

# Mutually Beneficial Democratic Engagement Between Universities and Their Communities

Nancy Cantor  
Chancellor  
Rutgers University - Newark<sup>1</sup>

## Democratic Engagement Between Universities & Communities

“... we have taken democracy for granted ... it has to be enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions.”  
John Dewey, 1937



Photograph by Sarah Connor / Anaphora.com / Getty

“It is our choice how we craft the narrative after Charlottesville. Are we prepared to become the architects of the future we imagine, one that leverages a diverse, democratic society?”  
Lewis & Cantor, *Huffington Post*, August 21, 2017

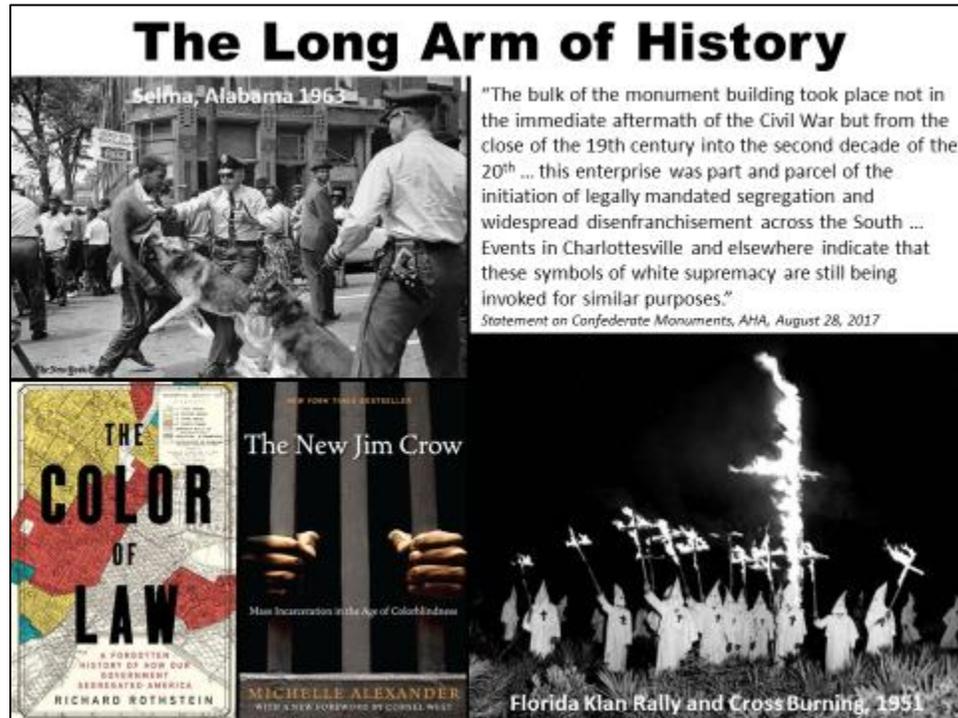
**Nancy Cantor**  
Chancellor  
Rutgers University-Newark

**The Power of Civic Engagement – Across Campus,  
Within Communities, Beyond Borders**  
AAC&U Pre-Conference Symposium  
January 24, 2018

As we gather to underscore the power of civic engagement and the responsibility, in turn, for higher education to prepare students to be involved in civic action now and throughout their lives, we can turn for motivation to the wise encouragement of John Dewey (who noted that democracy needs to be tended to anew in each new generation) and yet feel the “fierce urgency of now,” (as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. implored) in light of the resurgent expression of what might be called our worst instincts as a nation, on view in Charlottesville, and beyond. As Earl Lewis and I noted in our opinion piece, *After Charlottesville*, “It is our choice how we craft the narrative after Charlottesville. Are we prepared to become the architects of the future we imagine, one that leverages a diverse, democratic society?”<sup>2</sup> And, I would add, are we prepared to do this (re)-imagining with an eye toward cultivating empathetic citizenship – an attitude and skill set in short supply today?

<sup>1</sup> Opening keynote address at a symposium of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, titled, “The Power of Civic Engagement – Across Campus, Within Communities, Beyond Borders,” January 24, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Earl Lewis & Nancy Cantor, *After Charlottesville*, *Huffington Post*, August 21, 2017.

*The Long Arm of History*

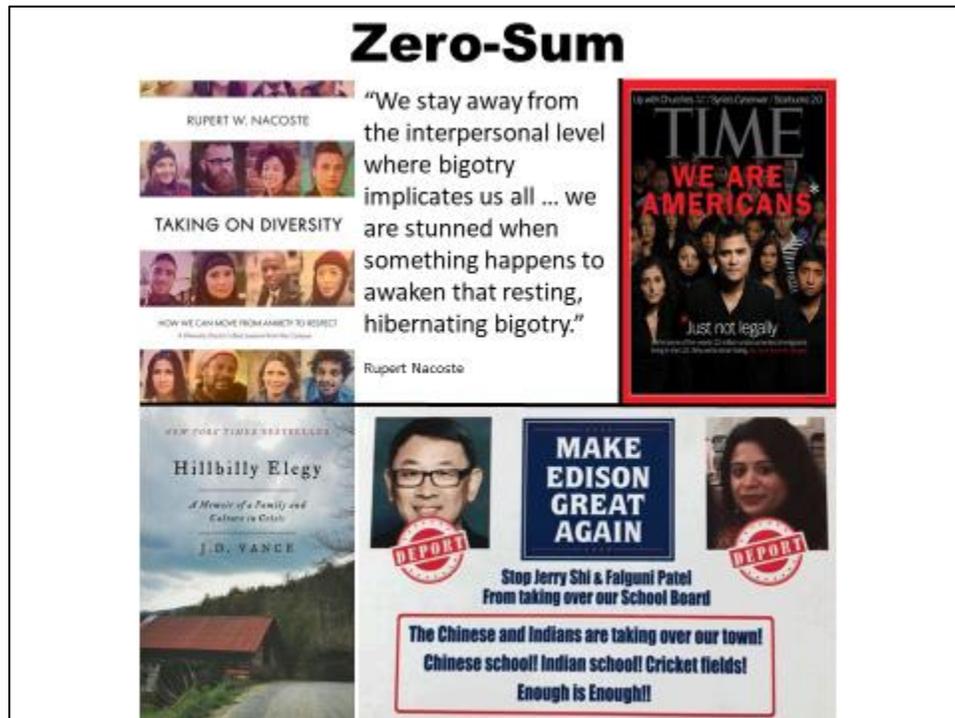
This is the backdrop to our work in higher education, to cultivate the voice and talent and active participation in the public square of democracy of the next diverse generation of local citizens in a global world, and yet we do it in the face of what feels like the long arm of history reawakening some of our worst national instincts. Indeed, today's divisive and divided social landscape – one characterized more by turmoil than by thoughtful engagement – feels like such a throwback to times past that it calls on us to first consider that history, before charting any course forward.

Indeed, events of our day eerily, often shockingly, resonate back to the KKK marches of the Jim Crow era and the construction of confederate monuments that peaked in the 1910s and 1920s, to the violent responses in the face of the nonviolent protest of the 1950's and 1960's civil rights movement, from the burning of the first Freedom Riders bus to Bull Connor's fire hoses turned on mere children marching in Birmingham. We remember again the fist of bigotry meeting the bravery of non-violent marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge from Selma to Montgomery, and so many other horrific moments of violence asserting the force of white supremacy.

And of course, this repressive supremacy has its historical precedents in our collective American sins, beginning with the assault on the true Native Americans, along with the forced journey, the middle passage of Africans on slave ships and later, the internment of Japanese Americans in World War II. And the exertion of a supremacist hierarchy remains a force in our contemporary geography as well, from Ferguson to Baltimore to Staten Island where young black lives are lost at the hands of those sworn to protect the public (all of the public), in the threats of deportation haunting immigrant families and the legal insecurities hanging over Dreamers of the next vibrant generation here and all across our land, in the debates in communities near and far where the

freedom to choose one's gender and sexuality is suddenly not a private but a public matter, across the architecture of segregation and the community trauma of mass incarceration, felt so acutely in my city of Newark even 50 years after the Newark rebellion for justice.

### *Zero-Sum*



We see in the recent events in Charlottesville, what my fellow social psychologist Rupert Nacoste calls the persistent legacy of fierce hibernating bigotry<sup>3</sup> (honed in this country and around the world for centuries). We see horrible bigotry that is not hibernating but rather on agonizing display once again. Now we see the specter of terrorism used to justify another form of racializing exclusion, as our nation selectively turns its back on refugees and migrants and immigrants from homelands that have been labelled as “others,” even as we know that this country has always been built on the backs of newcomers from diaspora all over the globe. We “terrorize” the name and face of Muslims, even as we hesitate to label others who commit extremist acts as domestic terrorists, as when Dylan Roof murders nine black parishioners in the name of white supremacy in the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C.

In all of this (often vicious) “othering,” we see the specter of zero-sum thinking – what you have is what I deserve and you took it from me. It is the narrative of *Hillbilly Elegy* that pits largely white Christian rural America against ethnically and racially and religiously diverse urban America, communities who sadly share many of the same economic and educational woes. It is the chants emerging in recent elections in which political rhetoric is used to mourn the loss of white majority status to the multi-ethnic generations now populating many cities and towns.

<sup>3</sup> Rupert W. Nacoste, *Taking on Diversity: How We Can Move from Anxiety to Respect*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2015, p.160.

And, most forcefully it is the threats levelled against immigrants in those communities, including so many of our students who came as children (the median age that Dreamers came to the U.S. is 6), grew up with siblings born here, and now face restrictions on their futures, and possible deportation. This is the backdrop of social division against which we all must push to find a new unity.

### *Change-Makers*

Yes, today's injustices harken back, underlining how shockingly real they are right now. But, as so often before, they also constitute a loud call to reckoning going forward, one that can perhaps also mobilize our best instincts if we work together to cultivate a new generation of change makers – one that has both lived with the divisiveness and yet also often embraces a much more dynamic, intersectional, and therefore empathetic social identity landscape. That is, when we look at the mosaic of mobilization of our much more diverse and intersectional next generation in the face of identity group threats – from racist assaults on campuses to travel bans and the rescission of DACA to anti-Muslim and anti-LGBTQ attacks – it gives one some hope that bonds of empathetic citizenship are emerging and strengthening, despite the many countervailing forces of the politics of resentment and the rhetoric of extremist fear-mongering. Much as we might think that institutional and community transformation for diversity and inclusion will be led by those already with power in place, I would put my aspirations for democracy, within and outside the academy, on that next generation of change makers and the work they are willing to do to support each other and build that all-important nuanced unity amidst our diverse demography.

## Change Makers

**DACA ADVOCACY DAY**  
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 7TH

**Join the Rutgers Newark SGA as we rally around our DACA students**

**Timeline:**  
11am-5pm - Come out to our table on student street to send a letter to Congress. Also we would have boards for you to write notes of encouragement to your fellow DACA students.  
**WHERE:** Paul Robeson Student Street

5:30-8pm - Reflection/Open Discussion  
**WHERE:** Paul Robeson DANCE ROOM Room 351

**#WESTANDWITHDACA**

**SGA**  
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY NEWARK

**#NOMUSLIMBAN**

**Stand in Solidarity**  
with students against racial and institutional discrimination!

**WEDNESDAY, 11/18**  
**NORMAN SAMUEL S PLAZA**  
**4PM-7PM**

**#MIZZOU**  
**#WERMIZZOU**



### *Express Newark*

How, then, can we as higher education institutions help foster that empathetic citizenship in spaces that both directly engage our scholars and students, and yet seamlessly create the public square of democratic exchange. There are, of course, many places to start, but I for one always turn to the arts and public humanities as the nexus of democratic engagement and the site where diverse talent gets a voice. In Newark, for example, when an historic building downtown that had been empty for 30 or more years was renovated recently, Rutgers-Newark took 50,000 square feet to house a university-community arts collaboratory – Express Newark – now the site of constant and vibrant exchange, creative production, inter-generational education, and community activism. Express Newark houses small, local arts organizations like the Newark Print Shop that welcomes all comers to learn printing, educational pathway programs in collaboration with the Newark Public Schools, Rutgers-Newark studios for 3D Design, the multi-media documentary collaborative, The Newest Americans, and a Shine Photography Studio dedicated to training the next generation of portrait artists in the tradition of James Van der Zee, the great Harlem Renaissance portrait artist, who had his first apprenticeship in the Hahne's Building years ago. There is inter-generational activity and artistic activism in this space – a third space as we say between university and community – 24x7, and it has become a platform for building connections and common ground.



### *Empathetic Citizenship*

As we try to move beyond a landscape of threats to one of social connection, as happens frequently in a third space like Express Newark, we need to be quite deliberate about facing history and finding opportunities to leverage our diversity, tell our different narratives, and build a unity that doesn't require assimilation and can celebrate rather than threaten our pluralistic

identities. We need to revisit the long arm of history with our newest generation of change-makers deeply embedded in the process, learning as we are doing in Newark and at Rutgers-Newark, to unpack in some detail what it would mean today to “bridge the two Americas,” as Dr. King called for fifty years ago. In Newark, this means understanding the economic, social, racial divides that fed the Newark rebellion, fifty years ago, and that continue today, with only 18% of the many thousands of jobs in the city held by city residents. It means connecting the stories of our students – The Newest Americans – to those who migrated and immigrated here before with many overlapping struggles for opportunity.



We need a concentrated moment of *Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation* – which the activities of our new Center, supported by AACU and Kellogg, and in partnership with the NJ Institute for Social Justice, the Newark Public Library, and Mayor Baraka, will allow. Those activities will engage our next generation change-makers in videos of citizens and students addressing the question: “What does racial healing look like to you?”; facilitated healing circles and discussions; screening with moderated discussions afterwards at NPL branches; history bus tour organized by Newest Americans to explore the complex migrant and immigrant histories here, to find common ground via histories of displacement between the City’s native-born communities of color, and immigrant communities established after the 1965 Immigration Act. Then based off of what emerges in the videos and bus tour, the Center partners will mount a series of small intimate City-Wide Story Circles (crossing generations), and Intergroup Dialogue “courses,” TEDx moderated events, public art installations at Express Newark with video interviews on the Newark Rebellion, and a community-campus reading as part of Mayor Baraka’s book club. Moreover, all of this work requires deliberate training in the art of civic dialogue across the boundaries of race and class and position, and so our P3 Collaboratory – a place for pedagogy, professional development, and publicly-engaged scholarship will team with

TRHT partners and our Communications Department to produce media training sessions for faculty, staff, and students on these issues.

Looking back and looking forward, we will come together, as different generations – those who have been there, so to speak, and those who will take us forward, hopefully with a stronger sense of empathetic citizenship and interdependent responsibility than has been on display in our world today.

### *Social Connectedness*

## Social Connectedness

“Achieving a connected society does not require that individuals shed cultural specificity. Instead it requires that we scrutinize how institutions build social connections with a view to ensuring that there are multiple, overlapping pathways connecting the full range of communities in a country to one another. The ideal of a connected society contrasts to an idea of integration through-assimilation by orienting us toward becoming a community of communities.”

Danielle Allen

As we engage across generations and the divides of both history and university-community in this collective narrative-sharing, hopefully, we will succeed in building the beginnings of a new kind of democratic, social unity – a **“community of communities”** as Danielle Allen calls it – one that does not require that be an assimilated melting pot but rather than we celebrate with and to each other the bonus of our diversity. We need to walk in each other’s shoes, as four of our Rutgers-Newark students allowed over two million viewers on the NYT website, *Lens*, to do in *Hijabi World*, their video-documentary of what it feels like to wear an Hijabi in Trump’s world. We need to develop literacies about identity as the interdisciplinary scholarly project, *Democratizing Knowledge*, does in its summer institutes with new scholars, graduate students, and community activists. And, perhaps most significantly, we need to structure our inter-group dialogues, university and community, to explicitly create the bridges across race, faith, sexuality, geography, class, that are missing in today’s America (and beyond). If we do this bridging work, then perhaps we – faculty, students, community partners – will be better prepared for the action research that, when embedded in collective impact collaborations, can make the change we want to see.

### *Action Research*

In keeping with my theme today, that cultivating the next generation of empathetic citizens requires both looking back and collaborating with community to move forward more equitably and more socially connected, when we take the steps to democratically embed our work in and with our communities, universities have a model to work from in the precedents set by Kurt Lewin in his action research tradition – as he famously noted, “If you truly want to understand something, try to change it.” We need only compare the role that scholars and community activists have played in the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, to see this intertwining of action research and social justice advocacy. Similarly, as we think specifically about cultivating the next generation of action researchers and social justice advocates, look back to the great Freedom School tradition of the civil rights era, and look forward today to the brave work that Freedom University, in Atlanta, is doing to educate Dreamers denied access to public higher education in Georgia. It is this kind of publicly-engaged scholarship and this kind of socially-conscious higher education that together can best prepare our future change-makers.



### *Collective Impact*

Moving from that platform of publicly-engaged scholarship and deliberately socially-conscious education to a full-blown model of collective impact, requires a substantial mind-shift for higher education, I would argue. It requires moving from “father knows best,” to “ask us, we lay our heads down here at night.” It requires that universities truly embed themselves as neighbors in the moral rather than just geographic sense, as Newark’s famed Rabbi Prinz intoned, speaking before his friend and comrade, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the 1963 March on Washington. We need to see ourselves as interdependent partners – anchor institutions, working in sustained ways to not only effect social change in our communities, but to mutually benefit by training the

next progressive generation of students and scholars as empathetic citizens of their place, locally and globally, as the Anchor Institutions Task Force encourages.

This is decidedly place-based work, for it takes that commitment to community, that nuanced education in history, and that sustained willingness to be responsible for social change, including for training those who live and have lived there for generations, for leadership, to be effective public scholars and civically-engaged students. Yet, as I will now briefly illustrate with the collective impact work in Newark, this anchor model is by no means parochial or narrow in its resonance beyond the local, and over time. Nonetheless, I do think we start locally, and so I will turn now to some of the work in Newark.

## Collective Impact

“Neighbor is not a geographic term. It is a moral concept. It means our collective responsibility for the preservation of man’s dignity and integrity.”

Newark Rabbi Joachim Prinz  
March on Washington, 1963



Father Knows Best

---

**Anchor Institutions Task Force**

**MARGA**  
INCORPORATED

*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.*



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

### *Mutually Beneficial Collaboration in Newark*

In ways very similar to most urban centers in our country (and indeed around the globe), Newark is a place of paradoxes – it is filled with fortune 500 companies, educational and health care institutions, large and small cultural organizations, growing real estate investment, and it stands across the river from New York City, and at the center of a major airport-rail-and port hub. It is home to a very diverse population, defined over 350 years and to this day by generations of migrants (south to north) and immigrants from diasporas all over the world. Newarkers have been at the doorstep of opportunity for generations, blocked by the architecture of segregation and the sequelae of poverty, yet organized in every neighborhood to fulfill a dream of opportunity. In this context, Rutgers-Newark is ideally suited, both as a home for the future generations of Newarkers (with a sixty percent growth in Newark residents attending RU-N over the last four years, amounting now to 13% of our undergraduate population) and as a major anchor institution in the city dedicated to scholarship in the action research tradition, to educating our next civic leaders, professionals, and citizens, and to establishing sustainable

collaborative infrastructure, university-community, to effect social change. And, with great fortune, we have many partners in Newark, from City Hall to the C-Suites, from the faith-based and community development networks, to the Newark Public Schools, libraries, and performing arts centers, as well as a strong alliance of higher education and hospitals – the “eds and meds” of anchor institution work. Most critically, this is a place where social change is long overdue, and where the next generation of change-makers wants to bring it on. Therefore, as we all – anchor institutions large and small – collaborate on city-wide initiatives to spur employment, to enhance the opportunities for small local businesses to thrive, to support equitable housing in the downtown, and to create pathways to educational opportunity for Newark residents, there is also a strong commitment to cultivating the next generation of civically-engaged citizens throughout the neighborhoods of the city. This, in turn, is the ideal local collaborative infrastructure for university faculty, staff, and students to join in mutually beneficial democratic engagement in our city, and here, then, are some examples of the inter-generational collective impact work from public health to public safety, from educational attainment locally to global citizenship far beyond our New Jersey roots.

**Community-Engaged Science** – As we consider ways to intervene to reduce health disparities amongst our Newark residents, we strongly see the value of designing interventions, such as the one illustrated here for African American brain health to address high incidents of Alzheimer’s and other degenerative brain disorders, with the full input of members of the community, health experts, and local neighborhood leaders, working with our neuroscientists. In the process of testing particular interventions (nutrition, exercise, and behavioral testing), the AABHI has formed very inclusive, cross-sector collaborations, especially with local community-based organizations (faith-based networks, retired nurses), that will be sustained well beyond any given grant-funded intervention project. Moreover, these networks now include multiple generations of researchers, STEM students, and high school students from the neighborhoods, allowing for the cultivation of the next diverse generation of scientists.



***Strong, Safe Neighborhoods*** – Moving from public health to public safety, it is equally vital to create inclusive collaborative teams to ensure that crime-intervention strategies are well-tailored to neighborhood needs and more effectively and consistently carried out by both public agencies and community residents. For example, the Safer Newark Council, a collaboration committed to reducing homicides and robberies by 20% in 2020, draws on crime hot spot analyses from our criminal justice scholars, as well as the on-the-ground interventions by residents familiar with the neighborhoods, including a Newark Community Street Team, as they craft credible, evidence-based interventions. Most critically, the Safer Newark Council is a sustained, cross-agency-cross-institution network that will remain in place for many years to come. And speaking of many years to come, one of its commitments is to engage a Youth Violence Prevention Consortium, to train the next generation of informed and committed public safety community advocates.



***Educational Attainment and Prosperity*** – And speaking of next generation leaders and informed citizens, there is likely no more important intervention that our anchor institution collaborations can effect than finding ways to increase post-secondary educational attainment in Newark, and similar urban communities. Therefore, as part of the Newark City of Learning Collaborative, aiming to increase post-secondary degree holders to 25% of Newark residents by 2025, we and our many community-based partners have created pathway programs for middle and high school students and for those not currently connected to schooling (“opportunity youth”) to mentor, engage with college curriculum, and more. Moreover, the Newark City of Learning Collaborative, with 60+ partners, is envisioned as a permanent infrastructure including long-term collaborations like a university-assisted community school partnership with a traditionally under-performing local high school. And, it works across the entire city and school district to create a

college-going culture in Newark, as well as to ensure that students and their families understand the available opportunities for financial support to not only go to but succeed in college.

**Educational Attainment**

**NEWARK**  
CITY OF LEARNING COLLABORATIVE  
25% by 2025

**60+ partners**  
incl. City of Newark, Newark Public Schools,  
higher ed & nonprofits aiming to:

- Expand & strengthen K-16 educational pathways
- Re-engage disconnected youth
- Retain college grads
- Re-engage adult learners
- University-Assisted Community Schools

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION    FORD FOUNDATION

APPLY NOW: [www.nccsl.org/apply](http://www.nccsl.org/apply)

Rutgers University - Newark  
presents  
**Youth Leadership & Success Program**  
Building youth leadership from local to global

Must be in 10<sup>th</sup> Grade attending a high school in Newark.  
APPLY NOW: [www.rutgers.edu/ru-n](http://www.rutgers.edu/ru-n)

Leadership & Academic courses    Global Student Exchange opportunities  
Summer Job Opportunities    Mentor Support

Shabazz University Assisted Partnership

OPPORTUNITY

**FAFSA FREE FOR ALL**  
Debunking Myths about Financial Aid

**RU-N to the TOP**  
Last-in, full-tuition scholarships for students with adjusted gross incomes of \$60,000 or less who are Newark residents or NJ county college transfers

### *Moving Democratic Engagement Beyond our Borders*

As this next very diverse generation of change-makers engage at once both in their own education and in the social change efforts underway in our community, tackling what we call in our new Honors Living Learning Community an interdisciplinary, publicly-engaged curriculum dedicated to local citizenship in a global world, the resonance of the issues facing our democracy and those seen across the borders of our contemporary landscape stand clearly in sight. Indeed, the global forum held in Rome last summer confirmed the resonance of our shared challenges – social, economic, cultural, political – and affirmed the need for more networks of engaged university-community partnerships spanning borders, even as so many countries struggle with questions of migration and immigration. So, as we in Newark think about bridging the two Americas (of prosperity and poverty, of white and black and brown, of citizen and immigrants and dreamers), we are increasingly reaching beyond our city, as the lessons of social change are borderless, and the education of change-makers must be too. Hence, our young jazz artists are playing in Cape Town, while our Shabazz High partners create solar kits for our Rutgers-Newark students to deliver to Nicaragua, and our Express Newark innovators look to the festivals created in Durham, U.K., and of course our dreamers see their lives narrated from afar in the Global Migrant Project, even as its leader from Malta comes to Rutgers-Newark for graduate work in Global Urban Studies. Surely, this is what Rabbi Prinz had in mind when he urged us to think of “neighbor” as more than a geographic concept. And in the same vein, this is the kind of work and the kind of education that breeds empathetic citizenship – something, as I began this

discussion saying is in short supply today. This is what gives me both hope and urgency in our collective efforts to be democratically engaged universities.

