Edited by Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis,
James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk

CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY FOURTH EDITION

WILEY Blackwell

Contemporary Sociological Theory

Contemporary Sociological Theory

Fourth Edition

Edited by

Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk

WILEY Blackwell

Contents

Notes on the Editors

Craig Calhoun is University Professor of Social Sciences at Arizona State University. He was previously Director of the London School of Economics, President of the Social Science Research Council, and a professor of sociology at NYU, Columbia, and UNC Chapel Hill. Calhoun's newest book is *Degenerations of Democracy* (Harvard 2022) with Dilip Gaonkar and Charles Taylor.

Joseph Gerteis is Professor of Sociology and Co-Principal Investigator of the American Mosaic Project at the University of Minnesota. He is author of *Class and the Color Line* (Duke University Press). His work explores issues of race and ethnicity, social boundaries and identities, and political culture. It has appeared in *The Sociological Quarterly, Sociological Forum*, *American Sociological Review*, *Social Problems*, and elsewhere.

James Moody is Professor of Sociology at Duke University and Director of the Duke Network Analysis Center. He has published extensively in the field of social networks, methods, and social theory with over 70 peer reviewed publications. His work focuses theoretically on the network foundations of social cohesion and diffusion, with a particular emphasis on building tools and methods for understanding dynamic social networks. He has used network models to help understand organizational performance, school racial segregation, adolescent health, disease spread, economic development, and the development of scientific disciplines.

Steven Pfaff is Professor of Sociology at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany* (Duke, 2006) and, with Mimi Goldman, *The Spiritual Virtuoso* (Bloomsbury, 200717), and with Michael Hechter, *The Genesis of Rebellion* (Cambridge, 2020). He has been awarded the Social Science History Association's President's Award and the best book award from the European Academy of Sociology.

Indermohan Virk is the Executive Director of the Patten Foundation and the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions at Indiana University Bloomington, and she works in the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs. She was previously a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Indiana University.

Acknowledgements

Chapter 23

Dorothy E. Smith, pp. 12–19, 21–7 from *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1990. © 1990 Dorothy E. Smith. Reproduced with permission of Dorothy E. Smith.

Chapter 24

Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Epistemology," pp. 251–6, 266–71 from *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edn. New York: Routledge, 2000. Reproduced with permission of Taylor & Francis Group.

Chapter 25

Kimberlé Crenshaw, pp. 139–140, 150–152, 154–60 from "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum 1 (1989), Article 8.

Chapter 26

Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research," pp. 129, 131–6, 146–7 from *Sociological Theory* 28: 2 (2010). Reproduced with permission of the author and American Sociological Association.

Chapter 27

Rocio R. Garcia, "The Politics of Erased Migrations: Expanding a Relational, Intersectional Sociology of Latinx Gender and Migration," pp. 4–6, 8, 14–17 from *Sociology Compass* 12: 4, e12571 (2018). Reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons.

PART VIII

Chapter 28

Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," pp. 39–40, 42–6, 53–5 from *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, edited by Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996. Reproduced with permission of The Polity Press and Surkamp Verlag.

Chapter 29

Jürgen Habermas, "The Rationalization of the Lifeworld," pp. 119–26, 136–45, 147–8, 150–2 from *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. English translation © 1987 Beacon Press. Originally published as *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, Band 2: Zur Kritikder funktionalistischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981). Reproduced with permission of Beacon Press.

Chapter 30

Jürgen Habermas, "Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere" from *Between Facts and Norms, Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, translated by William Rehg," pp. 331–333, 360, 362–364, 365–367, 368–370, 371, 372, 373–374, 378–379, 381–382, 385–387. © 1996 MIT Press. Reproduced with permission of MIT Press and Polity Press.

PART IX

Chapter 31
Norbert Elias, "The Social Constraint towards Self-Constraint," pp. 443–8, 450–6 from *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978. Originally translated by Edmund Jephcott. © 1978 Norbert Elias. Reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons.

Chapter 32
Bruno Latour, pp. 130–45 from *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. English translation © 1993 Harvester Wheatsheaf and the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reproduced with permission of Harvard University Press.

Chapter 33
Jeffrey C. Alexander, pp. 3–9, 53–62, 64–67 from *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford University Press, 2006. Reproduced with permission of Oxford University Press.

Chapter 34
Michele Lamont, "Addressing Recognition Gaps: Destigmatization and the Reduction of Inequality," pp. 420–436 from *American Sociological Review* 83: 3. Reproduced with permission of the author and American Sociological Association.

PART X

Chapter 35
Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Modern World-System in Crisis," pp. 76–90 from *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004. Reproduced with permission of Duke University Press.

Chapter 36
Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," pp. 1002–1039 from *International Migration Review* 38: 3 (2004). Reproduced with permission of Sage Publications.

Chapter 37
Craig Calhoun, pp. 1, 3–7, 37, 39, 40, 42, 43, 66, 92–93, 94, 99, 103, 123, 125–126 from *Nationalism*. Open University Press, 1997. Reproduced with permission of McGraw-Hill Education (UK) Ltd.

Chapter 38
Michael Mann, "The End May Be Nigh, But For Whom?" pp. 71–76, 83–97 from Immanuel Wallerstein, Randall Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, Craig Calhoun, *Does Capitalism Have a Future*? Oxford University Press, 2013. Reproduced with permission of Oxford University Press.

Introduction

Sociology is the pursuit of systematic knowledge about social life, the way it is organized, how it changes, its creation in social action, and its disruption and renewal in social conflict. Sociological *theory* is at once an integrated account of what is known and a guide to new inquiry. It is organized scientifically to help us see the connections among different facts, relations of cause and effect, and deeper patterns of social organization and change.

But, sociological theory always comes in the form of multiple theories. Each offers a distinct perspective on society, helping us to see different dimensions of what is going on. Some difference is just a matter of focus, like looking at nature with a microscope or a telescope. Sociological theories may focus on interpersonal relations, large organizations like a corporation or an army, or overall patterns of social change and stability. But at any of these levels, sociological theories also propose different ways to look at social life.

The Classical Inheritance

Contemporary sociological theory is built on a foundation of classical theory laid down as part of Western modernization between the 18th century and the middle of the 20th century. These were remarkable but troubled years. They ran from the Enlightenment and industrial revolution through the rise of empires and then decolonization, the formation of the modern capitalist world system, two world wars, communist revolutions, Cold War, to the formation of welfare states that expanded health care, education, and other benefits. They included fantastic advances in technology, urbanization, and wealth. They also included the flourishing of the world's first large-scale democratic societies – and long struggles to improve them because they were founded with internal contradictions, including toleration of slavery, exclusion of women, and restrictions on the rights of those without property.

Sociology was born of trying to understand all this transformation and upheaval – and also likely directions for further change and what action could shape the future of society. What we now call classical sociological theory is the most enduringly influential of this earlier work. Classical sociological theories orient us to several basic questions, revealing what is involved in different approaches to answering them. Among the most important are the following:

1. What are the conditions for scientific knowledge of social life?
2. How is society shaped by the state, and how in turn does society shape politics?
3. What are the social origins and impacts of markets, especially large and still expanding markets?
4. How do individuality, Community, and society relate to each other?
5. What are the fundamental differences among societies?
6. How have power relations among societies – such as colonialism and war – shaped individual societies and regional and global social relations?

All these questions remain active concerns for sociologists today. Sociological theories not only propose answers, but they also understand what counts as a good answer. They help us clarify basic concepts and their relations to each other. They help us develop the capacity for good judgment about what variables are likely to be important in a particular analytic problem or explanation. Even when they disagree with classical theories, contemporary sociologists measure their work by classical standards of intellectual quality.

Contemporary sociological theory has built on classical predecessors but sought both to go beyond them and to theorize new developments. Earlier theorists paid too little attention to race or to colonialism, for example. W.E.B. DuBois was an exception, showing the "problem of the color line" at work both in the racial division of the United States and in the global division shaped by European colonization. Not surprisingly, perhaps, most male theorists failed to appreciate the importance of both women's inequality and gender as a constitutive social category. Classical theorists like Harriet Martineau and Jane Addams pointed to the issue, but men were slow to grasp it fully.

But, Du Bois, Martineau, and Addams were all clear that what they wanted was not to abandon classical sociological theory but rather to bring its analytic strengths to bear on issues it initially ignored or underestimated. Du Bois, for example, drew enthusiastically on the work of Max Weber and later Karl Marx. Martineau admired Spencer; Addams drew ideas of social evolution from the American sociologist Lester Frank Ward. What all wanted was to keep improving sociology's intellectual inheritance and advance engagement with the key issues of their day.

What is "contemporary" of course keeps shifting. For Du Bois and Addams, the 19th century was classical, and the early 20th century was contemporary. For us, their work has become classical. Contemporary theory incorporates what is most valuable from its classical inheritance at the same time that it innovates, overcomes limits, and responds to new issues. Theorists ask, for example, whether the West is in decline or how it can renew itself.

We have drawn the line separating contemporary from classical roughly in 1968–1975. This was a period of crises and shifting directions. The year 1968 saw protest movements around the world, many sparked by the US war in Vietnam but also calling for broad social transformation. A million students marched through the streets of Paris and joined forces with as many as 10 million striking workers. In Japan as well as Europe and the United States, specific concerns of students mixed with pursuit of broader social transformation. Protests were huge in the United States, not just on college campuses but at the Chicago convention of the Democratic Party – where police repression became as famous as the protests.

Upheavals were international. Early in 1968, the Prague Spring briefly brought a progressive, potentially democratic government to Czechoslovakia before Soviet repression. Protests in Poland and Yugoslavia further signaled a crisis in the Communist bloc. Repression of dissent helped to bring stagnation that undermined communism over coming decades. 1973 brought a military coup in Chile that led to decades of right wing military dictatorship there (mirrored in some other Latin American countries). The dictators gave neoliberal economists some of their first chances to shape policy. Later in 1973, the Yom Kippur War helped to spark the transformation of OPEC into a global force controlling – and radically increasing – the price of oil. This sparked an economic crisis that famously combined high inflation with stagnant growth. Neoliberalism guided an intervention that tamed inflation but with policies that guided a long period when wealth grew but wages did not. The postwar boom ended, and inequality began to grow sharply.

Also in 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated, and the Great Civil Rights Movement launched in the 1950s seemed to stall. The same period saw dramatic expansion in the long struggle for women's rights. "Second wave feminism" started in the early 1960s and continued for two decades.

In short, the era was a watershed. Sociology was deeply engaged in trying to understand social change and transformation. Some earlier work seems surprisingly contemporary. We have no doubt that some later work will soon attain the status of classics. But, most of the major conversations and controversies in contemporary sociological theory have roots in the 1960s and 1970s, and each drew in different ways on classical theory.

Symbolic and strategic interaction

In the 1960s, there was renewed interest in connecting personal life to sociological issues. The most important bridge from classical to contemporary was established in Herbert Blumer's work in the tradition of his teacher, George Herbert Mead He named this "symbolic interactionism." The creation of social reality, Blumer argued, is a continuous process. Positivist research methods that break this down into "variables" commonly lose touch with the meaning that was created by actors in interaction. It is important to understand society not as static structures but as potentials that people could use in their future actions and interactions.

Part of the attraction of symbolic interactionism was that it offered insight into the self and society at the same time. This suited it to an era when people placed new emphasis on self-understanding, not least in the context of expansion in the range of choices they could make about their lives. Throwing off constraints was a major theme of the 1960s, an era of

Romantic enthusiasm for self-examination and self-expression. But, as contemporary sociologists showed, the ideal of perfect freedom was illusory. Even sex, drugs and rock and roll were socially organized.

No theorist was more important to this effort than Erving Goffman (excerpted here). Influenced by Mead, Durkheim, the "Chicago School" and classical sociological theory generally (and also by anthropology), Goffman resisted belonging to any one school. He pursued ethnographic studies with theoretical intent – and vast influence. In these, he sought to situate individuals not just in social relationships but in projects of creating and managing their self-understanding at the same time they managed their relations to others. Coping with embarrassment is a repeated and personally meaningful social task (even if sometimes ignored by theorists). We can think of individuals as actors in social dramas, he wrote, presenting themselves in more or less persuasive performances.

Part of what made Goffman's work so important was his focus on ordinary people as they managed social challenges such as stigma, mental illness, repressive institutions, or simply dating in high school. He did not see society mainly through its elites, nor did he see it as obviously harmonious. In this, he fit with and shaped an era of growing appreciation for the life projects of ordinary people and a sensitivity to society as sometimes an obstacle or a challenge as well as usually a necessary condition.

Goffman was perhaps the most powerful influence in the development of "microsociology." This focused on the small picture of face-to-face interaction, not the big picture of politics, economics, functional integration or class conflict. A successful conversation is a social achievement and not always an easy one, Goffman suggested, and commonly dependent on "interaction rituals." Goffman's insight informed decades of research in conversational analysis, a branch of ethnomethodology – the phenomenological study of how people create culture and meaning.

Randall Collins (excerpted here) took the theme of "interaction rituals" forward in a "radical microsociology," seeking to complement Durkheim's understandings of group membership and conflict with attention to the small scale and concrete. For it is not just conversation that has to be socially organized in interpersonal exchanges but also sex – or just holding hands, crime, violence, smoking or not smoking, or starting a business partnership. Institutions maintain themselves through the ritualization of interaction. Conflict results not only from the breakdown of ritual interaction chains but also from mobilizing them into contending social forces – say capitalists and workers, different religions, or police and protestors. In conflicts, action is shaped by rituals, but actors also mobilize ritual interaction chains to try to secure their objectives.

It is common to think of symbolic interactionism and interpretative microsociology generally as completely distinct from strategic or rational choice analysis. Goffman, however, made contributions to both. His accounts of the production and management of meanings and images always included attention to implicit strategies. Indeed, he coined the term "strategic interaction," which later became the title of one of his books, including a chapter based on his presentation to a 1964 conference on "Strategic Interaction and Games" that influenced developments in international relations and economics as well as sociology and social psychology. This introduced him to the dynamic (later to be called or evolutionary) game theory being developed by Thomas Schelling (an economist and

future Nobel economist). Schelling in turn cited Goffman appreciatively for contributions to understanding enforcement and communication in strategic interaction.

Strategic analysis of basic sociological questions is at least as old as Thomas Hobbes' account of why rational individuals in a "state of nature" would choose to give up their freedom for the security of a strong state. The issue remains current today as people debate whether to worry more about policy violence restricting their freedom or crime that poses a demand for policy to provide security. Obviously, balance is desirable. But, achieving balance is itself the kind of problem taken up by analysts of strategic interaction. Building on the exchange theories of George Homans and Peter Blau (both excerpted in *Classical Sociological Theory*), contemporary sociological theorists developed a "rational choice" approach to sociology. This was grounded in methodological individualism – the idea that a good sociological explanation had to make sense of individual action as a crucial building block. As articulated, for example, by James Coleman (excerpted here), this challenged Durkheim, Parsons, and all who approached society as a "whole" sharply distinct from individuals. Critics sometimes confused methodological individualism with a preference for individual autonomy over group solidarity. But as Michael Hechter (excerpted here) famously showed, one could provide a strong account of how rational individuals formed group solidarity.

Both studies of symbolic action and analysis of rational choice inform the idea of "agency." This means the capacity to act effectively, accomplishing one's own goals and potentially changing social relations. Minimal agency is involved in making a simple consumer choice – like which brand of breakfast cereal to buy. There is more when one can choose a career and acquire the education to succeed in it or start a business and secure the capital for it to flourish. This is partly a matter of resources and rational choices. But as Goffman showed, it is also a matter of communication that makes collaboration and social relationships possible. Paying attention to strategy and communication together helps to distinguish agency from action based on emotion or habit or indeed failure to think.

Without agency, people either act without direction or are dominated by social structure. This does not mean they *do* nothing but that their actions are highly constrained. People form relationships partly in order to get things done but also for the pleasure of the relationship itself. They invest relationships with meaning, which is mutually constituted through their interaction. Relationships in turn become factors enabling people to realize their goals. Goffman bridged what is more commonly a divide between interpretative sociology and more formal strategic analysis. Both sides inform the analysis of agency.

Structure, agency, and institutions

At its most basic, structure is the enduring patterns of social organization with which individuals must contend. They can change structure, but usually only over a long period and through collective action. Take the population structure. How many people are young and how many are old will have a big impact on markets, need for schools or old age care, hospitals and sports fields. The age distribution changes if young people marry earlier and have more babies, but the influence of any one pair of

parents is small. It will change if more immigrants are accepted, but this depends on politics and policy, not just individual choices.

Structural patterns are slow to change. Many constraints are produced and reproduced beyond the direct, conscious choices of individuals. Sociologists also want to know how much agency individuals or groups have in guiding this change, but the answer is never complete and full autonomy. Simply to celebrate action without considering constraints is unrealistic. And, constraint is not all conservatism. Consider Georg Simmel's famous contrast of dyads and triads (considered in *Classical Sociological Theory*). These are structural forms. A relationship between two people is changed if a third is introduced. And, there are more complicated versions. Group size is an example. If you mix two groups of very different size, equal contact will have different consequences for each. If a college is 10% black and 90% white, for example, black students will be far more exposed to their white classmates than vice versa. If there are more boys than girls at a dance (or vice versa), guess who will have more trouble finding partners.[1]

Networks work in a similar way. They are material realities based on numbers and patterns of relationships. We can grasp networks intuitively: who do we know? But, this is only part of the story. As the contemporary sociological theorist Harrison White (excerpted here) pointed out, we should also ask who do we *not* know? Think of a high school class where everyone seems to know the popular social stars – but there are many people they fail to recognize. The same logic applies to getting jobs. What credentials you gather is important – degrees and work experience make you a more attractive employee. But, the most important factor is not anything about you – it is whether or not there is a vacancy.

Networks have become an important theme for contemporary sociological theory, entwined with more and more robust empirical analytical techniques. They help to explain everything from transmission of diseases to chances for upward mobility. Networks, in this sense, are distinct from categories. Sociologists had long studied whether people were male or female, old or young, and native born or immigrants. All these categories correlate with social inequality and opportunities, and all are important. But, networks focus more on specific positions in webs of relationships. Not just male or female, but head of household or not. Not just old or young, but boss or employee. Not just native or immigrant, but connected to local elites or only to others in disadvantaged populations. Harrison White's work showed that networks and categories had distinct effects but also that the strongest groups were those in which category and network coincided.

The social bases for agency were challenged by the rising prominence of neoliberal economic ideology. This is the view that social policy should be guided entirely by the preferences and interests of individuals, especially individual owners of property. It is closely related to the classical liberalism that so appalled Karl Polanyi (excerpted in *Classical Sociological Theory*) when it led economists to endorse cutting welfare benefits to those who lost their jobs because of technological change that benefitted the wealthy. In 1987, the neoliberal UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher captured the notion so starkly that she inadvertently caricatured it, saying: "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."[2] Needless to say, this view was not widespread among sociologists.

Contemporary sociological theorists analyzing markets generally side with Polanyi and emphasize what he called "embeddedness." Markets are not an escape from society but

very much a part of it. Take applying for a job. This is an action, and it may build on earlier actions like acquiring educational credentials. But, as Mark Granovetter (excerpted here) showed, social networks shape who has access to information about new job openings. Those with friends and family in good jobs have an advantage. Their social relationships combine with their individual initiative to give them greater agency to realize their goals.

Neither structure nor agency is simply the "right" point of view. They are both important dimensions of social life. But, they are difficult to reconcile. This became a major focus for sociological theory. It is not enough simply to say "balance." It is important to see how categories and relationships are constructed out of meaningful action as well as how they constrain us as structures. It is important to see that structures not only constrain us but also empower us to get jobs or launch social movements. Anthony Giddens (excerpted here) called for "new rules of sociological method" designed to reconcile the two perspectives.

There is also more to social life than structures and actions – even actions with lots of agency. There are, for example, institutions. Whether we speak of family or religion or business corporations, institutions are a combination of structure, patterned ways of action, and cultural meanings. Families can be larger or smaller, for example, and the (structural) trend has been toward fewer children. Family members do not act randomly toward each other but take up more or less common roles (patterned ways of action). At least in principle, parents provide for children, secure their education, make sure they have medical care, and so forth. And families are products of culture. Are they formed of arranged marriages or love matches? How many children couples think they should have or at what age they should have them are views reproduced in culture not merely among individuals. So too how strongly children feel they should care for aging parents.

Specific families, or religious organizations, or business corporations all learn from each other. As Walter Power and Paul Dimaggio (excerpted here) argue, they both imitate and adapt to each other within fields. In essence, families look at other families to see how they should behave. But, they cannott look at all families; they look at those in the same country, and probably class, region, and religion. Likewise, business organizations in an industry will resemble each other more and more. This is not necessarily a matter of conscious choice. It is a matter of what possible actions or structures seem sensible, something that may be partly materially objective but is largely a matter of shared culture. The result is what they call "institutional isomorphism." Companies in the same industry or schools competing for the same students come to look like each other. As Powell and Dimaggio make clear, following Max Weber, this need not be either the result of happy functional integration or of coercive power. It is a pattern produced out of individual actions that in the aggregate become social pressures. Likewise, as Granovetter argues, there are many individual decisions in markets, but they are not the whole story. Markets are embedded in social institutions.

Power and Inequality

Pursuit of stability and prosperity were dominant concerns in the decades after World War II and the Great Depression. Functionalist sociology was dominant partly because it spoke to the desire for social order and gradual improvement. And, in fact, the years after

1945 saw a great deal of orderly progress, building new institutions, and improving social conditions. In France, they came to be called "les trente glorieuses" – the thirty glorious years. In the United States, it was "the postwar boom."

This was an era of building state institutions to provide social support – education, health care, social security, public media, and more. It was an era of relative cooperation between capital and labor. These still had competing interests, of course, but for a time they found negotiated solutions within the frame of "organized capitalism," based largely on public regulation to avoid disruptive confrontations.[3] Nonetheless, for all the eras achieved, there were internal tensions or even contradictions. These became drivers for transformations – including in sociological theory.

Sociologists had always been attentive to power, inequality and difference, but during the period of functionalist dominance after World War II, theoretical emphasis fell overwhelmingly on social integration, consensus, and factors that held society together. When Parsons and other functionalists used the word "power," for example, the emphasis was on the overall capacity of a society, the "systemic" character of social life, and the extent to which social organization fit together so that every feature was necessary to the whole. But, Parsons was less concerned with the ways in which some people wielded power over others and the extent to which such domination shaped social organization.[4]

A new generation of theorists criticized the implicit conservatism in this. They saw functionalist sociology as too supportive of the existing social structure, too focused on achieving stability. While Parsons drew widely on earlier sociological theory, he sidestepped Marx. The new generation looked for different classics largely to help them analyze the inequalities and conflicts they saw in contemporary society. Interest in Parsons declined, and there was new attention to Marx.

Sociological theory was also reshaped by new readings of the classics. While Parsons' interpretation of Weber emphasized legitimate authority, the new generation focused on Weber's critical analyses of oppressive rationalization. They integrated this with Marx's early writings about alienation in the experience of work as much as his mature theory of capitalism as a system. There was a renewal of interest in Adorno, Hokheimer, and other critical theorists who analyzed how social psychology and the construction of knowledge entwined to support authority and close off paths to liberation in modern society. Herbert Marcuse, for example, saw the new consumer capitalism as basic to a "one-dimensional society" that stifled creativity.

More and more sociological theorists presented a model of society in which tensions and struggles were basic and unity was largely maintained by power.[5] Environmentalists condemned exhaustion of resources, dumping of waste, and damaging side effects of new products. Sociologists of gender argued that better kitchen appliances did not compensate for consigning women to work in the domestic sphere. Sociologists of race pointed to inequalities in education, housing, and other dimensions of what were supposedly well-integrated societies. Many younger sociologists identified with the "New Left" that developed in the 1960s. This built on the history of labor struggles but contrasted itself with the Old Left that saw economic issues as always primary. It embraced traditions of radical democracy, the struggle for Civil Rights, and the peace movement.

C. Wright Mills (excerpted here) famously documented the existence of a "power elite." This was more than a matter of simple inequality. Members of this elite were connected to

each other across fields and professions, for example, generals to bankers, politicians to lawyers. They went to the same schools and belonged to the same organizations, like the Council on Foreign Affairs or certain clubs in New York. They were not only privileged; through these connections, they exerted power. Relatedly, Steven Lukes (excerpted here) showed that power was reflected not only in the making of decisions but also in determining what decisions would be on the agenda and shaped the very wants, desires, and attitudes of citizens.

Michael Mann (also excerpted here) offered perhaps the most fundamental theory of social power.[6] This was not, he suggested, just a matter of influence or even control exercised *in* society. Societies themselves were and are organized *as* power networks. Power was deployed hierarchically, of course, but also laterally, determining who and what was brought into a particular network. And, power was evident not only in explicit domination like that of a boss over subordinates but also in forms like what Mann called "infrastructural power" – the capacity to extend bureaucratic systems at a distance. In modern societies, states are able to exert influence and collect taxes as effectively at the geographical edges of countries as at the center.

Mann and other sociologists of the next generation shared with functionalism the question of how society was held together at a large scale. Parsons had called this "the problem of order," tracing it back to Thomas Hobbes. His answer was basically that order was achieved by a system in which the different parts of society met each other's needs and those of society as a whole. Schools, for example, met industry's needs for educated (but also disciplined) workers. Industry in turn met consumers' needs for products. Together, they contributed to society's overall prosperity. But when functionalists said that the social system "worked," critics asked "worked for whom?" Their answers pointed attention to patterns of inequality.

Inequality can of course be organized in different ways, from slavery to a feudal hierarchy to the special privileges bureaucrats and party officials have enjoyed in communist societies. In modern capitalist democracies, citizens are at least legally free to pursue different careers, but they are rewarded unequally. Functionalists, like many economists, have argued that differences in wages and salaries mainly reflect a necessary incentive system.[7] Critics charge that this might justify some inequality, but not the amount typical of modern capitalist societies.

The "incentive" view fits better when there is a high level of social mobility – that is, when large numbers of people are able to move up in the social hierarchy. This was characteristic of Europe and the United States, as the middle class expanded after WWII. Since the 1970s, rates of social mobility have declined sharply. Inheritance explains more of people's economic opportunities – like whether their families can help them buy houses. Not only do more people now find upward mobility blocked, many also experience downward mobility, for example, by losing good jobs with benefits and becoming unemployed or forced to accept work closer to the minimum wage. It is often the same categories of people who inherit better opportunities or more constrained life chances. As Charles Tilly (excerpted here) showed, inequality can be structural and durable without being the result of functional imperatives.

Indeed, in almost all the capitalist democracies, inequality has grown more extreme since the middle of the 1970s.[8] In the 1950s, CEOs were paid about 20 times what a typical

worker earned. In the United States, they now make more than 300 times the average worker's pay. This is not only higher than it used to be, it is higher than in other successful capitalist countries – such as Norway, for example, or France. Pay differentials are shaped by culture and power, not just functional necessity. It is no accident that the United States has not only the highest levels of CEO compensation in the world but also the most violent history of resistance to labor organizing.

More generally, contemporary sociologists point out that inequalities of wealth may be both more extreme and more durable than inequalities of income. The gap between those with $100,000 salaries and those with only $50,000 salaries is real, but it pales by comparison with the gap between those with billions of dollars in assets and all those who must sell their labor to live. It is easier to move wealth – capital – from one country to another or from the manufacturing industry to high-tech IT companies; it is much harder for workers to adjust when their jobs vanish.

Upward mobility is associated with societies in which there are many relatively permeable layers. Sociological theorists contrast such "stratification" systems with class inequality in which divides are sharper. Marx emphasized the categorical difference between owners of the means of production (capitalists) and workers who had no choice but to sell their labor. Class inequality remains a basic concern for sociological theory. It shapes every aspect of social structure.

In and after the 1960s, however, other dimensions of inequality demanded increased attention. Previous analyses of class have often emphasized the situation of white men, but race, ethnicity, and gender have also been basic dimensions of inequality. In each case, power has been mobilized to maintain inequality. And, there are other dimensions: sexual orientation, disability, and immigration status. In each case, contemporary sociological theorists are attentive not only to material inequality but also to issues of voice, cultural expression, and recognition of difference. They focus not only on the explicit exercise of interpersonal power but also on the ways in which culture and social structure distribute power unequally. Even a seemingly equal interaction between men and women or Black and White citizens is typically shaped by their previous experience of established inequalities and power dynamics. Likewise, unequal pay is not just a matter of pay for workers in exactly the same job but also cultural norms for workers in similar jobs. Women working as nurses and teachers are required to have high levels of education but are paid less than men in other occupations with similar requirements.

More generally, contemporary sociology has come to see inequality as a matter of cultural as well as economic capital and of the influence of each on the other.[9] Inequalities are reproduced when parents are able to get their children better education than others. They are shaped by the neighborhoods in which families live. They are shaped by accents in people's speech.

Bourdieu

The most important theorist of the interrelationship of culture and inequality was Pierre Bourdieu (excerpted here). Bourdieu showed ways in which inequality was reproduced through a combination of culture, social structure, and individual internalization and the

challenges of achieving agency for change. We do not just follow norms or rules, we develop habitual ways of acting. Bourdieu called this the "habitus." But this is not just habit; it is also how we improvise new actions, even in new contexts, on the basis of our previous experiences. It is how a basketball player knows when to pass and how a stand-up comedian knows the timing crucial to a joke.[10]

What becomes a part of us in this way is shaped by structural patterns in society, but not so much in the abstract as in the ways we encounter them. We internalize the class structure, for example, from the perspective of where we started out and a trajectory of how we did in school, job applications and promotions, treatment by other individuals – even dating! – and institutions like banks. Our experience of inequality is shaped not only by economic capital – money – but also by cultural capital.

After WWII, for example, there was a massive expansion of public schooling. Attendance through high school became almost universal. This was pursued as an extension of democratic rights and an attempt to create greater equality – and it did open up some opportunities. Bourdieu himself grew up poor, the grandson of a sharecropper and the son of a postman in a rural village in a disadvantaged region. He was able to attend elite schools and become a professor only because of government scholarships. However, Bourdieu pointed out, this was exceptional. Schooling was easily mobilized to reproduce inequality. Middle-class families could do more to prepare their children, and schools made their children feel more comfortable. The children of workers or peasants often felt out of place. Schools used tests to give an apparently objective measurement of performance, but children were not on a level playing field in the first place. And at every stage, there was sorting in which some children were destined for advancement. The "destiny" was not supernatural, however, not even natural. It was at least largely the product of different levels of investment in the children – by their parents, sometimes by teachers, by the state when they were sent to the "better" schools at higher levels and eventually to the top universities. The children of elites were inheritors of their parents' advantages not just by means of direct financial transmission but by the indirect means of schooling.[11]

Bourdieu was influenced by both Weber's analysis of status hierarchies and Goffman's account of the presentation of self in everyday life. He saw society as organized largely through making distinctions – from what food or music or art we like to what political candidates or potential romantic partners.[12] In the abstract, these reflect cultural categories and their structured relations – the food is hot or mild and we label it with ethnic categories such as Mexican or Japanese; the music is raucous or mellow and we label it in genres such as rap or jazz. But each person develops tastes based on experience that is socially ordered, not random. And acting on tastes is always a kind of performance in relation to others. Showing what one likes, that one knows how to use chopsticks, or that one knows how to behave in a fancy restaurant or a loud club is also showing that one fits in to certain groups and sometimes showing off.

Seemingly individual tastes, thus, reproduce unequal social organization – elites are more likely to enjoy classical music or jazz and know how to behave in fancy restaurants; they are more likely to have higher education and lots of money. Everyone may want more money, but they do not necessarily want the tastes elites have, and they like the company of people who share their tastes. And, the formation and expression of tastes is shaped not

only by hierarchy but also by oppositions: jazz is more popular among Black elites and those on the Left; classical music is more white and conservative.

Classifications are occasions for struggle, and what Bourdieu called "symbolic violence."[13] When women are told they are "naturally" more emotional and less rational, or when some forms of sex are said to be "unnatural," this is symbolic violence. The politics of gender seeks to redefine how women are seen and thus what opportunities they have. Struggles for gay rights seek changes in both laws and attitudes that reflect negative classifications.

For Bourdieu, this social organization of tastes is part of a more general theory of inequality, power, and action. The different forms of capital are all distributed unequally: wealth, the cultural capital of prestige, the educational capital of credentials, the social capital of connections. They give people different chances in life as well as different tastes. Lack of capital brings suffering; greater capital confers power. In modern societies, power and capital are organized into fields linked to different kinds of institutions and production: business, government, law, education, health, religion, literature, and art. Each field has its own hierarchy, forms of capital, and characteristic habituses. As C. Wright Mills argued, branches of the power elite may all be connected, but each field is shaped by an interest in maintaining its autonomy. The government seeks not to be collapsed into business; business (or capitalism more generally) seeks not to be dominated by the government. All the cultural fields seek autonomy from both business and government. But, they also need support from markets or the state, so they have to manage these boundaries. And inside each field, there is opposition between those with more autonomy and those with less.

Foucault

Another widely influential contributor to contemporary sociological theory was Michel Foucault (also excerpted here). He was a classmate and friend of Bourdieu's, and they shared both an enduring focus on unequal power and the perspective sometimes called "poststructuralism." The label is potentially misleading for both produced classic works of structuralist analysis. But both also sought to move beyond more or less static approaches, integrating attention to enduring patterns in social and cultural structure with a focus on change and the dynamics of individual action.

Foucault focused on the relationship of power to knowledge, on the relationship of both power and transformations of knowledge to the constitution of modern individuals, and on the development of new techniques of governance and administration – what he called governmentality – that work through positive means more than negative applications of force.

In an early study, Foucault examined the social construction of "madness" and its relationship to shifting ideas of correct knowledge and development of institutions of confinement and eventually psychiatric treatment.[14] He continued with *The Birth of the Clinic*, which included an examination of how the "medical gaze" objectified the body and then more general studies in the formation of kinds of knowledge – different "knowledges" – in distinct historical epochs.[15] These studies came together to shape Foucault's two most important projects.

Discipline and Punish is Foucault's account of how modernity reshaped law enforcement and with it helped to make the modern person. An older logic of punishment

had used dramatic public executions and other physical punishments to make moral examples of criminals. There was no expectation of rehabilitating them, though they might seek to save their souls by confessing their crimes. By contrast, the modern era developed prisons to take prisoners out of the public gaze (as asylums had done with the mad – now called mentally ill). In place of punishment, there was a new emphasis on surveillance. This constant monitoring was evident in the very design of prisons and used in an effort to remake prisoners. By some standards this was more "humane," but it was also a new extreme in social control. All of modern society was reshaped by surveillance, Foucault suggested, including policing but also social work and the collection of all kinds of statistics. This was complemented by governmentality, as citizens were given incentives – sometimes subtle and even hidden – to conform to social norms or government policies. Above all, citizens were made into the agents of their own self-discipline.[16]

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault again noted a modern disciplinary regime. Governing sexuality became an important religious concern, producing a new regime of internalization of responsibility combined with confession. This required constituting a "truth" of sexuality. This involved not just a classification of the morally acceptable and unacceptable but development of the ideas of "normality" and deviance. In addition, sexuality was essentially as something basic to who one *is* by contrast to sexual practices as some things one *does*. Along with the idea of normality, ideals of "performance" were deployed both in hostility toward homosexuals and other "deviants," and in anxieties to conform to expectations, the proliferation of "self-help" and "how-to" books and comparisons of each individual's own experience to that in movies or literature.[17] This was part of the constitution of the modern individual by disciplinary power.

Individualism ideologically presented the self as the fount of freedom, but in fact it was an effect of disciplinary practices. Deployed not only in prisons but also in clinics, schools, workplaces, and even through shopping, these made individuals the agents of self-discipline on behalf of social norms. But, modern states do not rely only on these regimes of disciplinary power. They also use what Foucault called "Biopower." Here, the object of attention is not the individual as such, but whole populations in which individuals are sorted by statistics on everything from birth to life expectancy to public health and processes such as sex and conception, migration, aging, and death are all managed.

Race, Gender, and Intersectionality

Race and gender are central dimensions of inequality. However, race and gender also denote dimensions of difference that are not reducible to inequality even if they are always deeply influenced by it. They are also dimensions of self-understanding, social relationships, culture, and power. How the categories are constituted is as basic as how they figure in inequality.

Understanding race and gender, moreover, is necessarily a matter of connecting structure and action, the relationship of agency to power, and the ways culture and inequality are reproduced in institutions – in other words, all the themes addressed in prior sections of this book.

Race

What we call "race" may seem obvious but is not. It is a complex mixture of observed differences in appearance, putative biological underpinnings, correlations with social or behavioral attributes, inherited assumptions from earlier classifications, dubious histories, and essentialist thinking. It is in large part a product of racism. Understanding here race and racism come from, how they work, and how they are reproduced are basic tasks for contemporary sociological theory.

Essentialism starts with the idea that there is some common denominator that unifies all the members of a particular category and separates them from others. It commonly flies in the face of manifest statistical variation. For inside any group we call a race there is enormous variation which we have to ignore to see it as unitary. It is in this sense that racism made race; it actively produced classifications, not simply responses to pre-existing racial differences.

By the 19th century, the inheritance of previous racial ideas was incorporated into new evolutionary theories. We now see genes at work.[18] Genetics makes clear that there are no sharp boundaries, only statistical patterns with varying degrees of association with popular conceptions of race. Individuals who have themselves tested commonly discover multiracial histories in what they had thought were clear racial identities. These inspire new projects of reconciliation, as, for example, Black and White descendants of Thomas Jefferson connect to each other.[19] As Alondra Nelson shows, reconciliation projects are just one of the ways in which genetics changes how we reckon with the biological dimension of race.[20] Are reparations due to genetically tested descendants of slaves, or should they be embedded in policies to benefit what we treat in general as races today?

The study of race has commonly focused on those marked out as different from whites. Whiteness is sometimes treated as normal and in need of no special explanation; sometimes it is strongly asserted, as by slaveowners, the founders of the Ku Klux Klan, or White Nationalists today. Only recently has "whiteness" become a significant object of sociological study, though as early as 1920, Du Bois famously asked, "But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?"[21]

Essentialism is specious. Yet it persists, and there are recurrent efforts to put the genie of variation back in the bottle of essentialism – and to base policies on racial categories.[22] Why? Because thinking about race is not just an abstract intellectual exercise, but embedded in practical power politics and inequality.

The single biggest factor in modern racism was the slave trade. This gave a powerful motive to classify Africans as both categorically different and inferior even while it deposited those it captured around an increasingly colonized world. The slave trade was part of both European colonialism and the global birth of capitalism. Even as race and racism were organized into specific national histories, there remained what the sociologist Paul Gilroy called a Black Atlantic.[23] Transnational networks shaped racial consciousness and racist responses. This was true for music – as in the multinational history of what became Rap and Hip hop. This was true for literature. The Black Atlantic was not an entirely separate Black culture; it was informed by different national contexts – as, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois was influenced by Marx and Weber as well as American thought and became central to Pan-Africanism. He gave the closing address at the influential First

Pan-African Conference of 1900 and coauthored its "Address to the Nations of the World." This included the line later made famous in *Souls of Black Folk*, "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line."[24] Advanced by leaders in the next generation, including Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, and Julius Nyerere, Pan-Africanism became a transformative social theory as well as a political movement.

In American sociology, however, Du Bois and other leading Black sociologists were often marginalized. Sociologists (mostly white) did study race and racism. They focused on "race relations" and projects of incremental improvement like the work of Booker T. Washington at the Tuskeegee Institute. But they did not integrate the more radical, transformative perspectives of Du Bois, Oliver Cox, or other early Black sociologists into dominant sociological theories or research programs. Resuming the path of sociological theory on which these classical thinkers embarked is now a central task for contemporary sociological theory, as suggested by Aldon Morris (excerpted here).

This requires appreciating both the advances made in long struggles and their limits. Demonstrating agency despite racist obstacles, Black Americans built institutions such as the historically black colleges and universities that provided education – and intellectual life – when admission to other universities was blocked. Workers like Pullman train porters fought to unionize. Most important of all was the great Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This renewed the progress made after the Civil War and reversed it during the Jim Crow era. It brought enormous advances, peaking in 1964–65 with the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. But, it also confronted violent resistance, including the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr.

During the 1960s, a new Black Power movement began to question the goals of assimilation and racial integration. The basic question was how much of their own culture, identity, and claims to respect African-Americans would have to surrender to assimilate. It appeared to many that ending forced segregation (a main goal of the civil rights movement) only addressed half the issue. It questioned keeping Blacks out of white neighborhoods and other preserves but did not question whiteness as such or the extent to which integration was only offered on the condition that Blacks act like whites. It appeared, in other words, as if greater economic and political equality for Blacks was offered at the expense of Black pride – that is, of recognition of the cultural achievements and self-understanding of Blacks themselves. Integration, as Orlando Patterson (excerpted here) suggested, was full of paradoxes. To deny it was clearly racist; to pursue it did not overcome racism. Confronting challenges of racism and shifting patterns of integration (and segregation) is never only a matter of equality. It is also one of recognizing cultural differences and creating solidarities.

Racial formation has never been just a matter of past history. Not only do struggles for social justice continue. So does a process of reproducing thinking – and both social action, and social structure – in terms of race. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant (excerpted here) have shown, racialization is reproduced with new groups in new situations.[25] The way Europeans (and white Americans) thought about Africans influenced how they thought about Native Americans. These were racially othered – again, despite great variation – as they were pushed out of the way and killed to make room for first colonists and then an expanding country. Racist thinking shaped the reception – or rejection – of