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Soc 221
8/30/2022 & 1/1/2022

WEEK ONE

First Class Assignment & Notes

Instructions: Read the 1st chapter to sociological imagination by Mills & The Looking Glass Self by Cooley.

C. Wright Mills. "The Sociological Imagination "Chapter 1: The Promise"

- What does Mills mean by a sociological imagination?

What Mills views as the sociological imagination is an almost hyper-aware doom-and-gloom perspective on society that he hopes would bring about more action. In a more "normal" sense, he hopes for everyone to view the world with context: why do we live in this system? Why did that system come to be? Where in history are we? Etc. I genuinely do think this is helpful, but, then again, it's also framed in such a depressing and almost elitist way by Mills (see my own notes).

- This reading was published in the 1950s. Is it still relevant today? If so, how does it speak to you and your commitments?

It definitely is still relevant today. I am somehow reminded of the Amazon Labor Union, and I can't quite put my finger on why that specific union. Maybe it's just that, Amazon has such shit working conditions that realistically every single warehouse should be unionized. But, without a sociological imagination, which is actively squashed by Amazon's union-busting, there is no hope of a union. Therefore, fostering a sociological imagination (which the ALU pres. Is doing) is incredibly difficult. On a more personal note, the sociological imagination has led me to making a YouTube channel, but also has led me to being a little more depressed. Because my commitments are so intertwined with history, and with the systems in place, that it can be overwhelming at times.

Notes on Mills

- One of the things that concerns me about this piece is the almost elitest nature of it. It really started to become clear at "They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay..." (1) The whole piece revolves around a doom-and-gloom re-reading from an outside & vantage perspective on the goings-ons of the layperson. Certain parts, like this, and like on page 2 ("information often... their capacities to assimilate it", "the skills of reason... exhaust their limited moral energy.") feel really icky.

Charles Cooley, The Looking Glass Self

- Cooley's main term is the looking-glass self: define this term and explain the 3 processes by which a self is formed.

The looking-glass self is a self-image that is influenced by other people. Rather than traditionally saying “I am tall,” (a reallyyyyy simple statement) the looking-glass self really asks: “why do I think I am tall? For who does this matter? Who will judge me or praise me for being tall? Am I proud? Ashamed?” The looking-glass self is made of the three components of how we appear to others, how we believe they will judge us on said appearance, and the feelings we received based on this (pride, shame, etc.).

- This essay was published in 1922. Can you think of an example (or two) of some contemporary practice that illustrates his points (that you could discuss in class)?

1. I am trans. A lot of my transition is for myself, but, there are many aspects of my transition that are for other people. I want to work on my weight to appear more feminine, I want to look pretty and dress nicely so other people praise me and gender me correctly. Pronouns are entirely for the benefit of other people, not for my own. So much of my identity is constructed on the basis that there are other people around me

2. I am smart. This is a bit of a weird one, but the only reason I consider myself smart a lot of the time, is because other people say I am. People judge me on my intelligence, they judge positively, and it gives me pride. There’s definitely a lot more complexity there, but its 6:45 AM I’m still waking up :(

Class #1: 8/30/2022 @ 12:00 PM