



MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Course # 11.469
BU Metropolitan Studies Program Course # MET SO 502 Urban Sociology

Urban Sociology Study Guide for Week 9: Identities, Boundaries, and Inequality

This week's readings look at the politics of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. While not all of them focus on the "urban" directly, these theories can inform our view of persistent inequality in the city and urban development.

1. **Franz Fanon** was a psychiatrist, critical theorist, and revolutionary who wrote about the social and cultural consequences of decolonization. Born in Martinique, he fought in Africa and in Europe with the Allies in World War II, graduated from medical school in France, worked as a psychiatrist in Algeria, and ultimately joined the Algerian National Liberation Front in its fight for independence from France. Many of his ideas were foundational to the American Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements. In the essay we read for class, Fanon is exploring the relationship between colonialism, racism, and culture. How does Fanon define culture? What are the implications of seeing racism as a "cultural element"?
2. **Michael Omi** and **Howard Winant** argue that race is a social construct. How do they conceptualize racial formation in the reading? How do they define racism? And how would you analyze their argument about the evolution of modern racial awareness?
3. **Eduardo Bonilla-Silva** puts forth a structural theory of racism and critiques the perspectives of **Omi and Winant**. In his view, what do Omi and Winant miss in their analyses? How does **Bonilla-Silva** seek to correct this? What does he mean by racialization?
4. Contemporary philosopher **Iris Marion Young** favors the explicit recognition of difference. She aims to reconcile "the politics of difference" with ethical principles regarding justice. In Chapter 2 of her book she lays out five faces of oppression. How do these faces of oppression help us understand inequality?
5. **Ruben Rumbaut**, **Hazel Carby**, and **Jennifer Nash** each focus on specific identities (i.e. Latinos, Hispanics, Black Women) to better comprehend the roles that race and racism play in our understanding of society and the human experience. How does focusing on a specific identity enhance or change our understanding of **Omi and Winant's** racial formation theory, **Bonilla-Silva's** structural theory of racism, and **Young's** five faces of oppression?
6. How would you relate these readings and theories to the "urban"? How would you design a study or research project to further explore any of these ideas in the city?

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