Spatial Histories of Radical Geography
North America and Beyond

Edited by
Trevor J. Barnes and Eric Sheppard
We dedicate this book to the community of scholars, students and activists who raised the flag to, shaped, and carried radical geography forward to its present wonderfully variegated state, and to future radical thinkers Charlotte and Jonah.
Myths, Cults, Memories, and Revisions in Radical Geographic History

Revisiting the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute

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John Henry was a steel driving man, or at least so goes the legend. This "tall tale," the only North American myth to feature the life of African Americans, is useful for setting up our chapter on the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI). The power of myth to take on important political meaning while at the same time obscuring embodied historical geographies lurks everywhere. Too often, we are seduced by and abide mythological narratives because we do not know any better and lack the necessary insight to challenge them. Other times they offer us convenient connections between places and politics that may otherwise be opaque. And yet, just as often, the complicated histories unmasking myths would force us to run the risk of destabilizing traditions thought too precious to disrupt, regardless of the emotional violence they might sustain. Given the intellectual and material harm centuries of masculinist and racist geographic thinking has fostered, we feel even the most precious radical histories require our best collective efforts at setting stories straight or at least unbraiding some of their knots when opportunities emerge to do so. The return of Gwendolyn Warren, the former co-director of the DGEI, to the field of Geography...
offers us an opportunity to reflect on the DGEI and the legacy of a small Detroit neighborhood called Fitzgerald, which is often thought of as the epicenter of the DGEI.

*Steel Drivin’ Man*, a book by historian Scott Reynolds Nelson, offers a path for unpacking politically powerful myths that have been constructed through racialized and gendered power relations. Nelson (2006) recounts the “true” story of John Henry, the black man, who was persecuted though Virginia’s white supremacist “Black Codes” at a time when convict labor was coerced in the U.S. South during Reconstruction. John Henry was imprisoned in the infamous Richmond Penitentiary, and forced to labor on the mile-long Lewis Tunnel for the C&O railroad. After John Henry died, through the brutality of his capture, his story began to build until a song was written about him. The first printed score of the song was copyrighted by blues legend W.C. Handy, and it is now the most recorded song in U.S. musical history.

The mythic status of John Henry, when mobilized by Pete Seeger for instance, was used as a symbol for labor struggles across the U.S. Given the positive portrayal of his racialized might and power, so rarely valorized in mainstream U.S. culture, John Henry’s strength and perseverance were mobilized symbolically in the freedom marches of the Civil Rights Movement. The phrase “how’s your hammer hanging” took on political and cultural significance, and still has resonance for expressing solidarity in many African American communities. But this expression of political solidarity was also sexualized, so that John Henry’s “hammer” accumulated layers of masculinist meaning as the myths about him traveled and evolved. This gendering of John Henry’s “vitality” is especially important when juxtaposed with the entry of Polly Anne, “John Henry’s woman,” at the end of the song. Polly Anne introduces other important layers to the myth. Although Polly Anne is presented to be as powerful as her mate, she is rarely discussed, and has received scant attention across U.S. cultural history. The myths of John Henry, and relative absence of Polly Anne in these stories, offer guidance for unpacking narratives of the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI).

Drawing on Barthes’s (1972) discussion of “myth as depoliticized speech,” Melissa Wright (2006) makes an argument that is productive for our resituating and examining the DGEI and Fitzgerald as we parse their mythical character in relation to how we can understand this moment with fresh eyes and new historical geographical insight. Wright (2006: 3-4) suggests, “myths are vehicles for foreclosing discussions of politics as they use fantastic characters and situations that depict hierarchical relationships broadly believed to have bearing on ‘real life’ without having to explain these relationships.” About the power of history and myth more specifically, Barthes (1972: 142) said,

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men [sic] have produced and used it; and what myth gives us in return is a natural image of this reality.

Given this understanding, it seems important to interrogate the myths that shape our intellectual and political lives and give rise to larger-than-life disciplinary figures.

Focusing on the DGEI, an extraordinary collective endeavor of community research and education in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we discuss the double movement of “manIPulation” within the history of radical geography. Our chapter shows how myths about radical praxis can play tricks with history and geography, wherein some people and places acquire cultish status while others are eclipsed with profound impacts on our understanding of the discipline and its community engagements. As the history of the DGEI was recovered in the 1990s and 2000s (see Barnes 1996; Katz 1996; Merrifield 1995; Heyman 2007; Heynen 2013; Barnes *et al.* 2011), the attention was largely focused on William Bunge, “the man behind” the DGEI, and Fitzgerald “the place behind” it, given that it was the title of Bunge’s 1971 book (also see Bunge 1974). The building of the DGEI and Fitzgerald mythology occurred at the same time as the co-director of the DGEI, Gwendolyn Warren, went largely unrecognized (see Warren and Katz 2014). Warren was mentioned in most accounts, but few sought her out to hear her perspective, whether based on her role in the DGEI or her long career as a working community organizer. Removed from the field of geography, she did not realize that the DGEI had become one of the more romanticized and inspiring episodes in the history of radical geography, with Bunge its charismatic leader. We intend to recover part of the lost narrative of the DGEI through the auto-ethnographic insights of Gwendolyn Warren, while at the same time thinking about the role of race, class, and gender in the histories, narratives, and futures of our field.

The DGEI was a revolutionary project of geographical knowledge production and exchange whose perils and potentials were fading from memory by the 1980s, a forgotten alternative of how geography might be done and learned. More accurately, its forgetting was willed — its history erased, at multiple layers, not just by a profession and university apparatus that exiled one of its co-founders, but even by the Geography left who saw it as a wildly utopian moment all the more impossible as they/we got absorbed in our own professionalization and the accommodations it required. In other registers, the DGEI was left in the dust of its “empirical” or “applied” concerns by the poststructuralist turn in Geography with its interests more in theorizing difference than what is
common, which now captivates the intellectual and political imaginations of so many. In the course of the remembering and forgetting, the DGEI and many of its key participants were mythologized in Geography and beyond.

**Radical Geographic HiStory**

We will first focus on the basics of the popular, mythological, version of the DGEI and Fitzgerald as has been articulated within radical HiStory. As the story goes, the DGEI arose in the aftermath of the 1967 uprisings and brought together academics and neighborhood residents to engage in collaborative geographical research and produce a “pipeline” to higher education. The DGEI was established in Fitzgerald, a neighborhood in northwest central Detroit. It aimed to reroute the school to street to factory pipeline into a school to street to university pipeline. That ambitious project really shook things up on the streets and in the university. As the DGEI took shape in Fitzgerald, Bunge claimed it was “not a nice geography” or a “status quo geography.” It was rather a community-defined practice of Geography, which drew on the skills and tools of Geography with a twist. It was neither Geography’s mid-century descriptive ideographic regionalism, nor was it a Geography of the “quantitative revolution.” And while it took aboard some of the tools of empire—the expedition, the map, the survey—it turned them on their head so that the power of the “expedition” was in the hands of the people “explored,” and what was explored came of experience and spurred consciousness of power’s effects in place (see Merrifield 1995; Katz 1996).

This version of the DGEI’s story is about the activist-intellectual work of a band of geographers with revolutionary aspirations who in the 1960s mapped rats and words and children’s pain. Their productions and exchanges of knowledge were part of an effort to organize politically. Their work spurred geographical imaginations in action that mobilized memory as infrastructure and history as possibility. Recalling past geographies and revisiting their sedimentations in place were tools for building alternative geographies of everyday life and mapping future alternatives. The Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, as it was formally known, the “Institute” to mark its educational ambitions, was a collective practical engagement with the city that aspired to document, analyze, interrupt, and reroute the multiple trajectories of “slum formation” that were ongoing in the late 1960s as white flight and the decentralization (suburbanization) of the automobile industry, which began in the 1950s, accelerated.

The decentralization of the automotive industry was impelled in part by union activism and the successes of various strikes—wildcat and otherwise—and enabled by the automobile itself and the enormous infrastructure that supported it. The state-sponsored development of the interstate highways advanced sprawl, and directly and indirectly destroyed much of the urban fabric of the U.S. in general and Detroit’s in particular. The shifting tax base to the suburbs further decimated the infrastructure and public services of Detroit.

The DGEI, which started in 1968, was a community-based collective of “folk geographers,” academic geographers, young people, whether students—high school, undergraduate, and graduate—or school leavers, and residents. At its best, it was a community of practice that shared knowledge, skills, memories, and imagined futures. Its ambitious and exhilarating project was to work the grounds of one square mile of the city after the 1967 riots to understand the very fibers of its existence so that the political economic historical geographical processes engulfling it might be deflected, rejected, undone. As Bunge (1971) wrote in the recently republished keystone text (2011), *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution, “they” saw the Fitzgerald neighborhood as “America,” as containing the story of the nation itself. Just as a drop of blood can tell the health of a patient so too could this mile square plot. “Their” overall intent was to produce an analysis of the spaces of nature, humankind, and machines at five scales—the neighborhood, the metropolis, the nation, the continent, and the planet.*

The DGEI was co-directed by Wayne State geographer, William Bunge who with his family had taken up residence in Fitzgerald in the early 1960s, and a militant high school leaver from the neighborhood, Gwendolyn Warren. They were a formidable, unlikely, and somewhat unholy alliance; more unholy as their narrative evolved. Guided by community participants, mostly youthful, Expedition members mapped land use of the most elemental kind. They mapped their rage at the crumbling they saw around them, and trained and energized a phalanx of militant and well-informed geographers to do the same. Among the brilliantly mundane phenomena they documented and mapped in the vicinity were what a child touches, that is, what comprised the tactile surfaces of the neighborhood’s open space. They asked basic and deeply political geographical questions about ‘slum formation’ reckoned in such things as “machine space” versus play space, traffic accidents involving children, childless spaces, hard boundaries like walls and forressed exteriors, the presence of rats, rat bites, broken glass, and dead trees, numbers of residential sales, racial and class composition of the residential and commercial areas, and the words that punctuated the landscape. All of which were mapped, charted, and analyzed.
Their work was intensive and revealing. In one schoolyard, for instance, participants combed one square yard and counted 59 pieces of glass and other jagged objects at or near the surface, weighing 6.5 ounces. Multiplying these findings by the size of the schoolyard they made the startling revelation that it contained about 820,690 jagged objects weighing 2.8 tons; and this was not the worst yard in the neighborhood. Such spaces may well now be the grounds of the booming urban agriculture in the “vacancies” of Detroit. Landscape and landscape histories matter in countless ways though they are often unremarked. As the provocative epigraph/dare at the start of one of the DGEI’s Fieldnotes publications put it: “...if you went down 12th Street or down Mack, or any such place, and you saw that street, what would we be able to read in that landscape that you couldn’t?” Plenty as it turns out.

The project was one that revolved around knowledge-action, their meticulous field research was always already part of a strategy for taking a community-based stand against deprivations. Depending where you stood, Fitzgerald was scripted and narrated as somewhere between a slum and a thriving community. The Expedition asked questions like whether and how the neighborhood might be regenerated forever. The DGEI did not see this as a utopian question. At the heart of its project was an educational imperative: it was the expedition and institute. The latter came more from the community while the former was spurred by the academics but was rerouted by community participants. The idea, now a cornerstone of Participatory Action Research, was that the community would do its own research and construct theories about the issues it faced in order to shape and inform practice. To that end, it developed an extension program in neighborhood education, initially through University of Michigan and then Michigan State, both of which were soon destroyed because of the program’s deeply radical nature (see Horvath 1971). Among its features were that faculty worked through tithing their time; there was open enrollment for students who did as much community as classroom work; tuition was free or paid for through the tithed salaries of faculty; the program was administered by the community participants; and the programs were based on the campuses of the state’s best universities with an insistence that those institutions’ resources be available to community-based action researchers. Their model was the extension education programs for rural youth that were part of the land-grant university system, which included Michigan State University. Somehow, though, when extension education was provided for non-white radicalized urban youth it was not seen in the same way by the state (Horvath 1971).

The educational program drew on a case-study method of instruction, which created multilayered communities of practice (see Lave and Wenger 1991). The first case focused on school desegregation and decentralization, and was drawn on by then State Senator and future Detroit Mayor Coleman Young to analyze redistricting possibilities. The DGEI’s plan, which was derailed by those in power, would have redressed some of the most pressing equity and social justice issues facing the local black community. It did not appear coincidental to anyone that its development coincided with Michigan State’s dismantling of the program in favor of accepting individual students to matriculate at the university. Also, not coincidental, at around the same time, Bunge was denied tenure at Wayne State. This denial and its aftermath have long been central to his mythical status; being oppressed by the system, while doing so much good for the community, made him into a kind of academic martyr.

Though the Institute was not without its problems, it was destroyed by, among other things, an academic administration that refused to forge, let alone nurture, any meaningful link between the intellectual resources of the state university system and the needs and interests of poor people of color in Detroit. We trace the historic contours of the DGEI to show how it sparked alternative radical and creative mores of geographic scholarship, but also how they were actively undermined and destroyed by those in power – university administrators, state and municipal representatives, and real estate investors, among others. Remembering the work (and failures) of the DGEI, and telling its HiStory has produced a political imaginary, a research agenda of community-based scholarship now deeply inscribed within the DNA of radical geography. The DGEI created a field of possibilities as much as possibilities for a field. Its work provided “exemplary suggestions,” to use a phrase of Peter Linebaugh quoted in Kristin Ross’s (2015) Communal Luxury, for thinking and acting that both framed a period and glimpsed another. Our recounting of this well-known HiStory is not meant to just frame and narrate this period of radical geography, but to open up possibilities for delving deeper into the myths of the DGEI as a cautionary tale for contemporary radical geographers.

The prevailing narrative of the DGEI reinvented the field of geography in many ways because it offered a new mode of inquiry that differed in radical ways from the two dominant strains in the field. One was the long-standing descriptive tradition that focused on regional and local variations of the earth’s surface looking for common patterns of land use and the unique attributes of place. The other was a quantitative approach to explain spatial difference and structure, which arose in the 1950s in part as a scientific critique of the ideographic tradition that held sway through the middle of the century (see also Barnes and Sheppard, this volume). The so-called quantitative revolution sought laws that would explain spatial organization and variation, fastening,
perhaps not surprisingly, on the role of distance in the location of various resources. It drew on increasingly sophisticated modeling techniques, along with spatial statistics that were later enabled by digital information science. The DGEI offered a radical break with these positivist traditions and interrupted the complacency of geographical inquiry to examine relational questions on the ground with no pretense of “objectivity” in the positivist sense, what Sandra Harding (1992) would later call, “weak objectivity.” Theoretical in the deepest sense—what is in relation to the historical geographies of lived experience—the DGEI looked at the uneven geographical distribution of resources, the histories of land occupation and exploitation, and the everyday effects of racial capitalism in space and place.

As we hope we’ve made clear to this point, the *Historical* narrative of the DGEI is one in which its participants valued participatory research and collaborative writing all the way down. While there have been other narratives; stories that noted problems with the DGEI’s division of labor and their mode of theory building, which retained some vestiges of positivism and a masculinist attitude (see, Katz 1996; Warren and Katz 2014), little of this thread was woven into the *Historical* record of the DGEI. All of this notwithstanding, the DGEI and its academic participants were instrumental in spurring the shift to radical Geography in the late 1960s associated with the founding of the Union of Socialist Geographers and *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* in 1969, which blossomed into a thousand forms of radical and then “critical” geography over the years. But the myths of the DGEI are inevitably altered in the encounter with HERstory.

**Radical Geographic HERstory**

The received narratives of the DGEI center on the neighborhood of Fitzgerald. This geography runs into some historical problems when we realize how little of the DGEI took place in this community, and that with the exception of Bunge, Frank Truesdale, and Gwendolyn Warren, no other community members from this neighborhood were involved in the DGEI. Because so little is known about how the Co-Director of the DGEI, Gwendolyn Warren, joined the project, we’ll start with how she and Bunge met and began working together.

In 1966, the students of Detroit’s Northern High School boycotted the 1966–1967 school year after the school newspaper was censored for noting both the school’s inferior learning environment and that students experienced police harassment around the school and their bus stops. In Spring 1967 the students from Fitzgerald who participated in the boycott, calling themselves the Infernos, picketed the expanding sex industry and burlesque clubs in their neighborhood. As a result of this organizing, a group of teenagers from the school met with the Fitzgerald Community Council. Bunge and Warren first met at this meeting. Several weeks later Warren was in Esquire Delicatessen on the corner of 6 Mile Road and Livernois. Bunge happened to be there too, and approached her and attempted to strike up a conversation. Because she did not recognize him and thought he looked out of place, she did not talk to him and went about her business. A few days later Bunge went to Warren’s house and asked her father’s permission to speak to her.

Warren and Bunge sat on the front porch and he told her about his project, the Detroit Geographic Expedition (DGE). He said that he had graduate students working with him to map the history of human spaces in the city of Detroit. He explained that in order to understand better the natural flow of the community he needed a local interpreter, a guide, someone who could interpret what the community saw and experienced, especially through the eyes of its children. He seemed to know all about Warren and the student boycott. For Warren, the words Bunge used were exciting; change was possible, but the thing that stood out the most was the disapproval he expressed toward whites. It was ugly and much worse than the statements made by blacks about other blacks. At this initial meeting, and frequently thereafter, Bunge expressed himself in ways Warren didn’t understand or appreciate, particularly the racialized values he assigned to different groups of people.

Bunge saw and represented himself as street smart. In what he seemed to think was a way of “acting black,” Bunge would do things like call himself a “nigger,” which was upsetting until Warren realized he did not understand the correct use of the word. As she put it, he thought it made him tough and soulful as opposed to stupid and dangerous. For him, whites—especially white men—were immoral, Jews were dishonest, and black women were better in bed than their white counterparts, because they could take pain and suffering in ways white women could not. There was always an underlying sexual and sexist stream that ran through his essentializing narratives about gender and race, inflecting his stereotypical ideas about how people interacted.

After several hours of discussion on the porch, Warren agreed to meet with Bunge and his students. On a number of occasions, Warren listened to Bunge talk about his project, the DGE, and why he moved to Fitzgerald to serve a more deserving people. She thought he was “crazy as hell.” But eventually they joined forces, and traveled around Detroit meeting with city, union, and civil rights leaders primarily with Bunge asking for opportunities to serve as the research arm of the movement.
He would list what he thought were his radical credentials of trustworthiness, which included introducing Gwendolyn Warren and her work on the school strike, followed by showing the newspaper article he kept in his wallet that named him as a Communist.

Soon it was clear to Warren that the interests of the DGE were very different than her own, which included finding a job. It was a new experience to talk to whites who expressed disdain for their own people and seemed to truly prefer her culture. Bunge and friends talked about all kinds of things from white self-hatred to how their community could manage the outcomes of Warren's community's future. It seemed to Warren, however, that when Bunge and his students were done doing research in and around Fitzgerald they would go home, and reap the benefits of their work with little regard for the toll it took on her or the members of the communities they were trying to help. After listening a while, the fascination wore off as the picture became clearer. After making the rounds with Bunge, Warren saw no long-term benefit of spending more time with him, so she decided not to return to his home and project, and instead chose to spend more time with her friends and looking for other opportunities.

Several weeks into this hiatus Bunge dropped by Warren's house excited to tell her what he had been doing. He had been meeting with several of the Fitzgerald Community Council members and church leaders, and they had come up with a solution to assist with jobs and recreational outlets for the youth in the community. The Council would help sponsor youth dances if the young people in the community agreed to manage the activities by rules set by the church. Bunge went on to say that the proceeds would go to the youth community organization – the Infernos – do what it liked until its members could find jobs or other sources of income. After Warren shared this news with the rest of the Infernos, everyone was excited and anxious to get started. The dances were overwhelmingly successful: the line to get in wrapped around the block, and everyone was on their best behavior. In about two months, the Infernos had saved over five thousand dollars.

With the help of Bunge and other adult members of the community, the Infernos sponsored the teen dances and eventually opened their own restaurant on Puritan Avenue. The restaurant was called the Inferno-burger, which did not sit well with the Fitzgerald Community Council; they didn’t think the incendiary sounding name was appropriate. Nevertheless, most of the skilled labor – electrical, plumbing, and finished carpentry – was provided by the parents of their middle class, largely white friends who lived in Marygrove, an area in the northern part of Fitzgerald. Warren and her friends referred to these kids, whom they’d hung out with for a long time, as the Marygrove Gang.

While most of the start-up labor came from adults in the community, the kitchen equipment – stove, burners, refrigerators, tables, and chairs – were paid for by the Infernos from the dance proceeds. Once the restaurant was opened, all of the kids north and south would go there. Warren recounted, “We sold hamburgers and fries to those who could afford to buy them, mostly adults who came to observe, and we gave away the rest free to any kid that asked. You would have thought by our sense of ownership and pride that we were running and managing a major business enterprise. The restaurant was closed twice a day for 45 minutes for cleaning. Members as well as kids who ate there for free would clean the restaurant thoroughly, burners, floors, bathrooms, windows, everything.”

The Infernos received citywide exposure for their youth-coordinated dances and restaurant. As Warren recalled, “I believe we had at least two grand openings, and a series of special events.” By keeping the menu simply hamburgers, cheeseburgers, fries, drinks, and assorted candy, the operational cost was low. All dance proceeds went to support the restaurant; various supporters came by to assist with the effort. The Detroit Free Press covered these activities in a positive and upbeat manner, which encouraged people to come by the restaurant and see for themselves. Attendance at the dances had reached capacity with overflow crowds, and “we even had a small savings set aside, which we kept in the refrigerator next to the fries.”

About four months after the restaurant opened all hell broke out. The local police had determined that the Infernos were a violent youth gang and that every crime in the community was committed by them. They were accused of everything from rape, burglary, grand theft, and strong-arm robbery; you name it, and they did it according to the police. The guys were constantly being harassed, followed, arrested, and roughed up. The police would come into the restaurant, gun in hand, threatening to kill anyone if they moved. The community stepped up and demanded that the harassment stop, but it didn’t. It intensified. With the closure of the restaurant and the conclusion of the dances, the relationship between the DGE and the Infernos came to end. Of its members, only Warren and Frank Truesdale maintained a relationship with the evolving DGE.

The tensions between young people in the community and the police escalated. One day, Warren was walking along on the way home and was stopped by the police. It was dusk dark and no one was around. After a few words one of the officers got out of the car and poked her hard in the stomach with his billy club. She fell to the ground and thought she was about to be killed right then and there. After the cops left, she lay on the ground crying in pain, shaking in fear, and trying to catch her
breath. Laying there she thought about the guys; if they had been here someone would have died. Things between the police and the community were tense in ways that have sobering resonance with the current climate more than 50 years later.

During the summer of 1967 the Detroit race riots broke out. They were one of the most violent urban revolts on U.S. soil during the twentieth century. The uprisings were sparked after Detroit Police Vice Squad officers raided an afterhours “blind pig” (an unlicensed bar) on the corner of 12th Street and Clairmount Avenue in the center of the city’s poorest black neighborhood. There was a party going on at the bar celebrating the return from Vietnam of two black servicemen. Officers had expected a few patrons would be inside, but when they came upon the party they arrested all 82 people attending. Shortly after the arrests started, an empty bottle was thrown into the rear window of a police car by crowds gathered outside. By mid-morning, lootin and windowsmashing spread out along 12th Street. Police officers began to report injuries from stones, bottles, and other objects that were thrown at them. And that was just the beginning.

Fires started, spreading rapidly in the afternoon heat. By the end of the second day, fires and looting were reported citywide. Michigan Governor George Romney ordered 800 State Police Officers and 8,000 National Guardsmen to address the situation. They were later augmented by 4,700 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division, ordered there by President Lyndon Johnson. In the five days and nights of violence, 33 blacks and 10 whites were killed, 1,189 were injured, and over 7,200 people were arrested. The first death report during the riot was a 16-year-old black youth.

The uprising represented a turning point for most city residents. White flight doubled to 40,000 in 1967, and doubled again in 1968. Construction of the city’s freeways, newer housing, and threats of further integration due to the demolition of the city’s two main black neighborhoods, Black Bottom and Paradise Valley for ‘urban renewal,’ caused many whites to leave for the suburbs. Virginia Park, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, rapidly became a predominantly black neighborhood by 1967. Twelfth Street became the center of black retail.

In Fitzgerald Bunge argues that the difference in intensity between the riot on 12th Street and in Fitzgerald could be attributed to the community’s efforts to create a “good community,” suggesting that years of caring made a difference. He went on to say that their implementation of “anti-slam” techniques saved the day. Based on Warren’s experience in the community, in congratulating Fitzgerald’s less extreme experience of the riots, Bunge failed to explain why of the 34 stores that were looted, all but seven were in the poor sections of Fitzgerald, or to note that 12th Street was the heart of Detroit’s black community where the uprisings might be expected to be more intense.

A different interpretation of the riot and its effects through HERstory can be found in Field Notes No. 3: The Geography of the Children of Detroit, in a discussion paper by Frank Truesdale, Roderick Shepherd, Sharon Evans and Debra Hampton, “Everybody was Eating Back Then.” According to this account of the uprisings, “Some people had a backyard full of furniture; they would put a couch on top of their cars and ride down the street holding them by hand. A&P on Puritan (a local grocery store) was looted by families along San Juan Drive, Prairie, and Fuller Streets. Living rooms were covered with food.” Their account suggests that for many people, “looting” enabled “everybody to eat” better.

Bunge did not discuss the fact that no individual houses were targeted in the riot or that the property of the church and the wealthy (white), including in Fitzgerald, were protected by federal troops with tanks. The poor section of Fitzgerald was actively involved in the riots and looting. It was common to enter homes in this part of the community and find the floors covered with items taken during the looting. Food, clothing, shoes, and household goods were frequently on display. There was also a concerted effort by many to retrieve loan paperwork that was on file at finance companies, and personal items located in the local pawnshops. The items taken by residents were dictated by individual family needs. Families with small children took diapers and baby food; others just took food—mostly canned goods—some stole shoes to wear. At the time, there was a sense that the seven shops that were located in the northern wealthier section of Fitzgerald were looted by their white business owners for the insurance. Most of the businesses in that section that were damaged never reopened again.

In the same way that Bunge declared himself a “nigger” because he stayed in a hotel in the black community for three weeks while participating in the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago, he declared himself successful with his Fitzgerald social experiment without asking the residents how they felt or even whether they had participated in the riots. He regularly suggested his dismissal from Wayne State University had to do with being a “nigger lover,” versus the version of the story that folks of the time will recall. Bunge had asked black male students in his class if a white female student, who was reluctant to go in the field out of fear, “was rape-able.” When he was dismissed for his behavior, he declared that “nigger lovers” made poor university professors, claiming that he was “a nigger” from Fitzgerald. Tellingly, he did not appear to recognize the racism or sexism of his remarks in the classroom.
As a teenager, Warren had limited exposure to white people other than those in positions of authority like teachers, police, and shop owners. With the exception of a few character roles, everyone on TV was also white. Bunge was the first white male adult with whom she had extended communication. Several weeks after the riots, Bunge came to her house again, this time to ask her to attend a meeting on school decentralization with him at State Senator Coleman Young's office. As this was one of Warren's political concerns, she was immediately interested and said that she would attend this time, but noted again that she did not want to participate in the DGE.

During the meeting with Senator Young, Bunge, along with community leaders and union organizers, argued that the community should have significant input and control of the newly proposed School Decentralization Plan. Bunge argued that their group was the only community-based effort that would be represented by public school students, local unions, community associations, and university faculty dedicated to political empowerment and community involvement. He noted that the state's land-grant university system was based on the model of community involvement and research, and the educational community had historically worked with communities that lacked the skills to solve issues of this magnitude and importance.

After leaving the meeting, Warren asked more about land-grant universities and the development of a special exchange bank. She said she would help Bunge, but only if he helped her and her friends. The Infernos requested income and learning opportunities that didn't include the military or a factory. After having spent time with Bunge's students talking about their plans for the future, Warren felt confident that young people in the community would be successful if given the opportunity to attend college. They were intelligent and motivated but lacked access to higher education. Warren and Bunge discussed what would have to happen for her to commit to working with him on an expanded DGE (key would be adding an educational component, which became the Institute), and to feel comfortable working with him as a community organizer. She agreed to work with the community to ensure the highest level of participation and he agreed to provide the technical and academic support necessary to achieve the desired outcome, which was community control of all research.

Additionally, she demanded that the project could not be located in Fitzgerald. It had to be in an environment where the whole community might have greater control and access. Warren felt that to be truly successful, the community needed more comprehensive access to the university system not just attention from a small group of Bunge's graduate students. There was a community sentiment that the graduate students could help study the problem, but they could not lead the fixing of the problem, because it was not theirs to fix. Bunge agreed to these terms. He also seemed to understand that he was becoming a distraction, and that he needed to both reduce his visibility in the community and assume a more traditional role in this effort. He could no longer be a "brother from another mother"; he had to be a real academic and "act white" since he very clearly was.

During the summer of 1969 with the assistance of a newly recruited citywide team, the principles of the DGEI were established. Bunge wanted to do community research and to be an agent of change, but he was growing more unacceptable to the black community. Warren wanted to make a change in her community, but she didn't have the requisite skills to make a real impact. Bunge understood the world of academia and Warren understood what motivated members of her community. They agreed to expand the DGE (Detroit Geographical Expedition) by the creation of the Institute, which necessitated a name change for the organization to the DGEI. Bunge was to manage the research component until a suitable replacement could be trained, and Warren would run the Institute. They agreed on core management principles for their combined efforts (see Horvath 1971):

1. Any Detroit resident could participate in the project as long as their contribution was productive.
2. Every participant would receive a full scholarship and be eligible for college credit if they met the requirements for the successful completion of each class taken. And with the completion of 45 college credits with a grade of C or better they would be eligible for admission to Michigan State University as a sophomore, regardless of their educational background.
3. Community control of all research projects that were to be conducted in the community's name.
4. Research projects would use only a case study form of instruction, and the projects would be selected and approved by the students or community. Relevance of cause was critical for people confronting skill limitations and/or poor educational experiences. The problems addressed would have to be more important to the individuals participating than their fear of past negative experiences.
5. They required the best facilities and staff; the resources used had to dignify the seriousness of the issue at hand. Students were required to challenge themselves and perform at a level of excellence necessitated by the project, which included challenging any skills deficits. The facilities and staff should mirror the community's commitment and only bring their best effort.
The division of labor between Bunge and Warren worked well. Ron Horvath, Edward Vander Velde, and Charles Ipcar took the lead on everything related to faculty recruitment from Michigan State University (MSU) and other state universities. Their commitments included playing a critical role in managing Bunge’s interactions with the students and with Warren (see Horvath 1971, 2016). Horvath’s involvement in the project was crucial to its success. Warren recruited students who were committed and energized, and Horvath recruited faculty from various universities who served with excellence. The DGEI team that participated in the development of the program’s principles and operational guidelines for the Institute were folks Warren met during the Northern High School walkout and other community activities. Frank Truesdale was the only other Inferno who participated in the DGEI. Everyone else joined the project after the Institute was conceived and it became operational.

The agreement that the faculty tithed their time to teach meant only those committed to change and excellence volunteered. The faculty members selected were as committed to the greater good as anyone involved, and quickly adapted to the needs of their students. They were special, and it showed. They met the students where they were, sometimes hungry, scared, and non-believers. But the faculty kept coming, sometimes acting as faculty recruiters themselves. Program offerings went from one class with 40 students in the summer of 1969 to 31 classes and over 500 students by the spring of 1970, with 50 new classes and instructors ready to begin in the fall. These numbers represent classes taught by MSU faculty only. Some of the students who enrolled were high school graduates taking advantage of free tuition in order to accumulate college credit toward their degree. Others enrolled because of their interest in community change. Several thousand city residents attended classes and orientations of the various research projects. And once the course requirements were met, almost a hundred students enrolled in other colleges or universities in the state.

The student recruitment effort was extremely successful. Students came from every corner of the community—factory workers, prostitutes, drug dealers, and grandmothers and grandfathers—they all came. The opportunity to share what they knew while simultaneously controlling and managing the intended outcomes was addictive. Giving the students the resources to rediscover their strength and find their moments of greatness was profound by itself; no additional accomplishments needed to be achieved to experience the sense of individual success. But there were abundant other accomplishments.

During the winter of 1969 the DGEI was awarded the distinct honor of working on the new school decentralization plan for the city of Detroit.

Collecting data, making maps, and writing the report represented its first real success as a research and educational program. The subject matter and case-study method approach to the project created a firestorm in the classroom. The final exam for two of the geography classes and an English class was based on material relating to the presentation and acceptance of the report by the community.

Like the rest of the students involved in the DGEI, Warren suffered from negative educational and life experience. By the time she left the Detroit Public School System at 16 years old, her family had moved 21 times and she had attended over 12 different schools. Her basic skills had suffered greatly, but her mind was nimble and agile, and, like most 18-year-olds, her energy was boundless. She enrolled in classes at the University of Michigan Extension Program located on Wayne State’s campus in Detroit while at the same time also recruiting students and interacting with the community leadership on the status of the study. It was difficult for her to take classes with the rest of the students, while maintaining control of the student body and acting as the DGEI’s co-director. Her first semester at Wayne State included classes in social stratification, statistical methods, and technical field research. The faculty teaching these classes were not aware of the agreement with Michigan State University, nor were they participating faculty in the Institute.

Every extra moment was spent reading and re-reading the class textbooks and related material. Warren transferred 68 semester units from the University of Michigan Extension Program to Michigan State University at the end of her first academic year. She received straight As with the exception of a geography class, where she received a B. Go figure! The winter of 1970, she was accepted as a full-time student at Michigan State University, graduating with high honors in the winter of 1971. Warren was accepted in graduate school at Michigan State University in the spring of that year.

Once she moved to East Lansing to attend Michigan State, Warren rarely saw Bunge unless they had to discuss DGEI business. Her concerns about him continued however. For instance, while in San Francisco attending an AAG annual meeting in 1970, Bunge was interviewed by the San Francisco Chronicle, and said, “The world is divided into spaces—Homosexual spaces and Heterosexual spaces. The heterosexual spaces are where you have parks and schools, and hospitals, and homosexual spaces are where you have prisons, armies and jails.” Warren’s distrust of Bunge grew after reading the interview. While his politics of exclusion, misogyny, and racism were masked by the good things he made possible through the DGEI, they were made visceral in statements such as these, and Warren found herself wanting to form an
all-women’s army to help the children of Detroit (see Warren 1971: 8). The HiStory of the DGEI has failed to capture these tensions and the difficulties such sentiments and ideas created for many Bunge claimed to be working to help.

Bunge’s biases would go on to create long-term problems for Warren. While at school in East Lansing, she received a call from a close friend of both Bunge and herself whom she had met while working in Detroit. Warren was happy to hear from him because he had never telephoned her before, and she missed talking to him. Warren asked how he was doing. He said well but he had something he thought she should know. He went on to say that Bunge was telling anyone who would listen that she was a lesbian and no longer capable of leading the project because of it. Being outed in this way after all of her hard work and dedication created immense feelings of hurt, betrayal, and disappointment for Gwendolyn Warren. She was disappointed not because Bunge thought she was a lesbian, but because he was attempting to hurt and undermine her. Until that point, she had never felt rejected or disapproved of by him, but this was very different. As a young woman she couldn’t make sense of it until much later in life. Although while she was living in California a few years later, Warren received a letter from Bunge that attempted to explain his behavior, they never spoke again.

The last project that the original DGEI project staff participated in was Field Notes Discussion Paper No. 3 “The Geography of the Children of Detroit.” Most of it was transcribed from earlier recordings and for the most part was not edited prior to being printed. Needless to say, the participants were disappointed, not in the content – which remains compelling and original – but the presentation. Its flawed production suggests the ways that the DGEI had been stretched thin by 1971, and in retrospect signaled the beginning of the end of the project. Beyond the research activities, managing the needs of the new students that were accepted each semester by the university fell primarily to Horvath and Warren, who were at the same time receiving a lot of pushback from Michigan State.

One night after a series of meetings regarding the future of the DGEI on campus, Warren received a home visit from Dr. Robert Green, Dean of Urban Affairs; Joseph McMillian, Director of the Equal Opportunity Program; Lloyd Cofer, Director of Special Services; and Thomas Gunnings, Assistant Director of Minority Counseling Services. All were high-ranking minority administrators on campus. They decided to stop by Warren’s house and have a “brother to sister” private talk with her about the DGEI. At first Warren was taken aback by their presence at the door, and just stared at them while trying to gather her thoughts. After she invited them into the house, Dr. Green said that they had come to her home because they needed to talk by themselves without the others being around, “because this was Black folks” business. The administrators explained in some detail how long they had worked to build and expand their role and relationship with the University. And now, with the hiring of its first Black president, Clifton Wharton Jr., things had to be perfect or we would never have an opportunity like this again. Talking with these four Black administrators about the appearance and communication skills of other Blacks took Warren back to a place she didn’t like. The administrators inferred that they were embarrassed by the presence of so many students from Detroit. It seemed that the students enrolled in the university through the aegis of the DGEI were represented to the University as Detroit’s best. But the administrators did not see it that way. They wanted what they believed to be the true representatives of the Black community at the University, not the people they perceived to be its burnouts. They thought it was important to compete grade for grade with the white community by recruiting merit scholars not factory workers.

The group of administrators indicated that they wanted Warren to work with them, and offered to help her with a graduate assistantship or a job. It seemed that they were fine with a few students from the inner city enrolling in the university, but not the hundreds that came as a result of DGEI. One of the administrators stated that he believed the program was operating as a front for white left-leaning faculty, and that the project couldn’t be community controlled because Warren lived on campus and no longer in Detroit. Warren tried to defend the work of the DGEI by talking about the political impact of the project in Detroit. How by bringing the students to school as a group it avoided class separation and enhanced their power base in Detroit. She made clear that attending the University collectively made it easier for these students to adjust to the cultural environment in this new community. But she was told that she sounded like an “emotional baboon.” The administrators suggested that Warren had been brainwashed by white people. They said they would not support additional resources for the group, not even if the faculty worked for free.

The next day Robert Ward Jr., another DGEI team leader, and Warren went to see the new university president at his office. To their surprise, they were granted an appointment right away. President Wharton was very gracious and welcoming. He was aware of the issues, and listened patiently as Warren and Ward explained their concerns. He inquired about their experience at the University and what he could do to improve things. In retrospect, Warren and Ward concluded that he managed them like kids. They left the meeting honored to have met him, but with no commitment on his part to change a thing.
Robert Green, Director of the Center for Urban Affairs, and his staff continued to insist that things change or no additional resources would be committed to the project. The major problem came from the University's insistence that students enrolled in classes held in Detroit, rather than the main campus in East Lansing, pay full tuition rates. The DGEI had free instructors who turned their salaries back to the University to pay for their students' tuition, and all administrative tasks were performed by DGEI project staff. They only required that the University take care of recordkeeping and grade processing. Even the space for classes was donated by universities and secondary schools in Detroit, but Michigan State University (MSU) wanted full tuition rates regardless (Horvath 1971).

During the 1970 fall semester several student demonstrations were held on the MSU campus in support of the DGEI (Figure 2.1).

Supporters from Detroit and other student organizations participated in the demonstrations. Rubin Barrera and Richard Santos from MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), the Chicano student organization, also spoke at the rallies to support the DGEI. Barrera said during his presentation, "The University must accept the responsibility of going into the barrio, the ghetto, and the reservation," adding, "The people is where the problem is." "Human needs come first," Santos said (Saddler 1970). Carolyn Ramsey, a representative from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, said the League supported the DGEI 100%, and added that they would bring all their supporters from Detroit if necessary. The University minority administrators continued to express concerns regarding the lack of support from the other universities, noting that the program had grown larger than they anticipated (Saddler 1970).

On October 11, 1970, the University issued a final Position Statement on the DGEI. The statement was issued by Dr. Robert Green and his staff at the Center for Urban Affairs. The statement addressed "control" of the program as a concern, as well as the competing interests and needs of other minority students and programs. He went on to talk about Michigan State University's coordinated effort to recruit and admit minority students nationwide. Further, they believed that the DGEI and its representatives had misrepresented the University's commitment to the program both orally and in writing, and that it was their responsibility to distinguish between "experimental" programs like the DGEI and carefully conceived long-range minority programs with proven success. Their final opinion was that the DGEI should not move past the experimental stage until evidence of long-term success and benefit could be documented and that no expansion of the program should be made before success was demonstrated.

Dr. Green went on to say that most experimental efforts lead to frustration and confusion if they make commitments that cannot be honored. The Black community is well aware of claims made by organizations and institutions for which no delivery can be made. We believe that the difficult struggle in which minority people are engaged to improve their general status is not facilitated by expedient and piecemeal efforts.

During the last meeting with the University, the administration presented their final terms for future program offerings. No tithe faculty would be allowed, the University would handle all administrative
activities, financial support for the program would not be guaranteed, and money for ten classes would be allowed only for the next three-quarters (not the 50 classes the Institute had lined up) (Horvath 1971). As Ron Horvath (1971: 84) stated, “It is ironic that a place like MSU, where the concept of the land grant college was pioneered (although on the idea of service to rural Michigan), rejected a program based on the same ideas when it came to servicing the poor of urban Michigan.”

The DGEI program located at the East Lansing campus was under increased attack. Non-tenured faculty members were harassed, and their jobs were threatened. On several occasions, tenure was denied, and graduate assistantships were rescinded. The DGEI staff was harassed, and one professor was even charged with stealing food from the faculty lounge to feed DGEI students. She was later denied tenure. In the meantime, Warren had been accepted to graduate school at Michigan State University, Department of Sociology and Howard University School of Law, starting that winter and had to decide between them.

Horvath and Warren called a group meeting of faculty and students to discuss the status of the program with the University. They had over 450 students who were taking classes, and some were waiting for final acceptance to the University. After talking over the situation with the group, Warren decided to prioritize the new students that were coming to campus and avoid any new conversations or conflicts with the University until the acceptance letters went out. She decided it was best to stop the DGEI once that occurred, because they could not sustain the fight politically. After all the students who had been accepted were registered for the fall, Horvath and Warren met with the University representatives to let them know their decision. The administrators seemed surprised and taken aback. Horvath and Warren thanked them for their support and left the meeting. Warren spoke later with President Wharton to let him know that it was an honor meeting him and attending his school. Wharton took Warren’s hand and said the honor was his, and that he was proud of her for graduating with high honors and being accepted into an excellent law school. He added that he wished he had more students like her. They both got the irony of his statement at the same time and smiled. After Warren moved to Washington D.C. to attend law school the program ran its course and faded away, although inspired by the DGEI, and learning from it, other Expeditions were started in Toronto and Vancouver (e.g., Stephenson 1974; Bunge and Bordessa 1975; Merrifield 1995; Blomley and McCann, this volume; Peake, this volume). Decades later, but spurred by prior Expeditions, a group in New York City received funding from the Antipode Foundation to launch one of their own. While each “expedition and institute” has had its own place-specific concerns, and also founded on its own mix of issues, the resonance of the DGEI across space and time suggests how inspiring its aspirations were and remain. Its collaborative productions and exchanges of knowledge made a difference at a variety of scales, including perhaps most significantly at the level of individual. In reviewing the sprawl of the DGEI’s ambitions as well as its stumbles and falls, we mark its still exciting relevance to the practice of radical geography, but also the important lessons it offers for those engaged in community-based and participatory action research (see Warren and Katz 2014).

Conclusions

There are important and lasting spatial dimensions to myths, their production, evolution, and diffusion (see Antipode 2017). As was the case in the story of John Henry and Polly Anne, it is important to pay critical attention to the way gender, race, and sexuality are used to propagate some myths and allow them to evolve into naturalized truths, while leaving other stories to die on the vine. Radical geographers have the capacity to do a better job of unearthing the racialized and patriarchal histories and geographies that have shaped the discipline just as we have the capacity to call out homophobic and other forms of persecution and discrimination. Discerning between HISstory and HERstory is an effort to do just that, which is why we have focused on providing this counter-narrative on the DGEI to the ones in general circulation.

In working through and challenging the main myths about the DGEI, it is important to recognize that Bunge came to Detroit and worked with passion to change the composition of its geography by educating black working class and poor young people, which was an important contribution and went against the grain of his upbringing and class position (Morrill 2010). At same time, his personal flaws—his anger, his sexism, which included his making sexual advances on young black women in the neighborhood, his racism and tendency to call himself a “nigger,” and his essentialist thinking, among other things—worked at odds against his serious and radical ambitions. He was a white wealthy straight man of his time who was dedicated to working toward civil rights (see Bunge 1965). But, he undid himself time and time again. Our heroes and heroines are not immune to human frailties and failures. Knowing this, we do not want to undermine the inspiration the DGEI has brought to many radical geographers in thinking about community-based research, nor disregard that
while their relationship was fraught and problematic, Warren is the first to say that she was also inspired in crucial ways by Bunge, and would not have accomplished some of what she has in life without his influence. Indeed, Bunge has been a profound inspiration and influence on all three of us.

So, at the same time as we work to capture bigger, more complete and nuanced narratives, and un buckle some of our cherished myths, we recognize that this task and its revelations can be painful. We understand and value the ways that knowing and sharing the accomplishments of particular projects and practices, even when they become mythological, is important. But it is also important, perhaps more so, to poke at and complicate the myths, remembering that they hold sway in part because they flatten competing narratives and remove their object or practice from its history and geography (Barthes 1972; see Katz 1992). Remembering the DGEI opens a path to revitalized geographies of practice and possibility in the discipline and more broadly, but it also speaks to the political potency of the construction and reconstruction of a field's history, of what retrieved and revivified histories of collective practice mean for the current moment, of what the radical geographies they made possible mean for producing space now, in multiple places. Places that might include Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, New York City, or Oakland, as well as Detroit.

Warren's coming into the DGEI and helping create the DGEI led to more community participation, which required and called forth an expanded exchange of values and skills. Her insistence that the community must control the questions being asked and the information being developed in their name, and oversee explaining the benefits of participation to the community is a lesson from which many radical geographers can continue to benefit (Warren and Katz 2014).

In recounting Warren's HERstory it is not our intent to turn off radical geographers and others who were inspired by the DGEI, but rather to add to and amend the record and to make it more inclusive so that people can see a bigger picture of what was happening, and better grasp the uneven practices by which knowledge is produced and exchanged in the work of social justice, both in the moment and over time. Digging deeper into myths is about locating accountability for the product, the people involved, and the process; it is a way to reanimate their stories in history and geography. Given how inspired current activist-scholars are when they learn about the DGEI, how do we alter its stories without losing them? We three have discussed this at length, and feel the weight of the burdensome contradictions that inhere in presenting competing narratives and complicating cherished myths.

Ultimately, however, we think the future of radical geography is better off if we recognize and take account of the bruises, slights, and misrecognitions of its past; to move beyond its fictions – even cherished ones. It always helps to remember, and remember again, that when we do community-based research, we not presume to know what's what or talk at community members, but rather recognize and engage the questions of power that riddle these engagements, and be in conversation and collaboration working together to share access to greater resources and skills. At the same time, it is also important to recognize the multiple voices and inequalities of power in the academy; together – inside and out – we comprise multiple communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; see Smith 2003) and potential action. The DGEI's HERstory teaches us not to see communities as projects, but as opportunities for solidarity and the production and exchange of knowledge and skills. Recounting Gwendolyn Warren's story of the DGEI, and learning about her life's work following her participation in it, helps us to see that these processes are ongoing and their effects unending and sometimes astonishing in their radical potential.

Notes

1. While various versions of The Ballad of John Henry circulated during the early 1900s, it evolved as an African American work song, and its origins are unclear and somewhat controversial. Through its long history, there have been many different versions of the song. For reference, see lyrics for Pete Seeger's popular version here: http://songmeanings.com/songs/view/3530822107838949356/ [songmeanings.com].

2. As a co-authored text, we have generally referred to Gwendolyn Warren in the third person, but we use quotation marks in a few places to note Gwendolyn's individual voice. Much of this text is derived from a three-day convening of the three of us in New York in August 2017. In the course of long and winding, difficult, pleasurable, and amazing conversations, all of which we recorded, we stitched together the story we tell here. Much of it is in Gwendolyn's voice, but always in conversation with Gindi and Nik who wove their questions, narratives, recollections, and concerns into the collective fabric. This story, like all stories, is partial, and we are collectively working on a longer more autobiographical piece that draws more fully on Gwendolyn Warren's recollections and experiences.

3. One of the biggest oversights of Fitzgerald, for all the geographic inspiration it has created, is that Robert "Snoopy" Ward, who made all the maps for the DGEI and Fitzgerald, is not credited for all of his cartographic skill and creativity.

References


