

# Sunlight Foundation - Media Giraffe Profile

## **Sunlight Foundation**

Zephyr Teachout - Director



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## About

SEE *Christopher Lydon Interviews...The Soul of a New Machine*: summary of an interview with Zephyr Teachout about her work on Howard Dean's 2004 campaign for president (link to audio of the interview at end of summary).

BELOW EXCERPTED FROM: *America Offline: An Open Letter to the DNC, the ACLU (and Anyone Else Concerned with Reviving Civic Life)* by Zephyr Teachout

In the 19th century, there was a rule of thumb that a county seat should be within a day's buggy ride for every citizen. We need to live by a similar rule now — a rule of thumb that pushes for physical closeness to political power through social communities.

The net is disrupting some old channels for political power and offering new kinds of connections as well, leading to lots of big, exciting thinking about how this may restructure society. Without an aggressive effort, however, I worry that most of this energy will go into fundraising, list-building, and maybe some online community building. These aren't bad things, but in the face of the Great American Loneliness and the Great American Powerlessness, I hope that the disruptive power of the internet might serve to create a new form of voluntary association: offline communities based on online connections but rooted in public places.

There's pretty good evidence that humans actively enjoy belonging to ritualized, secular societies that meet pretty regularly, weekly and monthly. Once upon a time, so many of us were engaged in local organizations with regularized membership and leadership roles that an observer wrote, "Here then we have the great American safety-valve — we are a nation of presidents." (My thanks to Theda Skocpol for unearthing that gem, and much of the research I am now citing.) Even as late as the 50's, there were more than twenty federated organizations which each counted between one and twelve percent of all Americans as their members. Think of the AFL-CIO, the Free Masons, the American Legion, the YMCA, the Elks, and so on.

. . .

Zephyr Teachout was the Director of Internet Organizing for Howard Dean's campaign, the Executive Director of Baobabs College Labs Project, and a consultant to America Coming Together. She was previously the Executive Director of the Fair Trial Initiative.

SEE an interview with Zephyr Teachout by Jeffrey Klineman in the Yale Alumni Magazine. Below excerpted from that article:

After graduating from Duke law school, Zephyr Teachout cofounded the Fair Trial Initiative, a North Carolina nonprofit that works for effective defense in death penalty cases. But she became better known last year as director of online organizing for the presidential campaign of former Vermont governor Howard Dean '71. She recently joined America Coming Together, a political group mobilizing Democrats in 17 states that provided swing votes for George W. Bush in the 2000 election.

## Links

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