

Name
Introduction to Sociology 1301.
1/1/2013

3 PERSPECTIVES ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Use each of the 3 major sociological perspectives to discuss the issue addressed in the news story which Prof. Mike will assign. What would each type of theorist have to say about it? First, study and understand all the handouts/lectures on the 3 perspectives. Start with an intro, *briefly* summarizing the broad issue. Do not worry about the details of the news story—just the basic issues.

Functionalist Theory

What would a functionalist talk about? Well-functioning societies need everyone to work together, according to Durkheim. What does this issue have to do with social forces between individuals and society? What keeps everyone together on the same page or apart? What's missing which would keep society functioning better? Perhaps focus on bonds, roles, solidarity, or latent functions. Not all social bonds/forces are necessarily good for the individual, but might be for the collective.

Conflict Theory

What would a conflict theorist talk about? Look for class conflict—are there two classes competing against each other? Identify how one class wins, one loses. A member of the losing class will be disadvantaged. What is the *social structure* which keeps the conflict going? In this class, use the term "conflict" only as it occurs between 2 classes (don't ever use this just for conflicts between individuals). Remember class can be defined by race, ethnicity, culture, religion or any other category people cannot easily change.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

What would a symbolic interactionist talk about? Think of how people learn the meaning of a symbol/idea (however they interpret it) and how it influences *individual attitude and behavior*. What stereotypes emerge? Do meanings differ between people who interpret it differently? Don't just claim that something is a symbol and affects people. Discuss how people learn the meaning of the symbol/idea, learn how to react to it, and then teach others the same.

CONCLUSION

Conclude with a summary. There is no fixed length for this paper—write what is necessary to demonstrate your understanding of the perspectives (hopefully not more than 3 pages). Be concise and precise in wording—keep revising to make it clear and short. This is an exercise in applying theory to social issues. Do not give your value judgements on the issue. Do not write “I believe that...” or “In my opinion...” Use a standard college paper format: APA style, Times Roman, double-spaced, 12pt (not Word's often default 11pt), 1” margins, stapled. If you cite anything, make sure references are at the end. Use no cover sheet, plastic covers, footnotes, funky fonts or colors. Use spellcheck, and doublecheck it. With the exception of double-spacing, try to save paper.

PAPER EXAMPLE (BY ROY BURKE)

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROPOSED TEXAS VOTER ID LAW

Texas Senate Bill 14, also known as Texas voter ID law is the most restrictive voter ID legislation in the country. The voter ID law in Texas states that Texans will be required to show photographic identification before they can vote. Republicans site voter fraud as their basis for the new legislation but Democrats with support from a number of studies, say voter fraud is largely non-existent. Hispanic leaders argue that the Texas voter-identification law is a purely political move by the Republicans to suppress the voting rights of Latinos and blacks who have historically favored Democrats.

Opponents armed with the state's own data say a Hispanic registered voter is between 46.5% and 120% more likely than a non-Hispanic voter to lack photographic identification. Between 2000 and 2010 Texas added four million people to its population, and 90% of them were Hispanics. During this same time non-whites have become the minority in Texas, shrinking to 45.3% while Latinos accounted for 65% of Texas's population growth.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Sociologists use three major theories to study human behavior and society. One of these theories is known as symbolic interactionism which is a perspective that the things we attach meaning to, also called symbols are the key to understanding how we view the world and each other. Charles Horton Cooley stated in *The Looking-Glass Self*, "The thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind."

Upon looking at this statement it could be perceived that we as a society view ourselves in a certain way and attempt to make others look at us in that same way. The Republican or

conservative side of the voter identification law pits primarily the middle and upper class against everyone else. They want to be viewed as caring and compassionate but also as strict followers of the law and Constitution. They say they want every vote counted to be fair and accurate. The Democrat or liberal side of this law focuses more on the rights and well being of the poor and minorities. Democrat and Hispanic leaders view themselves as the defenders of the rights of these groups and feel that is how they are viewed by them.

The focus of this law according to opponents is to disenfranchise voters that would normally vote democratic. Historically this means minorities and the poor who may view this as an attack on them and a perceived reflection from others that they don't matter because they are poor or not the right color

Functional Analysis

The second theory used to study behavior and society is functional analysis which is the idea that society is a whole unit, made up of parts that work together. Robert Merton might look at the voter identification law as a whole and view it as a good thing for society. Anything that purports to make something fair for everyone is a good thing. The manifest function of this law is confidence in the voting process and of a fair outcome. There could also be a latent dysfunction to the voter identification law in that it may disenfranchise poor and minority voters. The Texas Legislature only provided a narrow list of acceptable forms of picture identification which would require the registered voter to have to purchase a specific form of identification. Another latent dysfunction could be the distance some people would have to travel to acquire the required identification which could impose another hardship for those in remote areas. One might argue that this law would have a manifest function for the republican's. If the proposed identification

requirements do impose a greater burden to the poor and to minorities it would benefit the Republican Party while taking votes away from Democratic candidates.

Conflict Theory

The third and final theory used to study behavior and society is conflict theory. The conflict theory contends that a society is composed of groups that are competing with one another for the same but scarce resources. Karl Marx, the founder of the conflict theory, might look at the Texas voter identification law much in the same way he viewed the industrial revolution. He would label the Republican and conservative establishment as the bourgeoisie, and the minority and poor population as the proletariat.

The Republican lawmakers in Texas want to remain in power and make sure future Republican's are elected. Keeping the conflict theory in mind and the principle of the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat, what better way to do this than to cut out the competition, so to speak. If the Texas voter identification law is truly class warfare and it is allowed to stand, the Republican Party would theoretically benefit based on Texas's own studies. The bourgeoisie (the Republican Party) would essentially be viewed as the small group of capitalist's that suppress and exploit the masses, if it were to be shown later that the minorities and the poor were disenfranchised by this law.