

*The Perplexities of American Pluralism*  
University Studies - Sophomore Inquiry  
Fall -- 2005

**November 8 – Where are we now?**

At the beginning of our 7<sup>th</sup> week, with only a few more weeks before the first group presentations, it may be well to take stock of where we've been, where we are, and where we want to end up.

What I hope we've done so far is to:

- (1) garner an expanding appreciation of the "big picture" of American pluralism;
- (2) develop some working sociological concepts with which to make sense of that picture;
- (3) become more acquainted with some of the relevant issues regarding pluralism in regard to American society;
- (4) begin to learn something about each of the major groups currently contributing to the content and controversies of our multi-cultural, pluralistic society.

In addition to accomplishing a fair portion of what is listed above, each of you should be assembling a personal "portfolio" consisting of activities we've initiated in class or mentor section (see the accompanying list).

By now each of you should have finished reading your assigned "autobiography" and have begun to work in your groups to develop your class presentation. The purpose of this presentation is to help you solidify your learning, to connect it to both some of the dynamics of society in general, and to share it with your classmates. More particularly, it is to gain insight into some of the perplexing issues which affect all of the various groups in our multi-cultural society, as well as those that are unique to your particular autobiography group. In other words, each of these biographies can be seen as simultaneously saying something about a particular *person*, about a particular *group* which has been part of the American mosaic, about *all persons*, no matter who they are, and about *American society* as well (and perhaps even about every society).

Your group presentation should be imaginative, informative, interesting, and fun. Your growing knowledge of the social context and social concepts should enable you to provide us with some insights and understandings into the particular individual and group that you have been reading about. There are lots of ways to go about working together in designing a group presentation and I'm sure you will have already incorporated some of them. Here are some additional suggestions that might be helpful.

As you work through plans for your presentation, it is often useful to stop and take stock, reminding yourselves of what you are trying to accomplish and whether the means you have decided to utilize will be effective in achieving those goals. Have you thought about your audience and what will pique their interest? Are you comfortable with your division of labor? Is everyone participating,--in whatever different ways—equally? Are you in agreement about the major points you want to make? Are there different viewpoints among you that need to be heard? Does your presentation have a structure, i.e., does it have a beginning, a middle, and an end? Does it move forward in a coherent manner? Are there some major conclusions you want to draw? Some questions that you want to leave with your audience? Some personal insights or realizations that you want to share?

Is your method of presentation lively? Are you reinforcing it with visuals, graphics, audio, video, Powerpoint, overheads? Do you anticipate bringing some real energy and enthusiasm—a display of authentic vitality—to the presentation? Each of these autobiographies is a fascinating story. What of that fascination can you make alive, elaborate on, connect to? Have you practiced? Have you timed it? Are you planning for some particular response from the class?

What concepts or ideas that have been part of the sociological dimension of the course will you bring to bear as an integral part of your presentation? In what ways do they give you—and us—some additional leverage of insight, connection, and understanding?

One way to think through a presentation is to think about what questions you could ask—that you would want to ask—if you were to test your audience afterward. Those questions often identify the major themes or ideas that are the focus of your material.

Alas, if you have not already reviewed them, there is still time to review the additional materials at the back of the reading packet that might prove useful.