

Fulbright Presentation: Scholars and Tourists

Introduction: How do very bright people handle new places, different languages, meeting strangers?? I had an opportunity to find out when I participated in a Fulbright program in American literature designed by the Transregional Center for Democratic Studies at New School University, in New York.

First I will read briefly from my diary of the first week.

Secondly, I will take an overview of what I got out of my Fulbright experience.

Thirdly, I will assess some of what could have been improved in the planning and execution of it.

To conclude, I will discuss some of what I believe is of value to post secondary institutions in having faculty and students become involved in Fulbright.

OVERVIEW: My major learning was how to place and construct knowledge in a personal and public context.

Facts of my personal involvement: The only Canadian and controversial: foreigner? A Canadian ambassador? My identity had already been problematized before I arrived.

I felt I has some advantages, however, and also some handicaps. For example, there were fears I needed to overcome.

The program was set up to engage participants in various kinds of learning experiences. There were three sites: New York (one month) Sante Fe (one week), and Washington (one week).

It was clear that New School University is a stimulating place.

Outstanding faculty and journalists who gave presentations and papers:

Some examples of that—Jonathan Schell (political columnist), Bradford Morrow, writer and teacher (author of Trinity Fields), Robert Boyers (founder and editor of the well known periodical Salmagundi), David Slocum (New York University), Ann Snitow (author of the Feminist Memoir Project), Philip Harper (race theorist from NYU), and Louis Menard (reviews editor of The New York Review of Books).

I rewrote my course outline, the one I was planning to use for my course in American literature, to be taught when I returned in the fall.

I also bought five hundred dollars US of books (a gift) to support my teaching of the course.

I came back with photographs and memories that showed how the US looks TODAY and how places of literary significance appear now.

The importance of on site study—a real strength of the Fulbright program

Seeing Edith Wharton's New York; tour of literary Greenwich Village

Walled garden with key Gramercy Park

Some dreams that came true on the trip--

Seeing the Metropolitan Opera perform in Central Park

Visiting Georgia O'Keeffe's house at Abiqui

Plus my own determination to see and record what was meaningful for me
(e.g. Theodore Roosevelt's house)

ART—especially American art (visit to the Whitney Museum etc.)

I visited the chapel that is a shrine to D.H. Lawrence in New Mexico

I came back with many new ideas of texts to teach and topics for student presentations
such as the role of photography in the depression, the impact of the photograph of the
Migrant Mother, how this might impact on the reading of Faulkner's novels of the 1930s.

Overall, I read American texts with others who were foreigners and thus I had
DOUBLE VISION—my own gaze as a North American and theirs from other parts of the
world, especially from eastern Europe (countries once occupied by the Soviets)

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Problem areas in terms of nationalism, culture, history

(e.g. seeing the film of Dr. Strangelove with the Russian gals)

differing perspectives of the Cold War, WW II; missed communications

New School organizers had never been themselves to Los Alamos.

Problems of being tourists were clear and sometimes distressing—Racial issues in U.S.

1. Going to Harlem: the whole day in retrospect (pictures?)

Being a voyeur of voyeurs camera watching eye, resident of Harlem watching us as a
group watching the residents of Harlem

I was also overwhelmed by the social scene, the homeless, the racial violence (story of
people we visited in their apartment)

2. Going to the Taos Pueblo

We were not allowed to photograph in the church (or to do much, for that matter)

Native Americans almost seemed to be playing jokes on the tourists

3. Tour of Los Alamos, New Mexico

Some refused to go for political reasons

Read from my edited diary

What could have been improved:

Staying in one place instead of constantly moving

Washington was overkill

Debriefing might have been done on line afterwards

More follow up; we do keep in touch on line but that is minimal

BENEFITS TO POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

For those planning to sponsor and organize a program, there are many opportunities to
have foreign visitors whose perspectives cause us to see ourselves more clearly.

For institutions, the value lies in what I group under the four Cs++++

1. CURRICULUM—opening up new areas; finding new texts to study
2. CONTACTS—meeting new scholars and establishing new people working in areas of study of interest to me as teacher and my college
3. COMMUNICATIONS—I am now connected on line to colleagues who are friends all over the world and have been invited to Russia and India
4. CULTURE—establishing contexts (e.g. visit to Ellis Island) and consciousness of a new gaze that took in my new altered views of self (as a Canadian)

CONCLUSION:

Seeing Jane from Brazil at a conference in Albuquerque was magic

It's still a mystery why I was picked or the others

But I was led to believe that the organizers wanted a mixed group and they also wanted people who could really benefit from the experience

They picked people at a point of change in their lives and academic careers

I developed new confidence in myself as a scholar and in ability to take risks in travel locally, nationally, and internationally. I found a way to finish a book I was writing. I now look at geography, landscape, and environment differently. Although the dropping of the atomic bombs is still horrifying to me (and morally wrong), I have an understanding of how and why many Americans are proud of this. Overall, I learned to see from new angles.