

Social Class Lens

Hogan

The Social Class Lens

- Marx “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Each system, up to and including capitalism, was characterized by the exploitation of one class by another.
- Capitalism, according to Marx, is the cruelest, most efficient system yet evolved for the exploitation of the working majority by a small class of owners.

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- Becker (contemporary Economist from U of C)
- He explains that his framework of analysis is not a traditional self-interested motivation but an analysis based on a set of assumptions and individual preferences. Agents are maximizing welfare, which is based on individual conception constrained by income, time, and imperfect memory and calculation capabilities. People are constantly making decisions based on complex incentives.
- We weigh costs and benefits all the time making a mixture of rational and irrational decisions (some of which can be predicted mathematically).

Social Class in Literature

- Explore the ways in which different social groups of people are represented in texts. Evaluate the level of social realism in the text--how is the society portrayed?
- Look at the effects of power drawn from economic or social class.
- Look at the incentives motivating characters' decisions.
- Evaluate the costs and benefits of characters' decisions.

Discussion

- Have you considered the social class lens in your reading before? With what texts? How did that consideration affect your reading of the text as a whole?
- For example, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, who has the power and who doesn't? Which struggles could be considered class conflicts? What competing incentives influence the characters?

Discussion

- The Social Class lens emphasizes the importance of paying attention to class conflicts, power struggles, and how we place ourselves within the particular social structure in which we find ourselves. Where are you, relative to where power and money is located?
- What are some “economic” decisions you make on a daily basis? In what situations do you evaluate the costs and benefits of the decisions you make?