Review Essay

The Democratic Relevance of Knowledge: The Roots and Vision of Engagement in Practice

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Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey, and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the Twenty-First Century

Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, John Puckett, Matthew Hartley,
Rita A. Hodges, Francis E. Johnston, and Joann Weeks
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Knowledge for Social Change is an important book offered by some of the best minds in the civic engagement movement in higher education. They all have vast experience creating and implementing authentic democratic engagement through their different roles at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). Individually and collectively, they have made important contributions to the literature on higher education prior to this collaboration. And they have done a remarkable job of producing a collective work of clarity and coherence that comes across as a single voice and avoids repetition. It is a book that should be widely read by engaged scholars, practitioners, administrative leaders, and students of engagement. Their book builds off a robust literature about civic engagement at Penn, both by the authors, others at Penn, and scholars outside the university. The case they are making, in theory and practice, is that (a) assisted by universities, in a “neo-Deweyan conception, the neighborhood school becomes the core institution that provides comprehensive services, galvanizes other community institutions and groups, and helps solve the myriad problems that communities confront in a rapidly changing world” (p. xvii); and (b) “democratic-minded academics should form a worldwide movement . . . working systematically to radically transform the research university to *radically advance the advancement of learning and knowledge*” (emphasis in the original) (p. xii) through civic engagement.

Part I of the book, containing the first 5 chapters, provides the historical and philosophical context for the contemporary practice of community en-

gagement at the University of Pennsylvania, and through its infrastructure, the Netter Center for Community Partnerships. Chapter 1 begins with the foundational philosophical influence of Sir Francis Bacon, and sets the stage for the trajectory of the book with his influence on Benjamin Franklin, the conception of what became the University of Pennsylvania, the educational philosophy of John Dewey, and Dewey’s current influence on the structure and practice of civic engagement through the Netter Center. A radical vision means, by definition, going to the roots, and Bacon forms the roots of the Penn engagement agenda. It was Bacon who, in the early 1600s, offered a new philosophy of knowledge and science that “called for reformation of the educational system along civic lines” (p. 8) for the purpose of organizing knowledge and science “for the relief of man’s estate” (p. 16). Bacon’s claim, as the authors see it, “that organized research entailed both the production and use of knowledge” (p. 20) to advance the common good, inspired Franklin in the Philadelphia of Colonial America to start a college that would break the mold of European institutions (Chapter 2) in the best flourish of cultural independence and exceptionalism, creating the College of Philadelphia, which would become the University of Pennsylvania. The college that Franklin envisioned “would have had an *American* curriculum, taught in English, it would be pragmatic and utilitarian, suffused with ‘useful’ knowledge” (p. 23) and, as a distinctly American institution, it “exemplified secular humanism and practices Enlightenment ideals” (p. 24). Franklin’s innovations included learning linked to doing (later echoed

with Dewey) and higher learning that would not reproduce social stratification, but instead educate “a large number of non-elite members of a socially mobile, rising middle class, who would possess both the ‘Inclination’ and the ‘Ability’ to ‘serve Mankind, one’s Country, Friends, and Family’” (p. 29). That was the vision. Reality was something different. There is subtext that seems to run through the book, which is an abject failure of higher education to live up to its promise as an agent of democracy and vehicle for social betterment. Just as Bacon’s philosophy remained ethereal, Franklin’s vision was undermined by the trustees, who developed a traditional college that would become Penn. Franklin’s vision remained just that, a vision.

Chapter 3 diverts slightly from a Penn-centric narrative in order to fill in a wider context of the development of the research university in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and in particular to lay the foundations for Dewey’s philosophical development and later influence on the civic engagement work at Penn. Here we encounter William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, who had an evangelical view of the university as a “prophet of democracy” (p. 43), a place embedded in the issues and life of urban America with the purpose of serving the city and country and fulfilling the university’s democratic promise. It was Harper who brought Dewey to Chicago in 1894 to chair the Departments of Philosophy and Pedagogy. Earlier, at the University of Michigan, Dewey had shown little interest in education and schooling, but at Chicago he seemed deeply influenced by Harper’s interest in the city’s schools in the context of understanding that the problems of education are the problems of democracy. Dewey’s thinking about education and democracy was perhaps most shaped by his association with Jane Addams and her settlement, Hull House. Dewey became a close friend of Addams, and knew Hull House well from first-hand experience. As Dewey’s daughter, Jane M. Dewey (named for Jane Addams), prepared a biography of her father in 1939, she explained that his “faith in democracy . . . took on both a sharper and deeper meaning because of Hull House and Jane Addams.” (Quoted in Farrell, 1967, p. 69 n. 42; see also Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Saltmarsh, 1996, 2008). And, again, there is the modern university version of the Puritan Jeremiad, where Chicago becomes not a prophet of democracy but a traditional, disengaged, research university. Dewey would leave Chicago for Columbia, and Addams’ critique of higher education echoed into the 20th century: “the college” she wrote, “made the test of its success the mere collecting and disseminating of knowledge,

elevating the means into an end and falling in love with its own achievement.” (p. 32)

Yet it was at Chicago that Dewey developed his thinking about schooling and democracy and put forward the idea of “the school as social centre” (Chapter 4). It was also while at Chicago that he created the “laboratory school” as a place to test out his educational ideas. Not only was this a vibrant intellectual time for Dewey, it was when the fundamental philosophical ideas he proffered about education and democracy took root that has deeply influenced the civic engagement work at the University of Pennsylvania and more broadly. Dewey could see the possibilities of Bacon’s philosophical writings as he looked to reform schooling in the progressive era of early 20th century America.

Chapter 4 connects the past to the present. Dewey provides philosophical grounding for experiments in democratic education, and in doing so provides the foundations for the civic engagement work at Penn. Much of the material in this chapter draws on Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett’s 2007 book *Dewey’s Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform: Civic Society, Public Schools, and Democratic Citizenship* (see Saltmarsh, 2008). Dewey’s central contribution is what the authors call his 1902 “brilliantly prophetic, highly influential address, ‘the School as Social Centre’” (p. 55). Dewey called for what the authors describe as “the neighborhood school, a publicly owned site, to act as a publicly controlled and organized catalyst to bring people together and develop local coalitions of neighbors to solve a multitude of suddenly emerging problems” (p. 59). The authors’ critique of Dewey is that while he saw that the schooling system formed the strategic subsystem of democratic society, he failed to see that “universities are the most strategic component of society’s schooling system” (p. 49), as institutions that “have a significant influence on the norms, values, and practices of the preK-12 schooling system” (p. 68). Therefore, in the authors’ “neo-Deweyan conception, the neighborhood school becomes the core institution that provides comprehensive services, galvanizes other community institutions and groups, and helps solve the myriad problems that communities confront in a rapidly changing world” (p. xvii). Dewey also recognized that for the neighborhood school to effectively function as a social center, it would need additional resources and support. With Dewey as their guide, the authors “designed a historically and theoretically grounded, neo-Deweyan strategy called ‘university assisted community schools’ (UACS)” based on the idea “that community schools, appropriately developed and powerfully assisted by institutions of higher

education and other community organizations, can help create cohesive” (p. 65) communities in which individuals are active participants in developing civic life. This is the evolving, constantly refined strategy deployed by Penn since the early 1990s as it created a model for university-community engagement.

Chapter 5 places the developments at Penn within the larger context of a civic engagement movement in higher education taking place since the late 1970s. In 1985, Frank Newman, while at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, noted, “the advancement of civic learning . . . must become higher education’s most central goal” (p. xiv). Newman was instrumental in forming a national coalition of college and university presidents (Campus Compact) committed to find ways to advance that goal, primarily through public service and later through service-learning. The chapter nicely captures both the richness, complexity, and tensions of the development of the civic engagement movement. Penn was a bright light in that history, as it provided an institutional model and contributed significantly to building the larger movement. The chapter ends with the present, citing a 2012 report from the Association of American Colleges and Universities, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future*, which called on “universities to reclaim their democratic purposes by incorporating civic inquiry and civic problem solving into the curriculum” (p. 82). The observations about the movement are true for Penn as well: “a key challenge that remains is incorporating civic engagement into the core work of the academy – teaching, learning, and research” (p. 82).

Part II of the book shifts the focus from history and theory to local practice. The story of practice is the story of the mechanism for practicing campus-community partnerships, Penn’s Netter Center for Community Partnerships. The Netter Center is the name honoring the endowers of the center that had started in 1992 as the Center for Community Partnerships. The Center focused its work on the relationships between the University and the neighborhoods of West Philadelphia, of which the University is a part.

Chapter 6 tells the story of where Penn went wrong in the 20th century, and how efforts emerged late in the century not only to right its wrongs, but to remake the university so that it would not repeat patterns of ivory tower isolation and local disregard that had led Ernest Boyer in 1996 to observe that universities had become part of the problem instead of part of the solution in addressing pressing social problems. This is a brief but poignant chapter.

Part of it is a rather sordid story of Penn’s business school – the Wharton School – in the early 20th century. As with the great promise and dissolution of Franklin’s vision for the university, the Wharton School in the early years of the 20th century was a place where faculty connected their teaching and research to the immediate social issues of the city of Philadelphia, using knowledge for social change. It was the place that published studies like W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Philadelphia Negro*. Its faculty examined issues like municipal corruption and child labor in the textile mills. They examined earned and unearned income and inequality of wealth. They brought the issues of the city into their classrooms and connected their students with the economic, political, and social issues around them. While there was great promise for the kind of deep engagement of the university with the city envisioned by Bacon, Franklin, and later Dewey, it all crashed on the rocks of the interests of the wealthy trustees and benefactors of the university, and a house cleaning at Wharton so vicious that it would never return to this kind of social potential. In an era of debates over monuments and the histories they represent, it is telling that the statute that stands on a green today at Penn is of the Provost who cleaned house and fired the activist scholars, not of any of the activist scholars who have faded from memory.

The second part of the chapter is the story of Penn’s expansion into West Philadelphia in the 1960s and 70s with all the attendant horrors of urban renewal and gentrification that decimated neighborhoods and the lives of the most vulnerable. Only when the University felt the consequences of the social disintegration it had catalyzed did it find that its self-interest lay in a different path. As is often the case, students were ahead of campus leaders in pushing for change, and by the time the leadership came around it was the late 1970s. Interestingly, it was Martin Meyerson, Penn’s president from 1970–1981, and who was searching for a new future for the university in West Philadelphia (and perhaps truth and reconciliation), who gave an honorary degree to one of the economists fired from Wharton in 1915.

As told in Chapter 7, Meyerson’s shift was a portent of the future, where a succession of presidents committed to what the authors call “the Penn model” of developing and implementing an effective response to urban issues, and doing it in a way in which the University was a partner with the local communities in both advancing the core purposes of the university and the wellbeing of the community. At the epicenter of the model was the Netter Center, which, grounded in Dewey’s theory and the history of Penn and higher education in the U.S.,

implemented a dual strategy of academically-based community service (ABCS) – “community service rooted in and intrinsically connected to research, teaching, and learning” – and university-assisted community schools – providing “an organizing framework for ABCS courses” (p. 99) and center activities in West Philadelphia schools. The Netter Center

was based on the assumption that one highly effective and efficient way for Penn to serve its institutional self-interest and simultaneously carry out its academic mission was to focus on research and teaching on universal problems – problems of schooling, health care, and economic development, for example – that were manifested locally in West Philadelphia and the rest of the city. (p. 99)

The “Penn model” acknowledged “that Penn’s future and the future of Philadelphia are inextricably joined” (p. 107). The Netter Center was the enabling mechanism for implementing the model: “a mediating structure that would align Penn’s academic mission with community needs” (p. 107).

Chapters 8 and 9 offer significant detail on the impact of the Netter Center, both globally and through the kinds of Netter programs implemented to enhance the dual strategies for civic engagement. Practitioners will find these examples useful both for the contextual nuances described and the nitty gritty components of implementation. The examples are what ABCS and UACS look like in practice. The whole of chapter 9 is devoted to the intricacies of the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative (AUNI), “a comprehensive academically based community service (ABCS) program” that “emerged from the requests from West Philadelphia school and community partners to collaborate on health improvement projects” (p. 124). This detailed description of the AUNI makes visible how Penn “integrates research teaching, learning, and service in an approach that brings together a range of Penn’s social science, health, and medical resources, as well as the resources of the community partners at the Netter Center’s five university assisted community schools” (p. 124).

The final chapter restates the grand vision, linking it more forcefully to the kind of organization and culture change needed in institutions of higher education to carry out a vision of democratic engagement. It is a powerful vision with a compelling logic. “Universities – particularly research universities – are the primary shapers of the American schooling system overall” and their global reach “makes them particularly important partners in school systems reform, as well as in community-

wide improvement efforts” (p. 141). Universities are the agent “that can function simultaneously” as “preeminent local institutions (embedded anchors in their communities) and national and global ones (part of an increasingly interactive worldwide network” (p. 141). And as Dewey “forcefully argues, working to solve complex, real-world problems is the best way to advance knowledge and learning, as well as the general capacity of people and institutions” (p. 43). This chapter is not only about vision and potential, but offers a sober reminder that there is much work to do in reaching this vision on a school-wide level. Higher education, as a system, is deeply entrenched, struggles to define its public good mission, and has functioned as an engine of social and economic stratification instead of engine of equality and opportunity. “Commercialization and commodification” and the “fragmentation of disciplines, overspecialization, and divisions among the arts and sciences and the professions” that are manifested in universities’ “unintegrated, fragmented, internally conflicted structure and organization,” create obstacles that “impede understanding and developing solutions to complex human and societal problems” (p. 145-146). The civic engagement movement has come a long way in higher education, and at Penn, but it has a long way to go, and a tough path ahead.

I’m not sure we will find the way forward without some deeper, self-reflective, critical analysis of where we have been and where we are now. This is what I found missing in the book. I will offer that there are at least three ways to draw on the Penn experience to critically analyze its civic engagement work as a way to advance it. In Etienne’s 2012 book, *Pushing Back the Gates*, an unvarnished study of Penn’s engagement with West Philadelphia, the author maintains that successful engagement requires three ingredients: long-term, sustained, leadership; substantial infrastructure; and a widespread sense of self-interest. These can provide a useful framing for analysis.

Long-term Sustained Leadership

Since at least Martin Meyerson’s presidency in the 1970s, Penn has had a succession of presidents who have made engagement with West Philadelphia central to its mission. Presidents Hackney, Rodin, and Gutmann have all put their own mark on what that engagement looks like. There has been remarkable consistency, in part because of the guiding hand of the Netter Center and Ira Harkavy’s leadership. But there have been limits. At a prestige-driven, private research university, Presidents want safe investments and financial

stability to maintain and raise the prestige profile. Civic engagement can function in a way to ward off instability and outside pressures, and in doing so, essentially leave the core of the university untouched and isolated from an engagement agenda. The leadership at Penn has avoided upsetting this equation. To do otherwise, the President and Provost would have to take the lead in addressing real culture change, such as working with faculty to redefine a reward structure that values community engagement in promotion and tenure guidelines. Many campuses, at least since the late 1990s, have changed their guidelines. Penn has not pursued this. By not addressing this issue, the incentive for faculty to undertake community engagement as essential scholarly work is greatly diminished. When that happens, fulfilling an engagement agenda is left to individual faculty, often post-tenure, who have incentives other than university reward systems that motivate them. It also means that engagement will never be widespread, will not be embedded in departments and colleges, and will not be owned by the faculty across the institution. It would have been helpful for the authors to delve into a discussion of this element of institutional engagement; the role of the President, Provost, and Deans on the campus in leading this; and the role of the Netter Center (and centers generally) in leading change for creating faculty incentives and a culture of faculty rewards that values civic engagement across the faculty.

Along these lines, it would have been helpful if the authors had addressed the leadership role for the Netter Center to facilitate the ability of non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty to “own” community engagement. Simultaneous with a rise in civic engagement as core academic work and concomitant with the rise of neoliberalism, higher education has experienced an increase in the number of NTT faculty, to which even campuses such as Penn are not immune. The majority of all college faculty now work on part-time or full-time temporary contracts, and many lack sufficient access to the institutional support necessary for quality student education. While faculty contingency is increasing, and increasing at higher rates for part-time versus full-time NTT faculty, there has been little attention to the implications of increased contingency for service-learning and civic engagement. How will engagement continue to expand and deepen with contingent faculty at Penn? How will Penn avoid having the contingent faculty become the default for community-engaged teaching and learning, leaving the tenure-track and tenured faculty off the hook?

Substantial Infrastructure

The Netter Center represents the kind of infrastructure that was the state of the art in the late 1990s. Yet, as the landscape of higher education changes, how has Penn adapted its structural model for engagement? What kind of coordinating infrastructure is needed for a new era of civic engagement? As centers continue to evolve, what will be the next, emergent development of campus infrastructure supporting civic engagement? There may be some evidence of campuses where the coordinating infrastructure is moving from an emphasis on implementation of programs to a distributed model where the infrastructure takes on a distinct facilitative and capacity-building role. In other words, does engagement happen through the center or through the campus?

Where this distributive model seems to be emerging is on campuses that have made significant advancements in institutionalizing and sustaining community engagement and where there has been a strong coordinating infrastructure tied to academic affairs (e.g., Michigan State University, Portland State University, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Characteristics of community engagement on these campuses are such that it has become such an integral part of the campus culture that it is implemented broadly and deeply; is central to the core academic mission of the campus; and is one of the defining features of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship across departments and research centers. Additionally, as community engagement has been broadly and deeply institutionalized, the function of the coordinating infrastructure shifted from an emphasis on implementation (running programs) to an emphasis on facilitation and collaborative coordination (providing support to individuals and units across the campus in advancing community engagement in the context of the units).

Organizationally, this more distributed, emergent infrastructure suggests that the coordinating infrastructure assumes the role of a unit that can plan, manage, and support community engagement initiatives through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the community engagement to function smoothly and have the greatest impact. The infrastructure is less involved with implementing any particular set of activities, but it is dedicated to supporting and driving the engagement of many units across the campus so that the campus as a whole is engaged and making a difference in the communities with which it

works. As engagement evolves at Penn, how are the authors thinking about how the Netter Center could function in a way where it is not focused on running programs, but instead facilitating engagement across the campus? I would add here, that this would be much more feasible if the reward structure was addressed so that faculty culture incentivized engagement.

Widespread Sense of Self-Interest

How does a campus get to the place where there is a widespread sense that it is in the interest of the university to be engaged with the local community? The authors write that “enlightened self-interest” (p. 69) drove engagement at Penn. “The creation of the center,” they note, “was based on the assumption that one highly effective and efficient way for Penn to serve its institutional self-interest” (p. 99) was to engage in West Philadelphia through its academic mission. But as Etienne’s 2012 study finds, self-interest had different frameworks: it could mean “social justice and beneficial outreach,” and it could mean a goal to “stabilize the area for private investment” (p. 21). Etienne observes “enlightened self-interest has become a socially acceptable way of integrating a politically progressive movement designed to assist the city’s poor and needy with the broader interests of the university” (p. 122). What would it mean for Penn to shape its self-interest so that the institution and those who enact the institution’s mission share a core understanding that the campus’s well-being is connected to the local community’s well-being such that there is a widespread sense that it is in the best interest of the campus’s knowledge, learning, and democracy-building mission to be engaged deeply in the education, health, housing, employment, and overall well-being of the local community? Said differently, this would mean Penn is a better, more prestigious research university because of the way it generates new knowledge through its engagement with the community, addressing global issues that are manifest locally. This could only happen if there were leadership driving this vision and supporting the kinds of organization and culture changes needed to achieve it.

I have great admiration for the authors as scholars and activists leading the civic engagement movement in higher education in the U.S. and globally. I deeply appreciate that the “primary purpose” of their book “is movement development through stimulating creative counterproposals, serious debate, and informed action” (p. xiii). I look to them to help lead the movement to what I think of as “thick engagement” – a deeper, more significant commitment to the public good.

For example, how can the scholars at Penn and the Netter Center help us think about “thick” contributions to the public good in rethinking the design and delivery of professional education through its professional schools (such as Wharton)? In his book, *Democratic Professionalism* (2008), Albert Dzur re-conceptualizes professional education in such a way that the role of the democratic professional is to facilitate the democratic values of task sharing and lay participation for building a wider public culture of democracy. As such, evidence of contribution to the public good would be in the structure of professional programs, in their curriculum, and in their teaching and learning practices, whether they are fostering cooperation and creative problem solving by structuring learning environments for students to work and deliberate together, to learn the skills of facilitation, and/or to develop not only technical expertise but civic competence. There would be evidence that students learn about democracy by practicing it. This kind of education for professional practice would, of course, be predicated on wide and diverse participation, drawing on the rich assets of knowledge and experience of individuals. So there would have to be evidence that the professional program has recruited and retained diverse faculty and students as well as re-conceptualizing curriculum and pedagogy.

Another example of “thick” contributions to engagement and the public good would be in enacting a reframing of “merit.” We could look for this in admissions, mentoring, pedagogical practices, and in student support. Lani Guinier, in her 2015 book, *The Tyranny of Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America*, examines the way that merit has been defined almost exclusively by test scores, and the way merit serves as an incentive system that rewards the actions that the campus values. She challenges us to think about enacting what she calls “measures of democratic merit,” attributes such as “a student’s capacity to collaborate and to think creatively,” evidence of “teamwork and the fortification of strong collaborative relationships,” (p. 3) and qualities of “collaborative problem solving, independent thinking, and creative leadership” (p. 26) as well as “peer collaboration, [and] drive” (p. 28). Democratic merit does what our current meritocracy fails to do: “It creates an incentive system that emphasizes the development of more and more individuals who serve the goals and contribute to the conditions of a thriving democracy for both their own good as well as for the collective good” (p. 29). As an anchor institution tied to West Philadelphia, how could Penn advance its engagement by reframing merit, and in doing so reach the youth of West Philadelphia in more powerful ways?

How many undergraduates at Penn come from West Philadelphia, admitted because of the knowledge assets and democratic attributes they would bring to enhancing the goals of a Penn education? How many go back to West Philadelphia, prepared as agents and architects of democracy with their community-engaged education, able to contribute to the civic development of their neighborhoods? How does Penn draw upon the civic capacities and knowledge assets of the students from partner community schools admitting them as undergraduates who raise the intellectual profile of the campus? There are both intellectual and ethical dimensions to these questions. None of this is discussed in the book, yet interrogating this kind of reframing could allow for a critically productive analysis of engagement at Penn.

Looking Ahead

This fall (2017) the Netter Center will celebrate its 25th anniversary. There is much to celebrate, as this book amply illustrates. I look to the Netter Center to take the longer view, leading community engagement and shaping higher education for the next hundred years. In 1996, only a few years after the founding of the Netter Center, the American philosopher Richard Rorty wrote an essay called “Looking Backward from the Year 2096.” It wasn’t specifically about higher education, but American society broadly, yet I think it would be instructive to translate its meaning for community engagement and higher education.

Looking back from the year 2096, Rorty writes that the history of the U.S. in the early 21st century was one of what he describes as “the breakdown of democratic institutions during the Dark Years (2014-2044)” – we are now in the Dark Years – which by the end of the century had led to a changed “sense of the relations between the moral order and the economic order” (p. 243). He wrote:

Just as twentieth-century Americans had trouble imagining how their pre-Civil War ancestors could have stomached slavery, so we at the end of the twenty-first century have trouble imagining how our great-grandparents could have legally permitted a CEO to get 20 times more than her lowest paid employee. We cannot understand how Americans a hundred years ago could have tolerated the horrific contrast between a childhood spent in the suburbs and one spent in the ghettos. Such inequalities seem to us evident moral abominations, but the vast majority of our ancestors took them to be regrettable necessities. (p. 243)

What was it that had instigated this moral, economic, and political realignment and revulsion toward these “evident moral abominations?” Rorty describes what we are all familiar with – “the gap between the educated and well paid and the uneducated and ill paid steadily widened” – “under the pressure of a globalized world economy, the gap between most American’s incomes and those of the lucky one-third at the top widened” resulting in intolerable “unequal distribution of wealth and income” (p. 244). In higher education’s Dark Years (now), those from high-income families are eight times more likely to obtain a bachelors’ degree by age 24 than those from low-income families. The postsecondary system magnifies and reproduces social stratification. For faculty, their livelihoods have deteriorated and contingency has become the norm. For students, debt has risen to where, as Randy Martin (2012) has said, colleges and universities are no longer engines of opportunity, but instead engines of debt.

Yet, in Rorty’s construction of history, by the year 2096, the United States had come out of the Dark Years and there was a new political and economic order constructed of “social hope” based on “fellow feeling, the ability to sympathize with the plight of others,” “a sense of American fraternity,” all “in the name of our common citizenship” (pp. 244, 249). What Rorty’s essay does not imagine is the contribution that (thick) civic engagement in higher education could have made in creating a new affirmation of the civic engagement for the public good in which vast inequality and its consequences were treated as “evident moral abominations.”

I imagine that at the centennial anniversary conference of the Netter Center at the close of the 21st century (2092), presenters will be sharing ways in which their campuses had been fundamentally reinvented to address social issues that had shaped higher education’s emergence from its “Dark Years,” including:

- Issues, such as immigration reform, such that campuses collaborated across sectors to ensure that all education was enacted as a human right, instead of exclusion to common citizenship;
- Campus after campus partnered with pre-k-12 schools to end the school-to-prison pipeline and mass incarceration that decimated opportunity for generations of minoritized youth;
- Hundreds of campuses collaborated with local, state, and national government agencies to end the criminalization of poverty;
- Campuses that did not reduce their own carbon footprint and assisted communities in reducing theirs were the aberration; and

- Campuses ended their complicity with a tyranny of meritocracy based on test scores.

It was these issues and others that compelled campuses to interrogate their own implication in the ways in which power, privilege, and politics had exacerbated and contributed to deepening fundamentally anti-democratic racial and social injustice as well as social and economic inequality, undermining any meaningful claim to upholding a commitment to community engagement and the public good.

I imagine – with a sense of both urgency and optimism – that in the year 2096, there will be sessions at the Netter Center conference, and another book covering the 21st century evolution of engagement at Penn, providing examples of campuses (including Penn) that:

- measured and extolled the civic competencies of their graduates;
- celebrated the achievements of the democratic professionals they graduated;
- moved beyond the learner-centered paradigm to a collaborative learning paradigm;
- had expanded practices around community partnerships to enact partnership communities, transcending generations through long-term commitments and formal obligations;
- changed their admissions practices – and rose in global rankings because of it – because of their accounting for democratic merit; and
- had not only fulfilled but had exceeded standards for accreditation that require ongoing and systematic documentation of ways in which campus practices contributed to increased social and economic equality.

This would be evidence of the further advancing of knowledge for social change and the revolutionary transformation of the research university in the 21st century.

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