This article addresses the provincialism of most introductory sociology courses in this country. It suggests that the striking lack of comparative and historical focus in the introductory course is peculiar given such recent trends as the growing reconvergence of sociology and anthropology and the recent rise of historical sociology, as well as the fact that European sociology is notable for its strong comparative and historical outlook. Several serious consequences are held to follow from this provincialism: the virtual impossibility of presenting sociology as a discipline oriented to formulating general scientific principles when no serious comparative analyses are undertaken; an inability to expand students' cultural horizons to the extent usually desired by sociologists; and a crippling of the capacity of sociology to get a proper hold on the crucial problem of social change. A highly comparative and historical introductory course is then discussed as a means of overcoming these serious deficiencies.

The Provincialism of Introductory Sociology

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Judging from the nature of most of the textbooks, the course in introductory sociology is a curious phenomenon. Perhaps the most significant peculiarity of the course is its provincialism—its striking lack of any sort of comparative or historical focus. With but a handful of exceptions (e.g., van den Berghe, 1978; Lenski and Lenski, 1978; Giddens, 1982), the introductory textbooks present sociology as really little or nothing more than the study of contemporary American society. Although virtually all of the textbooks devote some attention to other societies and possibly other times, this is generally not carried beyond mere token proportions. Thus the attention to other cultures and societies is in many cases mere window dressing, appearing often to be little more than an afterthought. There is seldom any thorough comparative and historical treatment that allows the reader to see other societies in their fullness and richness, and to see just how they are similar to or different from one's own society. This article argues that this lack of any genuine comparative or historical focus to the introductory course has a number of debilitating consequences. It also goes on to outline a

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thoroughly comparative and historical course that I teach and to suggest a number of benefits to teaching the course in this way. In addition, it suggests how this course may be an improvement on similar courses taught by sociologists.

SOME REASONS WHY THE INTRODUCTORY COURSE IS A CURIOSITY

There are at least three reasons why the focus of the introductory course must be seen as a rather curious phenomenon. One of these is the growing reconvergence of sociology and anthropology. As is well known, in the nineteenth century anthropology and sociology were scarcely the separate disciplines that they became by the middle of the twentieth century. Many of the great founding fathers of both disciplines focused their attention extensively on both modern Western industrial societies and many types of preindustrial society. Herbert Spencer, for instance, attempted to create a broad evolutionary interpretation of society. In order to do so, he had to take into consideration the broad array of human societies past and present. Moreover, Durkheim, who has had such an impact on modern American sociology, eschewed any exclusive focus on Western industrial society. One of his most famous studies was devoted to understanding religion in the broadest comparative sense. He hoped to achieve considerable insight into the general role of religion in social life by examining its most primitive or elementary forms. Also, consider the contributions of Karl Marx. Although he was primarily interested in modern capitalism, he did develop a broad evolutionary interpretation of human history, and in his later life he engaged in considerable study of ethnology and ethnography. Marx would have thought ridiculous the notion that one social science studies modern capitalist societies and ignores the rest, whereas another science studies the rest and ignores modern capitalism.

Spencer, Durkheim, and Marx would have considered highly undesirable the intellectual and professional division between sociology and anthropology that was to occur in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet, happily, there are some definite signs that this division is becoming less and less meaningful, and that something of a recon-

vergence between sociology and anthropology is occurring. Anthropologists are increasingly turning their attention to modern industrialized societies. The relatively new specialty known as urban anthropology, for example, is devoted to the study of various types of cultural phenomena within modern urban settings. The revival of the Marxian tradition within social theory has caused many professionally identified sociologists to focus extensively on the study of precapitalist societies. The revival of interest since about mid-century in questions of sociocultural evolution has created considerable convergence of sociology and anthropology. Professionally identified sociologists who have become engaged in the study of sociocultural evolution have had to develop extensive familiarity with intellectual materials produced by people professionally identified as anthropologists. Moreover, as social scientists have become increasingly sensitized to the political context in which social science develops, the split between sociology and anthropology has seemed more and more unacceptable. For example, many would now argue that anthropology as a separate discipline was really the child of—and handmaiden to—colonialism and imperialism. With this growing recognition, the sharp distinction between sociology and anthropology has come to be seen by many as downright pernicious.

Another reason why the provincial focus of most introductory courses and textbooks must be viewed as a curiosity involves the rapid rise of historical sociology since the late 1960s. Again, the nineteenth-century social theorists were historically inclined, but American sociology throughout the first two-thirds of the twentieth century abandoned this historical focus with a vengeance. The dominance of functionalism in the American sociology of the 1940s and 1950s expresses this ahistorical character eloquently. Yet the reemergence of a historically focused sociology is a thing to behold. Two contemporary giants of modern historical sociology are Immanuel Wallerstein and Theda Skocpol. Wallerstein has been having enormous influence on contemporary sociology with his work on the history of the capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein, 1974), and Skocpol has been justly famed for her historically focused comparative political sociology (Skocpol, 1979). Yet how much discussion of the ideas of these scholars or of other recent historical sociologists do we find in the modern introductory textbooks? How much discussion is there in

which the historical context of various social phenomena is laid out before us? Virtually none. Curious. Curious, indeed.

A final reason to be noted for the peculiar nature of the American introductory sociology course has to do with what our European colleagues are doing. European sociologists are in many ways the exact mirror image of American sociologists: By and large, they are very comparative and historical, and cannot really think of being otherwise. Although they seem to pay little attention to preindustrial and precapitalist societies, they do show much concern with a vast array of modern industrial societies. Consider, for instance, the British sociologist Frank Parkin's (1979) recent book on Marxist class theory. This excellent book is pervaded by a comparative and historical focus, and such focus is arguably one reason that the book is so good. Or consider an introductory book written by another British sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1982). This small text is strikingly comparative and historical. Not a single topic is discussed without extensive attention to comparative and historical materials. Indeed, Giddens (1982: vi) regards this as one of the hallmarks of his book:

> Many accounts of sociology are written primarily with regard to one particular society—that in which the author, or the audience to which the book is directed, live. I try to avoid this type of parochialism, in the belief that one of the main tasks of sociological thought is to break free from the confines of the familiar. But perhaps the chief distinguishing feature of the book is its strongly historical stress. "Sociology" and "history" may be ordinarily taught as though they were distinct fields of study, but I think such a view to be wholly mistaken.

It is interesting indeed that European sociology has seen fit to perpetuate the comparative and historical focus so characteristic of classical social theory, whereas American sociology, through its introductory course, perpetuates, in Giddens's words, a kind of intellectual parochialism. How curious.

SOME DEBILITATING CONSEQUENCES OF THE CURRENT INTRODUCTORY COURSE

I believe that there are a number of unfortunate consequences that follow from the principal way in which we teach introductory

sociology in this country. Perhaps the most serious consequence is that, without any sort of comparative or historical focus, it is impossible to regard sociology as a general science of social life. In fact, it may be noted in this regard that most introductory sociology textbooks engage in a massive contradiction: They usually define sociology as some sort of general science of human social life, and then they proceed to limit about 95% of their discussion to American society since 1960. This contradiction is so blatant that I cannot understand why authors and editors have not recognized it. There are two ways out of the contradiction: either redefine sociology so that it becomes "the study of American society since 1960," or start employing much more in the way of comparative and historical materials in the textbooks. I would opt for the latter tactic.

I think it is clear that most sociologists have as one of their major goals in the introductory course the development of some general, scientific principles regarding social life. They want to think that sociology can make a contribution to doing this. That goal seems eminently appropriate. But the only way in which it can be accomplished to any extent at all is by a rather thoroughgoing comparative/historical perspective. Although it might not ordinarily be thought of in that way, one of the major reasons for the success of the natural sciences is their comparative approach. Biologists study all life forms and compare them to each other in detail. They do not simply study bees, or elephants, or echinoderms. Likewise, physicists study all forms of matter and energy, not just one or two particular forms. Physics is not defined as the study of heat. Furthermore, astronomers do not limit themselves to the study of the planet Earth, but study all the planets in the solar system, other solar systems, and all other forms of matter and energy in the universe.

To the extent that the introductory course is to establish for students any basic principles of human social life, it must be comparative and historical. The reason is obvious. Only by studying a broad array of social forms in both the past and the present can we obtain the data necessary to make broad scientific generalizations. Very little can be learned about sex roles, for instance, by limiting ourselves to examining how they are organized in, say, modern capitalist society. But by examining how sex roles differ (or fail to differ) across a broad array of historical types of human society, we stand to learn a great deal about why they take the various forms they do.

Likewise, the general principles underlying technological change cannot be grasped merely by examining technological change since the Industrial Revolution. We would also have to examine technological change (or lack thereof) in other societies and in other eras.

A second debilitating consequence of a noncomparative, nonhistorical introductory course was stated by Giddens—its parochialism. I believe that most teachers of introductory sociology also have as one of their major goals the widening of the cultural horizons of their students. That is one of my major goals, and many of my colleagues say it is one of theirs. Then why all of the attention to American society since about 1960? Surely American society since 1960 is important, but I want to widen the horizons of my students far beyond that. In fact, it seems to me that my students are intellectually imprisoned in American society since 1960 (or even 1970), and that is all the more reason for a detailed—not a token—comparative and historical emphasis. Surely it is important and enlightening for them to know that the !Kung Bushmen of southern Africa are extremely cooperative and detest competition and individual boasting; that women are seldom second-class citizens in hunter-gatherer societies; that the Industrial Revolution may have been associated with a worldwide deterioration, rather than an improvement, in the standard of living for the majority of the world's population; that many societies have religious systems that have little if any connection to the system of secular morality; that Roman slavery had no relationship to race; that racism is not found in any society before the rise of modern capitalism; that many societies do not have social classes; that most of the world's societies prefer polygymous forms of marriage; that priesthoods and ruling classes historically have been very closely associated; and so on. All of these facts and dozens or hundreds of others of a comparative and historical nature can be extremely useful in widening the perspective of the student. I constantly tell my students that I do not believe that they can adequately understand their own society—American society since 1960—until they have first understood many aspects of many other societies in other historical eras.

A third negative result of the typical introductory course is the wholly inadequate treatment of social change. In most of the introductory textbooks I examine, social change is treated in one or two

chapters at the end of the book. Presumably the rest of the book has nothing to do with social change. Social change is just something to be added on at the end. How unfortunate. Social change should be an issue treated throughout the course in regard to all of the basic phenomena that sociologists study. When sex roles are studied, changes in sex roles in the broadest sense should be studied too. When the economy is treated, the nature of economic change should be treated as a fundamental part of the topic. Of course, this criticism has been made many times before, but so far it has not seemed to impress introductory textbook writers. One of the major criticisms of functionalism was its inability or difficulty in treating social change—that it conceptualized it as a mere residue of social structure. Many sociologists have accepted this criticism, but it does not seem to have affected the way in which they teach introductory sociology. Even for many sociologists who accept much of what conflict approaches have to offer, social change is still strangely assigned a token role at the end of the book. It is still a second-class citizen not yet important enough to merit full-scale treatment throughout. How unfortunate, and how debilitating from the standpoint of presenting to uninitiated students a coherent account of sociology as a science of society.

A COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL INTRODUCTORY COURSE

I have been teaching a comparative and historical introductory course for several years. I am well aware that some other sociologists around the country teach similarly comparative and historical courses (Lenski, 1983; see Armer, 1983). Given the wealth of comparative and historical literature at the disposal of sociologists, many different kinds of courses can be created depending on the particular interests and the theoretical persuasion of the teacher. My course is, naturally, guided by my own particular substantive interests and my particular theoretical approach, which happens to be a broad-based materialist, conflict-oriented evolutionism.

I believe that my course largely overcomes the weaknesses of the typical introductory sociology course that I have just described. It

examines such a broad range of comparative and historical materials that it is genuinely possible to set forth certain scientific principles of human social life, and to use these principles as guides to further study. Also, given the broad comparative/historical framework, students' cultural horizons should be enormously widened. American society since 1960 is discussed, but it is not given any particular pride of place. Other societies and other times are deemed to be just as important. Because every topic is approached in a broad historical or evolutionary perspective, social change is treated continuously throughout, not as a "topic" that is merely "tacked on" at the end. Thus social change is as fundamentally a part of the course as is anything else. Finally, I believe that my course may have one additional benefit. Because it attempts to state general scientific principles about the nature of human social life, it just might help to improve the public image of sociology. It might help to demonstrate that sociology really does have something to offer that is intellectually worthwhile and not just the elaboration of the obvious.

Table 1 presents a general outline of the course I teach. Here I simply indicate the major topics that are considered and the order of their presentation. The table is, by and large, self-explanatory, and I therefore leave it to the reader to study it as carefully as he or she desires. I would, however, like to make special mention of three topics I discuss that I believe can greatly benefit, perhaps more than all the others, from comparative and historical treatment.

The whole problem of economic development and underdevelopment is an issue that, perhaps all too obviously, demands such treatment. Comparative case studies can be exceptionally valuable as means of scrutinizing the two major theoretical approaches to underdevelopment: modernization theory and dependency theory. One comparative analysis that I have found extremely useful in my course involves contrasting the recent economic history of Japan with that of Indonesia. Here we have the only society in Asia that has emerged as a modern, industrialized nation being compared to an Asian society that is characteristic of the rest of Asia—poor, economically underdeveloped, technologically stagnant, and so on. Another excellent comparative analysis that I present in my course involves the Americas. The U.S. Northeast took off in the nineteenth century into enormous capitalist and industrial development, while

TABLE 1
Schematic Outline of a Comparative and Historical Introductory Sociology Course

Substantive Topic	Major Issues Treated Comparatively and/or Historically*
Pre-Industrial Modes of Subsistence Technology	Hunting and gathering, horticultural, agrarian, and pastoral subsistence technologies/ reasons for technological advance
Pre-Capitalist Economic Systems	Modes of resource ownership in pre-capitalist societies/ pre-capitalist distributive systems (reciprocity, redistribution, expropriation)/ economic exploitation in evolutionary perspective/ pre-capitalist markets
The Origin and Evolution of Social Stratification	Stratification in evolutionary perspective/ theories of the origin of stratification
The Rise of the Capitalist World-Economy and the Industrial Revolution	The transition from feudalism to capitalism and its causes/ Wallerstein and the capitalist world-economy/ the Industrial Revolution, its causes and consequences/ capitalism since the late nineteenth century/ the emergence of state socialist economies/ capitalism and the labor process
Capitalism and Economic Underdevelopment	Nature of the underdeveloped world/ modernization and dependency approaches to underdevelopment/ case studies of underdevelopment (Japan and Indonesia, the Americas)
Social Stratification in Industrial Societies	Stratification within capitalist, state socialist, and social democratic societies/ theories of industrial stratification systems (functionalist, Marxian, Weberian)
Political Organization in Comparative and Evolutionary Perspective	General nature of political evolution (band, tribe, chiefdom, state)/ origin of the state/ pristine and secondary states/ historical forms of the agrarian state (feudalism and Oriental despotism)/ origins of parliamentary democracy and totalitarianism/ liberal, Marxist, and Weberian theories of the modern state
Racial and Ethnic Stratification	Paternalistic and competitive race relations/ plantation slave societies in the New World (U.S. South, Brazil, Caribbean)/ competitive race relations in Brazil, U.S., and South Africa/ theories of competitive race relations (orthodox Marxist, split labor market)/ origins of racism in Western colonialism
Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality	Commonalities in sex role patterns worldwide/ variations in intensity of female subordination/ sex roles in evolutionary perspective/ sociobiological and materialist theories of sexual inequality (bioevolutionary, Marxist, and ecological theories)
Marriage, Family, and Kinship	Systems of residence and descent worldwide/ marriage in comparative perspective/ incest avoidance, exogamy, and endogamy/ bride-wealth and dowry/ marriage, family,and kinship in evolutionary perspective
The Forms and Functions of Religious Belief and Action	Evolution of religion/ the Marxian view: is religion the "opium of the people?"/ revitalization and millenarian movements/ religion and ecology: sacred cows and abominable pigs/ the "great witch hunt" of early modern Europe/ types of religious organization in modern industrial societies

*Not all topics taught in the course are listed. Only those comparative and historical materials considered to be most salient are included.

the southern part of the United States failed to keep pace. Latin America was even worse off than the southern United States. Provocative theoretical interpretations of these contrasting economic outcomes have been offered by Geertz (1963) in regard to Japan and

Indonesia and Frank (1979) in regard to the Americas. But regardless of whether one accepts these particular theoretical interpretations, the comparative case studies on which they are based can be invaluable in putting this important sociological problem in excellent perspective.

A second issue that needs to be approached in the broadest comparative sense is that of stratification in industrial society. Here is an area in which I believe sociologists have not acquitted themselves well at all. Most of the introductory texts provide at least a few comparative materials, but, again, tokenism reigns. What is needed is a full-scale comparative analysis of at least two kinds of societies: modern industrial capitalist societies and state socialist societies. For good measure, the social democratic societies of Scandinavia can be thrown in to make a three-way comparison. This is what I do in my course. I begin with a detailed discussion of economic inequality and class structure in modern capitalist societies. I then turn to an analysis of the so-called "social democratic experiment": Has the attempt in Scandinavia to reform capitalism by making it more just and egalitarian been a success and, if so, to what extent? Following this, I discuss the basic nature of stratification in the modern state socialist societies, and proceed to a point-by-point comparison of capitalism and socialism in regard to such dimensions of stratification as the extent of economic inequality, mobility rates, the nature of ruling elites, and so on.

In sum, the issue of stratification in the modern world is much too important to be analyzed in the parochial way in which it is generally treated in the introductory texts. The only way in which the major theories of stratification—functionalist, Marxian, Weberian—can be adequately examined is through this kind of comparative analysis. Because most sociologists give major attention to these theories in the introductory course, comparative treatment in this area really seems imperative.

Sex roles is another topic in which a comparative analysis has so much more to offer than the traditional approach that barely goes beyond American society since 1960. It is sad to see that most sociologists have hardly approached this problem comparatively at all. The introductory textbooks are very parochial, with one noteworthy

exception: Almost all of them discuss Margaret Mead's famous analysis of sex roles in three Oceanic societies. But this is tokenism in the extreme, and poor scholarship to boot. Mead's analysis is grossly out of date and it has been superseded by some excellent comparative studies of sex roles by anthropologists (see in particular Martin and Voorhies, 1975).

When I lecture on this topic, I begin by trying to ascertain whether there are any uniformities in the assignment of sex roles throughout the world. I next turn to examining the extremes of sexual inequality in the world's societies. I examine two societies in which the status of women is very high (Iroquois, !Kung) and two in which their status is very low (Yanomamo, El Shabana). This is followed by a detailed evolutionary analysis of sex role patterns. The results of this analysis are striking: Women are best off among hunter-gatherers, and worst off in agrarian societies. I suggest to my students that this is largely due to the economic importance of women in these societies. In hunting and gathering societies women play a crucial economic role as food gatherers, but in agrarian societies men monopolize economic production and women are shunted off into domestic work.

A crucial issue in regard to sex roles is the extent to which human biology is implicated in the determination of sex role patterns. The important controversy that has grown up around this issue cannot be discussed intelligently without a comparative perspective. Only by using such a perspective is it possible to draw some generalizations about what might be in the genes and what might not. As van den Berghe (1978) has suggested, if a behavior pattern is universal, then there are at least prima facie grounds for suspecting that it may be rooted in biology. Only a detailed comparative analysis of sex roles can tell us what is universal, what is quite common, and what is highly variable.

CONCLUSIONS

I know that there are a number of macrosociologists out there who share my sympathies and who already teach introductory

courses of their own along lines similar to what I have been suggesting. They have already been convinced about the advantages of a comparative/historical perspective. I also know that there are many sociologists whose concerns are basically microlevel, and who therefore will be essentially unconcerned with what I have been saying. Yet there are many others who have been teaching largely macrosociological courses but doing so in primarily noncomparative, nonhistorical ways. They are the ones at whom I aim my message. To this message, I can only add the following. It has been my experience that the employment of a comparative and historical focus adds a startling dimension to the introductory course. It provides the sense of perspective necessary to think in critical and careful ways about one's own society. Students often report to me that some of the comparative materials that I present are extremely enlightening to them—that they "had no ideas that things were actually that way." When I hear them say such things, I realize that at least for them I am getting my message across.

Again, there are many ways in which one can focus the introductory course comparatively and historically. The course I have discussed here is only one way among many. Yet I do believe that there is a sense in which it might represent an improvement on similar courses. In a recent issue of this journal, Gerhard Lenski (1983) proposed a comparatively and historically focused introductory course. He has been severely chastised for his course proposal by Frank Vivelo (1984), an anthropologist. If I understand him correctly, one of Vivelo's main arguments against Lenski's proposal is that, although it is not necessarily unacceptable in principle, sociologists are seldom likely to have the level of anthropological understanding essential to making such a course successful. For sociologists to teach highly cross-cultural and cross-temporal introductory sociology courses, they must be highly versed in anthropological materials. As Vivelo (1984: 331–332) puts it:

> I am not opposed to sociologists teaching anthropology, provided they become truly knowledgeable about this discipline; but I am opposed to sociologists with only a superficial acquaintance with the field (primarily as "comparative sociology") purporting to teach an-

> thropology and thus doing themselves and anthropology serious damage by misrepresenting these disciplines to Freshman students.

I believe that Vivelo has a strong point. If we may judge Lenski's macrosociology course at North Carolina by the nature of his textbook *Human Societies* (1978), then I think it may well be vulnerable to the charge that it does not demonstrate sufficient familiarity with anthropological materials to be truly successful as a cross-cultural introductory course. There are simply a great many substantive concerns and theoretical issues and controversies within anthropology that find no real place in the Lenski text. By contrast, the course that I have outlined here employs an extensive amount of substantive and theoretical work in sociocultural anthropology and archaeology. (I have made a deliberate effort to become extensively familiar with anthropological materials in the process of developing the course.) For instance, only a few of the important issues that Lenski ignores or slights, but that I give explicit emphasis to in my course, include the following: recent theories of technological change, especially as these theories are applied to the origin of agriculture; the substantivist-formalist controversy in economic anthropology; dependency theories of economic underdevelopment; contrasting theories of the origin of the state; current literature on sex role patterns in preindustrial societies; and a great deal of standard anthropological work on kinship (residence and descent systems, exogamy, incest avoidance).

Like Vivelo, I admire Professor Lenski very much. In fact, it was his example that initially led me several years ago to begin developing my comparatively and historically focused course. Yet I think that Lenski has stopped a bit short of what is really necessary for a comparatively focused course that is both adequately cross-cultural and that does justice to anthropology.

The main point of my article has not been to criticize Lenski's macrosociology course, or to get in the middle of the recent debate between Lenski and Vivelo. Despite its deficiencies, I believe that Lenski's course (and his textbook) represents a positive step forward in the teaching of introductory sociology. Rather, my main argument has been to show the serious consequences of presenting sociology in a noncomparative, nonhistorical light, and to outline one

particular way in which this bias can be overcome. Because sociology has shown welcome signs in recent years of recapturing and revitalizing its nineteenth-century comparative and historical tradition, it would seem appropriate that the teaching of introductory sociology follow suit.

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