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Race

Race is a social construction with profound implications in our social world. While constructions of race vary across time and place, racial inequality remains a social problem throughout U.S. society and the world. Today, sociologists can often be found at the forefront of efforts to uncover patterns of racial inequality and discrimination and to promote racial justice. In this chapter, six sociologists in action describe how they have used sociological tools to better understand and address racial inequality and discrimination.

The chapter begins with, "Amplifying the Youth Voice of the Food Justice Movement with Film: Action Media Projects and Participatory Media Production." Author Mike Cermak vividly describes his work as a food activist and how he has collaborated with inner city youth of color to promote the food justice movement. Through participatory action research and an action media project, he and the young people have attempted to address "the racial bias in the environmental and food movements," which privileges the voices and perspectives of whites over others. In this process, Cermak took a back seat, allowing the youth to guide their own learning about patterns of food inequality and to put their knowledge to work educating others and transforming their neighborhoods in the process. In one culminating event of their work, Cermak describes how two of the youth presented their film, *Planting for Peace: Bury Seeds, Not Bodies* (2010), in front of an audience of over 300—and how they shone. Having grown as youth leaders in this movement, these young people gained the skills and confidence to deliver a presentation that moved and motivated their audience. For Cermak, this experience affirmed that "becoming a sociologist in action required that I use any medium at my disposal to amplify the voices that need to be heard."

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Next, in "Place and Race: Cultural Democracy and Reclaiming Public Space," Diane Grams writes about her work in Chicago protecting and restoring cultural works in a traditionally African American community threatened with gentrification. As new investment flowed into Chicago's near south side, deemed the "Soul of Black Chicago," she and fellow activists had to grapple with the question, "how does one preserve yet change local culture?" Bringing her students into her community work, she was able to elucidate how cultural symbols can empower a neighborhood. In describing the research her class undertook, she states, "this process of documenting knowledge from oral histories and personal accounts and assembling them into reports and publications helped to demonstrate how local cultural sites are community assets to build upon, not erase. This kind of cultural work I identify as 'empowerment' because it seeks to restore cultural reserves of communities suffering from disinvestment." Grams' work shows how sociologists, by bringing attention to the importance of these symbols, can help save them from destruction and move communities toward the ideal of a cultural democracy.

In the third piece in this chapter, "Social Movements in Action: Combating Environmental Racism on a Native American Reservation," Brandon Hofstedt provides an example of the positive impact students can make. Students in his social movements class learn about these movements, why they matter, under what conditions they are successful, *and* how to create one. From the many impressive social movements students have started, Hofstedt describes the work of one group to address environmental racism in their community. This group effectively used the sociological tools they gained in their class to stall the efforts of a mining company to develop an iron ore mine in the Penokee Mountain range in northern Wisconsin. The mine would have resulted in environmental damage and health risks for the Native American nations in the area. The students' successful efforts to thwart that plan are an inspiring picture of sociology in action. As Hofstedt describes, "Using their sociological tools and their newly acquired understanding of social movements, students were able to organize a successful Social Movement Campaign and to make a real impact in confronting environmental racism in their own community!"

In "When Resilience Is Not Enough: Recovery, Privilege, and Hurricane Katrina," Pamela Jenkins shows how race, class, and power intersected in the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans. Through sharing her own experience living through Katrina and its aftermath, and her training as an activist and sociologist, Jenkins illustrates how issues of race and class can help determine who survives a disaster such as Katrina. She shows how those with higher racial and class statuses tend to have resources to call upon that give them an advantage over others in the same situation. Speaking of

her own relative advantage, she states, "This privilege in the face of disaster placed me in a contradictory position of being 'part of' something yet 'standing apart' as well—the subject and observer of an event." As she observed the disaster and its aftermath unfolding, she reflected on how racism shaped media depictions of the chaos, stating, "The portrayal began to surface as some residents (usually white) were shown as 'taking' from stores and other individuals (usually poor and African American) were viewed as 'looting' from the stores. This stereotype of young African American men as looters did not show those men of color who saved people in neighborhood after neighborhood." Race also became an important factor in shaping the kinds of post-storm settlements families received, and Jenkins describes how groups and allies mobilized to address these inequalities.

Joshua Warren writes about how he used the sociological tools he gained as a sociology major at Bridgewater State University in "Living the DREAM: Race, Privilege, and DREAMs of a Brighter Future." Working with the DREAM program first in Vermont, and then in the Roxbury community in Boston, Warren helped connect children living in subsidized housing developments with college student mentors. Warren used sociological tools to understand why the DREAM program was a successful model in rural Vermont and how it could also be adapted successfully to urban Roxbury. He and the other members of the predominantly white DREAM program had to learn to recognize the lack of diversity on their staff and the issues that are raised when white staff and mentors work in a community of color. As they problem solved and negotiated these issues collaboratively with their partner communities, they also worked to encourage youth to recognize their potential and to achieve their goals. As Warren describes, "Youth who never before had access to college campuses now view higher education as a viable option. Many youth who may have joined gangs have made the decision not to. Instead, the program has created a positive peer group where youth are surrounded by friends and neighbors who are engaged in *constructive* [rather than destructive] risk taking."

In "Bridging the Campus and the Community: Blogging about the Asian American Experience," C. N. Le shares how he began to learn about and embrace his Vietnamese and Asian American heritage after he began to take some sociology courses in college. He decided to use his sociological knowledge to embrace the expectation that he would speak up for other Asian Americans. Through establishing his Asian-nation.org Web site and blog, Le has "portray[ed] Asian Americans as accurately and comprehensively as possible rather than let[ting] . . . other Americans rely on distorted portrayals and ignorant stereotypes about Asian Americans." In the mode of public sociology, he has made sure his postings are as jargon free as possible in order to bridge the campus and community divide. Le points out that, in

addition to educating the public at large, his Web site is "a source of information and learning for young Asian Americans, many of whom grow up [as Le did] isolated from their history, culture, and collective experiences." His Web site and blog are also a means "to mobilize [the Asian American] community in times of crisis (e.g., responding to a high-profile incident of racism)." Both are excellent examples of the use of sociological tools to combat stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

Amplifying the Youth Voice of the Food Justice Movement with Film: Action Media Projects and Participatory Media Production

Michael Cermak
Boston College

Michael Cermak is the founder and director of Environmental Justice Action Media (EJAM), an organization dedicated to producing youth-focused media on urban environmental issues. He is also a sociologist and teacher at Boston College, where he completed his dissertation on the role of hip hop and the arts in urban environmental education. His food activism includes working in Boston-area K–12 schools where he has set up numerous vegetable gardens and integrated them with science curriculum. His most recent work is as cofounder of The Green Dragons, a food and fitness initiative that combines martial arts and gardening education for youth.

There was a crowd of over 300 people filing into the room, and I was starting to doubt my presentation plan. This would be the first test for two urban teenagers who had little experience speaking in front of an audience, even less so in front of 300 potentially restless and half-interested undergraduates. The youth were two of the stars of my film, *Planting for Peace: Bury Seeds, Not Bodies* (2010), and we were to show the 20-minute piece and then hear about their experience helping me make it. I wondered if I was setting them up for failure. Sure, they were used to talking about their unlikely love of urban agriculture to me and their boss, but in front of such a large crowd the prospect was daunting. This would be an extension of a program where I sought youth narratives about food justice and put them

into a film that was co-written, filmed, and edited by teens. The youth were getting paid well for this appearance but even that couldn't stave off the nervousness they felt as they watched the crowd amass.

My sociological research on race, nature, and media directly informed the process that led to my travelling exhibition with the youth. My research questions revolve around the racial bias in the environmental and food movements, what Julie Guthman calls the "unbearable whiteness of alternative food" (2011). As a scholar of color who cares deeply about urban sustainability and youth empowerment, I wanted to do more than just describe the racial bias in yet another progressive movement and intervene by working with a set of teens to create food media that represented more of their perspective. The standard eco-discourse (e.g., global warming, the ozone layer, greenhouse gases) is deeply wrought with scientific and hyper-rational thinking. I had seen this turn off many of the youth with whom I worked. They had tired of hearing about the health content of foods, how everything they like is bad for them, and how organic is the way to go. Whatever the food message, the messengers were usually white scholars and writers (such as Michael Pollan, Frances Moore Lappe, Eric Schlosser, and Barbara Kingsolver) who are great but do not always tap into important justice and race-based frameworks for understanding food and culture. I wanted to engage young people in the production of their own narrative on food problems in their neighborhoods, and what *they* saw as the root of the issue.

The *Planting for Peace* (P4P) film project evolved from a methodology called Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is an approach to research and inquiry where the trained experts intentionally take a backseat to the community with whom they work. Instead of the researchers choosing the topic, they start with a meeting with community members to identify the most salient social problems. Instead of being the sole collector and cruncher of data, the researchers train and include the community in data collection and analysis. Last, PAR researchers make a commitment to help the community use the results of the field research to address the issues they have studied. PAR was born as a response to the nontransparent and noninclusive format taken by many researchers who study marginalized populations. As someone oriented to taking action, I also employ PAR because it gives me a chance to address the social problems I study side by side with the people who are the "subjects of research." This is what I was attempting to do by having the youth from the project present their film at the university.

Making this project into a film also helped me remedy the issue that much good PAR work gets done with such little documentation in popularly accessible media. Like PAR that critiques the standard research process, I extend

this critique to the filmmaking process. We were starting to hear of media *about* food justice that features youth of color, but these were still accounts largely written, filmed, and produced by white filmmakers. One example of a great film about food justice issues is Scott Hamilton Kennedy's *The Garden* (2008). Kennedy's film chronicles a Latino community in South Central Los Angeles fighting to save the largest urban farm in the country. I decided to incorporate the practices of PAR in a similarly garden-focused project, but in contrast I decided to put the youth more in the "driver's seat" of the media produced about them. The result was a PAR project on food issues that was complemented by what I call an Action Media Project (AMP). An AMP is a framework that challenges PAR or community-based practitioners to create engaging media about their projects so that it may be effectively shared with others. It places the real community research and action of PAR into a media project, in this case a film, and requires that the youth from the community get behind the lens. As the acronym suggests, the goal is to "amp," or amplify, the voice of marginalized communities about social issues.

I have described the full process of this film elsewhere (Cermak, 2012), but what is relevant here is how my training as a sociologist helped us create a more participatory media and action outcome. In 2010, I received an artist in residence grant from a community organization with the challenge of making a film about food justice with a team of youth who had almost no experience thinking about food in a sociopolitical context. The team, who had worked on other projects prior to my arrival, consisted of ten black and Latino youth, some of whom had dropped out of high school and/or been involved with gangs. At the time, they could not have envisioned how they would eventually be presenting this film to groups all around the city, or in front of hundreds of people. They had good experience organizing around stopping violence in their community, but had not extended this to thinking about how this connected to food and sustainability.

We spent a full year doing a workshop at least once every other week, covering food issues for the first six months and then learning about how to produce a film for the second six months. Each workshop was focused on the intersection of food and social justice issues, framing growing food not as solely about health and nutrition but about identity, space, and power. We watched films like the aforementioned *The Garden* (2008) and learned about Guerilla Gardening, an urban movement where citizens populate any open space they can find with flowers or vegetables, even if the land is someone else's. We even went back in history and covered the Victory Gardens of World War II and the propaganda that said "our food is fighting," showing how growing food had a militant angle used to assert pride and ownership of land. We also engaged in real food growing by starting

raised-bed gardens and growing cucumbers, peas, and tomatoes from seed. Next, we switched to workshops about filmmaking, covering everything from conducting interviews to using photography and videography. They learned how to create and conduct interviews on camera, and we traveled to other parts of the city to interview other urban teens doing urban gardening. This mix of content and skills helped develop the youths' perspective on food and their ability to coauthor this AMP.

The title of our film came from a script-writing workshop where I asked the youth to connect their framework of stopping violence to the food issues they were learning. David, a 16-year-old Puerto Rican teenager, said it best:

"To me it's about what we put in the ground . . . we need to bury more seeds than we do bodies."

His powerful phrase became the subtitle of the P4P film, *Bury Seeds, Not Bodies*, and the film calls for more paid opportunities to cultivate urban land and sell food at affordable prices at farmers' markets. These green jobs were also socially just because they would alleviate the unemployment of teens, a trend that is linked to higher crime rates as youth may turn to illegal work with gangs.

When the film was completed, I wanted to embody the AMP approach and do more than just distribute a DVD. The film could influence the way that people think about food justice with respect to race, class, and ethnicity, but a more interactive tour would help. I knew the youth would benefit from telling their story to a live audience, and I knew this would also enhance how the film was received. I decided to have a film tour that would employ the youth in the film by providing speakers' stipends, using the opportunity to create jobs and channel revenue back to the community. We began scheduling screenings with schools and other nonprofits. Sometimes only I would present the film, but eventually I trained two of the more vocal youth, Angel and Rigoberto (Riggy), to give a 5-minute introduction at the screenings and answer questions at the end of the film. It just happened that our first showing at Boston College, where I teach, attracted 300 people, vastly more than I anticipated.

Despite my worries, Angel and Riggy spoke from their hearts and quickly won over the audience. They spoke of the realities of living in their neighborhood, a so-called "food desert," that has only one grocery store for over 30,000 citizens and is inundated with fast food chains. They also spoke of what it was like for them, urban teens of color, to change their perspective from initially seeing gardening as a frivolous and relatively useless activity to seeing how growing food connected them to their community and provided one way to revitalize their local landscape. One young woman who watched our film and presentation sent me an e-mail:

I heard your presentation and watched your documentary at the teach-in yesterday. I just wanted to e-mail you because I can't stop thinking about it. I think what you're doing is so awesome. It seems like you have made a HUGE difference. Angel and Riggy were absolutely unbelievable. Riggy was so well spoken and did a great job getting the message across. Angel was adorable and SO positive. It seemed like every other word out of his mouth was "awesome." So, no need to e-mail me back or anything but I just couldn't not tell you how great I think what you are doing is.

The accolades were nice, but more importantly I saw how adding this educational piece to the production of our film empowered the youth involved in the project. By striving for an AMP approach, we made tangible changes in the opportunity structure for youth who had not previously seen food politics as a viable area of concern. Here is a short list of what we accomplished by having youth help create films that provide their perspective on food justice:

1. *We revised how education about food is conducted.* Switching the major frame of food from health and nutrition to jobs, justice, and antiviolence for violence-affected communities was a strong step in engaging the youth in this project. The workshops looking at food from a social justice perspective are still used in the trainings for new hires at the community organization.

2. *We created a documentary that can be used in classrooms and other venues across the nation.* This is a critical part of the AMP approach that creatively shows PAR projects in action. The film has been screened with a workshop over 75 times in the New England area for audiences ranging from middle school to graduate schools. I also use the film in my own undergraduate teaching.

3. *We created jobs.* Angel and Riggy still tour with the film, receiving pay for their work or a donation to their nonprofit organization that works on environmental justice and affordable housing. It is significant that both are youth of color from a low-income neighborhood. I also receive income from these screenings to supplement my income as a public speaker, and I share my views on the role of sociology for social and environmental change.

4. *We created a garden.* The film featured the evolution of our two raised-bed gardens where we grow produce and use it in recipes for some of our meals. This garden is still used and a strong symbol that youth of color are ready to participate in the food movement when it is tied more closely to the ownership of land in their communities.

The AMP approach has allowed me to take my sociological questions and turn them into tangible results at many levels. The journey started when I held my own work accountable with the simple statement: "Completing a paper and/or a documentary film is the beginning, not the end, of the empowering journey." As our culture becomes inundated with videos and

websites for progressive causes, it is increasingly important to add real actions and job opportunities for those who are featured in these media. AMP helps remind me to continuously leverage my sociology and stay more accountable to the communities I study and serve. Angel and Riggy's beautiful presentation under pressure helped teach me of the power that intertwining creativity and sociology can bring. At the beginning of my sociology studies I would never have thought of myself as a filmmaker, but becoming a sociologist in action required that I use any medium at my disposal to amplify the voices that need to be heard. How can *you* put your sociology into a creative medium and then put it to work for those being studied?

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Place and Race: Cultural Democracy and Reclaiming Public Space

Diane Grams
Tulane University

Diane Grams is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Tulane University in New Orleans. Her interest in cultural inequality began when she was Executive Director of The Peace Museum in Chicago (1992–1998), an activist museum providing community- and school-based violence prevention programs and exhibitions on peace, civil rights, and violence prevention movements. As the associate director of the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago (2003–2007), she conducted research on the relationship of cultural institutions to local urban culture. Her current work focuses on public parading organizations in New Orleans.

Like many urban areas, Chicago's downtown has a concentration of business, government, and cultural institutions. From the earliest days of the city, the downtown had been surrounded by areas considered to be "inner city" areas of poverty. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the developers of the city center sought to expand into these areas long inhabited by foreign born immigrants and African Americans. In 2001, I began research in the African American community on Chicago's near south side. I was interested in how local activists challenged both historic segregation and contemporary gentrification efforts by asserting cultural ownership of this increasingly contested urban space. By claiming the area was the "Soul of Black Chicago," these activists were redefining the area once considered to be one of Chicago's most neglected ghettos as a place of importance to black culture and history. I joined their efforts as I believe that cultural democracy means broadening understanding of what a place dominated by African Americans might look like if we remove the label of "ghetto." These efforts to reclaim and redefine a place in Chicago, also gives new meaning to our sociological understanding of the relationship of race and place.

The problems of poverty and neglect, often associated with urban segregation, are the result of long-term urban processes stemming back to slavery. The term *segregation* is a 20th century term for what W. E. B. DuBois (1902), a prominent African American sociologist, referred to as "the color line." These social arrangements of racial separation, once mandated by the provision of separate drinking fountains, bathroom facilities, bus seats, and schools, continue to operate in urban areas through the positioning, resourcing, and privileging of one group over another and one culture over another. As a cultural sociologist, I sought to understand and highlight how cultural distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984) that assign value to a place, an object, a form of skill, or kinds of knowledge can perpetuate the inequalities of the color line or support cultural democracy.

Scholars of race and urban history consider discrimination and inequality embedded in symbols, policies, and practice as "structural racism" because they result in unequal access to resources, unequal opportunity, and privilege based on skin color. I wanted my research to help change this. I used the skills of a cultural ethnographer to become involved in the community I was interested in studying. As an activist scholar I hoped my work could affect the processes of urban development to benefit long neglected communities.

When my research began in 2001, the neoliberal housing policies which began during the Clinton Administration in the 1990s—known as the Hope VI—were in the latter stages of public/private housing redevelopment under the George W. Bush Administration. These policies sought to

transform areas once dominated by government administered public housing projects for the poor into privately run, government funded, mixed-income developments.

When I first visited the near south side area, the Robert Taylor, Clarence Darrow, and Ida B. Wells Public Housing projects had been bulldozed, leaving large swaths of vacant land. Former residents moved into other communities near and far using public housing vouchers. The problem facing this community was no longer the problem sociologists refer to as *disinvestment*, the neglect evident when government and private business owners no longer reinvest in their properties and residents don't contribute as citizens of the community. Rather, a new problem emerged as money poured into the south side from local, state, and federal agencies: rapid change threatened to erase the history of black life and decimate a cultural history more than 100 years in the making. Community activists sought to ensure that investments to improve transportation, communication, institutions, and housing were designed to strengthen the black community and preserve its cultural history, not erase it.

The question then became how does one preserve yet change local culture? Through a series of studies, I was involved with an effort to inventory what was in the community (Grams & Warr, 2003). My interest continued through completion of my dissertation, teaching at a university in Hyde Park on Chicago's south side, the University of Chicago, and the publication of *Producing Local Color*, my book on the importance of local culture (Grams, 2010). Discussion of one project, "The Public Art of Bronzeville," on Martin Luther King Drive might best illustrate how this change took place. The project, initially criticized as part of the Mayor's beautification efforts because it was strategically completed in time for the 1996 Democratic Convention held in Chicago, came to symbolize long-term redevelopment of the area. The centerpiece of the artwork is a bronze map embedded in the median at 35th Street depicting the historic area. Harold Lukas and Paula Robinson, two longtime local cultural activists, led efforts to name the area depicted on the map and then ultimately rename the contemporary neighborhood, "Bronzeville." Few people, including some local residents, black activists, and other Chicago residents, understood Lukas's and Robinson's involvement or the purpose behind this effort.

Through my course "Excavating Cultural Policy" at the University of Chicago, my students and I interviewed people walking on Martin Luther King Drive where the "Public Art of Bronzeville" is located. We also interviewed a broad range of city workers and city policy makers to understand how this artwork came to be installed on King Drive. Our research traced the complex range of perspectives on the redevelopment of the neighborhood from within and outside the historic south side community.

For some, the term *Bronzeville* had racist connotations as it derived from a post-civil war era reference to a predominantly black community. Other local residents saw the name as a shallow promotional gimmick, as one artist remarked, "'Bronzeville' is an affectation by promoters. This is the South Side. When you say you are going to the 'South Side,' you don't mean Hyde Park, which is located on the South Side—you mean the black community." Others were afraid it was a racist effort to stereotype the black middle class or to divide the black community along class lines. As one community leader stated, "Some people have been referring to Bronzeville, marking out certain areas—this street and that street. I think wherever black folks live in Chicago is Bronzeville and is community."

If Lukas and Robinson were to be successful, the meaning of the term was to signify an area with rich cultural roots worthy of investment and preservation. Their efforts tapped into the history of the area, as "a city within a city," as it was referred to by sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton (1945/1993, pp. 12), making Bronzeville "a place within a place" on Chicago's south side. After all, the south side of Chicago developed as a black area in the early twentieth century because restrictive policies barred black migrants from the southern United States from living in most neighborhoods, thus enabling this "Black Metropolis" to form. The area once thrived from the economic diversity of its black residents; the intention of the 21st century plan was to restore that economic diversity back to the area.

We often think of activism as carrying protest banners and doing sit-ins, but my research and that of my students sought to detail connections between works of "local heroes and she-ros" named on the Bronzeville Walk of Fame (terms local leader Sokoni Karanja used to highlight both men's and women's contributions) and the community they help build. Through such activism, my students and I tracked down people and events to build on local knowledge and broaden its reach.

We found, for example, historic homes of renowned African Americans who once lived in Bronzeville, such as activist and author of *Black Boy,* Richard Wright (1945), and journalist Ida B. Wells, who documented lynching in the south. The lives of these two historic figures continue to exemplify the kind of creativity, commitment to community, and social justice to be modeled by present and future generations. And, rather than whitewashing faded and pealing activist murals created in the 1960s and 70s on cement retaining walls, funds were raised for restoration because these artworks are significant local history. New cultural facilities were also built during this 20-year span. Among them, Little Black Pearl Workshop teaches young people entrepreneurial skills through artistry. New knowledge was passed on as elementary school teachers had their students visit the mile-long public art project to do rubbings from the bronze plaques naming current and former residents. Students then research the lives of the more than

200 people who are memorialized. Such projects place the cultural history of blackness into the public forum as a positive creative spirit.

This process of documenting knowledge from oral histories and personal accounts and assembling them into reports and publications helps demonstrate how local cultural sites are community assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) to build on, not erase. This kind of cultural work I identify as "empowerment" because it seeks to restore cultural reserves of communities suffering from disinvestment. Such efforts are distinct from the processes typical of "gentrification," which erase racial and ethnic cultural identity and replace it with the signs and symbols of a homogenous culture in order to attract wealthy white urban professionals.

This account shows how cultural democracy is an important part of the solution to the problems created by the history of segregation. Cultural democracy means cultural resources are not concentrated in a city center or only in a city's wealthiest communities and that local places are not marginalized or left without even the most basic cultural resources. After years of involvement to landmark and preserve individual properties, Lukas and Robinson have set their sights on having Bronzeville designated as a National Historical Area. The designation would be based on its historical and cultural significance as the only place black migrants to the city of Chicago could live during segregation and would symbolize and celebrate how a creative spirit, commitment to community, and social justice has enabled the survival of black communities throughout the United States.

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Social Movements in Action: Combating Environmental Racism on a Native American Reservation

Brandon Hofstedt
Northland College

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As an undergraduate student studying sociology, I found the most rewarding and memorable learning experiences came when theory met practice. Today, as a professor, I find myself constantly returning to these transformative experiences and trying to find ways to recreate these opportunities for my own students. When I first taught a course on social movements in the fall of 2008, I took the opportunity to integrate the academic literature with real life experiences and hands-on, applied learning projects. To bring the literature on social movements to life, I required students to work with a group of their classmates on an issue that they all found to be interesting and exciting. I called these projects Social Movement Campaigns (or SMCs). As part of their SMCs, I asked students to create, organize, market, and carry out their campaign during the semester. Over the last 4 years, I have worked with over 20 student groups on topics ranging from combating environmental racism on a local Native American reservation, to securing local food sources and alleviating local class inequalities, to reducing domestic violence and providing domestic partner benefits for all campus employees. Through these projects, students have felt the power of sociology, as they have become active participants in their communities and in their democracy.

Social Movement Campaigns in Theory

Before delving into the SMCs, we spend class time discussing how social movements matter and how they operate. I will do the same here.

How do social movements matter?

Broadly speaking, social movements matter in three ways: politically, socially, and culturally. Politically, social movements are seen as making

a difference when they achieve acceptance or new advantages (Gamson, 1975). By *acceptance,* we mean that social movement leaders are recognized by other formal political establishments and are given a seat at the table during the decision-making process. When they help set or sway the political agenda and shape public policy, this represents having achieved *new advantages.* Culturally, social movements matter when they help shape attitudes, opinions, values, and knowledge systems (Earl, 2004). In other words, social movements are successful culturally when they influence how the broader public thinks about a given issue. And socially, social movements matter when they influence the arrangement of social networks and the flow of social capital (Diani, 1997).

How do social movements operate?

Place, space, and time all affect how social movements emerge, how they mobilize, how they operate and, ultimately, whether or not the social movement is successful. To fully understand the possible trajectory of a social movement, as well as the likelihood for success, one must grasp two separate but related ideas.

The first idea deals with the internal makeup (i.e., organizations, leaders, and participants) and dynamics (i.e., decisions, goals, strategies, tactics, and resources) of the social movement. The organizations, leaders, and participants of social movements make decisions about the tactics and strategies to use. They help develop the goals of the movement. They make decisions on which resources (e.g., financial, human, or social capital) to tap into and which resources to ignore. They make decisions about how the organization should operate (e.g., top-down and bureaucratic versus bottom-up and flexible) and what message(s) they want to convey to their adversaries, their potential supporters, and to the general public. All these things, these internal characteristics of the social movement, influence the ultimate success or failure of social movement activity.

All these decisions, however, are also made inside a social context (the second idea). In social movement literature, we refer to some of these contextual factors as political opportunity structures (POS). Political opportunity is "the degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power to manipulate the political system" (Eisinger, 1973, pp. 25). If a social movement operates in a democratic system where those in power allow for open and transparent dialogue, the likelihood for members of the social movement to voice their concerns and to have success increases. If the social movement has people in power who are sympathetic to their cause, the likelihood for success increases. In contrast, if a government does not allow or suppresses opposition to its policies, the likelihood for success

decreases. It also decreases if the social movement lacks a sympathetic ear from powerful decision makers.

Social Movement Campaigns in Practice: Native American Perspectives on an Iron Ore Mine

After spending the first few weeks of class discussing these important theoretical ideas, my students then attempt to put this knowledge into practice.

There are many great examples of how students have used their SMC projects over the years to create measurable difference on a variety of issues. For this piece, however, I would like to share one particularly effective example. In 2011, a large corporation expressed interest in developing an iron ore mine in the Penokee Mountain range in northern Wisconsin. The initial plan was to extract over two billion tons of iron from the ground to be converted into taconite pellets. The proposed mine immediately sparked a statewide debate pitting jobs versus the environment. Since this was an issue regarding a public policy that threatened the environmental well-being of Native Americans—a racial minority in the United States—this debate was also about a phenomenon that sociologists call "environmental racism." The proposed mine was located adjacent to sovereign tribal lands, raising concerns about air and water quality and natural landscape destruction. The students decided to carefully assemble a campaign that recognized the delicate nature of the proposal and offered a forum for marginalized voices to be heard.

The campaign involved a number of strategies: petitions, outreach efforts, and an educational forum. The primary goals of the SMC were to educate the college and local community on the proposed mine and to offer a forum for the leaders from the local Native American community to voice their concerns, needs, and wants. A secondary goal of the group was to raise awareness related to the negative effects of the mine, especially those connected to environmental racism such as reduced water and air quality and habitat destruction near the local Native American reservation. As part of their forum, the students brought together well respected community members, including a tribal elder, a female spiritual leader, the tribal chairman, and a local fish and wildlife commissioner.

Although the group's efforts were just a very small part of a larger statewide movement in opposition to changing mining laws in Wisconsin and in favor of stopping the taconite mine, the students, using their sociological skills and analysis, played an important role in stalling the proposed mine. The group was able to collect hundreds of signatures supporting the protection of clean air and water for the local tribe. The educational forum attracted well over 100 people and the attention of the local media. A number of the members of the group went on to volunteer and support the tribe's efforts through community organizing and protest. Using their

sociological tools and their newly acquired understanding of social movements, students were able to organize a successful SMC and to make a real impact in confronting environmental racism in their own community!

Bringing Sociological Theory to Life: How Social Movement Campaigns Matter

In addition to the above campaign, over the last four years, student groups conducting SMCs have used their burgeoning understanding of social movements to make a difference in a number of ways. These student groups secured many tangible and measurable outcomes, including donations in the form of money, food, and clothing; participation by a large number of people; and the creation of helpful documents, pamphlets, and petitions. Since 2008, SMCs have attracted over a thousand people from campus and the surrounding community through volunteering and event attendance. Student groups have collected over $2,300 in donations for organizations dealing with hunger, clothing, water quality, child abuse, and gardening. Additionally, these groups have secured over 300 pounds of food for the local food bank and have collected hundreds of signatures on petitions supporting better paper procurement policies, clean water, and environmental protection. Additionally, SMCs helped rejuvenate a dormant slow food movement on campus, created a number of booklets with information related to local food options and political involvement opportunities, and sparked an interest in local backyard gardening adopted by a local nonprofit.

Along with these measurable successes, I have received consistent feedback from students related to the lasting impact of organizing these campaigns. In the words of one of my students:

> When we started this project, I didn't think that we would be very successful. . . . But after seeing the number of people who showed up to the event and how interested the audience was . . . I realized that any "normal" person like myself can put together an event or start a group to make a difference in their community. For me, it was empowering to have this experience and to realize that I can be successful in doing something like this.

I have found acknowledgements of feeling empowered such as this to be very common in student evaluations. I am not surprised, however, considering that the social movement literature suggests individuals who participate in social movements are greatly influenced by their experience (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). In my opinion, the most important outcome of the SMC projects is not the tangible changes in policy, money raised, or number of participants. Rather, I think the greatest outcome is when in the process of putting together a campaign, students feel empowered.

I want them to gain the confidence and come to the realization that change can occur when they are involved and act in their communities and in their democracy. I have found inspiration in my students' projects and have identified a way to help them in the process of becoming sociologists in action by bridging theory and practice through the utilization of sociological ideas. Being a sociologist in action, I will continue to look for and implement ways to incorporate sociological concepts in meaningful, transformative ways.

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When Resilience Is Not Enough: Recovery, Privilege, and Hurricane Katrina

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Pamela Jenkins, PhD, is a Research Professor of Sociology and faculty in the Women's Studies Program at the University of New Orleans. She is a founding and associate member of UNO's Center for Hazard Assessment, Response and Technology. Before Katrina, her research interests were diverse but focused on how communities respond to a variety of problems. Her research interests post-Katrina include documenting the response to Katrina as part of a national research team on Hurricane Katrina evacuees. At a community level, she is involved in several projects that work directly with best practice for violence prevention, including domestic and community violence.

"1400 people died so you could take this picture."

— graffiti sprayed on an abandoned house in the
Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans.

This phrase was directed to the thousands of people who came to New Orleans on disaster tours who rode in buses and cars to visit the destruction of a city. The storm in the Gulf and failure of the levees revealed long-standing racial and class inequalities at the same time that it showed the ability of communities and families to step up and attempt to recover. The term *resilience* often refers to an individual's ability to withstand and thrive from adversity; this essay discusses how resilience in a catastrophe depends on the context, not the individual.

I did not set out to be a sociologist. As with so many working class women of my generation, I "fell" into the field. It was the sixties—there was always something to protest. One day, we would be going to an antiwar protest, then boycotting grapes for farmworkers, and then standing with the unemployed. But it was my work with the Welfare Rights Organization in Waterloo, Iowa, that taught me about inequality and resilience. To get to know women who had few economic resources but had the ability, as Mills (1959) would say, to place their own biography in history was what I refer to as "my first degree." When we would sit in a welfare office to protest conditions, it was those women who understood about the length and depth of the struggle. They knew from their lived experiences that inequality harms the self on all levels, and that resilience in the face of inequality is linked not just to a person but to a community. This tension between exploitation and agency captures the experience of life during and after a catastrophe. Learning from these women about how to both endure and fight the everyday exploitation and understand inequality led me to the university library to try to find concepts to match my experience. It was "finding" sociology that allowed me to add a theoretical analysis to the lived experience. From the beginning, my work in sociology is indebted to those first women I met living in Waterloo, Iowa. They taught me that the work had to be grounded in, and done with, the community. Those lessons would also serve me well when Hurricane Katrina made landfall east of New Orleans along the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Disasters give the appearance that they strike randomly, yet vulnerable communities and vulnerable people are often the hardest hit. My home, along with 80% of the city, flooded. As the waters receded, I and my family became, as did thousands of others, homeless and displaced. More than being homeless, I thought of myself as a wanderer. I landed first in Iowa, then California, back to Iowa, then to Baton Rouge, then to a friend's

house in New Orleans, then a FEMA trailer, then an apartment, and finally home eighteen months later.

Most of the social scientists from the eight colleges in the New Orleans area were asked to speak about their experience; we presented at national meetings that came to New Orleans, at conferences around the country, and even internationally. When I would give a lecture about Hurricane Katrina in the first year after the storm, I would begin with "I lost everything, but I was lucky." After the first year, I would say, "I was lucky, but I lost everything." My house flooded on Tuesday afternoon after the levees began to fail on Monday morning. There was no flood surge that pushed my home off its foundation and no unmoored barge that crashed into my house (as in the lower 9th ward). Instead, there was the slow rise as the water in the city rose to meet the water in Lake Pontchartrain. When all your possessions are on the curb and your home is down to the studs, the outside walls, and the roof, it seemed like I had lost everything. Yet the second phrase captures how I stood in privilege after this catastrophe; I still had my job at the University of New Orleans, my friends, and a community across the country that opened their doors and resources to us. Moreover, opportunities to write about this storm and to be funded to study this storm emerged. This privilege in the face of disaster placed me in a contradictory position of being "part of" something yet "standing apart" as well, the subject and observer of an event.

Standing in privilege included my ability to garner the necessary resources for recovery. After the initial failure of the federal, state, and local governments, there came resources from FEMA monies, FEMA trailers, and the Louisiana Road Home program (a federally funded Louisiana housing program). Because we stood in privilege with education and knowledge, my family was able to access these resources. We could not access them quickly or without a struggle, but eventually we were successful. Accessing these resources required a kind of agency that meant that individuals had to advocate for themselves. Having spent years advocating for others, it was uncomfortable and unfamiliar to advocate for myself and my family (Fothergill, 2011). Nonetheless, as a sociologist I know about lumbering bureaucracies and unresponsive structures. As a person in crisis, I used that knowledge to persevere.

Standing in privilege reflects the complex issues of race and class. The issues of inequality soon resurfaced after the disaster. From the first narrative about rescue, the story quickly shifted to a law and order event. The portrayal began to surface as some residents (usually white) were shown as "taking" from stores and other individuals (usually poor and African American) were viewed as "looting" from the stores. This stereotype of young African American men as looters did not show those men of color who saved people in neighborhood after neighborhood.

Race and class collided with issues of availability and accessibility of aid when evaluating, for example, the Louisiana Road Home Program implemented in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. The Road Home program, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for 10.5 billion dollars, is the largest housing redevelopment program in the history of the United States. Road Home began solely as a program to help homeowners rebuild after the storm but it was eventually extended to cover rental property. The Road Home began accepting applications in July 2006 and stopped new applications on July 31, 2007. More than 186,000 homeowners applied for grants through the program (Eden & Boren, 2008).

In 2008, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, National Fair Housing Alliance, and five African American homeowners filed a class action lawsuit against HUD and the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA). The suit alleged that the LRA's Road Home program discriminated against African American homeowners in New Orleans. The suit stated that the formula to calculate grants created by ICF International (approved by the Louisiana Recovery Authority and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) used the pre-storm value of a resident's home rather than an actual estimate of rebuilding costs. As a consequence, black moderate and low-income homeowners received less money than their counterparts who were mostly white, living in comparably built and equally damaged but higher valued homes. The suit stated that the grants from Road Home should be based on rebuilding costs rather than the pre-storm value of the homes. In July 2011, the federal government approved a settlement that awarded 62 million dollars to Louisiana residents under its new Blight Reduction Grant Adjustment program. In addition, HUD and Louisiana changed the Road Home program grant formula to provide full relief to more than 13,000 homeowners. This settlement may help some homeowners in the area; it took nearly six years and a court case for the program to develop a formula that was equitable. In the meantime, homeowners made decisions about their homes and moved on with their lives (Fletcher, 2011).

While this action taken by a collaborative to challenge the injustice of the relief efforts was one of the largest and most successful, it was by no means the only effort. Acorn fought for homeowners in the Holy Cross section of the lower 9th ward to keep their homes; other activists fought unsuccessfully to save the four large public housing units. The struggle around land and recovery continues today.

My own story took many turns in light of the uneven events surrounding recovery. The last seven years is a blur of community meeting after meeting, rebuilding our home, and writing about the storm. In collaboration with both scholars and activists, I continue to attempt to understand how recovery is unequal. I work on and write about issues of the elderly, domestic violence survivors, community violence, nonprofits, and neighborhood

recovery, and sociology provides a dynamic frame for this work, enriched and deepened by the community.

The flooding of New Orleans happened because the levees failed and the system failed. Because of that failure, people died in the immediate storm surge as they watched the water climb up their porches and into their houses. We all know people who did not leave and perished. Many were old, some were infirm and others too poor to leave. It is those who died who still haunt me. People died of exposure, dehydration, and shock throughout the city. Others drowned because they were so disabled or elderly, they could not get to their attics. Others died on what high ground they could find—overpasses, bridges, stretches of ground—because it took too long for someone to come rescue them from those pockets of high ground. Many of these deaths were preventable.

Those were the first round of deaths. In the aftermath of the storm, the recovery itself shortened lives. Somehow, we have stopped talking about those people who died. They have vanished quietly; there are few memorials to their struggles or their deaths. Seven years later, sociology still has much to say and sociologists still have much to do in understanding catastrophes and working proactively on the underlying issues of inequality that are exposed during times of catastrophe. Books such as *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora* edited by Lynn Weber and Lori Peek and *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe,* edited by David Brunsman et al., are just some of the important sociological pieces giving depth of insight into this catastrophe. The struggle for recovery after a catastrophe is not separate from the struggle around inequality; they are linked. The most vulnerable of the storm, poor African Americans, are rebuilding their lives in reestablished patterns of inequality. Our job as sociologists is to continue to pull back the veneer of everyday life to expose the ongoing issues of race and class and to use the knowledge we gain through our analysis to make practical change for a more just society.

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Living the DREAM: Race, Privilege, and DREAMs of a Brighter Future

Joshua Warren
Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

In 2004, **Joshua Warren** saw what was possible when children living in subsidized housing developments become connected with an abundant and often underutilized resource, college students. Working with the DREAM Program, Warren spent seven years collaborating with low-income communities in Vermont and Massachusetts, building communities of parents and college students that encourage and empower youth to recognize their options, make informed decisions, and achieve their dreams. An avid marathoner, he currently works with the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired supporting blind and visually impaired endurance athletes from all over the world.

Nobody grows up with dreams of becoming a sociologist. Have you ever met a 10-year-old running around with a copy of George Herbert Mead's "The Social Self," tucked underneath her arm? Have you heard a child exclaim, "When I grow up, I'm going to be the next Emile Durkheim?"

How about you? Did you have posters of Karl Marx and Max Weber on your walls when you were in middle school?

Well, I was no exception. It wasn't until my junior year in college that I discovered the wonderful world of sociology through a required course. After I realized that the only books that I could bear to read cover to cover were for my sociology courses, I knew that this was the major for me! Now, despite the fact that the 10-year-old me never aspired to be a sociology major, it was the child inside of me that drew me to my work. You see, children tend to see things very concretely, almost as if the whole world is black and white. There's a right and there's a wrong. There's fair and there's unfair. When I was a child and I was cut in line, I felt cheated. When I had to stay indoors and miss recess but my peers were allowed to go outside I felt robbed. Sociology, however, helped me to gain the tools I needed to provide a critical lens I could apply to the social problems I see around me in the world. My inner child, for instance, just knows that homelessness isn't fair. But my sociological toolkit allows me to understand why people are homeless, what policies are involved, which

demographic groups are most susceptible to homelessness and why, and especially what I can do to help create positive change.

As an undergraduate student studying a myriad of social issues, I was often frustrated, and even enraged, when reading about the prevalence of hunger and poverty in the United States, disease rates in developing nations, human rights violations worldwide, and sexism and racism throughout the world. But just as my coursework filled me with anger and frustration, my sociological training also equipped me with the tools and confidence to address those issues.

As a senior at Bridgewater State University, I began a sociology internship with The DREAM Program, a Vermont based mentoring program. Determined to break the cycle of poverty that often traps those living in subsidized housing, DREAM provides youth with long-term, one-to-one mentors from nearby college campuses and works closely with neighborhood parents, community partners, and local government officials to build a strong network of support committed to the youth and the entire neighborhood. For nearly a decade, DREAM had operated throughout rural Vermont, matching youth living in affordable housing neighborhoods with college student mentors. The results were astonishing. An early evaluation of DREAM's model, published in 2005, showed that a majority of youth participants felt that DREAM had given them a broader world view, expanded social horizons, increased social capital, increased self-reliance, created an expanded comfort zone, increased opportunities for constructive risk taking, and increased their aspirations and positive expectations for their lives.

My internship with DREAM took the form of a directed study under the guidance of one of my sociology professors, Dr. Jonathan White. DREAM had a vision of expanding beyond rural Vermont and into urban areas, and my research task was to take the DREAM mentoring model, which had only been rolled out in a rural, largely white population, and adapt it to a model that could be used in an urban, largely non-white setting. I set about conducting a large literature review that consisted of gaining deeper understandings of urban issues, race issues, and tackling the already existing literature on urban mentoring programs.

I began by trying to identify what facets of DREAM's mentoring model lent to the program's success by reviewing the internal and external evaluations of the organization as well as interviewing children, parents, and mentors. After a semester of research, I concluded that three basic tenets of DREAM's model may have held the key to its success. These tenets were: (1) a community-based approach to mentoring; (2) mentorship programming on a college campus; and (3) long-term, one-to-one mentoring relationships. Additionally, I explored the challenges that may be presented

given the social issues that affect youth living in urban housing developments, including issues of race and racism.

By the end of the semester, I was excited to present my findings to the DREAM organization and proud that they felt I had helped create a revised version of their model that was ready to be tested in an urban setting. The culmination of my internship was a successful meeting with a Community Development Corporation in Roxbury, Massachusetts—part of Boston—to discuss the possibility of establishing DREAM in Roxbury.

As I prepared for that first big meeting in Roxbury, I refreshed myself on DREAM's mentoring model, program implementation, and successful track record in Vermont. I also reviewed my sociological research on the need for programs such as DREAM in urban communities with high concentrations of youth at risk. Entering the meeting, I felt confident that I had an understanding of the scope of many of the issues facing youth living in the communities that the Community Development Corporation represented and that, while DREAM may not offer a cure-all solution, it offered a very real means of engaging youth and curbing their engagement in risky behaviors.

Many of the challenges facing youth and families living in low-income housing developments in urban Roxbury mirrored the challenges facing those living in rural developments in Vermont, such as struggling school systems, high unemployment rates, low academic achievement rates, and alarming teen pregnancy rates. However, Roxbury was also plagued by two problems nearly nonexistent where we work in Vermont: gang violence and the historical legacies and current issues related to racism, including individual levels of racism (racism individuals face in their everyday lives) and institutional levels of racism (racism that is incorporated into power structures in society, such as within government, business, and education systems). Thus, as we ultimately moved our model to Roxbury, we noted some areas where race might be a factor. For instance, our mentors were mostly white college students going into a neighborhood comprised of 60–70% African Americans and 30–40% Latinos. It was an added layer trying to go into communities to tell them we have a great program for them, when ultimately we were a white staff pitching the idea of mostly white college students entering the community as mentors.

Moving to an urban setting raised the need for strong diversity trainings, something we hadn't had to do in Vermont. We called on the Community Development Corporations that manage the properties where our youth live to run these trainings, which became an essential cornerstone of our success in working with a more racially diverse population. These were intensive trainings, utilizing varying techniques, to help the mentors develop a heightened awareness of the role of diversity in the program, examine their own

privilege, and have a better understanding of the ways that race and class affect their soon to be mentees. In the end, it did prove slightly harder for white mentors to gain trust from non-white youth than we had found in same-race mentoring relationships in Vermont, but one of the great things about kids is that if you're a fun adult and show you care and that you're there to stay, there is a lot of slack given. Ultimately, through a lot of hard work from mentors, mentees, and the skilled help of the community running their diversity trainings, race was a barrier we have been able to overcome in the formation of powerful, lasting mentoring relationships.

Another example that illustrates some of the important racial differences comes from the young people being mentored. Both in rural Vermont and in urban Roxbury, most of the young people didn't have high hopes of attending college. When we took the kids from Vermont to college campuses for their mentoring, they looked around and saw lots of other people who look like them, racially, and they could start to envision themselves going to college someday. When we took the kids from Roxbury, they looked around and saw mostly white students attending the colleges and it was harder for them to be able to say "this could be me, I could be a college student."

With gang activity being another hurdle in Roxbury, we felt the DREAM model would be a strong fit. Solutions to gang activity can be found in programs that are inclusive and create tight peer groups and family bonds, focused on healthy activities and socialization. For instance, one study indicates that "when Boston provided gang members with greater supervision, support, and services, youth homicides in that city dropped by two-thirds."[1] DREAM's program model creates many aspects of kinship that are lacking in many homes, and is able to replicate many of these attributes that often help youth avoid gangs.

In moving our program to Roxbury, we also learned more about ourselves as an organization. We realized that we had nearly no non-white staff throughout our program sites, and in analyzing this we came to understand that most of our staff were recruited from our mentors (who were mostly white) or from the college campuses with whom we were partnering (which also were largely white). We've undergone new strategies of creating a more diverse staff, and our community partners, parents and youth in Roxbury helped us identify this need.

Nearly three-and-a-half years after completing my senior sociology internship and that successful first meeting in Roxbury, DREAM has flourished in its new urban environment and expanded into other communities in the Greater Boston Area as well. DREAM programs currently support

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[1] Caught in the Crossfire: Arresting Gang Violence by Investing in Kids, retrieved from the web; http://www.fightcrime.org/reports/gangreport.pdf

62 mentoring matches, partnering youth from four low-income housing areas and mentors from their neighboring college campuses: Harvard University, Boston University, Tufts University, and Northeastern University. The program has successfully transformed the lives of its participants. Youth who never before had access to college campuses now view higher education as a viable option. Many youth who may have joined gangs have made the decision not to. Instead, the program has created a positive peer group where youth are surrounded by friends and neighbors who are engaged in *constructive* risk taking such as hiking, skiing, and taking weekend adventures with their mentors.

The DREAM Program has also had a strong impact on the mentors. Many of the students who sign up to be mentors in our program express that living on campus and attending classes often feels like being trapped in a "bubble." Daily interactions often become limited to conversations with teachers, classmates, and others on campus, and theirs are campuses with rather homogenous racial and socioeconomic makeups. For many of our mentors, DREAM offers an escape from that "campus bubble," and a unique opportunity to have a positive impact on a community that they may have never before seen. One mentor summed this up well, stating "DREAM means a great deal to me because it has shown me an entire world that I had never experienced before; it threw me into the middle of it, and I came out knowing that I had a positive impact on it."

Having the opportunity to apply what I was learning in the sociology classroom and through my senior internship and research in sociology was a powerful experience for me. It showed me how the skills I was learning in the classroom could be directly applied to creating social change in the community. I've since transitioned to a new job, working for the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where I continue to put my sociological skills of research and practice to work. The experience I gained with my work at DREAM changed my life, as it was likewise changing the lives of the youth and the mentors. In a survey conducted one semester after DREAM began programming in Orchard Gardens, one of the low-income housing communities in Roxbury, one participant shared, "I love that they (mentors) take me out of Orchard (Gardens) and I can see other parts of Boston. I also get to see what college is all about! I love the activities and I love hanging out with college kids!" Similarly, one young person shared, "I love hanging out with college students. I love playing with them and I love having fun with them! They want the best for me!" When asked, "Why is DREAM important for this community?" the youth shared, "They (mentors) don't want us to do drugs or to have guns! They believe that we can go to college!" Perhaps the most poignant sentiment was shared by a child who stated, "I can't wait to go to college!"

Bridging the Campus and the Community: Blogging about the Asian American Experience

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What do you do when you feel like you're the only one around? That's the question I frequently faced growing up in a predominantly white society. I had a lot of friends growing up, but almost always I was the only Vietnamese immigrant, the only Asian American, and the only person of color in my school and my neighborhood. I was expected to "represent" or be the spokesperson for these minority groups in a lot of situations. I didn't want that responsibility. Instead, I wanted to just blend in, to not stand out as being different or strange. In many ways, I wanted to be like my friends—to be white. Through those elementary, middle school, and high-school years, I did not really emphasize my minority identity, opting instead to deemphasize it as much as possible.

It wasn't until my junior year of college when I decided to minor in sociology and began taking classes on race and ethnicity, immigration, and Asian American studies that I finally began to learn about the history of people of color, immigrants, and Asian Americans in the United States. I learned how, in the face of injustices, inequalities, and oppression, people of color have not only survived but become stronger and more resilient through these experiences. I finally began to experience my Vietnamese and Asian heritage as a source of pride and confidence instead of shame and embarrassment. With this newfound understanding of myself and the world around me, I began to claim and embrace the expectation I had once shied away from: the responsibility of speaking up for others like me.

As I progressed through my research on various aspects of Asian American assimilation, the Internet revolution was well underway, and blogs, in particular, were becoming quite popular. I saw this as an opportunity to leverage the emerging power of the Internet by blogging to share what I was learning about the collective experiences of Asian Americans in particular (and immigrants and people of color more generally). It was my hope to portray Asian Americans as accurately and comprehensively as possible rather than let others portray my community however they want and have other Americans rely on distorted portrayals and ignorant stereotypes about Asian Americans.

With that in mind, I started my Asian-Nation.org Web site and blog in 2001. From the beginning, I wanted my site to be as accessible as possible. On my Web site and through my blog, I make "academic" research and data easy to understand. I also cover as many real-world issues and social problems in American society as possible. You might say that I have been able to bridge the gap that separates traditional academic articles from those published in magazines and newspapers—to connect the campus and the community.

I try to bridge these two aspects of society by first acknowledging that I am not always going to be completely objective or unbiased in my writing. As I tell my students, many academics claim to practice total objectivity in their research and teaching. Other professors think that it is virtually impossible to keep one's personal beliefs completely separate from one's research or teaching, and I happen to agree with the latter group. Biases can take many different forms: some may be quite blatant in terms of direct statements or writings, but other examples can be more subtle, such as when sociologists decide which questions to ask, which methods and data sources they'll use to answer those questions, and how they present their findings. In fact, as we see over and over again, the same statistical data can be used to support completely opposite interpretations and sides of a debate. With that in mind, I am up front with the students in my classes and the readers of my site and blog. I let them know that, based on both my academic training and my personal experiences, the political and social views I have tend to be liberal in nature. However, I also tell them that as a sociologist I am compelled to back up what I say and what I write with established theory, reliable data, and appropriate supporting examples.

I try to achieve a yin-yang balance between objectivity and subjectivity. Being an academic blogger means that people may pay a little more attention and perhaps give a little more credence to what I have to say because of my position as a professor. But with that added respect comes added responsibility. In other words, I can't get away with just ranting and raving about racial incidents or other injustices going on around me. Instead,

I understand that as an academic I have to support my opinions and back up my criticisms with valid theories, data, and intelligent analysis.

I think that sociologists are well-qualified to do this kind of work. I firmly believe that sociologists should apply their experiences and their expertise to educate as many people around them as possible (not just other faculty or college students) and apply their work to inform and influence social issues and policy to make sociology as "public" as possible. Sociologists can apply their research to lend some objectivity and empirical data to often emotional discussions and debates around controversial issues. I understand perfectly well that sound data and research may not ultimately sway people with passionate opinions, but I feel I've done my job if I help people look at issues more comprehensively and from different perspectives.

Beyond using my Web site and blog to educate the general public about the histories, experiences, and characteristics of Asian Americans, immigrants, and people of color, I also hope that my efforts can benefit the Asian American community specifically. That is, I hope that blogs like mine will be a source of information and learning for young Asian Americans, many of whom grow up isolated from their history, culture, and collective experiences, similar to what I went through when I was their age. I felt very satisfied when my site was mentioned in media outlets, such as *USA Today,* Yahoo News, the American Press Institute, the Library of Congress, PBS, and *The Washington Post,* to name a few. However, I am particularly gratified when I receive comments from ordinary readers, such as the following:

> Thank you for putting all this research together in one place! For most of my life, I haven't really paid much attention to Asian American issues. In school, I was always doing projects on the plight of the Native Americans, the Holocaust, or slavery, but I was never really encouraged to learn about Asian American History.
>
> I am so grateful that you are doing this. You have no idea how relieved I was to find this site. . . . I always realized the misrepresentation of Asian Americans in this country but had no idea just how far it extended.
>
> Yours is the best website that represents the Asian American community I have seen so far. It is very well-organized, informative, and most importantly, it has a certain candid and personal tone, which I feel makes it very distinctive from other sites.

Web sites and blogs also can help Asian Americans develop networks of people who share similar concerns, experiences, expertise, and so forth that can be used as a source of social support, but also to mobilize our community in times of crisis (e.g., responding to a high-profile incident of racism). A sampling of these responses in recent years includes Asian American blogs like mine joining with national advocacy organizations, such as the Asian American Justice Center, the Asian American Legal

Defense and Education Fund, the Media Action Network for Asian Americans, the Japanese American Citizens League, and the Organization of Chinese Americans, to protest racist and stereotypic media portrayals of Asian Americans in the 2009 movie *The Goods* and in the "Gay or Asian" column in *Details* magazine. We also took legal action to protect the rights of Asian American high-school students in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who endured a series of physical attacks in 2009, with school officials turning a blind eye to their repeated requests for help. Perhaps most famously, we advocated for nuclear physicist Wen Ho Lee who was falsely accused of espionage by federal authorities in 1999.

I think that Asian American Web sites and blogs like mine demonstrate that we want to be part of the American cultural mainstream and engage in the communication and democratic processes rather than secluding ourselves from the rest of American society as critics sometimes charge. Also, Asian Americans can use blogs and other emerging forms of Internet technology, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so on to be at the forefront of technology and Internet culture—to be "cultural entrepreneurs," like our technological counterparts who are achieving success in Silicon Valley. Finally, these forms of technological expression give us a voice that we haven't had before—another mechanism to speak up and empower ourselves to overcome the ways in which we've been silenced through the years by the cumulative effects of racial stereotypes and discriminatory laws.

With these points in mind, my site and blog are basically extensions of my research and teaching—they are an integral part of who I am as a scholar and an Asian American. On top of that, the topics that I am most interested in—race relations, immigration, assimilation, politics, and the cultural effects of globalization—are some of the most controversial and important issues facing American society today. Since these issues are still being played out and will continue to evolve for the foreseeable future, I anticipate having plenty of material to write about. For me, being a Sociologist in Action means fully expressing myself academically and personally, educating and empowering others, and contributing what I can to the larger human community.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Mike Cermak, how do Action Media Projects work to "amp" the voice of marginalized communities of color as they describe social issues? How do such projects relate to the goals of participatory action research?

2. Cermak managed to change the frame of the food issue "from health and nutrition to jobs, justice, and antiviolence for violence-affected communities." How did his ability to do so work to engage youth from marginalized

communities? Are you a part of the food justice movement? If not, why not? What would (or did) compel you to join the food justice movement?

3. After reading Diane Grams's piece, how has your understanding changed of how cultural attributes of a neighborhood can be used to strengthen a racial or ethnic community? According to Grams, how is the "empowering" cultural work she undertook in Bronzeville different from "the processes typical of gentrification?"

4. Imagine, as in Bronzeville, that your own community faces an influx of wealthier people from a different race or ethnicity. How might you and other members of your community work to protect and maintain the cultural symbols of your community?

5. How did Brandon Hofstedt's students help fight environmental racism? Think about one example of environmental racism you have witnessed or heard about. Describe what you can do to help address that injustice.

6. For Hofstedt, what has been the most important outcome of the Social Movement Campaign projects? Why?

7. How did Pamela Jenkins's social context help her recover after Katrina? Why did she consider herself "lucky"? If a disaster were to displace you and your family, do you think you would be as "lucky" as Jenkins? Why or why not?

8. According to Jenkins, how were most black homeowners in New Orleans disadvantaged by the initial funding allotment for home repairs? How did race and power intersect in that decision?

9. What were some of the challenges Warren and his colleagues faced when they moved the DREAM program to Roxbury? How is a sociologist uniquely qualified to understand and deal with these challenges?

10. Who has been a mentor in your life? How has that person (or those people) helped to socialize you? Are you now or would you consider becoming a youth mentor? How could you use your sociological training to help a young person succeed in life?

11. What prompted C. N. Le to become interested in his Asian American background and to eventually create Asian-Nation.org? If you were asked to create a sociologically based blog, what would be your focus? Why?

12. How does Le's blog and Web site help to both inform and support the Asian American community? What other purposes does it serve? Why do you think this site is unique?

Resources

Asian Nation

Sociological exploration of the historical, demographic, political, and cultural issues informing today's diverse Asian American community.

Excellent resource section with links to Asian American related websites on culture, economy, history, politics, and current organizations.

http://www.asian-nation.org

Civil Rights Movement

History Channel site on the Civil Rights Movement. Includes videos, photos, speeches, interactive resources, timelines, chronologies of events, and links.

http://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement

DREAM Village Mentoring Organization

Mentoring program that builds communities of families and college students that empower youth from affordable housing neighborhoods to recognize their options, make informed decisions, and achieve their dreams.

http://www.dreamprogram.org

Environmental Justice Resource Center

Research, policy, and information clearinghouse on issues related to environmental racism, environmental justice, race and the environment, civil rights, and human rights. Provides excellent bibliographies, resources, media, and archives on these issues and on the environmental justice movement.

http://www.ejrc.cau.edu

Hispanic and Latino Americans

Detailed history of Latinos in the United States.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispanic_and_Latino_Americans

Latino Americans

Companion site to the landmark PBS documentary on the history of Latinos in the United States. Site offers resources such as educator guides, video testimonials, and links to other resources and organizations.

http://www.pbs.org/latino-americans/en

Martin Luther King Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle

Interactive encyclopedia with over 1,000 entries on various events, key people, and legislation surrounding the civil rights movement.

http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia_ contents

MENTOR National Mentoring Partnership

National organization promoting and setting standards for mentoring programs in the United States. Provides resources, studies, toolkits, trainings, and webinars and serves as a clearinghouse for mentoring programs.

http://www.mentoring.org

Native Americans

PBS website on Native Americans with over 250 videos from the show *American Experience.*

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/filter/native-american-history

Race: Are We So Different?

The Race Project from the American Anthropological Association combines history, science, and lived experience. Explains differences among people and discusses the myths and realities of race. Website has a virtual exhibit, along with resources for students and researchers.

http://understandingrace.org/home.html

Race: The Power of an Illusion

Complement website for the PBS video. Teacher and student resources, interactive quizzes, curriculum, website links, and excellent information.

http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm

Real Food Challenge

Leverages the power of youth and universities to create a healthy, fair, and green food system. Primary campaign is to shift $1 billion of existing university food budgets away from industrial farms and junk food and toward local/community-based, fair, ecologically sound and humane food budgets. Offers resources such as films, organizations, and reports.

http://www.realfoodchallenge.org

The Storm

PBS Frontline documentary on Hurricane Katrina, which includes the full documentary online. Provides educator resources, links to organizations and online resources, timelines, and interviews.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/storm

We Shall Remain

Companion site to PBS documentary on Native Americans, which includes the full documentary online. Excellent educator resources, time-lines, bibliographies, resources to organizations, and a Native Now section with information updating progress and problems today.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

Full text of seminal article by sociologist Peggy McIntosh discussing the visible and invisible privileges of race.

http://ted.coe.wayne.edu/ele3600/mcintosh.html