

The Compelling Interest of Diversity and Inclusion: Threat or Opportunity?

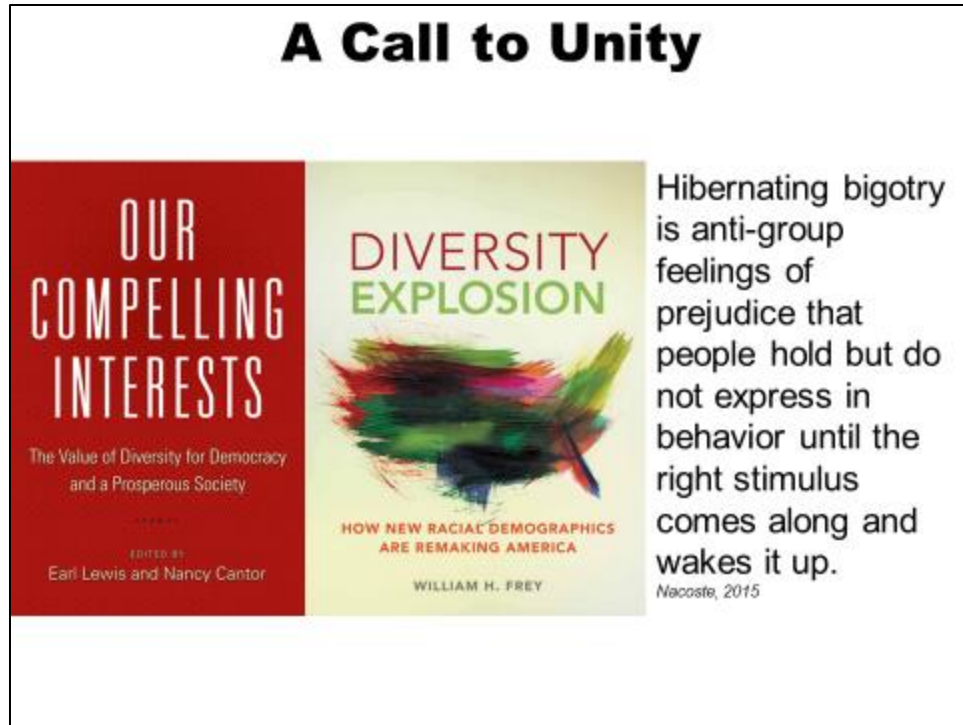
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In the introduction to our book series, *Our Compelling Interests*,² Earl Lewis and I ask what we see as a fundamental question for our time, and that is whether we as a people can rise to the imperative of our fast-changing demography. Can we come to see the diversity of our nation (and world) as an opportunity to be embraced rather than a threat to be defended against? This is a question that I believe can also help frame the discussion here as to the value of diversity and inclusion in higher education.

¹ Invited keynote address given at the conference titled Framing the Value of Diversity & Inclusion in Higher Education: Setting the Research Agenda held at Rutgers University – New Brunswick, October 6, 2017.

² Earl Lewis & Nancy Cantor (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Volume 1, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016.



Can the Diversity Explosion be a Call to Unity?

There is little doubt that the demographic map of our nation is fast changing. As William Frey has documented, there is a “diversity explosion” that will change us to a non-white majority population by mid-century.³ Nevertheless, at the same time, what Charles Tilly once dubbed the “durable inequalities”⁴ have also intensified. These inequalities conform to rigid lines of race and ethnicity, building on centuries of subjugation of our indigenous peoples and the long tail of the legacy of slavery. Add to that, the all-too-facile ways in which we now expand the national racist narrative with a resurgence of religious nationalism, given contemporary color by the equation of Islam with extremism, and immigration more generally with the loss of an “American” (white Christian) identity.⁵ One need only conjure the images of the signs furlled in Charlottesville, listen to the rhetoric of the travel ban placed on those from “majority Muslim countries,” or witness the wrenching anxiety of our DACA students to recognize that a new (but all too familiar) psychology of threat that promotes exclusionary insularity has gripped our national imagination. Will we now take to locking up our neighbors as we did in World War II with the internment of Japanese-Americans? Are we a country that will meet Frey’s exploding

³ William H. Frey, The “Diversity Explosion” is America’s Twenty-First-Century Baby Boom, Earl Lewis & Nancy Cantor (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016, 16-35.

⁴ Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca., 1998., Thomas Sugrue, *City Moves: Black Urban History Since 1967*, Marion Thompson Wright Lecture, Rutgers University-Newark, Feb 18, 2017.

⁵ Robert P. Jones, The Collapse of American Identity, *The New York Times*, May 4, 2017.

diversity by waking up our shared hibernating bigotry, as Rupert Nacoste asks in his recent book, *Taking on Diversity: How Can We Move from Anxiety to Respect?*⁶

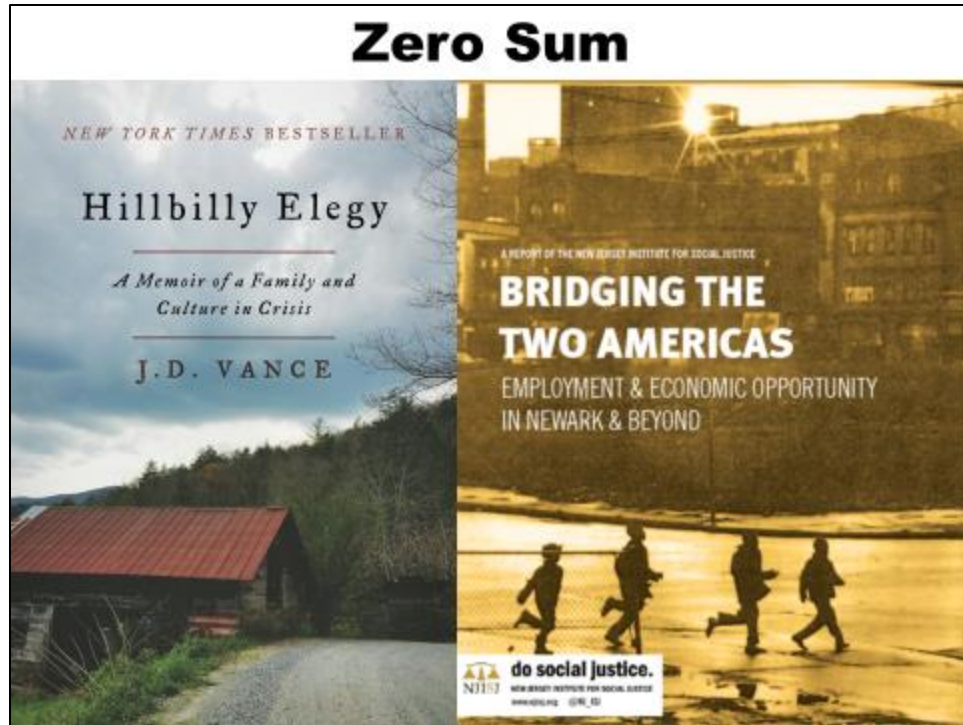
Indeed, this national mood of anxiety capitalizes on fears of displacement of once dominant groups (echoed in the resurgence of the white supremacy movement) and adds to that a zero-sum pitting of rural, largely white populations (expressed as a politics of resentment⁷) against urban, largely communities of color (where Black Lives Matter), as if the very real economic and educational woes were not a shared plague.⁸ And it is only getting worse as economic inequality post-recession has skyrocketed, exacerbating the plight of all groups without access to post-secondary education and stalling inter-generational mobility.⁹ Sadly, then, the only thing common in these voices is the splintering of aggrieved groups and the distancing of each one from a faith that the American institutions controlling justice, protection, opportunity, and prosperity will work for them, not to mention the belief that they are only working for others. This current status quo is not only a recipe for discontent, it is a zeitgeist that will make the work of leveraging diversity to build an inclusive unity all the harder, even as it is all the more important.

⁶ Rupert W. Nacoste, *Taking on Diversity: How We Can Move from Anxiety to Respect*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2015, p.160.

⁷ Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

⁸ See, for example, Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equity*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Less Separate, Still Unequal: Diversity and Equality in 'Post-Civil Rights' America," in Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016, 39–70.

⁹ Gary Orfield, Jongyeon Ee, Erica Frankenberg, and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, *Brown at 62: School Segregation by Race, Poverty and State*, Research Brief of UCLA Civil Rights Project, May 16, 2016; Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, & Danny Yagan, *Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility*, report released January, 2017; Anthony Carnevale, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report, 2016.



Just as the call for a new narrative of unity seems especially urgent in this moment of inter-group discord, it also requires that we rethink how to be unified in ways different from our past. Today's unity will have to come without the common refrain of a "melting pot" America and absent the need for assimilation to whiteness nor to a dominant faith?¹⁰ It will need to be a narrative that mirrors more closely the actual diversity explosion with its much more fine-grained, intersectional, and fluid social identity map. A map woven less along binary lines of race, language, religion, and normative sexuality, and more along self-identified multi-dimensions of social group identity. Who will champion this new more nuanced narrative of unity?

Here I turn to and take solace in our next generation student leaders, who both recognize and affirm intra-group bonds while building considerable common cause across all lines of durable inequality and all "othered" groups. We see that solidarity in the broadly-attended rallies on our campuses in the face of a multitude of current attacks – Muslims banned from travelling here, Dreamers facing deportation, transgender individuals denied the use of bathrooms of choice, young black men facing police violence, Native Americans forced to relinquish sacred land to environmentally-destructive pipelines.

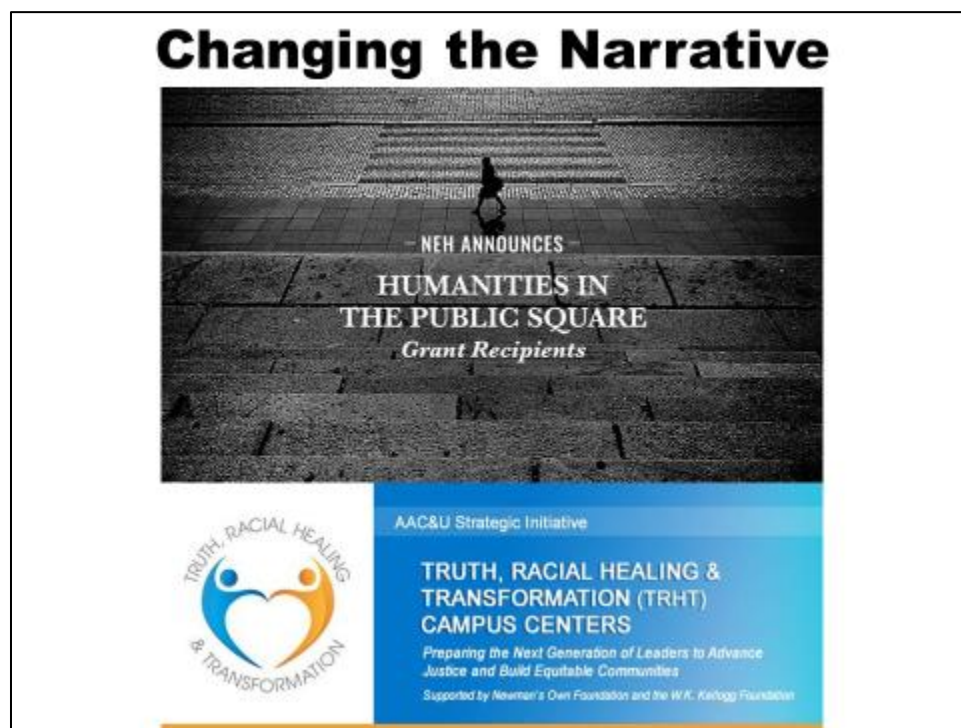
The next generation at our doorsteps seems poised to rise to the challenge and the possibility of seeing diversity in much richer terms, while confronting the injustices of those durable inequalities. They seem poised to see how diversity can be leveraged not feared, how inclusion can build upon rather than attempt to whitewash difference or under-cut group affirmation, and how justice must eschew supremacy, and opportunity must reach more not

¹⁰ Eboo Patel, *Religious Diversity and the American Promise*, in Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests*, Volume 3, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming.

protect the place of some. Accordingly, we all need to respond too, embracing their call to collective action in which all of higher education can take an affirmative stance for this nuanced unity.

Changing the Narrative: Moving from Threat to Opportunity

To begin the move from seeing diversity as a threat to building inclusive unity, we first need to resist the return to a reductionist, supremacist narrative that resonates backwards to an extremist legacy of bigotry and racism and violence and fascism and their intersection, as Earl Lewis and I argued in our opinion piece, *After Charlottesville*.¹¹ Changing the narrative and resisting a turn backwards is, in my view, the prerequisite to a course of collective action that unites to move forward. In the face of heated, often virulent division, as well as in the moments in between when the regular nuances of social relations tax both patience and any proclivity towards empathetic citizenship, we must all still speak out. We must speak out in unvarnished ways about the past and in some strong ways about the future, albeit with all the requisite modesty, knowing full well that we don't really know how to move on from the long-arm of that past. We still live in largely divided communities, so we don't have much daily experience with unity, and it won't come easily.



Nonetheless, and counter to our ivory tower tendencies, the academy has a very real role to play in edging us as a public, in the public square, toward thoughtful debate about a unifying narrative. We can play a public role in constructing a narrative that recognizes rather than covers over difference; one that looks back with appreciation for the experiences of those who may not have found a voice in the dominant narrative of the American identity. To weave that nuanced

¹¹ Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor, *After Charlottesville*, *The Huffington Post*, August 21, 2017.

unity, however, we need to learn about each other and this requires engaging in the public square, as Bro Adams articulated in his “humanities in the public square” initiative at the National Endowment for the Humanities,¹² designed to “demonstrate the vital role that humanities ideas can play in our civic life” by programming that engages the public in sustained conversations. As the American Historical Association beautifully articulated in their “Statement on Confederate Monuments” issued after Charlottesville,¹³ so much of our public symbolism was constructed and decided upon with relatively few voices engaged, and certainly without anything like the pluralism of interpretations of history that even a known set of historical “facts” allow. With this need for pluralistic reflection in mind, The Kellogg Foundation has initiated a national dialogue on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation, including ten campus centers organized by AACU (and supported by Newman’s Own Foundation and Kellogg), one of which Rutgers-Newark and its community partners, especially the NJ Institute for Social Justice, the Newark Public Libraries, and the Office of Mayor Ras J. Baraka, eagerly will lead.¹⁴

Building Just Academic Spaces

One reason for optimism that the academy will answer this call to democratic action comes from what seems to be building momentum for public scholarly engagement, seen for example, in professional societies from the American Sociological Association’s public sociology discourse¹⁵ to the citizen science projects promoted by the National Geographic Society,¹⁶ and in national networks organized to foster publicly-engaged scholarship, from *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*¹⁷ to the Anchor Institutions Task Force.¹⁸ Yet the challenge for us as academics remains also clear, as we need to learn how to construct what my colleagues in the Democratizing Knowledge Project call “*just academic spaces*,” where different voices, perspectives, and experiences find a welcome, not only on our campuses and in our disciplinary networks but in those critical public spaces that cross sectors, neighborhoods, and communities at home and abroad, that unite us as citizen-scholars, teachers and learners, trusted partners to change the (divisive and divided) status quo.¹⁹ Then, once we learn how to do this inclusive work, of course, we need to actually go one step further and build it into the investments and reward structures of our institutions, and we must turn to that task as we develop both the knowhow and the appreciation for the contributions of diversity to excellence.

Diversity and Excellence: Hand in Hand in Impact

¹² Humanities in the Public Square, *National Endowment for the Humanities*, <https://www.neh.gov>. Recent call for proposals, March 14, 2016.

¹³ Statement on Confederate Monuments, American Historical Association, August 28, 2017, <https://www.historians.org>.

¹⁴ <https://www.aacu.org/press-releases/aacu-selects-ten-institutions-sites-truth-racial-healing-transformation-trht>, <https://www.newark.rutgers.edu/news/truth-racial-healing-and-transformation-center-open-rutgers-university-newark-first-nation>.

¹⁵ <http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/footnotes/jan04/fn5.html>.

¹⁶ <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/idea/citizen-science-projects/>.

¹⁷ <http://imaginingamerica.org/>.

¹⁸ <https://www.margainc.com/aitf/>.

¹⁹ <http://democratizingknowledge.syr.edu/SummerInstitute.html>.

In that regard, let me turn now to briefly describing a range of programs and venues and scholarship demonstrating the benefits of diversity – defined along many dimensions and inclusive of many partners in and outside the academy – in disciplines ranging from the arts, humanities and social sciences to the sciences and business, religion and ethics.

Just Academic Spaces

democratizing knowledge PROJECT

developing literacies building communities seeding change

Announcing Summer Institute 2017

Just Academic Spaces: Institutional Transformation

Rutgers University Newark
June 12- June 17

The Democratizing Knowledge 2017 Summer Institute will bring together faculty, advanced doctoral and other degree students, and scholar-activist from the humanities and social sciences across the US and beyond to examine the current state of US higher education; explore productive dialogues between community organizations, activists, and scholar-activists; and work on collaborative strategies to create a more just academy. Together, scholar-activists and community partners will share how these collaborations build new, sometimes unexpected, kinds of publics between critical academic scholarship and community-based organizations.

Eligibility: Advanced doctoral and other degree students who have completed at least two years of course work; postdoctoral scholars, and pre-tenured faculty in contingent or tenure-track positions who are working on issues related to the topic of the institute. Underrepresented scholars and those who are at HBCUs and other primarily minority-serving institutions are especially encouraged to apply. Room and board is fully covered for up to 20 successful applicants. If needed, financial assistance is also available for travel to Newark.

Application deadline:
February 10, 2017

Notifications by:
March 15, 2017

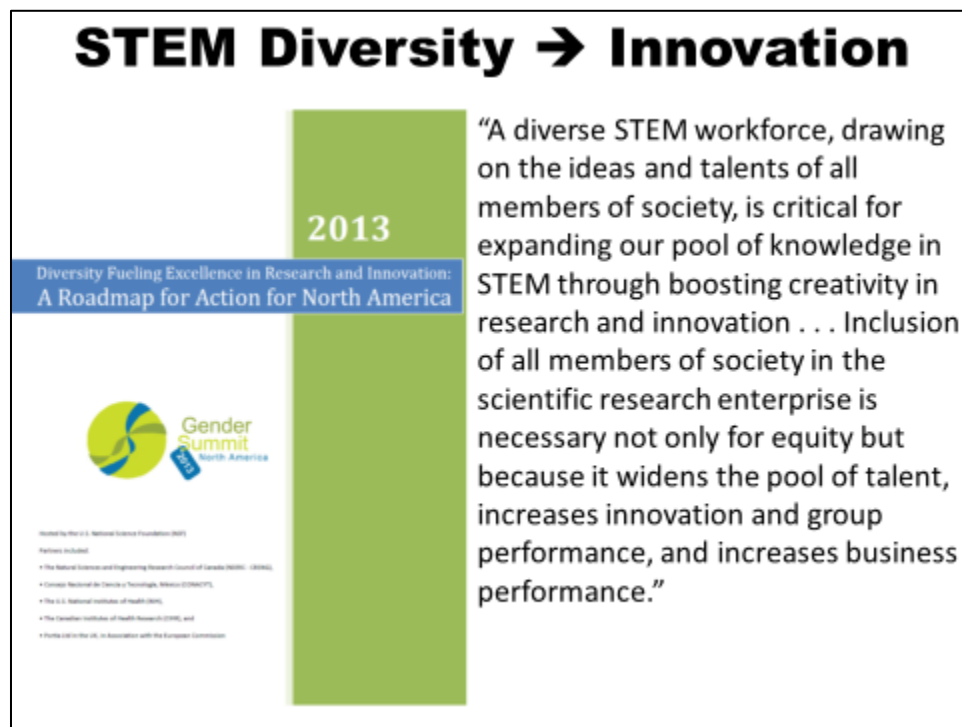
For more information, see <http://democratizingknowledge.syr.edu> or email DK_Summer_Institute_at_dk2017@indivmedia.rutgers.edu

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The DK Summer Institute is funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

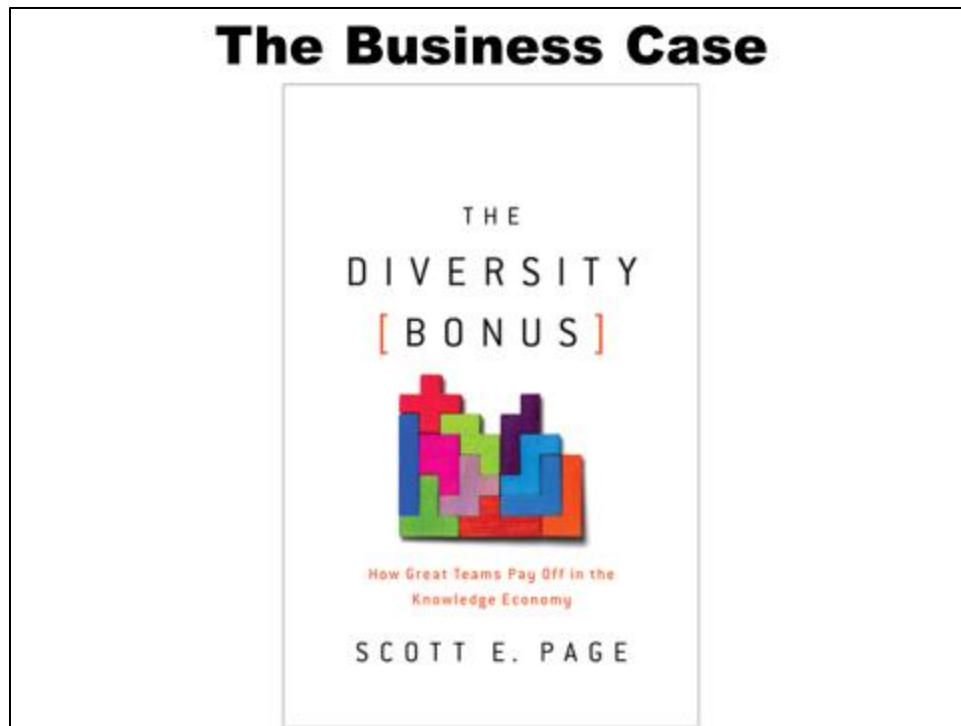
Democratizing Knowledge Summer Institutes. The Democratizing Knowledge Project began in 2009 at Syracuse University as a group of interdisciplinary scholar-activists and community activist partners came together to think about how to make knowledge production more open, inclusive, and democratic. In successive summer institutes (2016 at Syracuse, 2017 at Rutgers-Newark, 2018 at Spelman College), groups of advanced doctoral students, pre-tenure faculty, and scholar-activists from the humanities and social sciences have gathered with community partners to explore how collaborations that bring diverse voices to the table of dialogue can build new spaces that allow for identities to breath fresh air into our often narrowed disciplinary windows on the world. For example, one of the DK scholars from this summer's institute, Annie Isabel Fukushima, an assistant professor at the University of Utah, works in collaboration with a transnational feminist collective coordinating a series of public arts and education projects across South Korea, Columbia, and the Philippines. They engage immigrants' rights groups and scholars in tackling the many hurdles faced by migrants and refugees worldwide. As Annie faces the global landscape, her fellow DK scholar, Rachel Jackson, from the University of Oklahoma and a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, examines the rhetorical legacies of indigenous communities across Oklahoma, engaging, for example, Kiowa elders in leading discussions on traditional arts, oral traditions, ceremonial dances, and language, to decenter from more typical western humanities content. As the cross-talk develops between DK scholars, each pursuing a project but also making community across the cohort, there is a shared reflection on ways in which the normative language, evaluation and reward systems of the academy need to stretch to imagine a more just academy, as one scholar wrote in assessing the experience.



International Gender Innovation Summits. Similar in intent to the inclusive gatherings of the DK Summer Institutes, but on a much larger scale, the European Commission began back in 2011 organizing international Gender Innovation Summits, with 9 held already around the globe bringing together over 2750 participants and 575 contributors from over 50 countries.²⁰ These summits are built precisely around the benefits of broadening participation in science and innovation both in terms of the diversity of the practitioners and participants in scientific research and the integration of sex-gender analysis in the focus of the research and innovation itself.²¹ And while all of us who have participated in some of these Summits would likely agree with that assessment of the value of gender diversity in STEM, the gathering of such a richly diverse global audience has also served to surface the intersectional complexity of gender diversity, contextualized by race and ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and so on, giving everyone involved a deeper appreciation of both the importance and the challenge of broadening participation in the science and innovation enterprise.

²⁰ <https://gender-summit.com/>.

²¹ Gender Summit North America, *Diversity Fueling Excellence in Research and Innovation: A Roadmap for Action for North America* (Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation, Office of International and Integrative Activities, 2013).

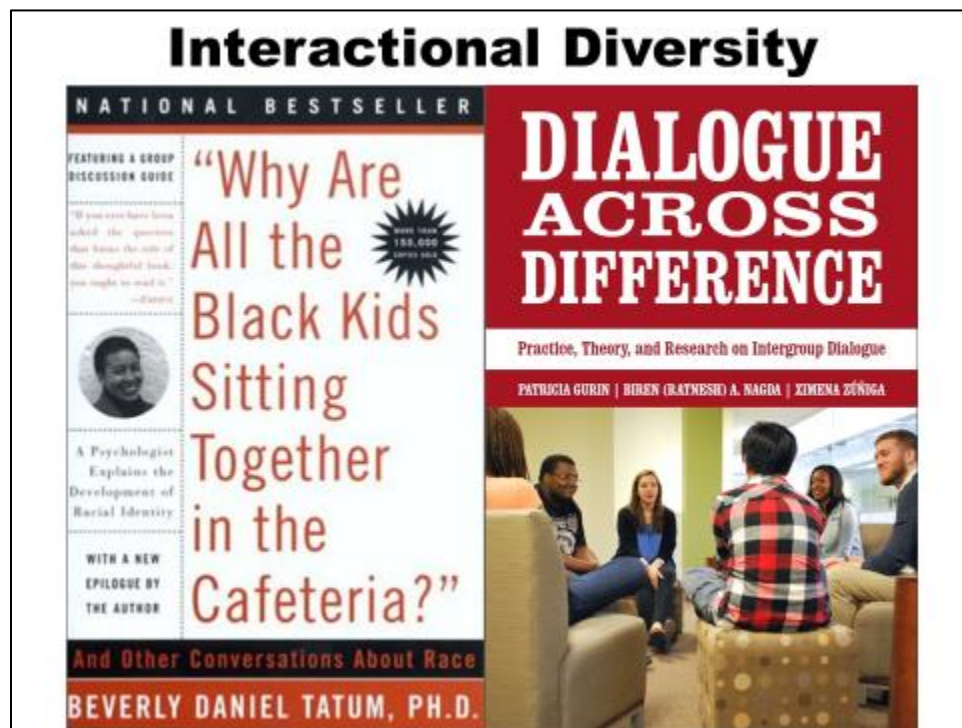


The Diversity Bonus in Teams. At the center of the arguments for broadening participation and focus in STEM is the desire to reap the bonus for solving complex, pressing challenges of our times (such as those outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, from poverty to hunger to clean water and good health, and more).²² And in this regard, scholars, practitioners and policy-makers alike have much to learn from complex systems and organizational behavior theorists who study the performance of teams in problem-solving under uncertainty. As Scott Page outlines in his recent volume, *The Diversity Bonus*, the second volume in *Our Compelling Interest* book series, the collective intelligence of a team is as important (and sometimes more important) to good solutions for hard problems than is the individual ability of its members. That is, the pragmatic or business case for diversity hinges on the cognitive complexity represented in the whole team, as well as on its ability to function as an inclusive whole, bringing out the best in each other, or at least the novel ideas, perspectives, and experiences that each member has to contribute.²³ Moreover, in a world in which highly nuanced social identities and group affiliations often map on to quite different experiences, knowledge bases, beliefs, and factual repertoires, the cognitive diversity of a team will likely be influenced by the identity diversity of its participants. In fact, identity diversity will influence group performance both directly in what different participants bring to the discussions and indirectly in how they interact and what they elicit from others in the group. For example, Katherine Phillips, an organizational behavior scholar at Columbia, in commenting on Page's analysis, notes that her data show how individuals in identity diverse teams tend to work harder

²² The Role of Gender-Based Innovations for the UN Sustainable Development Goals, http://gender-summit.com/images/GS6Docs/SDG_Report_FINAL.Jan13.pdf.

²³ Scott E. Page, *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*, Volume 2, Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017.

to elicit information from “different others,” thereby potentially maximizing the likelihood of a diversity bonus. Of course, the team has to function well in the face of this diversity, and as Phillips and others show, getting the best out of a diverse team takes hard work and much practice.²⁴ Sometimes, for example, the unconscious biases and stereotypes of group members about others with different identities can be an obstacle to really integrating the cognitive contributions of those others into the group’s solutions. So group work means managing one’s biases in order to reap the benefits of others’ knowledge. Thus, as we work to fill our classrooms and laboratories and workplaces and the halls of justice and government and beyond with diverse teams, let us also ponder the question of how we get along, how we talk across boundaries, or rather what it will take to change the group dynamics of our daily lives and work.



Structuring Inter-Group Dialogue in Diverse Settings. As we consider the hard work of getting teams to gel so as to reap the diversity bonus, it is worth noting that maximizing the diversity bonus requires multiple deliberate commitments by our institutions, each of which in turn is a process of culture change. First, we need to have critical mass (for students, faculty, staff) along many dimensions of identity diversity to minimize the stereotype threat experienced by “minority” group members so as to pave the way for their contributions, and at the same time to maximize the intra-group variation (in style, attitudes, knowledge, values) so as to wear away at the implicit biases that we all hold about other identity groups.²⁵ There is a lesson to be learned here from our many efforts to build good multi-disciplinary collaborative research teams and to diversify our professoriate. It is best to have more than one “representative” of a given discipline

²⁴See, for example, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>.

²⁵ Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us And What We Can Do*, New York: Norton & Company, 2010.

in a multi-disciplinary group and it is important to avoid the isolation experienced in any given academic department by faculty who come to “stand for diversity,” whether we think of women in STEM or faculty of color across the academy. Yet critical mass or “structural diversity” is not enough to reap the educational and academic benefits of diversity. As we argued at Michigan in defending affirmative action in *Gratz and Grutter v. Bollinger*,²⁶ there needs to be true “interactional diversity,” and that takes deliberate work in a society where such minimal residential, educational, and civil society interaction across groups makes for little of the social connectedness that Danielle Allen describes as building a healthy “community of communities.”²⁷

So the task before us is to deliberately get better at interacting across social identity dimensions and groups, allowing our daily life and work contexts both within and outside and between the academy and the wider world/community to mirror some of the intersectionality we see in the identity self-descriptions (especially of our next generation students) of our modern demographic map. And, ironically, this intersectionality of daily life experience may actually get harder, the more structural or representational diversity there is any one community. Robert Putnam, for example, documented a tendency for individuals in very diverse communities to “hunker down” rather than engage in social interaction, making cross-group connections less likely.²⁸ Hence the contemporary relevance of the twentieth anniversary edition of Bev Tatum’s classic, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*²⁹ (And by the way, implicit in Tatum’s title is the allied question which we less often ask, as to why all the white kids are sitting together, too?).

Once again, the lesson is that intersectional interaction takes real work, even when the structural diversity is there. We need to deliberately weave interactional diversity through the formal and informal contexts of life and work in the academy (and beyond). We need to pay attention to how diverse our academic groupings are in what may sometimes seem like contrived ways, whether we are thinking of residential life experiences for students, academic panels and conferences, research groups, community collaborations, and the like.

This will require deliberation and patience, as not all inter-group interactions will be positive, without some structuring of them and practice at them. For example, studies of roommate assignments in residence halls show a mix of positive (more empathy and lessening of implicit biases) and negative (less desire to actually interact outside one’s group) effects of cross-

²⁶ Patricia Gurin, Jeffrey Lehman, and Earl Lewis, *Defending Diversity: Affirmative Action at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

²⁷ Danielle Allen, *Toward a Connected Society*, In Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor, (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016, p90.

²⁸ Patricia Gurin, *Group Interactions in a Connected Society*, In Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor, (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016, p.173.

²⁹ Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 20117.

race assignments.³⁰ Hence, as we think deliberately about creating settings to maximize the diversity bonus by enriching both the structural and the interactional diversity in our midst, we need to pay attention to training to do it well. As years of work by Patricia Gurin and her colleagues demonstrate, perfecting a structured curriculum of inter-group dialogue can have real pay-off, but it requires expertise. Gurin and her colleagues have now studied inter-group dialogue courses at nine universities and shown long-lasting benefits to learning how to talk across the boundaries of identity in settings deliberately made comfortable by experienced group leaders.³¹ Moreover, as Eboo Patel's work on inter-faith dialogues on many campuses and in many inter-faith youth corp initiatives demonstrates, building common ground and debunking mythologies about "others" ideally should start young, but it can be productive nonetheless across the lifespan. This is especially true in the face of threats to one group (e.g., Muslims) that resonate with threats experienced by others (e.g., the racism and anti-Semitism of white supremacists). There is a basis for inter-group unity and solidarity if we do it right.



Third Spaces of Inclusive Engagement. As we ponder how exactly to create these boundary crossing (academic) contexts, I always return to the salutary role that the arts and cultural disciplines can play, especially in encouraging what I call “third spaces” of university-community collaboration. These third spaces can create authentic and safe venues for weaving an intersectional fabric. In these public collaborations, artists and other engaged scholars and

³⁰ Patricia Gurin, *Group Interactions in Building a Connected Society*, In Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor. (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 170-181.

³¹ Eboo Patel, *Inter Faith Leadership: A Primer*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016; Patricia Gurin, Biren Nagda, and Ximena Zúñiga, *Dialogue Across Difference: Practice, Theory, and Research on Intergroup Dialogue*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013.

students and community partners can go far in cultivating a very inclusive set of voices that change minds about what merit is and what excellence looks like. These collaborative creative spaces bring out the freshest, strongest, most authentic and organically grown voices and faces of our communities. Here we all can dare to ask the impertinent questions that will push us forward and that otherwise often remain unstated, in part because of who is and who isn't at the academy's table and in part because we all fear being shut down preemptively by seeming to have strayed into the political realm. To be simplistic – “art” can be acceptable when most everything else is vulnerable to the suspicion of pushing a particular agenda of a particular group or ideology. We need more places for more voices and more people to be acceptable, plain and simple, and we need the democratizing spaces that take some power and privilege of dominant groups or individuals off the table.

There are many precedents around the country (and globally) of third spaces where community artists and citizens have joined in common ground with academics. Just as the success of inter-group dialogue programs often depends upon very deliberate structuring of conversations across boundaries, one of the keys to successful third spaces is that there is sustained commitment to nurture the collaborative infrastructure (both physical sharing of space and organizational sharing of roles and resources). It is at the heart of many of the “creative place-making” efforts around the country, perhaps most developed in the remarkable work of artist, urban planner, innovator, Theaster Gates in the South Side of Chicago.³² In Newark, we have collaborated in creating a 50,000 square foot university-community third space, Express Newark, in a newly renovated historic downtown building, in which community and university arts organizations, small and large, reside. On any given day, one can find Newark Public School students participating in pathway programs, or residents coming to community print clubs or to a widely-used photo studio built on the legacy of James Van der Zee, the renowned Harlem Renaissance photo artist who began his career as an apprentice in this building. Express Newark, as a center for as fervent, contested, honest arts-making as possible, has enabled many of our colleagues – from both the university and the community – who feel especially vulnerable and targeted as a function of their social identity to collectively and safely express their voices, experiences, concerns and aspirations. For example, the digital story-telling platform, *Newest Americans*, hosted at Express Newark, enabled several of our Muslim students to produce a video entitled *Hijabi World* that ultimately was viewed by over 2 million viewers, but even more importantly, empowered our students to feel a sense of shared belongingness and power in our community, as has the digital story of one of our Dreamers, *American Sueño*, also a part of *Newest Americans*.

These third spaces affirm diversity and simultaneously build inclusive dialogue. Moreover, they tend to attract faculty and practitioners from a much wider set of disciplines and fields than one might think. For example, there is quite a movement growing around the interweaving of science and the arts, going from STEM to STEAM, and this in turn has burgeoned into more community-engaged science in these third spaces of collaboration. Moving out of these specific third spaces, scientists and artists alike are partnering with community-based organizations and neighborhood groups to create inter-generational programs, from faith-based neighborhood health programs to K-12 STEM pathway programs, and a much broader base of

³² Natalie Moore, *How Theaster Gates is Revitalizing Chicago's South Side, One Vacant Building at a Time*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 2015.

public support for science is growing from these opportunities to empower and benefit from the diverse voices and insights of our neighbors.³³



Collaborating for Change. Moving from the confines of our universities and our disciplines and our identity groups, as these third space experiments in the arts and in the sciences often entail, reminds us, as individuals and as institutions, of our place in a broader world. It reminds us of our responsibilities as scholars, citizens, students, leaders, neighbors, to attempt to break down barriers to full participation and the legacies of inequality that haunt us still and that prevent our reaping the rightful diversity bonus in our midst. Like everything else, collaborating in this way to effect change, requires understanding those barriers and legacies and our part in their perpetuation. But as Kurt Lewin famously said, “If you truly want to understand something, try to change it,”³⁴ and try we must.

There have been many periods as divisive as our own, when higher education has played a decisive supporting and collaborative role in social change movements, from the post-civil war enactment of the public land-grant universities and HBCUs in the Morrill Acts to the action research tradition of group dynamics post World-War II. Consider, for example, the deep and broad engagement of scholar-activists and student-activists in the civil rights movement, from informing the case for school integration in *Brown v. Board of Education* to participating in Freedom Schools throughout the South, to today’s movement for university-assisted community

³³ Harkavy, I., Cantor, N. and Burnett, M. 2014. Realizing STEM Equity and Diversity through Higher Education-Community Engagement, White Paper supported by National Science Foundation under Grant No. 121996, University of Pennsylvania.

³⁴ See <https://www.toolshero.com/toolsheroes/kurt-lewin/>.

schools.³⁵ Today is another moment that calls for mobilization outside of our normal routines, and there are many models, locally and globally, where higher education is taking its rightful place in social change. We see this in university scholars joining with citizen groups to bring evidence-based practices to stem the tide of racial profiling by police and discriminatory sentencing in the courts. We see it abroad in the massive efforts by ministries in Greece and Italy to engage higher education in embracing refugees and migrants, as well as at home in the legal advocacy for DACA and immigration reform more broadly. It is poignantly apparent in the relentless work in communities from Flint to New Orleans and beyond, to bring to light egregious environmental justice issues that disparately impact some populations and communities more than others. Accordingly, there are both calls to action and the cross-sector collaborative networks and organizations that stand ready to partner with scholars and students alike in the service of the public good.³⁶

A Call to Unity: Can Diversity Lead Us from Threat to Opportunity?

This brings us back then to the overarching call to unity even while recognizing our burgeoning and nuanced differences. A call for all of us – as educators, as scholars, as students, as members of community organizations, as participants in universities that are long-standing anchor institutions in those communities – to acknowledge a broad sense of interdependence stretching beyond our familiar territory, a proclivity currently in short supply but in high demand. And, as noted throughout my comments today, the motivation to do the required hard work of self- and institutional-transformation to fulfill that interdependence has to come from a belief that diversity is in our compelling interest to cultivate. Yet, unfortunately, there is still much reason to be pessimistic about the widespread endorsement of that belief. In fact, such a belief goes perhaps against the grain of our traditional meritocracy based more on exclusion than inclusion, on narrow rather than expansive definitions of excellence. After all, as many recent analyses have documented, there hasn't been much changing in the map of inclusion amongst the students we are educating (see The New York Times recent report on the slow pace of change in the racial demography of students at selective institutions over the last 35 years) or the professoriate we are producing and hiring (see for example the recent report of the Committee on Equal Opportunity in Science and Engineering at NSF where we call for institutional accountability for broadening participation in STEM). And of course the slow pace of change is vividly apparent in the faces of those that populate the fast-growing technology sector or the corporate boardrooms that guide our economy or the elected officials that shape and steer our democracy. Add to the slow pace of change in structural diversity, the worsening tensions and inter-group battles that are tearing at whatever interactional diversity exists in our professional, social, and civic-political landscapes, and it gives reason for concern.

³⁵ Harry C. Boyte, *Reinventing Citizenship as Public Work*, In Harry C. Boyte (Ed.), *Democracy's Education: Public Work, Citizenship, & The Future of Colleges and Universities*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015, p.1-33; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003;

<http://www.communityschools.org/about/universityassistedcommunityschoolsnetwork.aspx>.

³⁶ See http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/faculties_institutes_and_centres/centres/iace/2017_rome_global_forum.



Why then, am I actually cautiously optimistic about our ability to make progress? First, and not to be underestimated is the increasing recognition that the diversity explosion is upon us, and so there is a business or pragmatic case for maximizing structural diversity and not leaving as much of the up-and-coming talent pool by the wayside of opportunity, not to mention the diversity bonus to be leveraged in an increasingly complex knowledge economy if we can achieve more interactional diversity in our teams, workplaces, institutions, and the like. Second, and somewhat counterintuitively, there is a long history in the struggle for social justice for adversity to breed opportunity for making common cause, especially when we witness acts of inhumanity as we are seeing today. There was so much bipartisan, inter-racial, inter-faith, inter-group commonality in the reactions to Charlottesville across the urban and rural geography and crossing the political aisles that some incipient call to unity seems possible, even as we all reasonably look to protect and advance our places and the particularities of our identities.³⁷ Moreover, perhaps more than one might think from media reports, even seemingly particularized mobilizations like Black Lives Matter or the reactions to restrictive transgender bathroom laws have garnered considerable cross-group support. And, finally, and most significantly, 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

³⁷ See, for example, Maggie Astor and Nicholas Fandos, Confederate Leaders' Descendants Say Statues Can Come Down, *New York Times*, August 20, 2017; Statement from the Latino Jewish Leadership Council, August 21, 2017, American Jewish Committee (AJC), Washington, D.C.

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.