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Editors' Letter

This season's *Review*—like every *Review*, perhaps—is a way of inviting, broadly, fellow citizens into a dialogue about some of the exchanges that come to be voiced much of the time in deliberations, prompted by citizens throughout the nation. (And yes, nowadays in nations far beyond it!) Why do we deliberate together? What makes it work? And how do we learn to live as a people, sharing a community's life together, different though our experiences, tastes, and interests may be? It is this weighing together of the ways in which we may counter or accept the various interests that provides for our lives as “a people” that we sometimes refer to as “deliberative politics.”

The pieces in this *Review* collectively point to the central role of such deliberative publics in coming to public judgments needed to steer democratic states. The esteemed public opinion researcher, Daniel Yankelovich, argues that publics bring to the table something that governments cannot: a worked-through sense of what is right for the country, bringing together facts and values, pragmatically and morally, dialogically, into public judgment.

Melvin Rogers adds another dimension to this theme. In his introduction to a new edition he has edited of John Dewey's *The Public and its Problems*, Rogers discusses Dewey's point that at its best a pluralist public engages in “systematic care” for what should be taken up by governmental agencies and that it functions as “a sensory network” for emerging problems. In other words, a vibrant public is essential not only for democratic but for effective governance.

None of this is news to the Kettering Foundation or its sister organization, the National Issues Forums. Reviewing more than 20 years of NIF deliberations, in addition to deliberating about public problems, the NIF can also be seen as deliberating about the health of the political system itself. Even through times when the public has found itself shut out and alienated from politics, citizens continue to voice their strong desires to be able to participate and make a difference. “From deliberation, we learn, not how to write laws,” Kingston writes in closing, “but what kind of community we want to be.” And the answer to that seems, clearly, to be a democratic community in which what the public thinks does indeed matter.

Our old friend, the journalist E.J. Dionne, brings us to more recent history where a long consensus seems to be fraying. That consensus was that Americans' dual, and sometimes warring, values — of liberty and social obligation — should both be appreciated and maintained. This was also a consensus that a democratic public would work to balance these values. Dionne points to the recent emergence

of radical individualist politicians who want to eliminate the social-obligation part right out of the American character. Fortunately, the new generation of Millennials “espouse even more than their elders the values and commitments of the Long Consensus.”

The last two essays in this *Review* move us from the American context to an international and World-Wide-Web context. Political philosopher Nancy Fraser asks how, as the public problems of the day increasingly defy national borders, can an international public sphere form to develop public will and hold accountable borderless forces. As all the previous essays in this *Review* have demonstrated, democratic governance depends on a pluralist, dialogic, and engaged public to identify problems and develop judgment about what should be done. What we need now, Fraser argues, is an international public sphere that can generate public opinion to judge the legitimacy of international policies.

To the many obstacles that Fraser notes, the final essay, by Noëlle McAfee, suggests some possible solutions, namely through the public conversations that occur online. These are increasingly making the public’s voice, though often raucous and unfiltered, *audible*.

For almost a quarter of a century, McAfee has been a colleague in this work—not only as a respected scholar and professor but as a *Review* associate editor, too. So we are proud—as well as relieved—that she has agreed to serve now, routinely, as the *Review*’s coeditor. And as a kind of celebration, the two of us, just this once, decided each to contribute an essay of our own to sketch, in company with four distinguished scholars, a sense of the complexity, range, and value of genuinely *public* deliberation to the patterns of self-government that characterizes our democracy.

Robert J. Kingston and Noëlle McAfee

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