

CONNECTIONS

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The Work of the Kettering Foundation: Challenges and Changes Ahead

By Sharon L. Davies p. 2

On the Formation of Citizens

By Elizabeth Gish and Camryn Wilson p. 18

Breaking the Mold: Journalism Reimagined

By Paloma Dallas and Paula Ellis p. 62



INNOVATING FOR DEMOCRACY

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.

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Breaking the Mold: Journalism Reimagined

By Paloma Dallas and Paula Ellis



The Kettering Foundation knows that if democracy is to work as it should, journalism must work as it should, too, in a healthy media environment that supports robust debate, responsive government, and a place for citizens to do the work that only they can do. That's why for many years the foundation has partnered with journalists to explore how journalism can better meet the needs of citizens and incorporate their perspectives and actions in news coverage.

That task is more critical than ever today.

It may be no coincidence that in the last 20 years, as democracy has eroded along with trust in institutions, journalism has been threatened by the internet revolution that has upended media norms. Journalists were traditionally taught that their central mission is to provide verified, factual information. That meant one thing when information was scarce, but today we are awash in it. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, TikTok, and others have become primary sources of news as legacy print and broadcast media struggle to maintain an audi-

ence and replace advertising lost in the digital era. Journalists also have been taught that they must hold the powerful to account, and yet this isn't enough to shore up our democracy today.

In communities across the country, some journalists have been questioning their effectiveness and challenging assumptions and practices that were developed decades earlier in a dramatically different political context. Journalism professors also have been taking stock of the significant changes under way and wondering how they could better prepare students to thrive in a field that is no longer shaped by a reliably steady industry that predictably provided jobs.

Kettering designed its research to explore each of these developments as separate parallel strands, recognizing that they are interrelated and would at some point become intertwined.

The foundation's research approach to learn from the doers afforded these journalism innovators in the field and in the classroom a unique opportunity to take time away from their fast-paced work lives to reflect, share, and create a community of changemakers. We encouraged them to experiment and learn together.

This yearslong work has culmi-

nated with the publication of two books—a journalism textbook published in 2022 and a new Kettering Foundation Press book, available in the coming months, that brings together personal essays from 10 journalists who are bold thought leaders and innovators in their profession. Both books point toward new paradigms for journalism. The textbook suggests different



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***News for US: Citizen-Centered Journalism* by Paula Lynn Ellis, Paul S. Voakes, and Lori Bergen (Cognella, 2022).**

In the midst of the disruptions and distrust that have plagued traditional media in recent years, and a degree of polarization rarely seen in American history, a new style of journalism is emerging. Dozens of news organizations, from corporate powerhouses to home-office startups, are reviving a classic role of American journalism: inspiring and enabling Americans to do the difficult, authentic, and ultimately rewarding work of citizenship in a democratic society.

News for US: Citizen-Centered Journalism is the first-ever guide to this new approach—one that enriches the skill set of the 21st-century journalist with the mindset of civic engagement. Authors Paula Lynn Ellis, Paul S. Voakes, and Lori Bergen illuminate the principles of citizen-centered journalism and demonstrate how today's journalists can apply them within the context of modern-day news and feature reporting. The text features engaging perspectives from leading innovators and experimenters in the field who describe their challenges and offer guidance to readers.

Offering readers a blend of academic scholarship and case studies that highlight practical innovations, *News for US* provides readers with a comprehensive look at the emergence of citizen-centered journalism and the new journalistic mindset.

To learn more and purchase the book, visit: <https://titles.cognella.com/news-for-us-9781516548514>.



practices to emphasize for journalists in training. The book of essays discusses the results of experiments in covering the news not merely for, but *with* the citizens and communities in which they live.

The two books are very different, and yet they are linked by the belief that journalists who work with and for citizens can make both journalism and democracy stronger. The books complement one another because they feature some of the same innovators who, while holding fast to essential journalistic principles, are questioning long-standing practices that may no longer serve the needs of the public.

The textbook, *News for US: Citizen-Centered Journalism*, combines theory with practice to explore the emergence of what the authors call “relational” journalism, an approach that emphasizes building an ongoing relationship with members of the community it serves not only to restore their trust in news media but also to increase their power in the democratic process. To bring alive the mindset and skill-set shifts that the authors argue are necessary for journalists to play this facilitative role, the textbook features mini case studies of news outlets that are experimenting with relational journalism. The examples drawn from across the country are used to

illustrate five principles of relational journalism:

- Journalism is in itself an essential democratic practice.
- Journalists and citizens are collaborators.
- Journalists facilitate the work of citizens.
- Relational journalism updates time-honored traditions.
- Journalism must follow new paths to financial sustainability.

While the textbook was envisioned for use in advanced reporting classes, it has found a home in entry-level courses and in professional circles where people are rethinking the relationship between journalism and democracy. In his foreword, Neil Brown, president of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, said, “Three of America’s leading journalist-scholars have offered a powerful and optimistic playbook for journalists to embrace new and adaptive thinking about how journalism can be an effective tool of democracy, rather than settle for the trope that it simply is.”

Paula Ellis is lead author of the textbook, written with Paul Voakes and Lori Bergen. It is a product of the authors’ decades-long experience, and it was further inspired by the ongoing conversations between educators assembled by Kettering in

learning exchanges at the foundation and the annual AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) convention. The journalism professors, many of whom were leaders in the field of “engaged journalism,” repeatedly lamented that existing textbooks just couldn’t keep up with the rapid changes under way.

And here is where the two strands of Kettering’s journalism work came together. Just as these educators were meeting in learning exchanges at the foundation, leading innovators from news organizations across the country were also gathering at the foundation to trade ideas and experiences with each other. The textbook was able to bring their work and innovations to the educators and into classrooms, but the ideas that they were experimenting with were so rich that we wanted to share more.

The second book, *Reinventing Journalism to Strengthen Democracy*, is a volume of essays that we edited to bring together insights from 10 of the innovators who participated in learning exchanges at the foundation, many of whom are also featured in the textbook.

The central proposition of the textbook comes as no surprise to the authors of the essays, who believe that journalists and citizens together can cover the news and shape a narrative that makes the media more trusted, more robust, and strengthens democracy.

In the exchanges with these innovators, we kept the focus on the simple question that Kettering has persistently asked for decades: What does it take to make democracy work as it should? Then we asked about the implications of the answer for journalism. What more, or what else, is required of *journalism as an institution* for democracy to work as it should?

Over the course of a few years, we met regularly and learned together. The journalists reported on their efforts. Sometimes they succeeded; sometimes they fell short. Regardless of the outcome, we asked them to tell us, and each other, what they had learned. Foundation folks, drawing from decades of scholarly and practical research, added to the mix.

“What more, or what else, is required of journalism as an institution for democracy to work as it should?”

Reinventing Journalism to Strengthen Democracy: Insights from Innovators
edited by Paloma Dallas and Paula Ellis (Kettering Foundation Press,
forthcoming).

The book includes the following essays:

“Reorienting Journalism to Favor Democratic Agency”

by Subramaniam (Subbu) Vincent, director of Journalism and Media Ethics for the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University

“Journalism: Evolving with the People”

by Doug Oplinger, who led the statewide media collaborative, Your Voice Ohio, and is former managing editor of the *Akron Beacon Journal*

“Fostering Human Connection Is the Heart of Media Reform”

by Michelle Holmes, founder of Heart’s Ease Love and Freedom Center and former vice president of content, Alabama Media Group

“Dismantling Systemic Racism in News”

by Martin Reynolds, co-executive director, Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education and former editor in chief, *Oakland Tribune*

“Public-Powered Journalism”

by Jennifer Brandel, cofounder and CEO, Hearken

“Working with the Community”

by Ben Trefny, interim executive director, KALW Public Media

“Dialogue Journalism: Adapting to Today’s Civic Landscape”

by Eve Pearlman, cofounder and CEO, Spaceship Media

“A Framework for Building Trust with Communities”

by David Plazas, opinion and engagement director, USA TODAY Network Tennessee

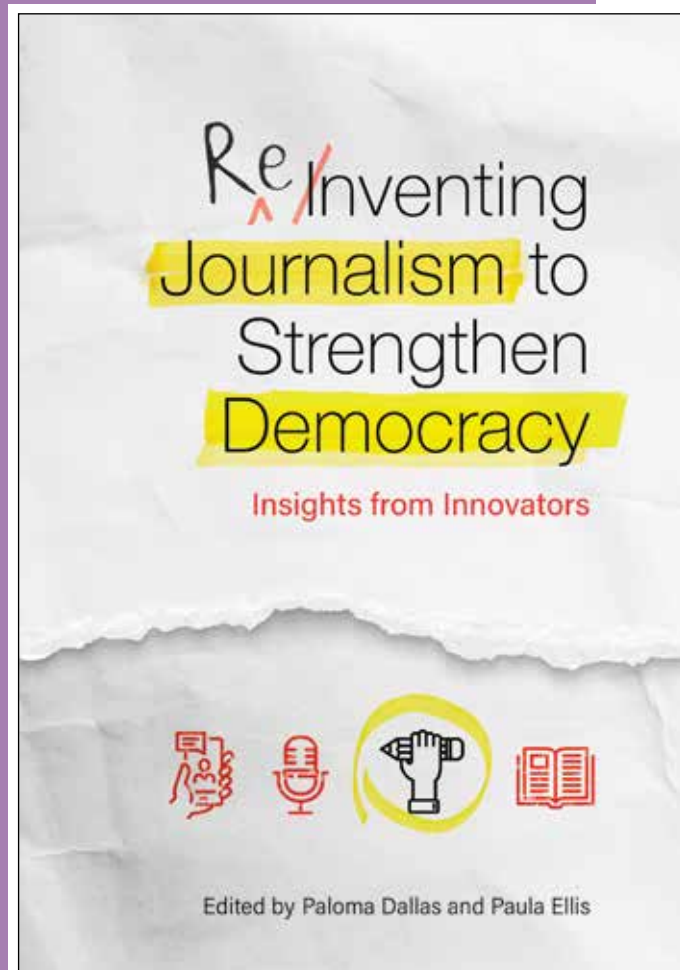
“For Democracy to Work, Journalism Needs an Ethic of Care”

by Linda Miller, who leads the Multicultural Media and Correspondents Association’s Equitable Media and Economies Initiative and was the former director of network journalism and inclusion for American Public Media

“Journalism’s Civic Media Moment Could Be a Movement”

by Darryl Holliday, cofounder and co-executive director, national impact for City Bureau

The book will be available for purchase soon at www.kettering.org, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble.





In the end, we hope both books will help small-d democrats everywhere to view journalists as potential allies in fashioning both new narratives about our collective identity and a more constructive public square.

As editors of the book, we asked the innovators to tell their learning journeys in their own words. We asked them to mine their experiences for insights and inflection points, focused always on the question of how journalism could better support a strong, thriving democracy.

The journalists in the volume of essays take aim at different challenges, but each takes stock of how we have landed at this point of deep distrust—of each other, of the media, and of institutions of all kinds—and each also offers ideas about ways forward.

The essays take on the myth of

journalistic “objectivity,” the overreliance of the media on experts and institutions, and the tendency toward an extractive relationship with the public. Many also focus on “belonging,” and the role journalism has historically played in creating a collective sense of the public, of an “us.” The loss of newspapers and fracturing of the information ecosystem has weakened the sense of a shared identity, but the journalists in this volume recognize that many have long felt excluded, misrepresented, and unable to see themselves and their experiences reflected as part of the democratic experiment. And this problem extends beyond the community to the newsroom as well. As one of the authors writes, “At the very least, mainstream news organizations have been sustainers and facilitators of systemic racism and White supremacy culture.”

The authors see an opportunity to help create a narrative that is more inclusive and better captures the rich diversity of our nation and its complicated history. Rather than aspire to neutrality, one innovator suggests deep authenticity. “In an era of mistrust and skepticism, with people on heightened alert for being manipulated and played, the way out for journalists is to be as forthright and transparent as possible.” Another author writes that all journalists

should be prepared to answer this question: “Why should I trust you?” Confronted with this question at a public event, he was forced to grapple with the impression that he and other “media elites” look down on their rural neighbors.

The essays suggest new imperatives for journalism: To care, not just about issues and accuracy, but about communities and the people in them. To work with the community, not just on their behalf. To more intentionally focus on advancing public understanding and “help the public discuss complex cultural and political concerns, including power itself, across racial and ethnic identities.” To be “integral, vital, living threads in the fabric of democracy, stretching and flexing so that people see us as partners, as vital to improving their lives.” To help people see themselves as part of a larger collective: “I see you and you see me and *we are all in this together.*” And to shift the journalistic gaze “away from Whiteness, to the kaleidoscope of gazes that reflect our society and the world.”

These journalists see a role for themselves in building trust not only toward the news media but also among people in the community. Some have experimented with a facilitative role for journalists. Others support a more participatory model of journalism that sees people in

communities as active problem solvers and producers of the kind of journalism they need to address the problems they face. They have coined their own terms: *dialogue journalism* and *public-powered journalism*. They have trained residents in cities around the country as “documenters” to record what happens in public meetings so that others might get involved and make a difference. This type of participatory media is seen as an essential part of a new civic movement.

All the authors see opportunity in this moment of turmoil. With older models of journalism under threat, they see a growing appetite for experimentation and the emergence of something new to meet the needs of today. Their thoughtful essays contribute toward a richer understanding of journalism today and its dual opportunity and responsibility of strengthening democracy.

In the end, we hope both books will help small-*d* democrats everywhere to view journalists as potential allies in fashioning both new narratives about our collective identity and a more constructive public square. ■

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