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## **Statement of Research Agenda**

A strong aspiration to bring to light the causes and consequences of racial domination and social inequality motivates my research agenda. I focus on producing empirically driven and socially relevant understandings of the relationship between racial meanings and structural racism. Moreover, in my work, I recast this dichotomy between meaning making and social structures by pulling in critical and power-sensitive modes of analysis and a focus on collective action. I maintain a rigorous and productive research agenda consisting of multiple interrelated scholarly projects connected to race and ethnicity, stratification, media, and politics and social movements.

My research looks at, on one hand, how people interpret and act upon the racial structure. I aim to understand how people engage in forming and protecting a sense of self, rationalizing a set of actions, subverting dominant meanings, and developing interpretations or readings of opportunities for social transformation. On the other hand, I seek to understand how the contexts that people inhabit are shaped by the power relations produced by larger social structures and institutions. In that sense, I emphasize collective processes of meaning making and social action – the way that racial meanings are circulated, amplified, and silenced by institutions such as mass media and the political system.

My dissertation is a qualitative case study of several organizations of grassroots political activists in the Northeastern U.S. to better understand the relationship between racialized political inequality, democratic participation, and social interactions. I routinely observed and participated in organizational meetings, informal social gatherings, political campaigns, and protests and demonstrations. I conducted semi-structured interviews to capture how grassroots activists of various backgrounds interpret the opportunities, barriers, and meaning of their participation. By merging these multiple data sources and themes, I bring people's awareness of racial inequality and their daily habits and collective routines into sharper focus as important dimensions for understanding racial inequities in politics and society. My dissertation is organized around three major themes: (1) how racial oppression shapes participation in grassroots democracy, (2) how racial and political meanings are refined by this participation, and (3) how racial inequality impacts social processes that determine the demographics, priorities, strategies, and leadership of grassroots political organizations.

Alongside my dissertation, I have also completed a large-scale project focused on racial discourse in the debate over the War on Drugs in the U.S. The study analyzes a large dataset of 394 newspaper manuscripts and 3,145 online comments and finds the omission of salient issues of racial injustice within this debate in mass media and the use of implicit racial meanings to both defend and decry the "war on drugs". I also demonstrate how audiences use such debate as a site for making racialized claims about themselves, others, and society. From this project, I have published two co-authored manuscripts in scholarly journals, a solo authored book chapter, and a solo authored book manuscript which is forthcoming with Routledge Press. The book places this debate in the broader context of racial politics in the U.S. and the history of mass media and the criminal justice system. It is intended for a wide audience including undergraduate students, practitioners and policy makers, and professional scholars.

Much of my work is concerned with the problem of racial injustice in the venues of politics, social movements, and human rights. I am currently developing two projects in the sociology of human rights and racial justice. The first is a study of past and present institutional, political, and social movement actors' use of the human rights framework and humanization to address the issue of racial injustice. This project has thus far produced a

published manuscript and I am hoping to further expand the project and write more about how these struggles against racial injustice can inform current efforts for social change. I recently completed a study of the discursive practices within two social movement organizations within the Mississippi Freedom Movement based on a comparative analysis of archival documents from the mid-1960s which is in development for journal submission. The study interrogates the relationship between social positions and discursive practices in social movements and demonstrates how issues such as the denial of political rights for African Americans matter differently for differently positioned groups in the social structure. The first manuscript from this project is under review for publication and I plan to develop further manuscripts from this project. Drawing together insights from past and ongoing research projects, I have plans for additional manuscripts examining the implications of racial inequality for electoral, party, and grassroots politics.

An analytical focus on the relationship between racial inequality and everyday social life is the primary thread throughout my research. I aim to continually develop and clarify sociological understandings of the impact of racial meanings and structures on social interactions. Toward this end, I have also undergone a study examining historical documents, previous research, and media content, that traces the development and features of the relationship between racial meanings and structures and everyday interactions throughout American history to derive a microlevel theory of racial domination. I explicitly focus on how implicit rules, interpretations, and habits of people's daily lives foster or challenge the status quo relations between racial groups. The study has thus far resulted in one published manuscript. This microlevel theory is further developed in my dissertation and will be explored further in my subsequent work and publications. Expanding my empirical repertoire in how I examine microlevel process of racial inequality, I also helped design and co-author a published experimental vignette study on the relationship between social positions and the perception of racial microaggressions among college students.

Additional to continued scholarly output from these projects, a large proportion of my future publications will draw from my dissertation research. My dissertation research will enable me to produce empirical articles covering: (1) the experiences and strategies of people of color in predominantly white grassroots organizations; (2) the role of racial meanings, reactions to political events, and regionality in political identity formation; (3) the role of white racial habits in shaping the political strategies of grassroots progressive organizations. Additionally, with my previous experience and the support of my committee, I am writing my dissertation in a format that will translate easily into a book that is intended to communicate to both scholars and the public on this vital issue in a timely fashion. My goal is to ensure that my research does not simply describe social and political life but change how it is practiced to advance racial equity and political empowerment. My professional goals are threefold: (1) to influence the national conversation about racial politics; (2) to share my findings with organizations and policy makers; and (3) to influence the scholarly field and reinvigorate the sociological study of racial inequities in civic and political engagement and everyday life.

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### **Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

I have been passionate about teaching sociology from the moment I first stood at the front of a classroom. Serving as a teaching assistant, instructor, and lecturer working with diverse groups of students has enabled me to turn this passion into both a calling and a career. I have grown confident in my abilities to deliver clear expectations and course material to enhance student learning, create a warm and open environment, build classroom rapport, and manage my time to meet deadlines and make myself available to students. My teaching style is oriented toward three overlapping goals: (1) that students cultivate a richer and deeper understanding of society and the dynamics of social life; (2) that they develop skills directly transposable to their careers and everyday lives no matter their trajectory; and (3) that they encounter an inclusive, challenging, and vibrant classroom environment.

In the classroom, I impart to students my own enthusiasm and genuine curiosity for uncovering new visions, understandings, and possibilities through the insights provided by sociology. I approach every class as an opportunity for shared investigation of social reality. Through exploring such topics as institutions, inequalities, and interaction, and the connections between them, students gain the tools to better comprehend the social conditions that touch everyone's lives. I provide students a grounding in established social scientific research methods, theories, and concepts. However, I aim for students to not simply learn what sociologists have discovered but rather to engage in their own practices of sociological discovery. Ultimately, I encourage students to take ownership over their process of perceiving and analyzing social reality.

I not only help students develop a sociological perspective, I also teach them to apply that perspective in their careers, whether socially engaged, academic, or otherwise. To that end, I focus on concrete and tangible skill building. These skills include critical and analytical modes of thinking, social empathy, research literacy, professional writing, and interpersonal communication. I ensure that students have the conceptual tools and relevant knowledge on a given topic to engage in their own investigations. Through discussions and interactive exercises, they acquire a greater ability to solve problems, find common ground, and critically analyze and assess those things that at first glance seem intuitive or natural. Additionally, many of my courses require students to engage in their own original research projects to gain firsthand experience with collecting and analyzing data and clearly communicating complex ideas. These skills extend into students' engagement in their own communities and careers. Moreover, I provide direct mentorship to help students achieve their academic and career goals. I have assisted students in gaining internships with community organizations, positions in research institutions, and acceptance to graduate, medical, and law programs where they can pursue their interests and passions.

Finally, I aim to develop a classroom context that engages, energizes, and empowers all students. I have taught and mentored a variety of students including those from both highly privileged and marginalized backgrounds. I've learned to meet both students where they are and encourage them to grow. Dialogue, rather than passive absorption, is an especially crucial aspect of my approach to teaching. I foster productive tension wherein students feel safe but also recognize being uncomfortable as a necessary aspect of learning. This approach helps students confront potentially contentious topics such as inequality and social problems which can give way to destructive conflict. Additionally, I recognize that not all students learn through the same teaching methods. Through a mix of multimedia, lectures, interactive exercises, student presentations, and in-depth discussions I meet a variety of learning styles.

These strategies have proven effective. I have received recognition as an outstanding graduate instructor by the Office of the Provost at UConn for 2017, 2018, and 2019, and commendation on teaching evaluations from students and colleagues. Yet, perhaps most rewarding of all is the progress, new mastery of skills, and achievements that I witness in students on a daily basis.