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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "GWU Student Uses Research Project to Explore Topic" (2016). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 816.
<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive/816>

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GWU Student Uses Research Project to Explore Topic

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Office of University
Communications

September 29, 2016

Jeff Day ('17) Investigates Racial Bias Issues through Sociological Lens of W. E. B. Du Bois

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Few topics in contemporary American culture offer as much opportunity for commentary as issues of racial bias—and many individuals wonder to what degree the media intensifies—or reduces—such concerns. Gardner-Webb University senior sociology major Jeff Day (Lancaster, Pa.) took advantage of an opportunity to do an in-depth study on the matter as part of the University’s Undergraduate Research Scholars program.

“Originally, I wanted to investigate how mainstream media affects racial discussions in America—if it exacerbates the problem at all,” Day explained. “With the climate today, including multiple police shootings, I thought it was a very relevant discussion.”

Day decided to evaluate current events through the lens of theories established by W. E. B. Du Bois, a noted sociologist of the 20th century. “Something I learned in my research was that race was never viewed from a sociological aspect before. Du Bois—who was African-American—introduced the fact that race can be connected to class, geography, and other sociological facets that previously hadn’t been taken into account.”

He read almost everything Du Bois wrote, and then began to review elements of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. “I wanted to see if the advice of Du Bois was something that BLM was living up to,” he offered. “Reading Du Bois and his thoughts on class and relationship to race—and I can’t say if this is totally original—it’s got me thinking of this unconscious capitalistic racism where it’s not something that people necessarily think about in everyday life. It’s just subconscious and based in a class system. Since we are in a rich-get-richer sort of society, then what happens to the poor? Is that racially motivated? Do we use class to suppress people of color?”

W. E. B. Du Bois

As Day began sorting through these emerging questions, he became particularly interested in how the media is portraying the BLM movement. “I’m keeping track of BLM, their actions, and what the media is writing about them,” he shared. “It’s a fairly recent movement, but I’ve probably read over 100 articles from the previous five years because there has been so much written about it.”

He continued, “I wondered, ‘Would Du Bois condone their actions?’ I am still gathering information and haven’t developed my analysis yet. With the election this year, I thought it would be appropriate to keep tracking the movement and see what comes up.”

By early next year, Day hopes to have a finished product, in the form of a conference presentation as well as a research paper. “I’m planning on presenting at the Life of the Scholar Multi-Disciplinary Conference (LOTS-MC) at Gardner-Webb in the spring, and hopefully will have a paper to go along with it. If I can get the paper published, then that’s great.”

After graduation, Day plans to apply to Duke University School of Law. Day believes his experience at Gardner-Webb has prepared him well for the challenges his future may hold. “It’s so much more personal, but it doesn’t give up anything in quality as far as education,” he expressed. “So many professors here have really impacted my life. If it weren’t for that personal relationship, I probably wouldn’t have gotten to do the summer research scholars program.”

Day continued, “If you’re coming here for an education, then you’re going to get some of the best education money can buy—and it’ll be personal, too. The experience here at Gardner-Webb is great. Just go for it.”

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University’s purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).

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Click below to hear the full WGWG.org interview with Jeff Day: