

Extending the Progressive Tradition to Poor Countries: The Role of Universities and Colleges

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Abstract: Historically, the academic community has supported social justice issues; given a voice to the poor, minorities, and the disadvantaged; and brought to light subjects that are considered taboo elsewhere. Yet, when it comes to dealing with global issues that affect poor nations, universities have not always acted as change agents. This article discusses the external environmental challenges and the internal constraints that universities and colleges must grapple with in their efforts to play in the global sphere. Further, it espouses ways in which universities might contribute to the global common good through their actions externally, particularly with regard to public policy, and internally within their campuses. A particular emphasis is given to Africa. The article concludes American universities could play a vital role in the global common good despite the various challenges and constraint that they face. However, it is important to recognize that it is impossible for any group to represent another's needs adequately, no matter how well-intentioned it might be. Universities in developing countries must therefore also step up and act towards the improvement of their own communities while forging partnerships with their counterparts in the East and West.

Key Words: social movements, social activism, global common good, globalization, internationalization, global citizenship, international students, research practices, alternative spring break, the third world, stereotypes, black lives matter

Introduction

American universities and colleges have always been a bastion of liberalism and progressive thought. Historically, the academic community has supported social justice issues; given a voice to the poor, minorities, and the disadvantaged; and brought to light subjects that are considered taboo elsewhere. Indeed, many social movements have either started in American universities (henceforth referred to as *universities*) or been energized by the actions of university students and faculty—and often with the support of university administrations. Yet, when it comes to dealing with global issues that affect poor nations, universities have not always acted as change agents. In some cases, universities have to been passive onlookers or been complacent in directly or indirectly participating in maintaining the status quo.

Of course, American universities are characterized by notable differences in resources, political bent, student demographics, and myriad other factors and so it would be unfair to generalize. It is recognized that different universities approach global issues differently. Nevertheless, they all face external challenges and internal constraints in their attempt to internationalize and participate in the global sphere. This essay discusses these challenges and

constraints, and ways in which universities might contribute to the global common good. A particular emphasis is given to Africa.

A History of Social Movements Support

Just in the last decades of the 20th century, American universities were actively involved in the social and political movements that defined the times. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was largely launched by the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*. The issue of school integration became front and center not just in schools but in universities in the South (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2004). Paralleling the Civil Rights Movement was the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which was founded in 1960 to campaign for the eradication of apartheid and the release of political prisoners in South Africa by lobbying for boycotts in various fields including academia, sports, and culture as well the military. Even though the movement involved extensive organization networks throughout the world and had the support of prominent public figures, American universities played an important role in making the movement visible. According to the African Activist Archive at Michigan State University, "organizations in the African solidarity movement created newsletters, pamphlets, leaflets, policy and strategy papers, meeting minutes, correspondence, and graphic, audio and visual material such as posters, buttons, T-shirts, photos, slideshows, radio interviews, and videos" (Anti-Apartheid Movement, n.d.). Activism by students from the University of Michigan and Stanford University was instrumental in launching the push for universities to divest from South Africa.

University campuses across America are known for the anti-war movement of the Vietnam era. Schreiber (1973) asserted that

The early stirrings of this opposition to the Vietnam war in America usually are traced to universities where students and faculty were among the first groups to organize and to voice opposition to the war in a way that very soon became highly visible to the news media commentators. (p. 288)

These types of vibrant social efforts, which were often only fueled by student and faculty passion for justice seem to have waned or been redefined in the last few decades. As early as 1992, Arturo Escobar lamented that

For some time now, it has been difficult—at times even impossible—to talk about development, protest or revolution with the same confidence and encompassing scope with which intellectuals and activists spoke about these vital matters in our most recent past. It is as if the elegant discourses of the 1960s – the high decade of both Development and Revolution—had been suspended... [M]any scholars seem to be proposing a radical reinterpretation of social and political reality based on a new set of categories such as "alternative development," new identities, radical pluralism, historicity and hegemony. (p.20)

Indeed, research into the response of university students to the Persian Gulf War in the 1990s indicates a shift in students' attitudes compared to the 1960s. According to Jayaratne, Flanagan, and Anderman (1996), media coverage of student attitudes and activism during the Gulf War was limited and reports were usually journalistic accounts, portraying the average college student as somewhat apathetic and not opposed to the American intervention. Similarly, McFarland (2005) found that authoritarianism—defined as a high degree of submission to authorities who are perceived as established and legitimate—increased blind patriotism among

students by, in part, intensifying the perception of threat by Iraq in 2003. Blind patriotism in turn led to “callousness regarding the loss of innocent lives the war would produce” (p. 366).

It is against this backdrop that universities must grapple with creating a place and an orientation toward local and international events and circumstances that culminate in the global common good.

The Global Common Good

What Is the Global Common Good?

In *Rethinking education: Towards a global common good?*, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) describes the “fundamentals of common humanity” as consisting of an education and development model “based on respect for life and human dignity, equal rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity, and shared responsibility for a sustainable future” (2015, p. 9). While recognizing the increasing complexity of policy-making in a globalized world, the publication stresses sustainable development as central to the common good. It emphasizes the importance of a “humanistic approach to education” that stands against “violence, intolerance, discrimination, and exclusion” (p.9), and which goes beyond an individualistic utilitarian approach to one oriented toward a holistic human existence.

So what does this mean for universities? It means developing students and faculty that think and act like global citizens and administrations that actively support global citizenship. It means wider and more meaningful exposure to the issues of the globe, the recognition of the interconnectedness of the world and all its people, the integration of local efforts to effect positive global change, and the cooperation of scholars from across the world in an effort to research and solve global problems. In essence, it means universities must become more open than ever before.

In their attempt to achieve a global common good, however, universities are faced with both external environmental challenges and internal constraints.

External Environmental Challenges

Too Many Movements

Trade imbalances. Economic injustice. Debt. Climate change and the environment. Clean water. Famine. Human rights. Gender violence. War and conflict. Gun rights/control. Living wage. Police brutality. There are so many problems, causes, and movements—both within the United States and around the world—that it is virtually impossible to coalesce around all of them. While one university might support a water project in a village in Mozambique, another might support a favela in Brazil. Those efforts are small scale and often invisible, unlike the big movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Additionally, the Internet, particularly social media, has exposed university students and faculty to many different disparate causes, hence dividing their attention and activism. The definition of social activism has also changed with technology. While the 1960s and 1970s era of visible student activism was characterized by the physical presence of student protestors, members of the *hashtag generation* only need click a button to consider themselves part of a

movement. In other words, it may only be a question of perception that students and faculty are less engaged.

Political polarization. The political climate in the United States has become very polarized with almost every cause becoming politicized. University administrations need to be perceived as fair and accommodative of different points of view. In an effort to stay above the political fray, it has become difficult for the institutions to take a definite stand one way or the other. This is particularly apparent in state universities since they have the mandate to stay politically neutral.

Similarly, the fragmentation of interests regarding certain issues internationally makes it difficult to rally around them. A good example is the gay rights issue in Uganda. This country has instituted harsh laws against homosexuality. While gay rights activists in colleges and universities have fought the law, the America Religious Right, which has affiliations with many Christian universities in the United States and in African countries, has been actively encouraging of homophobic attitudes and supporting anti-gay legislation (Baptiste, 2014; Faul, 2012; McEwen, 2014).

Globalization. Globalization has seen poor countries' economies grow enormously in the last decade or so in what Zakaria terms "the rise of the rest" (2008). In 2015, 18 of the 20 fastest growing economies were in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa (Robinson, 2015). But these emerging economies, which have seen visibly growing middle-classes, have also been characterized by greater income inequality, greater vulnerability of the poorest, and the absurd exclusion of whole segments of the population from the global economy. Economic development has also brought environmental degradation. This economic dichotomy has muddied the vision for social and economic justice activists who can no longer define the problems of poor countries in a neatly bound way around which they can organize.

New Actors

Not only are the problems not easily defined, the actors are also not always identifiable. It is easy to support poor citizens in a cause against an oppressive government—as was the case with Apartheid South Africa—or to oppose a war waged by a state. But what should activists do about non-state actors such as terrorist organizations? How do concerned global citizens rally against ISIS or Boko Haram, Al Shabaab or the Taliban? What is the relationship between state actors and the non-state actors operating within a country's borders? Can activists organize against Al Shabaab while supporting the poor citizens of Somalia? How do antiwar activists rally against an Afghan war that is fighting the Taliban?

The Death of News

In the age of 140-character-limit Twitter, college students and others are exposed to only superficial treatment of news. With the virtual death of print media and the increasing competition for the public's attention that is preoccupied with 24/7 entertainment streaming, video games, and countless technology-based activities, even traditional digital media has skewed towards a mere highlighting of headlines. As a result, college students are often ignorant about current global issues. More importantly, even when they are aware of the problems, they are unable to peel the layers surrounding the issue and hence fail to see the interconnection with their own lives. In two studies conducted at Worcester State University in the lead up to the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, for example, issues of immediate relevance to the students (jobs and tuition) were found to be high on the list of concern while issues that students deemed to be abstract and removed

from their lives (a nuclear Iran and climate change) were ranked low (Gathuo & Conroy, 2012; Gathuo & Wagoner, 2008). The same studies found that students did not actively seek news. This lack of exposure to issues of global importance tends to lead to apathy and disengagement and, ironically in the age of globalization, makes attempts to develop global citizenship among students more challenging than ever before.

Internal Constraints

Researchers have for many decades emphasized the college years as being uniquely suited for involvement in social issues. In 1967, for example, Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks, and Warwick (1967) described youth as a period of relative freedom from responsibilities when an individual—especially one attending college and living away from home—is exposed to different perspectives on social problems.

As pointed out earlier, however, universities differ in character and therefore deal with different internal constraints regarding their space in the globe. Small to medium state universities tend to serve nontraditional students, including first generation immigrants, older students, second-career students, and first-generation college students. The students also tend to be from working or middleclass families and most work while attending college. The *relative freedom from responsibilities* assumption just does not hold true. The Great Recession, the increasing cost of college, and the changed nature of the economy have only served to amplify the difficulty of such students to participate in global issues.

Resistance to Internationalization

One way for universities to participate fully in the global space is to internationalize their schools through the admission of international students, the expansion of international programs, and the recruitment of international scholars. Financially supported through state taxes, state universities are seen as both the first choice by local students seeking an inexpensive education and a last resort for those unable to gain admission to their preferred institutions. The state schools, therefore, face understandable resistance when they try to internationalize. Not only are internationalization efforts seen as providing unwanted competition to local students, they are also seen to change the character of the schools where local students have always felt safe and at home. This fear is not completely unwarranted. A *Wall Street Journal* article reported an analysis of 559 public 4-year colleges and universities that showed that between 2008 and 2012, 54 schools decreased the enrolment of in-state students by 10% or more in favor of out-of-state and international students. An additional 35 schools had a 5% differential in enrolment (Phillips & Belkin, 2014). Similarly, in 2012, a *New York Times* article reported that 18% of the incoming freshman class at the University of Washington was foreign (Lewin, 2012). The foreign students were getting seats that would normally have gone to local students. At the same time, the students paid an annual tuition of \$28,059 which was three times as much as local students were required to pay. The shutting out of some local students led local politicians to protest the university decision. The university administration saw the situation as a win-win where local students who were unable to pay tuition got scholarships in part due to the high fees paid by international students.

Limited Resources

With ever-shrinking budgets, small to medium state universities sometimes simply lack the resources and the infrastructure to play a substantial role in the global sphere. The international programs offices may be staffed by a skeletal staff that only has time to deal with

immediate concerns of admission and documentation of international students, with little capacity for strategic expansion. Finance offices are also ill-equipped in dealing with international travel for faculty and visiting scholars. Technology departments do not have the capacity to extend online courses to international students across the globe the way bigger and private (particularly for-profit) universities are able to do. This lack of resources stifles the universities' attempts to internationalize. Such universities follow the path of least resistance and passively deal with international students and scholars rather than actively seeking them out. They may also only establish those foreign linkages that require minimal legwork or commitment such as collaborations with European universities, which are easily accessible.

Despite these external challenges and internal constraints, universities—including small to medium state schools—can still contribute to the global common good.

A Framework for Support

Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, and Kalof (1999) established a framework for movement support that is useful as a lens through which to examine the support of universities for the common good. According to the authors, there are various types of movement support. The most visible and commonly identifiable type involves public activism, such as participation in demonstrations and organizing. Other types of support are *non-activist*, including:

- 1) "Low commitment active citizenship," which is less public and which involves less risk than engaged public activism. This type of support involves activities such as writing letters to political officials, joining and contributing funds to movement organizations, and reading movement literature.
- 2) Support and acceptance of public policies that may require material sacrifice in order to achieve the movement's goals.
- 3) Changes in behavior in the personal and private sphere. (Stern et al., 1999)

Stern et al. (1999) suggested that social movements help to activate personal norms. In other words, if universities are supportive of social movements as institutions, their constituents are individually also likely to be activated to seek social justice.

In the table below, I summarize an application of this model to universities. Specifically, how can American universities pro-actively contribute to the betterment of poor countries as well as disadvantaged communities across the United States?

Type of Movement Support	University Strategy	Examples of Specific University Action
Public Activism	Institutionalization of mechanisms for support of social movements	University can provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical space to engage in movement activities such as protests • Time to engage, e.g. cancelling classes • Freedom and a sense that there will be no adverse effect on participants • Visible support by administration through physical presence

Active Citizenship	Institutionalization of university clubs and societies that facilitate active global citizenship such as school chapter of Amnesty International, Third World Alliance, LGBT alliances, etc.	University can provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and funding for clubs • Physical space for meetings • Faculty patron release time • Course credit for participation
Support of Public Policy	Support and championing of public policies even when they involve self-sacrifice	University can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in general social justice advocacy • Lobby for better policies for international students and scholars • Proactive implementation of policies that support global good
Change in Behavior in Personal and Private Sphere	Formulation of internal policies that support the common good	University can implement internal policies such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research policies & practices that are just • Just treatment and representation of minorities and vulnerable groups • Policies that support environmental sustainability such as divesting in fossil fuels • Policies that support a more just world such as instituting a living wage for minimum-wage university employees • A welcoming atmosphere for all including foreign students and scholars • Social justice forums, teach-ins and courses

1. Turn Inward Regarding External Policies

An institution is incapable of supporting or propagating justice if it is involved in unjust practices internally. Universities must therefore start by looking inward to identify the areas in which they fail. In the recent past, for example, universities across the nation have been forced to examine their own policies toward African-American students as the Black Lives Matter movement has spread to university campuses. Students joined others in protesting the killing of unarmed black men, such as Michael Brown and Eric Garner, but soon turned to their own campuses where African-American students describe the climate as “hostile, indifferent and, at times, contemptuous of their presence” (Taylor, 2015). From Ivy League schools like Princeton University where students have protested against the honoring of President Woodrow Wilson (Fisher, 2015); to the University of Missouri where the university president was forced to resign when criticized for not doing enough to address several racist incidents (Svrluga, 2015); to Claremont McKenna, a small university in California where the dean of students resigned for her response to a racist school climate (Quinland, 2015); it is clear that universities must first be the change they claim if they want to see it.

If they are to generate a positive common good, universities must lead by example on such social issues as the fair treatment of minority students and faculty, including international

students; economic sustainability issues such as divesting in fossil fuels and instituting Green campus policies, economic justice issues such as paying a living wage to minimum-wage university employees, and human rights issues such as the welcoming of Syrian and other refugees to their academic communities.

While it is relatively easy to institute policies that engender justice if there is willingness to do so, changing the hearts of students, faculty, administration, and staff is a lot harder. Nevertheless, universities can engage in practices that socialize their academic communities to become global citizens through such activities as forums, teach-ins, and the support for academic courses that emphasize the global common good. Those within academic communities who benefit from unjust practices, such as racial discrimination, must be willing to acknowledge and reject that privilege and not simply talk about justice as an abstract concept. Administrations must also be willing to punish those who perpetrate injustices and avoid cover-ups of the misdeeds of their community members.

2. Join the Bigger Conversation

As leaders in social science research, universities are uniquely positioned to advocate for positive social change through public policy. In this area, university administrations have tended to be passive and to leave any advocacy attempts to individual faculty and organized student groups. Even in matters that affect the universities, administrations tend not to raise their voices. Technology companies, for example, through the Technology CEO Council, have become vocal advocates for immigration reform that would allow for more workers in their field. In academia, visas for foreign students tend to be restrictive, and otherwise qualified students are unable to attend U.S. schools because of being denied student visas. Academic administrations do not lobby for policies that are supportive to scholars, even though, foreign students spend about \$27B annually in the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2016).

A good example of an area where they could lobby the government for fairness is the fees charged to aspiring international students. For instance, a fee that is seen as unjust by international student applicants is the SEVIS fee. In 2004, Congress mandated all international students and exchange visitors must pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee, which funds the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2016). This fee ranges from \$180 for J-Exchange visitors to \$200 for F-1 students. The fee is required even before a prospective student applies for a visa and it is nonrefundable. This fee is separate from the nonrefundable student visa application fee, and the visa issuance fee should the application be successful. What does this mean for an aspiring student from a poor country? Before the student attends a visa interview, he must spend \$360 with no guarantee of a visa; that is equivalent to what many in poor countries live on for a whole year. This is an unusually heavy burden for students in the developing world. In 2014, the Department of State denied 173,062 F-1 visas (U.S. Department of State, 2016), which means \$34,612,400 was raised through the SEVIS fee for a system that the applicants did not get to utilize. This would seem to go contrary to UNESCO's definition of a global common good.

3. Improve Research Practices in Poor Countries

Research is the mainstay of universities. Given the history of abuse of research subjects in such studies as the Tuskegee Study (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016), the United States has instituted measures to protect research subjects. In theory, regulations that govern research within the country are supposed to be applied to research conducted in other countries. In practice, this does not always happen. According to Emanuel, Wendler, Killen, and

Grady (2004), the controversies surrounding research in developing countries include the standard of care of research subjects; the availability of interventions that are proven to be useful during the course of research trials; and the quality of informed consent. Information that emerged regarding the clinical trials of the antiretroviral drug Zidovudine, for example, indicated that thousands of women in poor countries participated in a placebo-controlled study even though the drug had already proven effective. Critics compared this to the Tuskegee study where participants were denied a proven treatment. The researchers argued that the women in the Third World would not receive antiretroviral treatment anyway and so they were doing nothing more than observe what would happen to the subjects' infants if there were no study (Angell, 1997). Angell further asserted that many studies done in the Third World could not be done in the countries sponsoring the work.

Why this state of affairs? First, research subjects in poor countries are already vulnerable by being in a poor country. Second, they are also often the poorest citizens in those poor countries. Third, the subjects are sick and desperate and willing to try anything, and fourth, they live in countries that are often under corrupt authoritarian governments that think nothing of allowing their populations to be exploited.

If they are to contribute to common good, universities must champion and implement stricter research protocols in developing countries, even if such restrictions may make it more difficult for the institutions to conduct research and even when the developing country may not impose such restrictions. Additionally, universities can play a role in pushing for access to new drugs for people in poor countries.

4. Avoid Preserving the status Quo

Not only should universities adhere to ethical research practices, their research must desist from preserving the status quo. When researchers come up with products for the Third World, there is an implication that those products may not be of a level appropriate to developed countries but are good enough for the developing world. Nowhere is this more apparent than in research into alternative energy. When research and policy decisions for the poor are made by people who are removed from the experience, there is a tendency to set a low bar. Many alternative energy start-ups seem to be premised on the idea that *anything* is better than nothing.

According to an article in Dignify Africa Movement (DAM, 2014), Chris Neal, a spokesman at the World Bank, for example, was quoted by Doreen Hemlock in a renewableenergyworld.com article as saying: "If you have no electricity at all, getting enough for a few lights and to charge a cell phone is better than nothing." The article indicates that

As a result, the products offered are basic and often made of nondurable materials, notably plastics. True, perhaps a little is better than nothing at all. But in the long term, this approach could prove to be counterproductive:

- The underserved continue to be underserved because the products are so basic ...
- there is a false sense of need being met, which gets in the way of long-term solutions [and],
- the nondurable products quickly deteriorate and end up in the dump—so much for clean energy. (DAM, 2014)

The article further notes, “Take Soccket, for example. The brain child of Jessica Mathews [who was then a Harvard University student]. Soccket is a soccer ball, which stores energy as the ball is being used for play. The energy is then used to light a bulb [for three hours]” (DAM, 2014).

The product has been touted as fun and innovative and has been endorsed by celebrities, supported by foundations, and celebrated by President Obama. A closer examination of Soccket as a product and also as an idea shows it is unlikely to be a viable lighting solution for the poor. The product is poorly constructed and has a high failure rate (Collins, 2014). That aside, the idea of children playing for light is not only impractical (which child will take the soccer ball home after play?) but it might be also argued that it’s inhumane—childhood play for poor children becomes a chore. Additionally, as Collins found out in her reporting from the Mexican village of Puebla, the villagers were not consulted as to what might serve them best in terms of lighting. The village where the balls have been distributed through charity organizations has on-the-grid electricity. One villager commented that for the \$60 it takes to deliver one ball to a child she could have had her house hooked up to the electric grid for a more viable and permanent solution (Collins, 2014).

Clearly, it is important to fully understand the needs of those in poor countries (and communities) before designing solutions for them. Otherwise, the benefactors are simply indulging in their own fantasies regarding the needs of the poor. Universities must be keenly aware of this trap.

5. Establish Meaningful Partnerships

One way of avoiding the above trap is to establish meaningful partnerships with universities from poor countries. Whether it is the type of research conducted or how it is conducted, it is of mutual benefit to work collaboratively. What does meaningful partnership look like? In research endeavors, scholars from developed and developing countries can work together from problem formulation to solutions implementation as equal coinvestigators who bring their own unique strengths to the project. Often, the scholars from developing countries act as research support or the host university in a developing country simply provides a place for a foreign scholar to hang his hat. Courses can be collaboratively designed and co-taught to students in both developing and developed countries so that students and faculty can share insights on global issues and enhance a sense of common humanity.

Meaningful partnerships might also mean rethinking such programs as the Alternative Spring Break (ASB). The ASB has become popular for universities seeking participation in the globe. It is premised on the idea that privileged college students can learn about different cultures and places, acquire leadership and other skills through community service, and at the same time help poor people. Here are some reasons why I think these goals are not being met effectively under the current model.

a) Learning experience. Alternative spring breakers descend on a community and participate in activities such as building houses, tutoring children, feeding the homeless, and providing healthcare services to residents. The students walk away with a sense of how people *on the other side* live and perhaps an appreciation of their own privilege. But that is an incomplete lesson. It’s okay to learn about how other people live but it’s even more important to learn *why* they live that way. It is also good to realize how privileged one is and hopefully appreciate one’s life more but it is even more important to understand how that privilege might be impacting the poorest in the world.

First, what might be truly beneficial to the learning experience of alternative spring breakers is to get a deeper understanding of the layered nature of the problems of the poor that they are serving. They should learn that history and current national and global political and economic systems created—and continue to perpetuate—the poverty that they see. In other words, it's okay for nursing students to go to Appalachia and provide health services but how about finding out why the people they are serving have inadequate healthcare in the richest country in the world?

Second, a lot of the good life that alternative spring breakers enjoy is largely facilitated by things produced in poor countries. Wouldn't a better lesson be to see the working conditions of the workers who produce some of those things? seeing this bigger picture might equip alternative spring breakers to make a more lasting impact on poverty rather than merely putting a one-week patch on it. A deeper understanding of the bigger picture might help the breakers to consider what they might do personally to ensure that their lifestyles are not hurting the poor as well as collectively help to push for changes in national and international policies to rectify the systems that perpetuate poverty.

b) Helping the poor: History has shown that treating poor people as helpless victims does little to advance them either economically or psychologically. Not only does the benefactor-beneficiary dynamic help to foster a dependency syndrome, it does nothing to dignify poor people as worthy human beings. Might it not be more useful if poor people understood that part of their poverty is a result of forces that they do not even know exist? instead of being passive receivers of short-term help from alternative spring breakers, poor people should be helped to put their poverty into historical and current global context and organize for change.

6. Be Careful about Issues Framing and Stereotyping

A survey was conducted among Worcester State University graduate students, seeking to explore their views on and knowledge of Africa. Findings indicated: (a) participants had little exposure to African issues, (b) the little that the participants thought they knew was mostly inaccurate, (c) participants' views of Africa were mostly negative, (d) interactions with Africans seemed to be related to participants' positive regard for Africa, and (e) participants were more comfortable with Africa as a beneficiary than as a business partner (Waritu, 2013).

With such a negative narrative on Africa coming from news and popular media, these results were hardly surprising. But it's not just the news media that is responsible for the negative narrative. Through publications academics frame issues and come up with terms that sometimes perpetuate stereotypes. The dominant narrative in Gifford's *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, for example, is that of a kindly, godly foreigner who travels to distant lands with nothing but the desire to save the natives from themselves (2009). This narrative is evident in the author's discussions of the causes of Africa's ills, the role of churches and missionaries in economic development, as well as the development of Christian philosophical thought. The book depicts the African as a helpless, witless receiver of good; the Kenyan church leader as a crude "religious entrepreneur" (p. 171) who peddles Western ideas and style; and the foreign missionary as a selfless provider of good. Unfortunately, this type of approach to Africa is hardly unique.

Consider as well a term such as *The Third World*. Although originating from Cold War political alliances, the term is now used to denote the level of economic development in some countries or regions of the world. Additionally, it is liberally used by politicians of every stripe to describe decline. Perhaps even worse, the term has pervaded the general population and been incorporated in everyday conversation—*My apartment building is so horrible, it's like I live in the*

Third World. So, what is wrong with the term? First, Third World implies that there are three different worlds. It emphasizes separation and *otherness* leading to apathy and a lack of solidarity with people in *other worlds*. How can we possibly end world hunger, cure global health epidemics, preserve the earth, or achieve world peace when we don't even live in the same world?

Second, the term has come to denote an acceptable standard for some regions of the world (and conversely, an unacceptable standard for others). The direct and obvious result is that those in the Third World experience permanent feelings of inferiority while those in the First World continue to feel superior. How can the two worlds ever negotiate fair political or economic terms when the power dynamic is so uneven?

Third, the effect of having an acceptable standard for the Third World is that the economic and other solutions proposed for those regions are only as good as is deemed sufficient for them. Worse still, people in the Third World have internalized these low expectations and are happy to only achieve at those levels. Another unintended consequence of this term is that it is used to keep poor people in rich countries poor and quiet: *You should be grateful that you have public housing; you should see how people in the Third World live!*

Clearly, words, imagery, and narrative are powerful and have the potential to either support or hurt the common good and universities must do everything possible to use these tools for good.

7. Be Proactive in Internationalization Efforts

Even seemingly small efforts at internationalization can bear fruit. During summer 2015, for example, the Worcester State University president, Barry Maloney, introduced a program to send faculty to international faculty summer seminars. The first program sent five faculty members to various countries. The attendance to those seminars led to two speakers—one from Brazil and another from Botswana—being invited to the university to speak on areas of their expertise as well as a major symposium that focused on refugees in just one year! Other relatively low investments in internationalization might include the support of international graduate students through graduate assistantships, greater integration of international students and faculty into the university, and a conscious friendly interaction between the International Programs Office and international students. These efforts can all contribute to the greater common good.

Conclusion

It is clear that with a willingness to act, American universities can play a vital role in the global common good despite the various challenges and constraint that they face. However, it is important to recognize that it is impossible for any group to represent another's needs adequately, no matter how well-intentioned it might be. Universities in developing countries must therefore also step up and act towards the improvement of their own communities while forging partnerships with their counterparts in the East and West.

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