

Chapter 6

Building the Neighborly Community in the Age of Trump: Toward a University–Community Engagement Movement 3.0

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ABSTRACT

With no moral compass, the current higher education civic engagement movement has wreaked havoc on inner city communities, especially for low-income people and people of color. This chapter explains why this happened, who it benefits, and why it largely continues unquestioned. A bold new vision is charted for higher education's civic engagement movement that is built upon principles of systems change and a fundamentally reimagined version of cities founded on social justice. Theoretical and practical solutions are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on how the *university-community engagement movement* can approach its mission of transforming the United States into a people-centered participatory social democracy during the Age of Trump.¹ The dominant force in the *university-community engagement movement (the movement)* is the University at Pennsylvania Netter Center, led by historian Ira Harkavy, and the Penn scholars associated with him (Benson et al, 2017; Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007). Hereafter, we refer to the Netter Center scholars as the *Penn Group*. Harkavy and the Penn Group convincingly argue that this larger purpose can only be realized by turning the *entrepreneurial university* (Clark, 1998) into the *engaged*

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university; by recreating public schools as engines of human development and social change; by converting underdeveloped neighborhoods into *neighborly communities*; and by changing the profit-making *metro-knowledge city* into the just *metro-knowledge city* (Taylor, Luter, & Miller 2018).

In the Age of Trump, where unconstrained neoliberalism and unquestioned market dynamics rule the day, the sharpest point of oppression and exploitation in the United States is the underdeveloped urban neighborhood. Of course, brutal exploitation and oppression exist on the “reservations” of indigenous people and in the rural sections of the United States. However, these underdeveloped areas are scattered and not centered in urban communities, therefore effectively attacking the root-causes of these outcasts of market capitalism is extremely difficult. Underdeveloped urban communities, on the other hand, are strategically located in urban centers, and the battle to turn them into *neighborly communities* represents a frontal attack on market capitalism, along with systemic structural racism and social class inequality. For this reason, undeveloped urban communities need privileging in the struggle to build *neighborly communities*, and the just metropolis (Hayes, 2017; Sharkey, 2013; Desmond, 2019).

Often, such underdeveloped urban neighborhoods lay in the shadow of the university (Florida, 2016). Thus, the task of transforming these marginalized places into *neighborly communities* is a prime task of the engaged university (Taylor, Luter, & Buggs, 2018; Hayward & Swanstrom, 2011; Marcuse et al., 2009). This chapter focuses on the role of the *university-community engagement movement* in turning such underdeveloped places into *neighborly communities*. Most of the chapter is a historical analysis of how the movement ended up falling short of its rhetorical aspirations, but we dedicate the final section to laying out a vision for what a new movement looks like and initial thoughts about how to get there.

THE NEIGHBORLY COMMUNITY PARADIGM

The neighborhood is a critical feature in the *university-community engagement movement* because it is the prime determinant of one’s life chances, well-being, and socioeconomic outcomes (Galster, 2019; Chety, Hendrin, & Katz, 2016; Sampson, 2012; Sharkey, 2013). The neighborhood is as a *force field* where an interactive relationship exists between *people* and *place*. People act on *place* and *place* acts on people. In underdeveloped communities, the *place* has an undesirable impact on *people* by creating obstacles that thwart their quest for well-being and desirable socioeconomic outcomes (Galster, 2019; Sampson, 2012). The foundation of racial and social class inequality in the United States is found in these underdeveloped communities. Therefore, you cannot build a just *metro-knowledge city* or nation without their radical transformation (Sharkey, 2013). For this reason, the *university-community engagement movement* centered on the transformation of underdeveloped communities into *neighborly communities*.

In the Penn Group’s imaginary, *neighborly communities* are the primary social units in the urban metropolis. They are inclusive cross-class neighborhoods that are characterized by high-quality housing, affordable to the lowest income groups, and serviced by high-quality schools, early childhood programs, recreational and health promotion activities, along with accessibility to a wide range of social well-being institutions. The *neighborly community* is anchored by community control, participatory democracy, collective ownership, and the close *monitoring* and *control* of market dynamics, along with the shared values of reciprocity, collectivism, solidarity, racial and social justice. The physical dimension of the *neighborly community* is characterized by a healthy, green, nurturing, and *smart* environment replete an integrated computer system and other features associated with high technology (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007; Taylor & Cole, 2001)

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