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**Millennial Milestone. The Heritage and  
Future of Sociology in the North American  
Region**

*Editor: Janet L. Abu-Lughod*

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## **INTRODUCTION THE HERITAGE AND FUTURE OF SOCIOLOGY IN NORTH AMERICA\***

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### **The European Roots of Theory, Orientations and Practices**

Just about one hundred years ago, North America was experiencing its third or possibly fourth wave of settlers and intellectual ideas -- drawn across the currents of the Atlantic and deposited on a shore which, while rapidly Europeanizing in cultural roots, was ripe to generate a different synthesis -- one born out of a different soil, a different history, and a different mix of peoples and institutional arrangements.

And just about one hundred years ago, the first departments of sociology were established on the North American continent, drawing upon the legacy of nineteenth-century western European (chiefly German and French) social thinkers (1). This implanting of sociology in the New World was intensified by highly selective "reverse migrations," as American scholars made pilgrimages abroad, seeking out more advanced training, especially in Germany.

The transmission of social thought from Europe, however, went through a highly selective screening in early American sociology. For example, Karl Marx's detailed analysis of the objective workings of the capitalist system was conspicuously absent during the early days when sociology was being "codified" in the United States. In the over 1000 pages of *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (known as "The Green Bible" (2)), the first American textbook in sociology jointly assembled by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess in the second decade of the twentieth century, there were only a few oblique references to the work of Marx, merely bibliographic or dismissive (3). It was only after World War II that Marxist analysis began to infuse the subfield of political economy, adding a structural appreciation of the operation of capitalism to the insights of historically-minded and globally-oriented thinkers.

From the beginning, regardless of the varied sources of its legacy, North American sociology began with the assumption that the purpose of theoretical understanding was to guide social reformation and to achieve "the good [humane] society" (4). Gradually, this "mission" came to be lost in a forest of empirical research, although it was to be emphasized again by Robert Lynd and C. Wright Mills. This controversy still persists and was linked to a second unresolved dilemma over the issue of "generalizations." From its European