

Erik Olin Wright ASA President Campus Tour to the South

April 8-20

Day 1, Prologue, April 8, 2012, en route to Jackson, Mississippi

I arrived back in Madison after my travels in Texas and Arizona on Tuesday night, March 27. When all of this was planned last Fall, I had anticipated having a quiet eight days in Madison before taking off again for my second extended campus tour organized by the ASA. That's not how things turned out.

After all of the plans had been set for the campus tours, I was invited to give a talk at the first international conference of the Participatory Budgeting Project in New York on the last weekend of March. Participatory Budgeting is one of the core examples of real utopia that I have studied, and the pilot projects of city council district level participatory budgeting in New York (and earlier in Chicago) are extremely interesting and, potentially, important. I just couldn't resist going to the conference and observing the New York participatory budget process. Here is how these pilot projects work: the elected city council members in these districts agreed to have around \$1 million of capital investment funds which they control allocated through a process of direct democracy. Neighborhood assemblies were convened in which any resident (including non-citizens and undocumented immigrants) could participate. Out of these assemblies working committees were formed on different themes – parks, education, transportation, public safety, etc. Anyone could submit proposals to these committees whose job was to discuss the proposals and decide which had the highest priority. After a few months of this process, the highest priority proposals were then submitted to a vote by residents in the district. The actual voting occurred on the weekend of the participatory budget conference. In the council district I observed – East Harlem – the proposals were displayed in a gymnasium in a manner a bit reminiscent of a science fair. People came to the gym, looked at the posters describing each project, discussed them with others present, and then voted for their top five projects. I found the whole process very inspiring. I like to say that pessimism is easy; optimism takes a lot of work. Observing the participatory budget in action helps to fuel that optimism.

So, I arrived back in Madison on March 27 and on the 30th headed off to New York for three days. On Sunday April 1, I attended the meeting of the national board of directors of the Participatory Budget Process (PBP), a nonprofit organization that provides materials and consulting services to cities interested in starting participatory budget processes. I flew back to Madison Sunday afternoon for three days to catch up with all of the backlog that had accumulated in the previous weeks: meeting with students, letters of references, dissertation chapters to read, a few journal articles to review. And then, on Thursday, left for a few days visit to Penn State University to give a talk at a conference on social theory organized by Alan Sica, to conduct a research master class with grad students in sociology, and to participate in a workshop of Real Utopias with some faculty and students in the communications arts program.

The event with grad students is what I call a “speed dating master class”. The idea is to meet with a group of graduate student whose work I know nothing about and have an intense discussion of some of the core issues in each of the projects. The format is simple: we divide up the time available equally among the students. In this case ten minutes per student. Each student then gives me a short, punchy, no-beating-around-the-bush presentation of some of the core problems in the research. I encourage them not to try to give me a summary of the project as a whole, but to focus on bottlenecks, problems, puzzles, gaps, sources of confusion. This is tough to do in five minutes, thus the no-beating-around-the-bush injunction. Usually a good presentation of this sort involves 1-2 minutes stating what the general theme and topic of the research is, and then a focused exposition of some difficult problem. In the Penn State event there were a total of 14 students. I put an ipod countdown timer on the table set at 10 minutes. Each student got to pick the end-of-time sound. The most popular in the end was the duck. Somehow quacking was a nice signal to end a discussion. We pretty much stuck to the ten minute limit, but in a few cases spilled over a bit. At a couple of hours we went to lunch to continue the discussion. By the time we were done, four hours had passed. I found it fantastically interesting. Every project was a serious attempt to grapple with some real question. The students were engaging, committed, and earnest (I think earnestness is a much neglected virtue) While some of the projects might in end not work out because of one problem or another, all were worth pursuing.

I had never been to PSU before. It was a beautiful spring weekend, sunny and crisp. The campus was lovely, the academic events were stimulating, the informal discussions interesting (and not just those about the football scandal), and the chance to have extended exchanges with Alan Sica a pleasure. As part of the visit he took me to see some sociological archives in the PSU library – some from the American Sociological Association, some from private collections (like the archives of Irving Horowitz). There has been discussion in the ASA Publications Committee and the Executive Office about what do with several hundred boxes of old files from the ASR (I think I have the correct number), files containing letters and manuscript reviews going back decades. The Archive doesn’t want to store these indefinitely. Alan would like to see them digitalized because some time in the future someone might want to do historical work on reviews of articles. The legal counsel at the ASA wants to destroy the reviews on the grounds that the ASA does not hold the copyright on rejected articles. The Archive also contained extensive folders with materials from C. Wright Mills, including some apparently unpublished manuscripts, lots of correspondence, and some early drafts of his books. One of the most interesting boxes of files contained answers to a survey conducted by L. L. Bernard (UNC) in the late 1920s sent to sociology departments asking a series of questions about the history of sociology departments. I have never been deeply interested in the history of sociology, but of course I wanted to see if there was a response from the Wisconsin Department. There was – a long letter from J. L. Gillin (apparently people only used initials) with answers to the questions. Actually, the letterhead indicated that while Gillin was a Professor of Sociology the department was the Department of Economics. I didn’t know that Sociology was not yet an autonomous department as late as 1928, since it was certainly a very well established course of study by

then. I made a photocopy of the letter and will share it with my colleagues when I get back to Madison.

Now I am on my way to Jackson, Mississippi. I have never been to Mississippi and Alabama, the only states in the country I have never seen. These places hold a very powerful place in my “cultural imagination” because of their importance during the civil rights era of the 1950s and early 1960s when I was growing up. I have vivid memories of the news footage of civil rights marches in Selma, the bus boycotts, the shootings, the defiance of George Wallace, and as much as anything in my childhood these shaped my concerns with social justice issues. But I have never really traveled in the South, only passing through most of the states or visiting big cities like Atlanta. This will be my first real drive with stops and discussions from the heart of the region. My wife, Marcia, will join me and Jean Shin in Jackson for part of the trip, so that will make this especially enjoyable.

Day 2: Monday, April 9, 2012 Jackson, Mississippi

We’re staying at the King Edward Hotel. It is a surprising place in Jackson, Mississippi: not particularly expensive, but with a quite elegant lobby and very pleasant rooms. And I wonder, why is a hotel in Jackson, Mississippi called the King Edward? It is elegantly restored, but right across the street is a row of boarded up, pretty seedy looking old store fronts. Perhaps this is part of some planned future downtown development.

The plan for the day was to have breakfast at 7:00 a.m. and be on the road no later than 7:30 for the drive to Alcorn State University, 70 miles or so SW of Jackson in order to arrive there for a reception at 9:00. I dutifully set my alarm for 6:30 a.m. Only it turns out I had set it for 6:30 p.m. At 7:00 I woke with a start, sensing it was late, bounded out of bed, shaved in a wiz, and got to breakfast by 7:15. I didn’t want to skip breakfast because my talk on real utopias was scheduled for 10:00 a.m. and I knew that I didn’t want to do that on an empty stomach. In the end we got off by 7:40 and arrived just a few minutes late.

The drive down was pleasant, but mostly on the Interstate. I had somehow expected Mississippi to look very different from other places I have been to, especially rural Mississippi. Jackson, at least as seen from the main streets and the highways that transect it, pretty much feels like many other American cities: the same chain stores, the same format of car dealerships on the outskirts. The billboards were pretty much like elsewhere, although maybe more advertising casinos than I am used to. The only thing that really struck me as visually different from most other places was the density of the vegetation in the woods bordering the highway. Instead of just trees, there was a dense wall of bushes and vines and other vegetation filling in all of the spaces between the trees. It made the interior of the wooded area look impenetrable.

I know, of course, that what one sees from the Interstate is hardly a realistic picture of any place. And indeed, on the way back from Alcorn State we took some small roads and passed by a few settlements that fit more my expected image of the poor, rural Deep South. But in spite

of that, my overall, superficial, first impression of Mississippi is that it is not as different as I had anticipated.

We were greeted at the lecture venue by Dr. Alpha Morris, the Chair of the social sciences department. (One of the things that I quickly learned is that people here use their professional titles when they refer to each other, so I will do so in my notes as well.)

At the talk, as in some of the early events on my campus tour, there were sign-up sheets connected to classes for students at a table outside of the auditorium, where students could get extra credit in classes for attending the talk. I had never seen this device before I went to San Antonio at the beginning of the campus tour of South Texas. At the time I thought it was an ingenious strategy at UT-San Antonio to get undergrads to attend a guest lecture, but now I see that this is a fairly common procedure in undergraduate programs. The fact that I was unaware of this after 36 years teaching just reflects my lack of engagement with academic institutions whose main focus is teaching rather than research.

Before I actually gave my lecture there were three preliminary presentations: a Welcome by Dr. Dickson Idusuyi, a political scientist from the social sciences department; a presentation that in the program was called "Occasion" by Dr. Dorothy Idleburg, director of the social work program; and then the formal Introduction, by Dr. Morris. During these presentations as well as my lecture, all of these people, and a couple of other officials, sat on the stage behind me. This could have been difficult for them since I used PowerPoint slides, but the auditorium was equipped with large flat screen monitors facing the stage in front of the first row of seats, so the people sitting on the stage could see the slides. This also meant that I could see the slides while walking around freely on the stage, which actually is a nice thing, I have to say. This is the first time I have given a lecture with this technological configuration and I liked it a lot.



The lecture I gave was pretty much the same as I have been giving at the other campuses I have visited, stressing the moral underpinnings of the study of real utopias, the critique of capitalism implied by these values, and then examples of real utopia institutions. I did not present the elaborate power-centered theoretical model, feeling that the examples themselves would be a better basis for discussion. I finished about 11:20, thinking that this would give us 40 minutes for discussion. As it turned out the session actually ended at 11:45 so that the president of the university, who was in the audience, could say some words.

Here are some of the questions that were raised by students:

- *"How does race fit into the Real Utopia framework? What will this do for black people?"* This was an important question. I realized that I had not said anything about race explicitly in the talk itself – that is something I will rectify in the other campuses I visit. I explained that the moral principles involved in the value of Equality are rooted in the

idea that ALL people should have equal access to the conditions to live a flourishing life, and the value of democracy requires that all people should have equal access to the means to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. The combination in each case of all people and equal access implies a rejection of any racial disadvantages and discriminations that undermine equality. I also pointed out that the inclusion of the social means to live a flourishing life, not just material means, implied a rejection of all forms of social stigma and denigration. I ended by discussing the specific proposal for community land trusts connected to community-based urban agriculture as a way of revitalizing and rebuilding inner city neighborhoods in ways that would specifically address some of the issues around marginalization in the black community. [I think the problem here in part stems from the distinction between the real utopia discussion of institutions that can realize these fundamental values and the question of the strategies and processes needed to go from here to there. The question of racial solidarities and struggles is critical for the transformation problem, for the realization of democratic egalitarian values, but it is less clear how much race as such figures in the institutional designs themselves. Difficult issues.]

- *“Can these ideas really work on a national and international level?”* Here I returned to the list of examples, stressing that these actually do exist, so the question is not whether alternatives are possible, but rather how extensively they can spread, whether they can be replicated and scaled up, and whether or not ultimately they can constitute a sufficient part of the economic structure as to undermine capitalism and constitute a systemic alternative. Here I emphasized the difficulty in really knowing what the future holds. The powers-that-be seem incredibly strong and capable of blocking any serious threat to their dominance. The experience of the 20th century does not give much hope that it is possible to destroy that power and then build new institutions on democratic egalitarian principles. It just doesn’t seem to work to smash first, build second. So the best we can do is figure out how to build new institutions, like the ones I discussed, and then try to expand, replicate, and scale up.
- *“What role do utopias play in politics? How do they show up in the current presidential campaign?”* I commented on the fact that the Republican candidates all seemed to believe in a special kind of utopia – the kind of unregulated free market capitalism which is impossible to sustain and which would make life much worse for most people. So these are pure utopias, not “real utopias” in my sense. I then made some comments about Obama, suggesting that at the level of values I think he probably did share many of the ideals of democratic egalitarianism that I laid out. In terms of actual policies he acted under huge constraints. I personally think he could have pushed the limits more aggressively, and certainly laid out the policies that would actually embody those values rather than engage in such endless efforts to find a middle ground with Republicans. I felt I needed to tread lightly on this topic.

- *“What are the major goals of the project?”* Pessimism is easy; optimism takes work. The goal of the project is to clarify the grounds for optimism by showing what kinds of alternatives can make a difference, can work on the ground, and exploring the political process for putting them in place.

After the questions, the President, Dr. M. Christopher Brown, spoke. This was an unusual intervention. He cautioned the students about the danger of utopias becoming dystopias. We must always look carefully, he said, at the problem of who will actually benefit from these designs, from these new institutions. We must ask who designs them and who will benefit?

Afterwards we talked briefly. He expressed some serious concerns about some of the proposals I had presented. Community gardens, he pointed out, usually benefit newcomers to neighborhoods. Whites who fled the city when gas was cheap now want to come back. Gentrification of the inner city is happening in Washington and many other places. Community gardens will just accelerate this, benefit the newcomers, not the poor. They will be displaced once again, just like in the urban renewal of the 1960s. He had come into my talk half way through (he had arrived on an overnight flight), so he didn't hear the set up for the discussion of these examples in which I stressed the strong egalitarian principles. I think this would have allayed some of the concerns, but perhaps not all. It is certainly true when real utopia innovations occur in micro-settings against a background of massive inequality and dispossession, that the improvements in both amenities and sites of participation can be hijacked by relatively privileged actors. That, of course, has to be fought.



Lunch was a gathering of faculty from the social sciences department and a few students. It began with saying grace, something that I am certainly not used to in academic gatherings, but which I think it probably part of the cultural traditions in the South.

At one point Dr. Idelburg from social work described a very lively discussion that they had had in class over the question of the optimal role for women in a marriage. She then turned to one

of the students who had been very outspoken in the class and asked her to tell everyone what she had said. This triggered an extremely interesting and freewheeling discussion.

The student said that she had argued for the ideal marriage in which women were submissive and men were the heads of households. She explained that by “submissive” she did not mean “weak” or even “subordinate” – it takes a strong woman to be submissive, to give up control and allow men to have the final say. Someone has to have the final say, she said. You can’t always reach agreement or consensus. So the ideal is to have a man who lives up to his responsibilities, takes everyone’s views into account, weighs them, and then makes the final decision. She commented that she was taking the June Cleaver position and that most of the students in the class disagreed with her.

I replied, gently I hoped, that I preferred a partnership model in which no one was the “head” of the family, and when disagreements occurred there would be give and take, accommodation and compromise. One professor seemed to defend a vision of a fairly rigid division of labor as being fine when it corresponds to what people are good at. Others argued that men could learn to cook well enough and there was no need for that kind of rigidity. The student stuck to her guns on the submissiveness argument and it was clear that the discussion in class had been a very lively and interesting one. In any case, she certainly did not seem personally at all submissive: she was forthright, outspoken, clear-headed. She was clearly very ambitious, smart and hardworking. It would be great if she continued in sociology.

Toward the end of lunch we were told by Dr. Idleburg that the social work program was likely to be accredited after a lengthy process. The final result will come in June. This is an important development and will increase the profile of the social work program.

After lunch Jean and I lead the professional/career workshop with students. I like these events. Jean talks about the kinds of skills students learn as sociologists and how these are relevant to all sorts of occupations besides sociology. Then I talk about sociological careers, especially being a professor. I explain what professors actually do, what kinds of activities are most central to their lives, and then say that a) if you love those things, and b) are pretty good at them, then you should consider an academic career. I then talked about diversity in sociology, as I had in the HSI campuses earlier. I said that of course there are real challenges facing minorities, but that sociology as a discipline really valued diversity as a source of sociological knowledge. Sociology needs diversity to produce good sociology, and that is different from physics. So I encouraged the students to consider it. Several of them seemed really intrigued by this and came up to me afterwards for more discussion. Who knows, maybe some of these undergrads will end up pursuing a sociological career.

Following the workshop, we piled into a van driven by Mr. Brooks from the admissions office who took us on a tour of the campus. It is really a special place: a sprawling, beautiful self-contained campus on 1700 acres in a rural area near the Mississippi River. There isn’t even really a proper town near-by. There was quite a bit of new construction and renovation. The student body was steadily increasing. And the academic climate seemed very serious. The college was founded in 1871 during reconstruction and is the oldest black land grant university

in the country. The first president was a black senator elected to the U.S. Senate during Reconstruction. It was built on the site of an earlier all white elite college for the sons of plantation owners, Oakland College, founded in the 1830s, but basically abandoned after the Civil War. Medgar Evers went to the University and the part of the campus with undergraduate dorms is called the Medgar Evers Heritage village.



I asked about the racial composition of the college. Mr. Brooks told me that it was 88% black, 12% white, Hispanic and Asian. He added that it actually had quite a few international students, the top two countries being Canada and Russia. Russia? One surprising detail was that the tennis coach in the University had recruited promising Russian tennis players to come to Alcorn State to be on the Tennis Team. Once they were here and liked it, some of their friends followed, even if they didn't play tennis. The Canada connection came through fast-pitch softball. In fact, on the championship team that won the Southwestern Athletic Conference title had only three black players. Mr. Brooks said that if you saw the fast-pitch softball team or the baseball team play, you wouldn't know that that they came from a black

college. This wasn't true just for Alcorn State but for other Black colleges in the conference. I had no idea that black colleges recruited white athletes to fill rosters in some sports, let alone that they would go to Russia to do so.

When we were done with the tour we said goodbye to Dr. Alpha Morris. She was a very impressive person. She had been an undergraduate at Alcorn State and told us that she had been in the same class as Medgar Evers and had lived through the turmoil of the civil rights years. She had studied at Michigan State and worked in Lansing in the 1950s and then returned to Alcorn State when her husband got a job there in agricultural economics. She continued her education in a number of institutions in Mississippi and has taught sociology at Alcorn State for many years. She is clearly an anchor for the program and an inspiration for students and faculty. It was a privilege for us to be hosted by her today.

Day 3, April 10. Jackson, Mississippi, Jackson State University.

In the morning we had a few hours free, so we decided to drive around a bit and take a tour of Eudora Welty's home. It was really quit moving to be immersed, briefly, the physical space she inhabited and learn more about the story of her life. In the small museum adjoining her house there was a photo exhibit of photos she had taken in the Mississippi Delta while working for the Works Progress Administration. Next to one of them this quotation was placed: "Whatever you might think of those lives as symbols of a bad time, the human beings who were living them

thought a good deal more of them than that.” This really struck me, especially in the context of my lectures in which I emphasize the ideal that “all people should have equal access to the material and social means necessary to live flourishing lives.” Sometimes when I talk about this there is a shadow of suggestion that the lives of people who are subjected to sharp injustices cannot flourish – that their lives are wholly defined by their exclusions and deprivations. But of course this is not true. People cope with deprivations and unjust exclusions and make lives that are “a good deal more than that.” I don’t mean by this that the critique of social institutions that generate such exclusions should be tempered by the realization of the ways people flourish and robustly create meaning and purpose in spite of injustice, but it is important not to obliterate that. The Eudora Welty quote and exhibit of photographs reminded me of this.

The other interesting site in the morning was driving past an artist studio with some interesting, gigantic sculptures on the front lawn. Jean took a wrong turn so we ended up driving a few miles out of the way, but at least we got to see this interesting piece of art with vines for hair



The highlight of the day was a very interesting discussion with a group of faculty in the sociology and criminal justice program at Jackson State. The original plan to give a public lecture had to be cancelled because the organizer of the event had to deal with illness in his family, but we still met with students briefly and then with faculty. The discussion was interesting and lively.

One faculty member asked me what I thought was the future of sociology over the next fifty or 100 years. Was sociology on the way out? He also asked more specifically about the status of “humanistic sociology” today. He has attended some meetings of the Association for Humanistic Sociology, and the participants in the meeting expressed a sense of being pushed out of mainstream sociology. Has sociology abandoned its humanism? This led to wide ranging discussion of the condition of sociology, its internal tensions, its relationship to other social sciences and its prospects. Here is some of what I said: If I compare sociology today with what it was like when I began grad school in 1971, it has become if anything more pluralistic, more tolerant of diverse styles of work and methods. You can see this in the sections of the ASA, which reflect a very wide range of styles of work. The methodological wars between quantitative and qualitative work have largely subsided, although not completely disappeared. As a community, sociology still values work that is anchored in the lived experience of people situated in different ways in the social structure, and interpretive modes of sociology still play an important role in making sense of those experiences.

From my point of view one of the things that makes sociology an exciting and vibrant intellectual discipline is the dialogue and tension between the humanistic interpretive, life experience forms of sociology and the hard-edged quantitative, statistical forms of sociology (to overly simplify a contrast). Of course this causes problems. The more hermeneutic forms of sociology are always vulnerable to attack for being “unscientific”; the more positivistic forms of

sociology are vulnerable to the critique of superficiality. I sometimes have posed this as the trade-off between chaotic depth and systematic superficiality. In any case, this kind of complexity in the overall field of sociology is pretty much alive and well, I think, and part of the strength of the discipline.

This led to a discussion of the lack of respect accorded sociology by scientists connected to STEM programs. One of the people at the meeting had been involved in various commissions dealing with science and technology matters and felt that the scientists never took the



sociologists seriously. I suggested that part of the issue here is also the way different disciplines deal with complexity and ambiguity. Social phenomena are extremely complex and around nearly all important issues there are deep controversies and are often impossible to fully resolve. This is why in courses many topics are taught around controversies rather than certainties with definitive truths. That is quite alien to many scientists who want hypotheses that are tested and nailed down once and for all.

The conversation also touched on the issue of the pressures for sociology as an undergraduate program to result in jobs. At Jackson State Sociology is combined with Criminal Justice. The Criminal Justice program is very large and vibrant, but it is hard to attract students to sociology because there isn't a clear job at the end of the process. I commented on the sad irony that HBCUs had so many students eager to study Criminal Justice in the era of mass incarceration of African-Americans, especially of young black men. The United States has dealt with the problems of social order, inequality and marginalization through mass incarceration. This has resulted in a deeply racist pattern of social control which has been enormously destructive to the black community, and yet it generates all these career tracks tied in to the criminal justice programs. This comment triggered responses by two of the faculty. The founder of the criminal justice program said that they really try very hard not to simply train people to be regular police officers, probation officers, etc., but to give them critical skills as sociologists. The program is set up to teach students the processes of the criminal justice system (the procedures of the system connected to occupations), but also to have as an integral aspect of the program sociological analysis of the planned changes needed to deal with the underlying causes. Another faculty member, a former police officer, said that he was not interested in training people to be conventional police officers. When he was a cop he believed in the lock-them-up view of criminals. Now he understood that there were social causes of crime, and he really tries to teach his criminal justice students the sociological perspective on their work. Once you understand the social causes, then you cannot hold on to the simplistic lock-them-up mentality.

I was very impressed with the way the people at the meeting talked about the connection between the sociological side of their department and the criminal justice program. I said that really they had what seemed like a criminal justice & social justice program, not just a criminal justice program. That received a very warm response.



After the discussion with Jackson State faculty, we piled into our rented Toyota Corolla and headed off to New Orleans, three hours away. I was pretty wiped out and coming down with a cold, so I slept much of the way. Dinner was in the French Quarter, followed by a stroll down Bourbon Street.

Day 4, Wednesday, April 11, 2012: New Orleans

I had the morning to finish the blog for yesterday and rest, hoping to nip my cold in the bud. I succeeded with the former, but not the latter. As the day went on, my cold got progressively worse and my energy level plummeted.

I had no real expectations about Xavier University and its Sociology department. Unlike the HSIs we visited in March and two HBCUs we have already visited, Xavier is a private school – a catholic school funded by a wealthy nun in 1925 who had inherited a fortune from her father. It has 3000 students from all over the country, and has a more diverse student body in many ways: 70% black instead of 90% and above. Apparently it has a very well regarded pharmacy school, which attracts a fair number of nonblack students, and also a very strong pre-med program. The school is 75% female, which is also different from Jackson State and Alcorn State which were around 55% female. At lunch I asked one of students why she choose Xavier. She said that all of her schooling growing up on the West Coast had been in white schools and she wanted to see what it would be like to be in a predominantly black environment.





Claire Norris

Lunch was with Claire Norris, an assistant professor in the department, and a couple of undergraduate students. The students clearly adore Claire. As we walked to the cafeteria, a number of students greeted her and one gave her a hug. She is filled with energy and enthusiasm, the kind of charismatic teacher that can inspire lots of students to become sociology majors. It turns out that one aspect of her research touches on urban agriculture and

community gardens, so I told her that I would invite her to the fall real utopia workshop on sociological research on new forms of urban agriculture that we will be holding in Madison. If this works out, it will mean that two people I have met on these campus tours – Claire from Xavier and Dana from Diné College – will participate in those discussions.

In the early afternoon we were taken on a tour of Xavier College by two lively, enthusiastic undergraduates. It was sunny and warm, I was coughing and blowing my nose, but I wanted to see the campus and didn't want to be unappreciative of the tour. At 2:00 we met with students informally for an hour and then had a little break before a reception at 4:00. I decided to meditate to see if it would restore my energy level – not rest, but meditate. I generally do a 30 minute breathing meditation every day, often in the late afternoon, and it can be rejuvenating. I actually felt quite a bit better after the sit, and managed to rev myself up pretty well for the talk at 5:00. I also had one of those nice moments in a meditation where an idea drifts through my mind that connects to things I have been thinking about. In my talks I have been following a formulation that I have used since writing *Envisioning Real Utopias*, namely that the agenda of an emancipatory social science involve three elements: diagnosis & critique, alternatives, transformation. But then in the discussion which follows, in the talks I have been giving, I added a preliminary task to these: clarifying the moral foundations for the critique of institutions. In the meditation the idea of saying that there were four tasks, not three, drifted into my mind and felt right. So after the meditation I changed the slide.



The reception before the talk went from 4-5 in the foyer outside the auditorium. Vern Baxter, an old friend from Wisconsin (he was a grad student when I arrived in 1976) came. He is currently chair of the department of Sociology at the University of New Orleans. It was wonderful reconnecting. We set up plans for a tour of the city with him for Thursday morning.

I managed to get through the talk in fairly good form, although by the end I was certainly drooping. The discussion afterwards was fantastic. After several of the questions from students I commented to them that their questions were really interesting, as sharp and on target as any that I get asked anywhere. One of the things this shows is that the students listened really well

– all of the questions were germane to the arguments I had made. There were no muddled, off-the-wall questions that were simply reactions to a particular word I had used rather than the analysis I was presenting. I was really impressed.

Here are some of the questions raised by the students:

- “What motivates people to do anything in a real utopia? If you realize your egalitarian principle, what will motivate doctors?” Suppose, I said, that medical education was free so that doctors did not have debts. And suppose that they earned a good income, but nothing extravagant. What would happen? Well, people mainly motivated by money might not decide to become doctors, but others motivated more by the desire to help people could now do so without incurring such financial burdens. There would still be plenty of motivations for people to acquire skills.
- “How can you transform the world in such an individualistic society? The U.S. is so individualistic, I don’t think people will be attracted to these real utopias.” I suggested that Americans are not simply individualistic; they also believe in community and reciprocity. This is basic sociological idea – that people have lots of conflicting values and that it is really contexts and settings that determines which have the most weight or force at any given time. I think the ideas of real utopias will resonate with many people, so the problem is figuring out how to create the contexts which bring forth these values.
- “Why didn’t you include Community and solidarity as principles? Why only quality, democracy and sustainability”. I have grappled a lot with the problem of what to include in my elaboration of the moral principles. I wanted to keep the discussion as simple as possible. At one point I included community with the others, but in the end I felt that its main role was as part of the conditions for an effective democracy and as one of the social conditions to live a flourishing life. But I don’t know, perhaps it should be part of the list of core principles.
- “Can you employ these values within capitalism?” Well, while capitalism as a system obstructs the full realization of these values, this does not mean that in a society which is capitalist institutions cannot be built that embody them. The result will simply be a tension between those institutions and capitalist principles.
- “Can real utopias be therapeutic – can this create a healthy population?” I hope so. My core commitment is that building real utopias not only helps to realize those values I talked about, but will actually make the lives of people go better.
- “How do you get people to participate – how do you get over the cynicism of endless meeting with nothing accomplished?” The cynicism barrier is often a very big obstacle to overcome. I don’t think there is any kind of magic formula here. It matters a lot when people not only discuss things, meet to formulate plans, but have control over the real implementation of the plans. This is one of the good things about participatory budgeting – participants know that there are real resources in play and they see the results.

- “Do you see these processes as changing “society as a whole”?” That expression “society as a whole” is a very tricky one. Here I will make a comment to all of the sociologists in the audience. There are two quite different ways people think of society as a “social system”. One way is to think of society like an *organism* in which all of the parts fit together into a tightly integrated whole. In that image, you cannot really change one part very much without causing the system to fall apart, so you have to directly try to change the system as a whole. Another image is more like the ecology of a pond. This is still a system in that everything affects everything else, but the parts don’t constitute functioning elements of an integrated whole. You can introduce invasive species in a pond. You can gradually change the ecology piece by piece. Society is more like that.

After the talk, Jean, Marcia and I went with a person named Tom Wooten to the Lower Ninth Ward for a meeting with people involved in community activism. Here’s the background: I had met Tom in my living room a month ago when he was in Madison for “visit day” as a prospective graduate student. He had been living in New Orleans since 2007 and was heavily involved in community projects in the city. He is currently a teacher in a middle school. When I met him I asked if it would be possible to meet with people in the Lower Ninth Ward while I was there. Tom has just finished a book on community struggles to rebuild, *We Shall Not Be Moved*, which is to be published by Beacon Press. I read it as part of my preparation for the trip. It is a wonderful account of the heroic efforts of people in the most devastated parts of the city to rebuild their communities and the continual thwarting of those efforts by political elites who have other agendas.

En route to the Lower Ninth Road we stopped at a classic New Orleans spot for po’ boy sandwiches, Parkway Bakery and Café. Because of the timing, we took the sandwiches with us and drove on the meeting place, an old warehouse that had been converted into a community center called Lower Ninth Ward Village (www.loer9thwardvillage.or). This was the brainchild of a resident on the ward, Mack McClendon, who had purchased the warehouse after Katrina with the original purpose of using it to work on antique cars. But then, after a community meeting where issues of organization were discussed, he decided to turn it into a community center. Since then it has functioned as a kind of hub where volunteers come and get connected to local groups. The main room of the center was filled with banners hanging down from the ceiling from many of the universities around the country that had come there with volunteers to help.





We got to the Lower Ninth Ward Village at 8:30. I wolfed down my sandwich so we could begin the discussion. It was moving, powerful, and deeply interesting. There were twenty people present – 16 black, 4 white. Ages ranged from 20s to 80s. Most were long-time residents of the L9W.

I gave a short introduction explaining the idea of real utopias and illustrating it with the example of worker cooperatives and participatory budgeting. I explained how PB could potentially be quite relevant to New Orleans because of the way in which it gave people direct control over part of the way city budgets were used. The discussion which followed revolved around a number of interconnected themes.



- The L9W has been treated very different from other parts of the city. It is undergoing a process of gentrification in a whole new way. Only 25% of the original residents have returned. One person offered the prediction that ten years from now only 5% of the people in the ward will be pre-Katrina residents. It is a prime location, close to downtown, and developers want to transform it.
- There has been constant obstruction to allowing people to come back. There is only one school in the whole ward, a K-12 school. There is not a single grocery store. There are parts of the ward where there are whole blocks with no houses or only one house. Before Katrina, 65% of the home owners in the L9W were elderly. Most of them just couldn't cope with the idea of starting over and rebuilding. People are resilient, but it is very hard to rebuild in these conditions.
- None of this is by accident. This transformation of land use is something elites in the city want – they want to whiten the city and blocking the rebuilding of the L9W for the time being is one way to do this.
- This all seems hopeless. I replied that new opportunities can emerge in very unexpected ways. One thing we know is that there are very big surprises. I was in the USSR in 1988. No one thought the whole system would disappear within a couple of years.
- We talked about the idea of PB. One person asked if there are triggers for creating PB or did it happen by accident? Can the design be corrupted? I responded that it is important

to distinguish between the accidental conditions in which something like PB gets started and the conditions under which it spreads and is copied. The more places that try PB the more models there are and the more people are likely to want to try it. But also it often does fail. It can be hijacked by elites. There is no guarantee that it will actually work well.

- One participant in the discussion pushed for a much more positive view of things. This is a desperate place where it is easy to give up. A lot of people have a give-up mentality and don't embrace things that give us success. What we need are small successes to breed enthusiasm. This is possible: to have projects that bring success and then build on them.
- One guy who was a welder said that he had been doing welding work all over the city in different neighborhoods affected by the disaster. Different areas of the city have very different mindsets. Other neighborhoods have been more successful at coming back. In the 9W it is sometimes impossible to get people to participate in a sustained way.
- A woman at the meeting responded to this by saying that people are just burned out. You go to meeting after meeting after meeting and here all of these promises and make all sorts of plans, and then they get blocked and nothing happens. The community was ready to do things but people get completely burned out. I haven't been to a meeting in a year.
- An older man said emphatically that the decision was made that nothing was going to come back. There were plans for grocery store and everything was set, and then it was blocked. Without a grocery store, why would you move back here?
- Right after Katrina we saw a map of the plans for rebuilding the city. In the map L9W was completely gone. The plan was to wipe out the community. Some areas hit harder or as hard as the L9W have come back, but they haven't been obstructed.
- One person talked about the idea that the levee that destroyed the L9W was dynamited rather than simply breached. (This apparently happened in the 1927 Mississippi flood – the deliberate sacrifice of low-lying poor areas of the city to reduce the chance of flooding elsewhere, but it is an urban legend that it happened in 2005).
- How to get over burnout? I said that burnout is almost inevitable when you have too many meetings with too little results. What you need is more certainty of access to real resources and political allies to get the resources. Ultimately this does become a question of political power and political struggle.
- One of the elderly people at the meeting talked at length about the creation of nonprofits to deal with the L9W with no ties to the community. These NGOs soaked up lots of money and had no accountability to the people. He said that he personally knew of 9 organizations with more than \$1million in hand – but no paper trail. Where has all the money gone? We need accountability.

We continued until 10. By then I was completely wiped out.

Day 5, April 12, 2012, New Orleans to Montgomery

My cold was much worse today, really miserable. The best would have been to stay in bed, but couldn't. In the morning Marcia and I drove around the city seeing different neighborhoods with Vern Baxter, who has been doing really interesting research on the social psychological effects on people in different places of Katrina. I hadn't slept very well and kept dozing off in spite of being really interested in what he had to say. We saw the devastated part of the L9W, which we hadn't been able to see in the dark the night before. It looked more like a rural community with overgrown lots, a few houses here and there, but nothing like the dense blocks of houses everywhere else. Then there was the new housing being built by the foundation started by Brad Pitt – the Make It Right Foundation, with interesting environmentally compatible houses raised above the flood line. I gather that there is some controversy about these new houses since many of them are being occupied by new residents, not returning previous residents, and they are more expensive than initially planned. And from there we wandered around the various other corners of the city. As I said, I slept through much of this.



Vern dropped us off at Xavier around 12:30 where I hooked up with Jean to finish the professional workshop with students. Then we stopped for a subway sandwich and cold medicine and drove off to Montgomery, where we are this evening. I slept most of the way on that trip as well. With luck I will be better tomorrow.

Day 6, April 13, 2012: Tuskegee University

When I first woke up this morning I thought I was over the worst of my cold, but by 9:00 I was coughing, clogged up, sluggish. What I really wanted to do was sleep the day through, but of course that wasn't on. Fortified with a decongestant and ibuprofen I managed to get through the day.

Tuskegee University is about an hour drive from Montgomery. Like Alcorn State, it is located in the middle of a rural area with no real urban amenities nearby. When I spoke with students during the day they said that in the evening if they wanted to go out for dinner they really had

to go to Montgomery. Auburn was a bit closer but, as one student said, “there are race issues in Auburn.”



When we arrived on campus we were greeted enthusiastically by the head of the sociology department, Vivian Carter. She is clearly the animating spirit in the sociology program here. I am really impressed with how much difference one very energetic and committed person can make.

The morning at Tuskegee began with a breakfast at a conference on Disparities in Health sponsored by the University. The tables in the room were labeled with health issues and diseases: obesity, breast cancer,

diabetes, prostate cancer, hypertension. The idea was for people doing research on different disease issues to congregate at the same table for informal discussion at breakfast, which makes total sense, but it still felt strange to sit down at a table labeled with some dire malady. Since Dr. Carter was currently working on research on prostate cancer, that is where we sat. She had previously been working on issues connected to the lack of adequate screening for breast cancer in rural Alabama – actually, more like the absence of any screening – and at one point in working with the communities some asked the question “what about the men?” That led her to work on similar issues around prostate cancer.

The actual program in the morning began with what was referred to as an “Inspiration”. The sister of one of the organizers of the conference led us in a prayer, followed by a lovely gospel song and then an extended religious reflection on God and faith and their importance to the work of this gathering. Religion is certainly woven into the fabric of life in this part of the country to a much greater extent than in my usual academic circles.

We weren’t able to attend much of the symposium itself, but we did listen to the first part of a presentation on the importance of the Affordable Health Care Act for Alabama. The presentation was given by an outreach specialist for the Department of Health and Human Services for Region IV, which includes most of the South. The speaker began by saying how much she enjoyed the “Inspiration”, especially the song which was her favorite gospel song. She then gave a greeting to fellow sorority sisters. On several occasions at different campuses we have visited mention has been made of Black sororities, at least one of which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. I don’t know the history of Greek organizations on Black campuses, but they seem to have some real salience.

At 10 we went for a brief meeting with the provost of the University and then a tour of the Carver Museum. Tuskegee University has been designated a national historical site and has a museum administered by the National Park Service. It became very clear immediately when we arrived at the campus that people here have a very strong sense of its historical importance –

founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881 and the place where George Washington Carver did his most important research for many decades. Throughout much of the 20th century it seems that when rich American philanthropists wanted to do something for Black education, one of their prime targets was Tuskegee. There were photos in the museum of people like Andrew Carnegie at the campus. After lunch we continued exploring the historical aspects of the campus by a visit to the chapel – a really beautiful building – and to the University archives (although unfortunately the director was away so we couldn't really be shown around) and finally the University historical museum, where there was an exhibit on the notorious US Government Syphilis research project carried out in Tuskegee (which we were told was not carried out with cooperation of Tuskegee University – then called the Tuskegee Institute – and thus should not be referred to as the Tuskegee project).



By the time of my talk at 4pm I was really dragging. My voice was very throaty and I couldn't project it at all. Fortunately I had a good lapel mic and people could hear me fine. And, as usually happens in such situations, once I got going in the talk and my focus was on the material and the audience and not my ailments, I was energized and able to do the talk without too much difficulty. I did cough quite a bit towards the end, and at one point I blew my nose forgetting that I was miked. It is amazing how loud a nose blowing can be with a good lapel mic.

I try very hard when I give talks, even today when I was really under the weather, not to be on "automatic pilot." Given that I have given more or less the same talk many times now, it is easy to slip into that and not to actively think about the ideas as you relay them. When that happens, I think the audience can feel it – that you are just going through the motions. But it is not just that: you lose the chance to reflect on the flow of the ideas and interject new thoughts when you do a lecture in a mechanical way. As it turned out, this lecture was one of those times when in the middle of the talk, I had an idea for a new way of illustrating a point that I hadn't planned on before the talk. This is one of the things I love about giving talks to new audience. With the mental focus on communicating the ideas and the repeated engagements with the same material, I often slip into a relatively improvisational mode in which new formulations jump out at me. Here is the issue: One of the things I discuss about half way through the talk is the distinction between policy reforms and looking at social transformations from the point of view of real utopias. The analysis and evaluation of policy reforms looks at proposals for improving life and asks: on balance do these changes make things better? The analysis of real utopias ask: what is the kind of society we want, what is the destination we want to realize, and to what extent does any given change move us in that direction. For real utopias, then, the critical problem is thinking through the central principles of the world we want to have and then asking of any given transformation: does this help build the elements of that world? That is pretty abstract. As I said this in the talk a really good illustration occurred to me: Consider the

problem of adequate nutrition and hunger in America. This problem certainly violates the egalitarian principle that all people should have broadly equal access to the conditions necessary to live a flourishing life. Food stamps are a way of improving people's lives with respect to this issue. But they are not a real utopia: in a society built around principle of social justice there would be no food stamps, no means-tested programs to fill gaps in nutrition. I strongly support food stamps as a practical solution to a pressing problem, but they are not a building block of a just society; they reflect and counteract injustice but do not embody justice. Community land-trusts connected to new urban agriculture, on the other hand, are potentially elements of a democratic egalitarian alternative to existing institutions around the production and distribution of food. They help solve the problem of the food deserts in central cities by restructuring the urban ecology of land and food and its relation to population, and potentially in ways that strengthens community participation and democratic control. I need to work this through a bit more, but I like the contrast with food stamps as a way of illustrating the real utopian perspective.

Here are a few of the issues raised in the discussion:

- “Could you explain policy juries and randomocracy?” One of the examples of real utopias on the list I provide in one of the slides, but had not had time to discuss, was policy juries and randomocracy. I explained that this was a way of bringing aspects of Athenian democracy to bear on contemporary issues. In Athens democratic councils were filled by lot, by random selection. We still do this for juries today. The proposal was to extend this to more contexts where a representative sample of citizens might be the most effective way of embodying the ideal of government by the people. I suggested that the democratic quality of state legislatures might be enhanced of getting rid of one of the chambers and replacing it with a citizens assembly of randomly selected members. In the US Congress there is a rationale for a Senate representing states on a non-population basis, but what is the rationale for having state Senates as well as Houses of Representatives, both elected on the basis of population districts (albeit larger and smaller geographic units)? Why not get rid of the senate chambers and have a random selection assembly – well paid to make it attractive to citizens, with say three year terms and a third of the members replaced every year? [After the lecture was done I spoke with the young woman who had asked me this question. I felt it was unusual for someone to specifically pick up on the “randomocracy” term and ask about. She said that she was the campaign manager for a friend of hers – also a Tuskegee student – who was running for city council in Tuskegee. She was really interested in ideas about how local government could be made more participatory and democratic.]
- “Are real utopias the next stage in capitalism or is this fundamentally opposed to capitalism?” I explained that I didn't like the expression “stage” because it somehow suggested some sort Hegelian logic of a progressive of immanent stages that unfold towards some destination. If real utopias are to emerge they will do so out of conscious purposes and struggles. They should be seen simultaneously as something that is

fundamentally opposed to capitalism, or at least in tension with capitalism, as well as something that occurs within capitalism.

- “What about The Tea Party – is this a parallel with real utopias? And what about the occupy movement?” My response: All social movements have ideals, visions of the world they want to create. And one might want to say that these ideals regardless of their content are “utopias.” Everyone has their own utopia. I am using the term utopia in a more restrictive way, not as simply the specification of an ideal society regardless of the content of the ideals, but of society that realizes our aspirations for a just and humane world. But there is another issue here: my idea of “real” utopia insists that we pay attention to the problems of unintended consequences, self-destructive dynamics and normative trade-offs. The Tea Party vision for institutional transformation is oblivious to all of these. Their vision of the minimalist state with unregulated free markets and drastic reductions of taxes and services would have massively self-destructive consequences and negative side effects *even from the point of view of the values which Tea Party members profess*. As for the Occupy Movement, I would say two things: First, as a movement it was mostly a movement of expressive protest, clearer about what it opposed than its vision of alternatives. Second, in its internal processes it did embody rudimentary models of new forms of direct democracy, deliberation and consensus formation. To be sure, these were enacted in the narrow context of the encampments, but still those could be said to represent some prefigurative elements of real utopia.
- “Do you have any thoughts about the Affordable health care act as a real utopia?” I said that while the affordable health care act had many desirable elements and would be an improvement over the existing institutional arrangements, it was really not a real utopian model, but rather a kind of patchwork, jerry-rigged solution to deep flaws in the existing system of healthcare in the United States. Perhaps it was the best that Obama could accomplish given the historical constraints, but in an ideal democratic egalitarian health system that reflects the ideals of equal access to the conditions to live a flourishing life there would be little or no role for private, profit-maximizing private insurance companies. If the Affordable Health Care Act survives the Supreme Court ruling it might set the stage for some future reform that would begin to introduce real utopian elements, but this reform itself does not.
- “Do you have any thoughts about Real Utopian directions for higher education?” I didn’t have a lot to say on this, and I was beginning to run out of steam. I made two main points. The first was that the current trends towards a commercialization of higher education and an ever-greater subordination of educational goals to narrow business interests was moving higher education in exactly the wrong direction. Second, I mentioned briefly the idea of a graduate-tax as a way of replacing tuition for higher education, along the lines adopted in Scotland where there is no tuition, but university graduates pay a surtax on their income tax *if their income rises above the median income* (I think that’s the threshold). This gets rid of the problem of amassing large

debts and the understandable risk-aversion of poor people taking out large loans for degrees with an uncertain pay-off, and yet also recognizes the fact that university education gives people a chance at higher earnings and this should not be subsidized entirely by taxpayers.

By the time the lecture was done, I was pretty much spent. But I also felt, somehow, that I was on the verge of turning the corner. There was a pleasant reception after the talk for an hour or so, and then we headed back to Montgomery. I began to feel revived a bit.

Dinner was at a Sushi place in the old railroad station – actually a combined Sushi & Thai restaurant. There seem to be sushi places all over Montgomery. We have counted at least six or seven we've seen from the highway. That certainly doesn't correspond to my stereotype of Alabama: visit Alabama, eat sushi. I was in bed by 9:30 and asleep by 9:35.

The next morning, after 10 hours of sleep, I felt almost completely well.

Saturday night

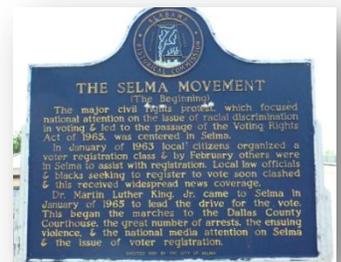
We're back in our hotel after a day of visiting civil rights sites in Selma and the surrounding area. It seems that this is prom night – at dinner (at another sushi restaurant) there were lots of high school kids decked out. Now, outside our window, but out of site, there is some loud band playing somewhere nearby, perhaps at the river front, and fireworks exploding in the sky.

Day 7 & 8, weekend of April 14 & 15, driving north to Nashville

The fireworks and music from Saturday night came from the opening game of the season for the Montgomery minor league baseball team, the Biscuits. What a fantastic name for a baseball team. If I had known they were playing we would have gone – Jean is a big baseball fan and I always like the scene of local sports events.

We spent the weekend visiting civil rights sites in Montgomery, Selma and Birmingham. On Saturday we drove to Selma along the route of the Selma to Montgomery march of 1965 ending the drive where the march began on the Edmund Pettus bridge. The National Park Service has recently designated the Selma-Montgomery route a national historical site and is

in the process of developing interpretative centers and other facilities. We stopped by the park visitor center in Selma, got some maps and brochures, and then drove around the town a little. Many of the storefronts and buildings seemed very much like the images from photos from the Civil Rights era.





Right near the bridge was the national voting rights museum. From the outside it looked more like an auto parts store than a museum, nothing like what we had anticipated, but once inside it was an impressive, compelling museum on the struggle for voting rights in the South with a particular focus on the events in Selma.

The museum was run by a nonprofit organization. While there we met one of the local civil rights

activists and a fieldworker for SNCC from the 1960s, Annie Pearl Avery. She approached us and introduced herself and was eager to talk about those times and her experiences.

Today, Sunday, we drove to Birmingham to see the museum at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. It is located facing the park where a march of mainly youth was met with high powered fire hoses and police dogs under the direction of Sheriff Bull Connor. The park itself is now a sculpture garden, with some really fantastic pieces depicting the confrontations between police and the Children's March. One installation was especially affective: two walls that you walk between, with dogs, on leashes, lunging at you. The park was also right across from the 16th Street Baptist Church at which four young children were killed in a bombing in 1963, so the whole setting is fraught with meaning and historical significance.



The museum is absolutely worth the trip. You walk through it in a specific sequence, beginning with a series of exhibits that convey something of the reality of the Jim Crow era. You see mock-ups of a typical white and black elementary school classroom in the 1950s, a segregated drinking fountain, a bus with segregated seating, along with exhibits about the KKK, the segregation laws, the constitutional decisions that backed them, and so on. Then you move to the Civil Rights era and basically walk through a series of spaces chronologically ordered, each featuring some pivotal event, with time lines and descriptive materials giving the context. Throughout the exhibits there are videos and music and recordings bring the times and emotional intensity to life. We spent almost three hours there.

In the exhibit about the 1963 March on Washington and the “I Have a Dream Speech” they show a video of the entire speech, which is always inspiring, along with footage of people at the march. As it turned out, at age 16 I was at the March on Washington. I went there with my cousin Walley who lived in New York. We carried a large home-made poster of a white and black hand clasping. Near the beginning of the film shown in the museum there was a close-up of the crowd marching, and there was our sign, with me by the side for about half a second. If you blinked, you would miss it.

Day 9, April 16, 2012, Austin Peay State University, Clarkesville, Tennessee

A year ago I gave a talk at a conference on Social Justice at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. After the talk a group of undergraduates approached me and said that they were from the sociology club at Austin Peay State University and had driven to the conference to hear me talk. One them, D.J., said he was the VP of the club and asked me if I would be willing to come to Austin Peay to talk to the sociology club. I was charmed by the invitation and said that I would be happy to come if we could figure out a way to tag this on to some other trip. In the course of the fall as my plans for the spring HBCU tour firmed up, I got back in touch with the Sociology club and said that I was going to be in Nashville in April. Jean then worked out the specifics with the chair of the department.

Austin Peay is a regional university in the Tennessee system about an hour’s drive northwest of Nashville. It has about 9800 students, 35% minorities, 61% female and 40% what they refer to as nontraditional students. The motto for the campus is “Let’s Go Peay.”

We arrived around 10 and spent the first hour talking about the department with five of the six sociology faculty members. The department had only recently been established as an autonomous department – before then it shared a chair of department with the political



science department. It had also just moved into a new building, with nice offices and classrooms and lots of lights. Before this they had been in a basement. The official ribbon-cutting ceremony to inaugurate the new quarters was set for this afternoon. The faculty were all very pleased and excited about these recent developments. They were young – one tenured professor, the Chair, David Steele, and six assistant professors – and perhaps this contributed to the sense of vitality and commitment. No one seemed at all burned out; they all seemed very energetic and engaged with students and the fate of the department. Judging from the discussions I had with students later in the day, they were clearly doing an excellent job in transmitting this enthusiasm to their students.

An interesting issue that came up during the faculty discussion concerned the possibility of the ASA establishing some kind of formal accreditation of sociology departments. The ASA provides all sorts of materials which help departments review their curriculum, develop standards for new courses, and so on, but nothing that constitutes an official set of minimum standards to be an ASA-accredited sociology program. The chair of the Austin Peay department, David Steele, felt that such standards would potentially help them negotiate resources from their administration, since they could claim that they needed another faculty member (say) in order to get accreditation. I pointed out that it could also work as a way of getting rid of a department that fails to meet the standard. In practice I think it would also be almost impossible for the ASA to work out a set of minimum curricular elements for an “accredited” sociology BA because it would be so hard to get any kind of consensus on this, but it raises interesting issues.

Clarksville, we were told, is a very conservative city. Partially this is because of the large military base nearby, Fort Campbell. The University has a branch campus there where soldiers can pursue a BA. The sociology department has just started courses there and now has at least a couple of sociology majors on the base. Some of the faculty are also beginning a research project on the adjustment to the end of don't ask don't tell at the base compared to bases on the East and West Coast. Still, in spite of the military, some of the students, we were told, were really radical: “They want to change the world right away.” There had been an Occupy Clarksville movement that had only closed up its encampment recently. A number of students I met later in the day had been involved and were certainly very animated by the ideals of the occupy movement.

From the faculty meeting we went to lunch at a very pleasant local in the downtown, historic district of Clarksville, and then returned for an informal chat with about 15 students. The idea

was for me to tell them something about my life in sociology and then just have a meandering discussion. I probably spent a little too much time telling my biography, but it ended up triggering an interesting discussion about religion. I mentioned that to keep out of the military during the Vietnam War I had enrolled in a seminary and worked at San Quentin Prison for a year as intern chaplain. A number of the students in the group were taking sociology of religion and asked



me how my time in the seminar had affected my views about religion. This segued into a discussion of religion and politics, religion and morality, and a variety of other issues. In retrospect I think I may not have been sensitive enough to the likely sensibilities of my audience. Usually I am very tuned into this, but I forgot that I was in the South and that religion was likely to be taken quite seriously by some of the students. At one point in particular I may have been insensitive: I expressed my general views on the relationship between morality and religion, arguing that a person could have deep and robust moral conviction without grounding those moral beliefs in religion. I then raised a general point about the character of the claim made by some people that moral codes are dictated by God and that without God's moral commandments, morality would lose its anchor: When people make this claim, are they saying that if God had commanded people to be mean and nasty rather than loving and compassionate, that it would have then been moral to be mean and nasty? If you then say that of course God would never command that, this implies that God had reasons for treating love and kindness and moral goods, that it is not a reflection of the arbitrary will of God. If this is so, then the reasons themselves provide the true grounding for these moral codes, not the fact God communicated these reasons to us. I think the discussion made some people uncomfortable, and when I sensed this, I shifted gears.

Following the informal discussion there was a department celebration of the opening of the new department digs, with a formal ribbon cutting ceremony and nibbles. In the reception I had an animated discussion with some of the students who had been active in the occupy movement. They were indeed radical, committed, and articulate. One in particular was very much animated by the anarchist impulse to refuse compliance with the state, to stay outside of any form of electoral politics and to connect to the state only through protest. One person mused, "If we could have a general strike in which everyone across the country participated we could change things." The impatience is understandable, and the fantasy appealing, but the politics that reflect this, a dead end.

After the reception, Jean and I conducted the careers & sociology workshop, and then I gave my talk. Here are a few of the questions that followed:

- "What is the role of the nation state in real utopias?" I took this question to be about the two things: the role of the state in building real utopias, and the extent to which real utopias were bounded within the geographical scale of the nation state. On the first point I emphasized the idea that societies are not totalizing systems within which everything fits together in a neat organic whole; they are fragmented and loosely coupled with lots of spaces for counter-system institutions. This holds for the state as well – it is only partially internally coherent, and this allows – within limits – for institutions to be created that violate the



core norms of the dominant system. On the second point I described instances of real utopias that were trans-national, that crossed borders and operated in a kind of global civil society.

- “If the real utopia changes are contrary to capitalism, won’t this cause capitalism to fail?” I used this question as an occasion to talk about interstitial transformations and the possibility of building contradictory principles into the spaces of the system without knowing in advance how far this can go and what it would take to reach a tipping point in which capitalism is reduced to a secondary niche within the overall configuration.
- “Does this mean abandoning a revolutionary ideology? How can anyone do anything today when everything is so corrupt and elections are so meaningless? Do we have to give up Big change for such small changes?” I explained that if by revolutionary ideology you mean the radicalness of the transformations you seek, then what I am proposing is revolutionary – it calls for a thorough-going, radical transformation of institutions towards a democratic egalitarian alternative. But it is anti-ruptural and rejects the possibility of a revolutionary seizure of power as a means to accomplishing such revolutionary transformation. As for abandoning the idea of Big Changes, I think we should avoid the simple dichotomy of big vs small changes: cumulative small changes, if linked together and encompassing sufficient variety of settings and constitute a big change. This might take a long time, but we don’t know the limits of cumulative possibility. The woman asking the question plaintively added, “But I’m so impatient.”
- “What do you mean by “reconstructing Marxism” in your piece with Burawoy in 2001?” I explained that reconstructing Marxism really meant sorting through the many ideas and concepts in the Marxist tradition and seeing which were robust and important for contemporary analysis, which needed repair and clarification, and which should be dropped. The idea is that Marxism is a tradition of debate and intellectual development rather than a doctrine. I explained that from my perspective the pivotal elements were class analysis, the critique of capitalism, and the search for a democratic-egalitarian alternative.
- “Why do ideas like participating budgeting and worker cooperatives get so much more attention in other countries and spread so much more rapidly than here?” Alas, the United States is not going to be in the vanguard of progressive transformations. But still, there are experiments going on here that are important. And in some specific ways the U.S. has real strengths. We have traditions of voluntarism and engagement in civil society that can be the basis for building new institutions and grassroots initiatives. This is one reason why PB is so appealing because it taps into this.

By the time the discussion wound down, it was getting on to 6pm. Nonstop talking from 10-6, and not exhausted. I must be healthy again.

We drove back to Nashville and headed to the center of town for dinner. We didn’t have any guides or specific idea, but just plunked down somewhere plausible and wondered about for a

while. It seems we went the wrong direction. We were within a couple of blocks of the honky-tonk district, but went away from it. Finally we found a small restaurant that advertised itself as classic American dining. We were hungry and the only other choice right there was – yes – Sushi, so we went for classic American, especially after the waitress who was standing outside said to us, “You boys want some good food?” Jean had corned beef hash with three eggs over easy. I had a Mediterranean salad with grilled chicken breast and grilled portabella mushrooms. Not exactly what I would call classic American dining, but perfectly good.

Day 10, April 17, 2012, Nashville

The first stop for the day was Vanderbilt University. I had initially resisted visiting Vanderbilt, not because of any lack of interest in the department or its students, but because I felt that in the context of the HBCU tour it would be better for people at Vanderbilt interested in hearing me speak to come to Tennessee State for the lecture this afternoon. But Jean thought it would be good for me to do something there, so I suggested I do a Speed Dating Mater Class like I did at Penn State just before the beginning of the HBCU trip.

We arrived at Vanderbilt at 8:30 for a very pleasant hour of informal conversation with faculty in the Sociology Department. I described the HBCU tour I was doing as well as some of the distinctive things that were going to happen at the ASA meeting in August. I also raised the issue with the department about the minority “pipeline” – the problem of recruiting good undergraduates to go on to get PhDs in sociology and then enter the pool for assistant professors. One of the students I met in Laredo at TAMU is one of the in-coming PhD students at Vanderbilt for next year. I told them about the MA program at TAMU which automatically admits any student from their own program with a BA in sociology and sees one of its purposes as preparing their students to enter PhD programs in leading universities. I encouraged the faculty at Vanderbilt to think creatively about how they might be able to partner with Tennessee State to increase the flow of minority students into grad school. Vanderbilt is in the unusual position of being in the same city as a strong HBCU with a very active sociology program, and this could be an excellent context for increasing the flow of African American students into graduate school. They seemed receptive, but of course it is not so easy in practice to figure out an actual process for doing this successfully.

At 9:40 we began the speed-dating. There were ten students who wanted to participate, and since Jean and I needed to leave right at 11:30, I figured we really only could give 9 minutes for each “date.” The routine was the same as at Penn State: each student gave a condensed no-beating-around-the-bush account of their research topic and then explained some problem, confusion, impasse, bottleneck, unresolved issue, on which they wanted feedback. I then filled the time remaining with



off-the-cuff thoughts and suggestions. I had my iPod countdown timer on the table with the quacking duck signaling the end of the time. The scene was wonderful: a dozen or so students intently listening around a table; one person laying out core ideas of research; me giving as much focused attention as I can and then trying my best to give constructive reactions; and then a duck quacking vigorously telling us it is time to move on.

As has been the case in other times I have done this, I found this incredibly interesting and, I think, productive for the students. I won't try to reconstruct my comments on the projects in detail, but here are brief descriptions of the research and a few scattered comments:

Sammy Shaw is working on a project concerning the ways in which artists navigate their artistic careers in cities that are not at the center of the art world. The study involved ethnographic data in Portland and Nashville. The issue we discussed was the difficulty of using Bourdieu's framework in a way that isn't just descriptive. I expressed some sympathy with the problem of finding "surprises" when you use Bourdieu's field framework since it doesn't tend to make strong predictions about configurations of relations, and in the absence of Predictions (expectations), you can't be surprised by anything. I suggested that perhaps the old concept of reference group might be useful here – artists can have embedded local reference groups which in a sense may insulate them from some of the status and power issues bound up with the large "field of power" in the art world.

Ebony Duncan is studying the impact of charter school reforms on minority communities. She is particularly interested in the ways charter schools do, or do not, engage parents as meaningful partners. She also wanted to explore the idea that race should be seen not just as a liability, but as a positive asset, but was puzzled about how to construct a socioeconomic scale or index that reflects race as an asset. I commented that in exploring charter schools it is very important not to rely only on official documents and mission statements, since all Charter schools claim to be deeply concerned about the students and to engage the community and parents. I like the idea of race as an asset, but wonder whether it is really race as such which is the asset or, instead, things like communities and solidarities that are built around racial experiences.

Whitney Laster is interested in which she referred to as racial liminality – the ways in which certain groups are "in between" primary racial categories – mixed race categories being good examples. She wants to study "Coloreds" in South Africa as an instance of this. One issue she had was whether she should also have some comparative cases. Would she risk being seen as an area specialist if she only studied the South Africa case? I suggested that she probably didn't need to worry so much about being pigeon-holed as an Africanist, especially since the theoretical problem she was exploring had such resonance in the American sociology of race. Comparative research always has potentially big payoffs, but maybe the kind of variation to look at would be within South Africa – perhaps Durban vs Johannesburg vs Capetown as three contexts in which liminality is constructed.

Blake Sisk is studying occupational mobility of previously unauthorized immigrants (about 30-40% of legal migrants were previously unauthorized). The research wants to compare them

with people who were always authorized immigrants and those who stayed unauthorized during the whole period. The data spans three years. The issue is the extent to which the previous unauthorized status has enduring impacts on mobility chances. I thought this was a very interesting agenda, but that it was fraught with measurement problems, especially since there is likely to be very large selection issues into the categories and it is unrealistic to deal with these with “controls.” I discussed a bit the various strategies of dealing with these problems, but said that one should be a bit skeptical about all of these. A key question is: how likely is it to have findings that are strong enough to withstand the criticism that the differences in groups reflect unmeasured selection biases?

Carly Rush is studying the contemporary formation of deaf culture. The decline in residential schools for deaf children combined with the rise of things like cochlear implants has weakened attraction to Deaf Culture. Her dissertation focuses on the way various kinds of cultural organizations for the deaf -- deaf clubs, deaf theater and music, institutions like Gallaudet, etc. -- shaping the movement of people into deaf world. She is planning an Ethnographic study in Gallaudet where she will enroll next year (she is already fluent in ASL). Her main concern was whether she should also study a second site -- a school for the deaf in Fremont California in which people take a very militant stance in support of deafhood. I said that I thought unequivocally it was worth investing the time and energy for the second case study. This should be thought of as banking data for the future as well. I know that this is a problem today when departments are putting such pressure on students to finish quickly, restricting funding to five years. But this can be a huge constraint, undermining the quality of data gathering, especially in this kind of project. If at all possible, adding the second case will have potentially great pay-offs. I also talked a little about my visit to Gallaudet University and how completely fascinating I found the issues around deaf culture and its dilemmas. I suggested that Carly meet Margaret Vitullo in the ASA Office who taught for many years at Gallaudet and would be a wonderful resource for her project.

Sandra Arch is studying the effects of development on the environment in the case of an island off the coast of Honduras that is a prime dive destination and has witnessed a huge tourist growth because of diving. This has had serious environmental impacts on the reef. She is in the early stages of the project, really the exploratory stages, and is trying to figure out what the most important questions might be. I used her case study as the basis for commenting on the distinction between learning *about* a case and learning *from* the case -- on the analogy of a doctor who in diagnosing a patient conducts a research project in which much is learned about the patient's disease, but generally nothing is learned from the patient. That is, knowledge about disease processes is not changed as a result. A lot of case study research is like that in sociology. The problem is that the cases are chosen not because of their potential to push general knowledge forward by, for example, showing some inconsistencies with received wisdom, but rather because the researcher has some special interest in the case for personal reasons. This can result in the choice of case in which it mostly illustrates the familiar story of capitalist developers not attending to the impact of their actions, and the marginally successful efforts of local and environmental forces to counteract this (or something like that).

Leslie Rodriguez is studying ways in which collaboration between the local police in Nashville and the immigration authorities is reflected in arrest patterns for minor offenses like driving without a license. She is focusing on the way the arrest documents include more information than strictly needed for the arrest, and seeing if this extra information is connected to foreign status of the arrestee. I suggested that it would also be important to talk to cops and see how they understood what they were doing when they added this extra information. Complementing the quantitative study with more qualitative work on the meanings of the key actors engaged in generating the data could add a lot to the interpretation.

Kwon Mai is at the very beginning of his research. He is interested in explaining why, before the end of the USSR, there were 21 “Communist States” and now there are only five: why have these five persisted? I encouraged him to be careful with the expression “Communist States.” North Korea and China and Cuba are not all instances of the same kind of state and economy. If the proper category is one-party authoritarian states, then many of the pre-1990 “Communist States” are still one-party authoritarian states, even if the parties are no longer called Communist.

Allison McGrath wants to study how feminism is treated and understood by women within various white supremacy organizations. This follows the line of research done by Kathleen Blee, but instead of just focusing on the role of women in these organizations she is interested in how feminism itself is dealt with and even incorporated into the identities of the women involved in the movements. This led to a discussion of issues connected with gathering data on such groups and the dilemmas of being transparent vs at least partially “under cover”.

Taylor Hargrove is interested in exploring various aspects of the “stress process model” in mental illness, especially as this affects black students. In the preliminary research he found that SES seemed to have no effects on the mental health outcomes in his models, even though he assumed that people with lower SES would be under more stress. I suggested that it was entirely possible that high SES and low SES each generated above average stress, but for different reasons: high SES puts people into high stakes competitive contexts which are stressful, for example. Low SES puts people in vulnerable positions, with lots of uncertainty and risks, which is stressful. Basically what you need to do is think through the mechanisms involved and then try to more directly measure these.



Everyone in who wanted to participate managed to do so by 11:30 when we had to leave. Jean and I then grabbed sandwiches and drove off to Tennessee State University, first going the wrong way on highway 440 for five or six miles and then turning around and eventually arriving at our destination by 12:30.

The visit to TSU was a bit different from the other HBCUs we visited. In the other visits we engaged in a variety of gatherings – with faculty, with students, with both in the public lecture. There was also time for more informal discussion. At TSU the only event was the public lecture. The option of a meeting with students was on the schedule for after the lecture, but in the end the student dispersed at that session didn't happen. One reason, I think, was that this week is the celebration of the centennial of the founding of TSU, and tomorrow is the day of the big events connected with this. As a result the lecture was held in a different part of the campus from sociology, and people were especially busy. I did have an intensive discussion with two undergraduate students who were interested in graduate school after the lecture, and I explored with them the issue of getting an MA degree as a bridge to a PhD program, but it was a bit rushed and I felt bad that I didn't have the chance to be more thoroughly encouraging.

At the talk itself there was a very lively discussion with the audience. Somewhat to my surprise, there was an extended discussion, involving four or five different people, on the issue of the value of Wikipedia and whether or not it represented a "real utopia". One person strongly questioned the value of Wikipedia because of its unreliability, but others defended it because you could also follow up on the sources, and the editorial process was not so different from peer review. A former editor of a journal said that peer review journals were like monarchies with an all-powerful king making the final decisions. When I noted the way in which Wikipedia destroyed the market for the print edition of the Britannica, the critic of Wikipedia said that this was a great loss. I then explained the purposes of the ASA Wikipedia initiative and stressed the ways in which Wikipedia should be seen as a dynamic process rather than a static document. It is a massive public good and it will improve and become of high quality to the extent that experts in subjects begin to see it as a professional responsibility to contribute to the public good. The use of Wikipedia writing assignments in sociology courses is one way of doing this over time.



A few other issues discussed:

- "Academic life is supposed run like a real utopia, but managerialism in many universities constantly undercuts this."
- "Isn't it the case that powerful people and organization are in the best position to take advantage of new digital technologies? Do these technologies really facilitate real utopias?" I replied that powerful people always have advantages with respect to any technology, but that the new digital technologies have if anything reduced the disadvantage of the less powerful. It helps them more than it helps elites. IT massively reduces the costs of coordinating collective actions across distances, even across borders. It opens up all sorts of new possibilities. And it reduces economies of scale,

which is one of the sources of power of the wealthy – they can deploy technologies that require big economies of scale.

- “What about the digital divide in the U.S.? Poor people have much less access to these technologies.” I explained that this was really much more of a political problem than a strictly technological one. We are a rich enough country to completely eliminate inequalities in access to these technologies if we had the political will to do so. And since access is getting cheaper and cheaper over time, this should become easier to overcome.
- “I like the utopia part a lot, but I am not convinced about the real part. Consumerism is such a powerful thing in the U.S. Americans love their consumption: doesn’t this make the “real” part of real utopia unrealistic? How can you get people to move away from consumerism.” I said that I didn’t have any magic strategies for this. The best I could offer was the prospect of building new institutions on the ground the embodied these other values and for people to see that alternative ways of living – even in a capitalist society – are possible. But to make those possibilities viable, you need to create the new realities – community gardens, participatory budgeting, worker cooperatives.

It was pouring after the talk, so Jean and I scuttled the tentative plan we had made to explore a bit the honky-tonk street in the downtown. Instead we decided to go to Opryland and maybe even go to the Grand Ole Opry. It turned out that it was sold out, so all we did was go to dinner.

Day 11, April 18, 2012, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky

Berea College was the fitting culmination of my tour of colleges and universities serving historically marginalized populations, especially given the focus on my lectures on real utopias. It was founded in 1855 by ardent Abolitionists as the only integrated educational institution in the South. It was founded on the Christian principle, “God has made of one blood all people of the earth.” In 1859 it was closed down by pro-slavery forces, and then reopened immediately after the end of the Civil War in 1865. From then until the beginning of the 20th century it was



roughly 50% black, 50% white, and coeducational. I was told that when dating between black and white students emerged in those years, the administrators accepted it as “natural” in spite of the strong social norms against it in the region. As Jim Crow laws were introduced in the South, the college became increasingly a target of hostility, until finally in 1904 the Kentucky Legislature passed the Day Law making it illegal to have integrated educational institutions, public or private. Berea College challenged this in court, but in 1908 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that

Kentucky was within its Constitutional Rights to pass the law, so the college had to be immediately segregated, and the black faculty and students had to leave. When this happened



the college divided its endowment to fund a black college near Louisville, where the black faculty and students went (I am not sure that I have the history of that institution quite right – I'm not sure if it already existed or was directly created by Berea, and I don't know how long and effectively this continued). The college had also help to anchor the racial integration of the town of Berea, part of which was organized in what was called a checkerboard pattern – every other lot being sold to a white

family or a black family. The college also insisted on equal pay for black and white employees. Once the school was segregated, however, this integrated pattern in the community declined, both because opportunities for African-Americans declined and, later, because of the great migration north during WWI.

In 1950, when the Day Law was amended, the college immediately reintegrated and energetically recruited black students, both from Appalachia and from urban areas. It has an extremely unusual admissions policy: Tuition is free (the equivalent of a \$24,000 scholarship for all students). Only low to moderate income students are admitted: families have to submit copies of their tax returns to prove that the family income falls below the required threshold. (I was told for a family of three this was around \$40,000/year). 80% of the students come from the Appalachian region, 20% from elsewhere. All students at the college have to work 10 hours a week, which contributes to paying for room and board. In the past this labor included construction work – many of the buildings on campus were built with student labor. Now janitorial work, secretarial work, various kinds of administrative support work, are all done by students as part of the labor requirement. And, the college does all this while clearly maintaining a rigorous and challenging academic program. I was deeply impressed and moved by the college's aspirations and history, but even more by the earnest and passionate way in which these aspirations are translated into the reality on the ground in the institution today.

The visit to Berea had not been part of the original plan of this trip. It developed in a really sweet way. A few months ago I received a letter from Jill Bouma, an assistant professor in the Berea Sociology Department, telling me that she had used the book I wrote with Joel Rogers, *American Society: how it really works* as the core text in a class and how much she and the students liked the book. At the end of her email she said something like, "I don't imagine we will ever meet, but I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the book." I looked at a map and saw that Nashville and Berea were not all that far apart. I wrote back thanking her for the kind words, and then said that I would be in Nashville in Mid-April and could easily add

Berea to the end of the trip. Jill was delighted with this possibility, and so she and Jean worked out the details. Since in any case Berea does serve a historically marginalized population – low income students, especially in Appalachia – it fit perfectly within the overall agenda of the campus tour.

Jean and I left Nashville for Berea around 8 in the morning. We were scheduled to arrive at noon for lunch, and according to Google maps the drive should take three and a half hours or so, so this seemed ample. Only we didn't notice that we changed time zones going from Tennessee to Eastern Kentucky. When we stopped for gas in Somerset, Kentucky, Jean noticed the clocks. So we called and explained that we'd be late.

We arrived a bit before 1 and were met by Tom Boyd, a professor emeritus from Sociology who had taught in the department from the late 1970s until a few years ago, when he retired in order to be a full time wood sculptor funded, as he put it, by his benefactors FDR (via social security) and Lyndon Johnson (via Medicare). The day was sublimely beautiful – 70 degrees, brilliantly clear and sunny. Spring was in full throttle – lush green, flowers. The setting is lovely, in the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains. The campus has a classic liberal arts college feel to it – old stately brick buildings, lots of green space filled with trees and grass. Charming little gazebos in which to sit are scattered around the campus yards.

Tom took us on a leisurely walk through the heart of the campus, telling us storied about his time there and the history of the place.

When it began the institution was mainly devoted to promoting literacy rather than being an undergraduate college. After the Civil War it added more units – the college division, a high school, and industrial arts program, reflecting the changing needs of the population it served. In the late 19th century it began attracting wealthy donors and built up an endowment. Andrew Carnegie, for example, was a major contributor, as was the Danforth family fortune. I would like to know more about the way wealthy donors saw their donations to a place that is so consciously committed to social justice and equality as ideals. Perhaps it was seen more in the spirit of “helping the poor” rather than “promoting equality and justice”. The result, in any event, is a very large endowment – approaching \$1 billion – which provides the basis for the zero tuition policy. (But also: most students have Pell grants and many receive food stamps). In the 1960s students from Berea joined the civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham, over the objections of the administration which thought it wasn't safe. In 2011 students went to Zarcotti Park to participate in Occupy Wall Street, over the objections of the administration which thought it wasn't safe.



At 3:00 we went to the sociology department for a meeting with students and a version of the careers and sociology workshop. The students were obviously very motivated and academically serious with lots of questions. A number were already admitted to graduate schools and would begin in the fall, others were thinking about it.

My talk on real utopias began at 4pm. The room was packed – maybe 120 people or so. In addition to the Berea students and faculty, was a group of students and faculty that had driven from Georgetown College, a Baptist-affiliated liberal arts college near Lexington, as well as some from the University of Kentucky and other places. Because of the setting at Berea I was especially filled with emotional energy and was there “in the moment.” Without any real planning, I began the talk with an improvisational riff on utopia: “This is the first time I have ever given a lecture at an academic institution in which the second sentence of its official brochure describes itself as a “utopian experiment.” What a beautiful, poignant way of ending a lecture tour of universities serving historically underserved populations where I have been talking about real utopias. Berea is a real utopia: a university that grounds itself in principles of equality and social justice and then tries very hard to live up to those ideals in its practices. Gandhi is often quoted as saying “Be the change you want to see in the world” (although I have been told that this is apocryphal). The idea of real utopias is “build the institutions you want to see in the world.” This is not, however, exactly like many intentional communities driven by utopian ideals. 19th century utopian communities saw withdrawing from the world as their solution to the corruption of the world; real utopia envisions building alternatives in the world as a way of ultimately transforming it, even replacing it. I then went straight to the contrast between ruptural, interstitial and symbiotic transformations as a ways of putting into practice the idea that another world is possible – explaining why ruptural strategies seem so problematic under conditions of social complexity. I then argued for interstitial strategies as a way of building emancipatory institutions wherever possible in the spaces of the existing society, but also said that they will inevitably be limited to niches and margins and often become more like adaptive self-help projects than social transformations unless combined with symbiotic strategies that engage in political struggles to open up greater spaces for the interstitial transformations. I then proceeded to the core of the talk as planned. Sometimes when you give a talk you feel completely connected to the audience, joined by common purposes, seeing their focus and attention and speaking to each person as in an animated conversation rather than an impersonal lecture. For me Berea was like that.

Some questions:

- “What does it mean to be an activist today? How can an activist connect to real utopias?” I spoke again of the connection between interstitial strategies and symbiotic strategies. Social movements to expand urban agriculture would be an example. Building community based urban agriculture is a way of actually transforming the food system in decayed central cities. But it is limited by land use rules and by property rights, and to change these requires politics, politics that change the rules of the game and open space for the movements. This is where activists and sociologists can play a role – linking the community building projects to political struggles. Sociologists can

codify the experiences and models so that each new effort does not have to reinvent the wheel.

- “Are there global south examples to add to your Western ones?” I explained how participatory budgeting came from the South and was initially copied and experimented me in many places in Latin America before really reaching the North. Basic Income is also being experimented in various places in the South more thoroughly than in the north.
- “With processes that are messy, how can you keep the Real Utopias model?” Messiness is at the heart of the real utopia model. Democratic experimentalism of the sort advocated by John Dewey is central. Learning by doing, trial and error, experimentation – these constitute the iterative process that produces new institutions that. The idea is not to come up with detailed blueprints in advance that can simply be put into place, but to establish design principles and the a dynamic of learning. That is inherently messy.
- “What is the use of criticizing capitalism in a society like ours? Can this be counterproductive? Maybe it would be better to talk about real utopias without attacking capitalism.” It may be that if I was an organizer, an activist who spoke regularly to things like church groups that I might decide I needed to tailor my language more carefully to the beliefs of the audience. But I hold academic values too strongly for this. Since I think capitalism is a source of great harm to people, that it is one of the root causes of the problems we face in the world, I feel I have to name the problem correctly if I am to be honest. I also think that in the ideal world I imagine there probably is some place for a bit of capitalism, some role for capitalism. No socioeconomic structure is ever purely one kind of economic system. American capitalism has public libraries, which distribute books in decidedly non-capitalist ways. So I suspect that there would be a niche for capitalism even in a radically democratic egalitarian society. Capitalism between consenting adults is probably OK. My 94-year old mother, who supports my work tremendously, tells me, using my childhood name, “Rickey, do you have to call it socialism?” I feel that I do need to advocate for socialism, for a social-socialism and criticize capitalism because that best identifies the solutions and the problem.

After the talk people hung around for a bit. A number of students wanted pictures with me, including the group of students from Georgetown College, and I was happy to oblige.

Around 6:00 we left the sociology department and walked across campus to Jill Buoma’s house for dinner. Ten or so faculty members were there. I was really happy not to eat at a restaurant. I almost always prefer home cooking. The party was great – relaxed, lots of laughing, interesting exchanges about life in Berea and Kentucky and other matters. We had an especially nice discussion about the virtue of earnestness.

Around 7:30 Jean left for Louisville. He was flying back early the next morning, whereas I was going to stay for most of the day visiting people associated with the Center for Sustainable

cities near Lexington. His leaving signaled the end of our glorious road trip together. Jean figured we had logged somewhere around 2800 miles of driving: San Antonio-Laredo-McAllen-San Antonio; Albuquerque-Chinle-Tsaile-Chinle-Albuquerque; Jackson-New Orleans-Montgomery-Tuskegee-Montgomery-Selma-Birmingham-Nashville-Berea. And we got along wonderfully the entire trip – never any grumpiness. I was sorry to say goodbye to my road buddy.

At 9:00 Tom Boyd escorted me to a cottage on campus that was a kind of retreat/hang-out for nontraditional students. They didn't live there, but it had a kitchen large living room, and a number of study rooms. It was near the female dorm and was referred to as part of "Estrogen Island", in contrast to the "penile colony" where the male dorm was located. There are nine or ten people waiting for me, mostly women, but a few guys as well. A number of them were single moms, and some of the others were clearly older adult returning students. One was a grandmother (although only 45). I told her I was jealous. She was basically the impresario of the event. She suggested that everyone introduce themselves to me. As each student did, I asked them questions about their work, commented on various themes and issues, sometimes gave some advice or suggestions, and after a bit of time she would gently suggest that we move on to another student, clearly anting to be sure everyone had a turn. It was a wonderful, relaxed, meandering conversation. The time slipped by and I didn't even realize I was beginning to wilt, until suddenly, around 11:15 I felt a wave of fatigue. I knew that I had a breakfast gathering with Jill and the other faculty in sociology at 8:00 the next morning, so I reluctantly said that I needed to call it a night.



The Boone Tavern where I was staying was just a 100 yards or so away, so I was in bed just a bit after midnight.

Day 12, April 19, 2012, flying back to Madison

I spent the final day of the trip mostly in Lexington at the architectural design studio of Richard Levine, the director of the Center for Sustainable Cities at the University of Kentucky. This was late addition to the trip, a kind of coda added a few weeks ago. Here is what happened: at the visit day for prospective graduate students in March, one of the students was Laura Frye-Levine. We chatted about various things and in due course I told her about my upcoming trip and mentioned that I was ending up in Berea. She lit up and told me that she was from the area, and knew Berea very well. It turns out she had been working for an institute called the Center for Sustainable Cities which was concerned with issues deeply connected to Real

Utopias and that she was going to be there just when I was in Berea. Gee, I said, why don't I try to visit the Center while I am in Kentucky – I'll be so close it would be a shame not to find out more about it. So, I contacted Jean, got "permission" (as it were) to change my return flight from the afternoon to the evening, and then coordinated with Laura for her to pick me up at Berea this morning.

If visiting Berea College was a fitting final real utopian meal of the campus lecture tour on real utopias, then spending the day exploring the issues of the Center for Sustainable Cities was a fantastic dessert. We didn't actually go to the Center itself, but rather to the home and



architectural design studio of the director, who I hadn't realized was Laura's father. The setting was extraordinary: Lush green Kentucky countryside, wooded hills, deep ravines. The house was a spectacular solar design – basically a kind of cube with one obliquely cut plane cut through it on which solar panels were fixed. A beautiful interesting design. The house was largely built by Richard and students in the mid-1970s and was a pioneering design for solar design and energy efficiency. The house, and

the adjoining studio, were on 30 acres of land, through which ran a gorgeous creek with limestone bluffs. At the end of the day, before leaving for the airport, we had a wonderful hike down to gully where the creek meandered and along the side of the creek to the end of the property.

For several hours we talked about urban design and the problem of sustainability, both in terms of the technical issues of use of nonrenewable and renewable natural resources and in terms of the social practices needed to sustain those technical parameters. I have not had many occasions to visit design studios and I am always blown away by the combination of the complexity of the technical parameters and the aesthetically compelling images and models.



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I'm now in the plane, on the tarmac in Chicago waiting for the door to close. It is two weeks since I left for the visit to Penn State. The trip – both this phase and the earlier one to Texas and Navaho -- has been remarkable for me. I'm hesitant to make any general, overarching comments that try to distill all of the impressions into a few catchy bullet points, but here is a first pass at some thoughts:

- I was very impressed by the academic seriousness of the places I visited. Both faculty and students engaged the ideas I was presenting in thoughtful ways, often posing demanding and sophisticated questions.
- The faculty were deeply committed to their students, both in terms of their efforts to teach them sociology and in terms of their support for them as persons. Of course this could be a bit because of self-selection – places with indifferent faculty would be less likely to have invited me. But at least in the schools I visited faculty were clearly dedicated teachers.
- In every department I visited there were smart, talented students who, at least on the basis of my discussions with them, seemed capable to being in PhD programs. And in every department there were students who seemed really interested – at least intrigued – by the idea of an academic career. My general sense is that the pipeline problem has more to do with actively recruiting such students, cultivating a strong relationship with them, strengthening their self-confidence and providing them with the needed support, than it does with the sheer size of the talent pool. I have no real statistical basis for that judgment, of course, but I was impressed with the number of young people I met who I could easily see doing successful work at the graduate level.
- I was also struck by the personal challenges facing so many of these students, challenges they have dealt with to get to college in the first place, let alone to go on for graduate training.
- At a practical level, I learned about the role of MA programs in helping some students get into a position to enter high-powered PhD program. I have had a very parochial view of MA programs, since the MA doesn't really play a serious role at Wisconsin and similar departments. But for some of the students I met on this trip, it clearly does offer a bridging degree that can be enormously helpful. I was especially impressed with the MA program at Texas A&M International, with its intensive mentoring designed to ratchet up core skills around writing and analysis. It would be a terrible shame if that program was eliminated because of rigid rules and budget cuts in the Texas higher education system.