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Recent Doctoral Dissertations: "The Social Origins of Academic Sociology: Durkheim"

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Although drawing on the standard secondary literature in the history and ethnography of New Caledonia, and on relevant general ethnology, the thesis is based primarily on Leenhardt's unpublished manuscripts and correspondence, which are in the hands of his children and students, as well as on mission and governmental archives, and interviews with surviving colleagues and family. It draws heavily on his extensive publications, the most important of which, Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World, will be published in translation in 1978 by the University of Chicago Press.

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"The Social Origins of Academic Sociology: Durkheim"

Brian James Turner
Columbia, 1977
(Anthropology)

This study analyzes the birth of Durkheimian sociology and its promotion into the French University system from 1879 to 1905. The theoretical and institutional progress of Durkheim's sociology is examined in relation to a wide spectrum of social contexts--from national social conditions to specific institutions and their key personalities. Within these contexts we can see why sociology was recognized as an academic science when it was, and why it was Durkheimian sociology alone that was introduced into the French University system.

Durkheim's sociology is analyzed as it fit into the social problematics perceived by the dominant republican political forces. He and his sociology met the needs of the middle-class liberals who were in political command, particularly those in the educational institutions. Durkheim committed his sociology in the republicans' political confrontations on two major fronts--against the previously dominant forces of the Right, and against the emerging challenge on the Left. Beyond this dual ideological combat, Durkheim's sociology was directly useful--and used--for the moderate republican's positive reform program.

As a sequence of determined events at a particular stage of French economic, social, and political evolution, the emergence of sociology can be seen as a necessary component of that broader social evolution. Like the rise of the labor movement, the development of mass education, and the beginnings of the welfare State, academic sociology can be understood as a normal product of the evolution of industrial society.

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Banton, Michael, The Idea of Race (London, 1977).