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**EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF A DEPARTMENTAL
HERITAGE**

Michael R. Hill
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The creation, maintenance, and diffusion of each academic department's corporate identity is a social project. This is as true for departments of sociology as for any other academic organization. Numerous individuals and organizations -- within and outside a particular institute of higher learning -- participate in the constructive, reconstructive, and deconstructive processes that shape the content and character of the institutional heritage passed from one generation of scholars in each department of sociology to the next.

The institutionally-generated identities of academic departments of sociology are subject to all manner of distortions stemming from rumors, "war stories," selective retention, personal biases, and wishful thinking. Such distortions can be aggravated and compounded when organizational power is marshaled to institutionalize and reify the myths, grand stories, and heroes and heroines typically memorialized in traditional, word-of-mouth, mentor-to-student transmission. For example, the well-known *Heritage of Sociology* series, edited by the late Morris Janowitz of the University of Chicago, plays a significant role in keeping "the Chicago story" readily available in university libraries, academic bookstores, and doctoral reading lists across the United States. The modern heirs of the classic Chicago school clearly possess a rich historical reality about which to write and publish, but it must be noted that the prestige and power of the University of Chicago Press has been an especially important and adroitly employed mechanism for insuring the repetition and continued currency of the Chicago school's past accomplishments.

In the long shadow of the publishing blitz generated by the Chicago school (cf., Kurtz 1984), the remaining story of midwestern sociology is largely untold and underappreciated. What little published work exists on "the other" sociology departments in Illinois, not to mention the Dakotas, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin, often leaves major figures and issues unexplored, and sometimes distorts as much as clarifies.¹ For example, the major work on Edward A. Ross, one of the region's leading sociological founders, was written not by a sociologist, but by an historian -- with an historian's perspective and disciplinary biases.

The creative visions, progressive ideals, and intellectual discipline of the early midwestern sociologists provide a solid and dependable anchor for modern students adrift in the too often typical tempests of campus politics and disciplinary factionalism. The published corpus of sociological history is a social construction, and it presently denies midwestern students much of their rightful, empowering heritage. The goal of this special issue on the foundations of Nebraska sociology is to demonstrate that -- armed with

determination and appropriate methodologies -- it is possible for midwestern graduate students to reclaim significant parts of their intellectual legacy.

It is extremely difficult to adequately excavate the record of a department's intellectual and institutional heritage without resort to the methodologies of archival research and analysis. The graduate student contributors to this issue have been especially fortunate to be introduced to the intricacies of archival methodology first-hand by Professor Mary Jo Deegan. Her innovation, leadership, and years of experience in the field of disciplinary reconstruction (recently exemplified in her 1988 monograph on Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918) have greatly benefited our collective efforts not only in producing this issue but also in several related and ongoing projects.

The papers and topics presented in this issue need little editorial introduction, as they speak well for themselves. George Howard, Charles Ellwood, and Edward A. Ross were sociological leaders of the first order, all three elected to the presidency of the American Sociological Society. Mari Sandoz, a student of Joyce Hertzler, is one of Nebraska's and the United States' most distinguished novelists, biographers, and social historians. Hattie Plum a student of George Howard, became the first known woman to chair a coeducational, doctoral-degree granting department of sociology in the United States. These are remarkable people to admire and to learn from. Each paper in this issue marks a significant aspect of Nebraska sociology, and whets our appetite (and we hope yours) for further investigations. It is important, however, to underscore the crucial role of full-fledged archival research in the production and publication of the papers in this issue.

Without cooperative, energetic archival work over the past year, much of the material in this issue would remain unknown and unavailable. George E. Howard's 1927 personal account of the Nebraska department lay for years unread, unknown, and unpublished in a file box in the University of Nebraska Archives. Charles Ellwood's 1899 essays were found on a brittle role of microfilm at the Nebraska State Historical Society. The existence of Mari Sandoz' unpublished interactional study was discovered through systematic reading of her archival papers and correspondence. The essays by Bruce Keith and Michael Ball are significantly informed by their archival understanding of the published works of Ross and Howard. The story of Hattie Plum Williams' work for the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement simply could not be told without searching through the boxes of her archival records at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The final contribution to this issue, a bibliographical chronology of Nebraska sociology, demonstrates the limits of traditional bibliographic research. The bibliography is but a skeleton of untold accomplishments that only archival (and, for more recent years, qualitative) methods can complete. Nonetheless, old-fashioned bibliographic work has a role to play in regenerating the core of an academic heritage. Prior to the compilation of the bibliography, few Nebraska students could name more than two or three of the numerous sociological books authored and edited by Nebraska faculty

and students.

The student contributors to this issue hope that our work serves as a model for graduate students in our own and in other midwestern departments of sociology. Working collectively or alone, graduate students can do much to reclaim academic inheritances long ago relegated to forgotten archival files. Across the midwest, discipline-redefining accounts remain everywhere to be discovered, written, and institutionally remembered.

In addition to the generous help and encouragement provided by Professor Mary Jo Deegan, acknowledged above, the following persons and organizations deserve special thanks for their help, ideas, useful information, and interest: Lynn Beideck-Porn, Alan Booth, Kathy Borman, Miguel Carranza, Caroline Sandoz Pifer, Roxann Roggenkamp, Sharon Selvage, Helen Stauffer, Joseph Svoboda, Pat and Scott Wendt of Bluestem Books, the Nebraska State Historical Society, the University of Nebraska Archives, and the University of Nebraska Photographic Productions.

NOTE

1. Some exemplary exceptions are found in the series of midwest department histories edited by Mary Jo Deegan for *The Sociological Quarterly*, specifically: McGuire and Dawes (1983), Sica (1983), and Fine and Severance (1985). There is clearly more than local campus interest in the disciplinary history of each midwestern department. As Thomas Eynon (1983:469) noted, for example:

These...articles are part of a series edited by Mary Jo Deegan. In 1979 the publications committee of the Midwest Sociological Society recommended the appointment of Professor Deegan "to coordinate and commission articles on the history of sociology in the Midwest to be published over several years in *The Sociological Quarterly*.

The commissioned articles published in *The Sociological Quarterly* demonstrate the rich potential for future work in the disciplinary history of the midwest. A further example of major relevance is Joyce O. Hertzler's ([1929] 1979) account, "A History of Sociology at the University of Nebraska," with an editorial introduction by Mary Jo Deegan (1979). For a useful regional perspective, see Deegan (Forthcoming).

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