



The Making of a Sociologist

Rutledge M. Dennis¹

¹George Mason University

Abstract

When students ask me how and why I became a sociologist, the question always forces me to pause and reflect. The pause and reflection may surprise many students, since my road to sociology was a zig zag road with many unforeseen detours and dead-ends. As a pre-teen, I was a tinker and fancied myself a fixer and technician. Taking apart working clocks and radios was a challenge I could not resist, and being punished for such inquisitiveness, since I usually did not have the skills for making the once working items work again, did not cause me to desist in such behavior. It was about this time when I decided that I wanted to become a physician. Looking back, I had a vague recollection of our family doctor, Dr. Hoffman, once telling me that I had a technical mind and might become a physician. In my youth enthusiasm I might have thought he said should, rather than might. In any case, the thought of becoming a physician stuck in my mind even as would venture into other areas of interest, the chief of these being music.

Keywords: Sociologist, Activities, Illustrate, Journey, Scholarship

When students ask me how and why I became a sociologist, the question always forces me to pause and reflect. The pause and reflection may surprise many students, since my road to sociology was a zig zag road with many unforeseen detours and dead-ends. As a pre-teen, I was a tinker and fancied myself a fixer and technician. Taking apart working clocks and radios was a challenge I could not resist, and being punished for such inquisitiveness, since I usually did not have the skills for making the once working items work again, did not cause me to desist in such behavior. It was about this time when I decided that I wanted to become a physician. Looking back, I had a vague recollection of our family doctor, Dr. Hoffman, once telling me that I had a technical mind and might become a physician. In my youth enthusiasm I might have thought he said should, rather than might. In any case, the thought of becoming a physician stuck in my mind even as would venture into other areas of interest, the chief of these being music.

At Henry P. Archer Elementary School, about six blocks from my house, I joined the band, playing the clarinet, joined the school choir, began a scheduled reading of the Bible, and won the Spelling Bee Contest, both in my homeroom class and for all Fourth Grade classes. This was also when I began writing poetry. The last year of elementary school was a difficult year, for my father David Dennis, Sr., a stevedore worker at the Port of Charleston, died at thirty seven. My mother, Ora, had to struggle to find ways to support seven children. Luckily, my godparents, Rebecca Rutledge Weathers and Joseph Weathers came to the family's aid, as they had done over many years. I began living with them, while they continued to assist the family. Rebecca and Joseph were entrepreneurs, selling ice, wood, and coal. I assisted in delivering these products to neighborhood customers and in the process became a young entrepreneur by exchanging, buying and selling pigeons, especially, the squabs, young pigeons. Along with these activities, sketching and drawing had long been an interest I'd developed over the years. At fourteen I enrolled in a correspondence art illustration program out of Minneapolis and simultaneously the Ford Motor model car building program out of Detroit. All of the above activities illustrate my circuitous journey to sociology. The one item on this journey that parallels a part of my later sociological task was raising pigeons. I began to take meticulous notes on the pigeons: their mating habits, when eggs emerged, and their births and deaths. Also, which ones were sold, their ages, and the price paid.

Throughout high school, at Burke High, my A-B grades were in English, History, and Social Science. There were no sociology courses, but there was a course in psychology. My math grades were B-C grades. I became a soloist in the choir, acted in a couple of school plays, became a member of the National Honor society, became Editor-Chief of the school paper, The Parvenue, and won Third Place in the Elks Oratorical contest, writing and presenting a paper on Abraham Lincoln and the Constitution. Because of this background, many thought my college major would be either music or English. Well, much to the surprise of many, but with Dr. Hoffman's comments fresh in my mind, I declared a biology pre-med major. Luckily, to assist financially, I won one of the ten S.C. State College Scholarships given by the city of Charleston for black students to attend S.C.

State College. In addition, I was also awarded a music scholarship to the college which stipulated that I sing in the choir as well as work a few hours a week in the music department cataloging sheet music and albums. I left school in my junior year for the U.S. Army where I was stationed in Germany as an operating room specialist, a scrub nurse, assisting doctors during surgery, a position consist with my college major.

The three years spent in the military were spent in the following places in sequence: Fort Jackson, Walter Reed in Washington, D.C., medical training at Fort Sam Houston, and finally, the 14th Field Hospital. The years were intellectually rewarding and fruitful. I outlined a three-year reading plan. First, American writers-Wright, Ellison, Baldwin, O'Neil, Hemmingway, Faulkner; African- Nkrumah, Fanon, Kenyetta; British-Shaw, Russell, Huxley; Russian-Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky; German-Goethe, Nietzsche, Thomas Mann, and Franz Kafka; French-Sartre and Balzac. In Germany, I attended operas in West Berlin, Mainz, and Frankfurt, visited East Berlin, and went to a few concerts and plays in the above cities. In addition, I seriously thought about a career in opera and began taking vocal lessons with a local voice instructor. After two months of vocal lessons I concluded that it was much too late for this venture and gave it up. Looking back, I've concluded that my vast reading agenda was designed to explore the technique and the art of style, craftsmanship, and the narrative of telling the story. The story-telling provided me with the content of the social lives of the characters. This angle was the sociological and social content that I drew from the stories, which drew me to Ellison, Wright, and Faulkner, writers who focused on stories whose characters were deeply immersed in issues of race, culture, and tradition, especially southern black culture and tradition.

After three years I was back at S.C State, my scholarship still intact, but with a new major, Sociology and Social Science, coordinated in a department under the direction of Mrs. Howie, one of Du Bois's students at Atlanta University. She gave us a good grounding in Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel, but also introduced us to Du Bois- his personality and his works. In her classes and seminars she encouraged us to explore the works of black thinkers, scholars, and sociologists. After my last class with her, she pulled me aside to remind me to consider Du Bois as a topic for my MA, or Ph.D. My return to State was longer than I expected, but there was a degree of continuity as I rejoined my fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, became Editor-in-Chief of the campus newspaper, The Collegian, and was inducted into Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society.

My first position after graduation was as a substitute teacher at Burke High, a position I took, notifying the principal that I had applied for a position with the Job Corps and that if it came through I would leave my teaching position. The job offer came, and I left for a position as Counselor with the Job Corps in Heber, Arizona. Though I liked working with northern urban youth now given the opportunity to leave the urban setting for a pristine rural western settings, I began to think about a possible graduate, either in history, or sociology. First, I applied for the MA in history at Duke, and was accepted, but with little funds. Then a fellow counselor who had gotten his BA in sociology from the University of Idaho in Moscow mentioned that I should try the University of Idaho. I applied and was given a teaching assistantship, and left for Moscow in August 1966. I worked under the supervision of Harry Harmsworth, director of the masters program. The university did not have a doctoral program. During the fall semester I met Evelyn Montague, a social work instructor at the university. She insisted that I speak with her husband, Monty, a lifelong professor in sociology at Washington State University, eleven miles away in Pullman, Washington. Evelyn gave me the history of the on-going program to recruit black students for WSU's Ph.D program. She indicated that at WSU I would meet more black students in Ph.D programs, more black students on campus, and be able to interact with a much larger sociology faculty than is the case in Moscow. I called Monty, met with him and a few sociology doctoral students, two of whom were black, and was sold on the idea. Monty and Evelyn would be close friends and advisors during my years at WSU. They became even closer after I got married in the summer of 1967. I was accepted into the doctoral program at WSU, with the stipulation that the MA had to be completed before beginning doctoral courses and was given a teaching assistantship.

Professors and Classes

In spring 1967 I took the elementary statistics course with Vernon Davies. Davies was nearing retirement, but full of life and spunk, and regaled the class with stories of students, faculty and events he'd encountered during his almost forty years of teaching. He made the class fun and interesting by injecting statistics into all the foibles of the worlds of students and faculty, including himself. The second course I took was Social Movements with John Lillywhite. Many of my friends thought I was pulling their legs when I said that was his name. Professor Lillywhite was quiet, friendly, and had a thick note pad from which he consulted occasionally as he lectured to the class. I was intrigued by the views of Marcus Garvey at the time and wrote my class paper on Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Bill Rushing's Social Structure and Personality class was my first obstacle in spring 1967. Rushing tried to get me to drop the class when he discovered I was a first year M.A. student. After class, one day during the second week of class he informed me that the vast majority of students in the class were doctoral students, which I knew, some at the end of their doctoral program. He wondered whether I should instead take a lower level masters level course. I had already become friends with a few doctoral students in the class and believed if they could take the pressure, so could I. It was a struggle. I should have taken his advice.

Rushing was a great lecturer, and throughout my years at WSU, no other professor topped him in the number of books and articles assigned for a class. Rushing was also the professor who made me ask which type of sociology professor/scholar I wished to become. He was very formal, not given to small talk, and followed his syllabus to the letter. He was rather soft-spoken with a noticeable southern accent and always wore a suit and tie.

He had extensive lecture notes which he infrequently consulted, but on no occasion did he ever read from the notes. Submitted essays exams and short papers were always return with his corrections in red ink, with points subtracted for inconsistencies, faulty sentence structures and other errors. Yes, he was picky, but as he often stated, in an aside manner, he wanted us to become great sociologists, and the craft of good writing was a crucial step in that process.

It was Rushing's class which alerted me to affinities between the ways sociologists understood and explained social structural formation and the emergence of personality and character formations. It was not so much that sociologists were creative artists in crafting the explanation and relations between social structure and personality. Rather, it was the fact that many novelists were describing characters and social settings, personality and social structure, as sociologists. A re-reading of Tolstoy, Wright, Faulkner, Mann, and Ellison reveals this great connection. In their works, one sees divergent patterns operative in the formation of the social structure. Likewise, one is able to link these patterns of social structural formations to varying permeations of personality and character formations in the interactions of individuals in the stories, either short stories or novels. My paper for the course was a twenty page paper on "Durkheim and Suicide."

Taking courses in statistics and methodology gave me the opportunity to meet one of the most brilliant man I've ever met- Louis Gray, only a few years older than myself. Though I viewed Louis as a great humanist, based on our discussions of the blues, jazz, and literature-he also played the flute, piano, and drums, his studies at the University of Washington under the influence of George Lundberg and Stuart Dodd clearly placed him in the school of scientism, out of which came his life- long research agenda of sociometry, simulation studies, and other small group studies. Since statistics was not my strong suite, during the late afternoons and early evenings I would leave my office in Johnson Tower and make my way to Louis's office in Wilson Hall, where he would inevitably be, to raise questions on statistical and methodological problems. However, inevitably, we would end up talking about the blues and blues singers, or jazz and jazz singers; or just general discussions on literature, art, and music. Later, I got to know a much stricter Louis when he served on my dissertation committee. He was particularly annoyed with me and my Du Boisian style of writing, and accused me of writing excessive "poetic prose." He thought it unbecoming of a scientifically-oriented dissertation, even if the dissertation is on *The Sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois*. Having read his articles I knew what he meant; he wanted the language to reflect the highest degree of acceptable "scientific prose." I agreed with the vast majority of changes he suggested.

Louis would serve as one of my academic role models for many years. I tried to emulate his work habits. First of all, he was a workaholic and always seemed to have had several on-going projects simultaneously. A review of his published papers demonstrates this. Also, most days, from early mornings until late afternoons and early evenings he'd be in his office, reading, or writing. Secondly, unless I timed it right, there were always students waiting to speak to him about stat or methods questions, or about other questions regarding graduate studies. He was a great listener and communicator, and cared very much for the welfare of his students and the academic or personal issues with which they were confronted.

In fall 1968 I took Joel Montague's(Monty) class in social stratification. Monty and Evelyn became surrogate parents to many of us. Monty was a 1930s Marxist who had experienced the witch hunt of the McCarthy era, and had refused to sign the loyalty oath regarding a knowledge of anyone affiliated with socialist or communist parties, or a declaration of not being a member of such organizations himself. His was a story of "up from poverty," and he often regaled the class with personal stories of classism, poverty, racism, and marginalization, and class exclusion. Many of us enjoyed the evenings with Monty and Evelyn, with Monty centering many of his stories around the history of the "blue stone" that hung from the living room ceiling. Monty called it the "blue stone of sociological truth." Each evening we spent at his home, we would hear yet another interesting story of the on-going revelations of the stone. We were given lessons in the fine art of contemporary sociological mythmaking. As Mao had unleashed the "Cultural Revolution" in China, I became interested in how such a movement could alter the lives of Black Americans and the entire American society, I wrote my course paper on "Class Structure and the Cultural Revolution in China."At the end of the course I concluded that though Monty was a neo-Marxist, he was even more so a critical and conflict Weberian theorist. In spring 1998, Bob Dunne and I organized two sessions on Montague at the Southern Sociological Society meeting in Atlanta. Monty asked us to contact former students he'd not seen in years. We did, and there was overwhelming support from them. The first session was Montague the Teacher-Activist, the second, Class, Race, Status, and Power: Theory and Practice. Monty and Evelyn both spoke during the sessions and at a special reception for them later in the evening. Monty's former students participating as presenters included Jim Conyers, Edgar Epps, Bilah Hashmi, Nick Sofias, Bill Benson, and Jimmie Williams. It was great seeing former fellow students and friends.

I have seventy-five pages of class notes from Rushing's class. I have a combined total of fifty from the two courses and a Special Topics course, Urban Economics, taken with Maris Van Blaaderen. The first, World

Population and Social Structure, the second, Urbanization and the City. For the former, I wrote a paper, "The Adjustment Patterns and Problems of Afro-Americans in Urbanized Communities-1940-1968." For the latter, the paper was "Problems of Rural Migrants to Urban Areas." Like Monty and Evelyn, Maris and his wife Maria often invited the class to their home. In fact, our classes were often held in their home, which we thoroughly enjoyed. Though their home lacked "the Blue Stone of Sociological Truth," their bountiful offerings of Dutch cuisine more than made up for the absence of the blue stone. Maris lectured while walking around the room, using both his hands and eyes to emphasize significant points. Even if one wanted to, it would be difficult to nod off in his class. We often joked about the difficult task of both listening to him and watching him as he raced around the room. He was, however, a superb lecturer. My students have noted to me that I often lectured while racing around the room. Funny, it never seemed to prevent them from nodding off while I race around and lecture!

If Gray was the consummate small group experimenter, Dick Ogles was the consummate theorist. A friendly critic once accused me of being a "mere theorist," a term more fitting for Dick. But he was much more than a mere theorist, for his ability to wrap his mind around a concept or an idea and analyze and explicate it, (his favorite term), to the hundredth degree was simply amazing. Likewise, his ability to connect concepts and ideas to ongoing practical situations, though it would take time, sometimes laborious time, was an experience I was happy to have. About ten of us enrolled in Dick's Philosophy of Science special topics course. Though we discussed metaphysics, Mach, Hume, and the Bacon-Kant dichotomy, the bulk of the class was devoted to Karl Popper and his concepts of critical rationalism and the idea of fallibilism. If Louis Gray spent an inordinate amount of time with graduate students, Dick Ogles's time spent far exceeded Louis's time. Each class session concluded with lunch at the CUB where the discussions continued. But that wasn't enough. A few of us, now deeply drawn into the theoretical net by Dick would then follow him to his office to continue the conversation. And we talked and talked and talked. I had ample opportunities to witness the workings of the mind of the theorist. And a great mind it was. Dick was a gentle man, and two incidents demonstrate this feature of his character. The first involved the lecture by Talcott Parsons to the sociology department; the second involved the lecture by Harold Garfinkel on ethnomethodology. Dick's Ph.D. dissertation on Talcott Parsons was written in 1961 while he was a graduate student at WSU. Though the dissertation was critical of Parsons, it did not go for the jugular as Mills did in *The Sociological Imagination*. In any case, Parsons was scheduled to give a presentation, and since Dick had made it known that he was in opposition to many of Parsons' ideas, we thought he was perhaps going to lead the charge against Parsons during the question-answer period. Most of us had also read Mills' critique of Parsons and theoretically poised to charge the enemy. Parsons spoke, essentially outlining how, piece by piece, the features of his social system were put into place. It was presented in such a casual down to earth manner, that is was extremely disarming. How could one attack such a gentlemanly presentation by one, who was by the way, much shorter than we'd imagine, but who smiled, stuttered in a few places, but explained the importance of theory and theory construction in the profession.

The second incident with Harold Garfinkel was rather funny. A couple of grad students had vowed to read and understand Garfinkel, but with little clarity. We thought his lecture might clear up the cloudy aspects of ethnomethodology. No such luck. During his presentation many of us began but discontinued taking notes on his presentation. During the Q and A, we thought there might be some clarity. Again, no. I walked over to Dick and asked if he understood the lecture. He smiled and said, "a little now and then." He then said perhaps at lunch the explanations might be more clear. Dick sat next to Garfinkel at lunch for what I thought was an animated conversation. However, later when I asked if Garfinkel was more concise and much clearer at lunch than during his lecture, he said, a little better, but not by much.

As we did for Monty, Bob Dunne and I organized a session for Dick at the Western Social Science Association meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico in April 1997. The session was titled "Evaluative Criteria and Assessment of Sociological Theory: The contributions of Professor Richard H. Ogles as Teacher and Scholar." Lyle G. Warner was another important faculty in my socialization into the profession. He completed his dissertation at Kentucky analyzing a variant of Kurt Lewin's Field Theory applied to prejudice and discrimination with emphasis on the role and importance of intervening variables. After discarding my original thesis idea of studying the acquisition of new cultural values attained by Charlestonian who moved to Harlem, Lyle mention that there was data from the DeFleur-Warner prejudice-discrimination study that might be useful as a MA thesis. There was. Lyle served as chair of my thesis committee, and I received my MA in 1969 with the thesis title *A Field View of Prejudice and Discrimination*. In 1969 I also took Lyle's course, *Theories in social Psychology*, and wrote a paper on Kurt Lewin's Field Theory.

For Melvin De Fleur's Social Theory class I wrote the paper which would serve as a blueprint for my dissertation, *The Sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois*. The paper was *W.E.B. Du Bois, the Radical sociologist*. De Fleur made minor comments on the paper, but overall approved it. He made it clear in meetings with graduate students that he was interested in developing a cadre of professional sociologists who would represent the best of the sociology department at WSU. He once opening threatened to revoke the teaching assistantships of graduate students who did not hold classes during the campus-wide student strike. The same fate awaited any graduate student who participated in the strike. The irony was that almost seventy five percent of the student strikers were

sociology major. Even more so, sociology graduate students comprised more than ninety eight percent of the SDS leadership. Russell Hanson and I, both SDS members and sociology doctoral students, spoke during the student strike. The only sociology faculty member who spoke at the strike was Monty.

Finally, two classes would play a role in shaping my role as a sociologist. One was the class in Theory construction taught by Walter Slocum. The other was the Special Topics, Seminar in Graph Theory, created by Gray and Mayhew but essentially taught by all the Young Turks in the department: Gray, Mayhew, Warner, and J. David Martin. Slocum did not provide a roadmap for the construction of theory, nor did we have text to illustrate the process. It was a matter of taking a topic, or subject, and working back to how the theory process “might” have occurred. It was the best possible approach at the time, since Jack Gibbs’s excellent book on theory construction had not been published. Incidentally, Gibbs was at WSU at the time, but teaching crime and delinquency, not theory construction. My paper for the class would be a critique and analysis of Arthur Jensen’s articles in the winter 1969 issue of *The Harvard Educational Review*, “How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?” and “Reducing the Heredity-Environment Uncertainty.”

The seminar on Graph Theory was a superb example of team-teaching. I, and many other students in the class, knew next to nothing about Graph Theory, nor did we ever expect to ever use it in our sociology. Yet it represented an intellectual, and sociological to some, journey. A framework for looking at relationships and structures—all the ideas permeating the works of both Gray and Mayhew. But it was the team-teaching approach that intrigued me most and how the idea of relations and relationships appear as a seamless web throughout the works of the team conducting the seminar. Though I understood very little, it was a joy seeing great minds at work.

From Teaching Assistant to Teaching Associate to Creating a Class

During the second year at WSU I was assigned to be a teaching assistant in Bruce Mayhew’s Sociology 101 class. I never knew him well, as he never engaged in extended conversations with me. He lectured, I attended the classes, then I wrote questions for the quizzes and exams. Before he left for Vanderbilt he did give me an assorted collection of sociological texts and a few classics. After I received the MA and was well into doctoral courses, the university was experiencing a series of revolts. The Black Students Union was upping the pressures for the creation of a Black Studies Program, SDS and the anti-war movement were staging demonstrations against the war. I was appointed to the Black Studies Steering Committee, the committee which would draw up a comprehensive design for a Black Studies Program. Departments within various schools were asked to suggest and either create, or contribute an existing course, or courses, to the Steering Committee, as their contributions to the future program. I chose the course, *The Sociology of Black Americans*, created it, and presented it to the committee. Not long after creating the course, I was appointed to the position of Teaching Associate within the sociology department. In this position, I was able to attend faculty meetings and engage specific faculty discussions and decision-making. That is, being faculty-like, or faculty-light. In any case, it was an experience that prepared me for my first position as Coordinator of African American Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia where I would have to create many new courses for a yet-to-emerge program.

Doing Sociology

There are many ways of doing sociology, and in the process of becoming a sociologist many of us have engaged in a variety of theoretical and methodological projects. I participated in a few small-group experiments conducted by Louis Gray, and along with a few other students worked on a methodology class project headed by Professor J. David Martin in which we presented a paper “A Replication of the Basic Principles of Stouffer’s Interview Technique” at a Washington State scientific conference in 1968. At the same conference in 1969 while taking Monty’s stratification class, Monty, Rao, and I co-authored and presented a paper on Establishment Sociology. Also, my professor and friend, Lyle Warner was instrumental in introducing me to the art of writing for the national sociological journals when he suggested and took the lead on the article on Prejudice and Discrimination that appeared in the June 1970 issue of *Social Forces*. The above experiences were reminders that sociology, like much of the other sciences, is both an individual, as well as, a collective endeavor. As such it is uniquely, and intricately, interwoven into the communalism of both life and science.

Probably the most unique “hands on,” doing sociology experience at WSU was working with Bill Rushing’s study of farmers and farm workers in selected counties in the state of Washington in 1966. The study, *Class, Culture, and Alienation: A Study of Farmers and Farm workers*, was published in 1972. I was one of about ten graduate students, some of whom could speak and understand Spanish selected as interviewers. Glen Howze did a great job keeping us on schedule and focused on the task at hand. Rushing’s project was extremely helpful to me as I would replicate techniques and methods from his study to full use when I was one of the principal investigators on the Black Middletown Project in Muncie, Indiana. I was able to laugh, though not loudly, and not too much, at the no show interviewees, incorrect addresses, getting lost in neighborhoods, trying to pull information from recalcitrant interviewees, and a host of other issues associated with conducting field studies. As was true of

Black Middletown, the teamwork and the completion of Rushing's project reminded me of the continuing importance of sociology is helping to uncover layers and layers of our sociological lives.

Becoming a sociologist was made more fruitful and culturally rewarding because of my membership and affiliation with members of the Association of Black Sociologists. James E. Blackwell, one of the first African Americans to receive the doctoral in sociology from WSU and the inspiration for the formation of the Caucus of Black Sociologists which eventually became The Association of Black Sociologists, had energy, ability, and desire as he and others, described in the very resourceful article by James Conyers, began the movement to give Black Sociologists a voice within the larger organizational framework of the American Sociological Association. Having failed in this effort, he and others were instrumental in the formation of the Caucus of Black Sociologists which later became The Association of Black Sociologists(ABS). The ABS gave me the opportunity to meet other scholars deeply involved in unearthing so much of the politics, economics, culture, and sociology of Black Life; over the years I've had the opportunity to jointly published articles and books, as well as participate in a variety of sociological programs, projects, and symposia. Members of ABS have enriched my sociological education and continue to be an important source of new and creative ideas and important sociological inspiration. I have served two terms as president and continue to be an active participant in the organization.

After having experienced a vast array of professorial types, I became consciousness of the need to find a type that would best fit my personality and my sociological needs, and the needs of the community, or communities, I would serve. The vast majority of the professors I liked were wedded to their academic research within the academy. I looked within me and feared that part of the "academic me." I then saw myself reflecting and playing and acting out the Du Boisian Doubleness, this time along academic rather than racial lines. Can I be both a superb academic-research scholar as well as a superb scholar-activist? Had I not already prepared myself for such a role? Had I not cleared the deck and made the case for the scholar-advocate by participating and providing sociological analyses for many events on the WSU campus and beyond? The reality is that both types are needed in the real world, though some of us may do the dialectical two steps, first tilting towards the academic-research, then moving towards the scholar-activist; or having a foot simultaneously in both worlds. In closing, I will suggest that sociologists put greater effort into studying and understanding the world in order to change it. For this reason, I view my sociology as following in the tradition of Marx, Weber, Simmel, Du Bois, Mannheim, Lewin, and Mills. Like these sociologists, my sociological focus has always been intricately connected to issues of power, inequality, racism, and classism. I view sociology as living in both the House of Humanism and the House of Science, each nurturing, informing, and re-enforcing the other. As a student, my eyes were fixed on, nay, fixated on, the untapped opportunities that awaits the explorer willing and able to dig beneath the sociological shell to find Monty's "Blue Stone of Sociological Truth." It's an exploration and excavation worthwhile pursuing.

Lastly, on my journey to professional sociology I decided that there was an important role for sociology, and for me, outside the walls of academia. My decision to travel this path, in some ways, had little to do with me, but more to do with the fact that universities and organizations were looking for a Black Voice, or a Black Presence. There were other black graduate students on campus, but many of them did not want to get informed in political, or partisan, groups. Many, especially married graduate students, simply wanted to work hard, as they always had, get their degrees, and find a job. That was also my goal, but I was more politically, at least theoretically, than the others. Afterall, I had read Marx, Du Bois, Shaw, Russell, Fanon, King, Malcolm X, Shelley, and participated in a couple of marches against the segregated bowling alley in Orangeburg, South Carolina, later the crucial event resulting in the Orangeburg Massacre.

My first speech was at an anti-war rally at the University of Idaho. I began by informing the audience that I was an ex-soldier and loved the American nation, but that the war was wrong for several reasons: it was guns over butter; soldiers in the battlefield were largely blacks, other minorities, and poor whites, and lastly, we were following the exact failed imperialist policy that didn't work for the French. The second speech was made at a Student Forum(February 12, 1968), sponsored by Washington State University's Black Students Union(BSU) and the Students for a Democratic Society(SDS). I spoke on the theme, "The Orangeburg Massacre and American Democracy."As I am a graduate of South Carolina State College(now university), I gave the audience a sketch of the state and its historical racial history and policy, then spoke about the particular racial history and racial culture of Orangeburg and the peculiar history of the college in this constraining racial environment, and how and why the three students were brutally murdered by the local all-white police force.

The University of Idaho presents its annual Borah Symposium in April, and I was invited to be the only student, and the only black person, to speak at its April 8, 1969 symposium, whose topic was Social Values and American Democracy. There were five other speakers on the program, but what I remember most was the anger of other participants at the behavior of one of the speakers, Saul Alinsky, who insisted on answering questions addressed to other participants. It was always, "I'd like to add to that..." or "Let's not forget..."My appearance at the symposium would be my introduction and participation in a program wherein the participants were largely what we know call "public intellectuals." My presentation was on " Social Values and Black America." I think I did well among the intellectual giants. Earlier at the University of Idaho, I was invited to participate on a forum on Identity and Alienation. I presented a paper on "Subordination and Social Identity."

My most disappointing presentation was made at the Conference of Washington State Social Services Agencies in Seattle, Washington, April 20, 1969. My presentation on "Violence in America" was probably more tempered, and intellectual, that most of the delegates wanted. After all, with American cities burning with the battle cry "burn, baby, burn," or Rap Brown's quote that violence in America is as natural as apple pie, the delegates were in no mood for an intellectual rumination on violence. But I couldn't do a Rap Brown, or a Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure). That speech and the audience's reaction convinced me that I could be a forceful intellectual speaker, but never a speaker of the hell and fire brand variety. The spirit may have been willing, but the flesh could not deliver and was not able. That experience was a reminder: We are who, and what, we are.

A request came to me from The Pullman Women's Book Club. They requested a speech on the ideas and philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King. My presentation to them came largely from two of King's books: "Why We Can't Wait" and "Black Power," and I titled my presentation as "Outlines for a New America." The last two speeches I presented were in 1971, before taking a position as Coordinator of African American Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia in July, 1971. Looking back in retrospect, these two speeches would, without my planning this to be the case, highlight much of my teaching and publishing interests and activities over the next thirty to forty years. The first would be my presentation on "The Importance of Culture in Everyday Life" at The Black Cultural Workshop at McNeil Island Prison in eastern Washington on January 3, 1971. I focused on music and literature, beginning with black spirituals, worksongs, blues, jazz, and rhyme and blues. With literature I covered Wright, Ellison, and Baldwin, the poetry of Hughes and the sermons of James Weldon Johnson. That was an opening to the value of speaking to the socio-cultural needs of those incarcerated. I would participate in such programs for the incarcerated, youth and adults, in the Richmond, Virginia metropolitan area.

With my WSU activist-scholar experience under my belt, I was eager for the Richmond, Virginia urban experience and to begin my academic role as Coordinator of African American Studies and Assistant Professor of Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University.