



# **People *Can*: The Geographer as Anti-Expert**

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When Jim Blaut died in 2000, he left behind a body of scholarship extraordinarily impressive in the scope of its topics, the depth of its theoretical analysis, and its unwavering commitment to liberation struggles and social justice.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, there are Blaut's critiques of colonialism, diffusion, Eurocentrism, development, and capitalism (Blaut 1970a; 1973b; 1975; 1976; 1977; 1986; 1987a; 1987b; 1989; 1992; 1993; 1997b; 1999; 2000); on the other is his work on children's cognitive mapping (Blaut 1970b; 1973a; 1987c; 1991; 1997a; 1997c; Blaut, Blades, Darvizeh, Elguea, Sowden, Spencer, Stea, Surajpaul, and Uttal 1998; Blaut, Sowden, Stea, Blades, and Spencer 1996; Blaut and Stea 1970; 1972; 1973; Blaut, Stea, and Stephens 1996; Blaut, Stea, Spencer, and Blades 2003). The first might be summed up by Blaut's insistence that "farmers can!", the latter by his claim that "children can!" (see Koch, Johnson, Kasnitz, and Wisner 2005, 1020). At first glance these two branches of Blaut's work might seem disconnected, but as David Stea, Blaut's long-time collaborator, insists, "There was only one Jim Blaut." Stea (2005, 990) maintains that "The studies of the development of spatial cognition in very young children, which consumed a good part of his time for nearly half of the last 30 years of his life, were informed by precisely the same thoughts and perspectives as his writings on inequity and injustice." They are



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<sup>2</sup> On Blaut's career see Harvey 2005; Mathewson 2005; Mathewson and Stea 2003; Mathewson and Wisner 2005; Wisner, Heiman, and Weiner 2005.

united by what Blaut called a rejection of "can'tianism", the belief that local knowledge "can't" help solve the problems of underdevelopment, and that working people and oppressed groups (including children) need elite experts to do things for them (see Blaut 1997a). It seems to me, reading him today, that Blaut's scholarship is unified by a profound critique of academic expertise as a mode of social intervention. Much of Blaut's research effort went into showing how dominant academic ideas about development—individual cognitive development, cultural processes, and socio-economic development of the Third World—were both wrong-headed and underwritten by racist, Eurocentric, and elitist assumptions. Blaut spent much of his scholarship trying to undo the damage done by mainstream academia, exposing the ways that dominant academic theories had been products of, and an integral part in spreading and sustaining, capitalism and colonialism—and showing how the everyday knowledges and practices of children and peasant farmers should be taken seriously. Blaut was an anti-expert, using his training to show that knowledge and problem solving are not the exclusive property of academic experts; in other words, "people can!"

I am drawing out this thread of Blaut's work because my own has been motivated by a similar anti-expert attitude, one that has led me to attempt to rethink the role of geography and knowledge production in social change. This agenda took the form of a dual approach. The first aspect of that approach was to develop a critical history of what I call the social scientific mode of knowledge production, which I'll have more to say about below. The second aspect was to develop an alternative model of academic work that went beyond mere critique; this led me to critical pedagogy. In this paper, I want to explain how an examination of the critical history of our discipline has shaped my thinking about pedagogy as a form of anti-expert social action and to describe a collaborative project informed by that thinking that I've been involved in with a local community organization.

I came to geography after studying critical theory and cultural studies in an English department, and specifically within the context of teaching writing (which is how most graduate students in English departments pay for grad school). Like many others, one of the first classes I took as a geography grad student was a course on geographical thought, that is, on the history and philosophy of geography. We learned about the German origins of modern geography in the thought of Humboldt, Ritter, Hettner, etc., about environmental determinism, about Sauer, about the Hartshorne-Schaefer debate, about the quantitative revolution, about the advent of radical geography, the relevance debates, Marxism, feminism, humanism, postmodernism, etc. And we paid attention to the historical context of these movements, the consolidation of European nation-states, imperial conquest, World War II and the cold-war, the civil rights and anti-war movements, May of '68, etc.

What struck me about this material was a near-complete lack of discussion about the relationship between geography and the *social* history of universities. What I mean by this is that while there was discussion about how geography became established as an academic discipline, and about how different geographical ideas served different interests, there was no critical reflection on the idea that geographical knowledge itself could be useful in effecting social change. In other words, there was little discussion about the actual mechanism by which geographical knowledge impacted the world. As I talked to people about this question, I began to notice that geographers and other social scientists who were interested in "making a difference" talked about their work in a very different way than scholars in the humanities. In the humanities, it was pretty obvious that very few people outside of academia were reading humanities research and that the relevance of the humanities needed to be constantly justified, especially in an era of funding retrenchment and the rise of a neoliberal corporate model in the academy. While there was a sense that some individuals could take on the role of "the public intellectual," social engagement in the humanities has primarily been theorized through teaching. The most important connection in English between the knowledge produced by researchers and the world is through students; therefore, political engagement is primarily theorized through the role of teacher. In geography, however, I perceived an unexamined assumption about the role of social scientific knowledge production in social change. The unspoken line of thinking goes something like this: the systematic gathering and rigorous analysis of information by trained professional researchers produces superior knowledge about the world that can be useful in intervening in the social process through better public policy and that publishing in academic journals and/or consulting with public and private agencies and NGOs makes this knowledge available to decision-makers, who are its rightful audience.<sup>3</sup>

As an example, I randomly pulled from my office shelf the June 2008 issue of the *Annals* and happened to open it to an article in the "Nature and Society" section. I turned to the last line of the article and found the following: "Studying the spatial practices embedded within resource use and management can improve our understanding of community-based resource management and can help inform more equitable solutions to park-people conflicts" (Roth 2008, 388). This is a common gesture in geography articles, and the outcome envisioned—more equitable solutions—is absolutely laudable. But let's pause to unpack the assumptions about social scientific knowledge production embedded here. The

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<sup>3</sup> For recent exceptions, see Blomley 1994; Cahill 2004; Castree 2000; Fuller and Kitchin 2004; Gilbert and Masucci 2004; Kindon 2005; Lees 1999; Mitchell 2004; Pain 2003; 2004; 2006; Pain and Francis 2003; Routledge 1996; Shaw 1995. As I have pointed out (Heyman 2007), however, much of the discussion in geography tends towards a "policy-activism" dichotomy that ignores teaching as a form of political engagement. For work in geography that focuses specifically on teaching, see Castree 2003; Castree, Fuller, Kent, Kobayashi, Merrett, Pulido, and Barraclough 2008; Cook 2000; Gibson-Graham 1999; Hay 2001; Heyman 2000; 2001b; 2001c; 2004a; Merrett 2000; Newstead 2009; Oberhauser 2002.

sentence claims that specialized knowledge ("studying") about a specific configuration of public policy practice ("community-based resource management") helps the understanding of a group of people ("us") *who are in a position to design "more equitable solutions" to a social conflict*. By placing this knowledge in the public sphere through its publication in a leading academic journal, the author imagines that it becomes available to an audience with the power to act on it. Furthermore, the author implies that this knowledge is superior to existing knowledge and that the study of such practices by professionals is the best way to know how to solve social conflict. In other words, social conflict is best solved by the adjudication of knowledge claims by experts. This dominant way of thinking in geography is what I have called the social scientific mode of knowledge production, an approach that reduces social problems to technical questions that are the exclusive province of professional experts who can speak directly to powerful decision-makers (see Heyman 2004b; 2007). It assumes a privileged access to and influence on social elites, based on professional authority and prestige (publishing in top-notch journals, holding appointments in top universities, etc.). It imagines a specific ensemble of institutions and practices through which social scientists situate themselves in the social matrix and define the goal of social scientific knowledge production. Such institutions and practices include those on the academic side (e.g. certification through theoretical & methodological training & examination, peer-reviewed publishing, hiring & tenure procedures, etc.), and those on the public policy side, which include a governmental and legal framework that empowers a bureaucratic apparatus of technical and managerial administration and planning. Furthermore, it imagines a smooth articulation between the two (lubricated, we might say, by funding agencies).

This mode of knowledge production is a form of Blaut's "Can'tianism": it assumes that public decisions are best made by professional experts, that people "can't". It serves to move important social and political questions out of the realm of politics and into the semi-public sphere of policy, a move that is fundamentally antidemocratic, as it transfers public power, agency, and authority to a cadre of experts.

As these unacknowledged assumptions of social scientific knowledge production became clear to me, I began to wonder about the origins of this institutional arrangement—that is, I wanted to figure out how social science (and geography) became conceived in this way and how it came to be housed in universities, specifically in the US context. How was it that academic social scientists were able to assume this special role in the political process?

The idea that social conflict is best addressed by professional experts working in the quasi-public sphere of policymaking has its roots in the urban crises of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when massive urbanization (fuelled by industrialization and immigration from Europe) created serious social

conflict over problems in housing, sanitation, health, education, poor working conditions, low wages, and hunger. Academic social science precipitated out of a constellation of projects that emerged to deal with these problems, usually grouped under the label of "social" or "urban reforms" (Alchon 1985; Axinn and Levin 1992; Beniger 1986; Bernard and Bernard 1965; Bledstein 1978; Boyer 1978; Bulmer 1984; Faris 1967; Furner 1975; Haber 1964; Haskell 1977; Larson 1977; Lubove 1962; 1965; Ross 1989; Smith 1994; Trachtenberg 1982; Wiebe 1967; Wilensky and Lebeaux 1965). Two of the most well known figures in these movements were Jacob Riis and Jane Addams. Although Riis' and Addams' projects both contributed directly to the development of social science by legitimating interventionist social policy based on systematic, empirical methods of urban social research, they represented two distinct and competing modes of knowledge production. Riis' program placed the social expert at the center of a reform structure that funneled power and knowledge upwards through an emergent bureaucratic apparatus, while the social settlements, such as Addams' Hull-House in Chicago, worked to diffuse power and knowledge production among the working class as a form of democratic activism. As Addams put it, "The Settlement then, is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city. It insists that these problems are not confined to any one portion of a city. It is an attempt to relieve, at the same time, the overaccumulation at one end of society and the destitution at the other" (1981 [1910], 61). Thus, while Riis' program was intended to rescue dominant social relations of economic exploitation from the threat of social change, settlement work aimed for a more wholesale social reorganization driven by a concern for social justice. I want to look a bit more at these two historical figures to draw out the contours of their competing models of knowledge production.

Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) marked a watershed in American approaches to urban social conditions. The wildly popular book created a sensation that signaled the beginning of public interest in legislative intervention in social organization and laid the ground for the advent of public policy as such. Until the 1890s, government services in the US were limited to only the most basic infrastructure, such as roads, canals, and police. However, Riis's book helped build a new consensus that empowered government to make ameliorative responses such as zoning, housing codes, sanitation, health, work, and safety regulations. *How the Other Half Lives* was innovative in a number of ways: it brought together the newly accessible technology of photography, social statistics, and first-hand reportage, and for the first time it directly appealed to *public* reform and legislative regulation as opposed to private charity (Stein 1983, 14; Gandal 1997, 178n36). In addition to catalyzing actual reforms in New York City (and inspiring them elsewhere), Riis' book is widely acknowledged as establishing the genres of photojournalism and reform-minded documentary photography (Stein 1983; Stange 1989; Solomon-Godeau 1991; Rosler 1989; Hales 1984). According to

photography historian Sally Stein, Riis' book was widely received as a kind of official report (Stein 1983, 14). In her important article on Riis' life and work, Stein notes that *How the Other Half Lives* achieved this status precisely because of the way it combined and presented statistical and photographic representations as empirical evidence in its argument for social legislation.

The argument in *How the Other Half Lives* basically held that only governmental action, through bureaucratic regulation, could maintain the social order that had been introduced by urban industrial capitalism. Riis begins his book with this statement:

LONG ago it was said that "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives." That was true then. It did not know because it did not care. The half that was on top cared little for the struggles, and less for the fate of those who were underneath, so long as it was able to hold them there and keep its own seat. There came a time when the discomfort and crowding below were so great, and the consequent upheavals so violent, that it was no longer an easy thing to do, and then the upper half fell to *inquiring* what was the matter. *Information* on the subject has been accumulating rapidly since, and the whole world has had its hands full answering for its old ignorance. (Riis 1971 [1890], 1, emphasis added)

This suggested a general way forward in dealing with the social problem that was dominated by the generation, handling, and analysis of social data. The conclusion of the book shows how this data will be used:

To remedy the overcrowding, with which the night inspections of the sanitary police cannot keep step, tenements may eventually have to be licensed, as now the lodging-houses, to hold so many tenants, and no more; or the State may have to bring down the rents that cause the crowding, by assuming the right to regulate them as it regulates the fares on the elevated roads. I throw out the suggestion, knowing quite well that it is open to attack. It emanated originally from one of the brightest minds that have had to struggle officially with this tenement-house question in the last ten years. In any event, to succeed, reform by law must aim at making it unprofitable to own a bad tenement. (Riis 1971 [1890], 224)

These urban reforms championed by Riis essentially envisioned a structure of continuous feedback in which knowledge about the social world is extracted, passed upward through a bureaucratic structure, and then reapplied to society in the form of policy regulations. Riis' ostensible social goal—building support for new forms of bureaucratic social control—was inextricably joined to the project of legitimating a rising new class of professionals expert in the gathering, handling,

and analysis of social data in order to produce knowledge that could not only help generate new laws and regulations, but could help monitor, implement, and enforce them. The establishment of new mechanisms of social control, therefore, were intertwined with the instantiation of a completely new kind of social authority and agency. The social expert not only provided the justification for a new, positive form of government, empowered to intervene in the social process, but ensured its smooth functioning through technical competence.

By the 1920s, academic social scientists secured a nearly exclusive authority over the production of valid knowledge about society, as well as over the training of future social experts. Social scientists became the première social experts who could help build the bureaucratic apparatus described by Riis through the production of knowledge that would assist in the design of administrative solutions, and through the production of the continuous stream of knowledge needed to implement, monitor, and constantly adjust these new regulatory mechanisms. Social scientific expertise was crucial for building a bureaucratic structure that moved important questions out of the public sphere of politics and into the realm of policy. Such a structure, as historian Guy Alchon explains, represented an effort to "depoliticize authority, to remove political issues from political processes, and to encourage the determination of public policy within the administrative precincts of technocratic and managerial elites" (1985, 171). In other words, building a bureaucratic apparatus required the establishment of a new kind of authority that could substantiate technocratic knowledge claims and certify their superiority over other kinds of knowledge.

However, before professional social scientists could establish this role for themselves, a rival model of social investigation, representing a very different version of social action, needed to be displaced. This rival model was the social settlement movement, exemplified by Jane Addams and others at Hull-House in Chicago. The efforts of settlement workers to build social and political change took the form of organizing among the working class, and involving them in appeals to the middle class through publicity, and to political elites through lobbying (on settlement work, see Davis 1967; Deegan 1990; Lathrop 1894; Levine 1971; Lubove 1962; 1965; Philpott 1978; Sklar 1991). In other words, while Riis' program placed the social expert at the center of a reform structure that funneled power and knowledge upwards, the social settlements worked to diffuse power and knowledge production among the working class as a form of democratic activism. Thus, there existed within the settlement movement an alternative model of social knowledge production that was consciously rejected in favor of one that rested on the professional expertise of academically trained social scientists working within a techno-bureaucratic administrative framework. In the social scientific model, the social investigator functions as a manager whose prestige is secured by professional authority as an expert knower, while in the settlement version the social researcher acts primarily as an educator whose role is based not on the

authority of an expert knower, but on the ability to expand access to knowledge production and facilitate grass-roots action.

The social settlements, and Hull-House in particular, established major precedents in social science methodologies, such as systematic data collection through surveys and interviews, the use of maps and mapping to analyze social patterns, and others (Bulmer, Bales, and Sklar 1991; Bulmer 1991; Burgess 1925; Cohen 1991). Despite establishing practices that were later incorporated into academic social science, however, knowledge production in the settlements had a distinctly democratic character, in several senses. Not only were the residents of the slum neighborhoods the intended beneficiaries of any reforms that came as a result of their social research, but research projects in the settlements were carried out at the instigation of neighborhood people, in cooperation with them, and with them as the intended audience. In other words, the "subjects" of the research—the poor—were directing research projects and helping to produce knowledge themselves for their own benefit. Addams provides an example:

Many years ago a tailors' union meeting at Hull-House asked our coöperation in tagging the various parts of a man's coat in such wise as to show the money paid to the people who had made it; one tag for the cutting and another for the buttonholes, another for the finishing and so on, the resulting total to be compared with the selling price of the coat itself. It quickly became evident that we had no way of computing how much of this larger balance was spent for salesmen, commercial travelers, rent and management, and the poor tagged coat was finally left hanging limply in a closet as if discouraged with the attempt. But the desire of the manual worker to know the relation of his own labor to the whole is not only legitimate but must form the basis of any intelligent action for his improvement. (1961 [1910], 215)

Despite the fact that this is the record of an unsuccessful research project, it nonetheless shows how the settlement workers viewed their role not as expert knowers, but as "anti-experts" helping to organize and assist knowledge produced by others, at their own behest, and for their own benefit. Moreover, this particular research program drew directly on the knowledge of the workers themselves—how much each was paid for a particular job—who were attempting to build a picture of their position in the economy of garment production for themselves. Much of the research carried out in this vein at Hull-House resulted in the production of maps and charts that were hung on the walls (Deegan 1990, 46-7). Sociologist Mary Jo Deegan explains their importance, distinguishing them from more mainstream social scientific documents:

Maps of "scholars" were intended to reveal to experts and decisionmakers the lives of the people of the neighborhood. On the other hand, the maps of Hull-House were intended to reveal to the



people of the neighborhood that their lifestyles had patterns and implications that they could use to make more informed decisions. These maps were part of the community, and integral to the settlement's goals of democracy and education. (1990, 47).

What Deegan glosses over in her description, however, is the role that the people of the neighborhood played in producing the maps. The working class people of the neighborhood were not simply the recipients of knowledge produced by others; rather, a major educational goal of Hull-House was to be a resource center where people could learn to organize and produce knowledge for their own ends. Again, Addams gives a vivid example:

The Hull-House Woman's Club had been organized the year before by the resident kindergartner who had first inaugurated a mother's meeting. The new members came together, however, in quite a new way that summer when we discussed with them the high death rate so persistent in our ward. After several club meetings devoted to the subject, despite the fact that the death rate rose highest in the congested foreign colonies and not in the streets in which most of the Irish American club women lived, twelve of their number undertook in connection with the residents [i.e. the settlement workers], to carefully investigate the conditions of the alleys. During August and September the substantiated reports of violations of the law sent in from Hull-House to the health department were one thousand and thirty-seven. For the club woman who had finished a long day's work of washing or ironing followed by the cooking of a hot supper, it would have been much easier to sit on her doorstep during a summer evening than to go up and down ill-kept alleys and get into trouble with her neighbors over the condition of their garbage boxes. ... The careful inspection combined with other causes, brought about a great improvement in the cleanliness and comfort of the neighborhood and one happy day, when the death rate of our ward was found to have dropped from third to seventh in the list of city wards and was so reported to our Woman's Club, the applause which followed recorded the genuine sense of participation in the result, and a public spirit which had 'made good.' (1981 [1910], 202-3)

Here, we can see how Hull-House acted as the site around which the club women could organize themselves to press their cases. Mary Simkhovitch, another intellectual leader of the settlement movement, explains that, "To work out the methods by which a neighborhood may become a consciously effective group is . . . the difficult task of the settlement everywhere" (quoted in Davis 1967, 75). In other words, settlement work was about forging group consciousness through organizing; it was a liberatory and anti-expert movement.

While social science moved away from the kind of participatory social justice activism which characterized settlement work and embraced a technocratic, expert approach, the story of Addams' work at Hull-House stands as an important reminder that alternative models *do* exist and that the history of social science is a contested one. It helps denaturalize the dominant social scientific mode of expert knowledge production and shows how geographers can begin to reconceptualize their role in social change. However, Hull-House was not an academic project. Its approach was consciously boxed out of the emerging social sciences as they developed within the university system.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, one might reasonably ask if the settlement approach is relevant as a model for academic geographers.

In looking critically at the development of our discipline, however, I have found that there is a history of trying to bring this kind of work into the university, most notably, the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, championed by one of Blaut's contemporaries, Bill Bunge. Elsewhere (Heyman 2007), I argue that the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI) was a kind of educational experiment that consciously challenged the antidemocratic patterns of techno-bureaucratic expertise. Bunge and others associated with the DGEI saw knowledge as fundamentally a political, not a technical, problem: solutions to social problems demanded not simply more knowledge, but wider access to the means of knowledge production. The DGEI was founded in the '60s not simply to refocus the topics of research towards poverty and ghettoization, but towards breaking the cycle of expert knowledge production and forging a new role for academics as central goals of radical geography. As Ron Horvath explains, the goal of the DGEI was fundamentally a pedagogical project, but one reconceived as radically democratic and anti-expert:

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 . . . Institutions of higher learning have neither provided access to educational services nor have they provided the community-level research and technical assistance

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<sup>4</sup>As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, in my original lecture, I neglected to address the important role of gender in the history that I trace here. The Hull-House model was marginalized, in part, because it was associated largely with the work of women. In the 1920s, when social scientists, such as Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, consolidated social science in the university system, they explicitly distanced themselves from the kind of "sympathetic" work associated with the settlement movement in favor of "objective" technocratic expertise, even though they adopted many research techniques and methodologies first pioneered by settlement workers (Deegan 1990; Sklar 1991). This led to a gendered division of labor in which the social sciences, which were gaining prestige and techno-bureaucratic power, became associated with men, while social work, which was subordinated to social science, was associated with women. Thus, traditional social scientific knowledge production developed in a particularly masculinist mode. This, of course, has been challenged by many feminist geographers, who have developed alternative models of research and fieldwork, such as participatory action research, which bears similarities to settlement work, as well as to the DGEI discussed below (see Heyman 2007).

*needed by the poor to begin to attack their own problems . . .* The major purpose of the D.G.E.I. was to find a way in which geographers could make available education 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. (1971,73–74; emphasis added)

The educational project of the DGEI was not conceived in traditional terms as career-oriented or training students up into a profession of expert knowledge producers, nor was it the transfer of an academic view of the world to the students. Instead, it recognized that the perspective of the members of the community had to be prioritized by putting the means of knowledge production into their hands and acknowledging them as the primary agents of change in the community. The goal was neither to gather information to pass up the chain of power, nor to assist students in assimilating to a hierarchical power structure; rather, the primary objective was to widen access to knowledge production, which represented a “bold reversal of the usual academic priorities and methods” (Peet 1977,14).

Inspired by the Hull-House and DGEI models, I have tried to bring such alternative modes of knowledge production into the context of the contemporary university; I would now like to describe one project that shows how geographers can work to transform notions of who has legitimate access to knowledge production and what it means to “know” through a reconceptualization of the role of the geographer as an anti-expert and how this can be joined to the project of critical pedagogy. The project is called “Building Austin, Building Injustice”, and it is a partnership between members of the University of Texas and the Workers Defense Project/Proyecto Defensa Laboral (or PDL).<sup>5</sup> PDL is a worker center, part of a national movement of organizations that seek to provide low-wage immigrant workers with the resources they need to fight to eradicate hazardous and unsafe working conditions (on worker centers see Fine 2006; Fine, Grablesky, and Narro 2008; Gordon 2005; Martin, Morales, and Theodore 2007; Narro 2006; Ness 2005; Sullivan and Lee 2008; Theodore, Valenzuela, and Meléndez 2006). One of the few organizations in Texas working to address workplace abuse faced by immigrant workers, PDL provides a source of power and hope for many low-wage workers who have access to few resources to improve their living and working conditions.<sup>6</sup> Worker Centers are organizations that respond to the needs of low-

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<sup>5</sup> The website for the “Building Austin, Building Injustice” project is <http://buildaustin.org/>. The homepage for the Workers Defense Project/Proyecto Defensa Laboral is <http://www.workersdefense.org/>

<sup>6</sup> My understanding of Workers Defense Project/Proyecto Defensa Laboral is based on two years of close collaboration, interviews with key staff and members, as well as participant observation in PDL’s many activities, including weekly meetings, seasonal gatherings, strategy sessions, meetings with policy makers, press conferences, protests, and other actions.

wage workers who tend to be excluded from traditional labor advocacy groups, such as unions; they typically serve immigrant workers in their native languages, and they focus on participatory organizing to improve workplace conditions and fight for policies that protect immigrant workers. Furthermore, PDL stresses community education, leadership development, and capacity building.

Several commentators have noted that worker centers have stepped into the void created by the hollowed-out, neoliberal state (Fine 2006; Gordon 2005; Martin, Morales, and Theodore 2007; Ness 2005; Theodore and Martin 2007; Theodore, Valenzuela, and Meléndez 2006). Two significant effects of neoliberal policies have been the retreat of the state from social service provision and the rise of informal employment. The deregulation and informalization of low-wage industries, such as construction, has drawn large numbers of immigrants to American cities, where they are faced with serious challenges, especially given wide-spread employment abuses that threaten their survival (such as unsafe working conditions and nonpayment of wages), coupled with the absence of social services available to them (Fine 2006; Fine, Grabelsky and Narro 2008; Gordon 2005; Martin, Morales, and Theodore 2007; Ness 2005). However, worker centers like PDL are membership-based organizations, meaning that they are not run on a charity model where low-income people come for services administered by professionals. Instead, worker centers are founded on the belief "that those who have experienced oppression first hand are the ones who should lead social justice movements, due to the fact that these individuals are intentionally excluded from decision-making processes that most affect their lives," (<http://www.workersdefense.org/index.php?p=5&lang=en>). As a result PDL has created participatory structures where immigrant worker leaders, those directly affected by workplace injustice, serve on its board of directors, and where workers themselves make important campaign and administrative decisions for the organization. Additionally, PDL provides an 8-week leadership development course that uses participatory education techniques to focus on building an analysis of the root causes of social inequality. Participants learn how to analyze their own social position in relation to race, nationality, institutionalized education, sexual orientation, gender, and class, as well as developing important skills in organizing, media, public speaking, and workers rights.

The "Building Austin, Building Injustice" project is a study of the construction industry in Austin, Texas, where about 85% of PDL's members work.<sup>7</sup> Although there has been some recent slowdown in construction in Austin, it remains one of the fastest growing metropolitan regions in the US (according to the

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<sup>7</sup> Information on the construction industry in Austin in the following paragraphs is taken from The report, *Building Austin, Building Injustice: Working Conditions in Austin's Construction Industry* (Workers Defense Project 2009). Using stratified random sampling techniques, 312 construction workers were surveyed during the period Oct. 2008-Jan. 2009. For more on methodology, see pages 3-6 of the report.

US Census Bureau, between July 2007 and July 2008, Austin was the second fastest growing metro area in the country). The Austin economy was estimated to have grown by more than 3% last year (compared to just over 1% for the US as a whole). In the fourth quarter of 2008, the Texas Workforce Commission estimates, approximately 10,000 people were employed in construction in Austin (although this is probably a significant undercount, due to the high percentage of undocumented immigrants in the industry.) According to the IPUMS data, immigrants' share of the construction workforce in Austin increased from just under 50% in 2000, to 70% in '06. As a measure of the informalization of this industry, 46% of construction workers surveyed reported that they were paid in cash or by personal check, and 50% reported not receiving overtime pay, although 71% of them worked more than 40 per week. 20% reported being the victim of wage theft in the past three years—that is, not getting paid at all for work done. Construction is the most dangerous occupation in Texas, and Texas is the only state that does not require employers to carry workers compensation insurance. One hundred forty-two construction workers died on the job in Texas in 2007, the most of any state (California, with 50% more population, was the next highest, with only 81.) 21% of workers surveyed in Austin report having suffered a workplace injury that required medical attention. Yet, only 24% of workers were covered by medical insurance.

Given these conditions, it may not be surprising that 47% of workers surveyed reported not having enough money to support their families; 35% didn't have enough money for groceries. 41% did not have enough money for needed medical care. 38% didn't have enough for rent, and 12% had been evicted because they couldn't pay their rent. Within this industry, however, there are major disparities between working conditions for white and Latino workers. The average hourly wage for whites was about \$20, while it was only \$12 for Latinos. 94% of white workers were paid by payroll check, 96% received proper overtime pay, 78% received medical insurance, and 70% had retirement benefits.

As David Harvey and others have shown, investment in the urban built environment is one of the "spatial fixes" by which surplus capital absorption takes place (Harvey 1982; 1985). This urbanization of capital can only be accomplished by maintaining the profitability of developers and construction companies, primarily through controlling labor costs. A major mechanism for that control is the deregulation and informalization of this sector, largely through the exploitation of Latino immigrants. In 1973 more than 80% of construction workers were unionized; today it is less than 14%. Average wages in construction have dropped 25% in that same timeframe. All this while the number of construction workers more than doubled from 4.1 million to 8.4 (Fine, Grabelsky, and Narro 2008). Thus, the struggles of PDL members are at the center of struggles against neoliberalization and dominant strategies for continuing capital accumulation.

All this data has been collected through the "Building Austin, Building Injustice" project. More than 100 people have worked on the project gathering data about the construction industry in Austin, including 10 faculty members of the University of Texas (and one from Blaut's own institution, the University of Illinois at Chicago), more than 50 UT students, 10 volunteer allies, a handful of union organizers, and 25 worker-members of PDL. The project consisted of three phases: the first was gathering and collating secondary data, the second (and most important part) was surveying 312 construction workers, and the third was qualitative, in-depth interviews with 17 workers and 20 employers. A report was released at a press conference in June (see Castillo 2009a; Austin American-Statesman 2009).<sup>8</sup>

What distinguishes this project from a typical social scientific study, and what makes it an alternative model of academic work in the vein of Hull-House's efforts to expand access to knowledge production is the nature of the collaboration. First and foremost, the study was initiated by the members of PDL: they strategically approached sympathetic faculty at UT with the idea. The need for the research arose out of PDL's own analysis of the situation and the need for a comprehensive understanding of the industry *on their part* in order to facilitate their organizing and policy reform efforts. It is much like the case of the tailors' union at Hull-House trying to put into a larger context the work that each contributes to a coat. In this case, faculty at UT were able to help PDL accomplish this work, not by doing it for them or undertaking their own academic studies of the industry, but by helping to plan and organize the project by teaching PDL how to carry out such research (for instance about survey protocols and data collection, how to create a stratified random sample, how to code interview transcripts, etc.).

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<sup>8</sup> Since the release of the report, and accompanying press coverage, officials from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) asked to meet with representatives from the Building Austin, Building Injustice team and announced an increase in the number of workplace inspectors in Texas (see Castillo 2009b). One outcome of this meeting was a significant change to OSHA policy regarding who is responsible for violations on worksites. Previous OSHA policy (based on a Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision, *Melerine v. Avondale Shipyards* [1981]) only held subcontractors responsible for worksite violations. Given the temporary nature of much subcontracting in the construction industry, this policy created severe limitations on punishing workplace violations, as subcontractors were often hard to locate, and the chain of responsibility was unclear. General contractors could tolerate workplace violations by subcontractors, knowing that the violations often arose out of cost-cutting measures and with the security that they would not be held liable. The new policy holds that general contractors are responsible for exercising reasonable care to prevent and detect violations at their worksites, including those under direct supervision of subcontractors. This policy will force general contractors to insure that subs adhere to OSHA regulations or face fines themselves. By creating a clear chain of responsibility and an incentive for enforcing it, this will significantly change workplace relations across the country. Furthermore, the *Building Austin, Building Injustice* report has resulted in new policies at the city level, including requiring workers compensation and mandatory safety training on city-funded sites, a crackdown on the nonpayment of wages, and new legislation currently (2010) being written by the Austin City Council to require on-site drinking water and mandatory rest breaks.

In this process, faculty were anti-experts working to diffuse power and knowledge production, not perpetuate a closed realm of privileged knowledge. Second, workers themselves, in addition to UT students and ally volunteers, conducted many of the surveys and interviews; they were trained by PDL staff and UT faculty. In other words, the knowledge is not simply *about* construction workers, but it is being produced by them: the project expands access to knowledge production. Third, PDL, not faculty, are the ones writing the report. The workers own the knowledge: the research and "expertise" is PDL's, and does not belong to the academics involved.

Fourth, and this is where pedagogy comes into the picture, students are brought into contact with this kind of anti-expert academic work, and the work is brought into the classroom. The majority of the 50 students who worked on the "Building Austin, Building Injustice" project did so through a service learning component of their senior capstone course in geography. This course had historically been taught as a course on geographic thought, with an emphasis on the humanistic tradition. When I began teaching it, I reorganized the class into something like a course on "geography and the world", exploring different ways that geographers work in the world, including teaching, policy work, consulting, academic scholarship, and activism. The idea of the class was to problematize social scientific knowledge production and make it an object of discussion, rather than the supposed neutral background against which academic work takes place. Earlier I gave an example of how the social scientific mode of knowledge production appears naively in research articles. Consider now this passage, from one of the most popular introductory human geography textbooks on the market, written by two critical geographers, as an example of how the dominant view of geography as professional expertise gets transmitted to students:

Geographers employed in business, industry, and government are able to use geographic theories and techniques to understand and solve a wide variety of specific problems. A great deal of the research undertaken by geography professors also has an applied focus. As a result, geography is able to make a direct and significant contribution to society. . . . The career choices for geography majors are diverse, challenging, and exciting. The single most popular choice for geography majors is, in fact, a career in marketing for retailing or industrial companies. Another popular choice is an administrative, managerial, or analytical post in local, state, or federal government. Most geography graduates are able to find careers in which they have the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the world through their skills in understanding and analyzing it. These careers include cartography, GIS, laboratory analysis, private consulting, urban and regional planning, international development, teaching, and management in private industry. (Knox & Marston 2001, 21-4)

The emphasis of this passage is on geographical knowledge production as professional expertise that can "make a direct and significant contribution to society" by channeling knowledge to power elites. The point of bringing my senior capstone students into contact with projects such as PDL is to allow students to imagine other roles for geography and geographical knowledge production, ones that challenge dominant social relations.

However, it is not enough simply to *tell* students this (Heyman 2001c). They must be brought into direct contact with this kind of anti-expert work. The point is not "to force open obstinately closed minds, but," as compositionist C. H. Knoblauch maintains, "to intervene creatively in processes of change that are already underway, making use of the intellectual disequilibrium that the university can foster in the interest of learning" (1991, 20).

In labor organizing, it is a truism that if you can get someone to take a small step now—say, to sign a petition—then you can get them to take a bigger step next time—say, signing a union card or joining a picket line. There is a cynical way to read this cliché, but there is also one that comes right out of the pedagogical theory of John Dewey, whom Blaut was found of quoting. Dewey stressed that education was experiential, that what we are *doing* is what we learn from (Dewey 1925). It is not a question of doing versus not doing in the classroom, but *what* we are doing, the kind of work that is being done. Put another way, in a different theoretical language, it is about subject formation. The process of signing a petition is a process of subject formation. Likewise, education—like all social processes—is *productive* of subjectivities. The question, then, becomes what kinds of practices produce what kinds of subjects?

Bringing students into projects, such as PDL's "Building Austin, Building Injustice" helps foster anti-expert subjects,<sup>9</sup> or—to invoke Blaut again—to foster a

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<sup>9</sup> During the question-and-answer period following the delivery of this lecture, one audience member (Scott Kirsch) asked why I was using the term "anti-expert" and questioned whether expertise was the thing I wanted to do away with, or whether creating *more* experts was a better description of what I was calling for. The concept of expertise as a quality endowing a particular individual with special authority, especially authority in *knowing*, dates only from the late-nineteenth century, the period in which academic disciplines and authority were being established during the elaboration of an intellectual division of labor (Heyman 2000; 2001a) and same period that Riis and Addams were operating in. It was at this time that the word "expert" began to be used as a noun, denoting a person "whose special knowledge or skill causes him to be regarded as an authority; a specialist", according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The word "expert" existed in English at least as far back as the twelfth century, but it was used exclusively as an adjective meaning *experienced*, until the nineteenth century. (The *OED* also records a number of other new forms of the word during this period, including "expertism", "expertize", and "expertship", which indicates how new usages of the word were being invented and tried out at the time, in relation to developments the social division of labor.) As a new form of social authority rooted in a superior way of knowing was being established in the late-nineteenth century, the word "expert" became attached to an individual possessing such special authority, rather than to the *experience* that someone might have had (see also Williams 1983, 129). "Expert" came to denote a new social role, distinguished by formal training and certification in new forms of knowing that were based on the emerging protocols of a nascent social science. The very meaning of the word "expert" is tied up with the politics of



thriving "dissenting tradition" in geography. In an article by that title, published in the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the *Annals* Blaut argued that

The socio-political groups which dominate a society like our own, which establish the division of labor in which professional geography has its place, must strongly influence, though not fully determine, the conditions surrounding our scientific work: the kinds of people who will be admitted to the profession and, as it were, licensed to do geographical research; the kinds of theories, or explanatory schemata, that will be most generally accepted (in the signing-off of doctoral dissertations, the publication of findings, the belief-status of these findings, and so on)—and thus, overall, the product of our science. (1979, 158)

Given his critique of "can'tianism", I believe Blaut would extend this list to cover not only the *products* of geographical knowledge production, but its place in the social matrix as a mode of intervention through expertise. Blaut continues,

A dissenting geographer, in this context, is one who conforms, or attempts to conform, to the interests of different classes, different ethnic cultures, and women; that is, to the interests of working people and oppressed groups. In plain words, mainstream geography is conformal to capitalism in something like its present form; dissenting geography is not. (1979, 159)

It has been my argument that the mode of social scientific knowledge production that is dominant in geography is "conformal" to the dominant power structure, and that breaking the chain of expert knowledge production must be a part of geography's "dissenting tradition." If geographers wish to work in the interests of working people and oppressed groups, we first have to reject the kind of "can'tianism" represented by a faith in expert knowledge production and we have to realize that "people can".

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knowing. Thus, an "expert" on poverty is someone who "knows" it through the operations of social scientific knowledge production rather than a poor person whose experience of it is the basis of his/her knowledge. Jacob Riis, rather than turn-of-the-century slum dwellers, becomes the authority on how to address housing issues. The concept of "anti-expert", therefore, is used to signify my attempts to undo this hierarchical understanding of what constitutes authority in knowing and to challenge the notion that certified "experts" are best positioned to inform public policy.

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