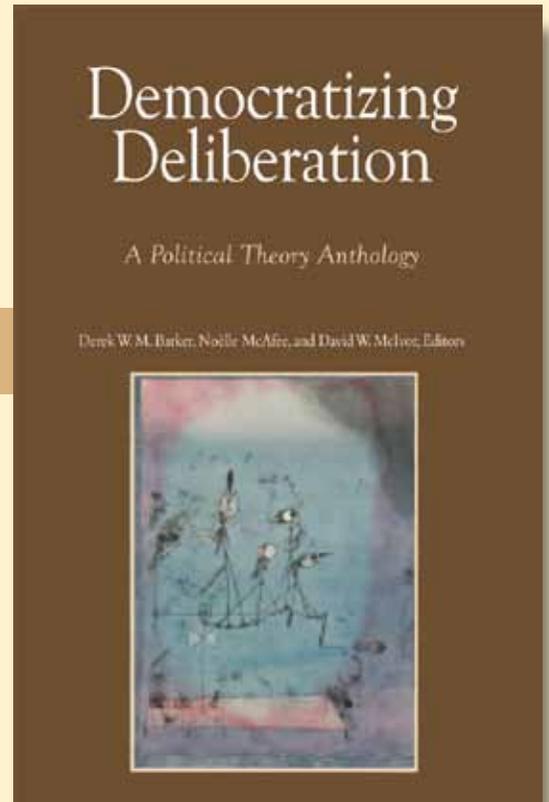
A Political Theory Anthology

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.

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CONNECTIONS

C O N T E N T S



- 4 **Reviewing Kettering Foundation Studies of the Role of Higher Education in American Democracy**
David Mathews
- 8 **Higher Education and Our Collective Future: Where Do Citizens Stand?**
Jean Johnson
- 12 **College Students and Politics: Fed Up or Fired Up?**
Jack Becker, Danielle Desjardins, Dwitiya Jawher Neethi, and Alice Diebel
- 16 **Reimagining the Civic Life of Non-College-Bound Youth**
Wanda Madison Minor
- 20 **Living Democracy: From Service Learning to Political Engagement**
Alexandra Robinson
- 24 **Deliberative Pedagogy: An Education that Matters**
Joni Doherty
- 28 **The Civic Arts: A Conversation with Bernie Murchland**
Interviewed by Keith Melville
- 31 **Community Colleges and the Work of Democracy**
Bernie Ronan
- 34 **Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Civic Aspirations of Faculty**
Claire Snyder-Hall
- 37 **Turning the Tide on Poverty: Shifting the University-Community Relationship through Cooperative Extension**
Alice Diebel
- 40 **A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future**
David W. McIvor

The Civic Arts:

A Conversation with Bernie Murchland

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in what colleges are doing to prepare students to take an active role in public life. Still, civic experiences for college students are often limited to optional campus activities or particular courses. A broader approach would be to consider students' development as citizens as a central aim of liberal arts education. Bernie Murchland, professor emeritus of philosophy at Ohio Wesleyan University and editor of the Civic Arts Review, has long been concerned about students' development to be active citizens. Murchland is part of a group of professors who are coming together at the Kettering Foundation to develop a civic understanding of the liberal arts and design civic experiments that go beyond specific courses or activities.

Keith Melville, Kettering associate and founding executive editor of the National Issues Forums, talked to Murchland recently about what is happening on college campuses today and what needs to be done to take the civic arts seriously.

To pose a question you must often be asked, what do you mean by "civic arts"?

Murchland: The key word here is *arts*. The Greek root of the word is *arête*, which often gets translated as "virtue," as in "civic virtue." Partly because of its religious connotations, *virtue* is a weak word in English. A more direct translation is "skill or craft," the right way to do something. When Socrates talked about *arête*, he often drew analogies with cobblers, athletes, shipbuilders, or flute players as models of excellence (which is another translation of *arête*). Civic arts, then, is the right way of acting in the *polis* as a citizen. That language found a home in the republican tradition, where it focused on certain key "virtues" a citizen ought to have. Liberal arts education was originally understood as education in these civic arts, with the purpose of preparing students for their responsibilities as citizens.

You have long had an interest in the connection between civic education and the liberal arts. The Civic Arts Review has frequently explored the ways the liberal arts tradition has been influenced by the classical curriculum, including the trivium of dialectic, rhetoric, and grammar. What's the relevance of the trivium to what today's college students should be able to do when they graduate? What kind of people should we expect universities to help shape?

Murchland: It goes without saying that we have to be educated in citizenship. The classical curriculum of the seven liberal arts is a kind of shorthand for that

The Civic Arts

kind of education. Bear in mind that the number seven is somewhat fungible, but nonetheless basic and indispensable. Consider how they were formulated in Roman times: the trivium consisting of dialectic, rhetoric, and grammar and the quadrivium consisting of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy (basically the sciences), and music (which we now include among the arts).

It can scarcely be denied that a basic scientific education is a sine qua non today. But the trivium is even more important—especially if we understand the trivium broadly, not as three discrete arts, but as arts that are most fully developed in active citizenship. For example, dialectic is a specific logical method, but it was also understood to aim at what we might call deliberation and judgment today. Rhetoric often refers to specific forms of argument, but a broader understanding is speech, good talk, and creative listening. (A medieval educator praised rhetoric in these words: “Reason would remain utterly barren if the faculty of speech did not bring to light and communicate its feeble per-

ceptions.”) Grammar can be understood narrowly, as in how to diagram sentences, but as a civic art, grammar means basic literacy, informed opinion on matters for every citizen: political literacy, cultural literacy, scientific literacy. Put them all together, and you have in a nutshell the arts that make a good citizen. When colleges and universities educate to that scale, they are fulfilling their civic mission.

Most colleges and universities claim to be concerned about preparing students for civic life, and many mention it in their mission statements. Do they really prepare students in this way?

Many campuses provide opportunities for things like community service, new kinds of business ethics courses that focus on corporate social responsibility, new styles of civic

engagement, the growing interest in environmental sustainability. Do you see much happening in colleges and universities today that corresponds to your sense of the civic arts?

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Murchland: It is true that educators have added practical ethics courses and global issues and the like, and there is a lot happening in extracurricular areas



The Civic Arts

like community service and volunteering. There is good talk—and some good initiatives—relating to civic engagement and partnering with communities. But these tend to be add-ons. With regard to the core curriculum, it's pretty much the same old thing.

If you were to choose one or two liberal arts programs or activities that are essential to your sense of the civic arts, properly understood, what are they?

Murchland: Good question. A full answer would involve the restructuring of the curriculum. Within the present curriculum,

our vocabularies, and many of our most pressing societal problems are political in nature, incapable of resolution by any objective truth. No serious philosophy of education from Plato onward has ever subscribed to so narrow a view of education.

Why do many academics today take such a narrow view of their intellectual task?

Murchland: In a paper I am currently writing, I go into this problem by examining the civic arts, tracing the idea from its foundations in Greek and Roman

republicanism to the civic humanism of the Renaissance, which had a huge influence in America.

Then I examine its connection to the liberal arts, and in doing so, I try to account for the disconnect between the civic arts and liberal arts that we experience today. The American Revolution has been called the last chapter in the history of civic humanism. This is where

our history gets interesting.

Two serious challenges to the republican tradition arose in the Enlightenment period. The first was the battle between commerce and virtue, which was won by the commercial party, a battle well described by Eric MacGilvary in his recent *The Invention of Market Freedom*. The debate took place at a time of radical changes in our perception of human nature, society, and politics. In the republican view, society is considered a natural condition into which we are born and find our fulfillment through participation in it. In the political philosophy known as liberalism, the individual has priority over society. Government is no longer seen to nurture the moral growth of citizens but rather primarily as an agency intended to protect previously existing (natural) rights. Political rhetoric shifted from an emphasis on community to the individual, from

virtue to self-interest, from an organic to a contractual view of society.

The second challenge was the rise of science to a position of eminence in the academic world. Science came with two trademarks: value neutrality and specialization, both of which remove science from the realm of moral discourse. They eventually degenerated into "scientism," the belief that science alone has a claim to be regarded as genuine knowledge. This was a serious blow to the liberal arts and accounts for the highly specialized nature of the curriculum and the fear many academics have about dirtying their hands in the mucky work of morality and politics. The humanities, while they did not go overtly to the side of science, retreated into what George Santayana called "the genteel tradition," or the ivory tower.

At a time when American public life seems notably downbeat, what makes you optimistic that civic arts will be taken seriously again in American higher education and that it will help to produce a generation of adults who are prepared to carry on the democracy project?

Murchland: As the Russian general said in *War and Peace* when Napoleon's armies were approaching Moscow: "Patience." He knew that the Russian winter would stop the French. Crisis is the motor force of morality and politics. Believing that makes me what Jacques Barzun called a "cheerful pessimist." When the crisis becomes bad enough, change will take place. In an interview I once conducted with Dan Yankelovich, he said that virtually every important domestic change in America has been bottom up. It has come from the public, not from leadership. Think civil rights, abolition, the women's movement, gay rights. In each of these cases, the public has been the leader, and leadership has followed. These are wise words to buck up cheerful pessimists.

Thanks, Bernie.

For readers interested in the Civic Arts Review, see the journal's website: <http://car.owu.edu>.

In an interview I once conducted with Dan Yankelovich, he said that virtually every important domestic change in America has been bottom up. It has come from the public, not from leadership.

English departments would have to do more with regard to basic literacy (like reading and writing, as well as talking without using the phrase *you know*) and a cultural memory. A basic course in political philosophy (including its history) would be on my list, and finally, a rigorous, interdisciplinary course in science and technology.

Literary theorist and New York Times columnist Stanley Fish has said the university should not be in the business of the civic arts; he says, "Save the world on your own time." Why isn't it enough, in Fish's words, for liberal arts teachers to be passionately devoted to "the intellectual value of pursuing truth"?

Murchland: What Fish says is seriously mistaken. We are not primarily intellectual beings. "Pure reason" is a recent fiction in



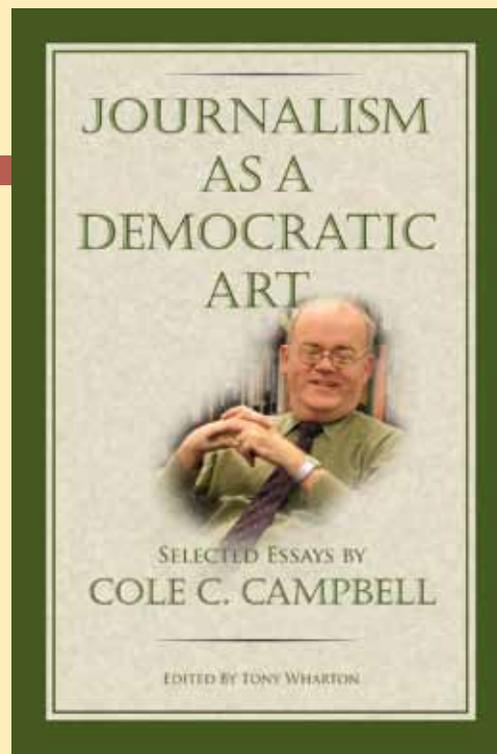
NEW from Kettering

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

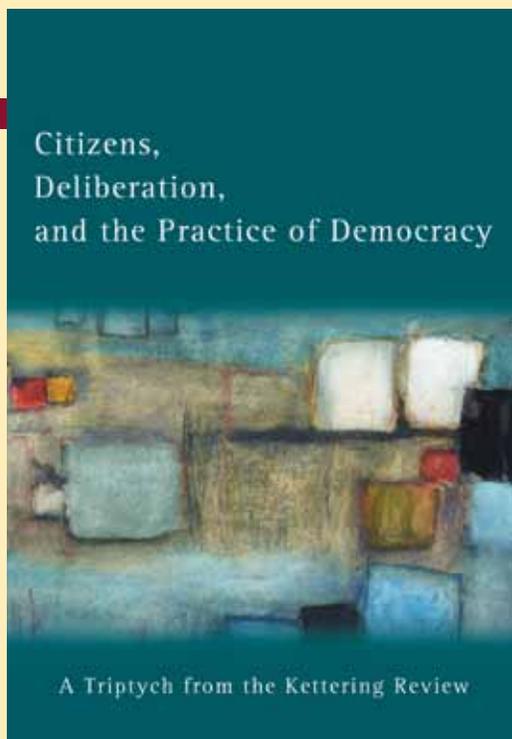
Edited by Tony Wharton

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.

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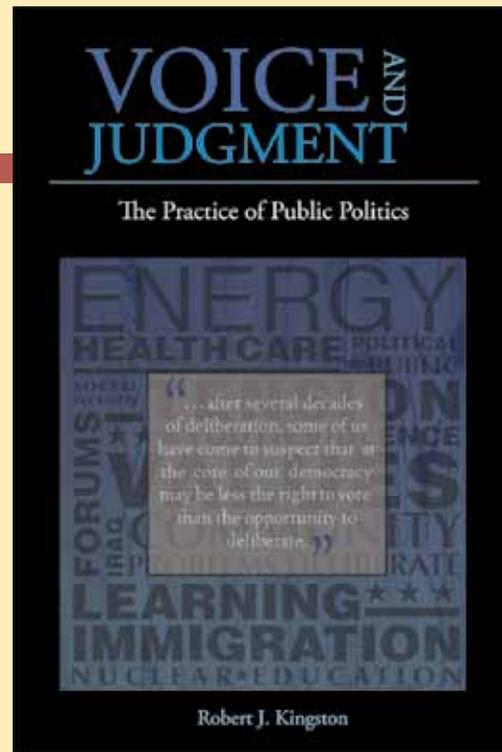
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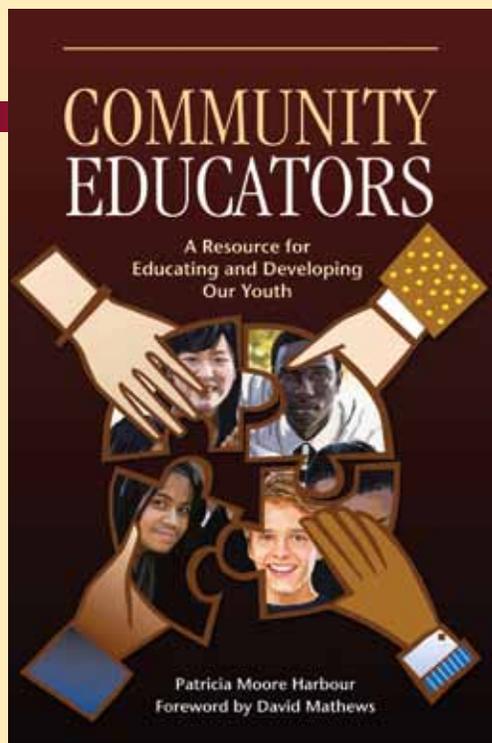
Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics

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."



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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.

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