

The PHI BETA KAPPA Society

VISITING



SCHOLAR
PROGRAM

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**PUBLIC LECTURE
OFFERINGS**

NORMS AND DEVIANCE

A major issue for the field of sociology concerns the nature of social organization over various epochs. Sociologists consider and draw distinctions between “normal” behavior and “deviance,” including issues of criminality and its etiology. The topic of my talk will focus on the nature of cosmopolitanism, ethnocentrism, and tolerance through history.

WHEN WORK DISAPPEARS

The years following the postwar economic boom of the 1940s and 50s saw changes in the U.S. economy that dramatically affected the lives of people living in the inner cities. The American economy changed from one based on manufacturing to one based increasingly on service and high technology in the context of increasing globalization. As a result, major dislocations resulted, especially among the inner-city poor. The positions that formerly existed for inner-city residents were largely in manufacturing, which allowed people to earn a basic living and were often low-skill and required little in the way of education. But many of these jobs were sent to non-metropolitan America, to Mexico, or overseas to developing countries where labor costs were much cheaper. As a result, through no fault of their own, many inner-city American citizens fell into a poverty that was best understood as “structural.”

ELIJAH ANDERSON

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on that Montgomery bus in 1955, the modern Civil Rights Movement began. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., a twenty-six-year-old minister, organized a bus boycott that brought the bus company and the city to its economic knees. This action also brought about social change in that Black people were no longer restricted to the back of the bus, and set the stage for other victories that challenged racial segregation throughout the nation. This movement changed race relations throughout the United States.

URBAN POVERTY AND VIOLENCE

Of all the problems besetting the poor inner-city Black community, none is more pressing than that of interpersonal violence and aggression. It wreaks havoc daily with the lives of community residents and increasingly spills over into downtown and residential middle-class areas. Muggings, burglaries, carjackings, and drug-related shootings, all of which may leave victims or innocent bystanders dead, are now common enough to concern all urban and many suburban residents. The inclination to violence springs from the circumstances of life among the ghetto poor—the lack of jobs that pay a living wage, the stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and lack of hope for the future.

RACE RELATIONS SINCE THE END OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Since the end of the Civil Rights Movement, large numbers of Black people have made their way into settings previously occupied only by whites, though their reception has been mixed. Overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, restaurants, and other public spaces remain prevalent, and many Blacks perceive such settings as “the white space,” which they often consider to be informally “off limits” for people like them. Meanwhile, despite the growth of an enormous Black middle class, many whites assume that the natural Black space is that destitute and fearsome locality so commonly featured in the public media, including popular books, music and videos, and the TV news—the iconic ghetto. White people typically avoid Black space, but Black people are required to navigate the white space as a condition of their existence.

ELIJAH ANDERSON

THE COSMOPOLITAN CANOPY: RACE AND CIVILITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A major feature of American cities is the mix of pleasant, racially mixed public spaces where civility is the norm. I have conceptualized these areas as “the cosmopolitan canopy,” a metaphor for civil society that manifests as islands of racial civility in otherwise segregated spaces. These canopies attract people of various races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and religions. By and large, all are welcome. Ultimately, these settings double as safe spaces that edify and encourage people with everyday lessons in racial tolerance.

BLACK SUCCESS, WHITE BACKLASH

Black prosperity has provoked white resentment that can make life exhausting for people of color—and it has led to the undoing of policies that have nurtured Black advancement.

For more than half a century, I have been studying the shifting relations between white and Black Americans. My own experience of race relations in America is even longer. I was born in the Mississippi Delta during World War II, in a cabin on what used to be a plantation, and then moved as a young boy to northern Indiana, where as a Black person in the early 1950s, I was constantly reminded of “my place,” and of the penalties for overstepping it. Seeing the image of Emmett Till’s dead body in Jet magazine brought home vividly for my generation of Black kids that the consequences of failing to navigate carefully among white people could even be lethal.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. ANY OF THE ABOVE LECTURES CAN ALSO BE USED AS DISCUSSION TOPICS