

## THE 'DETROIT GEOGRAPHICAL EXPEDITION AND INSTITUTE' EXPERIENCE

Ronald J. Horvath

Michigan State University

One of the remarkable aspects of higher education in the 1960's was that never before had such forceful demands for educational reform been confronted by such resistance to change. Universities changed little; the 'better' universities, where the demand for change was longest and most forceful, were surprisingly recalcitrant. One major area of resistance to change was in the reluctance of institutions of higher learning to respond in a major way to the needs of the poor, especially the poor of color. Institutions of higher learning have neither provided access to educational services nor have they provided the community-level research and technical assistance needed by the poor to begin to attack their own problems. These charges, made against higher education in general, are substantiated by the particular experience of a number of professors and black students who attempted to actively involve the major Michigan universities in a program of community research and education for the black residents of Detroit.

There are signs of change within the academy although they are not overwhelming. The literature arguing for change may represent the beginning of a redirection of effort in the social sciences in general, including geography. Bunge (1969), in the tradition of the pamphleteer, spoke of the crisis of our civilization and called for the human exploration of the planet. The emergence of field notes and Antipode during the summer of 1969 was a firm indication that a few geographers wanted to move in another direction. In a more formal article, "Beyond the Exponentials: The Role of Geographers in the Great Transition", Zelinski (1971) brought out another dimension of the crisis, which he labeled the 'growth syndrome'. Zelinski, like Bunge, not only said that we should study 'the problem', but as geographers we should actively do something about it. Zelinski suggests three strategies: (a) the geographer as diagnostician; (b) the geographer as a prophet; and (c) the geographer as an architect of utopia. In somewhat more cautious terms, a paper by Harvey suggests that what is needed is a new kind of normative theory which seeks to optimize social justice, not only economic production and efficiency without regard to justice. (Harvey, 1971)

The major thrust of this article is to provide a brief history of the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (D.G.E.I.). We live with the illusion that what happened in Detroit and East Lansing represents an important experience for a good number of geographers and that it occurred at what may be a major turning point in the history of the profession. The experience relates to the theme of this edition of Antipode in that the major purpose of the D.G.E.I. was to find a way in which geographers could make available educational and planning services to inner city Blacks; it represents an attempt by the black community and some professional geographers to build an institution that would

link the university to the needs of the disadvantaged Blacks in the city of Detroit. The activities of this institution included both community-related research and university-level education. As Bunge is fond of characterizing the need and strength of such a linkage: "People in the university have a sense of scale but no sense, while the members of communities have sense but no sense of scale." In retrospect it seems clear to us that the real dynamic of the D.G.E.I. came from the commerce between these two very different kinds of people.

The D.G.E.I. began in a neighborhood in black Detroit, largely through the interaction between a bright, articulate black highschool 'push-out' named Gwendolyn Warren and a white theoretical geographer named William Bunge. Miss Warren had the abilities of a natural leader; while she organized neighborhood activities she encountered William and Betty Bunge, who had developed a strong commitment to the neighborhood. Over a period of several years the street-wise push-out taught the theoretical scientist some sense and Bunge provided Miss Warren with a sense of scale. These early years have been described at some length elsewhere, and this paper will therefore focus on the period between the summer of 1969 and December, 1970 (Bunge, 1969; Bunge, 1971).

### The Origin of Principals

During the summer of 1969 many of the defining characteristics of the Expedition moved from the vague thoughts and desires of the individuals who founded the organization to the point where many of these thoughts were actually articulated on paper and some put into practice. These ideas came out of the fertile interaction between Bunge and a great number of black people in Detroit. Gwen Warren's role in all these early formulations was critical despite doubts, expressed by Whites and Blacks alike, that Miss Warren was "being used by Bunge and was just mouthing his ideas." Miss Warren was 18, black and a woman; in other words, a kid, a nigger, and a broad. How could such a creature have ideas? By the end of the summer, it was the interaction between Miss Warren and Bunge that very much decided how the Expedition was to function, and upon what principles it would be based.

Bunge wanted to do research for the black community; he believed also that Blacks must be trained to do their own research. Miss Warren and other Blacks wanted an education, but they wanted it to be useful to their community and not merely a means of escaping Detroit. We considered the distinction between research and education to be fundamental to the operation of the Expedition and constantly talked about its educational vs its research arm.

In the summer of 1969 a request was made at the University of Michigan to offer, through the university extension, a course on the geographical aspects of urban planning. The course was approved and several professional geographers,

including some well-known, taught in the first D.G.E.I. course; about forty students actively attended classes. We discovered later that the principles upon which the educational arm of the D.G.E.I. rested were remarkably similar to the concept of rural extension as practiced by land grant colleges such as Michigan State University. Those principles were as follows:

1. The Admission Principle--"Innocent until proven guilty". Those in the Expedition contended that the only test a black student should have to pass to go to college is the ability to pass college courses. The black students amply convinced us that schools in black Detroit prepared them for the factory and little else and that this faulty preparation, plus ethnocentrically-biased entrance exams, based primarily on white middle class experience, prevent all but a miniscule portion of the black community from entering college. Students who pass 45 quarter university credit hours through university extension with a C or better average should be admitted to regular upper class status at the university.

2. Tuition-Free Zone. It is essential that people from communities which have traditionally not been college-oriented come to college as groups, not individually. Systems which raise people above their neighbors, not with them, drive away the best youth and attract the childishly selfish. Thus a tuition-free zone based on income should be established, and people who live outside the zone should be considered on the basis of individual, not group, need.

3. Community Control of the Program. The program is run by the people from the community it serves, who act not as an 'advisory board' but as the total administration. All university personnel take directions from the community people.

4. Case Method of Instruction. Good education is expensive in terms of cost in labor. Instruction for princes, Harvard law students, and plumbers comes essentially through the case method and apprentice-intern relationships with 'old masters'. The students, in small numbers, should be attached to the master and this, not class room instruction, should be the heart of the educational system. Class room instruction should be retained, however, for its regularity and familiarity if nothing else. Cases should be picked by the groups in the city that most need help. High standards will doubtless be associated with this approach because standards naturally rise with an increase in relevance.

5. Volunteer Faculty. A tithe faculty (that is, one which volunteers 10 percent of his time) should provide the teaching and expertise requirements of the Expedition. This will not only provide financial underpinning, but also establishes the tone of the faculty. Experts will bring in skills -- that is, the ability to solve real community problems -- and a skilled faculty member must be modest about everything except his true knowledge, and about this he must be assertative.

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6. Best Campus Facilities. Extension students are not second-class students. They must not get left-over class rooms and worn-out equipment.

The idea then was that any black person could walk in off the street, take 45 hours of university credit courses free of charge, and then transfer with sophomore status to any Michigan university if he could do C or better work. Students came in just like that; factory workers, mothers, grandfathers and their grandsons, pimps, prostitutes, and pushers literally came off the street and took urban geography, introduction to sociology, philosophy, natural science, algebra, statistics and probability, English composition, and political science. Although not one black student paid tuition, all teachers were volunteers, the facilities were regular university facilities, the case method was sometimes used, and the community was always involved in all decisions (and at the end very much in control), the principles outlined above were never fully realized in the program with the possible exception of the three weeks before Christmas of 1969.

### An Institutional Peak Experience

The fall of 1969 represents the peak experience for the D.G.E.I. The psychologist Maslow uses the term "peak experience" roughly to refer to some event in which an individual is involved which is so intense that the individual comes to define himself in relationship to the peak experience. Though the history of the D.G.E.I. has been one of endemic crises, with its members experiencing alternative frenzied excitement and depression, no period was more intense than the three weeks preceding Christmas of 1969. It was during this period that education and research merged, and white professors and students and black community members came together in an organic whole for the purpose of producing a school decentralization plan for the city of Detroit. This plan was called "the most sophisticated plan to ever come out of the black community of Detroit" by the Detroit Free Press. To place this event in context however, we must relate how D.G.E.I. moved to Michigan State University.

The relationship between the University of Michigan and the D.G.E.I. was always tenuous. Though the redistribution of power was the real issue, the discussion between D.G.E.I. and U of M was over matters such as tuition fees, when course descriptions would be turned in, and other matters related to the proper way in which one communicates with a large university bureaucracy. The black students would say, "We're in pain, we hurt. Rats bother us at night when we go home after hearing a brilliant lecture by Professor \_\_\_\_\_, whatever his name is, you know, the dude who kept telling us how he just flew in from Chicago to tell us about some theory about land rent and land use." The representatives of the university would say, "But we have procedures, rules by which we must live, which, if followed, will be to our mutual benefit." "But your rules are keeping us out." And the university people would reply, "There

are good men, with good intentions, sympathetic and concerned about your dilemma behind those rules." "What's a dilemma?" whispers one black student to another. "That's what white folks call gettin' bothered by rats in your bed."

On the final night of the course, a large number of people were invited to hear the research papers prepared by the students. The formal part of the evening consisted of the professor relating how moved he was by being involved in the teaching of the course, some of the students presenting papers, and others rapping on the audience on the need to continue the program. The evening adjourned to a discussion of the way in which the program might be continued, but turned into a hostile exchange, which represented the end of Ann Arbor's relationship with the Expedition. We came to realize that university people who could not tolerate these kinds of sessions were also unfit to teach in the inner city.

Two Michigan State University faculty attending that final session became committed to an attempt to get their university to sponsor the program. In the next few weeks they succeeded in convincing university officials to establish what the university named the 'Michigan State University Inner City Experimental Program' with \$10,000 of seed money from the Center for Urban Affairs. Three courses were offered during the fall quarter.

Two of these courses--Cartography and Geographical Aspects of Urban Planning--were the context in which were developed the skills and concepts which culminated in producing field notes II, "A Report to the Parents of Detroit on School Decentralization," (1970). Actually, the first five or six weeks of the course appeared to be a bust: the classes were not going well, if attendance was any indication. The material covered just did not seem terribly important to the students. Before the request came in to do the decentralization study, a lot of effort had to be spent shoring up the morale of the students, who had real difficulties just showing up to even free classes--some came hungry, others couldn't afford bus fare, one student had been living in a car for five weeks. Learning how to make a clean line, lay a zip-a-tone pattern, or design a map with the right combination of point, area, and line symbols did not seem to be critical knowledge to members of a survival culture. But the school decentralization study made sense. The next three weeks both saved and came to define the potential of the Expedition.

field notes II should be read to appreciate the nature of the achievement. Briefly, after the passage of Senate Bill 635, ordering a redistricting of the educational districts of the city of Detroit, State Senator Coleman Young and John Watson, Director of the West Central Organization, asked the D.G.E.I. for technical assistance in the analysis of the various redistricting possibilities. Collecting data, drafting maps, and writing a report then became the final project in the two geography courses offered. Many geographers also participated as technical support in various aspects of the project.

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The school decentralization study was significant from at least three points of view: the black community of Detroit, the geography profession, and the D.G.E.I. itself. The decentralization study placed in the hands of the leaders of the black community of Detroit a technical study so well done that even the Board of Education was forced to respond. The Board of Education had, with the aid of a \$350,000 Ford Foundation grant, conducted its own study and released at one time or another eight plans, four of which were found illegal after subsequent study by D.G.E.I. The following table compares the plan adopted by the Northwest Community Organization (the black organization which adopted the D.G.E.I.'s plan and analysis) with that proposed by the Detroit Board of Education:

Table I

### Percentage of Children Under Black and White Control

	Northwest Community Organization Plan	Detroit Board of Education Plan
% black children under black control	80.0	39.4
% black children under white control	20.0	60.6
% white children under black control	20.5	4.2
% white children under white control	79.5	95.8

Source: field notes, discussion paper 2, 1970, p. 29.

Thus, for \$350,000 the Detroit Board of Education produced what was close to the legal maximum number of Blacks under white voter control, while the D.G.E.I., for approximately \$200, produced a plan which placed the same number of Whites under black voter control as Blacks under white control, while still allowing both Blacks and Whites to control the vast majority of their own schools.

For the professional geographer the use of geographical methods for socially just, rather than economically efficient, ends is noteworthy. Social justice, as Harvey points out, is a key issue with which our theories must be concerned (Harvey, 1971), and the school decentralization study was a milestone in the geographic literature in that it attempted to use geographical methods to determine the degree to which various plans were socially just. It also attempted to go beyond mere analysis to a plan which maximized justice for two major groups involved in conflict.

To D.G.E.I., this report demonstrated that the principles upon which the Expedition rested were not only sound but powerful. It was unfortunate that this experience was not more widely shared because the black students and white professors who took or taught classes in the Expedition after this peak experience never fully saw the principles of D.G.E.I. in operation.

### Evolution of a Campus Base

Beginning with the winter of 1970, the black leaders of the D.G.E.I. moved to Michigan State University, as Gwen Warren, Robert Ward, Beverly Edwards, and Dwight Ferguson enrolled as full-time students. Sue Cozzens and Bunge remained in Detroit. The educational arm of the program continued to expand exponentially while the research activities involving black students all but ceased. Table 2 shows that the number of courses taught in the Expedition just about doubled each quarter after the first course until, in the spring of 1970, eleven courses were being offered in ten different departments. Student enrollment went from 40 at the beginning of the program to approximately 475 during the Spring of 1970.

In many ways rapid growth was only an illusory indicator of success, because the Expedition actually began to come apart as soon as the black leaders of the program moved to the MSU campus. True, the growth of the program was in part due to the black students' presence; in the eyes of the university they added substantially more legitimacy to the program. But there was no way for the black students to maintain connections with the community in Detroit, do their school work, and deal with the Michigan State University faculty and bureaucracy.

The black leaders heroically tried to maintain close contact with the program in Detroit (they drove the 75 miles between East Lansing and Detroit often five times a week and put over 20,000 miles on their car in six months), but this placed real strain on the entire program. At first it was exciting and the administration made few demands of them, but as time passed they had to spend more and more time reassuring professors and administrators of the legitimacy of what was being done. Being on alien turf influenced attitudes: in East Lansing the administrators and faculty seemed to know "what was best" for Blacks in Detroit but, when the tables were turned and these same people had to drive to Detroit, they were less sure and spent a lot more time listening. (Many would not go to Detroit at all.) The black leadership should have remained in Detroit: which meant either that the leadership had to be transferred to people just coming up in the program, or that those who led should have remained behind and maintained contacts in the community. In the final analysis, dealing with university bureaucracies must take second place to community needs.

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Table 2

The Growth of the Educational Arm of the D.G.E.I.

Academic Quarter	Number of Courses Offered	Number of Academic Departments Involved	Number of Student Enrollment <sup>3</sup>	Tithed Faculty Contributions <sup>2</sup>	Outside Funds
Summer 69	1	1	40	\$ 1,000	\$ 5,000
Fall 69	3	2	25	3,000	400
Winter 70	6	4	238	6,300	9,600 <sup>1</sup>
Spring 70	11	10	470	11,400	21,000 <sup>1</sup>
Summer 70	10	8	300	10,000	10,000 <sup>1</sup>
Fall 70	0	0	0	0	0
Total	31	10	---	\$ 31,700	\$ 46,000

<sup>1</sup>Center for Urban Affairs, Michigan State University, funds.

<sup>2</sup>These figures are only approximate--tidy records were never one of our achievements.

<sup>3</sup>These figures represent student enrollments, not different individuals.

For brevity, the experience of the D.G.E.I. at MSU might best be summarized with reference to the six principles identified earlier. The D.G.E.I. classes were taught in Wayne State University classrooms. The black students were satisfied with these facilities. This principle came about after some professors suggested that classes be held in churches or high school classrooms in Detroit, which the black students rejected.



A tuition-free zone in Detroit was necessarily to be created through a consortium of Michigan universities. Much to the credit of the MSU administrators a meeting of the presidents of all Michigan universities was called during June of 1970; all universities sent either presidents or their representatives. We think the MSU administrators saw that meeting as really significant in that, if support for the D.G.E.I. came from other universities, then MSU was prepared to increase its commitment to the program. Despite what appeared to be a favorable reaction from the meeting, no support came from other institutions. The D.G.E.I. did not have the resources to do the high-level politicking necessary to bring other universities along. The relationship between D.G.E.I. and MSU rapidly deteriorated after other universities failed to give support. Nonetheless, no black student paid tuition for any of the 31 classes.

The case method of teaching was used in several courses, and its success was directly related to the amount of experience the professor had had with inner-city conditions. The decentralization study was the best example of a collective effort, but many fine individual studies were also conducted. It takes a number of years of experience with American inner-city problems before a professor can use the case method with the success that Bunge had. Also Bunge lived in, and cared about, the region he was using the case method on; even as many as five years of teaching experience might be insufficient for the professor who was willing only to parachute in three hours a week from an outlying university. Sometimes, the invigorating experience of teaching in Detroit profited the professor more than the students. One philosophy professor had never had such a vigorous response to Plato's Republic. Teaching natural science to people living in a survival culture was no academic exercise; again the students desperately wanted to learn. Black people brought real experiences to the classroom, and superior teachers could build and relate the principles of science to their everyday problems and concerns.

Finding a sufficient number of acceptable volunteer faculty was not a serious problem, certainly never a factor limiting the success of the program. During the spring of 1970 over 50 faculty members wanted to teach but funds were available for only eleven courses. An explanation of the budgetary bases of the educational arm of the expedition is therefore in order.

The major problem came from the need for the university to pay itself more than it cost itself to run courses through university extension. The D.G.E.I. had free teachers (they turned their salaries back to pay the students' tuition), free administration (the black students did all of this), and free classrooms. Only the processing of grades and record-keeping was required of the university. However, university officials insisted that either the off-campus rate of \$21 per credit hour or the on-campus rate of \$13 per credit hour be paid (which was either four or two and one-half times what it really cost the university to teach a course with 40 students).

Behind all of the bureaucratic, rhetoric-laden excuses given for not being willing to alter the fee structure, there are, no doubt, some fundamental truths about the operation of any large bureaucracy. Any reduction in fees would reduce the money available; in the university world, including a state-supported institution like MSU, as in the business world, success is measured in terms of growth, and growth is measured in terms of money and not education dispensed.

Another difficulty is that certain student-dollar ratios had, for years, been carefully nursed, argued, and defended before the State Legislature. When the university begins to bring in great numbers of students inexpensively, administrators fear that word will get back to the legislature that a program is being run below cost. The entire student-cost ratios are then questioned. It becomes politically expedient to destroy an innovative program rather than reduce the price of education.

### Community Control

Community control is not easily or briefly discussed, as a flood of literature clearly shows. The D.G.E.I. experience leads me to define community control rather strictly: a program controlled by the community is one in which the locus of decision-making is the community and external to the university. University personnel, regardless of color and commitment to the community, must play only an advisory role to such programs. The reasoning for this definition comes out of an understanding of the difference between black communities and the nature of the contemporary university.

Fein provides a framework within which differences between the university and the black community can be analyzed and which helps explain why intellectuals have difficulty with the concept of community control. (Fein, 1970) Fein argues that the liberal intellectual, who he equates with the dominant ethos in the university today, is committed to universalism over particularism, Gesellschaft (society) over Gemeinschaft (community), rationalistic bureaucracy over tradition, and individualistic organization over organic organization. Given this commitment, the modern university finds itself at loggerheads with the concept of community control with its associated commitment to particularism, i.e., the black community has its own set of values, and these values are legitimate. Fein's analysis does not go far enough, for it does not deal with the structural features of American society which lie behind this ideological perspective; yet looking at ideological differences alone shows why both community control and the question of standards are major issues which, in trying to deal with Michigan State University, the D.G.E.I. came up against.

The D.G.E.I. program came closer to being a program controlled by minority people than any other program that I am aware of at MSU. During the first two quarters of its operation, D.G.E.I. was community-controlled in the sense

that people still living in Detroit participated in a major way in decision-making. Even in that period, the lack of knowledge of how to deal with a large university made it necessary to rely upon white professors to make a large share of the decisions. As the leaders learned how to deal with the university machinery, black students took over an increasing and, to many people at MSU, a shocking number of decisions. The trick that was run on us at MSU was interesting: the white faculty and administrators at MSU were told that the professors in D.G.E.I. were irresponsible in that we did not run the program according to university procedures. The truth was we were not running the program. The black students on campus, by contrast, were told that D.G.E.I. was a white-run organization rather than a community-administered program.

These points aside, according to the definition given for community control, the fact that the black students were living in East Lansing would disqualify the program as being truly under community control. We were working to remedy that situation when the university decided to turn against the program.

The principle of high standards was never studied sufficiently by any of the D.G.E.I. faculty; in fact, it was one of the questions that we were going to look into during the second year. Most of the faculty felt that their course was equivalent to the ones that were taught at MSU, although some felt that the student performance in many of the classes was actually higher than at MSU. Some were uncertain. 'Standards,' like community control, collides with the ethos of universalism. In a community-controlled program, the priorities and standards are to be set up in large part by the community. Evaluation of the performance of one culture by the standards of another which are viewed as universal becomes meaningless at worst, and difficult at best.

### The End of the Affair

By the fall of 1970, MSU's involvement with D.G.E.I. was all but over. During that period, too, a flurry of publicity appeared in local papers monitoring the growing bitterness of all parties involved. Charges and counter-charges surfaced. Beneath the public dimension was an unending series of meetings with all interested groups on campus: black student organizations, black administrators, administrators of all levels, and faculty members. Public demonstrations were also held. The life of one member of the Expedition was publicly threatened. It was a period of bitterness for all. During what turned out to be the final meeting between the D.G.E.I. and MSU, the university administration presented the terms under which the program had to operate: (1), no tithed faculty would be allowed; (2), the university would handle the administration of the program through continuing education; (3), financial support of the program could not be guaranteed; (4), money enough for a total of approximately ten courses for the remainder of the academic year (fall, winter, and spring quarters). Gwen Warren decided that

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she could not accept the terms offered by the university which then terminated the relationship between MSU and the D.G.E.I.

It is ironic that a place like MSU, where the concept of the land grant college was pioneered (although on the idea of service to rural Michigan,) rejected a program based on the same ideas when it came to servicing the poor of urban Michigan. But then, Michigan State University is to be congratulated for going as far as it did: the University of Michigan and Wayne State University would not get involved with the program to the same extent.

As the sense of frustration and bitterness begins to fade, many of us are still haunted by the question posed by Gwen Warren at the final public meeting of the D.G.E.I. on October 9: "The question is whether or not this capitalistic system can deal with thousands of educated black people. . . .Who's going to man the factories and be the sexual slaves if we all get Ph.D.'s?"

Exploring for the antipode of establishment geography is not easy. Bunge was incorrect when he said, "Armchair geographers of the world arise; you have nothing to lose but your middle-aged flab!" for Bunge is going on his fifth year without a university position (he has had a one-year part-time appointment during that entire time). Clark Akatiff is without house or job in California and he, his wife, and four children are on welfare. Of course, many others who have advocated such unpopular points of view, including that the Vietnam war is wrong or America is a racist society, have been fired, denied promotions, been refused admittance to graduate school, etc.. Dealing with the poor and powerless transforms the advocate into a marginal man--apart from both the community he attempts to serve and the one he tries to educate. Recall what the D.G.E.I. tried to do: form a link between the intellectual resources of the university and the needs of the poor and powerless in the inner-city. From the perspective of one individual who tried to link up the two systems I can say that I am impressed with how very different the two systems are and how much each needs the other.

Geographers like maps to help themselves and others figure where things are at. Perhaps Eichenbaum and Shaw's chart can help a number of us determine where we are at individually and where we seem to be heading.

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POSTSCRIPT ON THE DETROIT GEOGRAPHICAL EXPEDITION

Robert Colenutt  
Syracuse University

In spite of the events at Michigan State University, the Society for Human Exploration and the ideas it represents are very much alive. Geographical expeditions have been organized in Detroit each summer since 1969. The purpose of these expeditions is to work with community groups on local research problems and to offer free courses on geography and geographic skills to community people.

The most recent expedition took place in the Trumbull community of Detroit in the summer of 1971. Research was conducted on problems of housing, police protection, and health services; in addition, the expedition became involved (as an advocate for the community) in a locational conflict over the use of local recreation space. At the same time, a free six week course in community planning was given by expedition members. Further information on the Trumbull Community can be found in Society for Human Exploration Field Notes No--4- The Trumbull Community, to be published in January, 1972.

Further expeditions are planned. In the summer of 1972, there will be an expedition in London, England (contact Robert Colenutt at Syracuse University for details) and probably another in Montreal (organized by Marcel Belanger of the University of Montreal). The ideas that were incorporated in the important Michigan State University experiment are still spreading. We should not let the turn of events at Michigan State slow down this diffusion.