

Remarks by Forrest Stuart, Assistant
Professor of Sociology, upon receipt
of the 2018 Gordon J. Laing Prize

Thank you, President Zimmer, Garrett (Kiely), and faculty board for reading the book, considering it for this prize. And thank you to everyone who made it out here today. We got some very special friends who made it down. My Mom actually made the trip out from California for this very reason. Thank you.

This is beyond surreal, and it's surreal for, I think, some reasons that I think a lot of folks in this room don't quite know exactly how surreal this is. My entire intellectual, scholarly identity and trajectory has been for a very long time tied to the University of Chicago, tied to the University of Chicago Press and actually tied to this Laing Prize. And it's actually a story ... it's a trajectory that begins at 1968 actually.

In that year, Gerry Suttles, who was a faculty member here in Sociology, published a masterpiece of a book that the University of Chicago Press called *The Social Order of the Slum*. It's this up-close ethnography of a slum neighborhood, actually the slum then up by UIC, so this would be on the Near West Side. Suttles uses all kinds of in-depth observations and maps and interviews to really unpack how it is at this combination of Italian, and Mexican, and Black residents are able to push past these class and ethnic divisions to build this powerful social order in the neighborhood and in 1970, Gerald Suttles won the Laing Prize.

And *The Social Order of the Slum* was actually the first sociology book that I ever read, and it was the first urban ethnography that I had ever read. This was about 15 years ago, I was a graduate student studying criminology in a pretty nurturing criminology program, and at the time, I was engaged in one of these pretty standard, large-scale quantitative analyses trying to find these statistical correlations between crime and demographic variables like race, and class and education and like many other young criminologists, I was trying to find a way to cut and sort and skew this data set to make something out of this really overworked and overanalyzed census data. And, one day I just kind of serendipitously stumbled upon Suttles's book, and it just completely blew my mind that we could do social science research in this kind of a way. And, if you haven't read it, I highly recommend it. If you've already read it, I highly recommend that you read it again.

And Suttles, right, he puts these large scale data sets away, and he leaves his office in the ivory tower, and he goes out and he just hangs out in this neighborhood, and he just becomes intimately involved in residents' lives. Day in, day out, he's there at the park, he is there eating with them in restaurants, and he uses this grounded perspective to really hit us over the head with the fact that what looks like, from the outside, as this chaotic, lawless, kind of runaway zone to outsiders, to criminologists

who have been looking at these big data sets; that instead it has this really nuanced and powerful set of informal norms that really keep the peace. And, again, this blew my mind. And, it subtly continued to show that the only way that these kinds of things become visible, the way that humanity becomes visible, is if we take seriously these kinds of trivial, mundane aspects of everyday life.

So, people greet each other on the sidewalk, or when they play together at a park, or when they see each other on a stoop, or when they run into each other at a grocery store and maybe lend someone some money. And, he shows us that if we are patient enough, or diligent enough to analyze hundreds and thousands of these moments, what we actually get is this really beautiful and I think, analytically rigorous, and sensitive, and accurate analysis of the way social life actually happens in neighborhoods that just isn't found in the kinds of large-scale data sets that I was working with.

And, so I read Suttles's work and I became obsessed with this kind of, this upflow of grounded research that was coming out of the University of Chicago at the time, all being published by the University of Chicago Press so, books I'm sure many people here are familiar with: Bill Kornblum's ethnography of the Steel Mill Communities on the South Side, Mary Catillo's beautiful studies of Chicago's Black middle class, Mitch Duneier's study of these elderly Black men who gathered at Valois Cafeteria up on 53rd street and feeling inspired to quit my criminology program and enroll in a sociology PhD program at UCLA which, at the time, had become kind of satellite for the Chicago school. Harold Garfinkel had left his mark, and Bob Emerson, Jack Katz; all these folks were kind of steeped in Everett Hughes's way of thinking about the social world.

And then I began doing this ethnographic work in Skid Row, and Suttles's book was this model and I just kept asking myself, "What would the Chicago School think about LA Skid Row? What would Gerald Suttles think? How would they make sense of daily life? How would they show that there is order and what seems like the most disordered neighborhood in the entire United States?" And, as I continued my fieldwork I just kept devouring these University of Chicago Press books and like someone, I guess, looking at the back of baseball cards, I'm pouring over the acknowledgements sections and I see all of these wonderful sociologists mentioning that one same person.

That person is Doug Mitchell, who is here. Longtime editor at the Press and really one of the folks in the world responsible for shepherding this revival of this effort to do this humanizing social science, this humanizing ethnographic perspective in American sociology. It's something that this university, at least the sociology department, was really founded on. And so, I think you can see, for me, why publishing the University of Chicago Press, getting this job, getting this money, prize, publishing with Doug really is the surreal dream come true.

It's this wild circle, kind of connecting to itself, and along the way, Kyle Wagner, and Levi Stallwick, I think I saw him come in. And Ashley Pierce really pushed the work in new directions and in ways that I couldn't have imagined, pushing us into the hands

of new audiences, some of my colleagues are here, Kristen Schill and in particular, read tons of this book and pushed me to think deeply and carefully and I am so appreciative. Now, Liz, sat me down and helped me walk through early 20th century welfare policy that made its way into the book. So, I certainly thank you all. My fantastic wife, we actually didn't meet but fell in love while we were both working in Skid Row and what would eventually become this book and so she suffered through Skid Row with me, she suffered through the book writing with me and so, so I thank you for that.

And then of course, right, I have to thank Gerry Suttles who unfortunately passed away late last year. I actually never got the chance to meet him. I never got the chance to thank him in person. But I would like to think that he would look favorably on my book and, you know, maybe he'll be proud of the kinds of things that my colleagues and I are trying to do to keep his legacy alive. So thank you all so very much.

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