

Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor
Rutgers University-Newark¹

I want to begin this discussion of the value of diversity for democracy and a prosperous society by pointing to three pillars of our foundational aspirations as an inclusive nation – guarantees of civil rights, mechanisms for social connectedness, and pathways for full economic participation. While historically we have not always lived up to these aspirations of our inclusive national identity– turning our backs on the Native Americans whose land we pillaged to found this country, building an economy on the labor of Africans whom we forcibly brought here, and sending to internment camps, our Asian-American neighbors in a blanket assessment of threat in World War II – to name a few of our most deplorable shared sins – still we are built fundamentally on these commitments, and the overarching signature, *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one.

**Our Compelling Interests:
The Value of Diversity for Democracy
and a Prosperous Society**

**OUR
COMPELLING
INTERESTS**
The Value of Diversity for Democracy
and a Prosperous Society
by Nancy Cantor

"Throughout my younger years my parents only spoke Creole to me, so when I started school I did not speak or understand English. As a result I took an ESL class, which I enjoyed. After one year of ESL I was able to take regular classes. All my life I had to work really hard in school because I did not receive help at home with my school work... I work really hard for the things I want in life, because quitting is never the answer. Although the world we live in makes it easy to fail and hard to become successful, [I] will refuse to let failure consume my life. So I leave you with a quote so dear to me, "Your future depends on what you do today" – Mahatma Gandhi."
Lucretia Pennypacker

- Civil Rights
- Social Connectedness
- Full Economic Participation

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor
Rutgers University – Newark

Council of New Jersey Grantmakers
Annual Meeting
December 15, 2017

At the same time, the events that fill our media channels and the escalating inequality in our midst across the land, call into question the veracity of those commitments today, raising a number of critical questions and challenges for us all, as we face a fast-changing demography and yet seemingly hold on to old divisions amongst us. We come to ask questions such as: Is the perceived legitimacy of American institutions—from those that educate to those that adjudicate,

¹ Keynote Address, Annual Conference of the Council of NJ Grantmakers, Dec. 15, 2017, New Brunswick, NJ.

from those that promulgate free expression to those that safeguard our security—at risk when so many are left behind in the “land of opportunity”? Why do we fear the difference in our midst? Instead, could the difference in our midst actually be the key to our sustained futures?

And speaking of our sustained futures, listen to the words of one of my students in our honors living-learning community at Rutgers-Newark:

Louvanie Pomplilus wrote in her self-portrait: “I am the youngest of four children. I am also the only one born in America out of all of my siblings. My parents are from Haiti and they do not speak much English. Throughout my younger years my parents only spoke Creole to me, so when I started school I did not speak or understand English. As a result I took an ESL class, which I enjoyed. After one year of ESL I was able to take regular classes. All my life I had to work really hard in school because I did not receive help at home with my school work... I work really hard for the things I want in life, because quitting is never the answer. Although the world we live in makes it easy to fail and hard to become successful, [I] will refuse to let failure consume my life. So I leave you with a quote so dear to me, ‘Your future depends on what you do today’—Mahatma Gandhi.”

I would say that the same can be said of the work that we – in our state and in our country must do now – that is, will we do the work today to reap the benefits in the future of our talent pool, to reverse the escalating inequality, to overcome the divisiveness of our social and political landscape, to build prosperity with full participation?

In our book, Earl Lewis and I take as a “first principle” that making diversity work is a positive societal value.² Indeed, for democracy to work, we must leverage the range of human actors who can contribute to the overall well-being of our society and as importantly we cannot afford the cost (both human and economic opportunity costs) of leaving so many behind, “stuck in place” as Patrick Sharkey calls the state of America’s urban poor (and increasingly of America’s rural poor).³ But to do that, we have to understand our landscape (with all its opportunities and its problems) and then work deliberately together to change it so as to be able to leverage our diversity.

Our Paradoxical Reality – Diversity and Durable Inequality Side by Side

Therefore, let’s begin with a consideration of our landscape:

First, we start with what Brookings demographer William Frey calls the *diversity explosion*. As he says: “America reached an important milestone in 2011. That occurred when for the first time in the history of the country, more minority babies than white babies were born in a year.... Soon most children will be racial minorities –Hispanic, blacks, Asians, and other nonwhite races...

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

³ Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 2013.

Sometime after 2040, there will be no racial majority in this country.”⁴ And our NJ data provide a clear example: we have the 3rd most dense immigrant population in the country (some 40 percent of New Jerseyans are either immigrants or children of immigrants and 30 percent of those five years old or older speak a language other than English at home);⁵ soon we will be a majority non-white state (data from the *American Community Survey* show that as of 2015, minority young adults – 18-34 years old – already make up the majority in their age group in NJ and this is expected to be true of the state’s entire population by 2028).

The Diversity Explosion

"America reached an important milestone in 2011. That occurred when for the first time in the history of the country, more minority babies than white babies were born in a year ... Soon most children will be racial minorities – Hispanic, blacks, Asians, and other nonwhite races ... Sometime after 2040, there will be no racial majority in this country."
William H. Frey

New Jersey

- 3rd most dense immigration state
- 40% are immigrants or children of immigrants
- 30% of those five years of age or older speak a language other than English at home
- Millennials are already the first generation in NJ without a white majority—and this will be true of the entire state's population by 2028

DIVERSITY EXPLOSION

How New Jersey's immigration and diversity are changing the state

Edited by 2011

NEWEST AMERICANS

We Came and Stayed!
Coyt Jones/
Ras Baraka

American Suello
A series investigating how different immigration statuses are producing different life options and tensions within a single Mexican-American family

From Where I Stand
Public images created by students in a New Jersey high school class contribute to the group "From Where I Stand..."

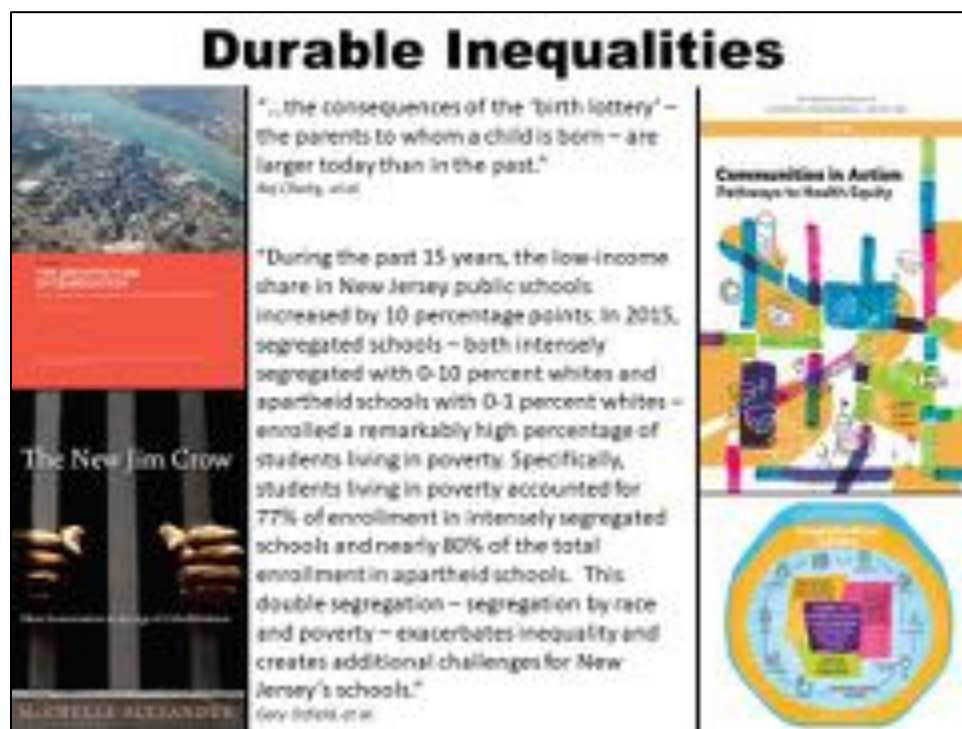
I would argue that this national diversity explosion (and its NJ example) provides us with a tremendous opportunity to leverage diversity, especially as there is a hunger in these populations to strive for social mobility and belongingness. NJ’s population is defined by generations of strivers in every city in the state and by fluid intersectionality with many multi-race/ethnicity children waiting in the wings to define a new diverse generation of citizens, professionals, and leaders who might be able to bridge these many differences if we give them a chance and cultivate their talent (even as they are growing up in highly segregated neighborhoods and communities). I certainly see that striving spirit in the narratives of the Newest Americans at my institution, and indeed in generations before them that came and stayed in Newark.

Unfortunately, alongside the opportunities presented by this diversity explosion (nationally and in NJ) stands the stark contrast of a whole set of what Charles Tilly called “*durable*

⁴ William H. Frey, The “Diversity Explosion” is America’s Twenty-first-Century Baby Boom, in Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 16-35.

⁵ Meir Rinde, The Top Ten Multilingual Municipalities in New Jersey, *NJ Spotlight*, April 27, 2015.

*inequalities*⁶ that threaten our ability to leverage our growing diversity, especially its next generation of strivers.



As Raj Chetty and his colleagues note: “The consequences of the ‘birth lottery’ – the parents to whom a child is born – are larger today than in the past.”⁷ We see widening divides between the “haves” and the “have nots,” greater social distrust across lines of difference, sharper instances of education serving the interests of some kids more than others, and other patterns disturbingly aligned with historically familiar group dynamics. These patterns require us to take seriously the relentless drag backward, to segregated neighborhoods (the architecture of segregation), schools (the double segregation by race and class), and prisons (the racialization of mass incarceration), and the sequelae of poverty and racism manifest in disparities in health, employment, and post-secondary educational attainment.

For example, as Gary Orfield and his colleagues recently reported about NJ schools: “During the past 15 years, the low-income share in New Jersey public schools increased by 10 percentage points. In 2015, segregated schools – both intensely segregated with 0-10 percent whites and apartheid schools with 0-1 percent whites – enrolled a remarkably high percentage of students living in poverty. Specifically, students living in poverty accounted for 77% of enrollment in intensely segregated schools and nearly 80% of the total enrollment in apartheid schools. This

⁶ Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca., 1998.

⁷ Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, Emmanuel Saez, and Nicholas Turner, *Is the United States Still a Land of Opportunity? Recent Trends in Intergenerational Mobility*, NBER Working Paper 19844, January 2014.

double segregation – segregation by race and poverty – exacerbates inequality and creates additional challenges for New Jersey’s schools.”⁸

Diving a bit deeper into this landscape of durable inequalities, let me illustrate with data from my city of Newark:

Durable Inequalities in Newark

Prudential | audible | Panasonic
an amazon company

PSEG | RBH | LEM
Development Partners

“How does a working-class city in the midst of economic interest from a fast-growing metropolitan region harness newfound resources to grow in ways that ensure the maximum amount of inclusion and opportunity for its current and future residents?” – David Troutt, Center for Law in Metropolitan Equity

Essex County: Newark with majority minority population has median income of \$33,139 whereas neighboring Millburn with a majority white population has a median household income of \$165,603; 48% of black third graders in Essex County attend schools that perform in the bottom 10% of NJ schools, whereas .04% of white third graders attend similarly low performing schools in the same county.

- Residents hold only 18% of jobs in the city
- Of people employed in Newark, 60% are white
- Poverty rate twice national average
- 42% of children below poverty line
- Newark residents with associate’s degree or higher = 18.1%
- 4,000 “disconnected” youth
- Violent crime concentrated on 20% of Newark streets (largely residential neighborhoods)
- Childhood asthma rate 3X higher than NJ average

Newark illustrates precisely the paradox of a highly diverse population sitting amidst considerable corporate and cultural capital and investment, very little of which reaches the residents of Newark, who hold only 18% of the many jobs in the city.⁹ Instead residents are held back by the pervasiveness of poverty, low educational attainment, health disparities, and concentrated crime in only some neighborhoods, even as the downtown of Newark experiences substantial development investment in buildings, technology jobs, and cultural life. And the paradoxes of this downtown development side-by-side with durable inequalities is also replicated by comparisons across the neighboring geography, such that 48% of black children in Essex County attend schools that perform in the bottom 10% of all NJ schools, while only .04% of white children in the County do.¹⁰ Similarly, the median family income of the majority minority Newark population (\$33,139) is vastly lower than that of the majority white population in adjacent communities like Millburn (\$165,603).¹¹

⁸ Gary Orfield, Jongyeon Ee, & Ryan Coughlan, *New Jersey’s Segregated Schools: Trends and Paths Forward*, UCLA Civil Rights Project, September 2017, pp.26.

⁹ *Bridging the Two Americas: Employment and Economic Opportunity in Newark & Beyond*, Report of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, April 2017.

¹⁰ See <http://www.nj.gov/education/schools/achievement/13/njask3/>.

¹¹ *Issues Brief: Child Poverty in Essex County, 2000-2015*, Center on Law, Inequality, & Metropolitan Equity, Rutgers University School of Law, February 06, 2017.

As such, it leads us to ask, as David Troutt, who runs our Center on Law, Inequality, & Metropolitan Equity (CLiME), did in a report to Mayor Baraka: “How does a working-class city in the midst of economic interest from a fast-growing metropolitan region harness newfound resources to grow in ways that ensure the maximum amount of inclusion and opportunity for its current and future residents?”¹²

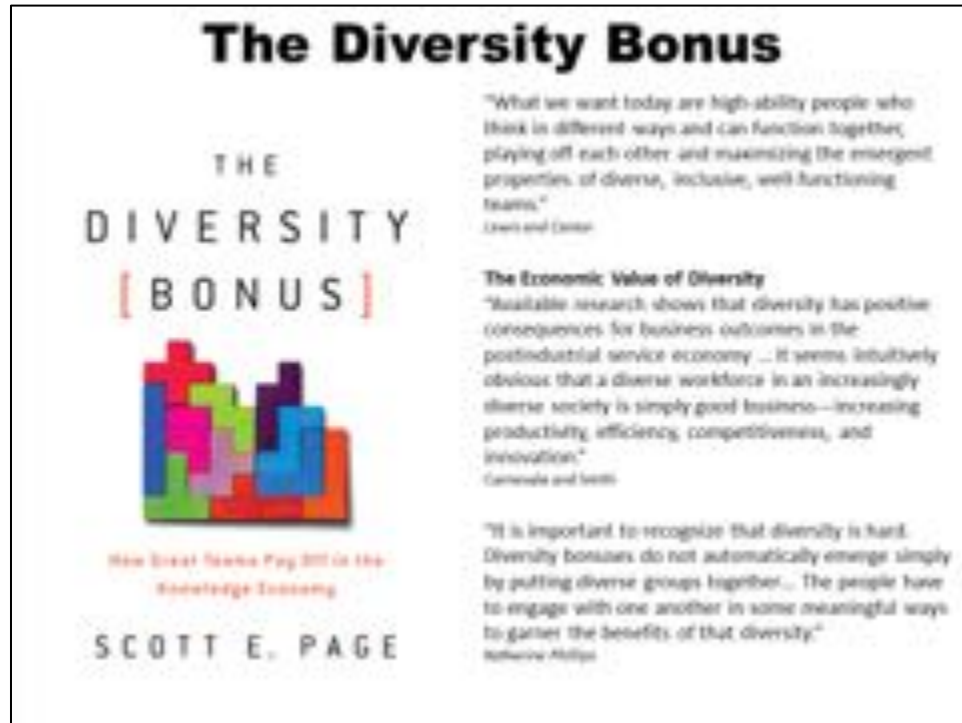
And that question, focused as it is around the foundational aspiration of equitable growth and opportunity – that is, full participation – brings us back to the notion of how to leverage the diverse talent in our communities for prosperity, to which I will now turn.



First, we know that today’s opportunity matrix is shaped fundamentally by the shift from an industrial to post-industrial service economy and the pivotal role of educational attainment in ensuring competitiveness, individually and collectively, as economist Anthony Carnevale’s data on the post-recession jobs recovery demonstrates, with only 80,000 of the 11.6 million jobs added to the economy since 2010 going to those with an high school education or below.¹³ Moreover, since there is pervasive inequality by race and class in educational achievement (throughout the U.S., and in NJ), one can only surmise that our future prosperity is threatened if we do not improve pathways to post-secondary attainment (as Secretary Hendricks is urging statewide in NJ and the Newark City of Learning Collaborative is pursuing in Newark).

¹² David Troutt, *Recommendations to the City of Newark, Mayor Ras Baraka, Report on Equitable Growth*, CLiME, Rutgers University School of Law, Newark, October, 2017.

¹³ Anthony Carnevale, *America’s Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report, 2016.

Aspiration versus Reality – Diversity as Opportunity versus as Threat

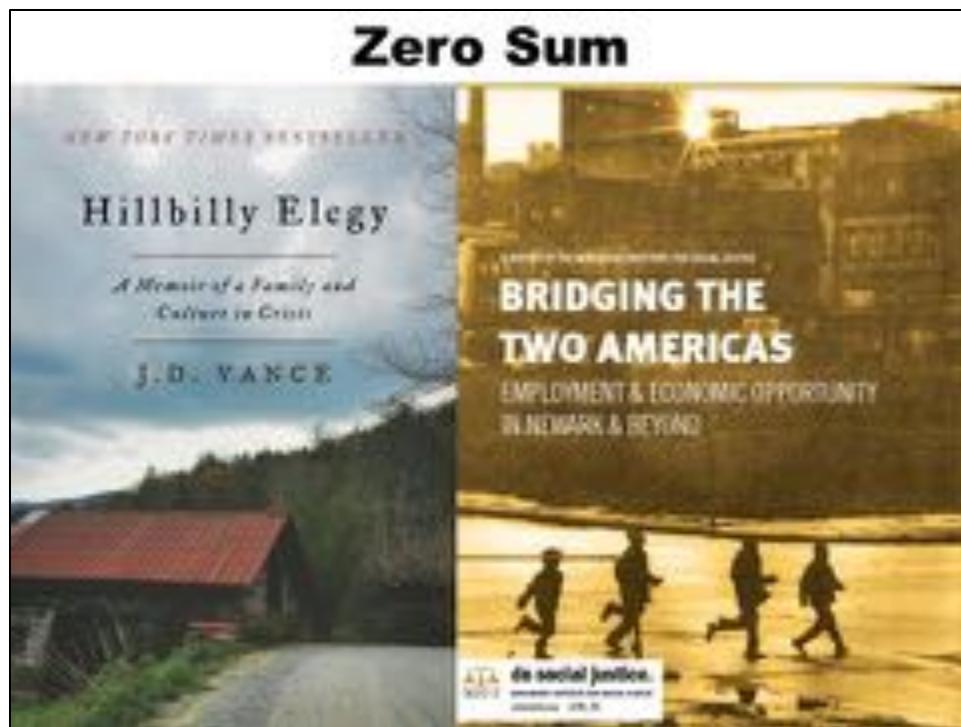
And at the heart of the commitment to equalize educational opportunity is what might be called the “business case” for the value of diversity in a knowledge economy. As complex systems theorist Scott Page documents (in the second volume in *Our compelling Interests* book series, entitled *The Diversity Bonus*), there is a substantial bonus to be reaped when the full diversity of our talent pool is engaged.¹⁴

This diversity bonus applies very broadly from business to the arts to scientific discovery, from the classroom to the courtroom to hospitals and the halls of policy-making – in other words, anywhere where there are complex challenges to address, diverse audiences to serve, and creative answers to be found – the collective intelligence of a team matters and the more diverse the team is, the better they will potentially perform. Yet, the diversity bonus is not automatic, as Katherine Phillips notes in her commentary on Page’s treatise: “It is important to recognize that diversity is hard. Diversity bonuses do not automatically emerge simply by putting diverse groups together... The people have to engage with one another in some meaningful ways to garner the benefits of that diversity.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Scott Page, *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017, *Our Compelling Interests* book series, edited by Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

¹⁵ Katherine W. Phillips, What is the Real Value of Diversity in Organizations? Questioning our Assumptions?, commentary in Scott Page, *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 225.

And, in turn, this prerequisite to competitiveness of building not only diverse teams and communities but ones in which diverse people engage with one another, brings into focus the relevance of our highly divisive social landscape as an obstacle as well.



The divisiveness of our socio-political landscape has at least two manifestations – first, there is a kind of zero-sum thinking that seems to be defined by the economics of local communities, for example, rural versus urban. Ironically, there actually should be a great deal of common cause around joblessness and educational attainment gaps, but instead there is a pervasive politics of resentment, captured by two recent treatises, on the one hand the rural narrative of *Hillbilly Elegy*, and on the other, the urban tale of *Bridging the Two Americas*.¹⁶

¹⁶ J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, N.Y.: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016. *Bridging the Two Americas: Employment and Economic Opportunity in Newark & Beyond*, Report of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, April 2017.



Secondly, and of course intersecting, is a great deal of surfacing of what Rupert Nacoste refers to as our collective “hibernating bigotry,” including specific and in some cases long-standing racial, ethnic, nationalistic inter-group conflict that also suggests a fear of displacement as opposed to an openness to common cause.¹⁷ How do we go, for example, from the inter-group hostility recently exhibited in Charlottesville and in several NJ elections (consider the Edison poster)¹⁸ to a state instead of empathetic citizenship, even for those without formal citizenship (as the cover of Time Magazine suggests)?

¹⁷ Rupert W. Nacoste, *Taking on Diversity: How We Can Move from Anxiety to Respect*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2015, p.160.

¹⁸ Carly Sitrin, Local Politics in New Jersey Takes Ugly Turn With Racist Fliers, *NJ Spotlight*, November 7, 2017.

Leveraging Our Diversity through Social Connectedness and Collective Impact



Indeed, building a “community of communities,” as Danielle Allen calls for in her essay in *Our Compelling Interests*, in the face of this hibernating bigotry and re-emerging insularity and zero-sum thinking will not be easy, albeit so necessary.¹⁹ This inter-group enmity hinders our ability to live together, reduces our ability to learn from one another, and often leads to significant differences of opinion, leading us to ask whether we are on a path of relentlessly increasing isolation (bonding within but not bridging across groups) or on one of increasing connectedness without a demand for assimilation to one canonical social or religious or cultural identity.

If we are to move forward, then, we must find ways to walk in each other’s shoes (as the video documentary by three of our Rutgers-Newark Muslim students recently demonstrated for the over 2 million viewers of Hijabi World on the *NY Times Lens* website). We must pursue ways to engage in structured inter-group dialogue, as the work of Patricia Gurin and her colleagues demonstrated to great effect at nine universities nationwide,²⁰ and to find spaces to engage in what the Kellogg Foundation’s national project on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation

¹⁹ Danielle Allen, Toward a Connected Society, In Earl Lewis and Nancy Cantor, (Eds.), *Our Compelling Interests: The Value of Diversity for Democracy and a Prosperous Society*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 90.

²⁰ Patricia Gurin, Biren Nagda, and Ximena Zúñiga, *Dialogue Across Difference: Practice, Theory, and Research on Intergroup Dialogue*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013.

supports (with 10 campus-community centers across the country recently announced, including one at Rutgers-Newark).²¹

Moving in this way toward a more socially connected community (of communities) should also enable us to collaborate for collective impact across groups, generations, and sectors. It would allow long-standing anchor institutions (universities and health centers and corporate and cultural partners) to recognize the role and the responsibility we have to invest in, listen to, and work with our communities. As such we may better realize what the famed Newark Rabbi Joachim Prinz, in his speech before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the 1963 March on Washington, called the moral definition of neighbor. As he implored, neighbor is not just a geographic concept, it implies an interdependence, demanding that we listen to and care about our neighbors – to those who live on the ground, as this wise grandmother in Syracuse once told me – “Just ask us, we lay our heads down here at night.”

²¹ <https://www.aacu.org/press/press-releases/aacu-selects-ten-institutions-sites-truth-racial-healing-transformation-trht>, <https://www.newark.rutgers.edu/news/truth-racial-healing-and-transformation-center-open-rutgers-university-newark-first-nation>.



These collective impact collaborations on the ground can cover many arenas and take many different forms as we leverage the full community’s diversity and expertise and lived experience for innovation and societal solutions. We see these emerging in arenas like community policing and public safety; environmental sustainability; the arts and cultural sphere which produces not only social connectedness but real economic value – for example, in a 2015 survey by Americans for the Arts, across 341 diverse communities and regions, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generated some \$166.3 billion of economic activity for those communities (with over half a billion in NJ alone). Similarly, we see progress in collective impact efforts to create more diversity in our K-12 schools and more post-secondary educational attainment in our communities. Corporate and university and health-care and government anchors are creating solutions for equitable growth in neighborhoods and in the economy, and we are also working on public health, expanding understanding of the social determinants of health. For example, a recent National Academies report, *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity*, explicitly recommended that: “anchor institutions (such as universities, hospitals, and businesses) make expanding opportunities to promote health equity in their community a strategic priority.”

The impact of these collective impact investments can be substantial as the non-profit CEOs for Cities has demonstrated. In their 2008 CityDividends analysis, even 1% gains in post-secondary educational attainment, for example, in the 51 largest metro regions in the United States would translate into \$124 billion dollars in aggregate annual income across those regions. Similarly, if residents drove only 1 mile less per day across those communities, the green dividend would be an additional \$29 billion annually, while there would be savings of \$13 billion annually if these communities collectively reduced poverty by 1% to realize an opportunity dividend in social

service spending.²² There is work to be done to drive those levers and reap the benefits of such talent, green, and opportunity dividends, but there is also a clear map of where we want to get, if we have the will to do so.



Therefore, we have something to look forward to if we can mobilize for the effort. And yet, to come full circle, as John Dewey famously said, “we have taken democracy for granted... it has to be reenacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions.”²³ So, returning to the beginning of my remarks, successfully tending to democracy today will require that we bridge our differences and invest in and with each other. Moreover, the kind of anchor institution-community engagement on pressing societal issues that is needed now will be greatly enhanced when we see full participation of all of our increasingly diverse populations (as illustrated in this recursive cycle diagram).²⁴ That is, significant societal problems cannot be solved without full inclusion. Yet we can make real progress if we leverage our diversity for democracy and a prosperous society. To do so though, we must come together, and, at the risk of sounding dramatic, I believe that this is the central challenge of the 21st century.

²² *The City Dividends: How Cities Gain by Making Small Improvement in Metropolitan Performance*, CEOs for Cities, September 2008.

²³ John Dewey, Education and Social Change, *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, 1937, 23(6), 472-474.

²⁴ Adapted from: Harkavy, I., Cantor, N. and Burnett, M. 2014, *Realizing STEM Equity and Diversity through Higher Education-Community Engagement*, White Paper supported by National Science Foundation under Grant No. 121996, University of Pennsylvania.