The Craft of Social Research/
The Sociology of Monuments

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
The nature of social research

✔ There are many ways of knowing about the world
✔ Personal experience and common sense knowledge enable us to get things done in everyday life
✔ Personal experience and common sense knowledge cannot be reliably generalized
✔ Social research is empirical & probabilistic
  • Empirical research: research that operates from the ideological position that questions about human behavior can be answered only through controlled, systematic observations of the real world (p. 82)
  • Probabilistic: capable of identifying only those forces that have a high likelihood, but not a certainty, of influencing human action (p. 82)
Sociologist considers own behavior indicative of larger trends (from *The Onion*)

Boston—According to the findings of a paper published Monday in *The American Journal of Sociology*, the behaviors and experiences of Boston sociologist Dr. Steven Piers are indicative of a host of wider societal trends.

“My observations indicate that the typical married American man has had increasing difficulty relating to his spouse over the last two and a half years, ever since she started taking those yoga classes,” wrote Piers, 56, in his *Interpersonal Connections Within The Marriage Paradigm: A Study in Causality*.

In the paper, Piers asserted that the most pressing issue for American men is maintaining healthy sexual relations with their wives.

“Back in 1999, American men’s frustration derived mostly from the infrequency of sex,” the paper read. “Recently, however, that trend has shifted as husbands report a decreasing interest in intimacy, particularly if there is a Celtics game or a new *NYPD Blue* on TV. While many men cite increased job responsibilities and stress as possible catalysts, many more blame the affair their wives had with some textile salesman during a training conference in Seattle.”

Material culture

✓ Culture: language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a society (p. 32)
✓ Material culture: artifacts of a society, which represent adaptations to the social and physical environment (p. 100)
✓ Includes clothing, buildings, inventions, food, artwork, writings, music, etc.
✓ Material culture both reflects and shapes nonmaterial culture (e.g., norms, values, ideology)
✓ James Loewen’s *Lies Across America* (1999): a study of monuments as material culture
✓ Loewen distinguishes between “past” (things that happened) and “history” (what we say about them)
Nathan Forrest statue in Memphis, TN

- Confederate cavalry leader
- Forrest has more statues in TN than any other state honors a single person
- Historic sites are always the tales of two eras
  - Era of person or event honored
  - Era when monument was erected
- Forrest monuments erected between Reconstruction and Civil Rights movement
- Forrest is symbol of white supremacy
  - First national leader of KKK
  - Slave trader before war, hired black convict labor after war
  - Led massacres of black soldiers during war

Faithful slaves of Fort Mill, S.C.

- Monuments throughout the South honor slaves who were loyal to the Confederacy.
- In fact, most slaves stopped working, fled, joined the Union Army and/or engaged in espionage.
- No monuments in South honor local blacks in Union Army.
- Intent of monuments is to present slavery as benign institution that had support of slaves.

Indian Statue in Muscatine, Iowa

✓ Although presented in 1926 by “Muscuitine Tribe” and dedicated to “Mascoutin Indians,” no such tribe existed in Muscatine then.

✓ Actually built by “Improved Order of Red Men,” white fraternal organization.

✓ White-built monuments to Indians tend to justify conquering Indians by:
  • Honoring Indians who helped whites
  • Honoring Indian tribes who are no longer there
  • Honoring Indians as “vanishing race” (as by Red Men)


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