

PAROCHIALISM IN THE ASA*

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The sensitivity of ASA in responding/not responding to professional and disciplinary needs is the subject which I will try to address from the vantage point of one whose membership in ASA spans a half-century. The themes that I would test as having been responded to/not responded to can be subsumed under the subject of parochialism.

Fifty years ago hotels in larger cities sometimes declined to host the then ASS annual meeting because profitable alcoholic sales would be too low. Former ministers, farmers' and ministers' sons abounded in the rank and file membership. While then as now many believed their professional activities would contribute to an improved quality of life, many more then believed with Max Weber's protestants that they were helping to build the kingdom of God on earth. A quick comparison of the names in the ASS directories then and the ASA directories now shows the decline in the proportion of males and WASPS. That ASS was so constituted reflected U.S. society itself. Its parochialism was that of mainstream U. S. A. This early parochialism yielded in time to the broadening effects of: a) sociological study, work, and travel abroad; b) the expanding literature-in-translation which gave easy access in English to important sociological works of foreigners; and c) personal contacts with foreign scholars who increasingly became a part of the faculty and student population of American universities.

ASA membership today reflects U. S. society itself and its parochialism again is that of mainstream U. S. A. If the younger ASA members now were to role play life in the ASS of 50 years ago, they perhaps

would liken it to life in the Dull Men's Club as that organization is described by its founder and members: a new anti-mainstream group which abhors and avoids situations in which everyone is expected to be interested in and knowledgeable about mainstream interests such as sensitivity training, disco roller skating, creative cooking for singles, couple seeks couple clubs, trips from the pill box, the political power of homosexuals, the new left, etc. (Zonana, 1980). If the ASS of the past, together with their contemporaries, avoided the fast, the foreign, and the fadish, it is equally true that the ASA of today together with their contemporaries, avoids what are perceived to be non-mainstream topics. An unpublished report I prepared from questionnaires voluntarily filled out by members at regional meetings of ASA the year I was president in 1967 reveals that 35 percent of those responding believed the field of sociology would be better off without the Rural Sociological Society and that it should be abolished. Responses to a sort of social distance scale show that sizeable proportions of American non-rural sociologists would not accept a rural sociologist in such status-roles as 1) office mate, 2) co-author of a book or monograph and 3) "chairman or head of your department or unit."

Although it is sometimes uncomfortable to work in a field where such rejections are commonplace, that is not the theme here. Whether such separatism means a significant loss to the discipline and whether the ASA can do anything about it are the main concerns. In my opinion the discipline does lose by the division within its ranks. I also think that ASA can take some measures to ameliorate this separatism. Both points are addressed in the following observations that largely are based on my own experiences because I

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know them best. Although they can not speak for all of rural sociology, I know that they are not at all unusual.

Some few venturesome non-rural sociologists occasionally break with mainstream sociology to "discover" rural sociology. For example Katz (1960:655) was startled to find that his own research bore a parallel to "the twenty-year-old tradition of research by rural sociologists on the acceptance of farm practices . . . [while the two branches of inquiry] were hardly aware of each other's existence or of their possible relevance for each other." As recounted by Loomis and Loomis (1967) few able rural sociologists would be uninformed of mainstream ASA sociology, but Katz is completely correct in imputing to non-rural sociologists an unawareness of rural sociologists' work and its relevance to the larger social and sociological scene. How else to explain the hiatus in otherwise fairly comprehensive bibliographies as in the following instance? Some mainstream sociologists have rediscovered the importance of family life cycles and are publishing widely on the subject. Rural journals and agricultural experiment station outlets of 40 and 50 years ago carry some of my own early research efforts on life cycles (1934, 1935) as well as the pioneering longitudinal family life cycle analysis done by Horace Hamilton and me (1936). (In contrast, most other studies were based on cross-sectional analysis.) Bibliographies in this recent spate of current literature cite the historic and landmark works with the exception of those published in rural sources, even though that is where most of the action on this subject was taking place a half-century ago.

More recently we have sent our agricultural experiment station bulletin, *Linkages of Mexico and the United States* (cf. Loomis et al., 1966) to the various ASA journals and to some mainstream members. Our aim was to combine cross cultural analyses with our interest in exploring the processes of boundary maintenance and systemic linkage and the relation of these to social change. The anti-rural mind set of mainstream sociologists, I believe, has been the principal factor in the lack of interest that for

the most part has greeted this substantial research effort.

My assessment of ASA's responsiveness to rural and border research, including my own, could be faulty. It is based, however, on such incidents as the following. The Western Social Science Association in 1979 convened in joint session with the Association of Borderland Scholars, an interdisciplinary but heavily sociological group of specialists. Their common interest is borders: what goes on there, in what ways interaction at the border is different than elsewhere, and what contribution the study of borders can make to the advancement of social science. At the meeting's conclusion the outgoing president, Ellwyn Stoddard, and the incoming president, Richard Nostrand, promised the group to continue attempts to have the Social Science Research Council make border research problems a focus for one of the prestigious SSRC committees. To my knowledge, despite sociological leadership in SSRC, nothing came of this request. Several years earlier, and while a sociologist was president of SSRC, Julius Rivera, then chairperson of the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at El Paso, and I appealed personally to have the SSRC make border research and problems the focus of such a committee. Our petition summarized the importance of getting to know the dynamics of social interaction occurring at borders, of relevant problems in such crucial areas as the Middle East, Africa, Ireland, and the U. S. Border regions. Nothing ever came of our request. My own experience in relation to studies of East-West relations in Berlin, joint ventures of East-West industrial companies in Eastern Europe, and especially in the U.S.-Mexican border region persuades me of a quintessence of interaction at borders that we have scarcely begun to explore. Besides their analytical promise, borders also teem with such practical concerns as border patrol, differential health care, public service delivery systems, transportation regulation, water use, and law enforcement. Only recently a rump session of interested academics at New Mexico State University, where I hold an adjunct professorship in sociology, met

with a visiting border specialist from Switzerland (a country with plenty of experience with borders) who wished to see what U.S. academics on *this* border were doing with some of the universal border problems. The subject of borders clearly is one that will not remain unstudied. If organized sociology does not show more interest in national and other borders, the geographers, political scientists, economists, communication people, and others who have already moved in will preempt the area.

Another arena being lost by mainstream sociology is that of the application and development of central place theory. The rural sociologist, Charles J. Galpin, today is credited by central place theorists, most of whom are geographers and/or economists, for pioneering the American efforts to work out an ideal typical system that logically relates higher and lower order localities to one another in hierarchies focusing on numbers, sizes, activities, and spatial distribution of places and associated regions. Rural sociologists have continued, through analysis of agencies providing service and consumers' use of them, to test the ideal types or models as developed from central place theory (Loomis and Beegle, 1975:44-51). In the planning for the location of hospitals, churches, economic and other facilities in changing and developing societies and for the study of interaction on national and other borders the contribution of central place theory can be great—too great to allow the geographers and economists to preempt it.

Confining sociological research and its dissemination to fragmented mainstream interests results for the discipline in curious blind spots not suffered by other disciplines or by sociology in other countries. The sociologist, Stoltzfus, writing with geographer Johnson, and Cramer (1978) develop the theme that the Amish and other Plain People have carried on successful agriculture for a long time with minimum use of fossil fuel based energy. Their adaptations are now worth studying. How many mainstream sociologists, even those specializing in ecology and energy, are familiar with that article or with the Hostetler et al. (1977) collection of writ-

ings entitled "The Plain People?" In my own judgment any or all of the articles in this publication should have been candidates for publication in an ASA journal. In contrast is Loomis (1979) on a related theme, "A Farmhand's Diary," which portrays these people from an outsider's view, but makes no attempt to analyze the structures and processes of a sub-culture. Exploring the processes of boundary maintenance and systemic linkage as these are related to social change prompted my own interest in national and other borders (including those on the fringes of the settlements of the Plain People) and generated my interest in these people. But through that interest I have come to know and appreciate the great contributions to sociology made by a group of scholars who for the most part grew up among the Plain People.

In summary the ASA should be more sensitive to the potential of research arenas that may advance knowledge even if these happen at the moment not to be of interest to mainstream society, non-sociologists as well as our colleagues. Specifically the ASA leadership should develop more effective linkages between ASA and all groups and individuals who are advancing sociological understanding. Among the many that should be more effectively linked to the ASA are the Rural Sociological Society, the Association of Border Scholars, sociologists in the considerable number of colleges serving the Plain People, and any others who at this time fall outside of the range of popular mainstream interests.

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SOCIOLOGY'S PROGRESS TOWARD SCIENCE*

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The roots of sociology include nineteenth century concerns with the social, economic, and political problems generated by the industrial revolution and the accelerating pace of urbanization. These problems include extreme manifestations of hopeless poverty, degrading slums, hazardous health environments, high general and infant mortality, sweat-shop working conditions, abuse of female and child labor, social unrest, and political oppression and corruption. Critics of the industrial order, philanthropic and utopian efforts to deal with the acute problems, the emergence of Marxist socialism, and the literature of anarchism all combined to provide the reformist climate during the developmental period of sociology.

Early recruits to sociology included, in disproportionate numbers, advocates of social, economic, and political reform who viewed sociology as a means to the achievement of a better society rather than as a scientific discipline. In at least part of the popular mind, including the mass media, sociology is still regarded as a form of social welfare advocacy rather than as a science. Moreover, to this very

day, some, but a shrinking number of sociologists, are more prominent as advocates of reform than as practitioners of social research.

It may be declared at this 75th anniversary of the American Sociological Association that perception of sociology as a science is gaining in ascendancy at an accelerated rate, both among professional sociologists and in the popular mind. Furthermore, this perception has gained ground as the number of sociologists has increased and it has been strengthened by the exponential growth of research publications in the expanded number of professional journals and in proliferation of research monographs. Eminently satisfactory also is the fact that sociological research publications over the years have been characterized by increasingly sophisticated and rigorous methodologies whether in quantitative or qualitative form.

It is not as necessary today as it was in 1949 (Hauser, 1949) to make explicit the role of science in respect to values and to social, economic, and political goals and their implementation. But in celebration of this 75th anniversary, it is in order to engage in some reminiscences—especially if one has reached emeritus status. Yet another reason for repetition of the

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