

SOCIOBIOLOGY AND BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM WORKING GROUP

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I acknowledge that the land we are on today is the traditional homelands of the
Council of Three Fires- Objive, Odawa, and Potawatomi

What is Sociobiology?

- Pushes forward the idea that human behaviors are a result of genetics, and therefore are subject to natural selection.
- It's one of the more recent iterations of biological determinism, which is a notion that relates inherent (read: biological) features to a person's place in society (Graves, 2015, p. 25).
- "Deterministic theories differ in detail, but all have a similar form." (Sociobiology Study group, 1977, p. 133)

Graves, J. L. (2015). Great Is Their Sin: Biological Determinism in the Age of Genomics. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 661(1), 24-50.
doi:10.1177/0002716215586558

Sociobiology Study Group. (1977). Sociobiology- A new Biological Determinism. In *Biology as a Social Weapon* (pp. 133-149). Ann Arbor, MI: The Ann Arbor Science for the People Editorial Collective.

What is Sociobiology? (cont'd)

- Because sociobiology states that human behaviors are a result of natural selection, it assumes that human behaviors must be or were adaptive.
- Adaptive theory explained in every case by one of three ideas: individual selection for self-serving behaviors, kin selection for altruistic/ submissive behaviors towards relatives, and reciprocal altruism for altruistic acts towards non-related persons (Sociobiology Study Group, 1977, p. 145).

Quick History

- Biological determinism has a long history in the US.
- Term Sociobiology was coined by John Paul Scott in 1948, but was popularized by E.O. Wilson in his 1975 book *Sociobiology: A New Synthesis*.
- In response, the Sociobiology Study Group formed at Harvard to refute E.O. Wilson's work.
- The Sociobiology Study Group later became the Boston chapter of Science for the People.

Modern Day

- While sociobiology is still taught in classrooms, it rarely goes by that name anymore.
- These ideas have moved more right wing compared to the 1970s.
Example:



Image credit: Cole, J. (2017, March 13). [Tweet by Rep Steve King]. Retrieved January 29, 2018, from <https://www.juancole.com/2017/03/civilization-white-american-babies.html>

- This topic is fading into the background.

Goals of Working Group

- For now, we need more information.
- Identify what areas of academia sociobiology has moved to, or if it's even still a part of academia.
- Identify how sociobiology and biological determinism are being adapted in today's political climate.
 - Publishing opportunity?
- Once we know more about current day sociobiology/ biological determinism, the working group would determine a course of action.