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Community, Neighborhood and Family in Ancient Athens and Modern Philadelphia

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Dr. Ira Harkavy
Center for Community Partnerships

Dear Ira:

I am delighted to submit to you my report on the freshman seminar which I offered this past semester, *Community, Neighborhood, and Family in Ancient Athens and Modern Philadelphia* (Classical Studies 125). It was, indeed, an extremely rewarding experience for me, and I am quite certain that the students in the class found it so as well.

As you know, although I had a number of related objectives in running this course, overall I was concerned to see whether I could make students feel that the study of antiquity is as relevant to our contemporary world as I have always felt it to be. I chose to focus on classical Athens not only because the evidence for its social and political history is relatively full and reasonably accessible in translation, but more importantly because our own society has mythologized the entire period into a construct that is often thought to reflect our own cultural values. Much of the rhetoric that we hear today about democracy, freedom, citizenship and community, in other words, is often alleged to have derived from "the Greeks", with little consideration of the actual historical conditions that produced their own forms of political and social discourse. I figured, therefore, that the students would have some basic familiarity with the "myth of the classics" in our society, and that this would make it relatively easy to go back and forth between modern Philadelphia and ancient Athens in focusing on topics that clearly concerned each society.

At the beginning of the semester I was unsure about how I could best integrate the academic aspects of the course with the tutoring that each student undertook in the Anderson elementa. school. Obviously some topics we studied worked better than others in this regard, though I w..s surprised to find how easy it was for my students to make rather profound connections between their tutoring experences (limited though their contact actually was) and the material we studied in class. Most exhilarating for me was the fact that my students were *eager* to look for connections, and could articulate cogently why it was important to do so. I think I was particularly fortunate this semester in having a class of seven students with extremely different backgrounds (e.g., an Asian-american whose father is by birth Chinese, but whose mother is Irish-born; a woman whose parents are both Greek-Americans living in New Orleans; a woman from *very* rural Pennsylvania town; you get the picture!). We spent a good deal of time sharing our own different experiences of the topics we were studying (notions of citizenship, personal experiences of "community" in our upbringing, our beliefs about race, education and religion as social forces), and such discussions always managed to illuminate whatever our focal topic of the week happened to be. I encouraged the students to try to bring up some of these issues with their tutees at the Anderson school, and this yielded some interesting results on occasion. Once the tutorial aspects of these courses become better organized at the schools, I am sure that the students will be able to integrate their tutoring experiences even more consistently than they were able to in my course.
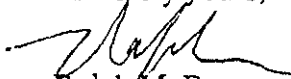
You have seen from my syllabus the shape of the course, and the selection of topics we covered, so I needn't dwell on those details here. When I offer this course again, I would certainly tinker with some aspects of it, removing some avenues of inquiry that worked less successfully than others (e.g., perhaps a little less Greek political philosophy, less reading about the nitty-gritty of Athenian political machinery), or spending more time on those that were especially fruitful (e.g., more material on neighborhood organization in Philadelphia, some more modern philosophy of education, Dewey et al.). In addition, with the benefit of hindsight now, I plan to seek out colleagues who work in modern urban history and sociology, hoping to tap not only their academic expertise on such topics, but their practical experience of them in Philadelphia as well.

In the end, the best way to evaluate the success of this course, it seems to me, is to ask whether the students came away from it with the feeling that their study of community, neighborhood and family (et al.) in ancient Athens actually illuminated their understanding about the world in which they are now living, whether studying an ancient culture actually *informed* their ability to formulate the questions, problems, and hopefully, some solutions confronting their own society. And, conversely, did their study of modern American social and political topics enrich their appreciation of antiquity. To judge from their papers (some of which you have seen) and their course evaluations I think I can safely say that the answer to these questions is certainly "yes". Among other things, I think the students learned from the class that the Greeks in fact were *not* "just like us", that in many respects they were *not* as enlightened or socially progressive as many have made them out to be, that their democratic system was so efficient for a brief period precisely because so *few* people were empowered and so many oppressed. Yet the many radical differences the students discovered between Athenian society and our own became most apparent from a focus on the more abstract issues of social organization and community which *any* group of human beings must address if it hopes to live in a functioning polity. Americans and ancient Athenians, in other words, had to ask similar *questions*, even if their respective responses are very different.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for being so supportive in this new endeavor. I look forward to further contact with your office as I work to refine the course for the future.

Sincerely yours,

Ralph M. Rosen
Associate Professor and Chair

Community, Neighborhood and Family in
Ancient Athens and Modern Philadelphia

Course Proposal of Ralph M. Rosen
Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Classical Studies

I can't even begin to calculate how many times, in my capacity as a classics professor, I have been asked by suspicious parents why their child was studying classical antiquity, or, worse yet, thinking of majoring in the field! Time after time I found myself reciting the usual rhetoric about the classics as the fountainhead of so many aspects of western culture, whether it be law, science, literature, or philosophy. I would even venture to suggest that a person well versed in Greco-Roman antiquity might be a more savvy and acute citizen, better equipped, perhaps, than others to confront a complex modern world. Many parents were consoled by this line of thought, but others wanted more direct evidence that my discipline can in fact rise above the merely pedantic and antiquarian, and serve an accountable function in the education of their sons and daughters. I've never felt myself like a crusty pedant, yet articulating just how the study of ancient culture can be relevant for today's world has always been a real challenge. The reasons for this lie, I think, not so much in nature of the material itself as in the various ways in which our discipline has constructed itself over the last few centuries. Obviously I cannot explore here the complex social and aesthetic factors that have contributed to the shape of our discipline today, but the point is simply that it is now time for classics to show how the study of antiquity, and indeed the study of the humanities in general, can enhance our understanding of ourselves, our community, our polity and our interaction with one another as private and public citizens.

For several years Lee Benson has delighted in challenging me about the social function of academic disciplines such as mine. When he asked me several months ago whether I could conceive of a classics course that would one day become a part of a curriculum sponsored by the Center for Community Partnerships, the typically hypothetical nature of our conversations about such matters suddenly took on an exciting urgency. I was initially skeptical, I have to admit, mainly because most of us have not been trained to think seriously about such projects. Classics and community service? After all, reconciling the *vita contemplativa* with the *vita activa* has been a problem at least since Aristotle. But the more I considered Lee's challenge, the more I realized just how much polarizing "intellectual" and "practical" lives has created a false and often pernicious dichotomy. The course that I propose to design this summer, therefore, and which I would like to offer next spring, will attempt to show how an academic discipline traditionally perceived to be aloof from real-world issues, can sharpen our perception of our own world, and perhaps even help us directly to solve of its most pressing problems.

I chose the subject of my course, Community, Neighborhood and Family in Ancient Athens and Modern Philadelphia, partly because my own scholarly work tends to focus on fifth-century B.C. Athens, but more importantly because that period in particular has been mythologized in modern times in a number of telling ways. We call the fifth century the "classical period" in Greek history, we speak of the "Greek enlightenment", we idealize "Periclean Athens", we think of "classical" Athens as the "birthplace of democracy", we tend to think, in general, of Periclean Athens as representing a cultural pinnacle after which "civilization" went into a decline at least until the Renaissance. What better model, one might suppose, could we find for our own society than fifth-century Athens? Yet such idealizations reflect only a small part of the whole cultural vista of the time. Many prevailing Athenian ideologies would surely be distasteful to most citizens of a modern democracy: the acceptance of slavery, the oppression of women, intolerance of weakness, a highly restricted political franchise, a culture of male-centered aggression, just to name a few. Part of what I'd like to do in this course, therefore, is to move beyond the modern myths about Athens, examine closely how an Athenian polis was organized, how Athenian citizens fostered a sense of community at both the local and international level, and how they framed their questions about the goals of a society and the nature of happiness. My aim is not to dwell on whether the Greeks of that time were "good" or "bad" people by our own ethical standards, but to show that,

by studying how an ancient culture quite different from our own wrestled with crucial issues of social organization and interpersonal behavior, we might learn something from them about our own formulation of and answers to similar questions.

Among the topics to be studied will be: notions of "community" in Athens and Philadelphia; attitudes toward the family; ethnic self-definition; notions of autochthony and "otherness"; myth-making as a force of social cohesion and fragmentation, e.g. myths dealing with urban "pre-history", aetiological myths about ethnicity, the controversy over "Afrocentricity" (history or mythopoiesis?); and the role of religion, ritual and the arts in both cultures. I will be spending part of this summer, therefore, learning what I can about the structures of Philadelphia and working out methods of making the connections between the ancient and modern world fully apposite. To this end, I will be talking to various people in community and school positions, as well as to colleagues at Penn who can help direct me to local resources and relevant individuals in the community. As a preliminary step, Ira Harkavy has suggested that I talk to Marie Bogle of the Turner School, who will be able to suggest ways of integrating our class with Philadelphia schools. I recognize at this point that this will be a real challenge, but I see no reason why a properly constructed course on an academic topic cannot at the very least help students (and teachers, too, including myself) evaluate better their place in the community and the world at large.

CLASSICAL STUDIES AND THE SEARCH FOR "COMMUNITY": A REPORT ON A RECENT CURRICULAR EXPERIMENT

Ralph M. Rosen
Department of Classical Studies

A recent article in *TV Guide* magazine, discussing the latest rage in children's programming, the "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers", notes in passing that the show is so popular that you would have to be the child of a classics professor in order not to be aware of it. Aside from the fact that my own two small children, who are captivated by the show, disprove this claim, I found the stereotyping of classicists and the assumptions about the discipline as a whole fascinating. Over the years a profession that was felt in the not too distant past to provide a universal education for those aspiring to be functional and informed citizens in western society, has gradually come to be perceived as a hermetically sealed bastion of antiquarianism and pedantry, completely divorced from the world around us. There are many diverse reasons for this evolution, and surely classicists themselves must bear some of the responsibility, but I am still astonished whenever I am confronted with the postulate that the study of Greco-Roman antiquity is a pursuit fundamentally "irrelevant" to today's concerns, problems and cultural practices. I keep remembering what drew me into the profession in the first place: learning, for example, about the oral poetic techniques of Homeric poets at the same time as I was discovering analogous poetics in jazz and blues; following the 1976 presidential campaign (my first as a voting adult) while studying the democratic machinery of classical Athens; observing in my daily life the quickly shifting sexual politics of modern America while discovering that many classical texts had articulated similar concerns. In short, just about everything I encountered within classical studies was enthralling precisely *because* it was profoundly implicated in some way with the contemporary world and my own life within it. "Escapism" or "elitism" was the last thing on my mind when I thought about ancient texts and society, and why they are worth devoting one's life to.

It is true, however, that the classical curriculum which most institutions have inherited do not on the surface reflect the vibrancy and "relevance" of the field, nor does it, perhaps, convey adequately the passion and personal engagement of its practitioners. I have spent many years now

trying to counteract this legacy, and have always found this a real rhetorical challenge. Time after time I have been asked by suspicious parents why their child was studying classical antiquity, or, worse yet, thinking of majoring in the field. Time after time I found myself reciting the usual line about the classics as the fountainhead of so many aspects of western culture, whether it be law, science, literature, or philosophy. I would even venture to suggest that a person well versed in Greco-Roman antiquity might be a more savvy and acute citizen, better equipped, perhaps, than others to confront a complex modern world. Many parents were consoled by this line of thought, but others quite rightly wanted to know more specifically how classics could serve an accountable function in the education of their sons and daughters. I slowly realized that no amount of rhetoric from me, no matter how passionate, could easily overcome popular perceptions about what a typical classics curriculum has to offer. So when Lee Benson asked me more than a year ago whether I could conceive of a classics course that would one day become part of a curriculum sponsored by the Center for Community Partnerships, I thought that this might be the opportunity I had been waiting for, a chance to communicate to students just how false and pernicious the polarization between the "intellectual" and the "practical" can be, especially in disciplines such as classics.

The challenge I saw before me, then, was whether I could design a course that would reflect what I had always believed, namely that classical studies can indeed sharpen our perception of our own world, and perhaps even help us in one way or another to solve some of its most pressing problems. It was initially an exhausting task to contemplate. The world is rightly bored with yet another pursuit that concludes glibly "See, the Greeks and Romans were just like us!" or "Gee, isn't it neat that it all began with the Greeks?!" Any classicist knows how incomplete and often simply wrong these conclusions are, and the non-academic public has little choice but to regard the perceived connections with antiquity as novel factoids at best. I wanted to find a context in which to analyze and integrate the many *differences* between ourselves and Greco-Roman antiquity as well as the connections, to examine our very discourse about and construction of antiquity as a reflection of how we define ourselves in our own society, and, I hoped, to show that

what we can learn from the Greeks and Romans tangibly enriches our understanding of our own behavior as individuals and political creatures alike.

I chose the subject and title of my course, "Community, Neighborhood and Family in Ancient Athens and Modern Philadelphia", partly because my own scholarly work tends to focus on fifth-century BC Athens but more importantly because that period in particular has been mythologized in modern times in a number of telling ways. We call the fifth century the "classical period" in Greek history, we speak of the "Greek enlightenment", we idealize "Periclean Athens", we think of "classical" Athens as the "birthplace of democracy", we tend to think, in general, of Periclean Athens as a cultural pinnacle after which "civilization" went into a decline, at least until the Renaissance. What better model, one might suppose, could we find for our own democratic society than fifth-century Athens? Yet such idealizations reflect only a small part of the whole cultural vista of the time. Many prevailing Athenian practice and ideologies would surely be distasteful to most citizens of a modern democracy: the acceptance of slavery, the oppression of women, intolerance of weakness, a highly restricted political franchise, a culture of male-centered aggression, just to name a few. Part of what I wanted to do in this course, therefore, was to move beyond the modern myths about Athens, examine closely how an Athenian polis was organized, how Athenian citizens fostered a sense of community at both the local and international level, and how they framed their questions about the goals of a society and the nature of happiness. My aim was not to dwell on whether the Greeks of that time were "good" or "bad" people by our own ethical standards, but to show that, by studying how an ancient culture quite different from our own wrestled with crucial issues of social organization and interpersonal behavior, we might learn something from them about our own formulation of and answers to similar questions.

I decided first to design this course with freshmen in mind, thinking that this group of students would be the least jaded and intellectually inhibited, and most open-minded to a teacher who was clearly shaping a course along the way. In retrospect, I am quite sure that any group of students would have worked out well, but I was glad to have the high energy and thirst for discovery that freshmen characteristically display as a group. The seminar became affiliated with

the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), which established contact between my students and a fifth-grade classroom at the Anderson Elementary School. My students met in pairs with small groups of these fifth-graders for tutoring once a week in a variety of special areas. I hoped that by establishing a relationship with these elementary school students, my students would be able to relate their tutoring experiences to the main themes we were addressing in the seminar. For example, when we studied gender roles in classical Greece, I encouraged my students to question their tutees informally about such matters (as well as to share with them their own experiences), in the hope that they would thereby come to see that contemporary discourse about gender and society is part of a conversation that has been evolving for millenia.

Classical Athens is practically tailor-made for a course concerned with social organization, the relationship between public and private realms of life, and the diverse, often conflicting, ideologies that control a complex society. Within a mere century, from the end of the sixth to the end of the fifth centuries BC, Athens developed from a city ruled by autocratic, if sometimes benevolent and impressive, "tyrants" to one that prided itself quite aggressively on its full-blown, participatory democracy. Along the way, we encounter the same sort of controversies that arise whenever one tries to analyze political categories and movements of any kind. Was Cleisthenes, for example, that legendary social reformer at the end of the sixth century, really the great "democratic" patriarch he was made out to be by the Athenians of the later fifth century, or was he really an "aristocrat" with his own agenda? How much power did the "people" actually have in Athens by the end of the fifth century? Did a few powerful individuals in fact control Athenian politics? Is a radical democracy a desirable political ideal in the first place, for Athens or anywhere?

While exposing the seminar to the various classical texts that bear on such issues (Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle), it was easy to assign parallel readings by modern thinkers on the nature of democracy. More significantly, however, the jump to modern Philadelphia proved to be more effortless and profound than I would ever have imagined. When we dipped into the recent history of Philadelphia, trying to see where its current system of

government and neighborhood characteristics came from, we saw, along with obvious differences in details, some amazingly analogous trends. The general development in classical Athens, for example, from an early democracy controlled essentially by a tightly-knit aristocratic elite to a system that attempted, at least, to be more inclusive of the larger citizen population seems remarkably parallel to the shift in twentieth-century Philadelphia from a government controlled by an elitist Republican machine to one firmly controlled by Democrats. In each society, one can find proponents and detractors of such developments, some nostalgic for the "good old days" when moral values were supposed to be immutable and the term "aristocrat" did not imply repression and the urge for self-aggrandizement, others thrilled that the political franchise was slowly opening up to those who could not claim a distinguished ancestry. Indeed, the reaction of both societies to their own aristocratic tendencies even produced two leaders described in their respective times with strikingly similar rhetoric: at Athens in the 420's the "demagogue" Cleon dominated the political scene, a man said by the largely conservative commentators of the time to be violent, boorish and vulgar, yet brilliant and effective as a general and champion of the demos; in recent Philadelphia history, Frank Rizzo cut a similar figure, both in his public persona and his ability to manipulate public sentiment.

With all our ballyhooing of the supposedly exemplary democracy of classical Athens, it is easy to overlook the fact that most of the surviving texts from that period remain suspicious of a political system that entrusted too much power to the "demos". Thucydides' remarks about Pericles summarize the conflict succinctly:

> Pericles, indeed, by his rank, ability, and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude. . . . In short, what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen. With his successors it was different. More on a level with one another, and each grasping at supremacy, they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of the multitude. [2.65; trans. Crawley]

The comic dramatist Aristophanes, too, seems to be suspicious of the way Athenian democracy was developing in the last years of the fifth century, and it is well known that Socrates was executed in 399 BC after a lifetime spent criticizing the premises of a radical democracy. We spent much time in class, therefore, trying to sort out the nature of the evidence about Athenian politics,

trying to transcend the misleading characterizations of the period that are current within modern political discourse, and, most importantly, debating from a practical and philosophical point of view the merits and flaws for a modern urban context of the competing political ideologies that existed within Athens itself.

In focusing on contemporary Philadelphia, class discussion of the most appropriate democratic system for a modern American polis touched on virtually every aspect of urban life, just as it did in the case of classical Athens, and ancient texts provided an eye-opening set of parallels for the students to contemplate. We looked, for example, at the current state of public education in Philadelphia, the recent history of the School Board, the educational reform movement of the 'sixties, its legacies and prospects for the future. Time and again, many of the issues that arose in this pursuit were reminiscent of issues that the students had traced from Aristophanes (in his *Clouds*, a play essentially concerned with educational ideology) and Plato, to Benjamin Franklin, John Dewey, E.D. Hirsch and others. What, for example, should be the role of education in a democracy? Should everyone receive an identical training? How should a society balance a "technical" education with a more theoretical one? The seminars in which we addressed these topics were particularly exciting, since the students were eager to bring to our discussions their experiences tutoring in the Anderson School. The spirited debates we had in class about education in a democratic society were clearly inspired by the unpredictable and exhilarating combination of ancient and modern theoretical texts, documents published by the Philadelphia School Board, and personal anecdotes from the students themselves. It was, needless to say, quite unlike any pedagogical experience I was used to.

The leitmotiv of the seminar, of course, was the notion of "community" in its broadest sense, how it was conceptualized in Athens and Philadelphia, and how each society worked towards realizing its own particular conception of it. I was not much interested in looking at social organization in Athens in the hope of finding some sort of magic formula that we could then "apply" to Philadelphia. There are too many fundamental differences in the actual details of each society for this to be a realistic expectation—differences in ethnicity, for example, economic

structures, technology, and even topography, to name just a few. In addition, as the students soon discovered, even the conception of democracy and citizenship was rather different for each society, with Athens stressing the primacy of the corporate polis, and Americans the primacy of individual liberty and rights. Nevertheless, by focusing precisely on some of these differences we were able to understand more clearly the ideology behind each society's efforts to organize itself in certain ways, and how this ideology governed each society's response to the realities of the world in which it was situated.

Perhaps the most fruitful avenue of comparison between Athenian and Philadelphian conceptions of "community" emerged from our examination of the elaborate organization of the Athenian polis into demes and tribes that prevailed in the fifth century. This self-conscious social experiment was the brainchild of the Athenian leader Cleisthenes, who, after the defeat of the tyrants in 510, re-structured the social and geographical groupings of Attica (the region surrounding Athens) in an effort to foster cultural and political coherence within a democratic system of government. The details of his organization are not always entirely clear, but the basic mechanism is: Cleisthenes divided all of Attica into three geographical areas, City, Coastal , and Inland, and he created ten new "tribes" of Athenians; he spread out membership in these tribes among the many demes (or "villages") of the region, by making sure that each of the three geographical areas had some of its demes assigned to one of the ten tribes. Whatever Cleisthenes motives might have been, it is clear that the effect of this social engineering was to unify disparate groups of demes into a political whole, and to provide relatively equitable representation of the demes and tribes in a central democratic government. Presumably, no one would want to re-organize Philadelphia the way Cleisthenes did Athens; it would be comical to consider what would happen if such a plan were proposed today by a politician! But even though the class did not find a practical blueprint for Philadelphia in studying Cleisthenes' reforms, we were able to articulate a set of problems and questions that concern virtually any group of humans trying to live together cheek by jowl in what some would call a "community". We addressed at some length, for example, the premises about human nature and behavior that evidently underlay Cleisthenes'

reforms, and what social problems these reforms set about to resolve. We saw clearly how similar much of the rhetoric about such issues remains today, as when we hear, for example about how disunity within a polis can only be harmful to individual and city alike, or how democracy can only work with equitable distribution of power, influence and representation. This sort of comparative examination of the rhetoric and ideology of two disparate cultures elicited a level of subtlety, sophistication and real passion in seminar discussion that I rarely find in the undergraduate classroom. By contemplating simultaneously Cleisthenic reforms and the recent history of neighborhood development in Philadelphia, the students found themselves asking themselves what "community" really means in the first place, what the real, and often subtle, differences are between community, "tribalism" and "clannishness", and how our own society (locally and nationally) might benefit from sorting out such differences for itself.

Such avenues of inquiry inevitably led to a host of other topics relevant to the larger issues of Athenian and Philadelphian society, including the role of religion, gender relations within the household and outside of it, and the uses of myth and mythmaking in each society to foster community solidarity (here we also had some intriguing sessions in which we compared Afrocentricity as a form of mythopoiesis in modern America, myths of autochthony in Athens, and even the modern "mythic" construction of "classical studies"). We also spent a good deal of time sharing our own different experiences of the topics we were studying (notions of citizenship, how we all experienced "community" in our upbringing, our beliefs about race, education and religion as forces in a community), and such discussions always managed to illuminate whatever our focal topic of the week happened to be.

One subject that such conversations addressed, the role of the arts in a democratic society, is perhaps worth mentioning here more fully, since I think it exemplifies strikingly how one can find significant points of contact between different cultures in very unexpected places. For this topic, I had the students read selections from Plato, who has little faith that the average human soul can withstand the detrimental effects of poetry, Aristophanes' *Frogs,* which stages a debate about literature and morality between Aeschylus and Euripides, and recent work on Rap music (we also

listened to the music as well). The juxtaposition of Rap and Greek poetry is for some, no doubt, an absurdity; but each art form incited a debate within its own society about remarkably similar issues: whether, for example, art must be socially edifying, whether it should be censored if it is not, who establishes the criteria for aesthetic evaluation, and what responsibilities an artist has to his or her community. Euripides, for example is taken to task by Aeschylus in the *Frogs* for corrupting Athenian society, though Euripides himself claims that his motives are deeply noble and socially responsible; similarly, many Rap artists come under fire from critics whose conception of social responsibility does not leave much room for unsettling, sometimes incendiary lyrics.

Throughout the semester, as I mentioned earlier, my students were tutoring elementary school children as a component of this course. At the beginning of most seminar sessions, I encouraged the students to share their tutoring experiences with the class, even if these experiences had little explicit bearing on the topic we were supposed to be covering that day. I worried at first about how this would work, whether there would be too much of a discontinuity, for example, between the elementary school context and the academic setting of our classroom. I soon found, however, that my concerns were misplaced: the students in fact needed very little prompting from me to relate their tutoring experiences to the topics we addressed more formally. And most gratifying of all was that they worked their experiences into our discussions on their own at every turn during the semester, not just when I had asked them to do so. When I offer this course again, I am hoping to achieve an even closer relationship between the course and the public schools than was possible last Spring, but there remains no question in my mind that the academic experience of the students was profoundly enhanced and complemented by their involvement with their own encounters with a real community beyond the University.

Although I had a number of related objectives in offering this course, ultimately I was concerned to see whether I could make students feel that the study of antiquity is as relevant to our contemporary world as I have always felt it to be. In the end, the best way to evaluate its success is to ask whether the students came out of the course with the sense that their study of classical Athens actually illuminated their understanding of the world in which they are now living, whether

studying an ancient culture actually *informed* their ability to formulate the questions, problems, and hopefully, some solutions confronting their own society. The final papers that they wrote for me, each in its own way, uniformly demonstrated that they did. All of the seven students in the seminar chose topics that focused as much on contemporary society in Philadelphia (and beyond) as on Athenian society. One student offered a trenchant critique of various aspects of the pedagogy he observed in the public schools, drawing on Plato, Aristotle, Franklin and Dewey, among others; another student compared attitudes towards gender in Athens and America, and focused on gender roles and conflicts within the African American urban community; another took on the topic of multiculturalism, exploring cogently its manifestations in modern society and why it appears to be such an un-Athenian concept! In all cases it was clear to me that the students had discovered that the study of a distant and different culture can indeed enhance our understanding of ourselves, our community, our polity and our interaction with one another as private and public citizens.

I would like to end with a few words about my own personal experience in teaching the course. I will avoid the temptation to rhapsodize and effuse, though it would be easy enough to do so, as I look back on it. In fact, however, the course was one of the most exhausting teaching experiences I have ever known, not only because I had to assimilate myself a good deal of unfamiliar material in a short period of time, but because I constantly worried about whether the class would "work". The last thing I wanted was to end up feeling as if I had offered up a semester of spurious connections between Athens and Philadelphia, and that the students would find the course a curiosity at best. But by the end of the seminar my fears diminished, and I was able to articulate why this course felt essentially different from every other I had taught. In other classes, many of the connections between past and present that we addressed in this seminar would indeed come to mind, and I might even mention them in passing to the students. Still, I tended to view such commentary in other classes as digressive from the matter at hand, which was inevitably rooted in a strictly classical context. This seminar, by contrast, was liberating: suddenly I was free to explore all those connections to our own world which our curriculum had traditionally encouraged us to stifle. Although I assume that my freshman students were not as fettered by

disciplinary constraints as I was at the beginning of that semester, I can only hope that they too felt something liberating about the class, and that they will often find themselves in the future, as they did in the class, making profound connections between things at just the moment when they are convinced that none could possibly exist.