

Vicky Demos
Narrator

Mary Klauda
Interviewer

November 14, 2022

MK: 00:00:01 We are recording, Vicky. So this is Mary Klauda, and I'm interviewing Vicky Demos on Monday, November 14, 2022. And we are meeting virtually on Zoom. Vicky is in Maryland, and I'm in St. Paul, Minnesota. So good morning, Vicky. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk about your legacy at UMM.

VD: 00:00:27 Well, good morning, Mary. I'm pleased to do it.

MK: 00:00:31 Well, we're going to have a fun time, so whether we like it or not.

VD: 00:00:36 Yes.

MK: 00:00:37 You taught sociology there at UMM for three plus decades, and during that time, one of your most enduring and profound impacts was in teaching gender and race, and I'm really looking forward to hearing more about that and other topics today. So let's get started. I just, first, want to talk about your arrival at Morris. Can you talk a bit about what brought you to UMM and why you stayed for over three decades?

VD: 00:01:09 Well, I was in the—I was on the job market, and I went to—I attended the Midwest Sociological Society meetings. And in those days when I was looking for a job, they used to have—you could interview right there at the meetings, to have a preliminary interview, and they would match people up. People would ask to—you would put your vitae in and they would look at it, and then the employers would look at it and they would ask to interview you.

00:01:56 And I was asked by the University of Minnesota, Morris to come for a preliminary interview at the meeting. And I didn't know anything about the school. I was curious, I went and there were five people, the people included Bruce Nord, Chris Templeman, Ellen Robert, Michael Winter, those were all faculty. And then the fifth person was a student, Michael Garcia.

00:02:46 And so they told me a little bit about UMM, and they asked if I would be interested in coming to the campus for a visit and interviewing there. And my sense was that UMM was like a—I can't remember the name of the schools, but it sounded very experimental, and it was quite—kind of an open curriculum. And so I was interested in coming and interviewing for the job, which I did. And then I was offered the job, and I came out deep into the Midwest. And I had grown up on the east coast, and my ambition from very young was to eventually end up in New York City.

00:03:56 So when I went out for the interview, I took the bus from Morris—from Notre Dame where I was a student, Notre Dame, Indiana, to Morris, Minnesota. And I was passing more and more cornfields, and I thought, oh, my gosh, where am I going? And finally ended up in this place which was quite isolated and very different. And I remember I had an apartment, a basement apartment across from the campus and facing the prairie. And I was talking to my father on the phone, I was describing where I was, and all of a sudden I see someone on horseback go by, there's someone on a horseback going by.

00:05:12 So it was a very different experience for me. And then the first snow was a whiteout and I couldn't—I had trouble crossing a street, the wind was so great. And from then, it was becoming accustomed to being on the prairie. And I developed courses, I participated in professional organizations, I built my career at UMM, I really built my career UMM. And what was so great about UMM was that it was a small campus, but it was also linked to the university so you had all the privileges of the university system.

00:06:12 Although from time to time, the existence of the campus was threatened by someone, the Board of Regents or somebody was wondering about our small campus and was it cost effective, all these kinds of issues. But the campus has survived and it's survived as a result of the commitment of the faculty. So that was what brought me to UMM. I became—I was very interested in issues of structured social inequality or otherwise called social stratification.

00:07:11 I grew up in a—I grew up as a Greek ethnic, my father was actually an immigrant. And part of what I had learned growing up was the American dream, that you could come to America, and if you worked hard, your work would be

realized. And so I believed in that. I thought, the American dream was just wonderful. Once I got into college and started taking sociology courses and a course such as social stratification, I realized that the American dream works for some people.

00:08:21 But it's basically a, from my point of view, a myth that it doesn't matter—for some people, it doesn't matter how committed they are to work and how hard they work and how many hours they work, there's no way they're going to move above their station. And a very real barrier to social mobility is race, so I became very aware of race. When I was in college in the '60s, I was a commuter, I took the bus to college. I took the bus to Towson. It was Towson State College, now it's Towson University outside of Baltimore.

00:09:20 And in 1968, we had the urban protests. We were—the National Guard came to the city, there were curfews, you had to be off the streets by 4:00 in the afternoon. And I remember one time coming back, walking back from the library, and I was—it was just after four, and there was this tank in the street, and the person stopped and they said, where are you going? I said, I'm just coming back from the library, I'm going home. You need to get off the streets. So that made a very big impression on me.

00:10:17 And those—at that time, those were explained as unruly Blacks. And Spiro Agnew had been governor of Maryland at the time, and he called all these people together, these Black ministers, and he blamed them for the unrest. And of course, years later, that was completely reinterpreted. Okay. But my sociology classes, I learned that there's a reason for these urban uprisings, and they have to do with social justice, they have to do with poverty. And so I became very interested in social inequality.

00:11:19 When I came to Morris, I also was interested in aging. And so I taught a course, of course, aging in contemporary society. And that also was from—I taught it from a social justice point of view, the discrimination that occurs with aging. And at that time, what we—the conceptual tools that we had were a prejudice and discrimination, those were the major tools that we use to talk about inequality.

00:11:59 Then I also started teaching. I was teaching a course called Prejudice and Discrimination in American Society. And

there I taught about racial inequality. And as I began to teach it, I realized that those concepts were inadequate, and they were concepts that focused mainly on the individual, like prejudice, focused on the individual. Why were people—why was there inequality? Because some Whites were uneducated and they were prejudiced, and all you have to do is educate them.

00:13:03 And what is missed by that—what is missed with that concept is that, no, racial inequality is not a matter of ignorance on the part of Whites, it's a matter—it's a result of the inequality and power that in fact, it's to the interest of Whites to discriminate against people because it's a way in which the inequality is maintained and the privilege of Whites is maintained. So all these ideas about characteristics of Blacks as opposed to Whites, Blacks are lazy, that was one kind of idea.

00:14:09 And of course, if you look at poverty, you know that poor people are stringing together two and three jobs, not getting a good night's sleep ever, and that it's not a matter of laziness at all. Yes, you might be able to pick out a couple people that you accuse of laziness, but that kind of labeling, only the powerful can do. The powerless don't say, oh, these executives are lazy. They could say it, but it doesn't have any—it doesn't carry any power behind it.

00:14:58 Okay. So I got into thinking that really, what you need to do is look at racism, not prejudice and discrimination, but racism and racism as a system. It's a system in which you always have—it's a system that is based on Whites in control, Whites in powerful positions. It's not a system in which you have Blacks in control. Yes, you might have Blacks who are prejudiced, but racism is always—it's historically rooted, it has to do with colonization, European colonization of the world in which peoples are considered, less than, inferior, and that whole system of racial categorization came up in the 19th century, and came up a lot in with anthropologists.

00:16:27 So these people look different from us. Well, they're inferior to us, they're not us. And racism really has—it's historically based, and it's—this concept of some people will say, well, I had this situation occur with me that this Black person treated me unfairly, it's reverse racism. No, that is an inaccurate use of the term racism, racism as a system. That person may have been prejudiced towards

you, and of course, you can explain—and people don't understand, Whites often don't understand why Blacks should have a negative view of them.

00:17:28 And then so they explain it as, oh, they're racist, but that isn't—so in a system that is race-based, you have all these—there's control by Whites of the ideas. Certain ideas through the media are passed on, certain ideas are passed on in everyday life, certain ideas—now, we're talking about what's happening in Ivy League schools where the Black students are saying, hey, these people are not treating me very well. And so it's those ideas that Whites have. It's the idea that you will never bring a Black person home to meet your parents so that they can see that you'll marry them. It's all of that. And it's very deep-rooted, deep-seated.

00:18:40 Okay. So that was one kind of thing that I worked on, and my courses evolved. We looked at the Black Panther Party in my courses. We looked at—we started to get with system of oppression, it branched out to other kind of systems of oppression, not just racism, but LGBTQ issues. We looked at ageism—

MK: 00:19:20 In women.

VD: 00:19:22 And women, and gender, and LGBTQ together. We looked at American Indian and looked at Leonard Peltier, who's been imprisoned for his involvement in a firefight defending American Indian as part of the American Indian Movement. So we looked at all those kinds of things that typically people shrug off as criminal but are otherwise considered criminal behaviors. We looked at them, which turned the lens around.

00:20:15 So now, with respect to gender, it started off with the interest in women. And in my—and I did not start teaching this course, I think it was Ellen—no, it was Mike Winter taught the course, sex roles. And the whole idea about gender began with this idea that women were in the house and men worked outside the home. Women did not go outside the house. If women did go outside the house, they were—women were supposed to be married in the first place, and there was this division of labor.

00:21:14 The division of labor didn't speak to inequality they said, it had to do with, this is the way the system works, this is the best way the system works. So women should be in the

home taking care of the children and men should be outside working and earning a living for the family. And so when you have someone like Betty Friedan coming along with the—what is her book called? Feminist—

MK: 00:21:57 Oh, The Feminist—I know—but it's Betty Friedan's work.

VD: 22:07 Yeah. So she comes—

MK: 00:22:10 Feminine Mystique.

VD: 00:22:11 The Feminine Mystique. So she comes along and she's a Smith graduate, an all-women's college. And all these women are educated at Smith, and then they're ready to go. Many of them aspire to doing things out in the world. But in fact, in those days, the first thing they should do is get married. And if you don't marry, then something's wrong with you, you're probably something weird going on. Okay.

00:22:51 So you—so she comes out, she graduates from Smith. I think she has a year of graduate school. She marries her—she has to go along with her husband, and then she has to be in the home taking care of the home. And so she did a survey of Smith graduates for one of their reunions. And she identified all this—the problem that has no name, that's what you called it, the problem has no name.

00:23:40 And it was this unease, this unrest, because these women were highly-educated, and it wasn't challenging, they were bored at home. And so they wanted to be able to—they fought to be out in the world. And that's what the second wave is. The second wave is for equality, for work equality or job equality, the right to go out and get a demanding job, not just a woman's job, but a demanding job to be able to do it, to be paid equal, equal pay for equal work. And she said, the African-Americans have the NAACP, we need an NAACP.

00:24:53 And so with that, she helped to found NOW, the National Organization for Women. And she—and so that was the focus of the second wave. But the second wave was composed mainly of White women, they were the major speakers for the second wave. There were some Black women, and some of them were very politically active.

MK: 00:25:43 Like Shirley Chisholm.

- VD: 00:25:45 Shirley Chisholm. Yes, like Shirley Chisholm. Yes. There were—women that were very politically active. So let me back up now. So what's happening at UMM? You ask, how do courses come into being? Well, they—a lot of the social science courses come into being in reaction to what is happening in the world around them. So you have this movement of women, there's the women's movement, the students movement in the '60s, and then you had all these other movements coming along.
- 00:26:32 So you have this women's movement, and you have—and then you attend professional organizations where people are trying to understand and conceptualize what is going on, so they give you the tools, the terms. So at UMM, we—this was before we had a—
- MK: 00:27:12 Well, there was a women's studies minor in history.
- VD: 00:27:16 Yeah. This was that.
- MK: 00:27:17 That was developed when I was there, but it was a minor, and Truman Driggs and I think Mimi Frenier spearheaded that.
- VD: 00:27:29 Okay. Before that, there wasn't anything. And so I was a part of that establishing that Woman's Studies minor. And it was very difficult to get that pushed through.
- MK: 00:27:49 Because?
- VD: 00:27:51 Because there was resistance of—there was a resistance on the part of male faculty. And the resistance came from outside of the division of the social sciences. So it first came up in the division of social sciences, and it got approval within the division of the social sciences. But you just can't propose something, it's got to get outside approval. And I remember I was at a meeting where we were talking to people outside of the division, and we were just—we were—Mimi was talking about what a Women's Studies minor would be.
- 00:28:41 And one faculty member said something, like, well, this seems like a trivial—doesn't seem worthy of a whole program. And I remember saying, most of the United States is dealing with women's issues at this time, it would be ridiculous not to pass this, and then he kept quiet. And so that was passed through, the Women's Studies minor. And now, it's—and it went from women's studies to—okay, so

within our courses, we went from sex roles, I think Michael Winter and Ellen Robert had left, so then the courses were up for grabs.

- MK: 00:30:01 So when they left, their courses, if no one was—if they were teaching the course and they left, if nobody picked it up, it would go away, is that—
- VD: 00:30:10 No, not necessarily. What would happen would be other—it was part of the curriculum. But sex roles, I took sex roles and I changed it to the sociology of gender. Because sex roles have been considered—by this time, Women's Studies, the idea of Women's Studies have morphed into Gender Studies. And then with Gender Studies, you got involved in all these issues of LGBTQ, and now your LGBTQI and a lot of focus on trans issues. But we didn't have that conceptualization then, we just went—it was just gay and lesbian rights.
- 00:31:20 So there's—the ideas changed and it changed from a focus on work and political equality to there was much more focus on violence against women. And then once you got into violence against women, that's also—you can expand it into clearly LGBTQI. And you also had, at the same time, Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality began to be used. Because at the time that we were talking about the second wave. The second wave started to be pitted against women, were pitted against Black men.
- 00:32:48 And so it was White women, you were either supported—if you were into social justice, you had to focus on race or you had to focus on gender, at least that was the way everyone thought at the time. And sometimes people would say, but it isn't just that, sometimes the two are combined. Then finally, Kimberle Crenshaw, who was dealing with—and she's an attorney, in a court case came up with this intersectional idea that a lot of social justice issues have to do with the intersection of two or more dimensions of inequality. And so that became so much more powerful, and you didn't have to pick.
- 00:34:02 That intersectionality concept was not widely circulated in the, in the classroom until after the O.J. Simpson trial, because that certainly was operating there, people couldn't—Whites would say he's guilty, Blacks would say, wait a minute, what about the social justice issue? Because if he was White, if O.J. Simpson had been White, you have

a certain kind of an outcome, he would get off. O.J. Simpson did get off, though people continued to have their own ideas about that.

- 00:34:50 Rajender. The Rajender case was the racial discrimination—no, the gender discrimination class action suit of the University of Minnesota. Shyamala Rajender was told, you have to either pick race or gender as a basis of discrimination as we try this case, and so she picked gender. But of course, it was intersected. In her case, it was clearly intersected. So intersectionality was another conceptual tool that was very useful in understanding social justice issues. Let's see, what else can I tell you?
- MK: 00:36:02 So how did your—I mean, you talked a little bit about the faculty and administration's reactions to some of these courses or different ways of teaching them, how did the students react? Did they get these ideas?
- VD: 00:36:28 There were several different kinds of things going on in the student body over the time I was teaching at UMM. The first thing was, when I arrived there—I don't know, what was the grading system when you were there?
- MK: 00:36:58 It was you could get graded, A, B, C. I'm not sure about anything beyond average. And then you could take pass fail, and you could change from graded to pass fail at a certain point during the quarter, which many students did when they realized if they weren't doing well, but they still wanted the credits, that's what I recall. And I really don't think there were Ds and Fs.
- VD: 00:37:28 There were.
- MK: 00:37:29 I didn't get any. But technically, there—
- VD: 00:37:31 Okay. So when I arrived, it was A, B, C. The system was very fluid, there wasn't a lot of angst about grades, people could up to the last minute to decide to go pass fail. There wasn't a lot of motivation for doing that because it was A, B, C. So the students didn't—the students didn't have a thing about grades so much. Then we instituted the D, and I think we eventually got the F. And this coincided with the era of the Yuppie. Okay. The era before the Yuppie, young, upwardly mobile—
- MK: 00:38:40 Professionals.

- VD: 00:38:41 —professionals. The era before the Yuppie were like—they were like flower children, just really laid back. But then you had the era of the Yuppie, and then you have these grades at a grade orientation among the students which was not as—which would detract from interest in the content of what you were learning, whether you were—it was interesting or not interesting, or whatever, it was the grade and getting out with a particular grade. And the grading I find does a great disservice and only accentuates needless, antagonistic competition.
- MK: 00:39:50 And also, it's very discouraging if a student who aspires to getting an A or a B gets a C, yet they still show an interest in the content, but they could be—this isn't—I don't want a C—I want a GPA that's better than that and so I'm going to—I'm not going to take this class on intersectionality, for example.
- VD: 00:40:20 GPA orientation, that's a good way to put it. There's a GPA orientation, so you have that going on. And then the other thing that was going on, and it happened more in my classes, I taught—the sociologists taught sociology students, the general elective students, and the LAHS students, the Liberal Arts for the Human Sciences students. And they were students who wanted to go on and do social work. One person who graduated with that kind of a degree went on and became a major probation officer in Iowa. And social workers, they became social workers, many of them in the Twin Cities area. Social worker in the school system.
- 00:41:41 So those students were less GPA-oriented. Students who were taking the courses because of general interests were probably the most GPA-oriented. Yeah. So you had that going on. Then you had another kind of division, and that is between the minority students and the White students. And it began—the minority student program began with Black students who were brought—a lot of them were given a first chance from the streets of Chicago.
- MK: 00:42:52 And that was going on when I was—that was in the early '70s when I was there.
- VD: 00:42:59 Yes. And that was Bill Stewart's program. Then as time went on, we began to have more of a focus on American-Indian students, which we should have of course. The campus being on—formerly having been an American-Indian school. Okay. So we had those students, and those

students didn't have the high school backgrounds that the White students had, so there was that kind of difference. There was a resentment on the part of some White students that minority students were on the campus.

00:44:11 Minority students were more prone to take sociology courses than other kinds of courses. Of course—actually, my discipline was a sociology, anthropology discipline. And they were also likely to take—more likely to take anthropology courses.

MK: 00:44:43 Did you find it at the time that students were wondering why take sociology if there's no career with it where there's a chance for making money? I mean, most social workers aren't the highest earners. I mean, I can see taking a sociology major and doing something with it, but by and large, it's not—I mean, that's going on now, too, where, where the liberal arts is getting attacked because there's no job other than—and we can talk about that off the record.

VD: 00:45:31 Well, there's a back and forth on that. Because what people would say to me would be, what do you do with a sociology major? So I can say, what do you do with a liberal arts—a bachelor of liberal arts degree? You become generally knowledgeable, aware. People who take sociology courses are able to get into those positions like equal opportunity, employment officer positions.

00:46:26 They have an understanding and can work across many different—with different people. They have a greater understanding of other people. They have probably have a more developed empathy. Some of these ideas that people are now finding strange that have come out with Black Lives Matter or Critical Race Theory, they can say, well, yeah, I remember we talked about that, of course. They're not strange ideas. So in terms of being a member of society, it strengthens your position as a member of society.

MK: 00:47:23 I like that. And maybe this is a time to bring up the—you said that at one point you were being—the liberal arts was getting criticized, and somebody from the community was saying, well, why don't we have the conservative arts?

VD: 00:47:46 Yeah. We had—yeah. This criticism of the liberal arts keeps coming up. And there's a good reason for that, it's because in the liberal arts, you learn to question what is taken for granted. Everybody knows that blacks are

inferior. So then it might hurt a little when you're first learning these different ideas that go against everything you were raised for or believed in. So it shows you the cracks in the system. The liberal arts helps you to identify the cracks in the system. And then when they occur and become very evident, then you're already—

- MK: 00:48:46 You're already there.
- VD: 00:48:47 Familiarity with it. Yeah. So this person who talked about the conservative arts, he was running for office, local office. And of course, when he made that comment, he was unaware he needed a liberal arts degree. He was needful of that, deeply needful of that. So the liberal arts—in the liberal arts, you learn that there is always change, that things don't stay as they are. You sometimes forget it, and sometimes I forget that. But there's always change, and you've got to be flexible in your thinking, you have to be open in your thinking.
- MK: 00:50:01 Which makes for a good reason for encouraging students to go into liberal arts because there's multiple opportunities for careers after—I mean, in terms of just being flexible and understanding people and organizations and how things work, I mean, how a society works. Can you talk a little bit about some of your colleagues?
- VD: 00:50:35 Yes. Well, Kathy Benson—Katherine, I should say Katherine Benson was the first woman faculty in psychology. And—
- MK: 00:50:53 She wasn't there when—I mean, there were no women in psychology when I was in Morris, I believe. None.
- VD: 00:51:02 Okay. So you left in '77?
- MK: 00:51:04 '77. Right. The spring before you arrived, I left.
- VD: 00:51:09 Yeah. Okay. Well, so the year after I arrived, Katherine Benson came. And she contributed to courses in development, human development across the lifespan, child development was her—she had—I think she got her dissertation. Her dissertation was on child development. She developed the psychology of women course. She taught more courses, more credit hours than any of her five colleagues.
- MK: 00:52:03 Interesting.

- VD: 00:52:11 Yeah. So, yeah, there's Katherine Benson. Solomon Gashaw had been—came from Ethiopia as a refugee.
- MK: 00:52:31 And he taught sociology?
- VD: 00:52:33 He taught sociology. Farah Gilanshah, her family had escaped when the shah of Iran collapsed in Iran. She had a very nice rapport with the students, a very soft-spoken person. She got her degree from the Twin Cities campus. Solomon got his degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Let me see who else was—oh, Anthony Lemelle. Anthony Lemelle was the first Black tenure-track man we had, first black tenure-track professor we had. And he was from the University of California, that's where he started from, I think it was Berkeley. And he came to UMM and he taught the courses on race before I did. He left. He started a fraternity for Black men.
- MK: 00:54:21 At Morris?
- VD: 00:54:22 In Morris. And fraternities—I don't know if you know this, but for Black students, fraternities are very important. And the fraternities they become involved in in college are lifelong kinds of connections. They work very hard to promote college education among African-Americans. So he, Solomon, and I actually wrote an article together called System of Oppression after my course.
- MK: 00:55:16 Can you speak a little bit about the income inequality for faculty at Morris? That women were, and I know it was going on earlier and probably when you were there too, for women. That women were just doing the same work or more and not getting...
- VD: 00:55:22 I can tell you what happened with Rajender and salary inequality. When the settlement came for the Rajender—when the Rajender decision was made, then throughout the university, people were supposed to—women were supposed to find a man that was doing what they were doing and comparing their salaries. And so there was a lot of inequality that showed up.
- 00:56:06 And so the first thing that happened was that that inequality was repaired. The woman was given the amount difference so that she was even with the man. Now, another kind of thing that happened was that a general estimation was made of the inequality between women and men. In other words,

an averaging. And women were given sums of money so that that averaging was e equal. So across the board, you didn't have to come up with your individual pays, you didn't have to do that research, you were just given that. And I think I was given \$1,000 or \$2,000 more as a result of that, and that was university wide.

- MK: 00:57:20 And did you—when you took—when you said you interviewed in Minneapolis, when you accepted the position, had you seen the campus before you accepted?
- VD: 00:57:31 Oh, no. I had come out to Morris for the—
- MK: 00:57:36 Oh, I thought the conference that you attended was in the Twin Cities.
- VD: 00:57:41 Okay. The conference was in the Twin Cities. And then I was asked from formal interview. That conference was an informal one, so I was asked to come to—yeah.
- MK: 00:57:59 And it must have been in the nice weather? So was it in the winter that you went out?
- VD: 00:58:06 No, it was the springtime. It was—and it was nice. Yeah, I didn't see the snow.
- MK: 00:58:24 Well, anything else that we should—that you want to—that I didn't bring up that we—you might want to talk about?
- VD: 00:58:36 Well, there is one other colleague that I think I should mention, that was Liselotte Gumpel. And when I had arrived at UMM, she had written—she was—now, when was this? She was writing or had or about to write *Metaphor Unexamined*, which was a non-Aristotelian examination of metaphor.
- MK: 00:59:17 She was brilliant.
- VD: 00:59:19 Yeah. And she went to—she was invited to, I think it was Cambridge, and she gave a lecture there. You knew her, right?
- MK: 00:59:32 I knew her after I graduated from Morris. Never—
- VD: 00:59:36 Did she ever mention that lecture?

MK: 00:59:40 She did, and it was above my head. So really—I mean, she did talk about it, but I remember she said she went to Cambridge.

VD: 00:59:53 Yeah. So I was just really floored by that. There were so many—I mean, there were people at that institution who were quite remarkable out there in the middle of the prairie.

MK: 01:00:13 There were, in Morris, absolutely. Yeah. Which is a tribute to those that were there in the beginning, that they kept it alive. Because there were many times, like you say, that it was on the chopping block, so, yeah. Which, again, perhaps it's—because there's nothing to do, your mind flourishes more and—

VD: 01:00:42 Yeah. You focus more on the work.

MK: 01:00:45 On the work. Right. Well, I'm going to—I think we should end the recording, Vicky, unless there's something else we need to talk about. It's hard to just say goodbye on a screen like this, but I just want to say thank you so much for doing this and being one of the first to be a distance interview.

VD: 01:01:14 Well, thank you for this opportunity, and I'm pleased to be able to talk about Morris.

MK: 01:01:20 Okay. Thank you, Vicky.