



# CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Text and Readings

Scott Appelrouth ■ Laura Desfor Edles

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Scott Appelrouth ■ Laura Desfor Edles

*California State University, Northridge*



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## PREFACE

Every semester, we begin our sociological theory courses by telling students that we love sociological theory, and that one of our goals is to get each and every one of them to love theory too. This challenge we set for ourselves makes teaching sociological theory exciting. If you teach “sexy” topics like the sociology of drugs, crime, or sex, students come into class expecting to be titillated. By contrast, when you teach sociological theory, students tend to come into class expecting the course to be abstract, dry, and absolutely irrelevant to their lives. The fun in teaching sociological theory is in proving students wrong. The thrill in teaching sociological theory is in getting students to see that sociological theory is absolutely central to their everyday lives—and *fascinating* as well. What a reward it is to have students who adamantly insisted that they “hated” theory at the beginning of the semester “converted” into theorists by the end!

In teaching sociological theory, we use original texts. We rely on original texts in part because every time we read these works we derive new meaning. Core sociological works tend to become “core” precisely for this reason. However, using original readings requires that the professor spend lots of time and energy explaining issues and material that is unexplained or taken for granted by the theorist. This book was born of this process—teaching from original works and explaining them to our students. Hence, this book includes the original readings we use in our courses, as well as our interpretation and explanation of them.

Thus, this book is distinct in that it is both a reader *and* a text. It is unlike existing readers in several ways, however. First and foremost, this book is not just a collection of seemingly disconnected readings. Rather, in this book we provide an overarching theoretical framework with which to understand, compare, and contrast these selections. In our experience, this overarching theoretical framework is essential in explaining the relevance and excitement of sociological theory.

In addition, we discuss the social and intellectual milieu in which the selections were written, as well as their contemporary relevance. Thus, we connect these seemingly disparate works not only theoretically but also via concrete applications to today’s world.

Finally, this book is unique in that we provide a variety of visuals and pedagogical devices—historical and contemporary photographs, and diagrams and charts illuminating core theoretical concepts and comparing specific ideas—to enhance student understanding. Our thinking is, why should only introductory level textbooks have visual images and pedagogical aids? Most everyone, not just the youngest audiences, enjoys—and learns from—visuals.

As is often the case in book projects, this turned out to be a much bigger and thornier project than either of us first imagined, and in the process of writing this book we have accrued many intellectual and social debts. First, we especially thank Jerry Westby of Sage Publications/Pine Forge Press for helping us get this project started. Jerry literally walked into our offices at California State University, Northridge, and turned what had been a nebulous, long-standing

idea into a concrete plan. Several months later, Ben Penner joined Sage Publications/Pine Forge and began to attend to the myriad of details this project entailed. We greatly appreciate “Ben and Jerry’s” continuous support and enthusiasm for our work, and also thank them for inspiring us and keeping us on task. We also are especially grateful for the hard work of our research assistant, George Skiles, who diligently searched out and collected the many copyright permissions absolutely essential to the production of this book.

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