Ambition, Vocation, and Sociology

JONATHAN B. IMBER

Offering advice to graduate students in sociology about their career prospects is an uncertain venture. I come to the question of how to give advice with the status of an outsider. I have taught nearly my entire career in undergraduate settings, the most recent one for the past 25 years. Most of my advice has been to students considering applying to graduate school in sociology. From this vantage, I send them off and then only see them again when their cohort reaches the stage of applying for jobs at colleges such as my own. The "missing" period of my observations about their socialization requires that I speculate least about it. But I can say with what I think is some certainty, that the probation period of assistant professor is, in many ways, the more obvious moment of truth for many young sociologists than what they choose to do in graduate school. My impression is that between the graduate career and the time before tenure, many sociologists find their groove; most stay in it, some abandon it, and a few make it out of their professional trenches into the larger battles of ideas in a world where the usual qualities of human nature are in full force.

I start with the basic proposition that well-crafted research, whether qualitative or quantitative, requires translation for audiences beyond those directly familiar with specific theories and methodologies. Having edited three journals during the past 15 years and having worked with hundreds of contributors over that same time, I can confidently report that the truest measure of what is important in social science is always a mix of professional accomplishment and broader public recognition and acknowledgment. But let me be as candid as I can about this mix: for some of us achievement within a profession with little notice beyond it is necessary and also sufficient; for others personal ambition demands greater recognition than a profession alone can provide. The narcissism of small differences that often painfully defines the relations among colleagues in the various small ponds in which they find themselves has to be balanced against the much larger pond of the marketplace, where vanity is rarely absent in the sound-byte world of public notice and attention. Academics with large egos are similar to those thousands of kids on basketball courts across the country, all of whom dream of dribbling their way to the NBA. It would appear that an excess of academic vanity could be

---

Jonathan B. Imber is Class of 1949 Professor in Ethics and Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College where he has taught for 25 years. He has been Editor-in-Chief of *Society* since 1998 and is author most recently of the forthcoming *Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine* as well as *Close Calls: Essays on Vocation*.

harmful to the pursuit of knowledge. Max Weber noticed the problem in "Politics as a Vocation," when he wrote that "Vanity is a very widespread quality and perhaps nobody is entirely free from it. In academic and scholarly circles, vanity is a sort of occupational disease, but precisely with the scholar, vanity—however disagreeably it may express itself—is relatively harmless; in the sense that as a rule it does not disturb the scientific enterprise. With the politician the case is quite different" (Weber, 1946: 116).

The occupational disease of academic and scholarly circles is, more precisely, a disease of "notice deprivation," suffered as a form of relative deprivation, so that at well-known and less known schools alike, the pufferies of self-regard are quite similar and easily observed. One key to success in academic life is demonstrating self-confidence and ambition without revealing contempt or displaying arrogance (at least while one is young). It is true that among the most vain colleagues are remarkable examples of generosity but the absence of such generosity is never surprising to onlookers whose appetite for *schadenfreude* is only surpassed by their desire not to get involved. As Erasmus recorded, *Venia primum experienti* ("Let a beginner off lightly"), but this was at a time when management was a contrivance more of faith than reason. And in the pre-business age of university management, the retired professor still around and about was also a fixture of endurance and respect. At about the same moment that individual ambition began to replace institutional loyalty, both the light touch on those who were new and the strong bond with those who were not, disappeared. Mr. Chips is long gone. Oddly enough, when the federal government finally saw its way in the early 1990s to eliminating the forced retirement of college and university professors at the age of 70, the moral sense of indispensability, which had inspired efforts to find ways to keep retired faculty *in loco universitas*, faded away, turning Mr. Chips into Shane.

I should add that historically the most secure link between the aging mentor and his university was established by those graduate students willing to work with (and often submit to) the vanities and oddities of their teachers. (These kinds of relationships typically culminated in the *Festschrift.*) I do not think there are many studies of such relationships, with the interesting exception of what some women have written about their experiences with strong-minded male mentors early in their careers (see Heilbrun, 1997 and Toth, 1997). The initial anxieties of all students, from elementary school on, are provoked by the concern about what they think their teachers think of them. Those who care the least rarely go very far; those who care too much have legendary epithets. The assumption these days that mentoring matters but that specific mentors may matter less so could be misleading for the simple reason that choice of subject (and teacher of that subject) is often the way into a network of mutually reinforcing supporters. My sense is that graduate students should be prepared to cultivate multiple networks in this regard.

Professional Engagement and Disengagement

The problem of communicating to a public beyond one's immediate profession cannot be separated from the norms of the profession anymore than it can be from the nature of the public sought. On the one hand, association with professional peers usually provides the self-assurance of achievement: perhaps, in the case of sociology, it is election to higher offices in the American Sociological Association, or to the Sociological Research Association, which Andrew Abbott, in a wonderfully vainglorious address he delivered at its annual meeting in 2000, described as "a secret handshake society of the movers and shakers in sociology" (Abbott, 2000). Although Abbott is incredulous about such a characterization and intends to be humorous, the most powerful forms of elite self-regard are always the most lighthearted. True snobbery is indifference based on distinction. No profession worth its name can do without such snobbery, and despite all disclaimers, pedigree and mutually reinforcing certainties about the distinctiveness of the company one keeps are both necessary qualities of what I would call "trading up."

On the other hand, the endeavor to write for and seek the attention of a broader public will eventually require knowing how to navigate between the Scylla of professional resentments of "selling out" and the Charybdis of being swallowed up by a notoriously short-term public memory. Graduate study is a time when the landscape of choices about how one will pursue a career seems not only hazy but limited with respect to what a student can know about what a particular teacher has done in a career. The criteria of succeeding are really of two kinds. One kind requires satisfying the local gods, who may by any measure come across as arbitrary and distant. The other, as I have described above, has to do with making a reputation. Most reputations of any importance show a connection among access to resources, positions of responsibility, and broadmindedness about one's associations.

At the same time, the strategies of gaining public notice have been thoroughly professionalized, offering a very low probability that anything other than persistence and the right association matter in the effort to be known. There is no shame in wanting one's work noticed and reviewed, but the mechanisms of selection are finally natural only as to human nature. I am, like most others I imagine, grateful for praise as much as I am improved (if not always pleased) by most criticism (for criticism is also a form of notice, and notice is the entryway to potential praise of any public significance). The concentric circles of praise are themselves worth noting in the same spirit that William Goode investigated in *The Celebration of Heroes*, the greatest book ever written on the relative deprivations of status, particularly in American life. All notice is ephemeral. How could it be otherwise? When the wisdom is finally achieved that what one has to say may no longer be important to say *yet one more time*, then "checking out" seems all the more dignified and honorable. In what follows, I will elaborate on three phases of engagement and disengagement in our profession in particular, as a way toward offering some advice (based on the anecdotal evidences of the things I have seen) to those fledgling missionaries of the sociological enterprise who rightly aspire for all the same rewards that they regard as the entitlements of achievement in their elders.

Trading Up

My first professional encounter with the phenomenon of "trading up" was as co-editor of *Qualitative Sociology*. As a matter of course, the refereed journal requires the evaluative expertise of fellow sociologists, and the willingness to provide such service is indicative of a commitment to the collective enterprise of scholarly communication. Or at least this seems to be the idealistic assumption at work in such a voluntary process. For many years, the ranking of journals has established both reputation and status for contributors and editors alike. The alliance at stake in the making of reputation between contributor and publication works partly on the principle of exclusion (e.g., proportion of rejections in relation to submissions) and partly on the principle of inclusion (e.g., editorial selection of associate editors and reviewers). In both cases, climbing the pyramid is accomplished by judgments that require leadership, ingenuity, and perhaps even some risk-taking.

A manuscript was sent out from our offices for review. Several weeks passed, and a handwritten note arrived from one reviewer about being unable to review the manuscript for lack of time. This was from a former contributor (two times) to the journal. My incredulity was only surpassed by my naiveté about the stepping-stones of status ascendancy, in this case, the convenient excuse of lacking time now that the journal was no longer meaningful in terms of career. This is a professional sin, and while it signifies a flaw in character, it also symbolizes something quite typically American, where one's past, even one's professional past, is always best managed as a matter of self-presentation. In an age of fluid and changing website creation, for example, where a *vita* can be easily reorganized and updated, I wonder how such presentations evolve as a career "ascends." Someone ought to study that. It could produce a section at the ASA on the sociology of careerism, and add to the already impressive amount of data we have about our colleagues' self-preening among themselves, as if local notice amounted to much more than that.

I do not mean to call for the banishment of the impulse to "trade up" but rather to point out that the expanding circle of one's professional acquaintances need not and should not come at the expense of one's earlier affiliations. My chief concern is about what such trading up means professionally, in terms of acknowledged categories of success and achievement. Professions are in many respects the remnants of aristocracy. They are meritocracies born of aristocratic impulse. The higher the move up in them, the less regard there is for the fact that *movement* is their most salient characteristic. You cannot be born into a profession, but you can certainly come to believe that you are among the chosen within such a profession. The confusion of ambitions, between individual career and the fate of a profession, leaves little room for considering what is best for a profession as distinct from that career.

Another way to describe this confusion is to ask what loyalties one has to others and institutions along the way of one's career. Fifty years ago, commitment to an institution of higher learning was probably for most *the* defining identity, so that teaching and service to one's institution were most important in two senses: they established the importance of reputation within the boundaries of an academic, as distinct from a professional, culture, and they required skills in communication that tended to reach a broader range of educated citizens than the professional culture that succeeded the academic one now does. The first modern, professional cultures that took shape were, of course, born of ancient occupations, for example, law and medicine. Both professions established alliances with the state, thus advancing their interests in ways that utilized material and symbolic resources to guarantee *how* competition was defined. The birth of "meritocracy" (about which I have more to say below) within the professions thus came through the schools themselves, requiring new recognitions of achievement based on individual talent, ability, and performance.

All this is familiar by now to any student of the history of the modern professions. The implications of this history for those of us who are, in the vast majority, ensconced in colleges and universities are less clear because the loyalties once assumed to be the basis for collegial culture are no longer nearly as strong as they once were in the old order. Professional commitments to scholarly work, for example, are not so easily translated into much more than opportunities to make status distinctions based on that work within academic communities, so that *publicity* (and service to it) are important markers of status within and outside universities. There are already fine ethnographies of the old order (Adams, 1976; Bailey, 1977). During the past quarter century, this old order of predictable vanities has given way to something quite different, both in terms of service to ideology and in terms of pursuit of career.

The phenomenon of an entirely career-oriented "trading up" once relied upon a kind of class system of "ideological correctness" (as Talcott Parsons termed it in the first issue of *The American Sociologist* in 1965). Divisions within academic departments, for example, were driven by demands for loyalty to particular schools of thought. Forty years later, loyalty to ideology among competing schools is beside the point, with literally no schools remaining to which to be loyal. This is both a hopeful development for the discipline as well as an odd situation for the profession and graduate students in particular, since it requires even greater individual ambition to achieve notice and thus reputation beyond the discipline and profession.

If I were in graduate school today, I would be asking my teachers how much the making of reputation depends on a diversity of commitments. Of course AJS and ASR matter, but do they afford exclusive opportunities that other publications and activities do not? Or do they simply create a pool of similar candidates who have achieved such recognition and who then compete with each other for tenure-track positions? Of course, the universities always rely on approaches that maximize the importance of access to resources. My advice would be to do what you do best and what interests you most, and add to that the careful strategies of gaining associations with others doing such work and the resources available to do it.

Over the past quarter century, the mantras of race, class, and gender have mimicked ideological "schools" of sorts, insinuating themselves in each subfield of the discipline, but as everyone knows, such mantras have a way of being double-edged swords, cutting favorably as the ideological winds blow in one direction and cutting another way as the empirical winds change. It may be better to be a sole investigator or consultant to foundations than to be associated with a "school of thought." The postmodern metaphor is one of sailing above the sea and not drowning in the morass of disappointments that engulf those unable to climb to the top or even near the top of the pyramid. Success is a private affair, defined by dollar amounts, but with it also comes the opportunity to be as true to what one sees, hears, and knows as is possible. Of course, such success is likely to be called "selling out" by those who cannot achieve it.

Selling Out

Among the most damaging legacies of the nearly unanimous political opinions of sociologists, is the equally unanimous sensibility that the ethical practice of sociology must be guided by strict abstinence from contact with commercial and corporate life. I recall, although I cannot document with any precision here, what I take to be a legendary instance of such a call to abstinence when, at what I think were the meetings of the Eastern Sociological Society in Boston in the late 1970s or early 1980s, Lewis Coser excoriated Rosabeth Moss Kantor after her move to the Harvard Business School for joining, in effect if not in reality, the ranks of corporate America. Her willingness to offer guidance (if not comfort) to those charged with leading corporate America was nothing more than a very upscale version of "selling out." (There are without a doubt more unexpressed opinions of this sort that underwrite the non-contractual aspects of the sociology contract with political and social reality, but we will never know whether the high-profile scolding of the kind mounted by Coser had more to do with preventing such "selling out" among the guild or with confirming that the best do sociology *and* something else, while the rest do *only* sociology.) In what might be considered Kantor's excommunication, in an obviously, highly symbolic way, the only question left pondering is how pure any guild can remain before it suffers the fate of the Shakers. Imagine if Kantor had gone on (using her base at Harvard Business School as a bully pulpit) to extol the invaluable part that an education and practice in sociology had given her? Imagine further a professional association that recognized the incalculable value of success by members in other spheres of human endeavor, beyond sociology? Any account of the history of the category of "public intellectual," now awarded at annual meetings of the ASA, will demonstrate that the good puritans of sociology are by and large still running the asylum (see Imber, 1997).

It was heartening nonetheless in 1994 to observe the celebration in Pittsburgh of the late James Coleman's presidency of the ASA, with a keynote address by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who introduced there his famous formulation of "defining deviance down." But the contrast between this memorable event and the staging of protests at the book exhibit over the rental of a booth to a local area right-to-life group captured both the passing of great sociological thinking and the puerile acting-out of political beliefs, the former of national importance, and the latter of importance to those measuring intolerance among sociologists. One of the peculiar confusions about sociology's place among the social sciences is how, in certain instances, collaboration between sociology and other fields has come to represent its strongest suit while at the same time other voices in the field can be heard loudly denouncing such alliances. The most important collaborations—what in the long term will assure the survival of sociology as both an academic subject and profession—are the ones between sociology and economics on one side, and between sociology and biology on the other. Resistance to such collaborations draws again from the idea of "selling out" in both political and intellectual terms.

Sociology and Economics

The popularization of social-scientific analysis and findings depends a great deal on techniques of effective communication. The Chicago economist, Steven D. Levitt, took this seriously and together with the journalist, Stephen J. Dubner, published *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (a title reminiscent of Peter Berger's observation that "The first wisdom of sociology is this: Things are not what they seem," which is now used as a logo on a tote-bag distributed by the American Sociological Association). Among Levitt's most provocative claims is a correlation between the legalization of abortion in 1973 and a drop in the crime rate two decades later, a hypothesis that should certainly be of interest to sociologists, demographers, and criminologists. (Further assessment of abortion from an economic perspective can be found in Levine, 2004.)

Reviewing Levitt's book, Jim Holt observed, "Economists can seem a little arrogant at times. They have a set of techniques and habits of thought that they regard as more 'rigorous' than those of other social scientists. When they are successful—one thinks of Amartya Sen's important work on the causes of famines, or Gary Becker's theory of marriage and rational behavior—the result gets called economics" (Holt, 2005). The operative phrase here is the last one, "the result gets called economics." Another way to put this is that what is noticed among social-scientific hypotheses and findings "gets called economics," and it speaks to the remarkable talent in that field today. More sociologists should know how to talk to economists, and together, the discipline of sociology may emerge stronger in the wisdom that Peter Berger imparted more than 40 years ago, before it became an adornment on a sack used for personal belongings distributed by the ASA.

Sociology and Biology

It is difficult to ignore how much courage a person calling herself a sociologist must have to be so much as inadvertently associated with the project originally called sociobiology and more recently evolutionary psychology. The entire field of brain and behavior (as well as modern genetics) has revolutionized how sociologists should be approaching such matters as human development, drug use, sexuality, and other publicly relevant concerns and problems. At the very least, sociologists could be leading the way in providing inventories of such developments, offering contexts and assessments that enable others to understand where and how science meets policy and policy meets politics. In what became the second great awakening for sociology of its extraordinary limitations in making sense of the sociological implications of developments in biology and psychobiology, a reactionary despair set in, which was as much a submission to ideological purity as it was a test of loyalty within the guild itself. The first awakening followed the publication of Edward Wilson's work on sociobiology in the 1970s. The next arrived following the publication in 1994 of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray.

Various members of the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, published a rebuttal to Herrnstein and Murray. Some of them also went "on the road" to promote their rebuttal (Fischer et al., 1996). The work of Fischer and his colleagues emphasized environmental factors in the disparities of wealth in the United States, a claim that could hardly be described as either controversial or sociologically interesting. But the deepest ambition of the work was not only to debunk Herrnstein and Murray's statistics. It was also to remove from debate any consideration of what particular factors innate to individuals were especially important to where they ended up in life.

The idea of "innateness" especially irritates sociologists, not for reasons of postmodern sensibility, but, in the case of *The Bell Curve*, because the long-enduring insights about group outcome were being hijacked by psychometric researchers to establish precisely what Marx had claimed 150 years earlier about the proletariat, namely, their oppression and exploitation by the bourgeoisie. Herrnstein and Murray added the twist already fictionalized by Michael Young in *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (which, by the way, was originally published in 1958 in England with the subtitle: *1870–2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*; the first American edition (1959) offered a different subtitle: *1870–2033: The New Elite of Our Social Revolution*). Young predicted a world in which intelligence, however measured, would replace social class as the defining characteristic of what sociologists in particular, following Ralf Dahrendorf, have called life chances. Meritocracy was coined as a pejorative term denoting the replacement of one type of caste for another. Yet, the fate of the term has been quite different in its wide application to principles of prosperity following the demise of socialism and the end of communism. Young, then in his mid–80s, was so vexed by the use of the term by Prime Minister Tony Blair that he wrote in the *Guardian* about how much worse the rise of the meritocracy had been for those left behind, "branded at school they are more vulnerable for later unemployment." Against Blair's hopefulness, he called for "increasing income taxes on the rich . . . and reviving more powerful local government as a way of involving local people and giving them a training for national politics" (Young, 2001).

The Bell Curve offered an answer of sorts to the redistributionists by shifting the debate from one of leveling the playing field as a matter of principle to reducing the costs of government as an end in itself, quite apart from what specific effects the pursuit of such an end would have on the shape and size of the under, middle, and over classes. From an empirical standpoint, the end of welfare "as we know it" has yet to inspire the formation of new social movements for greater redistribution. This does not mean that new forms of distress have not emerged during the decade largely defined by Charles Murray's earlier work, *Losing Ground:American Social Policy, 1950–1980*, which was published in 1985. The link of that earlier work to *The Bell Curve* is evident in how the pace of competition to achieve, for example by standards of testing, has yet to be resisted by counter-cultural movements like those celebrated in the 1960s. Instead of counter-cultural resistance, there is culture war engagement, where achievement (i.e., meritocracy) is retained in full in home-schooling movements, evangelical and parochial forms of education, and, as I expect will become more clear in the years to come, in the fascinating expressions of concern for "spirituality" that have appeared in the secular, elite colleges with the concurrent disappearance of their denominational identities. That last development should be of considerable interest to sociologists hoping to understand the ways in which the reinforcement of individual responsibility remains, in American terms, as pious as it has ever been. Some devotees of contemporary spirituality may hold out hope that from a dwelling on spirituality will spring a new resource for collective action of some kind, but I predict that they are wrong for the simple reason that such action in recent American history has always coincided with a rejection of American values. The achievement ethic is anything but such a rejection, and it is now in search of spiritual moorings, long ago jettisoned as Max Weber described a century ago.

Whether or not *The Bell Curve* should have become a pretext for race or class wars (or for that matter, of late, gender wars), it did announce a bracing realization that wealth creation, as it merges with globalization, promises to make the world an even more starkly stratified place, at least in the short run, than it already is. Consider how the resources that may soon be available to enhance and prolong life dramatically may also affect that picture. The sociologist worried about who others may think he or she is in bed with politically will miss opportunities to report on the implications of these changes. Rather than treating such works as *The Bell Curve* as necessary to debunk, the sociologists with such enthusiasm to do so should have insisted that the next generation of sociologists learn about genetics and psychobiology so as to report the unintended consequences that always come with new knowledge. The legal profession has already taken up the challenge (see Jones and Goldsmith, 2005).

I have belabored these two topics of sociology and its relations to economics and biology to pose a challenge directly to those entrepreneurial and less risk-averse graduate students who are looking for ways to take their sociological educations one step further. In the major universities, opportunities abound to make associations beyond one's immediate discipline. But such opportunities require a certain kind of courage. There are all kinds of "interdisciplinary" endeavors, and many of them are encouraged explicitly for the sake of undergraduate education, which often suffers the tyranny of specialization, of those who know a great deal about one important thing but have a much more difficult time assuming the confidence of an educated person. Sociology is in a key place to make that which is interdisciplinary contribute to knowledge as well as learning. The best ethnographers of medicine actually know something about medicine itself. How can anyone study the popularization of genetics without some basic (and more than basic) knowledge about molecular biology? This stands as a tall order in several respects. One's teachers, most of whom are long past learning new tricks, will be skeptical; one's peers will be intimidated. Interdisciplinarity is mostly fraudulent; it does take an enormous amount of study and engagement to claim some sort of expertise in one field, much less two. But it is not impossible, and sociologists in particular ought to be at the forefront of showing how it can be done.

Checking Out

During the course of my work as editor of *The American Sociologist*, I had the occasion to meet and talk with the late William J. Goode, who by that time had retired from teaching. I pointed out that his book, *The Celebration of Heroes*, was out of print and that he ought to consider finding a publisher to reissue it. His response took me aback: "I'm finished with sociology. I've done enough." He did not say that sociology was finished but rather only that he had done as much as he wanted to do in sociology. He said much more, but I recall our conversation as a turning point in my own reflection on two related problems in how career and profession relate to one another. First, the desire for greater recognition, what I have called here "trading up," has its pathological side. Being "in print" is confused with "being" itself, and the confusion is undoubtedly exacerbated by having no other attachments (to students, institutions, etc.). Goode's response to me was a lesson in modesty of a particular kind, and this has implications for all professional life. The period of retirement following life in the professions has expanded in time and in terms of the numbers who remain active and at work. In the case of teaching, they may take assignments piecemeal at various schools. All of this should be given much more empirical and theoretical attention in the future.

Second, just as the institutions from which we retire will survive without us, so, too, will the profession. This is why honoring our elder statesmen had such significance when the professional psychology of scale was much smaller than it is today. Writing in *The American Sociologist* in 1981, Goode noted that in previous decades, "Both seniors and juniors were visible when the numbers were small; and thus the more imposing figures could be recognized by the less well known. The contrast with the present meetings is captured by the wry comments of [Wilbert E.] Moore, who explains why the first social event on the ASA annual program is a small reception for the Past Presidents: It is the only time during the meetings when any of us will be recognized by anyone, much less given any deference" (Goode, 1981: 91). Goode's structural explanation goes only so far. As recognition becomes more impersonal, so deference gives way to indifference toward living and departed human beings. The essence of celebrity is distilled in the actions of the Paparazzi who sell recognition as a commodity, and so have no stake in the customs of interaction that historically defined public life. For sociologists elected to high offices in their professional association, a different, nearly opposite, fate awaits (Imber, 1999: 257–258).

William Goode concluded in the previously cited article, a quarter of a century ago, a hope that I share for all those inspired to think and write sociologically: "As to the residual hostility and the refusal of many to admit that others may be contributing to the field, I cherish a real hope, based on at most a few shreds of sociological observation, that within a decade more of us will stop denouncing other intellectual schools as politically detestable and empirically empty. Instead, we shall be paying others respect by battling them ardently about central theoretical and empirical puzzles: What are the social processes, and how do they work? That is more difficult than dismissing our opponents, but ultimately more rewarding and probably more fun. That kind of conflict was common a generation ago at the national meetings, as it is in all developing sciences. If it happens again, and displaces some of the current conflicts, we should not view it as a step backward into the past, but as a return to our calling: passion in the service of truth. At a deep level, our annual corroboree is a celebration of that vocation" (Goode, 1981: 93).

The calling to sociology, especially for those about to embark on graduate study, or for those in the throes of the anxieties and alienation about what it means to stay in such a field, illuminates the excitement and hope of being young and of wanting to make sense, indeed better sense, of the world. I am not convinced that sociology is a science in any received definition of incremental advancement by experiment and replication of findings. But I am confident that those called to it know that it has everything to do with the fragile and compelling nature of all insight. If you are an ideologist and dogmatist at heart, sociology may be a safer harbor than going directly into advocacy politics. But you should. Sociology should always be about observing *why* others go into politics and what difference it makes to politics. Sociologists should always hesitate for the sake of clearer thinking. There is no greater opportunity to learn how to practice that disposition than in graduate school. The challenges of each stage beyond that time will come soon enough.

References

Abbott, A. 2000. "Politics and Controversies in Sociology." Sociological Research Association Dinner, American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C., August 13. http://home.uchicago.edu/~aabbott/booksandpapers.html

Adams, H. *The Academic Tribes*. 1976 [1988], 2nd ed. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Bailey, F.G. 1977. *Morality and Expediency: The Folklore of Academic Politics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Fischer, C.S., Hout, M., Sanchez Jankowski, M., Lucas, S.R., Swidler, A., and Voss, K. 1996. *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Goode, W.J. 1981. "On Reaching Out and Coming Together: Then and Now." *The American Sociologist* 16(2): 90–93.

Heilbrun, C.G. 1997. *Feminist in a Tenured Position*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Holt, J. 2005. "Everything He Always Wanted to Know." Review of *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, by S.D. Levitt and S.J. Dubner. *New York Times Book Review*. Published: May 15, 2005, Late Edition–Final, Section 7, Column 2, Page 12.

Imber, J.B. 1997. "Editor's Column: The Future of Sociology: Coda." *The American Sociologist* 28(4): 3–7.

———. 1999. "Other-Directed Rebels." *Contemporary Sociology*. 28(3): 255–259.

Jones, O.D., and T.H. Goldsmith. 2005. "Law and Behavioral Biology." *Columbia Law Review* 105: 405–502.

Levine, P.B. 2004. *Sex and Consequences: Abortion, Public Policy, and the Economics of Fertility*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Toth, E. 1997. *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Weber, M. 1946. "Politics as a Vocation." Pp. 77–128. In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Ed., H.H. Gerth and C. W. Mills. New York: Oxford University Press.

Young, M. 2001. "Down with Meritocracy." *The Guardian*. June 29.