

But this revolution has not been without a price; an unintended consequence has been the schism that currently exists along almost all lines: political, economic, cultural and ideological. Klinenberg makes a powerful case that the decline in the utilization of shared space has led to an increase in crime, addiction, civic engagement – and even to an upsurge in our collective willingness to tolerate totalitarian tendencies that would have been unthinkable when most Americans saw themselves as part of something that was much bigger than themselves. In an era when bigger is seen as being better, Klinenberg asserts passionately that the key to living together peacefully in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and tolerance involves moving in the opposite direction. In order to illustrate this point, he spends an entire chapter discussing how to make our educational institutions more conducive to producing the kind of citizens we will need if we are to survive the obstacles that lie ahead. Consider the following from “Learning Together,” the third chapter and one of my personal favorites:

“Reducing a school’s physical size does not solve all of its problems, but it has proven to make a tremendous impact on student attention, achievement and college matriculation as well as teacher satisfaction and positive feelings about the school climate. A recent study of 21,000 New York City students by the independent, nonpartisan research firm MDRC found that, compared with students in ordinary high schools, students who attended small schools were 9.4 percentage points more likely to graduate, 8.4 percentage points more likely to enroll in college, and even more likely to attend selective universities.”

Klinenberg is a professor and director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University, where he also edits the journal *Public Culture*. After completing his undergraduate work at Brown University in 1993, he earned a master’s degree (1997) and doctorate (2000) at the University of California, Berkeley. A frequent contributor to *The New York Times Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Time* magazine, *Fortune*, *The Nation*, *The Washington Post*, *Mother Jones* and *The Guardian*, his previous books include “Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone,” “Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America’s Media,” and “Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago.”

Klinenberg is one of the few but growing number of voices raising the alarm about the alienating effects of social media on our mental and emotional health and on our sacred democratic institutions. Check out what he has to say about Facebook and its controversial and often under-siege founder, Mark Zuckerberg, in “Before We Lift the Next Shovel,” the conclusion:

“Zuckerberg’s rhetoric is as grandiose as we’d expect from a man whose company has billions of active users and a market value around \$500 billion. But the vision of social infrastructure that he endorses is flimsy. Social media, for all their powers, cannot give us what we need from churches, unions, athletic clubs and welfare states ... no matter how the site’s designers tweak Facebook content, the human connections we need to escape danger, establish trust, and rebuild society require recurrent social interaction in physical places, not pokes and likes with ‘friends’ online.”

I believe Klinenberg is on to something significant – something that could provide some much-needed relief from the deepening “us versus them” mentality that has crept into our national psyche over the last half-century or so. The key to overcoming the sad state of affairs that seems to permeate every corner of our world these days may well be spending more time with each other, in the moment, sharing our hopes, dreams and aspirations in real time without feeling the overwhelming need to record the event for our next update.

Highly recommended.

– Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.