Democracy and an Informed Citizenry

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Non-fiction


...[The author] has written this amazing book with the simple title: After. This is the book that tells the story of how America "confronted the September 12 era," as he puts it. Brill paints a vast and detailed portrait of Americans -- from the president on down -- at work in the new age. His conclusion: This country -- including its Republican leadership -- has conducted itself admirably well, given the circumstances.— National Review.

Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community by Robert D. Putnam. [Check library catalog].

Robert D. Putnam writes about the decay of American civic routines and sentiments at the end of the 20th century. While I like the book less for the science it contains than the simple moral vision that stands behind all the numbers and charts, Putnam has something important to say. Namely, it is better for people to spend more time together than they do alone, and there is something inherently right about a way of life that encourages them to make so many ways to be together.— Society.


According to Messrs Mann and Ornstein, Congress's current problems stem from three things. The first is a president with soaring ambitions (including reordering American foreign policy and entrenching Republican power) and an executive-focused view of the constitution. The second is an upsurge in partisanship in which the Republicans, though with slim majorities in both houses, are playing the politics of win-at-any-cost. The third factor is September 11th and the "war" that followed, which has given the Bush administration licence to treat the legislative branch with contempt. The result is that the
Madisonian system of checks and balances has metamorphosed into something akin to a parliamentary system.—Economist.


According to its author, Citizen Democracy was written to provide ‘real examples of relatively typical individuals who overcame cynicism to affect public well-being’. Initially developed to temper the cynicism of his students, the 19 chapters in the book celebrate citizen engagement against a background of decreasing political efficacy and a culture of distrust and apathy toward contemporary US politics.—Political Studies


In this superb account of how the British and American news media represent everyday citizens and public opinion, the authors show how coverage of politics and policy debates subtly - even inadvertently - urge people to see themselves as and thus to be politically passive, disengaged and cynical. The book’s analysis of how journalists misrepresent, even invent, public opinion is alone worth the price of admission. Written with great verve, passion and unswerving clarity, Citizens or Consumers? promises to become an instant classic in the study of the failings—and the still untapped promise—of the news media to further democracy.—Susan J. Douglas, Catherine Neafie Kellogg Professor and Chair, Department of Communication Studies, The University of Michigan.


Available Online: http://site.ebrary.com/lib/utah/Doc?id=10063863. UU only.

This collection offers a careful and realistic account of contemporary civic life in the United States. The authors are reasonably impatient with loose jeremiads and casual claims that things are okay.—American Journal of Sociology.


Milner’s subtitle tells us it is not social capital that makes democracy work, as Putnam claims, but civic literacy. The book argues that it is not interpersonal trust or associational participation that matters, but civic literacy, conceived as the knowledge and skill necessary for citizenship in the local community. He chooses the word ‘civic’ because it combines the notion of citizen and local community, and the word ‘literacy’ because it entails both knowledge and skill. The central theme of the research, though it is not clearly and unambiguously stated, is that we should not worry about social capital, but about the public policies, voting systems and political institutions that support or undermine the civic literacy that is essential for democracy.—West European Politics.


An extremely impressive volume integrated around issues at the core of many, if not most, debates in contemporary Anglo-American political and legal philosophy. It will undoubtedly be useful to scholars, teachers, and students working in philosophy, law, and political science.”—David Ingram, author of Group Rights: Reconciling Equality and Difference.


…a collection of 18 brief, pithy essays about civil society in America—past, present, and future, although the emphasis is on the present (mid-1990s). Community Works is a rich and complex book. It is a terrific smorgasbord of provocative thought (and some facts) both for beginners in Civil Society 101
as well as for those much more steeped in the concept and its realities.—Voluntas.


In this book, seminal decisions come alive about libel, refusals to salute the flag in school, sodomy laws, abortion, school prayer, unequal financing of public schools, civil rights, and other vivid illuminations of "the rule of law." There are interviews with the people, often with scant resources, who fought their way to the court; accounts of the battles among the justices themselves; and the effects of the decisions -- not only on the litigants but on all of us.— Editor & Publisher.

**Deliberation Day by Bruce A. Ackerman and James S. Fishkin.** New Haven; London: Yale University Press, c2004. JK1764 .A27 2004; General Collection, Level 2.

How severe is the problem of voter apathy and political ignorance? Acute enough, argue Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, to warrant a paid civic holiday for all voters two weeks before major national elections. On this day, citizens would gather in local schools and community centers and talk about the issues and the candidates in a structured fashion. [The authors] explain that "Deliberation Day, by informing and engaging the citizenry, will transform public opinion."—Harvard Law Review.


Proposes a fourth branch of government, in addition to the executive, legislative and judicial, that would provide for the adjudication of issues by assemblies of randomly selected citizens. Actions taken by the assemblies could be vetoed by the executive or legislative branches and would be subject to judicial review. The idea is designed to provide an outlet for popular expression similar to an initiative and referendum. The author is a law clerk for the U.S. Court of Appeals.— Campaigns & Elections.


American democracy is at risk," write the authors in their opening chapter, not because of terrorism or some other external threat but as a result of Americans' growing disaffection for politics and participation in civic affairs. In the pages that follow, Stephen Macedo, a professor of politics at Princeton University, and 18 other contributors, suggest how individuals, government, and nonprofit organizations can reinvigorate civic life.— Chronicle of Philanthropy.


The study of civil society and social capital has flourished since Putnam (1993) proposed a positive relationship between civic engagement and democratic governance. The arguments of Putnam and other "neo-Tocquevilleans" have generated significant debate, and in recent years, scholars increasingly have scrutinized, challenged, and revised such claims. With the publication of his latest book, Ariel Armony joins their ranks. This well-researched, engaging work is a welcome contribution to an important area of inquiry.— Latin American Politics & Society.


[The author] argues that in this time of rampant individualism and market consumerism, America 's civic virtue, displayed by our concern for our neighbors, schools, and social surroundings, does not lie dormant but is demonstrated on a daily basis. In our debate of civic virtue, Denning believes that we focus on a time when society was "simpler, more sedate, and certainly less changeable." We infuse the debate with popular anxiety and try to solve the problem with "an impossible return to a time long gone"—Perspectives on Political Science.

* Free Speech 101: The Utah Valley Uproar over Michael Moore by Joseph Vogel. Windriver
The valuable contribution of this book is to remind us that citizenship is an art, an art we are in jeopardy of losing. —David Keller, Director, Center for the Study of Ethics, UVSC.


Responding to the horrifying events of September 11, 2001, Liberty: Thriving and Civic Engagement Among America's Youth explores the development of civic values and participation among adolescents. Using positive youth development — that is, the process by which adolescents are able to contribute to society — Lerner demonstrates the importance of engaging youth in a democracy through programs and policies at a crucial period of psychological, social, and physical development —International Social Science Review.


In his newly revised book Neighborhood Futures, Liebmann envisions a decentralized American government that funnels decision making and no-strings-attached grants and vouchers to newly strengthened community organizations. Liebmann wants to revive the body politic with the localism that was prevalent in colonial and revolutionary America. Liebmann argues that federal bureaucratic solutions have alienated many citizens, and they now feel disconnected from a faceless and professionalized bureaucratic society. So he advocates empowering sub-local institutions like neighborhood associations, residential community and condominium associations, individual schools, and individuals (through vouchers) to give citizens participatory power in meeting their own local needs.—Futurist.

Never a matter of indifference: sustaining virtue in a free republic by Peter Berkowitz. Stanford, Calif. : Hoover Institution Press, c2003. JC574.2.U6 N484 2003; General Collection, Level 2. [Essays focusing on the questions:] What kind of citizens are necessary to sustain a republic based on individual liberty and limited government? And is such a republic likely to nurture such citizens and thereby preserve itself?—CATO Journal


This book is an outstanding study of shifting patterns of civic engagement among successive generations of American citizens. A key finding: generational differences matter, and we should pay more attention to indications of declining political involvement among young adults.—William A. Galston, Saul Stern Professor, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland.


Levine seeks new or better ways to build trust, conversation, and consensus that will restore responsible government and invigorate civic life. Like Clinton's embrace of both welfare reform and national health care, Levine's proposals mix liberal and conservative nostrums. He urges greater participation in voluntary associations, more responsible public affairs journalism, stronger unions, and radical campaign finance reform. At the same time, he advocates rolling back the regulatory state, simplifying the tax code, and prohibiting congressional delegation of authority to bureaucracies. Above all, Levine wants to achieve a new democratic consensus by empowering citizens to deliberate on the common good. –Human Events.
Krist Novoselic's memoir turned civics manual, "Of Grunge and Government," is lucid, unpretentious and, as the architect Louis Sullivan once described the ideal of democracy, "thrillingly sane." Detailing his path from Nirvana bass player to citizen politico, Novoselic offers specific platforms for electoral reform—instant runoff voting gets a lot of play—as well as charming anecdotes about rock 'n' roll as a pursuit of happiness. He is a thinker who asks questions about the efficacy of direct recording electronic voting machines, but also ponders such important mysteries as, "Where would the world be with out Black Sabbath?"—New York Times Book Review.

Ginsborg...argues, with lots of vivid detail, that participatory democracy is an essential complement to representative democracy.—The Guardian.

Steinberg concludes that four basic capacities are critical to democratic life in our emerging society: 1) the ability to undertake sustained and reasoned social and political deliberation on important issues; 2) the ability to attract and enable effective social and political leaders; 3) the ability to create viable, inclusive discourse communities; 4) the ability to create and sustain relatively clear and accepted boundaries between the public and private spheres.—Future Survey.

This useful book...provides an excellent overview of how the concept of 'community' has been interpreted and (ab)used by politicians and policy-makers in recent times. Taylor is unashamed in setting her argument within a context of changing political circumstances (globalization and the rising emphasis on market forces), using evidence from empirical research and current practice to examine both the limitations and opportunities that arise through an over-dependence on the idea of community as a key component in strategies for tackling poverty or other public 'problems.' CommunityDevelopment Journal.

The authors effectively show how two compelling and potentially conflicting forces—modern managerial techniques and citizen engagement—can be combined to produce livable communities where things get done and people invest in the future and care about the present. As a local government educator and former mayor, I see in this book a rare combination of practical case examples and intellectual guidance that should appeal to citizens, public officials, and students concerned about community building.—John Nalbandian, chair and professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Kansas.

On the whole, Wolfe's book is a valuable attempt to inspire Americans to move beyond a contempt for politics.—Perspectives on Political Science.

...a guide that shows regular folks how to organize in pursuit of collective action. The how-to manual outlines tactics, strategies, methods and techniques for community leaders to follow when setting goals, selecting issues, campaigning for those issues, recruiting members, lobbying politicians and
communicating with the media—American City & County

[A] fine book. Wuthnow carefully and clearly analyzes and evaluates the positive roles American religious elites play in maintaining the diversity and cohesiveness of our society and the acceptance of responsibility for helping those in need.—Library Journal.

In Silent Voices Adam Berinsky presents the most recent methodological critique of polls'/surveys' ability to reflect the panoply of public opinion. Drawing on National Election Studies and a wide range of other local and national polls and utilizing a variety of sophisticated statistical techniques, Berinsky argues that “opinion polls may fail to equally represent the preferences of all Americans with regard to some of the most important issues of our time: racial policy, the scope of the social welfare state, and attitudes toward war.—Public Opinion Quarterly.

In the classic sociological tradition of the Columbia School, this impressive collection of studies explores the impact of families, friends, workplaces, and communities on our political choices and behavior. The imaginative research in this volume amply demonstrates that, despite the imposing presence of the mass media, we continue to be shaped in significant ways by the company we keep.—Dennis Chong, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Professor, Northwestern University, Department of Political Science.

This book is a revised and updated edition. It was first published in 1988 by two distinguished sociologists who actively worked to reform voter registration which resulted in the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. It is about an electoral reform project.—Journal of Political & Military Sociology.

By recasting political trust as an independent, rather than a dependent, variable, Hetherington is making a marked reversal from the way the concept is typically treated by scholars. His argument is a specific one, however: Political trust only influences support for federal policies that require sacrifices from most Americans. That is, when political trust is relatively high, more people will be likely to see a federal role in helping minorities, the poor, and foreign nations, even though most will not actually benefit directly from such policies; when trust is relatively low, that support disappears.—Public Opinion Quarterly.

Fiction

Animal farm by George Orwell. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company [1946]. PR6029.R8 A74 1946; General Collection, Level 2
Anti-utopian satire by George Orwell, published in 1945. One of Orwell's finest works, it is a political fable based on the events of Russia's Bolshevik revolution and the betrayal of the cause by Joseph Stalin. The book concerns a group of barnyard animals who overthrow and chase off their exploitative
human masters and set up an egalitarian society of their own. Eventually the animals’ intelligent and power-loving leaders, the pigs, subvert the revolution and form a dictatorship even more oppressive and heartless than that of their former human masters. — The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature


*Fahrenheit 451* is a story built around book-burning, but that action is representative of all sorts of censorship. As the author states in a coda to the novel, "The point is obvious. There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches"— *Literature and Its Times.*


…explores the dark side of human nature and stresses the importance of reason and intelligence as tools for dealing with the chaos of existence. In the novel, children are evacuated from Britain because of a nuclear war. One airplane, with adults and prep-school boys as passengers, crashes on an uninhabited island, and all the adults are killed. As the boys fashion their own society, their attempts at establishing a social order gradually devolve into savagery. Finally abandoning all moral constraints, the boys commit murder before they are rescued and returned to civilization. — *The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature.*

**Nineteen eighty-four, a novelby George Orwell.** New York, Harcourt, Brace [1949] PR6029.R8 N5 1949a; General Collection, Level 2.

Novel by George Orwell, published in 1949 as a warning about the menaces of totalitarianism... Orwell's warning of the dangers of totalitarianism made a deep impression on his contemporaries and upon subsequent readers, and the book's title and many of its coinages, such as NEWSPEAK, became bywords for modern political abuses.— *The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature.*

**The Crucibleby Arthur Miller.** PN6112 .L59; General Collection, Level 2. [The work remains] a powerful indictment of bigotry, narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and violation of due process of law, from whatever source these evils spring."— *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of "The Crucible."*


Each of Rand's four novels celebrates the primacy of the individual versus collective society. *We the Living* [published in 1936] is a polemic against totalitarianism and its disregard of the individual.— *Contemporary Literary Criticism.*

Linda Keiter, Marriott Library