A QUESTION OF PRIORITY: SMALL AT CHICAGO OR BLACKMAR AT KANSAS? (Celebrating a Century of Kansas Sociology)

Alan Sica
University of Kansas


The goal of this paper is twofold. The first is to point out that American sociologists, as indicated in textbooks and published scholarly papers, often confuse the history of sociology as a profession with the history of social thought, so that the first is totally absorbed in the second with detrimental effects to both. The second goal concerns demonstrating that our understanding of sociology's growth in the U.S. during the late 19th century is not as accurate as it might be were documents of the period examined more carefully than has typically been the case. As an example of this faulty historiography, the widely held contention that the University of Chicago sociology department was "the first" to be founded in the U.S. is shown to be untrue. A case is made for Frank Blackmar's efforts at the University of Kansas as prior to Small's, and in some ways equally fascinating regarding the scope and definition of the discipline in its earliest days. The point, then, of the paper is to help reinterest American sociologists in the history of their profession as distinct from the history of its ideology or theory.

Sociologists whose major interests are not social psychology, methodology, statistics, mathematical sociology, or demography, typically harbor considerable interest in "the history of sociology" and the history of social thought. This is the conclusion Jones and Kronus (1976, p. 8) drew from their survey of 792 ASA members (Full, Associate, and Foreign) in 1974 (with 445 usable returns). And since specialists within those four subfields of the discipline amount to only a minority of ASA membership, it is fair to assume that most American sociologists care a good deal about sociology's past. For example, fully 96.2% (428) of the respondents believe Durkheim is "still worthwhile reading," with 424 for Weber, and 406 for Marx. Perhaps more amazing given the drift of contemporary graduate training, 282 (63.1%) believe Comte still warrants first-hand study, and 313 (70.3%) say the same of Tonnis. Put another way, a statistically insignificant 10 respondents (2.2%) categorically denied that any of the 29 social theorists listed were worth reading today, clearly a case of extreme deviance.

*Mrs. Carroll D. Clark, Marston McCluggage, John Nugent and the staff of the University Archives, University of Kansas, and a grant from the General Research Fund of the University (3557.X0.0038) all helped with this, for which I thank them.
Given the sparsity of such research, Jones and Kronus deserve praise for the study, and for their modesty in presenting its "conclusions." Yet it is remarkable that they failed to differentiate, in the survey instrument itself and in interpreting the data, between "the history of sociology" proper, interest in which they claimed to measure, and "the history of social thought," an altogether different subject. Examination of their 24 items illustrates this conflation, for in Question #1, the point of inquiry is "the history of sociological theory," but in the linked questions #2 and #10, "the history of sociology" becomes the referent instead. The respondent is given no indication that the two phrases are not synonymous. Thus it is likely that the survey did not so much measure interest in the history of sociology qua the development and institutionalization of a field of inquiry and an academic enterprise, as it bore instead upon the growth of ideas, systems of thought, and the formation of concepts through specific writers. This is, after all, what is usually implied when sociologists discuss the discipline's "history."

Though Jones and Kronus, nor anyone else, have recently compiled data on the other, related question--how much American sociologists care about the institutionalization of their profession in historical terms--some assumptions can be made based upon less systematic data. Programs of ASA meetings over the last decade list very few sessions which deal principally with "the history (or origins) of American sociology." The first in many years on "The History of Sociology" appeared in 1980, and the Southern Sociological Society scheduled one session out of 76 on the "Origins of American Sociology" in 1979. Since then token interest has been shown, but in a hit-or-miss fashion, with regard to public opportunities for scholars who work in this area to share their research. (In fact, most of the best study recently done on the history of sociology and other social sciences has been carried out by bona fide historians, not sociologists and their disciplinary kin.) Such unusual sessions, when in evidence, probably connoted for many association members something other than "theory," which nowadays has become quite a staple in meeting programs. For some reasons not often analyzed, it seems acceptable at professional meetings to discuss "theory," even that of the 19th century, but much less agreeable to point out details of the profession's institutional past. When one adds all this to the fact that nearly all graduate programs in sociology offer a sequence of "theory" courses, from pre-Comtean up to the latest wrinkle, but that virtually none offers courses which include information of the kind compiled some time ago by Small (1916), House (1936), the Bernards (1943), and Odum (1951), one can assume at least this much: knowledge about the beginnings of American sociology as a university subject is now slight, and, with some exceptions (for example Thomas 1983, and Bulmer 1984), of little interest to the same people who registered such overwhelming support for "the history of sociology" when queried by Jones and Kronus.

This was not always the case. The AJS in its early years was filled with articles dealing with this subject, for at that time (before about 1925), sociology was anathema to most other academic fields and not to a few college and university administrators. Its (apparently) irreversible establishment as a respectable discipline did not occur until the Second World War, and although its student enrollments were often quite high at the institutions in which it was offered between 1890 and 1925, as a field it remained on the outside looking in. Frank Tolman's famous series of articles and compilations (1902-1903) were but a few of many which meticulously--school by school--counted (among other things) (1) sociology courses offered, (2) date of inception, (3) approximate enrollments, (4) departmental affiliation, (5) name of instructor and training, (6) substance covered in the course, (7) textbook used, and so on. L.L. Bernard (1909) began his career with just such a study, under the direction of Small himself, and at the behest of the ASA (then the American Sociology Society) in 1908-09. Bernard was disturbed when his respondents delayed in returning his lengthy and involved questionnaire, and castigated some of them in print, so essential did he think it was to determine precisely what headway sociology was making on the American academic scene. It is no secret that these were crusading times for sociology, and the missionary zeal to win (student) converts prevailed over the "value-free" detachment of later years. And at that time, though social research was deemed essential to professional advancement, "The Teaching of Sociology in the United States" (Bernard's article) was of primary interest. But with the Bernards' mammoth compendium (1943), curiosity in these matters has apparently waned markedly. (This is partially documented by the difficult career of Journal of the History of Sociology which was published sporadically between 1977 and 1987, though several other journals are now trying to make more room for historical articles--most of them in Europe, however.)

In an effort to help reignite fascination with those bold nonconformists, who, beginning in the 1880s, dared to introduce sociology into stultifying "classical" curricula, perhaps it is worthwhile to revive a long forgotten argument: who was the first officially designated "sociologist" in the U.S. (hence, in the world), and whose "department of sociology" was the first to be established? Conventional wisdom holds that the University of Chicago take both honors, since Albion Small was imported in 1892 from Colby College, where he had been president, to organize what soon became the department of sociology (and anthropology) in the country. Small was named "Professor of Sociology" upon his arrival in Chicago. The younger Faris recently reproduced this claim (1970, p. 11), and since his book is part of a prestigious paperback series with wide circulation, it is likely that as many new readers will absorb this version of historical truth from him as from any other recent source. Faris writes:

When he [Small] came to the Chicago campus as Head Professor of Sociology he thereby found the first department of sociology, undoubtedly stimulating other progressive universities to add this subject in the years immediately following. Sociology took root at Columbia, Kansas, and Michigan within a year or two after the
founding at Chicago, but before long also at Yale, Brown, and elsewhere (but not until decades later at Harvard, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, and California). [emphasis added]

Given Faris' standing in the field and the authoritative guise of his monograph on "Chicago sociology," it is somewhat surprising to learn he is wrong on several counts. Whereas many Chicago doctoredates, rightfully proud of Small's department in its heyday, join with Faris in perpetuating the myth of Chicago's priority in sociology, their own founding father modestly contradicted this assertion in his landmark essay, "Fifty Years in American Sociology, 1865-1915" (Small 1916; reprinted 1949). First, he points out that Sumner initiated sociology courses in 1876 at Yale, although he was not labelled a "sociologist," nor were his courses (which changed titles frequently over the next thirty-four years) usually entitled "sociology." The Bernards (1943, p. 500) explain Sumner's aversion to the word itself, and Small comments sardonically on the content of Sumner's early social science courses (1949, p. 184n), i.e., "The sort of opinions that ought to be held on things in general by a Yale man." Claims for Sumner's priority, then, are muted somewhat by his idiosyncratic version of the field, and the unique nomenclature that went with it.

Another problem in Faris' historiography involves his indirect disparagement of Johns Hopkins. As is well known, it had not been for the spectacular energy and foresight of Herbert B. Adams, "the main dynamo" (Small's epithet) of the History and Politics department, the "social science movement" in the U.S. would have been much later and weaker in coming. Tolman (1902, p. 797) believed that until 1876, when Hopkins began courses in "the social science group" (as it came to be called at Chicago much later) under Adams and Richard Ely, the entire American academic scene was bereft of any course which could remotely be termed social scientific. When Small was sent to Hopkins from Colby College in 1888 to become enlightened by a Yale man." Claims for Sumner's priority, then, are muted somewhat by his idiosyncratic version of the field, and the unique nomenclature that went with it.

Once again we begin by turning to Small's seminal narrative. He notes that establishing chronology in these matters ought best be left in a sort of neutral zone" (1949, p. 201), so susceptible is the process to error and misatatement. Small's major concern was to identify substantive growth in sociology. Many smaller institutions—e.g., Gettysburg College, Rutgers College, Upper Iowa, Bowdoin, Wabash College, University of Wooster, Wellesley, Baker College, Allegheny College, Wake Forest, Bucknell, Agricultural College of Boston University (at Amherst; now University of Massachusetts), Pea College, Iowa State College, Adrian College, Macalester College, etc.—offered courses before 1890, which putatively grew from a concern with "social sciences." But by including within their ken "charities," ethics, labor questions, political economics, history, theology, "the woman question," and so on, taught by professors from a corresponding range of disciplines, the relation between many of these courses and "sociology," as created by Small, Giddings, and
Mid-American Review of Sociology

Arthur B. Woodford, a Yale Spencerian, began as “assistant and associate professor (sic) in economics and sociology” in 1885 at the University of Indiana, and taught as a member of the Department of History and Political Science. In 1885-1886 Woodford taught “Sociology,” which was described as treating “the latest results of this new department of scientific investigation.” Woodford taught the next year (1886-1887) in the new Department of Social Science and Economics, separated from history, in which he used Spencer’s Study of Sociology, along with texts by Wilson and Letourneau. In 1889 Woodford left. ‘Jenks’ arrived to join the Economics and Social Science department, and finally in 1890, an “Introduction to Sociology” was added to the course list.

Blackmar’s letter to Small follows Woodford’s. He explains that due to pressure from the University of Kansas Regents upon his arrival from Hopkins in 1889, he named his new department “History and Sociology,” and simultaneously became Professor of History and Sociology. He notes: ‘So far as my knowledge goes, this was the first time that the word ‘sociology’ was used in connection with the name of a university department in the United States” (1890, p. 202). In footnote 40, Small replies to this claim: “Professor Blackmar seems to be correct on this point. No evidence of priority in this respect over the University of Kansas is known to the writer of this paper.” It is this footnote that Chicagoans have ignored over the years when they parade their responses in his article, apparently ordering them via the dates provided by the authors (1949, pp. 201-203).

Another interesting difference from Indiana is that Woodford, and then Jenks, were junior faculty members, and both left Indiana quickly. They apparently did not enjoy the sort of longterm support Blackmar had at Kansas, perhaps best reflected in his ability to recruit talented new members for his department (from very reputable universities) during the ensuing decade, and by being appointed the first Dean of the Graduate School in 1896, a position he held for twenty-six years. (The doctoral program in sociology began the same year.) He was obviously favored by the administration, though at times a querulous, nonconforming favorite.

Faris’ misinformation becomes all the more perplexing (verging on sheer myth-making) when we remember that other recent major historians of sociology, following Small no doubt, have ritually conceded Blackmar’s priority. In 1943, the Bernards bluntly noted, “Frank W. Blackmar had already begun the development of one of the largest early departments of sociology some four or five earlier [than 1894] at the state University of Kansas” (1943, p. 662). And Odum, who writes inaccurately about Blackmar on other occasions (e.g., p. 106), accepts the standard chronology: Frank Blackmar “is recorded as starting one of the major departments of sociology some years before Small established his own great department” (1951, p. 114). He also points out that “Chicago, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Michigan, Kansas, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri were the leaders and constituted the main stream of the westward dominance of sociology in the United States [c. 1916]” (1951, p. 105).

It’s interesting to note that around this very time, Ernest W. Burgess was working under Blackmar on the sociology department’s series of "social surveys," which bear a remarkable theoretical and methodological similarity to those which later became famous as the "Chicago school" community studies. Burgess stayed at Kansas just long enough to co-author (with J.J. Sippy) one entertaining "survey," on Belleville, a town in north-central Kansas of 2,367, and incidentally the geographical midpoint of the country. He also wrote The Lawrence Survey with Blackmar. One can only speculate on the effect this work had on Burgess in shaping his methodological style. He was much the junior researcher, for Blackmar was in 1915 sixty-one, full Professor and Dean of the Graduate School, well-known scholar of two important monographs (Blackmar 1890a and 1891), while Burgess was a beginning assistant professor of twenty-nine.

Before closing this foray into forgotten facts, two other features of Blackmar’s innovative approach to sociology and teaching should be mentioned. Beginning immediately upon his tenure at Kansas, Blackmar published a handbook and propaganda booklet, “The Study and History of Sociology,” in which he indicated his delight at being in "a young, growing institution like your own," it having "an advantage in outlining policy, over older and wealthier institutions; it has the advantage of the experience of other institutions without the obstructions which essentially arise on account of traditional usage” (1890b, p. 6). This sentiment is probably not altogether instead the more eclectic, embracing program for social science outlined by the visionaries at Hopkins. 5

5 Another interesting difference from Indiana is that Woodford, and then Jenks, were junior faculty members, and both left Indiana quickly. They apparently did not enjoy the sort of longterm support Blackmar had at Kansas, perhaps best reflected in his ability to recruit talented new members for his department (from very reputable universities) during the ensuing decade, and by being appointed the first Dean of the Graduate School in 1896, a position he held for twenty-six years. (The doctoral program in sociology began the same year.) He was obviously favored by the administration, though at times a querulous, nonconforming favorite.
hypocritical, for (as was duly reported in the town newspapers at the time), his mentor at Hopkins, Herbert Adams, had written a splendid recommendation for Blackmar, and it is unlikely that as a trained mathematician and historian with Ph.D., he was forced to accept the position in distant Kansas. He had an idea: to bring Hopkins' social science eclecticism to fruition in a setting unconstrained by the fetters of tradition and "usage." Toward this end he imported from Baltimore the practice of convening weekly meetings of scholars, and from these, Seminary Notes were produced, the record of research papers read to all students enrolled in sociology and history courses, as well as to other interested parties (some of whom traveled many miles to make each meeting on Friday evenings). The first issue appeared in May 1891, cost 10 cents (50 cents per annum), was 24 pages long, and included synopses of papers dealing with "The Shelby Expedition to Mexico," "Wages and Wage-Earners," "Limitations of Legislation," "Irrigation," "The Romantic Literature of the Social question," and perhaps most intriguing, "The Afro-American Outlook." Later issues of Seminary Notes displayed "Life Among the Cherokees," "Taxation," "The Deep Harbor Movement," "The Silver Question," "History and Sociology in Cornell University," plus course listings and short book notices. The final issue (Vol. 2, No. 7) was published in May 1893, the reason for the demise of this fruitful experiment something of a mystery.

Referring again to Blackmar's "The Study of History and Sociology"—his 69-page didactic booklet explaining why an intelligent person might consider studying these related fields—one discovers a finely honed mind at work. He instructs the neophyte that sociology "can occupy one of three positions in the category of studies: it may be considered a philosophy, a branch of natural science, or a historical science" (1890, p. 32). With this he leads the unwary into the German Methodenstreit, which, of course, many of the Hopkins scholars had witnessed firsthand. Blackmar neatly summarizes the difference between history and sociology (without mentioning German epistemologists):

...sociology has, in a special sense, a specific work to do on its own account which is an important aid to history. It examines the universal elements and changes in different societies; it searches for the universal factors of society-building, the universal types of society forms, and the active functions of the social organism. The chief mark of distinction is that sociology treats of universals, while history treats of individuals. But sociology, while it ignores the individual in society, does not ignore the individual society (1890b, p. 33).

He also hastens to point out that sociology is not merely a philosophy of history, but must deal with "a great amount of concrete historical material," and in so doing needs to cultivate "the study and use of statistics." But with perfect foresight of later battles, he insists in the same breath:

Its great claim to an independent position is found in the special preparation necessary to the right use of statistics. No other branch is so useful, and yet none other so misleading in its efforts. The labor of weeks can be represented upon a single page, but the proper interpretation of the page requires a wide knowledge of the subjects treated, and consummate skill in their combinations and reductions (1890b, p. 34).

There is a great deal more to be said about Frank Blackmar, Albion Small, method and madness in the infant stage of our contemporary sociological empire. But that can await other opportunities (see Sica 1983). For the moment it is enough to have won back Blackmar's rightful priority from the grasp of uncertain historiography, and from the myth-making too often substituted for fact-finding in an effort to keep track of where we may have once been.

ENDNOTES

1. Even the Schwendingers' brassy attack (1974) upon some of the "founding fathers" of American sociology, while heavy on textual exegesis and polemical dissection, hardly treats sociology's institutionalization at all. Theirs is certainly the most recent and thorough attempt by younger sociologists to make sense of the field in its first three or four decades of official existence. But they follow current prejudice by ignoring huge bodies of historical fact (collected, for instance, in the Bernard archive) in favor of theoretical argument and counter-argument, particularly with reference to the "chauvinism" they discover in many of the early major works.

2. Carroll D. Clark, professor and chairman of the Sociology Department at Kansas for several decades in the generation following Blackmar, wrote, in reference to the "Elements" course, that "no other course bearing this title was then or had been offered in the United States" (Clark 1965, p. 95). Among a number of other innovative courses offered in the Sociology Department was one on "The Status of Women in the United States," taught (exclusively to women) by Blackmar in 1892.

3. "The aim of this course is to bring before the students the latest results of this new department of scientific investigation in life as it is manifested in human societies. Senior year, second term (5); required of Seniors in the course of Philosophy; may be taken as Senior specialty in the course in Economic Science" (Small 1949, p. 201). Woodford rewrote the description the following year in 1886, so that it merely read, "Sociology-Spencer's Study of Sociology, Wilson's Anthropology, and Letourneau's Sociology Based Upon Ethnography. First and second terms, three times a week."
Mid-American Review of Sociology

4. "Elements of Sociology--Mon., Wed., Fri., at 5. Lectures on the evolution of social institutions from the primitive unit, the family; including a discussion of the laws and conditions which tend to organize society. The latter part of the course will be devoted to the elements of modern social science as preliminary to the consideration of the problems of the day." This was but one of eight courses Blackmar taught that year.

5. Blackmar's pedagogical aims were not modest, as is reflected in the catalogue's prefatory note to courses in History and Sociology taught by him in 1889-1890: "The aim of the following courses is to give a comprehensive knowledge of the great topics of history, and to investigate general social, political, and economic phenomena and theories--especially those of Europe." In his "Outline for a Course of Reading on The Status of Woman," (apparently a combination promotional flyer-syllabus designed for college courses and reading circles), the reading list contains thirty-three tomes, mostly complete books, including one each in French and German. The "Outline" itself covers the following: women and industrialization (five subsections), urban women, women in professions, women's property rights, the political status of women (four subsections), marriage and divorce, temperance, charity, education of woman (including "Physical culture, intellectual training: common school, college-university, special training for self-support, training for home life and domestic duties, and the best education for citizenship"), woman in literature, women in Europe (five subsections), woman in the Orient, woman in the Middle Ages, and woman in the Ancient Life. Given the probable condition of Kansas culture in 1892, his thoroughness, breadth, and sheer interest in the subject seem remarkable. Since the course disappeared from the university catalogue after only two years, it could be assumed that Blackmar's prescience was not shared by many students.

6. Most of Blackmar's professional records and letters were lost some time during the Second World War, so it is difficult to reconstruct his relationships with his superiors except through a few preserved items, and in letters addressed to him from other important University personnel. A useful outline of Blackmar's importance to the University in general is provided by Griffin (1974, pp. 146, 152-3, 245, 326-7).

REFERENCES


Mid-American Review of Sociology


- Part II of above. American Journal of Sociology 8, 1 (July):85-121.

NOTES FROM THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY:
FRANK BLACKMAR'S LAST YEARS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Jan M. Fritz
California State University, San Bernardino

Frank Wilson Blackmar (1854-1931) has been described as "one of the master builders of the University of Kansas" and "an outstanding figure in the world of the social sciences." Despite Blackmar's many accomplishments, he is not well known by contemporary sociologists. This article briefly reviews his work as an academic and practitioner and then focuses on Blackmar's unsettling last years at the University of Kansas. This account of Blackmar's retirement is based on letters and memos found in the university archives.

As American sociology developed in the 1880s and 1890s, the country was struggling with issues of economic and social justice. Many of the early sociologists--academics as well as practitioners--were interested in solving or at least reducing the pressing problems confronting their communities. One of those scholar-practitioners was the University of Kansas' first sociologist, Frank Wilson Blackmar (1854-1931).

When Blackmar began his 40-year tenure at Kansas in 1889, as professor of history and sociology, times were more than difficult. Waves of new settlers had entered the Kansas region after the Civil War and the combination of an increase in population, adverse national economic conditions and drought hit Kansas hard. The situation was so desperate for farmers "by 1895 that the University of Kansas faculty voted to contribute part of their salaries to aid sufferers in Western Kansas" (Clark 1965, p. 96).

Blackmar was, for 25 years, the first dean and "guiding genius" (Patterson 1931, p. 7) of the graduate school and headed the department of sociology for almost 30 years. Blackmar (Blackmar and Gillin 1924, p. 37) thought sociology's purpose was "first, to understand society; then to enable us to formulate a scientific program of social betterment." He taught some of the first sociology courses in the country--e.g., "Elements of Sociology" (1890), "Status of Woman" (1893), "Questions of Practical Sociology" (1897) and "Remedial and Corrective Agencies (1897)--and had a distinguished record as an academic and as a practitioner.

Blackmar was the author of more than 18 books and 90 articles and pamphlets including The Study of History and Sociology (1890), History of Higher Education in Kansas (1900), The Elements of Sociology (1905) and

*Copyright Jan M. Fritz, 1989.