



# TIMELINES

Section on the  
History of  
Sociology

July 2005  
E-Newsletter  
Number 3

## ISSUES AND DEBATES IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY

**Susan Hoecker-Drysdale**

“The history of sociology is written by sociologists for sociologists; the same holds true for the other social sciences...The study of our “predisciplinary” as well as “disciplinary” history is essential to “the formulation of new questions and the discovery of forgotten problems.”  
Johan Heilbron 1995, 267, 272.

As we have seen in our previous discussions, there has been significant interest in the history of sociology from sociology’s earliest period. Early sociologists in Europe and North America (Comte, Martineau, Durkheim, Weber, Small, to name a few) saw the need to account for *sociology’s origins* and to understand its emergence in relation to philosophy, history, economics and indeed even literature. They approached the matter of social investigation within historical perspectives, always mindful of the *contexts* of human experience and social formations that they were trying to explain. Moreover, the founders of sociology exhibited a *fundamental self-consciousness* about social investigatory processes themselves. They maintained that one could not understand social phenomena outside of their historical development and contexts; nor could one make sense of the ‘sociological enterprise’ as a whole without a certain awareness of its emergence over time including major figures, key issues, debates and problems, and significant research findings.

Finally, early sociologists were interested in the *purpose* of sociology. What was it all for? The uses of their findings, of the new knowledge being generated by innovative sociological research, were to serve society by providing the bases for social policy and social reform. Indeed, there was an examination of the role which sociology was to play in society, how it should address everyday societal issues and the real life situations and problems of

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### [ASA Centennial Meeting](#)

**Aug. 13-16, 2005**

**Philadelphia, PA**



## Congratulations New HOS Council Members!

Chair-Elect — Eleanor Townsley, Ph.D. Sociology UCLA  
Associate Professor, Mount Holyoke College

Council Member—Uta Gerhardt, Prof. Dr.,  
University of Heidelberg

Council Member—Betsy Lucal, PhD, Kent State University  
Associate Professor of Sociology, Indiana University South Bend



## SESSIONS ON THE HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY IN PHILADELPHIA IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

1. ***The ASA Centennial as a Teaching Resource*** (ASA-HOS co-sponsorship) – P. Lengermann & Gillian Niebrugge, Organizers. (Teaching Workshop) Sat Aug 13 8:30am-10:10am Philadelphia Marriott
2. ***History of American Sociology*** Regular paper session – Stephen Turner, Organizer. Sat Aug 13 8:30am-10:10am Philadelphia Marriott
3. ***History of European Sociology*** – Regular paper session – Stephen Turner, Organizer. Sat Aug 13 10:30am-12:10pm Philadelphia Marriott
4. ***The Formation of American Sociology in International Context***. Invited panel. Centennial session co-sponsored by ASA & HOS – Susan Hoecker-Drysdale, Organizer. Sat Aug 13 4:30pm-6:10pm Philadelphia Loews Hotel
5. ***Lester F. Ward: A Life's Journey. Special Film Premiere***. Gale Largey, Producer and Presider. A Plenary Session. Sat Aug 13 7:30pm-9:30pm Philadelphia Marriott
6. ***Diverse Histories of American Sociology***. Invited session co-sponsored by ASA & HOS Anthony Blasi, Organizer Sun Aug 14 12:30pm-2:10pm Philadelphia Marriott
7. ***The Significance of Sociology for the American Public: 1880-2005*** Centennial Session co-sponsored by ASA & HOS Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge, Organizers. Sun Aug 14 2:30pm-4:10pm Philadelphia Loews Hotel
8. ***The History of American Sociology: Disciplinary Currents and Crosscurrents, I*** Regular History of Sociology paper session. Betsy Lucal and Larry Nichols, Organizers. Mon Aug 15 8:30am-10:10am Philadelphia Loews Hotel
9. ***The History of American Sociology: Disciplinary Currents and Crosscurrents, II*** Regular History of Sociology paper session. Betsy Lucal and Larry Nichols, Organizers Mon Aug 15 10:30am-11:30am Philadelphia Loews Hotel
10. ***Section on the History of Sociology – Business Meeting (40 minutes)*** Chair, Susan Hoecker-Drysdale Mon Aug 15 11:30am-12:10pm Philadelphia Loews Hotel
11. ***Section on the History of Sociology Reception and Award Ceremony*** Mon Aug 15 6:30pm-8:00pm Philadelphia Marriott
12. ***Landmarks in Sociology*** Centennial Session co-sponsored by ASA & HOS Ed Tiryakian, Organizer Tues Aug 16 8:30am-10:10am Philadelphia Marriott
13. ***W.E.B. Dubois and Philadelphia: THE PHILADELPHIA NEGRO and Beyond*** Centennial Session co-sponsored by ASA & HOS Donald Cunningham, Organizer. Tues Aug 16 10:30am-12:10pm Philadelphia Marriott



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ordinary people, as well as the quality of life in modern society (Small, Feagin). These concerns have come full circle. Both the earliest era of sociology and the current early 21<sup>st</sup> century in sociology share a pronounced recognition of the necessity of understanding the history of sociology as a discipline, as a perspective on the world, as a particular self-consciousness about how and why we do sociology and perhaps ultimately, how we should live in the world. There has been, to put it succinctly, a circle that we have traveled; we are returning once again to the critical need to understand our sociological history. There are current indicators of a return to basic questions, foundational perspectives, and more holistic concerns about the paradigms and purposes of our sociological work.

The specific process of sociology's evolution and our understanding of it have varied by country (Heilbron, Lepenies, Mitchell, Smelser, Feagin), but these interpretations of sociology's history have identified trends, problems, issues and debates that exceed national boundaries, and have offered insights into how the intellectual and societal contexts have influenced the life course of sociology.

The developments and debates are numerous; we shall mention a few. Contemporary articles address such issues as: an insistence on the centrality of race, gender, and class in social relations, the inclusion—exclusion debates, recognition that the shape of sociology's history—the historical narrative—changes; development of greater comprehensiveness in defining what sociology has been and is, and identification of its authors; the quest to understand the influences—personal, theoretical, academic, social—and the interconnections among the broad range of participants in the sociological enterprise; and the necessity to reread and understand the classical texts anew.

There are fads and fashions in sociological perspectives that rise and fade, reflecting the times and the state of sociological knowledge. The centrality of Durkheim, Spencer, or Parsons, for example, may be in part determined by the times and the national context; differences about what are the important questions vary from one historical period to another. Marx's place in sociology was inconsequential until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, in part because his early (1844) manuscripts, key to understanding the corpus of his work, were not widely known, nor available, to sociologists on a broad scale. The context too was important. The devastating effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s, critique of America's direction in the post-WWII era, the politics of the Cold War, industrialization and urbanization, and a pervasive social conservatism in the 1950s called forth sociological critique for which Marxian theory was seen as appropriate to address the social issues of the day. It rivaled the more conservative mainstream functionalism in sociology. The historical understanding embedded in Marxian sociology became relevant in the intellectual critiques of the 1960s, when C. Wright Mills raised the fundamental questions of how and why we do sociology. And so also the debate continues about the crucial influences and contexts in which sociology developed. (Ward, Sumner; Connell, Collins; Hamilton, Deegan)

In the history of sociology there are continuous debates over our assessments of particular sociologists and anyone whose work is inherently sociological, whether or not she/he possesses the "union card," a doctorate in sociology. These assessments always depend on the assessor's field, training, interests, attitudes and perspective. For example, Harriet Martineau, the controversial founding mother of sociology, is understood quite differently by economists, historians, specialists in literature, and sociologists. Robert K. Webb, the distinguished historian and a biographer of Martineau, once told me that, as an historian writing in the 1950s, he didn't appreciate the sociological dimensions of Martineau's work, even though Webb was the first to call attention to the fact that Martineau "had been preaching sociology for years." (Webb) Early interpreters of Martineau emphasized her "journalistic political economy" because they lacked a thorough understanding of her thought and took what little work they sampled literally and narrowly without regard to the different purposes behind her many writings. In both The Martineau Society (England) and the

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## Chair's Comments



First, congratulations to Eleanor Townsley on her election as Chair-Elect for 2005-2006. Congratulations also to Betsy Lucal and Uta Gerhardt on their election as Council Members. We extend a big thank you to those who ran in this

election, including Jan Thomas, Linda Rynbrandt, and Gale Largey. We appreciate the willingness of all of you to serve this section and we sincerely hope that you will put your candidacy forward again in the future.

This is our third electronic History of Sociology newsletter for 2004-2005. This new and large effort would not have been possible without the magnificent work of Cathy Coghlan (TCU) and the patience and perseverance she has exercised to get these issues out. Each back issue of the newsletter has been moved to the HOS website

([www.mtholyoke.edu/go/hos](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/go/hos)) which has been so well developed by Eleanor Townsley (Mount Holyoke) and Mikaila Arthur (NYU). We can all agree that these vehicles of communication for our section will help to expand our contacts, our knowledge of the work of members, and our presence in ASA and the Sociological community. On your behalf I wish to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to these members for their dedicated work.

In our previous newsletter I identified the various activities of HOS members regarding the Centennial meetings. These include: 1) the centennial volume, *Diverse Histories of American Sociology*, (Brill Publishers) edited by Anthony Blasi with contributions by a number of section members, which will be available in Philadelphia; 2) an HOS bibliography project and an ASA centennial bibliography on the history of sociology co-chaired by Jack Nusan Porter and Michael R. Hill (see the list of committee members elsewhere in this newsletter); 3) this electronic Section newsletter established by Cathy Coghlan; 4) the new website created by webmasters Eleanor Townsley and Mikaila Arthur; 5) efforts by the Chair to increase contact between HOS and other sections working in the history of sociology area.

We all look forward to the ASA and History of Sociology meetings in Philadelphia, August 12-16, 2005. A chronological list of sessions of our HOS Section and other ASA sessions that focus on the

history of sociology is provided in this newsletter. Members of the History of Sociology section are participating in all the sessions listed. Importantly, seven of the 20 or so ASA Centennial Sessions have been organized by HOS members and are being co-sponsored by ASA and HOS. We feel that our contributions to these Centennial Meetings are strong, and I congratulate and thank all those organizers and participants for their valuable contributions.

The work of this Section is done very much by autonomous committees composed of individuals who are willing to spend extra time doing the business of the section. The Nominations Committee, chaired by Pat Lengermann; The Awards Committee, chaired by Kay Broschart, with Vasilikie Demos, Michael Hill, Yolanda Johnson; the Membership Committee, chaired by Ed Tiryakian; the Centennial Bibliography Committee, co-chaired by Jack Nusan Porter and Michael R. Hill, with Pamela Roby, Kathleen Slobin, Roberta Spalter-Roth, and Brian Conway; the Centennial Volume, chaired/edited by Anthony Blasi with numerous section member participants.

No Chair can manage the work of the Section without the constant support and assistance of the members of the Section Council. For me, the collaboration with Pat Lengermann, Gillian Niebrugge, Ed Tiryakian, and the Council Members—Betsy Lucal, Robert Antonio, Donald Cunningham, Doris Wilkinson, Larry Nichols, Jack Nusan Porter and Yolanda Johnson—has been a fruitful and most enjoyable experience. It takes a team and teamwork to make a Section successful, and fortunately this Section has developed a history of positive and productive collaboration. It has been truly a pleasure and a highpoint of my career to serve as Chair of the Section. Thank you for your confidence and your support.

Please note that our HOS Business Meeting is on Mon August 15 at 11:30am (Philadelphia Loews Hotel) immediately following our two HOS sessions. We hope that you all will attend this meeting as well the History of Sociology Reception and Award Ceremony on Mon August 15 at 6:30pm at the Philadelphia Marriott. We can celebrate a truly successful Centennial year!

Susan Hoecker-Drysdale  
Montreal July 2005



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Harriet Martineau Sociological Society (North America) we find different perspectives on Martineau's work and her place in disciplinary histories. This is but one instance of the fluidity and variations in the 'reading' of a sociologist's work. In addition, the debate over *who* is a sociologist raises the issue of the criteria or qualifications to be so identified. (See Dirk Käsler regarding the criteria for being identified as a sociologist. Käsler, Deegan 1991, 7).

The debate over sociology's role in the world has arrived at the recognition that sociology, even though a science, is political. It is concerned with civil society and its transformations, with the ethics of social life, and therefore reflects those cognitive interests in its theories and research. The evaluation of sociologists, their research and their ideas reflect the stances and even the nationalities and cultural backgrounds of the sociologists who make them (Mannheim), so it is not surprising that the popularity and assessments of individual sociologists and their work will change over time.

Sociology is a public endeavor. At certain points in its history it was seen, or saw itself, as primarily private and academic. But the discipline reflects the trends and needs of the society: research on the working classes as a result of the Great Depression (Hamilton, 283); war research in the 1940s and the Cold War period; community and immigration studies in times of economic upheavals, transformations, and population mobility; research on poverty in the 1960s; race relations research and theory precipitating from the Civil Rights Movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; research on gender and women in sociology generated by the Second Wave of feminism; studies of class with shifts in the class structure and downward social mobility. As our recent ASA Presidents Joe Feagin and Michael Burawoy have argued, public sociology is now necessary, needed, and a reality. We are not simply studying society; we carry some moral responsibility for social justice in society and for our role in the global society. These concerns, they remind us, are not in fact new but can be traced through the history of sociology from its beginnings. The history of sociology is dynamic, just as the discipline for which it constitutes the narrative. It is constantly being rewritten, as we discover new knowledge about our disciplinary origins and founders, as we understand the relationships,

networks, and influences of which we were previously unaware, and as we contextualize ideas and writings biographically and historically to gauge their full significance. Indeed, an author's assessment of her/his own work may be quite irrelevant; the work on its own carries and acquires important relevancies, often in a later era.

We study the history of sociology, not only because, in doing so, we achieve new knowledge about our disciplinary origins and development, but also because we achieve new and more informed and incisive perspectives on our own work, and on our own understanding of both early and contemporary society. We gain a *renewed self-consciousness* of our particular sociological mission and the responsibilities it carries to our discipline, to social science, and to society.  
Montreal, June 2005

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## THE BIOGRAPHY PROJECT

A new project tentatively called "The Biography Project" is starting up. It will collect items for a bibliography of memoirs, biographical and historical analyses, and biographies of sociologists, both living and dead. Anyone with such items, either published or unpublished, please send to Dr. Jack Nusan Porter, Project Chair, 12 Dunstan Street, West Newton, Mass. 02465-2115; Tel: (617) 965-8388; [jacknusan@earthlink.net](mailto:jacknusan@earthlink.net).

## JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY ARCHIVES

Copies of the Journal of the History of Sociology and History of Sociology are needed to meet requests for missing issues from libraries and archives. If you have copies of the "Journal of the History of Sociology" or "History of Sociology", any volume, in any condition, and would like to donate or sell them; please contact Dr. Jack Nusan Porter at the above address.

## REMEMBER TO VISIT THE HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGY WEB PAGE

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/go/hos>

Hope to see you in Philadelphia!



Comparative Perspectives, Competing Explanations



Accounting for the Rising and Declining Significance of Sociology



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