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Contributors

Brandi Thompson Summers
Johanna Bockman
Lynda Laughlin
Lester R. Kurtz
J.L. Johnson

Write for *The Sociologist*.
Send us your insights.
sociologymilestones@gmail.com.

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CONTENTS

H Street and the Aesthetics of Cool

Brandi Thompson Summers
Virginia Commonwealth University

What are we to make of this image of a clinched raised fist? An image that resonates with a distinct global history; an image that the brewery's owners said derives from their desire to represent Washington, D.C. as a neighborhood and not merely the nation's capital.
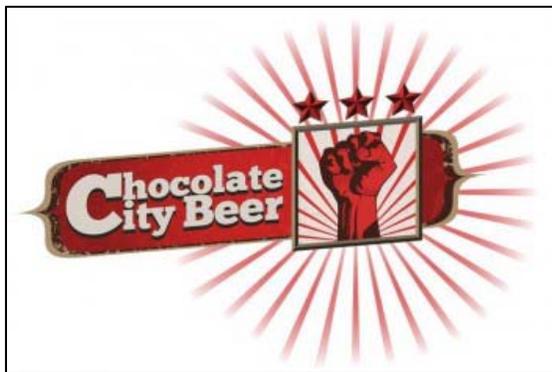
Chocolate City Beer logo 2013. Source: Brandi T. Summers.

For those familiar with the D.C. flag, this logo directly references the emblematic "stars and bars." But the clinched fist is widely recognized as a radical leftist symbol of solidarity, defiance, unity, and most notably resistance among oppressed people. While the redness of the fist might lead us to consider its relationship to the "red salute"— a symbolic marker of power and solidarity amongst communists and socialists — its association with D.C., the first *Chocolate City,* invokes us to see the fist as a nod to the black freedom movement tradition.

It conjures memories of the black power salute, of John Carlos and Tommie Smith raising their fists in Mexico City, of power to the people.

In the Chocolate City Beer logo, blackness is defined as edgy and cool, creative, resistant, unruly, and commercial. The absence of an actual black fist allows the red fist to operate in aesthetic proximity to blackness. While the red fist asks us to imagine its symbolic universality, the image need not be black in order to evoke blackness.

As an aesthetic, blackness no longer relies on the presence of black people, or in this case black limbs for social traction. Aesthetics define blackness in particular ways and open up space for play with the fluidity and instability of blackness especially when black bodies are not present.

> …the current post-Chocolate City aesthetic markets a depoliticized black cool in the multicultural neoliberal city.

Reimagining H Street

I use this piece to think about how blackness structures the design and execution of rebuilding and reimagining the H Street, NE corridor — a Washington, D.C. neighborhood in transition. As D.C. undergoes demographic change, I want to focus our attention on how the built environment informs how we think about racial aesthetics.

What is interesting about a place like D.C. is that it is not only recognized as "chocolate" because of the bodies that inhabit it, but because of its juxtaposition with a power structure steeped in white privilege (white politicians, white residents). In other words, *D.C.* is black and *Washington* is white.

> The production of an official history attracts visitors and justifies the deployment of diversity as a construct that might not deter white residents and patrons.

The Chocolate City label originally referred to Washington, D.C., but *Parliament's* 1975 song of the same name opened up the designation to include cities like Newark, Gary, and Los Angeles where blacks became the majority population as white residents fled to the suburbs.

But as I noted at the outset, the concept of "Chocolate City" is linked to the political and cultural imaginations of the civil rights and black power eras. The Chocolate City of the funk era referenced an aesthetic of black empowerment and nationalism in music, fashion, politics, and the visual arts.

In contrast, the current *post-*Chocolate City aesthetic markets a depoliticized black cool in the multicultural, neoliberal city — a dynamic the Chocolate City Beer insignia captures all too well. Where diversity was once invoked to emphasize the need for federal programs that enhanced the life chances of an entire demographic, the concept of diversity is now frequently used to emphasize opportunities for individuals to accrue cherished commodities and individual advantages.

Diversity is Cool

The consequence of this widespread shift in the value of diversity is that people can associate themselves with the nobility that derives from the term's social justice origins, while partaking in its more recent iterations of what it means to be "cool" and "hip." In the context of diversity's shift from a social justice ethic to an aesthetic lifestyle amenity, blackness enhances rather than threatens the esteem of a given neighborhood (Modan 2012).

District government agencies, private developers, historic preservationists, and others work together to provide official representations of a past that existed before H Street was "chocolate," as a way to promote and develop the space.

> The history of H Street tells the story of a black space that underwent significant challenges to achieve the political and economic infrastructure that enabled it to thrive.

The production of an official history attracts visitors and justifies the deployment of diversity as a construct that might not deter white residents and patrons. Diversity becomes a cherished asset. Overall, I highlight a shift away from black enterprise and aesthetics on H Street to think about the ways that governing, markets, space, and style are now organized around diversity.

This matters because the narratives are about the diversity of the H Street corridor, how bodies move through this space, what places and people are cool, safe or unsafe, and the kinds of establishments where the bodies belong.

From H Street to Great Street

Recognized as one of three commercial districts devastated by riots following the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the H Street, NE corridor was named *USA Today*'s top "up and coming" neighborhood as well as one of

Forbes magazine's "Hippest Hipster" destinations in 2011. The history of H Street tells the story of a black space that underwent significant challenges to achieve the political and economic infrastructure that enabled it to thrive.
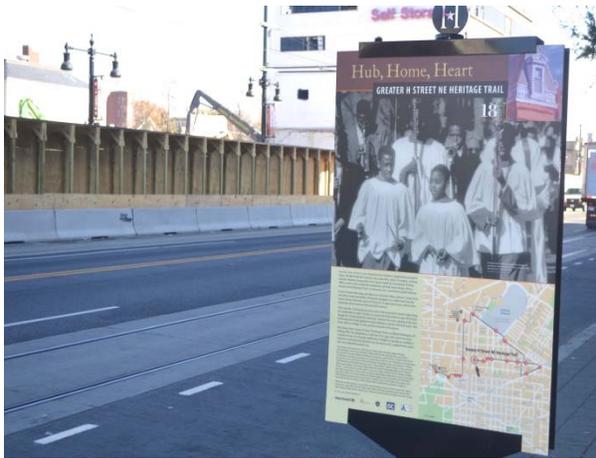
Greater H Street Northeast Heritage Trail Signpost. Source: Brandi T. Summers.

The area did not suffer from lack of attention or a commitment of funds, but a lack of sustainable options to support the people who lived, worked and shopped there.

In the years following the 1968 riots, the H Street, NE corridor was deemed, particularly in the media as blighted, unwelcoming, and teeming with transient people who did not care about their own condition or the conditions of their environment. Although the downfall of the H Street corridor was due to several factors, negative renderings of blackness prevented the restoration of H Street as a renewed black retail space. Prior to the 1950s, the H Street, NE corridor provided numerous retail options, eateries, and public spaces to black residents that were central to economic and social life.

The rebuilding of H Street was seen as an opportunity for the black community to control the money, jobs, and political power.

Back then, H Street was known as a sustainable black-business downtown district because segregation laws prevented black patrons from shopping at downtown D.C. businesses. Before the 1968 riots, it was the most significant commercial activity center within the greater Capital East area. The corridor was second only to downtown D.C. in the production of jobs and tax revenue.

By the 1960s, H Street suffered at the hands of suburbanization in America, when mostly white, middle class residents left the cities for the suburbs and used malls as their main shopping source. A combination of state and corporate divestment, abandonment, and disparaging representations of urban markets and black consumers left urban commercial corridors like H Street to falter.

Post-riot H Street underwent significant challenges in its rebuilding. Of the three riot corridors, none were so slow in redeveloping as H Street. As the neighborhood grew increasingly poorer and blacker, the closure of several key retail stores in the 30 years following the riots left large gaps in its streetscape.

Plans for the redevelopment of H Street in the late 1960s and 1970s originally included significant involvement and decision-making power in the hands of local groups led by black residents and community leaders. The rebuilding of H Street was seen as an opportunity for the black community to control the money, jobs, and political power.

Black residents living in the area wanted the corridor to be planned by black developers, built by black architects, and refreshed with local black-owned businesses, who they believed could meet the needs of the predominantly working-class black neighborhood (Kaiser 1968, *The Washington Post* 1968).

…cultural consumption intensifies social and economic inequities by valorizing diversity in particular areas and making previously undesirable spaces popular.

But plans to refurbish H Street as a black-developed and black-operated commercial corridor were later deemed economically impractical and unfeasible.[1] It was not until the Williams administration in the early 2000s that changes took hold and H Street attracted a number of investors and developers to transform the neighborhood.

The Williams administration particularly stressed neoliberal development strategies that encouraged economic growth through the proliferation of public-private partnerships.

Rather than emphasize an expanded role for the local government, several of the programs introduced by the administration, like the Main Streets and Great Streets initiatives, largely supported entrepreneurial efforts towards the growth of small businesses. These initiatives limited the role of the local government in providing various services for its residents, in favor of free market approaches to economic development.

Judging by the content and dramatic increase in media attention, commercial development and capital to the corridor, current value of H Street is abstractly conceived through material and symbolic representations of diversity, "hipness" or "coolness." These discursive representations affect the resources the area receives.

Resources like policing, surveillance, national media attention, and visits by political figures and celebrities increase as the area is deemed more desirable. The importance of diversity and cultural consumption intensifies social and economic inequities by valorizing diversity in particular areas and making previously undesirable spaces popular.

Again, renewed energy around the development of H Street in the 2000s placed particular emphasis on the corridor as a welcoming space of diversity.

The introduction of retail businesses like *Whole Foods Market,* that serve an upper-middle class customer base, shows us the ways H Street has come to resemble other contemporary "revitalized" urban spaces.

Diversity became a positive characteristic for business and tourism along H Street. National brands and local public-private partnership organizations strategically incorporated diversity as part of their official language to justify their introduction to the space — signaling affective cohesion with the neighborhood. For example, diversity is conceptually incorporated as part of the vision for H Street's future in D.C.'s 2004 official strategic plan (D.C. Office of Planning 2004:32).

> ...the neighborhood is both seen and aesthetically valued by corporate interests as a diverse space.

Business offerings on 8th and H Street NE. Source: Brandi T. Summers.

Similarly, marketing materials produced by the Washington, D.C. Economic Partnership (a public-private partnership that promotes business opportunities in D.C.) highlight cultural diversity as integral to the roots of H Street and its contemporary growth.

The introduction of retail businesses like Whole Foods Market, that serve an upper-middle class customer base, shows us the ways H Street has come to resemble other contemporary "revitalized" urban spaces.

Whole Foods uses diversity as a way to accrue value for both its brand and the H Street's brand. A 2013 press release announcing the new store references the corridor's diversity as an attribute and implies that communities with diverse, commodifiable cultural opportunities can benefit both old and new residents. So, in the case of H Street, the neighborhood is both seen and aesthetically valued by corporate interests as a diverse space.

The Corner: Racial Aesthetics and Politics of Belonging

The concept of diversity is not necessarily rooted in demographic representation, but in the visibility of racial difference. This is where we can point to blackness as a necessary component of diversity, as it indicates our successful transition into a post-racial social climate. Therefore black bodies must be there in order to make the space diverse.

In particular, the 8th Street and H Street intersection at the center of the corridor is an important site for the corralling of blackness and managing the excess of blackness in a specific location.

The intersection is now the city's busiest bus transfer point, the number one bus transfer location in the District, and is a central gathering place for lower-middle class and working-class black city dwellers.

> Blackness serves to make claims on the success and durability of the post-racial.

The corner served as an important junction from the early to mid-twentieth century when the streetcar was originally in service, which led to the commercial cluster that developed at the intersection of 8th and H Streets. This corner continues to be a center of activity and a meeting place along the corridor. But it has also had a particularly sordid history.

It was from this location that the "Eighth and H Street Crew" got its name. Sixteen members of the "crew" were charged with the 1984 slaying of 49-year old Catherine Fuller — often described as the

most brutal murder in District history. Attempts to relieve this intersection from its reputation as the gathering place of the Eighth and H Street Crew came in the form of several plans for commercial redevelopment.

The H Street Connection shopping center that begins at the southeast corner of 8th and H Streets opened in 1987 and was heralded at that time as the centerpiece of redevelopment efforts on H Street.

Because the intersection is known for its high volume of black bus riders who travel across the river to Anacostia, blackness can be contained on this corner as the riders socialize and wait for their transit. The corner is surrounded by several businesses including a corner store, athletic shoe store, a convenience store, McDonald's, a Chinese food carryout, a liquor store, and a check cashing facility.

As the rest of corridor starts to cater to more affluent consumers, these black bodies are invited to stay not for long, to share the corridor only momentarily, spatially or economically.

What happens as a result of H Street's remaking is that… blackness is transformed to become palatable and consumable while some of its edginess remains.

The presence of black bodies congregating around 8th Street and H Street provides evidence of the corridor as a welcoming, inviting space for all, while maintaining a bit of edginess and perceived danger. Blackness serves to make claims on the success and durability of the post-racial.

Repurposing the Neighborhood

In the redevelopment of the H Street, NE commercial corridor, *diversity* is used to attract capital, customers, and tourists to the area. Diversity discourse makes blackness one of many inflections while H Street acts as a neoliberal zone that sustains reforms and affirms blackness by using it as an entrepreneurial machine of development.

It is through the work of diversity that H Street emerges as a hip, yet edgy, district. Nevertheless, while diversity evokes difference, it does not provide commitment to redistributive justice.

One of the white owners explained that the decision to use the clinched fist…came from their desire to use "iconic images" rather than any direct reference to race or black political history.

In light of H Street's violent past, the narrative describing its history reinvents itself as multicultural in order to write the violent times away and repurpose the neighborhood for a new market and a new time. Racism and other forms of inequality that take place here are not overt, but subtle, and euphemisms like *creativity,* and *cultural vibrancy* can be used to disinvite.

Black excess can be unwieldy if not disciplined, managed, contained or deployed for proper use.

What happens as a result of H Street's remaking is that the area hasn't been purged of symbols of blackness; instead blackness is transformed to become palatable and consumable while some of its edginess remains.

I want to close by returning to the Chocolate City Beer insignia. Critics openly complained about the name of the company when it was discovered that the now defunct brewery was the brainchild of two white men who invited two black men to join the partnership. In response to this scrutiny, one of the white owners explained that the decision to use the clinched fist as their logo came from their desire to use "iconic images" rather than any direct reference to race or black political history (Kitsock 2011).

The "chocolate" in Chocolate City may no longer reference blackness as in the moment of integration, civil rights, and black nationalism, but instead refers to post-racial America, at a time when black aesthetics and diversity discourse can be deployed independently of black people.

Notes

1. In fact, on May 10, 1968, one month after the riots, then City Council Chairman, John W. Hechinger released a statement rejecting plans for H Street, NE to be rebuilt expressly by black people. Hechinger, whose corporation later built the Hechinger Mall at the eastern edge of H Street in 1981, said plans to rebuild and run riot-torn areas promoted an "ideology of two separate societies," therefore these ought to be rebuilt by all races.

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3. Kaiser, Robert. 1968. "Burned Out in Riots, Many Owners Won't Reopen." *The Washington Post*, August 1, pp. H3.
4. Kitsock, Greg. 2011. "Beer: Chocolate City Starts Small, Plans to Stay That Way." *The Washington Post*, September 21, pp. E05
5. Modan, Gabriella. 2008. "Mango Fufu Kimchi Yucca: The Depoliticization of 'Diversity' in Washington, D.C. Discourse." *City & Society* 20(2):188-221.

Global Commodity Chains, Social Inequalities and Social Movements
The Past and Present of World-Systems Research

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A Variety of Globalizations

Johanna Bockman
George Mason University

Last month at a local urban studies discussion group, University of the District of Columbia geography professor Amanda Huron talked about the grassroots work of Washington Inner-city Self Help (WISH) to stop the displacement of poor residents from the District. In the early 1990s, several WISH members brought their experiences to South Africa, building connections of solidarity with poor black residents there.

At the end of Huron's talk, an audience member asked, "but how did poor people in South Africa know about WISH, a very local organization run by poor people in Washington, D.C.?" This was before the internet. How did this connection happen?

The question might seem naïve, but in fact highlights the deep problems with our notion of globalization and, as I argue below, the deep problems that sociologists have studying globalization.

> Often, sociologists listen to these new voices or data in such a way that only confirms what is already known in European or American sociology.

While sociologists are some of the best scholars of globalization (for example, Saskia Sassen, Immanuel Wallerstein, Philip McMichael, Janet Abu-Lughod, Ulrich Beck, Jennifer Bair, Patricio Korzeniewicz), sociologists in the United States have traditionally studied the *United States*. As a result, sociologists who study countries other than the United States generally must present their work within a globalization framework, in order to give their work sociological significance in the eyes of more mainstream sociologists. I know this personally because I began my career studying Hungary and Eastern Europe more generally.

Source: https://pixabay.com

On the job market, I only achieved success by converting myself into a scholar of globalization. Academic sociologists who do not specialize in the U.S. are assumed to be the natural teachers of globalization courses, even though Americanists and the United States also, *obviously*, exist in a global world. I have long enjoyed teaching globalization courses, even though globalization studies was a fundamentally new literature and field for me, as it would be for someone studying U.S. topics.

Additive Sociology

In my graduate globalization course last semester, we read for the first time *Connected Sociologies* by Gurminder K. Bhambra, a sociologist at the University of Warwick in the U.K.[1] Her book was a revelation to me and the students. Bhambra criticizes a whole range of theories — theories of modernity, capitalist modernity, modernization, dependency, world systems, cosmopolitanism, global civil society,

globalization, and so on — for assuming that the modern, the cosmopolitan, and the global are European in origin. The rest of the world is perceived as not yet global or just becoming global, thus only gradually becoming relevant to sociology.

By recognizing how sociological knowledge about the nature of modernity is connected to imperialist violence, we can then begin to perceive other connections not visible in conventional sociology.

Bhambra argues that more recent global sociology does not overcome these assumptions because it remains *additive*: sociology merely needs to be supplemented by additional data, voices, and knowledges from other countries. Often, sociologists listen to these new voices or data in such a way that only confirms what is already known in European or American sociology.

According to Bhambra (2014:108), privileging of European or American sociology constrains "the possibilities for a truly global sociology, either intellectually or practically." Therefore, Bhambra argues, sociology must be fundamentally transformed to understand not only the present but also the past and the future of our global world.

To do so, Bhambra calls for "connected sociologies." American sociologists' focus on the United States — methodological nationalism — has obscured the centuries of global connectedness of sociology and the United States. Much of early American sociology came from nineteenth-century Germany, which was an empire practicing colonial violence and

exploitation until 1918 and thus was very much connected globally. The same could be said for British, French, American, and other national sociologies, which have also always been global in this imperial sense. Globalization is not new. Bhambra (2014:3) wants to reconnect sociology as the study of modernity with the imperialism — "the historical connections generated by processes of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation" — that made this modernity possible.

By recognizing how sociological knowledge about the nature of modernity is connected to imperialist violence, we can then begin to perceive other connections not visible in conventional sociology. We should thus practice a new kind of sociology.

The Global Connections

With this new sociology, we might then see the connections between WISH and poor residents in South Africa as part of a long history of an "always-already" global world. I believe that such connections go beyond Bhambra's focus on "the historical connections generated by processes of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation" toward a globalization driven by people outside of Europe and the United States.

From the 1950s, for example, developing countries forged the Non-Aligned Movement, a global movement to build what they called a New International Economic Order independent from Western Europe, the United States, and the "developed" world.

The Non-Aligned Movement still meets today. Perceiving the enormous range of connections must change our sociological understandings of globalization — from globalization seen as recent or European-based to a variety of globalizations — but also must change the conventional American sociology practiced here in Washington,

D.C.[2] William Julius Wilson, Loic Wacquant, Douglas Massey, Nancy Denton, and others have demonstrated how segregation, advanced marginalization, and poverty function in the United States. If we practiced "connected sociologies" beyond the study of local social capital, we might discover the participation of the poor in a variety of globalizations.

…Universities have been promoting globalization studies as part of their global branding. This provides a place for some of us in the university, but confined within the narrow and seemingly neo-imperial space…

We could look at the earlier global connections of the members of now-declining labor unions, members of churches in solidarity with those in Central America, the members of African drumming and dance groups, and the overlapping worlds of VISTA and Peace Corps workers. And these are just a few examples from D.C. We might then explore how these people became provincialized, made local or even isolated. Were they provincialized or are they just perceived this way?

Truly Global

These connections become apparent through practicing unusual forms of American sociology. Extremely few sociologists take part in the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies or other area-studies associations like the African Studies Association, the Latin American Studies Association, or the Middle East Studies Association. I have found that participating in such associations is not only additive, not only enriches my

sociological work, but also exposes me to connections and globalizations outside those originating from Western Europe or the United States, as well as to scholars from these regions working on the cutting edge of global transformations and exploring concerns unknown to most American sociologists.

This exposure makes my practice of sociology strange in the U.S. context. It does not fit in any conventional sense. Those sociologists and other social scientists practicing area-studies know how many of their colleagues perceive their area-studies research and teaching as superfluous, at best as some additional information about another country and at worst as completely irrelevant to mainstream sociology. Yet, area-studies are essential for understanding globalization.

Thankfully, universities have been promoting globalization studies as part of their global branding. This provides a place for some of us in the university, but confined within the narrow and seemingly neo-imperial space recognized by university presidents promoting global mindsets and taking advantage of global opportunities to create value.

A "truly global sociology" both intellectually and practically would go beyond these narrow confines and the narrow confines of conventional American sociology through area-studies and other means to perceive the many global connections of seemingly provincial and local people in our "always-already" global world.

Notes

1. Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2014. *Connected Sociologies*. New York: Bloomsbury.
2. Elsewhere, I have argued that the Non-Aligned Movement, the Second World, and the Third World more broadly worked hard to create a global economy in the face of active resistance by the United States and other current and former colonial powers. See Bockman, Johanna. 2015. "Socialist Globalization against Capitalist Neocolonialism: the Economic Ideas behind the NIEO," *Humanity* 6(1): 109-128.

Who is an *Applied* Sociologist?

Lynda Laughlin
U.S. Census Bureau

Although teaching and conducting research are the dominant career paths for professional sociologists, other forms of employment are growing in both number and significance outside of the academy. According to the American Sociological Association (ASA), a quarter of graduates who earn PhDs in sociology go on to work in non-academic positions. Sociologists work closely with economists, political scientists, social workers, and many others reflecting a growing appreciation of sociology's contributions to interdisciplinary analysis and action.

On October 15, 2015 DCSS hosted a discussion of the topic *What Do Applied Sociologists Do* at George Washington University. Panelists included: Andrew Clarkwest of ThinkShift Collaborative, John Czajka of Mathematica Policy Research, Diana Elliott of Pew Charitable Trusts, Theresa Goedeke of U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Christopher Tamborini of U.S. Social Security Administration. The panelists shared their experiences from a variety of nonacademic job markets. Below is a summary of their remarks.

Understanding the World from the Ground Up

Panelists affirmed that sociological training provides the skills to examine issues from the ground up. For example, in her position at the Pew Charitable Trusts, Elliot works with a team of survey researchers, economists, and sociologists to understand if and how Americans save money. Survey data often obscures the complicated relationship Americans have with money, leading to misleading assumptions about short-term economic security as well as longer-term economic growth. Elliot's training in sociology provides her the necessary analytic skills to understand American debt — how families hold it, their attitudes toward it, and how it relates to their overall financial health.

….students should consider taking classes in longitudinal analysis in order to work with large data sets which are used by federal and local government agencies to conduct program analysis.

Tamborini, Czajka, and Clarkwest agreed that their sociological training gave them the tools they needed to go beyond general survey data in order to understand the underlying reasons of individual or group actions; for instance, why individuals use (or don't use) government programs. Czajka noted that sociology provides the critical thinking skills necessary to conduct focus group interviewing, construct survey questions, as well as formulate research questions.

The Public Impact

Unlike the other panelists whose workplaces employ a number of people with social science backgrounds, Goedeke is only one of two sociologists working in her office; she said that unlike her colleagues who are trained in the hard or physical sciences, her training has helped her team understand the how individuals relate with their physical environment. Goedeke has helped inform environmental planning related to natural and man-made disasters as well as general land management.

All of the panelists noted that their sociological training has made it possible to discuss complex issues with members of the public, policy makers, and educators and see *a real public impact*. This is not always possible in the academic setting.

Geographic Information Systems or GIS is becoming a critical skill because more and more data are collected with geographic markers.

Marketing your Sociology Degree

Panelists revealed that they often felt constrained when writing about empirical findings in public reports, although sociological theory always played a role in how their research was directed. The panelists said that it is sometimes difficult to explain to others what sociologists do without naming sociological theories or using academic jargon. Unlike other professions, such as economists, most job postings that sociologists qualify for are not directly marketed to a *sociologist.* These postings rarely use "sociologist" in the job title.

In fact, none of the panelists use "sociologist" in their job title. Panelists suggested that job seekers search for different types of positions including social science analyst, statistician, project manager, policy analyst, research associate, qualitative analyst, or research coordinator. Given the vague job titles, sociologists are competing with economists and other candidates with social science degrees for a limited number of jobs. However, many of the skills sociology students learn in undergraduate or graduate school are exactly the types of skills employers are looking for. Sociological training fosters critical skills

that prove to employers that you are a problem solver. Advanced sociological training often includes training in quantitative and qualitative methods.

Source: https://pixabay.com

Research Skills

Panelists stressed that sociologists need to highlight their research skills to employers. Panelists noted that quantitative skills are often the most desired skills because employers need staff that can gather basic data and organize the information in useful ways.

Don't rule out applying for jobs with local or state governments, cautioned the panelists. Clarkwest and Goedeke mentioned that their first jobs were with local government agencies and they were hired because of their empirical and survey skills. These are great entry-level job skills for students with undergraduate or graduate degree. Panelists were also asked what classes they wish they had taken more of in graduate school. Tamborini suggested that students should consider taking classes in longitudinal analysis in order to work with large data sets which are used by federal and local government agencies to conduct program analysis. Tamborini also said federal and research agencies are looking at how to take advantage of large administrative datasets to supplement survey data.

Several panelists mentioned that Geographic Information Systems or GIS is becoming a critical skill because more and more data are collected with geographic

markers. Panelists also suggested learning to use some of the newer statistical graphing packages such as R or Tableau.

Networking and Professional Identity

Networking is just as critical for applied sociologists as it is for academic sociologists. Czajka suggested joining local sociological or professional associations related to your research areas. The ASA also has a section on Sociological Practice and Public Sociology. Local workshops provide great networking opportunities. Internships are a great way for students to gain valuable work experience, and can lead to permanent employment. Students can determine the appeal of non-academic work through an internship.

Elliott said she recently attended a meetup to network and learn more about using open source data to understand social and economic trends in the District of Columbia.

Sociology is often perceived as an academic profession, but employers do place a strong value in sociological training. The number of sociologists employed by the government or research organizations often pales in comparison to economists, but panelists clearly demonstrated that sociologists are working in a variety of settings and contributing to solving social and economic issues. As long as sociology graduates understand the various career paths available to them and learn to effectively highlight their skills, their career options are many.

Additional Resources
1. Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology. https://www.aacsnet.net/
2. ASA Section on Sociological Practice and Public Sociology https://sspps.wordpress.com/
3. Public Sociology Association, Department of Sociology, George Mason University https://gmupublicsoci.wordpress.com/
4. USAJOBS, the federal government's official jobs site. www.usajobs.gov

Structures of Violence

Engaging the Public Imagination

Saturday, April 9, 2016

5th Annual Public Sociology Conference

George Mason University Arlington, VA

Fighting Violence with Gandhi and Sociology

Lester R. Kurtz
George Mason University

"They hired me to kill people, so I can't remember people's names," an inebriated gentleman across the aisle explained to us after his companion complained that he had called him by the wrong name one recent morning at Starbucks. He had seen years of combat, he's "the one they called in when someone needed help." He was now clearly the one in need of help rather than the rescuing hero. As I write, the Commander-in-Chief of the world's largest military has teared up while talking about the deaths of first graders in a school shooting, and North Korea has claimed to have tested a hydrogen bomb.

Fighting violence has been a top priority on my intellectual agenda for decades. Max Weber said we have to wrestle with the demon of our time — for him it was bureaucratization, rationalization; for me, it is violence. Years ago, wanting to delve deeper into the causes of violence and its remedies, I combined my interest in the sociology of religion with a newer one in the arms race and the problem of violence.

I turned to one of my favorite authors from my anti-Vietnam War college days: Mahatma Gandhi. Off I went to India for a year of interviews and field work, reading and searching.

The Warrior and The Pacifist

From studying Gandhi's legacies, I have learned this: the world's religious and ethical systems present us with contradictory motifs regarding the use of violence and force: the warrior and the pacifist (Kurtz 2008).

The *warrior* believes in a sacred duty to use violence on behalf of a higher cause.

The *pacifist*, however, believes it is a sacred duty not to harm or kill others. These contradictory motifs, internalized by many, precipitate a structural ambivalence in various social roles (Merton and Barber 1976). Gandhi's nonviolent activist embraces both motifs and transcends them, fighting without killing.

Source: https://pixabay.com
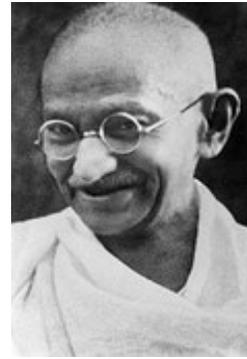
Both warrior and pacifist roles are fraught with dilemmas. The warrior knows there are moral problems with killing, and much combat research suggests killing under any circumstance causes psychological harm to the perpetrator (Grossman and Siddle 2008; MacNair 2002; Collins 2009) and high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among combat veterans (like our Starbucks friend) provide an indicator.

…religion becomes a powerful and widely available resource for justifying the use of violence. Violence becomes sacralized and is transformed from a sin to a duty…

When I interviewed the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, he insisted that humans were born nonviolent — our first act is to seek

nurture at our mother's breast — and we have to be taught to be violent. The pacifist, however, may be rendered ineffective in the face of injustice, paralyzed by concerns about harming others if she or he acts to address a problem. Sitting on the sidelines of history, the pacifist's moral stance paradoxically fails to take the offensive and challenge evil, thus creating another moral dilemma.

The Nonviolent Activist

Because the warrior has to account morally for his or her questionable behavior to himself or herself and others (Bandura 1999), religion becomes a powerful and widely available resource for justifying the use of violence. Violence becomes sacralized and is transformed from a sin to a duty; under such circumstances, what is usually forbidden, becomes obligatory (Girard 1977).

Personal and political dilemmas about violence are intertwined.

Gandhi addresses the shortcomings of both motifs with the *nonviolent activist*; his fusion of contradictory moral teachings results in a burst of cultural creativity that draws on ancient faith traditions but offers alternatives for the future. It diffuses globally in human rights and pro-democracy movements; it has led to the fall of the apartheid system in South Africa, the collapse of dictatorships, and significant cultural and policy shifts worldwide over the ensuing decades.

Ambivalence about Violence

Fighting violence becomes acutely problematic in the nuclear age, in which, Jonathan Schell (2002:195) argues "morality and action inhabit two separate, closed realms. All strategic sense becomes moral nonsense, and vice versa, and we are left with the choice of seeming to be either strategic or moral idiots." Nonviolent civil resistance, Gandhi argued, allows one to be both morally and strategically smart. This ambivalence about violence and Gandhi's struggle against it emerged quickly in my research on his legacies.
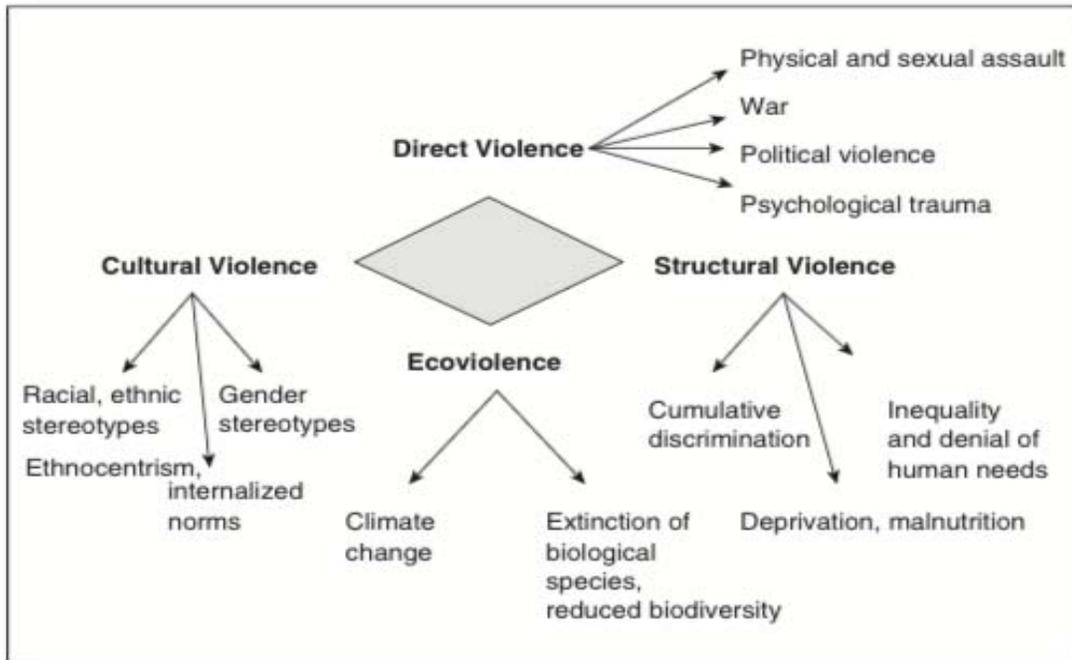

Gandhi's social theory was created out of and resulted in his praxis: mobilizing creative collective action against multiple forms of violence.

When Gandhian-trained Jawaharlal Nehru transitioned from nonviolent civil resistance to governance, he found himself caught in a classic Weberian dilemma: "he who lets himself in for politics, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers" (Weber 1948:123). As soon as he took office, the atrocities of communal violence "required" the resistor turned prime minister to send troops to quell the violence. The first interview I conducted in India was with a seasoned Gandhian activist, who declared Nehru was the devil who had betrayed the Mahatma. Yet, when the Chinese invaded the Indian border in 1962, critics claimed Nehru had failed to build up India's military. He could please neither warriors nor pacifists.

John Kenneth Galbraith, President Kennedy's ambassador to India who became close to Nehru, told me that the Chinese invasion destroyed Nehru; he died a few months later. Personal and political dilemmas about violence are intertwined.

Types of Violence

Gandhi's multi-faceted fight against violence took place on two "fronts:" on the one hand was nonviolent resistance of the system he opposed (British colonialism) and

Physical and sexual assault

War

Direct Violence → Political violence

Psychological trauma

Cultural Violence

Structural Violence

Ecoviolence

Racial, ethnic stereotypes   Gender stereotypes

Ethnocentrism, internalized norms

Cumulative discrimination   Inequality and denial of human needs

Climate change   Extinction of biological species, reduced biodiversity   Deprivation, malnutrition

The Violence Diamond (Kurtz 2015), adapted from Galtung's (1990) Violence Triangle. Source: Lester R. Kurtz.

on the other, his "constructive program" that involved building up alternative institutions that would serve the new society after the old one had fallen (an aspect too often neglected by today's social critics).

In doing so, he addressed all of the major types of violence later conceptualized by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung (1990): structural violence (harm caused by social structures), cultural violence (racism, imperialism, discrimination), and direct violence (what we usually think of as violence). In my conceptual resistance of violence, I have added a fourth side to Galtung's triangle, "ecoviolence," which is violence against the natural environment, which has become more prominent since the publication of Galtung's 25-year-old typology.

Gandhi's social theory was created out of and resulted in his praxis: mobilizing creative collective action against multiple forms of violence. His campaigns against the British Raj (systemic cultural racism and global structural inequality reinforced by the brute force of the British military) were accompanied by campaigns against "untouchability" (the extreme of the caste system) and patriarchy (although I do not think he called it that).

Here is how it worked, taking the two prime examples from his resistance to Empire: the cloth boycott and the Salt March. The former went to the heart of the colonial system of resource extraction (which persists today in relations between "the West" and the "South"). He called on Indians to spin their own clothes and boycott British products, allowing mass direct protests by individuals who could protest the Raj with low-risk daily actions that empowered them to address their own basic needs. The Indian National Congress gave out spinning wheels; recipients could participate in the revolution by spinning their own clothes.

The second iconic campaign was the Salt March, in which he again brought

macro issues to the micro level, marching 240 miles to the Indian Ocean to defy the British monopoly on that basic ingredient for everyday life, and promoting indigenous production of salt from their own natural resources. Arriving on the anniversary of the Amritsar massacre where nonviolent demonstrators had been gunned down by British troops, Gandhi kicked off the final major campaign that facilitated the move to Indian Independence and the eventual unraveling of the colonial system.

If the lessons from Gandhi's struggle against violence are to be better understood and actualized, we need more public sociology. That is at the top of my agenda, and I invite you to join me.

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Star Wars and the Problem of Public Attention

J.L. Johnson
George Washington University

I recently got married, which is how I became an uncle (that role with the vague semblance of parental pride and concern for young children not biologically yours). My wife and I spent our first married holidays in New Hampshire with her parents, where my five-year-old niece Maddy removed her jacket to reveal a *Star Wars* tee shirt. Her grandmother feigned a gush and asked Maddy if she wanted to be Princess Leia. Maddy grew cross. She was not Princess Leia. She was Rey, the pro-feminist protagonist at the heart of Disney's recent continuation of George Lucas's well-known space opera.

There was laughter. My wife and I encouraged her. Quietly to me, Maddy's mom lamented the lack of *Star Wars*-themed girl empowerment toys. For my part, as maybe all newly-weds do in uncertain interaction rituals marking the beginnings of legal-familial-assimilation, I overshared. I told a story about my mom. She is first generation Ecuadoran-American.

….it would be great to have sociological talks about gender without commercial mediation. Sometimes you have to start with *Star Wars*.

She was thirteen when a family friend took her to see *Star Wars* in 1977, and it was her first time seeing a movie, which would become a favorite pastime for her. She saw it at *Uptown*, the historic one-screen theatre on Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C. She often ends her recollection asking me, "Have you gone to Uptown yet?" Over the last year she has added, "Are you excited for *Star Wars*? I wonder if it will show at *Uptown*." It would.

Uptown

I saw it there. It was my first time at *Uptown*. I took joy in retracing my mom's footsteps. After a lifetime of consuming film at labyrinthine mega-cinemas, I bought my ticket, walked onto the faded maroon carpet of the lobby and grinned at the absence of hallways. There is really *one* screen. Trying to imagine my mom's feeling in 1977 was an experience of inversed awe at the quaintness of a single showing.

Pro-feminist character Rey and nonhuman character. Source: www.geekalerts.com.

Then the same teal invitation offered to my girl-aged mom phenomenologically transported me from the same room she had physically inhabited to another galaxy in another time, a galaxy somehow ancient and technologically superior than ours. My mom's highest education is a high school diploma. She wanted to go to college. My grandmother insisted she help at home, which she did for a couple of years. Then she married at nineteen. Knowing those facts, the time between my mom's first

movie and her first child seems galactic. The change of conceptions, expectations and representations of gender between my mom's *Star Wars* and Maddy's *Star Wars* is even more so.

To think in this direction, it helps to look at public sociology as a communicative problem that may be more fraught with a crisis of attention and translation than we realize.

To begin moving our issues out of personalist frames and into civic and collective frames of gender discussion, it would be great to have sociological talks about gender without commercial mediation. Sometimes you have to start with *Star Wars*.

I offer this short autoethnography as a way to juxtapose a symbolic interactionist approach to popular culture and cultural studies, recently exemplified by *Cyberology*, a blog started by sociology doctoral students at the University of Maryland. The site's essay on *The Force Awakens* (Banks 2015) is 1,627 words long but can be drastically shortened with no loss of argument:

"Like a grad student who has not done the reading but contributes anyway, here's a review of a major blockbuster film unseen by the reviewer. It doesn't need to be seen because we only need to look at how it causes hypercommercialism. Films of the future will be sequences of sensationalistic action scenes keyed by utterances from nonhuman characters. The reason being that Hollywood execs prefer technologically enhanced nonhuman characters because you don't pay them salaries and royalties so they more easily make for sellable toys. Not to indict the franchise, but nostalgia blocks us

from recognizing Star Wars as a product of capitalist industrialization (no citation of Horkheimer and Adorno [(1944) 1972]). On a positive note, other media are having a good conversation about the film's diversity.

Mainstream discussion of diversity should be better though, and the fact that diversity sells might be why capitalists do it. Which makes Star Wars a 'successful investment vehicle.' People might notice this once they realize they've put their emotions into such a vapid movie unseen by the reviewer."

Source: https://pixabay.com

Communicative Problem

By Burawoy's fourfold conception of sociology (Burawoy 2007:33), *Cyberology*'s review of *The Force Awakens* is a standard moment of critical sociology. Some of the critique is sound if not new.[1] It might be more challenging to figure out how *The Force Awakens* fits empirically within Buroway's conception of public sociology.

To think in this direction, it helps to look at public sociology as a communicative problem that may be more fraught with a crisis of attention and translation than we realize. Burawoy's (2007:25) first thesis that sociology drifts left while the world moves right may understate this problem. Buroway (2007:30) nods to this fact when he calls for a "sociology of publics…to better appreciate the possibilities and pitfalls of public sociology" that draws from the likes of Park ([1904] 1972), Dewey ([1927] 1954),

Habermas ([1962] 1991) and Fraser (1997), all of whom worried about the commercial structure of public attention at historical moments more amenable to sociology than today.

A rapid expansion of who counts as media partners accompanies the recent shift in power dynamics and changed strategies between social movement organizations and media.

Public Attention

Although rarely cited in this regard, C.W. Mills (1959:171) articulated well the problem of public attention in his concept of the "cheerful robot." People's ability to become balanced, self-educating persons is paramount to forming genuine publics, but Mills (1959:170) took seriously the fact that leisure time is used "to play, to consume, 'to have fun.'" Mills, however, displayed more sympathy than can be found in recent strands of studies of technology and popular culture.

It is not that people are unable to transcend their everyday lives to connect personal troubles to the institutionalized ambitions of capital. Instead, cheerful robot points to the tendency of consumption as one viable solution to relative powerlessness that continues and worsens today.

To use the parlance from one of my fieldsites, even Mills would "meet people where they are at." Mills himself noted that sociologists must begin developing people's sociological imaginations with the mass media.

A somewhat civil orientation toward media is why Mills agreed to appear on television, sadly dying right beforehand.

Today, social movement actors know this all too well. In a changed media landscape that puts self-publishing tools in the hands of activists and flattens the space between them and potential sympathizers, movement actors begin to think organizationally about their relationship to broad audiences and the problem of attention — captured well in what I call communicative mobilization, a concept that may help us consider the promises and challenges of reaching publics outside of the academy.

Shifting Relationships

Communicative mobilization does not conflate advocating for journalistic attention and media of all sorts, helping us secondly index the shifting relationships between movement and media actors. A rapid expansion of who counts as media partners accompanies the recent shift in power dynamics and changed strategies between social movement organizations (SMOs) and media.

In conjunction with self-publication, movement organization actors are thinking about their assumptions of what audiences pay attention to while accessing and shaping all kinds of media.

They may collaborate with cultural producers across the gamut: doing social media, editing scripts, advocating for diverse actors to play diverse characters, providing locations and footage, or participating in promotional campaigns.

Communicative mobilization is a processual concept that moves between media as civic participation in public and media as consumption in "lifestyle enclaves…"

In other words, "factual media" (Alexander 2006:80) may no longer be a sole priority of communicative mobilization for SMOs. It may be scandalous to suggest, but sociologists might consider such a shift as well.[2] In fact, Alexander (2006:82-83) already opened up this theoretical terrain by minimizing the capitalist organization of media, arguing that diverse publics historically contributed a diversity of press on noneconomic issues. This continues to be true. The organizations in my research constantly publish noneconomic issues in digital media. However, in agreement with the bloggers at *Cyberology*, capitalist frames of media and technology deeply structure the work of communicative mobilization and the attention of audiences.

It is a concept that may help us account for the shifting relationships between movement actors, cultural producers and audiences and the changing definitions of gatekeepers…

Against this, Alexander might argue that mass media are constitutional of a civil sphere, ascribing to media a symbolic autonomy. Alexander (2006:75) uses the passive voice in regard to media: "they" populate the civil sphere with the moments, stories and characters like pro-feminist Rey that help us grapple with the social justice or injustice of inclusion and exclusion. Relating media to movements in a bold theory of democratic justice and solidarity, social movements become "civil translations" (Alexander 2006:213) that communicatively push for democratic realization. On this, Alexander is aggressive: "In order to succeed, social movements…orient themselves not only to the state but to such communicative institutions as the mass media, which could mobilize persuasion rather than force" (Alexander 2006:229). At this juncture, it is unclear whether social movements *or media* have pride of place, and there is the matter of evidence that SMO actors actively and strategically mobilize with and against capitalist media. From the point of view of these actors and against Alexander, media do not autonomously fill civil society with democratic issues; contrapositively and against the cyberologists, capitalist media do not automatically exploit cultural dupes.

Communicative mobilization is a processual concept that moves between media as civic participation in public and media as consumption in "lifestyle enclaves" (Bellah et al. 1985:71).

It is a concept that may help us account for the shifting relationships between movement actors, cultural producers and audiences and the changing definitions of gatekeepers between civil society and the public sphere, which should be a concern when considering public sociology's potential for publicity. Additionally, communicative mobilization indexes relationships to other forms of media like film and television that have been ill studied as nonjournalistic gatekeepers of the boundary between sociology and the public sphere.

It may also account for assumptions about audiences and strategies for their attention. Here I end on a note that communicative mobilization is fraught with a tension between ideal public sphere and actual existing public sphere contaminated by capitalist media. And it gets us nowhere telling folks, true or not, that a movie plays Jedi mind tricks on them.

Notes
1. To be clear, I am sympathetic to such criticism, though I think Walter Benjamin is more appropriate to read alongside the film. *A New Hope* (1977) was a

pastiche of Sunday serials and spaghetti westerns whose plotline was copied for *Return of the Jedi* (1983), a plotline that reoccurs in *The Force Awakens* (2015), making it a second derivative of an imitation that nonetheless resonates with diverse audiences.

2. At the least, it would be great to see a study of those sociologists who have written novels and how they conceptualize their audiences and the potential of their novels to deliver sociology. Here I have in mind Richard Sennet's *Palais-Royal* (1987), Todd Gitlin's *Undying* (2010), and Kathy Giuffre's *The Drunken Spelunker's Guide to Plato* (2015).

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