Oppression and Genocide

Introduction

When most people think of oppression, they think of distant places and times, yet oppressive conditions still exist, even in modern liberal and democratic societies. Oppression is not always planned but can be woven into the social, economic, and cultural fabric of a society. In fact, most people experience one or more forms of oppression at some point in their lives. While small acts of oppression may seem insignificant, oppression can lead to large-scale, devastating impacts such as wars and genocides. Genocides and other mass murders killed more people in the 20th century than all the wars combined. After the Holocaust, the international community promised the world would "never again" stand by and allow genocide to occur. Although the sentiment of "never again" continues to be repeated, there have been many genocides committed since the Holocaust. Many people attribute the extent and severity of genocide to the inaction of outside governments and people. Genocide is a complicated and political word to apply to many situations, since its use implies a number of legal and moral obligations. In addition, genocides are often defined long after the violent acts have taken place, thereby complicating the ability for outsiders to intervene in the genocide.

While intervention in potential genocides can be a complex issue, prevention of genocides is possible. Understanding how oppression affects us (either as members of oppressed groups or of groups that have various privileges), how oppression can escalate with other causal factors to lead to mass atrocities and genocides, and what responsibilities we have to prevent or permit the occurrence of oppression and genocide, enables us to think and act like global citizens. Studying and understanding these dynamics can help us to truly comprehend the impact (whether positive or negative) that each of us can make on the world.

Exploring the Issues

Oppression

Oppression can occur in many forms. Some of these include exploitation (e.g., child labour), marginalization, powerlessness, cultural dominance or violence (e.g., police brutality against certain ethnic groups), racism (e.g., Apartheid in South Africa), colourism, classism (e.g., "untouchables" in India), ableism

(discrimination against those with disabilities), lookism, sizeism, ageism, nativism, colonialism, sexism (e.g., women's suffrage), heterosexism, and cisgenderism (discrimination against transgender people). Each of these forms of oppression are related to and reinforced by each other.

Oppression can persist through an individual, an institution, or a culture, and each of these can occur consciously or unconsciously. People often do not realize they are oppressing others (e.g., through laughing at racist or homophobic jokes or instructing sales personnel to watch African Americans carefully in the store for fear of theft), and are often even less aware of their own privilege as compared to those who are oppressed. Oppression is often linked to other measures of living standards such as life expectancy, employment, and income. For example, there is a correlation between poverty and race. Understanding the various forms and effects of oppression exemplifies the importance of challenging social arrangements that discriminate against some or privilege a select few over many.

What forms of oppression are occurring in your country? ...your community? ...your school?

What are the social, economic, and cultural structures that create or perpetuate oppression and genocide?

Genocide

The legal definition of genocide is outlined in international law in *The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide* and was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9th, 1948. It is important to note that the definition involves two components: the physical commitment of violent acts *and* the intention of large-scale destruction. The article reads as follows:

UN Definition of Genocide

Article II: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about
- its physical destruction in whole or in part
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group



Common themes in genocide studies include the following: the history of genocide; the factors that contribute to it; the processes by which genocide unfolds; the role of different actors within these processes, including those of perpetrators, victims, witnesses, bystanders, rescuers, and resisters; the role of external third parties who may choose to intervene, permit, prevent, facilitate, or ignore genocide; and the debate over the definition of the term itself (Yale, Genocide Studies Program).

Understanding genocide often involves exploring the causal factors of it and understanding how or if it could have been prevented or minimized. It is important to investigate the context and dynamics that lead to genocide (e.g., political considerations, economic difficulties, local history, and context, etc.). Could causal conditions have been deflected or minimized? Explore the different mechanisms for preventing genocide, including early warning indicators, diplomacy, international justice, legal infrastructures, the responsibility to protect, negotiation and mediation, and civil society. What are some resistance movements or policy measures that support the prevention of genocide (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)?

Comparing genocides is one means of exploring causal and preventative factors. What are the commonalities between them? Why has genocide arisen in some instances but not in others? While many have used a comparative analysis as a means of predicting genocide occurrences and their impacts, most acknowledge that each case of genocide (and the associated pain and suffering) is unique.

As important as it is to understand what was done to create genocide and mass atrocities, it is equally as important to learn about what was not done and why action was or was not taken. How did international and regional authorities respond? What is the role of non-governmental organizations? When is diplomacy, negotiation, isolation, or military involvement appropriate or effective?

What qualifies as genocide is also highly contested. For example, the Canadian government only officially recognizes five genocides: the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Armenian genocide, and the genocides in Rwanda and the Bosnian town of Srebrenica. Other countries have different opinions about what should or should not be considered genocide, and individual opinions provide an even greater variance. Canada considers the Ukrainian famine (Holodomor) to be genocide, while many others do not. The Turkish government still refuses to recognize the Armenian genocide. Teachers may want to include a discussion of understudied genocides (e.g., Bangladesh), near-genocides (e.g., Ivory Coast), contested genocides (e.g., Argentina), and mass violence against civilians within the context of other conflicts (e.g., Iraq).

Oppression and Genocide

Essential Questions

Inquiry questions related to oppression and genocide issues may include the following:

- What constitutes genocide?
- How can genocide be prevented?
- Is armed intervention necessary to prevent genocide?
- Are crimes by different categories of people less likely to be viewed as crimes, to result in an arrest, to be brought to trial, to result in a conviction, to lead to punishment or imprisonment or the death penalty, and so on?
- How are oppression and genocide related?
- Why or how is oppression linked to living conditions such as poverty, health, employment, or income? How does this relate to stereotyping people/groups?
- Is oppression necessary to maintain society as it currently exists?
- What would our classroom/school/community/country/world look like without oppression?
- While we may recognize that someone is disadvantaged, we are less likely to recognize our own privilege. Is one person's over-privilege related to another's disadvantage (i.e., men's versus women's privilege)?
- How is genocide experienced differently by men, women, boys, and girls?
- What are the consequences of labelling something "genocide," and who should be able to decide whether something is or is not considered to be genocide?
- In a number of cases of oppression and genocide worldwide, the scale and scope of the atrocity have been attributed to the inaction of outside governments and other people (e.g., Rwandan genocide, Cambodian genocide, etc.).
- What responsibility do governments and other people have to stop oppression and genocide occurring in other countries?
- At what point should governments be allowed to intervene in other countries on humanitarian grounds? Who should enforce this standard?
- What political, economic, or social reasons might a government or others have for not getting involved in preventing oppression and genocide in other countries?
- What role does the media play in the definition of atrocities?
- The Canadian government doesn't currently consider the colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada to be genocide, while many other people do. What reasoning do these groups have to support their positions? Why is this issue so contested?

DYK?

Did You Know?

The term *oppression* stems from "opprimere," which is Latin for "pressed down." *Genocide* was coined by Polish writer and attorney Raphael Lemkin in the early 1940s by combining the Greek word *genos* (race) with the Latin word *cide* (killing).

Bill Gates once spoke to an audience in Saudi Arabia where women made up roughly one-fifth of the audience. During his presentation, the women were not only separated but also partitioned off from the men in the room. A member of the audience asked if it was realistic that Saudi Arabia would accomplish its goal of being one of the top-10 countries in the world in technology by 2010. Gates replied, "Well, if you're not fully utilizing half the talent in the country, you're not going to get too close to the top ten."

Some scholars argue that Canada has its own history of oppression and genocide. They point to residential schools and continuing violence against First Nations peoples, especially women.

- Indigenous children were sent to schools off of their reservations where they were made to speak only English, and prevented from and punished for speaking their own language.
- In Canada, Aboriginal peoples, recent immigrants and racialized communities, and persons with disabilities continue to face higher levels of poverty than others and are at higher risk of long-term poverty.
- Indigenous people are more likely to live in houses requiring major repairs. Nearly half (45%) of First Nations people living on reserve in 2006 lived in homes that they identified as needing major repairs.
- In 2006, one-third (33%) of Indigenous adults aged 25 to 54 had less than a high school education compared to nearly 13% of the non-Indigenous population—a difference of 20 percentage points.
- Indigenous people are less likely than non-Indigenous people to be employed.
- The median total income of the Indigenous population aged 25 to 54 in 2005 was just over \$22,000, compared to over \$33,000 for the non-Indigenous population in the same age group. The median income for males is more than for females, regardless of Indigenous identity.
- Indigenous people make up 4 percent of Canada's population but 23 percent of inmates in federal jails.

Similar stats exist for visible minorities in Canada^{*}:

- Poverty rates for racialized families are three times higher than non-racialized families.
- Racialized Canadians earn only 81.4 cents for every dollar paid to non-racialized Canadians.
- Racialized women earn 55.6% of the income of non-racialized men.

^{*} Statistics and information are from *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2011; *Poverty Trends Score Card Canada*, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2015.



Examples of Historic Oppression and Genocide		
Time	Description	
To present day	The Amazon: various ethnic groups and miners, loggers, oil extractors, and poachers	
2003	Darfur genocide: Government of Sudan and Darfur rebels	
1994	Rwandan genocide: Between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups	
1990s	Bosnia and Herzegovina genocide: Bosnian civilians and Serbian militias	
1980s	Guatemala: Military dictatorship and Indigenous Mayans	
1975–1999	East Timor: Indonesian Military Dictatorship and East Timorese	
1975–1979	Cambodian genocide: Khmer Rouge and racial, social, and political groups	
1971	Bangladesh genocide: Pakistani army	
1965–66	Indonesian genocide: communists vs. anti-communists	
1933–1945	Holocaust: Nazi Germany and Jews	
1932–1933	Ukrainian famine: Stalin and Ukrainians	
1915	Armenian genocide: Ottoman Turkish government and the Armenians	

Thought-Provoking Quotations

"Many thought . . . that the horrors of the Second World War—the camps, the cruelty, the exterminations, the Holocaust—could

never happen again. And yet they have in Cambodia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Rwanda. Our time—this decade even—has shown us that man's capacity for evil knows no limits. Genocide . . . is now a word of our time, too, a heinous reality that calls for a historic response."

- United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (UN, 1998)

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

- Lord Acton

"Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable." — John F. Kennedy

"A person stands a better chance of being tried and judged for killing one human being than for killing 100,000."

– José Ayala Lasso

"In the prospect of an international criminal court lies the promise of universal justice. That is the simple and soaring hope of this vision. We are close to its realization. We will do our part to see it through till the end. We ask you . . . to do yours in our struggle to ensure that no ruler, no State, no junta and no army anywhere can abuse human rights with impunity. Only then will the innocents of distant wars and conflicts know that they, too, may sleep under the cover of justice; that they, too, have rights, and that those who violate those rights will be punished."

- United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (UN, 1998–1999)



"We owe respect to the living; to the dead we owe only truth." — Voltaire

"... I know that we will be the sufferers if we let great wrongs occur without exerting ourselves to correct them."

- Eleanor Roosevelt

"This world is ill divided. Them that work the hardest are the least provided."

– Mary Brookbank

"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group."

– Peggy McIntosh

"If you don't at least speak out clearly, you are participating in the genocide. ... If you just shut up when you see what you see — morally and ethically you can't shut up. It's a responsibility to talk." — Philippe Gaillard

Making a Difference

In every case of genocide, there have been individuals who have spoken out against oppression. The magnitude of the event and seeming inaction among the world community and its policymakers can be daunting, but actions of any size have potential impacts.

Name	How they make a difference
Cardinal Archbishop Raul Silva Henriquez	He started a group called the "Committee for Cooperation for Peace" to help tens of thousands of people in Chile escape persecution by Augusto Pinochet's regime. He also offered financial assistance, legal aid, and sanctuary for those targeted by the regime.
John Rabe	This German member of the Nazi Party stopped atrocities of the Japanese Army during the Nanking Occupation. He saved over 200,000 Chinese by helping to establish a safety zone.
Louis Riel	He resisted European influence and sought to preserve Métis rights and cultures in Manitoba.
Malala Yousafzai	A Pakistani advocate for female education, Malala was shot in the head for attending school. She is now the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (at age 17) and was named one of "The 100 Most Influential People in the World" in 2013 by <i>Time Magazine</i> .
Nelson Mandela	South Africa's first black president, Mandela focused on dismantling the legacy of Apartheid through tackling institutionalized racism, poverty, and inequality, and fostering racial reconciliation. He also created the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate past human rights abuses.
Oskar Schindler	A German businessman and former member of the Nazi Party, he saved over 1,200 Jews from the Holocaust by employing them in his factory (later inspiring the book <i>Schindler's Ark</i> and the Oscar-winning film <i>Schindler's List</i>).
Rainer Schubert	Schubert smuggled East Germans out of the communist GDR across the Berlin Wall (two of which escaped while hiding under a live tiger!). He spent nine years in prison (two in solitary confinement) and later promoted the need for East Berlin trials.
Raphael Lemkin	A Polish lawyer who coined the term <i>genocide</i> and advanced the passage of the UN Genocide Convention, he has received a number of awards for his work in international law and the prevention of war crimes.
Rigoberta Menchú	An Indigenous Guatemalan woman who has dedicated her life to promoting Indigenous rights.



Name	How they make a difference	
Roméo Dallaire	Served as Force Commander for the United Nations peacekeeping force during the Rwanda Genocide. Dallaire is the founder of The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative and is a Senior Fellow at the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) and Co-Director of the Will to Intervene Project, which strives to prevent mass atrocities.	
Viola Desmond	A black Nova Scotia business woman who challenged racial segregation in Halifax by refusing to leave the "whites-only" area of a theatre, helping to prompt the modern civil rights movement in Canada.	

Many heroes of oppression and genocide are just ordinary people choosing to do the right thing. There are many examples. Search "Nobel Peace Prize winners," "Pearson Medal of Peace winners," "oppression allies," or "heroes of genocide."

Glossary

Ally:

"A person who is a member of an advantaged social group who takes a stand against oppression, works to eliminate oppressive attitudes and beliefs in themselves and their communities, and works to interrogate and understand their privilege." (Suffolk)

Crimes against Humanity:

"A widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. Such crimes include the murder of political or social groups that are unprotected by the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention." (Yale)

Discrimination:

"Discrimination is an action that is taken to limit the freedoms and activities of others; it happens on individual, systemic, institutional, and societal levels. Discrimination is the active manifestation of a prejudiced or biased state of mind." (Dragonfly)

Ethnocentrism:

"An inclination to view events from the perspective of one's own culture, with a coinciding inclination to diminish other groups and regard them as inferior (e.g., the idea that European peoples "civilized" the West, without regard for the perspective of the Indigenous population)." (Dragonfly)

Genocide:

"Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group." (UN, 1948)

Genocidal Continuum:

The less dramatic, permitted (and often institutionally supported), everyday acts of violence that make participation (under other conditions) in genocidal acts possible (Scheper-Hughes).

Human Rights:

These are "rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible." (UNHROHC)

Internalized Oppression:

This is the "belief of a person or group that the stereotypes and assumptions society holds about them are true. Internalized oppression can involve self-hatred and shame about one's own identity or ethnocultural group." (Dragonfly)

Institutional/Systemic Discrimination:

"Actions by institutions and systems that are constructed to keep dominant groups in power and shut out marginalized groups. Systems and institutions control social, cultural, religious, or moral traditions and ideas that reinforce the power of the dominant group at the expense of other groups." (Dragonfly)

Marginalized:

"The status of groups that do not have full and equal access to the cultural, economic, political, and social institutions of society and are therefore less powerful." (Dragonfly)

Oppression:

"The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society." (Suffolk)

Politicide:

"The mass killing of individuals based upon their identification (or perceived identification) with a political group or view." (Butcher et al.)

Prejudice:

"A state of mind that casts those different from oneself in an inferior light, without actual evidence. It is a thought process." (Dragonfly)

Privilege:

"A group of unearned cultural, legal, social, and institutional rights extended to a group based on their social group membership. Individuals with privilege are considered to be the normative group, leaving those without access to this privilege invisible, unnatural, deviant, or just plain wrong. Most of the time, these privileges are automatic and most individuals in the privileged group are unaware of them." (Suffolk)

Stereotypes:

"A false or generalized idea or conception of a group of people that results in an unconscious or conscious labelling or categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences. Dominant groups use stereotypes to confirm the supposed inferiority of marginalized peoples." (Dragonfly)

Truth Commissions:

"These are commissions of inquiry tasked with the investigation of patterns of past crimes. Truth commissions offer a prospect of facilitating national and personal reconciliation while potentially complementing efforts to promote justice. However, they might also serve as a post-conflict battleground of narrative construction and unwanted compromise." (Yale)

War Crimes:

Violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflict that are committed as part of a plan or policy or on a large-scale, including, but not limited to, murder, torture, taking of hostages, pillaging, rape, or the conscription of children under 15 years of age. (ICC)

Xenophobia:

"The fear and hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange." (Suffolk)



Resources

Journals

- Journal of Genocide Research. A quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal published by Routledge that covers studies of genocide. <u>www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjgr20/current</u>
- *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal (GSP).* The "official journal of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), a global, interdisciplinary, non-partisan organization that seeks to further research and teaching about the nature, causes, and consequences of genocide, and advance policy studies on prevention of genocide." <u>http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/</u>
- Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Holocaust and Genocide Studies is a peer-reviewed international journal featuring research articles, interpretive essays, and book reviews addressing the issue of the Holocaust and other genocides. It has been published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum since 1987. https://academic.oup.com/hgs/pages/About

Websites

- **Canadian Museum for Human Rights.** This resource includes a school programs and resources to help teachers address human rights issues in the classroom or within the museum itself. <u>https://humanrights.ca/learn</u>
- Genocide Watch: The International Alliance to End Genocide. "Genocide Watch exists to predict, prevent, stop, and punish genocide and other forms of mass murder. We seek to raise awareness and influence public policy concerning potential and actual genocide. Our purpose is to build an international movement to prevent and stop genocide." www.genocidewatch.org/home.html
- Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) that advocates for human rights. <u>www.hrw.org</u>
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). A declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, in response to the human rights abuses that occurred during the First and Second World Wars. <u>http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/</u>
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007, by a majority of 144 nations in favour and four opposed, including Canada. In May 2016, Canada officially removed its objector status. <u>www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/</u> <u>DRIPS_en.pdf</u>

- University of Manitoba, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). The NCTR is the permanent home for all statements, documents, and other materials gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) regarding the history and legacy of Canada's residential schools system. <u>http://umanitoba.ca/nctr/</u>
- Yale University, Genocide Studies Program. Yale University's Genocide Studies Program focuses on the phenomenon of genocide and maintains research projects on catastrophes such as the Nazi Holocaust and colonial and Indigenous genocides. <u>http://gsp.yale.edu/</u>

Teaching Resources

- Discrimination and Stereotypes Lesson Plans. Advocates for Youth, a U.S.-based organization that advocates for young people's rights to sexual health information, services, and resources, created these lesson plans for students aged 13–18 years in order to help teachers address discrimination and stereotyping.
- Teaching Note: Teaching about Oppression through Jenga: A Game-Based Learning Example for Social Work Educators. This resource reviews the relevant literature on institutional game-based learning and offers readers an original game-based learning exercise adapted from the popular game Jenga that they can use as a tool for teaching about institutional oppression.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Guidelines for Teaching about Genocide. This site provides teachers with guidelines, essential topics, common questions, lesson plans, and additional teaching materials for teaching about genocide. <u>https://www. ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust/teaching-about-genocide</u>

Multimedia

- The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. In 1979, a group of people in New Haven, Connecticut founded the Holocaust Survivors Film Project, which was an effort to videotape the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. In 1981, their work was entrusted to Yale University. The Fortunoff Archive currently includes more than 4,400 testimonies comprising more than 10,000 hours. http://web.library.yale.edu/testimonies
- Human Rights Watch. This site includes videos and photos that are regularly updated. Human Rights Watch is a non-profit, non-governmental human rights organization that publishes reports and briefings on human rights conditions around the world and meets with governments, NGOs, financial institutions, the United Nations, and corporations to press for change and to promote human rights and justice around the world. https://www.hrw.org/video-photos



- USC Shoah Foundation. Founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994, the Shoah Foundation has conducted more than 55,000 audio-visual interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides. Its archive, which is available online and is searchable by keywords, provides a resource for students to learn directly from the eyewitnesses of history. http://sfi.usc.edu
- Voices of Rwanda. "Voices of Rwanda is dedicated to recording and preserving testimonies of Rwandans, and to ensuring that their stories inform the world about genocide and inspire a global sense of responsibility to prevent human rights atrocities." <u>http://</u> <u>voicesofrwanda.org</u>

Films

- John Rabe (2009). This film is about John Rabe, a German businessman and member of the Nazi Party, who helped to create a protective International Safety Zone in Nanking, China during its invasion by Japan. This helped to save more than 200,000 lives that would have otherwise been lost in the Nanking Massacre in late 1937 and early 1938. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1124377/
- *Schindler's List (1993).* Directed and co-produced by Steven Spielberg, this film is based on the novel *Schindler's Ark* by Thomas Keneally. It is about Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved the lives of more than 1000 people from the Holocaust by employing them in his factories during the Second World War. <u>http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108052/</u>
- Filmography of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity. Compiled by Adam Jones, Ph.D., this filmography is published by the International Association of Genocide Scholars, "a global, interdisciplinary, non-partisan organization that seeks to further research and teaching about the nature, causes, and consequences of genocide, and advance policy studies on genocide prevention." <u>http://www.genocidescholars.org/</u> <u>resources/filmography</u>

Other Modes of Inquiry

Oppression and genocide can be linked to various other modes of inquiry. For example, how does the media help or hinder conflict resolution efforts during large-scale human atrocities? How do issues relating to the environment, poverty and wealth, gender politics, or Indigenous people relate to oppression? How does oppression and genocide affect peace and conflict, health, or human rights?

Similarly, other subject matter can be incorporated or related to these events. Connecting these issues with other topics and current events helps students relate to the issue while recognizing the broader, global contributions and impacts on these events.

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