



## Editor's Introduction: "Politics, Method and History"

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In this issue we present a set of five provocative papers that range widely across a series of issues, both contemporary and historical, including some that remain controversial or "hot button" topics. Two articles in particular present critiques of attitudes and practices in sociology, but always in a spirit of civility and responsible self-reflection. Indeed, even as these critics raise concerns about the negative effects on the field, and especially on empirical sociological research, of political and ideological commitments, they confess their own liberal and "progressive" inclinations. In this way they uphold the ideal of "the ethos of science" that has always been, and remains, a hallmark of this journal.

Mark Horowitz, Anthony Haynor and Kenneth Kickham present an empirical analysis of the attitudes of contemporary sociologists in the United States toward three controversial issues, namely, black urban poverty, gendered occupations and immigration. Using data from a survey they designed and administered, the authors seek to examine the extent to which the personal values and orientations of sociologists determine their treatment of these issues, including the framing of questions and the openness to consider alternative explanatory possibilities. The authors do not pass judgment on the political perspectives involved, but try, instead, to illumine their effects on actual practice. They conclude that the field might be profitably understood as an "emotive community," and that the work of Jonathan Haidt and others on "moral foundations theory" might further illumine the contemporary relationship of politics and social science.

Musa Gharbi raises the related question of whether the explicit or implicit ideological and political commitments of social scientists may have influenced—and undermined—research about the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Gharbi is especially concerned with the possibility that a determination to read and understand events in terms of racism, especially as harbored by white male voters, might have had the unintended consequence of foreclosing other, more adequate explanations. The author critically examines three racism-based accounts of the 2016 election, while

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emphasizing that these interpretations are “by scholars I respect and even admire.” The overarching issue for Gharbi is the danger that a reliance on incomplete and inadequate explanations will damage the field of sociology by reducing its credibility and by tending to confirm widespread beliefs that sociologists are mostly propagandists on the political left. If progressives (with whom the author seems to identify) are to achieve political goals, they must do so by upholding the highest “methodological, evidentiary and disciplinary standards,” so that research designs, data collection and data analysis are grounded in facts—however unpalatable—rather than prescriptive formulas, however appealing.

Christian Daye addresses the present situation of the often maligned or neglected subfield of the history of sociology, in order to consider its value and uses. The author identifies four fundamental ways in which sociology’s history is, or might be, useful, namely, as a resource in identity politics, as a pedagogical resource, as a resource in research and theory building, and as a resource for broader reflections on the current state and prospects of the field. Drawing upon the thought of Gaston Bachelard (who influenced both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu), Daye then proceeds to consider the intertwined issues of historical epistemology and the normative historiography of science.

Lonnie Athens next advocates a revised reading of the thought of Robert Park, as framed by what Athens terms “radical interactionism.” In the author’s view, Park’s writings on the human habitat, though “incomplete and in disarray,” are worthy of far more scholarly attention than they have thus far received, especially since they are rich with implications for the possible emergence of a “world society.” Explicitly rejecting the view that Park neglected issues of power, Athens argues that the key idea in Park’s treatment of human “habitats” was actually that of domination, in other words, of individuals or groups taking initiative and command (whether justly or unjustly, in the light of contemporary values) of activity. The author concludes that re-reading Park as a radical interactionist, for whom social control was an overarching dynamic, would enliven discussion of his contributions and inform current debates over Park’s significance in the field.

Tamsyn Gilbert, finally, addresses the emergent contemporary phenomenon of “digitally mediated lives,” with an eye toward the creation of a new digital methodology within the field of sociology. The author sketches recent professional literature, with particular emphasis on the production of new, virtual boundaries, as well as new arrangements of social power in distributed networks, the construction of digital infrastructures and the egalitarian or non-egalitarian implications of networked societies. Gilbert has a particular interest in the sociology of art, and advocates for the development of a “digital visual methodology” based on social narratives, as well as tools, techniques and display, in order to illumine the changing character of artistic phenomena.