



Opinion Article

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Social Scientists Worth Listening to in These Turbulent Times

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Opinion

Herein find a short presentation on some psychologists and sociologists who throw more light than heat on issues of the day. For a thorough discussion of these issues that run across time spans, see Kronick [1].

Albert Bandura died on July 26, 2021 at the age of 95. According to his obituary in the New York Times [2], he was ranked fourth among all psychologists in the terms of citations. Ahead of him were Sigmund Freud, B. F. Skinner, and Jean Piaget. Of the three, Bandura focused on Skinner. He found rewards and punishments too mechanistic in explaining human behavior. When the doll was knocked around, the children imitated/modeled their behavior after what they saw. The power of dolls was present in the stories of favored dolls that were used in social science theory in the Brown v Board of Education study done by Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie. The doll study was actually proposed and implemented by Mamie Clark. Bandura gave his doll the name Bobo. Kenneth Clark was a student of Gunnar Myrdal, who's classic An American Dilemma is more cogent than when he wrote it.

Gunner Myrdal's An American Dilemma sums up in a few words, but many pages, where America is and where she came from. Myrdal states that America speaks of democracy, all men are created equal, motherhood, apple pie, and yet everywhere we see discrimination among class, race, gender, religion, and other lines. An understanding of Myrdal's work clearly explains the opposition to critical race theory, the zero-sum game where whites believe that gains by non-whites mean losses by whites [3,4]. This line of thinking is central to the power of Donald Trump.

Myrdal anticipates the problem areas that Donald Trump mined. He did not find anything new. What he did was unearth and churn historical issues. Myrdal also served as doctoral chair for Kenneth Clark, whose scholarly research led to desegregation of America's schools. Currently America's schools are not only not desegregated, they are more segregated. C. Wright Mills and Gunnar Myrdal are excellent pathways to the understanding and analysis of social class as proposed by Wilkerson [5]. Wilkerson analyzes material drawn from India, Germany, the United States, and a very personal vignette of an airline experience she had. There are some who argue that America is a society with no class structure and that vertical mobility is open to all.

Wilkerson [5], ties slavery to caste when she openly states, "slavery in this land was not merely an unfortunate thing that happened to black people. It was an American innovation, and American institution created by and for the benefit of the dominant caste and enforced by the poorer members of the dominant caste who tied their lot to the caste system rather than to their conscience. Wilkerson sees caste as providing comfort to all regardless of... social position.

Bandura's work has persisted in importance for sixty years based on the following contributions:

- The special cognitive theory of human behavior emphasized people's capacity for self-reflections and human agency.
- He focused on the treatment of mental disorders.

- He stressed that self-efficacy could be reused in the individual's control of their environment.
- His research has been used in education, public health, and psychology.
- Children learn from observing other people's behavior and how this is done can be through learning, modeling, and imitating behaviors.
- Behaviorism was good with rats and pigeons but not much else.

Bandura believed that people had the power to control their lives through their behavior. What is referred to as agency. At a more systemic level, Bandura believed that the social sciences should develop and complement its theories and methods. Emile Durkheim made the same argument a hundred years earlier.

Three books that influence this article are C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite*, Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, and Pulitzer Prize winner Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste*.

Mills juxtaposed culture and intellectualism, which he found lacking in America with power. He said power only wants more power. Mills was not really interested in wealth and income inequality. He was interested in democracy and power inequality [6]. President Eisenhower warned of the military industrial complex in much the same way as Mills. The issue was power inequality based heavily on income disparities. This leads to the nexus of wealth and power. Do counselor education programs and psychology teach this? Are counselors and psychologists broaching this in session? There is no doubt wealth and power are a powerful duo. In America and everywhere else, those who possess wealth have power. Mills saw the evolution of power elite where, regardless of the issues of the same group, the power elite made the decisions. This is what raised concerns for President Eisenhower. Mills died much too young. His lifestyle of motorcycle riding and heavy drinking and smoking was a precursor of his premature death.

We are free to the extent we know what we are about. Tom Hayden – student leader in the 1960's and husband of Jane Fonda. Mills emphatically urges that "in this particular epoch a conjunction of historical circumstances has led to the rise of an elite power: that the men of the circles composing this elite, severally and collectively, can make such key decisions as are made and that gives the enlargement and the centralization of the means of power now available, the decisions that they make carry more consequence for

more people than has ever been the case in the world history of mankind."

This prescient quote from Mills is references in this synopsis of critical race theory that is inundating our school and our news. "Critical Race Theory is the age-old academic promise that racism still permeates much of American life and America systems. Legal, criminal justice, health, and education among them.

Examples from each of these systems are all too easy to enumerate. In a court of law, one of the best predictors of guilt or innocence is one's lawyer. Socioeconomic status in intersection with race will play strong roles in lawyer selection and decisions made by judges and juries. Those decisions play a major role in sentencing. Non-white lower-income defendants are more likely to be found guilty and to receive harsher sentences than white defendants. Life in prison can and often is harsher while incarcerated for inmates of color. During Trump's presidency, he told low-income whites that at least you are better off than those blacks.

In education, black and brown and especially red children do significantly less well academically and socially than white children. Healthcare disparities are shown across the healthcare system beginning with births. Data show that white physicians do not listen to mothers who are black. Serena Williams, star tennis player, is a prime example of this. If Serena couldn't get competent care, imagine what happens to the average person [1].

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of Interest

Author declare no conflict of interest.

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