The relationship between urban universities and their host communities has long been a source of both hope and anger for city leaders, activists, and scholars alike. Part servant and part ruler, part benefactor and part exploiter, universities act out a contradictory set of agendas in relation to their surrounding communities. (Lafer, 2003, p. 89)

Universities bring human, material, and economic capital into many cities around the country, encouraging their faculty and students to engage in a variety of public service activities that help improve the quality of life in impoverished communities (Lafer, 2003). Those universities contributing not just volunteers but also scholarship that promotes democratic engagement arguably make the most valuable contribution to their host communities. In those circumstances, universities set about:

Educating students to understand democracy and to participate in it using the tools of scholarship—and legitimizing and rewarding faculty work that employs scholarship as the lynchpin of democratic engagement . . . [which] sustains the constitutional ideal of WE the People as an enlightened public sovereign. (Cohen, 2006, p. 8)

The idealism of public scholarship notwithstanding, universities have a long and troubled history of relationships with their host communities that portend the travails the editor of Transforming Cities and Minds encountered as she set about educating her city planning students in the arts of democracy.

Hired at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2002 as an assistant professor of city planning and promoted to associate professor without tenure in 2008, Lorlene Hoyt organized a group of six students in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning to participate in what she referred to as the "collaborative thesis project." Governing themselves democratically, the students worked together and with staff at MIT's Community Innovator's Lab (CoLab) to develop independent Master's theses, agreeing to investigate different cities, meet together to identify cross-cutting themes, and disseminate their findings during a public defense and in such alternative formats as blogs, films, and op-ed pieces. As the project evolved, the students also agreed to rewrite their theses as chapters of a book, which Hoyt would edit. With some considerable ups and downs, this student-centered plan materialized. All six students graduated, landed positions as city planners, and have since advanced in their careers. Hoyt, however, having been forewarned as a condition of her tenure review that "collaborative initiatives should be deferred" (p. 215), was not only denied tenure but her dossier was not even sent out for external review. Hoyt's denial of tenure calls into question the book's central premise, namely that universities and other mainstream institutions can play a vital role in addressing the legacy of disinvestment plaguing many urban areas. But first, a discussion of the book.

A Book within a Book

The body of this book is about transforming cities and the strategies of engagement city planners can use to address the continuing decline of the nation's inner cities. To summarize the highlights of this decline as it intertwined with the country's fierce struggle with race—a story not provided in the book but one that provides an essential framing for it—the current situation evolved over a period of one hundred years starting in 1910 when insufferable condi-
tions in the South began to crowd huge numbers of impoverished African Americans into deteriorated ghettos north of the Mason Dixon line. Although restrictive covenants, gerrymandering, careful drawing of school boundaries, job discrimination, and racist social customs combined to replicate the South's caste system (Sugrue, 1996), segregated urban ghettos were not without a sense of community. Blacks, who had in common experiences of migration and the struggle to survive racism, created informal banks, looked out for one another's children, shared meals and the harvest from backyard gardens, and gave birth to jazz, gospel, and a plethora of other artistic endeavors (Fullilove, 2004).

However, as early as 1949, city planners deemed these neighborhoods blighted and began destroying them as banks used redlining to block investment and state governments deployed the power of eminent domain to purchase homes and bulldoze highways through disinvested areas, while "slumlords, block-busters, and real estate developers were busily at work facilitating the process of racial transition and profiting handsomely as well" (Mohl, 1996, p. 267). As car travel became the norm, highways to access sprawling suburbs were carved through densely packed, walkable urban ghettos, turning them into crime-ridden, garbage dumps. In addition, industrial jobs began disappearing just as cities undertook massive urban renewal projects, some of which were carried out by universities seeking to heighten their "ability to attract tuition-paying students, research-funding corporations, big-name faculty, prestigious conferences, alumni donors, and middle-class patients" for their medical facilities (Lafer, 2003, p. 101). For example, Columbia University's urban renewal enterprise displaced so many black and Puerto Rican residents that it came under fire from the City Commission on Human Rights, the Faculty Civil Rights Group, and even the student-run newspaper.

The combined onslaught of highway construction, de-industrialization, and urban renewal provoked hundreds of race riots, which took aim at workplace discrimination, educational inequality, and policy brutality (Bowser, 2007)—riots that ultimately escalated white—and black—flight from inner cities, eroding their tax bases and leading to the severe distress, uneven development, and social stratification that continue today. Magnifying this history of racialized urban decline is the United States' ever-widening income inequality that began increasing in the 1970s and grew to its widest in 2011 as the census recorded 46.2 million impoverished people (Dodge & Dorning, 2013)—people living "on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity" (King, 1963). Sometimes referred to as a "Fourth World," these islands are excluded from formal labor markets and marginalized socially, spatially, and materially. As urban areas continue to hemorrhage jobs:

Elite schools across the country have found themselves stranded by history, islands of wealth amid the surrounding poverty. As other jobs have disappeared, universities have often become the employer of last resort for increasingly desperate communities. (Lafer, 2003, p. 90-91)

The message conveyed in Hoyt's book is that the knowledge for improving these desperate communities is held by civic leaders and residents, not universities; thus, the book is about her students' investigations of city planning approaches that engage this group in decision-making. Additionally, the book is about transforming minds and offers an example of how one faculty member sought to educate her students to understand and participate in democracy by learning the tools of engaged city planning practice. During the boom years of the 1990s, as urban disinvestment began consuming entire cities and parts of others, Ernest L. Boyer lamented the absence of such educational approaches, noting that universities were failing to address the nation's urban problems with the same energy they had once invested in rural America. He decried campuses as places "where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems" (Boyer, 1996, p. 23).

In recent years, however, the idea of education for the public good has come alive as part of a larger trend within the professions toward civic engagement (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). Whether referred to as public scholarship, the scholarship of engagement, or community-engaged scholarship, this educational approach is defined by collaboration, partnering, and reciprocity between academics and individuals outside the academy (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, nd). The scholarship of engagement recognizes the importance of citizen participation in maintaining the democracy and affirms the obligation of faculty "to teach students how to participate effectively in the democratic community" (Cohen, 2006, p. 9). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has encouraged such scholarship by offering an elective Carnegie Community Engagement classification to universities whose mission, identity, and commitments qualify them for recognition as community-engaged institutions.

Yet "as publicly engaged academic work takes hold in American colleges and universities, tenure and promotion guidelines lag behind scholarly and artistic inquiry and the programs that support them"
Sutton
(Ellison & Eatman, 2008, p. xi). Even though department chairs may encourage junior faculty to engage with communities, these faculty may have to choose between adhering to a traditional career path that prioritizes research and publication, and pursuing a risky path that prioritizes teaching and community engagement (Hoyt, 2013). When faculty rank research above teaching, graduate students may be hard pressed to obtain the advising they need to produce a thesis, which is an isolating experience at best. This book reveals Hoyt's attempt to make thesis writing more social, while also helping students learn to participate effectively in a democratic community. Believing that inclusiveness, participation, and reciprocal problem-solving (between those inside and outside academia) can contribute to education and community improvement (Hoyt, 2013), she sought to prepare students to address urban problems by learning how to engage civic leaders and residents in creating their own solutions.

The Audience and Content

Transforming Cities and Minds is written for city planning students, educators, and practitioners, but it would also be relevant to anyone interested in public scholarship and university/community relationships. The book contains six chapters written by the thesis students and their co-authors, bookended by an introduction and reflection piece written by Hoyt. The chapters are organized as pairs within three sections, one on the economy, another on equity, and a third on the environment. Serendipitously, most of the students had worked the summer following their first year in their graduate program in various cities helping write applications for stimulus funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to create jobs and promote clean energy. These cities became the study sites for their theses, with the fund-seeking process providing a unifying focus. The chapters are not the original theses but rather are abbreviated and refined versions, which the authors worked on with Hoyt for about a year after graduation—an impressive commitment given that all six graduates had secured employment elsewhere and that Hoyt was exiting MIT.

The Chapters and Their Authors

"Part I: Engaging Economy" begins with a chapter by Gayle Christiansen about Camden, NJ. Drawing upon an earlier Teach for America stint in that city, Christiansen identified small businesses struggling to survive in neglected neighborhoods and argued that the city should balance its prioritization of waterfront redevelopment with support for these entrepreneurs. After graduation, she was hired by Project HOME in Philadelphia, where she taught a class on entrepreneurship and placed young people in internships with small businesses. Christiansen is currently program coordinator and director of the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program at Rutgers University, which serves children and families in Camden. The second chapter in this section focuses upon Cleveland, OH and was written by Nick Iuviene with doctoral student Lily Song. Nick was from New York and had worked as a community organizer in the Bronx, so he was well-versed in the problems of urban decline. Drawing upon international examples of worker cooperatives, especially one in Spain, he identified green industry worker cooperatives in Cleveland as a model for economic democracy because they prioritized community needs above individual benefits. After graduation, Nick was hired as a program manager at CoLab, where he served as the project lead for creating a cooperative network in the Bronx. He has been promoted to program director in charge of developing urban economic democracy projects. Dr. Lily Song completed her doctoral studies and is currently a provost (postdoctoral) fellow at University College in London investigating an array of urban planning and development issues.

"Part II: Engaging Equity" begins with a chapter by Leila Bozorg, who sought out a civic leader with a bold approach to using the stimulus funding, a goal that took her to Kansas City, MO where a congressman intended to concentrate the monies in an area historically plagued by racial discrimination. Her research revealed a curtailed community visioning process and a misfit between federal policy and local needs. Bozorg, who is interested in the effects of urban policy and politics on socio-spatial equity, was hired as a presidential management fellow by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and has since been promoted to policy advisor. She is finding that “the things HUD is trying to advance are very much connected to the ideals of collaborative work.” The second chapter in this section is by Marianna Leavy-Sperounis and is about Lawrence, MA. A community organizer, she had personal ties in both Lawrence and Lowell where her grandmother had immigrated from Greece in the 1930s. Comparing the demographics of both cities, Leavy-Sperounis found that Lawrence had higher levels of poverty and unemployment, and lacked planning skills, strong leadership, and effective communication, which stymied its application for stimulus funding. In contrast, Lowell with its better educated, less impoverished, and larger white population was successful in its application. After graduation, Leavy-Sperounis was hired as special assistant to the assistant secretary for Community Planning and...
Part III: Engaging Environment" begins with a chapter on Oakland, CA by Benjamin Brandin and his wife Kate Levitt. Brandin, recognizing that historically this city had not made the best use of federal grants, set out to document strategies adopted in Seattle and Portland to create green jobs, which he proposed as models for Oakland. Upon graduation, Brandin was hired as an assistant project manager at Eden Housing where he designed green development strategies. He is currently project manager at the Tenderloin Neighborhood Association in San Francisco, which provides affordable housing and services for low-income people. Levitt works as a consultant and researcher, and is pursuing a PhD in communications. The last chapter, by Eric Mackres and doctoral student Lily Song, investigates the efforts of a community organization, labor union, and utility company in Boston to negotiate conflicting agendas and engage in collaborative problem-solving. After graduation, Mackres was hired by the American Council for an Energy-efficient Economy in Washington, DC, where he develops research and policy for energy-efficient communities.

Assessment of the Critical Analysis

The themes that knit these chapters together reflect an intensive dialogue among the authors. Chapters typically provide a historical perspective on the subject addressed; seek to identify opportunities created by decline, for example new approaches to economic and workforce development; differentiate community organizing and community implementation capacity; explore the applicability of the lessons learned to other situations; and above all, emphasize the importance of local leadership and what they refer to as "rooted institutions," while recognizing the difficulty of realizing partnerships with those institutions. As Hoyt put it:

Rooted institutions are rich with seasoned civic leaders, employees who live in nearby neighborhoods, political and financial clout, and the space and equipment necessary for public meetings, dialogue, and deliberation...Rooted institutions can provide jobs and workforce training, incubate the development of new businesses, and invest their purchasing power in local businesses...Forging productive relationships among rooted institutions for the purpose of improving the quality of life in cities is easier said than done. (p. 23)

Hoyt's nod to the difficulty of working with rooted institutions, especially universities like the one that had just given her the boot, seems curiously understated. However, what stands out most in the group's analysis of strategies to transform blighted urban America is the absence of a critical perspective on race. The invisibility of race as a unifying theme is rather astonishing given that all the study sites have huge historically-marginalized minority populations. For example in 2010, the black, Hispanic, and Latino population totaled 95.1 percent in Camden, 63.3 percent in Cleveland, 53.4 percent in Oakland, 41.9 percent in Boston, and 39.3 percent in Kansas City. In Lawrence, the Hispanic and Latino population was 73.8 percent. Thus in the six cities in need of transformation, the historically-marginalized minority population ranged from 95.1 to 39.3 percent, well above national averages. Furthermore, the population loss experienced in these cities has a puzzling relationship to demographics. For example, Kansas City, with its comparatively low black, Hispanic, and Latino population, grew by 4.1 percent but Lawrence, with its very high Hispanic and Latino population, also grew—by 6 percent. Camden, with its very high black, Hispanic, and Latino population, shrank by 3.2 percent but Cleveland, with a smaller black, Hispanic, and Latino population, shrank by 17.1 percent (American FactFinder, nd). How appropriate it would have been for these prospective city planners to speculate about such numbers in their deliberations of how to transform inner cities through participatory processes, which typically have not engaged more marginalized populations.

In her chapter on Lawrence—the one that most specifically explores race and class—Leavy-Sperounis (2013) mentions "attempts in the 1980s by predominantly Irish American city officials to keep out a growing Latino population through the exclusion of affordable housing" (p. 128). However, she does not dig down through the layers of racism to question its role in a city in which one quarter of its mostly Latino families live below the poverty level and how such realities as discrimination and stereotyping might upend her proposed regional approach to green job creation. Similarly, Brandin, another author who deals squarely with race and class, selected Seattle and Portland as models for Oakland because of their similar climates, population sizes, and citywide programs. However, the black, Hispanic, and Latino population in both cities (14.3 and 15.7 percent respectively) is well below Oakland's 53.4 percent; and both cities, unlike Portland, are experiencing growth (4.3 and 3.3 percent, respectively). Noting that unemployment in Oakland was 18 percent in 2010, and that one fifth of families lived at or below the poverty level, Brendan logically recommends targeting neighborhoods with high concentrations of older homes and impoverished minority populations for an energy retrofit pro-
gram, but he does not unpack his observation that previous federally-funded programs have proven "highly politicized, demanding extensive oversight from governing bodies," and how such racial politics might upend his retrofit proposal (p. 168).

In other words, students in the collaborative thesis project were united in promoting citizen engagement but, although several mentioned a "stimulus frenzy" that shortcut participatory processes, they do not consider race as a driving factor in the decline of these cities and how it might impede participation in their reclamation. Nor do they question whether the civic leaders who were their contacts represented the interests of the historically-marginalized minority population, whether this population was engaged in decision-making, or whether their own demographics as compared with that of the study sites shaped their investigations. Most disturbing their reference lists are almost entirely absent sources on race and place, and are entirely absent the standard planning sources on the topic by such authors as Douglass S. Massey and Thomas J. Sugrue. Although Transforming Cities and Minds represents a remarkable effort in community-engaged scholarship, its lack of a critical race perspective on the devastating conditions in the nation's inner cities—so essential to their future transformation—is disappointing.

Conclusions

Transforming Cities and Minds grew out of an untenured faculty member's risk-taking and should be an inspiration to faculty, students, and administrators dedicated to the ethic of education for the public good. Working a year beyond graduation to produce a publishable book from masters theses is an almost inconceivable feat that speaks volumes to the intensity of social learning that transpired within this group—and brave to Vanderbilt Press for publishing it.

And yet, MIT's denial of Hoyt's tenure—its refusal to even send her materials to the ever-enlarging community of public scholars for external review—calls into question the book's central premise: that universities can be key players in creating brighter futures for the desperate historically-marginalized minority populations residing in abandoned inner cities. The historical elitism upon which white patriarchal institutions like MIT were built remains and continues to reinforce social and spatial inequities.

References


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