During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, cities have been touted as epicenters for creativity and innovation, magnets for the coveted millennial workforce, and optimal retirement locations for privileged retirees who desire easy access to arts and culture as well as walkability. Richard Florida’s recipe for postindustrial urban success—technology, tolerance, and talent to attract the “creative class”—inspired ideas about the future growth and potential of urban America.\(^1\) Large and midsize cities have competed for “most livable,” “best arts scene,” and “healthiest” rankings. They have also dealt with long-standing localized challenges, including poverty, affordable housing, segregated schools, and gentrification. At the same time, colleges and universities located in urban areas have leveraged their locales to appeal to students while also taking a more active role in addressing local challenges. Institutions of higher education across the country have embraced civic engagement, supporting academically grounded community service, community-based learning courses tying course content to community-identified needs, and even large-scale university-community collaborations such as lab schools, downtown centers, and innovation hubs. As colleges and universities strive to matter in the places where they are located, a grounding in urban hist-
ory has emerged as an important framework for helping situate a wide-range of campus-community collaborations.

This volume highlights how the academy, in general, and urban history, in particular, can play a significant role in fostering these connections. Urban historians have highlighted the important role of urban universities as place-based anchor institutions with extraordinary resources that can and should help contribute to collaboratively addressing the most pressing issues facing cities and their communities through the lens of the past. Cities serve as a crucible for analyzing macrolevel processes, such as changes in the nature of work, concentrations of capital, and government disinvestment in the public realm. Studying people’s interactions in, engagement with, and conflict over urban spaces provides scholars of the city with tools for examining the relationship both between the built environment and culture and between large-scale social processes and daily lived experience. At the same time, delving into the past provides opportunities for urban historians to connect the history of urban policy to present-day practices, fostering publicly engaged scholarship that brings campus and community together to promote vibrant urban futures. By developing teaching, research, and institutional strategies that directly link academic scholarship to public practice and civic engagement, universities can help fulfill their mandate to produce the next generation of citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and values to be effective civic leaders.

The stated purpose of higher education to advance democracy and citizenship and the additional responsibility of urban universities to contribute locally has deep roots. A century ago, philosopher and educator John Dewey laid the foundation for understanding the valuable role all citizens could play in urban community problem-solving. Dewey believed in the intimate connections between the search for knowledge, the process of social engagement in urban communities, and deliberative democracy. For Dewey, knowledge and truth were not contained within the walls of the university. The processes of shaping knowledge and building community would be dynamic and dialogic; they would inform one another and unravel in new and spontaneous ways.² He wrote, “Democracy is freedom. If truth is at the bottom of things, freedom means giving truth a chance to show itself, a chance to well up from the depths.”³ All citizens, according to Dewey, had both
a right and a responsibility to be part of this process. So-called experts, according to Dewey, needed to recognize their role as members of the public, applying their specialized knowledge in the service of the public good. That way, a variety of models of expertise, from localized knowledge to large-scale solutions for urban problem-solving, could be brought to bear equally in confronting urban challenges.4

The gap between Dewey’s ideal and the complex role higher education institutions have played within their host cities has at times widened and narrowed. The contradictions are many: higher education has both contributed to knowledge creation, reciprocal partnerships, community development, and access programs for addressing the pressing needs of cities and residents and leveraged power to exploit the human, intellectual, and real estate assets of the communities in which they are located. During the twentieth century, universities benefited from government-sanctioned policies ranging from urban renewal to large tax breaks to fuel their growth and expansion, often at the expense of low-income and Black and Brown neighbors and neighborhoods. Even before federal policies began influencing university land use practices in urban areas, institutions of higher education often relied on more informal and market-based practices to shape their neighborhoods. At the time of its founding in the late nineteenth century, the University of Chicago sought to create a buffer between the campus and the surrounding community by buying up adjacent real estate. The university razed tenements and in their place built modern apartment buildings that could be rented to faculty, students, and professionals in the area. During and after World War I, as the Great Migration brought more Black Southerners to Chicago and other Northern cities, universities affected by these demographic shifts often were party to restrictive covenants that forbade renting or selling properties to Black people. The Chicago Defender, the leading Black newspaper in the city, referred to restrictive covenants as “the University of Chicago Agreement to get rid of Negroes.”5

From the beginning of the federal government’s urban renewal program in 1949, and its expansion and university-focused Section 112 introduced in 1959 and ending in 1964, 120 colleges and universities received funds to acquire land, demolish or rehabilitate buildings, and/or relocate occupants of buildings located in the vicinity of the project site.6 Columbia University united with other institutions
in Morningside Heights to stop “the encroachment of Harlem” by razing tenements occupied mostly by African Americans and Puerto Ricans and replacing them with middle-income cooperative apartments through a slum-clearance project. In response to protests from local community organizations about Columbia’s continued expansion, Jacques Barzun, the university’s provost, argued that if its urban renewal plans were blocked, Columbia would not be able to continue to produce the leaders who would serve the city and the nation in the future. Leveraging federal funds received through an amendment in the 1959 Housing Act, Fordham University purchased three hundred twenty thousand square feet in a low-income neighborhood near Central Park in which to expand. Despite protests and court challenges by homeowners, tenants, and small business owners slated to be displaced by the project, the Lincoln Center, new Fordham law school, and other university buildings opened in 1961.

In the later decades of the twentieth century, criticism intensified over expanding campuses, public universities’ exemption from paying real estate taxes, and local research projects based on “surveying local residents constantly”—often Black and Brown people living in lower-income communities—without producing results that benefited those who were surveyed. The power, privilege, and resources of higher education cut both ways for cities, producing new knowledge, generating economic and community development, and serving as major employers while also extracting data, land, and taxes from surrounding communities. These examples show the often antagonistic relationship between urban universities and their cities, and the various ways in which university administrators have justified their antidemocratic practices by pointing to their supposed role in promoting the public good.

Engaging with the complex history of cities alongside college and universities’ roles as potent players in shaping and being shaped by their locales requires an honest reckoning with higher education’s misuse of power and missteps. More recently, educators across the country have called for stronger connections between universities and their communities in addressing pressing societal concerns. Nancy Cantor, chancellor at Rutgers University–Newark, has championed the role of universities as a public good. “We educate the next generation of leaders,” she explains. “We address important societal issues with discoveries that change our world. We preserve our cultural past
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while laying the groundwork for the future. And we experiment with ways of building community.”¹² This last idea reflects the vision of numerous university leaders who have called for stronger ties between universities and their communities, whereby scholars, students, activists, and residents can join together in the act of collaborative knowledge building, problem-solving, and creativity. This process recognizes that different groups bring different kinds of expertise, and all have a vital role to play in fostering connections between people and across cultures. By engaging more directly and intentionally with communities, universities not only bring skills and resources to the public but also transform the process of knowledge production itself by fostering a symbiotic relationship with people and groups outside of the confines of the campus. This act of “collaborative co-creation,” as historian David Scobey calls it, places knowledge building and culture making at the heart of democratic public life, thereby reconnecting the university with its publics.¹³

From Los Angeles to St. Louis, Richmond to Miami, colleges and universities are working to intentionally connect to and build capacity in the cities where they are located. Each chapter in Engaging Place, Engaging Practices highlights how these projects provide opportunities to present multiple components of a city’s history to give context and promote a sense of cultural belonging. These projects help forge civic identity, shared meaning, and respect for groups that have come before while allowing new groups to feel part of a city’s history by reconnecting fragments of its past to its present and future. These links to the past, and the process of including multiple voices and community knowledge within the narrative of place, can help forge a stronger sense of place attachment and civic identity at a time when transience and disengagement define much of our urban culture.

In the first chapter, Alexandra Byrum and Amy L. Howard of the University of Richmond (UR) take up the theme of historical injustice and its role in shaping present-day community development concerns in “Historicizing Richmond’s Future: UR Downtown and the Geography of Community Engagement.” This chapter explores the possibilities and challenges of campus-community connectivity rooted in the urban history of an emerging Southern city. The authors reflect on UR Downtown as part of both the burgeoning downtown renaissance and the university’s commitment to civic engagement. What
does it mean for a liberal arts college to open a downtown hub? What possibilities for learning and community impact emerge? What obstacles exist and how can they be overcome? And, what role does the history of the city and its current challenges play in shaping UR Downtown and its programs? After reflecting on a decade of work to start and sustain the space and programming, the authors provide a practical guide to the challenges and possibilities of the work.

In Chapter 2, “Toward Creating the Democratic, Engaged Urban University: Penn’s Partnership with West Philadelphia as an Experiment in Progress,” University of Pennsylvania colleagues Ira Harkavy, Rita A. Hodges, John L. Puckett, and Joann Weeks examine what role, if any, an urban university should play in addressing historic and systemic injustices in place? What challenges must universities overcome to engage meaningfully in this work? This chapter argues for the development of “truly engaged universities” that embrace the comprehensive and sustained involvement of all aspects of the university with the community. By focusing on democratic practices that value the expertise “on the ground” and working with communities in respectful and collaborative ways, urban universities, like Penn, can address both the historic institutional harm inflicted on neighboring areas and the inequities of extreme poverty, persistent deprivation, and pernicious racism afflicting communities in the shadows of powerful and relatively wealthy urban universities.

J. Mark Souther, from Cleveland State University, examines how digital humanities has emerged as an important methodology for connecting history to its publics. In Chapter 3, “Digital Storytelling and University-Based Community Engagement in Cleveland,” he reflects on his experience in modeling university-based community engagement through digital public history. The chapter highlights the work of the Center for Public History + Digital Humanities at Cleveland State University by focusing on how the Cleveland Historical web and app project, along with the Cleveland Voices oral history initiative, created opportunities for location-based digital storytelling that have made the city a humanities-based, public-facing learning laboratory. The author shares examples of student-centered and public-facing outcomes associated with these projects and presents case studies of how these projects have contributed to placemaking and community-development initiatives in a Cleveland neighborhood. The chapter also
addresses the implications of deploying digital history to construct bridges between traditional scholarly practice and the imperative of public engagement.

Robin F. Bachin of the University of Miami continues the theme of digital history and public practice in Chapter 4, “Mapping Miami: Affordable Housing, Equitable Community Development, and Grassroots Engagement in South Florida.” This chapter addresses the variety of initiatives in affordable housing, land use, and placemaking that have brought together University of Miami faculty and students with local planners, architects, policy makers, advocacy groups, and community organizers in Miami. It examines the roles that digital mapping tools, planning history, and grassroots activism are playing in efforts to promote urban equity and resilience. It also focuses on the impact that cross-sector collaboration between campuses and community organizations can have in using both innovative technological tools and grassroots organizing to shape community development. A central theme of the chapter is the significant role racial displacement has played in shaping housing access and land use patterns in Miami over the past century. The chapter explores how local residents and activists have used oral history, historic preservation, and archival documentation to tell their stories. It highlights how campus-community partnerships have carved out new opportunities for resident engagement in the planning process, and how communities are using data-driven solutions along with historical narratives to shape the future of urban growth and resilience in their neighborhoods.

University of Missouri–St. Louis history professor Andrew Hurley links urban and environmental history in Chapter 5, “Engaging Neighborhoods in Climate Change Planning with Public History.” This chapter highlights the powerful role that historical understanding plays in building community resilience in the face of climate change and extreme weather events. If current projections of planetary-scale climate change come to pass, urban areas in the United States and throughout the world will face unprecedented threats to their viability. Typically, planning related to climate change revolves around emergency preparedness at the scale of counties and municipalities. Yet, this chapter shows there is much that grassroots organizations can do to build resilience capacity at the scale of neighborhoods. Low-income urban districts present a special challenge due to the vulnerability of
populations and the numerous issues that compete with climate change for the attention of residents. The author showcases how the students and faculty at the University of Missouri–St. Louis partnered with inner-city civic, environmental, and religious organizations to identify climate-related liabilities and assets through the production of local landscape histories and citizen-generated photo narrations about meaningful places. The chapter concludes with a call for public historians to intercede more adventurously in arenas of policy and planning not normally associated with historical or humanities inquiries.

In Chapter 6, Catherine Gudis from the University of California, Riverside, explores the ways in which critical tourism and embodied geographies can provide frameworks for examining and interpreting cultural landscapes, in particular, the historical, socioeconomic, and environmental issues related to urban infrastructure in Southern California. “Critical Tourism and Embodied Geographies: Touring Southern California with the Bureau of Goods Transport” takes as a primary case study the logistics industry in the Inland Empire and a tour and guidebook produced by the Bureau of Goods Transport focused on heritage and historic sites related to the goods movement industry. The bureau was developed out of a series of projects by the University of California, Riverside, faculty and students that aimed to bridge social science research and artistic practice, community engagement and broad-based outreach. The bureau’s Goods Movement Industry Tour derived from exploring models for alternative pedagogy, social engagement, and modes of research and knowledge production that exceed the traditional boundaries of the university. It is rooted in research developed through work with local union organizers, activists, and business leaders exploring the economic, sociopolitical, and environmental effects of moving goods through a congested, demographically diverse, and environmentally rich region. Yet, by reframing and representing this research through practices of critical tourism and embodied geography, the bureau’s tour poses additional questions regarding the university and civic engagement. Here are some central questions: How can we create spaces for nontraditional learning and for participatory site-based engagement? How might we employ urban interventions and touristic modes of exploration as entertaining and engaging means of building constituencies for social change? And,
might such critical pedagogical practices also help bridge divides between scholars, the general public, and industry as well as effect policy change?

Individually these case studies highlight a range of methods and modes for advancing collaborative campus-community partnerships rooted in a clear-eyed understanding of urban history and the power differential between urban campuses and their communities. Collectively, the successes and challenges of each study demonstrate the possibilities for colleges and universities to make good on their stated democratic purpose as well as the need for continued work to center and value community-engaged work within the academy and to fully embrace community-based knowledge as a critical factor in promoting the health and thriving of cities. The embrace of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and co-creation between communities and colleges and universities is even more urgent as the nation and world grapple with the death, disruption, and economic decline wrought by COVID-19. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both cities and their universities has called into question the future of both. Will city dwellers move back to urban centers after virtual meetings and remote work from small suburbs, beach towns, and mountain lodges became so widespread? Will people return to crowded theaters, museums, restaurants, and bars that have given cities their historic vitality? And can universities continue to thrive as anchor institutions in cities when Zoom classes and asynchronous learning can deliver content more efficiently and inexpensively? Partly what the pandemic has shown is that we need to rethink what cities are, whom they serve, and how they can be made more inclusive and just. As Farhad Manjoo argues, “What’s important here aren’t the specific ideas, but the larger push for civic revitalization. The coronavirus does not have to kill cities—just our old idea of what cities were, how they worked, and who they were for.”

As higher education and cities nationwide and globally grapple with the serious social, economic, cultural, environmental, and political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, engaging place through engaging practices in campus-community collaborations has become even more important. Joining the educational and public purpose of higher education with community-based knowledge and an understanding of historical context can contribute to a more equitable, just, and sustainable future.
NOTES

1. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). In subsequent books, including *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005) and *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class—And What We Can Do about It* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), Florida addressed the debate and criticism that arose after publication of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, especially his failure in the original book to address the impact that appealing to “creatives” to remake cities would have in exacerbating urban inequality, promoting gentrification, and making cities more unaffordable.


9. Diner, *Universities and Their Cities*, 58. As Diner notes, Fordham’s president at the time had ties to New York City’s powerful planner, Robert Moses. The federal government provided two-thirds of the funding for the project, which included Lincoln Center.

10. Comment from a community partner and leader of a nonprofit in Richmond, Virginia, who has regularly worked with Virginia Commonwealth and University of Richmond undergraduate and graduate students over the past twenty years.

11. See Davarian L. Baldwin, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021) for a discus-
sion of the inequitable relationships that continue to exist between cities and urban universities and the ways in which scholars, students, and community organizers are forging alliances that have the potential to transform both campus and community.

