

## 36 Problems That May Arise

(in Preparing for, and Implementing, Community Visioning Initiatives)

[Note: The following 19 page document is a draft section of a work-in-progress titled “Calling the better angels of our nature: Preparing for Ongoing Re-evaluation of Peacebuilding, Education, and Community Revitalization Efforts as Part of Responding to the Challenges of Our Times”. Because the following is a draft, many of the source references are incomplete. Even so, enough information has been provided, in most cases, for readers to discover the original source of a quotation or excerpt, and explore that source for themselves.]

### A. Introduction

1. This section is a brief overview of problems participants of a “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” Community Visioning Initiative process may encounter.
2. The problems described in this section are more local and regional, and more process-specific, than most of the challenges listed in the “Ten Point Assessment of the Most Difficult Challenges of Our Times” (also an IPCR document) (two of those challenges are included here). The “Ten Point Assessment....” (see <http://ipcri.net/images/Ten-Point-Assessment.pdf>) is still very relevant in this context, as it summarizes the indicators which suggest there is a need for problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before. And The IPCR Initiative—and specifically Community Visioning Initiatives of the kind advocated by the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal (see <http://ipcri.net/images/1000Communities2.pdf>)—are efforts to advocate for, and establish, “constellations” of initiatives relevant to the kind of problem solving needed in the years ahead. This “Problems That May Arise” section is an effort to be specific about obstacles to the problem solving, so organizers of Community Visioning Initiatives can do their best to minimize obstacles, and maximize solution-oriented activity.

#### **Special Commentary:**

Could problems overwhelm a Community Visioning Initiative  
of the nature described in this proposal?

Yes, that possibility does exist. Even though there may be a sense of shared urgency among a majority of the residents in a given community, there are problems, issues, and challenges which can turn the whole Community Visioning Initiative process into an unfortunate experience with few positive outcomes. And yet—given circumstances which require problem solving unlike anything most of us have experienced before—experiments must be tried, and risks must be taken. However, every precaution should also be taken to avoid costly efforts which result in experiences that could be demoralizing, and impair the effectiveness of other constructive efforts in the future.

Thus, organizers and participants would be well advised to err on the side of working carefully and consolidating gains rather than moving too quickly, creating a series of unfortunate experiences, and having a demoralizing effect on the willingness of people to participate and contribute. From this point of view, it may be necessary for a community to carry out two small Community Visioning Initiatives, before they can manage one Community Visioning Initiative with a large number of participants.

2. With this introduction as a word of general caution, what follows is an overview of some of the problems that may arise during a Community Visioning Initiative of the nature described in the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal. Organizers alerted to these problems—and others that may arise—may choose to provide workshops early in the process which can prepare participants so they can minimize such problems. Participants, for their part, can look closely at themselves, as they participate, and ask themselves at regular intervals: “Am I participating in a way that adds to the greater good of the whole, or subtracts from the greater good of the whole? Am I part of the problem—or part of the solution?”

**Additional Special Commentary:** This writer offers the following proposition as encouragement to organizers hoping to “get ahead” of problems before they occur, and take steps to minimize such problems:

The more we integrate the treasured wisdom of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions into the everyday circumstances of community life—and the more we demonstrate that cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence need not be considered an inevitable part of our community experience—the more we will see that problems like those described in this section can be reduced in frequency and repercussions until they are only insignificant and occasional parts of a much improved whole.

## B. An Overview of Problems That May Arise

### 1. Honesty is the best policy

“Oh! What a tangled web we weave  
when first we practice to deceive.”

### 2. There is no substitute for a healthy relationship with the local and regional ecosystem—and with the earth as a whole.

People who spend much of their lives amidst concrete, metal, plastic, and glass can easily forget how fundamentally our well being is linked to the land around us, and to the earth as a whole.

### 3. Widespread acceptance of a cynical view of human nature.

“Cultures” of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence have become so common that many of us accept such as inevitable.

Brief References to Evidence of This Concern:

a) Global Drugs Trade and Global Arms Trade

“The global drugs trade and the global arms trade are integral to violence in both developing and industrialized countries. Even modest progress on either front will contribute to reducing the amount and degree of violence suffered by millions of people. To date, however—and despite their high profile in the world arena—no solutions seem to be in sight for these problems.”

From the “World Report on Violence and Health” (World Health Organization Geneva 2002) in Chapter 9 “The Way Forward: Recommendations for Action” p. 254  
(at <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/9241545615.pdf>) (Accessed June 16, 2007)

b) From the website of UN Habitat—United Nations Human Settlements Programme—  
at <http://www.unhabitat.org> (from “Media Centre/Press Kits” section)

Specifically: from “State of the World’s Cities 2004-5” (foreward by Kofi Annan, UN Sec. Gen.)  
(at [http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media\\_centre/sowc/sgforeword.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media_centre/sowc/sgforeword.pdf)) (see paragraph 1)  
(Confirmed June 8, 2008)

“Many cities face pervasive and persistent problems, including growing poverty, deepening inequality and polarization, widespread corruption at the local level, high rates of urban crime and violence, and deteriorating living conditions.”

c) The increasing world population and its implications relating to widespread resource depletion (with special focus on *the increasing number of people* who are consuming material goods and ecological resources *indiscriminately*).

4. Most people would consider it unusual for a person to request to be excused from military service based on their religious, spiritual, or moral convictions.

Consider the following excerpts from the Wikipedia entry for “Conscientious Objector”. How many of us would qualify as someone who could legitimately be excused from a military service requirement based on our religious, spiritual, or moral convictions?

“During World War II, all registrants (in the United States; see section “United States”) were sent a questionnaire covering basic facts about their identification, physical condition, history and also provided a checkoff to indicate opposition to military service because of religious training or belief. Men marking the latter option received a [DSS](#) 47 form with ten questions:<sup>[26]</sup>

- a) Describe the nature of your belief which is the basis of your claim.
- b) Explain how, when, and from whom or from what source you received the training and acquired the belief which is the basis of your claim.
- c) Give the name and present address of the individual upon whom you rely most for religious guidance.
- d) Under what circumstances, if any, do you believe in the use of force?

- e) Describe the actions and behavior in your life which in your opinion most conspicuously demonstrate the consistency and depth of your religious convictions.
- f) Have you ever given public expression, written or oral, to the views herein expressed as the basis for your claim made above? If so, specify when and where.
- g) Have you ever been a member of any military organization or establishment? If so, state the name and address of same and give reasons why you became a member.
- h) Are you a member of a religious sect or organization?
- i) Describe carefully the creed or official statements of said religious sect or organization as it relates to participation in war.
- j) Describe your relationships with and activities in all organizations with which you are or have been affiliated other than religious or military."

**5.** There is a need for forgiveness and reconciliation between many people, communities of people, and even nations, in the world today—and yet it would be difficult for most of us to think of anything our “community, as a whole” does to cultivate forgiveness and reconciliation....

Consider the following passage:

“Just as a thunderstorm releases tensions in the atmosphere, it is time to clear the air of mistakes and resentments.... When it is possible to overlook past errors and forgive transgressions, do so, for the sooner the tensions are relieved, the better for all concerned.”

(from “The I Ching Workbook” by R. L. Wing, see Hexagram #40 “Liberation”)

a) And yet... if the following question is brought forward (from the document “39 Suggestions for Preliminary Survey Questions”), it would be difficult for most of us to think of anything our “community, as a whole” does to cultivate forgiveness and reconciliation....

“(Question #18) Please name 5 people—who you know personally, and/or who you have been influenced by—who have inspired in you the qualities of sympathy for the suffering of others, and willingness to express compassion in ways which might alleviate some of such suffering.

What does your local community do—specifically, as a community—to nurture, encourage, support, and inspire-- to cultivate-- such persons, and thus to attract other such people to move into your local community?”

b) “Quaker's often use what they call ‘queries’ as a focus for individual and collective meditation, consideration and prayer, guiding Quaker seekers in their search for greater love, truth, and insight into how to serve humanity and live lives that are consistent with their core values.”

Consider the following example of a Quaker Query: “When a members conduct or manner of living gives cause for concern, how does the Meeting respond?”

Are our collective responses to the need for forgiveness and reconciliation sufficient, given the nature of our current circumstances?

6. “The tendency of untrained minds is to adapt to their environment at the expense of their spiritual aspirations”—and “An undisciplined person is a danger to society; any moment he may run amuck.”

With regard to the above concerns: There may be many people who regard their faith community, spiritual fellowship community, etc. as fully represented by the quotations a) and b) (below); but it is possible that for the majority of people, the kind of in-depth training suggested by the quotations below is something they have not experienced.

a) “Man has to be continually examining every desire that emerges in his mind, so that he may suppress or destroy or by-pass or obey. He must learn, from parents, elders, teachers, friends, and the leaders of the land—(and from) the books written by wise men of his own as well as other countries—the standards by which he can test his desires.” (“Sathya Sai Speaks” 12.44 p242)

b) “The mariner uses his compass to guide him aright amidst the dark storm clouds and raging waves. When Man is overwhelmed by the dark clouds of despair and the raging confusion of irrepressible desires, he too, has a compass which will point to him the direction he has to take.... That compass is a Society that is dedicated to the propagation of Spiritual Discipline.” (“Sathya Sai Speaks” 8.21 p108)

7. There are now, in this complex world, many radically different ideas about how to live. And there are many ways in which these different ideas about how to live come into contact, and develop into conflict.

Even if we consider only--

The 2001 Edition of “The World Christian Encyclopedia” (editors David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson: Oxford University Press)—the result of “40 years of systematizing membership statistics and other information on world religions”—includes a “best estimated count of believers of all religions in each of 238 nations and territories” in the world, and in summary “identifies 10,000 distinct religions, of which 150 have 1 million or more followers.”

[Sources: “An Accounting of World’s Souls” in The Washington Post (Richard N. Ostling, 3/17/01); and [www.adherents.com](http://www.adherents.com) “New Edition of ‘World Christian Encyclopedia’ published”]

-- we still have, among people with a religious, spiritual, or moral foundation, the following difficulties....

“Because systems of meaning and ways of thinking differ from one culture to another, people from different cultures typically develop different ideas about morality and the best way to live.... These cultural differences become even more problematic when groups have radically different expectations about what is virtuous, what is right, and how to deal with moral conflicts.”

Some of the problems:

a) “Because identity describes who we are as a person, we tend to protect those things (beliefs, values, group affiliations) that help create our sense of self.”

b) “Each party may believe that its ways of doing things and thinking about things is the best way and come to regard other ways of thinking and acting as inferior, strange, or morally wrong.”

- c) “They may form negative stereotypes and attribute moral depravity or other negative characteristics to those who violate their cultural expectations, while they ignore their own vices and foibles, perceiving their own group to be entirely virtuous.”
- d) “They may view any compromise about their most cherished values as a threat to their very identity and a grave evil.”
- e) “In some cases, one group may come to view the beliefs and actions of another group as fundamentally evil and morally intolerable. This often results in hostility and violence and severely damages the relationship between the two groups. For this reason, moral conflicts tend to be quite harmful and intractable.”
- f) “Since resolving conflict necessarily involves some kind of change, it is essential to understand the operation of worldviews. When people are asked to change their identity or things they find meaningful, they will resist, sometimes even when the alternative is death.”

[All of the above quotes are from articles at [www.beyondintractability.org](http://www.beyondintractability.org) ; most of the quotes are from the article “Moral and Value Conflicts” by Michelle Maiese (July, 2003) (see [http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/intolerable\\_moral\\_differences/?nid=1036](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/intolerable_moral_differences/?nid=1036) )

#### 8. “... unhappy wrangles to which there seems to be no end....”

“The subject of religious education is one on which it is difficult to say anything at present without appearing to take sides in those unhappy wrangles to which there seems to be no end....”

Excerpt from document titled “Papers on Moral Education—Communicated to the First International Moral Education Congress” (Held at the University of London, **September 25-29, 1908**) Edited by Gustave Spiller (Hon. General Secretary of the Congress) (accessible through Google Book Search)

[Specific excerpt from the Sixth Session, in presentation titled “Systematic Moral Education” by Prof. J. S. Mackenzie, see paragraph 3]

#### 9. “Many writers (Brown 2006a; Hirsch et.al. 2005), argue that the only effective response to peak oil is a concerted response on the scale of a ‘wartime mobilization’. However, how this might be motivated has yet to be fully explored in the literature.”

[From “Energy Descent Pathways: Evaluating Potential Responses to Peak Oil” by Rob Hopkins Published by [www.transitionculture.org](http://www.transitionculture.org) September, 2006 (see p. 6 at <http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/msc-dissertation-publishable-copy.pdf> )]

#### 10. You can’t make people care.

No matter how inspiring, well-established, and highly recommended a system of education is for the purpose of cultivating compassion, understanding, sympathy, tolerance, forgiveness, wisdom, love, peace, etc.—if it is imposed as an obligation, and thus forced upon individuals, there will be resentment, opposition, and rebellion. It would be much better if individuals—without any coercion or subtle influence—decided for themselves that they have a need, or a desire, for the education offered.

## 11. Reform begins at home....

“Don’t worry about bringing people ‘in line’, but rather concern yourself with making sure your own practices are becoming a means for attaining inner peace.... If your practice brings you inner peace and wisdom others will emulate those practices voluntarily.”

[From Shaykh Nazim Adil Al Haqqani in “In the Mystic Footsteps of Saints” Vol. 1 (Sufi Wisdom Series) Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order (2002) p. 5-6]

## 12. “Youth always imitates the elders....”, and “Little pitchers have big ears.”

“How can local communities arrive at practical definitions of ‘right livelihood’? What local institutions would be most appropriate as commissioners and overseers of a resource guide to ‘right livelihood’? How can leaders at the regional and local community level assure residents that they understand the challenges of our times, if they themselves do not participate in the very activities they advocate for overcoming the challenges of our times? How can our communities change ‘the way things get done’ so that more people can live in accordance with their moral convictions?”

[Excerpt from document “Peacebuilding in its Most Compassionate Form” by this writer (see “All IPCR Documents” section of IPCR website homepage)]

For further consideration: [Question #8 from the document “39 Suggestions for Preliminary Survey Questions”]

“(Question #8) Arriving at Working Definitions of ‘Right Livelihood’

Consider what ways of earning a living you would identify as ‘right livelihood.’

Now imagine a local community resource guide relating to employment, apprenticeships, training, and volunteer opportunities associated with ‘right livelihood.’

And further: imagine a committee commissioned to produce such a ‘right livelihood’ resource guide.... And the individuals who make up the committee commissioned to produce such a resource guide....

a) What background (qualifications, experiences, etc.) would you like such individuals to have?

b) What local institutions would you consider most appropriate to commission such a resource guide, and oversee its production?”

## 13. Communities are not facing the challenges....

People cannot serve their communities as well as they would like when their communities are not facing the challenges of our times as much as they need to be. In such circumstances, people can easily get distracted from the pathways that lead to wisdom and solutions.

#### 14. Trust vs. “Quid Pro Quo”

“Quid Pro Quo” (“something for something”... thus making an action dependent on assurance that a corresponding action will follow) is appropriate in many circumstances; but there will also be times when individuals and communities of people will have to do their part—and simply trust that the others involved will do their part.

#### 15. Unrealistic expectations sometimes sabotage what could be critical educational contributions.

Over the years there have been many initiatives and organizations which had the potential to provide much needed solution-oriented education. Unfortunately, a significant number of such efforts have only provided a small percentage of the assistance they could have supplied. There are many possible causes for these efforts not realizing their potential; the possible cause highlighted here is sometimes “teacher-leaders” promote living in 100% accordance with their solution-oriented way of life as the only way challenges will be resolved. Thus, many people who could possibly do 25% after two years, 65% after five years, and maybe 85% after ten years, end up disengaging altogether.

I believe there must be some time during the unprecedented transition we are very likely going to experience in the coming years, when “teacher-leaders” (like those mentioned above) who have critical experience they could share with others soften their expectations about people’s capacity to “master the curriculum” right away, or even in the near future—and focus more on helping people to move, by such degrees as they can, in a positive and solution-oriented direction. There are going to be many opportunities for communities of people to help and support each other; these opportunities should not be sabotaged by expectations which are unrealistic or unreasonable.

#### 16. Everyone’s opinion matters

While some people may believe that their opinion does not matter, organizers of the kind of Community Visioning Initiatives advocated by The IPCR Initiative will encourage (only encourage) everyone to respectfully and courteously contribute their thoughts, suggestions, comments, recommendations, etc. to meetings, workshop discussions—and as formal responses to steps in the process. Encouraging a wide range of contributions will help the best ideas “bubble up to the surface”. At any time during the process, an idea or comment may be brought forward, and many others may immediately recognize its validity. By this process, challenges, solutions, and action plans can be raised to a high priority, and get resolved much sooner than they would have—because now there is an ongoing system for actively seeking, and actively doing something with, all possible constructive ideas.

#### 17. We must help each other.

Some residents may feel uneasy concerning the problem of residents who are less educated and less informed having as much of a say in Community Visioning Initiatives “process-voting” (votes which prioritize challenges identified, solutions identified, and steps in action plans) as those who have spent years working on these issues. This is a fundamental problem, which is not confined to Community Visioning Initiative processes; *as people who are not sufficiently informed about critical issues are*

*everywhere, and they are investing their time, energy, and money—voting—all the time.* If we are honest with ourselves about this issue, we must admit that there are very few people who have successfully aligned all of their investments of time, energy, and money with all of the principles, practices and codes of conduct associated with the religious, spiritual, or moral tradition they feel closest to. This writer believes that there are many serious challenges before us now, and that we will need to invest our time, energy, and money very wisely to overcome these challenges. How can we do it? We must help each other. The Community Visioning Initiative outlined in the proposal associated with this document (“1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” at <http://ipcri.net/images/1000Communities2.pdf>) is time-intensive so that we will have time to learn much more than we know now about how to help each other.

#### 18. How will we know if we’re on the right track?

On many occasions it will be clear that there are conflicting opinions being expressed by participants in workshops and in meetings (associated with Community Visioning Initiatives). It is also very likely that some of the solutions identified and some of the action plans created will include elements which may work against elements of other solutions or action plans. Included here is one possible overriding principle (different ones will develop from within different communities):

If the Community Visioning Initiative is on the right track, there will be more and more participants/community residents who believe that everyone has some potential for good inside of them. In other words, as the process moves forward, the capacity of each resident to contribute something to the greater good of the whole should become more appreciated, more easily recognized, and more visible in the everyday circumstances of community life.

#### 19. Many people expect to be entertained (by scripted performances, special graphic effects, “star-power”, etc.) no matter what the subject matter is.

Many forms of mass media, though they have a responsibility to community service, have evolved in the direction of “entertainment” as their way of competing for people’s attention—and many mass media consumers have (thus) become accustomed to choosing their sources of information based on criteria that might be totally irrelevant to the content they are looking for.

#### 20. Many people expect immediate results—immediate gratification—as much of popular culture mass media programming tries to persuade consumers that they can “have it all now”.

#### 21. On the Cultural Institution of Advertising

a) (“...advertising has in its dynamics no motivation to seek the improvement of the individual....”)

The following passages are excerpts from “People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character” by David M. Potter (first edition 1954) (p. 176-177)(partially accessible at Google Books)

“... we must realize at once that we are dealing with... one of the very limited group of institutions which... guide the life of the individual by conceiving of him in a distinctive way and encouraging him to conform as far as possible to the concept. For instance, the church, representing the force of religion, conceives of man as an immortal soul; our schools and colleges, representing the force of learning, conceive of him as a being whose behavior is guided by reason; our business and industry, representing the force of the economic free-enterprise system, conceive of him as a productive agent who can create goods or render services that are useful to mankind. Advertising, of course, is committed to none of these views and entertains them only incidentally. Representing as it does the force of a vast productive mechanism seeking outlets for an overwhelming flow of goods, it conceives of man as a consumer. Each institution is distinctive, again, in the qualities to which it appeals and in the character of the reward which it offers: the church appeals to the spirit of conscience of the individual and offers the rewards of salvation and peace of mind; learning appeals to the reason of man and offers the hope of a perfected society from which evils have been eliminated by the application of wisdom; free enterprise appeals to the energies and the capacities of man and offers the rewards of property, personal attainment, and satisfaction in the job. Advertising appeals primarily to the desires, the wants—cultivated or natural—of the individual, and it sometimes offers as its goal a power to command the envy of others by outstripping them in the consumption of goods and services.

“To pursue this parallel a step further, one may add that the traditional institutions have tried to improve man and to develop in him qualities of social value, though, of course, these values have not always been broadly conceived. The church has sought to inculcate virtue and consideration of others—the golden rule; the schools have made it their business to stimulate ability and to impart skills; the free-enterprise system has constantly stressed the importance of hard work and the sinfulness of unproductive occupations. And at least two of these institutions, the church and the school, have been very self-conscious about their roles as guardians of the social values and have conducted themselves with a considerable degree of social responsibility.

“In contrast with these, advertising has in its dynamics no motivation to seek the improvement of the individual or to impart qualities of social usefulness, unless conformity to material values may be so characterized. And though it wields an immense social influence, comparable to the influence of religion and learning, it has no social goals and no social responsibility for what it does with its influence, so long as it refrains from palpable violations of truth and decency. It is this lack of institutional responsibility, this lack of inherent social purpose to balance social power, which, I would argue, is a basic cause for concern about the role of advertising. Occasional deceptions, breaches of taste, and deviations from sound ethical conduct are in a sense superficial and are not necessarily intrinsic. Equally, high-minded types of advertising which we see more regularly than we sometimes realize are also extraneous to an analysis of the basic nature of advertising. What is basic is that advertising, as such, with all its vast power to influence values and conduct, cannot ever lose sight of the fact that it ultimately regards man as a consumer and defines its own mission as one of stimulating him to consume or to desire to consume.

“If one can justifiably say that advertising has joined the charmed circle of institutions which fix the values and standards of society and that it has done this without being linked to any of the socially defined objectives which usually guide such institutions in the use of their power, then it becomes necessary to consider with special care the extent and nature of its influence—how far it extends and in what way it makes itself felt.”

b) (“The educational system of a country plays a significant role in an individual’s selection and use of the media....”)

[The following passages are excerpts from “International Communications: A Media Literacy Approach” by Art Silverblatt and Nikolai Zlobin M.E. Sharpe July, 2004] (most content accessible at Google Books)

“Media literate individuals have learned to develop a critical distance from the information they receive through the media, so that they are in a position to make independent judgments about 1) what programming they choose to watch, read, or hear 2) how to interpret the information that they receive through the channels of communication.” p7

“The educational system of a country plays a significant role in an individual’s selection and use of the media. A country’s educational curriculum—what subjects students are exposed to—affects their ability to interpret the information being conveyed through the channels of mass media.” p. 157

“Popular programming reflects a level of acceptance and shared values among large numbers of people. People tend to watch programs that meet their approval. If they are truly offended by violent programs, they would not watch them. In that sense, media programming can be regarded as a text that reflects the attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths that define a culture.” p66

“At the same time, media programming reinforces cultural attitudes, values, behaviors, preoccupations, and myths. Media messages are communicated through the countless hours of media programming that repeat, directly or indirectly, the cultural script.” p68

“Finally, the media do not merely reflect or reinforce culture, but in fact shape attitudes, values, behavior, preoccupations, and myths.” p68

“The ability to identify and evaluate propaganda messages undermines the central persuasive function of propaganda by empowering individuals to develop independent judgments about the messages they receive through the media. However, developing an awareness of propaganda is not an easy task...” p50

c) (“The United States is the home of the world’s largest and most influential advertising industry.”)

“The United States is the home of the world’s largest and most influential advertising industry. As of 2001, 43% of the advertising produced in the world originated in the United States. Indeed, half of the top 100 global marketers—and six of the top ten—are U.S. companies.” p. 228

“The international market is saturated with American entertainment programming. Hollywood films account for approximately 85% of movie audiences worldwide. Further, American programming makes up approximately 65% of global prime-time TV viewing.” p. 69

22. “... a sort of tolerance within the culture for this sort of irregular kind of self-enrichment...”

The following interview excerpt is from the transcript of a segment on the November 26, 2008 Morning Edition Show on National Public Radio. The title of the segment is “Joseph O’Neill, The New Immigrant Experience”, and in this segment NPR Morning Edition Host Steve Inskeep is interviewing Joseph O’Neill on the subject of his new book “Netherland”....

November 26, 2008 from Morning Edition

“STEVE INSKEEP, host: We're talking this Thanksgiving week about what it means to become American....

.... Steve Inskeep: You began writing about this guy from the West Indies.

Mr. O'NEILL: Yeah.

INSKEEP: Chuck Ramkissoon?

Mr. O'NEILL: Correct, yeah.

INSKEEP: Is it fair to say that Chuck is trying to redefine what it means to be American?

Mr. O'NEILL: Well, I think Chuck, as a Trinidad immigrant, is invoking a pre-existing tradition of what it means to be American. He's trying to plug into the rags-to-riches narrative, which is part of the legend of America and of New York especially. And so I don't think he's trying to reinvent the wheel, but merely trying to find himself a place on the wheel....

.... INSKEEP: You mentioned that at one point that this character you write about, this West Indian immigrant, is involved in the classic American story, rags to riches.

Mr. O'NEILL: Yeah.

INSKEEP: Of course, the classic American version is a very specific kind of rags to riches. It's not that somebody suddenly makes you a prince. It's that you strive and dig and find some scheme and do whatever you have to do to make a little bit of money. And that's what...

Mr. O'NEILL: Yeah.

INSKEEP: And that's what he's doing. He's got different businesses. He's got different sidelines.

Mr. O'NEILL: Yeah.

INSKEEP: And when I read about that, I think about, well, so many American novels that - you go back to Mark Twain who wrote about a kind of striver and schemer in the Gilded Age and was kind of a striver and a schemer himself. He always had some idea to strike it rich. Were you thinking about - "The Great Gatsby" is another - I mean, were you thinking about so many American characters that had come before Chuck Ramkissoon when you presented this West Indian immigrant to a reader like me?

Mr. O'NEILL: Well, I think so. But I think, more specifically, Chuck Ramkissoon himself, the character, is thinking about it. He lives in the United States for a number of years. And he becomes aware of this very specific kind of narrative in American life which essentially authorizes people to do whatever it takes to climb up by their boot straps and to make something of themselves, even if that means cutting corners from time to time - which is what Chuck ends up doing - and even if it means being a bit of a rogue, because I think there's a sort of tolerance within the culture for this sort of irregular kind of self-enrichment, because it's not a perfect society, the United States. It doesn't provide everyone with the same start in life. And therefore if someone wants to do better for themselves, people kind of turn a blind eye and in fact have a smile, even if they've broken a few rules along the way. And this guy, Chuck Ramkissoon, is aware of that and tries to plug into it.

INSKEEP: Well, Joseph O'Neill, I've enjoyed speaking with you.

Mr. O'NEILL: Thank you very much.

INSKEEP: And happy Thanksgiving.

Mr. O'NEILL: Happy Thanksgiving to you as well.

INSKEEP: You can read an excerpt from Joseph O'Neill's novel "Netherland" at [npr.org](http://npr.org). Our conversations on becoming American continue into the holiday. Tomorrow our three immigrant writers describe Thanksgiving as they have experienced it. This is NPR News.”

### 23. “Economics is one thing; morality is, quite clearly, another.”

The following passages are excerpts from the article “Moral Disagreement, Moral Education, Common Ground” by Warren A. Nord in “Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society” Edited by Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti (only the first five lines accessible at Google Books)

“It is a little surprising that there has been no controversy over economics education, because economics is, in our culture, deeply controversial, often on moral and religious grounds..... A part of the problem is what the texts and the new national standards leave out. They say little about poverty, especially as a moral or spiritual problem. They are usually silent about the moral relation of the First and Third Worlds. They typically ignore the effects of economics and technology on the environment. They are oblivious to the moral and spiritual problems of consumer culture. They ask no questions about dehumanizing work. They emphasize the important of the profit motive and competition, but say nothing about the possibility of excess profits or the possible costs of competition....

“(Furthermore)... the economics world (is) defined in terms of competition of self-interested individuals with unlimited wants for scarce resources.... (and) decisions should be made according to cost-benefit analyses that maximize whatever it is that we value and leave no room in the equation for duties, the sacred, or those dimensions of life that aren’t quantifiable. Economics is one thing; morality is, quite clearly, another.” (p159-160)

“The texts and the standards approach economics not as a subject, open to various moral, political, and religious interpretations; but as a discipline, as a ‘hard’ social science. In the process, they convey uncritically to students a particular way of thinking about values, human nature, and social institutions that is deeply controversial.” (p161)

### 24. The “Triple Crises”

The following passages (with additional corroborating quotes) are excerpts from pre-conference (September, 2007) information (see [http://www.ifg.org/events/Triple\\_Crisis\\_Speakers.pdf](http://www.ifg.org/events/Triple_Crisis_Speakers.pdf)) for a “Teach In: Confronting the Global Triple Crises—Climate Change, Peak Oil (The End of Cheap Energy), and Global Resource Depletion and Extinction” (September 14-17, 2007 at The George Washington University Lisner Auditorium in Washington D.C.) Sponsored by The International Forum on Globalization ([www.ifg.org](http://www.ifg.org)) and The Institute on Policy Studies

“The planet’s ecological systems are on the verge of catastrophic change for which few societies are prepared. So far, responses by governments to this emergency are inadequate, or counterproductive. We call it the “Triple Crisis,” the convergence of three advancing conditions:

- a) Planet-wide climate chaos and global warming (‘There is a serious risk of widespread, catastrophic climate change if we do not begin dramatically reducing global carbon emissions’)
- b) The end of the era of cheap energy (‘peak oil’) (‘The peaking of world oil production presents the U.S. and the world with an unprecedented risk management problem.... The world has never faced a problem like this....’)

c) The depletion of many of the world's key resources: water, timber, fish, fertile soil, coral reefs; and the expected extinction of 50% of the world's species."

"All are rooted in the same systemic problem—massive overuse of fossil fuels and the Earth's resources; all driven by an economic ideology of hyper growth and consumption that's beyond the limits of the planet to sustain."

25. "Morality is now second to the economy as the number one concern of voters."

Surveys which provide results like this are contributing to an oversimplified view of our complex world.

26. An oversimplified view of education

"For some... any discussion of moral education must start from the question 'Should schools be involved in the moral education of their students?' To me, this is a deeply mistaken question. Schools cannot avoid influencing the moral development of their students, though they can certainly avoid thinking through what they actually do and the impact that they have." (in Introduction to "Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education" by Tim Sprod p. 1; accessible through Google Books)

27. The increasing world population and its implications relating to widespread resource depletion (with special focus on *the increasing number of people who are consuming material goods and ecological resources indiscriminately*)

28. "... humanitarian aid is not a solution to the world's crises."

a) From a United Nations press release dated November 18, 2003:

"(New York: 18 November 2003): The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, launched the annual global appeal for humanitarian aid today at United Nations headquarters in New York. He requested US\$ 3 billion for aid in 2004 to help save the lives of 45 million people in 21 of the world's most serious crises, many of which are in Africa."

b) And from the introduction to the document titled "Humanitarian Appeal 2004":  
(document accessible at <http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/appeals.html> )

"More than 45 million people are struggling to survive the painful consequences of conflicts and natural disasters. They are victims and survivors, sometimes of several crises at once: war, drought, poverty, and HIV/AIDS.

"As this Appeal shows, these people live amidst 21 crises across the world, the majority of them in Africa. At the same time, this Appeal calls attention to the plight of millions more people in need in other crises, such as Afghanistan and Colombia.

“Behind the statistics are ordinary people, each with their lives, hopes and dreams. They are people living in extraordinary situations. Many have been displaced from their homes, had their lives severely disrupted, and lost their livelihoods and belongings.... Savings and possessions disappear. People need food, and much more, to survive.... they need our practical support to help them to respond, recover and get their normal lives back.”

#### Agency plans

“For 2004, the humanitarian community has worked together to identify needs by sector, for example food, health, shelter, and education. They have prepared plans to work with national governments and local organizations: 136 agencies are proposing 1,086 projects to meet the needs of people facing acute risks to their lives.

“The plans reflect a commitment to coordinated aid work and agreement on a core agenda to protect life, uphold rights, and ensure health and basic subsistence.

“Specialization aside, all humanitarian agencies are concerned with alleviating human suffering, and saving and sustaining lives. Agencies are aware that, ultimately, they share the same goals and that the best way to proceed is in partnership.

“Few would disagree with the definition of the humanitarian goal stated at the June 2003 International Meeting on Good Humanitarian Donorship in Stockholm: ‘To save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters,’ and ‘to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.’

“But the task of ‘saving lives’ inevitably involves more than this. It also means rebuilding destroyed societies, restoring basic services and strengthening systems that protect people. The humanitarian agenda, therefore, often extends to reconstruction, recovery, transition and peace building.

“Humanitarian aid therefore also helps governments to work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals agreed in 2000.

“In 2004, agencies expect to build on their successes. Among more visible achievements in 2003, humanitarian organizations carried out large-scale polio eradication campaigns in several African countries, fed people as war raged in Liberia, resettled people in Angola and Indonesia, helped avert famine in Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Southern Africa, and provided potable water to people in Chechnya (Russian Federation).

“In each of the world's crises, aid agencies providing food, shelter, and medicine helped to save and sustain countless lives. And while aid workers faced growing risks to their personal safety, they continued to provide aid to people in need.

**“Nonetheless, humanitarian aid is not a solution to the world's crises. Aid workers can address humanitarian needs; but they cannot solve underlying political, economic and social problems that cause and perpetuate these crises.”**

### 29. Practice will be necessary

It may take 3-5 years and 2 or 3 Community Visioning Initiatives before residents can understand how many ways they can contribute to the process of Community Visioning, and how many ways they can benefit from it. But once they know, they will never forget.

### 30. Can we make the difficult decisions?

“At present, educated people are wanting in the grit necessary to act according to their convictions; they know a thing is right, but lack the will to carry it through.”

### 31. There are Many Factions....

The following is an excerpt from the website of “Earth and Religions: Crisis, Opportunity, Convergence” (subtitled: “An Interfaith/Environmental Conference/Engaging All People in the Quest for a Sustainable World”) (held June 9-12, 2005) Excerpt from website section titled “Letter from Satish” (Satish Kumar) (website no longer accessible)

“Leaders and activists in the environmental and social justice movement often consider spiritual and religious organizations irrelevant. They see religious pursuit and practice as being too self-centered and not engaged with the real world. In the same manner, religious leaders and organizations look upon the environmental and social justice movements as a waste of time. They believe that the only real change is personal change, and if all human beings behaved well and lived religiously then the world’s problems will sort themselves out.”

### 32. “... a need for approximately 58 million more farmers in the United States....”

a) Excerpt from article “50 Million Farmers” by Richard Heinberg, published at the Energy Bulletin website on November 17, 2006 (see <http://www.energybulletin.net/node/22584#> )

“One way or another, re-ruralization will be the dominant social trend of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thirty or forty years from now—again, one way or another—we will see a more historically normal ratio of rural to urban population, with the majority once again living in small, farming communities. More food will be produced in cities than is the case today, but cities will be smaller. Millions more people than today will be in the countryside growing food.

“They won’t be doing so the way farmers do it today, and perhaps not the way farmers did it in 1900. Indeed, we need perhaps to redefine the term *farmer*.... We should perhaps start thinking of a farmer as someone with 3 to 50 acres, who uses mostly hand labor and twice a year borrows a small tractor that she or he fuels with ethanol or biodiesel produced on-site.

“How many more farmers are we talking about? Currently the U.S. has three or four million of them, depending on how we define the term. Let’s again consider Cuba’s experience: in its transition away from fossil-fueled agriculture, that nation found that it required 15 to 25 percent of its population to

become involved in food production. In America in 1900, nearly 40 percent of the population farmed; the current proportion is close to one percent. (The current population of the United States is estimated at 306,670,896. 1% of that number is 3,066,708, an approximation of how many farmers there are now in the U.S. 20% of the total U.S. population is 61,334,179. According to this math, there would be a need for approximately 58 million more farmers in the United States, in the future, than there are now.)....

“How soon will the need arise? Assuming that the peak of global oil production occurs within the next five years, and that North American natural gas is already in decline, we are looking at a transition that must occur over the next 20 to 30 years, and that must begin approximately now.”

b) From the website of UN Habitat—United Nations Human Settlements Programme— at <http://www.unhabitat.org> (from “Media Centre/Press Kits” section)

Specifically: from “State of the World’s Cities 2004-5” (foreward by Kofi Annan, UN Sec. Gen.) (at [http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media\\_centre/sowc/sgforeword.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media_centre/sowc/sgforeword.pdf)) (see paragraph 1) (Confirmed June 8, 2008)

“Many cities face pervasive and persistent problems, including growing poverty, deepening inequality and polarization, widespread corruption at the local level, high rates of urban crime and violence, and deteriorating living conditions.”

c) Excerpt from the FAO Newsroom section of The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) website. In the “Focus on the Issues” subsection, see “High-level conference on world food security...”, and then see “Conference News” (6/6/2008). Specific article “Food Summit Calls for More Investment in Agriculture” (paragraphs 1, 2, and 9) (at <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2008/1000856/index.html>) (Confirmed June 13, 2008)

...“On climate change, the Declaration said: ‘It is essential to address (the) question of how to increase the resilience of present food production systems to challenges posed by climate change... We urge governments to assign appropriate priority to the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors, in order to create opportunities to enable the world’s smallholder farmers and fishers, including indigenous people, in particular vulnerable areas, to participate in, and benefit from financial mechanisms and investment flows to support climate change adaptation, mitigation and technology development, transfer and dissemination. We support the establishment of agricultural systems and sustainable management practices that positively contribute to the mitigation of climate change and ecological balance.’”

### 33. “The Great Way is very level....”

a) “Were I to have the least bit of knowledge, in walking on a Great Road,  
it’s only going astray that I would fear.  
The Great Way is very level;  
but people greatly delight in tortuous paths.”

[From Chapter 53 of “Te-Tao Ching” (by Lao Tzu) (possibly written in 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E., sufficient evidence unavailable) (translation by Robert G. Hendricks) Ballantine Books, New York 1989]

b) “If many people can learn to find contentment and quality of life while consuming much less, this limiting of desires at the ‘root’ will save much trouble trying to respond to the symptoms as they materialize worldwide. This is part of the ‘spiritual teachings’ element which often gets overlooked...”

[By this writer, from document “Spiritual Peacebuilding: 47 Quotes and Proverbs” by this writer (see the section “All IPCR Documents” at the website of The IPCR Initiative, at [www.ipcri.net](http://www.ipcri.net) ]

### 34. Proactive Measures Will Be Necessary to Encourage Constructive Activity during Community Visioning Initiatives

a) Consider the following commentary on preparation for carrying out a Community Visioning Initiative....

People who are doing preliminary planning for carrying out a Community Visioning Initiative should be aware that there may be people in the community who—regardless of the difficulties and urgencies associated with resolving multiple crises—choose to focus their attention of trying to make money by preying of people’s fears, manipulating people’s trust, and/or encouraging people to abandon hope in higher aspirations, and indulge in unhealthy, or immoral behavior. Such behavior is clearly counterproductive to the building of caring communities; it can be very dangerous for community morale, and it can become a crippling obstacle in times of crises. Responsible people will take sufficient preventative measures to proactively encourage a high percentage of constructive thinking and constructive action in their community.

b) Question #14 (from the document “39 Suggestions for Preliminary Survey Questions”) is as follows:

Please list at least 5 preventative measures which you believe would proactively encourage a high percentage of constructive thinking and constructive action during the carrying out of a Community Visioning Initiative in your community.

### 35. One of the most persistent ironies in life....

One of the most persistent ironies in life is that with so many opportunities to provide real assistance to fellow human beings—and with the potential for such assistance to result in happiness “to those who extend help as well as to those who receive it”—there are still many, many people in this world who cannot find a “way to earn a living” providing such assistance.

### 36. Peacebuilding in its most compassionate form is not a competitive field of activity

Peacebuilding in its most compassionate form is not a competitive field of activity. Viewed in this light, the most valuable forms of peacebuilding will nurture, support, and sustain the development of an infinite variety of other forms of peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecologically sustainability initiatives. The IPCR Initiative is an effort to nurture, support, and sustain peacebuilding in its most compassionate form.

### C. Concluding Comments

1. While there may be many people—some of whom are authorities in their fields of activity—who may already have clear ideas about what the challenges ahead are, and what solutions will be most effective

and

while there may also be many people who feel that they do not—because of lack of experience or education, or for other reasons—have the “appropriate skills” to fit into this kind of community activity....

*it is critical, and cannot be emphasized enough, that this kind of Community Visioning Initiative process (the kind advocated by The IPCR Initiative in the “1000Communities2” proposal, see <http://ipcri.net/images/1000Communities2.pdf>) gives as much importance to developing a close-knit community (and thus to increasing compassion for our fellow human beings, and helping each other) as it does to*

- a) contributing to accumulating and integrating the knowledge and skill sets necessary for the highest percentage of people to act wisely in response to challenges identified as priority challenges
- b) helping people to deliberately channel their time, energy, and money into the creation of “ways of earning a living” which are directly related to resolving high priority challenges
- c) assisting with outreach, partnership formation, and development of service capacity for a significant number of already existing (or forming) organizations and businesses
- d) helping to build a high level of consensus for specific action plans, which will help inspire additional support from people, businesses, and organizations with significant resources

2. Therefore, residents are encouraged to participate in as many ways, and in as many steps as possible.