

Sociology 220
Last Day Comments/Themes

- I. Legacies of history
 - A. Structures of inequality are created by past struggles, perpetuate themselves
 - B. Today's politics & issues are shaped by past politics & issues
 - C. "Race" is a problem in the US because it was the major axis along which the country was defined and constructed
- II. Structures, not individual attitudes, are the key issue
 - A. Prejudice & stereotypes are individual attitudes. These are endemic to humanity, a consequence of ignorance, media images, AND the structures of society. ALL racial/ethnic groups exhibit prejudice & stereotyping.
 - B. Attitudes are a consequence of structure. E.g. White segregation → White ignorance; structures of White domination → sense of entitlement among Whites.
 - C. Attitudes change in response to structures. E.g. as women become more common in management, men's "problems" with taking orders from women decline.
 - D. Education to change attitudes has limited benefit unless structures can be changed
 - E. One formulation: racism = prejudice + power
 - F. Getting over the "R" word: Why do Whites get so upset at being called racist? What is at stake?
- III. Key elements of current US situation
 - A. Race is still a problem on the Black-White dimension. White self-segregation has increased, economic inequality continues, discrimination still exists. In many ways, the gains of the 1970s were rolled back in the 1980s. But there are some counter-trends: economic & educational advancement of the middle class, decline in overt prejudice, etc.
 - B. US is now multi-racial, multi-cultural. Latinos, Asians are of growing importance. American Indians have made some political/economic gains. Issues are complex.
 - C. Dominant group is still a majority. Democracy can oppress minorities. A key structural issue in the US.
 - D. White sense of threat is an important issue. (Historical evidence that Blacks attacked more by Whites when there is a large immigration threat.)
- IV. Issues to discuss
 - A. Themes of assimilation/integration vs. separation.
 - 1. "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" The problems and stresses of being in the minority
 - 2. Do ethnic/racial minorities have to give up their own culture to gain acceptance/equality?
 - 3. Was it a good thing that European immigrants were stripped of their culture? Should Whites expect to find their own culture changed as they become part of a truly egalitarian society?
 - B. Tactics & strategies.
 - 1. Accommodation, self-development, legal challenges, electoral politics, protest, violence as a range of responses to White racial projects. "Conflict" exists even when minorities are accommodating rather than challenging domination.
 - 2. Why some people believe aggressive protest is sometimes necessary.
 - 3. Recognize that Whites have had & do have "racial projects" to which other groups respond. "Color-blind society," "race coded" politics (crime, welfare), cultural dominance (English-only, "mainstream values"), and White self-segregation as racial projects
 - 4. The role of White anti-racists.
 - 5. The problems of "persons of color" politics: common opponent, but lack of common goals.

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”

Karl Marx (1818–83), German political theorist, social philosopher. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, sct. 1 (1852; repr. in *Selected Works*, vol. 2, 1942).

History, despite its wrenching pain

Cannot be unlived, but if faced

With courage, need not be lived again.

Maya Angelou. From "On the Pulse of Morning"

"You have to play the hand you are dealt." American folk saying.

“Let me give you a word on the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her August claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all absorbing, and for the time being putting all other tumult to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightening. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue until they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Frederick Douglass. Letter to an abolitionist associate. 1853.