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The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 102, No. 6. (May, 1997), pp. 1511-1557.

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Why Is Classical Theory Classical?¹

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The familiar canon embodies an untenable foundation story of great men theorizing European modernity. Sociology actually emerged from a broad cultural dynamic in which tensions of liberalism and empire were central. Global expansion and colonization gave sociology its main conceptual framework and much of its data, key problems, and methods. After early-20th-century crisis, a profoundly reconstructed American discipline emerged, centered on difference and disorder within the metropole. The retrospective creation of a "classical" canon solved certain cultural dilemmas for this enterprise and generated a discipline-defining pedagogy, at the price of narrowing sociology's intellectual scope and concealing much of its history.

FOUNDATION STORIES

In any recent introductory sociology textbook, whether written in the United States (Calhoun, Light, and Keller 1994) or on the other side of the world (Waters and Crook 1993), there will almost certainly be, in the first few pages, a discussion of founding fathers, focused on Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. The introductory chapter will probably, though not certainly, also mention Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Georg Simmel. It will sometimes mention members of a second team: Ferdinand Tönnies, Friedrich Engels, Vilfredo Pareto, William Graham Sumner, Charles H. Cooley, and G. H. Mead.

In the view normally presented to undergraduates, these founding fathers created sociology in response to dramatic changes in European society: the industrial revolution, class conflict, secularization, alienation, and the modern state. "It was above all *a science of the new industrial society*"

¹ Work for this article was supported by research funds from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the University of Sydney. I am grateful for research assistance from John Fisher and advice from Pam Benton, Craig Calhoun, Wally Goldfrank, Barbara Laslett, James O'Connor, Jennifer Platt, Daniel Schulman, Andy Szasz, Barrie Thorne, students in my "classical theory" classes, and *AJS* reviewers. Direct correspondence to R. W. Connell, Faculty of Education A35, University of Sydney, Sydney NSW 2006, Australia.

(Bottomore [1962] 1987, p. 7). This view is repeated in more sophisticated form in advanced training. American graduate programs in sociology normally have courses (often required courses) in which students are introduced to "classical theory" and make a close study of certain texts written by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

This curriculum, in turn, is backed by a disciplinary history in which sociologists account for their origins in virtually the same terms. For instance Swingewood's *Short History of Sociological Thought* (1991), a reliable and well-regarded British text, presents a three-part narrative: "Foundations" (leading up to Comte and Marx), "Classical Sociology" (centering on Durkheim, Weber, and Marx), and "Modern Sociology." Similarly, according to Münch (1994, 1:ix) in Germany, the "classical period . . . was the time when the founding fathers set the framework of sociolog[ical] theory."

Sociologists take this account of their origins seriously. The classical texts are widely cited, and it is not uncommon for research papers, monographs, or treatises to identify themselves as having a Marxist, Durkheimian, or Weberian approach (e.g., Wallace 1994). A star-studded review of the field, *Social Theory Today*, began with a ringing declaration of "the centrality of the classics" (Alexander 1987). In the 1990s, commentary on classical texts remains a major genre of theory, even for those who think the process of interpretation should have an end (Turner 1993). To others, the genre is open-ended and can acquire new layers. One can go back in time and read Durkheim through the lens of Aristotle (Challenger 1994) or come forward and read Durkheim through the lens of post-post-structuralism (Lehmann 1993). Unfamiliar texts of Weber can be read (Drysdale 1996), or familiar ones reread (Kalberg 1996).

It is not just through direct commentary that the classical texts affect the discipline. As symbols of "what is most distinctively sociological" (Sugarman 1968, p. 84), they influence what kind of discussion counts as sociological theory, what theoretical language sociologists are to speak in, and what problems are most worth speaking about.

It is now well recognized (Seidman 1994) that the idea of classical theory embodies a "canon," in the sense used by literary theory (Guillory 1995): a privileged set of texts, whose interpretation and reinterpretation defines a field. Critique of the canon has begun, and a search is under way for improvements. The journal *Sociological Theory* has been running a series, Neglected Theorists. Undergraduate textbooks are beginning a kind of affirmative action, adding W. E. B. Du Bois (Macionis 1993) or Jane Addams (Thio 1992) to the familiar list of founders.

These responses are welcome as a modest broadening in ideas of the past. They do little to change the way of *using* the past that is embedded in the concept of "classical theory" and the pedagogy of classical texts.

Nor have they altered sociologists' general view of the structure of the discipline's history: a foundational moment arising from the internal transformation of European society; discipline-defining texts written by a small group of brilliant authors; a direct line of descent from them to us.

There are two troubling anomalies, however, about this story. First, though classical theory has great prestige in principle, much of sociological research ignores it in practice. The bulk of quantitative sociology, as well as most ethnographic and life-history research, proceeds without reference to canonical theory or the problems it defines. The gap has led some commentators (e.g., Chafetz 1993) to argue in vehement terms that the classical canon is now irrelevant and others to argue that it performs mainly a symbolic function, providing "rituals of solidarity" for the profession of sociology (Stinchcombe 1982).

Second, sociologists in the "classical period" themselves did not believe this origin story. When Franklin H. Giddings (1896), the first professor of sociology at Columbia University, published *The Principles of Sociology*, he named as the founding father—Adam Smith. Victor Branford (1904), expounding "the founders of sociology" to a meeting in London, treated as the central figure—Condorcet. Durkheim's and Weber's academic contemporaries did not see them as giants and often disregarded Marx.

Turn-of-the-century sociology had no list of classics in the modern sense. Writers expounding the new science would commonly refer to Comte as the inventor of the term, to Charles Darwin as the key figure in the theory of evolution, and then to any of a wide range of figures in the intellectual landscape of evolutionary speculation.

Witness the account of the discipline in the second edition of Lester F. Ward's *Dynamic Sociology*. At the time of the first edition in 1883, Ward observed, the term "sociology" had not been in popular use. But in the intervening decade a series of brilliant scientific contributions had established sociology as a popular concept. There were now research journals, university courses, and societies, and sociology "bids fair to become the leading science of the twentieth century, as biology has been that of the nineteenth" (Ward 1897, p. viii). Ward listed 37 notable contributors to the new science. The list included Durkheim and Tönnies but not Marx (nor Weber, who had published little that was recognizable as "sociology" at this date, when the discipline was already institutionalized and international).

The list of notables became a common feature in the textbooks of sociology that multiplied in the United States from the 1890s, Giddings's *Principles* being one of the first. (Ward had included Giddings in his list, and Giddings politely included Ward in his.) The famous "Green Bible" of the Chicago school, Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess's ([1921] 1924,

p. 57) *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, listed 23 “representative works in systematic sociology.” Simmel and Durkheim were among them but not Marx, Weber, or Pareto. Only one work by Weber was mentioned in this 1,000-page volume, only in the notes, and Weber was given less attention than Walker, Wallace, Wheeler, Wittenmyer, Woods, or Worms. Clarence M. Case’s *Outlines of Introductory Sociology* (1924) brushed aside Marx, mentioned Durkheim three times (disparagingly), completely ignored Weber, and included—in what was also a 1,000-page reader in sociology—no text from any of the three.

As late as the 1920s, then, there was no sense that certain texts were discipline-defining “classics” demanding special study. Rather, there was a sense of a broad, almost impersonal, advance of scientific knowledge with the notables being simply leading members of the pioneering crew. Sociologists accepted the view, articulated early in the history of the discipline by Charles Letourneau (1881, p. vi), that “the commencement of any science, however simple, is always a collective work. It requires the constant labour of many patient workmen.”

This suggests an encyclopedic, rather than a canonical, view of the new science by its practitioners. Encyclopedism was certainly the note struck by interwar academic commentators other than Talcott Parsons. Pitirim A. Sorokin, expounding European thought to North Americans, took a broad view of who should be included in *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (1928). Pareto, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber were there, along with Le Play, Bruhnes, Galton, Coste, Gumpłowicz, Petrajitzsky, and many more. Even more sweeping was the view from Howard Becker and Harry E. Barnes’s *Social Thought from Lore to Science* (1938). The members of the modern canon were certainly here—along with literally hundreds of other theorists and researchers, carefully abstracted and classified by nationality, date, and school.

It was only in the following generation that the idea of a classical period and the short list of classical authors and canonical texts took hold. The process is strikingly documented in Platt’s (1995) important study of the American reception of Durkheim’s *Rules of Sociological Method*. Platt shows, by a detailed examination of both textbook references and specialist studies, that Durkheim had only a modest presence in early American sociological thought. He was a known contemporary, but the *Rules* served mainly as a punching bag for arguments about the importance of the individual. The proportion of introductory texts that discussed Durkheim fell after his death to a low point in the 1930s. It then rose spectacularly, reaching nearly 90% in the 1960s. The stunning reversal of Durkheim’s reputation began in the late 1930s and consolidated in the 1950s. The *Rules* became a must-read classic, for the first time, half a century after it was published.

Detailed studies of this kind immediately confront us with the larger question, Why did a canon come into existence at all? Why does sociology now have the configuration of constructed memories known as “classical theory”? Psychoanalysis aside, sociology is the only one of the social sciences to take such an intense interest in the writings of a small group of putative founding fathers. Political scientists remember Niccolò Machiavelli and James Bryce, psychologists sometimes discuss Wilhelm Wundt and Sigmund Freud, educationists remember John Amos Comenius and often read John Dewey, some economists still read Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and historians honor—though they do not often read—Jules Michelet and Leopold von Ranke. None of these disciplines, however, shares sociology’s identity-defining focus on a small group of classical theorists nor its pedagogy of canonical texts.

To understand why this is so and what the classical canon means for modern sociology, it is not sufficient to deconstruct the canon and show its artifactual character. Nor is it sufficient to trace the waxing and waning “influence” of particular theorists, though these are useful steps along the way. The question concerns the structure of sociological thought as a whole. Accordingly we must examine the history of sociology as a collective product—the shared concerns, assumptions, and practices making up the discipline at various times—and the shape given to that history by the changing social forces that constructed the discipline.

SOCIOLOGY, GLOBAL DIFFERENCE, AND EMPIRE

Sociology as a teaching discipline and a discourse in the public arena was constructed at a particular time and place: the final two decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, in the great cities and university towns of France, the United States, Britain, Germany, and, a little later, Russia.

The conventional foundation story interprets these places as the locale of a process of modernization, or capitalist industrialization, internal to European and North American society. In this view—well illustrated by Nisbet’s (1967) formula of “the two revolutions,” industrial and democratic, and by Giddens’s (1989) formula of industrialization and urbanism—sociology arose from the experience of modernity. It was an attempt to interpret the new society being brought into being. Even the revisionist historiography of Therborn (1976), Seidman (1983), Lepenies (1988), and Ross (1991) maintains this internalist focus.

The main difficulty with this view is that it does not square with the most relevant evidence—the texts that sociologists at the time were writing and reading. This evidence is unfamiliar because of the canon itself. Most sociologists today do not read early sociological texts *except* the ca-

nonical ones. However surprising it may now seem, most general treatises or textbooks of sociology, up to the First World War, did not have a great deal to say about the modernization or the contemporary structure of the society the authors lived in. Their main interest was elsewhere. Giddings's *Readings in Descriptive and Historical Sociology* (1906), typical in this respect, ranged from polyandry in Ceylon via matrilineal survivals among the Tartars to the mining camps of California. It was so little focused on modernity that it took as its reading on "sovereignty" a medieval rendering of the legend of King Arthur.

The evidence of college textbooks needs not correspond to the research focus of sociology, but on this topic too, we have abundant evidence, collected by no less a figure than Durkheim. Between 1898 and 1913, Durkheim and his hardworking collaborators produced 12 issues of *L'Année sociologique*, an extraordinarily detailed international survey of each year's publications in or relevant to sociology. In these issues, nearly 2,400 reviews were published.² Modern industrial society was certainly included: the journal published reviews on the American worker, the European middle class, technology in German industries, books by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, by Werner Sombart, by Charles Booth on London poverty, even a work by J. Ramsay MacDonald, later Labour prime minister of Britain. But works focused on the recent or contemporary societies of Europe and North America made up only a minority of the content of *L'Année sociologique*—about 28% of the reviews. Even fewer were focused on "the new industrial society," since the reviews on Europe included treatises on peasant folktales, witchcraft in Scotland, crime in Asturias, and the measurements of skulls.

The bulk of the research material of sociology, as Durkheim and his colleagues documented it, did not concern modernity. Twice as many of the reviews concerned ancient and medieval societies, colonial or remote societies, or global surveys of human history. Studies of holy war in ancient Israel, Malay magic, Buddhist India, technical points of Roman law, medieval vengeance, Aboriginal kinship in central Australia, and the legal systems of primitive societies were more characteristic of "sociology" as seen in *L'Année sociologique* than studies of new technology or bureaucracy. The pattern is exactly that of textbooks like Giddings's (1906).

The enormous spectrum of human history that the sociologists took as their domain was organized by a central idea: difference between the

² I have counted only reviews in large type, whatever their length, not the brief notices in small type in the early issues nor the listings of titles without reviews. The reviews concerning Western/Northern Europe and modern North America increase with time: they average 24% of all reviews in the first six issues, 28% in the next five issues, and 32% in the bumper issue in the year before the war.

civilization of the metropole and an Other whose main feature was its primitiveness. I will call this the idea of “global difference.” Presented in many different forms, this contrast pervades the sociology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Together with the idea of “progress” from the primitive to the advanced (discussed below), it is both the key assumption of sociological research and the major object of sociological theory.

The idea of global difference was often conveyed by a discussion of “origins.” In this genre of writing, sociologists would posit an original state of society (or some aspect of society, such as law, morality, or marriage), then speculate on the process of evolution that must have led forward from there. The bulk of the three volumes of Spencer’s *Principles of Sociology* ([1874–77] 1893–96), was spent in telling such a story for every type of institution that Spencer could identify: domestic institutions, political institutions, ecclesiastical institutions, and so forth. Spencer proceeded as if the proof of social evolution was not complete without an evolutionary narrative, from origins to the contemporary form, for each and every case. (This was a much more important feature of his theorizing than the “society as organism” analogy for which he is now mostly remembered.)

The formula of development from a primitive origin to an advanced form was widespread in Victorian biological and social thought (Burrow 1966). Sociologists simply applied a logic that their audience would take for granted. The same architecture is found in works as well known as Durkheim’s *Division of Labor in Society* ([1893] 1964) and as obscure as Fairbanks’s *Introduction to Sociology* ([1896] 1901).

In none of these works was the idea of an “origin” taken as a concrete historical question. It could have been. Knowledge of early societies was growing dramatically in these decades. Troy, Mycenae, and Knossos were excavated, Flinders Petrie systematized the archaeology of Egypt, the first evidence of Sumerian culture was uncovered at Lagash and Nippur (Stiebing 1993). But sociology was not interested in where and when a particular originating event occurred. This insouciance was not confined to origins. Treatise after treatise offered surveys of social evolution or contrasts of primitive and advanced institutions, with only the slightest reference to when the major changes actually happened. Time functioned in sociological thought mainly as a sign of global difference. What was early could be taken to be Other.

Durkheim did not have to find a precise time in the past for “segmentary societies”; they existed in his own day. In a move characteristic of sociology at the time, Durkheim used the example of the Kabyle of Algeria as well as the ancient Hebrews and made no conceptual distinction between the cases. He knew about the Hebrews because the ancient texts were in his library. How did he know about Kabylia? Because the French had conquered Algeria earlier in the century, and at the time Durkheim wrote,

the French colonists were engaged in evicting the local population from the best land (Bennoune 1988). Given the recent history of violent conquest, peasant rebellion, and debate over colonization, no French intellectual could fail to know something about the Kabyle. For the curious, the social life of France's North African subjects was being documented in great detail by a series of private and official inquiries (Burke 1980).

This was far from being the only French adventure into the world of the primitive Other. In the dozen years before *Division of Labor* was published, the armies of the French republic had moved out from Algeria to conquer Tunisia, had fought a war in Indochina, conquered Annam and Tonkin (modern Vietnam), and seized control of Laos and Cambodia, and had established a protectorate over Madagascar. Under the Berlin Treaty of 1885, French trading posts in central and western Africa became the basis of a whole new empire. As Durkheim was writing and publishing the *Division of Labor* and *The Rules of Sociological Method*, French colonial armies were engaged in a spectacular series of campaigns against the Muslim regimes of inland north and west Africa, which produced vast conquests from the Atlantic almost to the Nile.

Impressive as this growth was, it was only part of a larger process. The British Empire, also a maritime empire with a preindustrial history, similarly gained a new dynamism and grew to vast size in the 19th century (Cain and Hopkins 1993). Imperial expansion went overland as well as overseas. The 13-colony United States became one of the most dynamic imperial powers throughout the 19th century, with about 80 years of overland conquest and settlement (the "westward expansion"), followed by a shorter period of overseas conquest. The tsarist overland conquests, begun in earlier centuries, were extended in the Far East and Central Asia. In the later part of the 19th century, they were consolidated by Russian settlement. Prussia's expansion as an imperial power began with conquest within Europe—in the process, setting up a relationship between dominant and conquered races in the East that became the subject of the young Weber's first sociological research (Weber [1894] 1989). German overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific followed the formation of the Reich in 1871. By the time the global system of rival empires reached its violent crisis in the Great War of 1914–18, a world-historical change had been accomplished—the creation of a world-embracing social order.

In this light, the time and place where the discipline of sociology was created take a new significance. The locales were the urban and cultural centers of the major imperial powers at the high tide of modern imperialism. They were the "metropole," in the useful French term, to the larger colonial world. The intellectuals who created sociology were very much aware of this. One of the major tasks of sociological research—and of *L'Année sociologique* as a record of sociological knowledge—was to

gather up the information yielded by the colonizing powers' encounter with the colonized world. The idea of global difference was not invented by European and North American intellectuals. It was given to them by the process of economic and colonial expansion, inscribed in the social structure of the empires that the North Atlantic powers constructed.

The birth of sociology cannot be understood by internalist models, then, because it crucially involves the structure of *world society*. It can only be understood in geopolitical terms.

Since Kiernan's ([1969] 1986) remarkable survey, *The Lords of Human Kind*, historians have begun to grasp the immense impact that the global expansion of North Atlantic power had on popular culture (MacDonald 1994) and intellectual life (Asad 1973; Said 1993) in the metropole, as well as in the colonies. It would be astonishing if the new science of society had escaped the impact of the greatest social change in the world at the time. In fact, the relationship was intimate. Sociology was formed within the culture of imperialism and embodied a cultural response to the colonized world. This fact is crucial in understanding the content and method of sociology as well as the discipline's cultural significance.

THE CONTENT AND METHOD OF SOCIOLOGY

The Concept of Progress

As the civilized Todd (1918, p. vii) remarked (the first, and perhaps still the only, professor of sociology to introduce Japanese cherry-blossom paintings into a discussion of social theory): "From Comte onward sociologists have pretty generally agreed that the only justification for a Science of Society is its contributions to a workable theory of progress." At the inaugural meeting of the American Sociological Society, Ward's (1907) presidential address announced that sociology was a science that "has gone farther even than physics," since the basic law of social evolution had been discovered along with its explanation. As Comte had argued, sociology itself embodied intellectual progress, its place "definitely fixed" (Ward 1907) at the summit of the hierarchy of sciences.

John Stuart Mill ([1843] 1891, p. 596), the sharpest mind among all whose idea of social science was shaped by Comte, had cautioned against equating historical change with improvement. Few of the sociologists took heed. Spencer's first social theory, in *Social Statics* ([1850] 1954), made moral improvement the touchstone of analysis of "the social state." Both the teaching enterprise of sociology departments (as documented in textbooks such as Giddings's *Principles* [1896] or Fairbanks's *Introduction* [1901]), and the popular expositions of the new science (such as Spencer's *Study of Sociology* [(1873) 1887] or Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution* [1898]), centered on the moral, intellectual, and material improvement of

society. Discovering and expounding laws of progress was the core of what sociology *meant* in those two generations.

There was, however, a shift of meaning within the concept of progress. In Comte's writings, the idea of progress, while extremely generalized, mostly had to do with the ancient-medieval-modern sequence within Western culture that was the common property of European intellectuals, worked up in different forms by Hegel and Marx. (In some passages in Comte's *Système de politique positive* [(1851–54) 1875–77] Western Europe is clearly also the locale for the transition to sociolatry, the religion of the final stage of human progress.) Sociological critiques of Comte in the next generation rejected the arbitrariness of his system and demanded an empirical base for the concept of progress.

This was the common ground between Spencer and Letourneau, and it is a fact of the greatest significance that both turned to the ethnographical dividend of empire as their main source of sociological data. Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* documented its evolutionary stories from the writings of European travelers, missionaries, settlers, and colonial officials, as well as historians. Spencer's reference list for "Political Institutions," for instance, ranged from the journals of the American explorers, Lewis and Clark, through the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* and *Thirty-Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria*, to that riveting work, *A Phrenologist among the Todas*. Letourneau's *Sociology, Based upon Ethnography*, while setting the facts out in a finer grid, was very similar in its sources. For instance, discussing the condition of women, Letourneau (1881, pp. 182–83), in two pages, cites social facts from China, Cochin China (Vietnam), Burma, India, Afghanistan, Africa, ancient Rome, and Arabia—apart from the last two, a roll call of British and French colonial expansion in the 19th century.

By the time sociology was being institutionalized in the final decade of the 19th century, the central proof of progress, and therefore the main intellectual ground on which the discipline rested, was the contrast of metropole and colonial Other. Sociologists did not debate the reality of this contrast; they debated how it should be interpreted—whether through physical evolution from lower to higher human types or through an evolution of mind and social forms and whether competition or cooperation was the motor of progress. In this context, Durkheim's *Division of Labor* was no founding text. It was a late intervention in a long-running debate. Durkheim quarreled with Comte and Spencer about how to explain the evolution of society, and he drastically reformulated the relation between social change and morality. Yet he did so by offering new "laws" within the same problematic, not by establishing a new framework.

The concern with progress was not a "value" separable from the science; it was constitutive of sociological knowledge. The arguments of Ward,

Du Bois, L. T. Hobhouse, Durkheim, Spencer, and Comte himself are absurd if one does not presuppose the *reality* of progress. It was as an account of progress that “sociology” spread to colonized peoples and others beyond the metropole. Spencer’s sociology, for instance, was being debated in India well before the turn of the century (Chatterjee 1986) and, in translation, became a significant influence on the intellectuals of Meiji Japan (Tominaga 1994) and the Chinese republican movement (Grieder 1981). Even Du Bois ([1904] 1978, p. 54) presented his research program on the American Negro community within the framework of progress, as a study of “the evolution of a vast group of men from simpler primitive conditions to higher more complex civilization.”

Race and Gender

The topics addressed by the new discipline also reveal its underlying connection with empire. Internalist accounts of classical sociology emphasize class, alienation, and industrialization and pay little attention to such topics as race, gender, and sexuality. “Race,” for instance, was not one of the “unit-ideas of sociology” recognized by Nisbet (1967) and does not even appear in the index of Swingewood’s *Short History* or Münch’s *Sociological Theory*. But a social science based on the social relations of empire must deal with race, and a social science concerned with evolutionary progress and hierarchies of populations must deal with gender and sexuality.

It is, then, an important fact that race, gender, and sexuality *were* core issues in sociology. When Du Bois ([1950] 1978, p. 281) proposed in 1901 that the color line was “the problem of the twentieth century,” he was saying nothing unusual for the time. The first “sociology” published in the United States, in the 1850s, was a defense of slave society in the South (Ross 1991, p. 32). After slavery was abolished, the wider colonial world remained as the object of sociological knowledge and was persistently interpreted in terms of race. Letourneau’s (1881, pp. 5–6) “ethnography” meant a science of racial differences, and his *Sociology* opened with an enumeration of the human races: the black man, “whose brain is small”; the yellow man, whose brain “is better shaped”; and the white man, who has “ascended a few degrees higher in the organic hierarchy” and whose “brain is developed.”

Spencer did not go so far but still displayed a genial contempt for the “primitive” races. Ward (1897) was confident that global race conflict reflected the superiority of the European races and that universal progress was dependent on their universal triumph. The extermination of other races was possible; at best, they could join the march of progress on the Europeans’ terms. The Canadian author of *Sociology Applied to Practical*

Politics (Crozier 1911) was blunter. To him, sociology proved that race mixing was a “crime” that would lead to the degeneracy of the white races’ culture. The solution was political: form a party of evolution and prevent miscegenation.

Here sociology reflected, in the most direct way, the social relations of imperialism. Racial hierarchies were the characteristic outcome of North Atlantic world power, the rule over indigenous peoples, and the creation of plantation economies and colonies of settlement. This is not to say that all sociologists were racists, though some certainly were. Others, Du Bois and Durkheim among them, suffered from racism. The point is, rather, that racial hierarchy on a world scale was a perception built into the concept of “progress” and a central part of what sociology was thought to be about: “It is evident that, despite the greater consideration now shown for the rights of the lower races, there can be no question as to the absolute ascendancy in the world today of the Western peoples and of Western civilisation” (Kidd 1898, p. 316).

Nor was there any question about the importance of gender and sexuality. Comte in his *Système* gave considerable prominence to the position of women, and his famous conflict with Mill included sharp differences over the subjection of women. When Spencer came to write the substantive part of *The Principles of Sociology*, the very first set of institutions he addressed was the “domestic.” By this he meant what we now call “gender” issues: kinship, family, and the status of women. Letourneau treated marriage and the family before property, and at greater length. He dealt with sexuality (“the genesic need”) near the start of *Sociology*, with an impressive absence of Victorian delicacy—menstruation, infanticide, prostitution, promiscuity, and sodomy were all on the agenda.

In the next generation, Ward devoted the longest chapter of *Pure Sociology* (1903) to developing a sociology of sex and gender, under the rubric of the “Phylogenetic Forces.” The longest coherent argument in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tönnies [1887] 1955, pp. 174–91) was devoted to gender difference. Much of Sumner’s *Folkways* ([1906] 1934) was about gender arrangements and sexual customs, the more startling the better. William I. Thomas (1907) published a whole book about sex and gender, and his work on these topics was duly reviewed in *L’Année sociologique*.

Some of this interest can be explained on internalist lines. Ward was certainly influenced by American feminism. Spencer had begun as a partisan of feminism, though he rapidly retreated (Paxton 1991). *The Study of Sociology* included an essay arguing the physical and mental inferiority of women, who, because of their commitment of energy to childbearing, stopped evolving earlier than men.

The way gender and sexual issues were taken up in sociology, however, was very much affected by evolutionary concerns and the issues of empire.

In the imperial context, racial and sexual issues were not separate. The interplay between them was most powerful in the colonies, and its vehemence is hard to grasp for those unfamiliar with the history of empire. In the later 19th century, the expansion of the North Atlantic powers was accompanied by a growing fear of miscegenation, a hardening color line, contempt of the colonizers for the sexuality or masculinity of the colonized (Sinha 1995), and fears of racial swamping that gave rise to panics about the “yellow peril,” pogroms against the Chinese in the United States and Australia, and racist immigration policies. Echoes are heard even in the most abstract texts from the metropole. Giddings (1896, p. xiii), expounding his theme of “consciousness of kind,” remarked that “living creatures do not commonly mate with individuals of other than their own species,” and his first example was “white men do not usually marry black women.”

These concerns underlie the discipline’s interest in eugenics. This pseudoscience of controlled evolution by selective breeding of humans was then regarded as a reputable and even important part of sociology. Francis Galton, the leading advocate of eugenics, was carefully evaluated by Durkheim in *The Division of Labor*. Galton’s (1904) work was published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, noticed in *L’Année sociologique*, and, in due course, reprinted in Park and Burgess’s (1924) famous textbook.

Method: The Imperial Gaze and Grand Ethnography

The most striking feature of sociological method was its bold abstraction. Comte offered cultural “laws” of vast scope, and the inaugural meeting of the American Sociological Society, 60 years later, was still celebrating tremendous “laws” of social evolution. As far away as the colonial boom city of Melbourne, we find an evolutionary social scientist formulating broad generalizations about archaic and modern society (Hearn 1878).

Durkheim ([1895] 1964, p. 139) argued convincingly that this approach was the basis of the whole enterprise: “Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, insofar as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts.” The comparative method meant assembling examples of the particular social “species” under study and examining their variations. For all Durkheim’s criticisms of Spencer, that was exactly what Spencer’s *Principles of Sociology* had done.

Comparative method rested on a one-way flow of information, a capacity to examine a range of societies from the outside, and an ability to move freely from one society to another—features that all map the relation of colonial domination. Letourneau (1881, p. 15) expressed the sociological point of view in a striking image: “Let us imagine an observer placed

somewhere high up in air above our terrestrial equator, far enough from the globe on which we live to take in a whole hemisphere at one glance, and yet close enough to distinguish with the aid, if need be, of a magnifying-glass, the continents and the seas, the great ranges of mountains, the white frozen tops of the polar regions, etc. etc.”

Sociology had limited interest in “ethnography” in the modern sense, the detailed description of a whole way of life. Witness the marginalization of Du Bois, whose *Philadelphia Negro* (1899) was perhaps the finest ethnography of the day. (The much greater attention given Chicago ethnographies from the 1920s is part of the argument below.) Rather, it was the structure of empire *as a whole* that provided the basis of sociological knowledge. Sociology’s comparative method embodied the imperial gaze on the world.

This is seen most fully in surveys such as Spencer’s *Descriptive Sociology* and the collective project of the *Année sociologique*. Perhaps the most striking was Hobhouse, Wheeler, and Ginsberg’s *Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples* (1915), an attempt to overcome the unsystematic use of data in theories of social evolution by providing a statistical base for comparative sociology. Hobhouse and his colleagues surveyed the whole world, collecting information on more than 500 societies. They classified societies by grade of economic development and tried to establish correlations of development with institutional patterns of law, government, family, war, and social hierarchy.

These surveys are virtually forgotten now, but the imperial gaze can also be found in more familiar texts. Sumner’s *Folkways*, published in 1906, is his last major work and perhaps the most influential book written by an American in the “classical” period. It sought to “put together all that we have learned from anthropology and ethnography about primitive men and primitive society” (Sumner 1934, p. 2). The whole world and the whole of history was the field of Sumner’s gaze. Take an entirely typical passage:

In Molembo a pestilence broke out soon after a Portuguese had died there. After that the natives took all possible measures not to allow any white man to die in their country. On the Nicobar islands some natives who had just begun to make pottery died. The art was given up and never again attempted. White men gave to one Bushman in a kraal a stick ornamented with buttons as a symbol of authority. The recipient died leaving the stick to his son. The son soon died. Then the Bushmen brought back the stick lest all should die. Until recently no building of incombustible materials could be built in any big town of the central province of Madagascar, on account of some ancient prejudice. A party of Eskimos met with no game. (Sumner 1934, p. 25)

Few cases delayed the author for more than two sentences. As this passage shows, for Sumner, the force of the argument did not lie in the depth of his ethnographic understanding. It was provided by the assemblage itself, the synoptic view of human affairs from a great height.

Durkheim's (1964, pp. 174–77) own use of the comparative method, for instance, in his analysis of transition from the horde to segmental societies, has been mentioned above. The imperial gaze can also be observed in Weber, in those late works where he was deliberately setting out to write sociology. In the manuscripts collected after his death and published as *Economy and Society*, Weber ([1922] 1978) had sometimes used the method of “ideal-types” with which the canon associates him. But more often he used the same procedure as Durkheim and Sumner, comparing actual social forms. The *Kategorienlehre* of part 1 set up the categories of theory in such a way as to require transhistorical content. In the studies of part 2, Weber swept across continents and civilizations in vast comparative analyses of economic forms, authority, religious groups, states, music, cities, and so forth. As Tenbruck ([1975] 1989) has suggested that the religious sociology provides whatever thematic unity there is in Weber's work, I will take an example from the chapter, “Religious Groups”:

Normally, the god of a locality and his cultic association reach fullest development on the foundation of the city as a separate political association with corporate rights, independent of the court and the person of the ruler. Consequently, such a full development of the local god is not found in India, the Far East, or Iran, and occurred only in limited measure in northern Europe, in the form of the tribal god. On the other hand, outside the sphere of autonomous cities this development occurred in Egypt, as early as the stage of zoolatric religion, in the interest of apportioning districts. From the city-states, local deities spread to confederacies such as those of the Israelites, Aetolians, etc. (Weber 1978, pp. 414–15)

The obvious risk in such a sweeping use of comparative method is incoherence. The problem could be overcome with a variation of the comparative method whose dramatic quality produced some of the best-remembered “classical” texts. This approach might be called “grand ethnography,” in contrast with the close-focus fieldwork of Franz Boas, Du Bois, or the French specialists on Algeria and Morocco.

Spencer pioneered it, with the broad contrast (in part 5 of *Principles of Sociology*) of “the militant type of society” oriented toward war, and “the industrial type of society” oriented toward peaceful production. But Spencer saw these two types of society existing at the same time—he feared, indeed, the tendency of empire to foster militarism in his own day. The more usual style of grand ethnography was built on the idea of global difference. It presented holistic accounts of the societies found at the origin

and the end of progress, on the understanding that “in all its leading characteristics—political, legal, religious, economic—archaic society presents a complete contrast to that in which we live” (Hearn 1878, p. 4).

The famous contrast of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* is grand ethnography in this sense, identifying polar states of society. Tönnies reached back to Henry Sumner Maine’s account of Indian society in expounding *gemeinschaft*, came forward to expound the state as an association characteristic of *gesellschaft*. Durkheim’s *Division of Labor* was a more rigorous grand ethnography, specifying the basis of the contrast in the division of labor and more systematically following out its ramifications at a given point in social evolution. It is not surprising that *L’Année sociologique* took a persistent interest in attempts to distinguish primitive from modern law, in German theories of *Naturvölker* and their distinction from *Kulturvölker*, and in attempts to formulate the nature of primitive religion.

Grand ethnography was the artistic climax of Comtean sociology, the literary form taken by the theory of progress as the rhetoric of the “struggle for existence” was bypassed. It replaced Spencer’s shapeless vision of history with a well-defined succession of social types.

SOCIOLOGY IN THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF EMPIRE

The late-19th- and early-20th-century world had several groups of intellectuals grappling with the analysis of society. The mobilization of European and American workers had produced an intellectual ferment, leading to Mikhail Bakunin’s analysis of religion and the state, Marx’s formulation of the structure of the capitalist economy, Ferdinand Lassalle’s strategy of mass organization, Fabian socialism, and Georges Sorel’s revolutionary syndicalism. The mobilization of women around the franchise, married women’s property rights, temperance, and women’s wages and working conditions had produced another ferment. Feminist ideas were articulated by intellectuals from John Stuart Mill to Henrik Ibsen, Susan B. Anthony, the Pankhursts, Clara Zetkin, Olive Schreiner, and Marianne Weber. The claim that Harriet Martineau was the “first woman sociologist” (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992) is anachronistic, but the story of Martineau—novelist, political economist, translator of Comte, travel writer, and reformer—should alert us to the complexity of the milieu in which sociology arose.

Beyond the metropole, there were many intellectuals in these decades who looked at modernity from the standpoint of non-European cultures and at Europeans from the standpoint of the colonized. Changes in culture and social life were central issues to writers as diverse as Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī in the Islamic Middle East (Ghamari-Tabrizi 1994), Bankim-

chandra Chatterjee (1986) in Bengal, and revolutionary activists such as Sun Yat-sen ([1927] 1975) in China.

From this range of groups, a range of discourses about society emerged, of which “sociology” was only one. The anarchist Bakunin ([1873] 1973), developing critiques of Comte on one side and Marx on the other, recognized at an astonishingly early stage that a “science of society” might rationalize the interests of a particular group (an insight that launched a long debate about intellectuals and the “new class”). Following Bakunin’s lead, we should consider the specific social location in which sociology developed and the cultural issues to which it was a response.

Sociology as a collective practice—that is to say, a set of institutions, a pedagogy, and a genre of writing—developed in a specific social location: among the men of the liberal bourgeoisie in the metropole. Those who wrote sociology were a mixture of engineers and doctors, academics, journalists, clerics, and a few who (like Weber after his breakdown) could live on their family capital.

This is not to say that the sociologists were, generally speaking, either rich or apologists for the rich. Ross (1991) points to the social distance between the academic makers of American sociology and the capitalist entrepreneurs of American industrialization. Weber was a fierce critic of the ruling class of the German Reich, and Durkheim was no friend of the French aristocracy. Nevertheless, they were beneficiaries of both class and gender hierarchies. Most lived modest bourgeois lives, supported by the domestic labor of women in patriarchal households. Their social interests were well captured by Comte’s celebrated slogan, “Order and Progress.”

Men of this sort began to discuss “the social science,” as Mill called it, from the 1850s on, in a diffuse movement to apply scientific thinking to society and to promote moral improvement. The successful Association for the Promotion of Social Science was set up in London as early as 1857 (Burrow 1966), soon copied in Boston (and thus the remote ancestor of the American Sociological Association of today). The same movement produced a heavily moralized “social science” curriculum in American colleges from the 1860s (Bernard and Bernard [1943] 1965). Individual attempts to synthesize the facts of primitive life and social progress (such as Edward Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* [1873]) counterpointed attempts to establish societies and institutes to formulate a science of man. The latter, in France, gave rise to the first chair to be named “sociology”—to which Letourneau was appointed in 1885 (Clark 1973).

In the 1890s “social science” curricula in American colleges, already fissuring, began to be replaced by more self-consciously scientific courses called “sociology.” Their claim to scientificity was closely connected with the shift to comparative method and imperial gaze discussed above. Hence

the world-spanning content of the first generation of sociology textbooks. Named sociology departments were established, undergraduate courses multiplied, and a market for textbooks rapidly developed (Morgan 1983). This was the historical moment registered in Ward's discussion of the foundation, mentioned above. Europe was a little slower to set up departments of sociology but quicker with associations and journals.

By the outbreak of the Great War, sociological societies, journals of sociology, and university courses in sociology were established institutions in most countries of the metropole. International links were built up, for instance, through René Worms's Institut International de Sociologie, launched in 1893, through visits both ways across the North Atlantic and through the journals. These provided a practical basis for sociology to develop as an international (more strictly, intermetropolitan) cultural formation. Histories that emphasize the distinctness of national traditions (e.g., Levine 1995) underestimate the extent to which scholars of the period were oriented to an international academic milieu and conceived of "sociology" as a universal science. Even a minor figure such as Stuckenberg (1903), the author of a now-forgotten evolutionary sociology, traveled from Boston to Berlin, Paris, and London collecting his materials and became well informed about the state of sociology on both sides of the Atlantic.

Overlapping the academic initiatives, and at first more important, was a genre of popular sociological writing. A text like Kidd's *Social Evolution* could be a considerable best-seller. Within four years of its publication in 1894, this book had gone through 14 printings in England and had American, German, Swedish, French, Russian, and Italian editions.

Sociological thought first circulated as part of the uplifting and informative literature avidly consumed by the new educated reading public. The same public, in the English-speaking countries, read novelists like Charles Dickens and George Eliot, cultural critics like John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, and scientists like Thomas H. Huxley. Sociology circulated through the same channels as these writers. Thus, Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* ([1873] 1887) was first published in installments in magazines—the *Contemporary Review* in Britain and *Popular Science Monthly* in America. It was then issued in book form in a new popular education collection called the International Scientific Series. Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, an integral part of the vast survey of human knowledge that he called the "synthetic philosophy," was first issued in installments to subscribers, the first volume coming out in 10 parts over three years, as it was being written.

The relationship between writers and readers was far from what sociological writing later became—the issuing of self-contained, impersonal re-

search reports to an abstract, professional audience. Lepenies (1988) has suggested that European sociology was culturally positioned “between literature and science,” but that exaggerates the contrast. Science too at this time was ethically and politically charged. Darwin, for instance, long hesitated to publish his work on evolution because he knew its religious and political consequences (Desmond and Moore 1992). Sociologists were expected as scientists to provide moral and political teaching. Their teaching especially addressed the dilemma that was inescapable for men of the liberal bourgeoisie: the tension between material privilege and reforming principle.

Nineteenth-century liberalism was, of course, a complex movement. It was not necessarily egalitarian and was often at odds with radical and democratic movements. But in liberal struggles against the ancien regime, commitments were forged that Hobhouse rousingly summarized in his *Liberalism* (1911): civil liberty and the rule of law, fiscal liberty, personal liberty, social liberty, economic liberty, domestic liberty, local, racial, and national liberty, international liberty, political liberty, and popular sovereignty. These remained culturally powerful beliefs in the public addressed by sociology.

These commitments were challenged by the class and gender inequalities of the metropole. The former is already recognized in discussions of the history of sociology (e.g., Therborn 1976); the latter is increasingly recognized in feminist revisions of that history (e.g., Deegan 1988; Lehmann 1994). What is still to be recognized is that liberal commitments were even more severely challenged by empire. Concepts of liberty, rights, and independence were plainly, repeatedly, and brutally violated by what the North Atlantic states were doing all over the world to the colonized.

The language I use is not overdramatized. Imperial expansion through this period was continuous and violent. It aroused resistance from the colonized, from the Little Big Horn to Zululand. It aroused protest from intellectuals in the colonies and the metropole. Contemporaries like the Anglican Bishop Colenso in South Africa (Guy 1983), the Australian historian G. W. Rusden, and the American journalist Park (whose indictment of Belgian rule in the Congo [Lyman 1992] is a striking prelude to his later career in Chicago sociology) denounced the murderous treatment of indigenous peoples. As Rusden (1908, 2:161) said,

It is not to be supposed that all colonists were accomplices in, or even knew of, the atrocities which were rife; nor were all offenders of like character. Some destroyed every native they met. Some with compunction (and in self-defence, as they persuaded themselves) kept guard on their property, and took life but rarely. At some stations in the interior there were but few ser-

vants, convicts or freedmen, and they were without moral restraint or support from a master. In all districts the first capture of a black woman, or the first shot fired at a black man, led to retaliation by the blacks, and thence to indiscriminate slaughter.

Hobhouse (1904, p. 56), consistent with his progressive liberalism, was a vehement critic of the ideology of imperialism, which he denounced as an amalgam of “the dream of conquest, the vanity of racial domination, and the greed of commercial gain.”

It is a familiar historical point that empire created political difficulties for liberalism: witness Gladstone’s conscience-stricken wrestling with Egyptian and Irish issues. Empire also created cultural and intellectual difficulties (Semmel 1993). Sociology, the science of progress that claimed the world as its province and that used so extensively the data of empire, was positioned squarely in this contradiction. And it offered a resolution.

Sociology displaced imperial power over the colonized into an abstract space of difference. The comparative method and grand ethnography deleted the actual practice of colonialism from the world of empire. We do not find passages like the one just quoted from Rusden in Durkheim’s account of segmentary societies, nor is the violent pressure of the Western powers on China throughout the 19th century part of Weber’s comparative sociology of Chinese and Western culture.

The relation between the imperial powers and the conquered was most directly addressed by the Darwinian wing of Comtean sociology (Spencer, Sumner, Ward, Hobhouse, Kidd, and fringe figures like John B. Crozier). They addressed it by constructing a fiction of “social evolution” that naturalized global difference. It is no wonder that Spencer became immensely influential in the colonies of settlement, where the idea of the evolutionary superiority of the settlers and their institutions replaced missionary religion as the main justification of empire.

This was despite the fact that Spencer was personally opposed to imperial conquest. In Spencer’s (1887, p. 212) writing, we do find sharp denunciation of “the diabolical cruelties committed by the invading Europeans” in America, the South Seas, and elsewhere. Like Gladstone—with whom he discussed the question—Spencer saw forcible conquest as a sign of militarism. But he had no such objection to peaceable settlement and economic competition. In the same passages, it is clear he regarded the colonized as “inferior races,” likely to lose out in evolutionary competition (Spencer 1887, p. 212; Duncan 1908, p. 224). Even Hobhouse (1911, p. 43), in full flight expounding the principles of liberalism, blurred them in the case of empire by wondering if the black races were capable of self-rule.

In other writers, there was no distance at all between naturalizing progress and justifying empire. The climax of Kidd’s *Social Evolution*, quoted

above on the subject of race, was a justification for rule over the tropical regions of the world—now languishing under the maladministration of “the black and coloured races”—by the more progressive peoples of European extraction. Kidd’s reconciliation of imperial rule, with his belief that natural selection inherently tended toward more religious and ethical conduct, epitomizes the ideological work done by sociology. After reviewing the advantages brought by the British to India, Kidd (1898, pp. 324–25) judiciously considered the case of northern Africa and concluded, “The work undertaken by France in Algeria and Tunis, although it has differed in many important respects from that performed by Great Britain in India, and although it has been undoubtedly more directly inspired by the thought of immediate benefit to French interests, has been on the whole, it must be frankly confessed, work done in the cause of civilisation in general.”

The resolution that sociology offered to the dilemmas of liberalism claimed the status of science. Mill and Comte had insisted programmatically that sociology must promulgate “laws.” This task was accepted by both academic and popular writers in sociology. Legitimacy for “laws of progress” was provided by the prestige of geology and evolutionary biology. Accordingly, treatises on sociology often expounded organic evolution and might even start with the evolution of the stars and the solar system (e.g., Ward 1897).

This conception of “laws of progress” enabled sociology to conflate the problems of empire with the problems of the metropole. The “social science” of the 1860s and 1870s embraced the social tensions of the metropole as ethical and practical problems. Investigations such as Booth’s (1902) *Life and Labour of the People in London* were more likely to be called “statistics” than “sociology.” Nevertheless questions of poverty, class struggle, and social amelioration—“the social question” in the terminology of the day—certainly came on the agenda of the sociological societies and journals in the 1890s and 1900s. In cities such as London, Chicago, and Paris, there was significant contact and overlap between academic sociologists, Fabian socialists, feminists, progressive liberals, religious and ethical reformers, and social workers (Besnard 1983; Deegan 1988).

What “the social science” contributed to “the social question” was an interpretation of the metropole’s problems in the light of an overarching theory of progress. The best-known example now is Durkheim’s conception of anomie as a pathological consequence of the division of labor. A more characteristic example then was the discussion of socialism found in many treatises of sociology. The universal approach of the sociologists was to evaluate the goals of the workers’ movement in terms of their own model of evolutionary progress—whether the conclusion was cautious endorsement of ethical socialism (as by Hobhouse, Durkheim, and Albion

W. Small) or robust rejection, as by Spencer or this one from Sumner (1963, p. 97): "The sound student of sociology can hold out to mankind, as individuals or as a race, only one hope of better and happier living. That hope lies in an enhancement of the industrial virtues and of the moral forces which thence arise. . . . The socialist or philanthropist who nourishes them [i.e., fools who insist on living in slums, etc.] in their situation and saves them from the distress of it is only cultivating the distress which he pretends to cure." The force of this argument lies in Sumner's widely shared conviction that the general laws governing social progress, established by evolutionary sociology, operate with rigor in the metropole as elsewhere.

THE CRISIS OF SOCIOLOGY

War and Progress

In *Pure Sociology: A Treatise on the Origin and Spontaneous Development of Society*, Ward (1903, pp. 450–51) offered as proof of progress the fact that atrocities were scarcely possible in modern society. Just 13 years later, the British army lost 60,000 young men killed or wounded on a single day at the opening of the Battle of the Somme.

The Great War marked a crisis of the old imperialism and triggered major shifts in global power. The European empires began to fissure, with the independence of Ireland and the dismemberment of the Hapsburg Empire. The French, British, and American systems continued to expand by taking over former Turkish and German territories and increasing their economic penetration of China and Latin America. The United States emerged as the leading industrial power. The 1940s saw a second crisis of imperialism, with the Japanese offensive against Western power in Asia, the independence of India from the British and Indonesia from the Dutch, and the Vietnamese war of liberation against the French. Soviet power reconstituted the old tsarist empire but supported the break-up of other empires and stood as a challenge to global capitalism. By mid 20th century, the United States had become the leading international investor, the dominant military power, and the center of mass communications and an emerging world commercial culture.

These changes decisively altered the conditions of existence for sociology as a collective enterprise—beginning with the Great War itself, which precipitated a disciplinary crisis. The war tore apart the intellectual community of sociologists that had been developing around the North Atlantic. Some, like Hobhouse, were horrified by the fighting; others became belligerent. Durkheim and Giddings became vehement anti-German propagandists; Small at Chicago broke with his German contacts, clashing with Simmel in particular (Bannister 1987). Weber went into the army,

as did a number of the younger members of the *Année sociologique* group, some of whom were killed. After serving for a while with the rank of captain, Weber threw himself into political projects to overcome the internal weaknesses of the German state. The young German Sociological Society liquidated itself when war broke out and donated its money to a fund for German war propaganda in neutral countries (Liebersohn 1988)—ironically, exactly the work that Durkheim undertook on the other side.

For all that, the more important impact was at the level of ideas. The course of social evolution had generally been understood as the growth of reason and civilized conduct: “Objectively viewed, progress is an increasing intercourse, a multiplication of relationships, an advance in material well-being, a growth of population, and an evolution of rational conduct. It is a final display in the grand metamorphosis of universal evolution” (Giddings 1896, p. 359). When brutal and protracted war in Europe made this an untenable view of civilization—as the experience of the frontier came home to the metropole—more than just a hypothesis had to be revised. The foundation of sociology’s worldview was ruptured. It was no longer possible to take “progress” unproblematically as the reality to be studied, the object of knowledge. “Cheap optimism,” as Hobhouse (1915) realized during the war, was now forbidden by history. Comtean language was too well entrenched to be immediately abandoned, but in books written after the war, evocations of progress tail off quite soon. The Park and Burgess “Green Bible,” first issued in 1921, was on the cusp of this change. It ended with a chapter defending the concept of progress, but the chapter was a defense against acknowledged criticism, and none too confident at that.

The war might not have had such an impact if the concept of progress were not already under challenge. A broader cultural crisis was developing in early-20th-century Europe, marked by sharp breaks in the visual arts, physics, music, and psychology. What Berger (1974) has called “the moment of cubism” was also the moment of Albert Einstein, Freud, and Arnold Schoenberg. When Pareto in the *Treatise of General Sociology* ([1916] 1935) denounced “sentimental ethics” as a basis for sociology and demanded a harsher realism, he was distancing himself from what he already saw as the pseudoscience of Comte and Spencer and from his own earlier liberalism.

That the framework of sociology created in the 19th century had reached its limits was indicated, finally, by institutional stagnation. British sociology entered a fallow period after the war, with Hobhouse retreating into metaphysics, while the intellectual excitement of the new ethnography was channeled off into a separate discipline, “anthropology,” under the leadership of Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. Durkheim’s close-knit group dispersed. Though some of its members con-

tinued to have distinguished individual careers, French sociology as a collective enterprise languished (Karady 1983).

Out in the colonies, an attempt to institutionalize Comtean sociology in the Australian university system (Anderson 1912) came to nothing. The first chair of sociology in that country was not filled until 1959. In South Africa, imperial sociology made its little-known final bow. As the racial hierarchy created by conquest hardened, it was a sociologist, Geoffrey Cronjé (1947), who produced the intellectual blueprint for the apartheid regime.

Alternatives

The decade around 1920 may thus be understood as the historical moment when the project of Comte, Spencer, Letourneau, and their successors had irretrievably broken down. It is clear that there was more than one possible replacement.

One possibility grew out of the cultural crisis developing in the central European intelligentsia. A measure of the depth of this crisis was Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* ([1918–22] 1932), which was enormously influential in the 1920s. Like Pareto, Spengler rejected the concept of social evolution; unlike Pareto, he was also acutely conscious of the imperial gaze. Spengler offered a scathing criticism of the Eurocentrism of European intellectuals and their view of human history. He saw European imperial expansion as the “murder” of other cultures, such as the Aztec/Maya culture in Central America, and thus treated contemporary imperialism not as the triumph of light but as a sign of the Last Days, evidence of decline. The break with the framework of progress could hardly be more complete.

The project of a critical sociology of culture was taken up by Sorokin, leading eventually to the immense, cloudy generalities of *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937–41). In Weimar Germany, from different starting points, Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim converged on a “sociology of knowledge,” the object of fierce controversy for a short period. Mannheim ([1935] 1940) in exile, like the scholars of the Frankfurt school, began to develop a synthesis of Freudian psychoanalysis with structural sociology to explain the catastrophe of fascism. A synthesis of phenomenology with sociology was proposed by Alfred Schutz ([1932] 1972) in Austria; a social theory grounded in idealist philosophy was proposed by Giovanni Gentile in Italy (Bellamy 1987).

The revolutionary movements of metropole and colony also gave rise to possible sociologies. In Russia, the Bolshevik leader Nikolai Bukharin ([1925] 1965) produced “a system of sociology” as ambitious as anything in the capitalist world at that time. Much better remembered are the social

theories of the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci, who developed in the 1920s and 1930s not only the famous analyses of intellectuals and hegemony, but also theories of socioeconomic change that have influenced current discussions of postmodernity (Harvey 1990). Du Bois (1968), having left academic sociology for civil rights activism, connected race issues in the metropole with movements in the colonial world and, increasingly, with the structure of global capitalism.

None of these initiatives, however, produced an institutionalized replacement for the old sociology. The principal reason was not their intellectual calibre—this work includes the most sophisticated social theory in the first half of the 20th century. It was, rather, the balance of global power and the growth of totalitarianism in Europe out of the same cultural and political crisis that had crippled sociology. Bukharin was purged and then killed under Stalin. Gramsci was arrested under Mussolini and died after years in prison. Sorokin fled the Bolsheviks; Mannheim, Schutz, and the Frankfurt school fled the fascists. Gentile became a minister under Mussolini but was killed during the overthrow of the Fascist regime, and his influence died with it. Colonial dominance in Africa remained unshaken, and Du Bois, returning to academia in the 1930s, found no audience for his internationalist views.

The Epistemological Break: A Practical Sociology of the Metropole

There was only one place where academic sociology flourished between 1920 and 1950: in the new metropole, the United States. But here the discipline was transformed. The United States was the arena of a change so fundamental that it can be regarded, to use Louis Althusser's expression, as an epistemological break (Althusser and Balibar 1970).³ In the academic space created by the late-19th-century sociologists, a new enterprise arose. It bore the same name but had a different object of knowledge, a new set of methods and applications, a revised definition of the discipline, a new audience, and—eventually—a new view of its history.

The new object of knowledge was society and, especially, social difference and social disorder *within the metropole*. Nineteenth-century sociology had some concern with these issues, as already noted, but had intellectually subordinated them to the conceptions of global difference and evolutionary progress. In the 1920s and 1930s, the internal problems of the society of the metropole became the intellectual center of sociology.

³ I emphasize that this was an *epistemological* break, not an abrupt institutional change; the transition took a couple of decades. Comtean texts could still be produced after the Great War (e.g., Case 1924). But the sociology centered on concepts of progress was visibly in retreat by then and had almost vanished by the 1930s.

Familiar markers of this shift are the prominence of the Chicago school's urban research and the growth of specializations within sociology—many of them defined by a social problem or an administrative apparatus of the society of the metropole. The custom of organizing American Sociological Society meetings in specialized subdivisions along these lines began in 1921.

In terms of method, where the old sociology had focused on difference between the metropole and the primitive, the new sociology focused on difference *within* the metropole. This can be seen clearly in the increasingly influential statistical techniques, from early measures of correlation through attitude scaling in the interwar decades to the formalization of “latent structure analysis” by Lazarsfeld at midcentury. The new quantitative procedures had as their logical basis the idea of difference within a population. Their main applications were to surveys and official statistics collected within metropole countries, principally the United States (Easthope 1974).

It is familiar that the 1920s and 1930s saw a flowering of empirical research on the social life of American towns, cities, and suburbs. There was great inventiveness in method, from the statistics of difference through urban ethnography to the first fusion of psychoanalysis with field sociology (Dollard 1937). Sociological empiricism was not new—as shown above, Letourneau, Spencer, and Sumner had put great energy into assembling facts—but the new empiricism had immeasurably superior techniques and new intentions. The Chicago school did not just do urban ethnography. It set up a comprehensive system of surveillance for America's second largest, and most turbulent, city (Smith and White 1929). In this, as in many other sociological projects, the intention was defined by an increasingly popular term, “social control.”

The rapid development of sociology in this direction was made possible by corporate and government funding, begun before World War I but greatly accelerated in the 1920s. Ross (1991, p. 402) gives the impressive total of \$41 million of Rockefeller money going to American social science and social work between 1922 and 1929. (Twenty years earlier, Du Bois had been unable to raise \$5,000 a year for his Atlanta research.) A high point was reached when the national government set up the Committee on Recent Social Trends, with William Fielding Ogburn, a president of the American Sociological Society and its leading advocate of empiricism, as director of research.

As research expertise rose, however, the conception of the discipline narrowed. R. M. MacIver (1937, p. vii), a successor to Giddings at Columbia, opened his textbook *Society* by acknowledging a crisis in the definition of the subject: “Abundant controversy has arisen over the question whether there is at all a subject deserving to be named sociology, whether

if there is, it is a science, whether in that event it is a generic or a specific science, and so forth." The only secure institutional base available for sociology at this time, the American university, provided an organizational definition that contradicted the Comtean vision of "the social science." Sociology could survive in the American university not as a metascience but as one department among a range of social science departments, distinguished from history, political science, economics, and psychology only by its special focus of interest. The intellectual difficulty, for a discipline whose earlier claims had been so vast, was to define what that special focus was. "Social relations" (MacIver 1937), "groups," forms of association, and human relations (Hiller 1933), "the social process" (Reuter and Hart 1933)—no formulation was very convincing, and none became generally accepted.

Bannister's (1987) absorbing history of sociological scientism in the United States in this period shows that the empiricist triumph failed to produce an intellectual program for sociology. The empiricists themselves fell apart in bitter faction fighting, which racked the American Sociological Society in the 1930s. Sorokin (1928, p. 757), an acid critic of the empiricists, remarked at the end of his survey of *Contemporary Sociological Theories* that "the whole field reminds one of a half-wild national forest rather than a carefully planned garden." The technocratic vision articulated by some empiricists (e.g., Smith and White 1929) lost credibility as funding dried up in the 1930s. The new sociology started life as the old sociology died, with a severe deficit of legitimacy.

MAKING THE CANON

In this conceptual vacuum—as Hinkle (1994, p. 339) aptly describes the situation after the collapse of evolutionism—the formation of the classical canon began. The process lasted a generation. It was the work of many hands, and the canon makers were far from harmonious—two of the most prominent being Parsons and C. Wright Mills. Over this period, nevertheless, a series of projects and debates converged on a new understanding of sociology's history. Intellectually, the process of canon making has two sides: the creation of a canonical point of view and the selection of particular founding fathers. Interwoven with both is a practical enterprise, the dissemination and pedagogy of "classical" texts.

Though the point is difficult to document, I would suggest that a condition for these changes was a change in sociology's audience. The late-Victorian liberal reading public was no more. However, the enormous wealth being accumulated in the rising world power, the United States, made possible, for the first time in history, a mass higher education system. Here sociology expanded tremendously as a teaching enterprise in the

three decades after World War II (Turner and Turner 1990). A mass audience of students required a teacher training program. The expanding graduate sociology programs, which did this job, became central to sociology's professional self-definition. It was in this milieu, and at this juncture, that the pedagogy of classical texts developed.

The Canonical View

The emerging vision of sociology's history identified a foundational moment, "that brilliant age in which the foundations of the discipline were laid" (Bottomore and Nisbet 1978, p. x). It was characterized by the texts of a small group of key figures: "There are four men, however, whom everyone in sociology, regardless of his special emphasis, bias, or bent, will probably accept as the central figures in the development of modern sociology" (Inkeles 1964, p. 3).

Few sociologists will miss the echo of Parsons's *Structure of Social Action* (1937). Parsons was not the only, nor even the first, American theorist to address the intellectual disintegration of sociology (Turner and Turner 1990, pp. 71–73), but there is no denying the genius of his solution. Parsons purged the discipline's history, acknowledging the collapse of the Comt-ean agenda ("Spencer is dead"; 1937, p. 3). He took the *empirical* problem of postcrisis sociology, difference and disorder in the metropole, and made it the *theoretical* center of sociology (the Hobbesian "problem of order"; 1937, p. 89). He even made this the basis of the discipline's definition.⁴ Parsons solved the problem of where sociology fitted by inverting the academic division of labor: the sociological conception of action became the basis for legislating the places of the other "sciences of action."

Parsons was no historian and did not claim to be writing the history of sociology. His project was to construct the logical bases of the science. But his reconstruction of the "emergence" of the action model in the theoretical logic of Alfred Marshall, Pareto, Weber, and Durkheim was understandably read as an origin narrative, and this story, as Camic (1989) has shown in an important article, became a means of legislating for the discipline. Parsons himself gave a strong lead toward this reading by his vigorous championing of Weber as a key figure for sociology. Parsons not only issued two volumes of translation but published extended commentary, and Weber was still the undisputed star of *Theories of Society*, the book of readings that Parsons and his collaborators issued in 1961.

The Structure of Social Action was not an overnight success; it became

⁴ In Parsons's (1937, p. 768) matchless prose, sociology is "the science which attempts to develop an analytical theory of social action systems in so far as these systems can be understood in terms of the property of common-value integration."

more important as Parsons's influence in American sociology grew over the following 20 years. The canonical view had to be established against other accounts of sociology. A residual version of the interwar encyclopedic view can still be found in some introductory textbooks after World War II (e.g., Murray 1947) and in such a substantial review as Nicholas S. Timasheff's *Sociological Theory* ([1955] 1967). There also survived from the 1920s an American-centered empiricism, which saw early sociological theory as a bad dream from which the discipline had been awakened by the kiss of science (e.g., Lundberg, Schrag, and Larsen 1958).

Parsons's vision, however, acquired powerful and unexpected allies. Sociology as social criticism could also yield a canonical view. In his very widely read *Sociological Imagination*, Mills (1959) constructed a composite image of "the classic social analyst" (his examples include Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, as well as Spencer, Mannheim, Thorstein Veblen, and others), which he held up as a model of how sociology ought to be done. "Classical sociology" to Mills was a style of work, not a period—though there was a definite sense that it was more practiced in the past and that the present was a period of decline. Mills (1960) soon turned the concept into a textbook, defining "the classic tradition" in a rather freewheeling way but including readings from all major figures in the emerging canon.

The canonical view was also reinforced by theorists wishing to establish a problem or a field as a central issue. Robert K. Merton's ([1949] 1957) account of anomie helped establish Durkheim as classic. Lewis A. Coser (1956) performed a like office for Simmel as founder of a theory of conflict. Not only functionalism but also the critique of functionalism fed into the canonical reading of history. An opposition between "conflict theory" and "consensus theory," symbolized by the classics Simmel and Marx versus Durkheim, became a textbook cliché (e.g., Broom, Selznick, and Darroch 1981).

The translation of the main texts incorporated into the canon was accomplished by 1950 (see below). Of course not all texts that are translated get recognized as classics—Leopold von Wiese (1932), for instance, was translated but is now forgotten in Anglophone sociology. The mark of canonization is the development of a genre of commentary and exposition. Levine (1995, p. 63) aptly remarks of the 1960s and 1970s that "fresh translations, editions, and secondary analyses of classic authors became one of the faster-growing industries within sociology." Indeed the rush had begun earlier. Long commentaries on Weber appeared with the translations in the 1940s (Gerth and Mills 1946), and Parsons made an exposition of Weber the centerpiece of the first edition of his *Essays in Sociological Theory* (1949). Reinhard Bendix's very widely read *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* was issued in 1960. Coser's *Functions of Social Conflict* (1956) was in large part a commentary on Simmel. Elaborate symposia

on Simmel and Durkheim, edited by Wolff (Simmel's translator), were published as books in 1959 and 1960, respectively. Platt (1995) traces a literature of commentary on Durkheim beginning in the late 1930s and picking up steam after midcentury. In 1958–59, centenary celebrations of Durkheim and Simmel appeared in both the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Sociological Review*.

As this genre developed, American interest both stimulated and was reinforced by European writing. The process is well illustrated by a British text, John Rex's *Key Problems of Sociological Theory* (1961). Rex's main points of departure were Durkheim and Weber *as read in America*. Rex had studied Parsons, and though he took more interest in class struggle—and therefore Marx—than the functionalists did, the new construction of canonical theory was the basis of his reasoning. American interest even helped to create a Weber revival in German sociology “after a period of inattention to its classical past,” as Lüschen (1994, p. 11) delicately puts it. The German sociologists got round to a celebration of Weber at their national conference in 1964. This year also saw the revision and wider circulation, in paperback, of Winckelmann's great edition of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Weber 1964). The sophisticated historical scholarship that has followed (Tribe 1989) has steadily undermined the “Weber” of Parsons, Mills, and Bendix, with little effect so far on sociological theory.

By the early 1960s, a quarter century after Parsons's *Structure of Social Action*, the canonical view was firmly established in American sociology. It was not the only view of the discipline's history available, but it was by now hegemonic. When Alvin W. Gouldner delivered his famous “anti-Minotaur” address to the Society for the Study of Social Problems in 1961, he could simply assume that all his audience regarded Weber as a central figure in the discipline. Gouldner (1973) could thus make points about sociology in general by criticizing a canonical text.

Translators and commentators saw themselves as providing a vital resource for contemporary sociology. On the face of it, the resource was intellectual, a set of ideas and methods. But something more was involved. Here I would call attention to the *language* of canon making: the imagery of the “golden age in sociology” (Nisbet 1967), when “giants” (Smelser 1967) walked the earth. The hagiographical language continued in evocations of “that brilliant age” (Bottomore and Nisbet 1978), in a book series called *Masters of Social Theory*, and in the textbook evocations of “pioneers” (McNall 1971) and “Founding Fathers” (Inkeles 1964)—terms with strong emotional overtones in the United States especially.

Such language indicates that emotional labor is being done (Hochschild 1983). The construction of the canon provided not only an intellectual but also a symbolic solution to the internal disintegration and cultural

marginalization that had overtaken sociology before the midcentury. Inheritors of a golden age, bearers of the insights of great thinkers, sociologists had weight in the world—in their own eyes and, increasingly, in the eyes of students.

The Choice of Fathers

Like Parsons, Inkeles in the textbook quoted above had a list of four great men—but not the same four. Inkeles listed Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, and Weber. It is an important fact (confirming the symbolic and emotional work done by the canon) that a canonical view of sociology could be shared by people who disagreed about which particular fathers had done the founding.

Parsons's attitude, that is to say, was more influential than his precise arguments. Some of his choices were accepted. Merton reinforced the interest in Durkheim; Gerth and Mills reinforced the interest in Weber. Each could be read as creator of a systematic conception of sociology, a key need of the academic discipline at the time. More, each as founder could do ideological work for sociology in the Cold War context: Durkheim as theorist of social solidarity, Weber as refuter of Marx. Platt (1995) rightly observes the complexity of influences behind the choice of particular founding fathers: broad historical circumstance, particular academic entrepreneurs or departments, affinity with current trends in the profession. These factors seem to have worked for Weber and Durkheim but against Parsons's other nominee, Pareto. Though Pareto was even more eligible as a systematist, his irony and pessimism were perhaps too obtrusive for his texts to work as "foundations" for the revived discipline. Pareto survives as a name among the founding fathers, but his writings are not routinely studied in the pedagogy of classical texts.

The complexities are greatest, and the changes most dramatic, in the case of Marx. To Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action*, he was part of the background, essentially a minor utilitarian, and in *Theories of Society* he received less attention than Mead, Pareto, or Freud. To Merton (1957) in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Marx was no more important. Some American textbooks of sociology in the 1940s and 1950s got along without any attention to Marx at all. When Marx did get attention, students might well wonder why; Bierstedt (1963, pp. 544–45) for instance presented him as an author of "vast oversimplification," "excessive, dogmatic, and radical."

But Marx was, of course, the founding father of modern social science from the point of view of orthodox socialism. However debauched the Stalinist version had become, Marxism remained an intellectual force in

global culture. It was the point of departure in the sociology of class even for non-Marxists like Ralf Dahrendorf (1957) and Stanislaw Ossowski (1963). In the United States, Marx was a significant presence to the neo-conservative theorists of the Cold War era. Thus to Daniel Bell (1960), Marx was a major theorist of alienation as well as the ancestor of Soviet communism. A progressive American sociologist could find in Marxism an important resource; in best canon-making style, Mills issued a collection of Marxist texts, with commentary, in 1962.

However Marx did not become a full-fledged member of the sociological canon until the dramatic expansion of sociology in the 1960s and the radicalization of university students. Sociology's new audience made its needs known. The "radical sociology" proposed by the student movement centered on Marx and Marxists (Horowitz 1971). From the other side, studying Marx provided a way for academic sociologists to talk to their new audience about social struggle and transformation. In 1965, the American Sociological Association annual meeting included a plenary session tellingly named "A Re-Evaluation of Karl Marx." Marx assumed a more prominent place in accounts of the history of sociological theory (Bottomore and Nisbet 1978) and appeared with increasing frequency in textbooks for undergraduates. The account of the formation of sociology was revised, in new editions of established textbooks, to give more prominence to Marx (cf. Bottomore 1962, 1987). By the late 1970s, he figured in some introductory texts as "the first great radical sociologist" (Sherman and Wood 1979, p. 7).

The canonization of Marx required a change in content for sociology but not a change in the conception of theory. The established pedagogy of classical texts was readily adapted. Marx's writings had long been available in translation because of their importance to socialism. They could now be positioned in opposition to a "consensus" position, or an "elitist" position, or a "micro" position, in retrospective constructions of sociological traditions (Nisbet 1967; Collins 1994). New editions and selections of Marx's writings appeared, and a sociological literature of commentary multiplied.

The grouping of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber was, thus, a late development in the construction of the canon. Durkheim and Weber were the survivors of the canon-making enterprise of Parsons's generation, Marx was grafted on in the next generation, and others fell by the wayside. The trio appears in the role of the founding fathers in elementary textbooks in the 1970s (McGee 1977). In theoretical sociology, a considerable effort of secondary interpretation tried to make sense of the Marx-Durkheim-Weber grouping, in the work of Giddens (1971), Alexander (1982-83), Seidman (1983), and others.

Dissemination

In Victorian scholarship it had been assumed that an English-speaking academic could read the major European languages, plus two dead ones. But for the study of a set of texts to become a teaching routine in American universities, translation was essential. Accordingly, the process of translation is an important index of the formation of a canon.

Translation of sociological books became a systematic process in the 1930s, aided by the emigration of European scholars to North America. The young Parsons, after visiting Heidelberg and negotiating with Marianne Weber, translated Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; the product appeared in 1930. Von Wiese's *Systematic Sociology* (trans. by H. P. Bieke) appeared in 1932. English versions of Durkheim's *Division of Labor in Society* (trans. by G. Simpson) appeared in 1933, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (trans. by S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller) in 1938. Pareto's *Trattato di sociologia generale*, curiously renamed *The Mind and Society*, was published in translation in 1935, Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*—renamed *Fundamental Concepts of Sociology*—in 1940. In 1946 Gerth and Mills issued their influential selection from the second part of Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, and in 1947 Parsons issued his translation of the first part. Passages from Simmel had been available in translation from the 1920s, but a larger selection was translated by K. H. Wolff in 1950.

The translations were received in the United States with less than universal rapture (Hinkle 1994). Yet they provided the essential basis for the pedagogy of "classics" to become established in American graduate education. As this pedagogy became systematized, books of readings in sociological theory, with extracts from the classical texts, appeared. Coser and Rosenberg (1957) edited one of the first, noting that with the rediscovery of Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel, American sociology had produced a "renaissance of sociological theory." Books of readings made it possible to teach an abbreviated version of the canon in undergraduate courses: Dennis H. Wrong and Harry L. Gracey (1972) claimed to have pioneered this at the introductory level. "Classical theory" courses appeared in undergraduate as well as graduate lists. Thus a canonical point of view became available from start to finish of higher education in sociology. What was available, in due course, became required: thus the Graduate Record Examination in sociology demands a familiarity with canonical authors (ETS 1987). Thus, through the pedagogy of classics, the canon became part of the constitution of sociology as a force in American higher education.

The effect was not confined to the United States. In the postwar de-

cedes, a liberal intelligentsia was reconstituted internationally, based in growing higher education systems and the new culture industries. This was done under American hegemony, in the context of Cold War politics and U.S. investment abroad. American foundations once again were active players in the process (Berman 1983). Academic sociology followed the general pattern.

In most countries that could afford to have sociology at all, the discipline was created or remade in the 1950s and 1960s on the basis of research techniques, research problems, and theoretical languages, not to mention textbooks and instructors, imported from the United States (e.g., Japan, Tominaga [1994]; Australia, Baldock and Lally [1974]; Scandinavia, Alldardt [1994]). Maus's (1962, p. 165) well-known *Short History of Sociology*, written in the mid-1950s, acknowledges "the dominating position American sociology occupies in the world today"—a comment the more revealing because written from a German point of view.

With the reconstructed discipline came its reconstructed foundation story and the developing canon of classical texts. Sociology students from Nigeria to New Zealand found themselves studying the canonical texts as the basic definition of "theory." Sociologists in the most remote parts of the world began to define themselves in the categories of the canon. A survey of Australian and New Zealand sociologists in the early 1970s reported that, of those who identified themselves as members of a school, "three named symbolic interactionism, two functionalism, three Marxist, three Weberian sociology, and another three emphasised the ideas of Durkheim. . . . It is interesting that only four respondents mentioned modern sociologists as having influenced their work" (Baldock and Lally 1974, pp. 279–80).

Thus world sociology arrived at the situation described in the opening paragraphs of this article. In a sense, the canon on a world scale did what it had already done in the United States: providing a symbolic focus, a shared language, and some kind of identity, for academics and students in sociology. Though many local variations have developed, the same accent of canon making can be heard in evocations of "Max Weber, the Living Classic" (Käsler [1994] in Germany), the "classical mainstream program" (Boudon [1994] in France), and "one of sociology's few true classics" (Kalberg [1996] in the United States).

REFLECTIONS

In his article on "the centrality of the classics," Alexander (1987) observed that classical theory performs an integrative function for the discipline. This is undoubtedly true but not very helpful unless we also know why the need for integration arose.

I have argued that the classical canon in sociology was created, mainly in the United States, as part of an effort at reconstruction after the collapse of the first European-American project of sociology; that the idea of “classical theory” replaced earlier and very different accounts of the making of sociology; and that this whole course of events can only be understood in the framework of global history, especially the history of imperialism. If this is broadly correct, it has implications for contemporary thinking about theory, beyond the calls for a more inclusive canon.

The circumstances in which the canon was created produced a striking disjunction in academic sociology between “theory” and “research.” The creation of the canon followed an extremely creative period of empirical research. The canon provides broad symbolic legitimation for the discipline, but none of the elected fathers actually motivates the empirical activities of post-1920 sociology at all well. Despite the designation of “methodological classics,” the main line of modern research methods does not run through Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, or Simmel.

The teaching of the canon in American graduate education did, nevertheless, consolidate the ideology of professionalism in sociology that the empiricists of the 1920s struggled to establish. As Stinchcombe (1982) observed, reference to the classics has become a badge of membership in a professional community. But that membership comes complete with the patterns of hegemony inscribed in the canon. It thus becomes important to consider not only which *writers* are included and excluded, but also which *problems*.

This is particularly important in relation to the formative issue of empire. The making of the canon deleted the discourse of imperialism from sociology. Those Comtean notables whose texts had most explicitly concerned the primitive, the concept of progress, racial hierarchies, and gender and population issues failed to be canonized. (“Spencer is dead.”) Those texts of canonized authors that most clearly bore the mark of empire, such as *L'Année sociologique*, Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, or Weber's inaugural lecture “The National State and Economic Policy” ([1895] 1989), were the least likely to be used in the pedagogy of “classics.”

This had the desirable effect of deleting open racism from the discipline's theoretical core. It had the undesirable effect of excusing most sociologists from thinking about global society at all. Ironically the major attempt to reverse this, “world-systems theory,” has been institutionally defined as a new specialization.

Gender, sexuality, and race relations, which were core issues for evolutionary sociology, were pushed to the margins in the process of canon formation. Nisbet's (1967) list of the “unit-ideas of sociology” (community, authority, status, the sacred, alienation) was a travesty of history but not

a bad map of the narrowed territory left after the canon making. Recent critiques of the patriarchal subtext of classical theory (Sydie 1987; Seidler 1994), which analyze 19th-century texts as if the foundation story were true, miss this larger effect. The continuing influence of the canon in defining what counts is one of the main reasons why gender and race, though now institutionally important for American sociology (as shown by affirmative action programs or the sections of the ASA), have still not reestablished themselves as central concerns of sociological theory.

A definition of subject matter can have this effect only if it carries authority; the *style* of theory making associated with the canon is also important. We might recall that “canon” in English originally meant a rule or edict of the Church. “Classical theory” is a package that not only exaggerates the importance of a few great men but in the same gesture excludes or discredits the noncanonical. The sociologists of the late 19th century, to do them justice, were not like this. They had a sense of adventure, a skepticism about authority, and a breadth of interest, which we could still do with.

It follows that no repair job on the canon will meet contemporary intellectual needs; a revised pseudohistory of founding fathers (e.g., Turner 1993) does not help. But throwing away the discipline’s history (Chafetz 1993) is no answer either. This would leave us with the consequences of history and no grasp of their causes.

What we need instead of “classical theory” is better history—sociological history—and an inclusive way of doing theory. Sociology can be introduced to students not as a story of “great men” but as a practice shaped by the social relations that made it possible. The full range of intellectuals who produced “theories of society” can be recovered for this history, including the feminists, anarchists, and colonials who were erased from the canonical story. The exclusions constructing the discipline can become part of the discipline’s self-knowledge.

The argument of this article suggests that a vital step—though perhaps the most difficult—is to abandon the internalist history of sociology and recover the global context that Victorian sociology, in its own way, addressed. This means including in the process of theory formation the intellectuals of the colonized world as well as the metropole—not, however, by revising the story of “great men” to include Ibn Khaldun among the classics. Rather, it is a matter of studying the rich analysis of *the world in which sociology was constructed* that came from outside the metropole, ranging from Islamic and Chinese debates about modernity to Indian and African critiques of empire. This is not utopian; it has been done in the past. While Durkheim and his colleagues built the imperial gaze into their sociology, other French social scientists engaged intellectuals of the Is-

lamic world in dialogue about modernity, colonialism, and culture (Burke 1980). The history of the discipline is richer than we normally assume.

For their part, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber will still be present in this history. They will be present in realistic contexts and proportions, not as shadowy giants at the limit of vision.

APPENDIX

Sources for Views of “Origins” and Incorporation of the Canon into Sociology Teaching

This article’s argument about accounts of origins and the crystallization of a classical canon in sociology teaching is based on (a) the programmatic statements and debates about classics and their teaching cited in the main bibliography; (b) an examination of current course descriptions in 30 U.S. graduate programs, reproduced in Career Guidance Foundation (1995); (c) a study of accounts of the history of sociology in English-language textbooks of introductory sociology and sociological theory. A list of the texts examined for this purpose follows. The period covered is 1896–1996, with a concentration on the last 50 years, tracing the arrival of the canon in textbook sociology. As anyone using such material will know, the boundaries of what is a “textbook” are blurred, and it is sometimes difficult to tell when a new edition should count as a separate book. Where more than one edition was consulted, I have listed the earliest.

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American Journal of Sociology

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