

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #49
“Building the people’s palace with Eric Klinenberg”
Sno-Isle Libraries, Dec. 5, 2019



Ken Harvey: 00:00 In this episode, we'll sit in on a recent conversation between Lois Langer Thompson, the Executive Director of Sno-Isle Libraries and noted sociologist and author, Eric Klinenberg. It's an interesting discussion about society, politics and why public libraries are important palaces for the people. In a minute, Jim Hills my co-host and I will tell you a little bit more about that conversation before we actually listen to it.

Ken Harvey: 00:33 Welcome to season two and episode 49 of Check It Out!, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.

Narrator 1: 00:41 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:49 Hi, I'm Ken Harvey.

Jim Hills: 00:50 And I'm Jim Hills.

Ken Harvey: 00:51 Hey, Jim. We had an opportunity to tape a special event in which our Executive Director, Lois Langer Thompson, had a conversation with noted sociologist and author, Eric Klinenberg.

Jim Hills: 01:02 What do we know about Eric Klinenberg?

Ken Harvey: 01:04 Well, fancy, you should ask that scripted question, Jim. Well, Eric is the Helen Gould Shepard Professor of Social Science and the Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University. He's the editor of Cultural Production in a Digital Age and co-editor of a publication called Antidemocracy in America that's put out by Columbia University Press.

Ken Harvey: 01:31 Antidemocracy is an interesting word. I don't think I had seen it before, but based from what I read, it's Antidemocracy in America offers essays for many of the nation's leading scholars, experts on topics including race, religion, gender, civil liberties,

(Continued)

protest, inequality, immigration, climate change, national security, and the role of the media, which is a lot.

Jim Hills: 01:59 It is a lot. That is a big lot.

Ken Harvey: 02:02 What else, Jim, do we happen to know about Eric?

Jim Hills: 02:06 Well, I happen to know a little more about Eric. You know, I thought one of the really interesting things about Klinenberg is that he does combine sociology with authorship and storytelling. His books reflect that combination. He has written a book called *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*, which does not sound like a real page-turner. But when you hear Klinenberg talk about that, it was published in 2002 by Chicago, University of Chicago Press. What he did is he take a look at a heat wave in Chicago and the factors that came into that and how that impacted the people of Chicago in various neighborhoods. Then, he tells a great story about that.

Ken Harvey: 02:48 Yeah. I think that one of the stories is really about the number of people who died from the heat wave and how there were some sociological reasons why some people did and some people didn't.

Jim Hills: 03:01 And how he found through the data in his research that on from one side of the street to another and literally, the death rate during that heat wave was substantively different-

Ken Harvey: 03:15 Wow.

Jim Hills: 03:15 ... based on these sociological factors. But he's done other things like that. He's done *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media* published in 2007 by Metropolitan Books. He's done *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*. I remember when that was published in 2012 is this whole idea of living alone has become a thing and so he thought he'd look into that and put some data to it. And then, his most recent book is *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. Again, not really a title. *Palaces for the People*, the rest of that doesn't really roll off the tongue or at least not off mine. But, what he's done is taken a look at the data behind that and then told a great story.

Ken Harvey: 04:06 Well, it was that book, the last one you mentioned *Palaces for the People* that really brought him into focus for us and put our sights on him because that book is really being celebrated by a

lot of public libraries around the United States, in North America. One of the reasons why we actually got him out from the East Coast to Washington so that he could talk to our staff.

- Jim Hills: 04:35 Yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 04:36 And to a group of others from some of our communities who gathered for the event we're going to talk about.
- Jim Hills: 04:43 What I found is when he was clearly talking about public libraries and you'd think he's the priest preaching to the choir, that that wouldn't be so interesting. But when you have someone like Klinenberg who brings the expertise and the perspective that he brings, I think it was illuminating even for those who have devoted their entire lives to the service of public libraries and in the communities and the customers.
- Ken Harvey: 05:07 Yeah, you're absolutely right. Well, we also happen to know that in 2013, he wrote an article that was pretty influential in the New Yorker about hurricane Sandy and climate change adaptation in which he talked about the role of social infrastructure in protecting cities and communities. He co-wrote a book that actually surprised me with a comedian Aziz Ansari, that was called *Modern Romance: An Investigation*. That was published back in June 2015.
- Jim Hills: 05:37 With all of his authorship and the other work that he's doing at universities that he is a busy guy.
- Ken Harvey: 05:41 Yeah. It seems to be a prolific writer. He also is a proud husband and a father. Something he chatted with me about. I think that our listeners are going to hear him kind of reference some things about his family.
- Jim Hills: 05:58 It was a real privilege that he took time to come and speak with us and that we get to share that with our listeners.
- Ken Harvey: 06:03 Yeah, I completely agree. So let's go ahead and share what we captured for our audience's listening pleasure. This is something that we're glad to share with you as our podcast audience. We're going to share the conversation that we taped and the first voice that you'll hear in this conversation is that of our Executive Director for Sno-Isle Libraries, Lois Langer Thompson.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 06:24 I'm really excited to have Eric Klinenberg here today. I've heard him a couple of times talk about libraries and social infrastructure and the value that we bring as libraries to our

communities. I think that one of the best parts as a librarian, right, as I go out and talk about the value of libraries, everyone knows I'm going to talk about how fabulous they are because they are, but they know that. And so to have a sociologist tell us, it just adds that little extra weight. Thank you for what you're doing.

- Eric Klinenberg: 06:50 It must be true.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 06:51 It must be true.
- Eric Klinenberg: 06:52 It must be true as sociologist said it.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 06:54 My first question, I just love to hear about why you became a sociologist and then turned to writing.
- Eric Klinenberg: 06:59 Wow, that's a big question. I didn't think we're going to go there today. Can I recline and lie down and turn into a psychoanalytic conversation?
- Lois Langer Thompson: 07:07 [crosstalk 00:07:07] We have a therapist in the audience if you need it.
- Eric Klinenberg: 07:07 Excellent. Thank you. Glad to hear it. Well, thank you. Thank you all for being here so early in the morning. It's nice to be at a breakfast gathering. The bacon was really delicious today. I really recommend the bacon if you haven't had it. It's hard to say why I became a sociologist. I think there's a couple of ways I could tell the story.
- Eric Klinenberg: 07:30 One is that I grew up in downtown Chicago. I grew up in the '70s and '80s. It was really tough time for Chicago and the city's economy was falling apart. Hundreds of thousands of jobs and people were leaving. I was from a family where a lot of my relatives moved to the suburbs and my parents were pretty committed to staying. I had this interesting experience as a kid where I lived in a gentrifying neighborhood, but it wasn't a wealthy neighborhood. You could feel a lot of the changes in the city happening there. I went to a private school, the public schools were really horrible in Chicago in the '70s and '80s. Actually the public libraries were in total disarray in Chicago at that time as well.
- Eric Klinenberg: 08:22 My parents can't decide if they're going to stay in Chicago. They wanted to send me to the school. At the school, I always felt that kind of the poor kid, but in my neighborhood, I really felt like a privileged kid. Then also my neighborhood, which was

gentrifying and changing but becoming very white was kind of right up against of famously African-American housing project called Cabrini-Green in Chicago, which was in the news a lot. There were kind of rules about where I could go and where I couldn't go. There was violence and all these things to navigate. I write about it a little bit in the book actually because I was a basketball player as a kid and I read about the basketball courts and the way that they became a shared space in the neighborhood and also some of the crazy things that some of the white families are doing to keep black people out of the neighborhood like taking the rims off the basketball hoops or the basketball court.

Eric Klinenberg: 09:21 I just think kind of growing up in that environment, I got tuned into all these social questions, how does the city work? Why do I feel one way in this setting and a different way in this other setting. In college, I studied philosophy and history and neither was exactly right for me. I wanted to be in the world, I wanted to be engaging real issues. I also wanted to engage real people. One Of the pleasures of being a sociologist is you get to spend time in places where you might not otherwise be. In my case, for this last book that meant the library, so I was not one of those kids who grows up in the library. It depends on you guys to raise me because my parents weren't there. Actually you guys are not the librarians. Some of you are librarians, but there are a lot of library supporters I know. I came to the library through my research and had it not been for the fact that I'm a sociologist, I'd never would've had the occasion to discover all this.

Lois Langer Thompson: 10:13 It's an interesting thing we share. I didn't grow up in the library either. My mother didn't drive and so we had one car and we didn't go to the library because there wasn't one within walking distance. When I finally was able to drive, then I went to the library, so not until my late teens did I start using the library. My mother actually didn't get a library card until her 60's and is still, she's 91 and she still reads a couple books a week. We were latecomers to the library as well.

Eric Klinenberg: 10:39 It's actually, I was just having a conversation before we got on stage about this problem of having people who are in our communities who have an impression that the library is like the library of 30 years ago or 40 years ago. I think a lot of people just haven't been in the door and they don't realize all the exciting things that libraries have done.

Eric Klinenberg: 11:01 In fact, I often say like, if you had been asked 30 or 40 years ago to name like which institution, which would public institution is

going to be the most adaptable and flexible and dynamic in this transition to the digital age, into this new social world that we live in, how many of you would have guessed the library? It seems like the library is the place that's going to be kind of stuck in time, right? Traditional and quiet because it's just a place to read an old book.

Eric Klinenberg: 11:35 But, the truth is that the library has become that most dynamic institution. It's extraordinary. I've traveled all around the world now and I've seen all the amazing things that libraries are doing to stay relevant. In some cases that means staying relevant by just ordering the newest books. In other cases, it's like creating makerspaces and having after school programming and video games for older people who live alone and want to socialize and be physically active with a Wii bowling game. There's just all these really cool things that libraries are doing. It's nice that your mother discovered it and that you discovered it as a teenager. But, I think one of the challenges for every community is to figure out how to show people who aren't already coming into the library just how relevant you are. You know, all the things you can do.

Eric Klinenberg: 12:24 I had this amazing experience a year ago in Chicago. I was there to give my first big talk and it was right after the election in 2018. It was November and I was talking to a very affluent group of people. I know that one of the things that's been happening is in a lot of very affluent communities, people are opting into Amazon and not the library. They're buying books, they're doing everything online. They're not using the shared public spaces, which I think is a real problem. So I asked people in this room a question like, how many of you have been to your local library in the last month? I thought a very small number of people would raise their hands and everybody raised their hand.

Eric Klinenberg: 13:05 Everybody raised their hand. I was like, "What's going on in Chicago? What are you feeding people here? This is amazing." And it turned out the reason that so many people had gone to Chicago is because Chicago Institute of program where not only could you register to vote, but you could do early voting in the library through the library. The library system really made it central to the electoral process. I thought, that's so cool. Now, all these people walked in the door and if you think a lot of them went there to vote, but when they got there they realize, "Whoa, this is like not the library I grew up in." And so I don't know that's a thing that you need to do in the Sno-Isle system. But the question for every community is, what's the thing that

we can do to make ourselves even more relevant and necessary to our citizens?

Lois Langer Thompson: 13:49 Yeah. I think that libraries have that sort of sense of the librarian with the fun and so quiet.

Eric Klinenberg: 13:56 I still haven't met her by the way. I'm looking at my whole-

Lois Langer Thompson: 13:58 We're all looking for. I remember I met a friend who asked what I did and I said it was a librarian and she marched over someone else and said, "She's lying, right? No one is like that. No librarians are like that." I think, and how that came about, but when you think about libraries, you've talked about this. It's one of the most radical, innovative ideas of our country. When you look back at the history of libraries, we've continued to adapt and change and be the first in things and figure out how to introduce people to it. But then, we're kind of this very of the Pacific Northwest and Midwest that we're all don't want to make too big a deal out of it, but it's pretty amazing the changes that we've made and when you walk in a library, as you've done all year to see those changes.

Eric Klinenberg: 14:39 Look. I hope you make a bigger deal out of it. I do think that this is an issue for library systems that they're not great at telling their own story. Well, and here's an area where, how many of you are a part of the foundation? Are you kind of supporters of the library? How many of you worked in a library system? Because we have a good mix of people. I really urge you to collaborate with each other to figure out some strategies for telling your story well. It's striking to me how many library people have come to me since my book has been published and said, "Oh, we're so happy you wrote this because it's so validating to have somebody who's outside of the library world say this thing."

Eric Klinenberg: 15:16 I've always, we've known this, I hope that in kind of the idea of social infrastructure and in some of the other arguments in the book, there's a vocabulary that we can share now to make the case for how important, not just libraries are, but these public goods that I think once made this country such a kind of vibrant and exciting place, a place that generated real opportunities for people. I fear that we've kind of lost sight of the value of libraries and other public goods. We think that the market is going to deliver the social goods that we need. I think there's all kinds of evidence at this point that it hasn't.

Eric Klinenberg: 15:56 It's not to say we shouldn't have markets to do some things, but we really need the public realm to get reinvigorated and we're

not going to do that unless people who are involved in it and invested in it already find a way to really tell that story and not be embarrassed about making sure that you got your message out.

- Lois Langer Thompson: 16:15 Yeah. Recently you retweeted, I know others of you saw, there was an article in the New York Times called In the Land of Defeat. It was about a library in Arkansas and they were voting about raising the librarian salary. They were hiring new librarian and they wanted to raise the salary-
- Eric Klinenberg: 16:31 To \$25 an hour.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 16:32 ... to \$25 an hour, which was more than almost double, I think what they said, what most people made.
- Eric Klinenberg: 16:37 In the median way was like 32,000 and this was going to be make her like 52,000.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 16:41 Yeah. On top of that, they didn't want to pay for the library that they built because they were losing natural gas money. It kept coming by. I don't need the library and this idea of, it's easy to pick on Arkansas, but it seems like there's a general mood around this idea of common good, right? That schools are about the common good and that we need an educated society to have a democratic society and we need libraries to be part of that. That seems to have been eroding and continuing to erode. I think part of it, as you say, is to get out and tell a little bit different story. But, what have you observed about that change across the country?
- Eric Klinenberg: 17:20 I was stunned by that article. It was beautifully written. It was very moving and it made me very worried. I just, the social scientist in me thought, "Well, I don't know that this is a general trend." The article was written as if it was a general trend, kind of in rural America, this is how people feel. It didn't seem to me like there was actually research in that article that made the case for that. I don't know if that was just a particular story about a particular place or if we surveyed people who live in rural towns around the country, we would find that sentiment. That felt very extreme to me.
- Eric Klinenberg: 18:04 I don't know. I think anybody who thinks they understood the country well. After 2016, if you still think you understand what's going on here, bless you. I hope you get your Nobel Prize soon. It's very puzzling moment. I have no idea. You know, what's really going on anymore because people are obviously saying

things to pollsters and then doing something else some of the time. Some people aren't getting polled. Some people just don't know what to do. I think some people are just really confused about the situation.

Eric Klinenberg: 18:41 Ken and I were talking about this a little bit before I came in today. Clearly a lot of people have been left behind by the changes in our economy. Even by some of the investments that we've made publicly. I think like during the Obama administration, a lot of people turn things around and got better. The country turned around in many respects. Remember when Obama took over as president, we were in the midst of this horrendous and terrifying recession and a lot of the country turned around over those eight years, but a lot of the country did not turn around and got stuck and it still stuck.

Eric Klinenberg: 19:18 I think that there's still this sentiment out there that we don't see what the future is going to be. I think when that sentiment turns to nihilism and self-destructiveness, things get really dangerous. So in that article I read, something that felt like nihilism to me. I don't believe the library or anything else is going to make my life better. Let's just tear the thing down. I saw some of that in the 2016 election also. Just like not this whole system is not working for me. Let's blow up the system. I'm going to vote for a candidate who's promising to blow up the system and at least it'll be entertaining. It's very entertaining but it's also completely terrifying.

Lois Langer Thompson: 20:07 Yes.

Eric Klinenberg: 20:07 You know?

Lois Langer Thompson: 20:09 Yeah. I just want to sit with that for a minute. All right. As we think about that and then make that switch into the role of the public library, the amazing thing that you see, and I think that's some of what's interesting is you start to, when you look at a whole state and you say they voted red or they voted blue, but when you dig down it's never, and that's what you found in the heat wave. When you dig down, the story is never true for an entire area.

Eric Klinenberg: 20:33 Yeah.

Lois Langer Thompson: 20:34 When you start to dig into it, and I think we see that in our public libraries. Jill Wubbenhorst is here today, I'm going to give her a shout out. She has started a programming called Parenting for the Teens and invited parents in to talk about how hard it is

to raise teenagers and the things that you need in that idea of being connected. That's at the heart of our vision statement, right? When you start to see people say, "Libraries, what do we need them for? I can get everything on Amazon." You can't talk to another parent and person on Amazon.

Eric Klinenberg: 21:02 [crosstalk 00:21:02] It's such a good point.

Lois Langer Thompson: 21:02 And so that sort of sense of connection. I think that is, and so then telling that story and being able to offer those opportunities are just without... No one else is doing that in our culture.

Eric Klinenberg: 21:15 Yeah. That was funny. My first thought when you're telling that story is like when I was a kid, all the parenting for teens classes were teenagers who were parents, you know? I just read for the first time that I think the trend is about to be that there's a higher fertility rate among women ages 40 to 45 than there are among women ages 16 to 20. That's for the first time in a long time. That's the kind of amazing shift in American society.

Eric Klinenberg: 21:43 On the more important point, right, so therefore more classes on parenting for teens. Yeah. Parenting for people who are too old to be parenting teenagers. Why do I still have to deal with all this garbage? I just want to rest. Yeah. I'm a parent in Manhattan and all of us are really old to be parents. We have kids much later than everybody else. It's very funny. You can't tell parent's day from grandparent's day apart. The more important point is libraries is places where people who have a need to encounter others, who share an experience or a problem or people who don't share much and have a need to actually be in a room with each other. That's so important.

Eric Klinenberg: 22:33 Yesterday at the public lecture, I was encouraging librarians to think about programs where you can bring people who might disagree about politics or anything into a room together. You don't have to start by saying, "Okay, Trump or Bernie Sanders, who's better? Is climate change real?" You don't have to start with the most divisive things. You can start by talking about the Seahawks.

Eric Klinenberg: 22:57 In the book, I read a lot about sports. I'm kind of a sports fan and my son is a really serious soccer player and I spend a lot of my weekends on these soccer fields. What I've noticed is that my social world is so different in soccer land than it is anywhere else. Because he plays on a regional team and there are all these families who are from very different places and who have different values and different interests. I'm talking Latino

immigrants and people who were making America great again. Cops, parenting kids on the same team. If we met each other on Twitter, we'd be hurling insults, within a couple of tweets. But, we all have this shared thing that we like, which is first are our sons, and then this game. We've found a way to be with each other. I like to think that we've made some progress, that we all understand each other a little bit more.

- Eric Klinenberg: 23:55 Libraries can have sustain programming. You can have a program on difficult topics, just like a lecture series or a conversation series on difficult topics and you pick, tend to do in the course of the or 12. There's 12 months or so before the election and you do one a month and try to just have respectful conversations between people who disagree and see what happens. You probably don't need to have like a referee in the room. In our private security, you probably, I'm guessing that you can work it out. You can even start with easier stuff and go up.
- Eric Klinenberg: 24:31 I don't see a lot of institutions in our society that are brokering those kinds of exchanges right now. I don't see a lot of institutions that are operating as bridges. I hear everybody wanting to build walls. I don't see how we survive if we just build walls.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 24:49 Yeah. Just another shout out to Sno-Isle Libraries, which I can't take credit for this, but we do a program called Issues That Matter and bring in people on different sides. The issues that are really important to us, homelessness, housing, we have so many people moving here. There is enough housing for people. Farming, our food supply. It is exactly that where we invite people to come in and carry on that conversation and we're seeing, and that is the value, I think in many ways of a public library. We haven't taken a public stand on those issues. We are seeing it as a place where you can come with whatever belief you have and share that. Really proud of that series that we've been doing.
- Eric Klinenberg: 25:29 Look, I don't want the libraries of the world to take stands on political issues except for the, I want them to help to facilitate the democratic process. I really want libraries to be involved in helping with the census. I want libraries to be involved in registering people to vote. I want libraries to help with voting when necessary. I'm really concerned about people not being able to vote in the next election, either because they're kicked off the rolls, they'll let you know for bad reasons or because of polling places aren't really adequate to handle the demand. A lot of core features of a democratic society that are now under

threat. I think the library as an institution has to stand for our best principals because if the library doesn't, then what's going to, right? Who's going to?

Lois Langer Thompson: 26:20 Yeah. I think we have good history. As you mentioned yesterday, many of you remember the Forbes article about closing libraries and just replacing them with Amazon and librarians took to Twitter one of the best uses of Twitter we think ever. In 24 hours, Forbes took the article down, right? We have a lot of power when we join together. I think around those issues that we can all agree on having a good count of everyone who lives here, everyone voting. Those are really important issues.

Eric Klinenberg: 26:46 Librarian of the world unite.

Lois Langer Thompson: 26:48 Watch out, don't mess with us. I want to take a little bit of a switch here. You've talked about the need for local gathering spaces. One of the things I was really intrigued about in your book was you talked about people who are place-bound. Typically, very young children and older people. That's hard for them. I'm just wondering if you could talk about we're creating, we're embarking on creating inspiring spaces for our staff and our customers. I'm just wondering if you could give us some advice about what you've seen that's worked really well and some things that maybe we might want to avoid.

Eric Klinenberg: 27:20 Oh, man. I don't think there's a formula for design. That's the thing. It's not like there's one, there's not one size that fits all. Good designers always spend some time with the communities that they're working with to figure out what local needs are. I spent a lot of time in the last few weeks with this group in Atlanta that's been designing these street soccer fields under the train stations.

Lois Langer Thompson: 27:45 Interesting.

Eric Klinenberg: 27:45 Because they have all these commuter train stations in Atlanta. They had big parking lots underneath them. They have elevated train lines. These guys realized we don't need all this parking space here. We want to have people drive less. What if we convert the land and build these little mini soccer fields and then have kids and their parents meet up at the end of the work day. It's really easy to travel these places. They've created these incredible community centers. If you took that idea and you brought it to cities where they don't love soccer, that'd be really stupid. No one would use that. Maybe you want basketball, so you have to know what your community's interested in.

- Eric Klinenberg: 28:25 That said, I think libraries are they're palaces for the people, right? That's the idea of the book is the library is really can be places that exalt you and take you, lift you up out of your daily grind and into someplace that feels more beautiful. The key thing I think is how to make sure that every person who walks in feels dignified and respected and welcomed. I think that's like the magic formula right there. No matter how you do it, when you walk in the door of this institution, do you feel dignified, respected, and welcomed?
- Eric Klinenberg: 29:04 Most people don't have that experience most of the time in this country. You walk in and feel that we're very stingy about affording people dignity and respect, right? A lot of people feel unwelcome. There are all kinds of ways to feel unwelcome, you know? So that's about design. What does the place look like? It's also about programming. Who's on your staff? How are they treating people? Librarians have this kind of heroic work that they have to do every day. It's especially true in this moment where all these other problems are getting pushed into libraries because we're not doing enough to deal with them. Right? Homelessness, drug addiction, mental health, aging, unemployment. If you're struggling with any of those things, you're probably going to wind up in a library because we're not doing enough to address them in the conventional agency. That puts a lot of pressure on librarians.
- Eric Klinenberg: 30:02 I've talked in the last year a lot of librarians who feel stressed out by their job. They did not go into this business to be social workers. They were not expecting to have to learn how to save the life of someone having an overdose. They're not there to deal with the problem if someone who's homeless who's using the bathroom to clean up and it's taking 30 minutes. There are all these things that you don't go to library school for and so you're stressed. But the thing is, you still have to be welcoming to everybody who walks in the door. The person who's going to cause the problems for you is the person who needs that feeling of dignity and that warm welcome more than anyone else there. The most powerful thing you can do. You're in your whole day is to smile at that person when they walk in and make them know that they're wanted, even though you kind of wish they didn't come today.
- Eric Klinenberg: 30:58 I think that is a huge challenge. If I'm talking... I can't tell you about your architectural design, but I'll tell you about your program design. That also means really taking care of your staff. If you're a manager, if you're on the board here, it's important for you to be investing in books and infrastructure and all those other things. But please, take care of your staff. You want to

make sure that they have mental health days, make sure that they have time off, have resources for them to do training if they wanted to get extra training to work on some of these things. Have a place where people can get together and talk at the end of the day about like, did anything bad happened today? Is there something that we can learn from today? Is something good happened today that we can learn from today?

- Eric Klinenberg: 31:45 I really think librarians are on the front lines of a social crisis and they need all the support they can get. I don't think we're doing it. I should write something about that.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 31:56 You should write it. There's an article right there.
- Eric Klinenberg: 31:59 I haven't really written that, but I think that's an important point.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 32:02 Yeah, it's interesting.
- Eric Klinenberg: 32:04 Guys, don't tell anybody I said that because I don't want you to steal my thoughts now.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 32:07 And don't write it.
- Eric Klinenberg: 32:08 Everybody should say, I think you all should say that. It's really a big, it's a big deal.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 32:14 Yeah. We're looking at our spaces and thinking about the great part about library staff is they care so much about the public. When we've designed our buildings, we put as much as we can out for the public and had as much space for the public at the cost of where staff have to go and have a break and to relax. We're trying to switch that paradigm a little bit.
- Eric Klinenberg: 32:33 Yeah.
- Lois Langer Thompson: 32:34 Still keep the focus on the community, but also that space for staff to recover as well so thank you for that. I'm just going to do a quick time check. I think I'm going to ask you one more question and then I'm going to bring, offer it up so if people have a question, they'd like to ask, if you want to start coming forward. Actually we've given you an article idea to write about, but what are you working on right now that you're ready to share with us?
- Eric Klinenberg: 33:01 I'm writing more about social infrastructure and I've been writing about this Green New Deal idea. Do you know about this

Green New Deal idea? I'm kind of decided that we need to have this somewhere so we can all die.

Lois Langer Thompson: 33:15

It's a simple promise.

Eric Klinenberg: 33:16

Yeah. No, I mean I'm really, I have kids. Anyone here have kids? You guys have kids? This thing that happened the other day with this global climate strike and Garrett Thornburg who came to New York. In this called debate about climate change, we always talk about what's going to happen to the children in the future. And we use it like, "They've become the symbol, like we talk about them and it's like they're the symbol of the people whose lives you have to save." Now, they're all talking back at us, you know? They're basically done being a symbol and now they're saying, "You guys have failed us." And we have. They're basically saying, "You're creating a world that's not going to be habitable and you're saddling us with these crazy problems." I feel like it's a crisis now.

Eric Klinenberg: 34:05

I think we need to do something really dramatic. It's a hard one because it never feels like the most urgent problem, climate change. But, the moment it feels like it's the most urgent problem is going to be the moment when it's too late to do anything about it. We have to get ahead of it. I think this Green New Deal, which includes a lot of social infrastructure, don't worry libraries are going to crush it in the Green New Deal. I think it's the best idea we have so I'm writing about that right now.

Lois Langer Thompson: 34:32

Great. Look forward to that.

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Ken Harvey: 35:20

I thought that Lois did a great job interviewing Eric. It was really neat to hear some of the things that he had to say.

Jim Hills: 35:28 I loved the kind of the casual approach to that and the conversation that they were having and how Klinenberg seemed to maybe reveal a little more of himself about the work that he's done and his personal feeling and perspective.

Ken Harvey: 35:45 Yeah, because this isn't the first time that you and I had heard him. We actually had a chance to hear him give a speech the day before. You had actually heard him previous to that.

Jim Hills: 35:56 I had. The day before was at a meeting for all of the employees of Sno-Isle Libraries that happens every other year. Klinenberg came and spoke to the entire group. And then earlier in 2018, January 2018, the American Library Association had their Midwinter conference in Seattle. It's just down the street from us and a great opportunity to go, better understand not only American Library Association, but Klinenberg was also presenting there and there were a thousand people in the room.

Ken Harvey: 36:30 That would have been right on the heels of his book being published.

Jim Hills: 36:33 Exactly. Yeah. Hearing him three times in the year, it was really interesting I think to hear again. I felt like he kind of let down his guard. He's been reviewed a lot, right? There are John Stewart, the former co-host of the daily show on TV, has reviewed it and call it a comprehensive entertaining, compelling argument.

Ken Harvey: 36:59 And we're talking about his book Palaces for the People, right?

Jim Hills: 37:02 Right. For how to rebuild social infrastructure and how important that is. There's another review by Rebecca Solnit, the author of Men Explain Things To Me, and A Field Guide to Getting Lost. But, she says it's a fantastic book that reminds us about how democracy is fortified by the people living together, coexisting and that's in the strength that comes from that. When you hear the perspective that we heard with Lois and his conversation there about where he comes from with that, I thought the genuine feeling and the authenticity was really rewarding.

Ken Harvey: 37:42 Yeah. I really appreciated his spending some time talking about the neighborhood that he grew up in and some of the social divisions between that neighborhood and other parts of other neighborhoods and how that would show up. His kind of commentary around ways that neighborhoods and communities and cities can work to ensure that they're not building walls

between themselves. That they're actually creating an infrastructure that helps bring everyone along and make everyone's life better.

- Jim Hills: 38:31 When he talks about the, what I thought was interesting on that, now actually I can't remember if he said this with Lois or in one of the other times, but when he talks about this idea that if you were going to invent something, and he's working with these folks from federal government and they're saying, "You know what we should do, we should invent a thing." And then, they go on to describe a public library and he points that out to them. He goes, "You know, these exist already. Right? And they're called public libraries." I thought that was really interesting as a fun perspective to hear.
- Ken Harvey: 39:05 Well, I had some thoughts, especially from hearing him give a keynote address. Then, hearing him in this interview and also spending a little bit of time with him just chatting and getting to know one another. Then also, reading the book Palaces for the People. That concept of there are few places, a few things and institutions, places and things and systems that are really designed to help everyone feel noble or everyone become noble. Just that concept of well that should everyone have the opportunity to be elevated in their lives from where they start to where they could end up. Should everyone have the opportunity to attain the lofty heights is I think a really key question that we continue to both ask ourselves and maybe grapple with as a society, especially around the whole notion of what is the American dream and what do we need to do to ensure that the American dream continues to be attainable.
- Jim Hills: 40:30 I couldn't agree more. That whole idea of the opportunity to attain the opportunity to become, that is the American dream. That as I think I understand that and Klinenberg is pointing that out, that the American public library is perhaps the quintessential example of that, that it's available and the world of knowledge is available to you. The opportunity is there and it's important. It's an important piece of the fabric of America.
- Ken Harvey: 41:07 Well, I think I recall one of the things that he said. In one of the conversations that happened was that we take for granted so often what we have available to us in this country and just even thinking of the availability of services and resources that our public library offers. And yet, it's fairly unique on the planet.
- Jim Hills: 41:37 Yes.

Ken Harvey: 41:39 Public libraries are not available everywhere for any individual off the street to just park and step inside or just walk in and take a full advantage of what's available there without pulling your wallet out and putting in a credit card down or cash down and kind of buying your way through the collection.

Jim Hills: 42:02 Right. It's just available.

Ken Harvey: 42:04 It's really something that's very unique in the history of humankind, but also fairly unique around this planet. It's something that I think he points out very well, really ought not to be taken for granted and continues to be worthwhile making available to others.

Jim Hills: 42:27 Yeah, in many ways Klinenberg, well in Palaces for the People, we look at the specific stories that he's telling and he's talking about public libraries, but really what he's talking about is that American dream, that social infrastructure that does make opportunity available. That's what he's a champion for and he's doing it. Using public libraries in the example, there has perhaps a bellwether for America, that this is something that you should be paying attention to. In many cases, in some places around the country, it's slipping away.

Ken Harvey: 43:05 Well, I want to spend just a little bit more time just chatting about what we just heard from him because some of his conversation with Lois got into social commentary and a little bit that was maybe kind of bordering on political commentary. I think he shared with us in the audience that he had worked with the Obama administration. He had been tapped on the shoulder to do some things for them and so some of that really crept into what he was sharing with us. I found that interesting really to listen to, though maybe personally I didn't necessarily agree with everything that he was saying. I think it's really useful to hear those perspectives and kind of keep them in mind, especially as he was talking about walls, which is very much in the news these days with a border wall with Mexico and all. You had mentioned a while we were not taken being taped about he had mentioned something about seawalls.

Jim Hills: 44:15 Yeah, right. He talked about the, "Hey, you want to protect lower Manhattan." He's put up a wall around lower Manhattan and he points out, "Well, New Jersey is across the river so that's a problem for New Jersey."

Ken Harvey: 44:28 Because the water's going to go somewhere.

Jim Hills:	44:29	Water's going to go someplace. The point of his story was how walls in general, well, certainly for if there are going to be rising sea levels and climate change, walls are only temporary measures. But figuratively, they are also perhaps not the most effective way to combat change.
Ken Harvey:	44:54	Well, we really appreciate Eric Klinenberg spending the time with us sharing from his kind of vast background of social analysis. He brings a rich repertoire of work and just want to remind our listeners that some of his materials are in our collection. We really hope that you will take the time to come online and search for his work. Eric Klinenberg. You'll see a list of some of that work on the show notes for this episode, and we just invite you to make sure that you check it out.
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