

(This is an overview of a year-long public dialogue program Imagine Chicago designed and implemented as part of the NEH's Public Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity)

Making Civic Connections (1996)

Program Background and Design

In 1995, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) issued a call for communities to participate in designing conversations and programs around the theme of American Pluralism and Identity. Imagine Chicago convened several design conversations, discussing objectives in preliminary meetings with prospective partners to the conversation. It was suggested by a young resident of public housing in Chicago, who was in the Imagine Chicago office at the time of one of these meetings, that newcomer communities to Chicago might have the most interesting perspectives on American identity. Inviting them would give Imagine Chicago an opportunity to explore ways of engaging them in contributing to civic life.

Imagine Chicago was also interested in how questions of religious identity influenced and inspired civic action. So we decided to enlist as conversation partners a diverse faith-based constituency of newcomer religious groups (20 different faith communities representing 14 faith traditions). In doing so, Imagine Chicago enjoyed the cooperation of the staff director of the Metropolitan Chicago Interreligious Initiative (MCII), a project of the Committee for a Parliament of the World's Religions. Imagine Chicago submitted a proposal to NEH and was successful in receiving support. During March 1996 luncheon meetings were convened on the north and west sides of the city with 51 leaders of "newcomer" communities (most of them formed in Chicago during the last 20 years). These first gatherings began discussing the "pluralism-identity" theme of the National Conversation.

Communities were invited to formally sign-on for a sequence of conversations that would last through 1996. Each group was asked to designate three leaders who would assume responsibilities within their own circle and later also for activities of the larger constituency: a "community humanist" recognized for scholarly work within the group (to be distinguished from "program humanists"), a community organizer and a youth representative—at least one of whom should be a woman. Communities could also apply for a small stipend to cover certain expenses. The designation of these community leaders proved key to securing an ethnically diverse, inter-generational and forthcoming constituency. Five orientation sessions were convened for 57 designated community leaders during May and June. Two were repeats—all were invited to three. These meetings clarified and practiced two activities that would take place in the coming conversations. (1) People would offer a brief introduction of their own community to other city groups. This was not to be inter-ethnic dialog, but a show-and-tell conveying "how we wish to be known in the city." (2) They would read and discuss basic "American" documents which all the groups now have in common: The Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution (especially the Preamble and the First Amendment),

and the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty. George Anastaplo, a professor in Loyola University Law School and a veteran teacher in the University of Chicago's Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults, introduced the documents in these orientation meetings, and prepared three papers on discussable themes for later reference by community leaders.

Introduced in the early program orientation sessions was a conversation procedure designed to help participants give attention to one another and to the documents in constructive and productive ways. "Appreciative listening" and "appreciative inquiry" were already regular emphases in programs of Imagine Chicago. An Imagine Chicago board member, Don Bushman of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, modeled a use of four questions to be taken in sequence, for which he also supplied a chart: (1) What did you actually *hear*? (2) How did you *feel* about it? (3) What did you come to *understand*? And (4) Where or how would you like to *use* this? These questions proved a second key to successful conversation in the programs that followed, and also provided a diagnostic instrument when conversations were less than successful—occasional floundering could be traced to neglect of these questions or to taking them out of order. (The scheme of questions has precedents in classical manuals for citizen discussion. Cf. Cicero, *On Invention* I.viii.10.)

During the summer, 19 communities conducted "prologue conversations" in which they both formed their own "declarations" and considered the Declaration of Independence that all citizens have in common. An extended "Prologue Conversation Summary Report" was returned to Imagine Chicago which, along with other information, included questions that should be carried forward to next encounters. Communities were then combined for seven inter-group conversations to be conducted during September and early October in local settings, typically a branch library. These were open to the public, and were announced in the program brochure which began: "It takes more than elections to make a good society" 10,000 program brochures were distributed through the Chicago Library System and by mail. (A descriptive article was later published in *The Chicago Tribune*.)

A more extended written description of the purpose and sequence of these conversations was set forth in the Introduction to *A Reader for the Conversation*. First readings were the documents so far mentioned. Spanish translations were supplied to two communities that requested them. A statement of desired objectives and outcomes was included for each conversation, as well as questions for use with each document. The point was not to steer discussion but to ensure that basic themes were introduced that would enter into the conversations that followed.

Program Overview

Community groups that joined conducted a Prologue Conversation in their own settings, where the first task was to express and briefly document their own ethnic, religious, historical and cultural identity. In the second session, called Conversation #1, two or three communities shared their expressions with one another, typically in a local library branch.

Even the first conversations turned to the question of a larger societal identity now shared by diverse communities in this nation and city. Community leaders gave consideration in preliminary workshops to the most relevant national documents as well as to group facilitation methods. The project "source document reader" began, accordingly, with two founding national documents, the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution (Preamble and Bill of Rights). To these were added a predecessor statement to the First Amendment, the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty. Since some new communities see themselves as religiously defined and we confront an increasing plurality of religions in our society, practical attention was given to the Constitutional invention which combines "non-establishment" of any religion by government with "free exercise" of all religions by their adherents.

In subsequent conversations, these original community groups, while maintaining their special identities, were joined by the general public. Conversation #2, convened on October 15, 1996 at the Chicago Historical Society, featured a special year-long exhibit of the work of Abraham Lincoln. This conversation addressed major unresolved questions arising from the founding documents that produced profound struggles in American history, including a tragic and pivotal civil war. Included in these readings were Abraham Lincoln's historic interpretations (perhaps reformulation) of the American identity in his Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address.

For this conversation 'Abraham Lincoln' himself visited, where he was seen roaming the Chicago Historical Society galleries repeating his speech on "The Last Best Hope of Earth". He gave answers once again to questions raised by almost every term in the chief sentence of the Declaration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal" - and concerning continuities between the revolutionary Declaration and continuing Constitution. The audience, both as communities and general public, took over this conversation at crucial stages along the way, raising questions from their own experiences.

Conversation #3, held at Harold Washington Library on October 22, 1996, turned attention to the special tests of democracy in the modern city. (Cities were not mentioned in U.S. founding documents). Participants heard voices of previous newcomers to Chicago, reviewed strategies devised by Jane Addams at Hull House with working immigrants from Europe, and remembered the struggles of community organizations, the freedom movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. against the exclusion of people on the basis of race and poverty. Included in this collection, in addition to very revealing firsthand expressions by earlier immigrants and migrants, were selections from Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull House*, and from two books of Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* and *Where Do We Go from Here: Community or Chaos?* The Final Conversation, at Truman College in Uptown on November 12, 1996, treated practical questions for the future that arose in the course of the program. These included problems of civic education, and of preserving spaces for continuing communication and cooperative action in the future. No documents were included for this final conversation. Young participants from the conversation series working with Pegasus Players wrote

short reflections on their questions about cultural and national identity. This gave "the future" the final word. Detailed objectives and questions were included in the Conversation Reader to guide each conversation as follows:

PROLOGUE CONVERSATIONS (descriptions from the Reader for the Conversations)

Declaring our Community Identities and Considering the American Declaration

Conversation Objectives:

1. To describe our own community as we would like to be known in the city. Deciding what to show and tell.
2. To ask how this society describes itself. Discovering in its first Declaration a "revolutionary identity" which we all now have in common.

Place and Time:

Within individual community settings. One or more conversations, we decide.

Objective 1: Select stories, events, photos, music, art, celebrations, writings, ideas, etc. to declare some things about ourselves:

How our community got its start, beginning perhaps in former places.
Special features about the places where our people live.
What is distinctive about our family or social life.
What kind of work we do--and want to do.
The nature of our chief values, religion, attitudes and beliefs.
How our people regard politics, and what we do politically.

Readings for Objective 2: *The Declaration of Independence (1776)*.

In the first two paragraphs the colonists declare to the world their right to form a new nation. What is their basis for claiming this "right"?

In summing up "America's Ten Gifts to Civilization" in 1959, historian Arthur Schlesinger Sr. put "right of revolution" at the top of the list. How do we respond today to the word "revolution" and what does this word mean to us?

In the first sentence of the second paragraph, every word raises a question. What did it mean to say "We hold these truths to be *self-evident*," even though many people did not agree with them?

What did "equal" mean, seeing people are different in size, color, intellect and other capacities?

Was there a contradiction in saying "all men are created equal" and then excluding slaves, and women, from political processes?

Would we have signed the Declaration? Would our community?

Considering experiences in this society, would our community have a "declaration" to make?

Conversation Outcome:

To appreciate, back and forth, our rich community identities.

To act responsibly on the basis of the surprising "revolutionary identity" we share in this society and city.

CONVERSATION 1
*We the People - Sharing Our Distinct Perspectives
and Considering the Way We Decide Things Together*

Conversation Objectives:

1. To describe our community, as we would like to be known, to one or two other groups. Showing and telling back and forth.
2. To consider how the nation constituted itself for communicating and deciding things.
3. To focus our first "rights" ---freedom of religion, speech and assembly.

Place and Time

This conversation will take place among different community groups at various Chicago Public Libraries across the city. These meetings will be open to visitors.

Readings for Objective 2:

The Constitution of the United States - Preamble and Bill of Rights (1787, 1791)

Why does the Constitution begin with the phrase, "We the people"?

Does establishing this Constitutional form of government put an end to the Declaration of Independence and its "revolution"?

The framers of the Constitution wanted something more than the arrangement they already had under the Articles of Confederation which provided for treaty agreements among the colonies. They also rejected a top-down monarchy. What else is there? What did they invent?

How does this differ from a tradeoff of interests? Is there a value in having people of different backgrounds in public deliberations?

The Bill of Rights was added later. Why does it put freedom of religion, speech and assembly first? Are there ever any conflicts between fulfilling our responsibilities for the common good and exercising our individual rights?

The Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty (1785)

Do we agree that "truth is great and will prevail if left to herself"?

Are there any "human impositions" today by which she is "disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate"?

In ruling out the "establishment" of any religion by government and any religious test for public office, did the Virginians establish a "secular" society? What does "free exercise" mean? What is ruled out?

Conversation Outcome:

To speak up in our community, city, nation.

To listen and discuss, since this is the way to discovery and innovation.

CONVERSATION 2

The American Tradition - Questions Addressed by History

Conversation Objectives:

1. To see how neglecting questions concerning human rights can lead to later crises.
2. To focus clearer meanings of "self-evident," "all " and "equal."
3. To see the continuity between "revolution" and the Constitution.
4. To consider historic speeches that went beyond statistics, polls and sound bytes.

Place and Time:

This conversation will take place at the Chicago Historical Society on October 15. Participants can visit the Lincoln exhibit. Discussion will be prompted by a visit from Abraham Lincoln in the galleries.

Readings:

Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address (1863)*

On what basis could Lincoln, who affirmed the Declaration and its right of revolution, oppose the rebellion of the South?

Do things sometimes have to change in order for a society to stay the same? Can we think of present examples?

What are we to make of the biblical images and religious language used by Lincoln? Is this a violation of "non-establishment" or is it a "free exercise of religion"?

Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address (1865)*

Why does Lincoln not express more satisfaction over the success of the war effort?

Why does he avoid calling for vengeance against the South?

What are we to make of the earlier strategy described by Lincoln, in which the government "claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of slavery?"

Is our society still divided? Is it still possible to refer to a higher judgement than that being made by either side?

Is it acceptable to speak of interracial "reconciliation" as well as interracial "justice"? Is forgiveness ever possible in public affairs?

Conversation Outcomes:

Learning to contend for real change on the basis of tradition.

Joining in a variety of strategies with respect to present divisions in the society.

Practicing public discussion prior to adoption of policies, prior to court rulings, and in place of social warfare.

CONVERSATION 3
Living Chicago Tradition
The City as Testing Ground for the "American Experiment."

Conversation Objectives:

1. To consider the special problems and possibilities of democracy in a large city with its differences of work, wealth, race and religion.
2. To see whether something can be learned from the struggles of early immigrants from Europe who faced issues of poverty, work and religion.
3. To ask what is to be remembered and learned from the Civil Rights movement and the Freedom Movement in Chicago.
4. To consider community organization as a way of achieving stability and power, and think about their next steps.

Place and Time:

The Harold Washington Library Center on October 22. We will hear living voices for previous immigrants and migrants, Jane Addams and Martin Luther King Jr.

Readings:

Expressions by Previous Immigrants and Migrants

- C. What is the difference between "ethnicity" and "nationality"?
- C. Should we strive to maintain institutions (like the family) and cultural traditions that are hard to maintain at home? Or should we change our way of life?
- C. What does it take to make you feel like an American?

Jane Addams, "Problems of Poverty" and "Immigrants and Their Children" from *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910).

- C. In her discussion of the problems of poverty, what troubles does Jane Addams describe that are still with us today? How do poverty and economic misery undermine family relations?
- C. Does her discussion of immigrants and their children strike any familiar chords for new families in the city today? In what way?
- C. Why did Jane Addams establish the Labor Museum? Does this tell us something about her view of human dignity and purpose? Do the tools we use (technology) have anything to do with how we function as families, neighbors and citizens?

Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Days to Come" in *Why We Can't Wait* (1963) and "Where are We?" in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967).

- C. Do we agree with King's assumption that "It is no more possible to be half-free than it is to be half-alive."?
- C. Are King's definitions of "freedom" those we grew up with? Have our notions of what constitutes freedom changed since the Freedom Movement?
- C. What is the relationship between freedom and equality? Would we draw a distinction between "equality" and "equality of opportunity"?

Conversation Outcome:

To seek strategies both for making a place for community and for going public in this city.

To consider what things communities might need to do together.

CONVERSATION 4

Imagining Chicago's Future Creating a Democratic City Together

Conversation Objectives:

1. To take up questions for the future which were raised in the course of these conversations: intercommunity and interreligious understanding, civic education in school and out of school, cooperative projects of city youth, refocused activities of community organizations.
2. To provide for future communication among communities, including mutual defense and common advocacies.
3. Conviviality.

Place and Time:

O'Rourke Center, Truman College, 1145 Wet Wilson Avenue, November 12, 7PM.

Conversation Starters:

- a. Civic connections: Twenty diverse community groups, including major religious communities, will know and communicate with one another as they have not done before.
- b. They will go public in this city, adding their voice to city life.
- c. Newer communities will help the society to be what it has always claimed to be but has yet to become.

OUTLINE OF THE READINGS AND FRAMEWORKS

Prologue Conversation:

Declaring our Community Identity and Considering the American Declaration.

- The Declaration of Independence (1776)

With respect to the Declaration, the primary “objective” was that groups who had introduced themselves to one another should now consider the expressed commitments that afford a basis for communication and life together in this country. Attention was directed to the practical meaning of “self-evident” as referring to principles from which arguments were to proceed rather than to propositions that were themselves subject to debate (the “American experiment”); to the assertion of a human “equality” that was to hold in spite of manifest differences of physique or wealth or capacities; and to the corresponding claim of a “right of revolution.”

I. Conversation #1:

We the People - Sharing our Distinct Perspectives and the Way We Decide Things Together.

- The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States (1787)

- The Bill of Rights (1791)
- The Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty (1785)

II. Conversation #2:

The American Tradition - Questions Addressed by History.

- Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (1863)
- Second Inaugural Address (1865)

With respect to the Constitution, the primary “objective” was to consider the most basic provisions for achieving individual protections and common actions in this plural society. Attention was given to a form of decision-making which is not merely a matter of top-down rulings nor merely a trade-off of interests, but which relies on creativity at appropriate levels and values plurality (“government by discussion”—Madison). Attention was paid, especially in groups characterized partly by religion, to a religious freedom which forbids official establishment of any religion while assuring free exercise to all. One way to gain a cooperative inspection of the “what” of these two documents (first question of the “dialog method”) was to cite a founder like Thomas Jefferson claiming the founders were doing a really “new thing” and then ask everybody to try to say what that new thing might be.

The connection between Conversations #1 and #2 was important: Lincoln would show the principles of the Declaration to be at work in the great Civil War, and also show them to provide a basis for full citizenship on the part of later immigrants. Were there more things for the Declaration to be doing today?

III. Conversation #3: Living Chicago Tradition - The City as Testing Ground for the "American Experiment".

Poems, letter and stories by previous immigrants and migrants to the city from:

- Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads
- The Polish Peasant in Europe and America
- Bintel Briefs in the Jewish Daily Forward
- The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz
- Journal of Negro History
- The Negro in Chicago
- Jane Addams, "Problems of Poverty" and "Immigrants and Their Children" in *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910)
- Martin Luther King Jr., "The Days to Come" in *Why We Can't Wait* (1963) and "Where are We?" in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967)

Conversation #3 turned attention to the city as our own “testing ground” (the city was not mentioned in founding documents). Two program scholars proposed these texts and questions for the Reader. James Grossman of the Newberry Library selected expressions by previous immigrants and migrants to this city, along with selections from Martin Luther King’s *Why We Can’t Wait* and *Where Do We Go From Here?* Jean Bethke

Elshtain of the University of Chicago chose two chapters from Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*.

IV. Conversation #4: Imagining Chicago's Future - Creating a Democratic City Together.

Selections made from contributions of high school students to Young Chicago Playwrights. For Conversation #4, which looked to the future, discussion was prompted by writings prepared by young people.

Use of the “humanities” meant for us, beyond seeking assistance from professional scholars and handing out texts regarded as classics, the achievement together of common discovery through exploration of basic terms, including pairs or sets of terms which might at first appear contrary but prove productive when considered together. George Anastaplo would show how innovations are produced by holding together the seemingly contrary principles of “freedom” and “equality,” and through use of “constitutional” procedures which value both. Jean Bethke Ellshtain would show how “social” formation helps achieve a rich city life that eludes “private” and “public” initiatives when taken all by themselves. When it came to religious pluralism participants were to consider how, by combining “non-establishment” with “free exercise,” differing religious groups might be able both to avoid religious warfare and to enrich civic discussion—contrary to events in world news.

What We Learned

We found ourselves surprised, and sometimes taken aback, by flesh-and-blood participants when they arrived. It was our declared intention to give attention and respect to differing community cultures, to bring newcomer groups together in this city who (we assumed) were strange to one another, and to consider together the unique ideas that characterize this society. When the project coordinator restated these purposes in intergroup meetings for Conversation #1, however, he could find himself gently reproved or instructed by the participants. A Zoroastrian participant recalled how Cyrus the Great had liberated the Jewish people from captivity, while also drawing up an early bill of rights; how magi of his country are said to have visited the Christ child adored by Christians; how his own people, fleeing persecution in Iran, were received by Hindus in India with whom they had lived amicably for many years; and how important ideas in the U.S. Constitution had found previous statement in the sacred books of his culture. When it comes to civic conversation, there is little room left for patronizing sponsorship.

We came to rely on our four-question procedure. Moderators found themselves assisted, even relieved, to work with this sequence. This enabled them, in introducing texts, to do something more than supply historical information and ask for reactions. It enabled groups to advance together, or to revisit things previously said without getting lost. By virtue of this device the Conversation did, on occasion, produce discovery and even transformation. There were, early and predictably, participants who, on the basis of their own previous social history, judged this nation’s assertion that “all are created equal” to be an example of “hypocrisy” or “deception.” Young Filipinos offered dramatic accounts of this nation’s dealings with the country of their birth, and gained support for their

criticism from other participants. In such moments, the scheme of questions in “the dialog method” provided a way forward. (First, what did you actually hear the document say? Only then, how did you feel? On the basis of both questions, what did you come to understand? Now ask whether there are any times or places where you might think of using this?) The same protagonists came in a later session to claim the Declaration no less eloquently for themselves and for what they were now doing in their community. The document was on their side. A speaker waved his copy of the Declaration: this piece of paper did not provide a guarantee against every ill-treatment in this society but it did provide a basis for continuing struggle with fellow citizens—“a right to fight for what’s right.”

Ground rules for conversations did not always succeed. When Mr. Lincoln came from the galleries of the Chicago Historical Society to open Conversation #2, all the words he spoke were his own: the Gettysburg Address, the Second Inaugural, and related passages assembled by his “living voice,” Michael Krebs, with counsel from a program scholar. People sat at tables marked by signs suggesting themes for conversation—“Equality,” “Freedom,” “Constitution,” “Religion”—on which they would form comments and questions. Lincoln was primed to comment briefly on these themes, so far as he could do so with words actually uttered in his own setting. Any more current questions and comments would have to be taken up with the assembly.

Here this program came to its most awkward moment. Individuals rose from their tables to ask unmoderated questions. A question uttered in Spanish seemed mostly rhetorical: “Who’s the ‘we’ in ‘We the People’?” Questions followed concerning Lincoln’s temporizing with slavery in the South, and then concerning the subsequent treatment of indigenous and Spanish-speaking peoples—questions which Lincoln could not be expected to answer. The speaker strove to stay in character, repeating historic remarks with their characteristic humor and irony. But the juxtaposing of current questions with historic utterances caused frustration to grow in the assembly, experienced first with respect to the questioners but then partly with respect to Mr. Lincoln himself.

Anastaplo rose to speak of Lincoln’s political constraints, his priorities and his real achievement. In closing remarks, Martin Marty, a historian of the University of Chicago, sought to turn the occasion into a learning experience for everyone. There are limits to conversing with the past. What we find in the Declaration and the Constitution are working hypotheses—which find new work to do with the arrival of new peoples. Yet even Marty drew an objection from the floor to a comment he offered concerning slavery—that, in that different past, everybody who could do it did it.

On the basis of this experience, we made notes to ourselves about public conversations: that it sometimes proves difficult for new participants to listen and converse judiciously until they’ve first had an introductory say, that history tends to lose its “cool” when it treats abuses that have befallen one’s own people, and that something more is needed than a reading of the Declaration and the Constitution if people are to accept arguments that they really *can* wait.

The idea of “citizen conversation” which takes account of both “pluralism” and “identity” received many confirming responses. The Chairman of NEH and Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago were true believers from the start. But others hedged at first by securing presenters who would be not only scholarly but also affable and even entertaining. We scheduled “conversation starters” that were informative, significant—and time consuming. In Conversation #2, the audience sat politely through dramatic readings of selections from early 20th century newcomers: a letter written back to Hattiesburg by a new Black worker, and a fascinating appeal for bilingualism by the famous German immigrant Carl Schurz. The audience gave appreciative attention to a storied and thoughtful presentation of Jane Addams and the Hull House experience by Professor Jean Bethke Elshtain, and to educator-congressman Danny K. Davis as he described the Black experience in Chicago from Bronzeville to Harold Washington. But most people present unquestionably drew their greatest stimulation from the scheduled periods of face-to-face conversation with one another. And they said so.

People who for many weeks had been preparing themselves to converse with members of other communities in the city really did wish to meet and communicate with those others. They were not readily satisfied with any announced “conversation” that turned out to be one more instance of speeches from the stage followed by a few questions from the audience.

Some shifts occurred not anticipated in the original design. Unexpected reinforcements were gained along the way for recording and evaluating program activities. At the time when communities were moving from prologues to Conversation #1, an entire class in “Naturalistic Methods of Communication Research” at Loyola University (Prof. W. Barnett Pearce) asked to bring a variety of research methods to monitoring this program. In conjunction with class discussion and review, they sought to measure whether and how far the goals were being met of various stakeholders in the project. Two sets of students chose to follow the experience of particular communities, which led them to investigate distinctive cultural communication patterns in two home settings. One student joined with her own Palestinian community and described a personal learning experience. Nine papers, most with multiple authors, have now been made available to the sponsor. Two students undertook to film the programs, thereby providing a visual record and footage for selected transcriptions. We were not able, however, either in class sessions or informal communications, to focus the attention of these students on the question of what might be “the contribution of the humanities” to such citizen activities, nor did any of them choose to monitor this aspect of the program.

Early planners with Imagine Chicago included leaders of a college-based theater group, the “Pegasus Players.” For Conversation #3, it was first proposed that actors should perform scenes from Jane Addams and passages from Martin Luther King. But demands for more conversation time, and the considerable dramatic abilities of Professor Elshtain and Congressman Davis, caused us to relinquish this larger performance strategy. For the final conversation, we early thought the players might perform selected scenes written by Chicago high school youth for the Young Playwright’s Festival. But a clamor grew up to hear from the very young people who had been participating in this program. They

themselves expressed a wish to air inter-generational questions that are particularly perplexing in newcomer communities. Arlene Crewdson, Director of the Pegasus Players and teacher of English in Truman College, therefore convened writing workshops with these youth, who reviewed their experience with the documents and the discussions to produce conversation starters for the last scheduled assembly.

Nine young people were chosen to read their own pieces, in groups of three. These treated both “pluralism” and “identity” in very concrete ways. Some asked for more rather than fewer cultural references and stories from their parents, preferably at times when their parents were not angry. Some described painful experiences in high school based on their distinctive behavior, food and fasting, dress and festivals, but nevertheless called for “free exercise” which they hoped could be combined with “conversation” and civility like that of the National Conversation. One young reader remembered moments of anger he himself experienced during the preceding conversations, and asked that civility be no less practiced when it came to speaking critically of *this* country. From youth in the larger assembly came a regret that, for all the words that had been spoken in recent months, we had failed to give attention to visual dimensions, ceremonies and rhythms in one another’s lives. This would enter into plans for the future.

Finally, we noted again the differences between conversations like the one completed here, in which people expressed their cultural differences and considered their civic commonalities, and another kind of discussion that addresses actual public questions and moves toward some resolution. We suspect that humanistic disciplines also have something to do with the latter, that our four questions might be adapted to clarifying issues and enriching what gets said along the way to finding common actions (which, in view of “pluralism,” may have to be reached on diversely stated grounds). Capacities, including imagination, must be built in citizen groups also for this kind of public conversation, and we are asking ourselves how this can best be done.

Evaluation Process, Outcomes and Reflections

Steven Schroeder, a philosophy teacher at Capitol University, produced an attached “outside” review of publicly-announced events in this program. Thirty students in the Department of Communications at Loyola University devised and practiced methods for determining achievement of goals, described longitudinally the experience of a Haitian and a Baha’i community through the course of the program, and (in the case of one student) performed participatory research and evaluation on the experience within her own community. Evaluation forms were completed by participants in all sessions, including those for recruitment and orientation. A more extended report followed the prologue conversations, in which communities listed items which had been presented as representative of their identity, indicating those which caused discussion by the group, and those they would be taking with them to Conversation #1. With respect to the Declaration, they answered questions along familiar lines: What actually struck the people in reading this document (especially paragraphs 1-2)? What challenges did they raise to any of its statements? What new understandings did they express? How did it compare with the “declaration” their community wishes to make? Did they see any

reason to refer to this document in the future? What experiences were cited from their life in this city? In the larger public conversations that followed, participants wrote answers to similar questions. In Conversation #3, they talked and wrote together, face-to-face, during designated periods along the way. At Chicago Historical Society, questions were included concerning the Lincoln exhibit and previous experience, if any, with the museum itself.

Outcomes of the conversation, in addition to what we learned which was noted above, included:

1. Further activities inspired, announced and undertaken on the part of a program humanist, the communities themselves, and Imagine Chicago.
 - a. James Grossman, the program humanist from the Newberry Library, offered counsel to communities wishing to gather, preserve and display cultural artifacts and perhaps also to use them for educational or ceremonial purposes. Both Grossman and community leaders, who found little time for this during the Conversation, attended to the possibility of making those connections afterwards.
 - b. During the last half-hour of Conversation, participants spoke of a need both to strengthen their own social communities and to “go public” in democratic ways. For both of these tasks, they deemed it desirable to stay in communication with one another. Casa Aztlán and Casa Guatemala issued a joint invitation to a follow-up cultural and civic occasion that might serve as a model. This first inter-community event took place on January 25. Imagine Chicago's next class of “Citizen Leaders” brought representatives of 15 communities together to improve competencies, compare one another’s innovations, and pursue selected new projects. Eight communities from the Conversation committed themselves with their community innovations to the Citizen Leaders group that convened the following April.
 - c. Conversations between Imagine Chicago and the Chicago Historical Society (host of Conversation #2) were joined by the Field Museum of Natural History (which also conducted a “National Conversation”) to respond to the newly opened opportunity for cooperation with the social and cultural groups who made themselves known in this National Conversation. Many in these groups had never before visited the museums, and some who had done so were chagrined to see their sacred objects behind glass. Subsequent Imagine Chicago programs took newcomer communities regularly to the museums as sites for reflecting on civic participation. The museums were exceptionally hospitable and willing partners in these programs.
2. Over 400 people participated, though fewer than the numbers originally envisaged. We were especially gratified by the composition of program constituencies. In particular, we were pleased to have brought to public notice more than a dozen less-known scholars within newer communities. These became known and available for other city programs and for consultation by the press. We communicated these names to the Illinois Humanities Council.
3. *A Reader for the Conversation* was made available in community libraries.
4. Our plan to begin the conversation within individual communities and move by stages to combine groups and add a general public proved successful. This served to engage people who might have hesitated to venture into larger groups from the start.

(Some did not make these later moves.) It placed initiatives in the hands of community leaders, who might otherwise have sat on their hands.

5. Civic communication has become revived, enlarged and enriched in this American city of Chicago. “Democracy begins in conversation,” as John Dewey said here—and ends without it.

Imagine Chicago pays tribute to the outstanding project director, Dr. Richard Luecke, a consummate humanist, and all the scholarly workers who selected the documents for these conversations, who served as mentors to community discussion leaders, and who made contributions as requested to the public discussions. George Anastaplo of Loyola University Law School and the University of Chicago's Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults conducted preparatory workshops with community leaders on the national founding documents and the speeches of Abraham Lincoln. Jean Bethke Elshtain, who works in social and political ethics at the University of Chicago, chose the writings and contributed a voice for Jane Addams. James Grossman, who administers a center for family and community history at the Newberry Library, selected the expressions by previous immigrants and migrants as well as the passages by Martin Luther King, Jr. The program was also greatly enriched by Michael Krebbs who brought his living voice to Abraham Lincoln in Conversation #2 and Congressman Danny K. Davis, who brought his rich voice and experience to the presentation of Martin Luther King, Jr. These conversations were facilitated by the cooperation of allied civic agencies: Metropolitan Chicago Interreligious Initiative opened communications with newer religious communities in the city and considered ways of preserving and publishing their self-identifying expressions and materials. The Institute for Cultural Affairs assisted community leaders in their task of fostering appreciative and productive discussions. For the broader public discussions, Chicago Historical Society and Chicago Public Library provided spaces which themselves prompted civic memories, passions and communicative acts.

Ten Outcomes of Public Conversation

The public encourages a dimension of human experience which private life denies us:

Strangers meet on common ground.

Fear of the stranger is faced and dealt with.

Scarce resources are shared and abundance is generated.

Conflict occurs and is resolved.

Life is given color, texture, drama, a festive air.

People are drawn out of themselves.

Mutual responsibility becomes evident, and mutual aid possible.

Opinions become audible and accountable.

Visions are projected and projects are attempted.

People are empowered and protected from power.

--Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*