The Looking Glass University: Listening to Strangers and Tending to Democracy

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Let me begin today with higher education's promise. There is an increasingly shared interest on the part of private and public institutions to attend to our public mission. This is a welcome sign as it comes at a time in a global knowledge economy when higher education has a clear role to play as a driver of positive social change. Certainly we can drive social mobility through education and reshape economic prosperity through innovation. Beyond those critical contributions, we can have impact on our quality of life through collaborations in communities, both near and far. To do so, of course, we need to take responsibility for civic life beyond our institutional boundaries – to be "good neighbors," moving beyond the geographic meaning of that concept to embrace its full moral dimensions, as a revered Newark rabbi, Rabbi Prinz implored in his speech that preceded Dr. King's at the 1963 March on Washington.

To realize this promise, though, requires of us some self-reflection, starting with some open eyes on the social and political and economic landscape. What do we see and hear when we talk to and, even more, listen to strangers, as Danielle Allen described in an earlier era of a civil rights movement?[2] And how do these images reflect back on us, as institutions, as potential agents of change today? John Dewey famously reminded an earlier generation that democracy requires tending anew in each generation – but to know how to do that tending we need to examine our past and our present practices, conditions, habits, and routines.[3]

Looking Glass Reflections

In that vein of outward reflection, Rupert Nacoste writes poetically, in his new volume "*Taking on Diversity,*"[4] that we live amidst "hibernating bigotry," and it may not be hibernating much any longer. Having taught many courses on "*Interpersonal Relations and Race,*" he notes with a heavy dose of pain how:

> "We stay away from the interpersonal level where bigotry implicates us all. We leave it to our children to carry our baggage on their backs. Baggage they cannot see, but heavy baggage they can feel… Although it is we who have kept it safe and cool…, we are stunned when something happens to awaken that resting, hibernating bigotry."

We are stunned when a racist song is chanted (sung on a bus filled with young leaders who will help define our future by dint of their privilege), a noose hung on a tree, and a barrage of micro-aggressions surface on college campuses. Stunned when those entrusted with the public's safety, succumb to a show of over-whelming force in the face of what start as routine encounters but quickly seem to trigger fear on the part of those with and without the power. Stunned when the threat of losing out to newcomers provokes xenophobic violence among those stuck themselves in poor Black townships, post-apartheid. Stunned when walls are erected and locked at night to keep "peace" between neighbors as decades of discord, grief, and resentment are reinforced anew. We only need to look at images of Belfast, the U.S. border, Selma and Ferguson, and Johannesburg, South Africa, to know that we are not done with the ghosts that haunt our social and political landscapes and the hibernating bigotry that threaten our interpersonal relationships.

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[2] Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 2004.

[3] John Dewey, Education and Social Change, *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors,* 1937, 23(6), 472-474.

[4] Rupert W. Nacoste, *Taking on Diversity: How We Can Move from Anxiety to Respect*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2015, p.160.

Ghosts Among Neighbors

And the dimensions of the ghosts that haunt and the paradoxes with which we routinely live are multifaceted. Consider the fluidity of demographic categories amidst a changing face of diversity and contrast it with the historical dimensions of difference that surface almost automatically to define entrenched biases (such as those that surface in policing contexts, as your colleagues Jennifer Eberhardt, Aliya Saperstein, and others have repeatedly shown).[5] Or the map of geographic mobility defined by trans-national migration contrasted with the deeply discouraging temporal arc of populations "*stuck in place*," as Patrick Sharkey traces.[6] These ghosts and paradoxes call into question whether the ever-presence of easy virtual communication is doing anything to alleviate (or perhaps it exacerbates) the cultural divides in our workplaces and communities as Markus and Conner so powerfully catalogue.[7] How to reconcile the economic and social power of disruptive innovation, as modeled every day here in Silicon Valley, with the astounding growth of inequality that leaves so many people here and worldwide out of the benefits it reaps– whether measured in wealth creation, social mobility through education, or entrepreneurial job growth.

Educational Attainment and the Sorting of Wealth

This reflection in the looking glass reminds us starkly, then, of the power of higher education to define winners and losers. As a recent report from the OECD on widening income

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[5] See, for example, Eberhardt, J., Goff, P.A., Purdie, V., & Davies, P.G., Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 2004, 87(6), 876-893, and Saperstein, A., Penner, A.M., & Kizer, J.M., The Criminal Justice System and the Racialization of Perceptions, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2014, 651: 104-21.

[6] Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 2013.

[7] Markus, H.R., & Conner, A. *Clash!: How to Thrive in a Multicultural World*, Penguin, New York, NY, 2013.

gaps in countries across the development spectrum, underlined: "educational attainment is the measure by which people are being sorted into poverty or relative wealth,"[8] and I would add, we in the U.S., are failing that test, and arguably higher education isn't helping matters.

Looking specifically at the U.S., despite what demographer William Frey calls a "diversity explosion that is remaking the face of America,"[9] there are growing disparities in post-secondary attainment. In fact, arguably, we are no longer a country of opportunity for most first generation, poor, black and brown or immigrant children, as is captured in any number of recent indices and reports and headlines, including that of Stanford's own Sean Reardon, who famously titled a NY Times opinion piece: *No Rich Child Left Behind.*[10] We have fallen in the OECD indices of social mobility through education (below many other advanced economies) – such that, for example, in Pell Institute data from 2013, 77% of children from families in the top income quartile attained a bachelor's degree by age 24 and only 9% of those from the lowest income quartile – and the data are strongly skewed by race and ethnicity (2013 data from U.S. Census survey shows 70% of whites with some form of post-secondary education, compared to 57% for African Americans and 36% for Hispanics).[11] And these educational attainment disparities not surprisingly carry forward into the job market, as, for example, a survey by McKinsey of 2014 employment data showed an unemployment rate of 12.4% for black bachelor's degree holders as compared to 5.6% for all degree holders surveyed.

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[8] See http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf.

[9] William Frey, *A Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics are Remaking the Face of America*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 2015.

[10] Sean Reardon, No Rich Child Left Behind. *The New York Times,* April 27, 2013.

[11] See Carnevale, A.,& Smith,N., *The Economic Value of Diversity*, working paper, 2015, p.13.

Of particular concern is the sorting out of wealth creation in the technology and innovation sector by the continued failure of higher education to attract and retain a diverse talent pool in STEM. Serving as I do on the NSF Committee on Equal Opportunity in Science and Engineering (CEOSE), I am struck by exactly how little progress we have made in broadening participation in STEM, such that, between 1993-2012 less than 20% of bachelors in STEM were awarded to under-represented minorities, excluding psychology (only at 25%) and social sciences (23%), certainly contributing to (though probably not accounting for) the paucity of diversity in the U.S. technology industry, as you are all very aware of in this region.[12] The Wall Street Journal recently reported that in 2014, there were only 6% Hispanics and 3% black employees in the U.S. technology industry, and a scant 28% of women in the industry worldwide.[13] And, in light of the rewards of education and employment in STEM, it is not surprising that NY Times columnist Charles Blow questions whether we should worry about "*A Future Segregated by Science*?"[14]
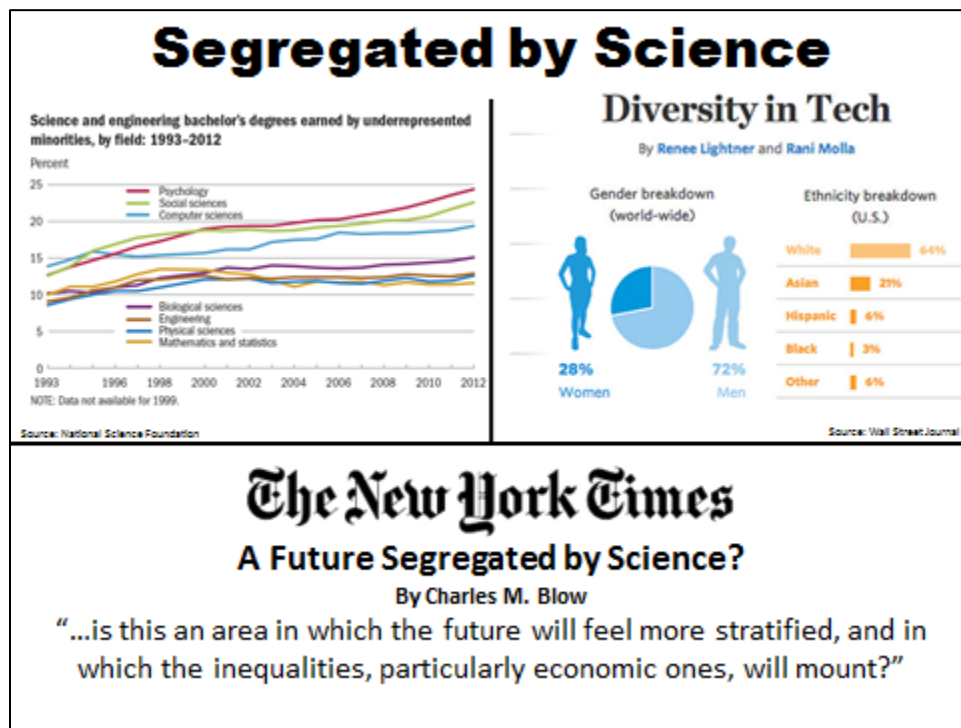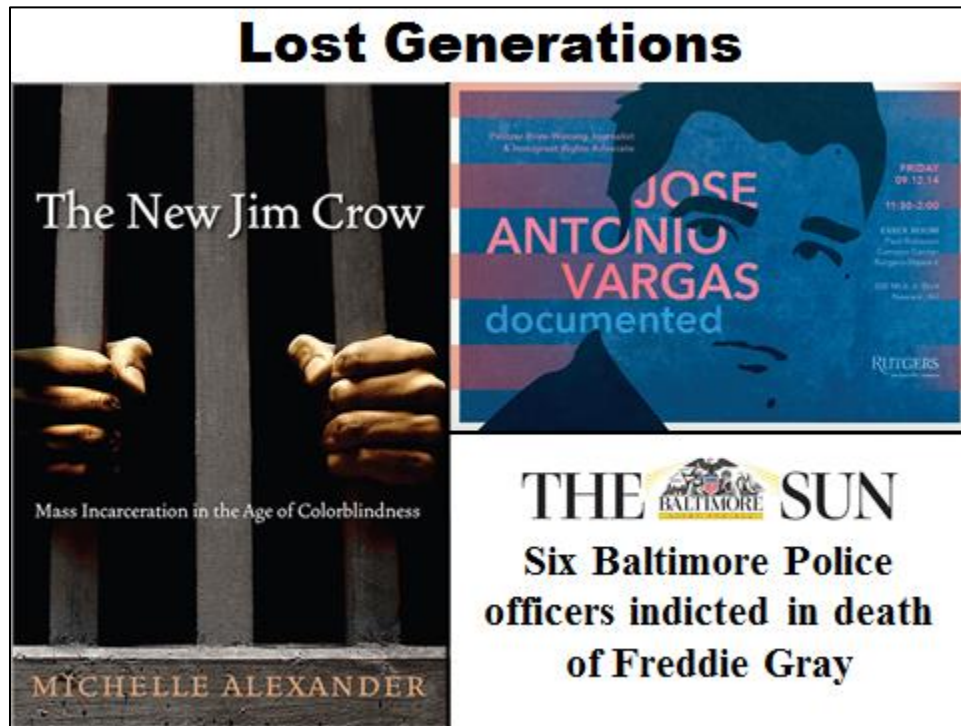

A Map of Opportunity and Inequality

Indeed, the ever-increasing role of higher education (perhaps particularly in STEM fields but certainly more generally as well) as a central driver of wealth, power, and opportunity in the map of global knowledge economies makes it absolutely imperative that we look squarely at the ghosts of inequality times past and how our current landscape continues to reflect them. I would draw, here, an imprecise analogy to how bad dreams seem to produce more stress when they

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[12] *Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering*, 2015, National Science Foundation Report.

[13] Renee Lightner and Rani Molla, Diversity in Tech, *The Wall Street Journal,* December 20, 2014.

[14] Charles Blow, A Future Segregated by Science? *The New York Times,* February 2, 2015.

repeat the same content night after night.   The more talent we continue to lose to prison rather than embracing in higher education, the more hopes we dash in neighborhoods like those in Baltimore or Ferguson, the more we close our borders to today's Dreamers, those reoccurring nightmares of our history will haunt us, as a nation and a world, and the more isolated will those who do reap the benefits of higher education become, from those who repeatedly do not. In other words, the way we are going we are solidifying not resolving the co-occurrence of a map of opportunity and inequality, side-by-side, across the U.S., and beyond.
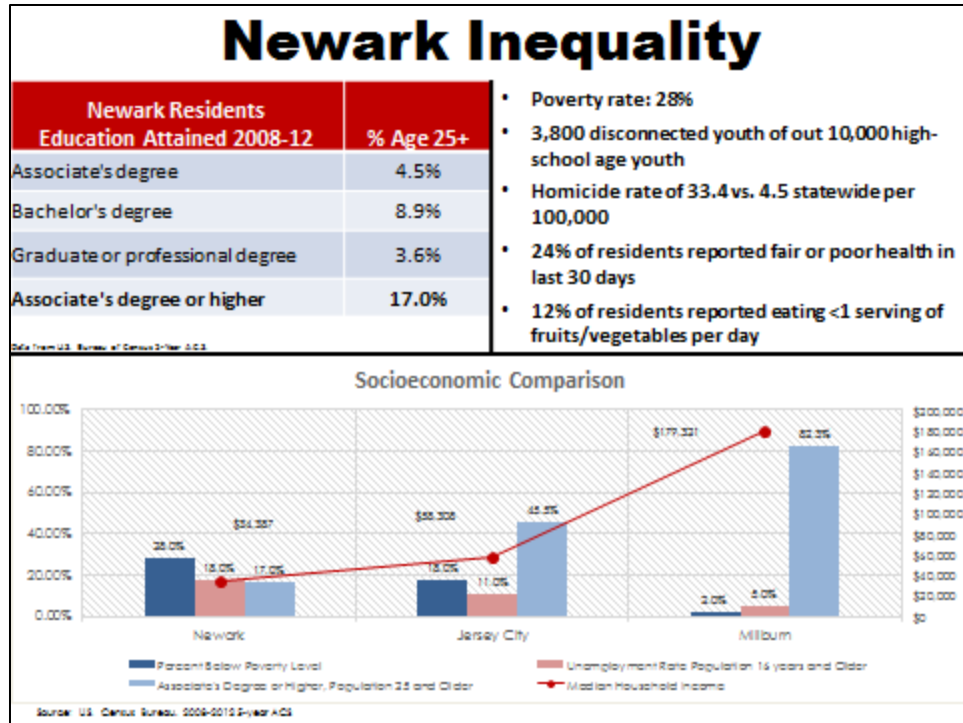

        Let me illustrate the haunting paradox of this contemporary landscape and its repetition of old themes, by taking a brief dive into the opportunity and inequality map of Newark and Northern NJ, right across the river from the financial capital of the world. Newark is, on one hand, a critical transportation hub for the New York Metropolitan area (with a major port, airport, and rail system), a major center of broadband superiority supplying the fiber for the NYC financial markets, home to the fifth highest concentration of higher education on the east coast with six colleges and universities and 60,000 students and faculty, and to both long-standing corporate headquarters like Prudential and cutting edge new ones like audible.com, and a remarkable array of thriving small and large cultural institutions, from major performing arts venues to local galleries with emerging artists telling old narratives to new audiences. Moreover, across Northern NJ , cities like Newark and Jersey City, have continuously welcomed waves of immigrants striving for opportunity– from the great migrations from South to North to the influx of foreign-born families over the last several decades, as the map shows, and there has been a strong surge of real estate development, as the NYC area prices itself out of the market, including so much in Jersey City that they now refer to it as the "Gold Coast," and currently downtown Newark has an estimated $2 Billion in corporate and residential development as well.

Amidst all of this opportunity – educational, business, cultural, human capital – the map of inequality is equivalently stark – with a post-secondary attainment rate for residents of Newark at 17% in the latest count of 2012 (compared to a national average of 40% in the latest Lumina Foundation report)[15], a population of approximately 3,800 disconnected youth (not in high school) out of a high school-age population of approximately 10,000, a poverty rate of 28% in 2012 (compared to a national average of 14.3%), high crime rates (Homicides 2013: 33.4/100,000 compared to 4.5/100,000 for the state), and very sparse availability of primary care and healthy foods (In 2013, 24% of Newark residents reported fair or poor health in the past 30 days and 12% of adults in Newark reported eating less than 1 serving of fruit/vegetables per day).[16] And all of these sobering statistics are overlaid on a map of disparities in educational attainment, poverty, joblessness, health status, and incarceration rates defined along dimensions of race and ethnicity, and this is a map that differentiates Newark from neighboring communities in the Northern New Jersey suburbs with white populations of 70% or greater (according to 2008-2012 Census Bureau data).

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[15] See Lumina Foundation Post-Secondary Attainment Report, http://strongnation.lumniafoundation.org/report/.

[16] Data reported by the Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies, Rutgers University-Newark.

Newark Inequality

Newark Residents Education Attained 2008-12	% Age 25+
Associate's degree	4.5%
Bachelor's degree	8.9%
Graduate or professional degree	3.6%
Associate's degree or higher	17.0%

Data from U.S. Bureau of Census 3-Year A.C.S.

- Poverty rate: 28%
- 3,800 disconnected youth of out 10,000 high-school age youth
- Homicide rate of 33.4 vs. 4.5 statewide per 100,000
- 24% of residents reported fair or poor health in last 30 days
- 12% of residents reported eating <1 serving of fruits/vegetables per day

Socioeconomic Comparison

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 5-year ACS

Echoes of Times Past: The Morrill Era Revisited

On the other hand, the very same map of inequality that haunts us, can just as well become a map of opportunity – in the context of the power and prevalence of education and innovation in a knowledge economy – and this is the time for higher education – across both public and private institutions -- to fully embrace its role in effecting that change – its public mission, its public promise.   In this regard, it is instructive to think of the echoes of another divisive period in American history, when Lincoln and Justin Morrill created the land-grant public institutions and the HBCUs as "democracy's colleges," on the principle that innovation, opportunity, and collaborative barn-raisings would go hand in hand to rebuild the agrarian economy and educate the sons and daughters of its communities.

Morrill Era Echoes

Morrill Act of 1862

"Though it's not widely known or appreciated, engagement in public work is the very heart and soul of the 'democracy's college' tradition in the land-grant system. It's central to the 'expression of democracy in higher education' that land-grant institutions have embodied, however imperfectly. But it's no longer limited to the land-grant system."

Scott Peters

What we need is a new Morrill Era, one in which not only all of higher education but other sectors as well – business, government, non-profits, CBOs, faith-based institutions – band together in a variety of place-based barn-raisings to drive change in that opportunity map. We know the dimensions of change that are needed – look carefully for example at the *Opportunity Index* map produced by the Social Science Research Council, based on indices of educational attainment, economic prosperity, and civic health for metro regions across America – and we also know that even apparently small gains in education, environmental sustainability, and economic opportunity, can affect large improvements in aggregate annual income in communities – as the non-profit CEO for Cities demonstrated. In their 2008 analysis, 1% gains in post-secondary educational attainment, for example, in the 51 largest metro regions in the United States would translate into $124 billion dollars in aggregate annual income across those regions. There is work to be done to drive those levers and reap the benefits of the talent, green, and opportunity dividends, but there is also a clear map of where we want to get, if we have the will to do so.
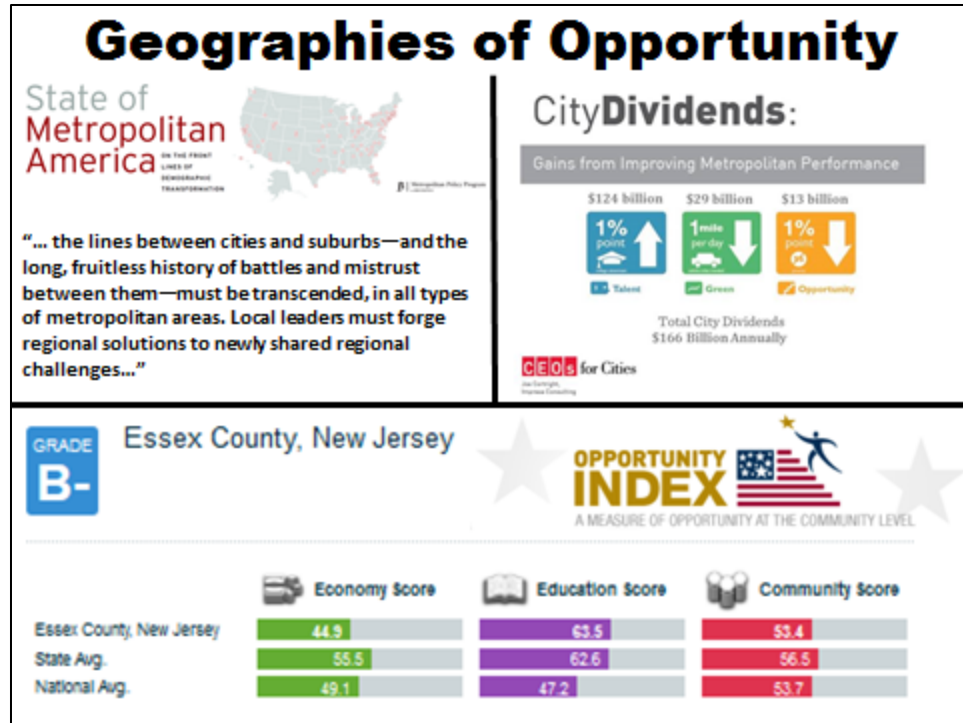
And I am cautiously optimistic that there is the will to do so, as we see demonstrated in the arena of post-secondary attainment: take for example – the collective impact networks for college attainment supported by the Lumina Foundation in 75 metro cities nationwide; President Obama's conversations with state and higher education leaders about college access and opportunity, including demonstration pilots on free community college access; and initiatives to re-engage disconnected youth and support educational pathways for re-entry and incarcerated populations. These educational opportunity initiatives are being complimented importantly by broader and sustained engagement of higher education with K-12 districts and corporate partners to produce not only access but success and a pathway to workforce development that promises to change the economic outlook for so many otherwise abandoned communities.

The Road to Opportunity

What Do We Look Like in the Looking Glass?

Before we jump however to turn our commitments into on the ground comprehensive action and collaborative impact, we need to both examine our own practices that play some non-significant role in perpetuating if not generating to begin with the map of inequality itself and turn to see what our reflection looks like in the public's looking glass. We need to ask what we can do to actively change the view (and often the reality) held by so many of those left out (disconnected youth, first generation students at community colleges, undocumented Dreamers, residents of long-abandoned neighborhoods) that higher education and the opportunities created therein, particularly by research universities, are for someone, or for some place, else.

As we look at ourselves in the public's looking glass, I suggest that three metaphors – the monastery, the marketplace, and the anchor, capture well the varied reflections and suggest some new ways of behaving for higher education. For centuries, institutions of higher learning have been purposely constructed as neutral ground, separated enough from the "real world" so as to allow a group of souls with common backgrounds and commitments to think deeply and freely about fundamental ideas – the monastic metaphor. By contrast, with the advent of technological connectivity and a global marketplace of ideas, education and innovation have become unbounded by place and more transactional in nature – the marketplace metaphor. In turn, and perhaps more recently as the public calls on higher education to take an active role in helping to "build strong communities at home" (as the National Issues Forum conversations across the country have recently suggested),[17] echoes of the Morrill Era resound and suggest a sustainable commitment for local, place-based collaboration – the anchor metaphor. While each of these metaphors has its purposes, I want to concentrate here on the metaphor of anchor institutions, as

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[17] NIF "The Changing World of Work: What Shall We Ask of Higher Education," 2015.

I see that model as particularly likely to proactively rewrite the map of opportunity, and close the inequality gaps. And if we learn to be good anchors, collaborating with our neighbors, stretching some of our propensity for monastic and/or transactional marketplace habits, we may edge closer to enacting *e pluribus Unum* and the "American dream."

Monastery, Market, Anchor
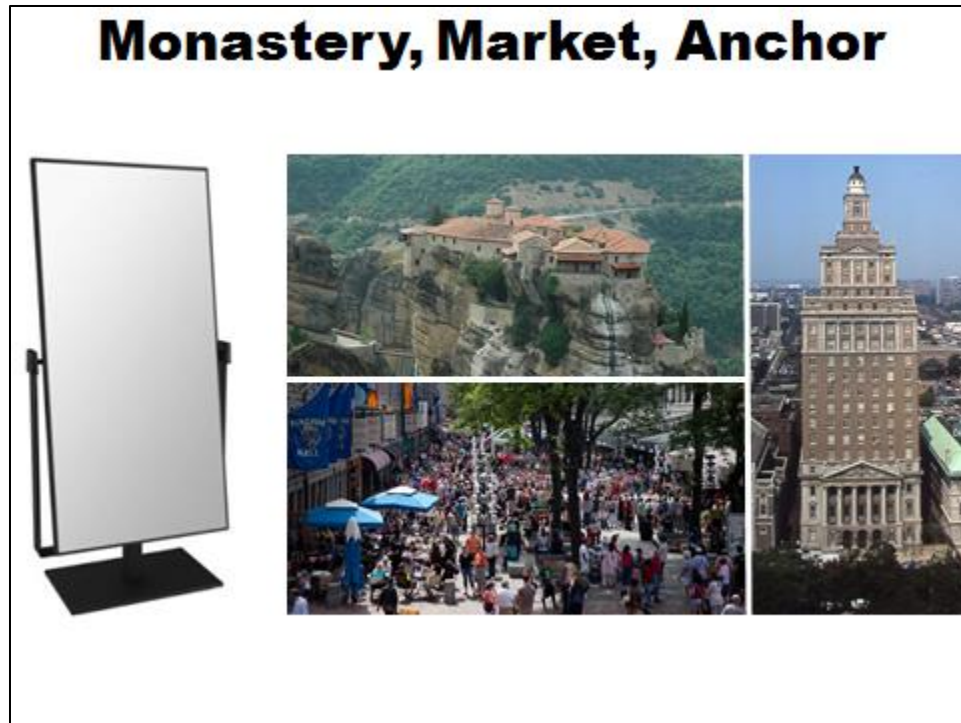
In turn, to make this transition from the monastery or the marketplace to a more mutually designed collaboration requires a strong dose of humility and self-reflection not always common in our midst, as we are much more prone to "father knows best" than to "Ask us, we lay our heads down here at night."   This distinction was vividly illustrated for me by a sign in a major airport advertising a public university's extension service (and even that name is telling) as responding with "university solutions" to "community problems," a model to be contrasted with that proposed by Carol McTighe Musil as "generative partnerships done *with* rather than done *to* communities."[18]

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[18] See Caryn McTighe Musil, Civic Learning for Shared Futures, *Diversity&Democracy*, publication of AAC&U, Washington, D.C., 10(1), Winter, 2013.

Listening to Strangers

Father Knows Best

Ask Us...
We lay our heads down here at night

  The Anchor Institution. The notion of generative partnerships and collaborative networks brings forth the third metaphor for higher education's public mission – that is, as anchor institutions with a long-term, sustainable relationship with and commitment to their community – a place-based approach. And while this approach to public engagement is decidedly local, it is in no way parochial, as global networks of place-based anchors are emerging to share best practices and understand the local-global resonances in our midst. For example, Ira Harkavy, Myra Burnett and I recently summarized the results of several international workshops with colleagues in South Africa and China, sponsored by the NSF to consider how community-engaged science can simultaneously produce better science, better societies, and a more diverse and equitable STEM workforce.[19] Or consider the phenomenal growth over only six years of the Anchor Institution Task Force, a network of now some 600 members, initiated by Ira Harkavy at the University of Pennsylvania and David Maurrasse at Marga, Inc, and collaborating with global partners in the Council of Europe and beyond.[20]

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[19] Harkavy, I., Cantor, N., & Burnett, M. *Realizing STEM Equity and Diversity through Higher Education-Community Engagement*, Whitepaper based on International Workshops supported by NSF, 2014.
[20] See the Anchor Institution Task Force, www.margainc.com/initiatives/aitf.
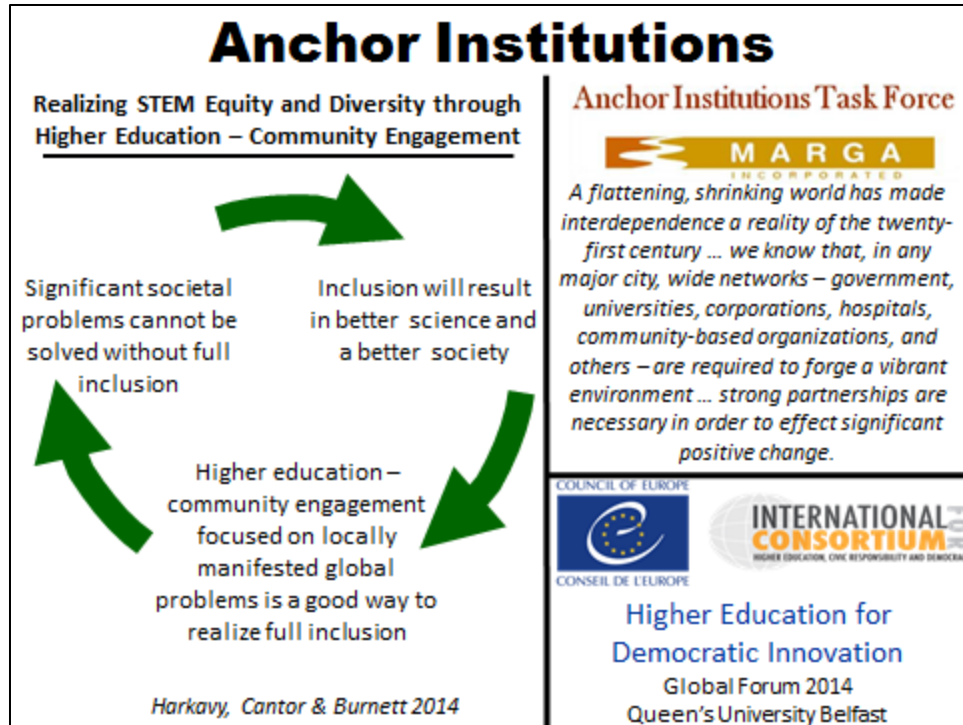
Partnerships are the essence of the anchor institution metaphor– as the following quote from the Anchor Institution Task Force mission suggests: "A flattening, shrinking world has made interdependence a reality of the twenty-first century.. we know that in any major city, wide networks – government, universities, corporations, hospitals, community-based organizations, and others… are required to forge a vibrant environment.. strong partnerships are necessary in order to effect significant positive change." And on the ground, as I'll briefly illustrate here with our work in Newark, those partnerships have to be sustained and sustainable well beyond the calendar of any given grant or service-learning course, and that will ultimately impact our practices in fundamental ways. Not only do we have to learn how to listen and to partner, but we also must support and reward this collaborative, long-term work – the success of which may be hard to monetize and evaluate. Yet that is what it will take to change the map of opportunity and inequality.

Lessons from a Legacy City of Hope and Hardship

So, let me return for a final moment to my city, Newark, a legacy city of hope and hardship, a city that defines the very notion of survival, about to celebrate its 350th anniversary, lead today by an ardent advocate, Mayor Ras Baraka, son of the late renowned poet, activist, and Newark native son, Amiri Baraka, and grand-son of Coyt Jones, who migrated from the south to find hope and freedom. Indeed, this is a city that thrives on never forgetting the stories and narratives of the waves of people coming to find opportunity, as illustrated in the many remarkable archival public humanities projects shared in public dialogues common to a place that wants to believe in its "renaissance" but is forever skeptical and wary of disappointment.

Rutgers University-Newark – a very diverse public research university, a majority of whose students are Pell eligible, many of whom are first-generation college going, and many transfers from community colleges, with no predominant racial or ethnic group – has a deep and long-standing commitment to this city and the justice that it is long due. And as such, we are an important anchor institution in Newark, and our faculty, students, and staff, take that seriously. Our neuroscientists work collaboratively with a network of faith-based and community-based organizations in the African-American Brain Health Initiative, our criminal justice scholars partner with the City, law enforcement, and numerous resident groups on the Newark Public Safety council, our Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies convenes over 60 organizations and all the local higher education institutions in the Newark City of Learning Collaborative to raise the post-secondary attainment rate in Newark to 25% by 2025, our environmental scientists are rolling up their sleeves with many others in land, park, and water restoration, our business school center for urban entrepreneurship and economic development teams with local merchants and non-profits to spur and sustain new local business development, our artists and public humanists and creative writers constantly collaborate to tell Newark's stories and reveal its voice, and more. And the signature of all of these engagements is that we are just a partner in a shared effort, and as much attention goes into nurturing the sustainability of the collaborative infrastructure – a very hard and continuous task – as to producing outcomes on any given project.

In all of these arenas of anchor institution work, the lesson of Newark is to tread carefully, keep humble, and yet keep going. Always, in these collaborations, there is a pitfall that once seen is obvious but that we need to look and listen for carefully. For example, as all the corporate and higher education anchors begin to try to use local procurement from our Newark merchants, we confront what they already know – there is a real need for capital investments for them to be able to bring their efforts to scale. As Rutgers-Newark builds downtown a 50,000 square foot university-community arts collaboratory – Express Newark – to encompass an arts incubator, Jazz exhibition space, design studio, community media center, portrait gallery, makers space, film production studio – there is both tremendous excitement in the City and the obvious but critical concern of how to ensure seamless transportation from the neighborhoods to Express Newark downtown and how to engage the many indigenous arts organizations in Newark in the process. In the Newark City of Learning Collaborative, addressing the missing infrastructure – such as college knowledge centers and counselors in the public schools – is absolutely critical to any success, regardless of all of our commitment. In our Newark Promise Neighborhood Initiative, it is as critical to trace the interconnections across systems that fail children and families – such as the wide web of influence of incarceration rates rippling through neighborhoods or the impact of maternal nutrition on children's school performance– as it is to perfect any particular health, justice, or educational intervention. And, most profoundly important, and so easily missed is the central role that the voices of residents must play in all collective impact work, from *public* education reform to *public* safety to *public* health – and the irony of how easily we forget to include the public and how hard it is to hone the skills needed to listen and as Harry Boyte says to do "work with publics, for public purposes, in public."[21]

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[21] *Democracy's Education: Public Work, Citizenship, and the Future of Colleges and Universities,* Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville: Tennessee, 2015.

This brings me back to that map of opportunity that higher education can help to create and to the need in all of our institutions for some "home grown" voices and leaders if we are to change that landscape. In Newark, for example, this means a commitment to building an honors living-learning community, recruiting up to 125 students a year, with many if not most students coming from Greater Newark, to live and learn in an interdisciplinary curriculum focused on Local Citizenship in a Global World that draws on the expertise and authentic knowledge of students who grow up in and are committed to impacting places like Newark. These are the talented students that often get left off that map of opportunity when "honors" is narrowly defined by prior success on standardized tests. It means recruiting back to Newark, faculty who also share that knowledge and those commitments. And it means recognizing how many of our staff come from and/or live in Newark and its environs, and making sure that they too are at the table as we collaborate across the range of anchor institution engagements.

It means, as we say when we describe our metaphor for place – Rutgers University-Newark is not just in Newark, it is of Newark – perhaps drawing us closer to the looking glass image that Rabbi Prinz meant when he defined the meaning of "neighbor," that Danielle Allen alluded to in "*Talking to Strangers*," and that John Dewey aspired to as we "tend to democracy" in each generation.