

## Community journalism and democracy in rural Alabama

The Alabama Humanities Alliance explores this connection and much more in new podcast series “Democracy and the Informed Citizen.”

**BIRMINGHAM / October 6, 2022** — A new podcast series from the Alabama Humanities Alliance explores the future of journalism in rural Alabama, and highlights a growing number of citizen-produced newspapers that offer a new path forward.

In an era when the definition of truth often can’t be agreed upon, community newspapers are one of the best tools at Alabamians’ disposal to combat disinformation, to help neighbors see past their differences and to know one another more fully.

“[Democracy and the Informed Citizen](#)” is a five-episode podcast series presented by the Alabama Humanities Alliance, in partnership with Alabama A&M University and WJAB-FM. All episodes are now available for downloading and streaming on AHA’s website: [alabamahumanities.org/democracy-and-the-informed-citizen](http://alabamahumanities.org/democracy-and-the-informed-citizen).

The series is part of a national initiative exploring connections between democracy, journalism, and an informed citizenry. Funding was provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for “Democracy and the Informed Citizen,” a multiyear project administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils.

Why a podcast on the need for service-oriented journalism in rural Alabama?

“Maybe the question isn’t: ‘Are community newspapers still worth publishing?’” says George Daniels, Ph.D., a former reporter and current journalism professor at the University of Alabama. “Maybe the question is: ‘Can we sustain a functioning democracy *without* community-minded journalism?’”

Indeed, community newspapers are often the *only* outlets covering locally relevant issues in rural communities. And when they cease to exist, it’s not just a local news source that’s lost; it’s a town’s historical record. Community papers “render lives in full,” as Daniels puts it, preserving portraits of local citizens in everything from birth announcements and graduations to marriages and obituaries.



# ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

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“Democracy and the Informed Citizen” also highlights everyday citizens — from librarians and pastors to retirees and high school students — who are starting newspapers in their communities. Their aim? To engender goodwill among neighbors, highlight their towns’ histories, inform voters on local issues and much more.

These young newspapers are already making a difference. Neighbors drawn together by shared interests — realized through stories in these papers — are crossing symbolic dividing lines in their towns to visit with one another. County and state officials are taking note of rural communities’ concerns as expressed in news articles. And cherished community institutions — from schools and churches to sporting events and roadside businesses — are being celebrated in print to underscore their importance to quality of life in rural places.

**Byron Williams** serves as host of the podcast; Williams is an author and host of his own public radio podcast, “The Public Morality.” Original music for “Democracy and the Informed Citizen” is composed and performed by Grammy Award-winning artist **Wu10** (aka Kelvin Wooten), a composer and producer based in Limestone County.

Project partners include PACERS Rural Community News Network; Auburn University School of Communication & Journalism; University of Alabama College of Communication & Information Sciences; Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities; Alabama A&M’s Electronic Media Communications; and David Mathews Center for Civic Life.

Learn more about the humanities and the future of journalism in rural Alabama:  
[alabamahumanities.org/humanities-and-the-future-of-journalism-in-rural-alabama](http://alabamahumanities.org/humanities-and-the-future-of-journalism-in-rural-alabama)

## About the Alabama Humanities Alliance

Founded in 1974, the nonprofit Alabama Humanities Alliance serves as a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. AHA promotes impactful storytelling, lifelong learning and civic engagement. We provide Alabamians with opportunities to connect with our shared cultures and to see each other as fully human. Through our grantmaking, we help scholars, communities and cultural nonprofits create humanities-rich projects that are accessible to all Alabamians — from literary festivals and documentary films to museum exhibitions and research collections. Learn more at [alabamahumanities.org](http://alabamahumanities.org).

