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The Drake Lecture

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In the spirit of my home in Oxford, Mississippi, I want to begin this talk with the words of William Faulkner. Here are Faulkner's words spoken in Stockholm, Sweden in 1950 following his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature:

Ladies and gentlemen, I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work—a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.

Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last dingdong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking.

I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.¹

In 1950 Faulkner said there is only one question: "When will I be blown up?" For those of us here today, I am glad to say, 63 years later, "Not yet." But, a similar fatalistic sentiment persists with a minor revision; today we ask, "When will I burn up?" In this essay I accept Faulkner's challenge in the form of reflection on the meaning of the Social Foundations of Education in a postmodern era of intellectual sand.

Last fall after the SOPHE conference in St. Louis, I had a conversation with Susan Laird about both of us focusing on similar topics for our corresponding Drake Lecture and SoPHE Presidential Address. While I have been remiss on following through with Susan, I prepared this talk after reading Susan's excellent essay, *An Obligation to Endure*,² and many companion articles in a special issue entitled "In Defense of Foundations"³ ("Defense") in the journal *Critical Issues in Education*. The articles in "Defense" as a whole resonated intimately. I recall during my junior year in college when I changed my major from business and economics to history being asked repeatedly, "why history?" My 21-year-old answer to my father was, I liked history—and I

reminded him I had just failed Introduction to Business Data Processing. So, as a result of my difficulty punching data cards and getting them in the right order, I chose a field of study and a profession—education in the humanities—known for its ability to generate the “why” question. “Defense” begins with a lament from its guest editors, Ben Baez and Deron Boyles,⁴ asserting Foundations has failed “...at clarifying (or persuading) others of the importance, centrality, and relevance of Foundations coursework.”⁵ The broad “why” question persists throughout “Defense” with articles focusing on the definition, purpose, and relevance of Social Foundations in our rapidly changing, educational milieu: What are Social Foundations? What are the purposes of Social Foundations? And why are Social Foundations relevant? Baez and Boyles also talk of persuading others, begging the question, “who are the ‘others’ being addressed?” My impression as a whole is many of the articles speak, appeal, and argue to power or those in power.

Speaking to power is vital to the traditional, critical role of Social Foundations. The radical history of our field, a tradition critical of existing social systems, presents a dilemma and Baez and Boyles sum up what negotiating the modern academy requires:

...we must attend to the academic scholar as a social role, especially when we argue that in order to survive, we should find a place within the current system, or to argue for ourselves in ways attractive to those with the purse strings.⁶

Two questions are raised here. First, is there a difference between arguing for the relevance of an academic discipline and an academic discipline being relevant? Second, what is the difference between relevance and purpose in our contemporary postmodern society? In response to the first question, I think one must be relevant to argue relevance; in other words, while many engage in the practice, it is specious to argue you are relevant when you are not. In regards to the second question, I suggest that relevance comes from acting with moral purpose; by moral purpose, I simply mean acting and making decisions with the intent of promoting a social good, albeit the meaning of a social good, is relative. Nonetheless, it is reasonable that one paid by public funds to provide a public service, or promote a public social good, is only relevant by acting (or being) in a manner that promotes actual public good. Thus, the purpose and need for being is clear for Social Foundations scholars as evidenced by the articles in “Defense,” but institutional decision-makers in the academy and beyond are motivated by a fundamentally different set of assumptions regarding the purpose of education, the meaning of moral purpose, and the definition of public good. Baez and Boyles conclude their introduction to “Defense” with an

unflattering mirror reflecting the difficulty of negotiating the role of a promoter of political and economic change in the modern, U.S. academy:

For we know from tenure games and hazing games and grant games, and so on, that once we accept the rules of the game, not only will we be bound by them (we are bound whether we accept them or not), we will enforce them on others, we will standardize them in the name of the “rule of law,” we will reproduce them to institutionalize them, and thus our future roles will be determined by them. Knowing this, can we re-imagine what it might mean to be a [F]oundations scholar within increasingly instrumentalist, corporatized institutions? If so, what is required and how might we bring it about?⁷

In response to the first question it may be time to consider the possibility the answer is no, it may not be possible to be a Foundations scholar within a corporatized institution. Furthermore, I am concerned it may not be possible to re-imagine what it means to be a Foundations scholar in existing institutions of higher learning without selling one’s intellectual and moral soul like Robert Johnson at the crossroads.

Certainly, there is a history of tolerance of critical views in the academy and this will likely continue; however, it must be acknowledged that the goals of the academy, *writ large*, are to strengthen and reinforce existing political and economic systems, not to replace or even change them to any significant degree. Increasingly, it appears that, while radical views are tolerated, they are often marginalized, or worse, ignored, especially within professional fields such as education. While the image of a bluesman standing at a crossroads on the outskirts of the delta city of Clarksdale, Mississippi in the 1920s exchanging his soul for a song is powerful, it is also meaningful. As Laird so eloquently points out in *Obligation to Endure*,⁸ the climate of education has changed and the articles in “Defense” all, one way or another, speak of finding a way for humanities to survive in the current climate while simultaneously working to change the climate.

Consistency in modeling the moral purpose in which we ground our work is one issue. Again, in using the term moral purpose I mean the use of a moral/ethical framework in one’s personal and professional decisions. One reason I raise the possibility of answering “no” to Baez and Boyles’ core questions is because I find inconsistency when one criticizes the head that he feeds and the hand that feeds him; not that this stops me any more than practicing a faith tradition stops selfish, thoughtless, and harmful behavior. Faulkner captures the essence, and, in my view, the reason, for humanities when he speaks of exploring the problems of “the human heart in conflict with itself.” Yes! How could

one be a public intellectual and not be in conflict with one's own heart? It often seems my adult life is a story of an unending struggle to live what I profess to believe: a struggle with my own heart. And, although I am quick to recognize and expose inconsistencies in the writings and actions of other public intellectuals and Social Foundations scholars, I cringe and pull back my pen when I recognize the same glaring contradictions in my own writing and life. But the pen must not be pulled back. In the interest of fairness, however, I am going to reflect on my own participation in the system I criticize. My purpose is to compare representations of Social Foundations as an intellectual sphere which define, defend, and promote the field's self-articulated, moral purpose; and, the ontological actuality of a moral benefit to and positive impact on society.

The fundamental issue, from my experience, is my culture, history, language, and being. In a nutshell, I recognize the problem and it is I (and all the "other" "I"s I live and spend my life with). I am going to switch focus here for a brief historical view of our corporate political and economic system in order to emphasize the deep and integrated relationships between individual identity, economics, politics, and national identity. In U.S. culture, the mutually reinforcing relationship between corporate and government institutions essential for the hegemony of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is deeply entrenched in our political and economic system. Our national economic path, largely controlled through the relationship between government and industry, was settled during the Civil War and the northern victory solidified and entrenched a political and economic system that accelerated a rapid development of commerce and industry. We, as a nation, committed to completing the transition from our early agrarian roots to a modern industrial state. A dominant motive in most national economic decisions became the impact of any decision on the nation's wealth and power. As a result, since the Civil War, the U.S. has consistently and enthusiastically supported corporate development and expansion.

We are in a situation now, however, in which we have become victims of the success of our own political and economic systems. Given the systemic problems provide the content for our work and are much discussed, I want to speak a little of the success of the system. U.S. citizens have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, almost 150 years of peace at home and historically unprecedented material, consumptive wealth. At the end of the twentieth century, economically, the modern international corporate economy helped establish the U.S. as the world's hegemonic military and economic power. Because of this, I have been fortunate to experience my life in a nation with high levels wealth and security. bell hooks⁹ and other critical race scholars talk of "white privilege" and I

think it describes an actual cultural condition but is not there also something we might call “American privilege?” As a Foundations scholar, I try to remember the system I criticize and seek to change has provided many a life of relative security and economic privilege.

Nonetheless, the conflict in my heart refers to more than systems of politics and economics. Yes, privileged U.S. citizens, those “haves,” live lives replete with full pantries and closets, nice cars and homes (notice I employ plurals), a vast array of entertainment/media/popular culture, Walmart, Home Depot, and fast food; but, the real struggle is at the social/psychological level. When I reflect on who I am, what I am, what I believe, and how I act, I begin to see how being “American,” my individualism and liberal temperament, and my consumptive and other economic decisions, are holistically combined in an almost unconscious U.S. ethos of membership in a national tribe. In other words, I am glad to be living in the U.S. and I enjoy the results of our collective wealth and power. Likewise, I fear what a loss of national wealth and power might mean, both for me and those I care about.

As a member of the American tribe, I continue to make decisions every day that ensure my active participation in the social, political, and economic life of the tribe. Among the multiple ways I participate: I continue to burn fossil fuels at an alarming rate, I purchase goods produced under questionable human rights and environmental conditions, I eat food produced using genetically modified organisms and other harmful chemicals, and on and on. More troubling on a deeper level, not only do I participate in the system, I (and millions of others who challenge the moral authority of the system) own the damn thing. I, as an employee of the University of Mississippi, like employees in public universities across the country, am offered large matching financial benefits to participate in state-supported or individual-optional retirement plans based on investment in corporations. Thus, I am placed in a position of increasing my actual “ownership” of the very corporations my scholarship argues are the problem, or paying what amounts to a financial penalty.

Laird’s *An Obligation to Endure* is a compelling analysis of the tensions between moral purpose within the field and actual social contexts and conditions. We face existential crises on two, deeply intertwined levels. The forces intentionally marginalizing and silencing radical voices in the academy and within the field of Social Foundations are the same forces dominating political and economic systems and decision-making around the globe. What Laird describes as global climate change and educational climate change are both products of similar social and cultural forces. Climbing way out on a small limb to summarize, on one hand Laird presents the global threat of devastating

effects from global climate change and, on the other hand, the educational threat of devastating effects from educational climate change. The similarities are, if I read Laird correctly, a failure of humans or the humanities to maintain control of systems.

Laird's argument seems consistent with views expressed by Chris Hedges in "Death of the Liberal Class."¹⁰ Hedges defines the "liberal class," prominent in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as "characterized by the growth of mass movements and social reforms that addressed working conditions in factories, the organizing of labor unions, women's rights, universal education, housing for the poor, public health campaigns, and socialism."¹¹ Hedges marks World War I as the end of influential liberalism and the rise of "consolidated state and corporate control over economic, political, cultural, and social affairs."¹² The end result, according to Hedges, is a decline in institutional controls to limit corporate control of "politics, education, labor, the arts, religious institutions, and financial systems."¹³ As a result, liberals, including myself, end up compromising their basic beliefs, resulting in tacit support of "unfettered capitalism, the national security state, globalization, and income inequality."¹⁴ Laird¹⁵ likewise seems to say global climate change and education climate change are an effect of the failure of Social Foundations (or the liberal class, or the humanities) to ground humanity within the tools to control systems of their own creation: to limit corporate power and influence.

It is symbolic to me that, among all the articles in "Defense," Laird's is the only one that emphasizes and highlights climate change as relevant to our work. Laird's focus is on two actual pragmatic effects of our corporate state and the political failure of the liberal left: global and educational climate change. To build on what Laird says about climate change, I concur that the situation is critical. There is overwhelming consensus among climate scientists that we are currently experiencing rapid climate change caused by humans through the burning of fossil fuels, and the effects of this change, while largely uncertain in specific detail, will be catastrophic and potentially lethal to the human species (and perhaps life on the planet).

While time prevents a detailed discussion of debates on the "science" of climate change, I do want to say a little about what I mean when I say "consensus of climate scientists" and what that consensus is. First of all, the consensus is consistent among climate and atmosphere scientists at universities around the world. There are almost no climate-change skeptics within the fields of climate and atmospheric science housed at universities; most climate change skeptics are housed in private research institutions or corporate-funded think tanks. Our own government agency charged with studying climate and weather, the

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,¹⁶ has consistently released balanced, well-supported information on climate change. President Obama¹⁷ consistently affirms the reality of climate change, articulating the position of the world's heads of state. Governments of every country in the world accept the conclusion of mainstream climate scientists, and every country with a scientific agency related to the environment supports the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).¹⁸ In addition, much of the intense criticism of the IPCC is from the political far right, and almost exclusively comes from within the United States. In fact, the U.S. is now the only country in the world within which the reality of human-caused climate change is openly discussed as a public question.

Matt Kelsh, from the University Corporation of Atmospheric Research, housed in Boulder, Colorado, recently described the science of climate change during a program on National Public Radio¹⁹ on connections between climate change and the recent Colorado flooding. Kelsh uses a metaphor of medicine, stating climate scientists are very much like doctors: they conduct an examination and gather data through diagnostic tests and then, even though there is much they do not know, analyze and discuss all available information and work to achieve consensus on a diagnosis and prescription. Here is a summary of the latest scientific consensus on climate reporting provided through a 2013 IPCC press release:²⁰

Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased.

Ocean warming dominates the increase in energy stored in the climate system, accounting for more than 90% of the energy accumulated between 1971 and 2010 (high confidence). It is virtually certain that the upper ocean (0–700 m) warmed from 1971 to 2010, and it likely warmed between the 1870s and 1971.

The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years. CO₂ concentrations have increased by 40% since pre-industrial times, primarily from fossil fuel emissions and secondarily from net land use change emissions.

Human influence on the climate system is clear. This is evident from the increasing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, positive radiative forcing, observed warming, and understanding of the climate system. It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.

Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of the climate system. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. Changes in the global water cycle in response to the warming over the 21st century will not be uniform. The contrast in precipitation between wet and dry regions and between wet and dry seasons will increase, although there may be regional exceptions.

The global ocean will continue to warm during the 21st century. Heat will penetrate from the surface to the deep ocean and affect ocean circulation. It is very likely that the Arctic sea ice cover will continue to shrink and thin and that Northern Hemisphere spring snow cover will decrease during the 21st century as global mean surface temperature rises. Global glacier volume will further decrease.

Global mean sea level will continue to rise during the 21st century. Climate change will affect carbon cycle processes in a way that will exacerbate the increase of CO₂ in the atmosphere (high confidence). Further uptake of carbon by the ocean will increase ocean acidification.

Most aspects of climate change will persist for many centuries even if emissions of CO₂ are stopped. This represents a substantial multi-century climate change commitment created by past, present, and future emissions of CO₂.

Climate scientists tend readily to acknowledge the large areas of uncertainty and many limitations to a full understanding of what is happening; nonetheless, Kelsh is typical of most when asked, at the close of his NPR interview, what science is saying needs to be done, ending with a statement based on the evidence: “we need to act now.”²¹

Let me summarize: scientists are saying that to avoid irreversible damage to our planet we need fundamental change in our behavior and economic choices. A similar existential threat to humanity, nuclear war, was acknowledged and used by Faulkner as a challenge to the humanities during the early stages of the cold war but, at that time, humans still had control: all we had to do was avoid pushing a button. Considering the

end of humans, Faulkner chides: “when the last dingdong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking.” Could it be that Faulkner’s “puny inexhaustible voice” is intellectual scholars talking to one another with loud proclamations of their own relevance, purpose, and value? I give kudos to Susan Laird for clearly defining global and education climate as the issue of our lives, time, and profession. I believe she models the positive potential of a public intellectual in our field. One knows this from the passion to make a difference evident in her students.

Laird, Faulkner, and the title of this paper speak of hope. With regard to Social Foundations, I do not see hope in the traditional institutional roles of our field, but I do see hope in accomplishing the reason and purpose of our being a field. We must, however, as a field, determine a way to provide the education young people want and need. We must, in other words, be relevant to the lives and experience of young generations during the peak of their advanced moral and intellectual development in the humanities. Given this, the question is, “what do young people want and need?” The answer I hear from young people is “hope.” Young people want a future; they want hope in a future. Social Foundations, if it is to survive as a voice in the institutional provision of educational services, must provide a path to discover hope and to act in hope.

I have some examples of finding and acting in hope from my own experience. First, I met a young couple three weeks ago who, after losing hope in the academy, left the academy for an alternate path. The couple started a commercial food garden, Amorphous Gardens, near Clinton, Mississippi, in the spring of 2012. Before coming to Mississippi, both were graduate students at the University of Wisconsin. The man was a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology and the woman was in a masters’ program in the same field. Today, the couple and their two children are gardening (they do not call what they do farming) on a small plot of hardscrabble red clay in the hill country of north Mississippi. The couple grow food and raise animals with limited external inputs, use no-till gardening practices to preserve the soil, do not use irrigation, raise a number of standard and perennial fruits and vegetables, raise and sell a number of edible plants found wild in Mississippi (curly dok, lambs quarter, poke, thistle, dandelion, and other edible, native plants and herbs), and are working towards saving all their own seed within three years. When I asked the young man why he did not finish his doctoral degree at the University of Wisconsin, he replied, “I just came to the point where I felt it is all corrupt; the field of Sociology, my department, the university, our entire society. I just couldn’t do it anymore.”

I have heard many stories like this over the past four years. A large number (well over 100) of young men and women, mostly in their 20s, work and volunteer on the organic farm I started in 2009. Through WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)²² and HELPX,²³ both internet-based, work-share programs which connect people and farms willing to exchange labor for lodging and food, I have hosted young guests from Germany, France, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and all parts of the U.S. My impression from these young people as a group is that they have concern, unmatched since the 1960s, for justice, peace, and the environment. They are deeply concerned for the future, want to be active, and want to engage in activities that make a difference. They also have heroes, individuals they model and follow. Almost universally, young people who actively work for social change follow leaders who speak and, importantly, act with a humanitarian voice: a voice that links social and environmental justice.

As I strive to be what I am not now, I, too, look to heroic examples. Robert Inchausti,²⁴ in his introduction to *Subversive Orthodoxy: Outlaws, Revolutionaries, and Other Christians in Disguise*, provides multiple models of hope as a Social Foundations scholar. Inchausti sums up some commonalities among these individuals:

Most of the thinkers examined here are religious traditionalists whose ideas challenge the assumptions of their secular colleagues. Most are also innovators in their respective fields, alert to contemporary circumstances, aware of changes in their disciplines, critical of dominant narratives, and yet still capable of drawing connections between their faith and the realities of the modern world.

Each of them does far more than simply say “no” to modernism; they bridge the chasm between our longing for spiritual completion and the technoscientific world in which we live. From Any Warhol to Marshall McLuhan, this orthodox avant-garde finds its inspiration not only in the Gospels, but in the monastic silence of John Cage, the devotional music of John Coltrane, even the negative dialectics of Theodore Adorno.

I read this work because Inchausti is one of my intellectual heroes. I have been a huge fan of Inchausti since I read *Spitwad Sutras: Classroom Teaching as Sublime Vocation*,²⁵ finding it the best book I have read on teaching. For me, *Spitwad Sutras* establishes Inchausti as a writer and thinker in the Social Foundations of Education. In *Subversive Orthodoxy*, Inchausti profiles and discusses many of my heroes in the humanities I have read (and many I have not read) and who have inspired me

throughout my educational life: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Jack Kerouac, Walter Percy, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Wendell Berry, and Ivan Illich.

Unfortunately, except for Wendell Berry, these individuals are no longer with us. Fortunately, there are many other heroes in the humanities alive and doing amazing work today. I want briefly to profile a few (among many) of my contemporary heroes (in addition to Susan): Vandana Shiva, Woody Tasch, Bill McKibben, and, of course, Wendell Berry.

Vandana Shiva is an environmentalist and eco-feminist writer and activist with a background in philosophy and science. She holds a masters in Philosophy of Science and a Ph.D. in particle physics. She founded and directs the Navdanya Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology.²⁶ She has published many books including: *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*;²⁷ *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*;²⁸ *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*;²⁹ and *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*.³⁰ Here is a brief bio from one of her publishers, South End Press:³¹

Shiva is a leader in the International Forum on Globalization, along with Ralph Nader and Jeremy Rifkin. She addressed the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle, 1999, as well as the World Economic Forum in Melbourne, 2000. In 1993, Shiva won the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award). In 2010, she was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize for her commitment to social justice. The founder of Navdanya (“nine seeds”), a movement promoting diversity and use of native seeds, she also set up the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology in her mother’s cowshed in 1997. Its studies have validated the ecological value of traditional farming and been instrumental in fighting destructive development projects in India.

While Shiva seeks to expose through her writing and speaking the catastrophic social effects of industrial agriculture in India and throughout the developing world, she also works to develop and promote sustainable alternatives consistent with an emphasis on social justice. One of the biggest problems in addressing the issues she raises is the international corporate/industrial financial system and its monopolistic control of capital.

Woody Tasch is a public intellectual who writes on the problem and actively promotes and develops an alternative sustainable and local

financial system. From 1998–2008, Tasch served as chairman of Investor’s Circle,³² an investment group that has invested over \$150 million in sustainable ventures. Tasch is the author of *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms, and Fertility Mattered*.³³

I would be remiss at this point if I left out Bill McKibben, perhaps the best known public intellectual and activist in the world today. I heard McKibben speak last spring and he said something that changed the way I view my role in society. I have never been one to carry a sign or even one who believes protest, and similar forms of activism, effective. McKibben’s talk changed my view when he spoke of politics as decision-making and the obligation of those who speak of change to act for change. I will again quote from a bio, this one from McKibben’s website, that succinctly summarizes his work:³⁴

McKibben is the author of a dozen books about the environment, beginning with *The End of Nature* in 1989, which is regarded as the first book for a general audience on climate change. He is a founder of the grassroots climate campaign 350.org, which has coordinated 15,000 rallies in 189 countries since 2009. *Time* magazine called him “the planet’s best green journalist” and the *Boston Globe* said in 2010 that he was “probably the country’s most important environmentalist.” Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College, he holds honorary degrees from a dozen colleges, including the Universities of Massachusetts and Maine, the State University of New York, and Whittier and Colgate Colleges. In 2011 he was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

McKibben has published multiple books on climate change following 1989’s *The End of Nature*,³⁵ including *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*.³⁶ Through his work as a public intellectual, McKibben has created organizations like 350.org and has become a world leader in environmental activism and protest.

Saving my favorite for last, I want to say a few things about my hero of heroes, Wendell Berry. Berry has been the subject of or been included in many of my SoPHE papers and I always struggle to explain who he is and what he does, and why I view him as a transformative model of inspiration and hope. In working on this talk and looking through descriptions and bios, I came across an article published in 2012 in *The New York Times* by Mark Bittman. Realizing the risk of including long quotations in my talk from writers far more eloquent than I, I ask nevertheless you indulge me while I read Mark Bittman’s³⁷ article in its

entirety, because it captures the life, person, and work of Wendell Berry extraordinarily well:

The sensibility of Wendell Berry, who is sometimes described as a modern day Thoreau but who I'd call the soul of the real food movement, leads people like me on a path to the door of the hillside house he shares with his wife, Tanya, outside of Port Royal, KY. Everything is as the pilgrim would have it: Wendell (he's a one-name icon, like Madonna, but probably in that respect only) is kind and welcoming, all smiles.

He quotes Pope ("Consult the genius of the place in all"), Spenser, Milton, and Stegner, and answers every question patiently and articulately. He doesn't patronize. We sit alone, uninterrupted through the morning, for two or three hours. Tanya is at church; when it's time, he turns on the oven, as she requested before leaving. He seems positively yogic, or maybe it's just this: How often do I sit in long, quiet conversation? Wendell has this effect.

Tanya returns around noon, and their daughter, Mary, arrives shortly thereafter. (Mary lives nearby, runs a winery, and is engaged in enough food and farm justice issues to impress Wendell Berry.) We eat. It's all local, food they or their neighbors or friends or family have grown or raised, food that Tanya has cooked. There's little fuss about any of that, only enjoyment and good eating. I note that I can't stop devouring the corn bread, and that the potatoes have the kind of taste of the earth that floors you.

And we chat, and then Wendell takes me for a drive around the countryside he was born in and where he's lived for most of his life. As he waves to just about every driver on the road, he explains that the land was once home to scores of tobacco farmers, and now has patches of forest, acres of commodity crops and farms where people do what the land tells them to. That's one of Wendell's recurring themes: Listen to the land.

There really is not that much to see until I try to see it through Wendell's eyes, and then every bit of erosion becomes a tiny tragedy—or at least a human's mistake—and every bit of forest floor becomes a bit of the genius of nature. (If you imitate nature, he's said, you'll use the land wisely.)

He knows the land the way I know the stops on the Lexington Avenue subway line and, predictably, I begin feeling like the fairly techie city person I am and wonder if it could have been

otherwise. I have friends who back-to-the-landed it in the late '60s and early '70s, and a couple of them stuck it out. Although one of them seems to have disappeared somewhere near Leadville, Colo., another—urban as he was in the beginning—has gained the same kind of wisdom Wendell has, a sense of patience and understanding, a kind of calm despite full awareness of the storm.

Genuine and as much of a product of place as Wendell is, he's not a full-time farmer and never was, but a farm-raised intellectual and even a man of the world. I'd never heard of him the first time I read his work—probably in *Harper's*, probably in the '80s—but his words have changed my life. As the years have gone by, I've watched his stature change. If he's not a leader then he's an inspiration to those who are.

In any case, he's in Port Royal now, and has been for decades (his family has been here for 200 years), and there is something about his attachment to nature—it's not just the land but everything on the land—that is so profound that his observations and his judgments (Wendell is a kind but very judgmental man) can be jaw-dropping. If you read or listen to Wendell and aren't filled with admiration and respect, it's hard to believe that you might admire and respect the land or nature, or even humanity.

In Washington this past Monday, Wendell delivered the 2012 Jefferson Lecture, the highest honor the federal government has for “distinguished intellectual achievement” in the humanities. He titled the talk “It All Turns on Affection.” When I visited him last month he told me that preparing the talk “taxed him greatly,” and I can see why. It's incredibly ambitious, tying together E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*, the history of his family and the country around it, and—to summarize it rather crudely—the costs of capitalism's abuse of humans and land.

I doubt there is a more quotable man in the United States. (You can readily see this by reading the text of the talk, or by visiting this lovely page of Wendell Berry quotes.) Monday, he spoke of the “mechanical indifference” of a financial trust, that it had the “indifference of a grinder to what it grinds,” saying, “It did not intend to victimize its victims. It simply followed its single purpose of the highest possible profit, and ignored the ‘side effects.’” This from a poet and an essayist who, by following his love of the land and its people, describes the current state of affairs as accurately and succinctly as anyone on

earth: “The two great aims of industrialism—replacement of people by technology and concentration of wealth into the hands of a small plutocracy—seem close to fulfillment.”

I knew that Wendell and I agreed on these things when I went to visit him. Oddly, I felt, as I imagine others have in making the same trip, as if I were seeking wisdom. Indeed, Wendell’s thoughtfulness and perception, combined with his outside-ness and demeanor (if anyone could persuade me to start worshipping, it would be Wendell), makes this only natural.

We spoke, as I said, for hours, and my two big questions for him were, essentially, “How are we going to change this?” and “What can city people do?”

He makes it clear that he doesn’t think anything is going to happen quickly, except perhaps the possible catastrophe that lurks in the minds of everyone who believes the earth to be overstressed. “You can describe the predicament that we’re in as an emergency,” he says, “and your trial is to learn to be patient in an emergency.”

Change, he says, is going to come from “people at the bottom” doing things differently. “[N]o great feat is going to happen to change all this; you’re going to have to humble yourself to be willing to do it one little bit at a time. You can’t make people do this. What you have to do is notice that they’re already doing it.”

Then he takes me to the barn, where there are seven newborn lambs. And he says, “When you are new at sheep-raising and your ewe has a lamb, your impulse is to stay there and help it nurse and see to it and all. After a while you know that the best thing you can do is walk out of the barn.”

We walk out of the barn, and say goodbye.

Three hours later, my phone rings. (Wendell, famously, does not own a computer.) “Mark,” he says. “I’ve been thinking about that question about what city people can do. The main thing is to realize that country people can’t invent a better agriculture by ourselves. Industrial agriculture wasn’t invented by us, and we can’t uninvent it. We’ll need some help with that.”

Next week, an interview with Wendell Berry by Bill Moyers is airing on *Moyers and Company*.³⁸ If anyone is wondering what I am articulating when I hold Berry up as a model of a relevant public intellectual, I hope you will tune in and watch or download and watch the interview when you have a chance.

Social Foundations as a field must change and adapt not only to educational climate change, but also the postmodern shift in the cultural nature and meaning of knowledge and the educational expectations and needs of future generations. If Social Foundations scholars continue to expect the traditional, academic privilege of institutional authority from which to impart, Mortimer-Adler-like, pre-determined, and essential knowledge, I believe we will not be relevant. Rather, we must understand the contemporary, postmodern milieu and how contemporary learners understand and value knowledge. Like it or not, knowledge is becoming much less objective, authoritative, and fixed and much more fluid and communal through the World Wide Web. A couple of things I will say: The public intellectuals I have just discussed do not argue the relevance of the humanities, rather, they use the humanities to argue for decisions that will make a positive difference; second, I believe relevance for public intellectuals comes from action and not words. Given this, what do the examples of these relevant public intellectual say to me as I continue to work as a Social Foundations scholar?

First, we as a field need to support science and scientists. While I am not a positivist or even a post-positivist, I *do* find science a morally neutral, social process of representation that is both essential to understanding the effects of our corporate industrial system but also necessary as we seek solutions. Scientists who, based on evidence from their field, take a strong stand on the social implications and need for change need support, encouragement, and defending. Most importantly, the socially embedded processes of contemporary science beg for support amid the flood of attacks that challenge the credibility of science—and scientists—by distorting and misrepresenting scientific processes and findings. Science is more than a corporate tool, it is a social process of investigation and meaning-making that, seen through a postmodern lens, is deeply connected to the humanities.

Second, while many of us engage in some of these activities, we need to engage in and create opportunities to pressure the corporate academe system internally. There are multiple ways individuals working at colleges and universities might do this. Bill McKibben is leading a highly effective campaign of divestment³⁹ based on South Africa's successful anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s. This movement seeks to have colleges refrain from investing funds in the petrochemical industry. Students and faculty across the nation are putting considerable pressure on universities and colleges to provide better food more food choices on campuses, especially advocating for the availability of non-GMO, organic, or local food. Employees of colleges and universities should have matching retirement savings options that allow for either investment in local, sustainable enterprises, or environmentally friendly

corporations. Student activists on college campuses need support from faculty. I hosted a three-day meeting in my home (while I was out of town) of students from colleges and universities across Mississippi: a group called MASS (Mississippi Association of Students for Sustainability). These students are doing amazing things but, sadly, they do not feel well supported by faculty members; rather, they tend to view faculty as part and parcel of the system they are protesting.

Third, as much as possible, I believe we need to go local in every possible decision. As an organic farmer, struggling to maintain a business that has four fulltime employees, I am struck by the number of people who talk the talk but who fail to support local, sustainable enterprises. I try not to be the person who complains about the loss of the locally owned bookstore, the locally owned restaurant, and the locally owned hardware store while at the same time chooses to shop at Barnes and Noble, McDonalds, and Walmart because the “prices” are lower. The alternative, I believe, to a global, monopolistic, corporate economic system is a local market economy. This change does not require a revolution or the end of democracy, rule of law, or private property. It does require people who make different economic choices. I work to model these choices.

Finally, we must act without fear. I often ask myself a critical question: “At what point will my values prevent me from working at an institution that fails to support or promote my values?” And “am I willing to give up the money, prestige, and power that comes from being a professor in the academy?” The truth is, I am, in a sense, addicted to the money, prestige, and power. Nonetheless, I must ask myself—and believe we as field must ask ourselves: “What effect does fear have on my decisions regarding doing what I think is right?” To this end, I think we may need to acknowledge the answer to the question presented by Baez and Boyles at the beginning of this talk may be “no.” We may need to recognize and accept a corporate-controlled education system (regardless of who pays) is not public in spirit or practice and be willing to embrace non-public alternatives, and then develop, engage in, and support alternative education models that redefine “public” as a local system under local control.

Endnotes

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- 6 *Ibid.*, 59.
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- ²⁵ Robert Inchausti, *Spitwad Sutras: Classroom Teaching as Sublime Vocation* (New York: Praeger, 1993).
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- ³² Investors Circle, <http://www.investorscircle.net/>
- ³³ Woody Tasch, *Inquiries Into the Nature of Slow Money: Investing as if Food, Farms, and Fertility Mattered* (White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010).
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- ³⁷ Mark Bittman, "Wendell Berry, American Hero," *The New York Times*, 24 April 2012, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/24/wendell-berry-american-hero/?_r=0
- ³⁸ Bill Moyers, "Wendell Berry, Poet and Prophet," *Moyers and Company*, 4 October 2013, <http://billmoyers.com/episode/full-show-wendell-berry-poet-prophet/>
- ³⁹ Details on McKibben's divestment program available at <http://gofossilfree.org/>