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Ward, Lester Frank (1841–1913)

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Lester Frank Ward, a man of modest origins born in Joliet, Illinois, was a major architect of American sociology. Prior to Ward's election to the first presidency (1906–7) of the American Sociological Society (ASS, now the American Sociological Association), academic sociology in the US had no independent national disciplinary organization save the unifying voice of the *American Journal of Sociology*, then edited by Albion W. Small at the University of Chicago. The ASS, under Lester Ward's pioneering and able leadership, catapulted sociology into the American intellectual and academic mainstream.

Following horrific service in the Union army during the US Civil War (Ward was seriously wounded, the details of which are found in *Young Ward's Diary*), he earned his undergraduate degree from Columbian University (now George Washington University) in 1869 and won a master's degree, in botany, in 1871. Like the interdisciplinarian Roscoe Pound, who later excelled in botany, law, and sociology, Ward was a formally trained botanist and a self-taught, pioneering sociologist. Working as a paleobotanist in various government offices, including the US Geological Survey, Ward privately developed his systematic analyses of human society and, like several early sociologists, personally underwrote the publication of his books. Ward's major works include: *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), *The Psychic Factors of Civilization* (1893), *Outlines of Sociology* (1898), *Pure Sociology* (1903),

and *Applied Sociology* (1906). His six-volume *Glimpses of the Cosmos* (1913) is replete with autobiographical commentary on the origins of his voluminous writings.

Ward's early books and his 1895 contribution of a seminal article on "The Place of Sociology among Sciences" to the inaugural issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* (*AJS*) demonstrate his leadership at the forefront of sociological thinking. From 1900 to 1903, Ward presided over the international Institut de Sociologie, foreshadowing his subsequent role as president of the ASS. In 1906, Ward achieved a formal academic post, as Professor of Sociology in Brown University.

Ward's interest in Darwinism, notions of systemic "synergy," his concept of "gynecentrism," and his advocacy of civilization's progressive "telic" forces allied him in promoting many of the same intellectual trajectories advocated by sociologists Edward A. Ross and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Ward died on April 18, 1913. His papers, manuscripts, and professional files repose in multiple locations, including the following major depositories: Smithsonian Institution Archives; Brown University Archives; George Washington University Archives and Special Collections; and the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress.

SEE ALSO: American Sociological Association; Gilman, Charlotte Perkins; Pound, Roscoe; Small, Albion W.

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