This article is about moving past the debates and arguments concerning public anthropology and how students can realize public engagement via collaborative research (i.e., between and among researchers and local communities of collaborators). I suggest that students should be aware of at least the basics of the current debates surrounding public anthropology; that they should appreciate, as many have argued before, that these debates represent only a point of departure in a much larger anthropological project; and finally, that although students can engage in applied, publicly oriented work (regardless of what you may call it) in many different ways, collaborative research practice presents a special opportunity to do so. I thus begin with a very brief statement about moving past public anthropology, follow this with some of my own ideas about collaborative ethnography and public engagement, and suggest some general advice for doing collaborative research. Keywords: public anthropology, collaborative research, collaborative ethnography, applied anthropology.

This article is about moving past the debates and arguments concerning public anthropology and how students can realize public engagement via collaborative research (i.e., between and among researchers and local communities of collaborators). I should admit right up front, though, that as I was originally asked to write about public anthropology for this volume, I struggled for quite some time about exactly what advice I would offer within the context of this larger NAPA Bulletin, crafted to help students navigate careers in applied anthropology. My dilemma had less to do with the sometimes rocky relationship between public and applied anthropology (see Stull 2006)—although that was certainly a factor—and more to do with my own struggle to place myself and my work under the subject heading about which I had been asked to write. While I have indeed argued in previous writings for a more publicly engaged anthropology (see, e.g., Lassiter 2005b), and have been a participant in discussions about public/engaged anthropology (see, e.g., Lassiter 2005c), I find that most of my ideas do not fit all that well within the now dominant discourse on public anthropology (see, e.g., Borofsky 2006). Moreover, my focus on the local (see, e.g., Lassiter 2003), expressive culture (see, e.g., Lassiter 2004b), collaborative ethnography (Lassiter 2005a), and pedagogy (see, e.g., Lassiter 2006)—as well as my “academic applied research” (Erwin 2000:2–4), which includes practice such as consulting for archives and museums, working for and administering local nonprofits, and conducting evaluation research (see, e.g., Lassiter 1998a, 1999a; Lassiter and Heaton 2006; respectively)—often seems distant from these prevailing conversations.
Of course, I could have easily settled my dilemma by abandoning this writing project altogether (which I considered several times) or writing on something completely different from public anthropology and submitting that (which I considered many times over). But after much thought, I decided that perhaps the ambiguity of my position vis-à-vis public anthropology might resonate with those coming of age during this time, and that I might have something to offer: namely, I think that students should be aware of at least the basics of the current debates surrounding public anthropology; that they should appreciate, as many have argued before, that these debates represent only a point of departure in a much larger anthropological project; and finally, that although students can engage in applied, publicly oriented work (regardless of what you may call it) in many different ways, collaborative research practice presents a special opportunity to do so. I thus begin with a very brief statement about moving past public anthropology, follow this with some of my own ideas about collaborative ethnography and public engagement, and suggest some general advice for doing collaborative research.

MOVING PAST PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

In recent years, “public anthropology” has become one of the many labels used to describe a growing and ever-more ubiquitous concern with anthropological relevance, public engagement, and action. While there is little agreement about just what exactly “public anthropology” is (Purcell 2000), it nevertheless has come to have many different and overlapping meanings. In its most commonly cited sense, public anthropology can be a kind of public scholarship, one that more universally enlists anthropology and anthropologists in a larger stream of public issues, concerns, and debates; cultivates a more aggressive public presence through print and other media; and enlarges public outreach, which may or may not be meant to influence public policy (see, e.g., Borofsky 1999, 2006; Eriksen 2006; Lamphere 2003). This kind of public engagement is similar to “public ethnography,” which more directly engages ethnographic research and writing “with the critical social issues of our time” (Tedlock 2005:473; cf. MacClancy 2002; Sanjek 2004); and “public archaeology,” which mobilizes the public benefits of archaeological research in museums, schools, governmental and other public institutions (see, e.g., Little 2002; Merriman 2002). In another but closely related sense, public anthropology may also imply an amplification of action or activist anthropology, a “public interest anthropology” that challenges the theory/practice divide; reconfigures an anthropological praxis established on equity and social justice; and augments moral, ethical, and political action, which, again, may or may not be meant to influence public policy (see, e.g., Sanday 1976, 1998; cf. Basch et al. 1999; Hill and Baba 1999). In this same vein, this practice may employ a kind of participatory action research that plants roots in locality, and assembles cooperative cocitizenships and coactivisms built on the counderstandings emergent in the collaborative research partnerships between and among anthropologists and local publics (see, e.g., Lassiter 2001a, 2003, 2005b; cf. Checker and Fishman 2004).
Obviously, the issues revolving around public anthropology—whether called “public interest anthropology,” “public archaeology,” “public ethnography,” or just “engaged anthropology”—are very closely aligned with applied and practicing anthropology (see Lamphere 2004). After all, they all draw from the same sources of inspiration: Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead are a few oft-cited examples. Given this, though, many applied and practicing anthropologists argue that many of those who espouse a public anthropology are ignoring and usurping the important role that applied anthropology has long played in our field (see, e.g., Singer 2000). Past SfAA president Donald D. Stull, for example, points out that

anthropology newsletters, listservs, and letters to editors are rife with hand wringing about how, despite the growing public fascination with things anthropological, no one pays any attention to anthropologists. Invariably, there are reports that Margaret Mead has left the building. . . . I disagree profoundly with the very premise of such arguments. None here [i.e., SfAA members] need to be told that anthropologists and kindred social scientists are actively engaged in public policies and actions. [Stull 2005:2]

Barbara Rylko-Bauer and colleagues (2006) echo this sentiment, noting that while “recent movements toward a more public anthropology have done a useful service for the general discipline” (186), “critiques grounded in labeling and othering or those based on dismissal of large portions of anthropologically informed work and erasure of disciplinary history are counterproductive, because they overlook significant areas of creative accomplishment” (187). They suggest that instead of worrying about the differences between applied/practicing and public anthropology—as some anthropologists apparently have (see, e.g., Wickens and Grant 2005),

a meaningful convergence of methodologically sound, critical, reflexive, and engaged anthropology—a convergence that builds on and learns from the extensive past experiences of putting anthropology to use—will free us up to focus on differences that actually do matter in the real world: the compelling divides that separate those who have from those who do not, those who are honored from those who are stigmatized, those wielding disproportionate power from those with limited agency and voice, and those who are central from those who are marginalized. [Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006:187]

I think this is particularly useful advice for moving past public anthropology—especially because such divisions between public and applied or practicing anthropology are increasingly becoming less pronounced (if they ever were that relevant; see Lassiter 2001a). For contemporary students of anthropology, this seems truer now than ever before (cf. Nader 2001).

Les Field and Richard Fox argue in Anthropology Put to Work (2007) that such divisions and the recent calls for a public anthropology are out of touch with contemporary practice. Field and Fox point out that the disintegration of such divisions—such as that between “pure” and “applied” research—has already happened, mainly because the contemporary work conditions of anthropology require an ever-expanding range of conceptual and practical expertise. Discussions about singling out this or that anthropology
are increasingly irrelevant to the latest generation of anthropologists, especially as the
dichotomies between theory and practice—long prevalent in the United States but less
so in other parts of the world (see Nader 2000)—now invoke less meaning than they
have in the past (see Bennett 1996). Students today, then, must be prepared to be expert
theoretical, applied, public, and practicing anthropologists all at the same time, no matter
where their career trajectories take them, in or out of academia.

Simply put, rather than worrying about which side of the argument on which you
fall, or more precisely, rigidly demarcating what you do as applied, public, practicing
or academic anthropology, students should be charting, as anthropologists, how best to
connect with the central questions and problems of a larger anthropological project
(Lamphere 2004:432)—questions such as, to borrow from Rylko-Bauer and colleagues
(2006:186) again, “How do we operationalize the goals of addressing and ameliorating
social problems? How do we translate knowledge successfully into pragmatic action?
Which strategies work?”

One of the ways we can engage such questions is through collaborative research, to
which I now turn.

**COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH**

While many of the prevailing arguments about public anthropology have envisioned
theorizing, problematizing, and engaging multivariate “publics” on a grand scale, my
own vision for public engagement is more modest. Only a very few of us will ever have
the opportunity to write widely read books or engage in activisms that have far-ranging
effects on the public at large. But most of us, faculty, students, and practitioners alike,
will have the opportunity to more systematically involve the various publics with whom
we work in collaborative research partnerships, many of which will transpire on a local
level.

Applied anthropologists have written a great deal about collaborative partnerships
between researchers and local communities, and offer many exemplary models for doing
this kind of work (see, e.g., Austin 2004; LeCompte et al. 1999; Stull and Schensul
1987). Collaborative research can have a variety of names, including “community-based
research,” “action research,” “participatory action research,” or “participatory community
research” (Wali 2006:6). Although the various labels for collaborative research may denote
a wide and diverse range of applications, and implement collaboration to varying degrees,
the “underlying spirit is that of working, learning, and moving toward positive social
change together” (Wali 2006:6).

My own interests along these lines have focused on doing and writing *collabora-
tive ethnography*—a very specific kind of ethnography that builds on the cooperative
relationships already present in the ethnographic research process (i.e., between ethno-
graphers and informants/consultants) and endeavors to engender texts that are more
readable, relevant, and applicable to local communities of ethnographic collaborators
(i.e., local publics). While I have in previous works outlined the relationships between
collaborative ethnography and discussions of public and applied anthropology (see, e.g., Lassiter 2003b), in this article, I briefly introduce what I see as some of the key attributes of collaborative ethnography, with particular emphasis on how students can engage in collaborative ethnography as applied and public practice. In this section I will build on my most recent work, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (Lassiter 2005a), and briefly describe some of the potentials and problems of collaborative ethnography.

To start, a definition. In *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, I define collaborative ethnography as

an approach to ethnography that *deliberately* and *explicitly* emphasizes collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it—from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, and, especially, through the writing process. Collaborative ethnography invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself. Importantly, the process yields texts that are co-conceived or cowritten with local communities of collaborators and consider multiple audiences outside the confines of academic discourse, including local constituencies. [Lassiter 2005a:16]

Collaborative ethnography implies more than what this brief definition might at first glance suggest. In the *Chicago Guide*, I argue that collaborative ethnography rests on an understanding of the historical and theoretical trajectories of collaborative research (see Lassiter 2005a:1–75); and importantly, is founded on four main commitments:

1. ethical and moral responsibility to ethnographic consultants—whereby moral and ethical commitments between researcher(s) and research participant(s) frame the contours of many ethnographic projects;
2. honesty about the fieldwork process—whereby the ethnographic fieldwork experience (including that of both the ethnographer[s] and interlocutor[s]) is honestly discussed, explored, and evaluated within the context of collaborative research partnerships;
3. accessible and dialogic writing—whereby the ethnographic account not only represents diverse experiences and voices, but is clearly written, free from the highly specialized discourse of the academy, so that ethnographic consultants can actually read, engage, and respond to ethnographic texts; and subsequently,
4. collaborative reading, writing, and co-interpretation of ethnographic texts with consultants—whereby ethnographer(s) and research participant(s) work together (via, for example, focus groups, community forums, editorial boards, ethnographer/consultant research and writing teams) to co-interpret ethnographic representations as they develop and evolve. [see Lassiter 2005a:77–154]

Such collaboratively based commitments are not the final step in practicing collaborative research and practice, however. These commitments have the potential to establish a foundation for community-based collaborative action as well, where ethnographers and consultants choose to work together to make a difference in their local communities via
the coproduction of ethnography. As a kind of participatory action research, I thus believe that collaborative ethnography has something to offer “the many kinds of public and activist efforts that have long abounded in our field” (Lassiter 2005a:154). (I return to this point below.)

As I stress in the Chicago Guide, this particular vision for collaborative ethnography “may be appropriate for neither all researchers nor all types of ethnographic projects” (Lassiter 2005a:xi). In reality, our moral and ethical commitments to our ethnographic collaborators may take us in very different directions, where the coproduction of texts is secondary to other more pressing community-based issues and concerns (see Lassiter 2004a:8). Collaborative ethnography, though, is often most appropriate when dealing with issues of voice and representation—such as, in my own research, when documenting American Indian song traditions (see, e.g., Lassiter 1998b; Lassiter et al. 2002; Kotay et al. 2004; Horse and Lassiter 1998, 1999) or redressing the representation of African Americans in the famous Middletown studies literature (see, e.g., Lassiter 2004c; Lassiter et al. 2004; Papa and Lassiter 2003). Other recent examples include Robin Ridington and Dennis Hastings’s Blessing for a Long Time (1997), in which an anthropologist and a tribal historian chronicle for the Omaha people, using Omaha conventions of storytelling, the history, meaning, and contemporary significance of the venerable Sacred Pole; Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers’s Pictures Bring Us Messages (2006), in which Brown and Peers reinterpret with members of the Kainai Nation the repatriation of Kainai images from the University of Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum; Cedric N. Chatterley and colleagues “I Was Content and Not Content” (2000), in which researchers document along with consultant Linda Lord the closing of the poultry plant in which Lord worked; and Laurie Thorp’s Pull of the Earth (2006), in which Thorp and the teachers and students of a local elementary school together recount the story of a school garden and its transformative effects on their school and everyday lives.

Such projects, and others like them that also struggle within collaborative research frameworks, illustrate that there are many and diverse visions for constructing a collaborative ethnography—which actually may fall under a host of other labels, including, to name a few, dialogic editing (see, e.g., Feld 1987), reciprocal ethnography (see, e.g., Lawless 1992), collaborative biography or life history (see, e.g., Rios and Sands 2000), collaborative oral history (see, e.g., Rouverol 2003), and action, participatory, or cooperative inquiry (see, e.g., Heron 1996; Heron and Reason 1997).

Regardless of what you call it, though, collaborative ethnography can be extremely challenging (cf. Lawless 2000). For students who might want to do this kind of collaborative research as part of their larger applied or publicly engaged anthropological practice or both, it is important to recognize that any such venture requires constant negotiation—moral, ethical, political and otherwise (see Brettell 1996). As a matter of course, “our key consultants have visions, agendas, and expectations, and so do we” (Lassiter 2005a:141). Negotiating these diverse visions, agendas, and expectations is the real challenge of collaborative ethnography. I offer several negotiations from my own collaborative research in the Chicago Guide (see, e.g., Lassiter 2005a:88–97), but different ethnographers deal with these dialogic processes differently, incorporating (and
experimenting with) collaborative research and writing to varying degrees (cf. Lavie with Hajj and Rouse 1993; Marcus and Mascarenhas 2005; Rappaport 2005). Ethnographer and oral historian Alicia Rouverol, for example, describes a point of disagreement with consultant Linda Lord in researching and writing “I Was Content and Not Content”: The Story of Linda Lord and the Closing of Penobscot Poultry (Chatterley et al. 2000) thus:

Our key area of disagreement . . . was in the question of what businesses owe communities when they shut down. I believe that some sort of restitution is in order when long-time businesses close and leave a community that is significantly dependent on that industry for its livelihood. Linda believes that businesses do not necessarily owe a community anything when they leave. We chose to include in the book’s edited interviews our exchange on this point, to draw attention to our differing perspectives. [Rouverol 2003:66–67]

Rouverol included these exchanges, she writes, “to show the dynamic of our collaborative exchange, to make plain our respective interpretations, and to suggest that meaning forged through dialogue is not necessarily arrived at through agreement and shared perspectives” (Rouverol 2000:72–73). Other ethnographers have chosen to deal similarly with the divergent visions, agendas, and expectations inherent to collaborative research and writing, such as including consultant responses to the manuscript in a final chapter or epilogue (see, e.g., Stacey 1991), soliciting consultant-written contributions (see, e.g., Field 2008), inviting community-wide reviews (see, e.g., Foley 1995, 2002), or working consultant commentary back into the text as it develops (see, e.g., Hinson 2000). Collaborative ethnography, then, does not require that we flatten, homogenize, or even “whitewash” differences (cf. Foley and Valenzuela 2005). As in any collaboration, both ethnographer(s) and consultant(s) must be willing to make concessions so they can work together in the first place; but they must also be willing to open themselves up to a dynamic knowledge exchange, to stick it out, and to discover in their work together emergent counderstandings, cointerpretations, and coinscriptions (which will always include points of disagreement). As Rouverol (2003:84) contends, “dialogue—and social change, if that’s what we are after—simply cannot happen unless we are open to hearing perspectives other than our own.” But more than this, collaborative ethnographers must also be willing, as Glenn Hinson (2000:324) writes, to “surrender the interpretive authority they have historically assumed, seeking instead a collaboration that draws consultants into the analysis as equal partners and then creates textual space for the ensuing conversation.”

Some might suggest that collaborative ethnography is a kind of collusion; but as I have stated before, “there is never a time when we are not colluding—with our institutions, our colleagues, our disciplines, our presses, or with other centers of power” (Anthropology News 2006). In actuality, collaborative research struggles within and against a multitude of simultaneous and often conflicting motives. It is often, for instance, an academically based project, one that requires, on the part of the ethnographer(s), balancing the demands of producing relevant knowledge (and, for academic practitioners, all that goes with it, including the demands to “publish or perish”) with the desire to do applied research, to
“make a difference” in local communities. Such a balancing act is not necessarily a bad thing; like all anthropological practice, especially today (to recall Field and Fox 2007), collaborative research is neither purely academic nor purely applied. When, for instance, as an undergraduate I sought to understand the experience of drug addiction and recovery via my first real ethnographic project, utilizing a collaborative ethnographic approach opened up the possibility for discussing with my collaborators the applied dimensions of my student project: my consultants fancied the idea of coproducing a text that they could give to the still-suffering addict, and we together produced a manuscript that served both an academic and community purpose (albeit, I will admit, very tentatively; see Lassiter 1999b).

This, I believe, is the whole point of doing collaborative ethnography: to realize along with our consultants both collaborative meanings and collaborative actions (see Lassiter 2005a:151–54). In the Other Side of Middletown project (see Lassiter et al. 2004), to offer a more recent example from my own research experience, faculty, students, and community members worked to coproduce a text that addressed a community-based concern, in this case, about the exclusion of black experience from both classic and ongoing studies of Middletown (which had largely ignored the contributions of African Americans to the city of Muncie, Indiana). We were charged, as a group, to write a text to rectify this problem. And as its completion was so important to many in the community—in fact, some had already begun the work years before we started—its very collaborative inscription was a powerful way to engage in collaborative action from the very beginning (see Miles 2004). This initial collaborative process yielded still other collaborative actions, though, as members of the community guided faculty and students into the realm of larger community-centered issues, concerns, and activisms. Several of the students, for example, became closely involved in community debates, forums, and protests that surrounded a contentious community conflict to rename a local city street to Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard (see Williams 2003).

Does such an approach have limitations? Of course it does (see, e.g., Lassiter 2004a:8–9). Again, collaborative ethnography is neither an end-all method that we can use to study everything nor a one-size-fits-all public–applied–action anthropology. I do think, however, that collaborative ethnography—with all of its complexities, conflicting motives, limitations, as well as possibilities—is, to recall the advice of Rylko-Bauer and colleagues (2006) cited above, a strategy that can work. In addition to having the potential to narrow the gap between academic and applied anthropologies (see Lassiter 2005b), I believe that collaborative ethnography has something to offer to a larger engaged anthropological project that, along with our consultants, endeavors to “operationalize the goals of addressing and ameliorating social problems” and to “translate knowledge successfully into pragmatic action” (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006:186).

With this in mind, I now turn to some brief advice for students who might want to engage local publics in collaborative research as part of their anthropological practice, now or in the future.
Collaborative ethnography is just one small part of a larger commitment to community-based, collaborative research. Not all students of anthropology will choose to do collaborative research as part of their applied or publicly engaged anthropological practice, but for those who do, and for the purposes of this volume, I offer the following brief notes of advice (not meant in any way to be complete, of course).

Familiarize yourself with the history and broad range of collaborative and community-based research. Many will be happy to know that practitioners across several disciplines, not just in anthropology, are doing collaborative research, too, and have been, in some cases, for quite some time—including in fields such as sociology (see, e.g., Nyden and Wiewel 1992), psychology (Jason et al. 2003), folklore (see, e.g., Evers and Toelken 2001), oral history (see, e.g., Thomson 2003), public health (see, e.g., Wallerstein 2006), and education (see, e.g., Staikidis 2006). Be especially aware, however, that different disciplines and their various scholar–activists have a diversity of visions for what this collaborative research practice should look like. These different visions, of course, are often based in the history and traditions of any given discipline. In anthropology, for example, calls for a more collaborative ethnography materialized, as is well-known, in the vibrant discussions of ethnographic authority emanating from critical theory, feminist, and postmodern anthropology in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s; but the roots of collaborative research go much deeper than this (see Lassiter 2005a:25–47). Paul Radin (1923, 1927, 1933), for example, did much to push our field in this direction (see Darnell 2001:137–70). In the end, though, we cannot presume to know everything about every historical moment or every collaborative research model. But we can push ourselves to appreciate—and this is the point—that doing collaborative research is part of a much larger project in the social sciences, past and present. And that when we choose to do this kind of research, we are, first, not alone in our efforts, and second, in the company of many fellow travelers who have much to offer each other in our common efforts to realize a more equitable social science. If you can, get to know these “fellow travelers” and their collaborative researches. There is much for all of us to learn.

Choose your methods with care. Being familiar with the history and broad range of collaborative research, of course, provides the foundation for choosing collaborative research methods that best suit the goals of you and your collaborators in any given project or partnership. For me, collaborative ethnography has often worked extremely well for apprehending the common goals that emerge in collaborative inquiry: whether researching drug addiction and recovery, Kiowa song, or black Muncie, collaborative ethnography seemed the best approach for articulating multicultural understanding and, my collaborators and I have hoped, social change. In other cases, however, my consultants and I have sought out other methods and procedures that were best suited to the context of the collaborative partnership in which we worked. I have mentioned this elsewhere—for example, doing more traditional ethnographic surveys for Muncie’s African American community in the wake of The Other Side of Middletown collaboration (see Lassiter 2004a:8–9). Most recently, in my job as the director of a program closely associated
with a school of education, I am now working to varying degrees with a diversity of local teachers and administrators, school districts, service agencies, state officials, higher education faculty and students in the context of a wide range of collaborative research projects meant to improve teacher training and student learning (see Lassiter 2007). In these partnerships, we have pulled together several different research approaches, from quantitative and qualitative methods to collaborative ethnography and action research. While these combined research approaches deploy collaboration in very different ways, they share a commitment to community-based collaborations that are responsive to the needs and goals of the parties involved. What this requires, of course, is openness to and the careful selection and utilization of multiple approaches that allow for diverse collaborative research partnerships and projects.

**Acknowledge that collaborative research is challenging and that it requires time.** Of all the research approaches available to anthropologists and other social scientists, collaborative research is perhaps the most time consuming. Collaboration rests, first and foremost, on trust, and building trust does not happen overnight; it grows—often, over the course of years—as any given project or partnership develops and evolves. For example, in a recent publication of the Field Museum’s Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, *Collaborative Research* (Wali 2006), the authors line out for both scholars and community-based organizations seven steps for doing participatory action research: finding a partner, forming a research question, planning, conducting research, analyzing the data, sharing the findings, and taking action. As each of these steps is built on cooperation and mutual respect for varying viewpoints, each of these steps accordingly requires time and the ongoing nurturing of relationships: “Planning meetings, hosting social events in each other’s neighborhood and homes,” the authors point out, “and openness to constructive criticism all help to create bonds during the research process” (Wali 2006:33). Such commitments to collaboration, of course, require that we learn to work effectively with many different people, to listen, and to take others seriously. I have already mentioned, above, that the negotiation of diverse visions, agendas, and expectations can be challenging intellectually. But collaborative research can also be challenging on a personal level. It often requires us to surrender authority and control, shifting the role of the researcher(s) from one of “expert” to one of “facilitator.” This can be hard for some, especially as collaborative research may necessitate that we put aside our own egos in order to bring about more multidimensional, dialogic understandings.

**Look for and take opportunities to collaborate.** While not all research will fit well within the contours of collaborative research, plenty does. And once you start looking for opportunities to collaborate, the opportunities tend to only multiply—in my experience, at least, collaborative research projects seem to beget more collaborative research projects. My work with Kiowa hymn singer Ralph Kotay, for example, grew out of earlier collaborative research on Kiowa song. After the completion of *The Power of Kiowa Song* (Lassiter 1998b), Kotay, one of many consultants who worked on the initial ethnography, wanted to continue our work together, focusing specifically on Kiowa hymns—an oral song tradition that combines elements of traditional Kiowa song with Christian hymnody.
In particular, Kotay wanted to augment the impact of his Kiowa hymn class, which he taught each week as a way to preserve and maintain the Kiowa song, language, and larger community and spiritual relationships associated with Kiowa hymns (see Lassiter 2001b). Our work together, and with historian Clyde Ellis, and later, graduate student Chris Wendt, produced two major collaborative projects—the book *The Jesus Road* (Lassiter et al. 2002) and the audio recording *Kiowa Hymns* (Kotay et al. 2004)—as well as several other smaller projects.

Similar processes have transpired in other collaborative partnerships. A collaborative museum exhibit on African American pioneers originated the partnership that would eventually establish *The Other Side of Middletown* project (see Lassiter et al. 2004:4–5), which, in turn, produced—in addition to the already mentioned collaborative actions—collaboratively based undergraduate and graduate theses, a video documentary, a photo exhibit, a library digitization project, public school programs, a range of community events, and another state museum exhibit (see, e.g., Indiana State Museum 2007). The possibilities for collaboration can thus be endless. Indeed, one could spend a lifetime doing collaborative research: if we are open to the collaborative process, then we need only look for and take opportunities when they arise.

But when to get started? This raises another set of issues, and summons some advice that may be unpleasant to bear in mind; but important nonetheless for any student considering collaborative research now or in the future.

*Start early, but proceed cautiously.* Doing collaborative research is not just for the seasoned practitioner. In my mind, students who are interested in doing collaborative research should start as early as possible. It may not always be feasible, though: academic environments, especially, are not at all times as open as we think they might (or should) be. I now realize that I was extremely fortunate to “come of age” as both an undergraduate and graduate student in departments of anthropology that supported and encouraged collaborative research practice (see Lassiter 2004a:5–8). When I wrote my dissertation on Kiowa song, for example, my Kiowa consultants—particularly Billy Evans Horse, tribal chairman and key consultant—insisted that Kiowas be able to read the dissertation and comment on its evolution. My dissertation committee was open to this idea and allowed the student training inherent to the dissertation process to unfold accordingly as we negotiated a middle ground.  

But after leaving graduate school and working in other academic environments, I discovered that this kind of openness to student collaborative research—and for that matter, open-ended cooperation with one’s professors—does not always proceed this smoothly (see, e.g., Lassiter 2005b:102). Many academics, including anthropologists, still seem suspicious of collaborative research approaches: while it can be theoretically appealing to many, in practice collaborative research still seems to pose, for some, a threat to academic privilege, authority, and control. Given this, though, the validity and value of collaborative research seems to be growing, and I suspect that students will have less trouble doing collaborative research earlier in their career as our field, as many predict, steadily turns once again toward more public and applied emphases. In the interim, students should be especially cognizant that while many
academic environments support and nurture collaborative research, others may not, and in fact, may actively discourage it.

Be aware of the larger risks. A closely related issue is how collaborative research situates your overall work as an anthropologist. Put another way, the work you do as a student, especially as a graduate student, will define your career trajectory (at least in its earliest stages). On the one hand, doing collaborative research as a student may enhance your future job prospects if you envision doing applied anthropology outside academia. On the other hand, doing collaborative research as a student may pose a risk to future job prospects (and future job security) if you envision yourself doing this kind of applied anthropology within the context of academia. Right now, and perhaps for some time to come, multisited, theoretically couched, and academically situated research is king in anthropology. As anthropologist and educator Douglas Foley writes about critical ethnography, for example, “the technical, theory-driven academic ethnography remains the standard through which young scholars must aspire. The senior scholars who control the machinery of academic production and promotion maintain a tight grip on the conventions of social scientific writing. This surely will be the last bastion to fall, if it ever does. In the meantime, the social sciences remain a rather elitist, ‘high culture’ form of social commentary” (Foley and Valenzuela 2005:224).

What this means, of course, is that these same senior scholars—who may view collaborative research as compromising, to paraphrase Foley, the “high culture” of social commentary—may also have considerable sway over the machinery of hiring new faculty. Although, again, collaborative research may be more common and acceptable in some academic circles (perhaps especially so in programs that comprise a strong applied curriculum), students who are doing (or imagine themselves doing) collaborative research should at least bear all of this in mind as they consider jobs in academe. Ultimately, however, I suspect that many of us who do collaborative research do not choose this practice first and foremost because of our career trajectories; we choose it because we believe in and value its approach, results, and outcomes (see Lassiter 2005a:147–51).

CONCLUSION

The discussions about public anthropology will no doubt continue for some time, especially as many anthropologists maintain—in some cases, convincingly—that “public anthropology is not just old wine in new bottles” (McGranahan 2006:256). These dialogues will no doubt, too, continue providing “a useful service for the general discipline” (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006:86). But if we are to get beyond public anthropology (particularly those arguments and debates that separate out this anthropology from that anthropology), and chart the central questions and problems of the larger anthropological project, then we—students included—must resist the temptation of academic solipsism and together build more deliberate opportunities for public engagement. A powerful way in which we can do so is through collaborative research. Such research—and the partnerships on which it is based—can press theory and practice into service
in ways more direct and immediate in our common search to make a difference in our world, however small or large.

NOTES

1. Although the critique of academic anthropology's sequestration within the academy—which had its roots in early Americanist anthropology (see, e.g., Boas 1928; Mead 1928; Radin 1933), surfaced in various forms in the 1960s and 70s (see, e.g., Hymes 1969; Sanday 1976), gained traction in the 1980s (Marcus and Fischer 1986), and peaked in the late 1990s (see, e.g., Peacock 1997)—arguably gave rise to current discussions of public anthropology, such critiques were not limited to anthropology. Various forms of these critiques cut across several other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities as well (see, e.g., Jacoby 1987). Indeed, anthropologists' latest discussions about public engagement share common ground with other discussions and movements such as public folklore, public history, and public humanities (see, e.g., Baron and Spitzer 1992; Grele 1981; and American Council of Learned Societies 1990, respectively)—discussions and movements that also materialized in the context of similar critiques, and subsequently, sought to more systematically situate "the public" closer to the center of knowledge production and dissemination.

2. My dissertation committee, of course, had expectations for the work, which influenced the dissertation's evolution as they, too, made comments and shaped its outcome. Negotiating these variant outlooks, agendas, and expectations became a major factor in crafting the collaborative ethnography I wrote (see Lassiter 2005a:92–93; cf. Lassiter 1998b).

REFERENCES CITED

American Council of Learned Societies, ed.

Anthropology News

Austin, Diane E.

Baron, Robert, and Nicholas R. Spitzer, eds.

Basch, Linda G., Lucie Wood Saunders, Jagna Wojcicka Sharff, and James Peacock, eds.

Bennett, John W.

Boas, Franz

Borofsky, Robert

Brettell, Caroline B.
1996 When They Read What We Write: The Politics of Ethnography. Westport: Bergin and Garvey.

Brown, Alison K., and Laura Peers
Chatterley, Cedric N., Alicia J. Rouverol, and Stephen A. Cole

Checker, Melissa, and Maggie Fishman, eds.

Darnell, Regna

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland

Erwin, Alexander M.

Evers, Larry, and Barre Toelken, eds.

Feld, Steven

Field, Les

Field, Les, and Richard G. Fox, eds.

Foley, Douglas E.

Foley, Douglas, and Angela Valenzuela

Grele, Ronald J.

Heron, John

Heron, John, and Peter Reason

Hill, Carole E., and Marietta L. Baba, eds.

Hinson, Glenn

Horse, Billy Evans, and Luke Eric Lassiter

Horse, Billy Evans

Hymes, Dell, ed.

Indiana State Museum

Jacob, Russell


LeCompte, Margaret D., Jean J. Schensul, Margaret Weeks, and Merrill Singer 1999 Researcher Roles and Research Partnerships. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.


Mead, Margaret 1928 Coming of Age in Samoa. New York: Morrow.


Miles, James, dir. 2004 Middletown Redux. DVD documentary. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.


Rylko-Bauer, Barbara, Merrill Singer, and John van Willigen

Sanday, Peggy Reeves

Sanjek, Roger

Singer, Merrill

Stacey, Judith

Staikidis, Kryssi

Stull, Donald D.

Stull, Donald D., and Jean J. Schensul, eds.

Tedlock, Barbara

Thomson, Alistair

Thorpe, Laurie
2006 The Pull of the Earth: Participatory Ethnography in the School Garden. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Wali, Alaka, ed.
2006 Collaborative Research: A Practical Introduction to Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Communities and Scholars. Chicago: Field Museum.

Wallerstein, Nina B.

Wickens, Matthew, and Kathleen Grant

Williams, Marco, dir.