Essay Assignment 1: Utilizing a Sociological Imagination

Recommended Readings: Look back through "The Promise" by C. Wright Mills.

Mills discusses the fundamental concept of the sociological imagination and its value in looking beyond the personal in order to understand the relationship between society and people. His essay makes the distinction between "personal troubles", private matters of which individuals are personally aware, and "public issues" that transcend individuals and are public matters. He then identifies the central task of sociology as grasping the relationship between history and biography and the insights it provides in understanding the human condition and patterns of behavior. Your task in this essay is to apply Mills' perspective to a specific case.

Instructions:

Interview a few people close to your own age and ask them to identify and describe at least two large scale historical social events or issues that they think have most shaped their lives. Have them describe how these events or issues have impacted their beliefs or behaviors.

Now ask a few people of a different generation those same questions.

Finally, write a brief 2 to 3 page essay describing any patterns evident across your interviewees' responses. Then discuss these patterns of responses and how they relate to Mills' perspective about the distinction between personal troubles and public issues and the relationship between history and biography.