

NEWSLETTER OF THE
Comparative & Historical SOCIOLOGY
SECTION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Fall, 1994

Vol. 7: No. 1

Criticism, Hypercriticism:

**Zaret responds
to Antonio**
See page 3

**Gorski Receives
Best Paper Award**

The winner of this year's Comparative-Historical section Paper prize is: "The Protestant Ethic Revisited: Disciplinary Revolution and State Formation in Holland and Prussia," by Philip S. Gorski, published in 1993 in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Gorski's paper is a creative analysis of state formation in
(please turn to page 6)

**Babb, Kaelber Split
Grad Paper Prize**

The Comparative Historical Sociology Section held its first "Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper" this year. Graduate student papers in historical/comparative sociology written in the last two years qualified for the competition. The selection committee consisted of Nicki Beisel [Northwestern University], Lis Clemens [University of Arizona],
(please turn to page 6)

Responses? Comments?

To comment about articles or issues of the Section, please write to the editors. See page 2 for details.

Issues in Sociohistorical Inquiry:

**Rethinking Politics: The Case of
Progressive-Era Education**

Pamela Barnhouse Walters
Indiana University

The conventional definition of politics—voting and actions of formal government institutions—is inadequate for understanding the influence wielded over social policy formation by groups formally outside the polity. Sociologists and historians studying women in American politics in the period prior to suffrage, for example, have argued that politics must be thought of in broader terms, as "any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community" (Baker 1984, p. 622). This burgeoning literature has given us a new appreciation of the innovative means women used to influence social policy, especially welfare policy, prior to suffrage (e.g., Clemens 1993; Gordon 1990; Koven and Michel 1993; Muncy 1991; Orloff 1993; Skocpol 1992).

My purpose here is to use my preliminary research on American school reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to comment on the question of what constitutes politics and political action. I identify four main ways in which the understanding of politics offered by the scholars noted above must be further broadened. First, women were not the only group formally outside the polity that exerted important influences over

social policy formation. Second, much of the literature has focused on national policy formation, whereas many important policy developments occurred (and remained) at state and local levels. Public education was one of the most important outputs of (state and local) government, even though federal involvement was minimal prior to the 1960s (James and Walters 1990). Third, the literature pays insufficient attention to a bottom-up strategy used by some groups outside the polity for affecting social policy: first change educational practices. Fourth, scholars have failed to appreciate the mingling of public and private funding and initiatives that was the basis of policy reform in the public sector. That is, the line between the public and private was fuzzy at best.

Education was a politically contested institution during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the extant scholarship on education gives us an incomplete picture of school politics. Much of it focuses on the Northeast and urban Midwest, where non-elites—the urban working class—had the vote and with it access to formal political channels (e.g., Katz 1968; Katznelson and Weir 1985;

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FUTURE PUBLICATION DEADLINES:

Winter: December 1, 1994

Spring: March 15, 1994

News of the Section**Council, Business Meeting in L.A.**

The Historical/Comparative Sociology Council meeting and annual business meeting took up various topics at the 1994 ASA meeting in Los Angeles.

MEMBERSHIP: A decision was made to push to increase section membership from the present 544 to 600, at which level the section will get another session at the annual meetings. Jeremy Hein [Sociology, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004] suggested that roundtables might be used to increase membership. At the business meeting, it was decided that he would chair the membership committee. Other committee members include Mansoor Moaddel [Sociology, Eastern Michigan University], Victor Roudometof [Sociology, University of Pittsburgh], and Brian Gran [Sociology, Northwestern University]. **1995 SESSIONS:** The options discussed for the section's session included: 1. Gender, 2. Political economy and culture, 3. Analytic strategies and methods, and 4. roundtables. At the business meeting, Carol Tubin expressed interest in organizing a session on feminist methodology and historical sociology. Some discussion also was given to having roundtables organized in advance by individuals who

know of other people doing research in similar areas. Individuals interested in the 1995 section sessions and roundtables should contact the section chair, Ann Orloff [Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706], or consult ASA Footnotes for final topics and details about submissions.

NEWSLETTER EDITORSHIP: John Hall announced that the section needs to find a replacement for him as newsletter editor. We thank John for the great job he has done with the newsletter, especially his efforts at successfully soliciting short articles from colleagues that address important controversies and debates in comparative and historical sociology. Individuals interested in serving as editor should contact the section chair, Ann Orloff [Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706].

SECTION AWARDS NAMED: At the business meeting, the section decided to name its annual research awards. The best article award will be called the Barrington Moore Award, and the graduate student paper / article award will be the Reinhard Bendix Award.

—Harland Prechel

Section Secretary

Texas A&M University

Historical Methods Special Issue on Historical Sociology

Guest Editor Larry Isaac announces that *Historical Methods*, a journal of quantitative and interdisciplinary history, will publish a special issue in 1996 featuring research in historical sociology. The guest editor solicits research-based empirical contributions that demonstrate the theoretical and methodological diversity, novelty, utility, and aesthetic that historical sociologists have brought to a wide variety of substantive areas. **PROCEDURES:** Authors are encouraged to send papers or to contact the guest edi-

tor, in writing, to discuss the suitability of their proposed projects as soon as possible. Papers should be no longer than 40 pages inclusive of notes, tables, appendices, and references. The deadline for preliminary consideration is August 1, 1995. Send papers or proposals for papers to: Larry Isaac, Guest Editor, *Historical Methods*, Department of Sociology, 536 Bellamy Building, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2011. Phone 904-644-3067; 904-644-6416 [messages]. Fax: 904-644-6208. Email: lisaac@garnet.acns.fsu.edu

Ogburn or Lynd? A Response to Robert Antonio

David Zaret
Indiana University

Editors' note: at our invitation, David Zaret prepared the following rejoinder to the article written by Robert Antonio ("Are we critical enough?"). We invite readers interested in addressing these or other issues to contact the newsletter. See page 2 for details.

Two principal conclusions emerge from Robert Antonio's thoughtful and, to my mind, rather gentle response (in vol. 6 #4) to my deliberately provocative comments, "Historical Sociology and Hypercritical Theory" (in vol. 6 #3). First, the response is not sufficiently confrontational; as he notes, "we both embrace a similar type of historicism", and this may explain why the exchange does not amount to a confrontation of sharply divergent views.

Second, where we do most evidently disagree, we reiterate terms of an old conflict in American sociology, nearly identical to the celebrated one between Robert Lynd and William Ogburn. This thought occurred when I read the following line in Antonio's defense of hypercritical theory: "Are we producing knowledge worth knowing?" (p. 4) Of course, this is the same question posed by Lynd, half a century ago, in *Knowledge For What?* Like Lynd, Antonio wants sociology to accommodate modes of scholarship whose avowedly speculative and ideological qualities put them at odds with more empirically oriented work. The response to my principal criticism of postmodernism and critical theory—that they rely on models of communicative change that command little support from empirical, historical considerations—is that these theories "deserve to be a serious topic of inquiry, regardless of questions about the validity of their empirical and normative claims" (p. 3).

I take this to be the principal line of defense for hypercritical theorizing, and it is justified by points made elsewhere about the pressing nature of problems in the social world—these provide the ethical imperative to engage in ideologically-committed modes of scholarship, with the goal of social amelioration. "What kind of visions of society and global conditions are visible when we scan the mainstream journals?" asks Antonio.

This was the question asked by Lynd, who objected to repeated pronouncements by Ogburn on desirable future directions for sociology. Typically, Ogburn's 1930 Presidential address denounced what he called "intellectualism" and argued that "sociology as a science is not interested in making the world a better place in which to live". Among his predictions of what a "scientific" sociology would look like, Ogburn

envisioned a disciplinary accretion of knowledge that involved "the writing of wholly colorless articles" (Ogburn 1930, pp. 2-3). Lynd's response called for subordination of an empirical discipline to a problem-oriented approach to scholarship, "a change in emphasis from disciplines to problems", in which amelioration is the bottom line. "Social science will stand or fall on the basis of its serviceability to men as they struggle to live" (pp. 174, 177). Antonio follows the path of Lynd and argues that disciplinary blinders have led sociologists to neglect hypercritical theories and refrain from pursuing speculative modes of cultural criticism and ideologically-driven critiques of the political economy.

This is a long way from the main issue raised in my piece, but it is the principal point at which the response engages my argument. Constraints of space preclude me from doing much more than describing this issue. For adjudicating the issue, I suggest that readers ignore Ogburn's intellectual philistinism and consider the fact that sociology has largely followed the disciplinary course charted by Ogburn, yet today it routinely entertains the "outrageous hypotheses" called for by Lynd. Criticism of vested interests and prevailing wisdoms is a valued, rewarded task pursued in all directions, under a variety of theoretical names. Lynd would be mightily pleased by contemporary sociology, but puzzled about how we got here. Hence, it may well be the case that Ogburn's disciplinary approach is more ethically compelling than might initially appear to be the case. And Lynd's invocation of current social problems to justify an ideologically-driven mode of inquiry may, in spite of its conspicuous concern with ethically-good outcomes, lead to precisely opposite outcomes.

So the issue for me, and I hope most sociologists, will turn on the empirical adequacy of critical theory and postmodernism. They may, indeed, have "large interdisciplinary audiences" and be "embraced by many nonacademics" (p. 3) and rooted in the social problems alluded to in Robert Antonio's remarks. While I agree that sociologists should not ignore these larger intellectual developments in our culture (and hence can join Antonio on this point), we diverge on how we should relate to these developments. ■

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William F. Ogburn, "The Folkways of a Scientific Sociology," *Publications of the American Sociological Society* 24 (1930).

Progressive-Era *(cont. from page 1)*

Tyack 1974; Wrigley 1982). In the South, in contrast, virtually all African-Americans and large numbers of poor whites lost the franchise by the turn of the century. But African-Americans, in particular, did not abandon their attempts to affect educational policy, and both their political strategies and their organizational means of political mobilization tell us much about the nature of politics among groups outside the polity.

African-Americans were enthusiastic participants in formal school politics from emancipation to disfranchisement, when they effectively used "normal" political channels to shape educational policy. In the 1880s, for example, they successfully pressed school boards to staff black schools with black teachers (Rabinowitz 1974). Even after disfranchisement, they were sometimes able to work conventional politics to their advantage, as was the case in Atlanta where the few remaining black voters were able to trade votes in close municipal elections for promises for new or improved schools for African-Americans (Plank and Turner 1987; Rouse 1991).

After disfranchisement, African-Americans turned to private initiatives to combat their inability to influence public-school policies through conventional political means. The black church provided the key organizational means for affecting education <1>, but white denominations were important as well. Southern school boards, for example, almost completely denied African-Americans the opportunity to attend public high schools until well into the 1920s, but before then churches—some southern black denominations and a range of northern white denominations—built and operated dozens of private black high schools (see Jones 1917). Women's auxiliaries of southern black and white denominations undertook important efforts to improve black public schools and to fund black private schools (McDowell 1982; Higginbotham 1993).

Philanthropic organizations—mostly northern-based—provided another important means by which private funding affected educational policy. The Rosenwald Fund, for example, supported the construction of rural schoolhouses for African-Americans in the South in the early twentieth century. Rosenwald provided half of the funds, and in most cases the black community privately raised the other half (Anderson 1988). Once constructed, however, the schools became part of the public system (also see Dabney 1936). Rosenwald, as a northern organization, had no formal political standing in the southern states in which it was trying to influence educational policy. So rather than try to directly affect political decisions about education (the "normal" way of doing politics), Rosenwald set about changing educational practice in one community after

another. The result was to vastly increase the number of schools available to African-Americans in the South—their policy objective. In the broader definition of politics advocated by Baker and others (of affecting social policy), Rosenwald's actions were clearly "political," even though they were private.

Church efforts to build private schools for African-Americans in the face of school-board hostility can also be understood as a means of affecting educational policy. Those without formal political voice can under some circumstances "vote with their feet" and flee the public sector altogether (as Catholics outside the South did in massive numbers). Private black schools affected public educational policy in another manner, however. When southern school boards started to extend public secondary opportunities to African-Americans in the 1920s, they often took over formerly private black high schools. The infrastructure for public high school education for African-Americans in the South, then, depended on the earlier efforts within the private sector, mostly undertaken by black and white churches.

As a few historians of education have pointed out (Reese 1985; Link 1986; Raftery 1992), women and women's groups throughout the country undertook important efforts to improve education and expand educational services during the Progressive Era. As welfare-state scholars have similarly found, despite their lack of the franchise women often attempted to influence policy-makers' decisions about education through means such as lobbying, letter-writing campaigns, and informal means of personal influence. Nonetheless, women did not present themselves as "political" actors: In addition to their lack of the vote, their actions were circumscribed by prevailing cultural norms about the inappropriateness of women in the public sphere. In order to be politically efficacious, women had to present themselves as non-political.

Some of women's educational activities cause a rethinking of even the expanded version of politics offered in the welfare-state literature. Like churches involved in improving education for African-Americans, women's groups throughout the country often raised money privately to improve education or institute new educational services in one school and community after another. Black and white women's clubs, for example, worked to build playgrounds, start kindergarten and school-lunch programs, introduce various vocational classes, and provide medical services (Scott 1991). After the women privately created the infrastructure for these programs and /or demonstrated their viability, they often successfully pressed school boards to adopt the initiatives as educational policy. They probably deserve the credit for the policy innovation of incorporating kindergarten within the public sector, for example. The important point for my pur-

poses is that they employed a bottom-up means of affecting educational policy. Change practice first, then change policy. It is one important strategy available for those who were denied formal channels of political influence but who could marshal private resources.

These examples do not exhaust the groups involved in school reform nor the strategies they used to affect educational policy, but I hope that these illustrations have shown the usefulness of comparing the political strategies used by groups with and without access to formal political channels to gain a fuller understanding of social policy development and reform.

FOOTNOTES

1. Poor southern whites were conspicuously absent from the politics of education once the Populist movement was defeated, even when one defines politics broadly. I believe that the explanation for this rests in large part on the absence of formal organizations that could express poor whites' political interests (see Walters 1994).

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Prize to Gorski (from page 1)

early modern Europe that looks beyond political and administrative developments to consider "disciplinary revolutions". These were driven primarily by ascetic religious movements, particularly Calvinism, and promoted discipline at the individual, institutional and social levels. By comparing several cases, Gorski shows the important contribution made by disciplinary revolutions to state formation.

The committee also awarded an honorable mention to Margaret Somers for "Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere: Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy," published in the *American Sociological Review* in 1993. She uses regional comparisons within England to draw out the importance of law, community and political culture for the development of rights of citizenship. Her theoretically sophisticated argument goes beyond the traditional emphasis on capitalism and citizenship to illuminate the latter as a process rather than a status.

The awards committee consisted of Bruce G. Carruthers (Chair), Said Arjomand, and Judith Stepan-Norris. ■

Progressive Era (from page 5)

School Reform: Grassroots Movements During the Progressive Era. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

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Babb, Kaelber Win Award (from page 1)

and Fatma Muge Gocek, chair. [University of Michigan]. After reading through a good number of submissions including many papers of very high quality, the committee decided to split the prize between the top two contenders. The Best Graduate Student Paper co-winners are Sarah Babb of Northwestern University, for her paper entitled "A true American system of finance: ideology, rhetoric and resonance in the U.S. Labor movement, 1866-1878," and Lutz F. Kaelber of Indiana University, for his paper entitled "Was there a Protestant ethic before Protestantism? Inner- and outer-worldly asceticism in medieval Waldensianism." The

committee found Mr. Kaelber's paper "Exceptionally sophisticated in its dialogue with theory and use of sources," and Ms. Babb's paper "very well grounded in empirical data as well as theoretically well articulated."

The committee and I would like to congratulate Ms. Babb and Mr. Kaelber for the accomplishment, and their advisors, respectively, Bruce Carruthers and David Zaret, for their excellent guidance. I would also like to thank Nicki Beisel and Lis Clemens once more for agreeing to serve on the committee, for providing astute insights into all the papers, and for making the whole selection process a pleasure.

-Fatma Muge Gocek
University of Michigan

Historical and Comparative Sociology, ASA Section (22) Membership Form

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