Excerpt from: Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 1: The Promise

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other milieu[1], they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.

Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies. The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them…

What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality, I am going to contend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination.

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter[2] of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that

---

[1] Milieu: a person's social environment (plural: milieux)

[2] Welter: a state of general disorder, a confused mass

embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances…

We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst… [I]t is the signal of what is best in contemporary studies of man and society.

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

(1) What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?

(2) Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it

affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period—what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?

(3) What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining?...

For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from consideration of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being.

That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society…

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure.' This distinction is an essential tool of the

sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu—the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner Me. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus if only because it is the very nature of an issue, unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary men. An issue, in fact, often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements, and often too it involves what Marxists call 'contradictions' or 'antagonisms.'

In these terms, consider unemployment. When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals.

Consider war. The personal problem of war, when it occurs, may be how to survive it or how to die in it with honor; how to make money out of it; how to climb into the higher safety of the military apparatus; or how to contribute to the war's termination. In short, according to one's values, to find a set of milieux and within it to survive the war or make one's death in it meaningful. But the structural issues of war have to do with its causes; with what types of men it throws up into command; with its effects upon economic and political, family and religious institutions, with the unorganized irresponsibility of a world of nation-states.

Consider marriage. Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them….

In so far as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution. In so far as war is inherent in the nation-state system and in the uneven industrialization of the world, the ordinary individual in his restricted milieu will be powerless—with or without psychiatric aid—to solve the troubles this system or lack of system imposes upon him. In so far as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves and men into their chief providers and unweaned dependents, the

problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution…

What we experience in various and specific milieux, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. Accordingly, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination…

Chapter 8: Uses of History

Social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within social structures. That these three—biography, history, society—are the co-ordinate points of the proper study of man has been a major platform on which I have stood… Without use of history and without an historical sense of psychological matters, the social scientist cannot adequately state the kinds of problems that ought now to be the orienting points of his studies…

We have come to see that the biographies of men and women, the kinds of individuals they variously become, cannot be understood without reference to the historical structures in which the milieux of their everyday life are organized. Historical transformations carry meanings not only for individual ways of life, but for the very character—the limits and possibilities of the human being…

[W]e cannot adequately understand 'man' as an isolated biological creature, as a bundle of reflexes or a set of instincts, as an 'intelligible field' or a system in and of itself. Whatever else he may be, man is a social and an historical actor who must be understood, if

at all, in close and intricate interplay with social and historical structures…

The biography and the character of the individual cannot be understood merely in terms of milieux, and certainly not entirely in terms of the early environments—those of the infant and the child. Adequate understanding requires that we grasp the interplay of these intimate settings with their larger structural framework, and that we take into account the transformations of this framework, and the consequent effects upon milieux. When we understand social structures and structural changes as they bear upon more intimate scenes and experiences, we are able to understand the causes of individual conduct and feelings of which men in specific milieux are themselves unaware. The test of an adequate conception of any type of man cannot rest upon whether individuals of this type find it pleasantly in line with their own self-images. Since they live in restricted milieux, men do not and cannot be expected to know all the causes of their condition and the limits of their selfhood…

Chapter 9: On Reason and Freedom

The interest of the social scientist in social structure is not due to any view that the future is structurally determined. We study the structural limits of human decision in an attempt to find points of effective intervention, in order to know what can and what must be structurally changed if the role of explicit decision in history-making is to be enlarged. Our interest in history is not owing to any view that the future is inevitable, that the future is bounded by the past. That men have lived in certain kinds of society in the past does not set exact or absolute limits to the kinds of society they may create in the future. We study history to discern the alternatives within which human reason and human freedom can now make history. We study historical social structures, in brief, in order to find within them the ways in which they are

and can be controlled. For only in this way can we come to know the limits and the meaning of human freedom…

Chapter 10: On Politics

Whether or not they are aware of them, men in a mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues. They do not understand the interplay of these personal troubles of their milieux with problems of social structure. The knowledgeable man in a genuine public, on the other hand, is able to do just that. He understands that what he thinks and feels to be personal troubles are very often also problems shared by others, and more importantly, not capable of solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structure of the groups in which he lives and sometimes the structure of the entire society. Men in masses have troubles, but they are not usually aware of their true meaning and source; men in publics confront issues, and they usually come to be aware of their public terms.

It is the political task of the social scientist… continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. It is his task to display in his work… this kind of sociological imagination…

Appendix

Do not allow public issues as they are officially formulated, or troubles as they are privately felt, to determine the problems that you take up for study… Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues—and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles—and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time.

Excerpt from: Berger, Peter. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective.* New York, NY: Anchor Books: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

There is another excitement of discovery beckoning in sociological investigations. It is not the excitement of coming upon the totally unfamiliar, but rather the excitement of finding the familiar becoming transformed in its meaning. The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives…

Sociologists move in the common world of men and women… The categories they employ in their studies are refinements of the categories by which other people live—power, class, status, race, ethnicity. As a result, there is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this: things are not what they seem. This too is a deceptively simple statement. It ceases to be simple after a while. Social reality turns out to have many layers of meaning. The discovery of each new layer changes the perception of the whole…

To ask sociological questions, then, presupposes that one is interested in looking some distance beyond commonly accepted or officially defined goals of human actions. It presupposes a certain awareness that human events have different levels of meaning, some of which are hidden from the consciousness of everyday life. It may even presuppose a measure of suspicion about the way in which human events are officially interpreted by the authorities, be they political, juridical or religious in character…

Sociological perspective can then be understood in terms of such phrases as "seeing through," "looking behind,"… We will not be far off if we see sociological thought as part of what Nietzsche called "the art of mistrust."… [The] sociological perspective involves a process of "seeing through" the facades of social structures… The social mysteries lie behind the facades.

We would contend, then, that… the sociologist will be driven time and again, by the very logic of the discipline, to debunk social systems… The sociological frame of reference, with its built-in procedure of looking for levels of reality other than those given in the official interpretations of society, carries with it a logical imperative to unmask the pretensions and propaganda by which men cloak their actions with each other.

A few examples of the way in which sociology "looks behind" the facades of social structures might serve to make our argument clearer. Take, for instance, the political organization of a community. If one wants to find out how a modern American city is governed, it is very easy to get the official information about this subject. The city will have a charter, operating under the laws of the state. With some advice from informed individuals, one may look up various statues that define the constitution of the city. Thus one may find out that this particular community has a city-manager form of administration, or that party affiliations do not appear on the ballot in municipal elections, or that the city government participates in a regional water district. In similar fashion, with the help of some newspaper reading, one may find out

the officially recognized political problems of the community. One may read that the city plans to annex a certain suburban area, or that there has been a change in the zoning ordinances to facilitate industrial development in another area, or even that one of the members of city council has been accused of using his office for personal gain. All such matters still occur on the, as it were, visible, official or public level of political life.

However, it would be an exceedingly naïve person who would believe that this kind of information gives him a rounded picture of the political reality of that community. The sociologist will want to know above all the constituency of the "informal power structure" (as it has been called by Floyd Hunter, an American sociologist interested in such studies), which is a configuration of men and their power that cannot be found in any statutes, and probably cannot be read about in the newspapers. The political scientist or legal expert might find it very interesting to compare the city charter with the constitutions of other similar communities. The sociologist will be far more concerned with discovering the way in which powerful vested interests influence or even control the actions of officials elected under the charter.

These vested interests will not be found in city hall, but rather in the executive suites of corporations that may not even be located in that community, in the private mansions of a handful of powerful men, perhaps in the offices of certain labor unions or even, in some instances, in the headquarters of criminal organizations. When the sociologist concerns himself with power, he will "look behind" the official mechanisms that are supposed to regulate power in the community. This does not necessarily mean that he will regard the official mechanisms

as totally ineffective or their legal definition as totally illusionary. But at the very least he will insist that there is another level of reality to be investigated in the particular system of power. In some cases he might conclude that to look for real power in the publicly recognized places is quite delusional…

It may have become clear at this point that the problems that will interest the sociologist are not necessary what other people may call "problems." The way in which public officials and newspapers (and, alas, some college textbooks in sociology) speak about "social problems" serves to obscure this fact. People commonly speak of a "social problem" when something in society does not work the way it is supposed to according to the official interpretations. They then expect the sociologist to study the "problem" as they have defined it and perhaps even to come up with a "solution" that will take care of the matter to their own satisfaction. It is important, against this sort of expectation, to understand that a sociological problem is something quite different from a "social problem" in this sense. For example, it is naïve to concentrate on crime as a "problem" because law-enforcement agencies so define it, or on divorce because that is a "problem" to the moralists of marriage. Even more clearly, the "problem" of the foreman to get his men to work more efficiently or of the line officer to get his troops to charge the enemy more enthusiastically need not be problematic at all to the sociologist (leaving out of consideration for the moment the probable fact that the sociologist asked to study such "problems" is employed by the corporation or army).

The sociological problem is always the understanding of what goes on here in terms of social interaction. Thus the

sociological problem is not so much why some things "go wrong" from the viewpoint of the authorities and the management of the social scene, but how the whole system works in the first place, what are its presuppositions and by what means is it held together. The fundamental sociological problem is not crime but law, not divorce but marriage, not racial discrimination but racially defined stratification, not revolution but government.

The concept of "ideology," a central one in some sociological theories, could serve as another illustration of the debunking tendency discussed. Sociologists speak of "ideology" in discussing views that serve to rationalize the vested interests of some group. Very frequently such views systematically distort social reality in much the same way that an individual may neurotically deny, deform or reinterpret aspects of his life that are inconvenient to him. Sociological analyses of ideology unmask self-conceptions and justification as self-deception, sales talk, the "sincerity" of individuals who habitually believe their own propaganda.

We speak of an ideology when a certain idea serves a vested interest in society. Very frequently, though not always, ideologies systematically distort social reality in order to come out where it is functional for them to do so. In looking at the control systems set up by occupational groups we have already seen the way in which ideologies can legitimate the activities of such groups. Ideological thinking, however, is capable of covering much larger human collectivities. For example, the racial mythology of the American South serves to legitimate a social system practiced by millions of human beings. The ideology of 'free enterprise' serves to camouflage the monopolistic practices of large American corporations whose only common characteristic with the old-style entrepreneur is a steadfast readiness to defraud the public.

The Marxist ideology, in turn, serves to legitimate the tyranny practiced by the Communist Party apparatus whose interests have about as much in common with Karl Marx's as those of Elmer Gantry had with the Apostle Paul's.

In each case, the ideology both justifies what is done by the group whose vested interest is served and interprets social reality in such a way that the justification is made plausible. This interpretation often appears bizarre to an outsider who 'does not understand the problem' (that is, who does not share the vested interest). The Southern racist must simultaneously maintain that white women have a profound revulsion at the very thought of sexual relations with a Negro and that the slightest inter-racial sociability will straightaway lead to such sexual relations. And the corporation executive will maintain that his activities to fix prices are undertaken in defense of a free market. And the Communist Party official will have a way of explaining that the limitation of electoral choice to candidates approved by the party is an expression of true democracy.

It should be stressed again in this connection that commonly the people putting forth these propositions are perfectly sincere. The moral effort to lie deliberately is beyond most people. It is much easier to deceive oneself. It is, therefore, important to keep the concept of ideology distinct from notions of lying, deception, propaganda or legerdemain. The liar, by definition, knows that he is lying. The ideologist does not…

A commonly used concept in sociology is that of the definition of the situation. First coined by the American sociologist W.I. Thomas, it means that a social situation *is* what it is defined to be by its participants. In other words, for the sociologist's purposes, reality is a matter of definition. This is why the sociologist must analyze earnestly many facets of human conduct that are in themselves absurd or

delusional. In the example of the racial system just given, a biologist or physical anthropologist may take one look at the racial beliefs of white Southerners and declare that these beliefs are totally erroneous. He can the dismiss them as but another mythology produced by human ignorance and ill will, pack up his things and go home.

The sociologist's task, however, only begins at this point. It does not help at all for him to dismiss the Southern racial ideology as a scientific imbecility. Many social situations are effectively controlled by the definitions of imbeciles. Indeed, the imbecility that defines the situation is part of the stuff of sociological analysis. Thus the sociologist's operational understanding of 'reality' is a somewhat peculiar one…

Does sociology have a core? Yes, but it is not an
eternal essence; not a set of texts or ideas, but an
activity… I also believe we have hit upon a
distinctive intellectual activity. Its appeal is
strong enough to keep it alive, whatever its
name will be in the future and whatever happens
to the surrounding institutional forms. The lure
of this activity is what drew many of us into
sociology. One becomes hooked on being a
sociologist. The activity is this: It is looking at
the world around us, the immediate world you
and I live in, through the sociological eye.

There is a sociology of everything. You
can turn on your sociological eye no matter
where you are or what you are doing. Stuck in a
boring committee meeting (for that matter, a
sociology department meeting), you can check
the pattern of who is sitting next to whom, who
gets the floor, who makes eye contact, and what
is the rhythm of laughter (forced or
spontaneous) or of pompous speechmaking.
Walking down the street, or out for a run, you
can scan the class and ethnic pattern of the
neighborhood, look for lines of age segregation,
or for little pockets of solidarity. Waiting for a
medical appointment, you can read the
professions and bureaucracy instead of old
copies of *National Geographic*. Caught in a
traffic jam, you can study the correlation of car
models with bumper stickers or with the types
of music blaring from radios. There is literally
nothing you can't see in a fresh way if you turn
your sociological eye to it. Being a sociologist
means never having to be bored…

The world a sociologist can see is not
bounded by the immediate microsituation.
Reading the newspaper, whether the business
section or the personal ads, is for us like an
astronomer training his or her telescope on the
sky. Where the ordinary reader is pulled into the
journalistic mode, reading the news through one
or another political bias or schema of popular
melodrama, the sociological eye sees
suggestions of social movements mobilizing or
winding down, indications of class domination
or conflict, or perhaps the organizational
process whereby just this kind of story ended up
in print, defined as news. For us, novels depict
the boundaries of status groups and the saga of
social mobility, just as detective stories show us
about backstages. Whatever we read with the
sociological eye becomes a clue to the larger
patterns of society, here or in the past. The same
goes for the future: Today's sociologists are not
just caught up in the fad of the Internet; they are
already beginning to look at it as another
frontier for sociological discovery…

We can always reenergize ourselves by
getting back to the source: Turn on the
sociological eye and go look at something.
Don't take someone else's word for what there
is to see, or some common cliché (even a
current trendy one), above all not a media-hype
version of what is there; go and see it yourself.
Make it observationally strange, as if you'd
never seen it before. The energy comes back. In
that way, I suspect, sociologists are probably
more energized by their subject matter than
practitioners of virtually any other discipline.

Now I want to thicken the plot. Turning
on the sociological eye is the main way that
many of us became sociologists, but it isn't the
only way. There is another recruitment path,
which also acts as a continuing source of energy
and commitment. This is the path of social
activism. Many, perhaps most of us, became
interested in sociology because we belonged to
social movements or had social commitments.
We wanted to do something to change society,
help people, fight injustice, and elevate the
oppressed.

This is a second reason why sociology is
so distinctive. Although politically committed
persons and former or current activists work
throughout the academic world, in few
disciplines does activism mesh so directly with
one's immediate work as in sociology.
Sociology is nearly the most politicized and
activist of all fields.

As Maxine Atkinson explained, "The scholarship of teaching is the process of transmitting perspectives, skills, and knowledge to others while remaining a vital learner oneself" (2001:1221). How do we know when the scholarship of teaching sociology has occurred? According to Atkinson, "when students learn to evaluate evidence critically, formulate arguments, apply concepts to new situations, and differentiate between a social structure and a building made of bricks and cement" (2001:1221)—or , put another way, when students learn to use the sociological imagination.

This is an important arena for transforming knowledge into action: teaching the sociological imagination so that students become practicing sociologists in their roles as citizens of the world. Imagine living in a world where people have been introduced to the concept of structure and given the opportunity to move beyond individual-level explanations for social problems. I believe that teaching the sociological imagination provides democratic citizens with a powerful tool to better understand the world in which we live, and can be a key to meaningful and effective social change.

[S]ome sociologists, like Dorothy Smith (1999), argue that it is the responsibility of social scientists to use their knowledge to bring about a more humane society… I am committed to value-centered research and teaching, because, like Dorothy Smith, I feel a responsibility to use the tools of our discipline to work for a more humane social world. I believe that sociology has the capacity, as Smith (1999:65) put it, to "lay bare how the system works" so that citizens are empowered to act for meaningful social change.

Like many sociologists, I believe that sociology holds the promise of a better, more just world. This promise is why I became a sociologist and how I have kept a sense of hope in seemingly hopeless times….

At the root of our desire to practice sociology is, as Allan Johnson wrote, a deep and broad sense of "morality that touches on the essence of what we're about as human beings and what our life together consists of (1997:2). He claimed that the practice of sociology "changes how we see the world and how we experience it, which is a first step toward new ways of participating in it" (165).

Part of the goal of teaching, I believe, is to give students tools they can use to see, for example, the elephant in the room or the fact that the emperor has no clothes (Zerubavel 2006). Or that poverty is not the result of individual choices. Or that the greed of the western world in consumptive patterns is (literally) killing women and children in third world countries. In other words, to use critical pedagogy as developed by Paulo Freire (1974), teaching students to question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that sustain oppressive conditions.

In many ways this is teaching for engaged citizenship, challenging students to understand that their role as citizen (and student) is "contextualized as consumption" (King and Zanetti 2005:20) in contemporary multinational corporate culture, and that they should expect (and demand) more. bell hooks (2000) has long claimed that critical thinking is "the primary element allowing the possibility of change." She argued that "no matter what one's class, race, gender, or social standing, without the capacity to think critically about our selves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow" (174).

If we agree that citizenship requires both ethical reasoning and critical thinking, then it is our responsibility to combine the study of sociology with a commitment to social justice… To begin this task, we can ready ourselves with tools from sociology, as well as other disciplines and perspectives. The sociological imagination provides a framework within which we can image the world anew.