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TIMELINES

Newsletter of the American Sociological Association's History of Sociology and Social Thought Section

Message from the Chair

BY LISA MCCORMICK

As a member of this section, you are likely to know a great deal about the scholars of old who shaped our discipline, including the more obscure and underappreciated figures. But how much do you know about the community of scholars who form the current membership of this section?

It might surprise you to learn that HoSST has more student members than retired members (see Figure 1), and that nearly a fifth of the membership is based outside the United States (see Figure 2). As for those living in America, the state with the most section members is New York, followed closely by Illinois (see Figure 3). Looking at the institution level, NYU, Northwestern University, and the University of Michigan are all tied for the highest number of members (6), unless six campuses of the University of California (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Santa Cruz, Riverside) are treated as a single entity (see figure 4).

At the last official count, in early September, the section had 201 members, which is slightly higher than last year (197), but some distance from the high point of 272 members in 2021. Attracting new members remains a high priority for the membership committee, but growing the section perhaps no longer has the urgency that it did. The ASA has dropped the requirement that sections must maintain membership over a certain level, which allows us instead to focus on the many virtues of being a smaller section.

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FIGURE 1

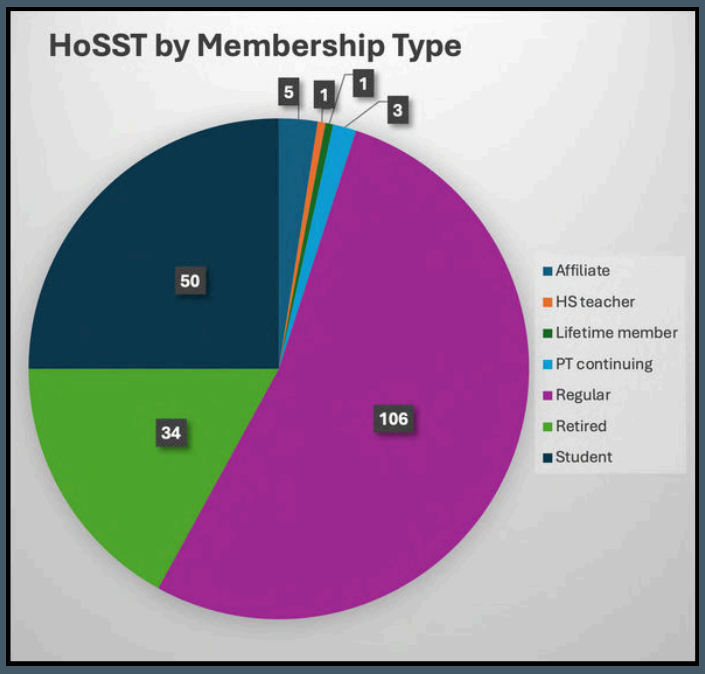

FIGURE 2

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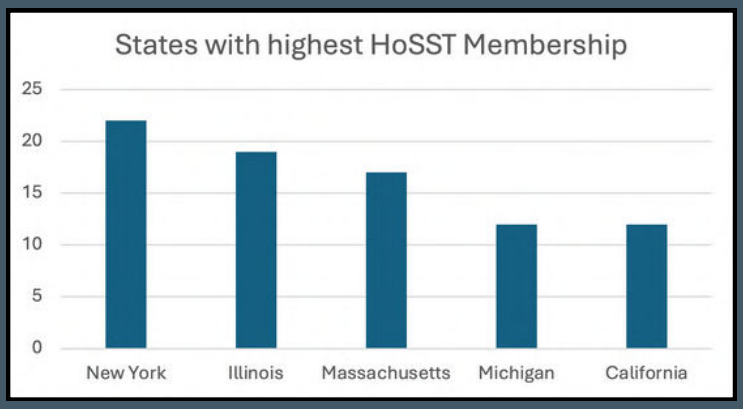

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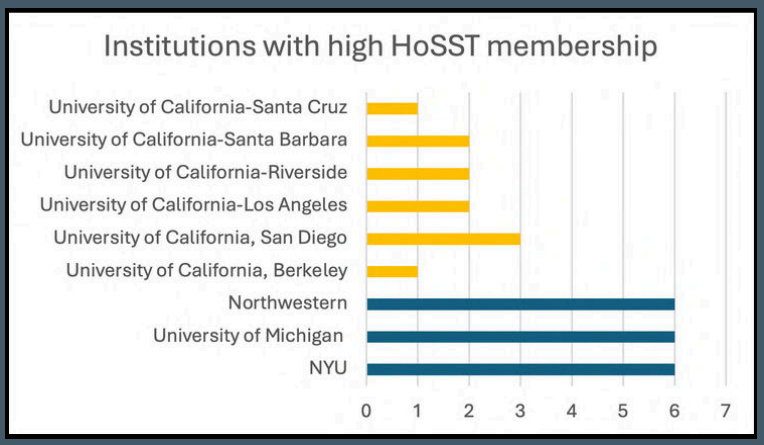

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Message from the Chair, cont.

Regardless of size, every community of scholars needs channels to disseminate information of professional interest and exchange ideas. Thanks to Jarron Long and John Mirsky, Timelines has returned after several years on hiatus. This issue of the newsletter is packed with fascinating material. The feature item is a thought-provoking essay by past Chair Laura Ford. She reflects on three examples of she calls "ASA politicization" and suggests how the HoSST can offer a helpful perspective for navigating the current period of value conflict. Also in this issue are essays by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Jack Nusan Porter, a catalog of recent works published in the area of HOSST, an in-depth interview with George Steinmetz, and even a pair of sociology trivia questions! I encourage everyone – especially new members – to submit items to the newsletter, whether it be a thought piece, the announcement of a new publication, a book review, or a research note about archival materials. Submissions like these build the section's own archive of activities, initiatives, debates, and contributions.

Naturally, the best way to find out more about our community of scholars is to get involved. I offer my thanks to everyone who agreed to stand for office this year. It was also great to receive an enthusiastic response to our call for volunteers to serve on the section's committees. Soon we will circulate the nomination calls for the section's three awards (Lifetime Achievement, Best Scholarly Publication (book) and Best Grad Student Paper). Planning is also underway for next year's annual meeting in New York City, where our programming will be more extensive than in previous years. Our section's allocation has risen from two to six sessions, and we are collaborating with other sections to propose co- sponsored sessions. This expanded presence in the annual meeting is a welcome opportunity to demonstrate to the wider ASA membership how the history of sociology is central to the discipline and an essential component of the sociological imagination.

I look forward to the year ahead and to working with you all.

Lisa McCormick
Chair, ASA History of Sociology and Social Thought Section
Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Edinburgh
Affiliated Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study CEU

Pictured above: a selection of letterheads from past issues of Timelines

HOSST SECTION LEADERSHIP

Chair: Lisa McCormick, University of Edinburgh
Chair-Elect: George Steinmetz, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
Past Chair: Laura Ford, Faulkner University
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Timothy A. Perez, University of California, Santa Barbara

Historical Conscience for the ASA: An Invitation

BY LAURA FORD[1]

> "This conscience, unlike the voice of God within us or the lumen naturale, gives no positive prescriptions – even the Socratic daimonion, his divine voice, only tells him what not to do; in the words of Shakespeare, 'it fills a man full of obstacles.' What makes a man fear this conscience is the anticipation of the presence of a witness who awaits him only if and when he goes home....He who does not know the intercourse between me and myself (in which we examine what we say and what we do) will not mind contradicting himself, and this means he will never be either able or willing to give account of what he says or does; nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can be sure that it will be forgotten the next moment."[2]

In her essay on Thinking and Moral Considerations, Hannah Arendt intriguingly takes up the morally freighted concept of conscience to grapple with the significance of thinking in human capacities for judgment and evil. As she often does to deeply insightful effect, Arendt plays with the imagery of the etymology, and she makes it active: conscience is knowing with (con-science) another. Because conscience works through internal dialog, Arendt suggests, the other with whom one is engaged (either in conflict or in peaceful harmony) is ultimately oneself.[3]

In this essay, written from an avowedly personal perspective as outgoing chair for the History of Sociology and Social Thought (HOSST) Section, I will take up Arendt's concept of conscience to propose a task for this Section, which, if accepted, would, in my view, be of great benefit to the American Sociological Association (ASA). I will invite HOSST to serve as historical conscience for the ASA, and for sociology more broadly, and I will focus on three aspects of recent ASA activity to argue that the ASA is in desperate need of historical conscience, at this moment in time.

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Portrait of Hannah Arendt, photographed by Bernd Schwabe

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS:

In addition to sharing valuable information and offering scholarly recognition, it is our hope that the Timelines newsletter can provide a space for fruitful debate and dialogue within the HOSST community. We welcome your thoughts, comments, and critiques of this essay or any of the other pieces in this issue.

Whether brief or extensive, please email your commentary to Jarron Long (jarronal@umich.edu) or John Mirsky (jmirsky@umich.edu) for inclusion in future issues of Timelines.

[1] I am very grateful to Jarron Long and John Mirsky for their willingness to include this essay in our inaugural issue of the revived newsletter, Timelines. I hope that willingness to publish the essay will not be interpreted to imply endorsement. Responsibility for the content is entirely my own. Thank you to a number of people, including Jarron, who provided helpful and thoughtful comments on an earlier draft.

[2] Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," Social Research 38(3) (1971): 417-46, at 444-45.

[3] See id. at 418, 442.

The three aspects of ASA activity upon which I will focus – (1) Land Acknowledgments, (2) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) litigation, and (3) Pro-Palestinian political activism – represent three clear instances of ASA politicization, which is a broader and more diffuse problem. By focusing on these three activities, and by suggesting the benefits of historical conscience vis-a-vis these areas of political activism, I hope to make a constructive argument about ways that HOSST can help to ameliorate the problems of value-conflict that have been part of sociology since its beginnings, but, in my judgment, have become particularly acute in recent years.[4]

First a few more words about what I mean by "historical conscience."

Historical Conscience

Arendt's 1971 essay to some extent represents a return to her intensely controversial argument about the "banality of evil," put forward in her coverage of the 1961 Eichmann trial for The New Yorker, then published as a book in 1963.[5] What Arendt saw in Eichmann, both at the time of his trial and in later reflection, was a disastrous failure to "think what we are doing,"[6] an unquestioning adherence to groundless social conventions and fashions.[7] Eichmann, she asserted, understood moral rules as a language game: "He knew that what he had once considered his duty was now called a crime, and he accepted this new code of judgment as though it were nothing but another language rule."[8]

Although weighty moral questions about good and evil, right and wrong, are implicated in her essay, Arendt resists an overtly moralistic interpretation. She takes two Socratic propositions from Plato's dialogue on rhetoric, the Gorgias, and argues that they are descriptive inferences, derived from the experience of thinking.[9] Both point to the value and importance of coherence.[10]

"It is better to be wronged than to do wrong," encodes the experience of a self-reflective person (Socrates, or maybe Plato) whose thinking experience is that of an internal dialog. In order for this dialog to be bearable, the person must be able to live with herself. In the end, this is easier if she is the one who has been wronged, rather than the one who has done wrong. "It is better for you to suffer than to do wrong because you can remain the friend of the sufferer; who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer?"[11]

[4] In a communication sent in September 2024 at the beginning of my term as chair of the HOSST section, I highlighted the problem of ASA politicization and briefly discussed the attitude that Max Weber took to the problem, particularly in his involvement with the newly established German Sociological Association (DGS). Christopher Adair-Toteff's book, Sociological Beginnings (2005) provides a narrative and translates some of the records associated with the founding of the DGS. In Adair-Toteff's words, Weber "insisted that the D.G.S. must be 'party-less,'" meaning that the organization "must reject any question of the value of the ideas, but must focus exclusively on the analysis of the relevant facts" (20-21). Partly based on his frustration with the refusal to recognize a separation between facts and values, Weber resigned from the board of directors in 1911 (31). After the 1912 conference, Weber wrote a letter stating that he would no longer have any involvement with the organization, giving as his reason the "battle of value judgments," i.e. the refusal to exclude value-judgments from purported expressions of scientific fact (31, 35).

[5] Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (2006) (1963). For a discussion of the storm of controversy that surrounded the book, see Amos Elon's introduction to the Penguin edition, vii-xxiii.

[6] Cf. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (1958), 5

[7] Arendt, Thinking and Moral Considerations, 417-18.

[8] Id. at 417.

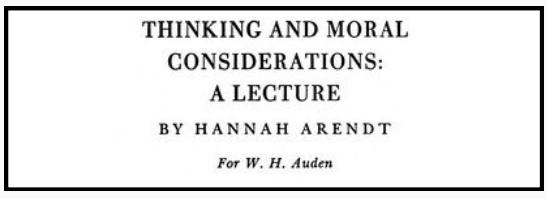
[9] Plato, Complete Works, edited by John M. Cooper, translated by Donald J. Zeyl (1997), at 791-869.

[10] Arendt, Thinking and Moral Considerations, 438-44.

[11] Id. at 442. Cf. Plato, Gorgias, transl. Donald Zeyl: "I wouldn't want either, but if it had to be one or the other, I would choose suffering over doing what's unjust (adikein)." (813 [469c]). On translation of adikein (doing injustice or wrong), the glossary for Terence Irwin's edition of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics is helpful (2d ed. Hackett 1999), 324.

The second proposition is even more clearly one of internal coherence. "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me, rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me."[12] The internal experience of self-consciousness, Arendt argues – an experience that is only possible when a person stops to think and momentarily, at least, exits the busy-ness of action and social interaction – is an experience of internal duality and dialog. Even Socrates, "so attracted by the marketplace, must go home where he will be alone, in solitude, to meet the other fellow."[13] At the end of the day, when we stop to think, we realize that we have to be able to live with ourselves, and the only way that this can be a bearable experience, let alone a pleasant experience, is if we are able to make coherent sense of who we are, what we are doing, and what we have done.

The picture Arendt elusively paints in this essay is one in which the cognitive (and, for her, ultimately political) action of thinking opens up an internal dialog of self-consciousness, enabling a person to recognize incoherences in personal values and the social norms by which she lives. This is vital for protecting against mindless conformity with ever-changing social conventions and fashions, including the nihilistic reversals of values that are just as "sleepily" conventional as the values they have replaced.[14]


THINKING AND MORAL CONSIDERATIONS:
A LECTURE
BY HANNAH ARENDT
For W. H. Auden

Thinking, in Arendt's sense, does not create or adjudicate values. Rather, it creates "obstacles,": bulwarks against the social tide of value-conformity. And it is no particular talent of intellectual elites. The inability to think, indeed, is an "everpresent possibility for everybody – scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded."[15] While the main effect of thinking is negative and even destructive – by dissolving received moral certainties, conventions, and values – it does have indirectly positive moral and political effects. This is because it provides a necessary condition for judgment, the capacity to recognize particulars as instances of conceptual categories ("this is beautiful," "this is good," "this is right," "this is important," "this is new," even "this is true") without relying, at least exclusively, on the positivist's subsumption under a rule.[16]

Arendt was speaking primarily about individual conscience and judgment, but I will assert that her argument can be extended, by analogy, to the social and institutional level. For an associational institution, like the ASA, it is also vital to "stop and think what we are doing," in order to recognize incoherences in actions and valuational stances across time. The ASA will be best equipped to be a "friend" to itself, metaphorically speaking, if it is self-conscious and reflective, both about its institutional history, and about sociology, in its historical context. The HOSST section, I propose, can (and I am advocating normatively, so should) provide an institutional home to facilitate this historical reflection. This "historical conscience" will primarily help to support institutional coherence and scientific truth-seeking, but it will also provide valuable resources for the moral and political judgments that ASA members necessarily and naturally (as human beings and social actors) make.

[12] Arendt, Thinking and Moral Considerations, 439; Plato, Gorgias, transl. Donald Zeyl, 827 [482b].
[13] Arendt, Thinking and Moral Considerations, 444.
[14] See id. at 435.
[15] Id. at 445.
[16] Id. at 445-6.

What might this look like, practically speaking? I will give some examples throughout this essay, drawing on the HOSST section sessions at the 2025 Annual Meeting in Chicago. But let me start here with two of the section's founders: Gillian Niebrugge and Patricia Lengermann. Jill and Pat, as I will affectionately render them, are working on a paper addressing Florida state processes connected with the politically-motivated proposal to eliminate sociology from the educational curriculum in Florida.[17] In her presentation of the paper, Jill spoke with the passion of a committed historical sociologist when she pleaded for record retention, to enable an accurate institutional memory about what is happening in the administrative and legal processes in Florida. Jack Nusan Porter, another of the section's founders, has been pleading with the section to help him find a good way to digitally archive the Journal of the History of Sociology that he edited.

The theme of record retention has been constant in HOSST discussions ever since I became involved with the section in 2013. One thing our section can do is develop a set of best practices and suggestions for record retention and archival. We can also maintain an active relationship with Penn State University, which, under a contractual relationship with the ASA, houses ASA records.[18] As we all know, accurate and readily retrievable records are a sine qua non for good historical research. This is a minimal condition, but a necessary condition, to enable institutional coherence for sociology and for the ASA. The ASA, to be fair, has already facilitated this kind of institutional memory, in commissioning and publishing histories that run from the ASA's founding (as the American Sociological Society, ASS), in 1905, to 2005, and in maintaining a relationship with the Penn State archives.[19]

But there is much more that can be done, and we can help.

This is Public Prayer (i.e. Religion): Land Acknowledgments

In 2022, I served as the presider for a HOSST panel at the Annual Meeting in Los Angeles. On May 9, 2022, I received an emailed set of instructions informing me about my responsibilities as presider. Following basic guidance about arranging Q&A sessions and seating arrangements, a two-sentence paragraph instructed me that I was to remind everyone to wear their masks, except the presenter, and then: "We also ask that you begin the session by reading the ASA Land Acknowledgement and Recognition statement." In 2022, that statement read as follows:

> Before we can talk about sociology, power, and inequality, we must acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples. The American Sociological Association (ASA) acknowledges that academic institutions, indeed the nation-state itself, were founded upon and continue to enact exclusions and erasures of Indigenous Peoples. This acknowledgement demonstrates a commitment to beginning the process of working to dismantle ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, and to recognize the hundreds of Indigenous Nations who continue to resist, live, and uphold their sacred relations across their lands. We also pay our respect to Indigenous elders past, present, and future and to those who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.

[17] Patricia Lengermann & Gillian Niebrugge, "Sociology in Crisis – or Sociology Amidst Crisis? – Sociology Versus the Florida Board of Education."

[18] Katherine J. Rosich, A History of the American Sociological Association, 1981-2004 (2005), available on the ASA website; American Sociological Association records, 03058, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University, finding aid available at https://archives.libraries.psu.edu/repositories/3/resources/2754. Rosich continued an earlier history by Lawrence J. Rhoades, A History of the American Sociological Association 1905-1980 (1981). Rosich's book contains a helpful chronology running from 1905-2005 in Appendix 1, incorporating the earlier chronology of Rhoades' book.

[19] On the establishment of the archives, see Rosich, History, at vii, 81-2; Stephen Turner, Footnotes, "Salvaging Sociology's Past" (May 1991), at 6.

Except for the first sentence, the same Land Acknowledgement was included in the 2025 Annual Meeting program and, I believe, urged upon session presiders.

I will argue, drawing on Durkheimian sociology of religion, that this is a prayer, but before making that argument, I think it is also important to make the obvious point that this is very new. According to Heather Washington (who is now Executive Director, but in 2022 was Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) the practice of including a Land Acknowledgement in the ASA Annual Meeting began in 2019.[20] The first Annual Meeting Program in which I was able to find a Land Acknowledgement was the 2020 meeting, which was planned for San Francisco, but held digitally, due to COVID.

Upon my inquiry about the ASA process by which the Land Acknowledgement was developed, here was Heather Washington's reply:

> As you might know, recently a new section, Sociology of Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations, was formed at ASA. You are correct that we've just been doing this [including Land Acknowledgements] for the last couple of years (since 2019), and when we first began we consulted with the folks who were in the process of developing this new organizational group. They led the development of a statement we could use to begin this practice. We were grateful to them and deferred to their expertise as Indigenous sociologists. I've continued to be in conversation with the new section's leadership and we have discussed the question of whether to continue this practice in the future and, if so, whether to amend the language in the future. As I'm sure you know, this is a complex issue.[21]

In summary, the ASA has endorsed a statement developed by one (new) ASA section, with no transparency about the process by which it was adopted. The ASA has simply "deferred to their expertise as Indigenous sociologists" and, since 2019/20, asked that all presiders begin Annual Meeting sessions by reciting a statement developed by them.

Pictured above: graphics from the 2019 and 2020 Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association

Turning to the content of the statement, and drawing on a Durkheimian approach to the sociology of religion, it is a relatively straightforward argument to assert that this is a prayer. What is prescribed is a ritual that enacts and encodes a boundary of sacred and profane. Inference is not even necessary. The statement itself recognizes "the hundreds of Indigenous Nations who continue to resist, live, and uphold their sacred relations across their lands." In Durkheimian terms, this is a "piacular rite," a ritual of mourning and expiation, which is every bit as powerful in stimulating "collective effervescence," bringing the "collective conscience" of society, with its moral bonds and boundaries, to bear on individuals within the society.[22]

[20] Email communication on file with the author.
[21] Email communication on file with the author.
[22] Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, translated by Karen E. Fields (1995), 34-44, 190-93, 207-30, 303-29; 390-417, see also W.S.F. Pickering, Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories (1984), 339-40.

Durkheim did not speak very specifically about prayer in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, but his nephew, Marcel Mauss, did write specifically about prayer.[23] In a recent article in Social Compass, Matteo di Placido has drawn on the theoretical foundation established by Durkheim and Mauss, together with Randall Collins' theory of "interaction ritual chains,"[24] to offer a theory of collective prayer in a neo-Guru movement.[25] Echoing the functionalism of Durkheimian theory, di Placido asserts that "religious rituals such as group prayers, function as the basic component of, and evolutionary force behind, the birth of specific social groups and their continued social cohesion."[26]

This is not the place for an extended argument about whether the ASA Land Acknowledgments truly are prayers. From a Durkheimian perspective, the argument is straightforward. But not all would accept the Durkheimian framing of the issue. Ultimately, this is a judgment that involves placing experiential facts under a categorical concept. Judgments are contested and contestable. But because the argument is at least plausible, in terms that all sociologists can recognize, even if not accept, I will take it as given, for the sake of argument, that these are prayers.

What is wrong with the ASA prescribing public prayers? I will focus on problems of process, which will be the most relatable for a largely secular audience. But I will first mention another set of problems, rooted in a failure to adhere to basic norms of pluralistic mutual respect, and I will state the problem in personal terms.

I am a religious person, specifically a Protestant Christian. (I am currently a member of a Presbyterian church, but I was raised Seventh-Day Adventist, and remain formally a member of a Seventh-Day Adventist church because I have not withdrawn my membership). I work in a conservative Christian university (Faulkner University) that is affiliated with the Churches of Christ. Most of our faculty meetings begin with prayers.

I mention my personal religious affiliation for two reasons. First, because I believe it helps to explain why the religious character of Land Acknowledgements is so obvious to me. In short, I recognize religion when I see it. Second, because I believe it can help to personalize what would otherwise be an abstract issue, namely the vital importance of "institutional neutrality" in matters of religion.

Ours is a religiously pluralistic society – pluralistic between religions and between people who are religious and people who are decidedly not. When civil society organizations, like the ASA, begin to compromise the institutional neutrality that supports our delicate pluralism, they compromise a basic trust that enables fruitful mutual exchange across sharp religious (and political) differences. In her presentation at the ASA Annual Meeting in Chicago this year, Julia Adams acknowledged that the language and practices of "institutional neutrality" can be unattractive. But, however unattractive they may be, we need them to support the social interchanges that enable social science.[27]

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[23] W.S.F. Pickering (ed.), Marcel Mauss on Prayer, translated by Susan Leslie (2003). Mauss offers a preliminary definition of prayer as a religious ritual that is "oral and bears directly on the sacred." Id. at 57. Because prayer is a ritual performed in words, it is always, in part, a Credo: a declaration of orthodox belief. Id. at 22. Prescribed forms of collective prayer illustrate prayer's essentially social character, for Mauss. See id. at 32-37.

[24] Randall Collins, Interaction Ritual Chains (2004).

[25] Matteo di Placido, "Prayer, ritual, and spiritual capital in a contemporary neo-Guru movement," Social Compass 70(2) (2023), 226-42.

[26] Id. at 229.

[27] Julia Potter Adams, "Agency, Institutional Neutrality, and Disciplinary Crisis."

The ASA, moreover, represents itself to the world as an organization dedicated to the advancement of social science. What happens when an organization dedicated to social science flirts, however superficially, with the endorsement of a particular religious viewpoint? While I would never assert that science and religion are incompatible per se, I am very comfortable asserting that religious dogmatism (the unwillingness to allow for debate and criticism of doctrinal positions) is incompatible with scientific inquiry. The well-documented history of the Christian church provides ample testimony to this truth, derived from very painful experience.

The problems of process may be more comfortable and self-evident.

Based on the inquiries that I made in 2022 and the responses I received, I came to the conclusion that there was a glaring lack of clarity and transparency, both about who actually drafted these successive versions of the Land Acknowledgment, and about the principles they used to determine attributions of "traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory" to particular groups of Native American people. For example, were there authorized spokespeople for the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples in the ASA Section for Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations in 2021/2022? Who decided that historic ownership interests should be accredited to these tribal groups, and not others? Because I could not locate them among the Indian Entities Recognized by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, I wondered who had decided how particular groups should be accredited as legitimate Native American tribes? Unfortunately, there are examples of claims to constitute Native American tribes by groups organized essentially as non-profit entities, rather than as recognized Indian Tribes with sovereign nation status.

From a purely political perspective, the Land Acknowledgement articulates a legal and political position with which persons of good faith and moral integrity, as well as historical and social scientific training, might very well disagree. The statement opens by saying that "we must acknowledge our presence" on "traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory." This is obviously a normative position ("we must") and one that implicates principles of property ownership. The very clear and obviously intended implication of the sentence is to bring into question any subsequent claims to property over the "unceded territory."

The statement continues with an assertion, by the ASA, that "academic institutions, and indeed the nation-state itself" are based upon (they are "founded upon" and they continue to enact) "exclusions and erasures" of "Indigenous Peoples." The unavoidable implication here is that academic institutions and the very "nation-state itself" are essentially illegitimate enterprises, which could not even exist but for the morally reprehensible "exclusion and erasure" of "Indigenous Peoples."[28]

Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians
Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California Tribal Council
Gabrieleno/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians
Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians – Kizh Nation
San Manuel Band of Mission Indians
San Fernando Band of Mission Indians

Pictured above: Native peoples and local tribal governments listed in the 2022 Land Acknowledgment for the County of Los Angeles

[28] According to Heather Washington, the ASA deferred to the "expertise" of "Indigenous sociologists" in preparing this statement. There is no indication that experts in nation-state formation were consulted.

Although the phrase Indigenous Peoples is capitalized as a proper noun, the term is not defined, and indeed the United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights acknowledges, in its 2013 Fact Sheet on Indigenous Peoples and the Human Rights System, that there is "no singularly authoritative definition of indigenous peoples under international law and policy."[29] As one scholar of international law has noted, the phrase has become "a basis for group mobilization, international standard setting, transnational networks and programmatic activity of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations."[30] In other words, the phrase forms the basis for a political and normative agenda. It is partly for this reason that some highly respected scholars have been hesitant to embrace it from a social scientific point of view, noting, for example, that impoverished people in northern India who are being harmed by processes of commodification "do not always fit the label 'indigenous people' used by international bodies."[31]

Reasonable people of good faith will disagree, to say the least, about whether the nation-state project and academic institutions are illegitimate and morally reprehensible enterprises. In a U.S. context, no person of good faith and reasonable historical sensibility would deny that the treatment of Native Americans has been deplorable. But it is one thing to acknowledge that, and another thing to assert that "academic institutions, indeed the nation-state itself, were founded upon and continue to enact exclusions and erasures of Indigenous Peoples."

The statement goes on to avow a commitment to "dismantle ongoing legacies of settler colonialism," and to pay a deep (and virtually sacralizing) respect to Indigenous Nations and elders, "past, present, and future." The language of "dismantling…settler colonialism" is obviously highly politicized, normative, and, in my own view, irresponsibly revolutionary. Paying respects to Indigenous Nations and elders seems like a nice thing to do, but without knowing who they are, it is hard to know whether the avowal of respect is deserved, or even desired. Any basically humanist perspective on the value of persons will acknowledge that all persons, Native American included, are a complex combination of good and evil, with actions that may be admired and that may be deplored. Sanctimoniously blanket praise for all persons of any category is simplistic and facile, more like a form of public piety than sober social science.

All this is to say that the Land Acknowledgment articulates a political platform and normative agenda, an avowal of a particular set of value commitments that not all members of the ASA share. The ASA is free, as a private association, to embrace such an agenda and set of value commitments, although, for an organization that represents itself to the world as "the national professional membership organization for sociologists," it seems profoundly unwise.

What the ASA should not be free to do, consistent with its public affirmations of academic freedom and free speech principles[32], is to pressure participants in the Annual Meeting to publicly avow this agenda. To request, and virtually require, as part of a general set of instructions for session presiders, the recitation of the Land Acknowledgment, constitutes a deeply concerning

[29] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Human Rights System," Fact Sheet No. 9/Rev. 2 (2013), 2.

[30] Benedict Kingsbury, "'Indigenous Peoples' in International Law: A Constructivist Approach to the Asian Controversy," The American Journal of International Law 92.3 (1998), 414.

[31] Sanjib Buruah, In the Name of the Nation: India and its Northeast (2020), 106.

[32] ASA Public Statement, "Communicating Across Difference: Free and Responsible Speech," August 22, 2017; ASA Public Statement, "Statement Reaffirming ASA's Commitment to Scholarly Freedom," March 6, 2020; ASA Code of Ethics, June 2018, especially General Principles B (Integrity), C (Professional and Scientific Responsibility), and D (Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity).

invasion of the intellectual integrity, professional responsibility, and political conscience of its members, one that seriously undermines the academic integrity, intellectual respectability, and ethical standing of the ASA.

How might the HOSST section, acting as "historical conscience" for the ASA, address this issue? One possibility might be to explore other periods of time in which public professions of faith were proposed or imposed. The ASA's own official histories record the organization's experience with McCarthy era loyalty oaths, imposed on faculty by the University of California.[33] The ASA in its Business Meeting passed a resolution "deploring such discriminatory requirements" and stating that "there is a special interest on the part of social scientists in the right of free inquiry in the field of controversial social, economic, and political issues."[34] Why is it that today there has been no resistance from the ASA, but rather an enthusiastic embrace? This, I suggest, is a fascinating historical question that cries out for comparative and historical studies of political and religious culture, brought to bear on the ASA itself, and on the U.S. discipline of sociology.

This is (partisan) Politics: Litigating DEI

On February 25, 2025, ASA members were informed by email that the ASA had joined with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and an organization called "Democracy Forward" to "take legal action to prevent the advancement" of Trump Administration educational initiatives targeting DEI. The announcement referred to the Department of Education's (DOE) recently published "Dear Colleague" letter, which sought to enact, by way of interpretive letter, a sea-change in the educational culture and administrative apparatus of DEI. On April 24, 2025, ASA members received an update:

> We are writing to share an important update about our case against the Department of Education that was filed in February 2025 in collaboration with a coalition of educators, a public school district, and Democracy Forward. We are delighted to share that we have succeeded in securing a nationwide preliminary injunction that will temporarily stop the Trump administration's attempt to threaten educational institutions with prosecution and loss of vital federal funding for teaching students about race and racism and supporting their students and communities through diversity, equity, or inclusion efforts.[35]

[33] Rhoades, History, 39-40, 50-51.

[34] Id. at 50. Rhoades' history documents an ongoing pattern of tensions and ambivalences between a purely scientific vision of the ASA and a more practically focused vision, which brought the organization into closer alliances with religious, moral, and political reform movements. An early episode was the discussion of the proposed constitution for the association, in December 1905. Discussion on a "Resolution" article of the constitution highlighted a desire on the part of some members for a specific provision that would "prevent the society from passing 'any resolution approving or disapproving specific sociological doctrines or specific schemes for social betterment.'" According to Rhoades, the members decided the existing article was "sufficient to prevent the submission and consideration of undesirable motions." Id. at 5. In a major push for a more exclusively scientific vision of the organization, a letter to ASA members authored by Maurice Parmelee noted the cost in public perception from political activism. "The immediate result from this situation is that the public is given the impression that the Society is a religious, moral, and social reform organization rather than a scientific society." Id. at 25.

[35] Emphasis added. Nationwide (or universal) injunctions are controversial among legal scholars and judges, and the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that they exceed the equitable powers of U.S. courts. Trump v. CASA, Inc., 145 S.Ct. 2540 (June 27, 2025). The traditional injunction is an order prohibiting action against the plaintiff; in a nationwide injunction, action of the enjoined type (e.g. enforcement of a federal statute) is prohibited against anyone, not only the plaintiff. When obtained in the form of a preliminary injunction, this "nuclear weapon" of the judiciary's equitable powers is deployed before the merits of the case are even decided. The goal has often been to halt the presidential administration and prevent it from carrying out its political agenda. That is a weapon that both sides have used. See Samuel L. Bray, Multiple Chancellors: Reforming the National Injunction, 131 Harv. L. Rev. 417 (2017).

Finally and most recently, on August 14, 2025, ASA members were informed:

> We are delighted to share the ruling made today in ASA's case against the Department of Education. The case was filed in February 2025 in collaboration with a coalition of nationwide associations of educators and a public school district. Today, the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland ruled in favor of the coalition, declaring that the Trump-Vance administration's attempt to require school districts throughout the nation to censor lessons, abandon student support programs, and certify their compliance with the administration's unlawful interpretation of civil rights is unconstitutional.[36]

ASA President, Adia Harvey Wingfield, issued the following statement:

> The American Sociological Association is delighted with this ruling. It affirms that we sociologists can still do the challenging yet rewarding work of asking and answering hard questions–about race, inequality, society, and more. Furthermore, it confirms that teachers across the nation can continue to support students, enrich academic institutions, and maybe most importantly, do the essential work of providing a nuanced, thoughtful education! ASA will always stand with and for sociologists, and we are proud to stand up for students, for free speech, and for all Americans' right to an education that isn't marred by censorship, threats, and scare tactics.

At the end of this most recent communication to ASA members, we were reminded again that the "coalition" with which we had joined in this litigation was "represented by Democracy Forward."

Who are Democracy Forward (DF)? According to its website, DF is "a national legal organization that advances democracy and social progress through litigation, policy and public education, and regulatory engagement." According to an organization called InfluenceWatch, DF is "a left-of-center litigation and advocacy nonprofit created in early 2017 by high-level Democratic Party operatives." According to the New York Times, DF is "a liberal-leaning legal organization that frequently battled the first Trump administration in court," and that was arming itself in November 2024, when the article was written, for "a large-scale new effort aimed at thwarting President-elect Donald J. Trump's second-term agenda from his first day in office." The New York Times article, authored by Lisa Lerer, described these preparations as including over 800 lawyers, from 280 organizations, "developing cases and workshopping specific challenges," with the avowed intent "to be ready to unleash a flurry of lawsuits." This political "project," coordinated and funded by DF, has a name: "Democracy 2025."[37]

Pictured above: a February 2025 post from the Democracy Forward Instagram account

DF, to put the point plainly, is a political organization that uses legal processes as a weapon to achieve partisan political goals. According to the New York Times – hardly a bastion of right-wing politics – DF "has deep ties to a number of prominent [Democratic] party strategists and lists Marc Elias, the powerful election lawyer, and Ron Klain, President Biden's former White House chief of staff, as members of its board." Marc Elias, Chairman of the DF Board of Directors, served as

[36] Emphasis added. The plaintiffs sought a declaratory judgment and an injunction, but the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland denied those requests. The court vacated the DOE's Dear Colleague letter and Certification requirement, holding that this was all that was necessary to provide complete relief to the plaintiffs. The plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment was granted in part and denied in part. American Federation of Teachers et al. v. Department of Education, __ F.Supp.3d __ (2025), slip opinion pp. 3, 32-34.

[37] Lisa Lerer, "Liberal Legal Group Positions Itself as a Top Administration Foe," New York Times, Nov. 14, 2024.

the general counsel of Hillary Clinton's 2016 election campaign. According to the organization InfluenceWatch, Elias is the "lawyer of choice for Democratic politicians in very close races that require a recount or other post-election litigation." Elias is uniquely credited with helping wealthy Democrats to funnel more money into politics. According to Reid Wilson in The Hill, Elias is "the father of the super PAC," uniquely helpful "when some Democrats wanted to increase the amount of money their wealthiest donors could spend on candidates and campaigns."[38]

The ASA, in other words, has put itself forward to serve as a plaintiff in a project of partisan litigation, operating at a scale and with tools of political funding that are historically unprecedented. Many will argue, of course, that this is an appropriate response to a Presidential administration that habitually deploys unprecedentedly pernicious political and legal tactics. And I think there is very little question that the regulatory tactics the Trump administration deployed in its DOE "Dear Colleague" letter and related efforts to roll back DEI were administratively sloppy: vague, overbroad, and, to put it pointedly, crude.

Precisely because I believe that there are real and significant problems with the way DEI has been implemented,[39] I regret that the administration was unwilling to be more thoughtful and careful, and to follow the legal rules for regulatory changes. I can speculate that they chose, for tactical reasons, to make a political impact, knowing that they would be halted in the courts no matter what they did, and thinking it was better to accomplish something, even if only politically. But I will not argue that the DOE regulatory actions were constitutional, lawful, or wise.

The opinion in American Federation of Teachers (AFT) et al. v. DOE et al., authored by Stephanie A. Gallagher, U.S. District Judge for the District of Maryland, strikes me as reasonable, fair, and judicious.[40]

> The crux of the problem, in this Court's view, is that this Letter [the Dear Colleague Letter] says to teachers and schools "if you engage in DEI practices we deem impermissible, you will be punished" but does not provide any clarity on what DEI practices are impermissible. Nor does it even define what a DEI practice is. It is impossible to determine what conduct triggers the prohibitions and sanctions of the Letter.[41]

Left or right, we can all agree that legal threats to bring the power of the U.S. state to bear must, at a minimum, contain a clear specification of the actions prohibited, with definitions of the prohibited conduct that follow the rules for a legitimate legal process. What a sadly missed opportunity to define and address real problems in the ways that DEI-related initiatives have been implemented.

[38] Reid Wilson, "Meet the lawyer Democrats call when it's recount time," The Hill, Nov. 14, 2018.

[39] Examples include mandatory DEI-related trainings, which have often succeeded only in stoking resentment, and the imposition of DEI statement requirements for faculty hiring and promotion. See, e.g., Frank Dobbin & Alexandra Kalev, Getting to Diversity: What Works and What Doesn't (2022); Randall Kennedy, "Mandatory DEI Statements Are Ideological Pledges of Allegiance. Time to Abandon Them," The Harvard Crimson (Apr. 2, 2024) ("By overreaching, by resorting to compulsion, by forcing people to toe a political line, by imposing ideological litmus tests, by incentivizing insincerity, and by creating a circular mode of discourse that is seemingly impervious to self-questioning, the current DEI regime is discrediting itself. It would be hard to overstate the degree to which many academics at Harvard and beyond feel intense and growing resentment against the DEI enterprise because of features that are perhaps most evident in the demand for DEI statements. I am a scholar on the left committed to struggles for social justice. The realities surrounding mandatory DEI statements, however, make me wince. The practice of demanding them ought to be abandoned, both at Harvard and beyond.")

[40] __ F. Supp.3d __ (2025), available at https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/maryland/mddce/1:2025cv00628/577437/83/. As of September 14, 2025, the opinion is not published in the federal reporter, so I am citing to the "slip opinion," a preliminary form of the opinion published by the court.

[41] Slip opinion p. 31.

My goal here, however, is not to debate the merits of the litigation. I will assume, for the sake of argument, that someone needed to challenge the DOE's ham-fisted effort to "roll back" DEI. My question, though, is whether that someone needed to be the ASA.

As far as I can tell, the ASA was largely superfluous to the litigation. The important plaintiffs were the AFT, AFT Maryland, and the Oregon school district, District 4J. The litigation needed an "associational" plaintiff that included teachers at all levels, but it looks to me like it had that with the AFT and AFT Maryland. In addressing the standing and injuries of the associational plaintiffs in the case, the court refers to them as "teachers" and describes the injuries to First Amendment and Due Process rights in terms of teachers who wish to teach about race-related topics (or need to teach about those topics), but face uncertainties about whether their approaches to teaching will be legal under the DOE's Letter-based rulemaking.[42] While this doubtless describes the position of some ASA members, it hardly describes the position of all, perhaps even most, ASA members.

I am suggesting, in other words, that the ASA did not need to join this litigation, in order for it to proceed.[43] And, in fact, cases proceeding in other federal district courts (New Hampshire and D.C.) had already successfully enjoined the DOE from enforcing the Letter (as well as the other instructions on the DOE website: the frequently asked questions, the END DEI portal, and the Certification Requirement). Noting the "unusual" posture of the case, Judge Gallagher drily summarized: "at present, the Letter is stayed and enjoined, and the Certification Requirement is enjoined twice over."[44]

DF and its allies are taking no chances.

But do they really need the ASA as part of their partisan project? And is the ASA truly representing its full membership in joining this project? There are, horror of horrors, Trump voters in the ASA. And even a Trump voter who recognizes the legal merits of a challenge to the DOE's actions will find it pretty hard to stomach an alliance with DF.

Partisan litigation is damaging our court system and infecting our judicial nominations process. Both the right and the left are doing it, and it needs to stop. Why does an organization that claims to act as "the national professional membership organization for sociologists," seeking to "advance sociology as a science and profession," need to leap into the fray? And how, might I add, can the ASA expect to be seen as anything other than a partisan organization by right-wing politicians? Why does the ASA expect to have its cake and eat it too? Why does it expect that it can join overtly partisan litigation and then claim, at the same time, to be horrified when the profession it claims to represent is viewed as partisan enterprise?

The ASA rejoinder will doubtless be that it needed to defend DEI and, in particular, the sociologists teaching targeted subjects. But there is a reasonable case to be made that there are real problems with the ways that DEI is being administered. And there is a disingenuousness in claims that thick commitments to DEI philosophy and practice are necessary in order to adequately teach and discuss American's history with racism.

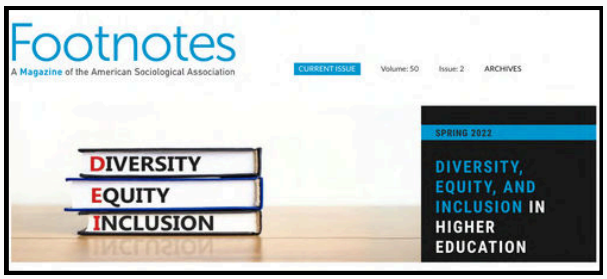
DEI is new. To some extent this is simply new language to discuss older priorities that went

[42] Under First Amendment principles, the DOE's Letter-based rulemaking regulated speech based on its content and constituted a prior restraint on speech. See slip opinion pp. 26-28.

[43] I am not asserting that the ASA made no contribution to the litigation. In addition to the symbolic value of including the national organization representing sociologists, the fact that ASA is a national organization probably bolstered the case for nationwide vacatur. See slip opinion pp. 33-34. Here again, however, the AFT (which is also a national association) should have been sufficient.

[44] Slip opinion p. 1.

under other names: affirmative action, minority opportunities, etc.[45] But dimensions of it are unquestionably new, and justifiably controversial. Looking at old issues of Footnotes, it appears to me that 2017 was a year of heightened emphasis on diversity.[46] ASA's inaugural Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director was Heather Washington, hired in 2021.



Pictured above: screenshot of Spring 2022 issue of Footnotes

Here again, HOSST can serve as an "historical conscience" for the ASA, to enable careful parsing of what, precisely, is new and different about DEI as it developed across the 2010s.[47] HOSST can also provide an institutional home for recognition of the ASA's increasing engagement in partisan politics and litigation, with an uptick in the late 1960s and a slower, steadier ascent since the 1990s.[48]

For the ASA to act as plaintiff in partisan litigation, however, is virtually unprecedented. I am only able to identify one other comparable case.[49]

This is not the place to debate the merits of DEI. But we need to have that debate. This is not a debate about whether steps should be taken to address the legacies of slavery, racism, and sexism. All people of good faith agree those steps should be taken. The question, as we all know, is what kinds of steps are appropriate and effective, and about the processes that should be followed. There are also important and valid questions about how we should think about "diversity,

[45] See Rosich, History, 2-3, 36, 47, 53-4, 60, 63-5, 68-70, 83, 89, 91. Rosich emphasizes the ASA's promotion of "diversity and inclusiveness," but never uses the phrase "diversity, equity, and inclusion." For an acknowledgement that there is something new in the emphasis on "equity and inclusion," alongside "diversity," see, e.g. Alexandra Love, "When did we add the 'equity' to diversity, equity, and inclusion?" https://ideas.bkconnection.com/when-did-we-add-the-equity-to-diversity-equity-and-inclusion (2020) ("In recent years, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are bolstered by the addition of the concept of "Equity." Unlike equality, which focuses on providing equal resources regardless of context, equity focuses on the process of just and fair consideration because of someone's experience or specific social position. Equality is treating everyone the same, whereas equity is about achieving the same benefits, even if it means that everyone receives different, though still just and fair, treatment. For example, when I was growing up, I wasn't a very strong student in math, so I had to take extra tutoring to get on the level of my classmates. I received extra help as a way of making sure that I was equal to other math students at my grade level. In this way, equality is the ideal result, while equity is the means by which we achieve equality.")

[46] See Footnotes, Volume 45, Issue 1 (January/March 2017). Footnotes dedicated an entire issue to DEI in Spring 2022.

[47] I first encountered DEI, under that name, in the job application process, which I started in 2013. As I recall, it was only a few University of California jobs that required DEI statements. An interesting historical reflection by the UC Regents on their DEI requirements is available here. The proposal to make DEI statements mandatory for job candidates across all UC campuses came in 2019. In March 2025, the Board of Regents voted to end mandatory DEI statements.

[48] See Rosich, History, 11-13, 48-51, 70-71, 73-77, 80-81, 88-91. In the late 1990s, however, there were still some attempts to establish guardrails against overtly partisan policy recommendations. The 1996 Council Report on policy recommendations stated as follows: "In the past, Council has considered member resolutions and other proposed policy statements during its regular working sessions. These discussions have at times generated a sense of uneasiness among Council members who felt that they lacked the expertise to assess the theoretical and evidentiary basis behind various proposals. The subcommittee suggests that, in such cases, the Council employ the model of a review panel in order to develop recommendations for a course of action. It is especially resolutions pertaining to public policy issues where the credibility of the discipline and the Association is placed on the line and where, therefore, Council needs to be confident that its decisions are made on the basis of solidly grounded knowledge. We recommend that, in such cases, Council appoint a subcommittee from its members to evaluate the scientific basis and the appropriateness of any proposed resolution. Such a subcommittee should be empowered to consult with any non-Council members it deems as having expertise bearing on a resolution. It should also consider the appropriateness of a resolution for a learned society, to screen out, to take an extreme example, any resolution that takes a politically partisan stance." Rosich, History, 50-51 (emphasis added).

[49] ASA v. Chertoff, 588 F.Supp.2d 166 (D. Mass. 2008).

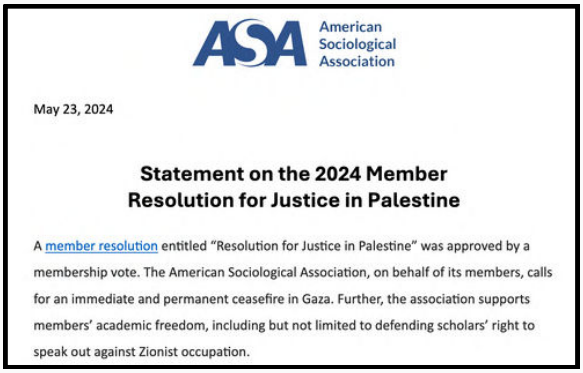
equity, and inclusion." Shouldn't "diversity" be broader than sex, race, and gender? Couldn't "equity" be more broadly conceived and shouldn't its complicated relationship to law and legal justice be acknowledged?[50] Shouldn't we debate whether subjective emotional experiences (feelings) are the proper consideration with "inclusion," and whether a more objective set of criteria might be more appropriate?

As historical conscience for the ASA, my sincere hope is that HOSST can constructively help to catalyze, facilitate, and provide historical foundations for such debates. Musa al-Gharbi's presentation in Chicago provided a fertile launch for these discussions, both by noting metrics indicating dramatic changes on the left in recent years, and by humorously recognizing the methodological problems in ways that partisan political positions are "scientifically" explained.[51] Was it racism or authoritarianism that explained a vote for Donald Trump in 2016? Why wouldn't a vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016 also need to be explained?

The ASA desperately needs to "stop and think what we are doing" in the area of partisan politics. And, just maybe, HOSST can help facilitate that.

This is (bad) Politics: The Palestine Resolution

In May 2024, ASA members were asked to vote on a Resolution for Immediate Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza. Many of us only learned that this Resolution would be on the ballot in April 2024. No debate about the measure was ever held, although members of the ASA, including a number of past Presidents, communicated their positions publicly. The measure passed, although hardly with the ringing endorsement that some wished to claim for it. Only 34.3% of the ASA membership voted on the measure, and only 58.8% of that 34% voted in favor of the measure. I'm admittedly quite rusty in my quantitative methods, but, according to my reckoning, 60% of 34% is 20.4%. So 20% of ASA members voted in favor of the Gaza Ceasefire Resolution. Nonetheless, there was a great deal of exultation among those in favor of the Resolution.



ASA American Sociological Association

May 23, 2024

Statement on the 2024 Member Resolution for Justice in Palestine

A member resolution entitled "Resolution for Justice in Palestine" was approved by a membership vote. The American Sociological Association, on behalf of its members, calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Further, the association supports members' academic freedom, including but not limited to defending scholars' right to speak out against Zionist occupation.

In an essay that has already grown longer than intended, I will not attempt to relitigate the merits of the Gaza Ceasefire Resolution, which I considered to be very one-sided. I will, however, argue that this is an example of very bad politics, not because of the substantive outcome of the vote or the content of the Resolution, but because of the process.

Formalistically, as far as I can tell, the proponents of the Resolution followed the rules for placing a resolution before the ASA electorate. But that does not mean that this was a good process politically.

Following Max Weber on this point, I believe that politics is, and should be, contentious. People should have to argue their positions and debate those who see things differently. That never occurred with this Resolution. Ezra Zuckerman Sivan did try to provide an alternative perspective, but he could only do so informally, by emailing

[50] The word "equity" means multiple things, in a legal context, and these are all relevant to DEI. It may simply mean fairness, as perceived by the person invoking the term, or it may carry the Aristotelian meaning of epieikeia: the adjustment to general legal rules that is necessary for a nuanced and just application to specific facts. It can also mean the law developed in English and American courts of equity, together with the "extraordinary" equitable remedies (like injunctions) that developed in those courts. See Samuel L. Bray, "A Student's Guide to the Meaning of Equity," available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3821861 (2021).

[51] Musa al-Gharbi, "What's Wrong with Those People?"

section chairs. And the viewpoints he offered were never publicly engaged, much less refuted.

If this is meant to be politics, it is a failure. And perhaps this is because the ASA is not supposed to be a political organization. The ASA is not organized to facilitate political debates and its members are not educated as political actors. They are not taught the skills of compromise and debate that characterize good politicians. Sadly, if they are primarily trained as sociologists, they may never have even been taught to see a policy or political position from multiple sides.

Looking at the website of Sociologists for Palestine (S4P), a group that may have been largely responsible for the Resolution, it is interesting to see their ringing endorsement for "deliberative democracy."

> Sociologists for Palestine (S4P), a collective of ASA members working in support of Palestinian liberation, extends its congratulations and gratitude to the many volunteers who persuaded and mobilized their colleagues as well as to everyone who voted. United by a commitment to a deliberative, democratic, and member-driven ASA, we invite all sociologists to join together in building a more responsive and globally engaged sociological project.

But where was the deliberation? Deliberation among people who already agree does not count as "deliberative democracy," in my view. Without a debate and a discussion in which people who see the issue differently are compelled to engage with each other across lines of mutual respect, there is no genuine democracy and no genuine politics. This is simply the victory of a vocal minority (20%) who managed, by following the rules, to overrule wiser heads in the ASA Council.

So where can HOSST come in as a "historical conscience" on this type of hot-button political resolution? Perhaps by reminding us that there controversial wars in the past, like the Vietnam War, which generated intense passions, including among sociologists. As far as I can tell, the first proposal for an ASA membership endorsement of a political resolution was in 1968, when there was a petition for a resolution against the Vietnam War. And the resolution was voted down.[52]

Why did the Gaza Ceasefire Resolution succeed where the Vietnam War Resolution failed? That seems like a fascinating question, and one well worth exploring. But in order for that question to even be entertained, sociologists within the ASA will need to show a greater willingness to turn the tools of their trade back upon themselves. They will need, in Hannah Arendt's terms, to stop and think what they are doing.

Conclusion: Starting with Pluralism

One person was not able to join us Chicago: Michael Burawoy. With the encouragement of George Steinmetz, I invited Michael to join a panel dedicated to the theme of "Value-Commitments" in sociology.[53] The background for this panel was the letter that I sent to HOSST members upon taking my position as chair.[54] The letter pointedly stated my concerns about ASA politicization, which have been elaborated in this essay, and I mentioned Michael specifically as someone whose understanding of sociology was very different from my own. Michael responded with alacrity to my initial invitation, read my letter, and promptly submitted a paper for the panel.

The paper that Michael submitted for our "Debating the Place for Value-Commitments in Sociology" panel in Chicago is available on his website. It is titled "Why and How Should Sociologists Speak Out on Palestine?" I read the opening paragraph of Michael's paper, and reprint it here, as follows:

[52] Rhoades, History, 60.

[53] As I stated in Chicago, I did not know Michael Burawoy personally. But I will take the liberty of referring to him by his first name, as he implicitly invited me to do in our email exchange.

[54] See n. 4 above.

I will begin by turning the question around: why should sociologists not speak out on Palestine? And if we do speak out, what should our contribution be? To speak out about Palestine requires a minimal knowledge of its history: the struggle for Palestine is fought on a physical battlefield but also on the battlefield of history, over the interpretation and suppression of history. To make sense of the past and to link the past to the present and the future, we need an orienting conceptual/theoretical framework. Like others I have chosen "settler colonialism" as my frame. This is the standpoint of this essay, a standpoint from which I elaborate the history of Palestine/Israel through the lens of another very different settler colonialism – apartheid South Africa. In that way 21st century sociology does what it has to do – offer a sense of possibilities out of a bleak situation.

As I said in Chicago, with just a touch of hyperbole, I disagree with almost every word of Michael's essay. But I have only admiration and appreciation for his willingness to participate in a panel organized by someone who he knew, going in, did not share his political vision for the discipline of sociology.

I liked his opening paragraph, and chose that for my reading, because it highlights the importance of historical perspective, as well as the need for a conceptual framework in doing history.

Yes, history is a battlefield. But it also provides opportunities for reflection.

In this essay, I have drawn on a different conceptual framework, namely the phenomenological political theory of Hannah Arendt. In my judgment, her reflections about the political and moral necessity for thinking and conscience are constructively suggestive for a section of the ASA committed to disciplinary and organizational historical reflection. Extending her argument about thinking and conscience, by analogy, to the institutional and organizational level, I have suggested that HOSST might serve as historical conscience for the ASA. And I have drawn on the papers presented in one of our HOSST section sessions to illustrate my argument.

But I want to close with Michael's paper because I think it points to the heart, both of what is needed for the ASA, and of the contribution our section could, ideally, make. What thinking does, Arendt suggests, is open up a duality within the thinking person. I have to ask myself whether I am living in a way that is consistent and coherent, and I have to recognize the possibility of incoherence. I need to be able to live with myself, to be a "friend" to myself, and that is only possible if I can recognize the inconsistencies in my values and in my actions.

This goes for the ASA, too, and I have suggested some glaring inconsistencies in the ASA's values and actions, in this essay. But the opening for duality within the thinking person that, for Arendt, is conscience, can also be extended, by analogy, to the institutional level, as pluralism.

We need to have genuinely thoughtful and respectful conversations across political, moral, and religious differences. Michael Burawoy modeled the willingness to do that, and we need more people like him: passionately committed to their own viewpoint, but ready and willing to engage respectfully with people who don't share that viewpoint.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as Chair of the section and thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy essay. It grew much longer than I intended and it is perhaps best understood by analogy to the culmination of a legal complaint: a prayer for relief.

Laura Ford
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Faulkner University
Thomas Goode Jones School of Law

Publications

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP BY SECTION MEMBERS AND OTHERS

Member Submissions

Anthony Albanese, "Luther and Jessie Bernard, Values and positivist developments in Origins of American Sociology and Luther's 'Onion Skins'". *Journal of Classical Sociology* (2025): 1-20

Gary D. Jaworski and Colin Jerolmack, "Erving Goffman, Thomas Sebeok and 'Interaction Ethology'". *History of Social Science* vol. 1, no. 2 (2025): 167-204

Lonnie Athens, "The Emergence of Radical Pragmatism from Radical Interactionism: Moving Beyond Chicago Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism". *The American Sociologist* (2025)

Lonnie Athens, "The Self from a Radical Interactionist's Perspective: Its Basic Components, Phylogenesis, and Ontogenesis". *Symbolic Interaction* (2025)

Lonnie Athens, "The Functioning of the Self During the Interlinkage of Action: A Radical Interactionist's Perspective". *Symbolic Interaction* vol. 47 (2024): 3-17

Ben Merriman, *The Kansas Court of Industrial Relations: Interwar America's Dangerous Experiment in Social Control* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2025)
Description: The Kansas Court of Industrial Relations (KCIR), founded in 1920, was the lone US trial of a labor court, a policy design used almost everywhere else in the industrial and industrializing world during the interwar period. The KCIR, a coercive new variant of the labor court model, banned strikes and lockouts, created heavy criminal sanctions, and gave the court nearly unlimited power to control the material terms of economic life. It was America's closest practical encounter with fascism. This book describes the intense legal, political, and intellectual controversy over the KCIR, ranging from academic journals to the front page of The New York Times to the Cabinet, Congress, and US Supreme Court. Of particular interest to section members, the KCIR provoked a debate among institutional and labor economists and deeply divided the era's leading evolutionist and realist legal thinkers. The failure of the KCIR by 1923 destroyed American interest in labor courts, though the KCIR influenced labor policy design in other countries, including Italy. The intemperate divisions over the KCIR, and the legal doctrines that litigation over it left behind, were an early manifestation of the intellectual and political alignments that produced America's unique New Deal labor policy.

Michael Strand and Omar Lizardo, *Orienting to Chance: Probabilism and the Future of Social Theory* (The University of Chicago Press, 2025)
Description: Orienting to Chance presents an extended argument for "probabilism" as a foundational framework for social theory, challenging the prevalent understanding of probability as merely frequency of occurrence. The book contends that probability is not solely an epistemological tool for calculation or an updated belief, but an ontological reality that exists in the world, constitutive of social orders, and shaping our experiences. The central concept in the book is "Chance," an idea reconstructed from the work of Max Weber and Johannes von Kries, which refers to the objective formations of probabilities and possibilities towards which social actors orient themselves as they "loop into" Chance. Orienting to Chance aims to recover an intellectual tradition where probability and interpretation are inherently linked, contrasting with the current academic dichotomies that separate natural science from social science and quantitative from qualitative methods. Orienting to Chance provides a genealogical account of probability, tracing its history through figures like Pascal, Fermat, Huygens, Bayes,

Bernoulli, Laplace, Quetelet, Lewis, Mises, Keynes, Kries, Peirce, Weber, Du Bois, and Bourdieu, demonstrating how a focus on objective probability and a "Chance/expectation loop" can offer new insights into social order, motivation, and human cognition. Ultimately, Orienting to Chance serves as a toolkit for reconfiguring contemporary social theory, proposing a sociology that focuses on how objective probabilities are created, maintained, and oriented to in action, aligning with contemporary cognitive science models, such as predictive processing, and providing a unified approach to understanding the social world beyond data-centric methods.

Other HOSST-Related Publications

Articles:

Botello, N. A. (2024). Cultural Sociology in Mexico: Meaning-Making as Hybridization, Power, and Cultural Structure. *Cultural Sociology*, 19(1), 3-22. (Original work published 2025)

Cohen-Cole, Jamie, et al. (2025). "A New Space for the History of Social Science." *History of Social Science*, vol. 1 no. 1, pp. 1-13.

Connell, Kieran. (2024). “An African American Anthropologist in Wales: St. Clair Drake and the Transatlantic Ecologies of Race Relations.” *Journal of British Studies,* 63(1):167-198.

Cosovschi, A. (2025). "Making and Remaking a Social Science: Croatian Sociology from Socialism to Post-Socialism." Serendipities. *Journal for the Sociology and History of the Social Sciences,* 9(2), pp. 15–32.

Dawson, Matt. (2024). A sociologist in the Lords: the parliamentary career of Anthony Giddens. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*

Engelking, Wojciech. (2025). "Schmitt’s Reinterpretation of Hegel During His Nazi Period." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Online first.

Etzrod, Christian. (2025). "A Systematic Summary of Max Weber’s Sociology of Religion." *Max Weber Studies,* 25 (2): 137-184.

Kökerer, Can Mert. (2024). "Max Weber’s Athens: The entanglement between charismatic domination and non-legitimate domination." *Journal of Classical Sociology,* 25(3), 314-332.

Leme, Alessandro André. (2025). "The Sociology of Fernando Henrique Cardoso: Contexts, Circulation, Debates and Criticism." *American Sociologist,* 56, pp. 337–361.

Mangone, Emiliana and Lucia Picarella. (2025). "Sociocultural Context, Reference Scholars and Contradictions in the Origin and Development of Sociology in Italy." *American Sociologist,* 56, 1–29.

Marcucci, Nicola. (2025). “Decanonizzare/ Ricanonizzare. Riflessività sociologica e critica contemporanea” [Decanonize/Recanonize. Sociological and contemporary critical reflectivity]. *Sociologia Classica Contemporanea*, 1(1), 7–26.

Martini, Elvira and Emiliana Mangone. (2025). "Sociologists in Italy Between Cultural and Normative Legitimization. The Failed Construction of a Community of Practice." *American Sociologist,* 56, 30–49

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Sciortino, G. (2025). Regional Spotlight Italian Sociology of Culture: A Method to the Madness. *Cultural Sociology*, 0(0).

Steinmetz, George. (2024). "Durkheim's Critique of Colonialism and Empire." *Modern Intellectual History* 21:4 (December): 874-896.

Steinmetz, George. (2025). "Rethinking Postcolonial Sociology." *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 25 (1): 88–100.

Vandenberghe, Frédéric. (2024). "Marcel Mauss, MAUSS and Maussology: The productive reception of the Essay on the Gift in France." *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 25(3), 295-313.

Vila, E. E. (2025). "Émile Durkheim in The Pampas: The reception of his ideas in Argentina and Uruguay (1895-1947)." Serendipities. *Journal for the Sociology and History of the Social Sciences*, 9(2), pp. 33–45.

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Zhang, Chunjie. (2025). "Max Weber and the Re-Enchantment of Charisma." *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 86(1), 169-192.

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Atkinson, Will (ed). (Forthcoming). *For a New Political Sociology: The Relational Approach of Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge.

Collyer, Fran, ed. (2025). *Research Handbook on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London : Edward Elga.

Fadaee, S. (2024). *Global Marxism: Decolonisation and revolutionary politics*. Manchester University Press.

Frie, Roger. (2024). *Edge of Catastrophe: Erich Fromm, Fascism, and the Holocaust*. Oxford University Press.

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Unzué, Martín and Diego Ezequiel Pereyra (eds). (2025). *Modernization, Democracy and Social Classes: Gino Germani and Latin American Sociology*. Routledge.

Upcoming Conferences

Link: https://hssonline.org/page/HSS25

Social Theory between History and Systematics

BY JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER
RECIPIENT OF THE 2025 HOSST LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

After learning of this recognition for "Lifetime Achievement," I wondered, is there anything I might offer in return, other than the ritual expression of gratitude certainly appropriate on such occasions? Might a small intellectual contribution also be made? Perhaps. At any rate, I would like to try.

I wish to share some thoughts about unpacking the title of this section -- about the relationship between the history of sociology, the history of social thought, and social theorizing itself. About the first of these, the history of the discipline, I have contributed nothing other than my own half century of praxis, of struggling to push the discipline in new directions –from scientism to hermeneutics, from materialism to meaning, from theorizing conflict to conceptualizing democratic solidarity. About the latter two endeavors, the history of social thought and social theory itself, I have more to say.

In the discipline of sociology, the tension between the "history" and "systematics" of theory has been vividly on display ever since Robert Merton proposed the distinction in 1957. As I see it, however, this conflict has generated more heat than light.

In The Structure of Social Action (1937), Parsons hid his theoretical ambitions beneath the fig leaf of history. Not content simply to make the analytical argument for the independent causal role of values, he created a pseudo-historical narrative about an intellectual "convergence" among French, German, Italian, and British fin-de-siècle social thinkers. What they putatively discovered, according to Parsons' just-so story, was independence of the normative element ("values") in social life. Structure was an brilliant theoretical exercise, but Parsons was not content to leave it at that. He wanted also to have history on his side, to make an emphasis on values seem, not just theoretically (and morally) desirable, but temporally inevitable. If Parsons' analytic argument for values was philosophically powerful, however, his canned history was not. It was manifestly obvious that, during that same fin-de-siècle, materialistic, utilitarian, and individualistic modes of social theorizing also had emerged in full force. Which was, of course, exactly why the young Parsons had felt compelled to write Structure in the first place! Indeed, after "action theory" ruled the roost of American sociological theorizing in the immediate postwar period, it was pushed aside by the materialism, utilitarianism, and individualism, the very modes of thinking that intellectual history had once supposedly cast aside. Was history now going in reverse?!

Merton rebelled against Parsons in several fundamental ways, none more significant than when he differentiated between "history" and "systematics," the former about the social context in which theories develop, the latter about the logic of theorizing itself. For knowing observers of this intra-functionalist tussle, it was obvious that Structure was Merton's unmistakable, if implicit, polemical target. Prima facie, Merton was correct. Parsons' history was pseudo; real intellectual history is entirely different. It must place the emergence of ideas into the social, political, and ideational context of their times. Merton's influence has reverberated through the decades, as the distinguished list of winners of this section's Lifetime Achievement award amply attests.

Yet Merton's distinction is too neat. Intellectual history is always already "theorizing by a different means." For the simple reason that the writing of history rests upon interpretation. It is not merely an account of true facts (a chronical, in Hayden White's terms), but a selection among facts and an interpretive reconstruction of the temporal arrangement between them (a narrative, for White).

When Quentin Skinner created the Cambridge school of intellectual history, he polemicized against what he denigrated as head-in-the-clouds historians of ideas, arguing that the actual intentions of thinkers, their grassroots contexts, their networks, and their adversaries should be investigated instead. Yet, the very idea that intentionality can be empirically ascertained is philosophically naïve. Motive can be only hermeneutically reconstructed, in relation to what Gadamer calls the horizon of meaning, the intellectual and life experience of the interpreter, their intellectual interests and normative ambitions.

Skinner discovered that republican theory had become institutionalized in European city-states as early as 1000 CE, and that not only the Renaissance but the Reformation was inspired by secular civic values. Yet this discovery was hardly uninformed by theoretical and normative interests. Skinner was inspired by his broad democratic commitments, his particular dislike of liberal individualism, and his philosophical immersion in the discursive turn that Wittgenstein and Austin had initiated. Moreover, the "old fashioned" intellectual history that Skinner disparaged is hardly simply ideational. Was Arthur Lovejoy merely an armchair historian? Could an investigator concerned purely with ideation have written the visionary "Chinese Origins of a Romanticism," the genial exercise in historical revisionism built upon transnational and cosmopolitan intersectional-and-intertextual-ity?

I speak from personal experience. My own systematic conceptual efforts have been informed by theoretically inflected historical understandings. For example, the case I made for cultural sociology, while in the first place analytical, no doubt gained authority from my historical argument that, in the late 1890s, Durkheim had turned sharply away from the structural functionalism of Division of Labor and Rules, experienced an intellectual coupure, and developed a newly inspired appreciation of religion. This understanding, in turn, was deeply influenced by revisionist French historical investigations into the evolution of Durkheim's thought, from Bernard Lacroix's revelation about the effects on Durkheim of his father's death to Philipe Bésnard's discoveries of the teamwork marking Durkheim's équipe, research that has been so effectively carried forward by Marcel Fournier, an earlier Life Achievement honoree.

Jeffrey C. Alexander
Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor
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The JHS—The Journal of the History of Sociology (later "History of Sociology") and the ASA section on the History of Sociology: A Brief History

BY JACK NUSAN PORTER

This was a fascinating, diverse, elucidating and eclectic journal, not just in sociology but in all the social sciences—anthropology, psychology, social work, political science, plus philosophy and history. It was magnificently edited by Glenn Jacobs and then by Alan Sica and Gerd Schroeter.

I thought of the idea for the journal in 1976. The year 1976 marked the centennial of the teaching of sociology in America. William Graham Sumner taught the first course in sociology at Yale University in 1875-1876 using Herbert Spencer's The Study of Sociology. (Maybe someone should duplicate that course using that same book).

The centennial went unmarked by the ASA except for the conception of this journal in 1976.

The purpose of the JHS was four-fold; as I wrote in my introductory remarks in the first issue, Vol. I, No. 1, Fall 1978: First, and naturally to disseminate information on the history of sociology and its institutions; second, to encourage research and teaching in an area of our discipline that had lain barren for some time; third, to discover a "usable" past, a past that can bring meaning to our present situation; and fourth, to revise and recover those segments of our history that have been lost, stolen, or overlooked.

I believe the journal and the section have fulfilled these goals magnificently. In fact, in 2005, the 100th anniversary of the ASA in 1905, Michael Hill and I co-chaired the Centennial Bibliography Committee of the Section of the History of Sociology and excellent bibliographies by Michael Hill, Mary Jo Deegan, and Joseph Blasi emerged. Mary Jo Deegan must be highlighted as a pioneer in the history of women in sociology.

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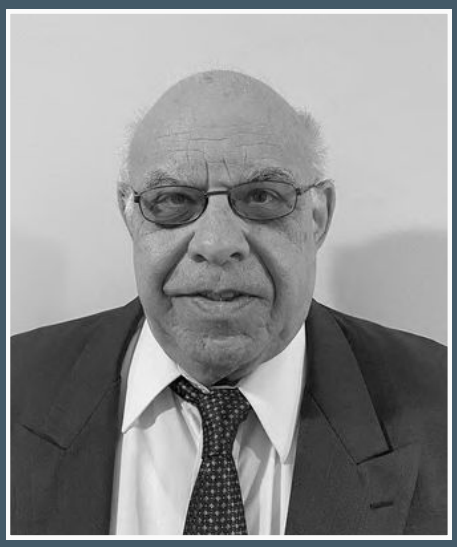
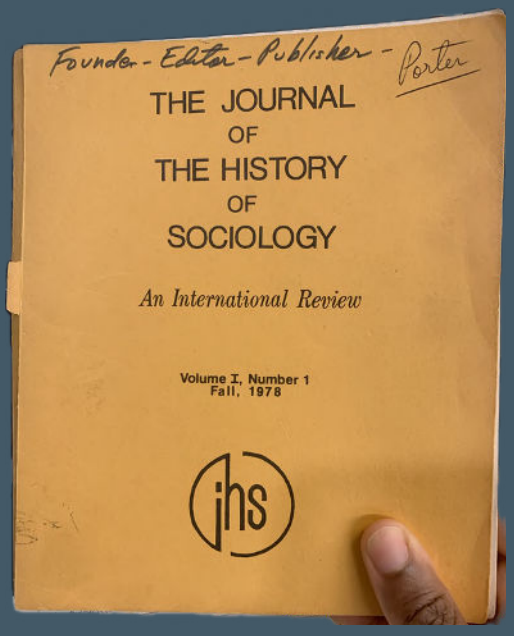


Dr. Jack Nusan Porter



First issue of the journal, photographed by the Editors

I co-founded the section in October 1999, along with Jill Niebrugge-Brantley, Patricia Lengermann, Susan Hoecker-Drysdale, Michael Hill, and Mary-Jo Deegan, If I have inadvertently omitted someone, please let me know.

For a more detailed history of the journal see my article "The Journal of the History of Sociology: Its Origin and Scope", in The American Sociologist, Fall of 2004, Volume 35, Number 3, pp. 52-63.

Thanks must go to Glenn Jacobs, Alan Sica, Gerd Schroeter and the dozens of associate editors over the seven years the JHS was in bloom. However, thanks should also go to Michael Hill, Mary Jo Deegan, Susan Hecker-Drysdale, and others for their hard work. The journal lasted from 1978 to 1987, only seven volumes and fourteen issues. I hope I can find a publisher who will scan the journal and keep it alive so scholars and students will be able to archive and utilize the articles for years to come.

Surprisingly, there were no articles on C. Wright Mills or other radical sociologists; but also few on their opposites like Talcott Parsons (one article). And none on Erving Goffman and Howard S. Becker, and only one on Sorokin, by Larry Nichols. The journal seemed to emphasize Midwestern sociology, women in sociology, and European sociology and its interaction with the USA. This was due to the interests of the editors.

I wish there had been more on Afro-American and Caribbean thinkers like C.L. R. James and other Marxist writers as well as European theorists such as Ralf Dahrendorf, Ralph Miliband and Isaiah Berlin but there were articles on the Marxist Oliver C. Cox.

There were of course fantastic essays on women in sociology and on Weber and Durkheim, including original translated documents, including Max Weber's only trip to America, to North Carolina, surprisingly. Naturally, there were articles on the rise and fall of the Chicago School, though nothing on the "Harvard and Columbia Schools of Sociology".

There were also several articles on major departments (Minnesota, Wellesley, Nebraska, Berkeley) and on sociology in Japan, Czechoslovakia, and Brazil.

An amazing collection of articles in only 14 issues. Here is a sample:

I. The Founders in Europe (David Sutherland) also pieces by Alan Sica on Weber, Pareto, Simmel and Durkheim
II. The Founders in the USA (Ellsworth Fuhrman)
III. The Chicago School
IV. The "Great Ones" (Parsons, Sorokin)
V. Women in Sociology (the groundbreaking work of Mary Jo Deegan)
VI. Blacks in Sociology (Oliver Cox—none on WEB Dubois, who has been written about many times elsewhere)
VII. Sociology Departments (Minnesota, Nebraska, Wellesley, UC—Berkeley)
VIII. Sociology in Unusual Places (Max Weber only trip to America—North Carolina)
IX. Forgotten or Overlooked Sociologists (Sumner, Sorokin, Gurvitch)
X. Personal Tales (Nels Anderson, Helen McGill Hughes, Robert S. Lynd)

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Two Unique Sociology Trivia Questions

BY JACK NUSAN PORTER

#1 Which Sociologists Have Had Profiles in The New Yorker?

1) Robert K. Merton had a lengthy profile in 1961 due to his uncanny ability to coin phrases and concepts still in use today: The Matthew Effect, manifest and Latent functions, locals and cosmopolitans, and the self-fulfilling prophecy.

2) William Julius Wilson (1997) for his work on race and class, especially among Black-Americans.

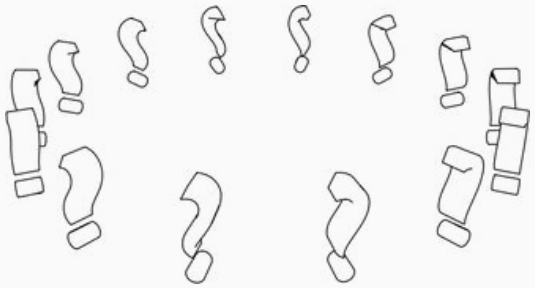
3) Peter Bearman (October 10, 2005) A Columbia University professor and his book on Manhattan "doormen in the "Talk of the Town" section "Doctor Doorman"; his teacher Robert K. Merton's phrase "The Matthew Effect" –the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, is mentioned in the profile.

4) Jack Nusan Porter (April 9, 2012, pp. 23-24) Talk of the Town "The Campaign Trail—Write-in", about my run for US Congress for the seat that Barney Frank was vacating; I ran against Joseph Kennedy III, Robert F.'s grandson, and was heavily favored to win. I received 1% of the vote and it was quirky enough race to be profiled. Not for my sociological work, but my work was mentioned. The profile came as a surprise.

5) Eric Klinenberg of New York University (November 2013) on how to deal with natural disasters like hurricanes on the New Jersey shore.

6) Sociologists Kathy Davis and Robin DiAngelo have been quoted but not profiled.

7) I'm sure there are others; I'm happy I made the list.



#2 Which Sociologists have won or been nominated for the Nobel Prize?

Here is where a knowledge of the history of sociology comes in handy, especially of women in sociology because the surprise finding was that the first three sociologists to win the prize were women!

There is no Nobel prize in sociology, so most winners or people nominated are either in the Peace or Economics category, and there have been quite a few. It would be an interesting game to ask your students if there was a Nobel Prize in Sociology, who should have been selected; people like Talcott Parsons, Robert K. Merton, C. Wright Mills, Erving Goffman, Theda Skocpol, Janet Abu-Lughod, Patricia Hill Collins, or Dorothy Smith? They must be alive to win.

1) Jane Adams (Peace Prize, 1931), for her work as a social worker at Hull House in Chicago.

2) Emily Greene Balch (Peace, 1946). A nearly forgotten sociologist, co-founder of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

3) Alva Myrdal (Peace, 1982) Swedish sociologist and diplomat who wrote key books on disarmament (of atomic and hydrogen bombs).

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4) Gunnar Myrdal (Economics, 1974) Swedish author of An American Dilemma, on race relations in America in 1945, and part of only a handful of couples who have won the prize.

5) Herbert Simon (Economics, 1978) of the Carnegie Mellon University for his work on decision theory. Simon was widely perceived as a sociologist in many circles.

6) Gary Becker (Economics, 1992). An economist at the University of Chicago with deep roots in the sociology of the family, crime, and discrimination.

7) Herbert C. Brown (Chemistry, 1979) Not a sociologist but his collaborator wife Sarah Baylen Brown was a sociologist and noted in cross disciplinary Nobel histories.

8) Jack Nusan Porter (Peace, 2016). A sociologist of the Holocaust and genocide, its definition, prediction and prevention, using mathematical models to predict genocide and terrorism. He was nominated by four renowned sociologists and historians.

9) Some like Martin Luther King (Peace, 1964) drew on sociological ideas but was not trained professionally as a sociologist.

10) Others like Elinor Ostrom (Economics, 2009) are often claimed by sociologists and political scientists due to her interdisciplinary work on collective actions and institutions.

11) There were other economists such as Paul Samuelson, Paul Krugman, Amartya Sen, and Claudia Goldin who had the “sociological imagination”.

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The first three sociologist laureates pictured in descending order: Jane Adams, Emily Greene Balch, and Alva Myrdal

A Conversation with George Steinmetz

RECIPIENT OF THE 2024 HOSST LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
INTERVIEWED BY JOHN MIRSKY ON AUGUST 26TH

JM: You've played a pivotal role establishing the contemporary historical theoretical tradition in sociology. Can you reflect a little bit on your history with the section and the work it promotes?

I was first exposed to the history of sociology as a subfield when I was a graduate student because, as a teaching assistant when I was allowed to teach my own undergraduate theory seminar in my last year at the University of Wisconsin, my advisor was Charles (Chas) Camic. And Chas Camic, I would say, is the real contemporary founder of, you know, rigorous professional history of sociology in the United States. There were, of course, precursors long before him, like Albion Small and Harry Barnes and others in the 1920s and 30s.

At the beginning of the American Sociological Society, historical sociology was sometimes even equated with the history of sociology. We all know the story of writing the history of sociology as a kind of a legitimatory and a founding discourse to create a new discipline. So they look for pre-disciplinary precursors. So it's really interesting that the history of sociology began at the same time as sociology as a discipline, but those are forgotten precedents, and in the more recent period, people who've worked in this area, like Chas Camic, have worked in a way that's more similar to that of historians, or intellectual historians, to be more precise, in that they work seriously with archives.

They look for personal papers in archives or if they're working on people with descendants and their personal papers aren't available. They try to track them down, like historians do. They go to their homes. Sometimes they look at the papers in their attics and their garages before they've even been installed in archives. They sometimes try to create archives after they finish their own work; they're like historians in that sense. Serious interaction with the methodologies of historiography didn't begin until the 1970s and 80s, in the United States at least, when Chas Camic came of age, and after a few other people led by Charles Tilly had started to work in archives. So that was my first encounter with the history of sociology. And at the first ASA meeting I ever went to, I heard Chas Camic give a paper. I was totally inspired by it. I kicked myself for not having, you know, worked more closely with him, although I had a brilliant dissertation advisor, with Eric Olin Wright, but in a very different area. And I thought at the time, okay "someday I'm going to have to work in this area." Then I finished my dissertation and went on the job market and decided to go to the University of Chicago.

And at the University of Chicago, one of the first things that happened when I got there was a series of visits to the city and the university by Pierre Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu was visiting at the time at the Center for Psychosocial Studies in Chicago., which was a kind of an attempt to replicate the Frankfurt School on a small scale, and it was

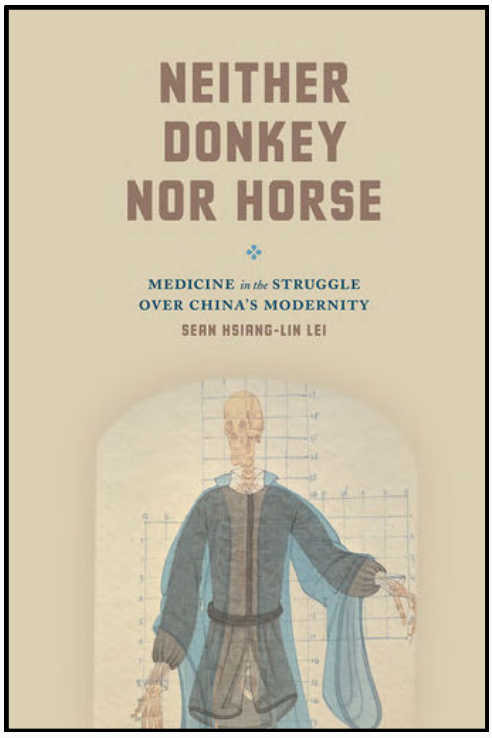
financed by a real estate developer called Bernard Weissbourd, who was also a left-wing thinker and wanted to do something productive with his wealth, and so created the Center, and they brought in Pierre Bourdieu for a series of seminars. And that gave rise to the edited book by Postone, LiPuma, and Calhoun, Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives (1993). Then Bourdieu gave a series of seminars at the University of Chicago as well, and participated in a seminar that he co-organized with James S Coleman, the sociologist at Chicago.

And that gave rise to a volume that was published by Russell Sage Foundation, Social Theory for a Changing Society (1991). And in the last essay of that book, which is one of the most fascinating pieces that Bourdieu, I think, ever wrote, at least for an American sociologist, he started to talk about the field of American sociology and its relationships to other thinkers from other countries, for example with his own theory migrating to the US from France, and the problems in translation and circulation of concepts. And it became clear that to really approach that problem as he presented it there, you would have to do a history of your own discipline, and your own field, and relate that other fields as well. And the reason that really struck home was that he began to thematize in that essay: the position of the American sociologist who is marginal or somehow heterodox vis a vis the dominant mainstream trends within the discipline.

And as you can easily maybe imagine, and as the only Marxist who'd ever been tenured at the University of Chicago in the sociology department, or who wasn't yet tenured, but you know, who was at the time coming out of a Marxist training, and knew the history of Marxists being, you know, even in the case of Richard Flacks, physically attacked in his own office, I felt like I was somewhat peripheral or marginal, at least vis-a-vis the dominant traditions. And it was as if Bourdieu were speaking to me personally, even though, of course, he wasn't. He was perhaps speaking to Loïc Wacquant, who was a graduate student there at the time, and to others in the audience whom he had invited, people like Rogers Brubaker, who was also a beginning assistant professor at that conference that year, or maybe still a graduate student – I don't recall. And this planted this idea in my mind, that in order to understand one's own position, one needs to do a historical genealogy of the field that one is entering into. And so that was another way in which I became convinced that this was a really important thing to do.

And then the third element of the kind of induction into it was my interaction with the historian of anthropology, George Stocking, who was at the University of Chicago's anthropology department. He was the great founder of the history of anthropology in the United States. He published in the first issue of the Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences. He published multiple volumes with the University of Wisconsin Press on the history of anthropology, he worked comparatively, and he worked on what we nowadays call the international circulation of scholars, or the trend toward a transnational history of social science. And he was part of a committee at the University of Chicago that is an interdisciplinary committee called The Committee on the Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science. But this program -- conceptual foundations of the sciences -- had its own graduate students – at least until this current year, when it has frozen admissions -- and it had a number of really interesting graduate students at the time whom I worked with, one of whom was, one of whom, who is, the scholar at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, Xianglin Lei, who wrote this book

called Neither Donkey Nor Horse. It's a great book about the competition between traditional Chinese doctors and westernized Chinese doctors in the context of a malaria epidemic in the beginning of the 20th century, and how the malaria epidemic and the public response to it shaped the relative power of these two forms of medical science in China.



That was the kind of dissertation that was being produced there, and that was a fabulous dissertation. I was introduced to another member of that committee, Jan Goldstein, who published a book on the history of French psychiatry and psychology in the 19th century, called Console and Classify, the French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century. That was really interesting, and Jan Goldstein also put on a conference in that period on Foucault and the history of the human sciences. So she brought in a number of major French historians, intellectual historians, and specialists in Foucault.

So we had a very enticing introduction to the thought of both Bourdieu and Foucault, specifically, as historians of science. So I'd say those elements: the exposure to Chas Camic who was American-oriented in his work on Veblen and British and Scottish- oriented in his first book, a historian of social science; Bourdieu as a sociologist giving us an elaborate justification for the need for a history of sociology, which I can go into later if you want; the Conceptual and Historical Studies of Science program; and the focus on Foucault, who had introduced methods as a philosopher for doing the historical genealogy of science. And so that's how I was introduced into this field.

JM: Could you reflect a little bit about where the field is today, and what you would like to see in this kind of arena?

Well, the first thing I'd like to see is simply more people dedicating their time and energy to doing this kind of research. As Chas Camic pointed out a long time ago, more than 25 years ago, in the Swiss Journal of Sociology in a special issue on writing the history of social science, in France at the time, the history of sociology and the social sciences was already a kind of a fashionable, trendy, exciting, new discipline for French speaking social scientists, whereas in North America it was basically Chas, along with a couple other people—notably Alan Sica, Guenther Roth ,Edward Tiryakian, Steven Lukes, Stephen Turner, Robert Alun Jones, Donald Levine, Mary Jo Deegan, and Marcel Fournier.

It's important to have young scholars in this field, for as Mannheim would have told us it's important to have new blood and new generations entering fields. Bourdieu's field analysis points out that one of the main motors of internal struggle and conflict and disagreement, but also development of ideas, is that kind of entrance of new cohorts into fields. The United States has a weakness of the history of sociology. It doesn't function as a proper subfield

within sociology. A proper subfield needs to be part of the field, and, you know, it kind of obeys the same rules as the field within which it exists.

You have to pass through the same gatekeeping mechanisms as all other agents in the field to get into the subfield. But once you're in the subfield, it can transform, or even invert some of the values in the field around it. For example, political theory within political science inverts systematically a series of the criteria within mainstream political science. Empirics over theory is reversed to theory over empirics, value freedom versus non value freedom is often inverted.

Camic had pointed out that the history of sociology was vibrant in France, and as you probably know from having been to Austria, maybe you found out it's very vibrant in Austria as well. They've even got an archive in Graz, which has the personal papers of a number of American sociologists, because nobody here wanted them, or they weren't ambitious enough to grab them. No one's even really claimed the papers of Mannheim that are in the United States, and there are no natural archives for the history of sociology, and that's a huge problem. (There's an archive at Penn State, and the ASA collects certain papers, but not as far as I know the personal papers of scholars which are essential for a historian of social science).

You always, when you drill down, you find the individual, an individual thinker, and the individual has personal correspondence, the individual has drafts, the individual has personal collections of books and papers that are annotated, and so on. For example, if you visit the Norbert Elias papers in Marbach, Germany, you can also consult his personal book collection, and see what he annotated. If you consult the papers of Ernest Gellner at the London School of Economics you can read printouts of his letters of recommendation for various sociologists. All of this stuff is incredibly valuable, and to have that in the United States would be a major step forward. We don't have that.

So now we don't have the reproduction of our own subfield. History of sociology doesn't have graduate level courses. And it doesn't have an established methodology for how to do the work.

I've been trying to write about this combined method that combines macro contexts, with intellectual contexts, with field contexts, and then moves down to the level of the individual biography, and then finally to the level of the individual text. And each of those levels, I think, requires somewhat different theories and somewhat different methodologies to study them. To study macroscopic changes, gigantic historical changes, you need a different methodology than for analyzing a text. And then the British Cambridge School of intellectual history, has the idea of intellectual contexts. All the other references we refer to, the Marxists and Mannheimians have the idea of social contexts, and the very careful literary critics have the methods of formal analysis of texts, and I think we need to combine all of those. The history of sociology needs to figure out if it warrants that kind of approach, which is very labor intensive and requires a lot of time and effort, but perhaps produces work that might be more compelling.

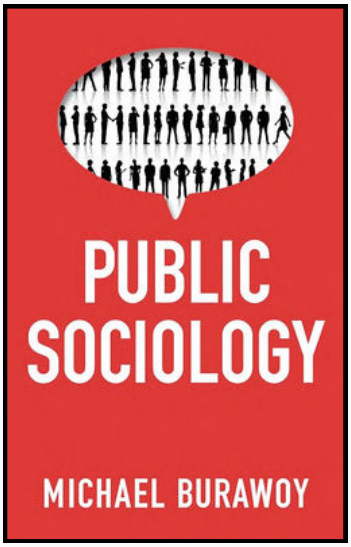
So that's where I think it should be going to, in some direction like that. And I think it should be going in the direction where it makes a more ambitious claim on its right to exist in sociology, that doesn't treat itself as a kind of a memory space or solely a moral space, but really as the site for the reflexivity of the discipline, a discipline that has gotten sidetracked by non-social-scientific definitions of what reflexivity really means for scientists, moving toward the idea that to be reflexive means to understand the space in which the social scientist or sociologist is located, and

that to understand that, you need a historical genealogy of that space, as well as perhaps a biography or a psychological approach to understand the individual and their trajectory within that space. That's important too. But that can't exhaust it. We have to take seriously the ways in which ideas and subjectivities and identities are reworked and sometimes completely transformed by the experience within disciplinary fields, which are often very powerful in their effects on individual thought.

This is why standpoint epistemology can never be the starting point for science, or the history of science, even if it may play a role further along in the research process; the first point is to objectify one's own structural position by locating it within a historical field, and to understand how the field became what it is and how one's own position came to be defined by that space. This requires a history of that space, i.e., a history of sociology, if we are talking about a sociologist. The second axis of reflexivity involves reconstructing the historical genealogy of space of the sociologists one is studying.

A final point is that the history of sociology needs to embrace interdisciplinarity and not be worried about it. Sociology has had very strange relations to the idea of interdisciplinarity. On the one hand, it's a discipline that's had very weak boundaries and a very weak ability to defend itself against the outside and to produce a space of autonomy where thinkers can develop their ideas without immediately being forced to respond to everyday events or macroscopic political events, or to align their views with those of authorities outside of the field sociology hasn't had that.

When Michael Burawoy introduced the idea of public sociology, it was as if there was a roar of consent by about 90% of the discipline. Public sociology involves one barrier to autonomy being broken through -- the barrier between sociology and the political field. The other important boundaries are the boundaries with other disciplines. And the barriers or boundaries or frontiers with the other disciplines are ones that sociology has had a much less easy time figuring out how to deal with. Even though I defend the autonomy of disciplinary boundaries, in order to produce the autonomy that's required for any ideas to be developed, we also have to recognize that the division of the social sciences into different disciplines is very arbitrary, and you can tell it's arbitrary if you just compare how they're defined differently from one country to the next.



Each national education system and each intellectual tradition has produced a different way, for example, or relating sociology to history, to economics, to anthropology, and to psychology. So you have to develop systematic, conceptual approaches to figuring out how you want to approach interdisciplinarity. You can't be so allergic to it – to interdisciplinarity -- that you don't recognize how crucial it is for fruitful and flourishing ideas. The most flourishing historical sociology, for example, has been done in periods when History and Sociology were relatively equal,

where one discipline wasn't telling the other what to do, and where there was no external agent telling them what to do. I've argued that that was the case in France between the wars, and in Germany during the Weimar Republic, and in France after World War Two. Here we see that in certain periods, History and Sociology are in that kind of harmonious, relatively equal, and relatively autonomous situation. Each national education system and each intellectual tradition has produced a different way, for example, or relating sociology to history, to economics, to anthropology, and to psychology.

So you have to develop systematic, conceptual approaches to figuring out how you want to approach interdisciplinarity. You can't be so allergic to it – to interdisciplinarity -- that you don't recognize how crucial it is for fruitful and flourishing ideas. The most flourishing historical sociology, for example, has been done in periods when History and Sociology were relatively equal, where one discipline wasn't telling the other what to do, and where there was no external agent telling them what to do. I've argued that that was the case in France between the wars, and in Germany during the Weimar Republic, and in France after World War Two. Here we see that in certain periods, History and Sociology are in that kind of harmonious, relatively equal, and relatively autonomous situation.

And then when interdisciplinarity occurs, and you get very exciting projects, like the project on collective memory that Maurice Halbwachs and Marc Bloch developed in interwar France, or the ideas that Bourdieu developed with historians, historians of education, historians of science, in the 80s, producing a kind of a historical field analysis. And so I think interdisciplinarity is key if it takes a form in which sociologists don't think they can just pillage history for facts or tell historians what to do, but to learn from historians and learn, in this case, from the history of science and social science done by intellectual historians.

JM: Absolutely. And would you say there's a relationship between kind of a more interdisciplinary sociology and taking the history of sociological thought more seriously? I'm just thinking about some of course, you mentioned, you know Bourdieu's historical field analysis and collective memory. But I'm thinking in the founding of the field. I mean Capital Volume One. You have British Political Economy, German Hegelianism, and French Utopian Socialism. Can history of social scientific thought teach how to be more interdisciplinary today?

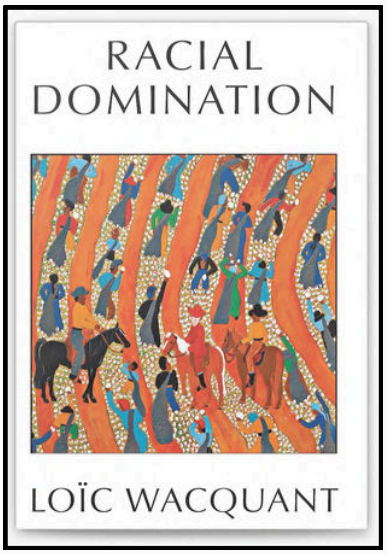
In some capacity. So what I was saying is that we need that interdisciplinary to do the history of sociology, and we need history of sociology to properly do interdisciplinary. Yeah, the history of sociology teaches us that interdisciplinary is the key to most, if not all, innovative work. I think you're correct. I think almost every great thinker we can think about that we claim as a sociologist would fit that. I think it's not just Marx, it's Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Du Bois. The philosophical training, of course, for Marx, Durkheim, and Simmel, and the application of social

Pictured above: W.E.B. Du Bois as photographed by James E. Purdy, 1907

theory to philosophical problems -- the engagement with Kant's first critique by Durkheim in Elementary Forms of Religious Thought, and the exact same Kantian Critique of Pure Reason that is treated sociologically in Bourdieu's Distinction. Weber had no sociological training whatsoever; Nietzsche had none, and yet they became major influences on sociology.

JM: Absolutely, yeah. And then just bringing it a little bit to the younger kind of younger generation today, in this kind of milieu that you've described, what advice do you have for a young scholar wanting to incorporate the study of history and social thought in their research?

Well, I think the history of social thought is crucial for any problem you address, even if you're addressing a problem that seems on the surface, to be remote from the history of social science. Without the history of thought you can't really understand the lay of the land. You can't understand what you could call your scientific prenotions without conducting a historical analysis of the field that you're in. So take, I don't know, almost arbitrarily, take some subfield within sociology like stratification analysis. How can you understand stratification analysis and the way that its own local traditions within our discipline in the United States and elsewhere without understanding all the intellectual conflicts that led to it being defined in that precise way? One of the most interesting illustrations, one of the most obvious but funny illustrations of that is why we even call what we do the "social sciences" instead of the "human sciences," why did we call this "behavioral science" in the 1950s instead of "social science?" All these had to do with political and intellectual contexts leading sociologists to adopt a new language. We need to understand these sorts of issues even to pose a basic sociological problem, to construct a sociological object. If we want to understand race relations in the US, we have to understand what Loic Wacquant and Bourdieu called the imperialism of concepts, the traveling of an American set of concepts, imperialistically to other national contexts. If we want to understand gender relations, we need to understand the gender theories that we're using. Where did they come from, and how and why are we applying these outside of their context of origin? Do they make sense? Or do they need to be adapted? Are these perhaps parochial concepts, linked to a local and perhaps American context that hasn't been brought to light of day?



I think younger scholars would benefit from the fact that in the intervening period, these ideas have become clearer. For example, Loïc Wacquant's text Racial Domination is one that problematizes and historicizes the U.S.-centric and monolithic nature characterizing certain racial theories. The text is a further development of those ideas with Bourdieu in that classic essay on a grander scale. And when you look at Wacquant, he's also someone who you wouldn't really necessarily call a historian of social science. But as a someone trained by Bourdieu, and who understands Bourdieu extremely well, and has developed his ideas, he's always accompanied his own empirical research -- on boxing, on prisons, on poverty in the US -- with a parallel line of research that's epistemological and specifically a critique of

sociology, and often a historicized critique of sociology, as in this work on race concepts. I think that's another way for sociologists, like you yourself, to think and others to think about how this is relevant to them. They can think about it as a kind of a parallel line of research that they carry forward along with their main line of research.

Or they can make this history of sociology their main line of research, and the other becomes, then, a parallel but equally important line of research. For example, working on the history of colonial thought, I have to also be a historian of colonialism. And as a historian of colonialism, working on the history of colonialism, I needed to understand the history of colonial social science and colonial thought, which influenced European colonial empires, especially in the 20th century but also, as I showed in The Devil's Handwriting, in the late 19th century. So the history of thought can't be separated from other social objects. That's why the history of sociology needs to be an intrinsic part of the discipline--it brings reflexivity, and it makes an essential methodological contribution to doing any research.

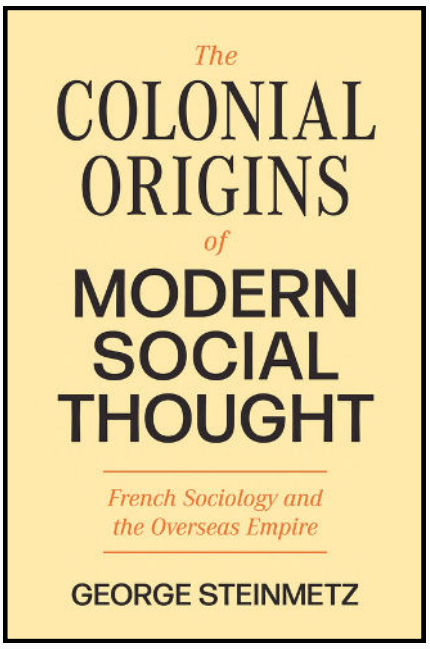
JM: You mentioned work on these different contexts or levels. I also know you're working on a book project. Do you want to say a little bit about that?

I'm in the middle of the second volume of the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought. The first volume was on the French- speaking context of the French Empire and the French world system in the 20th century. And the second is on the British Empire and the British world system, the global British world. And it also focuses on the 20th century, because that's when sociology really becomes a discipline and really begins to influence colonies and to be influenced by colonialism. I think in the late 19th century, that was less the case. I know from my research on late 19th century and colonialism that most social scientists were not listened to by colonial governments. They didn't have a systematic effect, whereas in the post-World War Two period, that was reversed, and even during World War Two, the British colonial office decided, even before World War Two, with Lord Hailey's African Survey, this massive, 1000 page book that was commissioned by the Colonial Office to be written by this former British colonial governor in the Punjab, Hailey, who worked for the colonial office. Hailey pointed out at the end of his book the need for science and social science, in particular, to advise colonial governments on how they would reform in ways that would prepare their populations for independence through economic and political development and enhanced education at all levels.

The idea of Independence was already taken for granted in the late 1930s and early 40s, among British Labour politicians, but also by enlightened conservatives like Hailey. They didn't know when it would happen, but they thought they had to begin preparing for it. And so I'm writing about the ways in which Hailey's African Survey was one of the precursors of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 and then the creation of the Colonial Research Council and the Colonial Social Science Research Council in the early 1940s, especially its Subcommittee on sociology and anthropology, which financed the beginnings of the careers of dozens of students in the social sciences, sending them to universities in the UK to be trained in colonialism, teaching them what colonialism was, how to think about it, and then sending them to Africa or other parts of the colonized Empire on two year studentships or on research fellowships. So the Colonial Office really created the disciplines of sociology and anthropology in this period, and played a large role in economics and psychology as well. Many of the people who occupied the first sociology chairs in Britain, at Cambridge, at Oxford, at Manchester, and elsewhere, were trained, got their first introduction to doing sociology, with these fellowships from the Colonial Research Council.

So I'm reconstructing that set of macro contexts, and I'm then moving into the set of intellectual contexts which include all of the scientific disciplines surrounding sociology, which were very tightly linked to sociology, most importantly social anthropology, because of its attention after World War Two to transformations of Africa, to the necessity of transcending colonialism, and to the importance of analyzing the effects of colonialism on African cultures. All of that was taken up by sociology. And so I'm dealing with those intellectual contexts. And then I'm dealing with a field analysis, an analysis of the field of sociology in formation. And one of the interesting features of that, which I've discovered is very parallel to the French case, is that these colonial specialists were not marginal as a group, or on average. They were not dominant, either. They were spread across the entire discipline.

So there's a sense in which they were integral to the discipline. That's what that demonstrates. Some of them were the leading sociologists at Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, and the University of London and London School of Economics. Some of them became presidents of the British Sociological Association. But others were very marginal, you know, spending their lives, or much of their careers, outside, outside Britain, in African institutions or other overseas institutions. Or they were -- you know, the British financed gigantic research institutions for social science in Jamaica, in Uganda, in Nigeria, in Malaysia, and they had close connections to South African Anglophone sociologists, before and after the 1948 general election in South Africa that allowed the Nationalist Party to begin introducing Apartheid. Both the English and the Afrikaans speaking universities remained part of the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth until 1962 or 1963.

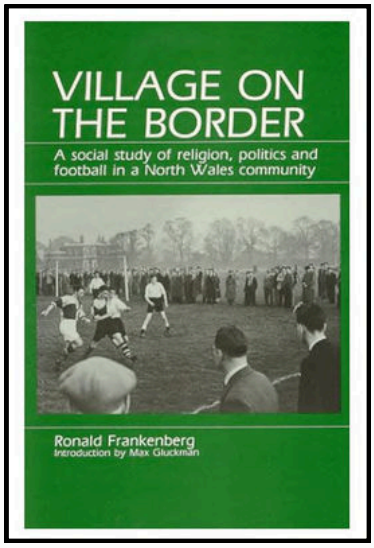


There was a lot of circulation of sociologists between Britain and South Africa in the post-world war two period. English-speaking sociologists, both white and African, circulated to Britain and went to school in Britain. Some social scientists, like the social anthropologist Max Gluckman, were born in South Africa, trained in Britain, started their careers in African, and finally moved into jobs in Britain. A number of British sociologists were born in South Africa. For example, Clyde Mitchell, the first Oxford professor, was born and , received his sociological training in South Africa and further training in Britain. Many of the first African sociologists, sociologists who were born as British colonial subjects, were trained in Britain, and then moved back to African universities. An example is Kofi Busia, the first Chair of the Sociology Department at the University College of Ghana, or the Gold Coast as it was called before decolonization, who went on to become Ghana's second Prime Minister.

So it's a completely global situation, and I think it's fascinating for that reason, and many of the ideas that emerged reflect the ebullience of a part in which the barriers between colonized and European sociologists are breaking down and scholars are interacting across these and other lines.

JM: So these are some of the different levels you were talking about?

These are parallel to the levels I was talking about, yeah. And in the end, you know, some of this sociological production is interesting for its own sake. It's interesting to discover the origins of contemporary ideas that still exist in disciplines. In this case, it's the British sociology discipline, but also in South Africa and Jamaica, where the idea of race relations research exists, which goes back to these Colonial era researchers. Another example is the idea of community studies, which was a British sociological specialty in the 1940s 50s, 60s, you know, the sociological study of an individual community, a city, a small town, a neighborhood, very much like Middletown, but richer, infused with a kind of Gluckman style social anthropological insight into social structure and process. Where did specialty come from? It came from the overseas colonial research, and almost all of those researchers first carried out research in some African colony in a neighborhood or region, and then came back to Britain, and after the British Empire ended in the 60s, began to study British communities. Others first studied British "communities" and then moved out to study communities in the colonies, or in postcolonial Africa.



One example of this is the British colonial sociologist Ronnie Frankenberg. He first studied a village in Wales because he wasn't allowed to go to the Caribbean, because he was thought to be a Communist Party member.

And then finally, after decolonization, he was able to go to Africa, and he went to Zambia for research. He then published Custom and Conflict in British Society (1982), which was an homage to Gluckman's earlier book Custom and Conflict in Africa from 1956, calling attention to the continuities between the two bodies of work, inside and outside Britain, including the ways in which an "imperial gaze" was cast not over the colonies by these thinkers but over Britain itself, reversing the colonial order of things, much like the Collège de sociologie in the interwar years in France. If you look at industrial sociology, it's the same thing. British industrial sociology came out of copper mine research in Northern Rhodesia, and studies like that, studies like the one that Michael Burawoy did for his first book on the managers in the copper mines in northern Rhodesia, or rather Zambia by the time he got there.

This was connected to innovative industrial sociological work in Manchester by people like Tom Lupton. Or there was research on the forms of psychopathology caused by anxiety – for example, the research on the rise of witchcraft accusations in Northern Rhodesia by the South African born sociologist Max Marwick, who ended up at Stirling University's Sociology Department in Scotland. There's a number of different lines of research where you can't really understand how these came to be British, defining a specifically British sociology, at least in the 60s, without going back to the colonial era. But of course, many of these sub-forms of sociology did disappear. The community study disappeared as a British specialty.

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So it's also a story of, you know, strands of sociology that are worth picking up again, which is another goal of the history of sociology that I really haven't mentioned. There are certain authors, texts and traditions that really were valuable and that have been forgotten, not because they lost some great scientific adjudication battle and were weaker and had to be dismissed, but because of other reasons.

You know, there was a sense of British science and culture reinventing itself, and Britain becoming a strong nation again after World War Two. But by the late 60s, it was clear that Americanization had eventually become one of several important influences on British sociology. You can't say that Americanization was the main trend, but it became increasingly important. Marxism also became increasingly important in British sociology over the course of the 1960s and 1970s and it did not engage much with colonialism or the rest of the world but was generally highly abstract. In France there was more systematic resistance to scientific Americanization, but there's a lot more of it nowadays than there was when the Empire was still there. That's not a defense of the Empire, but it's important to see that the colonial empires were a different way of organizing geopolitical space at the global level than the simple model of American hegemony, and that these late colonial empires were largely a different kind of empire than the evil empires of the distant past or even the 19th century. Colonialism is not a single entity.

You can't talk about colonialism in general, or even about homogenous subtypes of colonialism. There was the Palestine Mandate, the Aden protectorate, the colonial empire proper, India, the Sudan, and various protectorates and mandatory governments. The League of Nations protectorates had a different legal framework governing them than the formal colonial empire. And there was the British Commonwealth. The British Raj in India had a different office in Britain governing it than the Colonial Office. Sudan had a different office as well. So there were different British colonial officials, different laws, different traditions in each case, and in each period. You have to be very careful about that.

JM: This all seems to me to relate to the Loïc Wacquant discussion of the different concepts of race or racial domination, for example, like the book is titled "Racial Domination" because there is no such single thing as racial domination. He breaks down all the different kinds of types in different contexts, and it seems like subtypes from colonialism, there's a parallel there. You can't just talk about colonialism as such, and need to be more specific to context and time.

You can't even just break it down into two types. They're really multiple forms, and we have to acknowledge that colonialism is an abstraction, a very broad ideal type. It's a social scientific concept or a political concept.. The British colonial empire, it called itself colonial, but the officials and intellectuals at the time usually refer to colonization, not colonialism; that was an epithet.

Pictured above: 1885 cartoon by Thomas Nast

JM: The emphasis on different forms of reflexivity, more specificity with concepts, and the refusal to be satisfied with American importations is very interesting, and that might be an effective way of curbing the attacks of sociology's Eurocentric nature, as well as help sociology be less Eurocentric. On the other hand, responding to attacks of sociology not being a science and not being rigorous, I see potential because we are looking at real texts and real people and real events that happened and building, I mean, like you were talking about in your presentation at ASA, you can be right and you can be wrong. I'm curious on your thoughts about this.

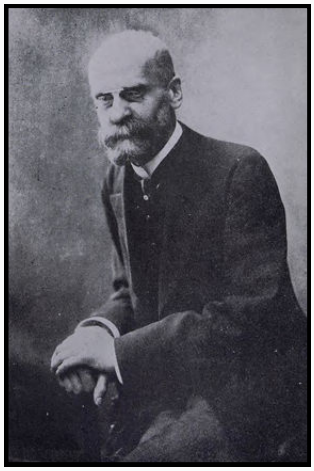
That's a very interesting way of putting it, because what you're pointing out is a parallel between the two sets of attacks. And I think, with respect to what we've been talking about, that is spot on, that on the one hand, there's a critique of sociology as being mired in or buttressing of colonialism or mired in racism or mired in sexism.

And some of those critiques, most of those, I mean, framed in that broad, sweeping way, you can generally respond to those with empirical evidence, showing that they are partly correct but also showing where, and in which parts, showing that it is really not the totality of sociology. The empirical evidence in this case is textual, and most people agree on the recognition of words and the definition of many words, so there's not going to be a whole lot of disagreement if you point these words and texts out to them.

Durkheim is another interesting case. His book reviews are crucial and tell us that he really was building his sociological project to position sociology vis a vis a number of other disciplines, you have to read those reviews. If you read those, you find that when he's reviewing colonial ethnographies for the book reviews, he does deal with the colonial context, and he's very condemning of colonialism in all of those cases, when he's dealing with ethnographies in the The Elementary Forms of Religious Life or in The Division of Labor, he usually doesn't talk about the colonial context of primary source material or the secondary source material.

He's using these ethnographies because he's deploying them to other ends. He's deploying them to show that "primitive religious," or so-called primitive ones, at the time, were the origins of contemporary religious thought in highly developed or highly industrialized societies. And to do that, he doesn't need to say, "actually, when these anthropologists were studying Northern Africa and Morocco, they were studying a society that was under French rule." I mean, that's not really relevant for this point. I think we have to respect the intellectual project and the high level of coherence of that project.

Durkheim's work on Anomie is also extremely powerful. In his lectures on Moral Education he actually does talk about colonialism and analyzes the colonial situation as one in which it's a stronger form of anomie or anomic disorganization, even than in contemporary industrial France, insofar as the colonizer, he suggests, is not really subject to any moral conditioning or moral control at all.



Pictured above: undated photograph of Émile Durkheim, found in edited volume by Kurt H. Wolff (1960)

The third example that I mentioned in my paper for the ASA and my 2024 article in Modern Intellectual History, but I didn't have time to develop, was the example of the German social scientist, Richard Thurnwald. I guess I had done to him what some of the self-appointed decolonizing sociologists have tried to do to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. I did this because I was able to find the documents in which he committed himself to the Nazi project or at least offered his services to the heart of a forced labor in Nazi Germany at the time, to the armaments Ministry at the key point of the war. And I published those documents, and I thought I was a little less generous to some of his thinking leading up to that. An Austrian reviewer of my work on Thurnwald said that my logic was overly implacable, and if you approach things with that level of implacability, you also create new blind spots alongside the ones you are pointing out. Incidentally, I think Thurnwald knew exactly what he was doing because I've read his personal correspondence, and his wife said, you know in the margins of his paper, this is, blood and soil – Blut und Boden -- language.

They knew exactly what they were doing. They were opportunistic.

But, you know, I went back and looked at his early anthropology in New Guinea, I found that he was actually extremely innovative in some ways, and you could say that he's doing exactly what post colonial sociology thinks sociologists should be doing, which is showing the resistance of the colonized, showing their -- and it's super interesting, because he's showing their resistance within their drawings, showing how they're describing violence against themselves by the colonized. And so I think he may be the first professional social scientist who ever reproduced those kinds of drawings and discussed them. And so, I think he deserves credit for that as well. And you know, we shouldn't put ourselves, we shouldn't position ourselves as these moral judges who get to decide the fate of past thinkers. I mean, Thurnwald was Nazi-like (though not a Nazi Party member), but it's not you and I who are going to be able to condemn him at Nuremberg. He's already dead. We need to discuss these writers, including others like Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger and Paul De Man who were fascists but also are seen by some as useful thinkers in the present, and figure out how we should deal with their political repugnancy. I think the other thing Thurnwald's case shows is that scholars lives' are often extremely varied and heterogeneous, and there's a lot of transformations. And people can change directions—becoming worse, politically, more fascist, less liberal, less tolerant, less intelligent, but they can also change in the opposite direction, as in the case of Edward Ross, the sociologist who helped found the American Sociological Society, who was very anti-Chinese at the beginning, but then went to China, changed his views and supported Asian, as he put it, Asian revolution against Europe, and wrote a report on forced labor for the League of Nations, showing how Portugal was using forced labor in Africa. How much more interesting can you get than those kinds of changes?

Pictured above: "Thurnwald and his companions during a trip into the interior of Kaiser Wihelmsland" (German New Guinea)
Source

The history of sociology allows us to understand ourselves, but also our discipline, and also human beings in general, to understand how they manipulate and respond to the structures of constraint and possibility. It's easier for us to study intellectuals than social movements, because we can study almost every move that an intellectual makes, showing how they explore certain openings in ideology and ignore others. You know, for the Florida case [the abolition of sociology teaching, discussed at the ASA in our panel on values and sociology], this would be super important. The appropriate response to the political critique of sociology is to show that sociology is capable of offering a rational, empirical, and analytic analysis, you could even say, a scientific approach to the social.

Empirical accuracy is the bottom line, the common denominator for sociology, unless it's purely theoretical.

JM: Even when it's purely theoretical, you have to look at the words that people said, as you mentioned.

Exactly, so that you have an empirical grounding. If you're a Hegel critic, you need to actually read what Hegel said. If you're a Kant critic, you have to read what Kant developed in his last 20 years, and not focus only what he said in the first 20 years, which is where you can find him saying some things that you might disagree with much more strongly than the things in the final 20 years. And with Hegel, you might find things you agree with in the first 20 years, whereas in the last 20 years -- that's Susan Buck-Morris's argument, although I think it's a little simplified -- Hegel became worse, at least politically, as he got older.

JM: I also think the notion of autonomy is very important. And that's something you've talked about at some length.

Autonomy is crucial for intellectuals and academics. Autonomy is also crucial in the arts, as you have seen, since you've been writing about music, but also in the sciences, and in the debate about epistemology. And one of the really interesting things is that each subfield of theory has a debate about autonomy. In the field of Marxism, for example, you have, on the one hand, Georg Lukàcs, who really invents standpoint epistemology, but you also have Berthold Brecht, who invents a form of theater in which the entire aim of theater is to alienate people from their spontaneous notions and to give them an analytic, autonomous view of the events that are being described on the stage. And also to put a distance between, you know, the kinds of characters and the actors' personae, or the appearances of the actor, to create all kinds of dissonances, so that people become estranged from their own ideology --and that's an autonomous position. Adorno also has an autonomy position. So these debates on autonomy work their way through all of the social sciences, and all of the aesthetic fields. It's a huge discussion. I think we should have a whole panel on this notion of autonomy in the history of sociology section, both because it's poorly understood and because it is so central to intellectual innovation and scientific flourishing. The origins of the idea of autonomy, like the notion of critique, are poorly understood, as are the different ways autonomy works in different realms.

The history of sociology section, for reasons I've already, I guess, talked about, has intrinsic relations to historical sociology, because it's inherently historical. I think it also has inherent connections to theory, because it's about theory, and it's called the history of sociology and social thought section. It also has intrinsic connections to sections like culture, which is why I think Lisa McCormick as the current section chair wants to co-sponsor one of the panels with culture, because it's obviously about cultural phenomena. It's about the cultural field, the field of sociology is located in the cultural field.

The scientific field is also located in the broader cultural field. And our section is close to transnational sociology, because of the fact that intellectual life isn't limited to the boundaries of the nation state container. I mean, the nation state context is important, but it's always crucial to theorize exactly how it's important.

I think that's why the connection to the transnational section would be important, the global and transnational section. But I also think, you know, there's nothing preventing us from connecting to sections on methods. Quantitative methods such as network analysis and correspondence analysis, have made very important contributions to the history of science and the history of social science. We shouldn't wall ourselves off. The quantitative vs. qualitative divide is orthogonal to the divide between those who think the history of sociology is important and those who don't, just as it is orthogonal to politics.

I think that the Social Sciences in the Looking Glass volume is an interesting illustration, because when I organized a yearlong seminar at the Institute for Advanced Study on the history of the social sciences, we put out the call for applicants. And you had to have your PhD, but other than that you could be at any level whatsoever. You could be from anywhere in the world. And what's really amazing is how few Americans there were. There's lots of space for US-based sociologists to be doing this work as well.

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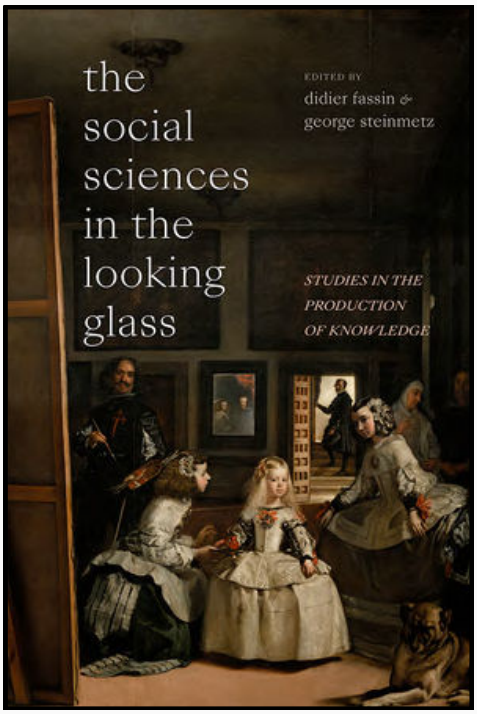

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Thank you for reading!

Interested in contributing to the next issue of Timelines?

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