

Kelsy Burke
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Application for *Contemporary Sociology* Editor

Qualifications

I bring to *Contemporary Sociology* experience from all sides of the book review process. First, I have written two solo-authored books. When my first book was published prior to my tenure, professional reviews published in time to be included in my promotion file helped establish the merit of my work. I understand how important timely and fair book reviews are for individual careers, in addition to the broader intellectual community. This is why I agree to write book reviews whenever I am able. At this point in my career, I have written six (two in *Contemporary Sociology*) and am a current member of the *Contemporary Sociology* editorial board. I also regularly serve as an ad hoc peer reviewer for books in various stages of preparation for university and academic publishers.

Most significantly, I have served as the Book Review Editor for *Gender & Society* for a three-year term that will end May 31, 2024. I began in March 2021, three months earlier than the anticipated start date due to an unanticipated leave of the previous editor. Amidst the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the book review office was significantly behind on its book review queue. I prioritized organization and efficiency and by my second issue, we were at normal operating capacity. Since that time, I have processed 54 book reviews per year (6 reviews in 9 issues).

With the support of a graduate student assistant I trained and mentored, I select books appropriate for review in the journal, solicit expert reviewers, edit their reviews and request revisions, and submit reviews for publication. We complete most of our work in Manuscript Central, the submission management portal used by Sage journals including *Gender & Society*. I therefore have a general working knowledge of how to best use this site and obtain technical support when necessary.

My editorial skills stem from a wide range of writing experiences. In addition to books and standard peer-reviewed journal articles, I frequently write op-eds and short online research reports. I love writing in an engaging way that translates research and theory to non-academic audiences (this is why I published my second book with a trade press rather than traditional university publisher). This is similar to the task of a book review: to convey and assess a book's argument and evidence in a relatively limited amount of space.

These qualifications reflect my sincere love of book reviews. As a reader and writer of books, it's hard for me to overstate my love of a well-crafted one. I read them to understand others' perspectives on the books I have read, to learn about books I have not read, and to expand my knowledge of academic fields far removed from my own. When I first became a member of ASA back in graduate school, I chose *Contemporary Sociology* as the journal to have mailed to me in hard copy. I often carried it around with me in my purse for when I had a few extra minutes and could dive into the thousand words or so that make up a typical review. I was always glad for the added knowledge, but was also glad for the book writer's achievement, which helped inspire my own pursuits.

Vision

In many ways, my primary goal as Editor of *Contemporary Sociology* would be to maintain the excellent work established by past editors. This includes successfully soliciting expert scholars to review academic books on a wide range of topics related to the discipline of sociology.

I have three specific goals that reflect the three-part mission of ASA.

First, **I am committed to cultivating a supportive and diverse intellectual environment.** This goal aligns with the ASA mission to serve sociologists in their work. One dimension of this effort is being mindful and organized when it comes to the timeliness of publishing reviews. Though an Editor cannot ultimately control if a reviewer misses a deadline, I will prioritize sending early requests to solicit reviews, sending reminders, and efficiently completing edits. This also means being mindful of power dynamics within academia (the tone of senior scholars reviewing junior scholars, e.g.) and representation when it comes to books reviewed and who reviews them. I aim not only to review books written by and about marginalized communities, including trans people and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, but to also solicit members of those communities to write reviews. As I describe in more detail below, I hope to steward an editorial board that is as broad and diverse as the discipline itself.

To measure my efforts over time, I plan to track data on the books we review and who reviews them. This is something I implemented after I began the position of *Gender & Society* Book Review Editor, when my aim was to highlight the diversity of sociology of gender/sexuality. We began collecting data on author and reviewer rank, institutional affiliation and location, publisher, and topic. I presented these data along with a biannual report at the summer and winter meetings of Sociologists for Women in Society, *Gender & Society*'s publisher.

Another way I would cultivate a supportive intellectual environment is by hiring assistants who are Sociology graduate students or recent graduates to provide professional development and mentorship as they assist with the practical operations of the position.

Second, **I am committed to a sociology that draws from interdisciplinary knowledge.** As Editor of *Contemporary Sociology*, I would solicit reviews for books that push forward theoretical and empirical knowledge on a range of topics relevant to the study of society. This includes books that are authored by scholars who may be formally outside of sociology as a discipline but whose work can inform and transform it. I can imagine publishing a symposium, for example, with reviews written by environmental sociologists on books written by ecologists or science journalists on the human effects of climate change. By inviting sociologists to review a wide range of books about the social world, *Contemporary Sociology* can help advance sociology as a science and a profession. By pushing past the traditional, and so often stifling, silos of academic disciplines, *Contemporary Sociology* can help us envision the sociology of the future.

Third, **I am committed to public sociology**, which aligns with the ASA mission of promoting the contributions and use of sociology to society. In my experience, scholars tend to pursue book manuscripts when they want their work to reach a broader audience than that of academic journal articles. One challenge, especially for sociologists who publish books with university publishers,

is that the publishing industry may do little to market and promote books, depending on the focus or specialty. Already publishers rely on *Contemporary Sociology* for pull-quotes for book promotion, but the journal could do even more to partner with book authors to help promote their work, as well as promoting the profile of reviewers. I would maintain and extend the previous editor's strong social media presence and would plan to make visible published reviews in other ways. For example, I can imagine using a model like Substack to link audiences with the journal webpage, the webpage for the scholars writing and reviewing books, and with quoted content from published reviews. This could be published monthly as "Book Buzz" for new reviews that have come out online. I can also imagine utilizing existing conference spaces to celebrate book authors and reviewers and for them to find community with one another, for example an evening reception for "Book Buzz."

Editorial Board

One of the advantages of *Contemporary Sociology* is the editorial board that helps bring together the latest books in sociology with potential reviewers. This is unlike most book review arms of other journals, such as *Gender & Society* where I am responsible independently for finding and soliciting reviewers. I understand that my professional networks are limited given my own identity and my research topics. Therefore, I would make it a priority to expand the existing Editorial Board for *Contemporary Sociology* and to make contact with professional networks beyond my own—utilizing ASA section leadership and journals of relevant subfields—to invite editorial board members. As with the previous editor, I would invite members to suggest reviewers, including themselves, for the list of recent books in the queue for review.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As a sociologist, I recognize that organizations and social institutions, including professional groups and universities, both reflect and contribute to overlapping social inequalities, including racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism, and more.¹ Thus, I have oriented much of my university service toward diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Since Fall 2022, I have served on the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) committee. The charge of this committee includes allocating funds to departments and individuals pursuing DEI and evaluating all CAS departments' guidelines for promotion, tenure, and merit review to ensure equity. At the university level, I serve as the IDEA committee representative on the Council on Inclusive Excellence and Diversity, where I attend monthly meetings and serve as a liaison.

On an individual and interpersonal level, as a sociologist, I understand that actions motivated by good intentions may inflict harm. Within professional groups and organizations, I seek to listen and learn from others in order to check in with my own blind spots and the multiple ways in which my specific identity as a queer, white woman prevents me from fully understanding the experiences of others.

As I have detailed above in my application, I see diversity, equity, and inclusion as central to editing a journal such as *Contemporary Sociology*. First, I see it as my job to ensure that the book reviews published do not perpetuate the myth that the sociological "canon" or core texts are only

¹ Sekile M. Nzinga, *Lean Semesters: How Higher Education Reproduces Inequity*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press (2020).

written by white American or European men – instead it is a discipline that has always and continues to be greatly shaped by a diverse array of voices. This means that both authors of books and reviewers themselves are diverse when it comes to race, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and methodological perspective and professional affiliation. I will utilize existing networks within ASA to ensure this diversity is also reflected across the editorial board.

Institutional Support

My department and college are very supportive of editor positions taken on by mid- and senior-career faculty. Administrators understand that this position will further my national reputation and raise the profile of UNL Sociology. As the only book review journal of ASA, sociologists at all stages of their careers (from aspiring to distinguished) read the journal. They will thus be exposed to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and its Sociology Department and both prospective graduate students and faculty are likely to take a closer look at the quality of our program. I do not anticipate any significant other professional service role for the duration of the editorship, and my department understands and respects the work involved for this kind of position. As described in the attached letter, my department is able to provide the infrastructure to receive and send books, along with office space.

For *Contemporary Sociology* to be housed at my institution within the budget limitations for the journal, I plan to hire two part-time assistants to contract directly with ASA, in addition to the existing managing editor and copy-editor. My department offers a MA and PhD program in Sociology and therefore some current and former students would be eligible to work as assistants. While one assistant should be in Lincoln to help with office tasks, I would advertise the second position as a remote work opportunity for students, independent scholars, or recent graduates hoping to build their resumes with skills related to journal management.