

**Lecture Notes:**

- ① **power:** an agent's capacity to act or direct the application of resources so as to affect events or circumstances to conform to the agent's wishes or desires
- **agent:** any individual or social group or aggregate that acts with unified purpose
  - the exercise of power often depends on having enough resources to effect your will:
    - types of **resource** or **capital**:
      - **economic** (Smith): material or monetary wealth
      - **cultural** (Bordieu): wealth in the form of knowledge or beliefs
      - **social** (Coleman): wealth in the form of networks of acquaintance or personal connections
    - the powerful have large relative concentrations of these resources, the powerless must band together
    - **deprivation:** lack of access to resources or supports generally accepted as essential to human experience
      - **absolute:** when such lack is significant according to a standard transcendent of time or place
      - **relative:** when such lack is significant when compared with others in that time or place
    - **needs** (Maslow): physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, self-actualization
  - the effective character and limits of power may be characterized by three important dimensions:
    - **scope:** ranging from the **interpersonal** level through the **societal** level (and many ranges in between)
    - **basis:** the grounds upon which an act of power is founded (role, relationship, representation, membership, experience, expertise, tradition, convention, charisma/characteristic, authority, reason, etc.)
    - **sphere:** usually power is limited to a particular institutional or structural form (political, economic, social, etc.)
      - politics is often *implied* when discussing power, but *all life arenas may be politicized*
      - who exercises major societal power?
        - decision makers, leaders (power elite) < .03
        - knowledge generators = < .01
        - masse or collective movements
  - elite rule is probably inevitable (remember Michel's "iron law of oligarchy") once an organization reaches a certain size and complexity...but we must ask who is best represented among those elite decision-makers?
- Marx was the first major social theorist to seriously consider issues of power in rapidly emerging industrial societies:
- Marx's strengths were his abilities to synthesize existing ideas in new ways and to see implications of those ideas that others had missed:
    - he derived his "engine" (the dialectic) from Hegel
    - his notion of "value" (the labor theory of value) from Smith and, especially, Ricardo (also Hegel and Rousseau)
    - his "emancipatory politics" from Rousseau (and other revolutionary philosophers of the enlightenment)
    - his concern from social welfare and human dignity from the romantics
    - and his polemical language from the 17<sup>th</sup> century English social communitarians (the Diggers & Levellers)
  - central principles of Marxian thought:
    - **economic determinism:** economy (how classes relate to the means of production) drives the social system
    - **class:** distinctions between individuals or groups are hierarchical and based on their relation to the means of production or access to economic resources
      - **class consciousness:** awareness by social class members of shared interests in opposition to other classes
      - **false consciousness:** members of a lower class believe themselves to be members of a higher class and can be used to perpetuate the inequalities inherent in the system
    - **dialectical materialism:** Marx retained Hegel's dialectic (history moves forward through a series of conflicts between opposites, the resolution of one giving rise to the next), but rejected idealism in favor of materialism (this is also why he rejected religion as the "opiate of the masses"); thus, history followed a cycle of conflict:
      - master vs. slave → feudal lord vs. serf → capitalist vs. proletarian → classless socialist state
    - **superstructure:** the ruling class develops a society's culture (including norms, ideologies, beliefs, ethics and morals, religions, and so forth) so as to reinforce the existing power structure and means of production; the underclass tends to accept this and develops a **false consciousness**
    - **labor theory of value:** the worth of an object is the total labor needed to produce it
    - lack of control, lack of connection to the means of production, and the inherent dehumanization involved in selling oneself results in **alienation** (a disconnection to others and to the material world)

- capitalism is inherently dysfunctional and cannot continue because it induces a destructive cycle
  - Marx's ideas were variously developed by thinkers such as V. I. Lenin, Antonio Gramsci, Leon Trotsky, the Liberation Theorists, Erich Fromm, Jurgen Habermas, and the members of the Frankfurt School
- ③ There are several ways of looking at power and resources in society today:
- **neo-Marxian** model
    - **instrumentalist**: capitalists rule by having enough power to control elected and appointed officials
    - **structuralist**: capitalists don't have to directly influence officials as their interests are too integrally bound up with the welfare of a modern capitalist democracy
  - **pluralist** model: societal power is fragmented among everyone in a society, though some may have bigger portions than others
    - **interest group** pluralism: people break into aggregates according to their interests on specific issues and these collectivities can exert pressure on elected and appointed officials; power is held by constantly shifting alliances
    - **strategic elite** pluralism: same as above, but alliances are among elites in key positions rather than groups
  - **power elite** model (Mills) decision makers, not necessarily owners have the power — this holds true in *all* societies
    - three level model: small power elite, relatively small middle level of limited power, and large masses
  - **integrated power** model (Domhoff): elites are integrated, share resources, and engage in long range planning; they dominate key social institutions, share similar backgrounds and social standing, interchange functional roles in business and government, and are largely regulated by economic interests more than any other; however, there are significant differences among elites even though they often agree fundamental issues of political economy
  - **iron cage of bureaucracy** (Weber): bureaucrats and technocrats will dominate, not capitalists and officials

**Key Ideas:**

**Resource, capital (economic, social, cultural), power, power elite, Karl Marx, pluralism**

