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What is This?
Civic Engagement and Public Sociology: Two “Movements” in Search of a Mission

Mavis Morton¹, Corey Dolgon², Timothy Maher³, and James Pennell³

Abstract
While the tools of civically engaged higher education (service-learning, community-based research, etc.) existed in sociology classes well before the onset of what some call the “civic engagement movement,” they have quickly shifted from margin to center as key building blocks for sociology’s own trend toward public sociology. While we examine the precarious rise of both civic engagement and public sociology, we argue that lacking strong social movements as shaping forces, the social justice potential for both civic engagement and public sociology must come from practitioners’ links to community-based politics and social movement organizing. Such connections still ground teaching and scholarship in the real politics of everyday life: people, institutions, and communities.

Keywords
discipline, community action research, public sociology, teaching, board member

For anyone following recent trends in higher education, the movement toward civically engaged pedagogy and scholarship has been more than simply notable—it’s been ubiquitous. Ever since Ernest Boyer’s “The Scholarship of Engagement” appeared in the mid-1990s (Boyer 1996), more and more colleges and universities have answered the call to encourage, support, and reward faculty embracing community-based research and teaching. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2011; AAC&U):

Civic engagement has become an essential learning goal for institutions throughout higher education. AAC&U believes that recent educational innovations to advance civic engagement, such as thematically linked learning communities, community-based research, collaborative projects, service-learning, mentored internships, reflective experiential learning and study abroad are all helping students advance on this essential learning goal.

In fact, such a claim is not only based on belief, but troves of research now argue strongly (and perhaps definitively) that students involved in community-based projects not only learn...
extensively about the meaning of civic engagement and how to be effective citizens, but they also acquire discipline-specific and interdisciplinary course material more effectively (Bringle and Hatcher 2009; Butin 2003; Ehrlich 2010; Eyler, Giles, and Giles 1999; Jacoby 2009).

While the tools of civically engaged higher education (service-learning, community-based research, etc.) existed in sociology classes well before the onset of what some call the “civic engagement movement” (Hollander and Saltmarsh 2000; Kezar 2005), they have quickly shifted from margin to center as key building blocks for sociology’s own trend toward “public sociology.” As defined by Michael Burawoy (2004b: 104), public sociology is:

a sociology that seeks to bring sociology to publics beyond the academy, promoting dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society, placing the values to which we adhere under a microscope. What is important here is the multiplicity of public sociologies, reflecting the multiplicity of publics—visible and invisible, thick and thin, active and passive, local, national and even global, dominant and counter publics. The variety of publics stretches from our students to the readers of our books, from newspaper columns to interviews, from audiences in local civic groups such as churches or neighborhoods, to social movements we facilitate. The possibilities are endless.

In the past decade, despite a healthy dose of professional and political criticism, the movement toward public sociology has produced dozens of books, hundreds of peer-reviewed articles, and over 150 graduate programs that offer degrees specifically in one form or another of public sociology.

As civic engagement and public sociology achieve certain ascendancy, however, many of the political engagements and progressive movements that inspired them (civil rights, women’s and gay liberation, peace and environmental, etc.) have waned (Epstein 2001; see also Omni and Winant 1994; Staggenborg and Verta 2005; Woodward and Woodward 2009). Meanwhile, the processes of institutionalization and formalization continue to act as conservative forces that depoliticize or neutralize progressive movements within higher education (Gaye 2009; Washburn 2005). While scholars have well documented the institutional impact of these forces, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) has pondered the eventual impact of mainstreaming and “professionalization” among progressive sociology (or by extension any progressive academic enterprise):

What happens when radicals get jobs at Wisconsin, Berkeley, and other major universities? What happens when their articles are published by the American Sociological Review and their books are published by the University of California Press? What happens when their income rises significantly and they no longer have to deal with the threat of insecurity, instability, and unemployment? What happens, in short, when they join the sociological elite? (P. 113)

The authors of this article contend that the answers to such questions characterize the crossroads now faced by movements for, and practitioners of, civic engagement and public sociology. Will these efforts and their advocates continue to drift toward the political conservatism of theoretical abstraction, professional rewards, institutional restrictions, and bureaucratic demands (as many progressive intellectual endeavors have in the past), or can they regain their progressive political mission and again become a force for social justice both within and outside of the academy (Boggs 1993; Williams 1989)?

While we examine the precarious rise of both civic engagement and public sociology in the United States, we argue that lacking strong social movements as shaping forces, the social justice potential for both civic engagement and public sociology must come from practitioners’ links to
community-based politics and social movement organizing. These connections are grounded in teaching and scholarship and in the real politics of everyday life—people, institutions, and communities. In promoting just such a direction for radical sociology, Bonilla-Silva (2006) echoes Marx’s German Ideology suggesting one’s position—where one lives his or her life and does his or her work—shapes one’s consciousness. As Cornell West suggested over a decade ago, to avoid the dilemma of being a progressive intellectual whose professional work is restricted by academia and adds only to the resources and power of elite institutions, faculty must be “critical organic catalysts” functioning inside the academy but remaining grounded outside the academy in “progressive, political organizations and cultural institutions [who are] the most likely agents of social change in America” (West 1993: 27).

This article accepts both Bonilla-Silva’s (1996) and West’s (1993) theoretical and epistemological arguments and offers a few examples for how engaged, public sociologists immerse their own research and teaching in community organizing. Thus, after looking at the ascendency of civic engagement and public sociology in the United States, we explain how particular practitioners’ experiences (written as personal narratives by the practitioners themselves) offer a potential for re-radicalizing these movements now at proverbial crossroads. In doing so, we do not engage with an ongoing debate over science and politics in public sociology or the comparable squabble over scholarly “rigor” and civic engagement itself. Suffice to say that others have critiqued this dichotomy and our own work suggests that the most effective politically infused social science research and teaching is also rigorous in method, theory, and pedagogy (Burawoy 2004; Harding 2008; Restivo and Zenzen 2010). Guiding influences such as feminist and participatory action research models, as well as principled and patient local praxis, offer the best possibility that both civic engagement and public sociology might revitalize their mission and realize their goals of social justice.

A Tale of Two Histories

Civic Engagement and the University

The role of civic engagement in education, particularly higher education, did not begin with Ernest Boyer’s (1996) work. In fact, Boyer himself called upon academia to “reaffirm its historic commitment” to engaged scholarship. He traced the roots of engagement back to the Jeffersonian vision, articulated by Dr. Benjamin Rush, where colleges and universities served as “nurseries of wise and good men” preparing them to lead America’s “peculiar form of government.” These roots later flourished, nurtured by Abraham Lincoln’s historic Land Grant Act of 1862 that linked “higher learning to the nation’s agricultural, technological and industrial revolutions.” And, according to Boyer, the integration of higher education with civic purposes continued throughout the twentieth century: the post-WWI emphasis on federal funding for university research, the G.I. Bill, and the post–civil rights focus on affirmative action and making colleges accessible to non-traditional student populations. One might add the early establishment of ethnic and gender studies during this time as well (Boyer 1996).

Yet, as Boyer (1996) surveyed higher education’s civic engagement landscape in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he noted a significant decline in the relationship between academic work and civic life. Citing Russell Jacoby’s (1987) The Last Intellectuals, he writes:

Being an intellectual has come to mean being in the university and holding a faculty appointment, preferably a tenured one, of writing in a certain style understood only by one’s peers, of conforming to an academic rewards system that encourages disengagement and even penalizes professors whose work becomes useful to nonacademics or popularized as we like to say. (Jacoby 1987)
For Boyer (1996), this resulted in a higher education perceived of as a private benefit, not a public good. Students received credentials and faculty paychecks, but little that went on within the “ivory tower” seemed to influence or even improve the community at large. What ensued were state and federal budget cuts for higher education and a variety of populist (conservative and progressive) revolts against everything from feminist and ethnic studies (often discussed within the ambiguous narrative rubric of “political correctness”) to local university development, gentrification, and the displacement of working-class ethnic and racial neighborhoods adjacent to college campuses (Altbach, Gumport, and Berdahl 1999; Berube 1994; Dolgon 1999; Kerr, Gade, and Kawaoka 1994). Sometimes, the major function of higher education appeared to be providing an ideological whipping post for pundits and politicos with all kinds of agendas.

Ironically, even as Boyer (1996) constructed his argument, movements for greater engagement through things such as service-learning and civic partnerships started spreading around the country. While service-learning “pioneer” Bob Sigmon first published “three principles of service learning” in 1979, by 1989 over 70 organizations consulted with the National Society for Experiential Education to produce 10 “Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning” at the Johnson Foundation’s Wingspread Conference Center in Wisconsin (Sigmon 1990). By the mid-1990s, national networks for service-learning appeared, the Michigan Journal for Community Service Learning started, and dozens of states formed Campus Compact organizations with over 500 college and university members all committing to the goal of civic engagement in higher education. In 1997, the heads of these institutions signed the Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, declaring:

We challenge higher education to re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal. We also challenge higher education to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities. We have a fundamental task to renew our role as agents of our democracy. We will know we are successful by the robust debate on our campuses, and by the civic behaviors of our students. We will know it by the civic engagement of our faculty. We will know it when our community partnerships improve the quality of community life and the quality of the education we provide. (Hollander and Ehrlich 2004: 1)

In other words, while Boyer’s (1996) call for academic civic engagement reinvigorated an important debate, it occurred within an already burgeoning movement for greater democratic and community-related work in higher education.

As most of the “pioneers” in service-learning and civic engagement from the late 1970s and 1980s acknowledge, their experiences with the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s significantly influenced their goals of creating a more practical and politically engaged scholarship and pedagogy. These connections are especially clear in the seminal work by Stanton, Giles, and Cruz (1999), Service Learning: A Movement’s Pioneers Reflect on Its Origins, Practice, and Future. Many pioneers traced back their inspiration for community-engaged teaching to high school experiences with civil rights issues and events such as the freedom rides, sit-ins, and local campaigns around fair speech and equal employment opportunities. As one contributor, Michelle Whitham, explained,

I was truly a child of the sixties. In high school a bunch of my friends got very involved in the civil rights movement. One of them went South to work as a freedom rider and was horribly injured; he had his pelvis shattered and came home crippled . . . he threw out a challenge when he got back. He said, “When are you going to do something? When are you going to get involved?” (Stanton et al. 1999: 38)
By the late 1970s and 1980s, however, the civil rights movement and other social movements declined significantly. While there are many debatable causes for this decline, one notable element (some would say cause and others would argue outcome) was the professionalization of the movement and many of its leaders. On the community end of things, many movement leaders became agency bureaucrats as social movement organizing turned to social movement organizations, often funded by the very government agencies created to address issues raised by protest movements (Piven and Cloward 1978). On the academic side, many successful institutional battles led by non-traditional students resulted in the creation of women’s and ethnic studies and so on. But these initially radical departments and programs quickly professionalized as their battleground became internal issues of curriculum and tenure and less about power in local or national political struggles (Kennedy and Beins 2005; Wallach Scott 2008). Thus, as the civic engagement “movement” is similarly perched to achieve the institutional success of ethnic and women’s studies, the social justice initiatives that motivated it appear to be losing ground to the same conservative forces of bureaucratic, professional, and institutional demands that impacted ethnic and women’s studies (Butin 2010).

Nowhere is this dynamic made clearer than in the questions posed by the Democratic Engagement White Paper published by the New England Resource Center for Higher Education. Lamenting what they perceive as a “stalled” movement for civic engagement on college and university campuses, Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2008: 2) ask:

Are current civic engagement efforts transforming higher education or have they been adopted in ways that do not fundamentally challenge the dominant cultures of higher education institutions and American society? How can the movement best navigate the inherent tension between challenging the status quo and securing legitimacy through accommodation? . . . What sort of institutional commitments are needed to foster civic engagement among students and among academics in order to advance participatory democracy on campus, in the community, and the wider society?

The potential democratic (and we would argue social justice) possibilities encouraged by engagement are neutralized and sometimes undermined by the dominant institutional cultures of higher education. This process has not only evolved in the movement for civically engaged institutions of higher education, but also within the movement for a more publically informed and active discipline of sociology.

A Sociology Connected to the Public

Sociology is inherently and historically a socially engaged discipline whose founders and framers started their efforts with a keen view on the potential impact sociological thinking and acting might have. From Comte to Marx and Engels to Emile Durkheim, from Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois, to C. Wright Mills to the Radical and Feminist Sociology Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the discipline of sociology always engaged with efforts to inform and inspire, not just understand, social change. While more conservative periods existed when “professional” academics called out for “dispassionate” research (although they often linked their efforts to government or corporate funding and patriotic or commercial interests), such periods were always contested, criticized, and eventually transcended by more progressive movements.

In the United States, for example, sociology’s birthplace was as much in the work of community activists at Hull House as it was in the sociological theories and research pursued on the campus of the University of Chicago. Mary Jo Deegan (1988) demonstrated how Jane Addams and Florence Kelley’s book, Hull House Maps and Papers, created a powerful influence on the intellectual work
of sociologists at the University of Chicago. Addams and Kelley (who corresponded often with Friedrich Engels and drew heavily from his work on Manchester and London) compiled massive statistical data and drew sophisticated maps of urban Chicago’s working-class neighborhoods and industrial development. They effectively presented the web of social agencies and labor struggles as well as the art and culture of immigrant communities. More notable, however, was the relationship between their research and their social engagements. As Deegan explains, *Maps and Papers* established many precedents:

The use of mapping as a statistical technique to reveal patterns of social groups; emphasis on the city as a major factor structuring daily lives; the analysis of immigrant groups and their disorganization in the city, primarily as a function of debilitating economic conditions; and a direct link between the work of Hull-House residents and sociologists at Chicago. (P. 48-49; see also Reisch 2009)

Addams and Kelley’s sociological research in Chicago, similar to Du Bois’s efforts in Philadelphia, were carried out as part of an effort to inform and engage community organizing for social change on both local levels (ethnic and immigrant communities) as well as national levels (the labor movement and race relations).

Yet, the men of the Chicago School and other burgeoning sociology programs around the country did much to obscure or denigrate the work of Addams and other community activists. By the 1920s, most sociological efforts had been professionalized within higher education and were dedicated to either corporate and government research or abstract social theorizing. But the economic depression and the social upheaval of the 1930s inspired a new generation of sociologists engaged with social movements and social action. Robert Lynd questioned the alienated and elite knowledge of university settings asking the question, “knowledge for what?” His multi-methodological studies of *Middletown* demonstrated that important information about social problems could not only be gained from close quantitative and qualitative research, but that such work could be used to inform policymaking to address problems. In particular, he and his wife, Helen Lynd, believed that integrated and comprehensive institutional studies could help communities avoid provincial and reactionary approaches to social problems, instead “suggesting the possible utility of a deeper-cutting procedure that would involve a reexamination of the institutions themselves” (Lynd and Lynd 1956: 502; for a brilliant Canadian example, see Smith 2005).

Similarly, a strong relationship to labor organizing, early civil rights activity, and eventually, Popular Front activities brought sociologists and other social scientists back into the heart of political struggles and, in particular, labor organizing. The labor college movement started in the 1920s and 1930s in places such as the Brookwood Labor College in Katonah, NY, and the Commonwealth College in Arkansas and flourished in the 1930s and 1940s. These institutions evolved as prime examples of the growing practical relationship between academics and worker education projects in cities across the country like New York City (The Jefferson School), Detroit (the Workers’ Service Program), Chicago (The Abraham Lincoln School), and especially in California where schools in San Francisco (The California Labor School) and Los Angeles (The Peoples Education Center) counted numerous teachers from the University of California system among their faculty (Denning 1998; Kornbluh 1987; *The Report of Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California* 1947). Among the UC faculty teaching worker education courses were anthropologists such as Harry Hoijer, Paul Radin, and Ralph Beals and psychologists such as Frank Davis, Howard Gilhausen, Leonard Bloom, and Franklin Fearing.

However, hybrid sociologists/social workers like Mary van Kleeck continued to lead the way in using social research and action to play a crucial role in the labor movement’s resurgence as part of Social Work’s Rank and File Movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Van Kleeck’s research on
industrial conditions for women workers in New York City “convinced her that social justice for
the lower classes in general and women in particular was possible only if the objectives of business
were ‘social’ and not ‘individualistic’” (Selmi and Hunter 2001: 79). As radical social workers
engaged a “United Front” approach (a variant of the Communist’s Popular Front strategy), Van
Kleeck emphasized linking sociology (in general) and social work (in particular) to labor organiza-
tion for the benefit of both. In 1936 she wrote that the labor movement bore the responsibility to
support the same policies and politics that social workers “naturally advocate . . . by becoming part
of the labor movement, [social workers] are strengthened in their advocacy, and they may in time
broaden the scope and increase the effectiveness of the trade unions in the development of a social
program” (Van Kleeck 1936: 6).

Toward the end of the decade, even more formal sociologists such as C. Wright Mills critiqued
the growing conservatism, bureaucratization, and elitism within both the academy as well as within
labor itself. In *The New Men of Power*, Mills (1948) explained that labor’s progressive agenda
required:

a rank and file of vigorous workers, a brace of labor intellectuals, and a set of politically alert
labor leaders. There must be the power and there must be the intellect. Yet neither the intel-
lectuals nor the workers at large are in a position to take up an alliance and fight against the
great trend [toward conservatism]. (P. 223)

Such conservative forces impacted both the labor movement and progressives in academia as
well. But it was McCarthyism that provided a subsequently powerful force that rid many universi-
ties of its radical faculty (Schrecker 1996).

Even within the thick shroud of intellectual and political repression created by McCarthyism
and its aftermath, C. Wright Mills continued to write critical and politically influential work.
Meanwhile, sociologists like Alfred McClung Lee (1973) asked their own versions of Lynd’s
“knowledge for what?” by wondering, “sociology for whom?” McClung Lee developed an inter-
disciplinary and humanist approach to sociology that drew power from the growing social move-
ments of the late 1950s and 1960s. Discussing the possibility of sociologists “serving man,”
McClung Lee wrote:

Opportunities for sociological service require firsthand knowledge of the arenas where both
popular and special knowledge about humanity is most necessary. These arenas concern
disciplines in addition to sociology . . . all social scientists need to keep their eyes trained
and to encourage their students to keep their eyes trained . . . upon the great and pressing
problems and challenges of man’s life in contemporary society. Thus they can help create
social sciences to serve the needs of man rather than to aid the manipulations of present and
future elites and tyrants, such as those in Huxley’s and Orwell’s nightmares. (P. 201)

McClung Lee and his wife Betty helped found the Society for the Study of Social Problems
(1951) and the Association for Humanist Sociology (1976)—professional organizations more
openly political than the American Sociological Association.

Yet, as the civil rights, anti-war student movements, and other social movements of the 1960s
developed, Wright, McClung Lee, and myriad other sociologists and social scientists would help
inspire a politically infused sociological engagement that once more took the study of society out
of the ivory towers and into the streets. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
ran Freedom Schools in the South; Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) ran education pro-
grams (ERAP) for college students to do political organizing and service in poor urban commu-
nities around the country. Freedom Riders and Freedom Summer students were returning to campuses
around the country and calling for a new relevancy. Social movement activism created powerful experiences for young college students who, as Chuck McDew (1966) suggests, witnessed the "words of their books and lectures" and their "ideas became flesh" on the picket lines and sit-ins and freedom rides.

A University of San Francisco sociology student (and SNCC member), Hardy Frye (1991), discussed the dialectical impact of this intellectual study on his political work, but also the key influences of engaged political activism and organizing on his scholarship. His doctoral research, eventually published as *Black Parties and Political Power*, demonstrated that micro-level political activity "must not be overlooked as we attempt to find solutions to address our community's social problems." He explained that, "Some changes can be made by the people themselves. This research heightened my interest in grounded theory. I began to feel strongly that sociologists should look more closely at what people do, not just 'structure', the 'state', 'values' and so forth" (Frye 1991: 192). Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the Radical Sociological Movement took hold and served as a precursor to what we now call "public sociology." An inherent part of their academic scholarship was political activism.

The mid- to late 1980s witnessed some retrenchment on the part of these academic-activist connections as the very social movements that inspired their contours dissipated into the conservatism of Reagan-era politics and a political and popular culture hostile to much of the progressive changes from the 1960s and 1970s. While many an activist found more friendly terrain within higher education (new ethnic and gender studies programs, affirmative action–inspired diversity among student populations, etc.), the late 1980s and early 1990s also saw campus progressives come under attack. One example is the government-coordinated counter-insurgency programs initiated as the FBI’s now infamous COINTELPRO campaign. It began as basic spying and disinformation against MLK and other civil rights organizations but flourished as a serious and violent effort targeting the American Indian Movement and the Black Panther Party (Churchill and Wall 2001; Cunningham 2003).

But in the 1980s and 1990s, government-led break-ins of campus offices related to Latin American solidarity groups like CISPES and churches affiliated with the sanctuary movement continued to push back against academics engaged with political efforts off campus as well as on. Eventually, these physical assaults would bleed into the more ideologically driven culture wars of groups like Accuracy in Academia and other conservative-led and -funded campaigns against the supposed “scourge” of “political correctness” that continued to pressure and even censor the engaged and political sociology from previous decades. On the one hand, historians and investigative journalists such as Jon Wiener argue that right-wing crusades against radical professors succeeded in creating moral panics about left-wing politics in the classroom. On the other hand, the evident need for conservative-led groups to attack faculty demonstrates that Russell Jacoby may have only been partly correct about the alienation of university faculty in the 1980s and 1990s. As Oppenheimer, Murray, and Levine suggested in 1991, “College professors, including sociologists, continue to speak out on both local and global issues and have continued to participate in community struggles, yet perhaps not in the visible, vocal ways that would attract huge media attention” (p. 5). What seems to have changed most is not that sociologists exited the public sphere so much as the social movements that always buttressed their work (labor, civil rights, women’s liberation, etc.) dissipated.

The contemporary public sociology movement explicitly and often effectively supports and inspires new engagements. Occurring alongside the civic engagement movement, these efforts sometimes overlap and cross-pollinate, and certainly the work of engaged scholars such as Randy Stoecker at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Phil Nyden at Loyola University in Chicago are two excellent examples. But so much of public sociology, as theorized by Michael Burawoy and ruminated over by others in several recent anthologies, seems like the kind of alienated and
intellectualized discourse about politics and discipline that inspired initial critics like Boyer and Jacoby. Even Bonilla-Silva, whose work recognizes that a true radical public sociology must be linked to social movements, offers little in understanding the particular kinds of engagements that might lead to just such alliances. When progressive sociologists and other engaged scholars hear calls for the power of participating in social movements, we nod, we smile, we clap, and we stand and we cheer—but what do we do after the conference?

We want to suggest that only strong integrated partnerships with community organizations and principled theoretical and methodological approaches informed by paradigms such as radical feminism, participatory action research, and democratic collaborations will lead the “engaged campus” movement back to its mission for progressive social change and inform a public sociology with social justice and community change as its focus. Now we want to move from historical and political context to actual praxis. Next, Mavis Morton, a sociologist and activist at the University of Guelph describes and analyzes her own journey as she navigated institutional positions, political commitments, and radical social theory along the trajectory of civic engagement and public sociology in higher education.

Mavis Morton: A Dialectical Life in Struggle

While the concept of “community-engaged scholarship” is relatively new language, upon reflection, I would argue that I have been a community-engaged scholar and public sociologist for as long as I can remember. On the one hand, my working-class rural origin, gender, age, and education shaped my sociological imagination and its application to issues of pay equity. For example, local farmers paid my female friend and me less for “haying” than they did the boys for doing the same kind and amount of work. I began to see this as having more to do with gender stereotyping than our individual abilities to labor. On the other hand, my evolving social identity and sociological imagination inspired me to seek more meaningful employment, which allowed me to connect my labor and my undergraduate studies as a budding sociologist. For example, I worked with “at risk” youth—listening to them about the issues they faced and strategizing ways to engage them and prevent their entrance into the criminal justice system. Instead of retail jobs, I sought jobs that entailed working with community members and nonprofit community-based agencies to identify and develop, deliver and evaluate services for local youth, seniors, and others in need.

As a graduate student in the 1980s, I embraced feminism as a theory, methodology, and practice. During this time, violence against women emerged as a “social problem” (in large part because of feminist lobbying and advocacy) and became a target for state redress in Canada. One offshoot of this attention was the development of “Domestic Violence Coordinating Committees” (DVCOS). Initially, these grassroots-inspired committees, comprised of citizens as well as social service and criminal justice representatives, came together to better serve victims of “domestic violence.” DVCOS used community-based education as tools to design new protocols for domestic violence response, coordinate service delivery, and organize political action. Combining my academic skills, my interest in grassroots democracy, and the access to these emerging DVCOS paved the way for a 25-year history of work and study on violence against women, equity, and social justice.

These committees reflected the Duluth, Minnesota, model, an internationally recognized example of mobilizing multisector agencies (shelters, criminal justice, health, education, etc.) to develop policies, protocols, and procedures that provide more coordinated and collaborative responses for victims of domestic or intimate partner violence (http://www.theduluthmodel.org/). Inspired by Ellen Pence’s call for increased collaboration to improve domestic violence response and services, an interagency committee was formed in Haldimand-Norfolk counties. Haldimand-Norfolk was a geographically large but rural region in southwestern Ontario. Its mission was to “work together to improve the coordination, education and effectiveness of the legal and social service systems that
respond to women who have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners.” I worked with this committee for a number of years, and together we developed and evaluated:

- interagency protocols,
- multisector training and education forums,
- community information and action forums (e.g., federal government’s proposed changes to the Divorce Act, changes to Ontario’s Family Law Act, recommendations to the May/Illes inquest in Ontario, which addressed systemic problems with the social and criminal justice system’s response to victims of “domestic violence,” etc.),
- political action events (e.g., letter writing campaigns to support social justice and critique changes to funding, policy, and/or political initiatives that we saw as counter to equity and social justice),
- community-based research (e.g., an institutional ethnography of the domestic violence bail process).

Following Pence’s work on “safety and accountability audits,” the committee decided to conduct an institutional ethnography of the bail process in domestic violence cases. Haldimand-Norfolk was, at the time, only the second Canadian community to conduct this kind of safety audit.5

To conduct the audit, we drew on the theoretical and methodological work of Canadian feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith. Smith originally developed the idea of institutional ethnographies, and Ellen Pence applied Smith’s work to domestic violence criminal justice reform efforts. Ethnography’s attention to how people or specific groups (in this case police officers, dispatchers, or defense attorneys) interpret what they see or read and then act accordingly proved vital for research in the areas of domestic violence and criminal justice. Dr. Smith reasoned that in order to understand how agencies impact people’s lives (often negatively despite stated intentions), we must treat the institution as something we can examine ethnographically. In our case, the purpose of institutional examination included the following objectives:

- improving the criminal justice system’s response to victims of wife/partner assault by making recommendations locally and provincially that address victim safety and offender accountability;
- improving the local response to victims of violence against women in intimate relationships;
- improving local agency communication, collaboration, and coordination;
- increasing interagency understanding of roles, mandates, and challenges of other agencies and colleagues.

The audit exposed the need to clarify and update information concerning how local agencies responded to violence against women. In response, we helped create cross-sector training and education programs to address misconceptions and discuss best practices.

The audit research yielded much for the community, and it profoundly impacted me as a feminist sociologist and scholar. My experience and interest in engaged research resonates with other academics who argue that participatory action research is not only legitimate and valuable in its own right, but also important for academics who try to integrate their teaching, research, and service toward what Dolgon (2002) called a “cognitive consonance.” As Joyner (2003: 5) argues:

[A] legitimate role for the sociologist involves using disciplinary knowledge, practice experiences, and applied research to inform program and policy development and/or reform geared toward social justice. Within this context, I offer examples of applied work that contributes to program improvement and incremental social change (e.g. expanding the capacity
Morton et al. of human service programs, empowering neighborhood residents to take leadership roles in partnership with university representatives in community-based projects, and helping to shape the understanding of policy actors on various social issues. Applied or engaged work also has a number of potential positive effects on students and faculty members. For example, my experience suggests that students who engage in applied research often gain a deeper understanding of disciplinary content while becoming more aware of structural inequality. Also, faculty members frequently report that such work is useful in helping them more easily integrate their teaching, research, and service responsibilities.

Another example of engaged, community-based research shaped by my feminist sociological framework was research I conducted with a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered (GLBT) Youth Planning Group in Ontario. The group wanted to improve the quality of life for GLBT youth in their community and provide guidance and support for programming initiatives. I found working with this planning group to conduct participatory action research (PAR) transformative. PAR engages those whose lives are impacted by the research directly into the research process (Boser 2006; Williams 2005). And as Sullivan et al. (2005: 978) suggest, this occurs “in all stages of research including research design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of findings.” As identified by Stringer (1996), a fundamental premise of community-based action research is that it begins with an interest in the problems of a group, a community, or an organization. Its purpose is to assist people in extending their understanding of their situation and thus resolve problems that confront them (Stringer 1996).

Involved in all aspects of this research project, the GLBT Youth Planning Group provided its small, rural community with an opportunity to hear from its youth—in particular GLBT youth—about their needs and issues. This research, and our efforts to disseminate its findings locally and beyond, identified for the first time (at least in a more formal and recognized way) some of the experiences and opinions of GLBT youth living in a small rural community. What we heard from these youth mirrored (unfortunately) the literature and research: isolation, harassment, intolerance, and fear prominently shaped GLBT youth and their supporters.

The opportunity to engage with this group of youth for this research project provided me with invaluable experience. It was an opportunity to employ the theoretical and methodological approaches I studied and to which I stood committed. It offered me practical experience in attending to challenges facing engaged scholars such as: power differentials among the researcher, research collaborators, and participants; confidentiality and anonymity; research ethics issues (especially when there is no research ethics board in a community); data collection questions/problems; and issues of dissemination and action (Langan and Morton 2009). In keeping with the spirit of engaged scholarship, I conducted the research to make social change, particularly to advance equity and social justice for a population of marginalized youth.

My work with violence against women in three different communities in rural Ontario represents another example of engaged scholarship. In 2003 we worked together to negotiate organizing an academic-like conference for service providers, academics, advocates, and the general population. This conference was called “Beyond Coordination: A Call to Action: Critically Examining Issues Related to Violence Against Women.” It was inspired by our frustration from the lack of social change we witnessed after trying so hard for 20 years to work together in “collaborative and coordinated” ways (as though this was the solution to ending violence against women). This initiative was memorable for me because it demonstrated my attempts to integrate the public sociologist and criminologist, the service learner, the community member, and the feminist activist in me, and how I tried to integrate all of these interests with my commitment to work toward equity and social justice.

My experiences doing or attempting to do engaged scholarship have not always been successful (see Langan and Morton’s [2009] article “Reflecting on Community/Academic ‘Collaboration’:
The Challenge of /Doing/ Feminist Participatory Action Research”). Nevertheless, they serve as examples of ways in which my social location (e.g., gender and class in particular) has influenced and been influenced by my academic training (as a sociologist and feminist) and how my education and training has influenced and been influenced by my scholarship (research, teaching, service). All three have (I hope) and will continue to be connected to larger social change efforts.

My history in community-based research fueled my interest in community-engaged teaching and learning in the classroom. Over the last five years, I developed and launched a community-engaged research agenda with new and previous community partners interested in making positive social change. I work to introduce and mentor my undergraduate and graduate students in community-engaged scholarship through community-engaged research and learning projects. This approach to teaching, I argue, helps students make connections among theory, research, policy, action, and impact. Teaching fourth-year sociology gave us (my students and I) an opportunity to partner with nonprofit agencies and organizations that are relevant to the sociology courses I teach such as “Childhood and Violence,” “Women and the Criminal Justice System,” and “Violence and Society.” As an integral and integrated part of the course curriculum (including student evaluation), student teams in these fourth-year seminar courses worked with my “partner” agencies such as the shelters, police services, prisons, child protection agencies, immigrant services, sexual assault centers, community legal clinics, and so on. We also worked with associations such as the Sex Professionals of Canada, Women in Law Enforcement, and Canadian Women’s Foundation.

One example of such a community-based course was my “Women and the Criminal Justice System” class in the fall of 2010. As part of this course, small student teams worked on community partner–defined needs/projects with three community organizations (the community legal clinic, immigrant services, and a correctional facility for women offenders). The community partners would generally come to our class early in the term and provide an overview of their work and then speak specifically about a question, problem, or project with which they wanted our help. Based on the information provided by the community partner, student teams would develop a work plan and then work on the project together every week until the end of the term. At that point, community partners would return to our class and all student teams would present their project in a conference type forum. The student teams’ presentations would include a brief overview of the process, the challenges, and the product. In the following paragraph I offer examples of the kinds of engaged learning we hoped to achieve.

According to Uggen and Inderbitzin (2010), public criminology “is as much about teaching as it is about research.” They suggest that “faculty members can serve as ‘transformative intellectuals’ (Giroux 1992)” and that part of this effort entails academics that build connections among universities, state agencies, and communities. Our partnership with a local provincial jail for criminalized women serves as such a connection. In this case, the jail’s volunteer coordinator (a correctional officer with a history of many other roles in and outside of corrections) asked a group of students in my “Women and the Criminal Justice System” course to research, create, and deliver a presentation to the women in the correctional facility about the contributions Canadian women have made to the economy. This was to be part of the educational programming for women’s history month provided by the jail. Pedagogically, this opportunity allowed us to integrate numerous learning objectives. Students expressed both excitement and anxiety and took on the challenge with thoughtfulness and creativity. They wanted to develop and deliver an engaging, yet accessible, educational presentation. After much deliberation, the group decided to write monologues about six individual Canadian women as a way to highlight women’s paid and unpaid work as mothers, workers, and entrepreneurs. Interwoven in the monologues was information and critical reflection that demonstrated the students’ sociological imagination and their knowledge of the audience. Their monologues included profiles of women with complex identities (e.g., immigrant women, aboriginal women, highly educated and uneducated women, incarcerated women, mothers, etc.) and the ways
in which they contribute to Canada’s economy. Once all team members applied for and received police checks (which was necessary to gain entry into the correctional facility), we planned a tour and presentation at the correctional facility for the end of the term.

The night before the presentation took place, I received a call from our community partner apologizing for rescheduling the presentation as a new policy forced cancellation of all prison programming the following day. Although this disappointed all of us, it revealed correctional institutional issues, policies, and challenges faced every day by our community partner and criminalized women. Hence, it became another piece of the “education” that students experienced in working with “real-life” institutions. The presentation was rescheduled for months after the course ended. Nevertheless, students remained committed to the project. Their monologues and PowerPoint presentation was well received by over 35 incarcerated women. After the presentation, the audience invited us to stay for cake and coffee. During this social period, we had the opportunity to sit with the women at small tables and talk with them. All of the students were very thankful for the opportunity to participate in this project. One of the students expressed it by suggesting it was “a once in a life-time opportunity to apply theory to practice in hopes of being able to better the lives of others.” Our community partner thought the presentation “informative and valuable” and passed on the results of the evaluation she conducted after the event. Prisoners’ comments were all positive and included remarks such as “I really truly believe this can be helpful to any woman that is incarcerated and would recommend this to be conducted to other ranges of this facility.”

Our other partner this past fall was the community legal clinic. They wanted to identify and document barriers abused immigrant women face when attempting to leave abusive partners. In particular, the legal clinic was interested in documenting obstacles encountered in women’s efforts to obtain access to social assistance (welfare) and in particular specialized priority housing. This proved to be a rich and engaged learning experience for my students and the community partner. Based on the research questions, which were largely informed by the community partner, the team’s methodology included:

- interviews with relevant community agencies (e.g., the women’s shelter, social assistance, and immigrant services),
- a critical analysis of relevant public policy (e.g., Ontario’s Special Housing Reform Act and provincial ministry policy directives on social assistance called “Ontario Works Policy Directives”),
- a review of current academic literature.

Through this project the students identified in a concrete way the systemic and structural obstacles and barriers abused immigrant women may face in their attempts to leave violent intimate relationships. For instance, the theory of “intersectionality” and the literature about the blurred distinctions between women as victims and offenders was operationalized for students. They heard about the ways in which women’s multiple identities (immigrant and/or refugee status, victims of violence, mothers, age, education, etc.) influenced and impacted immigrant women’s experiences as victims of violence. As precarious recipients of the welfare state, these women were often judged as risky or unworthy and/or ineligible of public support/resources. The community partner received a detailed written report, which connected previous academic research findings with local community agency experiences. The community partner was eager to use this report to advocate for local and provincial resources and policy changes. Our partner was also happy to have the opportunity to help educate, inform, and politicize local undergraduate students. Given that part of the agency’s mandate is to advocate for and engage in political action to address poverty, her time with these engaged students was a unique and interesting way to realize this work.
At the end of the course, we encouraged students to think about the connections made between the work with their community partner, the course curriculum, and the larger issues of equity and social justice. In their written reflections, students were effusive about the ways in which their community-engaged learning project was successful in bringing alive the connections between theory, research, policy, and action. One student’s reflection included this statement: “This was definitely a great experience to learn, interact and engage with you all. Thank you very much for the amazing opportunity!”

As I have tried to chronicle here, the applied sociology, community-based participatory action research, and engaged scholarship that I have participated in all directed my academic skills toward social justice initiatives. But the work also profoundly influenced my understanding of social problems themselves. I learned new ways to think about and theorize issues like violence against women and criminalized women. As a result, the way I teach, research, and serve the academy and larger community is much different than if I had researched, written, and taught from a different set of social and institutional locations. These intellectual, theoretical, and political commitments; social relationships; employment opportunities; and institutional positions have kept my work focused on social change and social justice.

**Tim Maher: Using Engaged Sociology to Create Long-term, Sustainable Change**

Sociology first attracted me because sociologists seemed at the forefront of social change. They practiced what they taught. But those social change movements began to wane by the time I finished my PhD in 1977 and started teaching full-time in Indianapolis. In their relative absence, I focused my work and teaching on what now would be called community and environmental sustainability.

Initially, these broad social movements and the media coverage of them illuminated a clear link for individuals between their private troubles and public issues. C. Wright Mills (1959: 11) described such dynamics in writing about the 1930s labor movement:

Some men came to understand their personal troubles in these terms. The values threatened were plain to see and cherished by all; the structural contradictions that threatened them also seemed plain. Both were widely and deeply experienced.

Losing this context and experiential connection in the absence of such broad movements, I found it necessary to foster more local and organizational partnerships with groups engaged in struggles for social justice. The institutional-level focus described herein creates possibilities for illuminating the same linkages between personal biography and social structure that Mills (1959) elaborated. These community-campus collaborations demonstrate the need for structural transformation in both the community and the university as the basis for personal change on the streets and in the classrooms.

Thus, despite the diminishing of national, even international, solidarity movements in the late 1970s, passionate and committed activists for social justice persisted at the local level. In fact, social justice movements evolved at the local level. It is the passion and excitement of those activists—working without national and even international support networks and attaining a modicum of media attention—that I want my students to see and experience. Unglamorous work. Sustainable work. It is about relationship building and commitment. And these relationships frequently last beyond courses and college graduations.

Although I long worked with getting students out into the community in a variety of ways, I began to see that approach as essentially psychological or individualistic in focus, not sociological.
I, as an individual faculty member, possessed a range of community connections through which my students could do social change work. The impact: limited. My students acquired good learning experiences, but with little evidence of community transformation. Reflecting on this dynamic, I realized that a sociological form of civic engagement could not work at the individual level of faculty members and students, but only at the institutional level. It is at that level that sustainable, transformative work becomes effective.

Through my role as director of the university’s Community Programs Center, I began lobbying the administration and even board members to back a new kind of initiative, where the university as an institution would become a player in community development and sustainability. One example of this institutional engagement is a community-campus collaboration that created the Wheeler Arts Community (WAC) in October of 2000. WAC represents a collaboration between SEND (Southeast Neighborhood Development—a neighborhood-led community development corporation)—and the University of Indianapolis (UIndy) Community Programs Center (CPC)—a university department established in 1996 to oversee the implementation of service-learning across the curriculum.

WAC is in the Fountain Square neighborhood at the heart of the SEND area. It is one of the oldest areas in the city, dating to the 1840s but including a house built as early as 1826. Fountain Square is located 1½ miles from “the Circle,” the symbolic center of the city, and 3 miles from the UIndy campus (this is not one of the many university initiatives around the country designed to prop up property values around an urban campus). It stands as an ideal yet vibrant model that links academic study with real-world issues, complete with the many assets, and liabilities, that arise in such a relationship.

Although located close to the gentrified downtown area, the Fountain Square neighborhood suffered from industrial pollution and decaying factories that generally kept upscalers at bay. Along with fouled air, the community is among the poorest in the city, with record low levels of educational attainment. The Fountain Square neighborhood claims the highest dropout rate for white males in the entire country, with an overall high school graduation rate of 24 percent and an average literacy level at fourth grade.

The gritty determination and strength of Fountain Square residents drew the partnership with the university in the mid-1990s. Seeing that the middle-class suburban and rural students at the university had little understanding of community and community involvement, the Fountain Square neighborhood became a teaching venue emphasizing the potentially reciprocal nature of the community-campus relationship. The neighborhood would help teach students about urban problems and community assets, and the students and faculty would work with the neighborhood on the critical issues it faced and resources it needed.

From the outset, a sociological understanding of communities shaped this partnership, as well as the civic engagement movement spreading throughout the country. The “Community Building and Learning” model of community engagement that guided the collaboration emphasizes not just individual student learning through doing but includes a macro-level focus on transformation at the community and university levels (Maher, Pennell, and Osterman 2003). It stresses the need to incorporate institutional engagement alongside individual engagement to ensure long-term sustainability and meaningful change. It is not enough to simply send students out into the community and have them “do good.” Neighborhoods like Fountain Square are inherently suspicious of universities and doubt their interest in working long term on real issues in local communities. Instead, students, faculty, and institutions must demonstrate long-term commitments to neighborhoods and develop meaningful relationships with community partners.

The Community Building and Learning model is based on the work of Jane Addams and Saul Alinsky, in contrast to more traditional service-learning models that derive from the work of John Dewey (Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett 2007). As such, the university is a participant in rebuilding the community, responding to neighborhood issues, and incorporating student learning into all
aspects of the neighborhood. In the fashion of Jane Addams, our work has included collaborating with the Southeast Neighborhoods of Indianapolis to develop and expand physical spaces (health center, social service center, art and theater center) that respond to issues identified by neighborhood residents and leaders. Likewise, in the fashion of Saul Alinski, the University of Indianapolis faculty and students collaborate with the neighborhood on street-level community organizing efforts (Feagin and Hernan 2001). Some examples include putting together a community newsletter, working with neighborhood leaders to expand sidewalks and bike routes, collaborating with community residents to force a local utility to clean up a dangerous 144-acre brownfield site, researching landlord-tenant legislation for the local Community Development Corporation, among many other community organizing projects.

In the 1990s, as this model of engagement began being implemented, the most serious issues facing the area were lack of affordable housing, dangerous abandoned buildings, low educational attainment, and an anemic level of economic development. Few bright spots existed beyond the determination of neighborhood residents and a belief that partnerships, not money and grants, would be the key to community transformation.

In 1998, then Mayor Steve Goldsmith labeled a local abandoned factory as his least favorite building in the entire city. Built in 1914 by Charles Wheeler (a founder of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway), The Wheeler Carburetor factory was the first carburetor factory in the world. It represented the cutting edge of American technology and stood as an important part of a local automotive industrial complex that also included the first motorcycle carburetor factory in the world. In fact, at the beginning of the automobile era (prior to Ford’s success in mass producing cars), Indianapolis sat as the capital of automobile construction. Wheeler and his factories formed the center of that enterprise.

Although the automobile center shifted to Detroit, the Wheeler building continued to house cutting-edge technology. Ransburg Electronics followed the carburetor maker in the facility and in short order invented the process of electrostatic painting at the Fountain Square site. By the last half of the twentieth century, however, the building’s cutting-edge technology days were over. The final industrial occupant of the Wheeler building made Styrofoam packaging peanuts. That company abandoned the building in the early 1990s and left it in very poor condition. By the early 2000s, the structure’s large industrial windows were mostly broken out, its concrete exterior cracked and stained with years of neglect, its loading dock full of trash. Standing right off the Square and visible from a major north-south traffic corridor, it stood as a daily reminder of the depths to which the neighborhood had sunk. The mayor’s criticism hurt many neighborhood residents, but he was right—the decrepit building created an eyesore and posed serious safety hazard for those living nearby.

The neighborhood pressured the local CDC, SEND, to purchase the Wheeler building and come up with an appropriate re-use for the facility. After many conversations and site visits, SEND narrowed down the redevelopment options to some kind of artist studio space. It is certainly not a novel idea, but the constraints of the building and location left few other choices. A unique zoning designation allowed SEND to envision artist live/work spaces, making the project distinctive from the ubiquitous warehouse-to-artist studio spaces found in most cities. Zoning in most cases excludes housing in favor of industrial, commercial, or warehousing uses, reflecting their original zoning category.

Unfortunately, even with HUD low-income housing subsidies, the Wheeler project was simply not economically feasible. The only chance for the project was to attract an institutional partner of some stature as a collaborator and thus guarantee a level of financial solvency for the project. SEND courted all of the city’s art institutions to no avail.

At this point, the UIndy CPC, looking for off-campus space for community-based learning programs, suggested that the university might become the anchor, as the largest cultural institution on the south side of the city. After touring the building and many long meetings, UIndy agreed to become an anchor for a HUD-subsidized community with an arts focus. Although two other live/
work art facilities exist in the United States (in St. Paul, MN, and Little Rock, AR) similar to WAC, a university anchors neither. With the blessing of the local community organization, the Southeast Umbrella Organization (SUMO), the project went forward. SEND, with an initial three-year lease agreement with the University for 6,600 square feet of the 60,000-square-foot building, arranged financing for the $5 million historic rehab project. Work commenced in late 1999. SUMO pressed the university for access to the theater space in the building since there were no large rooms in the neighborhood available for community meetings. The university and the neighborhood agreed that not-for-profit community groups could use the UIndy space (subject to availability) at no cost. WAC became an important focal point for the community organization, the CDC, and the university, stimulating numerous collaborative projects.

The most significant of these initiatives is the Fountain Square Center (FSC; opened in 2003), which represents another aspect of the implementation of the Community Building and Learning model. The FSC is a 45,000-square-foot facility representing collaboration between UIndy, a social services center, and a low-income health center, located three blocks from the WAC. Unlike WAC, with an arts and education focus, the FSC incorporates the university programs in nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, and social work. These programs supplement services offered by the other agencies and provide on-site real-world experiences for students, much like the model at Wheeler Arts.

Within the 60,000 square feet of space at WAC exist 36 live/work studios ranging in size from 950 to 1100 square feet, all with 14- to 20-foot-high ceilings and large industrial windows. Of the 36, HUD subsidizes 34, while 2 rate at market price (to meet a HUD desire for mixed income developments). Besides residences, the space contains seven offices (including the leasing office), a small gallery, community art room, a classroom, and a 200-seat theater.

The original mission of the Community Arts and Education Center (CAEC) at WAC was to work with the neighborhood to increase educational opportunities, particularly in the arts. These types of experiences continue to decline in the local public schools. Moreover, many university students identify youth arts and education as an area of interest to contribute in the local community. To that end, the CPC attracted the Writer’s Center of Indiana to move to WAC and become a partner in improving neighborhood literacy. The Fine Arts Society (a music organization) provided music instruction to neighborhood kids, using university students as assistants.

Once the CAEC got established, the CPC received funding to offer an arts academy in collaboration with Indianapolis Public Schools. When the funding for the Arts Academy ran out, the CPC received a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation for after-school arts programming. Sometimes the collaborations based at WAC entailed the use of the space by community partners. A local high school lost its theater to building renovations and moved their theater program to WAC for a couple of years.

Since the space operated free to not-for-profits, many local community theater groups, including Inklings, Loose Canon Productions, Non Noblise, No Exit, and Convergence, used the WAC space as a springboard for more independent productions. Other groups used the theater to try out new plays written by local authors that address local issues. For example, the Indianapolis Living Wage Campaign produced a play titled $15.48. Some productions grew out of class work by UIndy students, such as John Cox Ford’s production of Marx in Soho, initially for a sociological theory class and later for others including the 25th anniversary celebration of the Indianapolis Peace and Justice Center. Kate Ayers’ play, What the Hull (about Jane Addams), part of which was produced at the 2009 Association for Humanist Sociology conference in New Orleans, grew out of the WAC environment.

Like theater, dance and music blanket WAC’s 10-year history. One dance group liked the WAC theater so much they actually put down a new floor more suitable for dance than the inexpensive flooring originally installed. Music is a mainstay at Wheeler, with music series in the theater and
frequent bands playing in the atrium, on the balcony, or on the front porch during Open Houses and 1st Friday Openings. Most are acoustic, since it is a residential facility. Artists include Anne Feeney (several times), David Rovics, and even Indy’s own Acoustic Catfish.

The CPC collaborates with the WAC Tenants Association in putting on three Open Houses each year (usually) and monthly 1st Friday Openings. These are visual arts events that give Wheeler artists the opportunity to exhibit and sell their work to the public. During 1st Friday Openings, resident artists display work for sale in the atrium and other common areas in the building. For Open Houses, residents open up their studios and sell their work directly to the public in their own spaces.

Besides these collaborations with Wheeler Arts tenants, the CPC collaborates with the broader neighborhood on two or three Community-Campus Forums per year where university faculty, staff, students, and neighborhood residents get together for a catered lunch to discuss past collaborations and plan future ones. Although not envisioned in the beginning, WAC theater has become a popular banquet, meeting, retreat, and workshop venue. A 2006 International Symposium on Service Learning was held in part at the WAC and gave participants an opportunity to see a community building form of service-learning in action. Many international visitors attend events at WAC and tour the facility.

WAC also serves as a space for expression in the city of Indianapolis. Over the past 10 years, many groups lacked venues for artistic or social expression. Noted Palestinian peace activist and educator Elias Chacour spoke at a banquet in the theater in 2004, for example. Eyes Wide Open, an American Friends Service Committee project on the Iraq war, found a home at WAC after being turned down by other suitable locations in the city. WAC now holds a central place in the social and cultural life of the city.

The university academic programs that have taught courses at WAC include sociology, social work, criminal justice, service learning, education, and art. Teaching at WAC is a distinct experience and not all faculty and chairs appreciate that difference. For sociology, however, teaching in a low-income housing project that has been at the center of neighborhood rebuilding and transformation is an exhilarating experience. WAC stands as evidence of sustainable change, an effective reuse of a huge building, and the fact that institutions, not just individuals, can become involved in civic engagement and public sociology that makes a difference.

Jim Pennell: Extending Engagement among Faculty, Students, and the Community

My colleague, Tim Maher, shared part of the story of our university’s work in the Fountain Square neighborhood of Indianapolis, a project that invited the involvement of many faculty and hundreds of students from our university. I will briefly share how the institutional collaborations initiated by Maher contributed to changes in teaching, student involvement, and real community-based change—not just talking points for various institutional reports.

My initiation into service-learning came through the establishment of a Civic Engagement and Community Leadership minor spearheaded by Maher, which included a one-credit, optional service-learning lab for our “Social Problems” courses. Since I teach that course regularly, I started seeking opportunities for students to gain community experience. Between 50 and 150 students participate in this lab each year. This lab provides students with direct experiences of local problems that, combined with course readings and discussion, require them to confront many of their assumptions about the causes and consequences of social problems. They also learn about community organizations and meaningful work opportunities, an experience that often transforms their thinking about their life’s work. As department chair, I assisted other faculty, including adjunct faculty, with integrating the service-learning labs into their courses. The Community Programs Center at the university also served as a resource for encouraging involvement and matching community needs with student interests.
When the sociology faculty at the University of Indianapolis added a senior seminar for their majors in 2009, we included a team project as a requirement. With the project, students work together using their sociological knowledge and skills to serve the community. In the first year of the seminar, I facilitated the exploration of a number of community organizations and their needs with the class. Students also brought ideas to the table, drawing on their service-learning experiences. One possibility developed out of a student’s prior involvement with SEND’s (discussed previously by Maher) community organizer and a community meeting I attended. The seminar class invited the community organizer to talk about his work and the southeast neighborhood’s needs. He shared a number of neighborhood initiatives. After some discussion, the students agreed that doing background research to assist helping tenants with landlords would draw on their interest in social justice and make use of their library and writing skills. A student and I attended the tenant-landlord committee meeting to discuss the community’s interests and the areas for exploration.

Back in the classroom, the students and I discussed the issue and divided up research tasks. Over the course of a few weeks, the class shared their findings and resources, and we began to craft a report. A few editing sessions and searches for more information led to a final report. The report consisted of a five-page overview, a bibliography, and hard copies of potentially useful articles and Internet materials. A student and I presented the report at a committee meeting, and they used it to inform decisions about the direction the neighborhood should take.

Typically this would be the end of the story. But the community learning and serving model and the design of our departmental major encourage continuing involvement by students and faculty. One of the senior seminar students requested a practicum to advance the work initiated in the class. She worked with the SEND community organizer and the task force to identify approaches used in other cities to track negligent landlords. On completing her task, the community organizer sent me the following email:

I filled out the practicum evaluation yesterday for [student], but wanted to follow up with a few words of appreciation for her work. [She] has done some terrific research around rental registries and spoke with people in Columbus, OH, and Evansville, IN, who were involved in the implementation. In addition, she has worked to identify several of our most negligent landlords and provided information that may allow us to apply pressure to them. She has well documented this work and provided us with several useful tools. We are very satisfied with her work.

In her final report to me, the student noted:

Although my official tasks and time have been met to complete the 1 credit hour practicum, I do not consider my work completed. I am now considered a member of the taskforce and will continue my research on landlords in Indianapolis . . . I have learned much about community organizing during this practicum and I look forward to learning more as I continue my work on this taskforce.

These collaborations, the partnerships and relationships that develop, the research and teaching they inspire, and the learning experiences for students (and faculty) that they create provide a bright future for both civic engagement and sociology.

Corey Dolgon: Reflecting on the Condition
My Conditions Are in

I currently serve as the director of Community-Based Learning at Stonehill College, a small Catholic Liberal Arts College near Brockton, Massachusetts. A typical old, New England mill
town (former shoe capital of America), Brockton is an increasingly diverse and culturally rich town with few economic resources, an unemployment rate above the national and state average, and Massachusetts’s largest foreclosure rate. While it maintains one of the highest performing urban high schools in the region (complete with music, theater, and sports envied by school districts around the nation), the city largely abandoned the downtown area. For years, Stonehill viewed Brockton as a “service area” for its community programs and civic engagement. While such work gave students excellent opportunities to fulfill an institutional commitment to service, it’s hard to see how student engagement provided an equally significant community impact.

A focus on community impact in the higher education civic engagement movement is finally coming under the proverbial microscope. Recent books like *Unheard Voices* (Stoecker and Tryon 2009) and *Race, Poverty, and Social Justice: Multidisciplinary Perspectives Through Service Learning* (Calderon 2007) issued a serious challenge to “engaged scholars” and service-learning practitioners who long promoted the enhanced student learning outcomes linked to civic engagement but who ignored evidence showing any positive impacts on the communities themselves. Similarly, Americorps Vista positions at higher education institutions now require increased assessment focus on community impact and include “embedding” college and university vistas in community organizations. I direct a new office whose very title “community-based learning” (as opposed to service-learning) was chosen to provide focus on the community nature of the work. The “community” is not just the source of student learning but also a collaborative partner in designing educational projects and the recipient of service, research, and other resources. Ultimately, however, community is also the final outcome we hope to create in the process of collaboration and mutual commitment.

This is a perfect job for me as it culminates much of the community-based teaching and research I have done throughout my career. Much like Mavis Morton, my history reads of a scholar/activist with writing and publishing about the local community struggles along the way—homeless activists in Ann Arbor, Michigan; outsourced janitors in Southampton, New York; and housing activists in Worcester, Massachusetts (Dolgon 2005; Dolgon and Baker 2010; Dolgon, Dresser, and Kline, 1995). Such work also led me to think about the history and status of sociology as a discipline and how the current trend of public sociology carries with it both the potential to radicalize teaching and research but also the pitfalls of becoming another “academic” enterprise that ignores the actual public impact (Dolgon 2010). Along with Tim Maher and Jim Pennell, I find that embedding my own work in community organizations and with community activists shapes my scholarly sensibilities to a point that always demands an answer to what my friends at the Association for Humanist Sociology call the “so what?” question. This focus now shapes my everyday activities as I try to build campus and community capacity to engage in partnerships for social change.

In a recent piece, I look at how academic engagements with groups such as the Brockton Interfaith Community (BIC), Community Connections of Brockton (CCB), Massachusetts Jobs With Justice and Local 615 of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union), and The Cape Verdean Association impact my research and teaching (Dolgon 2011). In particular, a partnership among BIC, CCB, and my office resulted in students helping CCB start a *Brockton Parents Magazine* published quarterly and published primarily by local parents; a series of cosponsored neighborhood block parties; and a Parents Leadership Conference that brought together over 100 local residents and dozens of local service agencies and organizations. Our small coalition is committed to bringing a community organizing and social movement paradigm to local groups and service organizations with a focus on building capacity of local residents to serve on boards and become decision makers on economic development, public planning, and local health and education policy boards. Ironically, these programs prove some of the most powerful educational experiences for students too.

Suffice to say, I work hard to produce the kind of engagements that not only bring students and faculty into the community but also produce relationships and collaborations that promote social
justice. Similarly, I try to produce a public sociology that explores and documents the politics and culture of such engagements, suggesting that the most powerful social theories find their origins in the collective action of people organizing and struggling to change their worlds, locally and globally. Colleagues such as Mavis Morton, Tim Maher, and Jim Pennell provide evidence that the long legacies of civic engagement in higher education and politically motivated public sociology continue to inspire new generations of engaged scholars in search of social justice.

Raymond Williams (1989) once lamented that many of the practitioners whose work in political education and organizing inspired London’s cultural studies movement were overlooked or “forgotten” as the radical projects gave way to institutional formations. The scholars who write articles and books eventually tell the histories of intellectually engaged innovations; their texts become that to which others respond. The professional fetish for texts distorts not only the actual history, but also the ways in which the practice of popular education informed cultural studies theory itself. Williams distinguished between the project of cultural studies—born out of political struggles to educate and radicalize workers—and the formation of cultural studies as a field with texts, institutes, and so on. He argued that as texts took over as the centerpiece of the formation, the field itself changed. He wrote:

I often feel sad about the many people who were active in that field at that time who didn’t publish, but who did as much as any of us did to establish this work. Only when it reached the national publishing level or was adopted in the university was this work perceived as existing at all. [People chose] alternative sites to do their work in distinctly as a vocation rather than a profession. (P. 154)

My guess: The work of folks like Mavis, Tim, Jim, and myself go overlooked as we fight battles for social justice in the mistakenly perceived “provincial” trenches of local communities. And the “boots on the ground” organizing and activism of our community partners perhaps go even more marginalized within the academy.

But, at the same time, my own experiences teach me that these places of struggle provide the richest source of sociological theory and action and the most powerful examples of civic engagement for higher education. Undoubtedly, these same places will germinate future large-scale progressive movements for social justice. Sounds like the nexus for public sociology and engaged social science to me.

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Notes
1. Here the authors contend that a traditional focus on social movement phenomena might signal a decline in the women’s movement, but a focus on women’s organizations and institutional resources dedicated to feminism signals persistent strength and vitality.
2. These histories are focused primarily on the United States in particular and are somewhat relevant for Canada as well. These are generally the conditions within which the authors work and experience. It is within this context that such proposals from the authors, we believe, are most relevant. Thus, it may be true that the history of public sociology or civic engagement in other countries suggests different proposals. We look forward to work from other scholars who compare arguments.

3. It should also be said in fairness that the current civic engagement trend is not without its conservative critics who claim (as they did with women’s and ethnic studies) the progressive political motivation makes this pedagogy somehow less rigorous, less serious, and politically dangerous—witness Glenn Beck’s recent attacks on “social justice as fascism” in general and on activist/academic and former ASA President, Frances Fox Piven.

4. Ellen Pence is credited with creating the Duluth Model of intervention in domestic violence cases, Coordinated Community Response (CCR), which uses an interagency collaborative approach involving police, probation, courts, and human services in response to domestic abuse.

5. A Safety First Audit is a comprehensive review of each process/stage where a victim of domestic violence has contact with the criminal justice system to determine how well the victim’s immediate safety is addressed at each stage. It examines the agency’s procedures as a whole to determine how well they provide safety to victims of domestic violence and how well they demand accountability from offenders (Kainz and Seguin 2003).

6. One of my former students now works as a volunteer coordinator at the organization she first encountered in this course.

7. Howard Zinn once wrote: “Revolutionary change does not come as one cataclysmic moment (beware of such moments!) but as an endless succession of surprises, moving zigzag towards a more decent society. We don’t have to engage in grand, heroic action to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions, of people, can transform the world.” While some local actions in communities around the globe possess an articulate and intended “global” aspect and even impact, many local actions inform or inspire future actions that evolve into larger struggles. Our work suggests, and the current Occupy Wall Street movement confirms, that the ultimate size or impact of local organizing and action cannot be planned or predicted.

References


**Bios**

**Mavis Morton** is an Assistant Professor teaching criminology, criminal justice and public policy in the department of sociology and anthropology at the University of Guelph. Her scholarship interests include violence against women, women and the law, feminist critical criminology, justice and social policy, feminist participatory action research (FPAR) and evaluation research, public sociology and community-engaged scholarship. Her previous work includes twenty years with rural and urban community partners (advocates, community committees, criminal justice and social service organizations and government) engaging in research, education, community development, advocacy and service coordination on issues related to violence against women and their children and other social justice issues.

**Corey Dolgon** serves as Director of Community-Based Learning for Stonehill College. He recently co-authored *Social Problems: A Service Learning Approach* with Chris Baker. He co-edits Teaching Matters, the newsletter of the ASA section on Teaching and Learning, and serves as Assistant Editor of Theory in Action. Previously he held the positions of Department Chair in Sociology at Worcester State College, Editor of

Timothy Maher is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Community Programs Center at the University of Indianapolis. Dr. Maher’s work focuses on social inequality, community development, environmental sustainability, and urban change. He was instrumental in the creation of the Wheeler Arts Community and the Fountain Square Center (both in Indianapolis, IN) as examples of the Community Building and Learning Model of civic engagement.

James Pennell is Associate Professor of Sociology and Chair of Social Sciences at the University of Indianapolis. He is also Past President of the Association for Humanist Sociology and most recently published the article, “Learning from Lennon: Using Songs and Stardom to Promote Peace and Justice,” in Shawn Bingahm’s Art Reflects Life: The Artist as Observer and Social Critic.