

*Imagining America; Imagining Universities: Who and What?*  
Chancellor Nancy Cantor, Syracuse University<sup>1</sup>

Welcome to Syracuse University, the new home of Imagining America! We have come together to collaborate on our campuses and in our communities on our common dreams of democracy and social justice.

The region in which we meet has a rich history of *passionate* efforts to create and enlarge democracy. The Syracuse area was a station on the Underground Railroad, a seedbed for abolition, and the cockpit of the struggle for the rights of women.



The operative word is *passionate*. Daring. Powerful. Committed. I invite you, as the novelist Alice Walker has done, to see in your mind the shocking and touching image of Sojourner Truth baring her breasts at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in 1851.

I invite you to imagine Harriet Tubman as she showed her revolver to the slaves she freed, after they hesitated with fear to go any farther and put everyone else in danger.<sup>2</sup>

This is a region where words and ideals have substance and have led to action, to vital changes that have informed and amplified all that is best in our society. We are here in that tradition.

This *is* the right place and the right time to imagine a new America, a more democratic America, because *this* is where imagination, education, and determination can unite scholarship and action. And Imagining America, I will assert this morning, is as much about transforming the academy as it is about transforming the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This speech was prepared as a welcome address for the *Imagining America Annual Conference* at Syracuse University, September 7, 2007. Deep gratitude is extended to Jo Thomas for her collaborative contributions to the preparation of the speech and to Sonita Surratt for her artistic assistance with the slides.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Walker, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997) xxxi.

## *Who Imagines; What is Included*

Let me frame two critical questions at the very beginning:

*Who* gets to imagine America?

And, how do we understand *what* America is?

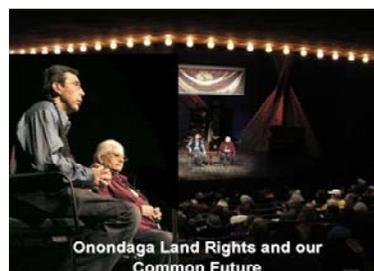


To begin, we could start here with Onondaga Lake, little more than a stone's throw away from us. It is the sacred and original site of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of six sovereign nations that we once called the League of the Iroquois. The confederacy served as a template for our Federal system of government. And its recognition of women as full participants in society inspired our national struggle for the rights of women.

For centuries, Onondaga Lake, its wetlands, and its tributaries were cold and clean and filled with fish, but industry has left them utterly polluted, a Superfund site.

So how are we to imagine Onondaga Lake refreshed and reclaimed?

We can begin by admitting we cannot do it alone. We need the voices and the expertise and the activism of the Onondagas. They have a claim in the courts to recover all their ancestral land, not to kick anyone out, but to assert their fundamental right to protect and preserve their natural environment.



To know where we are going---to Imagine America---we must get together. We must recognize and draw on the talents of nations and peoples within and beyond our official boundaries.

*Associated Living, Conjoint Experience*



As we think about democracy, I'd like to move to John Dewey's emphasis on deep communication, such as occurs when we really know each other, when we speak and really listen to each other, when we empathize with each other---communication that occurs so naturally and profoundly in the humanities and in the arts.

Democracy, Dewey wrote, is "a mode of associated living, of communicated conjoint experience."<sup>3</sup> This concept of democracy---deeply human, alive, fluid, always changing---requires the voices of all of its members.

Communication produces the social bonds that tie people together and make society possible. Communication---in politics, in society, in love, in war, in the arts-- is a symbolic process, whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.<sup>4</sup>

As the scholars James Carey and Raymond Williams have observed, when we look at our society, we have traditionally examined networks of power, administration, decision, and control---we have looked at society as a political order. As an alternative, we have seen society as relations of property, production and trade---as an economic order. But society also includes aesthetics, religion, and personal values,<sup>5</sup> and now---more than ever---democracy requires that every voice have access to the circle where ideas, opinions and outlooks are exchanged and decisions are made.

On our campuses, in our cities, and in our multicultural world, exchanges about religion, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and politics can be powder kegs.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, a Division of Simon & Schuster Inc., 1916) 87.

<sup>4</sup> See James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989) 22.

<sup>5</sup> See Carey's discussion of Dewey and the analysis of Raymond Williams in *Communication as Culture*, op. cit., 32-35.

We are not comfortable with pluralism. And yet we should not call for a society that is blind to the categories of our social terrain. It is naive, and it overlooks the productive roles that groups, as well as individuals, can and must play.

Although we are used to speaking of individual rights and insisting on stakeholder rights, each of us also belongs to many groups, and it can be constructive to take these groups seriously. In a world made up of insiders and outsiders, for example, each of us is both an insider and an outsider, depending on the context.

Underneath it all, there is a fundamental interdependence of individuals and community. It is easy to miss the truth in the often repeated notion, to paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, that if we don't all hang together, we will all hang separately.<sup>6</sup>

This is difficult to see in an American culture William Sullivan describes as "instrumental individualism,"<sup>7</sup> a culture that values individual advancement, narrow careerism, and private self-interest.

As Harry Boyte has warned, "Images of the good life, what it means to be successful, what the dream involves, have become hyper-competitive, materialistic, focused on celebrity, not substance. The heart of the democratic creed—the equal worth of every individual, liberty and justice for all, the value of cooperative labors that build our commonwealth—are becoming empty pieties, not principles we live by."<sup>8</sup>

### *Giving Voice, Building Democratic Culture*

At such a time, the arts and the public humanities have critical importance in building democratic culture. They have unique abilities to communicate, to transform the ways we see others and the ways we see ourselves. As Angela Davis beautifully envisioned, they can turn "walls into bridges."<sup>9</sup> They are both individual and profoundly social, constituting both our private experience and our public memory and collective conscience.

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or more assuredly, we shall all hang separately," in the Continental Congress just before signing the Declaration of Independence, 1776.

<sup>7</sup> William M. Sullivan, "Institutional Identity and Social Responsibility in Higher Education," *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, ed. Thomas Ehrlich (Westport, Ct: Onyx Press: American Council on Education, 2000) 35.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Boyte, "Culture-Makers for a Democratic Society: Organizing in the Cultural Sector," Center for Democracy and Citizenship, University of Minnesota, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Y. Davis, "Walls turned sideways are bridges," *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers [reprint], 1988) 346.

In Syracuse, we want to hear the voices of the children of our inner city, most of whom are locked in neighborhoods and schools that have been described as “failure factories.”<sup>10</sup> A significant piece of our new Partnership for Better Education with the Syracuse City School District involves “literacy through the arts,” with projects from elementary through high school that use filmmaking, poetry, photography, dance, to unlock these voices.

As our faculty say: “We are poorly educated and suffering from illiteracy if we marginalize the arts in our education.” And we are so rewarded by the remarkable creativity of the students in these projects and how quickly they get to the heart of the matter – their dreams.



Consider, for example, the following poetry and photography from a high school project inspired by the pioneering work of artist-scholar-activist Wendy Ewald who “handed over her camera to her subjects.” In this case, students from Henninger High in Syracuse were given digital cameras and asked to photograph and write about their city as part of a project funded by the Verizon Foundation.

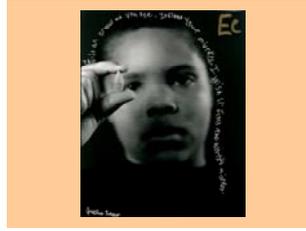
A poem written by Mike Barrington to accompany his photograph includes these impressions:

The pigeons are like small planes  
Traffic is like lock-down  
The bridge is like a getaway

As artists and humanists, and as educators and activists, we must cultivate both the inward-looking aesthetic of creativity and the outward-focused aesthetic of socially-shared experience and responsibility. This is what we see in the work of the

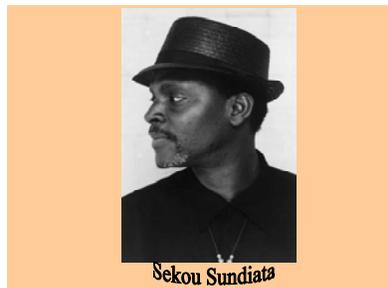
<sup>10</sup> Editorial, "The Small Schools Express," Rethinking Schools Online, 19.4 (Summer 2005)  
[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/19\\_04/expr194.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/19_04/expr194.shtml)

school children in these new programs. Here is a fifth grader, given the letter E, and asked to illustrate it in photography and poetry.



He writes: "This is an eraser as you see. It fixes your mistakes. I wish it fixes the world's mistakes."

Perhaps we can't magically erase the world's mistakes, but we certainly can take some socially-shared responsibility for them and use our art and our educational voices to work to fix some of them.



The poet Sekou Sundiata---who died this summer at only 58---described this task powerfully and poignantly the last time many saw him, at last year's conference for *Imagining America*. "I'm not interested in art rituals for art audiences," he said. "I'm interested in people talking and creating across the closely guarded territories of Art, Academia and Activism."

### *Public Memories; Public Rebirths*

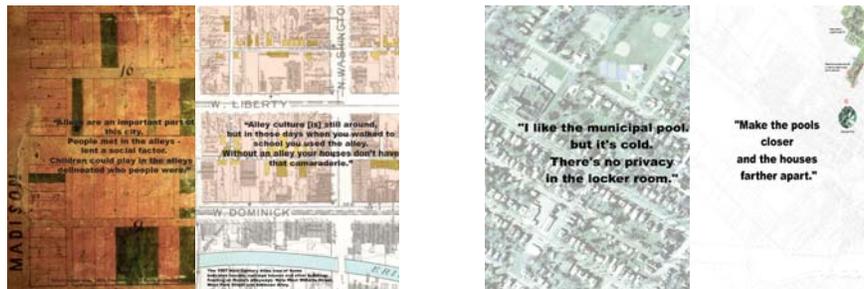


Public culture projects can create these spaces for people to tell stories that map the past, present, and future possibilities. Across Upstate New York, for example, towns and cities are struggling, and people are getting together to (re)imagine the region in ways that invite economic development *without* gentrification.

Let me point in particular to a few of these public memory projects.

In “Maps As Stories: Rome – New York,” Syracuse Architect Anne Munly and Geographer Anne Mosher, combined historic maps and photos with contemporary ones, asking local citizens to draw cognitive maps and to tell stories, in a portrayal of “everyday life and the hopes and losses of this upstate community.” They framed their exhibition with the words of Michel de Certeau: “What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.”<sup>11</sup>

By staying close to daily life, they got to the heart of people’s aspirations for Rome in the most routine parts of life. In their descriptions of alleys, for example, the residents harkened back to the days when alleys meant “camaraderie” even as “they delineated who people were.” When describing pools, they looked forward to the days when “the pools could be closer and the houses further apart.”



In Syracuse, we are building on the success of artist relocation projects in Paducah Kentucky, by teaming up with a remarkable community-based non-profit organization and the Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative to revitalize the homes and warehouses in a predominantly black and Latino neighborhood on the near west side of the City. The project will make room not only for artists, and media and technology companies in huge old warehouses, but also build and renovate some 140 houses with current residents. Our students and faculty are actively engaged in documenting the voices and maps of this neighborhood, as it was in its bygone glory days, as it is now, and as its residents hope it can become again.

<sup>11</sup> See Anne Muly and Anne Mosher, “Maps as Stories: Rome – New York,” 2007, with quotes from Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

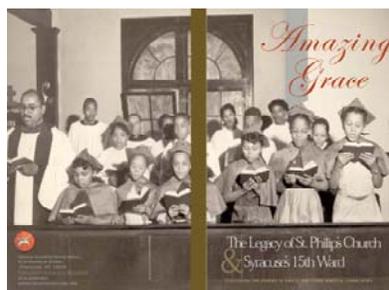


What is central to the rebirth of American cities and neighborhoods is the exploration and celebration of the institutions and identities that shaped those bygone eras.

Certainly, for example, this powerful homage to "the Steel Worker," created by a former steelworker, Sid Rackhoff, cannot be forgotten in the rebirth of the steel towns of Ohio, as Sherry Linkon and John Russo and other public scholars at Youngstown State University have catalogued.<sup>12</sup>



In Syracuse, public memory projects are emerging side-by-side with the rejuvenation of institutions and neighborhoods here. For example, 2007 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closing of St. Philip's Church---an African American Episcopal Mission founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It formed the hub of Syracuse's 15<sup>th</sup> ward for 60 years until it closed and its congregants joined the all-white Grace Episcopal Church.

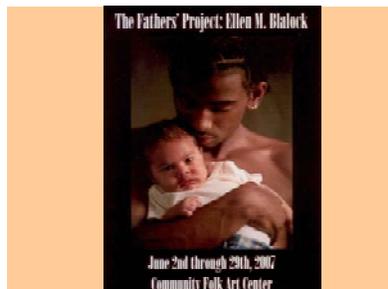


<sup>12</sup> Piece built by Sid Rackhoff with assistance from workers at the scrap yard, "The Steel Worker," Niles, OH, 1990.

Grace, still an integrated church, is situated on the Connective Corridor, an urban design and transportation project that is being built to both connect our university hill to the downtown, and to make more visible the arts and cultural institutions, like Grace Church and the Syracuse Stage, along its path.



In fact, several historic institutions are located along the Corridor, reminding us of who we are and what we must remain. One of them, the Community Folk Arts Center, has been a unit of our Department of African American Studies for 35 years. It gathers the voices and images that portray the hope, and dispel some misperceptions, of this community.

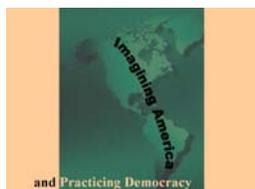


Similar space for public voice to emerge strong in the face of challenges is being constructed across our country. Imagining America is extremely fortunate that its new national director, Jan Cohen-Cruz, has made such community engagement in the arts her life's work, ever since she joined the NYC Street Theatre Company at the age of 17.

Last Spring, she collaborated on a new community theater program for children in New Orleans' 7<sup>th</sup> ward. It was one of five organized by *HOME New Orleans?* a community-based, arts-focused organization, including universities, schools, artists, and neighborhoods seeking positive change in the city. *HOME New Orleans?* wants to use art to redress the inequities in race and class that plague New Orleans, to bring people together to talk and, hopefully, to act on deeply polarized and polarizing issues. In so doing, it seeks to demonstrate the practice of democracy.



## *Practicing Democracy*



My hope is that Imagining America can continue to foster that inclusive space, that practice of democracy, and I know that Jan will help us do it. But, as we do, we must also address fundamental issues of how we do our scholarly work. Our scholarship should be about democratic culture and promote democratic culture. But it should also be done in a democratic way, so it should live democratic culture.

Therefore, I want to suggest today that our collaborations embody several basic principles, similar to those ways of associated living that Dewey described and that Ira Harkavy and his colleagues have used as touchstones in their efforts to promote the engagement of universities as public goods.<sup>13</sup>

- They must be diverse. Justice demands it. So do excellence and truth. They must *include*---NOT *exclude*. As Ronald Dworkin has written, ‘The worst of the stereotypes, suspicions, fears, and hatreds that still poison America are color-coded.’<sup>14</sup> And, as we know, other codes follow closely too.
- Democratic scholarship must be reciprocal, with a sense of mutual exploration. Gone should be the days when we do our scholarship “on” or “in” communities rather than *with* communities of experts sharing a common set of responsibilities, if not a common set of experiences, positions, locations, voices or backgrounds.

<sup>13</sup> Lee Bendon, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Dworkin, “Affirming Affirmative Action,” *New York Review of Books* 45.16 (22 October 1998) : 91-102, cited by William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, Eugene M. Tobin in *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005) 141.

- Related to the reciprocity of democratic scholarship must be a commitment to working on interpersonal trust and mutual respect, even as hard and unstable as that can be across differences.
- Collaborations must be interdisciplinary, reaching across academic "silos" in ways that are still difficult to do and gathering together people who share common scholarly interests and are willing to embark on a joint venture of exploration.
- And finally, democratic scholarship must [and will] nurture a sense of interdependence, which is our true situation in the world---like it or not, see it or not.

### *Scholarship in Action*

At Syracuse we call this work *Scholarship in Action*, and a centerpiece of it is the sharing of voice and power as essential features, not after-thoughts. This is happening on the South Side of Syracuse where the youth go to prison more often than to college. It is a part of the city that has often felt silenced and abandoned.

A recent report noted that each year over 40 million dollars flows out of this neighborhood for the purchase of goods and services elsewhere in the county, and there is renewed determination to keep those resources at home. The Southside Community Coalition, and the Southside Entrepreneurs Association, are resident groups working to do just that – and they are presenting us with RFPs for projects, rather than the other way around.

We have collaborated to create a South Side Innovation Center for women- and minority-owned business start-ups, a food co-op and test kitchen, a community-run newspaper to tell the full range of stories, not just report the latest crimes of the neighborhood, appropriately titled "*The Stand*," and more – all assets that the community itself identified.

Expertise within the neighborhood itself is pointing the way. Thus when African American Studies professors Linda Carty and Kishi Animashaun Ducre were funded by the Ford Foundation for a project on Gender and Environmental Justice, they turned to the mothers of the South Side to map the areas that frightened them and their children and the places where they felt safe. They used "Photovoice," a

participatory-action research methodology pioneered by Caroline Wang at Michigan, based on the understanding that people are experts on their own lives.<sup>15</sup>

This photograph by South Side resident Inessa McGrew, exhibited with others at the Community Folk Art Gallery, reminds the world of the feelings in this neighborhood where tragedy and loss are signified in the boards that have closed up a beautiful home.



Almost a year ago, a 12-year-old boy who loved watching professional wrestling on TV was killed in an accident here when he tried to imitate a wrestling move he had seen on television, the same move that had killed a six year old neighbor only two days before. The cameras, the reporters, and the boy's family have all gone away. Only the house remains.

There is a Haitian proverb, once cited by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and picked up by Tracy Kidder, whose biography of Dr. Paul Farmer, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, was last summer's reading for entering students here at SU. The proverb says: "The rocks in the water don't know how the rocks in the sun feel."<sup>16</sup> Now maybe we do.

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<sup>15</sup> C. Wang, M. Burris, Y. Ziang, "Chinese Village Women as Visual Anthropologists: A Participatory Approach to Reaching Policymakers, *Soc Sci Med* 42 (1996) :1391-1400., cited in C.C. Wang, S. Morrel-Samuels, P.M. Hutchison, and R.M. Pestrok, "Field Action Report; Flint Photovoice: Community Building Among Youths, Adults, and Policymakers," *American Journal of Public Health* 94.6 (June 2004) : 911-913.

<sup>16</sup> Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains; The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World* (New York: Random House Paperbacks, 2004) 110.

*Transforming Communities, Transforming Universities*



As such public scholarship proliferates and we learn to take it seriously,<sup>17</sup> we must simultaneously gather together to understand how it transforms, not just our communities, but our universities as well. In fact, the transformations are already well underway, as are the discussions about them that *Imagining America* is promoting through Julie Ellison and Tim Eatman's work on the Tenure Team Initiative, and on other projects to test the limits of "the gold standard" of research productivity – the monograph or journal article – as the Modern Language Association called it.<sup>18</sup>

This is a fundamental structural change that must be addressed so that we can judge excellence in public scholarship and not punish and discourage some of our best scholars, especially those whose work does and will have an important impact in communities near and far.<sup>19</sup>

Taking public scholarship seriously is not an easy task. For public scholarship not only produces "works" that appear in non-traditional forms and outlets, whose "impact" must be measured on different audiences and by an expanded set of peers, but it also crosses the sacred divisions of the three-legged academic stool of teaching, research, and service. And, in fact, when done well it obliterates the very notion of service, either in or outside our campus communities, replacing it with shared democratic responsibilities.

All of this blurring of categories not only makes it hard for faculty to embrace, but it reasonably unnerves graduate students who worry about their job prospects – as one Syracuse graduate student, who actually likes what we are doing here, bemoaned

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<sup>17</sup> Nancy Cantor and Steven D. Lavine, "Taking Public Scholarship Seriously," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (9 June 2006) : B20.

<sup>18</sup> John V. Lombardi, "Research Competition and the MLA," *Inside Higher Education*, 1 January 2007. See also "Tenure and the Public Sociologist," *Inside Higher Education*, 15 August 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Many institutions nationally are well along in writing new policies and procedures; others like Syracuse are in the midst of analysis and discussions with faculty chairs, deans, the faculty senate, and other campus leaders poised to try to effect policies that address directly *excellence* in public scholarship. See Julie Ellison's Tenure Team Initiative background reports for summaries of existing policies that promote public scholarship and others in progress, University of Michigan, 2007.

recently: what happens when you go to “an institution where Scholarship in Action is *not* valued, *not* recognized.”<sup>20</sup> Fair enough.

*When Identity Politics and Public Scholarship Productively Intersect*

And as we take such concerns seriously and try to reward public scholarship, let us not forget to talk about *who* is doing it and how we make sure they are truly allowed to be at home as “insiders” in the academy.<sup>21</sup> As George Sanchez has persuasively argued, many of the most productive experts in public scholarship are and will be faculty with a strong commitment to their social identities and to their allied communities who are often not well-represented in the academy.<sup>22</sup>

The academy must recognize the significant contributions that arise from scholars whose public scholarship reflects and engages a commitment to identity, diversity, and community. When scholars who historically are “outsiders” come inside, we must realize that they cannot and should not voluntarily leave their social identities at the door. [Only those already “inside” pretend not to have such identities.] These identities have value for the academy and contribute to the excellence of our scholarship. They become problematic only when this value is ignored---or worse---denied.

There are many productive examples of the intersection of “identity politics” and public scholarship in which not only is excellent work produced and social change effected, but the academy is transformed to be more democratic itself in the process.

At Syracuse, for example, faculty and students in the School of Education have been using the arts as a means of activism for and by persons with disabilities, since the pioneering work of its former dean, Burton Blatt.<sup>23</sup>

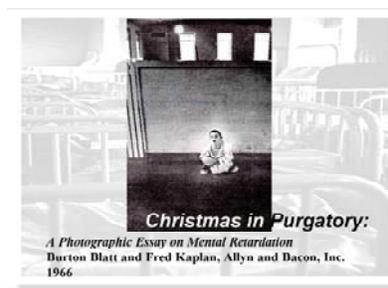
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<sup>20</sup> Posting by dmueller, “In Action,” to *Academe*, 24 July 2007, 9:45am.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Cantor, “Multiculturalism, Universalism, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academy,” Future of Minority Studies Summer Institute Colloquium, Stanford University, 28 July 2006.

<sup>22</sup> George Sanchez, “Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy,” The John Dewey Lecture, University of Michigan, October 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan, *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*, (New York: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966). This remarkable photographic expose of the horrors of state institutions for the developmentally disabled, lead to the famous Willowbrook Consent Decree signed in 1970 by Governor Hugh Carey to deinstitutionalize thousands of New York State citizens.



The impact of this work is substantial because it embraces not only public scholarship *about* disabilities but the public scholars who *are* disabled.

Consider, for example, the work of Jamie Burke, an individual with autism, who was 15 years old when he began using facilitated communication, a technique developed and advocated by Doug Biklen, a protégé of Blatt and now dean of the School.



"I was a boy who had much intelligence but no voice," Jamie says in the documentary film he wrote and narrated, produced by Biklin. "Now I'm using my speech, it feels like freedom."

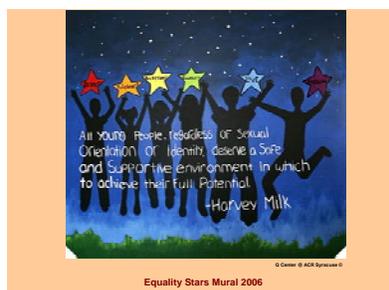
And while the controversy about facilitated communication in the research literature in psychology and education never seems to tire, the compelling testimony to its power is written and rewritten in the stories of autistic individuals, turned public scholars, college students (including Jamie at Syracuse), actors and film-makers and writers, whose lives it has turned around – and freed.<sup>24</sup>

### *Making the Invisible Visible and Institutions Transparent*

As academia increasingly embraces public scholarship with its democratizing practices, we will all become freer. The voices of “outsiders” coming in (women and minority junior faculty, LGBTQ faculty, students and staff, and more) will be heard

<sup>24</sup> Ralph James Savarese, *Reasonable People: a Memoir of Autism & Adoption* (New York: Other Press, 2007).

as well as simply listened to. And if there is one thing that I believe most runs as a thread through public scholarship in the arts, design, and humanities, it is that dedication to making the invisible visible, giving voice to the silenced.



With visibility comes a certain transparency that itself encourages accountability to a wider set of voices, so that we at least ask the questions: “who” gets to imagine the academy and “what” gets included, especially as the boundaries between campus and community vanish.

Here in Syracuse, I see that happening frequently as we find ourselves intimately joined with our Syracuse City School District and community activist organizations. For example, when students in our new LGBT Studies Program and Minor took a course entitled Queer Youth/Straight Schools, they not only analyzed the oppression of queer youth in the high schools, but in their own school. In practicing this public scholarship both the university and the community learned about the domains of accountability on which we must work to be better, freer institutions, widening the circle of “who” we let imagine “what” we are.

### *Widening the Circle of “Who” Imagines “What” America*

I think it is imperative that the boundaries of universities and of the “America” we all imagine stretch in these ways. We also must embrace the local/global resonances in our lives. The challenges to democratic culture are firmly embedded in our local realities, but engaging some solutions globally widens our circle too. Higher education has a significant role to play in promoting collectivizing practices that cross borders and boundaries, whether they are disciplinary, geographic, or social in nature, engaging many communities of experts along the way. And the way we do our scholarship, teaching, and cultural or social activism must be both integrated and democratic at its core. When we do this, and Imagining America can lead the way, then we will productively outlive our Ivory Towers, and make a lot more people visible participants and narrators of their own stories in the process.

## *Afterthought*

I do, however, have an afterthought on the need for honesty and modesty as we move forward because every so often I am reminded that artists and humanists, even the best of them/us, are as much products of our deeply divided and stigmatizing history and societies as are any.

This was brought home to me just recently in the poignant piece, “Arthur Miller’s Missing Act,” in the September 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair*.<sup>25</sup> Miller was a man of courage and empathy, an activist for social justice. Shortly after his death, when talk began to circulate about his will, the existence of a fourth child, a son named Daniel born with Down-syndrome, came to light. Miller institutionalized his son at birth, seemingly against the desires of his wife Inge, who stayed in touch with him as long as she lived. Although institutionalization was then a common practice, Miller went far beyond that, literally excising Daniel from both his private life and the public record, not visiting him, and not even mentioning his existence in Inge’s obituary. This great artist, who gave visibility to so many in his plays, couldn’t give it to his own son, whom he described at birth as “mongoloid” and never mentioned publicly again.

My point here is not to demonize Miller – though as a mother of a son with autism it is tempting to do so – and it is not to distance us from Miller. Instead, I want to remind us how easy it is to hurt others, even as we try to erase the hurt around us. The best we can do, I believe, is to remain modest in our self-assessments as we take on a huge and critically important task: imagining an America that is more democratic and more just, truer to the best in all of us.




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<sup>25</sup> Suzanna Andrews, “Arthur Miller’s Missing Act,” *Vanity Fair*, September, 2007. Online at <http://www.vanityfair.com/fame/features/2007/09/miller200709>