

Pioneering Founders of Sociology

1. Auguste Comte : French social philosopher (1798-1857)

Comte was the first social philosopher to coin and use the term sociology. He was also the first to regard himself as a sociologist (known as the father of sociology). He argued that *sociology can and should study society and social phenomena following the pattern and procedures of the natural science*. Comte believed that a theoretical science of society and the systematic investigation of human behavior were needed to improve society. Comte assumed that a theoretical science of society and the systematic investigation of human behavior were needed to improve society.

2. Karl Marx: German social philosopher, (1818-1883)

Marx was a world –renowned social philosopher, sociologist and economic historian. He contributed greatly to sociological ideas. He introduced key concepts in sociology like *social class, social class conflict, social oppression, alienation*, etc. According to Marx, *economic forces are the keys to understanding society and social change*. He worked hard towards *realizing a classless society*, one in which there will be no exploitation and oppression of one class by another, and wherein all individuals will work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. (Macdonis, 1997)

3. Harriet Martineau: British sociologist, (1802-1876)

Harriet was interested in social issues at a time when women were greatly stereotyped. She was one of the pioneering sociologists. She came across with the writings of Comte and read them. She was an active advocate of the abolition of slavery and she wrote on many crosscutting issues such as racial and gender relations. She helped popularize the ideas and writings of Comte by translating them into English (Henslin and Nelson, 1995)

4. Herbert Spencer: British social philosopher, (1820-1903)

Spencer was a prominent social philosopher of the 19th century. He was famous for *the organic analogy of human society*. He viewed society as an organic system, having its own structure and functioning in ways analogous to the biological system. Spencer's ideas of the evolution were called "Social Darwinism», which is analogous to the biological evolutionary model. Social Darwinism is the attempt to apply by analogy the evolutionary theories of plant and animal development to the explanation of human society and social phenomena (Team of Experts, 2000).

5. Emile Durkheim: French sociologist, (1858-1917)

Durkheim was a sociologist; he defined sociology as the study of social facts. According to him, there are social facts, which are distinct from biological and psychological facts. By social facts, he meant *the patterns of behavior that characterizes a social group in a given society*. They should be studied objectively. Some regard Durkheim as the first sociologist *to apply statistical methods to the study of social phenomena*. (Macionis, 1997; Clahoun, et al, 1994)

6. Max Weber: German Sociologist (1864-1920)

Weber was another prominent social scientist. He believed that sociology is the scientific study of man social action. He agreed with much *Marxian theories* but did not accept his idea that economic forces are central to social change. Weber argues that we cannot understand human behavior by just looking at statistics. Every activity and behavior of people needs to be interpreted. He argued that a sociologist must aim at what are called subjective meanings, the ways in which people interpret their own behavior or the meanings people attach their own behavior (Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Rosenberg, 1987).

7. Abu Zaid Abdal Rahman Ibn Khaldun: Arab Sociologist (1332–1406)

Abu Zaid Abdal Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was a historian, philosopher, and founder of Arab social science. Born in Tunis, North Africa, Ibn Khaldun worked for a variety of North African princes as an emissary and in administrative positions. He was active in politics during a period of intense rivalries among the leaders in the Arab world, and even spent time in prison for his activities. Ibn Khaldun lived the last years of his life in Egypt as a scholar, teacher, and magistrate. He wrote a lengthy history of world that laid groundwork for sociology. In seven volumes, he covered the history of Arabs and Berbers, the nature of civilization, and the meaning of historical events (Baali 1988). He advocated empirical research and has been called an excellent deductive sociologist who was “more positivistic than Durkheim” (Gellner 1975, 203).

After the attacks on New York and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, interest in Ibn Khaldun’s work and his analysis of civilizations was revived (e.g., Ahmed 2002). Today, the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development (ICDS), an independent applied-social-science research institution in Egypt that applies social science perspectives to serve Egypt and Arab development, bears his name.

8. C. Wright Mills: American Sociologist (1916–1962)

C. Wright Mills (1916–62) was a colorful, contentious, and influential figure in American sociology. He was a tall man (6’2”), originally from Texas, described as speaking with a “thundering drawl” (Horowitz 1983, 4). Mills cultivated a renegade image with his motorcycle and leather jacket. After riding to work, he would deposit “his paratroop boots on the podium before lecturing to his enthralled students” (Tilman 1984, 9). He reportedly bragged about his prowess with women, married three times, and fathered a child during each marriage. As a student at the University of Texas–Austin, Mills excelled in sociology and other subjects he liked with professors he respected. His work in other areas was only average. Yet several of his professors recognized his

abilities even as an undergraduate and his talent for presenting interesting lectures (Horowitz 1983, 19–21; Tilman 1984, 6–7). Always one to do things his own way rather than bow to conformity, Mills received both a baccalaureate and master’s degree from the University of Texas on the same date in 1939 (Horowitz 1983, 19). He went to the University of Wisconsin to obtain his doctorate.

9. Albion Woodbury Small: American Sociologist (1854–1926)

Albion Woodbury Small (1854–1926) was born in Buckfield, Maine. He received his bachelor’s degree from Colby College in 1876. Small then continued his studies at the Newton Theological Seminary, and in Europe at the University of Berlin and the University of Leipzig. Upon his return to the United States, he took a position as professor of history and economics at Colby, later becoming president of the school. Small was appointed professor of sociology at the University of Chicago in 1892. At that time, “the university was less than two years old and not yet open to students” (Bannister 1987, 37). Small’s appointment was the first professorship in sociology in the United States. His annual salary was \$7,000. That was not an extraordinary amount for Chicago professors. It was, however, high for even the most well-known professors elsewhere.

10. Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931)

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) was born the daughter of Mississippi slaves. It is her parents that Wells-Barnett says gave her “the interest in politics, the clear sense of justice, and the confidence for independent thought which are hallmarks of her sociology” (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1998, 151). She attended Rust College until her parents’ death from yellow fever in 1876 required that she goes to work to support her five younger siblings. Wells-Barnett took a job teaching school in Memphis. She also worked as a journalist and became and part-owner of the Free Speech and Headlight of Memphis. She gained quite a bit of notoriety among

the black community by refusing to move to the segregated section of a railroad car and a subsequent lawsuit she brought against the railroad. Although her case was won in circuit court, it was lost on appeal.

References List

1. American Sociological Association (ASA). <http://www.asanet.org/>. The ASA is the largest professional organization representing sociology in the United States. Its site contains a wealth of information for anyone interested in the field, including professional sociologists, students, and the public
2. Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. This book critiques sociological thinking and shows the ways that our personal lives are inevitably linked with social issues
3. SocioSite. <http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/sociosite/index.html>. Under chief editor Albert Benschop, this site provides an extensive set of links to topics of interest to social scientists internationally.
4. Steele, Stephen F., AnneMarie Scarisbrick-Hauser, and William J. Hauser. 1999. *Solution-Centered Sociology: Addressing Problems through Applied Sociology*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage. This book shows how to apply a range of sociological tools to solve real-life problems.
5. Stephan, Ed. A Sociology Timeline from 1600. <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/timeline.html>. This extensive timeline contains a wealth of events including births, deaths, and publications of many influential sociologists (and others). There are also links to additional online information for some entries and a calendar that allows users to see what happened in sociological history, by date.