

THE PROMISE OF FREE INQUIRY IN CREATIVE SOCIOLOGY

Donald E Allen, Editor, 1978-1984

Status Quo 1978: Of some 60 sociology periodicals published when I assumed editorship, none served the lay reader. All tended to be conservative, traditional, and highly selective. Some took pride in rejection rates as high as 90 percent. If any of several reviewers faulted a paper, it was readily rejected. Restrictive and rejective editorial practices generated uniformity of content and approach. Articles were remarkably similar both within and between journals. Small new journals strove to duplicate the model created by established journals.

Tradition vs Discovery. Nascent sciences like sociology cannot thrive under the restraint of traditionalism. Part of sociology's problem is the fear of daring to innovate or to work in ways which might violate established perspectives. The history of the influential sciences is replete with courageous ventures in theory, technology, and experimentation. The only well-recognized venturesome thing in sociology in the past half-century is Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma*. American society still feels the aftershocks of this eminently serviceable piece of social science.

FICS Ecological Niche. I thought that the sociology profession needed a channel to the lay reader with potential interest in our ideas, methods, findings, and analyses. It appeared that most articles could benefit from editorial compression, and that a journal issue could serve much better with a large selection of varied articles where the lay reader would more likely find something of direct interest. Finally, the term *journal*, from French *jour* for "day" originally meant a *daily* record of events and actions, as with the *Wall Street Journal*, and was later applied to other periodicals. A journal offers a record of contemporary thought and action, which means that a science journal can be rather generous and prompt in what it publishes, while not squandering time or space on vacuous and nonsensical materials. Above all, it should disseminate new ideas, theories, methods, and data, and new challenges in sociology.

The Sociology Consortium. In December 1978, the sociology department heads of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Central State,

and Tulsa Universities formed the Sociology Consortium and pooled slender resources to support about 60 percent of the printing costs for a slick journal edited according to these principles. Remaining costs were to be met by subscriptions, manuscript fees, reprint sales, and other sources which the Editor might generate. They constituted the Governing Board of the Consortium, and specified that subscription charges must be the same to all, regardless of income or endowments. The publication name was shortened from *Free Inquiry: A Journal of Sociological Expression* to the present title. I instructed reviewers on the purpose and standards of the Journal, and invited papers from sociologists of all brands from all lands. After five years, the Consortium support share dropped to 25 percent. The rejection rate is 30 percent, and 232 articles have been published. University library subscriptions have increased from 8 to 118, including some of the world's most prestigious. It is planned to invite other schools to join the Sociology Consortium at an annual inflation-adjusted \$100 fee of 1983 dollars, with membership on the Governing Board and participation in editing services. It is also planned to rotate the editorship every few years, as determined by the Governing Board. For the sponsoring school the cost is quarter time for the editor plus quarter time secretarial support. A word processor is useful. The challenge is truly invigorating!

Author Reactions. A few authors feel bruised when papers are reduced by 25 percent in the editorial compression process. But more authors are grateful for the improvement in readability and suitability for publishing. Many authors with novel or unusual data and materials are very grateful to find a publishing outlet. Others are encouraged to seek publication when they see the wide range of materials appearing in FREE INQUIRY in CREATIVE SOCIOLOGY. FICS articles in the criminology and penology field are sought by the U.S. Department of Justice. Some have been useful to United States Congressmen. Many are used by undergraduate sociology majors. The lay market exists! We must recognize its considerable potential for sociology.