

“What (Public) Good Are the (Engaged) Humanities?”

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I. “A change is gonna come” -- Sam Cooke

This essay originated as an invited response to the Imagining America Curriculum Project Report on “Culture and Community Development In Higher Education,” an in-depth study of arts-based projects that link campuses and communities in common efforts to advance social justice.¹ I was asked to reflect on the report’s implications in the field of the academic humanities, where developments carrying such monikers as the “scholarship of engagement” or “public scholarship” may be compared to arts-oriented initiatives for community cultural development. Such reflection deserves a lengthier treatment than I can give here, and poses complex questions both in theory

¹ “Community Cultural Development describes a range of initiatives undertaken by artists in collaboration with other community members to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and communications media, while building the capacity for social action and contributing to social change” (*The Curriculum Project Report* p. 1). <http://curriculumproject.net/report.html>

and practice.² My starting point is also problematic, since the term “humanities” is itself a disputed one, ranging from the classical liberal arts to today’s interdisciplinary scholarship in cultural studies and post-colonial theory, which often critiques traditional humanities work for its ivory-tower separation from real life and its various exclusionary biases of race, nation, class, and gender. Within higher education, nasty internal debates over critical methods (deconstruction, feminism, postmodernism, et al.) have coincided with a steady decline in institutional support and prestige, as liberal arts curricula find themselves marginalized by the burgeoning of the professional schools and patent-producing sciences. Yet as Gale and Carton note, “the contemporary crisis of the humanities in America is . . . centuries old,” and reports of its death greatly exaggerated.³ Efforts to connect humanities research and teaching with projects to advance democracy, social justice, and the public good can take advantage of the latest episode of crisis, and even argue that they represent a strong new direction for revival. Given the drastic budget cutbacks, grim hiring forecasts, mounting student debt, and challenges presented by the digital revolution, advocates of an increased engagement of the curriculum in community development and public cultural work, however, face a stiff wind.

In order to navigate these conditions, we will need to convince people that simply fighting to retain the remnants of the status quo will neither ensure the endurance of traditional knowledge practices nor build a platform for a vibrant (and well-funded) future. Professors who hunker down in their classrooms explicating texts, explaining documents, interpreting images, parsing metaphysical concepts, or PowerPointing facts and ideas in hopes of reproducing their own

² For a powerful beginning, see George J. Sanchez, “Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy.” *Foreseeable Futures #4: Position Papers from Imagining America*. <http://www.imaginingamerica.org/foreseeFutures.html>.

³ Gale, Sylvia and Evan Carton. “Toward the Practice of the Humanities.” *The Good Society* 14:3 (2005): 38. The “crisis” is the explicit topic in *Do the Humanities Have to Be Useful?*, edited by G. Peter Lepage, Carolyn (Bid)dy Martin, and Mohsen Mostafavi (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2006), though none of the essays in this collection by Cornell faculty discuss publicly engaged humanities work of the kind focused on by Imagining America or Campus Compact.

scholastic selves will likely be abandoned, and their curriculums shrink the way that the once mighty Classics departments went from dominance to marginality. My speculation is that the future of the humanities will depend upon two interrelated innovations: the organized implementation of project-based engaged learning and scholarship, on the one hand, and the continued advancement of digital and new media learning and scholarship, on the other hand.⁴ One thing these two innovations have in common is their attention to, and redefinitions of, the “public,” especially in relation to the purpose and practice of higher education. In the wake of the critique of traditional humanities work for its racial, gender, class, and nationalist or imperialist biases, we must take seriously the continued importance of expanding who we mean when we say “the public,” and to whom our work is accountable. The issue of accountability, in turn intersects with the need to assess the outcomes of our practices, both in terms of student learning and community benefit. Humanities faculty have found the institutional pressure to increase assessment difficult to manage, beyond pointing towards such artifacts as the quiz, test, or student paper. Assessments of community benefit may be just as perfunctory, as in post-event surveys and reports of attendance. It may be that the kinds of projects made possible by community engagement, service learning, participatory action research, and multimedia production can enhance the possibilities for demonstrating achievements in learning and community development, bringing along other skills such as collaboration, intercultural communication, and digital literacy.

As the Curriculum Project Report shows, practitioners in the arts have successfully created hundreds of outstanding examples of projects that advance community cultural development, enrich democratic dialogue, create exciting aesthetic advances, and fashion meaningful collaborations among diverse partners. A wealth of examples and possibilities can be explored

⁴ I am indebted to Kathleen Woodward for sharing a draft of her excellent essay on “The Future of the Humanities—in the Present and in Public,” which appeared in a special issue of *Daedalus* titled “Reflecting on the Humanities,” 138:1 (2009). 110-23. Readers interested in the subject of the public humanities could do no better than to begin their research with Woodward’s essay.

through the Community Arts Network site⁵ as well as at the “Project Profile Database” of Animating Democracy (a program of Americans for the Arts).⁶ These examples, however, focus mostly on projects originating in community organizations or art organizations rather than on campus or in university-community collaborations. That said, we have to acknowledge that historically the arts have been more at home with collaborative production and community engagement than the humanities, though many art schools and departments turn their noses up at community engagement as they concentrate on studio teaching of future artists. The humanities have tended toward solitary work whose results may be presented publicly, but are not designed to do so and often make the transition awkwardly or in static, almost ceremonial presentations. While a large body of collaborative art projects testifies to how students, faculty, and community can join together on the creation and execution of work that advances the public good, there is less precedent when it comes to collaborative knowledge-making in the humanities. Humanities research has tended towards the museum and library (and now the online database), rather than towards knowledge produced through community engagement. Social science disciplines, of course, often focus on studying the community, though such research has often been of a kind that makes the community an object of study, not a partner in its design or implementation or assessment. Both social science and humanities disciplines, however, have included participatory and community based action research in various areas, public history and oral history projects, literacy campaigns, and some kinds of documentation initiatives and event commemorations, though these, too, are often asymmetrical in terms of university-community relations.

⁵ <http://www.communityarts.net/>

⁶ The Animating Democracy site explains that it is “based on the premise that democracy is animated when an informed public is engaged in the issues affecting people’s daily lives. The arts and humanities can contribute unique programs, settings, and creative approaches that reach new and diverse participants, stimulate public dialogue about civic issues, and inspire action to make change.”
http://www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/resources/resources_008.asp.

Despite these obstacles, service learning and engaged curriculum projects in the humanities and social sciences have become a major avenue for public scholarship in the last ten years, helping to create collaborations in which university and community partners share in the design, execution, and analysis of intellectual projects that have real-life impact. Though initially more oriented towards “doing for” the community than collaborating with it, service learning practices have recently begun to move more toward the kind of collaborative ethic espoused by community engagement models. These kinds of innovations have been bolstered by the legacy of Ernest Boyer’s campaign on behalf of the “scholarship of engagement” and by national consortia such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities and Campus Compact. The emphasis, however, has been more on student learning than on getting the university’s research mission in synch with its commitment to engagement, though Campus Compact has begun to change direction by initiating the Research University Civic Engagement Initiative.⁷ Many humanities faculty and students have testified to the excitement of such projects and the prospect they offer for rejuvenating humanities education and salvaging the reputation of the humanities with the public. Appreciation for what we call “public humanities” has always been fairly strong, as in support for museums, symphonies, libraries, film series, music performances, and literary readings, for example (though support has waned and looks paltry compared to, say, some countries in Europe). Many campuses have a humanities center that showcases research, sponsors lectures, and otherwise does public programming without connecting to an engaged curriculum or community development project.⁸ “Public scholarship” and engaged curriculums are a different thing, naming

⁷ <http://www.compact.org/initiatives/civic-engagement-at-research-universities/>. For a thorough account see Timothy K. Stanton, “New Times Demand New Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Engagement at Research Universities.” *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice* 3:1 (2008): 19-42.

⁸ See the description of “public humanities” on the site of the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage at Brown University. Their thoughtful mission statement appears not to include the kinds of collaborative cultural development work with a social justice orientation being focused on by this essay and *Imagining America*; they do include a useful list of other such centers: http://www.brown.edu/Research/JNBC/about_phach.php. Some, such as those at Emory and Santa Barbara, have recently closed.

projects of collaborative knowledge-creation involving teams of individuals and organizations from on and off-campus in quite complex partnerships that sometimes take years to create.⁹

Yet some humanities institutes have leveraged their resources and readjusted their missions to create successful, innovative programs of community-university collaboration, such as those at the University of Texas and the University of Washington. Founded in 2001, the Institute at UT Austin consciously aimed to augment the traditional activities of such organizations “by actively fostering public access to and involvement in humanistic inquiry” (39)¹⁰. Moreover, as founding Director Evan Carton explains, the Institute also struggled to get beyond “outreach” models of engagement that always privileged the campus over the community: “the outreach model reinforces conventional academic and public conceptions about the legitimate production and ownership of knowledge. A vital practice of the humanities, we believe, depends upon the breakdown of this hierarchy and this conception” in which all expertise rests with the academic experts (40). Instead, as the Curriculum Project Report found, partnerships need to be “reciprocal and collaborative,” producing knowledge through jointly designed activities and “ensuring that community engagement projects serve communities as well as they do students” (56). Through a long-term process of dialogues, Texas eventually devised the “Writing Austin’s Lives” project, which “would elicit and collect family histories, personal experiences, and diverse visions of life,” and hundreds of citizen-writers responded. The project “overturned the top-down dissemination from the university *to* the community” that other Institute programs “continued to reinforce” (41). Gale

⁹ For some definitions of “engaged scholarship” and its potential at the research university, see Cynthia Gibson, “Research Universities and Engaged Scholarship: A Leadership Agenda for Renewing the Civic Mission of Higher Education.” <http://www.compact.org/resources/future-of-campus-engagement/research-universities-and-engaged-scholarship-a-leadership-agenda-for-renewing-the-civic-mission-of-higher-education/4250/>. Stanton writes that “Engaged research must have an intentional *public purpose* and direct or indirect benefit to a community. . . . a public purpose beyond developing new knowledge for its own sake” (p. 24).

¹⁰ Gale and Carton, “Toward the Practice of the Humanities.” References given parenthetically. Compare, for contrast, the Portland Center for Public Humanities at Portland State, which appears to be in a more traditional mold: <http://culturalstudies.english.pdx.edu/about.html>

and Carton’s thoughtful essay on their work embodies the kind of “self-critical awareness” that the Curriculum Report identifies as a key ingredient in successful engagement.

A similar transformation occurred at the University of Washington’s Simpson Center for the Humanities, led by Kathleen Woodward. The Center helped sponsor the exemplary Seattle Labor History and Civil Rights Project¹¹ and just received a large NEH challenge grant for innovation in the digital humanities, including “the public circulation of our scholarship.”¹² While the Simpson Center continues to fund faculty fellowships, interdisciplinary scholarship, and public lecture programs, it has expanded its scope with such initiatives as its “Public Humanities Institute for Doctoral Students” and the “Teachers as Scholars” program. The Institute’s purpose is “to put public scholarship in the portfolios carried by our doctoral students into their future and thus to help bring about the structural change in higher education” that sustainable engagement requires;¹³ the Teachers program is “designed to ignite and sustain the intellectual interests of K-12 teachers. It joins primary and secondary school teachers with university faculty in an educational environment that enriches the teaching and learning of both groups.”¹⁴ These and similar efforts demonstrate how strategic reorientation of traditional humanities programs—following the principles of reciprocity and collaboration and guided by concerns for social justice and community cultural development—can produce concrete, replicable results.

Of course sometimes you have to start from scratch. Stanford University’s Haas Center for Public Service (begun in 1984 and named in 1989) has grown in two decades into a model for

¹¹ <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/about.htm>

¹² See http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/projects_neh_digital_commons.htm.

¹³ Woodward, “The Future of the Humanities,” p. 113. Woodward discusses a number of other humanities centers doing new public work. The Simpson Center is advancing plans for a Graduate Certificate in Public Scholarship.

¹⁴ http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/courses_teachers.htm

fostering the connection of academic study with community and public service. It coordinates a rich array of opportunities for students, faculty, and community organizations, with a focus on leadership training and careers in public service. Humanities departments are scarcely represented in its course list, however, except for some sections of Writing and Rhetoric (some social science classes on race, ethnicity, and gender do appear). At the University of Michigan, the “Arts of Citizenship” program was founded in 1998 under the directorship of David Scobey (now Director of the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships at Bates College). AOC stood out early on for the collaborative process it followed with community organizations in the Detroit and Ann Arbor areas, helping to bridge the chasm between these areas and the ivory towers of the University of Michigan with a diversity of projects. When we here at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee set out to design what became the Cultures and Communities (CC) Program, AOC served as a model, particularly for the way it used small grants to create university-community partnerships that were truly reciprocal and met needs articulated by the community partners.

At UWM we fashioned CC quite differently from a humanities or arts institute. We adapted the AOC “mini-grant” model, and have now awarded more than thirty over nine years to fund an array of collaborations. These have included a city-wide commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Milwaukee’s Open Housing marches (soon to be a teaching-resource web site); a Holocaust education partnership with the Milwaukee Jewish Council; a multi-year oral history collaboration with an African American neighborhood revitalization group; an oral and video documentation initiative focused on black men in Milwaukee; a collaboration with the Milwaukee Muslim Women’s Society on “Combating Islamophobia”; two community-based day-long conferences on finding “common ground” against racism, sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Milwaukee; and a Hmong Arts preservation initiative.¹⁵ Reciprocity begins with the application, which must be a collaborative

¹⁵ For detailed lists and descriptions, see <http://www4.uwm.edu/milwaukeeidea/cc/cup/index.html>.

project proposed by a community partner and a university entity (faculty, student, or staff). The CC staff (led by Associate Director Cheryl Ajiro-tutu) mentors applicants, nurtures new relationships among partners, and oversees the receipt of the reports from grantees that become the basis for assessing outcomes. Another CC wing sponsors an undergraduate minor in multicultural studies, which includes a service-learning requirement. That requirement is in turn administered by CC's Institute for Service Learning, which is thus tied directly to the curriculum and which works closely with the grants office in expanding opportunities for new community partners to come aboard. Small awards to faculty continue to support curriculum development, public events, and other engagement projects. Campus participants have come from the College of Letters and Science as well as the schools of Education, Arts, Information Science, and Architecture and Urban Planning.¹⁶ We differ from a humanities institute in our administration of a degree curriculum emphasizing multiculturalism and community engagement, and thus in the way we integrate courses, advising, service learning, grants, and public programming. UWM's Center for 21st Century Studies remains the campus's premier humanities/social science institute in the traditional mold; however, spurred by UWM's membership in Imagining America, the two offices are now working together on a planned series of events focused on exploring the meaning and methods of "public scholarship."¹⁷

I am not going to prophesy that public scholarship represents the (immediate) future of the humanities, at least in the practical sense. It's too expensive and time-consuming, and too peripheral in the eyes of those administering the university's primary commitments to undergraduate education and advanced research. Undergraduates can be efficiently processed and credentialed through huge lecture courses largely managed by teaching assistants, whereas engaged classes typically require small cohorts working closely with a faculty member who has

¹⁶ For more information see <http://www.cc.uwm.edu>; the "Publications" link includes essays on the history, design, and outcomes of the program.

¹⁷ For another promising model, see the Public Humanities Collaborative at Michigan State University: <http://www.phc.msu.edu/about.php>.

designed the project or assignment. Some administrators may only become interested in service learning when they realize that it might free-up more classroom space, as students could be out volunteering in the community instead of attending discussion sections. Public scholarship may also not be the future of the humanities because many scholars come to their careers with solitary temperaments and a tendency to see the attachment of scholarship to public purposes as either crudely instrumental or simply a “service” dimension of their labor that cannot be counted like a publication. (It is probably also the case that public-minded scholars are pushed out of the profession early on by its biases.) As the work of the Simpson Center above shows, graduate education in the humanities would have to be substantially reengineered if we were to produce future faculty adept at public scholarship, knowledgeable in its methods, educated in its history, able to critique its examples, and ready to use it to further their research agenda.

II. Out of the Tower and Into the Street: The Humanities After 1968

It would be misleading, however, to think that simply undertaking structural innovations on campus to connect “the humanities” to the community or to public scholarship would suffice. As already suggested, there isn’t a consensus about what “the humanities” include or stand for; thus just as we need “critical reflection” on how we engage the community, we need to join with the community in critical reflection on what we mean by “the humanities” and what we want from them.¹⁸ Since the 1960s, a critique of the humanities grew along two fronts. First, the socio-political movements on behalf of oppressed or exploited identity groups challenged the presumptive

¹⁸ Edward Ayers reminds us that the phrase “the humanities” is only about a hundred years old, and was invented as an academic bureaucratic device or “secular glue” to “hold together the disparate components of a higher education system assembled from elements of German research universities, Oxbridge tutelage, and French training for civil service.” It really took root when adopted in the 1930s “in the curricula of elite institutions from the Ivy League to Chicago to Berkeley” and was adopted as the anchor for most “general education” programs. Today we need to argue that community engagement and public scholarship, along with their social justice concerns, should be at the heart of new models for “general education.” See Ayers, “Where the Humanities Live.” *Daedalus* 138:1 (2009): 25.

universalism of the academic humanities formation, exposing the degree to which previous canonized views of what it meant to be human restricted that image to whites and males and the rich and powerful. As classically defined, “liberal arts” had been so-called because of their intended effect of liberating the mind from superstition and bias (and, in class terms, as appropriate to free men but not slaves); in practice the institutionalization of the humanities in American colleges and universities too often became a matter of simply credentializing the ruling class or assimilating new members to the ideological club of the elite. Beginning in the 1960s, expansion of who we studied in the humanities coincided with an expansion of who was allowed to study the humanities, by which I refer to the opening up of college education to women and people of color (though for the latter, this opening remains narrow and perhaps once more closing). At least in terms of scholarly interest and student enrollment, it can be argued that the future of the humanities lies in these new areas, and in the study of cultural globalization, though the preponderance of humanities enrollments remain tilted towards women and whites, while students of color, often being first generation college students, look to major with more sure vocational and financial benefits.

Second, the theory revolution from the 1960s through the 1990s brought paradoxical changes to the relation of humanities work to the public. On the one hand, the rise of structuralist and post-structuralist analysis injected socio-political concerns into humanities scholarship in ways that challenged the dominant models of aesthetic formalism and historical objectivity. Though sometimes castigated for abstruse philosophizing and an eccentric focus on linguistic and anthropological meta-theory, the French influenced theorists were actually offering a rejuvenated, reengineered, or regurgitated school of ideological critique firmly grounded in the traditions of Marxism and existentialism (with not a little bit of psychoanalysis thrown in). The theory revolution was concentrated in departments of English and Comparative Literature, but also had an impact among historians, religious studies scholars, students of art and music, and even philosophers (though American academic philosophy departments were mainly hostile to

Continental speculation). Although branded as a kind of “theoretical antihumanism,” with its antipathy to “bourgeois individualism” and its focus on “the subject” rather than “the person,” postmodern theory continued the tradition of critical thinking, interdisciplinarity, debate over values, and the posing of profound philosophical questions typical of humanities scholarship.¹⁹ When post-structuralism in turn gave way to the rise of what called itself “cultural studies,” the turn both underscored the inherently socio-political caste of Theory’s concerns and revamped the program in substantial ways.

The publics spoken to by Paul de Man and Michel Foucault and Helen Cixous differed radically from those at the base of the cultural studies paradigm advocated by Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton (and in the educational field by Paolo Freire, in theatre by Augusto Boal, and in feminism by Adrienne Rich). For cultural studies people, scholarship should not only address the concerns of the public and the marginalized and the working class, it should emerge in some way out of collaboration with them (hence the resonance with “critical pedagogy”). Though often in contentious debate with other wings of the theory revolution, cultural studies scholars advocated a neo-Marxist scholarship of praxis that departed radically from the formalism of previous modernist critics, and so shared much of the expanded agenda of the post-structuralists. But neither the post-structuralists nor the cultural studies scholars wrote in ways accessible to a large common reading public, nor did they spend much time in active collaboration with schools, museums, social agencies, or community organizations, despite the claim of their scholarship to be working on behalf of a libratory politics. Of course there have been exceptions, as one can see in the changing direction of the American Studies Association over the last two decades, which has ventured strongly into the arenas of post-nationalist critique and opened the doors to community studies and

¹⁹ See Biodun Jeyifo, “Humanities—With or Without Humanism,” in Lepage et al, *Do the Humanities Have to Be Useful*, p. 61-65.

collaboration.²⁰ In retrospect it appears that the scholarship of Theory was easily accommodated by the institutional regimes of publication, tenure, and a new “star system” of celebrity thinkers who appealed to an exclusively academic audience in contrast to an earlier generation of “public intellectuals.” The public for the humanities may actually have shrunk in part because of this esotericism, which also did not succeed in building any kind of funding base in the form of government grants or foundation dollars, leaving it vulnerable when the downturn came.

In this short history of changing publics, I want briefly to acknowledge the revolution done by historians and sociologists in retrieving, documenting, writing, and representing the histories of those previously left out of the American story.²¹ Education in American history had been, ever since the rise of universal public schooling at the end of the nineteenth-century, explicitly an instrument for the fashioning of an American public imbued with authorized American values and able to repeat canonical stories that embodied authorized American beliefs. While this instrumental use of history education was most obviously visible in the way schools and colleges rose to the challenge of assimilating the unprecedented millions who immigrated to the United States from the 1870s through the 1920s, this instrumentalization of history education also underwrote the curriculums generally distributed to all school children and written into stone by textbook publishers and their school-board allies. I shall never forget my eleventh-grade U.S. history class where, in the back of the room, the newly-minted teacher had placed a bookshelf with optional readings to supplement the standard textbook. It was there that I found Lerone Bennet’s *Before the*

²⁰ See George J. Sanchez, “Working at the Crossroads: American Studies for the 21st Century. Presidential Address to the American Studies Association November 9, 2001.” *American Quarterly* 54:1 (2002): 1-23. For one example of new directions, see the M.A. in Cultural Studies at the University of Washington-Bothell, which advertises itself as “one of very few programs nationally, to partner the interdisciplinary study of art and culture with a community-based learning network. The program offers students multiple opportunities to develop and document educational experiences and professional skills suited to their individual career goals.” <http://www.uwb.edu/IAS/mac/>.

²¹ Much vital primary research scholarship in literary studies has also recovered dozens of texts and writers, primarily women and people of color, in a successful effort to alter the canon.

Mayflower, which opened my naïve eyes to African American history and the existence of a public that was otherwise invisible in my suburban universe. In the forty years that have followed, we have seen an outpouring of scholarship in the areas of race, gender, and class of unprecedented quality, substance, and scope. The history of presidents, wars, and white men has begun to give way to far more comprehensive accounts, typified by summary volumes such as Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* and Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*.

Books such as those by Zinn and Takaki reach a large public, and shape that public in turn. Though I am by trade an English professor, I cannot think of a recent work of literary criticism or theory that has accomplished a parallel task with such success.²² Perhaps for the discipline of history there is a tradition of public history that makes such work acceptable and rewarded, especially when done by the already-tenured. The language and stories in the Zinn and Takaki books, moreover, tell the tale in a style accessible to a large public, an accomplishment that ironically still eludes most literary critics. As the Internet has become a friendly resource for much of the public, it has also become a ready vehicle for communicating the new social history. Today you can google Frederick Douglass or Elizabeth Cady Stanton or the Chinese Exclusion Act or the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire and find a wealth of documents, photographs, videos, and interpretative accounts far beyond anything the historian of the 1950s or 1960s could have imagined, and certainly beyond what the public of the twentieth-century could easily learn. Moreover, students and non-academics can become workers in history themselves, analyzing the primary material, even becoming the original gatherers and archivists, so that history is literally being written by the public instead of for the public. This phenomenon can be witnessed at the "Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History" at <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/> site. Opening authorship of knowledge this

²² Perhaps one could nominate *Orientalism* by Edward Said, whose career as a public intellectual defied most academic norms.

way makes for major abuses and errors, of course, but anyone who has dipped into the pro-Ku Klux Klan pages of Woodrow Wilson's influential 1902 *History of the American People* can tell you that peer review and publication by a major press of an Ivy League professor's research doesn't guarantee that it is without bias.

These major trends in the humanities since the 1960s have dwarfed simultaneous efforts to enlarge the practices of community engagement and public scholarship by institutions of higher education. The original Curriculum Project report documents many fine examples, but these stand out exactly because they are exceptions to normative campus goals, structures, and reward systems. For decades the triumvirate of "teaching, research, and service" has ruled, with "service" a distinctly less-rewarded and less-respected afterthought in the typical academic's work-load. Usually projects in community engagement or public arts and humanities are mistakenly categorized as "service" rather than knowledge production, and so downgraded. Some debate about this value system is recurrent, as one can see in looking at the reception of Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, his 1990 Carnegie Foundation report which attempted to replace the triumvirate with a quadruped: the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching.²³ This proposal did have the advantage of trying to separate engagement from service. Yet though widely discussed, Boyer's reform never took hold widely. In the present context, one can observe that insofar as the "application" category was intended to subsume engagement, it perpetuated a "missionary" model in which knowledge was first created on campus and then "applied" to "problems" off-campus, effectively pathologizing the community and future campus partners.

²³ Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (New York: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

Engagement has been powerfully instantiated and successful on a number of campuses through service learning programs. While the term “service” unfortunately plays into the biases of the old paradigm, many of the projects do not, arising out of collaborative knowledge or art-making enterprises in which community partners hold positions of leadership, and even do some or much of the teaching. The service learning movement can be, I would argue, a strong ally in advancing the vision of engagement contained in the Curriculum Project report, and vice versa. But this will require that we continue to debate and refine the aims, underlying values, and institutional politics of engaged and public scholarship. In the rest of this discussion, I will highlight some key points in this debate, and do so in terms that stress commonalities across the arts, humanities and social sciences, and design. While each discipline faces unique challenges, it would be wise to frame these against a common set of institutional and social conditions.

III. Public Scholarship: Ten Key Points for Reflection

1. *Community Engagement versus the Political Economy of Higher Education*

As general support revenues fall, campuses are more reliant on outside grants and tuition revenue. Activities that do not bring in outside revenue are marginalized and further defunded. Activities not integrated with curriculum and enrollments are also de-prioritized, since they do not produce tuition dollars. Engagement, service projects, and public arts or humanities events are seen as “loss leaders” at best, and among the first targets when budgets must be cut. The public support for a campus generated by such engagement is impossible to immediately be capitalized on as increased revenue; if directed at less economically prosperous parts of the community, such engagement also does not create an alumni capable of giving back in the form of foundation donations. Service or project-based learning usually limits class size and is thus expensive. How do we “go to scale” with engagement given these constraints? **For academic and financial reasons, then, engagement should be structured into the university’s core**

curriculum, especially in areas of general requirements, so that engagement and tuition dollars reinforce rather than conflict, and students come to see engagement as a valued and normative aspect of the campus's mission.

2. ***“That Doesn’t Count”: Institutional Barriers to Engagement and Public Scholarship***

Academic institutional structures, policies, and reward systems work against community engagement practices in multiple, often intentional, ways. While there are differences specific to disciplines, the general resistance takes the same form (“that doesn’t count,” “that isn’t valued,” “that is amateurish,” “that is service not scholarship,” etc). Advocates should take a page from the Imagining America Tenure Team Initiative report and argue that engagement resides on a “continuum of scholarship,” not separate from it. **Engagement and publicly-oriented humanities or art work are forms of research and of the production of new knowledge.** Project participants need to design this claim and its outcomes into the plan from the start and produce objects that can document the achievement of them and so substantiate assessment. Do not cede the ground of “research” or “scholarship” to others while vainly hoping to persuade powerful interest groups or administrators that community engagement is so wonderful. ***Don’t argue that engagement should be valued equally with research and scholarship; show them that engagement IS research and scholarship, though it is also so much more.***²⁴

Most campuses have one or more offices, centers, or units supporting various kinds of engagement or public scholarship, but these are rarely affiliated with an academic department, which is the unit that holds the real power on campus. Engagement gets outsourced and marginalized, and is not seen as part of the essential or required work done by the core

²⁴ For one way to make these links, explore the Research Service Learning: Scholarship with a Civic Mission program at Duke University: <http://rslduke.mc.duke.edu/rsl.htm>.

institutional players. While it is true that many campuses lack offices or centers or programs for training and supporting faculty and students doing engaged work, it is also true that when these do exist, they function peripherally. Bringing engagement into the structures sponsored by departments (requirements for courses and the major, scholarships, tenure and promotion criteria, etc.) is thus vital. In lieu of that, we should labor to **connect all the offices and units sponsoring engagement to form a network that can advocate on behalf of public scholarship and the engaged arts.**²⁵

3. What Comes First, the Discipline or the Community?

Faculty are trained to have a primary affiliation with and loyalty to their discipline: they see themselves as belonging to a “profession” first—as dancers, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, English teachers, etc. They do not limit their focus to a locale, which would be seen as “provincial.” Merit is largely determined nationally, even internationally, through peer reviewed publication/performance and job mobility. Going local is not always respected or valued by our disciplinary structures of assessment. The traditional models of disciplines and departments value national or international relationships and institutions, not local engagement or connection. Faculty are encouraged to move among jobs and not to become “tied down” to their locale (many do not subscribe to the local paper but get the New York Times instead).

²⁵ See, for example, the creation of the Public Humanities Collaborative at Michigan State University, which “provides a gathering place, a ‘commons,’ where MSU faculty, students, and outreach professionals from the arts, humanities, and design disciplines can collaborate with community groups, build strong campus-community partnerships, enhance public understanding of liberal arts for democracy, and engage in cultural work that serves the public interest.” <http://www.phc.msu.edu/about.php>.

A major challenge will be to articulate projects as “glocal,” at once embedded in local conditions and still examining forces, ideas, and trends that are global in origin and effect.²⁶ Because of the disciplinary provinciality of departments (which restrict merit review to other practitioners within their own guild), interdisciplinary centers and institutes are often more successful partners in sponsoring engagement. As government support for higher education withers, **campuses can strengthen their support base by reorienting curriculums along lines of engagement and local impact rather than continue ivory-tower practices that disconnect campus and community.** Some of the more successful examples of maintaining disciplinary focus while reaching out to the community appear in programs that bring university or college scholars into the public schools. Examples include the Public Humanities Initiative at Rice University²⁷ and Humanities Out There at the University of California at Irvine.²⁸ These initiatives also show how an institutionalization of engagement can flourish when a strong, focused partnership is built around well-identified needs and given adequate and appropriate staff.

4. Educating the Students/Practitioners

Whatever their disciplinary home, students and practitioners (including staff and faculty) will need a common core of education in issues related to community engagement: race and class studies, white privilege, principles of organization based in mutuality, cultural identity theory, local history, techniques for reflection, etc. This may not be the kind of knowledge emphasized

²⁶ The Colorado Center for Public Humanities, for example, offers itself “as a think-tank” that “will investigate the public value of the humanities disciplines in relation to historical change by sponsoring programs that help to clarify the roles that humanities-based scholarship can play within the region, the nation, and the world more generally” and promises that it will “encourage interaction between the scholar and the wider public by matching scholars with particular communities, funding appropriate research activities, and supporting the production of books, film, and web-based conversation that are aimed at extra-academic groups.” <http://clas.cudenver.edu/publichumanities/about.html>.

²⁷ <http://www.publichumanities.org/>.

²⁸ <http://hot.hnet.uci.edu/>.

in, or even covered by, the usual training or normative scholarship in the discipline. Faculty in economics, for example, would be wise to read about and reflect upon white privilege before engaging in a project with a neighborhood group from a “minority” area. Students from a wealthy university need to reflect upon their own class position and cultural identity before going to work as tutors in local schools or assistants at a food pantry or as ESL instructors.²⁹ (Everyone, for example, could read Allen Johnson’s *Privilege, Power, and Difference*.)³⁰

Successful community engagement requires critical reflection on diversity and multiculturalism, since it almost always involves asymmetries of power in relationships among individuals from distinctly different backgrounds who may have had little or no previous contact because of the continued segregation of our metropolitan areas. Reflection activities (journals, essays, performance, online discussion, etc.) about these issues should be threaded throughout the project.³¹ Assessment of outcomes should include measuring the impact of engagement on the attitudes and knowledge of students and faculty in the area of diversity; specific projects might also be assessed for their contribution to addressing community conflicts around race or gender or nationality or religion.

²⁹ See Gregory Jay, “Service Learning, Multiculturalism, and the Pedagogies of Difference,” *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 8:2 (2008). 255-80.

³⁰ Allen Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. 2nd edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2005.

³¹ For a valuable set of essays on this topic, see Carolyn O’Grady, ed., *Integrating Service Learning and Multicultural Education in Colleges and Universities* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

5. The Necessity for Asset Mapping of Community and Participants

The community is a set of assets, not an amalgam of deficits. Expertise resides in the community as well as on campus. **Preparation for engagement should include a collaborative mapping of community assets beneficial to the project.** All the participants bring a variety of skills and knowledge to the collaboration. These need to be mapped early on and the project in part shaped by what people bring to it, with recognition that **not all authority need be academic.** Participants need to feel empowered to use their skills and to experiment in order to grow. The project should proceed on the basis of mapped assets as well as identified challenges, with each partner contributing to the overall inventory.

Preparation of faculty and students should thus include an explicit critique of the “missionary” position taken formerly by campuses towards communities, and a recognition that community partners stand in the position of educators in relation to faculty as well as students. Students should assess the skills and talents they bring to the partnership and offer ways that these can be put to use; partners and faculty should likewise **see students as bringing resources, not empty heads or bleeding hearts.**

6. Sustainability: Turning Projects into Partnerships

Examples abound of outstanding one-time projects linking campus and community. These can take an enormous amount of energy and result in a high level of knowledge for all participants; unfortunately, unless the project turns into a partnership, the return on the investment of time, resources, and passion is limited. Moreover, a community partner can be left standing at the altar after one or two semesters, abandoned (yet again) by a campus that then seems to be practicing “drive by” engagement. While we should not abandon limited-term projects, **programs should strive to engage communities in ways that create long-term**

partnerships. Ideally, projects should be such that different cohorts of students from different classes over multiple years can “plug in” to them. Such sustained programmatic engagement is also more likely to find outside funding but will require commitment of initial seed money by campus. If there is a service learning program, then sustainability may be achieved by planning for multiple classes to work with the partner over the years.

7. Sustainability: Institutionalizing Engaged Courses

Most engaged class offerings are the product of the initiative of one or two faculty and a group of students, who use a regularly listed course as the platform for their project. Much work goes into redesigning the syllabus for the course, creating reflection assignments for students, meeting with community partners, building assessment instruments, etc. When that particular faculty member moves on and someone else is assigned to teach the class, the engaged component may be dropped, and all that work lost. Sustainability involves having engagement written into the prescribed course description in the course catalogue and securing commitment from the department to support that component whenever the class is offered. Even better, **making an engagement experience or service learning class a requirement for the major, for a minor or a certificate program, or for the college’s general education requirements will enormously strengthen sustainability** and drive resources, and enrollments, in the right direction. Sustainability also depends on assessment and the “feedback loop.” Projects and syllabi should have clearly stated objectives for outcomes and be able to assess whether these have been met, and what further initiatives initial successes suggest. If outcomes fall short, campus and community partners can identify weak spots, misunderstandings, resource limits, and devise a mutually agreed-upon set of action steps. The campus’s central office for data analysis and institutional research should become a partner in structuring and implementing long-term engagement assessment.

8. Reexamining Course Goals, Learning Outcomes, and Assessment

The goals of engaged projects and classes may differ from the goals of traditional courses and programs. Traditional curriculums emphasize the production of an object (a work of art, a performance, an essay or monograph) whose quality is measured irrespective of any value to a community or a larger social purpose. **Engaged practice begins with the goal of community cultural, social, and/or economic development and the advancement of social justice;** it is measured by such rubrics as extent and diversity of participants, impact on an identified community need, effective communication, innovation or dissemination of successful techniques for collaboration, expansion of the information base beyond traditional academic materials, transformations in self-understanding of participants, etc. Engaged curriculums will need to specify these revised goals and outcomes on the syllabus at the outset, and make clear how their achievement will be measured.

9. Balancing Work Loads for Faculty, Students, and Community Partners

Engagement courses and projects often add substantially to everybody's workload, at least initially. For faculty there may be months of preparation, including research, meetings, fund raising, syllabus design, and the training of students or staff. Campus resources are rarely allocated to support this work, though they ought to be. This is where a center or institute can play a crucial role in providing information on best practices, bibliographies, community contacts, and active networking with experienced faculty who have already done this kind of work. Students, too, will at first complain when their own workload now includes going off-campus to labor at times other than that on the course schedule. **Faculty should be realistic in recognizing the additional burdens being placed on student time and thus make reductions in other parts of the syllabus.** When planning a project with a community partner, **faculty and students should be aware of the danger of adding to the workload of already**

overburdened non-profits with small staffs and limited resources. The more we ask of partners (help teach, write evaluations, review syllabi, come to conferences, etc.) the less time they have for the work they are trying to do, so that the partnership becomes a negative rather than a positive. Campus resources are not often available to compensate partners for their time, so every effort should be made to husband extra-mural resources to channel back to community agencies in compensation.

10. Diversity and Engagement

The disconnection between campus and community often appears dramatically when we look at the diversity, or lack thereof, among students, faculty, and staff. Recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color is a major priority at many campuses. Public scholarship and engaged arts practices can be positioned to address this issue on multiple fronts, and it should be a priority of our collaborations. **Engagement projects can be a bridge that brings underrepresented youth onto campus** and into relationships with college students and faculty who can encourage their ambitions and mentor their journey to higher education. In turn, a disproportionate number of engaged scholars and artists are faculty and staff of color, who hope to give back to their communities and strengthen their cultural and economic development. These faculty and staff are also thus the most vulnerable when tenure and promotion decisions become embroiled in debates over “research versus service.” Campuses should use the Imagining America Tenure Team Initiative report as a platform for debating **how research norms often oppress faculty and staff of color by marginalizing knowledge or artistic production done through local collaborations or addressing local concerns.**

IV. New Publics, New Media: Assessing the Future

These ten talking points certainly do not exhaust the subject of public scholarship, engagement, and the future of the humanities. In closing, however, I think it essential to raise one

last issue that cuts across the others: the advent of new media and the impact that the Internet and digital technology are having on higher education, our relation to public communities, and assessment of our work. The analysis can begin with this simple question: How is the challenge of doing “public scholarship” different for the humanities? Work in the arts and in design or architecture has an inherent public component, produced with some consideration of public display, or public installation, or public performance, and thereby as part of public conversation on various issues. Academics working in the humanities, in contrast, typically produce written texts, often as commentaries on other written texts. The production of such work is largely a solitary endeavor, and its consumption takes place individually, in private rather than public. Humanities work can certainly aim to intervene in public conversations on important issues, but the road to such influence lies through a cross-platform marketing of scholarship into more public venues—newspapers, magazines, trade press books, symposia, public lectures—that cannot themselves be the primary listed achievements in tenure and promotion deliberations. The rules for those deliberations forcefully limit the public reach of humanities scholarship. While this has been the situation now for decades, the advent of the Internet and digital culture may provide some breakthrough. Even in textual form, humanities work can now circulate much more broadly than in the day when it languished in the compact-shelving archive of the library. Once introduced into web formats, such scholarship also moves, often unintentionally, in the direction of multimedia, if only through the addition of graphics, illustration, YouTube links, or connections to other related work. Academics now build home pages and subject web sites (such as my site on “Whiteness Studies”) that serve as resource pages in the public sphere of the Internet. Multimedia scholarly e-journals such as *Vectors* represent the most cutting-edge effort at multimedia humanities scholarship, though the technological resources to produce such work remain in the hands of a very few, and the knowledge to create them a rarity.³² We simply are not trained to do so, and it can be argued that

³² <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/>. See also the innovative offering of space for wiki “collaboratories” by the

such multimedia authorship represents a different genre altogether from the academic paper or monograph that has been so normative for us. Yet the precipitous decline of the academic publishing apparatus, both in book and journal outlets, suggests that eventually the digital alternatives will supersede their hard-copy forerunners.

Whereas the new publics after the 1960s formed around categories of identity politics, the new publics of the 21st century are forming in and through networking, which connects people not only on the basis of avowed affiliation but also through media of interaction that cut across group barriers and create alliances of unexpected kinds. So as we debate the merits and character of “public scholarship,” we need to sustain the critique of the notion of the “public” that exploded forty or more years ago, when the narrow definition of who, or what, counted as the “public” was challenged by so many who had been excluded from it.

New media are changing the very nature of the “public,” and thus what we might conceive of as public scholarship. Across our society and culture we have witnessed enormous transformations in our way of life with the advent of these media, leading to unexpected changes in how we work, eat, play, love, and of course in how we represent these activities to one another. Indeed, the post-structuralists got at least this right—that the line between the practice of life and the representation of life was dissolving in the post-modern era. What new media have done, in part, is to accelerate this process to dizzying speeds and to extend its reach across virtually all dimensions of human interaction, with the added meta-benefit that we can watch ourselves and reflect on ourselves at the same time. No one should imagine that scholarship will be immune from the viral speedup of new media or their capacity for embroiling the representation of knowledge in the generally ungovernable network of information and sensation exchange. New media will

web site for *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, based on the book by that name edited by Glenn Hendler and Bruce Burgett and published by New York University Press (2007): <http://keywords.nyupress.org/>.

dramatically alter the future of the humanities, though it's far too early to predict exactly how. Will text messages and Twitter replace the analytical seminar discussion? Or as David Marshall asks, "is this a reconstitution of a public sphere in which the humanities can participate or is it the final fragmentation of the public into blogs?"³³

What we can say, however, is that new media are providing a platform for the process, content and dissemination of public scholarship. Students are learning new expressive and documentation techniques using photography and video and combining these with words and argumentation. Community partners are getting access to technology they would otherwise not be able to afford or know how to use. The outcomes of projects are being disseminated globally rather than only locally. Questions about inequalities of access and resources, of course, remain substantial, and not every project lends itself to multimedia. The use of such media, however, can go a long way towards demonstrating how student skills are being advanced through engagement projects, and their documentation through multimedia creates products that can then be the subject of assessment and evaluation in determining the research value and scholastic merit of the project.

Assessing the outcomes of public scholarship in the humanities presents challenges, whether that scholarship is done through old or new media. Traditional assessment of scholarship is by peer review. Who are the peers in engaged scholarship? Can community partners participate in tenure and promotion documentation and review? Are distinguished scholars who have never done engaged work really "peers" when it comes to reviewing the public work of their colleagues? Such review will require a set of criteria, benchmarks, and methods of assessment not yet in place.

³³ David Marshall, "Introduction," *The Humanities and Its Publics*, with contributions by Ivo Banac, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Robert Weisbuch. American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Paper, No. 61. 2005. http://www.acls.org/Publications/OP/61_Humanities_and_Publics.pdf

Peer review is well-designed to establish whether a scholarly article or monograph offers new knowledge or substantially alters previous concepts or data. This may be possible in the case of some public scholarship produced through community collaboration. Yet how do we (faculty, students, staff, community partners, funders) assess the benefits to the community, which are after all an essential aim of publicly engaged scholarship? Are we looking for a change of consciousness? Implementation of new programs? An increase in the number of participants in a given initiative? A tangible improvement in the lives of certain community members? Short-term gains? Long-term? These questions intersect with the abiding debate over whether scholarship should be instrumental at all, or remain the production of knowledge for its own sake.

Engaged practitioners will need to use all the media they can muster to navigate these questions, especially since documenting the outcomes of public scholarship may be crucial to their survival as campuses cut budgets. What I think we can assert with some confidence, however, is that the project-basis of most public scholarship means that there will be products that can help substantiate assessment, be they performative or textual or digital. We will need to intentionally design assessment into the original planning and execution of future projects, however, if we are to produce persuasive documentation. This will mean knowing what kinds of outcomes we are hoping for, and how we intend to measure them. If we can begin to lay these out in principle, then the specifics of their articulation within concrete projects will start to take shape organically. And that itself will need to be a collaborative enterprise, with an emphasis on documenting outcomes for both community and campus. If one outcome turns out to be the fashioning of a reality in which the campus is a member of the community instead of a stranger surveying it from distant shores, then we will know we're doing something right.