

# REFLECTIONS ON THE PROJECT, SOCIOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES\*

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The successful launching of the Soviet "sputnik" in 1957 had immediate educational consequences in the United States. This achievement was interpreted as showing the superiority of the Soviet system of instruction and pushed incipient reforms here into crash programs for improving American schools. One of these programs was the development by the National Science Foundation of new curricular projects for secondary schools. The Foundation had funded programs in mathematics, physics, the biological sciences, geography, and anthropology, before sociologists got into the game.

The stimulus in sociology came from a recommendation to the Council of the American Sociological Association from the Eastern Sociological Society in 1961 that we as a profession try to improve the high school work in our field. The Council approved the idea and President Lazarsfeld appointed a distinguished committee, with Neal Gross as chairman, to make plans and seek funds. After protracted discussions with NSF about the nature and scope of the project, a grant was made to ASA in May of 1964. The project lasted seven years with headquarters successively at Dartmouth under Robert A. Feldmesser and in Ann Arbor under me.

A basic directive from the ASA committee was that the new curricular materials should be "investigative;" the students were to learn so far as possible by inquiry. All the three sorts of materials developed achieved this in one way or another. The one-semester course for senior high schools did so by including many student exercises the answers to which were given only in the instructor's

guide. The guide also gave full information to the teacher on how to conduct inquiry-oriented classes. The 23 short units called "episodes" (planned to take two weeks) on topics presumably of student interest and suitable for other social studies courses beside sociology also were investigative in character and were accompanied by instructor's guides. The third component, seven paperback reading books, included articles from sociological journals on topics like "Cities and City Life" and "Racial and Ethnic Relations" rewritten for the high school level by free lance journalists. These were investigative only in the sense that the students learned how professionals conducted their studies. The total product of the project's endeavors covered more than 3000 pages.

Headquarters personnel did comparatively little of the original writing, but they rewrote most of what came in from the writing teams that were selected for parts of the course and the episodes. Staff members also traveled a great deal to choose the high school teachers to collaborate with the sociologists heading the teams, to consult with the teams on their progress, to observe class trials of the materials for purposes of evaluation, and to participate in workshops in order to explain the SRSS project and to disseminate its materials. Systematic national tests were made on the episodes and the course before final approval.

The SRSS publishers were Allyn and Bacon of Boston. In accordance with the NSF policy they were given an exclusive 6-year contract on all the materials. Thereafter these materials were placed in the public domain. The reason for this arrangement was that NSF saw their role as providing significant innovative resources by offering publishers adequate incentive for making large outlays without being

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seen as using government funds to enrich particular firms.

Comments on SRSS publications by high school teachers generally were favorable and four NSF social science projects—geography, anthropology, and sociology and political science—all were doing well within three years. A study of sociology teachers in California, Colorado, Connecticut, and Texas high schools showed that 36 percent of them were using SRSS materials (Turner and Haley, 1977). This was confirmed by another study in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin (Switzer, Lowther, Hanna, Kidder, 1977). Considering the number of popular high school texts then available, this was a good showing and seemed to confirm the judgment of the Curriculum Information Network that the new materials generally were considered improvements over more traditional ones (Morrissett, 1973).

The National Science Foundation did not expect, of course, that their project-sponsored materials would dominate the high school market for long. They hoped that these innovative resources would, by their appeal to teachers and students, influence the output of commercial publishers. That this had begun to happen is suggested by three studies. NSF itself sponsored an analysis of the publishing industry to consider the impact of their projects. BCMA Associates concluded that "the larger contribution the programs have made to the improvement of education is their impact on the development of instructional materials by commercial publishers" (BCMA Associates, 1975). In a similar vein is the conclusion of a doctoral dissertation that texts in the field of history published between 1955 and 1961 were less stimulating to the students than those published in 1970 and 1971 because of the influence of the "new social studies" (Fetsko, 1979).

Despite these favorable indications, Thomas J. Switzer, a former staff member of SRSS and now an Associate Professor in the Michigan School of Education, is convinced that interest in the "new social studies" declined in the later seventies. He finds that most college social studies methods teachers are of that opinion and

he cites as evidence results of a study of them in 13 states, in which he participated. Out of the 301 usable questionnaire returns 60 percent had heard of SRSS materials, 48 percent had examined them, 22 percent had been instructed in their use, 44 percent had told their students about them, the students of 36 percent had seen the published materials, the materials had been demonstrated to students by 31 percent, and the students of 25 percent had taught from them (Switzer, Walker, Mitchell, 1977). Switzer is convinced that the figures would have been higher in the early seventies.

It is not hard to find reasons why there may have been a decline: 1) The end of the supporting grants has meant that the promotion that headquarters personnel provided is gone. 2) Inflation has made publishers wary of inquiry materials with their teacher's manuals, blank forms for exercises, projection transparencies, and other aids. 3) Schools are suffering from tight budgets that permit nothing more elaborate than a textbook for each course. 4) More basically, it may have been wishful thinking by NSF and ASA to suppose that a one-shot project could make a lasting impact on high school teaching without provision for continuing contact between the sociology profession and the teachers.

SRSS was the sole effort of this kind ever undertaken by ASA. A conscientious staff labored seven years to fulfill the objectives of NSF and the ASA committee. Though qualified judges pronounced the materials to be of high quality, their ultimate impact seems likely to be less than originally hoped. This would be unfortunate since high school students would be missing the challenge of inquiry learning.

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## THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, 1958-1960\*

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My first five years of work at Doubleday and Random House must have brought my name before the Council of the American Sociological Association as a possible editor of the *American Sociological Review*. For on other counts I had no visible credentials: my connections with scholarly journals were limited to the authorship of a few essays and a flock of book reviews. Even so, as a bold gamble, in 1957 the Council invited me to edit the *ASR* for a three year term. With misgivings, to be sure, I accepted this surprising invitation—thus taking on, with no decent preparation, an important professional assignment.

This new venture carried far weightier responsibilities than those of an advisor in a commercial firm. An important similarity between these editorial jobs was time-consuming labor with sloppy manuscripts, an exercise referred to below. As editor of the ASS's official journal, my contacts with sociologists of all breeds would be extensive, I would play a gate-keeping role in the profession, and this function

surely would call for more tact and courage than I had evidenced heretofore. But those initial concerns diminished quickly soon after "my" *ASR* was underway in the fall of 1957.

The move of the *Review* to Smith College was a homecoming event, for Frank Hankins had been its first editor more than twenty years before. But the return to Smith raised problems. Use of an office was approved by President Benjamin Wright, although with hesitation—as a historian of political thought he saw little scholarly virtue in the new-fangled "behavioral sciences." The office, a room of no more than 300 square feet, served as headquarters for my faculty activities as well as the *ASR*. It housed a secretarial desk, a small table, and a few shelves for the book review editor, some ancient kitchen chairs, and a child's desk for the editor himself. A greater handicap, or so I assumed at the outset, was the location of the journal at an undergraduate college which lacked the institutional facilities and ready supply of sociologists available at larger universities. On both counts, however, these anticipated difficulties proved to be of little consequence: the cramped quarters became a jolly center of magazine production and the Valley supplied a corps of able men and women who helped to run the enterprise.

\* This piece is taken from Chapter 6 ("Sociology and the printed page: Journeys of an editor") of the forthcoming volume, *A Lucky Journey: The Sociological Enterprise, 1931-1980* (tentative title; publication expected in 1981). [Address correspondence to: Charles H. Page, 7 Hampton Terrace, Northampton MA 01060.]