The Origins of Sociology

The Beginnings of Sociology as a Field of Study
Changing Social Conditions

- In the late 18th Century and into the 19th century Western Europe was experiencing fundamental changes in the structure of the society
  - Monarchies on the decline -> Democracies on the increase
  - Agriculture on the decline -> Industry on the increase
  - Increase in Social Liberties
  - Increase in Social Mobility
    - The ability to move up in Social Class
Contextualizing the Origins of Sociology

- 19th Century Western Europe
  - European Society had long been dominated by hereditary Aristocratic families
    - Wealth connected to land ownership
  - Industrialization leading to more access to goods and wealth
  - Growth of large Urban Areas
    - Especially in England
Contextualizing the Origins of Sociology

• New Social Classes emerging
  • For most of human history the majority of humans were living in Agricultural Societies
    • Divisions between Land Owners and Peasants (People who worked the land)
  • Due to industrialization humans were transitioning to Industrial Societies
    • Division between Factory Owners and Laborers
The Scientific Revolution

- Starting in the 17th century developments in Scientific theory and knowledge were changing how humans examined the world
  - At first used to try to explain astronomical observations to explain the Earth’s position in the universe
    - Ex. Copernicus theorizing the Sun was the center of our Solar System
  - Late applied science to biological developments
    - Ex. Darwin and the Origin of Species
  - Eventually used to try to explain social order
Early Sociologists: Auguste Comte

- French (1798-1857)
- One of the first scientists to apply the theories of physical science to studying society
- Considered the father of Sociology
  - Coined the term Sociology
Early Sociologists: Harriet Martineau

- British (1802-1876)
- Translated the works of Comte to English
  - Broadened field of Sociological study
- Believed principles of study should be to improve societal conditions
Early Sociologists: Herbert Spencer

• British (1820-1903)
• Built upon theories of Charles Darwin and applied them to the study of Sociology
  • Theory of Social Darwinism
  • Used to try to justify one group over another
Early Sociologists: Emile Durkheim

• French (1858-1917)
• Considered father of modern sociological study
• Empiricist
  • Focused on observable social phenomenon
• Founder of Functionalist Theory
Early Sociologists: Karl Marx

• German (1818-1883)
• Made observations of working class in England
• Divided society between the “haves” and the “have nots”
  • Bourgeoisie—owners of the means of production (capitalists)
  • Proletariat—the workers
• Founder of the Conflict Theory
Early Sociologists: Max Weber

• German (1864-1920)
• Developed theory of Ideal type
  • Model to which everything else could be compared
  • Models used as a way to measure reality
• Founder of Symbolic Interactionist Theory