



**Resolution in Memoriam
James W. Loewen
Professor Emeritus of Sociology
1942 - 2021**

**A Tribute by Nick Danigelis, Professor Emeritus of Sociology
Presented by Thomas Macias, Professor, Department of Sociology
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The UVM Department of Sociology is saddened to announce Dr. James W. Loewen, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, passed away on August 19, 2021.

Jim and I arrived at UVM at the same time in 1975. He already had published two books, the latter his controversial text on Mississippi history. Very quickly I learned that conflict followed Jim Loewen wherever he went. Conflict that he embraced, indeed seemed to encourage.

I will leave it to others to recount in detail his important contributions to the understanding of social inequality – especially race inequality – in the U.S. through his books like the best-selling *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, his court appearances as an expert witness in dozens of civil rights and voting rights cases, and his numerous public lectures on the U.S.'s troubled racial past and present.

Here I will focus on what I remember as some of the important ways during his 20 years at UVM that Jim directly impacted our students as well as the rest of the UVM community.

The first is his teaching of race relations. While courses on race had been taught before Jim's arrival, no one taught race the way Jim did. Probably his most singular contribution was to shed light on Kake Walk, at UVM, exposing the bad and the ugly, along with the perceived good of this racist tradition in which white male students dressed up for a mock dance contest as minstrels in blackface. Jim brought to light this shameful aspect of UVM history in the classroom with his students, and also in a 1991 essay, where he explained that, although the Burlington area had benefitted economically and even experienced a sense of community through Kake Walk weekend, it was at the expense of perpetuating racist stereotypes. A decades-long perpetuation of racist stereotypes that wasn't abolished until 1969, well after the Civil Rights movement had begun.

A second area where Jim made an important contribution to UVM was in his Introduction to Sociology course in which he presented, among other things, a series of in-class exercises to teach students the benefits of sociology over what passes for common sense, exercises that were published in the journal *Teaching Sociology*. One that had a profound impact on me and my own teaching focused on the relationship between formal education among adults and attitudes toward the Vietnam War circa 1970. How does education affect war attitudes Jim would ask innocently, and the vast majority would answer that the more educated people were, the more likely they would be against the war. After soliciting a variety of seemingly plausible reasons for the connection, which usually included reference to college

student protests at the time, Jim would then share Gallup polling data that showed just the opposite: Among adults 25 and older, more schooling meant more support for the war. Exploring possible reasons for the actual facts – the economic benefits of the war for the well educated, the greater likelihood of poorly educated individuals to be drafted and die in the war, leaving behind families that saw only the horror of the war, etc. – taught his students an important lesson in using facts and the scientific method rather than what seems to pass for common sense.

A final teaching example comes from a four-credit methods/statistics course that Jim and I jointly developed in 1984 and which continues to be taught today in one form or another. One innovation of the course was The Burlington Area Survey for which our students interviewed residents and analyzed the results of those interviews for class credit and later for a report submitted to City Hall. Jim's insistence on including questions related to Burlington's economic, political and social landscape helped sensitize our students to a perspective on Burlington residents that was missing in their lives, especially during the first semester when we focused on the Old North End, an area where many of our students lived but didn't really **know**. Even when he was teaching methods and "howto's," Jim was living his role as the social conscience of UVM.

And that's how I'll remember him: As our social conscience. Whether it was teaching life lessons to our students about race and inequality or arguing about diversity in faculty hiring and student admissions, Jim Loewen never had an "off" switch with regard to social injustice writ both large and small. His striving for social justice was not just a part of his day job. It was who he was – his manner often contrary, but always sincere and offered up with his own whimsical sense of humor. Jim Loewen's 20 years here helped make UVM a better institution.

I MOVE that this resolution in memoriam be inscribed in the Minutes of the Faculty Senate and that copies be sent to the family of Jim Loewen.