

FULBRIGHT CHRONICLES



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Fulbright Chronicles is a new, independent, open access, peer-reviewed journal with contributions by and for the global Fulbright community. The journal is overseen by a global Editorial Board.

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The journal provides a welcoming space for Fulbrighters to share their work and reflections on global issues with a broad audience. It features thoughtful, accessible articles that reflect on how Fulbright experiences have contributed to knowledge and cross-cultural understanding,

or that comment on contemporary issues that affect the Fulbright program or cultural and educational exchange more broadly.

The *Fulbright Chronicles* can only succeed with the engagement of the Fulbright community. The editors strongly encourage Fulbrighters to contribute articles or commentaries

on topics related to your research and practice and the critical issues of our times. We also welcome letters commenting on this issue's contents or other matters of interest to the Fulbright community. Author Guidelines are available on our website (www.fulbright-chronicles.com).

SEEING THE WORLD

KEVIN F F QUIGLEY AND BRUCE B SVARE

Fulbright alumni know that “seeing” the world is just the first step. The enduring relationships, empathy and understanding that develop have been the legacy of the Fulbright Program for over 75 years.

Today, we face great challenges in our world. We are called upon to work even harder to live up to Senator Fulbright’s words: “The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy—the ability to see the world as others see it.”

It is a fitting time in the history of the Fulbright program to honor these words by shining the light on the dedicated work of Fulbrighters. With this issue, we are launching the *Fulbright Chronicles* as an online, peer-reviewed journal by and for Fulbrighters and for future Fulbright award recipients.

Launching this journal has been a wonderfully collaborative effort. We are fortunate to be joined by a talented and dedicated editorial team of Fulbright alumni spanning the globe from Argentina to Australia to Nigeria to Italy and the United States, and whose professional backgrounds cover most of the six Fulbright program areas. (You can learn more about the editorial team here: www.fulbright-chronicles.com).

This issue includes a variety of remarkable Fulbright experiences and lives that they helped shape. It begins with an eloquent essay on the importance of the Fulbright Program by former Slovenian Prime Minister Dr. Miro Cerar, and it includes reflection by Pulitzer prize-winning author Jane Smiley on how her Fulbright experience in Iceland shifted her career; Executive Director of Australia’s Fulbright Commission James Arvanitakis shares his Fulbright-generated research on the rise of discontent that is impacting politics in the US and elsewhere; art historian Barbara Paca discusses the ways in which her Fulbright experience in Ireland led to the establishment of an innovative museum on the Chesapeake Bay addressing issues of race and environmental justice; MacArthur Fellow Derek Peterson describes how his Fulbright led to his life-long research understanding the political, intellectual, religious and racial history of Kenya; and educator Celeste Brody discusses her Fulbright work on faculty development and the establishment of student centered teaching practices in Thailand.

The *Fulbright Chronicles* only can succeed with the participation of our community. We invite that participation in a variety of ways. You can contribute a commentary on any topic of interest or an article that is more explicitly tied to research. We have included [Author Guidelines](#) on our website. We also welcome letters to the editors, commenting on what you have read here or what you would like to see in future issues.

We very much look forward to hearing from you and are confident that with your help, we all will “see the world” more clearly.

We very much look forward to hearing from you and are confident that with your help, we all will “see the world” more clearly. In that way, the *Fulbright Chronicles* can help see what steps are needed to shape the more understanding world that the Fulbright Program seeks to achieve.



Kevin F F Quigley and Bruce B Svare
Co-Editors

WHY THE FULBRIGHT PROGRAM REALLY MATTERS

MIRO CERAR

ABSTRACT

The goals set forth in the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* show that the pursuit of the right knowledge and action is no longer just a matter of human welfare. It has become a question of the survival of our civilization. This cannot be successfully addressed without comparative knowledge, intercultural understanding and last but not least, sufficient empathy and solidarity. This is why the Fulbright program, as the largest and most prestigious educational exchange program in the world, really matters.

Keywords: Sustainable development • intercultural understanding • educational exchange



The name Fulbright has two very positive connotations. First, it commemorates the highly esteemed U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright, and second, it designates the largest and most prestigious educational exchange program in the world. Fulbright's idea of giving Americans and citizens of other countries the opportunity to exchange knowledge, ideas, and cultural patterns still rightly bears his name and reminds us of the importance of an open and interconnected world. Today, after 75 years of the program's existence, we can much better understand and appreciate its far-reaching scope and benefits, and be grateful to Senator Fulbright and all the other legislators who supported his 1946 bill, the Fulbright Act. In the decades that have followed, the program has become a leading example of an intercultural approach to education and science.

In the words of the Senator himself, "(T)he essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy - the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something that we have failed to see, or may see it more accurately." All my life's experience and especially my academic teaching in the field of comparative law and legal cultures have shown me that learning from other social and cultural environments is more than necessary for an intellectual, scholar or scientist. Of course, it is beneficial for any individual. But it is of particular importance for individuals whose opinions and professional or scientific achievements are widely recognized, or who play a leading role in major social fields such as politics, law, economics, education, health, environment, industry, or military. In theory, it is clear to everyone that the same knowledge can be used very differently in

the hands of a violent dictator or in the hands of a true democrat. In practice however, the lack of awareness of this fact is striking even among many educated people, whose ambition, egoism, greed and other negative tendencies make them servants of unethical goals and deeds.

The individuals who participate in the Fulbright program are ambitious and their intellectual abilities are above average. Many of them have assumed or will assume important or leading positions in various public and private institutions, organizations, and associations. The number of Fulbrighters who, for example, have received significant and prestigious national or international awards (such as the Nobel Prize) or who have become heads of state or government is relatively high. This means that their impact on people around the globe is significant. Their contribution to intercultural and multidisciplinary activities in their countries and around the world is especially indispensable when we think of the most pressing challenges facing humanity, such as armed conflicts, poverty, hunger, lack of education, demographic explosion, discrimination, extreme inequality, lack of certain resources, pollution of the planet, climate change, and mass migration as addressed in the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)*.

The world is in dire need of proper education and enlightened leaders, as well as highly experienced and ethical scholars, scientists, and other experts with cross-cultural experience and human empathy. It is no longer just a matter of human welfare. It has become a question of the survival of our civilization. This is why the Fulbright program really matters. It is the model for enhancing knowledge, understanding, and ethics among intellectual and scientific elites, with positive consequences for the whole world.

I have had ample opportunities to experience, study, and learn from different cultures and social environments. I have spent half of my life under a communist regime in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the other half in the modern democracy of my native Slovenia. In addition, all of my travels abroad and encounters with people from other parts of the world during that time and later, including my Fulbright scholarship in the U.S. in 2008, broadened my insight into and understanding of the impact of different social environments.

Let me say a few words about my experience from multiethnic and multicultural Yugoslavia, which was a unique social experiment. Everyone might be able to learn from it. Despite its communist rule, it was more tolerant than the communist regimes in other Eastern European countries. We lived in a one-party state that constitutionally created a unique system of self-management at the state level starting in 1974. There was no free market and no rule of law in the modern sense of the word. Instead of private or state property, so-called “social property” was invented as the predominant legal category. This property belonged to all and to no one in particular. Private property was allowed, but most of the property was legally defined as social property, managed by various workers’ organizations of associated labor. There was

almost no unemployment. The social rights were quite extensive, and many state (public) funds were spent on the army or lost through non-transparent or corruptive operations of politically protected elites. All of this led to an ineffective economy and consequently, in combination with extreme nationalist tendencies in some Yugoslav federal republics, to war and the dissolution of the federal state.

My experiences in communist Yugoslavia and democratic Slovenia have given me a very deep insight into and understanding of manipulative political ideologies and practices. From the non-democratic and the democratic, both have their positive and negative sides. However, if we evaluate them from the point of view of human ethics and development, we must agree with Winston Churchill, who said that democracy is not the best system, but we do not know a better one.

My home country, Slovenia, gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and established itself constitutionally as a modern democracy governed by the rule of law. But all these constitutional changes were not followed by a sufficient democratic political and broader culture. The transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime requires time, effort and a truly democratic political elite. Unfortunately, even today, after 30 years of living in a modern constitutional and parliamentary democracy, the political culture in Slovenia is not yet at a sufficient democratic level. Of course, there are many other countries and societies facing similar challenges.

This is just one example to show that changing social values, worldviews and ideologies is not an easy process. It takes a long time and continuous efforts on the part of the protagonists and supporters of democratic values to complete such a change. All of this was especially evident in the early days of the democratic transition in Slovenia. People were confused in many ways. Things that are obvious and undisputed today seemed very strange at the time. Political parties, for example, why did we need more than one? They would only bring conflict into the political arena. Nevertheless, such dilemmas were overcome, and people generally adapted to modern democracy. Among its protagonists were many Slovenian intellectuals who had previously studied in various democratic countries, including the USA.

I strongly believe that the Fulbright Program must continue its commitment to providing insights into ideological, cultural, and other differences and finding ways to reconcile them through understanding, tolerance, and multidisciplinary approaches. Despite setbacks in the program's current performance due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the program should continue to prioritize student and faculty exchanges. The

I strongly believe that the Fulbright Program must continue its commitment to providing insights into ideological, cultural, and other differences and finding ways to reconcile them through understanding, tolerance, and multidisciplinary approaches.

use of internet platforms and applications and other technological means is useful and will continue to evolve, but they should never replace direct human to human contact. Therefore, student and faculty exchanges should remain the fundamental imperative of the program.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the privilege and honor of participating in the Fulbright Program can only be justified by the noble intentions and actions of each individual Fulbrighter. The future of this world depends on individuals and groups who understand the urgent need for proper balance between our materialistic and spiritual dimensions and the need to strengthen our ethical efforts for sustainable development and protection of the dignity of all human beings and other beings. I am convinced that Fulbrighters are among those who are aware of these needs and necessities and who are willing and able to meet them with appropriate responses and solutions.

NOTES

1. United Nations. (2015) *General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1. Transforming Our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available from: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Miro Cerar is professor of legal theory and philosophy of law and comparative law at the Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, and former prime minister (2014-2018) and minister of foreign affairs (2018-2020) of the Republic of Slovenia. In 1991, he was secretary of the parliamentary constitutional commission that drafted the new Slovenian Constitution. In the spring semester of 2008, he lectured on comparative constitutional law as a Fulbright visiting professor at Golden Gate University School of Law, San Francisco, and attended a post-doctoral seminar at the University of California School of Law Berkeley. Dr Cerar can be reached at Miro.Cerar@pf.uni-lj.si.

ICELAND MADE ME

JANE SMILEY

ABSTRACT

I have been to Iceland twice—first, for about eight months, in 1976-77, on a Fulbright, and second, a couple of years ago, when I was invited to return and celebrate all of us Fulbrighters who got the chance to spend time in Iceland. This is the speech I wrote for that occasion. My Fulbright in Iceland grew out of my love for the Icelandic Sagas, which I studied in graduate school. I expected to be inspired to write a dissertation about the Sagas. But instead, my trip to Iceland pivoted me away from academia toward fiction writing—I wanted to write my own saga, and about a decade after I got back, I did—*The Greenlanders*.



Keywords: Iceland • Icelandic Sagas • Fiction Writing

The thing you want to remember most about going to Iceland is all the hiking you did—up the hills and across the dales, wind, rain, and sunshine poured over you and through you, but you were always facing down the elements, maybe with the aid of a little hat and a poncho. You will have knitted your own socks from oily (but natural) Icelandic wool, and your own gloves, too. Your backpack will have contained dried reindeer meat for sustenance, a few containers of skyr (like yogurt), and, because you were so adventurous, some hakarl, which is shark meat allegedly buried in the sand, and then preserved by fishermen who urinate on it as they go by everyday for a few months, until it is truly inedible to everyone but Icelanders. You will not have had even a sliver of rjomaterta in your backpack (cream cake) because you were too sturdy for that, and your only reading matter was by medieval saga writers (Halldor Laxness was way too modern for you).

But I am unlike you—my main memory from my eight months in Iceland is sleeping. My favorite dream was of myself swimming in the waters of the north Atlantic (unrealistically warm and bright), and being approached by a pod of dolphins, who lifted me out of the water as they leapt into the blue sky, then let me down gently to float again in the gentle sea. Almost all of my dreams were more vivid than any I had ever had, and from them I understood some of the incidents in the Icelandic Sagas—for example the monster who sits astride the roof of a house in Grettirs Saga, and rides it until the roof beams crack. As the nights grew longer and the days shorter (down to two hours in December) I remained on American east coast time—I would go to sleep around four a.m. and get up at dawn (1 in the afternoon), go swimming at the local pool (hail and ice on the concrete between the locker room and the hot tub) (the hotter one, not the hottest one, where the old men were boiling themselves and talking), then walk home in the dusk, stopping at the

American consulate to take a book from the library, something I had never read (*The Grapes of Wrath*) or never heard of (*The Man Who loved Children*, by Christina Stead) or was long enough to require many dark hours of concentration (*Anna Karenina*).

Iceland made me.

I was always a traveler. My earliest journey I do not remember—my mother and father driving from LA to Michigan when I was a year old—but I think I remember all of them after that—from St. Louis to Chicago on the train with my grandmother, to visit cousins when I was three, to Grand Rapids around the same time, to visit the other grandparents, down to the Current River in southern Missouri when I was nine and ten, then camp in northern Wisconsin and Vermont when I was eleven, twelve, and thirteen. Always staring out the window of the plane or the train or the back seat of the car, fascinated by the landscape, listening to people around me talk. When I was a senior in high school, my parents let me go to England for two weeks during spring vacation, and that's where Iceland was planted, right there in those cathedrals and those dialects that my very saintly hosts exposed me to, day after day. After college, there were no jobs, so my first husband and I scraped together three thousand dollars and went to Europe for a year, first working on an archeological dig in Winchester, England, then hitchhiking through France, Italy, Greece, Crete, Yugoslavia, Austria, Switzerland, France again, Denmark, and back to England. He was 6'10", my mentor and protector. We met other travelers who had been scammed and robbed and frightened. The closest we came to being taken advantage of was in an Italian train station, where we fell asleep on some benches, and my husband woke up just as a man was attempting to steal his shoes from under his head (size sixteen—maybe they were worth something on the black market?). Much more typical was our experience at an outdoor bazaar, where we ponied up the asking price for some item, and the seller took pity on us. He taught us how to bargain, then gave us the item half off. In grad school, my boyfriend and I thought nothing of heading out to Iowa to California, Oregon, Idaho, New York, Martha's Vineyard, by car or motorcycle.

But until I went to Iceland, I had never traveled alone.

There were seven or eight of us—my fellow Fulbright recipient, Elizabeth, and other students from England, Denmark, Norway, and even the Soviet Union (he said his father was in the KGB, which was why he was allowed to leave—he also knew how to knit, thanks to his grandmother, so he fit right in). Elizabeth had gone to Radcliffe and graduated summa cum laude. She had grown up in the Upper East Side of Manhattan and read *War and Peace* when she was ten. We got along well. While I was catching up on classics, she was plowing through Barbara Cartland. The Danish boy (four years younger than I was) was Knud. He was handsome and personable, with blond hair and a square, open face. He was a whiz at Icelandic—not all the Danes were. There was a woman who knitted in the lobby before class who was rumored

to be stuck between the liquid pronunciation of Danish and the harsher, multi-consonantal pronunciation of Icelandic, unable to go either back or forward. She knitted like a whiz, though—the whole front of a baby’s sweater in twenty minutes. Elizabeth and I lived in a dorm at Haskoli Islands. From the front door, you could see the mountains beyond Reykjavik rearing into the sky, crusty and barren. Once, I was sitting at my desk, and three swans flew by outside the window, close enough to touch, it seemed. An American professor was in Iceland on a teaching Fulbright. His name was Oscar, and he hosted informal parties every Sunday, where we ate the food he liked to cook, chatted, and played hearts or whist. What was eerie and alluring was the walk to his house, along the dark beach at night (it was always night), listening to the water lap the sand, to the wind slithering here and there. Oscar liked to bake, but Iceland was a treasure of baked goods, so buttery and creamy that for the first time in my life, I had to pay attention to how often I gave into temptation.

It was an easy walk to downtown Reykjavik, and I loved to observe the Icelanders, who spoke loudly and stood closer to one another than New Yorkers. My favorite episode was at the local grocery store. I was walking past the meat counter. A woman customer and the woman butcher were looking at a plate sitting on top of the butcher case that contained two stalks of celery. The butcher said, very clearly, “SELL-ER-EE.” Then the two women shook their heads slightly and shrugged. No idea what that green thing was for. The greatest difficulty when I went to the grocery store was bringing home eggs—no cartons, just plastic bags. I could not get more than three or four home intact. But the skyr was great, the granola was great, the precious oranges from somewhere far far away were great, and there were other vegetables, too, grown in Iceland, in thermally heated greenhouses. My fellow students were more gustatorily adventurous than I was, and even ate whale meat (which was cheap).

Occasionally, we went to the movies, if only to test our Icelandic, and many Fridays we went to the philharmonic hall, which was within walking distance, where we listened to the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. At Christmas, I went to New York, where I stayed with a friend on the Upper West Side. The first morning, I sat up in bed, wide awake, thinking it was noon. The sun was pouring through the windows and it was eight in the morning. After Christmas in New York, I went back to Iowa for a few days, where my boyfriend broke up with me (not unexpected).

Now I didn’t even have a reason to write letters. When I got back to Reykjavik, the days were getting longer, but I didn’t notice. All I did was read and read and walk. In late January, I did get so depressed that the only book that could help me was a collection of humorous essays by S.J. Perelman that made me laugh in the bathtub while I was hiding out from the darkness and my shirked responsibilities toward my language class and my dissertation. At some point, one of those points that are so sunk in the endless passing of

time, I started writing a novel, always from about eleven at night until about four, when I fell onto my couch/bed and continued to dream of what I was writing. It was set in Idaho, and concerned my grandparents and my grandfather's brother trying to start a ranch with a little money my great-grandmother had given them and their winnings from as many poker games as they could get into. The best episode was very Icelandic—they were caught in a blizzard and had to dig a hole in the snow. They saved themselves by lying in each other's arms until the blizzard covered them over and then subsided. My Idaho had no trees. I wrote and read, read and wrote, went once a week to the best hotel in Reykjavik where I did eat rjomaterta, a six-inch-tall wedge of layer cake, all the layers made of cream flavored with different liqueurs. The other meal I remember was a traditional Icelandic end-of-winter feast, *Porrablót*, consisting of everything that traditional Icelanders would have found in their frozen storerooms at about the time when the grass greened up and the sheep were allowed out into the pastures. The most startling thing on the plate, to me, was the singed sheep's head (*Svið*)—eyes restfully closed. I took one look and opted for one of the alternatives, maybe a roast chicken. Elizabeth ate everything on her traditional plate with relish, including the liver sausage and the *Súrsaðir hrútsþungar*, which were lambs testicles cured in lactic acid.

The days got longer. The Fulbright Committee packed Elizabeth and me onto a plane and sent us to Berlin for a meeting with all of the European grantees. The hosts showed us around and invited us to appreciate the difference between West Berlin and East Berlin, then still behind the Wall. I did appreciate the difference, but not as they wanted me to—what I saw in East Berlin was some kind of patience—letting the ruins from the war sit there until someone came up with a better idea than replacing everything with chrome and neon lights. We were taken to Dahlem, where we visited the Botanic Gardens and a few of the museums. The best piece of art I saw was a Japanese scroll painting that ran along the entire wall of one of the galleries, the story of a single journey up mountains and through forests that unfolded as you walked past it, peering carefully at the trees and the rocks and the tiny figures. The principal difficulty of solitary travel, I decided, was not being able to turn to your companion, to say, "Look at that! I love that!" Whatever revelations were pouring into you and out of you, they were yours alone.

I felt this the following week, too, when I hiked in the southwest of England, a region John and I had missed in our months spent in Winchester, York, and the Lake District. Exeter, Dartmoor (which reminded me of the Hound of the Baskervilles), Newton Abbot, Dawlish—the place names, the wide landscape, the grass and blossoming trees and the wealth of flowers (going from Iceland to England in March is indeed a revelation) seemed to sink into me and disappear, escaping all of my attempts to capture the view, the fragrance, the warm feel of the air in letters or diary entries. When I read the old letters now, I am embarrassed at how desperately they grasp at the things I was seeing and try to push them into the minds of my recipients. When we re-

turned to Iceland we had five weeks left, the sun was everywhere, and I went back to work, this time relating the tale of my grandfather winning a diamond ring in a poker game, giving it to my grandmother, who had no wedding ring, and then my grandmother losing it down the drain of the kitchen sink when she was washing the dishes.

I began preparing to go back to Iowa City. I would move into my ex-boyfriend's apartment, I would work on my dissertation, applying modern theories of literary criticism to the Icelandic Sagas; I would continue my solitary existence and come to enjoy it as well as rely upon it. Duncan asked me to go with him riding.

Duncan was an oboe player from Edinburgh who had by that time been in the Icelandic Symphony for two or three years, though he was a year younger than I was. He was maybe the only person I knew then who was gainfully employed. He was also handy (he did, after all, have to make his own reeds, and they had to be good). He was outdoorsy, he was adventurous, and he had a car. In the last three weeks (now April and May, sun up at four, down at nine or ten), we drove to Dritvik, Laugurfell, Hlítharendi (the setting of *Njalssaga*), and Eyjafjallajökull. We saw Skógafoss, and stayed in a youth hostel near Bergþórshvöll. The grass in every valley was brilliantly green. On our second morning in the hostel, another Brit arrived—a sailor taking a break, as I remember. The two men talked all day about sailing and life on the ocean, and never once acknowledged my presence, which was an illuminating experience, the first time in my life as a 6'2" American woman that I was entirely overlooked. Which is not to say that Duncan was unkind. Every time we met for those three weeks, he had a plan or an idea about something that might be fun to do. He also had a lot to say about Scotland, the oboe, the orchestral life, music, nature, haggis, his former plan to sail from Scotland to Iceland to Greenland to America by himself. He wore glasses, his hair was red, he was as easygoing as any man I had ever known. We knew that our relationship was neatly circumscribed by my imminent departure. He didn't ask me to stay and I didn't ask him if I could. What Iceland had to offer me was strangeness, the theme of seven and a half months on my own now gently expanded by his knowledge and mobility. My vocation, I knew, was to return to America and keep writing, but to have Iceland deeply engraved into my own sensibility, not only by the land and the people I met, but by the ghostly presence of the saga writers and the living Icelandic writers whose work I read, most notably Halldor Laxness, who was still alive and writing not far from Reykjavik, but whose books, especially *Independent People*, entered into me as if they had existed forever.

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On the way home, we flew over Greenland. The sky was clear, and I stared down at the glaciers and the icy coast, felt more deeply into my fascination with that far flung offshoot of Nordic restlessness, and arrived in New York, where the first movie I saw was “Annie Hall,” of which no film is less Icelandic, and the first food I ate was a bagel with lox and cream cheese from Zabar’s, Icelandic in a much-translated but still evocative way.

I went back to Iowa City. My old boyfriend was gone for the summer. I moved my suitcase and my typewriter into his apartment. Now, when I wrote, I was looking out the window at green grass and the white siding of the Foursquare house next door. I kept on with the grandparents in Idaho, my mother as an adventurous two-year-old wandering among the cattle while my grandmother cared for the new baby in the house. But I knew that the work to come, whatever it would be, had taken on a deep Nordic tinge, let’s say a combination of wind and sky and snow and grass, of making the best of isolation and hard work, tragedy, luck, and magic.

BIOGRAPHY

Jane Smiley is the author of many works of fiction, and nonfiction, most recently *Perestroika in Paris*. She grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, lived for a long time in Iowa, then moved to California in the mid-1990s. She is known for the variety of her work—tragedy, comedy, historical novels, novels set in the present day, novels for young readers. She explores the form of the novel in her nonfiction work, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for *A Thousand Acres*. She was a Fulbrighter to Iceland in 1976-1977. Jane Smiley can be reached at jane.smiley@sbcglobal.net.

LIVING BLUE IN A RED STATE: UNDERSTANDING THE TRUMP PHENOMENON AND THE CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH

JAMES ARVANITAKIS

ABSTRACT

We have seen what can best be described as a U-turn in US political positioning: From street protests and outpourings of grief in support of Black Lives Matter (BLM) following the murder of George Floyd, to a moral panic about ‘critical race theory.’ How did things change so quickly and how do we understand this change? This article explores the reasons for this turn and explores whether such swings will continue to define contemporary politics.

Keywords: Donald Trump • Trust • Critical Race Theory



BACKGROUND

I sit at the counter of the local diner with my wife following our newly established ritual of reading the New York Times over a cup of coffee. A family of five walk in with the father of the group, around his mid-50s, wearing a cowboy hat, cowboy boots and openly carrying a handgun in his holster.

Both my wife and I stop eating and look at the gun then up at the man. He warmly smiles at us, nods his head and wishes us a good morning. We respond and the rest of the family warmly greet us as they walk past.

For Australians, this is a strange sight: most of us will never own a gun or even shoot one. In fact, for most Australians, the only guns we will ever see will be the ones that the police carry in their holsters.

Australia and the United States have much in common but also significant cultural differences that run deep. To truly understand these differences, what is required is profound engagement and deep cultural analysis through a program that is consistent with the history, integrity, and intent of the Fulbright Program.

THE PROJECT

My Fulbright Project was the inaugural University of Wyoming/Fulbright Australia Milward L. Simpson Fulbright Scholarship that included both teaching and research. While the focus of this article is the research component of my journey, the teaching and engagement with students provided me important insights that fed into my study.

The research component had three specific goals: 1. To understand the rise and support of Donald Trump amongst a socially conservative state; 2. To gain insights into the culture of a deep Red state such as Wyoming; and, 3. To gain an understanding of the future direction of the Republican Party.

I employed a number of research methodologies but central was ethnographic methods. As such, I embedded myself in the daily rituals of the small town I lived in and engaged in discussions about the state of America not just politics, but also standards of living and quality of life, America's place in the world and whether people saw expert institutions such as universities and public policy organizations as representing their interests. I was also an active member of the University of Wyoming academic community, as well as attending seminars and conferences and events with the Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren campaigns. I gathered a wide range of secondary research across the political spectrum and wrote a regular opinion piece for an Australian online journal.

It is important to note that in my research I opted not to undertake structured or formal interviews. Rather, I explored conversations in informal, random and unexpected locations—from diners to college football games, airports to bars, rodeos to music festivals and political rallies. While I occasionally sought permission to record a specific quote, I gathered diary notes and observations after the interview rather than writing during the conversation. I acknowledge both the benefits and limitations of this process.

The fortnightly online opinion pieces established a discipline in forming and communicating my ideas, as well as giving me access to real time feedback from the readership. It also led to regular invitations to speak about my research, including academic conferences, public meetings, and a monthly discussion on Australia's national broadcaster, ABC News).

In the end, I gathered hundreds of pages of notes, visited ten states, and spoke at 22 public meetings and various academic gatherings. Unfortunately, the emergence of a global pandemic resulted in me returning to Australia two months earlier than planned. Despite this, I continued my teaching, attended online meetings, and sustained my public engagements.

While there are many elements I could write about, I will concentrate on three broad areas of my research: Understanding the complexity of the Trump base; discussing the declining levels of trust that now plague the U.S. (and Australia); and finally, examining how the elements of *the great reversal* – or backlash against progressive politics – had taken hold, even as Joe Biden was being elected and the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE TRUMP VOTER

For many outsiders who witnessed the many controversies of the Trump Presidency, one question that continually emerged was, *how and why does Trump retain support?*

There is no simple answer. The first thing to note is that a vast majority of the American public have turned away from politics seeing it, according to the Pew Research Center, as “less respectful, less fact-based and less substantive.” This is not just about Trump. As such, while many I spoke to felt that Trump may have acted inappropriately, they also did not believe that the Democrats acted in good faith and saw the sustained attacks on former President Trump driven by a refusal to accept the 2016 election. From the Mueller Investigation to Freshman Representative Rashida Tlaib’s declaration in January that the newly installed Democratic majority in the House will “go in there and impeach the motherf***er” before any evidence was presented, suggests that many see a party obsessed with Trump rather than one interested in governing.

One mistake that seemed to be continuously repeated by media commentators and academics was a tendency to homogenize all Trump supporters as Hilary Clinton did in her infamous “basket of deplorables” comment. This fails to understand both the above mentioned collapse in respect for politics and the enmity towards the behavior of the Democrats. An understanding of the Trump phenomenon requires a more subtle analysis. The following groupings of Trump supporters is based on a joint analysis with Dr Jason McConnell from the University of Wyoming.

Committed Republicans. Data from the Voter Study Group highlighted that more than 80 percent of Trump supporters came from voters who voted for Republican nominee Mitt Romney just four years before. These are your traditional American Republicans: tax-cut advocates, religious evangelicals, gun rights supporters and business leaders eager for deregulation and tax cuts. While many may not like Trump himself, his Administration gave them enough to keep them inside and they see no home in the Democratic Party.

Those who are ‘anti-politics’. The Cooperative Congressional Election Study — an election survey of around 50,000 people – found that 12 percent of people who voted for Sen. Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic presidential primaries went on to vote for Trump in the general election. These voters seem to be a growing segment of the American electorate that was

once both peripheral and ignored, which is now drawn to chaos incitement. They see the current system as failing them and would like to see the structures dramatically changed – and they saw Trump, an outsider detested by the establishment, as offering this opportunity.

The disenfranchised. A recurring theme over the last decade by economic commentators has been that economic liberalization has resulted in the hollowing out of the middle class. Those that feel left behind see someone like Trump, who is brash and willing to do things differently, actually changing the economic model that left them vulnerable. Further, Trump was perceived as paying attention to the rust belt. What we have seen from Reagan through to Obama is a relative continuity of foreign and domestic policies including never-ending wars and economic liberalization. An impartial observer may not feel that Trump has the solutions, but he does acknowledge that many have been left behind – and even traditional union-based Democrats saw him as the only politician speaking to them and their concerns.

Nationalists. Associated with *the* disenfranchised are those that believe America has lost its place in the world and negotiated away its economic supremacy. While Donald Trump has been criticized for embracing nationalism, the patriotic appeal for national unity and pride is what many feel America needs. Not all of us are comfortable with such patriotic calls, but the nation-state remains the most influential institution in our lives and Trump's America-First rhetoric appealed to those who feel that the nation has suffered while many others, both Republicans and Democrats, focused on a cosmopolitan globalism.

The Trumpers. All of this does not dismiss a specific portion of the Trump base that is attracted to his anti-political correctness rhetoric. The Trumpers continue to feed off Trump's many outlandish and unsubstantiated claims, such as migrants being the source of all of America's social and economic ills. Although baseless and sometimes openly racist, they appeal to a certain percentage of the population. It is simple to call them "deplorables" as Hillary Clinton did — and sure some may be — but such insults ignore the reasons they have turned to Trump.

A CULTURE OF MISTRUST

The 2016 election of Donald Trump reflected the rise of populism that became the focus of many researchers. While Trump may have lost the 2020 election, populist leaders remain prominent across the world – something unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

One trend that has paralleled this rise of populist leaders has been the loss of trust by significant sections of the population in scientific and expert systems, including universities. This mistrust is a defining feature of many conservative states.

This is not to argue for a simple causality, but rather that experts have been attacked as elitist, out of touch. In fact, the priorities between ‘the experts’ (and elites) and ‘the people’ has been framed through simple binaries including ‘jobs v. environment’ or ‘immigration v. jobs.’ Populist media often describe universities as ‘ivory towers’ home to ‘boffins’, further exasperating divisions and distrust.

As far back as March 2020, many were worrying that this distrust in experts would undermine America’s response to the pandemic. Since then, we have witnessed the pandemic become a partisan issue and driven along by conspiracy theories and a refusal to believe medical experts. The impacts have been devastating.

This skepticism should not be simply dismissed for the scientific method has failed significant sections of the U.S. population. For example, the Tuskegee study that ran between 1932 and 1970 purposely left many Black men with syphilis so doctors involved could study the consequences of the disease even as treatments became available.

For others, the removal of scientific experts from decision-making is part of building a more business friendly environment, freeing American business from problematic red-tape, and encouraging entrepreneurship. In fact, Jared Kushner boasted that the Trump Administration was “taking the country back” from doctors.

THE GREAT REVERSAL

In May 2020, the world witnessed in horror as a Minneapolis police officer leaned on the throat of George Floyd with his knee and slowly suffocated him. The murder of George Floyd led to an outpouring of grief with mass vigils, sports stars ‘taking the knee’, high profile organizations vowing to be part of racial healing and the supercharging of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) as promises about pursuing racial justice were made. We debated the legacy of once celebrated figures such as Cecil Rhodes, and even revered former presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson who, we were reminded, were slave owners.

The protests that started in the U.S. quickly spread across the world as grief turned to anger and violence followed. As statues tumbled and riots manifested, there were claims and counter claims of who perpetrated the violence. Depending on your news source of choice, the world was either experiencing a long overdue racial reckoning or was imploding.

It is hard to understand that only a year later, this promise of reconciliation has been replaced by a wholesale backlash as witnessed through the moral panic towards Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT, with its foundation in U.S. law schools in the 1970s, is an approach of studying how race and racism has shaped legal structures, institutions, and politics. The theory rests on the premise that racial bias – intentional or not – is embedded in laws and institutions across all Anglo-nations: including prisons, health, welfare and

education systems. Once an obscure academic pursuit, CRT is now the latest battleground of the cultural wars with White parents expressing fears that both they and their children are being made to feel guilty for past injustices and are blamed for all inequalities.

This move towards and then away from racial justice I describe as *the Great Reversal*. This move from reconciliation and resolution to fearing guilt and accountability for past injustices is, however, one of many phenomena we have witnessed recently. For example, debates about ‘freedom of speech’ and fear that political correctness has gone too far, made by conservative and right-leaning commentators, actually mirror the same language of progressive activists from the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, it was progressive activists that wanted to challenge accepted norms and expand the freedom of speech and were confronted by conservatives who laid out accepted customs of morality and decency.

Likewise, the language used by those who are anti-vaccine about the sanctity of one’s right to choose what is done to one’s body echoes that of ‘pro-choice’ activists in abortion debates. In this way, we see slogans ‘freedom of choice’ blazoned across anti-vaccine protest rallies while in Australia, the blue Eureka flag, once a symbol of unionism and the need to respond to tyranny, has become the rallying cry of resistance against mask and vaccine mandates with roots in the White supremacist movement. These same activists have been drawn to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra that symbolizes claims of sovereignty by Australia’s First Nations people.

If we want to return to the idea of amicable disagreement, we need to relearn compassion, empathy, and nuance in political discourse.

How did this happen? The seeds of *the Great Reversal* are the discontent and loss of trust that have been described above. *The Great Reversal* is not only about a right-wing backlash against progressive politics, but a move away from the very foundations of the expert systems that are at the foundation of our society.

A CONCLUSION OF SORTS: WHAT I DID NEXT

In response, we must find ways to draw on our democratic and liberal values to engage with those citizens that have stopped listening. This is an ongoing project with no end in sight: from the need to understand those that feel disenfranchised, to finding ways to work in a bipartisan way, and ensuring that the value of scientific and humanities research is communicated, and that it positively impacts people’s lives.

Following my time in Wyoming, I continued my work at Western Sydney University for a further twelve months before accepting the Executive Director position at the Australian American Fulbright Commission. This was motivated for many reasons, but one of the keys was the many insights

I acquired while a Fulbright Scholar. These came in many forms, but one of the most important is that, if we want to return to the idea of amicable disagreement, we need to relearn compassion, empathy, and nuance in political discourse.

NOTES

1. This article draws from the many publications I produced while on my Fulbright which can be sourced from www.jamesarvanitakis.net.
2. The rise of populism and the Trump phenomenon has become a very crowded academic field which shaped many of the insights outlined here. Of all this literature, I would recommend the meta-analysis by Carlos Lozada in his book, *What Were We Thinking: A Brief Intellectual History of the Trump Era*.
3. A detailed analysis of trust in American society and the perception of expert systems is drawn from a cross section of qualitative and quantitative research produced by the Pew Research Center (www.pewresearch.org).



Dr Arvanitakis at the University of Wyoming campus

BIOGRAPHY

Professor James Arvanitakis is the Executive Director of the Australian American Fulbright Commission. He is also an Honorary Professor at Australian National University and an Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. In 2019, he was a Fulbright Fellow as the Milward L. Simpson Visiting Professor – University of Wyoming. He blogs at www.jamesarvanitakis.net and can be followed at @jarvanitakis. He can be reached at james.arvanitakis@fulbright.org.au

HOW MY FULBRIGHT JOURNEY IN IRELAND HELPED LEAD TO THE FOUNDING OF THE WATER'S EDGE MUSEUM

BARBARA PACA

ABSTRACT

The author received a Fulbright Scholar Award to Ireland in 1995-1996. Fulbright scholar awards are about fulfilling your dreams. My goal was to investigate the artistic and scientific achievements of a circle of eccentric 18th century artists and land improvers in Ireland. This experience equipped me with the skills to envision and achieve goals locally and globally. It ultimately enabled me to focus on the overlooked history of founding black families in the Eastern Shore area of Maryland and the founding of the Water's Edge Museum (www.watersedgemuseum.org).



Keywords: Water's Edge Museum • founding black families • environmental justice as a civil right

My Fulbright scholarship was a postdoc to rural Ireland during the period of peace negotiations in the mid-1990s. Based in the idyllic Georgian town of Birr, I hiked out into the backdrop of Birr into the picturesque Slieve Bloom Mountains, bizarrely noted as the former tactical training ground of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Living in history was to become a normal way of life. On a personal level, there was a history for me here: I was in the Ely O'Carroll, land of my maternal forebears, and in the heart of "plantation" territory – the region settled by Elizabeth I with Protestants to suppress the long-established Catholic population. During my tenure there I witnessed great changes in the country, a kind of awakening among gentle people as they found their voice in beautiful pastoral landscapes and literature and culture among the people of rarified Dublin. This experience was to shape my way of understanding the world and my role as an art historian, academic, and art activist.

My Fulbright allowed me to investigate the artistic and scientific achievements of a circle of eccentric 18th century artists and land improvers. This group of people seemed to have no boundaries of creative inquiry. They brought changes to early theater design on the Dublin stage along with significant improvements in agriculture, scientific experimentation, and the arts in general. Their brilliance spanned across an unimaginable spectrum of disciplines. For me, it was a revelation to see how they could create large-

scale loosely painted theatrical backdrops with a new kind of perspective that brought the highly imaginative settings to life, and within the same studio, craft smaller-scale paintings with meticulous brush lines to present accurate axonometric views of the houses and gardens within the townships and cities of Ireland in the finest detail.

It became clear in examining notes, studies, drawings, inventions, and paintings that the central and most talented figure of my circle of artists experienced mental health issues. My research became more involved in connecting his profound outpouring of work to the mysterious threads of his life which likely ended in suicide. What is the dividing line between creativity and madness? This question grew during my tenure as a Fulbright scholar, and it turned out that this experience represented only a beginning as I continued in a study of creative genius and insanity with Dr. Roy Porter at London's Wellcome Trust.

While the general population of Ireland lacked the kind of racial diversity I experienced in the United States, it became clear to me that there was a new and satisfying way of working together across social, economic, religious, and educational lines. I learned as much from a local historian or a farmer asking about theatrical inventions or early agricultural practices as from my loyal professors who remained mentors until they passed away. It was fulfilling to work with people from varied backgrounds and to attend gatherings where multiple generations of people from different backgrounds gathered to share ideas and enjoy one another. Banished was the American way of working in silos, segregated by age, academic institution, or socio-economic background: Ireland represented a microcosm of a fascinating world where everyone had something to say!

LOCAL: TRANSLATING THE FULBRIGHT EXPERIENCE INTO THE WATER'S EDGE MUSEUM

My Ph.D. in the history of art was a pursuit of a deeper understanding of the historical and intellectual context of gardens. Although I was educated as a landscape architect and art historian, and continue to work to this day across both disciplines, other puzzling questions that seemed distinct from my profession occupied my thoughts. Why is history always presented from one perspective? How is it that the dissonant tones and melancholic music of Ireland is as powerful as the early African American spirituals I heard in Maryland? I was deeply moved and intrigued by both artistic experiences. The writings of Frederick Douglass, who grew up ten miles away from my home noted the similarity in this haunting music, and explained it via the connections between the oppression of the Irish and enslaved persons whom he had grown up with on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The music of these two populations, whose journey is about overcoming, serves as a kind of soundtrack to that compelling story of the thirst for freedom.

Wanting to know more about the often-overlooked African American history of Maryland, I worked locally with descendants of Douglass and Tubman to establish The Water's Edge Museum in Oxford, Maryland. Opened in 2021 and recognized as the first museum to honor the founding black families of America, this museum is a direct result of what I learned during my time in Ireland as a Fulbright scholar. Our mission is purely educational, and our target audience is impressionable youth. The museum's message is simple:

The Water's Edge Museum proudly presents Black farmers, professional sailmakers military figures, musicians, watermen, and crab pickers. These Founding Black Families of America harnessed knowledge and power, and placed it firmly and confidently into the hands of their descendants.

The Museum seeks to empower the young people of today to find their place in history and identify their own positive and unique voice when facing contemporary issues and challenges. It encourages young people to see how people of color on the Eastern Shore lived and how their lives mattered.

The museum is about a sensitive collaboration that never ceases to ask difficult questions. It also requires working across many backgrounds and on an intergenerational level to attain a vision that is accurate and enduring. Located in a region so isolated that it is known for being the only place to retain an Elizabethan accent, the Eastern Shore is also home to important leaders such as Harriet Ross Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, Henry Highland Garnet, Charles Albert Tindley, and Waters Edward Turpin. In spite of a staggeringly long and rich African American history, many of these luminaries have been largely unrecognized as being among the country's founding families.

Elders on the Eastern Shore had a tradition of gathering annually to "honor the ancestors," by sprinkling rose petals into the water at the end of the dock in the small port of Oxford, Maryland. What was the meaning behind this poetic ceremony? Research established Oxford as not only the oldest port on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, but revealingly as the only place of disembarkation on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware for Middle Passage and Intra-American slave vessels. Further inquiry established the fact that the last known documented Intra-American ship, *Experiment*, docked on the fourth of July in 1772. The owners were from some of Maryland's founding families. How could this information not be a part of the curriculum? (1)

Throughout these obvious distortions of the folk-mind, however, one thread of constancy weaves; a somber chronicle that begins in the foul belly of a slave ship, and ends in a gutted ruin.

In 2021, The Water's Edge Museum added two more galleries, Environmental Justice as a Civil Right, which as an EJ museum represents yet another first in Maryland. The galleries examine the environmental health and safety of vulnerable populations, mostly persons of color who live in low-lying areas on the Chesapeake Bay. Giving consideration to the miracle of learning about the Middle Passage stop, we wanted to know how people of African descent were trafficked throughout the state. Where did people go to find freedom? What monuments were left behind? How much has already been lost to climate change? Which areas were under threat? Much to our surprise we learned that there was no comprehensive map. We are now working in a collaborative effort to chart the way to freedom, documenting communities, schools, churches, safe houses, and cultural landscapes to determine at-risk regions. Our EJ galleries begin with a local perspective but expand into a comparison with vulnerable regions within the developing world by taking a look at the island nation of Antigua and Barbuda. These islands are part of a region under threat of total destruction due to the inability to bring about ecological reform in so-called first world countries.

The Water's Edge Museum fundamentally serves as a unique kind of teaching institution that opens up people's eyes in history, culture, and science. Through art, music, and history, visitors learn about the essential role of people of color in using genius, stamina and strength to help found our democracy. The museum pays homage to the mighty ancestors of the incredible team with whom I have collaborated, and is a direct result of my experience as a Fulbrighter in taking the time to listen and to learn from others.

GLOBAL: HOW FULBRIGHTERS TAKE ON THE WORLD

My Fulbright experience was impactful on teaching cultural understanding at home in Maryland but also abroad. Having traveled a lot on my own I was sensitive to the ways that communities worked and how people in smaller societies tended to have success in achieving a lot with few resources. When things are going wrong among people in a small population you know it—and when things are going right everyone feels it. The Fulbright experience taught me to be observant and respectful of societal ecosystems and I took interest in noting the diversity of leaders in terms of class, education, gender, and age.

The island nation of Antigua and Barbuda reminded me of Ireland in many ways—small populations of multiple generations of people worked together with few resources and great vision toward common goals that were in alignment with my own philosophies. Similar to Ireland, the lack of diversity (most people are of African descent) made little difference as our objectives

The museum pays homage to the mighty ancestors of the incredible team with whom I have collaborated, and is a direct result of my experiences as a Fulbrighter in taking the time to listen and to learn from others.

were clear as we sought to preserve the often-overlooked history and artistic achievements of the people there. Eventually the Prime Minister and his Cabinet honored me with an appointment to serve as their Cultural Envoy. Serving in this capacity has allowed me to work with Antiguan and Barbudans to promote their incredible culture and history on a global scale. My closest collaborators and teachers there have been nonagenarians and women who have helped me to understand the subtleties of art, history, and culture harkening back to my early lessons as a Fulbrighter.

For three years, I served as curator to the National Pavilion of Antigua and Barbuda at the Venice Biennale where our message was well received by global audiences, many of whom were learning about Antigua and Barbuda for the first time. Our three exhibitions dealt with 1) The Last Universal Man, exploring the work of Antiguan artist Frank Walter, who was a genius and with perceived mental challenges, 2) Environmental Justice as a Civil Right, where we featured the photography of Mohammid Walbrook, the gifted Barbudan artist, and 3) Carnival as Resistance.

Our work in Venice placed Antigua and Barbuda on a global map of excellence in culture and the arts. Beyond featuring a Caribbean artist who served as one of the founders of Modern painting, we worked with Antiguan and Barbudan women on early African seedwork—beautiful complex patterns of wild tamarind and jumbie bead seeds sewn together to make spider web patterns for jewelry and table decorations. The same craftwork turns out to be present in the African American tradition of Maryland and is now a part of a larger initiative to empower the women of Antigua and Barbuda through a program to transfer this artistic tradition to youth in the Caribbean and the US.

Most importantly for me, the Fulbright experience prepared me for the meeting that changed my life. The reclusive Antiguan artist and philosopher, Frank Walter (1926-2009) lived in paradise on an isolated hillside accessible only by hiking. Escorted to him by his family members who saw to his care, I quickly recognized his genius and spent six years in his company, discussing art, agriculture, and history, but mostly learning about his fascinating life.

Wealthy people from the United States who had a second home on the island informed me that he was “crazy” – however, for me that title was not only insulting, it was inappropriate. My closest friend of thirty years and I had spent considerable time in think tanks where there are numerous examples of “crazy” individuals. However, for my friend and me, Frank Walter’s unconventional behavior was just a part of his high IQ and keen artistic temperament.

Again, there were many questions that my time as a Fulbrighter helped me to ask—and to answer: How does one draw a line between genius and madness? How is this expressed in other societies? How does one work respectfully in a developing country? Working with the artist’s family, gallerists, and art historians, we began an international conversation celebrating the ar-

tistic and intellectual achievements of Frank Walter via exhibitions in New York, Miami, London, Frankfurt, Edinburgh, and Hong Kong, and he is now recognized as one of the most important Caribbean artists. I am now collaborating with Hilton Als on an exhibition in June in New York, two exhibitions in Brussels in November, and an exhibition in the Garden Museum about the artist as gardener and agriculturist in 2023.

Being a Fulbrighter helped me have the experiences that equipped me with the skills to envision and achieve goals locally and globally. Reflecting on lessons learned after nearly thirty years after my time as a Fulbright Scholar, my philosophy is confirmed: we are here to work respectfully with others and the more diverse, the better.

NOTES

1. It turned out that people of African descent always knew this story about the disembarkation of slave vessels in Oxford but repressed it due to fear of reprisal. Further truths emerged about this. Born in Oxford in 1910, Morgan State University Professor Waters Edward Turpin was a person of color who had deep roots on the Eastern Shore. In his final novel, *The Rootless* (1957), he evoked the haunting memories of slavery and its aftermath.



Barbara Paca on Fulbright in Ireland in 1996

BIOGRAPHY

Barbara Paca is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. She serves as an art and environmental justice activist, locally and globally. Locally, she is Trustee to Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies Member's board; a Commissioner to Maryland's Commissions on African American History and Culture, The Maryland Historic Trust, and the Maryland Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities. Globally, she serves as the Cultural Envoy to Antigua and Barbuda. She can be contacted at barbara@preservationgreenllc.com.

MAKING HISTORY IN KENYA, 1993-94

DEREK R PETERSON

ABSTRACT

My scholarly vocation was vitally shaped by the people I knew in 1993 and 1994, when I was a Fulbrighter in Kenya. In this short essay I focus on two dramas: first, Kenyans' efforts to build culturally coherent communities that could reliably act in politics; second, the growth of a confidently assertive Christianity. In both of these contexts, Kenyans' energy, commitment, trauma, faith and fervor vitally shaped my sense of intellectual and moral purpose.

Keywords: Kenya • ethnicity • Christianity

I was a Fulbright U.S. Student fellow in Kenya between 1993 and 1994. I was expert in nothing. I had been to Kenya once before: as a second-year undergraduate, I had spent two months living and working with a Maasai pastor in Narok, in the south-west. At the University of Rochester I had taken classes in African history and politics. But when I arrived in Nairobi late in September 1993 I spoke no African languages nor did I have a deep knowledge of Kenya's politics or history.

Over the course of the year, I was drawn into two great dramas of the day. Kenyans were making strenuous efforts to create culturally cohesive communities, platforms for political mobilization. Pulled along in the tide, I embarked on a long research project into the history of ethnicity in Kenya's public life. At the same time, I was folded into a storyline of world-historical importance: the definition and growth of Africa's Christianity. In both of these contexts Kenyans' energy, commitment, trauma, faith and fervor vitally shaped my sense of vocation.

THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY

The early 1990s were a time of political ferment across Africa: old regimes were falling and new political possibilities were coming to light. Kenya's ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), had been in power since independence in 1963, but its cultural and political power was waning. On 7 July 1990 courageous activists had convened a massive rally at the Kamukunji grounds outside Nairobi. In the violence that followed, policeman killed over twenty protestors. Facing an increasingly mobilized public, President Daniel arap Moi's government was obliged to dismantle the one-party system. In December 1992, Kenyans—for the first time since independence—voted in



a multi-party election. The opposition won a substantial majority of the electorate; but, because the opposition was divided into several parties, KANU returned to power as a minority government. It won a bare 36 percent of the vote.

For many activists Moi's return to the presidency was a failure of organization. In the wake of the election activists set out to define constituencies that were politically reliable and demographically coherent. That is how, in the early 1990s, ethnicity became the framework in which politics worked. President Moi's base of support lay largely in the Rift Valley, among members of the disparate people called 'Kalenjin'. In the run-up to the 1992 elections, Kalenjin militias organized against immigrants,—especially the Kikuyu-speaking people. Since colonial times, the Kikuyu had made their homes in the Rift Valley, on land that they considered to be their own. Over 300,000 people were displaced and 1,500 people were killed in the months preceding the election. In 1993, there was a new wave of attacks. In mid-October Maasai youths in a place called Enoosupukia attacked their Kikuyu neighbors, killing 17 people and forcing 30,000 from their homes. The leader of Maasai political opinion defended these assaults from the floor of Parliament. "Kikuyu have oppressed the Maasai, taken their land and degraded their environment", he told his colleagues. "We had to say enough is enough. I had to lead the Maasai in protecting our rights".

I knew very little about any of these things when, early in November 1993, I set off from Nairobi in the company of my friend, whom I shall call Petero, to visit his family in a Maasai settlement called Olokurto. Petero identified himself as a Maasai person. He had grown up in the Rift Valley, spoke Maa as his first language, and proudly wore the distinctive beaded bracelets of Maasai people about his wrists. His father, though, had been Kikuyu, an immigrant who had come from central Kenya to settle in Maasailand in the 1950s. Over time, Petero's family had invested in the key marker of Maasai prosperity—cattle—and acquired land around Olokurto.

I had been in Olokurto for about two weeks when, one morning, I awoke before dawn to hear the shrill trills of women sounding an alarm. The herd of cattle that Petero and his brothers had grown was stolen during the dark hours of the night. I hastily put on my clothes and, following Petero and a group of a dozen men, set off on the trail of the stolen herd. All of the men were dressed in the distinctive style of Maasai herdsman, with bright red cloaks wrapped about their shoulders. After fruitlessly tailing the herd for some time, we approached a nearby police station to ask for help. The police were disinterested in our predicament, saying that their vehicle lacked fuel. Petero conducted an impromptu fundraiser, and after considerable money had changed hands, the group was on its way, trailing the stolen cattle. I was left behind. My presence among the vigilante group was judged to be dangerous for myself and for my friends. I returned to Petero's home and a few days later I made my way back to Nairobi.

This was a very minor incident in a long catalogue of displacements, murders, and terror in the Rift Valley in those years. Even so, there was much at stake. In Olokurto, on that Sunday morning, boundaries were being drawn and contested. Petero's cattle had been targeted because he and his family were judged, by some, to be outsiders, beyond the fold of Maasai community. Petero's response was to assert his right to recognition and security. The vigilante group that pursued the cattle rustlers that morning was not simply engaged in retribution, they were claiming an entitlement and defending their status as Maasai.

Back in Nairobi I began to conceive a research project about the historical architecture of Kikuyu identity. I was already taking classes in Swahili language and I added Kikuyu language classes to my schedule. I began working in several different archives, searching for materials that could help me trace the changing logics of Kikuyu civil argument. I spent most of my time in the archives of the Presbyterian church, which were located at the top of a very high tower in a Nairobi church. My research was soon focused on the 'Mau Mau' war, which was fought between Kikuyu insurgents, who were called Mau Mau, and the colonial government of Kenya between 1952 and 1960. It was a war of political liberation. It was also a Kikuyu civil war, pitting insurgents against 'loyalists' who refused to accept the moral or political authority of the insurgents. In the years since independence, the memory of the Mau Mau conflict had been suppressed by Kenya's government. Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, had regarded the insurgency as a discreditable and embarrassing episode. His successor, Moi, feared that the memory of Mau Mau would provide a foundation for anti-government solidarity.

As I began my research, opposition activists were bringing Mau Mau back to life. A new organization, the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association (GEMA), was on the front pages of the newspapers. There was a search for heroes, as Kikuyu politicians looked to claim the moral and historical high ground over other of Kenya's people. Some demanded that Dedan Kimathi, the leader of the Mau Mau rebels, should be given a state funeral and honored with a monument commemorating his sacrifice. Kimathi had been hung by British officials in 1954. His body laid in an unmarked grave on the grounds of a government prison. In June 1993, one of the organizers of a leading opposition party launched a soccer tournament called the Dedan Kimathi Memorial Cup. The competition was meant to raise funds for the erection of a monument to the late Kimathi. In October editorialists in Kenya's leading newspaper proposed to create a national holiday to honor the sacrifices of the nation's founding heroes. One writer complained that Kimathi "lies in an unmarked grave amongst murderers, rapists, and other criminals". He wanted government to "erect huge monuments in all towns" to honor Kimathi and other heroes of national liberation.

Cultural and political history were being reworked when, in the last months of 1993 and into 1994, I started interviewing elderly men and women who had been involved in the Mau Mau conflict. Some of the people I interviewed confidently emphasized their heroism and self-sacrifice on behalf of Mau Mau. They had come to see themselves as founders of the Kenyan nation. I was surprised to find, though, that many of my interviewees regarded Mau Mau with skepticism and scorn. For them, the violence and indignity of Kenya's civil war was not easily forgotten. I spent one memorable afternoon near Kijabe, interviewing a formidable man named Parmenas Kiritu. In June 1950, Kiritu, a shopowner, had been the leading witness in one of the first court trials concerning Mau Mau. In his testimony he had stressed the greed and indiscipline of Mau Mau, describing partisans as hungry and wanton young men. When war broke out in 1952, Kiritu had helped to found the Torchbearers Association, a loyalist group that fought against Mau Mau insurgents. Kikuyu people had been "led astray by bad men who had given filthy oaths to women and children", he told a Torchbearers meeting in 1956. In conversation Kiritu told me about a man he knew, a member of his church, who had been forced by Mau Mau partisans to take a blood oath supporting their cause. Kiritu was outraged. He thought the Mau Mau movement was barbarous. It was this conviction that made him a vociferous critic of Mau Mau.

I spent ten years pursuing the questions that Parmenas Kiritu and others inspired. In 2004 I published a book entitled *Creative Writing* about central Kenya's political and intellectual history. I made no mention of Kiritu, but the book was shaped by the lessons I had learned from the emphatic, passionate criticism that he gave of Mau Mau. *Creative Writing* showed that Kikuyu political identity was never settled. The book traced the century-long work by which Kikuyu grammar, orthography, and literature were defined, showing how and why the elements of cultural life were contested. Kikuyu language, I argued, was a forum of democratic argument, not a stable vernacular. It was

a venue where opinionated, diverse, purposeful people could make their voices heard.

The year I spent in Kenya was the starting place for my academic vocation. It was also the time when I formed some of the most enduring, most meaningful friendships in my life.

CHRISTIANITY AND PUBLIC LIFE

The year I spent in Kenya was the starting place for my academic vocation. It was also the time when I formed some of the most enduring, most meaningful friendships in my life. I came to Kenya as a modestly accomplished saxophone player, and within a few weeks of my arrival, I was playing every week in the house band at one of Nairobi's rapidly-growing churches, the Nairobi Chapel. All of the musicians were students at the University of Nairobi, whose campus encir-

pled the church building. We all played, practiced and performed with great conviction and enthusiasm, writing new songs in Swahili and English to suit the needs of a congregation that seemed to be at the very edge of something new.

At the time, I only dimly understood how consequential all of this was. Nairobi's population was growing rapidly. In 1980 there were around 800,000 people living in the city. By 1993, there were over 1.5 million. Many of these newcomers were exceedingly poor, but there was a growing middle class, too, with well-paying jobs in Nairobi's booming economy. They were searching for a Christianity that reflected their confidence, their ambition, their drive. The Chapel had been founded in 1952 to serve British expatriates living in the city. By the mid-1980s, its congregation had virtually disappeared. A new pastor—Oscar Muriu, only 27 years old, was appointed in 1989 to serve the congregation. He had a Masters of Divinity from Nairobi's leading divinity school, and a confident ease as a preacher. By the time I began playing my saxophone at the Nairobi Chapel, there were three services every Sunday, and the halls were packed with upwardly-mobile Nairobians.

In the first part of 1994, I began working with my Chapel friends to record an album that captured some of the music we'd invented, practiced, and rehearsed. This, too, was part of my work as a Fulbrighter. There were rehearsals and recording sessions three or four times a week, usually in the evenings. It was hard work. The album we recorded was called *Ni Wewe Tu*. I can be heard on it playing the saxophone. I also sang bass and arranged some of the choral harmonies. It is one of several albums that the musicians at the Nairobi Chapel recorded in the 1990s. Today the Nairobi Chapel is one of eastern Africa's most successful, most forward-looking Christian churches. There are over a hundred congregations that look to the Chapel as their point of origin. They are located in Kampala, Dar es Salaam, Addis Ababa, Accra, Kigali, and elsewhere in Africa. The Chapel is presently making efforts to launch churches in Europe. It is one of a number of African churches that are shaping the future of Christianity worldwide.

Here again, my sense of scholarly direction was vitally informed by the passions of the Kenyans I came to know. Having been involved in the early life of a confident, growing congregation, I became interested in the longer-term roots of east Africa's Christian evangelicalism. My second book, published in 2012, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent*, told the history of the East African Revival, a Christian conversion movement that began in northern Rwanda and southern Uganda in the mid-1930s and spread through Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, eastern Zaire, and southern Sudan over the course of the 1940s and 1950s. Converts were people of the world. Contemporary advances in eastern Africa's communications infrastructure along with the widespread sale of bicycles, the circulation of newspapers, and

the advancing road network, made it possible for converts to travel across cultural and political frontiers, learn new languages, and read other people's autobiographies. Through media, converts came to see themselves as sharing a trajectory, an exemplary life-course, with people from other places.

The people I knew in the Nairobi Chapel were not revivalists, but their grandparents were. Family histories connected the confident, upwardly mobile people I knew with the cosmopolitan, widely-travelled revivalists of fifty years before. In the 2000s, I did several interviews with the elderly relatives of people who I had come to know as a Fulbrighter. The student who had played drums in the Nairobi Chapel band became one of my closest friends and collaborators. I lived in his family's rural home for months at a time, interviewing elderly men and women in his company. Another friend, the piano player, became a pastor and a theologian, a colleague to whom I now turn for advice and insight. Relationships forged in an earlier time shape the social and intellectual contexts with which I now work.

That is how my scholarly vocation took shape, not as the result of a singular intellectual vision nor as the fruit of careful planning or strategic thinking. My scholarly work was directed by the passions and preoccupations of Kenyans who I came to know and admire. That is the wonderful thing about Fulbright. Americans dealing with the global South usually rest upon the self-inflating notion that we should teach or guide the people with whom we work. With the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, there is no such conceit. The program puts us in political and cultural situations that we cannot pretend to control, and obliges us to act within storylines that we can not pretend to author.

NOTES

1. Kenya's post-colonial history is discussed in Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair* (Yale University Press, 2011). Gabrielle Lynch's *I Say to You: Ethnic Politics and the Kalenjin of Kenya* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) is a fascinating study of Kalenjin identity. My book about Kikuyu cultural history is *Creative Writing: translation, bookkeeping, and the work of imagination in colonial Kenya* (Heinemann, 2004); my book about the East African Revival is *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: a history of dissent* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).



The author and hosts in Olokurto, November 1993

BIOGRAPHY

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A FULBRIGHT EXPERIENCE WITH FACULTY DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND UNIVERSITIES

CELESTE M BRODY

ABSTRACT

Based on the experience of creating programs to facilitate faculty development in Thailand universities as a Senior Fulbright Scholar (2006-2007), the author shares her insights from these efforts to reform higher education. She worked with Burapha University as the administration developed the first teaching and learning center in Thailand. This is a revised version of a paper that appeared in *International Journal of Education in Asia-Pacific*, 1(1), 12-09.

Keywords: Faculty development • collaborative learning • student-centered learning • cultural values



INTRODUCTION

My experience working on faculty development in Thailand occurred as a William J Fulbright Senior Scholar based at Burapha University, a large public university located 85 kilometers southeast of Thailand's capital, Bangkok. In response to Thailand's national educational reform initiative to modernize practices, I was invited to provide workshops for faculty learning as the first step in their plan to establish a "teaching and learning center" at Burapha. It was to become the first of its kind in Thailand—a place to act as a conduit for resources and programs for faculty learning. Over nearly a five-month period, I also conducted programs for faculty at six other universities, engaging more than 500 teachers and administrators throughout Thailand. Faculty participation at these sessions varied greatly in terms of the composition of the audience, e.g., from an all-graduate school faculty to a single nursing department, to only teachers of English. These also varied in length of time from full day stand-alone workshops to a series of three hour bi-weekly sessions over a three-month period. I adapted these to the needs expressed by the inviting faculty and administration.

I have spent my career in higher education working mainly with graduate students in my field of teacher education. I specialized in instructional theory, notably small groupwork. In my last assignment, I worked as an instructional dean at a community college where faculty learning was the centerpiece of its promotion and tenure structure. My history of preparing teachers for the classroom gave me the experience to design and conduct workshops in interactive pedagogies for these faculty across disciplines. As the co-president of the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education,

I was one among a small cadre of international consultants and educators who were committed to bringing expertise to regions of the world where the student-centered learning philosophy was emerging. A Fulbright was a natural step for me to focus specifically on the international arena and to learn from Thailand.

FACTORS SUPPORTING FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AND STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

Since 1999 the Thailand National Education Act stressed the importance of unity in educational policies and diversity in implementation. They were preparing with new learning tools to enter robustly into the free trade markets. They had been slowly experiencing a shift to more inclusive practices, e.g., increased student enrollments, as well as a need to teach in English in more areas of their higher education system as they reached out to serve a more diverse—and international—student population. The growing knowledge base regarding learning and teaching was also creating the impetus for supporting faculty development, a relatively new idea for Thailand's higher education system. These factors were influencing faculty to expand their instructional repertoire to pedagogies beyond the common, rote methods of learning. Faculty and administrators recognized that there are complex challenges and problems to solve in a society that required an educated cadre who can think creatively, work collaboratively and produce new knowledge for a globalized world.

Student-centered learning (SCL) represents a major shift in the way teachers think about and engage in teaching, assessment and even research. The pedagogies associated with SCL fit loosely under the umbrella of active learning: e.g., collaborative/cooperative learning and problem-based learning, and are sometimes called, student-focused learning, or learner-centered learning. They require time for faculty to learn, adjust their curricula and develop new assessment practices. The goals of this effort include greater student achievement and satisfaction, higher academic standards and increased student retention. This shift in orientation to more engaging and complex student learning contexts requires a faculty committed to an ongoing process of their own learning. Structured and planned efforts include all-university as well as discipline-specific activities and processes. Because many higher education institutions have often been slow to change, it is not surprising that faculty development, as these activities are often called, remains a challenging endeavor, even under the best of conditions. Establishing a new teaching and learning center would be a big step in creating and maintaining faculty development efforts as Burapha University planned to do to serve its campus and the greater region.

The teachers I met through my work throughout Thailand were exceptionally hardworking by any standard. Based on my observations, the university structure in Thailand was, not surprisingly, more hierarchical than those I have known in the West. Thai faculty would confide that they felt obligated to accept assignments given by the administration regardless of whether they had sufficient time or support. This, coupled with scholarly requirements and continuous quality control and governance demands, created overworked faculty. These added up to a lack of time, resources, experience and shared language for collaboration, classroom experimentation and reflective practice. Despite these conditions, the faculty I worked with regarded teaching as a call to service and a special way to invest in Thailand's future. And what Thai teachers lacked in pedagogical knowledge and understanding, they compensated with strong commitments to one another, their students and their academic fields.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

When I asked teachers to describe their most difficult teaching situations and students, they often mentioned problems with class attendance, the lack of student-to-student respect, and the failure of students to do their own work. While these aren't unique to Thai classrooms, there are cultural values that influence how Thais interpret "student-centered learning." The Fulbright orientation and periodic briefings helped me enormously to understand how certain Thai values contribute to these problems—and needed to be understood and addressed with sensitivity to this cultural context. For example, in Thai society authority and age are represented through a traditional hierarchy of relationships, and thus there is the deeply held view of the teacher as the unquestioned authority and dispenser of knowledge. This is not unique to Thailand. But for the Thais this follows from their cultural habit called, "kren-gi-jai" students must be careful to never confront anyone senior or higher in authority so as not to make them look bad. Along with this is a desire to avoid shame and save face for oneself, one's friends, and those in positions of power and authority. This value may translate in a classroom and a school to a preponderance of rote learning experiences because students can be respectful towards the teacher yet persistently quiet and actively resistant to even basic question and answer strategies.

Learning in groups can be less effective initially out of the fear of being "muunsai," another deep cultural value. If a student stands out too much as a leader or performer they could risk not "belonging" to the group, meaning that they could be regarded as "being boastful/showing off," causing others to get the feeling of "muunsai." How to involve students in focused discussion and paired activities that do not involve friendship patterns (and often less than satisfactory learning outcomes according to some faculty) seemed formidable to many teachers. These barriers can be overcome with persistence and incremental application of collaborative strategies that focus on

creating new, normative course agreements. Much of the student resistance is not simply “muunsai” but rather students not knowing how to respond to questions because they are not accustomed to doing so. Some teachers expressed conflict between the values of fostering mutual respect and active engagement among students with their need to exercise authority, sanctions and rules.

Through collaborative/cooperative learning strategies I introduced ways to structure student-centered teaching and learning. This encouraged teachers to address the challenges, e.g., getting students to talk and work together on meaningful questions and tasks. Some teachers admitted that they were often overly permissive, erroneously thinking that SCL meant allowing students unbridled choice in what they learn and how they learn it. They raised questions about how a desirable learning environment could foster students to become “culturally” comfortable while gradually developing the capability of expressing viewpoints. Teachers were eager to work together to help each other understand—just as they hoped their own students would. Newer teachers were not always as adept at connecting key course content to the main ideas—the curricular building blocks. Working in collegial teams, often representing the diversity in the workshop, gave these teachers both confidence and practical experience. These simple strategies provided faculty a living model of how to engage students, particularly those who have different English abilities or shyer personalities.

LEARNING IN AND COMMUNICATING IN ENGLISH

It is easy to over-estimate the proficiency of a teacher to learn new content in English, a second or even third, language for many of the Thai teachers. My Vice-President at Burapha University assured me that all the faculty attending the first round of workshops were proficient in English. Within a matter of minutes, however, it was obvious to both of us that having conversational English levels was not sufficient for learning new content, particularly teaching strategies, in a workshop format. I was already prepared for teachers to work collaboratively—to pair-up frequently to summarize and raise questions together. I simply needed to provide more time for them to do that. I learned to assess, prior to the program, the level of English proficiency among the faculty with the administrators I worked with at each university. If there was any concern about that proficiency among their faculty, I requested translators, something I needed only a few times.

My Fulbright work increased my sensitivity to the need to continue supporting teachers and young academics whose first language was other than English, particularly in their professional writing and conference presenting skills. In our professional organization committed to serving international members we instituted processes, such as mini workshops, that helped presenters develop effective, interactive, presentations at the international con-

ferences. We also provided hands-on guidance and editing for the successful writing of proposals for conferences and papers for professional journals. I remain committed to furthering local research and writing on how student-centered learning takes shape in different environments and cultures.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR FACULTY LEARNING

It takes the average teacher three to five years to adapt and apply a new instructional pedagogy as complex as say, collaborative learning, with ease. Added to this is the reality that perhaps 5-10% of faculty can make instructional changes from workshops alone. Faculty development programs need to include theory, demonstrations, time for practice and then feedback about how the adaptation is occurring in the local context. So, it follows that there needs to be support for faculty development activities other than, or along with, workshops.

In the brief time I had with most teachers and administrators, I encouraged them to start by developing a common language around teaching for student-centered learning. This may best happen at the department level where course outcomes are understood, and program goals become coherent. We explored how teacher-to-teacher dialogue and support could provide a beginning point for faculty to gather data and feedback through collaboration among colleagues. Effective programs may include coaching by peers with opportunities for instructors to review and reflect on how they are adjusting the innovation to their situations. But very few Thai teachers had ever been in another instructor's classroom. I recommended starting small by encouraging simple invitations among the workshop participants to visit another teacher's classroom to begin that dialogue. Even this can be difficult to orchestrate given the vicissitudes of instructor schedules and dispositions. Many of the faculty wanted to improve their teaching but were stymied about how best to proceed given so many competing needs. Suggesting opportunities for that kind of exchange became one of my goals with the faculties at the various universities. Particularly in systems with deeply compelling traditional role relationships, the formal approval and regard of the administration is especially critical to any success but many faculty were unsure how to obtain that approval.

LONG-TERM IMPACT OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

The goal of faculty development programs should be to develop local leadership capable of modeling, leading and supporting innovation, and while many administrators tacitly agreed none gave any hints as to their next steps in the process of institutionalizing these reforms perhaps because these ideas were new to them as well. For example, would the university faculty development programs distinguish activities for faculty pre-tenure and post-tenure? What activities would Burapha University's Teaching and Learning Center

wish to support regarding teaching, scholarship and service? And for faculty, how do they find out “what counts?” It simply wasn’t possible for me to see whether these goals had been addressed, in the short time I had with the Thais.

The long-term impact of my Fulbright work in Thailand on faculty development and the promotion of student-centered learning is yet to be felt and precisely measured. Change is slow especially in a Thai higher education system that is forced to operate under unstable governments that frequently change course. However, there are beacons of hope with the establishment of teaching and learning centers in some of Thailand’s best institutions (e.g., Chulalongkorn, Songkla and Chaing Mai) and an increasing number of professional articles appearing on student-centered learning outcomes in the country (e.g., Wattanakasiwich et al, 2021).

REFLECTIONS ON MY WORK WITH THAI FACULTY

Nothing gives me more satisfaction than working with teachers who want to improve their teaching for their students’ learning. It was an honor to be part of a new experiment for Thailand in faculty development; one that could enable the faculty and administrative “dreamers” of this modernizing country to carry on. Despite the cultural differences between us, it was re-assuring to see how open the faculty were about their challenges as well as their successes. I witnessed their confidence in themselves grow as they tried out new teaching strategies. From the stories that have drifted back to me from colleagues still working in Thailand, it is clear that “student-centered learning” is now part of the lexicon of teaching.

We do well when we cultivate a sense of empowerment and playful wonder among the audience we are serving, and when we communicate respect for their lived experiences. We shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously in these endeavors. As the outsider, I had much to learn from those who were working diligently on behalf of their communities and universities and whose ready regard for my expertise was humbling. The teachers’ commitments to one another, their work ethic and their support for their students energized me. In the end, we are all colleagues, and the only measure of our success is that local faculty can work more effectively and with even greater satisfaction with their students.

We do well when we cultivate a sense of empowerment and playful wonder among the audience we are serving, and when we communicate respect for their lived experiences.

NOTES

1. Brody, C. M. ‘Faculty Development in Thai Universities: A Fulbright Scholar’s Lessons’. *International Journal of Education in Asia-Pacific*, 1(1), 12-09.

2. P. Wattanakasiwich et al., 'Investigating Challenges of Student Centered Learning in Thai Higher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic,' 2021 *IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE)*, 2021, pp. 1-7, doi: 10.1109/FIE49875.2021.9637298.



Thai teachers at Burapha University receive an award for completion of a three-month program in faculty development from Dr. Rana Pongreungphant, Vice President, presiding with Fulbright Scholar Celeste Brody.

BIOGRAPHY

Celeste Brody, Ph.D. is formerly the instructional dean at Central Oregon Community College, Bend OR and prior to this held appointments in the field of teacher education at San Jose State University in CA and Lewis & Clark College in Portland, OR. She can be contacted at brody886@gmail.com. She wishes to thank Dr. Ian Smith, associate professor, University of Sydney Australia, and Ms. Porntip Kanjananiyot, former Executive Director, TUSEF, whose insights regarding academic life in Thailand and Thai reform standards, have been most helpful.



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