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Césaire, Mills, & de Beauvoir in Sociological Theory

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*The values and priorities of sociology as a discipline have changed dramatically over the past 70 years. Theories of race, class, and gender that had been excluded or marginalized in the positivist twentieth century now make up the classical core of social justice reading lists. Where did these central ideas germinate from? This article identifies and illustrates the influence of three representative theorists: Aime Césaire, C. Wright Mills, and Simone de Beauvoir. These three are commonly read for their incisive critiques of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, respectively. Focusing mainly on a critical appraisal of their principal texts in these respective areas -- Césaire's (2000[1950]) *Discours sur le colonialisme*; Mills' (1956) *Power Elite*; and de Beauvoir's (2009 [1949]) *Le Deuxième Sexe* -- I draw attention to the enduring ideas of inequality, domination, and oppression that appear in contemporary sociology.*

Keywords: theory; social justice; Aime Césaire; C. Wright Mills; Simone de Beauvoir; history of sociology.

Introduction

Lester Ward (1900:829) once wrote of Veblen's (1899) *The theory of the leisure class*, "The trouble with this book is that it contains too much truth." Though penned admiringly, this is perhaps the reason that early critiques of inequality present in the field have only recently been assimilated. (Deegan, 1988; Morris, 2015) Decades after Jane Addams and Albion Small, post-war activist-scholars began to take a more radical approach to addressing social problems.

A critical reading of the principal texts of Aime Césaire (2000[1950]), C. Wright Mills (1956), and Simone de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]) illustrates critical influences on contemporary activist-scholarship. Their influence was attained, not solely on the strength of their ideas, but also because these ideas became embedded in successful mass movements in the second half of the twentieth century. These three are a selection from a fair number of theorists about whom this could be said.ⁱ Nevertheless, these three represent the movements from which they came rather well. Over the intervening 70 years, race, class, and gender are today among the more popular areas of research in sociology. The make-up of the sociological canon itself is now in question (Ray, 2013).

The influenceⁱⁱ of these three scholars, and the intellectual movements which they here represent, can be seen today in (1) the widespread attention paid to issues of inequality; (2) the innovative use of humanistic sources of data; (3) the embeddedness of their ideas in social and political movements; (4) the employment of non-neutral polemics against inequality.

The theorists discussed here were as much political as they were theoretical. I quote extensively from the principal texts, especially to illustrate the use of non-neutral polemics. I use the 2009 translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chavallier (2009), most scholarship in sociology having used the 1953 version. This newer translation is more loyal, more complete, and partially clearer, restoring sweeping cuts that had been made in the

original English translation (Thurman, 2009). Three tables illustrate where broad contemporary social dynamics that the theorists address now stand. The data from these tables come from UNCTAD, ECOWAS, and other development agencies. I also include descriptive statistics gathered from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the US Department of Education, and the American Sociological Association. I briefly discuss peer-reviewed syllabi compiled in a database maintained by ASA TRAILS (American Sociological Association, 2021) to identify the extent to which these scholars are taught. My reading and short translated quote from Roger Caillois' (1955) article on Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* is meant to contextualize Césaire's critique of mid-century metropolitan intellectuals. Similarly with de Beauvoir, my reading of Ingrid Galster's (1996) evidence of de Beauvoir's involvement with Radio Vichy during WWII complicates her many years of activism and opposition to anti-Semitism after the war. I use the 2009 translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, most scholarship in sociology having used the 1953 version.

Césaire

Aime Césaire was a principal critic of European (especially Francophone) colonialism, which he viewed as destructive to the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Coining the term *négritude*ⁱⁱⁱ, Césaire built a critical theory and social movement illustrating a Pan-African pride influenced by the Harlem Renaissance.^{iv} Often essentialist about identity, but not exclusively so (Diagne, 2015), Césaire offers one of the most formidable^v formulations of anti-colonial discourse. While only recently included in mainstream social theory texts (Lemert, 2013) and sociological theory syllabi (Kidd, 2010), Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme (Discourse on Colonialism; henceforth Discours)* remains one of the clearest and most damning treatments of the subject.

Colonialists, Césaire argued, are hypocrites, at once articulating a civilizing project while carrying out unspeakable atrocities in Madagascar, Peru, and India. While Pizarro and Vasco da Gama introduced European practices to lands far flung from the Iberian Peninsula, these were violent events that led to centuries of domination. Colonialism, in Césaire's view, vanquished local cultures to leave a European imprint. Colonialism replaces disparate local identities with an inferior subalternity. The history of human empires had never before, nor since, seen such dramatic territorial and cultural expansion. Reserving his ire especially for the French colonization of his home country of Martinique, Césaire's treatment is wide-ranging.

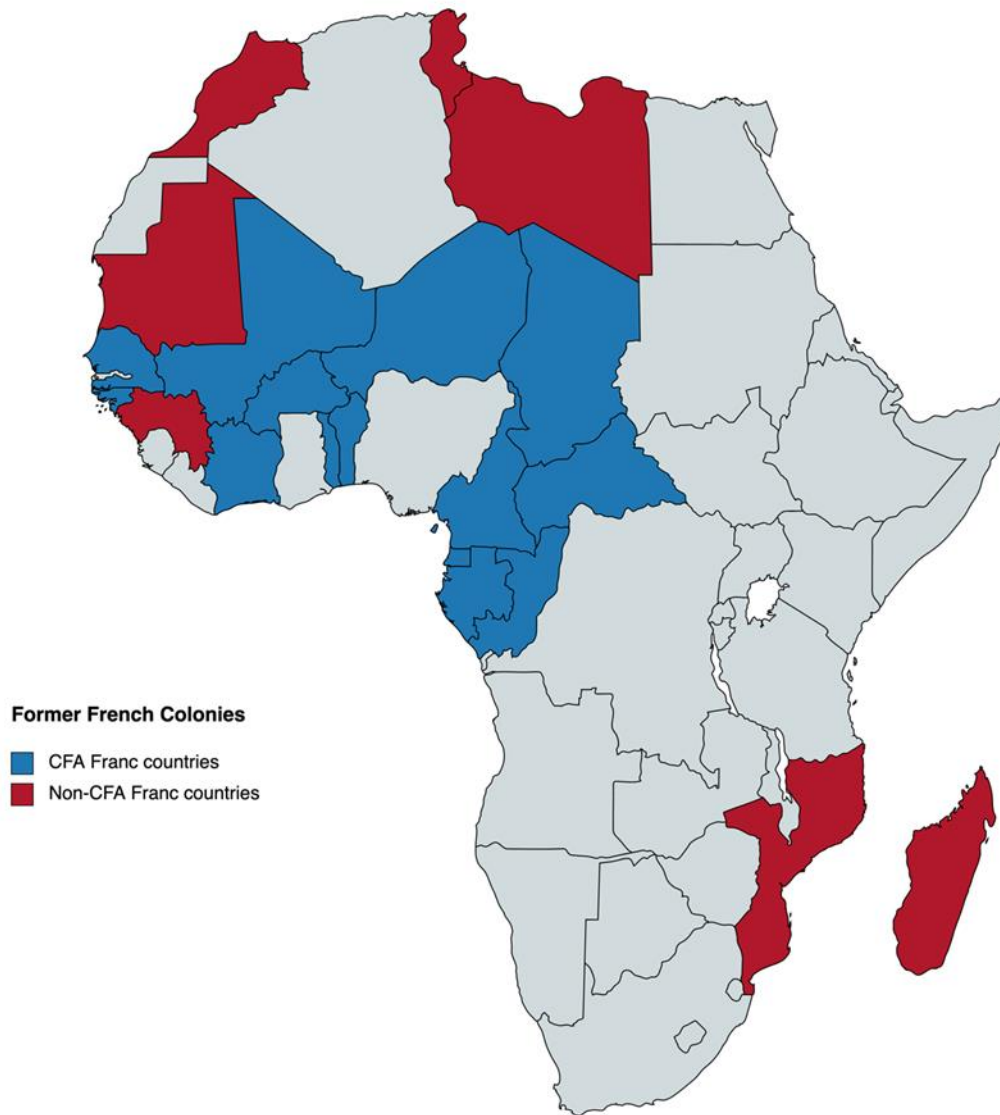
Postcolonial scholars had been critiquing the excesses of Western colonialism since at least the October Revolution of 1917. They were influenced by the work of Karl Marx and inspired by independence movements throughout Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Instead of relying on the Enlightenment ideas coming out of the French Revolution, most of these movements, and the postcolonial scholars that supported them, relied on some combination of Leninism, liberation theology, and vanguardism. Many revolutionaries and revolutionary scholars viewed communism as a natural response to decadent bourgeoisie capitalism.

Discours characterizes colonization as a decivilizing event. By that Césaire means that the incipient civilization is erased in order to make room for the imposition of European practice. Influencing the work of Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, Césaire pinpoints colonization as the source of exclusionary social dynamics (Gordon, 2017). The argument about colonization's faults has become so successful that it has the danger of seeming almost obvious. This makes it difficult

to appreciate that this was not at all obvious in the middle of the 20th century. It was difficult for Western scholars at that time to notice that Latin America, Africa, or Southeast Asia had any civilization worth mentioning. While Césaire's rhetorical and analytic ideas had influential progenitors, his offensive also echoed through mid-century liberation movements.

Even today, while opinions may vary about France's direct influence over its former colonies, the fact of its influence is evident to even the casual observer. Césaire's home country of Martinique has been an overseas department of France since the expulsion of Nazi control during WWII. Martinique is one of ten populated overseas departments and territories where the French government enjoys political authority. Economically, more than half of France's former African colonies use the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine) Franc.^{vi} The Banque de France continues to serve as guarantor, keeping the currency equal in value to the Euro. The Quai d'Orsay counts over 600 French companies operating in Côte d'Ivoire alone, accounting for 30% of that country's GDP (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, 2021). In 2020, French corporations and individuals invested the equivalent of 1.5 trillion US\$ making France the third largest foreign investor in the world behind China and Japan. (OECD, 2021) France funds hundreds of development projects on the African continent, ranking them third behind the UK and the Netherlands in outlays to the continent (UNCTAD, 2021). Except for raw materials and agricultural products, the region is heavily dependent on imports (ECOWAS, 2016). Airlines usually route flights out of West Africa through Paris. Adding the Belgian colonies, well over one-hundred million Francophones reside on the continent.

Figure 1. Former African Colonies of France by CFA Franc currency use, 2021



*Guinea-Bissau and Equatorial Guinea use the CFA Franc today but were never colonies of France.

While Césaire’s life stood athwart these trends, many West African counties themselves see foreign direct investment as an essential component of their plans for economic development (S. Adams, 2009).

For colonists engaged in this practice with eyes wide open, he indicts. After connecting colonial brutality to that of Adolf Hitler during WWII, Césaire encapsulates his own view with equal parts pith and mirth thusly: “Colonization: bridgehead in a campaign to civilize barbarism, from which there may emerge at any moment the negation of civilization, pure and simple” (p. 40). Europe

had been no stranger to bloodletting. Césaire quotes Francophone colonizers themselves, illustrating the capriciousness of their callous.

As long as Europe viewed colonization as a benign communication of superior practice across space, they would be blind to injurious outcomes of their own making. King Leopold's holocaust in the Congo and Colonel Dyer's massacre in the Punjab were not isolated incidents discrete from liberal humanism. Rather, colonial atrocities were integral manifestations of the widespread and willful blindness of Europe to the ethical cost of material supremacy. Classical wars of supremacy akin to the Punic Wars bear no resemblance to the Congo Free State, where tens of thousands of tons of rubber left for European ports at the cost of millions of Congolese lives.

This line of attack became increasingly common among postcolonial scholars and activists against racism and white supremacy. It took longer to penetrate the mainstream of sociology. W.E.B. DuBois' scholarship was actively opposed throughout his career^{vii} (Morris, 2015). This active censorship of important scholarship on the part of mainstream white sociologists had the effect of biasing the field toward erroneous ideas about the Great Migration and about racial conceptions in general (Schwartz, 2020). This censorship was not a benign aberration, but an intentional effort to protect false Social Darwinistic ideas from the rigors of empiricism (Schwartz, 2017).

Where Césaire may have gone wrong is in his romanticization of the vanquished, calling them "democratic," "cooperative," and "content to be." This was perhaps true vis-à-vis a militarily superior Europe, but certainly not amongst themselves. Pre-hispanic Americans documented their own bloodletting and sacrificial practices that are not much more resplendent (Stuart, 1984). But taken in context, such romanticization was perhaps a necessary correction to the equally romantic view of Europe that prevailed. Césaire, however, is also hyperbolic about the European professional classes, listing them as:

“[...] goitrous academics, wreathed in dollars and stupidity, ethnographers who go in for metaphysics, presumptuous Belgian theologians, chattering intellectuals born stinking out of the thigh of Nietzsche, [...] the agrarian sociologists, [...]” (p. 54)

along with others as “all hateful, all slave-traders, all henceforth answerable for the violence of revolutionary action” (p. 55). Anything but abstract, Césaire draws a red line between “all those [...] performing their functions in the sordid division of labor for the defense of Western bourgeois society” and revolutionary communists. He devotes six pages attacking French sociologist Roger Caillois, an antifascist and friend of Georges Batallie, beginning his sarcastic volley with, “I almost forgot hatred, lying, conceit. I almost forgot M. Roger Caillois” (p. 68). A footnote leads to an article in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, where Caillois warmly reviews the work of anthropologist and anti-racist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955). In it, Caillois actually defends the use of violence by indigenous people in the Caribbean against “Spaniards sending commissions to decide whether the Americans had a soul” (1955, p. 59). Césaire takes aim at quotes where Caillois is actually defending equal protection under the law against eugenicists. Césaire's critique is somewhat vindicated, however, as Caillois does invoke Western “supériorité” as he sometimes questions Lévi-Strauss' claims about the universality of the human character:

In the end, is it really fair to argue that all peoples apply the same ingenuity to produce equivalent inventions, and that the West's pride at their own superiority in this area is unfounded, even if they do so with a dose of humility? It is not that different peoples are unequally talented, but it rather seems that they are quite variably invested in efforts of rigorous investigation (1955, p. 62).

Those few who still engage with this kind of civilizational analysis today prefer structural and socioeconomic analyses (Hall, 2004) or religion and culture (Arjomand, 2021) as explanatory factors.

The disagreement between Césaire and Caillois may be at least partially political. Himself a life-long communist, Aime Césaire held party positions both in Martinique and France (Viveros-Vigoya, 2019) whereas Caillois is better known for his avant-garde playfulness (Caillois, 2001[1961]).

It is plain to appreciate Césaire's critical logic of colonialism. Césaire stands apart from the broader context of mid-twentieth century intellectualism. In both substance and style, Césaire's critique of Western intellectuals has influenced contemporary ideas of social justice and informs the prehensible divide between social justice and "metaphysical" pursuits. Proponents of praxis also here turn to Fanon (1965) or Scott (1985) as they engage with the urgency of action for global populations.

Mid-century revolutionary movements and many of the more radical social movements of the 1960's, 70's, and 80's also critiqued, and sometimes attacked the participants of Western capitalism. This led them to hijack international airliners, to plant bombs in trendy cafés, and to kidnap unwitting children. Many of the communist revolutionaries successful in taking state power managed to mimic the very brutality of the colonizers they once criticized.

But this textured view of the tradition that Césaire represents is probably a more useful one for his successful incorporation into more reading lists. Césaire continues to influence scholars and students throughout the social science curricula (Nikoi, 2019). Césaire's thinking is increasingly being viewed in its best light. Scholars wishing to "decolonize" sociology widely cite Césaire, and with good reason. But such corrections need not be generalizing and uncritical.^{viii}

Mills

If not beloved, at least better known to even the most mainstream sociologist is C. Wright Mills for his concept of the sociological imagination. Anything but mainstream himself, his Che Guevara-like mystique notwithstanding, Mills' *Power Elite* took on conventional notions of meritocracy in American hierarchies. Particularly important among critical sociologists, "Mills was undoubtedly the intellectual most widely read and studied by the New Left, especially the burgeoning student movement of the 1960s" (Aronowitz, 2012). Tom Hayden, author of the Port Huron Statement, "was very influenced by Mills" (Treviño, 2004) and Robert Ross, a fellow member of Students for a Democratic Society at Michigan was "seized by the power of Mills's [sic] language, by his craft, his anger, by the power of the powerful he depicted"(1991). Mills absorbed Midwest populism during his time in Madison (Cosser, 1971), tapping into a long history of American grassroots movements (Esparza, 2012; Schwartz, 1976). Some contemporary

detractors may question Mills' status as a theorist, but excerpts of Mills' work are assigned in dozens of sociology syllabi in the United States.^{ix} It would be difficult to tell a story about how sociologists came to be concerned with economic inequality without discussing Mills.

If Césaire was concerned with hierarchy's colonial origins, Mills was concerned with its American manifestation as the power elite. Less Marxian than Césaire, Mills emphasizes that the power elite are not as aware of their power as are their critics (p. 4). Operating much in the same way as how contemporary activists use the term "privilege," Mills argues that power is nearly invisible to those who wield it. This power elite is composed of a tripartite network of political, economic, and military leaders located within "interlocking directorates" that grant these individuals their social position.

The "power elite" is a somewhat more general term than the "1%" used by some of today's movements. Mills details certain cultural markers that set blue blood apart from the nouveau riche but also demonstrates this stratification further. The power elite, for Mills, waltz in exclusive social clubs, send their children to Groton, and sportfish in Cabo. As such, Mills' concept allows for social mobility through proximity to and adoption of these and other cultural markers. "A typical local woman," he illustrates,

could work herself to the bone on civic matters and never be noticed or accepted by the executives' wives. But if it became known that by some chance she happened to be well acquainted with a metropolitan celebrity, she might well be 'in' (p. 44).

Mills bemoans,^x too, the mid-century displacement of geographic wealth away from his native Texas. Ranchers, while still profitable, began to be overshadowed by New York's Madison Avenue executives. American wealth had been centralizing since the Civil War (a trend that has not abated), having allowed for local power structures before then.

The power elite are those middle and middling members of the political, economic, and military class that, by virtue of their interlocking and exclusionary networks, have outsized influence on national politics. Mills' analysis is detailed and clinical in parts, and fiery in others. Anticipating the growth of the corporation, Mills writes that "American corporations seem more like states within states than simply private businesses" (p. 124). Today, the market capitalizations of the top five global corporations supplant the GDP of all but the main contenders in WWII and their closest allies (See Table 1).

Table 1: Top 15 Global Entities (Expressed in US\$ Billion)

Rank	Entity	Nominal GDP* / Market Cap**
1	United States	22,940
2	China	16,863
3	Japan	5,103
4	Germany	4,230
5	United Kingdom	3,108
6	India	2,946
7	France	2,940
8	Apple	2,600
9	Microsoft Corp	2,523
10	Italy	2,121
11	Canada	2,016
12	Alphabet Inc (Google)	1,983
13	Saudi Aramco	1,920 ^{xi}
14	Korea	1,824
15	Amazon.com Inc	1,798

*Source: International Monetary Fund, 2021 Current Price Estimate. (IMF, 2021)

**Source: Nasdaq, 16 November 2021.

† Shade indicates publicly traded company

Mills warns readers of tax loopholes, the outsized influence of mass media, and loose congressional outlays to the military. He does so precisely and insightfully in parts, but having spent so much time immersed in this dour reality, Mills often succumbs to florid broadsides:

All over the world, like lords of creation, are those who, by travel, command the seasons, and, by many houses, the very landscape they will see each morning or afternoon they are awakened. Here is the old whiskey and the new vice; the blonde girl with the moist mouth, always ready to go around the world; the silver Mercedes climbing the mountain bend, going where it wants to go for so long as it wants to stay (p. 92).

Mills’ contemporaries often criticized him for straying from the numbers. Where others may have listed property valuations, Mills employs rhetorical flourish. But as Alan Wolfe (2000) points out in the afterward to a recent edition,

not much of the academic sociology of the 1950s has survived, while *The Power Elite* is rivaled by only very few books of its period in terms of longevity (p. 378).

Where Mills shines is in his close reading of written and cultural text. Mills makes astute observations about the psychological manipulation of mass society. He quotes at length from John Adams’ (1805) *Discourses on Davila*. Comparing Adams to Veblen, Mills notes that Adams anticipated Veblen’s ideas about status and prestige. Calling Adams “shrewder psychologically” than Veblen, he goes on to illustrate why Adams deserves to be more widely read by sociologists:

Adams understands the status system of a nation in a way that Veblen does not, as politically relevant, and in this we had better listen to John Adams: [...] ‘The desire of the

esteem of others is as real a want of nature as hunger—and the neglect and contempt of the world as severe a pain, as the gout or stone... It is a principal end of government to regulate this passion, which in turn becomes a principal means of government. It is the only adequate instrument of order and subordination in society, and alone commands effectual obedience to laws, since with it neither human reason, nor standing armies, would ever produce that great effect' (p. 90).

Ross speculates optimistically that if Mills had lived to see how the debates of the Left have developed over the decades, that perhaps Mills would admit that he had underestimated “the sources of renewal in Marxism” (Ross, 1991). The contemporary Left is as alive as ever, though they are relatively silent on the influence that large technology companies have had to distract from meaningful action on growing economic inequality (Esparza, 2022). If Mills were alive today, he would have trouble finding the vanishing American middle class that *The Power Elite* was meant to warn and reprimand.

de Beauvoir

Without knowing it, Simone de Beauvoir developed the ideas that later influenced the feminist movement of the 1960's. de Beauvoir's life and work apostatized mid-century French norms around sex and the place of women as intellectuals. Nancy Bauer explains that de Beauvoir's influence on feminism was four-fold, (1) exemplifying an applied feminism, (2) exposing blind spots, (3) articulating a feminist standpoint theory, and (4) opposing essentialism (2001:25). In feminist philosophy, de Beauvoir is often read alongside Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig (Oliver, 2000). In sociology she is more commonly paired with Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Smith, and Virginia Woolf (Lemert, 2013). Most use a similar method to de Beauvoir of critically reading texts to expose blind spots.

de Beauvoir's masterpiece, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*; henceforth *LDS*), while not certainly not inspired by the holy ghost, is often referred to as the “feminist bible” (Borde & Malovany-Chevallier, 2010; Roudy, 1975; Thurman, 2009). The book gave birth to the fields of sex and gender in sociology and philosophy, setting much of their research agendas and methodologies. Even after three-quarters of a century, being ignored for fifteen years (Pilardi, 1995; Simons, 1983), having her ideas reproduced in English without attribution (Lemert, 2013, p. 12), and enduring sustained critiques (Evans, 1985) from feminists themselves, de Beauvoir's *LDS* continues to be widely recognized as the intellectual well-spring of research on sex and gender (Dietz, 1992). German sociologists (Gather, 2008) consider *LDS* a sociological classic and despite the book being banned in Spain during the Franco regime, scholarship on the text is now widespread on the Iberian peninsula (Álvarez Carrillo, 2021).

de Beauvoir is increasingly included in survey courses on theory (Burawoy, 2021; Kidd, 2010; Tiryakian, 2010). Describing de Beauvoir's influence on his approach to teaching social theory, Burawoy (2021:32) recalled:

As far as the theory course was concerned, the breakthrough came with my study of the life and work of Simone de Beauvoir. The scope and brilliance of *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir 1953) posed a series of challenges to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, a fitting end to the course that turned sociology upside down and inside out.

de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:617) was acutely sensitive to male gatekeeping, describing it as the “Moloch” to whom women “sacrifices pleasure, love, and freedom.” Presaging scholarship on situated knowledge (Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988), or, that knowledge which is rooted in experience, de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:14) explains:

It is difficult for men to measure the enormous extent of social discrimination that seems insignificant from the outside and whose moral and intellectual repercussions are so deep in woman that they appear to spring from an original nature. The man most sympathetic to women never knows her concrete situation fully. So there is no good reason to believe men when they defend privileges whose scope they cannot even fathom. [...] [W]e know the feminine world more intimately than men do because our roots are in it; we grasp more immediately what the fact of being female means for a human being, and we care more about knowing it.

Much of *LDS* applies dialectical reasoning to examples from philosophy and literature to illustrate her central argument: that men think of women as fundamentally different from and inferior to themselves. For de Beauvoir, to otherize is to objectify. This claim shared its controversy with a similar argument made by Sartre (1956), though critiques of objectification seem almost pedestrian today. Put in more existentialist terms, de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:20) explains further that,

what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness.

de Beauvoir opposes the woman as object because she opposes the subject-object dichotomy as much as she does because of any gaze of the masculine. It is the woman as lived experience that de Beauvoir is concerned with. Alongside Sartre, *LDS* applies the theories of Lacan, Mauss, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, and Levi-Strauss (Vintges, 2010) to further develop her concept of woman as “other.” The influence of Mauss’ *The Gift* (1954[1925]) is clear as de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:583) explains the social obligation of exchanging parties between women,

If there is pure generosity in this homage to others, the party is really a party. But social routine quickly changes the potlatch into an institution, the gift into an obligation, and the party hardens into a rite. All the while savoring the ‘dinner out,’ the invited woman ponders having to return the invitation[.]

de Beauvoir had arrived at the concept of “the Other” prior to *LDS*, through both her scholarship and her lived experience. *L’invitée* is a novel where de Beauvoir explores existentialism through one of several sexual relationships that she had with her students (1954). The fictionalized student in *L’invitée* becomes “the Other” in a ménage à trois including both de Beauvoir and Sartre (Cook, 2009). The experience drags de Beauvoir through a series of emotions as the complex relationships unfold. While the concept of “the Other” is often understood in dialectical terms, de Beauvoir’s

theory of woman as lived experience itself originates from the cocktail of emotions of lived experience.

As method, de Beauvoir analyzes short fiction, novels, plays, and operas alongside classical and contemporary philosophy. Through these, de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:3) applies the social constructivist approach that later sex and gender scholars would adopt. de Beauvoir attacks directly:

Is femininity secreted by the ovaries? Is it enshrined in a Platonic heaven? Is a frilly petticoat enough to bring it down to earth? [...] If there is no such thing today as femininity, it is because there never was.

de Beauvoir identifies common woman tropes in a wide range of areas. The idealized mother, virgin, and prostitute are present in writings ranging from Plato to Voltaire, in mythology from Isis to Cinderella, and in cultural examples ranging from Greek hetaera to Muslim harems. Turning to the modern European man, de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:195) takes aim at sex tourism:

Many a traveler would ask woman for the key to the countries he visits: when he holds an Italian or Spanish woman in his arms, he feels he possesses the fragrant essence of Italy or Spain. ‘When I come to a new city, the first thing I do is to visit a brothel.’ Said a journalist. If a cinnamon hot chocolate can make Gide discover the whole of Spain, all the more reason kisses from exotic lips will bring to a lover a country with its flora and fauna, its traditions, and its culture.

The practice continues, and they are today joined by many French women who travel frequently to the beaches of Françafrique for their rendezvous (Salomon, 2009).

But de Beauvoir’s (1949:13) ambition to demonstrate the social construction of gender (“*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient.*^{xii}”) does not limit her to humanistic, philosophical, and cultural texts. Early chapters tackle the biological, evolutionary, and psychological origins of sex difference. de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:22) questions sexual dualism by arguing that “[t]he existence of heterogenetic gametes alone does not necessarily mean there are two distinct sexes[.]” This discussion in particular is rather dated, however, as debates in these areas have evolved to include the effects of hormones (Lupton, 1996); epigenetics (Richardson, 2017); and even artificial intelligence (Coeckelbergh, 2019; Halberstam, 1991). de Beauvoir’s (2009 [1949]:168) reading of the ludicrous nineteenth century medical literature, however, is still affecting:

In 1878, a member of the British Medical Association wrote in the *British Medical Journal*: ‘It is an indisputable fact that meat goes bad when touched by menstruating women.’ He said that he personally knew of two such cases of hams spoiling in such circumstances.

Summarizing the complex relationship between sex and gender, de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:49) writes, “The female is a woman, insofar as she feels herself as such.” Prefiguring *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963) and *The Sociology of Housework* (Oakley, 1974), de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:474) continues:

Few tasks are more similar to the torment of Sisyphus than those of the housewife; day after day, one must wash dishes, dust furniture, mend clothes that will be dirty, dusty, and torn again. The housewife wears herself out running on the spot; she does nothing; she only perpetuates the present; she never gains the sense that she is conquering a positive Good, but struggles indefinitely against Evil. It is a struggle that begins again every day.

de Beauvoir would later extend more a materialist form of feminism with Christine Delphy (1977) and others in the 1970s (Tidd, 2008). But even in *LDS* there is no lack of anti-bourgeoise wit of the kind seen in Mills and Césaire. For example, consider her response to the memoirs of the famous soprano Georgette Leblanc known for her leading role in the opera *Carmen*. de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:573) at first quotes lengthily from Leblanc's memoir:

I was always dressed like a painting. I walked around in van Eyck, in an allegory of Rubens, or in the Virgin of Memling. I still see myself crossing a street in Brussels one winter day in a dress of amethyst velvet embellished with old silver binding taken from some tunic. Dragging insouciantly my long train behind me, I was conscientiously sweeping the pavement. My folly of yellow fur framed my blonde hair, but the most unusual thing was the diamond placed on the frontlet of my forehead. Why all this? Simply because it pleased me, and so I thought I was living outside of all convention. The more I was laughed at as I went by, the more extravagant my burlesque inventions. I would have been ashamed to change anything in my appearance just because I was being mocked. That would have seemed to me to be a degrading capitulation.

To which de Beauvoir remarks: "The best examples of this magical appropriation of the universe are found in mental institutions"(2009 [1949]:573). de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]:8) is explicit when comparing women to the way that Marx discusses the industrial proletariat or the way that Césaire discusses the African Diaspora:

Proletarians say 'we.' So do blacks. [...] [Women] have won only what men have been willing to concede to them; they have taken nothing; they have received. [...] They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; [...] The proletariat could plan to massacre the whole ruling class; a fanatic Jew or black could dream of seizing the secret of the atomic bomb and turning all of humanity entirely Jewish or entirely black: but a woman could not even dream of exterminating males.^{xiii}

This line of reasoning was effective in gradually improving the material position of women. The feminist movement in academia started out by asking where the women were. Now, one-third of today's American women work in the professions compared to 21% of men.^{xiv} Women have made up the majority of American Sociological Association (ASA) membership since 2003.^{xv} Most of the individual ASA sections are majority women and Table 2 shows that only five of the 54 sections are over 55% men. These five sections -- Ethnomethodology, Marxist Sociology, Mathematical Sociology, Methodology, and Rationality & Society -- are among the smallest in the Association.^{xvi} In each of the 53 years between 1966 and 2019, women have received the majority of US bachelor's degrees awarded in sociology. In 2019, women made up 76% of sociology graduates in the US.^{xvii} Women composed 59% of the doctoral recipients in sociology in 2013, a mirror image of the 59% of men who received them in 1983.^{xviii}

Table 2: 2020 ASA Sections with highest male ratios^{xix}

Section	Male	Female	Other	Unknown	Total
Rationality & Society	75 (68%)	24 (22%)	0 (0%)	12 (11%)	111
Mathematical Sociology	156 (59%)	73 (28%)	0 (0%)	34 (13%)	263
Marxist Sociology	149 (58%)	66 (26%)	7 (3%)	36 (14%)	258
Methodology	212 (56%)	118 (31%)	0 (0%)	48 (13%)	378
Ethnomethodology	63 (56%)	31 (27%)	0 (0%)	19 (17%)	113

Part of this dramatic change in the gender ratio was achieved by increasing the total number of doctoral degrees awarded. Doctoral degrees awarded in sociology increased 34% between 1990 and 2003.^{xx} Despite all of this progress, the field as a whole has experienced a shift away from the tenure system. Since at least 2015, most sociologists have been working on a contingent basis (Atkins, Esparza, Milkman, & Moran, 2018) and overall ASA membership has reached its lowest point since the mid-sixties.^{xxi} Occupational gender segregation has declined considerably over the years, though this is not always reflected in job titles and remuneration (Martin-Caughey, 2021).

In later decades, de Beauvoir became active in French social movements. However, during WWII de Beauvoir worked as a producer for Radio Vichy in Nazi occupied France. While at Radio Vichy, de Beauvoir broadcast the antisemitic speeches of the Minister of Propaganda Philippe Henriot (Galster, 1996, p. 113). de Beauvoir became a fierce defender of both Jews and Israel after the war^{xxii} and there is not much to support antisemitism in *LDS*. But de Beauvoir was not unaware of her role while employed at Radio Vichy. Galster quotes from de Beauvoir’s memoirs: “the very act of breathing implied complicity”(1996: 132). Indeed, some elements of 20th century feminist movements were explicitly Nazi (Koonz [1986]2014). Critics of the modern feminist movement find opposition to the state of Israel present in recent rallies and accuse some feminists of anti-Semitism (Brahm, 2019). Right-wing movements are usually even more so, (McVeigh 2009) even when they take the form of feminist backlash movements (Connell, 2005; Mansbridge, 1986).

Still, the progress in gender equality and de Beauvoir’s role in it is unmistakable.^{xxiii} The humanistic and existentialist methodologies she applied to expose sexism in centuries of text had never been done. Standpoint theory and the privileging of the subject stood to gain.

Legacy and Context

Césaire, Mills, and de Beauvoir’s attention and commitment to issues of inequality were both philosophical and sacrificial. Their combative rhetoric sometimes isolated them from their scholarly communities and led to initial marginalization of their work. Nonetheless, each conducted meticulous research and drew from a breadth of sources to persuade broad audiences to think and act. But it was not solely through the strength of their individual scholarship that their work

eventually gained traction. Rather, it was the racial, class, and feminist movements external to them that adopted and eventually popularized their ideas.

It was not the goal of this article to discuss these figures simply to recognize them, as recognition is sometimes part of the pathology that led to the initial exclusion (Oliver, 2001, p. 28). Nor are their politics necessarily always admirable. Césaire, Mills, and de Beauvoir bring important and challenging insights to bear on social and analytic processes. As Burawoy playfully puts this, “My assumption is that sociology cannot exist without its sparring partner, Marxism!” (2008, p. 367). Movements to “decolonize” sociology and post-colonial theorists such as Raewyn Connell and Raka Ray will continue to interrogate not just the make-up of the sociological canon, but the very idea of it (Ray, 2013).

Arduous ideas sometimes led to factionalism, both in social movements and in intellectual circles. Some critical race theorists continue to see race as the major social cleavage (Crenshaw, 1995). Dependency theorists have prioritized class in their scholarship^{xxiv} (Wallerstein, 1974). No less conciliatory, de Beauvoir had written in *LDS* that “There have not always been proletarians: there have always been women[.]” (2009 [1949]:8). Black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) would try to integrate these competing interests into intersectionality theory, though the separate ideas endure.

The areas of sex/gender and race/ethnicity have long been two of the most popular subfields in sociology.^{xxv} Future treatments might consider the intellectual movement context in which theorists are situated to understand variable traction over time. Providing an exact accounting of the influence of ideas is challenging. Future studies might also use this context to refine such accounting methods. I also hope to have illustrated that a less romantic approach to the study of critical theorists is a no less compelling manner in which to understand them, our society, or ourselves. Rather, exploring their complexity and contradictions can illuminate fruitful pursuits.

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Endnotes

ⁱ The works of Oliver Cox (1948) or Amílcar Cabral (2016), for example, deserve similar treatment where I use Césaire. Similarly, Herbert Marcuse (1964) or even Erich Fromm (1941) have lasting impacts that arguably rival that of Mills. Even de Beauvoir has her rivals, both in French feminist philosophy and American sociology (not the least of which are Dorothy Smith (1990) and Jane Addams (Deegan, 1988)). The importance of these other theorists highlights the importance of illustrating the movement of ideas from social movements to the core of sociological theory. I leave the question about distinguishing relative impact among these theorists vis-à-vis the 20th century literature that followed to others.

ⁱⁱ Proving intellectual influence is an empirical question beyond the ambition of this article. Sociology of knowledge methods, such as David Swartz's (2003) account of Bourdieu's rise to fame uses a "cultural/political field explanation," (Pinto, 1998) identifying political and politicizing biographical events in context. Most such attempts also take a biographical approach, sometimes making use of family letters and other primary source documents (Lyon, 2004). While one must be wary of "great man" theories of history (Carlyle, 1846), citation patterns are far from evenly distributed among journal articles (Cole, 1970; Palacios-Huerta & Volij, 2004) and monographs. (Cronin, Snyder, & Atkins, 1997; Lindholm-Romantschuk & Warner, 1996) This article aims only to illustrate the influence of social movement ideas on contemporary social justice concerns in sociology. This more humanistic (Abbott, 2007) and metapolitical (Badiou, 2005) approach treats politics as thought and discusses the politics of theory.

ⁱⁱⁱ Before appearing in Césaire's work, W.E.B. DuBois developed proto-négritude concepts. Césaire had also discussed the concept with Senghor. Consult Rabaka (2016) for a fuller discussion on the full constellation of intellectuals surrounding the Négritude Movement.

^{iv} Speaking of the impact of Claude McKay's *Banjo*, Césaire explains in an interview: "Although I was not directly influenced by any American Negroes, at least I felt that the movement in the United States created an atmosphere that was indispensable for a very clear coming to consciousness." (Depestre, 2000[1967])

^v Founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Julius Nyerere, also provided significant Pan-Africanist rhetoric. (Hansen, 1989)

^{vi} Really two currencies, the Central African Franc and the West African Franc, though they are equally interchangeable. While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plans to sever ties with the European Central Bank by introducing its own currency, this has not taken place as of this publishing.

^{vii} This is also the case with Oliver Cox and several other black sociologists.

^{viii} Take as an example this definition of decolonized sociology as "rooted in the emancipatory experiences and intersectional projects of colonized, subaltern subjects across the globe seeking to overthrow European colonizers and implement economies, politics, and social organization rooted in and conditioned by the epistemologies of the colonized. (Weiner, 2018) This is distinct and much more narrow than Fanon's language and intent. Fanon is anticolonial, not decolonial. Fanon does not employ, or even intimate intersectional language nor does Fanon articulate a decolonial agenda.

^{ix} (American Sociological Association, 2021)

^x Borrowing from Mills' tone, "There are men in Texas today whose names are strictly local, but who have more money than many nationally prominent families of the East. But *they* are not often nationally prominent, and even when they are, it *is* not in just the same way." p. 36. (italics in original).

^{xi} Source: (2021)

^{xii} "One is not born, but rather, becomes woman." (Borde and Malovany-Chavallier, 2009)

^{xiii} It would take another 18 years for the S.C.U.M. Manifesto to advocate for the extermination of men. (Solanas, 1971)

^{xiv} (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021, p. 6)

^{xv} (ASA Member Data, 2021c)

^{xvi} (ASA Member Data, 2021a)

^{xvii} (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020)

^{xviii} (ASA Research Department, 2021)

^{xix} (ASA Member Data, 2021a)

^{xx} (ASA Research and Development Department, 2007)

^{xxi} (ASA Member Data, 2021b)

^{xxii} See for example, (Daily News Bulletin, 1974)

^{xxiii} Not to detract from others, such as Dorothy Smith or Jane Addams.

^{xxiv} Though some Marxists disagree. (Brenner 1977)

^{xxv} (Curtis & Kisielewski, 2015)