

# SOCI 503

## Foundations of Sociological Explanations

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### Course Description: <sup>1</sup>

In this course, we will study a group of theorists whose work provided key intellectual resources for the foundation and development of social theory and sociology. It will include the canonical 'founding' figures of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, but will also cover other founding scholars whose work has been erased or forgotten, such as Jane Addams, Martineau, Du Bois, Cooper, and Wells-Barnett. There will be large emphasis on knowledge politics and the different ways theory informs the study of society. The course will also attempt to follow through on some of the key sociological themes (e.g. class, capitalism, power, the state) developed by these thinkers, and trace how they have been transformed and still influence contemporary theoretical issues and debates within sociology and social theory more broadly. Of particular interest, will be how contemporary sociological explanation considers the intersection of class, race and gender in understanding current structural patterns of inequality, and how these complex, interrelated dimensions of social power form the basis for ongoing political and social struggles. However, we will also look closely at the intersectional theory – its origins, uses, and politics. A key question for the course is: how can a deeper understanding of classical sociological theory help to inform our interpretations of contemporary political, economic, social and cultural phenomena?

### Course Objectives:

Theory is about learning what has been said, but it is also about learning a unique vocabulary and history that is tied to knowledge politics that continue to shape the work we do today as contemporary sociologists and theorists. To that end, the objectives of this course are to (1) understand and learn these thinkers on their own terms. You will learn to read them, think critically about them, and to see their usefulness. (2) You will come to see how their biography and social

location shaped their method and their theory. The methods we use are rooted in theoretical traditions and assumptions, which fundamentally shape what we can and cannot know, our causal arguments, and what we observe and see. (3) You will learn about the politics of theory, theorizing, and sociology itself and how this shapes theory building and our empirical work.

#### **Required Resources May Include:**

At this time, required course readings will be made available via Brightspace or will be available through the library.

#### **Mode of Delivery:**

This class is a seminar style class and is very hands on for students. Students will be class leaders and play a big part in facilitating discussion and learning.

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<sup>1</sup> This online outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students before the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.