

The Sociologist

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Photo by Ryan Low

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Building an Interdisciplinary Community through Public Sociology

Coming in the next issue of *The Sociologist*, a report on George Mason University's annual Public Sociology Association conference, which met from October 20-22, 2021.

Announcement by Dhruv Deepak and Kellie Wilkerson

From October 20-22, The Public Sociology Association (PSA) at George Mason University (GMU) held their annual Public Sociology Conference. The PSA at GMU is a student-led and organized collaborative space for researchers ranging from undergraduate students to experienced practitioners. The Association invited proposals seeking to address: interdisciplinary research practice, public/community-engaged research projects, and further applications of the sociological imagination to active, dynamic and publicly-engaged contexts.

The conference was intended to express the vitality of public sociology as a discipline and the energy, inclusiveness, and innovation of GMU. The conference also aimed to increase the accessibility of public sociological knowledge and advance publics' understanding of, and engagement with, social issues; panels and other forms of conversation during the conference addressed this topic.

This was the seventh annual conference hosted by the PSA and GMU's Department of Sociology and Anthropology; it featured traditional paper sessions, poster presentations, organized panels, and workshops in a virtual, online setting. The panels and workshops were hosted by partnering organizations such as GMU's Center for Social Science Research, GMU's Education and Health Research Hub, Next System Studies, and the Institute for Immigration Research. An overview of the conference sessions can be found at <https://cssr.gmu.edu/events/12795>.

If you're interested in learning more about the PSA or future conferences, please reach out to Kellie Wilkerson (kwilker@gmu.edu).

Immigration Policy, Legal Status & Enforcement through Three Decades of Research among Central American Immigrants in the United States.

Cecilia Menjivar, President, American Sociological Association



Immigration policy has been in the public eye, often taking center stage, for the past couple

of decades. This interest grew considerably during the Obama and then the Trump administrations, as the number of unaccompanied minors and families from Central America arriving at the southern U.S. border grew in the mid-2010s and these administrations sought to contain the growth by detaining and separating these families. Given the heightened attention that immigration policy received during the Trump administration and the unprecedented policy activity during that presidency, there are raised expecta-

tions about what the Biden administration may do in this area. Will the Biden administration help to reunite separated families, lift restrictions on asylum at the border, and restore the refugee resettlement cap? Will the new administration reverse some of the policies of the previous administration or advance new ones?

Such debates usually focus on the effects that immigration policies have

of immigrants, their employment opportunities, and integration patterns in U.S. society?

These questions have animated my three decades of research in the field of immigration. Through my empirical focus on Central American migration (e.g., Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan) to the United States, I have researched the effects of immigration laws and the enforcement

system on various aspects of life for these immigrants, including family composition and dynamics, gender and generational relations, employment and earnings, health and health care ac-

cess, educational aspirations, religious participation, relations with non-immigrants, and experiences of citizenship as belonging. In this essay, I summarize some highlights from this body of research through a connecting thread that ties together the main substantive

"I focus not on a dichotomy of documented/undocumented status but on the various in-between, temporary statuses that law produces."

on immigrants and their families. Will policies of separation affect children, and if so, how? Will enforcement practices have long-term effects on families and on children's development? Does legal status, as produced by immigration laws, affect the health

questions I have researched.

Three caveats are in order before I proceed. First, as other migration scholars also have observed (De Genova 2014), I treat the designation “legal status” as “legally produced and constructed through law” (Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014), not as an inherent characteristic of individuals that can be transformed into a variable whose effects can be measured. Following, I focus not on a dichotomy of documented/undocumented status but on the various in-between, temporary statuses that law produces (Menjívar 2006), and the effects of uncertain statuses on immigrants’ lives. Second, my longitudinal work has allowed me to capture in real time the changing context of enforcement, as in the past two decades it has expanded externally beyond the U.S. southern border but also internally, to all states, counties, cities, and towns (Menjívar 2014). Amplified enforcement is predicated on agreements between federal immigration agencies and local law enforcement, the creation and expansion of shared databases that allows easier detection, expansion of surveillance in different institutions, and faster deportations. And third, with an amplified enforcement context, an insecure, vulnerable legal status carries graver consequences today. However, because immigrants in insecure statuses live in the same families, work alongside, and pray in the same congregations as co-ethnics who are documented or even U.S. citizens, the effects of enforcement have spillover effects on family, friends, co-workers, and co-ethnics. Thus, today even U.S. citizens who have family members who are undocumented or in temporary statuses experience similar effects. Importantly, an undocumented status is not

race-neutral (Armenta and Vega 2017; Kibria et al. 2013; Menjívar 2021); an undocumented status has become a proxy for race (García 2017), and this association is so powerful that it affects a wide swath of the Latino population, regardless of generation or nativity (Donato and Rodriguez 2014; Ebert and Ovink 2014; Menjívar et al. 2018; Pew Research Center 2017).

Among Latinos, Central American immigrants have experienced legal instability since the early days of their

“...an undocumented status is not race-neutral; an undocumented status has become a proxy for race.”

presence in the United States. When they started migrating en masse in the 1980s due to civil wars in the Central American region, the U.S. government refused to recognize their plight as refugees fleeing political violence. Thus, instead of extending them refugee protection, it classified them as undocumented immigrants (and thus subject to deportation). This condition has endured over the decades, as this migration has continued and increased. In pioneering work among Central American immigrants, Rodriguez (1987) examined Central Americans’ legal status as central in shaping their new lives in the United States; three decades later, similar questions persist in research on Central American migration as their legal status continues to be insecure, temporary, and vulnerable (O’Connor, Batalova, and Bolter 2019).

The critical place of legal status for Central American immigrants emerged early in my research. Their long-term legal instability manifests in a range of legal statuses, from undocumented to temporary to permanent residence to naturalization, and U.S. citizen.

Thus, an important finding from my work, which Central Americans’ legal ambiguity pointed me to, was the effects of in-between and uncertain statuses, which I conceptualized as “liminal legality” (Menjívar 2006). This research, which I have conducted among Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Phoenix, and Kansas has allowed me to uncover the complexities of lives lived in legal uncertainty for indefinite periods of time, and the effects of such ambiguity today and for future prospects (Menjívar, Agadjanian and Oh 2020).

Furthermore, through an analytic lens of legal uncertainty created by immigration law, I have been able to highlight the critical importance of context, both geographic and historical. Immigration laws change significantly over time; in the past twenty-five years there have been dozens of laws that have amplified the enforcement context while narrowing legislative paths for immigrants to regularize their status. And given that the legal infrastructure that governs immigrants’ lives is composed of laws enacted at various levels of government, there is variation across locales and states concerning the resources immigrants may access, for themselves or their children, and for how long. Centering analytically this complex multi-layered legal context has been key in my work. Thus, variation across contexts plus a multiplicity of legal statuses form a strong connecting thread across my various research projects in this area.

In my first project, based on ethnographic fieldwork, I documented how U.S. legal reception to Salvadorans, which reclassified them as undocumented immigrants instead of as refugees or asylum seekers, under-

mined these immigrants' access to and accumulation of resources. This situation had direct consequences for these immigrants' informal networks because they ended up not having enough resources even for themselves, much less to help loved ones in need, leading to a weakening of their networks (Menjívar 2000). In that project, women's networks emerged as central bridges between families and organizations that provided vital resettlement aid. Thus, in a follow up study I conducted in Los Angeles (Menjívar 2002), I delved more deeply into Guatemalan women's networks as the women mobilized their ties to procure medical treatments and information. Here too, legal status and context played a critical role in what the women could access and what they could share with others, when, and how. In both projects, Catholic and Evangelical (mostly Pentecostal) churches emerged as central in the immigrants' lives. They were welcoming institutions for immigrants with very limited institutional options to access material, but also emotional and spiritual, support. Thus, in a subsequent study I conducted in D.C., I focused only on these religious spaces to understand how Central American immigrants built networks, neighbor-

hoods, and communities in the United States (and in their home countries) through these religious spaces (Menjívar 1999; Menjívar 2003). As the immigration enforcement climate started to intensify in the late 1900s/early 2000s, I focused on its effects for immigrants who live in insecure statuses, and for their families and communities. I engaged in longitudinal research among Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans living in the Phoenix metro area, where I captured the deleterious effects of the enforcement system on the lives of these immigrants, leading me to understand it through a lens of 'legal violence' (Menjívar and Abrego 2012; Menjívar 2013). This interest has continued through my current project, an ethnography that examines

“U.S. legal reception [...] undermined these immigrants' access to and accumulation of resources.”

relations between non-immigrants and recently arrived immigrant workers, mostly Guatemalan Maya, to a rural town in Kansas. This project has allowed me to examine internal racism against Indigenous immigrants and to observe how it operates on the ground, in the context of health and access to health care (Gómez Cervant-

es and Menjívar 2020).

Back to my initial question about the prospects for the Biden administration to reverse course and/or set in motion a more just immigration policy agenda, the answer rests on what the U.S. Congress will allow them to do. But based on my three decades of research on Central American immigrants' experiences, I would strongly suggest a two-pronged approach, to cover the legislative and the enforcement sides of the system. On the legislative side, I would suggest creating concrete avenues for regularization/legalization and to end obstacles that prevent millions from even entering this process; and second, to move immigrants who have lived in temporary legality for decades to permanent statuses. On the enforcement side, the recommendation would be to reverse policies of criminalization, which would reduce the pool of immigrants who end up lingering in detention facilities across the country. These recommendations are not easy to implement but they represent a win-win scenario for all.

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Response to Menjívar

Lauren Díaz Quintana



I was inspired to the reflections that follow by Dr. Cecilia Menjívar's February address

as president-elect of the American Sociological Association, reprised here as "Immigration Policy, Legal Status & Enforcement through Three Decades of Research among Central American Immigrants in the United States" and by the article she co-authored with Dr. Andrea Gómez Cervantes, "Legal Violence, Health, and Access to Care: Latina Immigrants in Rural and Urban Kansas." The former is an overview of the emotional, physical, and material stresses experienced by Latino immigrants to the U.S. as a result of increasingly hostile and arbitrary laws, policies, and enforcement practices beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the administration of Donald Trump.

My interest in immigration grows out of my lived experiences coming to the United States from Puerto Rico to attend college beginning in 2016. The year Donald Trump was elected, I moved to the United States and started my undergraduate academic career at the University of North Florida (UNF). A year later, Hurricane Maria tore through Puerto Rico causing deaths, tension, and social upheaval. As a result, I began to think about the ways in which my status as a first-generation Puerto Rican immigrant could change

during that administration. I asked myself, "Is the United States going to 'sell' Puerto Rico and would I lose my citizenship because of this?" I delved into the social sciences to further understand and answer my questions, and I am currently a first-year sociology graduate student at The George Washington University. My studies and upbringing have helped me understand that governmental administrations have a civic duty to alleviate feelings of fear from our communities, and as such political change is crucial for immigrants.

At UNF I cultivated a relationship with Dr. Jennifer Stuber, sociologist

"I asked myself, 'Is the United States going to 'sell' Puerto Rico and would I lose my citizenship because of this?'"

and qualitative researcher, who focuses on studying inequality. After many office hours and conversations about the systemic issues, inequality, and racial injustice that plague society, I had decided — more like I knew — that I was made for sociology and my purpose lay in creating change for people of color. In 2019, I took Dr. Stuber's qualitative research methods course and I learned the importance of asking questions and listening. I pondered the proposition that it is only through qualitative research that we can create a space for individuals to amplify their voice and story, creating narratives where we attain the details about their worlds.

That spring, Dr. Stuber offered me

a paid position to conduct research on the experiences and attitudes of Latino immigrants and workers in the elite ski town of Aspen, Colorado because of my interest in immigration and my qualitative research and Spanish speaking skills. Specifically, we wanted to investigate the living and housing experiences of Latino immigrants and workers. My assignment and role as lead researcher entailed conducting interviews in Spanish with Latino workers and mentoring another student on qualitative research methods. Some of our research is used by Dr. Stuber in her 2021 book, *Aspen and the American Dream: How One Town*

Manages Inequality in the Era of Supergentrification.

Within this book, Dr. Stuber highlights the ways in which middle class and Latino residents navigate the highly gentrified geospatial area of

Aspen.

As I interviewed and shared often revealing conversations with Central American and South American immigrants, I realized our stories were not so different. I wasn't an outsider looking in. I saw myself as the mother who had left her seven children in Mexico and worked sixty hours a week to save money to hopefully bring them one day. I saw myself in the daughter who feared that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids would take her mother away. And I saw myself in the twenty-year-old man who had spent months walking to the border for a new life. There was a general sentiment that life in the U.S. had become increasingly hostile due to

the Trump administration's explicit anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric, as well as ICE's increase in arrests.

Drs. Menjívar, Gómez Cervantes, and Stuber all focus on the sociology of place as a key variable in how trends actually play out in people's lives. And I see now that the answers I was getting to the research protocol questions were shaped by place: a more benign

"I see now that the answers I was getting to the research protocol questions were shaped by place."

location like Aspen contrasts with the world Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes explore in Kansas. I found some of the same phenomena discussed in their article but not to the same degree—fear of family separation, fear of contacting medical institutions, lessening of mobility, and coping mechanisms (Cervantes and Menjívar 2020). For example, the fear of family separation was present throughout my intimate conversations with Latino immigrants. This theme is evident with individuals like Ana¹, who said, "Um... So that doesn't affect me because...but at the same time I know that my mother has to go to court sometimes to pay her bills and I don't feel okay with that. I go for her and if not...I... If I hear something I go for her so that nobody comes near here because...no...not to take her away from me. Yes... That is my biggest fear". (Santiago 2019)

My research questions were shaped by the larger concerns of Dr. Stuber's study that explored place-based class differences in the U.S., using Aspen as a case in point. Thus, my questions were somewhat less about

immigration and more about economic living and working conditions in and around Aspen, particularly around employment and the stress caused by lack of affordable housing. Aspen is a tourism-based community that is wealthy and basically liberal in its attitudes to its working-class population, which is heavily Latino. This contrasts with the poorer and more conservative

Kansas communities in which Drs. Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes did their study. These

questions led people to report on why they had come to the Aspen area, how they felt about employment there, and how they were handling the problem of housing. Within the interviews I conducted, many of the respondents expressed how they were happy about finding work and with the pay they received in Aspen and the surrounding towns. Alejandro states, "[In El Salvador], they earn five dollars a day, while here you're making twenty dollars per hour. That's a huge difference"

(Stuber 2021:206). Additionally, many Central and South Americans highlighted that one of their reasons to move to the U.S. was to escape the existing violence within their native countries. Alejandro also states,

"In my country, I was a student studying for a language degree, but it's just not safe. If you go out, the gangs can murder you, kidnap you, or whatever, so I decided to come here so that I wouldn't have to take that risk... I made the decision to come because of, let's say, more than anything else, the circumstances of my country"

(Stuber 2021:206).

Even though Central and South American immigrants expressed feelings of emotional pain about the sacrifice required to move from their home and leave family behind, and in some instances exploitation, they also discussed the economic and social benefits of moving to the U.S. Through the process of moving to the areas surrounding Aspen, the immigrants that were interviewed stated how they have been able to create their own communities with other immigrants.

I wonder if I did not have enough time to establish trust with my participants, if I did not ask the right questions, or if I should have probed more in certain instances. As a developing researcher, I hope to learn from the experts on how I can ask questions that further reflect on vulnerability and the meaning of status for Latino immigrants.

But I also recognize that it is important to think about the ways

"...the immigrants that were interviewed stated how they have been able to create their own communities with other immigrants."

in which we can use interviews as interventions to diminish inequalities in society. My experiences and research opportunities have made me realize how the interview process is crucial for building a space of healing for Black and Brown people. This not only helps people make sense of their story, but it also helps social scientists understand the sociological issues and what interventions could help diminish them. I hope to continue conducting ethical and sound research to create a platform to amplify people's voices. I plan on applying to doctorate of psychology programs to learn more

1 Interviewee names are pseudonyms to ensure privacy and anonymity.

about the clinical side of psychology, counseling, and practice. This step will help me in my career goals of opening a safe and affordable space for Black and Brown people to tell their stories and cope with the psychological effects that oppression and exploitation perpetuate.

This summer, I will be presenting at the annual meeting of The Society for the Study of Social Problems in the session “End Inequality: Transformations in Disparities Research and Interventions,” which gives me the opportunity to share my experience as a first-time field researcher and the ways in which social scientists can intervene to diminish inequalities through academic research. I offer two key principles for field research among

vulnerable populations: (1) the need to frame intervention as part of your intention in fieldwork and (2) the need to understand the power dynamics that will shape your field work (Diaz Quintana 2021). I am hopeful to see change, but it is only through intervention and through policy changes that this will happen.

Dr. Cecilia Menjívar, I thank you for your contributions, academic activism, and response to this issue. Now more than ever, the hope you bring us and the younger generation is inspiring. It is only through asking questions and seeking answers that we can access information for intervention. As Dr. Menjívar says, these approaches will not be easy to implement, but it can be a start to a better world for Latino immigrants.

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Memories of



Mel Kohn (1928-2021)

Three colleagues of Mel remember his life.

From Johanna K. Bockman

Back in 2014, as DCSS president, I discovered that Melvin L. Kohn gave a DCSS presentation on March 30, 1961, titled “Reports on Some Current Research on Health,” and had, in fact, been a member of DCSS since the early 1950s. I decided that to deeply understand DCSS I had to talk with Mel, and I am very glad I did.

When I revealed at our meeting that I have been an ecstatic fan of sociology, Mel declared, “We’re twins!” He truly loved sociology and being a sociologist. In his memoir, *Adventures in Sociology: My Life as a Cross-National Scholar*, he began, “the true hero of this tale is not Mel Kohn, but an academic field, Sociology” (p. 7).¹ Sociological research at the National Institute of Mental Health for almost 35 years and then at Johns Hopkins University offered him an exciting life of adventure. In his adventurous life, he worked with collaborators – in particular, those in China, Italy, Japan, Poland, and Ukraine – and came to

identify himself as a “cross-national sociologist.” He and his collaborators explored “whether the relationships of class and stratification to job conditions, and of job conditions to values and orientation,” are similar across countries with transforming economic systems, using ever-new statistical methods and innovative indices (p. 129). His cross-national approach and his thoughtful methodological writings on it provided a much-needed counterweight to sociology’s often provincial focus on U.S. society.² His great love of sociology and cross-national research has contributed much to our discipline and to DCSS.

For decades, DCSS provided Mel and other sociologists a space different from other professional associations. Bringing together academics and non-academics, it wonderfully filled a gap. Mel ended our discussion with, “How grateful can you be to DCSS!” And DCSS is very grateful to Mel.

¹ His self-published memoir is enjoyably written and insightful about the development of his sociological subfields. Kohn, Melvin L. 2016. *Adventures in Sociology: My Life as a Cross-National Scholar*. Washington, DC: Opus, Politics and Prose Bookstore, <https://www.politics-prose.com/book/9781624290749>

² See, for example, Kohn, Melvin L. 1987. “Cross-National Research as an Analytic Strategy: American Sociological Association, 1987 Presidential Address.” *American Sociological Review* 52(6): 713-731.

From Sandra Hanson

I met Mel Kohn through DCSS. He was one of the biggest supporters of our regional sociological society. Mel spoke many times at DCSS, but perhaps one of his earliest talks was in March of 1961. At that time, Dr. Kohn was Chief of the Laboratory of Socio-environmental Studies at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). He spoke with Forest Linder (from the Public Health Service) on “Some Current Research on Health” at Gallaudet University. Mel Kohn was an extremely popular presenter and one was fortunate if you could arrange for him to give a talk. The sociologists at Catholic University were among the fortunate. Mel Kohn gave the “Che Fu Lee Memorial Talk” in honor of our colleague Che Fu Lee in 2010. The topic was “Class, Stratification, and Personality under conditions of Apparent Social Change: A Comparison of the U.S., Japan, Poland, and Ukraine.”

Mel and I (along with my husband Steven Tuch) shared a love for Eastern Europe and often laughed over some of our adventures. By all appearances, this kind and modest man with a huge smile was some interesting sociologist attending the DCSS meetings, when in fact he was a world-famous sociologist. Steve and I had done exchanges at

the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Mel had done much more. He was involved in groundbreaking work comparing social structure and personality in countries across the world including Italy, Poland, Japan, Ukraine, and China. All of this comparative work was in collaboration with sociologists from these countries. Some of it was conducted under repressive communist regimes. It is those stories of Mel’s that most affected me because of the danger and challenges of doing sociological research under difficult circumstances.

Mel’s research tying social structure to personality was perhaps some of the first (and finest) work showing micro-macro connections. This radical move toward combining the two distinct approaches affected my work on race, gender, and science in countless ways, as it did the work of many others. More importantly, I never taught a class at Catholic University without mentioning this brilliant work on how work structures affect personalities, which in turn affect interactions in the home. I remember students being incredulous: “You mean our jobs affect our personalities and ultimately how we socialize our children?” Who else but someone with Mel Kohn’s training

and work at NIMH could have created this theory and found empirical support for it? Mel didn’t stop there. He was one of the first American sociologists to point out that our sociological lens need not be limited in focus to the U.S. Instead, our insights are heightened by comparative, cross-national work, and it is comparative work that involves collaboration with international scholars that is the most valuable. Once again, Mel paved the way for me (and many others). I can think of no one else who was as influential in my decision to look at gender equity in science in a comparative context.

Thank you for all that you gave us Mel. We will miss you.

From John W. Curtis

I don't have many positive memories from my grad school years, but the few interactions I had with Mel Kohn are certainly among them. Mel came to the sociology department at the beginning of my second year, and I think those of us students who fancied ourselves Marxist internationalists were skeptical when we learned he would be joining the faculty. His classic book, *Class and Conformity*, had been included in the required first-year seminar, which gave it a negative association for those of us who had just gone through the painful ordeal that course was in those days. But Mel quickly set any doubts aside with his combination of sharp intellect, open mind, and approachability.

I remember a self-deprecating anecdote Mel told early on about his first trip to Poland presenting some of his work on class to an academic audience steeped in Marxist-Leninist dogma. Although I didn't take it myself, I heard that Mel's seminar course on social structure and personality was a hit even with my leftist fellow travelers. Given my own focus on African and Latin American societies, I had only one course myself with Mel

as a faculty member. It was a methods seminar on structural equation modeling, which was pretty cutting-edge stuff in 1986. I have never had any reason to make use of structural equation modeling in my own work, but I feel I gained a conceptual understanding of the method from that seminar that was far more important than any "how-to" instructions would have been.

Probably my last interaction with Mel as a student came during my required foreign language exam. The exam consisted of reading an assigned piece of scholarly literature and discussing it with the faculty member one-on-one. I chose German, because I had studied the language as an undergraduate. But at the time, I had not been to Germany or really read much of anything in German sociology, whereas Mel was then a member of the Scientific Advisory Board for the Max-Planck Institut für Bildungsforschung und Humanentwicklung in Berlin. I have no recollection now what that article was about, but I do remember being stuck on a term that was used repeatedly but didn't seem to fit the dictionary definition. I was worried about that coming into the exam, but it turned out Mel had also found that

term somewhat confusing and we had a good discussion about it. (The word was *Betrieb*, which I later figured out referred in this context to a workplace, but that was not at all clear at the time.) I still remember that after more than 30 years.

I only had a couple of brief interactions with Mel after graduate school, chance meetings at conferences and one pleasant conversation at a DCSS event a few years ago. I know he has been deservedly honored for his scholarship and is remembered for groundbreaking comparative research. But I will always remember Mel for his kindness and the genuine curiosity he demonstrated in conversations about pretty much anything. I'm glad I had the opportunity to know him.

Being a Fence Watcher

Essay and Photos by Wen Guan



Above: November 5, 2020

After Inauguration Day, fewer and fewer people showed up in the Black Lives Matter Plaza every day. Most people took the footage they wanted and left, except for the homeless people, the street artists, and the fence watchers (protecting the protest signs and street artwork on the fence between the plaza and White House), they have to stay as long as they can. My boyfriend Ryan and I joined the fence watchers in Black Lives Matter Plaza two days before Inauguration Day. Living in DC for two years, I have my personal emotional attachment to this plaza. Most protest routines always have a stop around here. I love this public place not only because it reminds me of all my protest memories, but also because of its symbolic meaning about freedom of expression.

I come from China, where they

never allow street protests or any potential disagreement towards the state or authorities. Lacking freedom of association, assembly, and press, only non-controversial protests could be approved by the government, which is always portrayed by Chinese mainstream media as proof that China guarantees the same rights as Western countries. In practice, however, any self-organized protest could be proscribed as a violation of the penal code against ‘inciting subversion of state power’¹ under the auspices of maintaining ‘social stability’ in a larger narrative. Even though massive protests have happened in Hong Kong since

2019, the public in mainland China generally holds negative opinions towards it because the Chinese Constitution declares that it’s every citizen’s duty to “fight against those forces and elements [...] that are hostile to China’s socialist system and try to undermine it.”

Now as I live in DC, I view the BLM plaza as our public space and our social infrastructure, carrying our anger, sorrow, and a deep sense of commitment to the community. The art pieces hanging on the fence are a physical reminder of resistance and cross-class, cross-race bonds reinforced during Black Lives Matter protests, anti-Asian-hate protest, the Women’s March, and so on.

¹“Inciting subversion of state power” (pinyin: Shāndòng diǎnfǔ guójiā zhèngquán zuì) is a crime under the law of the People’s Republic of China. It is article 105, paragraph 2 of the 1997 revision of the People’s Republic of China’s Penal Code.

Since last year after George Floyd was killed by the police, more and more people came to protest or march around the Black Lives Matter Plaza, and they left their protest signs on the fences. After months, these signs became a public exhibition and a part of the historical record of the place. They are also a part of collective memory, which has material and social consequences in helping people resist the homogenizing forces of urbanization and maintain the heterogeneity and locality of a place. As Jordan (2003) argues, collective memory affects not only the landscape of the city but also the concrete social, political and spatial projects. We met Nadine Seiler, 55, a street artist who spent months outside Lafayette Square and Black Lives Matter Plaza advocating against racial injustice and making artwork about human rights and social justice. Nadine told us that last year after the announcement of the newly confirmed Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett, a group of white

conservative religious people stormed the fence and pulled down many signs. From then on, Nadine dedicated herself day and night to stopping the destruction of the signs on the fence. Protecting the material representation of collective memory in space has local significance. The artwork on the fence served as a collective memory for the community itself, and its symbolic meaning was socially constructed by the social activities that happened in this space. Both of these are forces that shape the perception and self-definition of the community, as well as of DC. The plaza provides a symbol for oppressed communities and also a moment of organization, resistance, unity and power for the people that fight against racial injustice, police brutality, and state violence.

January 20, 2021 Inaguration Day



November 5, 2020



A “place,” as defined by Gieryn (2000), is a physical environment invested with personal and collective meaning, memory, and value. Places carry a lot of meanings, which are “qualitative, historically specific configuration[s]”, incorporating a sense of individual rootedness in locale and the dependence of memory on the particularities of the physical and cultural environment (Jordan 2003). Every individual in a place not only occupies a spot but also defines that space at the same time. Public space is not only a physical container. It also composes social relations and contains collective memory embedded in the social activities that occurred on the site. According to Right to the City (Lefebvre 1996), space is shaped by society for economic production and social reproduction. Lefebvre argues that the city is fragmented where use value and exchange value meet in relation to production. During the Covid-19 pandemic and all the recent changes in US politics, the criminal justice system, and the society as a whole, the social exchange that used to take place in the city retreated due to social distancing, the fear of physical encounters, and the uncertainty of safety. The public space shrank both physically and theoretically.

Preserving protest artwork on the Lafayette Square fence is also the protection of a living art gallery. That history would never have been complete if it wasn't for the fence watchers' tenacity and dedication to protecting it. But the self-appointed fence watchers can't physically stop every conservative group from ripping signs off. The DC Department of Public Works also dumped a lot of them that were left on the sidewalk in December. When the city announced they would take the whole fence down we reached out to the National Archives and National Museum of African American History and Culture to save the protest signs.



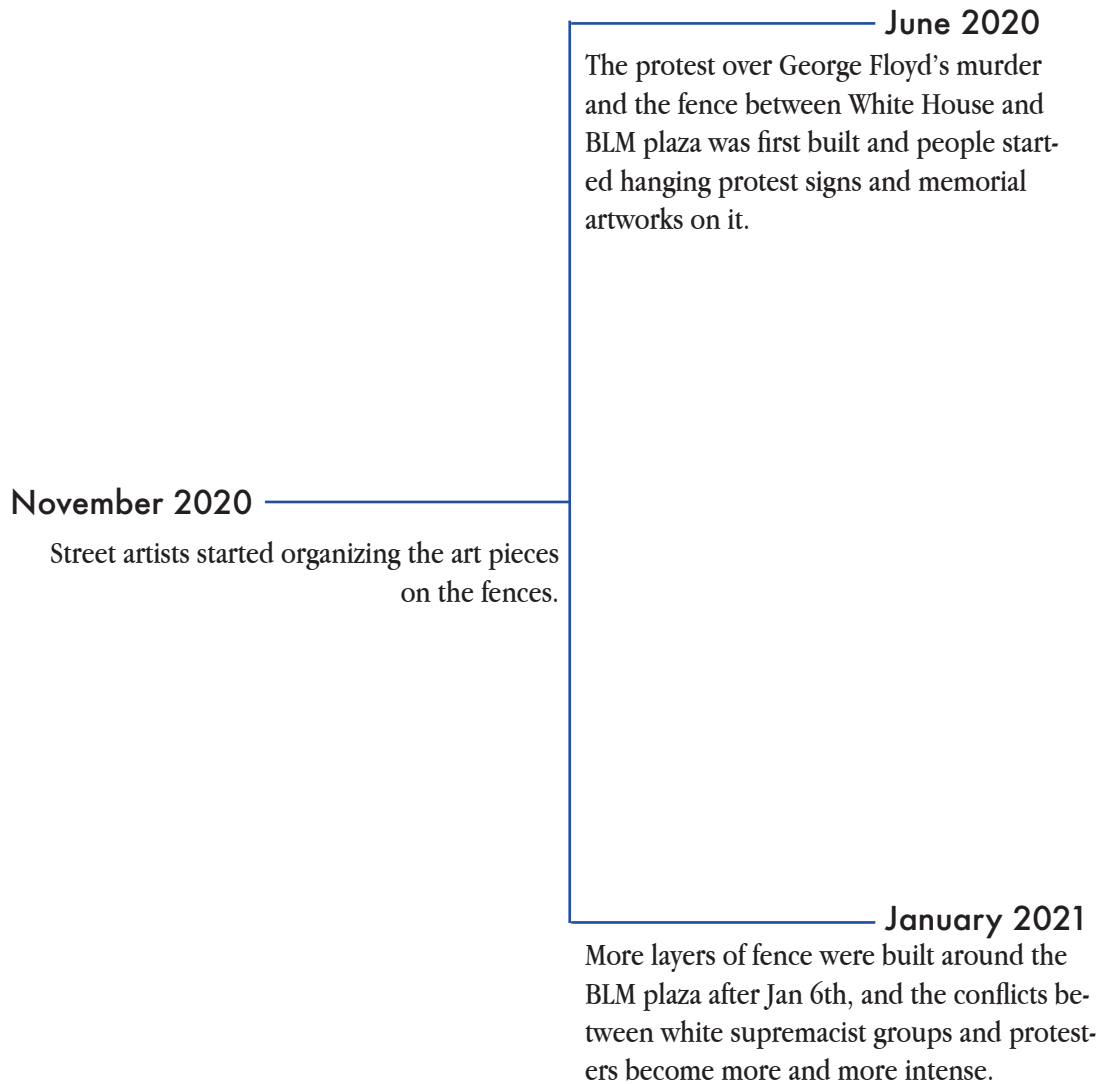
November 5, 2020

Now Howard University and National Library of Congress have already selected some of the representatives for a collection but there are so many good street artworks, protest signs and hand-written poster and notes will be gone with the wind. My boyfriend and I were trying to take as many photos as we can to save a digital copy of them but after the fence being gone, will we still remember the nationwide protest, historic chaos and resistance, darkness and sparkling of humanity?



January 20, 2021 Inaguration Day

Timeline



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Photo by Andy Feliciotti from Unsplash



The Capitol Riots and Police Suicides Remembered

Jurnee Louder

While growing up in Georgia, Capitol Hill was physically and ideologically distant from my life. I understood that it was tied to our government, but the scale of it was so grand that it was imperceptible. I thought the Capitol to be an unwavering institution. When I accepted my admission to the George Washington University (GW), my parents and I toured Downtown Washington, D.C., finally seeing the Capitol for the first time. As semesters passed, as more of my peers found internships in the Capitol and as I continued my studies in sociology, the Capitol's presence solidified. It was more than the protected seat of Congress. It still felt unwavering and grand, but conversely, it also felt like my neighborhood.

As a sociology student, I also took note of how other things were changing in my life — namely, politics. Over the past several years, socio-political unrest had been bubbling under the surface as the political landscape of the United States became a culture of extremes. As the 2020 presidential election results trickled in and his loss looked increasingly imminent, former President Donald J. Trump stoked the hysterical fury and violent skepticism of his followers. In a series of tweets on Dec. 19, 2020, then-President Trump denounced President-elect Joseph R. Biden's win and foretold the day that would change the trajectory of our country — “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!” (Barry & Frenkel 2021). The protest, officially named the “Save America Rally,” would in a few hours turn into a violent insurrection on Capitol Hill, where fervent Trump supporters stormed and looted the place I had come to know. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, GW had chosen to hold classes remotely, and even though I was back home again, the Capitol as an

institution no longer felt unwavering, as it did all those years ago.

As the hours-long insurrection unfolded, those of us who were not on the front lines watched the live reporting in horror. Videos showed insurrectionists breaching the police lines, attacking the police with blunt objects and chemical sprays, and waving Trump flags as they walked in the emptied House Chamber. While all members of Congress were kept safe, the riot ultimately injured about 140 officers (Schmidt & Broadwater 2021) and an unknown number of protesters. Depending on the source, the death toll is counted as five or seven. The difference is decided by the exclusion or inclusion of the suicides of U.S Capitol Police officer Howard Liebengood and D.C Metropolitan Police officer Jeffrey Smith.

One day after the insurrection, U.S Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick suffered two strokes and later died. Officer Sicknick's death, along with the death of four insurrectionists, is included in every death toll. On Feb. 2 he lay in honor in the Capitol Rotunda, and government officials paid their respects. On Jan. 9, Officer Liebengood committed suicide. Six days later, Officer Smith also committed suicide. Though the White House ordered flags to be lowered to half-staff in remembrance for all three officers, only Officer Sicknick's death was reported as a line-of-duty death. Although D.C. Chief Medical Examiner Francisco Diaz, announced on April 19 that Officer Sicknick's death was due to “natural causes”, (Wise 2021) his death is still considered to be a direct result of the insurrection — unlike the deaths of Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith. Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith were not buried in the Arlington National Cemetery, and did not lay in honor in the Rotunda.

In a country burdened with crises — from mass shootings to COVID-19 outbreaks — our bodies are in constant survival mode. In an attempt to alleviate the daily strain we experience, our minds begin to forget the critical events that happened not too long ago. This culture of amnesia has additionally fogged the memory of January 6th, and as our news cycles have moved on, so have we.

However, the families of Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith have struggled to move on. In the midst of Officer Sicknick's public memorialization, the widows of Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith have pushed for their husbands' deaths to be considered deaths in the line of duty. In a Feb. 12 Washington Post article, “Two police officers died of suicide after Capitol riot. More are hurting,” Officer Liebengood's wife, Serena Liebengood, said, “I cannot imagine the trauma Howie and his colleagues faced on January 6th or the pain they have endured afterwards. In Howie's case, it cost him his life. His service, sacrifice and memory should be honored with official recognition that he died in the line of duty” (Hermann 2021). David Weber, the attorney for Erin Smith and Officer Smith's family, echoed the sentiment — “It is time the District recognized that some of the greatest risks police officers face lead to silent injuries. Why do we say that one person is honored, and another person is forgotten? They all faced the exact same circumstances” (Hermann 2021).

While both Liebengood and Smith appear to want their husbands to be ceremonially celebrated to the extent Sicknick was, the Post article noted that excluding their husbands in the line-of-duty death count may also affect employment benefits — “In many jurisdictions, including the District,

rules or laws governing pensions exclude extra payouts in suicides. D.C. law says the fatality must be ‘the sole and direct’ result of an on-duty injury and one not caused by an ‘intention to bring about his own death’” (Hermann 2021). For Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith’s widows, the support they have received from the police force — financial or otherwise — may not reflect the extent of their sacrifice.

The fields of sociology and criminology have extensively studied many aspects of police organizational culture, specifically the strong sense of solidarity that unifies not only local police units, but departments across the nation and around the world. In “Police Occupational Culture: Classic Themes, Altered Times,” Loftus observed in London that “many officers reported feeling alienated from the general public and consequently developed a strong sense of togetherness with colleagues. Feelings of solidarity were further exacerbated by the anticipation of danger” (2009:12). This is evidenced in the recent shooting of Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, in Minneapolis. Afterward, the Brooklyn Center Police Department flew a thin blue line flag at full-staff. For some, this flag represents police solidarity and the proclamation of “Blue Lives Matter.” Others believe this flag represents police solidarity against movements for racial justice. Either way, the result is the same — the police have a tradition of protecting each other and maintaining a unified public front.

This camaraderie is further exemplified in memorializing police deaths. In “The Commemoration of Death, Organizational Memory and Police Culture,” Sierra-Arévalo found

that “the statistical rarity of death in policing does not negate that officers do die in the line of duty. Knowing that death is a rare but nonetheless real possibility, officers are socialized into the shared understanding of dangerous police work in various ways” (2019:636). When officers do die in the line of duty, their lives are often celebrated in public pageantry — ranging from memorials in police stations to lying in honor in the Capitol Rotunda. Perhaps this memorialization, reverence, and heroized police culture is what keeps new recruits coming. This context begs the question of why Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith received differential treatment from Officer Sicknick.

Death and suicide are also

“The Capitol riot threw the rules the officers would have identified with into abandon, causing them to feel hopeless and lost.”

long-standing interests for sociologists. In *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897), French sociologist Émile Durkheim analyzed societal data to make claims about why one might commit suicide and who is most likely to do so. (He lists soldiers as a particularly affected group, for example.) Durkheim theorized that suicide was the interplay of two constructs: social integration (how well one is connected to others) and moral regulation (one’s ability to act according to society’s rules). Durkheim also identified four types of suicide: egoistic (the individual does not feel connected to society), altruistic (the individual is too connected to society), anomic (the individual no longer identifies with society’s rules), and fatalistic (the individual is oppressed by society’s

rules). Though sociologists have called Durkheim’s methodology into question over the years, his conceptualization allows us to start forging connections between societal pressures, individual actions, and life or death. From a Durkheimian perspective, we might say that the suicides of Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith were anomic — the Capitol riot threw the rules the officers would have identified with into abandon, causing them to feel hopeless and lost.

In fields tangential to sociology — philosophy and political theory — another connection has been made between the state and one’s ability to live: necropolitics. In the essay *Necropolitics*, Cameroonian philosopher Achilles Mbembe defined the term

as the ability of a sovereign state “to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (2003:27). Under this theory, states have sovereignty over our bodies, and the decision to live or die is not wholly

ours. Mbembe’s work is more nuanced than this snapshot, but we can nonetheless see threads of it at play in many aspects of society. For example, a 2021 journal article analyzed how the connections between capitalist actors and the state created a necropolitical dynamic in which the lives of workers in U.S. pork packing plants were needlessly lost in the COVID-19 pandemic (Ken and León 2021).

In the case of Officer Liebengood’s and Officer Smith’s suicides, it would be difficult and crass to speculate fully about the circumstances leading to their deaths. However, using what we know about police culture, necropolitics, and suicide, we can begin to understand the mortality of police officers and the reaction to Liebengood and Smith’s suicides.

On a minute level, police officers are given the chance to exercise discretion. U.S. Capitol Police officers can decide how strictly they want to guard congressional grounds. Local police officers can decide whether or not it is worth their time to pull you over. However, considering Mbembe's necropolitical analysis on the systemic level, police officers as arms of the state have little control over the course of their job, and thus, the course of their lives. Police officers are expected to make the ultimate sacrifice — losing their life to protect and serve. As an arm of the state, whatever interests the state holds, the officer must uphold, whether that entails the squashing of an insurrection or the taking of a Black person's life. They are socialized to believe that death is always a possibility, but that it is a sacrifice worth making, in an effort to protect the interests of the state from an enemy.

Concurrently, our nation is obsessively preoccupied with the perpetrators of crime. We want to know names, demographics, and histories. As we've moved on from the losses of the insurrection, we've watched the Department of Justice and the FBI enact a months-long manhunt to identify and charge those associated with the riot. When Black Americans are murdered extrajudicially on camera, many are quick to ask what they did to make an officer shoot. In many ways, the fascination with police has less to do with

the police themselves and more do with the targets of their force. When an enemy is staring down the barrel of a gun, officers are given two choices — dispose of the enemy or lose their life trying. To use Durkheim's analysis, police officers, like soldiers, are expected to perform the ultimate form of altruism — the loss of one's own life for the state. Police officers are not literally expected to commit suicide, but the act of being willing to die for a cause is inherently quasi-suicidal. This makes Durkheim's theory useful. This also makes police officers disposable — revered, yet disposable.

We will never fully know what Of-

“Trump insurrectionists, who normally proclaim their loyalty to police, did not protect these officers.”

icer Liebengood and Officer Smith felt in the days before their passing. However, after surviving the riot and after the enemy combatants were thwarted, Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith were “supposed” to make it. Instead, they took their own lives. Who was the enemy combatant in their case? Who was the perpetrator of crime that we can obsess over for months on end? Was it the insurrectionists, Trump, their inner demons? We will never be able to arrive to a suitable answer, but we can start by examining the police system itself. The hands of suicide take more officers' lives than the hands of perpetrators (Miller 2005). Yet, performative movements like Blue Lives

Matter or the Thin Blue Line fail to adequately address this fact.

Trump insurrectionists, who normally proclaim their loyalty to police, did not protect these officers. The state did not protect these officers or their families. The state did not protect the lost lives of Black and Brown people, disproportionately killed by the police. Regardless of the sense of obligation officers may feel to protect the state, the state does not feel the same for them. The suicides of Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith have drawn negative attention to the police organizational structures instead of the usual commemoration of bravery that follows the death of a police officer. To count the deaths of Officer Liebengood and Officer Smith as line-of-duty deaths and have them lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda would be an acknowledgment of the necropolitical forces that wear on all of us. This is something the state and the police departments are not willing to do. They are not willing to yet admit that the real unwavering enemy combatant is the organization itself.

Editor's Note: Between the completion of this story and publication two more officers who responded to the riot committed suicide. Metropolitan Police Officer Kyle DeFreyTag passed on July 10 and Metropolitan Police Officer Gunther Hashida passed on July 29.

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Howard University Panels on Race Relations

Sally Amankwah

In spring 2021, as part of Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD)'s Anti-Racism Initiative, Beta chapter of D.C. received a \$1200 award to sponsor a series of colloquia on systemic racism in the U.S. The funding went to produce three Zoom events that each highlighted different issues in discussing systemic racism: health disparities, policing, and structural racism. The intent of the overall program was to engage not only the Howard University community in the discussion, but also our counterparts at the other colleges and universities in the local DC/MD/VA (or DMV) area who have AKD chapters. To ensure this wider participation, each colloquium involved discussants from institutions other than Howard. All programs were also advertised to local AKD chapter representatives on Instagram, by email to sociology departments, and on Howard's website.

The three different colloquia were organized as Zoom discussion panels that all followed the same format. The Chapter Representative welcomed participants to the event and described the AKD and Department sponsorship,

before introducing the moderator. The latter for each session was a faculty member from Howard's Department of Sociology and Criminology, who then introduced both the session topic

"The discussion came to focus on Black-White relations in the DC police force, on the difficulties of bringing about reform within police departments, and on the tensions felt by Black citizens."

and the discussants. Each session included a national expert on the subject matter, as well as a mix of professors and graduate students or recent graduates drawn from Howard and from local universities. The objective was not only to include participants beyond Howard, but also to make certain that younger, graduate and postdoctoral student voices were heard, as well as those of more seasoned professionals.

Each colloquium lasted two hours, with roughly 1-1.25 hours used for presentations and the remainder for an open discussion among the panelists, the moderator, and the audience. This colloquium was a three-part series on Critical Conversations: Key Issues

for Discussing Race in America.

The first colloquium, on February 25 from 6pm - 8pm on Zoom, was titled, "Race, Pandemics and Social Response" moderated by Dr. Terri Adams-Fuller, Interim Chair, Department of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University, whose practical experience and research interests include emergency management, policing, and the impact of disasters on individuals and organizations.

The featured panelists were Dr. Henrika McCoy, Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Student Service, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois Chicago; Dr. Ivor Livingston, Professor, Dept of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University; Dr. Marie-Claude Jiguiep-Akhtar, Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University; Ms. Denae Bradley, PhD Student, Dept of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University, and Ms. Tia Dickerson, PhD Student, Dept of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University,

This colloquium addressed the

questions “How has racism affected current and prior responses to pandemics?” “What are the particular psychological as well as physical effects of the current Covid-19 crisis on people of color?” “What cultural factors affect treatment and recovery?” “What new approaches might be tried?” The 25-30 people who participated over the course of the colloquium included a prospective Howard student, the grandmother of a current Howard student and members primarily from the Howard community.

The second colloquium occurred on March 25 from 6-8pm on Zoom was on “Race and Policing” and was moderated by Dr. Delores Jones-Brown, Visiting Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University; retired emerita professor from CUNY Graduate Center and founding director there of the Center on Race, Crime, and Justice, whose practical experience and research interest focuses on studying police-community relations as a legal expert (J.D.).

Panelists:

- Dr. Charles Adams, Coordinator, Office of Undergraduate Research; Chair, Department of Behavioral Sciences & Services; and AKD Chapter Representative, Bowie State University, who researches policing and arrestee drug use.
- Dr. Jennifer Cobbina, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, who studies community responses to police violence.
- Dr. Akiv Dawson, Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Georgia Southern University, who studies intersection of crime, immigration, and mass incarceration.
- Mr. Evan Douglas, M.A. candidate in the Department of Sociology, The George Washington

University, who reflects on his practical experience as a former D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer, and who is now working on new approaches to policing.

Some 30-32 people Zoomed in over the course of the colloquium, including a faculty member from Georgia Southern University, several faculty members from The George Washington Department of Sociology, representatives from DCSS, prospective Howard MBA and Sociology and

“The discussion had a strong positive note in its focus on initiatives to combat structural racism being undertaken by Black citizen NGOs.”

Criminology graduate students, and students from George Mason University and Hood College.

The discussion came to focus on Black-White relations in the DC police force, on the difficulties of bringing about reform within police departments, and on the tensions felt by Black citizens trying to interact with or seek help from police departments.

The third colloquium on April 15 from 6-8pm on Zoom focuses on “Addressing Structural Racism” and was moderated by Dr. Marie-Claude Jiguiep-Akhtar, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology, Howard University, whose research includes race/ethnicity, gender, the life course, and “place” disparities in criminal justice and health.

Panelists:

- Dr. Ivy Ken, Department of Sociology, The George Washington University, who studies the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, and labor market issues.
- Dr. Judy Lubin, Founder and

President, Center for Urban and Racial Equity (CURE), a Howard Ph.D., whose practical experience and research have focused on the promotion of equity for underserved and marginalized communities by looking at the intersection of racial equity, institutional change, public health, and policy advocacy.

- Dr. Brittany Gatewood, Post-Doctoral Researcher for the Center for Educational Opportunities at Albany State University and a Howard University Ph.D., who studies social movements within carceral institutions as well as the political practices and tradition of resistance of Black women and their children.

- Also invited was Dr. Benedict Ngala, Department of Sociology, Montgomery College, who has done research in race/ethnicity/class and gender relations and globalization. (Dr. Ngala was unfortunately unable to participate, due to illness.)

The 23-26 people who participated included a faculty member from the University of Cincinnati, members of the DCSS and The George Washington University faculty, and, primarily, members of the Howard community, including an alumnus and a technician/safety officer/building manager in the Department of Chemistry.

The discussion had a strong positive note in its focus on initiatives to combat structural racism being undertaken by Black citizen NGOs.



Interview with Evan Douglas: Rethinking Policing

Noah Semel

On Monday April 19th, 2021, I had the privilege of interviewing Evan Douglas, a native of Washington, D.C., an ex-D.C. Metropolitan police officer, and current Policy and Advocacy Fellow at the DC Justice Lab. Douglas has dedicated his life to criminal justice reform and making a positive impact in the D.C. community. As an ex-police officer, he has a unique perspective on why police violence and brutality keep occurring and

how police reform may be achieved. I spoke with him to learn more about the root sociological causes that drive police violence in the U.S.

April 19th was also the day the jury began deliberating in the trial of Derek Chauvin for the killing of George Floyd. This specific day, and the last year as a whole, have been salient times for the movement against police and police violence in the U.S. And it was against this background,

that Douglas and I discussed alternatives to police, the results to mental health and trauma from police violence, the relation between poverty and police violence,, and the phenomenon of police loyalty to each other.

Douglas himself grew up in D.C. He mentioned that negative experiences and trauma from his childhood led him to join the D.C. police. Douglas believed that he could be a guardian for D.C.'s Black communities as a po-

lice officer. However, he now pursues change through policy, advocacy, and academia. In 2019, Douglas returned to school to pursue his master's in criminology at the George Washington University. Douglas recognizes that his childhood trauma from growing up in a predominantly Black and impoverished area, is not an isolated occurrence. He cites how D.C. neighborhoods often exist in different realities even though they stand so close to each other. The communities east of the Anacostia River in Southeast D.C. exist in intense poverty, with struggling schools, food deserts, and a lack of consistent job opportunities. The neighborhoods of Southeast D.C. struggle while Georgetown and the Palisades thrive. Douglas also mentioned that Southeast D.C. lives in the shadow of the Capitol, a place where aid and reform should, theoretically, come from.

Douglas was--and still is--motivated to understand why and how the disparities in D.C. became so dramatic. He said it took him some time and education to understand that poverty and crime are not the result of individual actions but arise largely out of the social environment. Douglas cites his education as a driving force behind his pursuit of criminal justice reform and desire to learn how people arrived at the social position they are in. He wants to learn about how factors such as race, poverty, education, and physical environment intersect to cause harm to communities. Douglas also

believes that these same contributing factors can lead to negative interactions with police and eventually cause police violence. He, along with others who explore this problem, believe that intervention strategies and changes in an individual's social environment minimize the need for interactions with police in the long term. Douglas reflects that policing is almost entirely reactionary, occurring largely after a crime occurs. By addressing a crime that already occurred, police are not solving crime systemically or in the long term. The goal to Douglas is to change the environments people are raised and socialized in, with the goal of eventually no longer needing police.



Above: In 2019, Douglas and his former MPD partner were doing their usual drive through Ward 8. They saw a group of children playing outside a Day Care Center and decided to say hi. Most kids ran up to the two officers excited and smiling. However, one girl, pictured above, was timid and crying. The girl's father had been recently arrested in front of her. This is why on a separate call I had with him, Douglas says this picture is not "cute" or "wholesome". Douglas believes the photo and young girl's experience is "traumatic" and "devastating". Douglas captioned the photo: 'Policy and procedure change can only go so far but how do we start to heal and undo the trauma that has already been done?''

Douglas also recognizes the fundamental relationship between race and policing. In the context of George Floyd's murder and Derek Chauvin's trial, Douglas stated that he believes police officers and police departments fail to recognize the facts. The facts are that the cornerstones of policing are rooted in racism and white supremacy. Douglas believes that policing is upholding racial disparities and maintaining a racist architecture that needs to be toppled. The connection between race and policing can be interpreted as part of the larger racial formation that produces disparities in the criminal justice system. The intertwining institutions of our criminal justice system can be, and have been historically, used to oppress certain populations; Douglas explains this by mentioning how Black and brown populations are often labeled as "deviant" by law enforcement and therefore subject to intense police surveillance and control.

One component of policing that I asked Douglas about was trust. Is there any mutual trust between police and Black and brown communities in cities across the United States? Douglas says that law enforcement has never had full

trust or legitimacy in these communities.

He mentions corruption, violence, and killings at the hands of police and other institutions in the criminal justice system as reasons why that trust has never been maintained. He claims that individuals may have micro-level trust of

police based on individual interactions or what they see in the media. However, there has never been macro-level trust of police in Black and brown communities, especially in cities like D.C. An individual officer, much like Douglas was, cannot outweigh the macro-level discrimination and harm the institution of policing inflicts.

In the context of the murder of George Floyd and killing of Daunte Wright, I wanted to ask Douglas, as a former officer, if he believed that the “blue wall of silence” was real. Do officers really defend each other even when they clearly murdered someone? Officers and other law enforcement officials seemed to proudly support and defend the actions of Chauvin and Kimberly Potter, who is charged with manslaughter in the death of Wright, so I wanted to ask Douglas how widespread this phenomenon was.

Douglas says the theories about the blue wall are absolutely true. He said policing is an institution that “steamrolls individuals.”

My interview with Douglas went to a very common, yet important, question with sociological and political impact: should we defund the police? Douglas believes the eventual answer should be yes; that public funding and effort should be pushed towards education, health care, improving the physical environment, and other community programs instead of policing. By specifically focusing on these public safety tools instead of policing, poor Black and brown communities will hopefully have fewer and fewer interactions with law enforcement.

Douglas experienced police forces and policing firsthand. He recognizes that policing issues are systemic and disproportionately harm marginalized communities. Therefore, according to

Douglas, the goal of criminal justice reform should be to entirely rethink public safety and move society away from police.

Douglas likes to work back from the outcomes when analyzing a situation. We talked about the terrible carjacking and beating of two teenage girls in D.C. just this year. Douglas wants people to ask the questions “how did they get here?” and “why aren’t they in school?” The reality is that children and students in poor Black and brown communities often have little to no adult guidance during the day, no safe green spaces to go, no individual mentoring, and no indoor community centers to go to after school. Instead of funding policing, Douglas says, we should

***“Should we defund the police?
Douglas believes the eventual answer
should be yes.”***

reallocate significantly more funding to these programs that are currently almost nonexistent in underfunded communities. In doing this the goal is to avoid having police as the first tool for public safety.

Douglas wants to be optimistic and say he sees a future with no police. However, for now, he wants to see the neighborhoods of Southeast D.C. policed more like Georgetown or Beverly Hills. Communities where police violence is rare and there is plenty of money to address public safety without police. These White and upper-class neighborhoods experience a completely different relationship with police than those in ultra-policed, poor, Black, and urban environments. Douglas believes that most of the time, residents of these Black and brown communities will see police as a threat rather than a public safety tool. He

mentioned, however, that there will be outlier cases wherein a resident of these communities does feel as if the police are a reasonable public safety tool.

Douglas’s sentiment echoes that of many activists and leaders who are frustrated and angry over policing in this country. Determinants like race, zip code, age, class, and education influence how one feels about the police. More importantly, these sociological determinants also impact the likelihood that one experiences police violence.

Douglas provides a unique perspective on the entire situation because of his time serving as a police officer. He understands the problematic nature of current policing across the country. He wants to see public safety rethought to prioritize community groups, education, green spaces, and more neighborhood services. Right now, it is clear police are being used too much and causing too much harm and trauma on Black and brown communities across the United States.

Watching Fences

Essay and Photos by Ryan Low

I think change can be a proofless endeavor, much like watching paint dry. Except in this instance the paint never becomes dry enough for you to decide if what you have covered up is made any better by your efforts. Watching fences is a lot like that.

Editors' Note: Fencing was erected around the White House in June 2020 in response to the Black Lives Matter protests in front of it sparked by the murder of George Floyd. A portion of this fencing at Black Lives Matter Plaza became host to BLM-related protest signs, art, and memorials, curated unofficially by Nadine Seiler beginning August 2020. This stretch of fence became known as the Black Lives Matter Memorial Fence. Beginning October 2020, counter protestors began trying to destroy and deface the display. Volunteers, most often Seiler and Karen Irwin of the William Thomas Anti-Nuclear Peace Vigil, began maintaining a presence at the fence to prevent this. Over the weekend of January 30th 2021 Seiler and other volunteers dismantled the memorial and photographed it for archival purposes. The physical components are spread among Howard University, the Library of Congress, and storage care of Seiler and Irwin, with a small portion used as a traveling display. Digitally, every fence item is being scanned by Enoch Pratt Free Library for archival purposes, and there is a digital photo album publicly available of the fence as it stood.



January 19, 2021, 8:27 a.m.

Fences by their design mark a line, one that cannot be seen. Yet the two sides are so delineable they need to be marked or kept apart physically. This could not have been made any clearer than by the events of Jan. 6th. When I went out to cover the Capitol Hill riots around 3 p.m., I never reached the Capitol. There was so much hostility and violence all around the city, I only made it to 16th and I street. My appetite for watching my fellow citizens tear each other apart was full by 5:30 p.m.



January 6, 2021, 5:09 p.m.

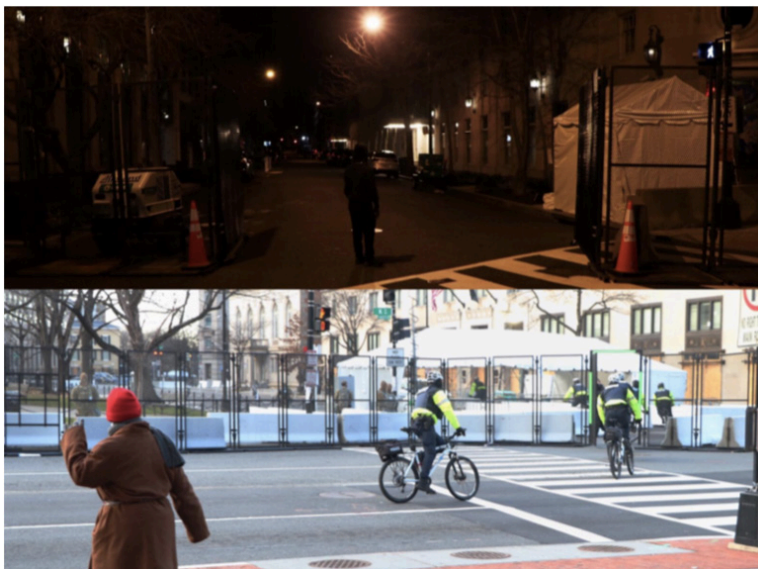
I watched Black Lives Matter protestors from Southeast D.C. maintain their ground after round after round of clashes with Trump supporters, who amassed on the other side of the street while DC bicycle police just sat by, watching. It was obvious there was nothing off limits. After witnessing the pepper spray, the knockouts, the push and pull of what seemed to be full-on 1950's street warfare, it became apparent why that fence was around the White House. That fence which, at the time, was much more representative of a mausoleum to injustice, is gone now but the injustice it came to represent remains.

January 6, 2021, 5:29 p.m.



Going out the nights before Biden's inauguration was a surreal experience. Seeing the map of the proposed "Green Zone" in *The Washington Post* struck me like lightning. Studying political science, I had only heard the term "Green Zone" in reference to the heavily fortified portion of central Baghdad during the Iraq War. It would hurt the heart of anybody who believes in a peaceful exchange of power through a time-honored democratic process, to have a need for a "Green Zone" in a metropolis such as D.C. in peacetime. Yet, I wanted to see it for myself, all of it: the construction, the methods, the checkpoints. I wanted to see something that no one had seen in almost 80 years: what D.C. would look like in a time of war.

When I got to Black Lives Matter Plaza a few nights before the inauguration it was a rather solemn group. The decades old Non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty Group had a couple of lifers (protesting since the late 70's) who had been pushed out of "The People's Park" in front of the White House when the first fence went up in June 2020, in response to the George Floyd protests. That night there were about four other people there who had been watching the fences for weeks before I arrived. This group became collectively, if unofficially, as "The Fence Watchers."



Top: January 18, 2021, 1:34 a.m.;
Bottom: January 19, 2021 8:27 a.m.



January 20, 2021, 1:26 a.m.

The energy on inauguration morning was a strange concoction of pure jubilation and apprehension. As the morning turned to day the mixed apprehension gave way completely to a tide of joy and celebration. It felt good, it felt right, it felt like, maybe the tide was indeed turning. And there we were, right in the middle of it all, with a little cordoned-off area (simple caution tape) that we put up the night before so our and the long-term residents' things wouldn't be lost in celebration. We were there, with control of a 600 watt speaker and a playlist, on the fence.



January 20, 2021, 12:09 p.m. - 1:14 p.m.

Overnight I watched the crowds diminish into the same few of us, cold and clustered fence watchers. However, now we were joined by two or three local homeless people, whom we began to refer to more lovingly as “long term” residents. The night was still, it was not exciting, there was no party at 4 a.m., and it went back to much as it had been before: solemn and quiet. However, the rising sun would bring a day that I began to refer to as “Day Five.” Even the other watchers who had been there more than five days began to call it “Day Five.” It was a coordinated plan of racism, bigotry, trolling, and pure hate. First, a member of neo-fascist group the Proud Boys, who we would see many times later, came by pretending to be an ardent supporter of “White Jesus.” He came equipped with a Valkyrie horn, a symbol Proud Boys and other white supremacists carry to merge Old Norse religion with a mythos of Aryanism and White racial purity. The problem, which I pointed out to this man, was that that was a pagan symbol. No one who supports a fundamentalist Christian viewpoint would carry it. I knew he was faking to upset this woman, but why? I would soon come to find out.



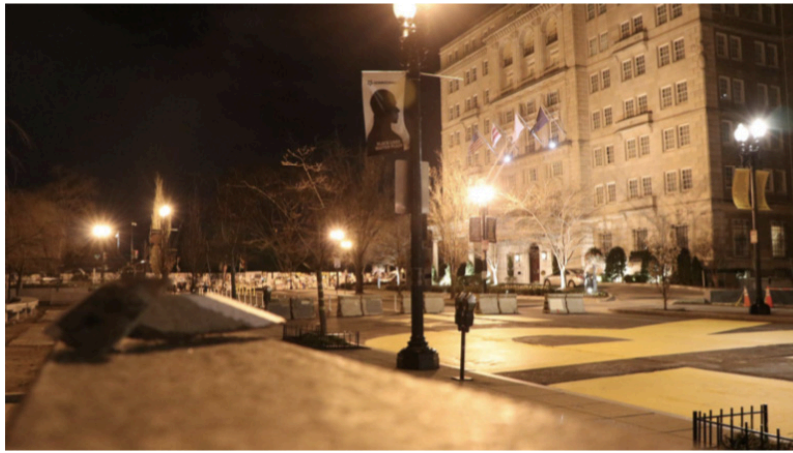
Above: January 21, 2021, 12:57 p.m.

The goal was to make the fence watchers and other BLM supporters look like “a bunch of angry black people.” After “White Jesus” man ran away, a second man livestreaming on his phone got right in the face of a Black person angered by the first man. I can still hear his narration: “This is what the BLM movement is, just a bunch of angry black people...” (The livestreamer was also present at BLM Plaza on April 20th this year, the day Derek Chauvin was found guilty of murdering George Floyd. He showed up in an all-blue suit and started yelling a bunch of “stop the steal” nonsense at the media before being escorted away.) This is when I realized that the “White Jesus” man and the live streamer had coordinated their actions. The day progressed with more coordinated acts of intimidation and harassment, strange believers in the QAnon conspiracy theory, and right-wing nonsense. There were a series of men, only ever in groups of two, who would sit on the far end of BLM Plaza and take reconnaissance photographs. One would spot with binoculars and the other would take three pictures left-to-right across the fence. When they turned to leave I, noticed that strange white Proud Boys cross emblazoned on an all-black sweatshirt. I started to feel fear, real fear, of what could happen.



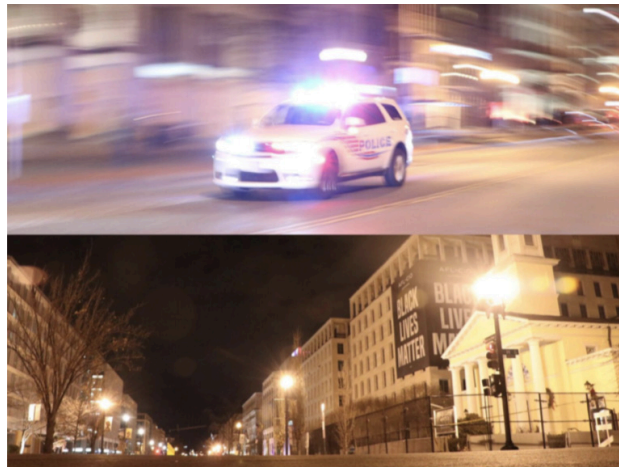
Above: January 21, 2021, 1:33 p.m.

That night was tense; I remember all of us being on edge, looking at every person that walked near the Plaza with great scrutiny. As time went on, however, and night turned to day, nothing happened. No attack, no pepper spray, no nothing; just still, cold, morning. The next night as I walked to the plaza something quite unexpected greeted me. The second fence was gone. The fence watchers were back to the White House fence, doing what they had been doing before: keeping people from walking by and ripping people’s pictures, memorials, and art off the fence. It felt like a victory. The problem was, this was a small victory in a long war of attrition.



Above: January 23, 2021, 5:45 a.m.

The daily tasks of chasing away Trump supporters and Blue Lives Matter supporters who would vandalize the fence, providing water and food for the long-term residents and ourselves, and talking to people about the importance of the right to peaceful protest, would give way to nights of cold hands and freezing toes. Police, who were always there watching us, would intentionally run their lights and blare their sirens at 4:30 a.m. to wake the homeless and the few watchers who would be trying to get their first hours of rest of the night. It made me start to question, what was the permanence of anything we were doing? What happens when everyone just decides to leave?



Top: January 26, 2021 4:39 a.m.; Bottom January 27, 2021 11:35 p.m.

I started to look into ways to make the effects of our sacrifice more permanent than just a few shared memories. The first, I thought, was preservation. I thought the fence's pictures and art needed to be thoroughly documented and cataloged, at least in pictures and at best in a permanent exhibit. This, somewhat, happened. I say somewhat because I saw how they were cataloged; I saw the items leave and who took them. It must have been what it was like at the end of World War II somewhere, seeing the great stolen works of art, loaded into crates, knowing most of them the world would never see again. I looked into having the actual yellow letters that were painted on BLM Plaza to christen it made into a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Besides not qualifying by age, there was so much other red tape that after a few months it became apparent that without more resources or more outside interest, it was not going to happen. So there I was one Saturday, and the other fence watchers, mostly out-of-towners, were leaving. Like Bush in 2003 on that aircraft carrier. Mission Accomplished!!! Accomplished what? Getting written up in an extremely stilted article in The Washington Post to show your friends? The truth was the fence watchers were gone, the memorials and "in remembrances" on the fence were gone, and the injustice continued on and on. Ask Andrew Brown Jr. and Michael Hughes, both killed at the hands of police since the Derek Chauvin guilty verdict, if anything has changed. No accomplishment, no change, just like watching paint dry in a monsoon.



April 20, 2021, 5:14 p.m.

I suppose what I witnessed or learned was that change requires sacrifice. For some, that sacrifice is comfort, time, money, friends, or family; for too many others that sacrifice is compulsory and too often means life itself. In this way, it is very different from watching paint dry. People move on, they forget, they feel like they have sacrificed enough, but for too many oppressed in this country, they don't get to go home or leave the fight behind. The injustices and the sacrifice follows them wherever they go. The experience left me feeling empty, disappointed, tired, and at a loss as to how so many could care so little. Then it struck me: if I felt this way, allowed by my skin color to leave the struggle somewhere else and go home, then I had not sacrificed a single thing. The injustices that plague this country are often and everywhere. In this light, I suppose watching fences matters after all...



Journeys and Cycles — Student Experiences of Virtual Learning During The Pandemic

Essay and Graphic by Conor Barbieri

As the end of the pandemic seemed to be around the corner many students reflected on the past year. Some found it to be a wonderful self-journey where they discovered themselves in ways they could not have imagined, and others were stuck in an endless cycle of doing nothing. Conducting interviews with students in the D.C. area, it became clear how differently people are going

to remember the year of the pandemic, depending on where they spent it.

Those at home with their families frequently felt “stuck” while those who had the luxury of living in D.C. for most of the pandemic remember how fun the last year was. Although Covid-19 plagued their thoughts, they were still able to socialize in small groups and form connections through this shared trauma. Connor Leary

a, full-time senior at GWU reflected on the friendships he made during the pandemic. “Yeah, the pandemic allowed me to focus on myself and helped me realize which of my friends actually cared and who did not. Friendships required work during the pandemic and you could tell who tried. Before the pandemic, I was stretched thin with classes, socializing, and an internship and it just became

too much and Covid-19 prevented me from having a breakdown.” The world slowed down and allowed him to pause and reflect on what he needed to do to become happy again. Although he wished that in-person school had returned in the fall, he was thankful for the time he had for himself. As Connor put it, the pandemic stole from many people, but it was also a gift to some.

Robyn Moore, a Ph.D. student at the University of Maryland, College Park shared in Connor’s good fortune of positive pandemic experiences. Robyn spoke about how before Covid-19 she was working an unhealthy number of hours at her job and was living there part time. She was also dealing with classes and stretched thin, just like Connor Leary. After the pandemic started, she was forced her to stay home. She realized how unhealthy her lifestyle had been and how she wanted more time for herself. Robyn began developing her creative side by painting and planning fun new sociological classes based on topics such as the hit show “Buffy the Vampire Slayer.” Robyn is a great example of how people who could quarantine often became so bored they decided to branch out. Not only was she doing these new activities, but she was doing them on Zoom with fellow bored grad students.

However, not every student was doing something new, myself included, and the pandemic also allowed for those of us doing nothing not to have to feel bad about themselves.

Deniz Giray, a local Puerto Rican who attends GWU, reflects on how happy the pandemic made her parents. They were very pleased to spend as much time as they could with Deniz before the pandemic ended and she

moved back to D.C. Deniz describes going back to living full-time with her parents as time-traveling back to high school. They would cook together, watch movies, and, most importantly, talk about themselves. This pandemic allowed Deniz and her family to speak about their past experiences and become closer together. Nina Mewborne, who attends American University, had a similar experience of bonding with her family in ways she could not before. She remembers that when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer during Covid-19, her family isolated to an extreme. On top of that, they had to deal with the stress of living in Texas with anti-maskers and lenient

“Nina would count the days since she had last touched another person outside her immediate family and got up to 380 days.”

public health policy. Nina would count the days since she had last touched another person outside her immediate family and got up to 380 days. This extreme isolation forced Nina and her parents’ relationship to adapt to be more of a friendship in response to what they all needed, and she was very thankful for that. She comments that her relationship with her parents is much more advanced than other kids her age and the pandemic was the main cause of that. Nina looks back at Covid-19 and remembers the beginning as a blissful time where she got to be with her family one last time but then, as the pandemic continued, she realized she could not see the light at the end of the tunnel and this blissful feeling became fear.

Another student at GWU, Leonela Tasé Sueiro, left home in the middle of the pandemic to live with her boy-

friend in Ecuador. She loved being at home, but her grandparents, who lived in Cuba, had been forced to stay in the U.S. with her because of Covid-19. With Leonela’s grandparents, parents, and sibling all at home it began to feel cramped for her. She describes leaving her grandparents as “freeing because I do not have to worry about getting them infected,” though Leonela and her family tried not to let Covid-19 dominate their thoughts. Many students had the same mindset as Leonela, not worried about getting Covid-19 and dying but instead worried about passing it to family members who were at higher risk. Another gift of Covid-19 for Leonela was the freedom to stay in

Ecuador for such a long period. Without online classes, this would not have been possible for her.

Ellie, a student at the University of Chapel Hill who lived in Austria with her mother during quarantine,

has a different story — she envied students who were back in the U.S. She talks about how hard it was to adjust to the six-hour time zone difference and how going to bed at 3 a.m. made it difficult to fully grasp classes. Leonela had a similar experience: during the second week of classes, one of her teachers decided Zoom was not working for him and told the class they would not be meeting synchronously at all. One of the reasons Leonela loves college is the interaction with teachers and the discussions she had with both teachers and students. Leonela was deprived of this and ended up having to use the pass/fail grading option, which disappointed her.

Not only was the time difference hard for Ellie, but she was also cut off from friends and family. It was just her and her mom, which led her to wish she was back in the U.S., free from

the strict curfew and lockdown that came with Austria. The descriptions of their experiences by students abroad reminded me of Marx's description of alienation — though I know the causes are different. Marx would look at the economy while Ellie and Leonela were trapped by biosocial conditions (pandemic and response) and government action (quarantine).

But their experiences are the ones Marx names — the isolation from the pleasure to work, loss of control over our bodies, the absence of cooperative experience with others, and the loss of pleasure in the product of the work. Many students may have felt alienated from their schoolwork because the pleasure in working was removed by having to stay up so late or teachers not accommodating to an online format or abroad students. They were also prevented from making new friendships and having discourse with new peers. Sarina Wise, who attends Georgetown University, reflects on how hard it was being a first year at a new school. Covid-19 made making friends much harder for Sarina, and she talked about how she had FOMO, fear of missing out. Sarina also discussed how hard it was to get

the motivation to do schoolwork, and how even when she did it was hard to retain the information. She reflects that when the pandemic is over and she looks back at her life she will mostly think of negatives. Along with the social separation that made making friends almost impossible, there was also a lack of control over one's time. Ellie, for example, had to work within the mandatory curfew in Austria, as

“...it became clear how all these individuals went through nominally the same pandemic, but will remember it very differently...”

well as the time difference that caused her classes to disrupt her sleep cycle.

Connor spoke about how mass shootings are starting to return to his mind as crowds begin to return to public spaces. Since the pandemic started such shootings had disappeared from Connor's mind, and his anxiety about them was at an all-time low. But now he thinks mass shootings are going to be on the rise again. Connor's fears were shared by scholars of gun violence; NBC News cites Seamus McGraw, the author of the forthcoming “From a Taller Tower: The Rise of the American Mass Shooter,”

as worrying that “this is a moment in time when we're finally coming out after months of hiding in the shadows from Covid, and I deeply fear we're going to see another spate of mass shootings.”¹

When thinking of Covid-19 experiences it's hard to not think in the binary of good and bad, but many people have had experiences that do not fit in this. At the end of these interviews, it became clear how all these individuals went through nominally the same pandemic, but will remember it very differently; and in ways that reveal the nuanced effects a global disruption of our lives can create.

1
Corky Siemaszko. n.d. “After Two Mass Shootings, Americans Ask: Is This What a Return to Normal Looks Like?” NBC News. Retrieved September 23, 2021 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/after-two-mass-shootings-americans-ask-what-return-normal-looks-n1261841>).

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Do you have a question about sociology as it relates to everyday life? Submit your inquiry to "Ask the Sociologist," and we will try to find a sociologist to reply to your question. All submissions will remain anonymous, but the questions and responses will be made public so that individuals with similar inquiries can use them as a resource.

<https://thesociologistdc.com/ask-a-sociologist>

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