

Dr. Lewis Walker: A Background Profile--2012

Dr. Lewis Walker, with a newly minted Ph.D. from The Ohio State University, was hired as the first full-time African American professor at Western Michigan University in 1964. Certainly no one could have imagined when he began his career in the Sociology Department what an impact he would have on the University, the Kalamazoo area, the state, national and international arenas. Long an activist in civil rights, he marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on King's last march through Mississippi and he continued to be active in the struggles for social justice throughout his career. In addition to his scholarship, he shared his educational, administrative, negotiating and leadership skills and expertise wherever and whenever he was asked.

In short, he has both publicly and quietly contributed unselfishly to the lives of countless individuals, and his work professionally as a sociologist and as a citizen of Kalamazoo make his life worthy of emulation by others.

The University

Dr. Walker is the author and/or co-author of seven books and numerous scholarly papers and published articles. Among his most recent co-authored books are two with Dr. Benjamin C. Wilson, *African Americans In Michigan* and *Black Eden: The Idlewild Community*. *Idlewild* was listed as One of Twenty Must Read Books in Michigan. His latest book, *Discovering the Peoples of Michigan Reader*, was published by Michigan State University Press in 2008.

Above all, Dr. Walker is an outstanding professor in the classroom. He taught over 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students. His influence on his students went far beyond the classroom. He demanded that they take what they learned in his classroom and apply it to the real world. For example, to help in this endeavor he organized field trips into Chicago and Detroit so his students could see first hand the challenges that faced ethnic groups such as Native and African Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Polish immigrants and others as they tried to make their way in the American culture. He also authored *Ethnic Relations: Patterns of Intergroup Relations In Various Societies* (with Chester Hunt) to encourage his students to develop a global perspective on race relations. His classroom efforts resulted in his receiving the prestigious and coveted WMU Alumni Award for Teaching Excellence in 1972. Many of his students went on to graduate and professional schools and he chaired committees for many masters and Ph.D. students, including Dr. Charles Jeter, father of Yankee superstar Derek Jeter.

Dr. Walker also saw a great need to recruit and retain minority students, not only in his department, but to the University. To this end he wrote and received a grant for a Self-Enhancement Services Program which focused on the retention of minority students.

Initially, an office was established to organize all the departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest college on campus, to identify, notify, and provide tutorial services to those students whose academic performance put them at risk of degree completion. The program was later expanded to cover all at-risk students throughout the College.

The National Science Foundation recognized Dr. Walker's administrative and teaching skills in awarding him over \$3,000,000 over several summers to conduct summer institutes for high school sociology teachers from around the country.

The University soon recognized that Dr. Walker had a unique ability to look at an issue from all sides, come to fair judgments and, most importantly, lead others with him to solve major issues on campus. To this end, he was constantly called by WMU presidents to serve on important committees and help solve complex problems as they arose on campus. For example, he:

- Served as a conflict mediator/investigator on numerous occasions that involved sensitive race issues on campus. One such presidential assignment involved a far-reaching investigation of complaints about racial issues on WMU's football team and the results were published in the Kalamazoo Gazette.
- Served as a negotiator on two WMU/AAUP contracts, which involved months of meetings to hammer out tough issues on health benefits, working conditions, academic calendars, compensation, promotions, tenure and more.
- Served on two Presidential Search Committees that resulted in the hiring of the first African American, Dr. Elson Floyd, and the first female president, Dr. Judy Bailey.

Dr. Walker served as Chair of the Department of Sociology for ten years. As chair, he continued his stellar classroom and scholarly actions while guiding sociology/criminal justice to be one of the strongest academic units on campus. He significantly increased the diversity by adding more minority faculty members (including a Native American) and dramatically increased the number of minority graduate students who majored in the discipline. His dramatic growth and development of the department was a major factor in a decision by a donor to leave the department a million dollars. He also established the Leonard C. Kercher Fellowship Endowment in memory of the first head of the Sociology Department, a major endowment which financially supports a selected doctoral student until degree completion.

Dr. Walker was a co-founder (1989) of one of the first institutes (Wayne State University was the second) for the study of race and ethnic relations in Michigan (now the Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations on WMU's campus). A two-day statewide conference was held in Lansing, Michigan, to involve scholars and community leaders in the future work of the institute. During its 23-year history, the Institute has actively pursued various research projects, launched a minor in race/ethnic relations for undergraduate students, and participated with various community groups on issues of poverty and social justice. In 2007 Dr. Walker came out of retirement to serve as interim director of that Institute. Under his directorship, the Institute conducted a statewide, two-day conference on The Peoples of Michigan held at the Fetzer Center on campus, launched a campus-wide, cash prize research/creative competition for faculty and students on race and ethnicity, hired a full-time office manager, secured the service of two part-time associate directors and conducted a nationwide search for a permanent director.

Dr. Walker has used his expertise and leadership skills to raise much-needed funds for the university:

- Served as chair of the annual WMU Gary Fund drive and raised over \$800,000 in 2005. These funds are crucial, especially in these financially scrapped times, in helping the Western's department of intercollegiate athletics remain competitive in football, basketball, volleyball, hockey and other sports.
- Established the George Doles-Walker/Elson S. Floyd Memorial Student Athlete Scholarship Award. Each year at least two student athletes who have distinguished themselves in the classroom, the community and the intercollegiate competition are recipients of this award.
- With the local Dulcet Club in Kalamazoo, he established the Georgia E. Doles-Walker Emergency Student Grant Fund. This emergency fund for minority students was recently created and placed in the Sociology Department at Western. This fund is used essentially for emergency purposes such as books, food, housing, back-home emergency travel, material supplies and more.

Kalamazoo Area

Shortly after his arrival in Kalamazoo, Dr. Walker founded the Kalamazoo Resource Development Council (KRDC) in 1967, a black youth development program designed for youngsters who had various family problems and trouble with the law. The KRDC program worked with both young men and women to improve their lives and their own north-side neighborhood. They received intensive self-development and leadership training which empowered them to develop various programs favorable to their neighborhood.

The city asked Dr. Walker to develop, organize and conduct the first police/community training program for police officers in Kalamazoo. The basic aim was to focus on improving the relationship between police and the black community. The training took place at a time when the Kalamazoo Police Department was predominantly white, with Al Goodwin the only African American police officer. These programs were conducted in three consecutive years--1968, 1969 and 1970-- and were thought to be helpful in modifying attitudes as well as behavior among some of the officers.

Kalamazoo's city manager sought out Dr. Walker to chair a major Task Force on Police Complaints, an initiative prompted by several incidents involving law enforcement and citizens, especially those amplified by black citizens at the time. After several months of tedious study and heated discussions regarding police procedures, citizens complaints, and perceptions, the task force work resulted in the city's first civilian review board.

Over the years, as citizen of Kalamazoo, he has served as a member or consultant on numerous boards such as: Douglass Community Association Board, 1965-69; Northside Development Association, 1967-68; Kalamazoo Community Relations Board, 1967-68; Kalamazoo Human Relations Council, 1967-68; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1967--; Senior Citizen, Inc., 1967; Riverview Cooperative Board, 1967-69; Planned Parenthood (consultant); American Red Cross Board (Kalamazoo), 1969-70; Advisory Board of the Learning Village, an experimental project; Kalamazoo County Crime Commission, 1984--; Goodwill Industries' Board of Directors, 1986--; Midwest Recovery Center Advisory Board, 1987--; Midwest Adolescent Substance Abuse Advisory Board; Vice Chair, Community Corrections Advisory Board (Kalamazoo City Government); Healthy Futures: Crime and Violence Subcommittee, 1966; and others.

The State

Dr. Walker developed and conducted numerous workshops for teachers in Grand Rapids, Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo and other cities. These workshops were designed to better prepare classroom teachers to work effectively with black and other minority youths. Multicultural competence and sensitivity training, among other training components, were important aspects emphasized during these workshop sessions.

He developed and conducted an extensive and intensive black youth development program for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan. This program focused on the so-called hard-core unemployable youth from the inner city of Detroit. After months of training, these black youths with lengthy police records and drug problems were successfully integrated into the workplace at the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan.

He served as a consultant and program developer of "In-service Training Programs" for Grand Rapids Public School Teachers, 1969-71. A reduction of racial incidents between student-student and teacher-student was the aim of these programs. Moreover, from the mid-60's through late 80s, he conducted numerous workshops on techniques of Intercultural Adjustment and Race Relations (i.e., multiculturalism in a plural society).

He developed and conducted Human Relations Training Programs for Michigan Department of Corrections (Audio-Visual), 1973-74. Improving the relations between prison officials and inmates, especially minority inmates, was one of the major goals of this program.

The Michigan Department of Family Services asked Dr. Walker to serve as a consultant on Foster Parents: Training, Retention and Participation in November of 2007. They had discovered that some trainees become participants after finishing the program, others finished the training but did not become participants and still others left the training program before finishing. Thus, the agency needed to be able recruit potential foster parents who would both complete the training program and take in foster children for a prolonged period of participation.

For eight years, Dr. Walker served as president and CEO of a black-owned resort that provided employment opportunities for local residents and housing for seasonal migrant workers.

International

Dr. Walker is an international consultant to a group headed by Mr. Archie Sripp in South Africa on land reclamation issues. During the apartheid era, many people of color were forced from their land by the power structure in that country. A land reclamation commission was established in the post-apartheid era to provide ways and means for eligible individuals and/or groups to reclaim their land. He has also completed a six-volume DVD/Video project involving a socio-historical view of South Africa.

As Professor of Record: he taught a special overseas course on global race/ethnic relations to members of WMU basketball team as the members traveled Europe, specifically in various cities in France, Monaco, Italy and Greece (2002, 2006 and 2012).