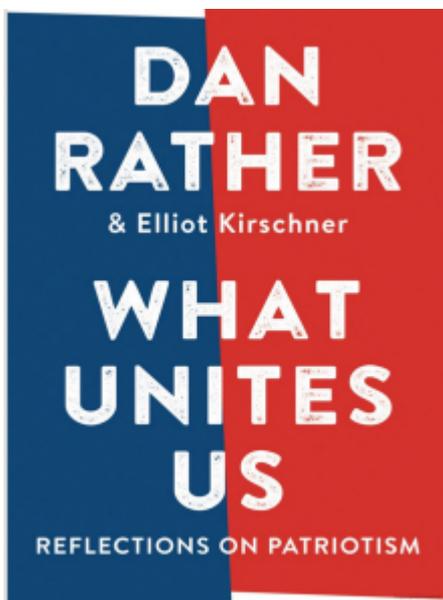


# LTN Book Club: ‘Steady’ words by Dan Rather

By Susan Wood

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Martin Luther King Jr. made the powerful statement with such poise about a time of social movement, I wished I had written it. It resonates with me to this day.



Venerable journalist Dan Rather used it near the end of his new book “What Unites Us” (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2017) to describe a society full of strife needing “Courage” (the name of the chapter) to overcome the chaos of injustice. He wrote it with Elliot Kirschner.

This work of nonfiction is one to learn from. For the battle for truth and justice is not clean and simple. Take Jackie Robinson, Eleanor Roosevelt or countless others who committed their lives to the quest for distinguishing right from wrong.

“What Unites Us” is an easy read and hard to put down.

Maybe it’s me, but I can’t help but think others would be as interested as I was.

I needed this book at this particular point in time. When truth, decency, democracy and the free press is under attack, I turned to someone I trust to be a patriot.

Rather has practically seen and experienced it all. With a career spanning six decades, he's covered every president since Dwight Eisenhower. He's been on the scene for about every important dateline around the globe. He joined CBS News in 1962, launching a decorated career as anchor, managing editor and major contributor to "60 Minutes." He was forced out when a bad source took him down the wrong path.

Still, his wisdom and steady hand provided the news for millions of television viewers – a few stories hard to stomach because of their sheer impact on our lives and their senseless nature.

He even incorporates a personal flair, as when he recounted a chat with his wife as he struggled to cover the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Rather was especially moved.

After all, this was a leader who came to Rather's hometown of Houston in 1962 to "issue a call to explore space." The journalist was so enthralled with the notion he remembered the grass at the stadium where Kennedy spoke was damp.

Who knew he would return to Texas to be cut down at his prime?

So, when Rather told his wife, Jean, how he was hanging in there when she asked about his wellbeing, he told her "steady."

One of Rather's favorite go-to words, "steady" as she goes is a word Americans trying to maintain their sense of dignity and duty could live by. He borrowed it from his father after catching rheumatic fever as a boy. He coined it to describe a grieving country in 1963. He maintains it today as a veteran journalist trying to make sense of a divided nation.

When we face what seem to be insurmountable odds, steady is a condition that a reasonable patriot should have.

In chapter after chapter and section after section – from the “Freedom” to vote to the “Character” of courage – Rather makes the case for Americans to build off our love of country and principles we believe in to carry us.

And to borrow from an old chant from the gay rights movement, “our strength is our diversity.” As clarified in the book’s chapter on immigration, this means we can learn from our unique nature as a people united by a common good.

Rather recognizes this and reminds us to hold on to these self-evident truths.

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- Please join in the discussion via commenting. Feel free to pose questions.

- **Questions:**

What is the parallel between the “What Unites Us” and the divisive politics we witness today? What do you think unites us as U.S. citizens? What does it mean to be a patriot?

- The **next book** will be the novel “Dying Words” by K. Patrick Conner. Synopsis: “Written with humor and pathos, ‘Dying Words’ is a novel about mortality and remembrance, the story of an aging newspaper reporter less afraid of dying than of being forgotten. For the past 11 years, Graydon Hubbell, an aging reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, has been assigned to write obituaries, working in a corner of the newsroom that has long been referred to as Section Eight, an oblique reference to the section of the U.S. military code that provides for a discharge on the grounds of insanity.” The review will be posted March 1.