

Traditions, Challenges, Choices

A Group of Civic Leaders

Cumberland, ME

Fall 2005 – Spring 2006

Introduction

Over the course of six structured conversations, civic leaders will meet in a congenial environment to reflect together about leading their community during times of change. Selected readings and a film will serve as opportunities for participants to discuss traditions of civic life in the local community, to gain insights into current circumstances and perspectives, and to imagine opportunities to deepen individual and community relationships.

Participants

Community leaders in Cumberland, ME.

Guiding Questions and Readings

Sessions	Readings	Guiding Questions
Session 1	<i>Town Office</i> , Edward Holmes	<p>What customs of civic participation have defined this community?</p> <p>Thinking and Writing: Please write down (for your use only) the kinds of opportunities for civic participation available in this community and the extent to which you are engaged in them. For group discussion, write about what shared values are represented in this community. How important are trust? security? identity?</p> <p>In preparation for Session 2, please talk to two people of generations other than your own about their perceptions about “community” in Cumberland. Write down for group discussion some reflections about what you have heard. How comfortable was the conversation? Do your conversation partners differ from you in their attitudes towards “community”? How?</p>
Session 2	<i>Death of the Hired Man</i> , Robert Frost <i>Mending Wall</i> , Robert Frost	<p>What does it mean to be a member of a community, to work towards a better common life?</p> <p>Thinking and Writing: For your use only, what kinds of behaviors in the community that reveal people’s attitudes to a “common life.” What would others say about <u>your</u> attitudes based on your behavior in community-based activities? Have these behaviors changed over time?</p> <p>To inspire your Thanksgiving holiday, you might like to read two additional selections: O. Henry’s <i>Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen</i> and William May’s <i>The Prayers of Thanksgiving</i>.</p>

Session 3	<i>Charitable Effort</i> , Jane Addams	<p>What makes this community a special place to live? How have citizens formed voluntary associations to work together to improve their common life?</p> <p>Thinking and Writing: For group discussion, how do voluntary associations differ from government, business or even religious associations?</p>
Session 4	<i>Democracy in America</i> , Alexis de Tocqueville	<p>How do we define our relations to one another? What good does our “art of association” do us? How have we changed together over time?</p> <p>Thinking and Writing: For your use only, what are the most important associations for you in this community? How have you nurtured their continuation?</p>
Session 5	<i>Bishop’s Beggar</i> , Stephen Vincent Benet <i>Twelve Angry Men</i> (film)	<p>What ideas of leadership emerge from your reading and viewing? What do leaders do to affect change? What are the implications for how we “lead change?”</p> <p>Thinking and Writing: For your use only, write about how you have reacted during times of change in the community. Did <u>you</u> change or did the <u>community</u> change? Did you remain involved or did you retreat? Did other people respond to your behavior in any noticeable way?</p>
Session 6	<i>Laws Concerning Gifts to the Poor</i> , Moses Maimonides	<p>How do our voluntary associations in the community help us solve common problems? How do we stay committed to a particular association when we are confronted with choices and/or doubts about the future? What role, if any, do traditions have in making decisions about the future?</p> <p>Thinking and Writing: Please write (for use in small group discussion) what kinds of traditions of civic engagement that you believe are no longer as present in this community as they once were. Have “new” traditions replaced old ones? How so? In response to what? For your use only, write down how you see yourself adopting or rejecting these “new” traditions.</p>

Unique Features of this Conversation

As can be seen above, this group consistently included a writing component to their discussions. For a group open to it, writing can add a powerful self-reflective element to the conversation.

This group also used a film to ground their dialogue during one meeting.

Facilitator(s)

Carol A. Kontos, Associate Professor of English, University of Maine at Augusta.