

# CONNECTIONS

An Annual Journal of the Kettering Foundation | 2017

## Countering Democracy's Challenges

By David Mathews p. 2

## Recasting the Narratives That Shape Our Public Life

By Paula Ellis p. 23

## Being a Civically Engaged College

By Adam Weinberg p. 36



Experiments in  
**DEMOCRATIC  
CITIZENSHIP**

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what does it take to make 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](http://www.kettering.org).

*Connections* is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459. The articles in *Connections* reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its directors, or its officers.

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ISSN 2470-8003

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# CONTENTS

- 2 **Countering Democracy's Challenges**  
David Mathews
- 15 **The Educating Neighborhood:  
How Villages Raise Their Children**  
John McKnight
- 23 **Recasting the Narratives That Shape  
Our Public Life**  
Paula Ellis
- 30 **Park Life: Experimenting with Democracy  
and Civic Engagement in Cincinnati's  
Oldest Public Park**  
David Siders
- 36 **Being a Civically Engaged College That  
Contributes to Democratic Ways of Living:  
Reflections of a College President**  
Adam Weinberg
- 45 **Parents for Public Schools: Encouraging  
Educational Citizenship**  
Joann Mickens
- 51 **Becoming a Catalyst for Civic Learning**  
Betty Knighton
- 59 **Public Deliberation, Historic Decisions,  
and Civic Education: A Journey with a  
Presidential Library**  
Kathleen Pate
- 67 **Science and the Cultivation of Public Judgment**  
Daniel Sarewitz
- 72 **How I Learned What Not to Do as a School  
Superintendent**  
Charles Irish

# Public Deliberation, Historic Decisions, and Civic Education: A Journey with a Presidential Library

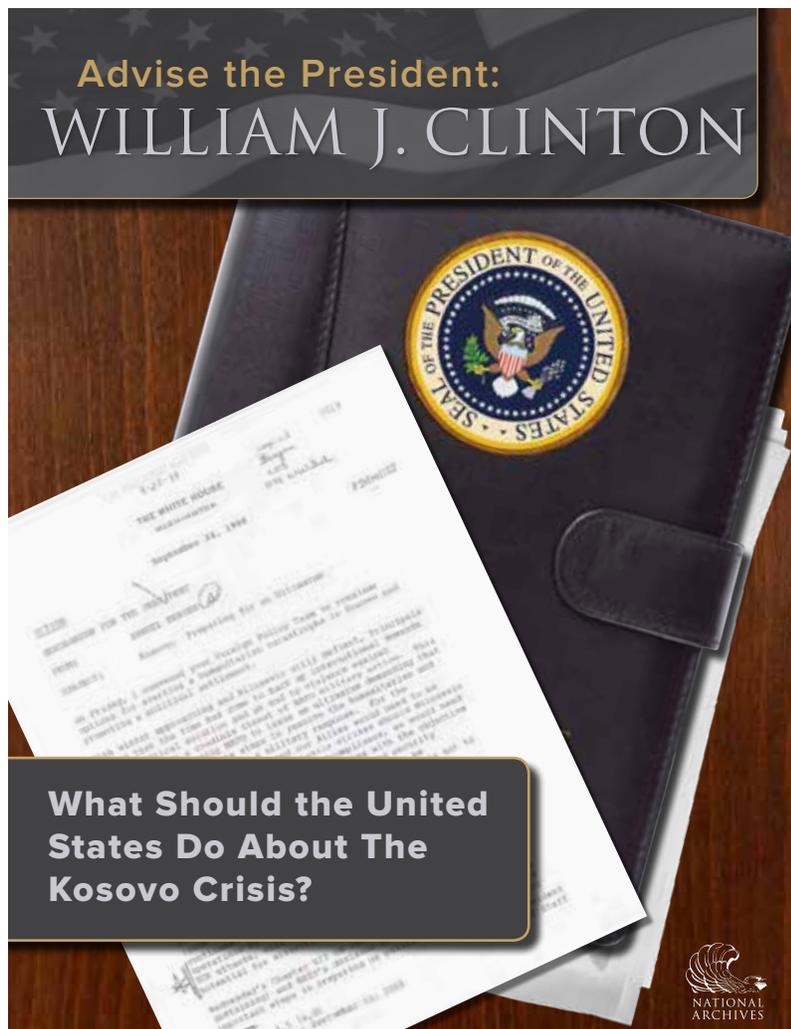
By Kathleen Pate

**O**n May 17, 2017, more than 100 high school students participated in deliberative forums on historic decisions at the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock, Arkansas. They used issue guides developed by the Clinton Presidential Library and by the National World War I Museum and Memorial.

## FORUMS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

This program grew out of a decade-long collaboration between the National Archives, the National Issues Forums Institute, and the Kettering Foundation. In late 2007, Kettering senior associate Bob Daley approached the archivist of the United States, Allen Weinstein, with





Advise the President:  
WILLIAM J. CLINTON

**What Should the United States Do About The Kosovo Crisis?**

the idea of having all the Presidential Libraries host forums on contemporary issues between Labor Day and Election Day 2008. Weinstein agreed, later stating in a press release that it “is consistent with the National Archives’ emphasis on civic education. Presidential Libraries are public places and it is appropriate for citizens to engage in intense discussions

of major public policy issues in the midst of a presidential campaign.”

As education specialist at the Clinton Presidential Library, most of the programs I provide are for pre-K through 12th grade students; elementary and secondary teachers; and families with young children. I worked closely with Malcolm Glover, a University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service graduate, to recruit and train moderators for four forums, held in the fall of 2008. Three forums were open to the public, and the fourth was for a group of about 30 high school students from Hamilton Learning Academy, an alternative school. The forum on “Closing the Achievement Gap” resonated with them on a very personal level. At the conclusion of the program, students completed the postforum questionnaire. When asked, “Did you learn something today that you didn’t already know?” one student wrote, “That adults care what we think.” I was blown away by her response.

**ADVISE THE PRESIDENT  
ISSUE GUIDES**

In late 2010, some of the Presidential Libraries began work with Kettering to create a series of issue guides based on past presidential decisions. Each library was asked to designate a liaison to participate in research

exchanges at the foundation. Given my positive experience conducting contemporary issues forums, I jumped at the chance to create an issue guide to teach students about President Clinton while also introducing them to public deliberation.

Glover, assisted by Clinton School student Kate Cawvey, served as the chief researcher and primary writer for the *Advise the President: William J. Clinton—What Should the United States Do about the Kosovo Crisis?* issue guide. Developing the guide took almost two years and included participating in several research exchanges in Dayton. These exchanges provided an opportunity to interact directly with Kettering staff and representatives from the four other Presidential Libraries that were working on Advise the President issue guides relating to the Truman, Eisenhower, Ford, and Reagan administrations.

Along with our colleagues from the other libraries, we explored the balance between providing adequate historical background on the issue and offering too much introductory information. In these research exchanges, we worked to frame the issue, particularly on creating tensions within and among each option, making sure that each option was equally appealing and equally unappealing so students could under-

stand that every potential action has both benefits and downsides.

Many versions of the guide were tested with different groups. A particularly memorable program in the fall of 2011 involved a group of AP history students from Little Rock Central High School. After reviewing all of the options, a male student stated that “all the choices suck,”

## **Diplomatic Pressure, Military Action, or a Hands-Off Approach: What Should the United States Do about the Kosovo Crisis?**

### **POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION**

#### **OPTION ONE: PROMOTE DIPLOMATIC RESOLUTION**

Use diplomacy to focus on crafting a peace agreement between Kosovar Albanians and Serbian leaders to end the violence.

#### **OPTION TWO: USE MILITARY FORCE**

Commit the US Armed Forces to a military mission against Serbian forces in Yugoslavia to end ethnic genocide in Kosovo.

#### **OPTION THREE: FOCUS US RESOURCES AT HOME**

Denounce the violence, but stay out of the conflict; concentrate on more important US interests at home.



expressing his dissatisfaction with each of the options. His frustration provided an opportunity to explore how the president is often faced with difficult decisions that do not have a good answer or a correct response. This deliberative moment confirmed that the framework we developed truly included tensions.

Over the next year and a half, the issue guide was completed. In August 2013, the program moved from the pilot phase to being listed in the education programs manual published by the Clinton Foundation at the start of each school year.

As part of her Clinton School Capstone Project, Cawvey designed a moderator's guide for the Kosovo crisis issue guide and led two mod-

erator training sessions. The first session was for Clinton Presidential Library volunteers who work with school groups. The second session was offered as a professional development workshop for high school teachers in the Little Rock School District (LRSD). Neither training went particularly well. Both the docents and the teachers were incredulous that students could actively engage in the deliberation with little or no preparation. They didn't believe that students could have this kind of conversation without being well versed in the subject. Yet, in spite of their tepid response, a couple of LRSD teachers scheduled visits to the library for students to participate in the program.

## FORUMS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Each forum with students is different, and I often find myself wondering whether this is the one that isn't going to work. Many times, students are quiet at the beginning. The format is unfamiliar and requires them to participate in a way that is much different than listening to a lecture. Forums can be uncomfortable for students, particularly those who are accustomed to always having the right answer. Conversely, teachers have indicated at the conclusion of multiple forums that the students who contributed significantly to the deliberation were those who rarely speak in class.

For a forum to be successful, the participants must interact with one another, not just respond to the moderator. In one of the pilot forums, a participant exclaimed that "America is a bully" soon after the start of the forum. I added her comment as a pro under the "Promote Diplomatic Resolution" option. Later, she suggested using military force to compel Milošević to negotiate with the Kosovars. One of her classmates challenged her suggestion by responding, "How is that not being a bully?"

While it can be challenging to moderate forums with students, in every forum I've been a part of,

the group has inevitably reached a deliberative moment. It's important to engage students in this kind of activity so they can wrestle with the options and make connections to contemporary issues. Forums allow students to view history as a series of decisions made by groups of people rather than seeing their actions as foregone conclusions.

## ANOTHER ISSUE GUIDE EXPERIMENT

In the summer of 2014, the Presidential Libraries were invited to participate in a second round of issue guide development. Given our positive experience, Glover and I signed on to create a second guide for the Clinton Presidential Library. We selected a domestic issue and decided to create an issue guide on



**Forums allow students to view history as a series of decisions made by groups of people rather than seeing their actions as foregone conclusions.**

the economic issues Clinton faced following his inauguration in 1993.

Research exchanges were held at the foundation in Dayton between September 2014 and February 2016. At the October 2015 meeting, the Presidential Libraries exchange participated in a joint plenary session with two other research exchanges. The Historic Decisions participants, from museums across the country, were developing programming and issue guides that integrated historical and civic education, while the Location-Based Issue Guides participants were creating frameworks that address site-specific contemporary issues.

A year later, I participated in a meeting of the Historic Decisions group focused on how the museums planned to use the issue guides at their institutions. Prior to the meeting, I reviewed reports from each institution on their test forums. I learned more about each issue guide at the meeting and offered suggestions based on my experiences using the Kosovo guide at the Clinton Presidential Library. During one of the breaks, I visited with Lora Vogt, curator of education, and Cherie Kelly, school programs manager, from the National World War I Museum and Memorial. We began to discuss the possibility of collaborating on a program.

## **A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT**

Back at my office, I noticed that the World War I issue guide and the Kosovo issue guide share a common theme. Both issues require participants to explore America's role in the world and to consider similar options. I also began to recognize the connection between World War I and President Clinton. World War I began with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo. The crisis in Kosovo resulted from ongoing ethnic tensions dating back at least a century. When President Clinton was deciding how to respond to the actions of Slobodan Milošević, he had to consider the history of the region. The Battle for the Balkans program was born.

After I confirmed Vogt's and Kelly's willingness to travel to Little Rock to assist with the program, I applied for and later received a Heritage Month grant. I proposed a large-scale student forum with half the participants deliberating using the Kosovo issue guide, and the other half using the World War I issue guide. The idea of collaborating in this way was new for both institutions. The National World War I Museum and Memorial had partnered with the Truman Presidential Library for traditional teacher workshops. While the Clinton

Presidential Library had hosted contemporary forums for students, the only Advise the President forums offered were those connected to the Clinton administration.

In March and April 2017, I recruited schools to participate in the program. These efforts resulted in the participation of 110 students and 12 teachers from 4 different schools. The schools were a mix of urban and suburban, as well as traditional public schools and charter schools. These students would not normally interact, either in their daily lives or during the majority of education programs offered at the Clinton Presidential Library. On the day of the program, students were given a name tag to fill out with a table number pre-printed on it, which ensured that each table would have a mix of students from each school.

The students were engaged in meaningful deliberation about the role of the United States in the world. Their opinions varied widely. After 30 minutes, students were asked to share something from the discussion. Most of the reports centered around the most popular option at that table, but some students brought up points of contention between participants. Following the table shares, the decisions for each scenario were revealed. In addition, Vogt spoke about the significant toll that enter-

ing World War I took on the United States, then I explained the connection to President Clinton and modern foreign policy decisions. Students, teachers, and moderators all provided positive feedback at the conclusion of the event.

### **A CIVIC EDUCATION CHALLENGE**

Shortly after the program, I was invited to present at the National World War I Museum and Memorial as part of a week-long teacher seminar entitled “World War I and Its Aftermath.” The seminar was being presented by the museum in partnership with The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.





On the fourth day of the seminar, I gave a presentation on using Historic Decisions issue guides with high school students and the Battle for the Balkans program. Following my presentation, the teachers were divided into three groups. Vogt, Kelly, and I each moderated a deliberation. I used the Kosovo guide, and they used the World War I guide. Many teachers seemed reluctant to voice an opinion about the conflict they had been studying for three and half days. Their response echoed my past experiences with teachers. It is sometimes difficult for adults, particularly teachers, to resist the desire to be seen as an expert on a specific topic. Students seem much more willing to consider the benefits and consequences of different options. One of the things I stress when lead-

ing forums is that there are no wrong answers. If you call out a negative consequence of a possible option, you are reflecting the things that you value. Even if I don't agree with your assessment of the situation, I must respect that your values may not match my own. This is a valuable lesson for students. Two notable things resulted from this summer seminar: I have been invited to present on deliberation at the National World War I Museum and Memorial 2018 Teacher Institute; and one of the teachers from the seminar requested 30 copies of the Kosovo guide for use in her classroom.

Based on the student and teacher responses to the Battle for the Balkans program, the Little Rock School District has asked to bring all 10th grade students from all 5 high schools, roughly 1,400 students, to participate in the Kosovo forum. While accommodating this request will be challenging, I know from work over the last decade that it will be worth the effort. The Advise the President and other Historic Decisions issue guides provide a unique opportunity for true civic engagement. ■

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