

My reaction to the  
sociological  
imagination chapter  
one assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

After reading The Sociological Imagination Chapter One: The Promise by C. Wright Mills, I had mixed emotions about multiple topics in which he discussed. The overall subject of the Sociological Imagination is one that I found to be confusing. Firstly, I agree with his statement that, "Nowadays people often feel their private lives are a series of traps," (Mills 1). This statement is then followed by the acknowledgement that humans, as individuals, are nothing but spectators of our everyday milieu.

When going about our daily lives, many individuals feel as if they must do certain things because they cannot overcome the obstacles standing in their way. I agree with this idea because I personally feel as if some days I am "trapped" in my own life, and there is nothing I can do to escape. Whether this is with my daily high school schedule, daily work schedule, or even my weekly AC schedule, I feel as if there is no way out. I become so caught up in everything at once that I just want to "break free" in a sense, escaping for just an hour, so I can relax.

The second point he conveys, is the idea that individuals can only fulfill their fate in accordance to the moving of their place in the hierarchy of one's surroundings. One example indicating social stratification is how ranking individuals allows for the knowledge of fate, such as a given class rank in high school. The class rank is a numerical value given to each student allowing for them to know where they stand while being compared to their peers. The previous example demonstrates how I also agree with Mills' idea.

However, there were also numerous topics that contradict my opinion and I am not in complete accordance with. One of these topics that Mills discusses,

but I do not agree with it when he states, "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both," (Mills 1). My reaction to this quote is that I believe it is false. I personally believe that to understand the life of an individual, one does not need to know the history of their society. If one would trace history back far enough, everyone will end up back at the same few places.

Therefore, making all history of society even and unnecessary to understand the life of an individual. Although I disagree with this idea, I understand Mills' idea of the historical involvement. Overall, this chapter of Mills' work left me with a reaction of mixed emotions. I agreed with some aspects of his work, yet disagreed with certain aspects of his work. I never thought of an individual and history in a co-ordination together. I also would have never thought of a daily life being "trapped".

This chapter led me to want to further read into the ideas of social positions, social values, and social troubles and issues. My final reaction to this chapter is that Mills' has a unique way of thinking, and it led me to personally have mixed emotions to his overall work. The first main point of C. Wright Mills' chapter that I found to be appealing is the idea of social positions. It should be clarified that social position is not discussing positions in terms of physical location, but as a hierarchical stature. It is similar to that of the location on the totem pole.

Mills notes [Imagination] is the idea that the individual can understand her own experience and gauge her own life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in her circumstances," (Mills 2). This quote is showing that in

order for individuals to know their own future, they must know where they rank in place with everyone else. Another phrase that may also seem applicable here, is self-consciousness. Knowing everyone's locations allows individuals to estimate where they may be in a few years, without over or under estimating themselves.

If they see someone who is relatively close to their own social status being successful, they can then come to the conclusion that they too, will be successful. Their social position can then help them look back in history and see where they may be able to assist in the current making of history. Every person lives out a biography during their lifetime, and it helps shape society, even though their input is minor to the current history making (Mills 2).

Social positions have helped shape history from generation to generation.

The second point I would like to discuss, is the idea of social values. A value is something that holds importance and meaning to someone or a group of people. When asked a question regarding public issues and private troubles, Mills responds quite simply that, " To formulate issues and troubles, we must ask what values are cherished yet threatened, and what values are cherished and supported, by characterizing trends of our period, (Mills 5). By this quote, Mills shows the importance values have on society, and that they must be characterized depending on how they make people feel.

The state of an individual is directly related to the state of their values.

People experience well-being when they have values that are not being threatened. This is due to the fact that they have nothing to worry about, and they can go through their day in a normal fashion. However, when the

opposite occurs, and the individual has values that they feel are being threatened, the individual then experiences a crisis. A crisis is a sudden change or a stage of danger. Furthermore, if all of the individual's values are threatened at the same time, they experience a full panic, overwhelming fear.

In continuance, if one does not know of any cherished values nor experience any threat, they are in a state of indifference. In addition to the above, the final feeling is the experience of uneasiness or anxiety. This occurs when the individual is unaware of cherished values, yet feels a threat. Often people have these feelings, but are unaware of the direct cause of them. One example Mill uses in his work is the time period after World War Two. He mentioned how not everyone was aware of the values, but all felt a threat. From the previous one can conclude that there was a full feeling of uneasiness in America.

As one can now see, values play an important role in society and in the individual. The final idea that I would like to acknowledge is the idea of social troubles and issues. There is a distinct difference between troubles and issues, and Mills makes that very clear in his work. According to Mills, "Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his or her immediate relations with others...," (Mills 4). In other words, troubles are the problems that are concerned with the self and personal awareness within their direct surroundings.

Troubles are private matters to an individual and occur when their values seem threatened. He also states that, "Issues have to do with matters that

transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of her inner life," (Mills 4). This also means that they are public matters, and become a problem when the public group of people is as large as a few communities. There are many common examples showing the difference between troubles and issues. Unemployment is a perfect example to differentiate between the two.

Unemployment as a trouble is if one man is unemployed, and as an issue is if ten percent of the nation's workers are unemployed. As one can see, the trouble is personal and the issue is public. Another example is war. The trouble of war is the need to survive and to make money out of it as a career. The issue of war is the cause and effects on others, therefore making it public. Those are examples of the major differences between troubles and issues. In conclusion, after reading the article *The Sociological Imagination Chapter One: The Promise* by C. Wright Mills, I had an overall feeling of mixed emotions.

I strongly agreed with some of his topics, while disagreeing with others. Throughout the entire paper I was capable of understanding Mills, even while in disagreement. The topic I found to be most appealing was the fact that some individuals feel a sense of being "trapped" within their own lives. Although it sounds contradicting, Mills was capable to explain the idea thoroughly and fully. I also believe that with the understanding of social position, values, along with troubles and issues one is fully capable of understanding the Sociological Imagination.