

Why I quit sociology 343A

By VITTORIA METELLI

I was, until a few days ago, a student in Race and Ethnic Relations 343A, a sociology course. Because I thought the reasons why I dropped the course could be of interest to other York University students, I am outlining them.

Tuesday morning (Oct. 20), I went to class more willing than usual; we had been dealing all along with the problem of the negro in the States, but I was expecting some comment about the latest events in Quebec.

I thought the professor would draw a parallel or invite us to consider and think about the situation in Quebec. But not a single word was said!

It was with a bit of disappointment, therefore, that I sat on my chair and concentrated on the negro in Mississippi.

In the second hour of the lecture Prof. Morris told us about a project she has been involved in for quite a while; implicitly she was encouraging us to join.

The project consisted of sending money and parcels of food and clothes to a particularly needy family in the Mississippi delta.

She had a file of very touching letters of thanks that she had received from families and she read some to us.

One was from an 18-year-old girl who was in grade 13 and could not spell yet; another was from a mother with 8 or 9 children that she was supporting with only \$60.70 per month.

I was very moved and I felt great pity for these poor people, like all the other students. But I also started to ask myself questions: Is this the reason that I am attending a three hundred level course in sociology? To be moved? To feel pity?

Is this — the sending of parcels — the solution that a sociologist is offering me to solve the problem of poverty, discrimination and exploitation of the negro in the U.S.?

This to me seems like grade six teaching, and should be left to grade six teachers to use. If this hint of the project had come from the wife of a minister, I would have very gladly joined it, but coming from a "sociologist", no thank you!

Why didn't she at least suggest to us to support some of the negro organizations that are operating in that line, that so badly need food and clothes to distribute, and money to pay for the bails of their members?

Maybe I have been learning the wrong things (I am an Atkinson student) but to me these parcels have the function of reinforcing the stereotype concepts we have of the negro and of relieving our consciences from the guilt of Quebec!

Why not? Let us all use this nice scapegoat. Let us all concentrate on the problem of the negro in Mississippi. Mississippi is far enough away. After all, you know poverty is dirty and this way we will have very little chance of seeing it up close, and so we will not have to consider our own problems, our down-town slum, our reservations, not to mention Quebec.

Well, I have heard before that at Atkinson there is a "different standard" of teaching from that of the day school. If this is the standard of the sociology department of York University, I am very happy to be an Atkinson student and stick with it.

To my former classmates, I can only wish good luck.



"Today class, I'd like to look at a case of poor race relations right in our own backyard; the case of the American Negro."

Care packages to Mississippi

Soc. Sc. 343A: the (U.S.) unreality

By BOB ROTH

York's sociology department, ever faithful to its traditional role of ignoring Canadian content, has once again opened its annual Pandora's box — this time releasing an infliction called Sociology 343A.

Sociology 343A is a course on race and ethnic relations which, like most sociology courses, is dutifully conducted so as to minimize discussion of Canadian problems and maximize discussion of American problems.

In fact, through its use of U.S. content and liberal methodology, Soc. 343A typifies what is happening to Canadian education at York.

The university calendar's course description for Soc. 343 promises the student "a systematic study of ethnic group relations in selected happening to Canadian education at York.

For the entire first term, however, 343A course director Ruth Morris has decided that the United States should be the "selected" country whose problems Canadian students should examine. As Morris puts it in her outline:

"In exploring these (racial and ethnic) questions, most of the first semester will be focussed on a study of the extensive current literature and events regarding the American Negro."

Canadian problems such as conflict in Quebec, to which an entire course could easily be devoted, are to be discussed "among others" in the second term. As Morris says:

"As the course develops, some attention will be given to a wide variety of other ethnic and racial groups: French Canadians, Indians in Canada and the U.S., and Jews and a minority group in varied cultures, among others."

The guiding light

In other words, race and ethnic relations are to be taught here the same way they are taught in the United States — with the American situation being used as the standard by which we judge other racial problems. Indeed, Morris is careful to instruct her students not to look at Canadian problems without using the U.S. model as the guiding light:

"Papers will also be due 2nd semester. Basically you are expected to follow a brief description of your minority group with a paper comparing them to the American Negro as a minority..."

Of course, we can be sure that when Dr. Morris is teaching in the United States she doesn't ask her American students to examine

the American blacks "comparing them to French Canadians as a minority."

The obvious conclusion, then, is that non U.S. problems are too parochial to be looked at in themselves and can only be viewed in the context of the American situation.

One would think a course on race and ethnic relations taught in Canada would have as its primary — albeit not exclusive — objective, the increasing of student awareness about problems in Canadian society.

Personal concern

But Morris sees the course function as something altogether different:

"The basic purpose of the course plan is to give students a sense of involvement, a personal feeling and concern about at least one racial problem..."

"Consequently the whole thrust of first semester is to give this personal depth feeling for one racial problem: that of the American Negro and white."

How fitting. In the midst of increased turmoil in Quebec, in view of continuing misery on the part of Canadian Indians, Eskimos and Metis, Canadians are instructed to develop "a sense of involvement, a personal feeling and concern" about a U.S. problem.

Little wonder Canadians are more familiar with the Black Panthers and SDS than they are with the history of FLQ, FLP, FRAP, CNTU and other Quebec movements.

That is not to say American problems are not important and should not be discussed. It's simply a matter of realizing that our priority has to be the examination of Canadian problems; if we don't solve them, nobody else will.

Morris is, however, quite prepared to let students discuss Canadian topics, providing discussion on these topics "relates to our primary example."

This developing of a methodology and analysis from U.S. examples and situations is not uncommon at York — and in more than one department.

Transplanting methodology

The transplanting of U.S. methodology based on the American experience is, however, not as adaptable to Canada as some of our professors would have us believe. Using the U.S. black situation as the "primary example" by which we evaluate the Quebec problem is highly questionable.

In the American case we are studying a displaced African culture that was forcibly torn from its homeland and, hence, to a large extent destroyed. In the Quebec case we are studying an indigenous culture that developed in Canada and survived the conquering efforts of the British empire. One situation cannot be significantly compared to the other.

Consequently, we can be sure that preoccupation with such attempted comparisons does more to obscure the real nature of Quebec and its problems than it does to clarify them.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to our coming to grips with Canadian problems, however, is not so much U.S. content, but the influx of American liberal ideology.

Liberalism, because it fails to acknowledge the relationship between social problems and their material base in the economic system, fails to deal with root causes of social problems.

CARE packages

The fact that Morris, herself, sees the sending of "care" packages of money and clothing to a family in Mississippi as a way of dealing with poverty, is indicative of the approach she is, no doubt, instilling in her students.

At a time when militant black groups in the U.S. are coming to see that the dismantling of the white power structure is the true solution, Morris virtually ignores this approach. Her failure to include the works of such people as Cleaver and Seale on her required reading list exemplifies this point.

If Morris insists on sending money — given to her by the Canadian taxpayer — south of the border, then her money might be better spent by contributing it to the Black Panther Party or other black groups trying to obtain community power.

But the harm this southern looking viewpoint may have already had on Canadian students is immeasurable.

One shudders at the thought of Canadians being encouraged to support a programme of sending money to blacks in Mississippi while Indians at Kenora suffer from malnutrition.

And the solution to these Canadian problems is not to simply start sending the "care" packages to Kenora.

The solution, as many Indians themselves see it, is the transformation of a system that renders minority groups powerless to control their own affairs.

The solution is the creation of a society where GM and INCO — whose interests after all are in making profits, not solving social problems — no longer pull the strings.

Garage mechanic

But the sociologist, like most liberal social scientists, has, in essence, become an agent of the status quo.

Convinced that the societal machine is, on the whole, running just fine, the sociologist has reduced himself to the role of garage mechanic, his prime function being to tinker with the engine now and again to prevent it from seizing up when malfunctions such as poverty and racism threaten to gum up the valves.

Unless we stop looking at Canadian problems through these eyes, we will no more solve our social ills than the Americans have their's.

The time has also come for Canadian students to reject the old stand-by reason for not dealing critically with Canadian problems — "but there isn't enough Canadian material yet."

There is plenty of written material on Quebec to be had, as well as first hand accounts from those who live there. The information may not be in neat little piles — Bobbs Merrill reprint style — but it's there, in the pages of Quebec-Presses and the bulletins and newsletters of workers and tenants committees.

The same applies for the Indian situation, both in terms of written material and speakers.

The problems are real

This begs the question: Why isn't York's sociology department digging this material up? Where are the courses on Quebec, the Canadian Indian, the Italian immigrant?

We are being asked to tolerate a situation where such courses are absent, while at the same time courses are being offered on the United States, not to mention Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The time is long overdue for the sociology department to examine its warped sense of priorities.

Students last year made it clear they wanted to talk about Canadian problems and they wanted to hear first hand from those people who know most about those problems and are actively combatting them — Michel Chartrand in Quebec, the Just Society Movement in Toronto, and the various Indian federations from coast to coast.

Yet, little has been done.

How many more times do we have to ask?



Social Sociology 343:

Race and ethnic relations

Content and purpose of course

This course will stress two major questions:

- 1) What kinds of factors make some race and ethnic relations positive, while others are much more negative? A variety of examples of race and ethnic relations will be studied to try to examine some of the variables involved. Related to this question is the whole issue of what methods are more and less effective for improving race and ethnic relations.
- 2) What are the effects of racial and ethnic prejudice on BOTH the dominant and the minority group? What are the cause of negative attitudes in both groups, and what are some of the effects of negative attitudes on them, and different patterns of responses among each group where discrimination exists?

In exploring these questions, most of the first semester will be focused on a study of the extensive current literature and events regarding the American Negro. As the course develops, some attention will be given to a wide variety of other ethnic and racial groups: French Canadians, Indians in Canada and the U.S., and Jews as a minority group in varied cultures, among others. Through papers and reports students will have opportunity to explore a wide variety of ethnic and racial situations.

No smoking rule

As a matter of personal courtesy for myself and others who prefer breathing unpolluted air, I request no smoking in the lecture room. This rule applies during lectures, during exams, on rainy Tuesdays, and in short at all times. I would appreciate your co-operation in reminding anyone around you who is amoking of this rule. Anyone who feels excessively discriminated against might try asking himself in how many situations he is already inflicting his smoke on others who would like to breathe relatively clean air. I strongly urge anyone who is excessively bothered by this rule to transfer to another section or take another course.

Course plan, requirements, and grading

First semester, readings are heavy in quantity, but light and interesting in quality. All focus on the Negro-white situation in the USA; many are autobiographical and most deal in a personal way with the situation.

Second semester readings will be somewhat heavier and more theoretical but much shorter. A paper will be required second semester, based on material to be used in a small-group report to the whole class on some one minority group. See below for more details on paper.

First semester the course will consist of two hours of lecture and one hour of discussion sections per week; for part of second semester, small group reports will take the place of some of the lectures.

Grades will be based on the following:

FIRST SEMESTER EXAM	1/3
SECOND SEMESTER EXAM	1/3
PAPER, oral report and class contributions	1/3

The basic purpose of the course plan is to give students a sense of involvement, a personal feeling and concern about at least one racial problem; the assumption is that if this can be conveyed, the student himself can go on to learn more about it, to develop ideas of his own about why and wherefore, and to experiment with social change approaches. If on the other hand, we were to make an essentially fascinating subject such as race and ethnic relations dry and dull, and thus to quell your budding interest, no brilliant theories of ours would have any significance to you.

Consequently the whole thrust of first semester is to give this personal depth feeling for one racial problem: that of the American Negro and white. Second semester we will deal with other ethnic and racial problems and with some theories about race and ethnic relations, considering how each of these relates to our primary example and other race and ethnic situations.

Paper and oral reports

Your teaching assistant will help you form small groups of about 4 or 5 persons for oral reports to class on some minority group, based as far as possible on your interests. The following groups are possible ones, but if you can interest 3 other students in your discussion group in some other minority of your choice, you need not be limited to these:

- Franch Canadians in Quebec
- French Canadians outside Quebec
- Canadian Indians (US Indians)
- Jews
- Poles
- Ukrainians in Canada
- S. African blacks

- Draft dodgers
- Catholics
- Puerto Ricans
- Italians in Canada
- Women
- Japanese in N. America
- Chinese in N. America

- minorities in Brazil
- race relations in Hawaii

The library will probably NOT have adequate material on some of the more obscure groups above; other groups such as draft dodgers and women and Catholics are not perfectly parallel to ethnic minorities and may present problems in this sense. You are not expected to start much reading toward your topic first semester, but your group IS expected to make sure you can cover the topic agreed upon, before the end of 1st semester, and arrange a change of topic where necessary. We will not be sympathetic to groups which come to us a week or so before their report deadline with the discovery they cannot handle their topic.

Oral reports will be discussed more 2nd semester, and will not take place till then. It is not necessary that every member of the group group get up to speak; the purpose is to plan your group report to inform the class in the best possible way about your minority group.

Papers will also be due 2nd semester. Basically you are expected to follow a brief description of your minority group with a paper comparing them to the American Negro as a minority, focusing on one of the following three subjects:

- A) Comparative effect of minority status on these two groups; their comparative roles in the society, self-images, and attitudes toward assimilation, integration, and independence.
- B) Comparative effect of these two minorities on the dominant group: causes of its attitudes toward them, and toward assimilation.
- C) The two groups compared in relation to best methods for achieving desired social change in the two situations.