

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

Soc 1101: Summer 2023

Shelley Yan

Department of Sociology

Cornell University

Discipline Origins: The Five Guys and Beyond

Lecture 3

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIOLOGY

1. The historical: What are the shared vs different goals of sociology's "founding fathers"?

- Auguste Comte (1798 -1857)
- Karl Marx (1818 -1883)
- Émile Durkheim (1858 – 1917)
- Georg Simmel (1858-1918)
- Max Weber (1864 – 1920)



2. The critical: How did they become "founding fathers"? What are the understandings of theory outside of the "canon"?

Auguste Comte & Positivism

- Most influential work: *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1855)
- Adopted the name "Sociology" (sociologie in French)
- The scientific study of human society
 - Scientific = positivist
- Mathematics vs sociology?
 - Generalizability
 - Empirical complexity
- Legacy: Positivist sociology (e.g., Durkheim)



KARL MARX & CLASS CONFLICT

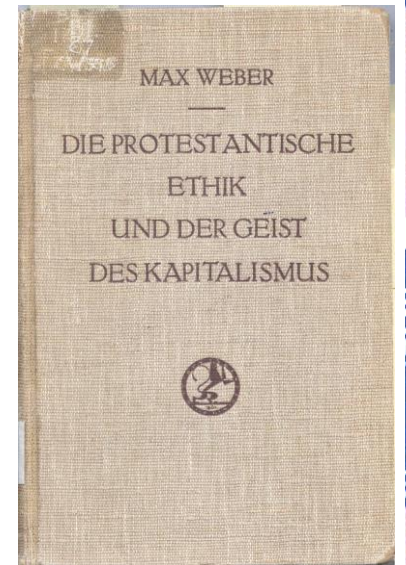
- **Social theory ⇔ Political project**
- **Class struggle as the engine of history**
 - **Capitalism specifically: bourgeoisie vs proletariat**
- **Legacy:**
 - **Conflict perspective – a main paradigm in sociology**
 - **Communist revolutions**
 - **Critical theory (Frankfurt School, contemporary Feminist theory etc.)**

**i only type in
lower case
because i hate
capitalism**



MAX WEBER & INTERPRETIVISM

- Religion and capitalism
 - *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)*
- **Verstehen**: “understanding” the actor from the subjects’ point of view, focusing on the meanings they attach to their behaviors



MAX WEBER & INTERPRETIVISM



- “Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.”
- “Sociology is concerned with the “**interpretive understanding of social action** in order thereby to arrive at **a causal explanation** of its course and effects. [...] (Weber, 1922 *Economy and Society*, p4)

EXAMPLE: RELIGION

POSITIVIST might:

- **Count members of religions**
 - e.g. U.S: 70% ID as Christian
- **Look for general laws**
 - e.g. Durkheim argued: Protestants more likely to commit suicide than Catholics

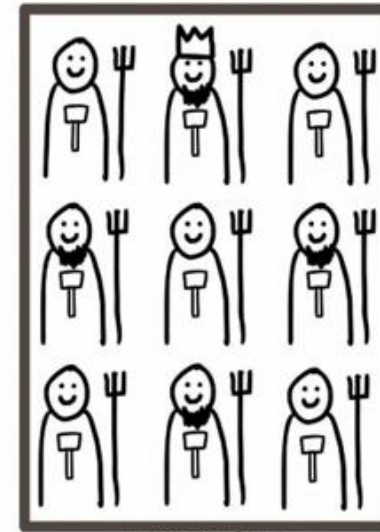
INTERPRETIVIST might:

- **Interview people about their subjective religious identities**
 - e.g. what it means to be Christian
- **Compare how different people have different understandings of same phenomena**
 - e.g. my "Christian" isn't the same as your "Christian"

DURKHEIM & SOCIAL COHESION

- Fought to establish sociology as an academic discipline in France
- Collective consciousness; rituals; social solidarity

**mechanical
solidarity**
(pre-modern)

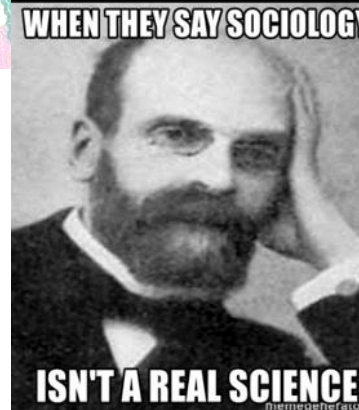


solidarity from
collective consciousness

**organic
solidarity**
(modern)



solidarity from
inter-dependence



GEORGE SIMMEL: SOCIAL FORMS

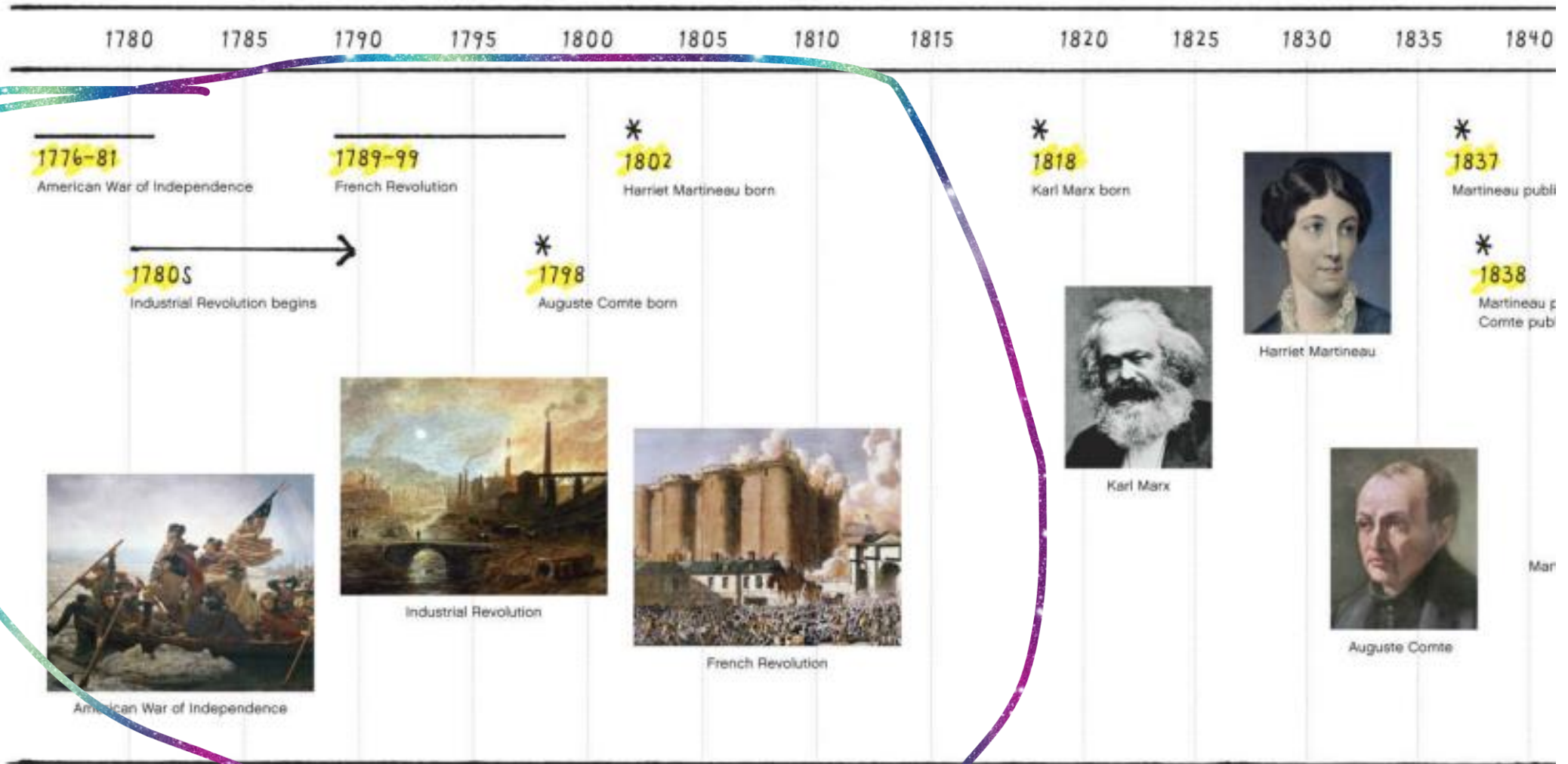


- **“Sociology [...] is a new method”, which must discriminate between “form” and “content” of society”. –Simmel, 1909, *The Problem of Sociology* in *American Journal of Sociology***
- **“Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner . . . (12).” –Simmel, 1903, *The Metropolis and Mental Life***

FOUNDING FATHERS OF SOCIOLOGY

- **Aguste Comte (1798-1857) [positivism]**
 - **Methods**
- **Karl Marx (1818-1883) [class conflict]**
 - **What divides us**
- **Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) [social cohesion]**
 - **What unites us as *large groups***
- **Max Weber (1864-1920) [interpretivism]**
 - **Methods**
- **Georg Simmel (1858-1918) [social networks]**
 - **What unites us as *individuals***

TWO CENTURIES OF SOCIOLOGY



FOUNDING FATHERS OF SOCIOLOGY

- **Aguste Comte (1798-1857) [positivism]**
 - **Methods**
- **Karl Marx (1818-1883) [class conflict]**
 - **What divides us**
- **Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) [social cohesion]**
 - **What unites us as *large groups***
- **Max Weber (1864-1920) [interpretivism]**
 - **Methods**
- **Georg Simmel (1858-1918) [social networks]**
 - **What unites us as *individuals***

(Europe's)
Transition to
Modernity/
Capitalism
Industrialization

REFLECTIONS ON THE CANON

The five guys are:

- 1. Considered the founding fathers of sociology**
- 2. European White men**

This is not to say that women, people of color, and people from non-European origins have not made incredibly creative contributions to sociology.

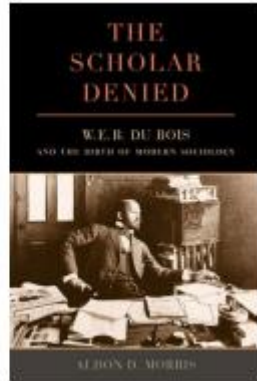
But for reasons of power, resources, privilege and discrimination, the (Eurocentric) history has not given them as much attention or credit—at least within English-speaking sociology

FREQUENTLY FORGOTTEN FOUNDERS (OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY)

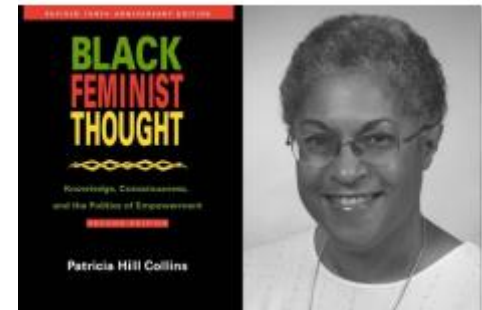


- **Harriet Martineau
(1802-1876)**

- **Jane Addams (1860-
1935)**



- **W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-
1963)**



NEXT CLASS

- **Social Facts and Research Methods**
- **Readings**
 - **Conley (textbook) 2021 Ch 2**