

The Social Environment: ISS 1120

Lecture I

The Sociological Imagination & The Three Perspectives



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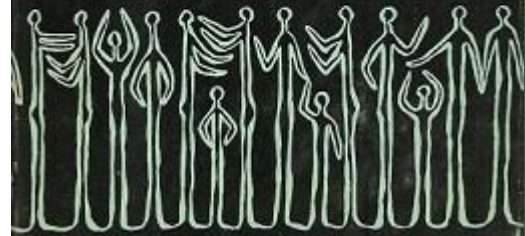
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THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

C. WRIGHT MILLS



SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Sociological imagination refers to a way of seeing the world which transcends the individual and takes a sociological view of the world.

DEFINITION

Mills defined the sociological imagination as the ability to "grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society." (Mills, 1959)

EXAMPLES

1. Recognizing the connections between our personal experiences (biography) and larger socio-historic forces (history).
2. Learning to identify when certain phenomena are the result of structural forces acting upon an individual.
3. Learning to isolate and identify all the social forces acting upon an individual.

I. The Sociological Imagination

Sociology in America

Sociology made its way from Europe to the United States by the turn of the 20th century.

Like their European predecessors and counterparts, early American sociologists attempted to understand and solve the problems of their day, including crime, racial problems, and economic woes.

But unlike the Europeans, who were more interested in forming large-scale social theories, American sociologists tried to develop pragmatic solutions to specific problems, such as child labor.

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/child-labor-in-america-throughout-history.html>



Children working in a cotton thread mill in Macon, Georgia, early 20th c.

Jane Addams and Hull House

Jane Addams (1860–1935) was a preeminent founder of American sociology. She set up her Chicago-based “Hull House” as a center for sociological research in 1889.

Most of the sociologists at Hull House were women who enjoyed applying sociological knowledge to solve social problems such as unfair labor policies, exploitation of children and workers, poverty, juvenile delinquency, and discrimination against women, minorities, and the elderly.

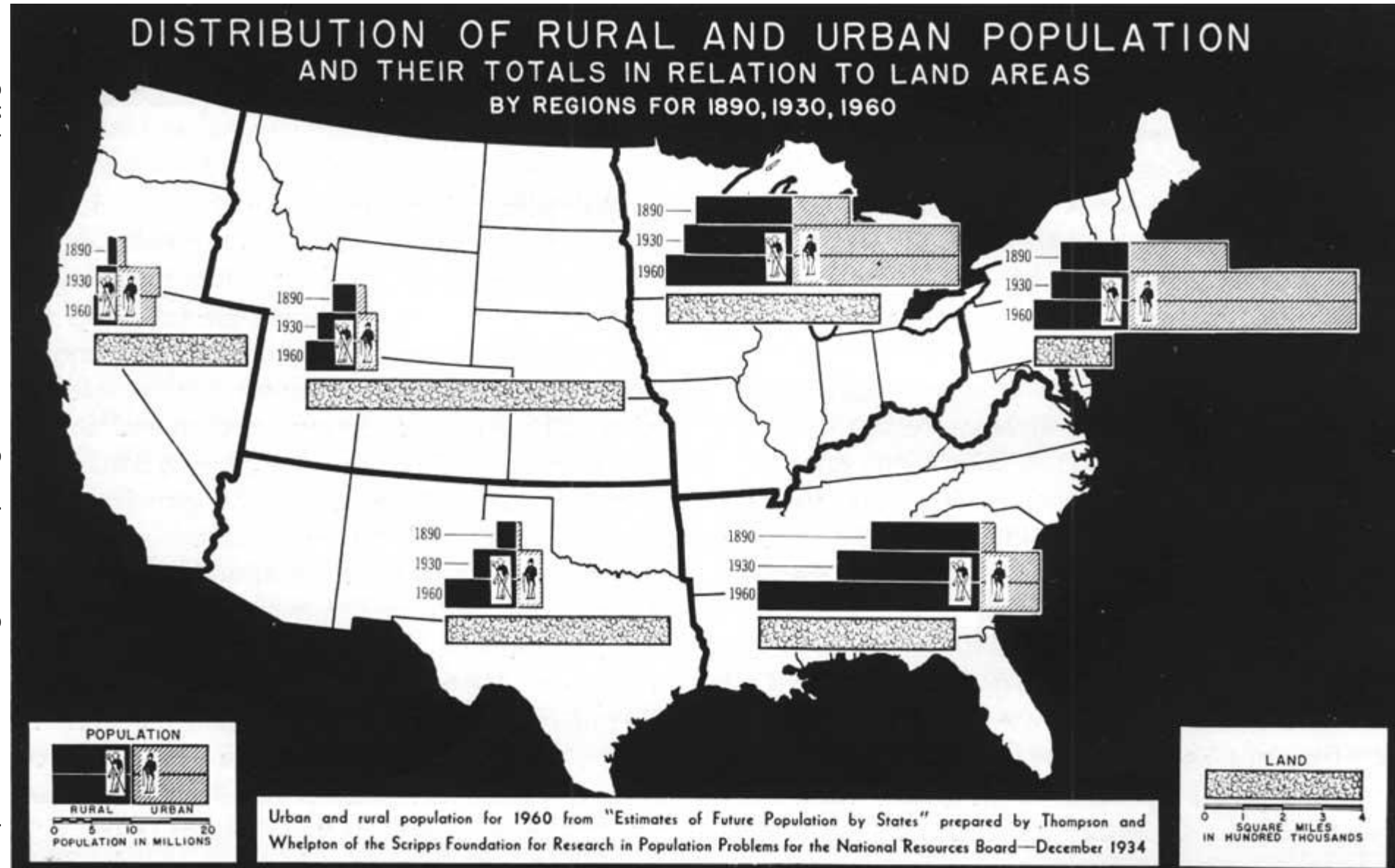


https://www.google.com/search?q=jane+addams+hull+house&source=lmns&bih=722&biw=1519&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjy9Hz5vL0AhWBc98KHSpBBEQQ_AUoAHoECAEQAA

These sociologists also used a research technique known as **mapping**, in which they collected **demographic data** such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, geographically distributed this information, and then analyzed the distribution.

After identifying problems and devising a social-action policy based on available data, they would organize community members and lobby political leaders to solve the problem.

<https://www.census.gov/history/img/urban-rural-distributionmap.jpg>



Addams won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, and was instrumental in establishing government safety, and health standards regulations, and assisted in founding other programs, including Social Security, Workers' Compensation, and the Children's Bureau.



I believe that peace is not merely an absence of war but the nurture of human life, and that in time this nurture would do away with war as a natural process.

— *Jane Addams* —

AZ QUOTES

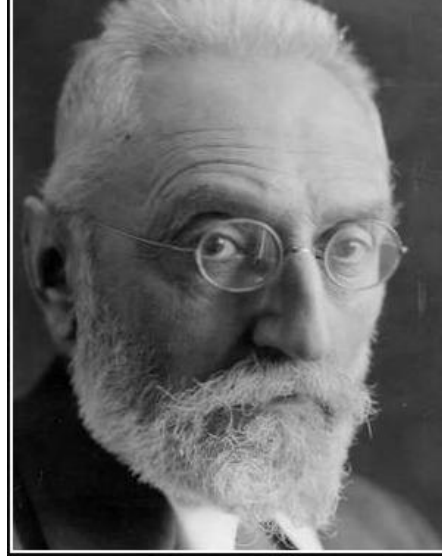
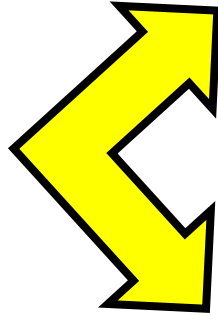
<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/528954>

Both an applied and a basic science

For about the first 40 years of the 20th century, most American sociologists emphasized the practical aspects of the field, especially in terms of initiating various social reforms.

That is, they viewed sociology as an **applied** social science (applying their knowledge to create practical solutions to societal problems).

Later, when sociologists became more interested in developing general theories of how society works, many viewed sociology as a **basic** social science, (seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge only).

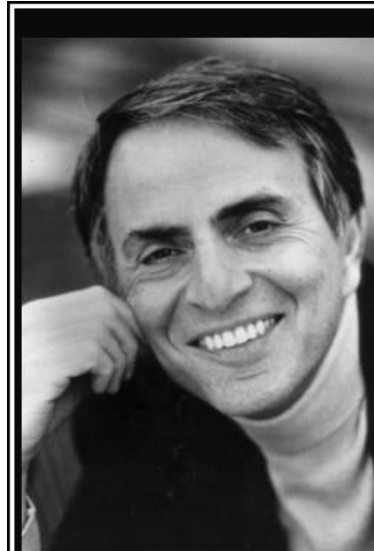


All knowledge has an ultimate goal.
Knowledge for the sake of
knowledge is, say what you will,
nothing but a dismal begging of the
question.

— Miguel de Unamuno —

AZ QUOTES

These two views tend to be at odds with one another.



What counts is not what sounds plausible, not
what we would like to believe, not what one or
two witnesses claim, but only what is supported
by hard evidence rigorously and skeptically
examined. Extraordinary claims require
extraordinary evidence.

(Carl Sagan)

izquotes.com

Along with the ideal of knowledge for its own sake came the notion that sociology should be “pure” and objective—without values, opinions, or agendas for social reform. As a result, between 1940 and 1960, sociologists developed and applied rigorous and sophisticated scientific methods to the study of social behavior and societies.



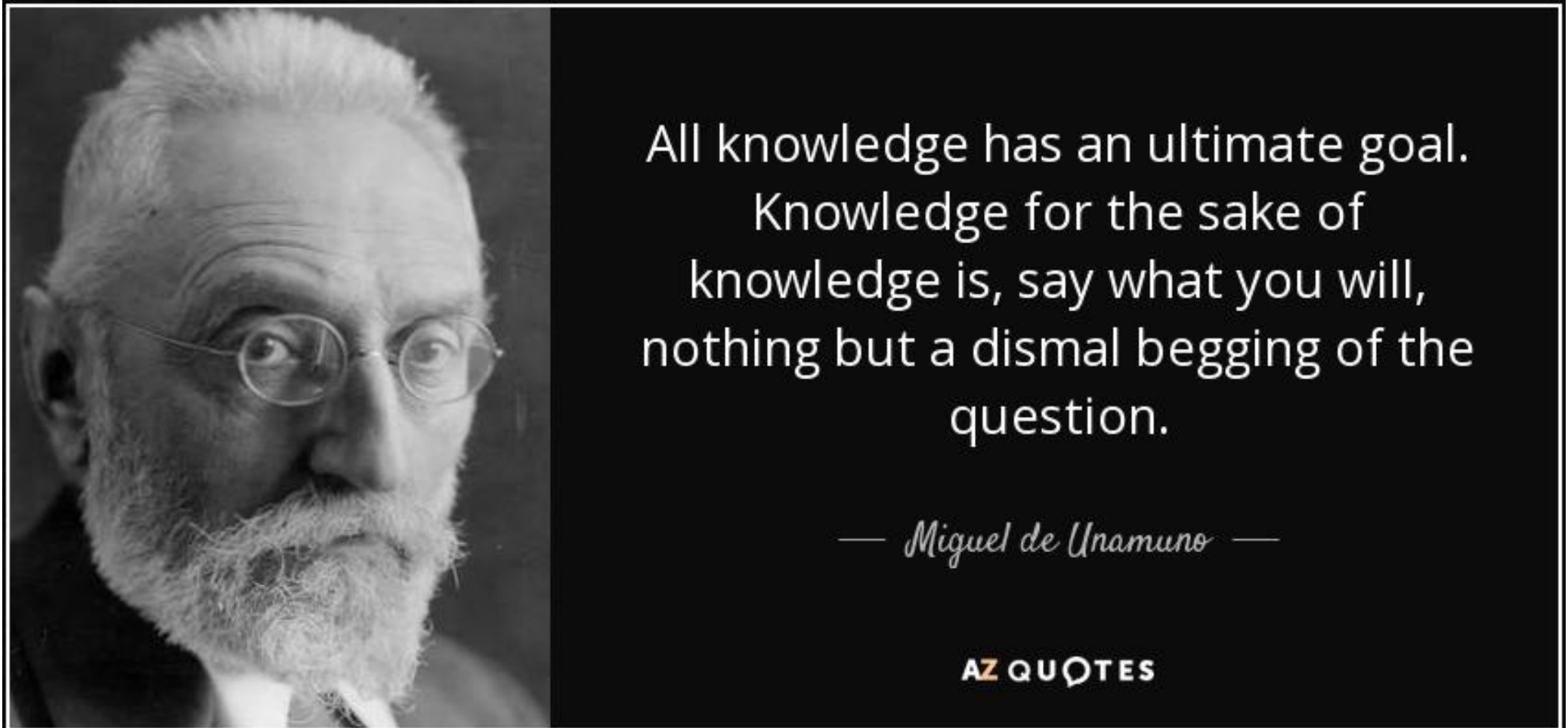
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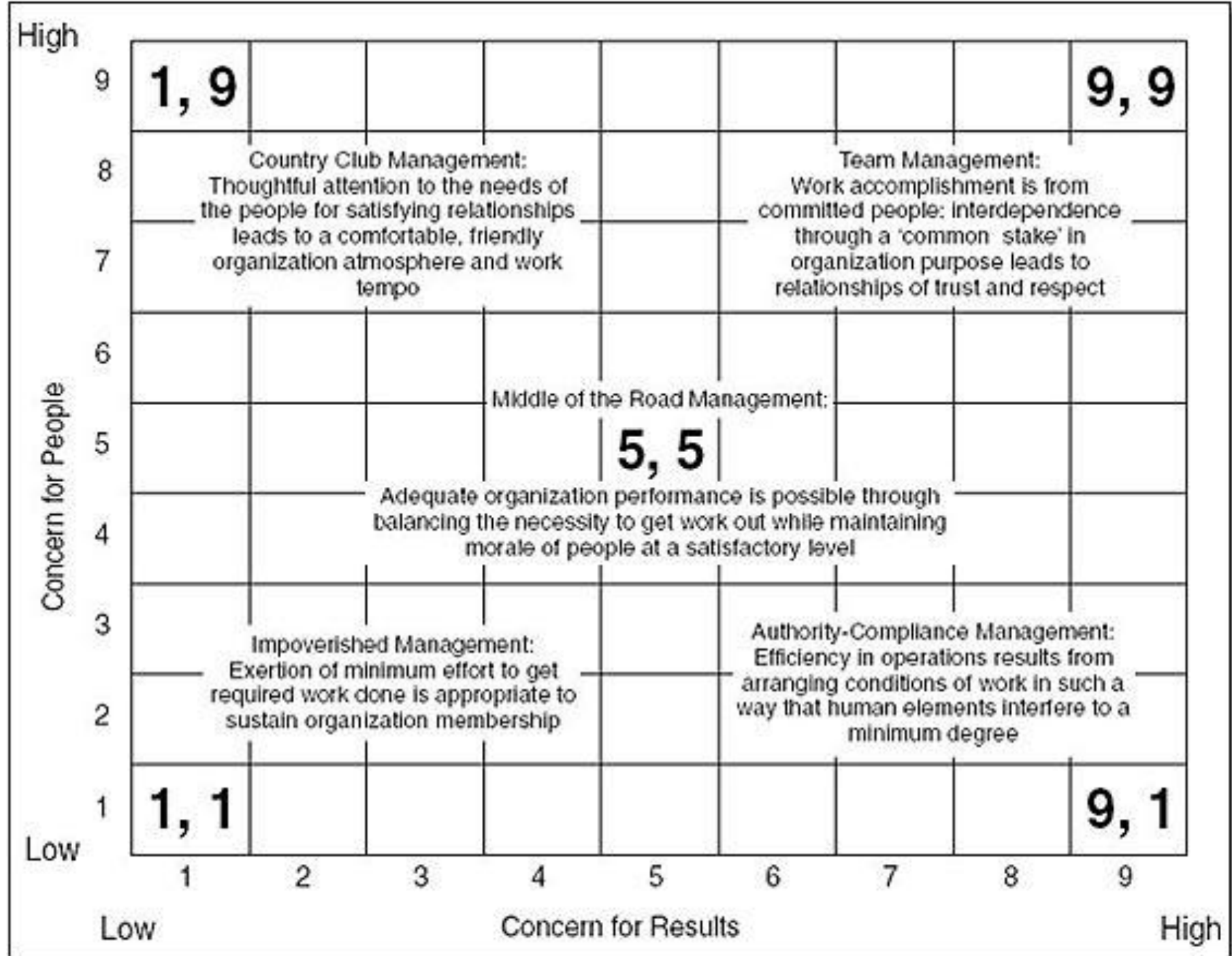
In the 1960s, however, people began to challenge sociology's objective and value-free approach to social knowledge.

An increased awareness of and interest in such social ills as racial unrest, gender inequity, poverty, and controversy over the Vietnam War led society once again to look for the practical solutions associated with sociology as an applied science.



Blake and Mouton's Managerial (Leadership) Grid

I will explain this leadership grid. It is very much related to Industrial Sociology, this is from a PPT that I wrote for MGT 520 (Organizational Leadership)



to **Ethnomethodology**, often referred to as the “study of common sense.” Ethnomethodology is a theoretical approach in sociology based on the belief that you can discover the normal social order of a society by disrupting it. Ethnomethodologists explore the question of how people account for their behaviors...



Which are the Germans?
See von Steuben piece on Why?



Three Major Perspectives in Sociology

Before we look at the “Big 3,” Sociologists analyze social phenomena at different levels and from different perspectives. From concrete interpretations to researched generalizations of society and social behavior, sociologists study everything from specific events (the **micro** level of analysis of small social patterns, in the study of small groups) to the “big picture” (the **macro** level of analysis of large social patterns).



Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- **Levels of Analysis**
- 1. Macro – level analysis: Functionalists and conflict theorists - examine large-scale patterns in society – Homelessness = changes in society (family structure, outsourcing, failing economy)
- 2. Micro – level of analysis: symbolic interactionists – examine small scale patterns in society – homeless (patterns of communication both verbal and nonverbal)

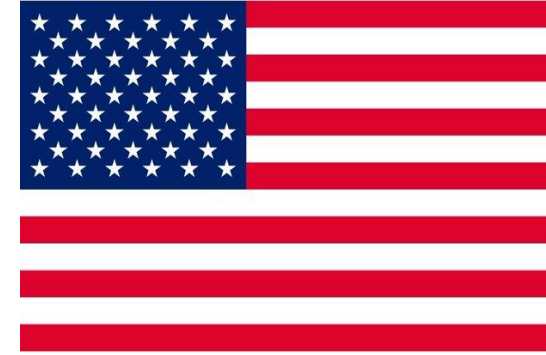
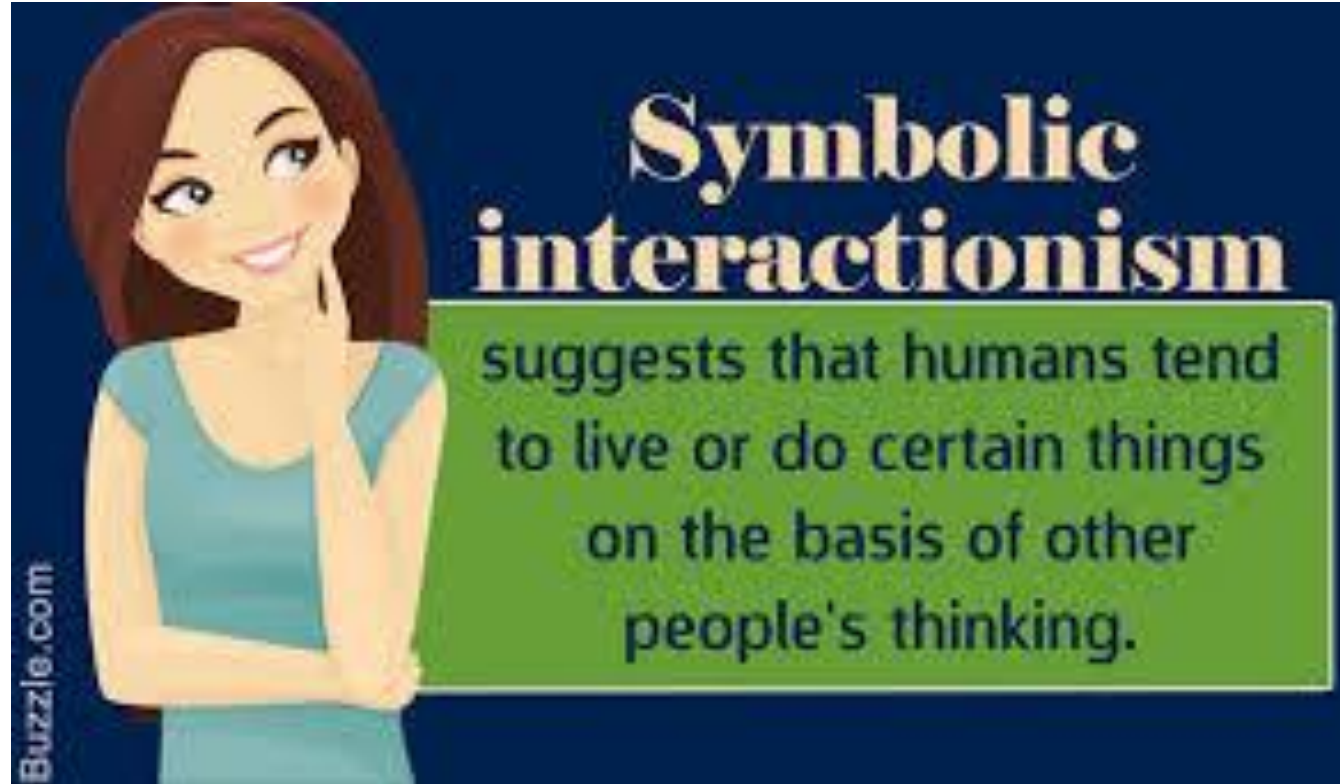
Sociologists today employ three primary theoretical perspectives: the symbolic interactionist perspective, the functionalist perspective, and the conflict perspective. These perspectives offer sociologists theoretical paradigms for explaining how society influences people, and vice versa. Each perspective uniquely conceptualizes society, social forces, and human behavior (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Sociological Perspectives

<i>Sociological Perspective</i>	<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Focus</i>
1. Symbolic Interactionism	Micro	Use of symbols; Face-to-face interactions
2. Functionalism	Macro	Relationship between the parts of society; How aspects of society are functional (adaptive)
3. Conflict Theory	Macro	Competition for scarce resources; How the elite control the poor and weak

The symbolic interactionist perspective

The **symbolic interactionist perspective**, also known as **symbolic interactionism**, directs sociologists to consider the symbols and details of everyday life, what these symbols mean, and how people interact with each other. Although symbolic interactionism traces its origins to **Max Weber's** assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world, the American philosopher **George H. Mead** (1863–1931) introduced this perspective to American sociology in the 1920s.



SYMBOLIC-INTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVES

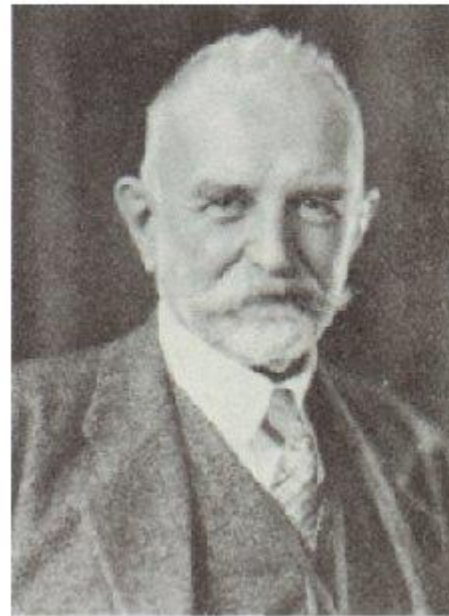
According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, people attach meanings to symbols, and then they act according to their subjective interpretation of these symbols. Verbal conversations, in which spoken words serve as the predominant symbols, make this subjective interpretation especially evident.

The words have a certain meaning for the “sender,” and, during effective communication, they hopefully have the same meaning for the “receiver.”

In other words, words are not static “things”; they require intention and interpretation.

Conversation is an interaction of symbols between individuals who constantly interpret the world around them.

Of course, anything can serve as a symbol as long as it refers to something beyond itself.



George Herbert Mead American Sociologist (1863-1931) is regarded as the founder of the interactionist perspective

➤ Symbolic interactionists view ***symbols***- things that we attach meaning- as the basis of social life.

A ***symbol*** is something representing something else:

➤ symbols range from words and language to nonverbal gestures and signs.

In addition to the symbols on the previous slide, consider our: vocabulary, to include whether we incorporate profane language, and its symbolism in different communities; how deep a voice with which we choose to speak, the volume with which we choose to speak; etiquette, non-verbal gestures; the type of clothing we choose to wear, the brands of clothing we choose to wear, etc.

Symbols may include wedding bands, vows of life-long commitment, a white bridal dress, a wedding cake, a church ceremony, and flowers and music.

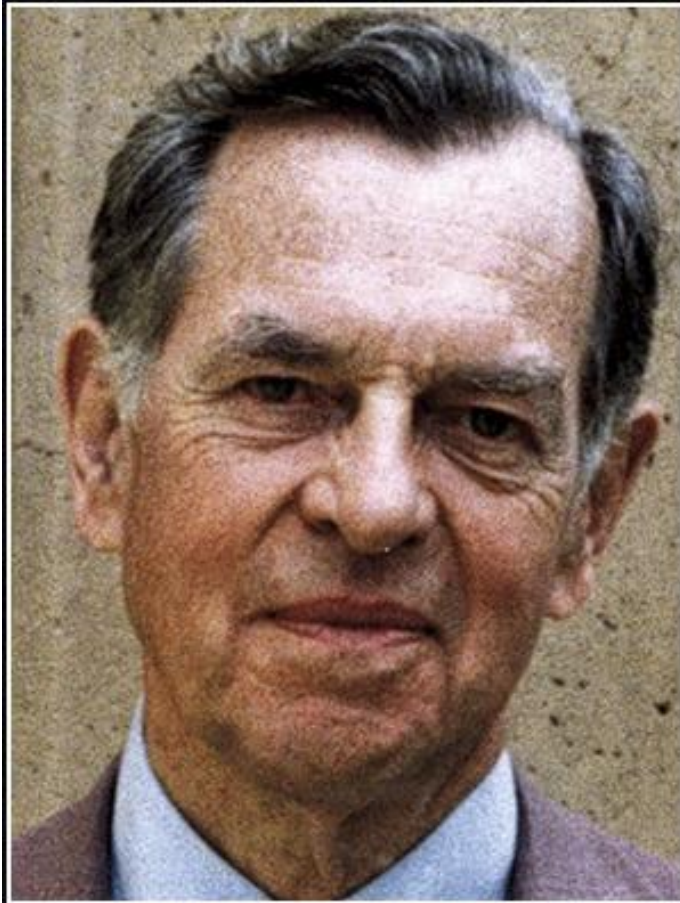


Tallis Wrapping
A Jewish couple is bound together by a *tallis* (prayer shawl) as the two are united in marriage.

Wedding Lasso
Popular in Mexican, Filipino and Spanish cultures. A rosary(or lace rope) is placed around the couple as a symbol of unity.



Hand Wrapping
The original meaning of “tying the knot”. A Celtic tradition where the hands are tied with cloth in the shape of the infinity symbol to symbolize the couple’s unity.



Life is without meaning. You bring
the meaning to it. The meaning of
life is whatever you ascribe it to be.
Being alive is the meaning.

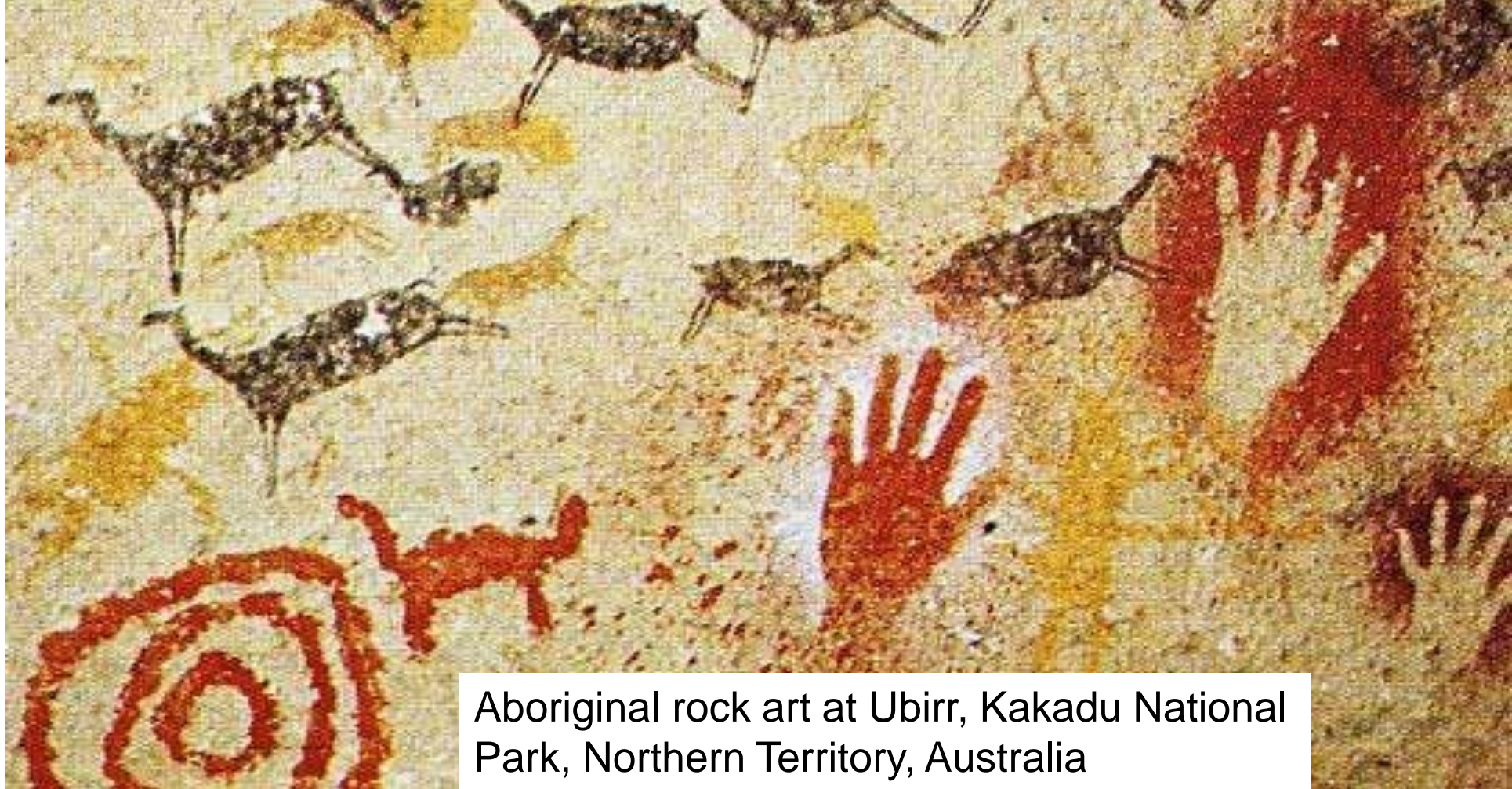
— *Joseph Campbell* —

AZ QUOTES



Pachmari Hills, India ~5,000 BCE

Ancient cave paintings from around the world communicate the same message through pre-historic art. The hunt is depicted, and the hand is the autobiographical symbol/signature, "I am man, see what I can do." These hunter/artists were very proud to have mastered their environments to the extent that they had.

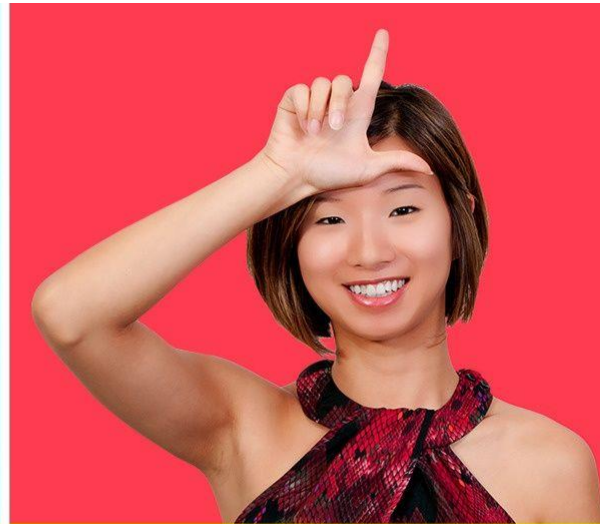


Aboriginal rock art at Ubirr, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory, Australia

Much faulty communication can result from differences in the perception of the same events and symbols.



LOSER



NUMBER 8



MIDDLE FINGER



CROSSED FINGERS



FUCK YOU

The functionalist perspective

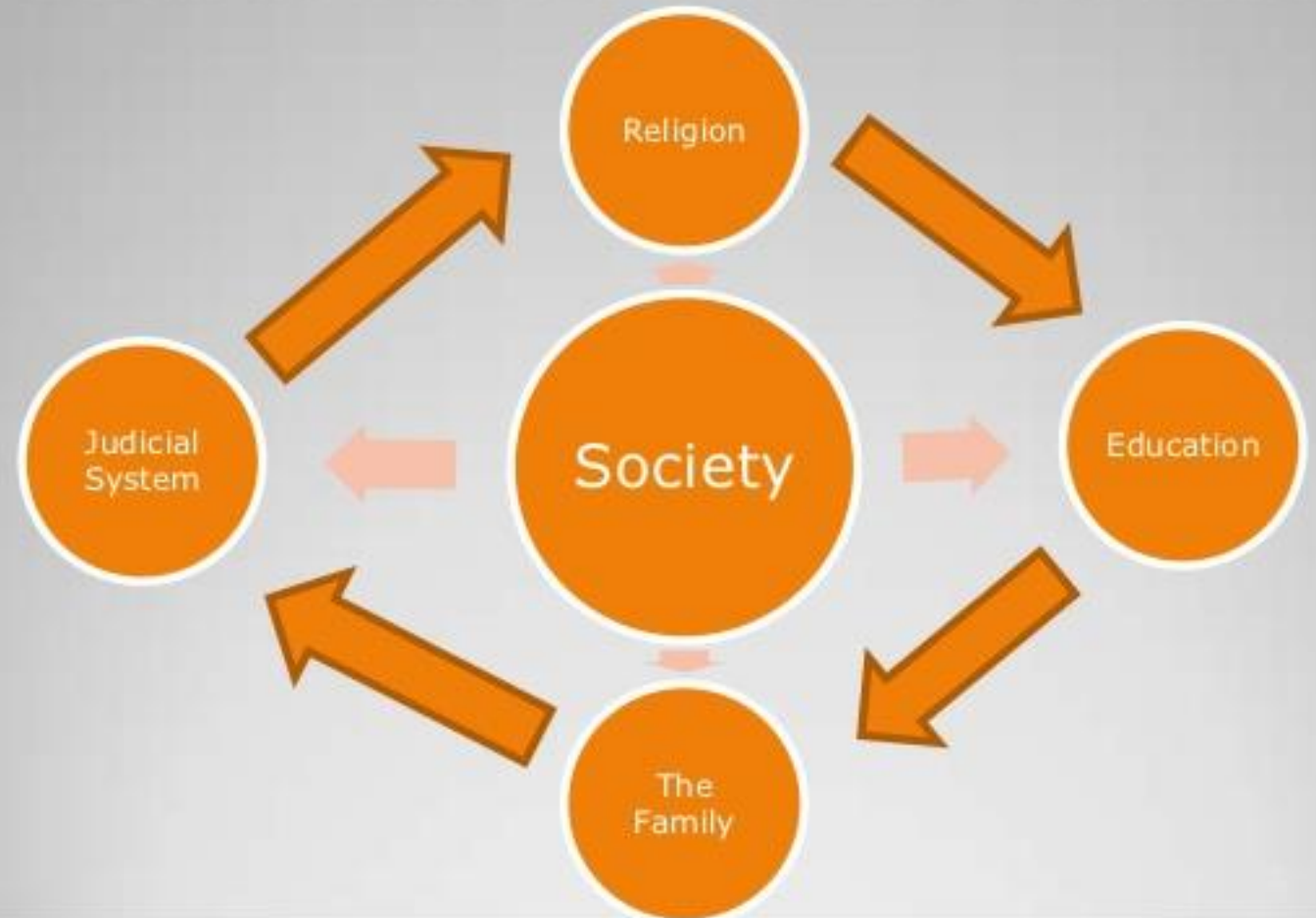
According to the **functionalist perspective**, also called **functionalism**, each aspect of society is interdependent and contributes to society's functioning as a whole.

The government, or state, provides education for the children of the family, which in turn pays taxes on which the state depends to keep itself running.

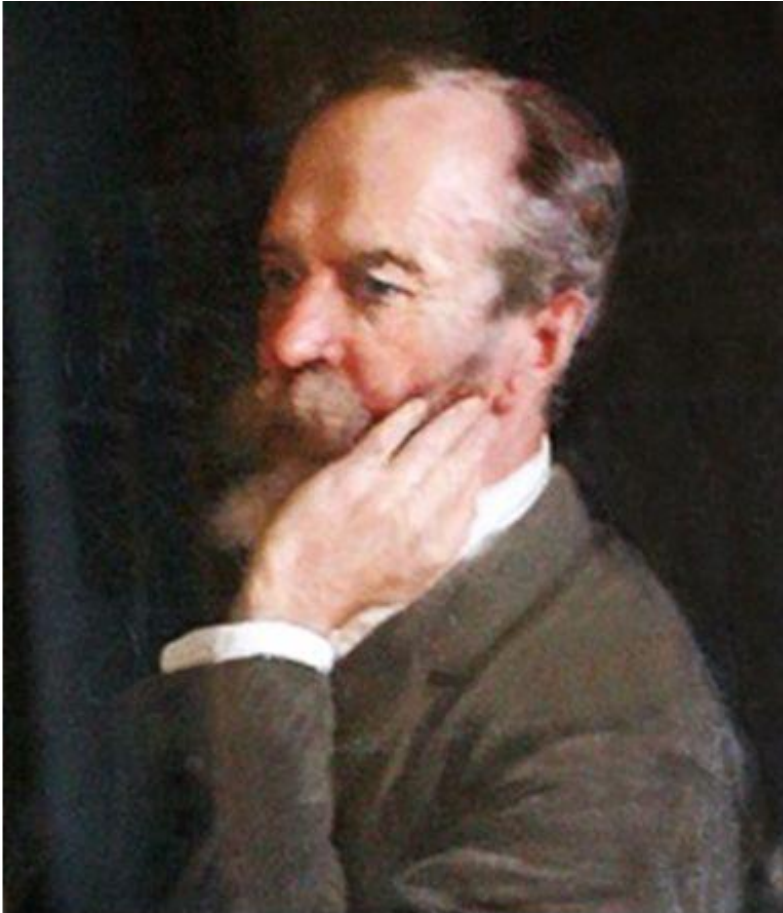
That is, the family is dependent upon the school to help children grow up to have good jobs so that they can raise and support their own families.

In the process, the children become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, who in turn support the state.

Structural Functionalism Visualized



Functionalism began with **William James**, who argued that structuralism's emphasis on the mind's component parts left out the mind's role in enabling us to adapt to our environment. This view drew inspiration from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection.



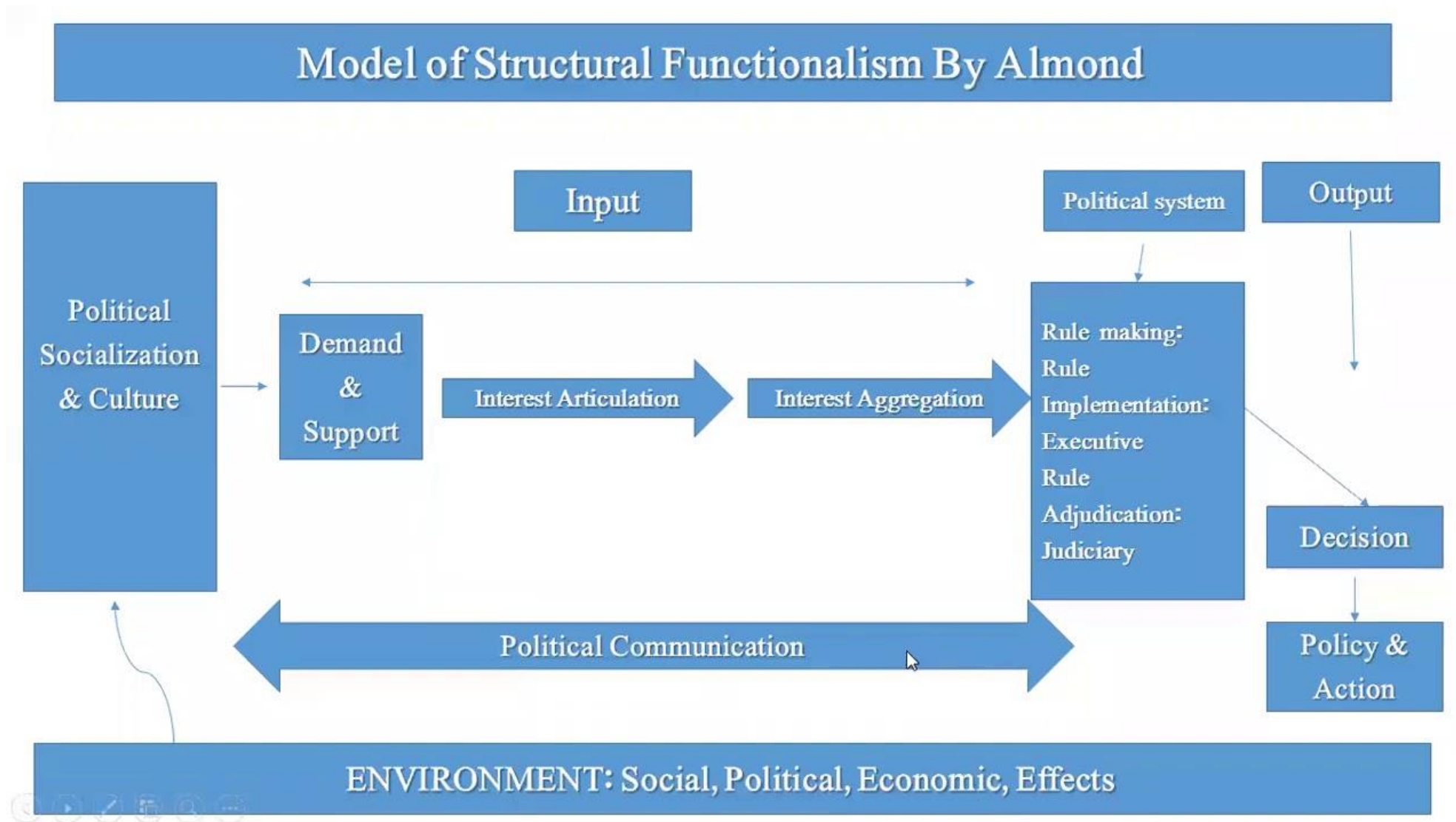
- This approach says our mind is a product of our environment
- How we behaviorally and mentally adapt
- Studied animals
- Influenced by Darwin & natural selection

James' magnum opus is Principles of Psychology (1890)

If all goes well, the parts of society produce a self-perpetuating system of order, stability, and productivity.



If all does not go well, the parts of society then must adapt to recapture a new order, stability, and productivity. For example, during a financial recession with its high rates of unemployment and inflation, social programs are trimmed or cut. Schools offer fewer programs. Families tighten their budgets. And a new social order, stability, and productivity occur.



Functionalists believe that society is held together by **social consensus**, or cohesion, in which members of the society agree upon, and work together to achieve, what is best for society as a whole. Emile Durkheim suggested that social consensus takes one of two forms:

- **Mechanical solidarity** is a form of social cohesion that arises when people in a society maintain similar values and beliefs and engage in similar types of work. Mechanical solidarity most commonly occurs in traditional, simple societies such as those in which everyone herds cattle or farms. Amish society exemplifies mechanical solidarity.



https://www.google.com/search?q=the+amish+and+modern+society&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwidrKnrsPX0AhVLSN8KHb5dBgMQ2-cCegQIABAA&oeq=the+amish+and+modern+society&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQAZoHCCMQ7wMQJzoFCAAQgAQ6BBAgAEEM6BggAEAgQHjoECAAQGfCCCVj8JmC2KWgAcAB4AIAByleBoegSAOivMleBAKABAoBC2d3cv13aXotaW1nwAEFB&scient=img&ei=BOrcYd2VHsuO_Qa-u5kY&bih=722&biw=1536&hl=en#imerc=1hNHbTfEfaaM



- In contrast, **organic solidarity** is a form of social cohesion that arises when the people in a society are interdependent, but hold to varying values and beliefs and engage in varying types of work. Organic solidarity most commonly occurs in industrialized, complex societies such as those in large American cities.



"Together - all the way"

Dr. Rely Alon, Head of Hadassah's Division of Nursing and Allied Health Professions, and the ICU Team of Hadassah Ein Kerem

The functionalist perspective achieved its greatest popularity among American sociologists in the 1940s and 1950s. While European functionalists originally focused on explaining the inner workings of social order, American functionalists focused on discovering the functions of human behavior. Among these American functionalist sociologists is **Robert Merton** (b. 1910), who divides human functions into two types: **manifest functions** are intentional and obvious, while **latent functions** are unintentional and not obvious.



The *manifest* function of dinner, and...



a *latent* function of dinner

(how might a similar manifest example of the same relate to latent functions of dinner among family, friends?)

The **manifest function** of attending a church or synagogue, for instance, is to worship as part of a religious community, but its latent function may be to help reinforce other, indirectly related social tendencies within the same community. With common sense, manifest functions become easily apparent. Yet this is not necessarily the case for **latent functions**, which often demand a sociological approach to be revealed.



Three-in-ten Black adults say predominantly Black churches have done a ‘great deal’ to help Black people move toward equality in U.S.

% of Black Americans who say each of the following have done ____ to help Black people move toward equality in the U.S.

	A great deal	Some	Not much	Nothing at all	No answer
	%	%	%	%	%
Civil rights organizations	60	29	7	3	2=100
Predominantly Black churches	29	48	16	5	3
The federal government	11	44	34	9	2
Predominantly White churches	7	32	38	21	3

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

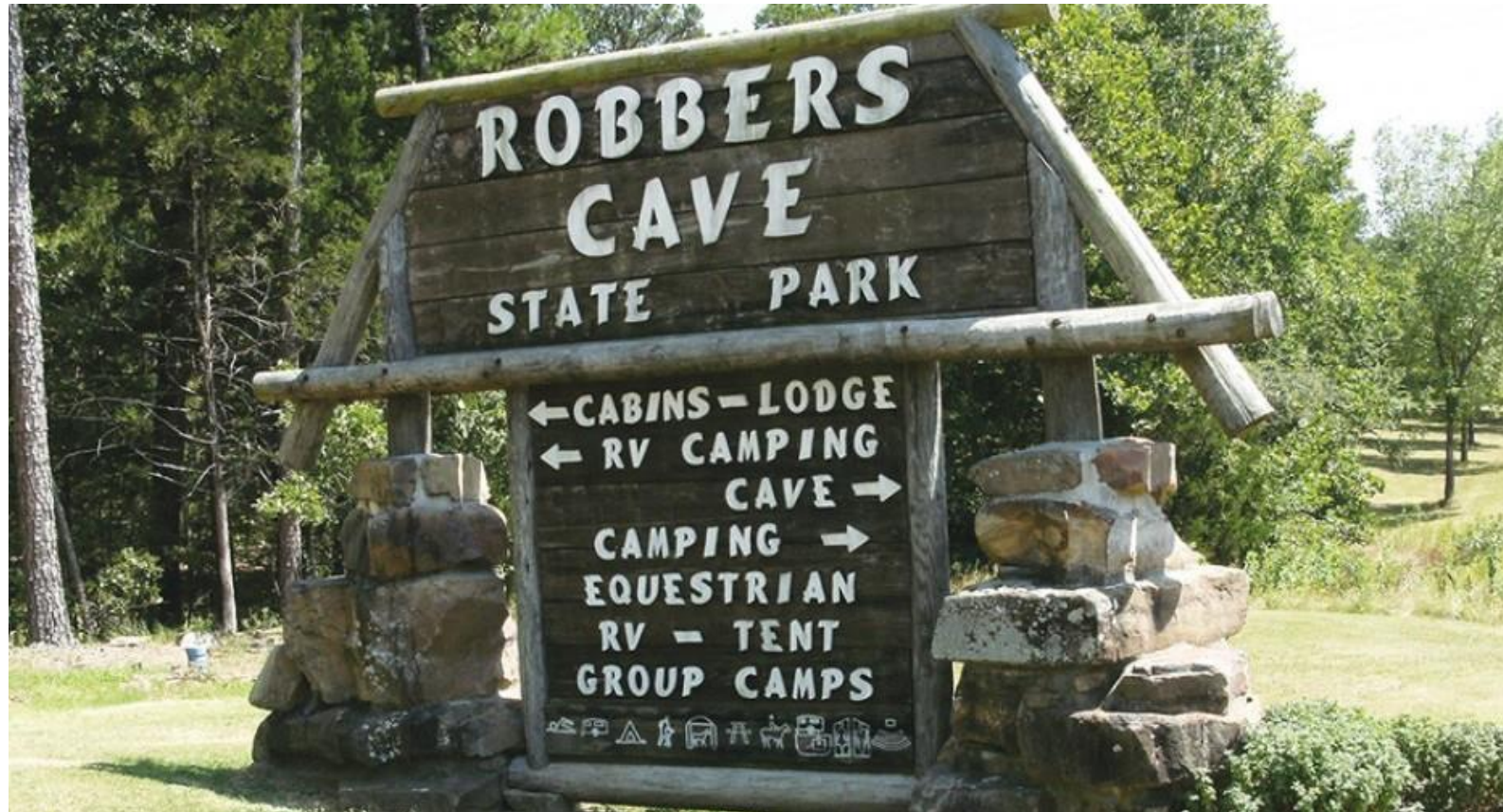
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults.

“Faith Among Black Americans”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The conflict perspective

The conflict perspective, which originated primarily out of Karl Marx's writings on class struggles, presents society in a different light than do the functionalist and symbolic interactionist perspectives. While these latter perspectives focus on the positive aspects of society that contribute to its stability, the **conflict perspective** focuses on the negative, conflicted, and ever-changing nature of society.



Excellent pieces on Robbers Cave...
<https://youtu.be/7KU5u75J8VU>

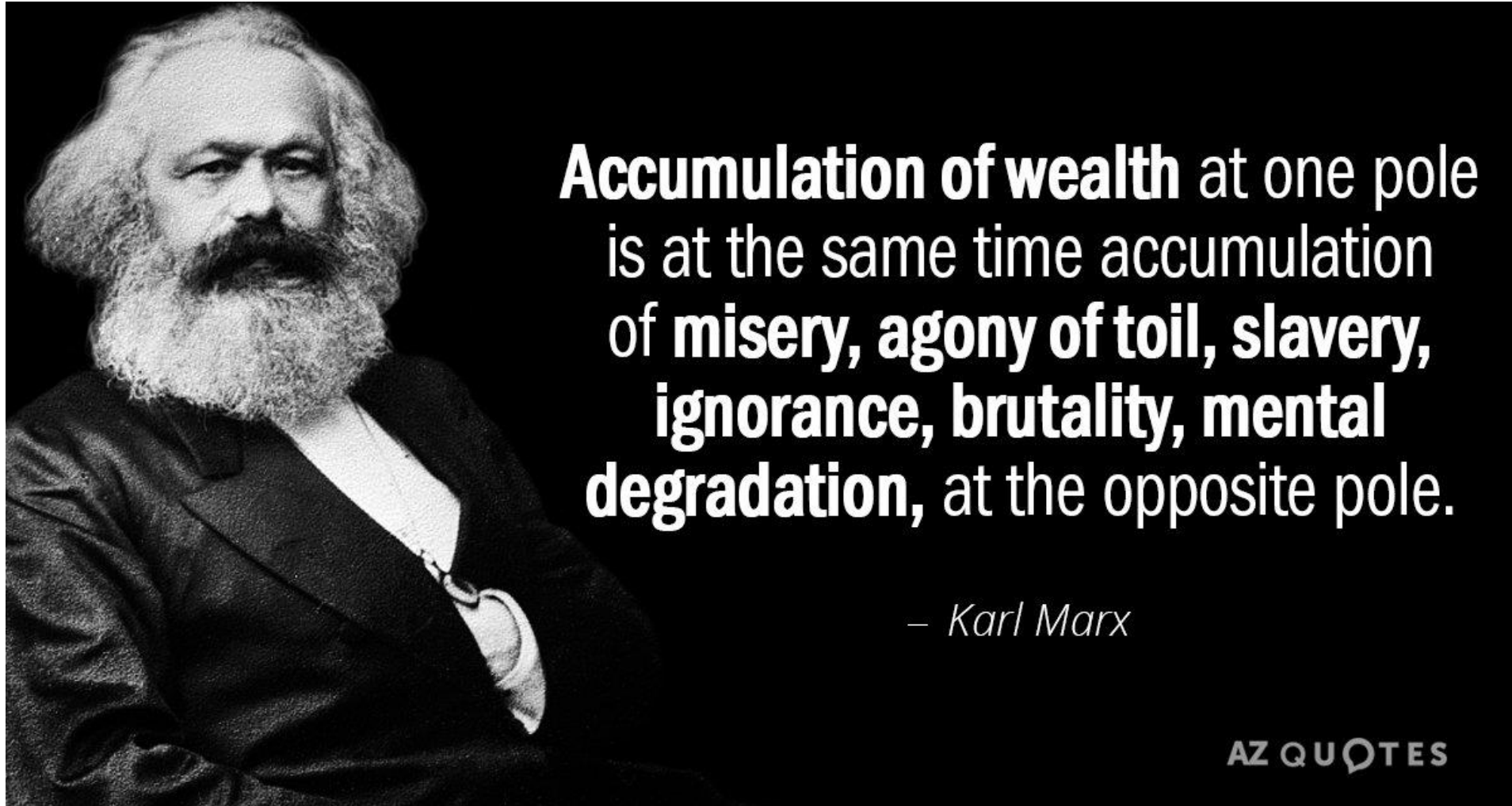
<https://youtu.be/8PRuxMprSDQ>

Unlike functionalists, who defend the status quo, avoid social change, and believe people cooperate to effect social order, conflict theorists challenge the status quo, encourage social change (even when this means social revolution), and believe rich and powerful people force social order on the poor and the weak.

FUNCTIONALISM VERSUS CONFLICT THEORY

FUNCTIONALISM	CONFLICT THEORY
Theory that states all aspects of a society serve a function and are necessary for the survival of that society	Theory that states there is a perpetual class conflict in the society due to the unequal distribution of resources
States that all elements of the society are interdependent and they serve a function for the overall stability of the society	Focuses on the concept of social inequality in the division of resources and therefore, the conflicts that exist between classes, which will eventually trigger social change
Pioneer is Emile Durkheim	Pioneer is Karl Marx

Whereas American sociologists in the 1940s and 1950s generally ignored the conflict perspective in favor of the functionalist, the tumultuous 1960s saw American sociologists gain considerable interest in conflict theory. They also expanded Marx's idea that the key conflict in society was strictly economic.



Accumulation of wealth at one pole
is at the same time accumulation
of **misery, agony of toil, slavery,
ignorance, brutality, mental
degradation,** at the opposite pole.

– *Karl Marx*

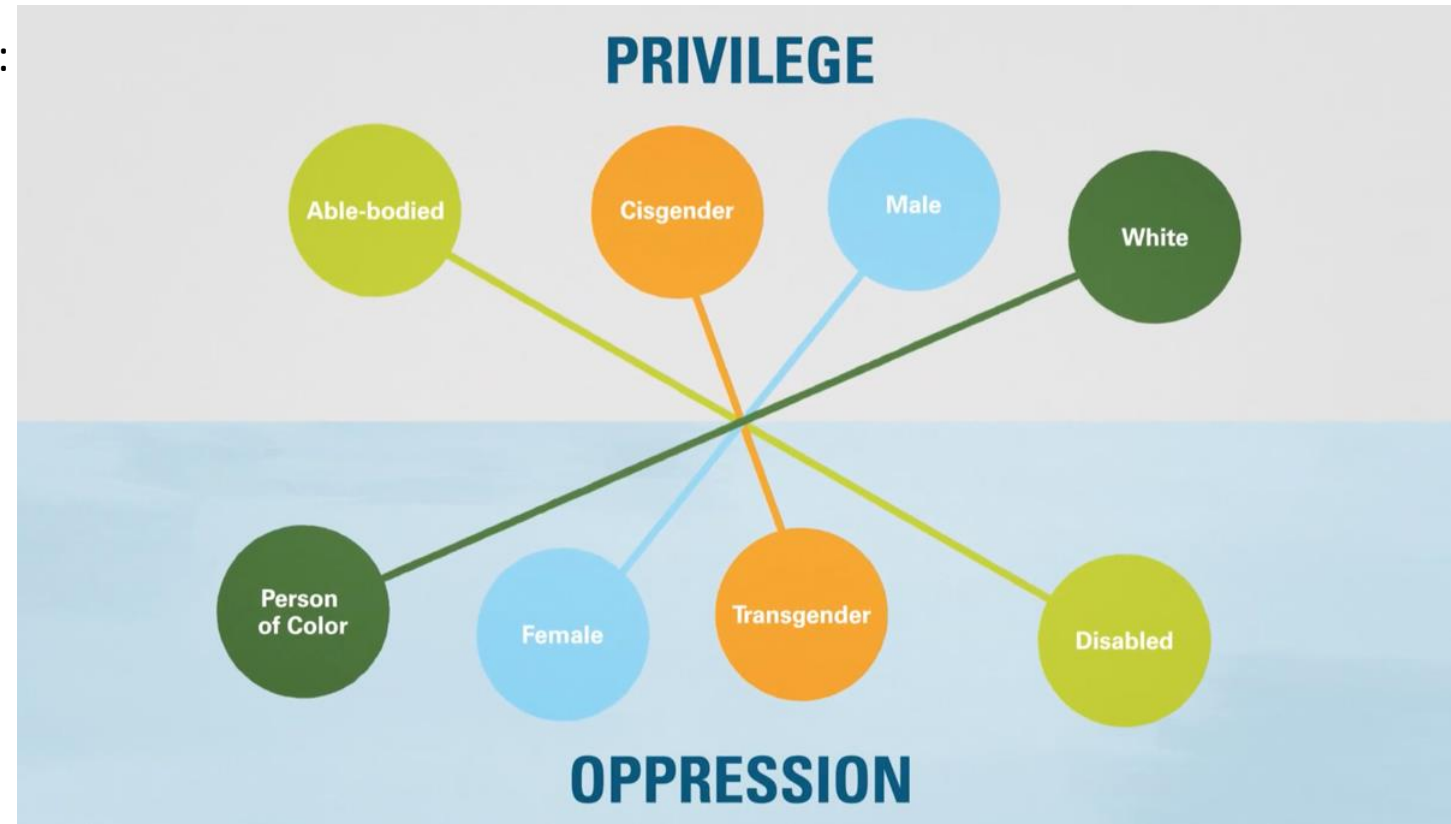
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Conflict theorists find social conflict between any groups in which the potential for inequality exists: racial, gender, religious, political, economic, and so on. Conflict theorists note that unequal groups usually have conflicting values and agendas, causing them to compete against one another. This constant competition between groups forms the basis for the ever-changing nature of society.

Today, conflict theory is expressed through extreme organizations and views, those that believe there must be a revolution, and an overthrow of the U.S. Government. These individuals believe that the U.S. Constitution—which is a metaphor for the Enlightenment—has proved unable to create an atmosphere of fairness to oppressed groups. Some are elected officials of the U.S. Government.

These organizations, individuals, and concepts include:

1. the notion of **intersectionalism**, which holds that minority groups should combine forces to oppose Western democracies as racist, homophobic, and misogynistic.



Proponents of the concept of intersectionality believe that those not in power are oppressed, and that the government has failed to take measures that would expand opportunities.

Intersectionalists believe...

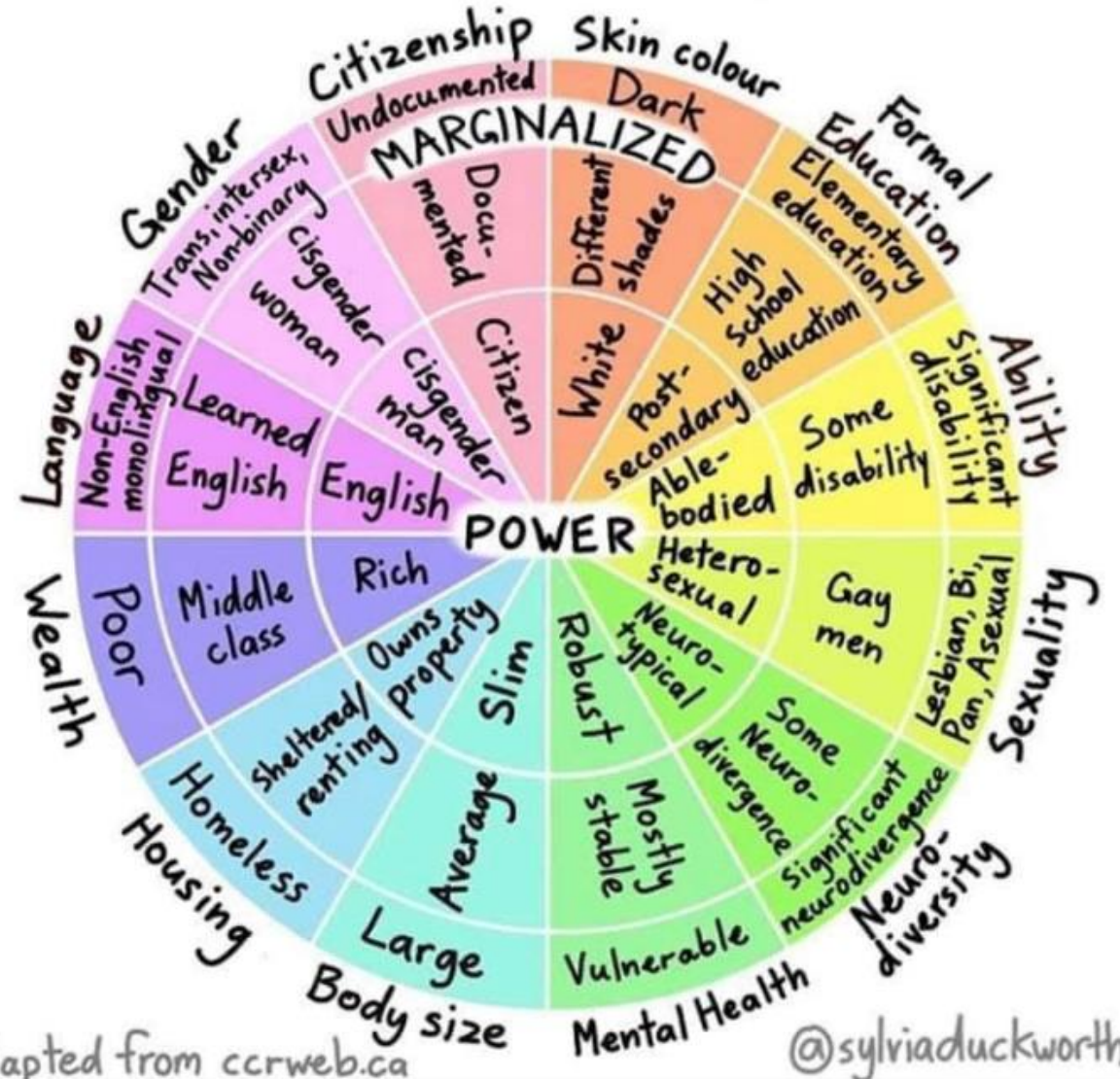
Intersectionality is directly tied to oppression. Oppression is the force that allows, through the power of norms and systems, the unjust control of people.

They believe that intersectionality shows us that social identities work on multiple levels, resulting in unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers for each person.

On the other hand, critics who oppose the view of intersectionality point out that only two generations since the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s, 30% of African-Americans are now comfortably middle-class, and they further note that, on the eve of the Civil Rights movement, there were 4 representatives in the House and Senate who were black, yet today (2021), there are 59.

Similarly, on the eve of Second-Wave Feminism in 1969, there were 11 members of the House and Senate who were women, yet in 2021 there are 144 women in the House and Senate. Furthermore, there are more women in college and grad school than men, even in the STEM fields, which seemed a glass ceiling for many years.

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



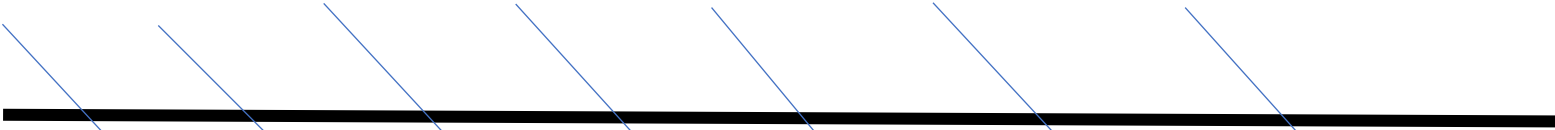
<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL30378.pdf>

Adapted from ccrweb.ca

@sylviaduckworth

INTERSECTIONALISM-belief that minorities are marginalized, excluded, and the system is unfair to them. However, when minorities are successful, and support the system, they are often excluded by intersectionalists, as these individuals do not fit their argument. Often, these “exceptions” are economically successful, but face discrimination and violence by intersectionalists as well as other members of society.

WESTERN CULTURE



AFRICAN AMERICANS

LGBTQ

WOMEN

ARAB AMERICANS

LATINO AMERICANS

JEWISH AMERICANS

ASIAN AMERICANS

(JEWS & ASIANS OFTEN EXLUDED AMONG MINORITIES)

2. **The Squad**, also representing an informal group with attributes of conflict theory, is a group of six Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives. It was initially composed of four women elected in the 2018 United States House of Representatives elections: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. They have since been joined by Jamaal Bowman of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri following the 2020 United States House of Representatives elections. The Squad is well known for being among the most left-wing members of the United States Congress.

These congresspeople agree on large-scale criticism of the U.S. Government, charging that Constitution fails to Allow government to address domestic social ills, largely based on minority oppression (see previous slide on *intersectionality*), that there exist fundamentally unfair voting rights access, access to medicine, and treatment of the oppressed in the U.S. They further tend to agree that U.S. foreign policy is equally flawed, unfair, and that U.S. foreign policy is “bought off” by political donors, “It’s all about the Benjamins (hundred-dollar bills),” to the Jews, in the words of Andrea Ocasio Cortez.

Critics point out that Democratic Socialists, such as A.O.C. and Ilhan Omar, have often been factually wrong in the details used to support their claims, as well as racist, as in the Benjamins accusation (above). A.O.C. has further claimed that the U.S. Senate is not a democratic institution*.



“Squad” Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), Jamaal Bowman (D-N.Y.), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) Cori Bush (D-Mo.), and Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.).

<https://twitter.com/reppressley/status/1227648452441657345>

* https://townhall.com/tipsheet/spencerbrown/2021/12/20/aoc-doesnt-even-know-how-many-people-she-represents-n2600827?utm_campaign=rightrailsticky2

3. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, proponents of this style of thinking has largely shifted to critical theory, and related views...
Critical Theory and Postmodernism.

What is critical theory?

- The term is most closely associated with a multi-disciplinary group of historians, philosophers, and political scientists known as the 'Frankfurt School'
- The researchers were affiliated with the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) in Frankfurt, established in 1923.
- The group disbanded when the Nazis came in power in 1933, but was re-started in New York by Horkheimer and Adorno in the 40s as the New School of Social Research.

ROOTS OF CRITICAL THEORY

- ▶ Frankfurt School philosophy
- ▶ Karl Marx
- ▶ Knowledge in society is NOT objective
- ▶ Organizational communication scholars operating from a critical theory attempt to reveal how social and technological structures within organizations serve to oppress workers

An outgrowth of postmodernism, "critical theory" has a distinctive aim: to unmask the ideology falsely justifying some form of social or economic oppression—to reveal it *as* ideology—and, in so doing, to contribute to the task of ending that oppression. And so, a critical theory aims to provide a kind of enlightenment about social and economic life that is itself *emancipatory*: persons come to recognize the oppression they are suffering *as* oppression and are thereby partly freed from it. —Prof. Daniel Koltonski

This type of thinking is well summarized by R.B.J. Walker, in his *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (1993), in which he lamented that the 20th century may be remembered as the one in which “the grand ambitions of Enlightenment Reason and universalist principles finally collapsed in traumatic ruin.”



Postmodernism is an intellectual stance or mode of discourse defined by an attitude of skepticism toward what it describes as the grand narratives, or institutions that claim to provide fairness for all. It questions or criticizes viewpoints associated with Enlightenment rationality, to include its dismissal of the U.S. Constitution, as well as other Western governing documents.



Postmodernists are generally skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and describe truth as relative.

It can be described as a reaction against attempts to explain reality in an objective manner by claiming that reality (marriage, religion, even time itself) is a mental construct.

This explains, at least in part, why post-modernists, such as critical theorists, believe that Western documents, such as the Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, and even the U.S. Constitution are discriminatory toward many marginalized groups.

Postmodern “Truth”

- “Truth” is relative, not fixed or absolute.
- One can never know something without question.
- “Truth” is constructed, not discovered.
- People construct “truths” that work for them.
- What is “true” for one may not be “true” for another.
- One “truth” is as valid as another.
- “Truth” can be revised without contradiction.
- “Spin” is everything.

Postmodern thinkers frequently describe knowledge claims and value systems as contingent or socially-conditioned, describing them as products of political, historical, or cultural discourses and hierarchies. Accordingly, postmodern thought is broadly characterized by tendencies to self-referentiality, epistemological and moral relativism, pluralism, and irreverence. Postmodernism is often associated with schools of thought such as deconstruction and post-structuralism. Postmodernism relies on critical theory, which considers the effects of ideology, society, and history on culture. Postmodernism and critical theory commonly criticize Enlightenment universalist ideas of objective reality, morality, truth, human nature, reason, language, and social progress.

Initially, postmodernism was a mode of discourse on literature and literary criticism, commenting on the nature of literary text, meaning, author and reader, writing, and reading. Postmodernism developed in the mid- to late-twentieth century across philosophy, the arts, architecture, and criticism as a departure or rejection of modernism.

Postmodernist approaches have been adopted in a variety of academic and theoretical disciplines, including political science, organization theory, cultural studies, philosophy of science, economics, linguistics, architecture, feminist theory, and literary criticism, as well as art movements in fields such as literature and music. As a critical practice, postmodernism rejects abstract principles in favor of direct experience.

		Relativism	
		High	Low
Idealism	High	<p><u>Situationists</u></p> <p>Rejects moral rules; advocates individualistic analysis of each act in each situation; relativistic.</p>	<p><u>Absolutists</u></p> <p>Assumes that the best possible outcome can always be achieved by following universal moral rules.</p>
	Low	<p><u>Subjectivists</u></p> <p>Appraisals based on personal values and perspectives rather than universal moral principles; relativistic.</p>	<p><u>Exceptionists</u></p> <p>Moral absolutes guide judgments, but pragmatically open to exceptions to these standards; utilitarian.</p>

Critics of the conflict perspective point to its overly negative view of society. The theory ultimately attributes humanitarian efforts, altruism, democracy, civil rights, and other positive aspects of society to capitalistic designs to control the masses, not to inherent interests in preserving society and social order. The conflict perspective, as most commonly expressed today, through critical theory, largely depend on the Marxist claim that the Enlightenment, and contemporary Western society, are corrupt beyond the possibility for reform. Again, critics argue on a more affirmative view of the West, based on the balance between the heritage of both Athens and Jerusalem.

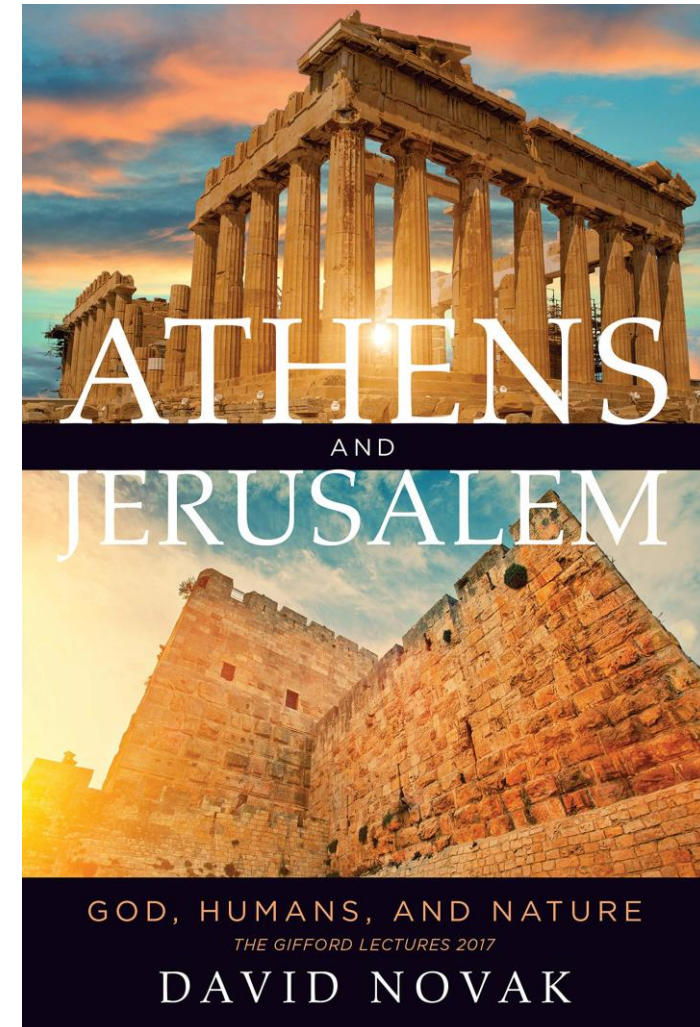
As we read on slide #34, the monumental achievements and acceleration of Equality and rights enjoyed by minorities and groups historically persecuted, Has grown exponentially since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Additionally, critics of Critical Theory/Postmodernism have yet to articulate an alternative to Western society, or demonstrate successful alternatives currently or historically.

We will see this related clip....

Why has the West been so successful?

<https://youtu.be/RVD0xik- FM>



So... having been exposed to various perspectives on Western society vs. Postmodern Critical Theory, what do you believe?

#MasterchefArgentina

¿QUE TE PARECE?



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