

Democracy Matters: Giving Students a Political Voice¹

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Since the publication of C. Wright Mills's brilliant *Sociological Imagination* in 1959, many sociologists have explored the intersection of private troubles (biography) and public issues (social structure) (see Mills, pp. 7–11). My own passion as a sociologist has been similarly focused—on understanding how people attempt to remedy their personal (private) concerns by challenging and changing society's institutions (social structures) through social movements. But, following Marx's (1845/1998) dictum not to just understand but also to change the world, I have actively participated in movements for social change since 1964 when, as an undergraduate, I became part of the civil rights movement's Freedom Summer.

In the movements that followed—the antiwar, student, and antipoverty movements of the 1960s, and later the women's and environmental movements—students connected their private concerns about the draft, discrimination, or the destruction of the natural world with political efforts to change laws. My research followed these movements, tracking

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