



Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life

Eric Klinenberg

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An eminent sociologist and bestselling author offers an inspiring blueprint for rebuilding our fractured society.

We are living in a time of deep divisions. Americans are sorting themselves along racial, religious, and cultural lines, leading to a level of polarization that the country hasn't seen since the Civil War. Pundits and politicians are calling for us to come together, to find common purpose. But how, exactly, can this be done?

In *Palaces for the People*, Eric Klinenberg suggests a way forward. He believes that the future of democratic societies rests not simply on shared values but on shared spaces: the libraries, childcare centers, bookstores, churches, synagogues, and parks where crucial, sometimes life-saving connections, are formed. These are places where people gather and linger, making friends across group lines and strengthening the entire community. Klinenberg calls this the "social infrastructure" When it is strong, neighborhoods flourish; when it is neglected, as it has been in recent years, families and individuals must fend for themselves.

Klinenberg takes us around the globe--from a floating school in Bangladesh to an arts incubator in Chicago, from a soccer pitch in Queens to an evangelical church in Houston--to show how social infrastructure is helping to solve some of our most pressing challenges: isolation, crime, education, addiction, political polarization, and even climate change.

Richly reported, elegantly written, and ultimately uplifting, *Palaces for the People* urges us to acknowledge the crucial role these spaces play in civic life. Our social infrastructure could be the key to bridging our seemingly unbridgeable divides--and safeguarding democracy.

Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life Details

Date : Published September 11th 2018 by Crown Publishing Group (NY)

ISBN : 9781524761165

Author : Eric Klinenberg

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Politics, Sociology, Social Movements, Social Justice, Cities, Urban Planning

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Aja says

I didn't think that I could dislike a book as much as I dislike THIS book, but yes, I really disliked this book. Wonderful ideas and some really interesting points but I do not trust ANY book which talks about race and sociology without talking about white privilege and white supremacy. Correct me if I'm wrong but it seems this man wrote an entire book about community while NOT ONCE naming white supremacy.

This book tries to play the role of "both sides" and let's all come together and sing kumbaya while never naming that it is consistently the political right who votes against social services which actually help ALL people. That to me is intellectually dishonest. It's great to focus on how people of color consistently fix our own communities through personal efforts but to never talk about why the oppression exists from the get go seems again intellectually dishonest. You can't talk about "rough neighborhoods" without talking about white flight and how when whiteness leaves, there goes the money with it. If you're going to talk about zoning but you don't want to talk about racism and white supremacy and the part they play in it, miss me with all of that.

Apparently NOBODY segregated the pools which lead to an epidemic of brown children not knowing how to swim. I had no idea that my parents putting us all in swimming lessons growing up made us the exception as black people and not the rule (because we were privileged). But it was important to my parents because we grew up in a town that had many lakes and they grew up knowing that black kids often drown because those resources aren't available to us. But who did this? Who held the power and who made these rules?

Don't ask me to hold hands and come together and sing kumbaya if you're going to be intellectually dishonest about whiteness and white supremacy, Eric Klinenberg.

Yujia Zhang says

3.5

Mimi says

I decided to read the book because it was Carla Hayden's #1 book for 2018. Now I know why. Public libraries are the star of this book which is about social infrastructure and the importance of communities.

Cara says

Such an interesting book that touches on my favourite aspect of social infrastructure: libraries. This book is so timely given the current political climate...do we want higher walls or more social cohesion?

Vanessa Ames says

A really great read about social infrastructure and healthy communities. My interest in this particular title came from an essay by the author and I enjoyed reading more about his sociological observances about many different civic entities.

Mike Stolfi says

Yes!

Let's fund libraries again because people need them, & a lot more social infrastructure as well. A virtual life pales in comparison to an actual one.

Joe says

Sociologist Eric Klinenberg makes a persuasive argument for the strengthening of America's "social infrastructure" - the places where people gather to share experiences across social divides and strengthen the bonds that help us in divisive times. It is a timely examination of what qualifies as "community" in the age of social media and a useful tool that public officials should use for cultural and social planning.
Recommended.

Brigid says

"Libraries stand for and exemplify something that needs defending: the public institutions that -- even in an age of atomization and inequality -- serve as bedrocks of civil society. Libraries are the kinds of places where ordinary people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can take part in a living democratic culture. They are the kinds of places where the public, private, and philanthropic sectors can work together to reach for something higher than the bottom line."

This book is about more than libraries but (unsurprisingly) I found the sections on libraries to be the most interesting and inspiring.

Shawn Thrasher says

If it seems like the world really sucks right now, Eric Klinenberg knows why: the fraying of social infrastructure. Social infrastructure is "a set of physical places and organizations that shape our interactions." This includes libraries, schools, playgrounds, parks, athletic fields, swimming pools, community gardens... the list is large and varied. Unlike social media, these spaces allow interactions and friendships that build community and reinforce them in times of trouble. Klinenberg gives numerous examples of times when social infrastructure proved to a life saver (during heatwaves or hurricanes). Social

infrastructure makes neighborhoods stronger, smarter, and safer. The coming world is going to be fraught with dangers, particularly because of climate change, and Klinenberg aptly explains how healthy social infrastructure can be a balm.

Doni says

I enjoyed his tribute to libraries; was skeptical of his pro-corporate solutions such as Gates' donations to create smaller schools. Liberal, not radical, and therefore insufficient targeting of capitalism's fundamental flaws.

Carol says

Gives perspective and case studies regarding social infrastructure. Especially relevant to public libraries and other civic institutions looking for ways to be more welcoming and responsive to their community. Very timely and useful.

I took a star off because I found the text somewhat rambling and roundabout. I thought it would be much more useful to divide chapters by type of institution, so those reading for institutional purposes could easily find what they're looking for. I did see an indication that the finished copy will have an index, so that should help.

I received an advanced copy from the publisher via Netgalley for review consideration.

Vanessa (splitreads) says

3.5. Overall, the ideas Klinenberg poses and the research he references are interesting and gets one thinking of what we need to do to create a better future society. Social infrastructure is a philosophy I can get behind and the stories he shares from fieldwork (especially more personal vignettes) were insightful. But I will say I wish this was structured differently. After listening to the first chapter, which is exclusively about libraries, I expected (and wanted) the rest of the chapters to focus on a singular infrastructure (parks, community gardens, schools, etc.). Instead, it was more jumbled and mixed. I understand that these stories can be intertwined in different infrastructures, but didn't like how we'd be talking about gardens and then we'd be back to libraries. Maybe it's because some chapters would be slimmer than others, but it seemed to me less focused and in need of a bit more editing/organization. I think the first chapter is the most worth-it part of this book.

Daniel Beck says

Look, if you're on Goodreads, you probably already know that public libraries are important institutions. But this book provides some good reminders of why that is.

Stephanie (That's What She Read) says

I couldn't think of a better book to read in January. I really feel inspired to become more involved in my community. This book is about the importance of social infrastructure and how it can significantly improve the lives of those in communities and bring down crime rates. I loved the chapters about libraries. I wish Parks and Rec was still on because I can't even imagine how much Leslie Knope would've loved this. If I had one criticism of the book, it was that I wish the chapters stuck more closely to topics. The library chapters seemed to focus on libraries, but then it seemed to go all over the place from there. Recommend if you're curious about the effect of social infrastructure or need a reason to feel inspired to go out and connect to those in your community.

Trish Tomes says

I was excited when I won this book on Goodreads. I want to thank them and Putnam books to get a pre-publication copy of it. It is an excellent book for activists who want to improve their communities. Most of the examples given are from big cities, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Singapore. The surprising entry was from Iceland but nothing like that is possible in the US. Their communal swimming pools reminded me of the baths of ancient Rome and Greece that still are popular in Turkey and Hungary. Will this be a trend that catches on?

I think many cities and towns are catching on to the need to better serve the social aspects of their cities. Not just the elected officials taking action but churches, too, are stepping up to address the need.

Still, it will be difficult to fully integrate new immigrants into our society as they tend to cluster together, you know, birds of a feather . . . There is comfort in the familiar: their foods, their churches/mosques/synagogues/temples. They can interact at work and social clubs, then return to their comfort zones.
