BASICS OF SOCIOLOGY

WHAT IS FUNCTIONALISM?
FUNCTIONALISM

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION

- Functionalism looks at society as a whole unit, and views human actions as either functional or dysfunctional to the whole structure of society.

- From the functionalist perspective, each part is necessary for the functioning of the whole. If one piece is out of place (for example, deviant behavior), the system must adjust to reach equilibrium.

- Each function is essential for the balance of the structure.
Functionalism focuses on the “institutions” of society, and how they all work together in an integrated fashion - much like a machine - to produce positive outcomes for the whole.

The family produces children who are indoctrinated and educated in our education system, then contribute within the workforce, and pay taxes to fund the government, which then in turn supports families and education, and the whole system moves forward in an integrated fashion.
The Functionalist Perspective relies on the idea of shared values and consensus.

Criticisms of the approach focus on the fact that there is no one consensus of values in a society, but rather a cacophony of different goals and beliefs that make it difficult to move in one direction as a whole people.

This is especially pronounced in a melting pot society like the United States.
American sociologist, Robert K. Merton, extended Parsons’ and Durkheim’s original line of thinking by dividing functions into two types: Manifest and Latent.

- **Manifest Functions** are intended and obvious.
- **Latent Functions** are unintended and sometimes hard to identify (i.e., not obvious).
Sociologists operating from the Functionalist Perspective ask questions like:

- How is this issue, or event, related to other aspects of the system?
- What consequences will result from this event or issue?
- How do the results of this action, issue, or event contribute to or prevent the progress of the cultural values on which the social system is based?
Police violence against citizens - especially unarmed citizens of color - has become a huge issue in recent years.

A Functionalist would relate such violence to:

- **Manifest Functions**: upholding the law, enforcing societal norms of respecting authority by any means necessary
- **Latent Functions**: creation of more fear among all Americans toward law enforcement, entrenchment of racial divides, inspiration of social movements like #blacklivesmatter