

# States, Power, and Societies

**POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY SECTION**  
**American Sociological Association**

## In this Issue

<b>Symposium on Public Sociology</b>	1
<b>Comments from the Section Chair</b>	2
<b>Graduate Horizons</b>	9
<b>Book Abstracts</b>	10
<b>Article Abstracts</b>	11
<b>Announcements</b>	11
<b>ASA Meeting Schedule</b>	12

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Department of Sociology  
University of Arizona

## Symposium: From Public Sociology to Real Utopias?

**Knowledge for what?** Our contributors moved beyond the walls of the university and exercised their “sociology in public”. We often look to the developing world (Porto Alegre again) for insights on how sociological knowledge can contribute to the construction of successful and long lasting participatory democracy and development projects. Our contributors practiced their “public sociology” in the US. Cornell works with U.S.

Indian tribes and Ross with politicians and social movements. They reflect on project challenges and the professional perils of public sociology. Will public sociologists be the visionaries and designers for “real utopias”? See ASA President-elect Erik Olin Wright’s answer and read the praise for his new book. **Which knowledge?** John Stephens illustrates the importance of fundamental arithmetic in formulating policies of income redistribution.—KCS

## Sociology in Public

Robert J. S. Ross  
Clark University

I. Image from the past: Mid 1980s. I was interviewing for a job for a joint position in an R-1 Sociology Department and the undergraduate experimental college that nestles within the larger University. The Sociology Chair, with whom I had a prior and cordial professional relationship, is looking over my CV and publications. He comes upon three items listed as policy briefs. I explain that I

wrote these in my role as policy adviser and speech writer for a candidate for Lt. Governor in a Democratic primary. The candidate was seeking credibility for his ambitious policy agenda. We distributed these at a Democratic State Convention. “Ah yes,” he says, “service.” The implication is that this was NOT intellectual work.

II. Image from a more distant past, 1978: Despite a publication record that equaled  
(Continued, pg. 3)

## Public Sociology is Sometimes Better Sociology

Stephen Cornell  
University of Arizona

I didn’t set out to do public sociology. It just turned out that way.

A little over twenty years ago, a colleague and I launched a research project designed to understand why some American Indian na-

tions were more successful at economic development than others. Much of our interest was intellectual. My colleague—an economist—had come across some intriguing data showing two very different development trajectories on the part of two closely related Indian nations. Both nations were eager to

(Continued, pg. 5)

## Comments from the Chair: The Arithmetic of Income Redistribution

John Stephens  
UNC Chapel Hill

It is disturbingly frequent that scholars working on the topic of social policy and income distribution (not to speak of politicians legislating on the topic or political journalists writing on it) misunderstand the fundamental arithmetic of governmental income redistribution. Try this: Ask a doctoral student in political sociology or social stratification the following questions: (1) If a country levies a proportional tax to finance a flat rate social benefit, will this affect the distribution of income, and if so, how? (2) What will be the effect of earnings related benefits? (3) What are the distributive effects of the US Social Security system? (4) If an American state increases the sales tax to pay for an expansion of public higher education, what will be the net effect on the distribution of material welfare? I predict that you will get the wrong answers to #1, #2, and #4 and a contradictory answer to #3. I think the modal answer to #1 will be no redistribution and to #2 more inequality or no redistribution (though the latter would contradict a "no redistribution" answer to #1). The student will probably answer that Social Security redistributes income because that is the commonplace view, though it is not consistent with my expected answer to #2. And finally to #4, you will almost certainly get that it will redistribute income (material benefits) from lower income groups to upper income groups.

Let us begin with the first question because it is the baseline for answering the other three. I will illustrate this with Tables 1 and 2 [See Appendix, pg. 8]. Table 1 is the actual distribution of income and social spending across income quintiles in Uruguay in 1998. Table 2 is an illustration of the hypothetical impact of 20% of GDP in social spending (approximate Uruguayan spend-

ing level in 1998) if the 20% were distributed equally across the quintiles (4% each) and financed by a proportional tax. One can see that such a structure of taxes and benefits is very redistributive: The bottom three quintiles are better off, with the bottom quintile gaining the most, 60% more income/benefits than before taxes and benefits.

To move to the next question, let's look at the actual distribution of transfers and benefits in Uruguay in 1998 (Table 1). The bottom row summarizes the overall information shown in the quintile data. In the first column, the figure is the conventional Gini index that I have expressed here as a percentage, which varies from hypothetical extremes of 0 for perfectly equal income distribution to 100 for complete inequality in which the highest income group receives all of the income. When the Gini is expressed as a percentage, one can give it the intuitive interpretation that it is the amount of national income that must be redistributed to achieve complete equality. The figures in the bottom row of columns 2 to 5 are "Quasi-Ginis" (ECLAC's term). To calculate the Quasi-Gini, income units are ranked according to the size of gross income and then the income in question is distributed along this continuum. The index varies from -100 to 100, with -100 indicating that the poorest income group received all of the income of this type, 0 indicating that all income groups received the same amount (i.e. the flat rate benefit in Table 2), and 100 indicating that the richest income group received all of this type of income.

As one can see, the Quasi-Ginis for social assistance, education, and health are negative, thus, they are more redistributive than our flat rate benefits in Table 2. By contrast, social security benefit in Uruguay in 1998; mainly contributory, earnings

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## A Brief Exchange on Public Sociology With ASA President-Elect Erik Olin Wright

SPS: *What do you see as the connection between public sociology and "envisioning real utopias?" Can you get from Public Sociology to Real Utopias?*

Erik Olin Wright: Public sociology is a way of doing sociology. It involves deep forms of interaction and dialogue with different publics outside of the community of professional sociologists, interactions that challenge sociology with new questions and public purposes. At its core, at least in Michael Burawoy's formulation, such public dialogue infuses sociological analysis with normative concerns. *Envisioning Real Utopias* is a particu-

lar way of thinking about the connection between normative concerns and systematic sociological research. The idea is to join together elaborations of clear-headed visions of emancipatory alternatives to the existing social world with sociological research and analysis of the viability of the institutions that could move us in the direction of that world. Public sociology is a way of bringing normative concerns of broad public relevance to sociology; envisioning real utopias is one way of translating such normative concerns into a sociology of the possible, not just of the actual. ##

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## Ross: *Sociology in Public Sociology* (continued)

almost all of those tenured in the five years before me, I was denied tenure by a University Wide committee. Prominent sociologists and historians wrote warm external reviews, and my Department was unanimous in support. But the tenure committee's charge was that these were merely my circle of intellectual fellow-travelers. [Had Adler and Jung endorsed Freud's candidacies, I always wanted to fire back, would this committee have rejected their opinions?] In our many debriefings my allies and I developed a theory of the case: in the cognitive world of the conservative leadership of the committee, the sets of scholar and activist did not overlap, so those who testified to scholarship must have been biased.

III. Image from the more recent past: Montreal, the 2006 ASA Annual meeting. ASA President Michael Burawoy makes the theme of the meeting "Public Sociology." In a packed plenary Frances Fox Piven explored the origins of sociology and Bill Wilson noted one key to understanding the ability of public intellectuals to succeed in grabbing attention in the public arena is clear and jargon free writing. He goes on to admonish those in our profession who use the word "journalistic" to damn a fellow sociologists' work.

IV. Image from my home institution, a few years ago: It is a quarter century since a conservative personnel committee rejected my tenure application and a year less than that when they reversed their decision after local protest and professional affirmation. Now my Department is conducting what we call "post tenure review." This is a seven year review of one's work – after one has attained tenure status. My Department's memo proudly notes that "Bob is Clark's public intellectual." The memo positively refers to op-ed pieces, magazine essays and the activist work with which I combine my scholarship on the sweatshop issue.

I think the Grateful Dead have it right: "what a long strange trip it has been."

One might think, what with Burawoy's relaunch of a reform mission for sociology, and the decidedly "progressive" atmosphere of the plenaries at both ASA annual meetings and (in my recent and direct experience) the Eastern Sociological Society, sociology had become comfortable with the citizen-scholar, activist-scholar bundle. As with much about America, it is a quilt, perhaps crazy, but filled with squares of different colors and patterns. And then there is the problem of Aesop with which I will end.

As to the quilt: Our journals are not places, on the whole (but not without exception) where one finds big picture thinking. The disjuncture between the discourses of what one might call the working teacher-scholars and the techno-journal discourse is

striking. There are always, exceptions of course – this journal's health reform discussion (SPRING 2010, Volume 15, Issue 2) is a model of clear language and interesting reflection. The contributors (Jill Quadagno, Theda Skocpol, Ellen M. Immergut, and John D. Stephens) are colleagues who are good communicators. On the other hand, despite their eminence, a faculty member at any of their institutions would probably not be promoted to tenure with a preponderance of scholarly production that took the form of essays in intellectual as distinct from technical outlets. By the way: that is also an obstruction to timely commentary or analysis. The time consumed by first round peer reviews; the inevitable cycle of revision, then the lead time to publication in the foremost journals almost guarantee a "wait 'til next time" impact on policy or public affairs.

Another aspect of our common culture that prevents broadly public work from reaching audiences is the effect of our culture of prestige on aspiring scholars. In tenure and promotion processes university presses are privileged – they are considered "better" outlets for books than commercial or text publishers. The problem is that only a handful of these presses have enough budget to market aggressively the books they produce. Even presses with very good lists and reputation in tenure committees do almost nothing to market. My own experience is something like tossing my beloved puppy of a book down a deep well, never to hear of it again. Not all of our work is suitable for trade publication – but when it is we should enable colleagues to place books with publishers who want to sell books – whatever the form (hard copy or digital) that the future defines.

So we have a red state-blue state patchwork of physical places and social locations where in some ways public sociology and the politically engaged end of it is valued and in other ways the Titanic's momentum has yet to fully change course. There may be some larger evolutionary prudence in such variety, but it can be hard on people trying to make a life and find a voice.

V. In the meantime living a politically engaged life as a scholar and intellectual – even after tenure—ain't always so easy. Take those electoral campaigns and candidates and officials with whom I worked in the 80s and 90s. Despite being Policy Director of this, and chief speechwriter for that, in fact I was not always "in the room" when the Big Choices were made. The policy guys are lower on the totem pole than consultants, the media constructors etc. One of my dear professional politician buddies once said: Bobby, you're our peace time consigliere –he meant, not war-time. (See *Godfather I* and *II* if the pop-culture reference missed the mark). It can be frustrating to pound out material on short deadlines and then hang out in a corridor or with your feet up on a desk to find out if the Guy is going to use it.

(Continued, pg. 4)

## Ross: *Sociology in Public* (continued)

Among the problems with the framing of “public sociology” at the “plenary” level of ASA is the equation of public, or even engaged with “famous”. Just as most (successful) scholarly careers do not produce Nobel and Pulitzer and Sorokin prizes; so too, public intellectuals and activists most often toil at middle and local levels. So one may risk professional prestige and still be obscure.

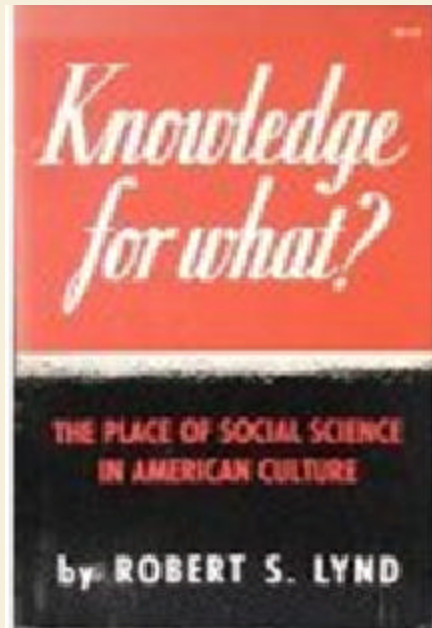
On the other hand, there are some great moments. Late Eighties: My guy is running for Lt. Governor and I am on his state Senate staff. The Governor is running for President, and wants an unblemished record of tax cuts. On a particular one of the two days I am in the senate office each week we get a call that the Senator wants me to meet him in the lounge off the Senate chamber. We sit down and he asks – what do you think about this tax cut? I respond, “You’re advocating tens of millions of dollars in new social services and economic development spending: this boom won’t last forever; where will the money come from?” The Guy walks out of the lounge, into the Senate chamber and votes no – even though the Governor is a chief ally. It passes. The Governor loses for President. He comes back to a recession and a crazy deficit. We lost for Lt. Governor (not because of that vote), but at least we did not have the nutty budget millstone around our historical necks.

VI. And then there are (if one is lucky) the sweetest celestial convergences: when your hard core scholarship becomes centrally relevant to a noble social movement. I had decided to work on the sweatshop issue “before Kathie Lee”, before United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and before the El Monte slave labor case. By the time students had created the sweatfree campus movement I had actually learned some things about the garment industry, its history and structure, globalization, and the

race to the bottom. Having had the life-forming experience of being part of the founding of the new left in the 1960s, how sweet it was, almost forty years later, to have some expert knowledge to contribute to a new wave justice-seekers.

VII. In one of Aesop’s fables, an old laborer gathering firewood complains of his toil and cries out, “If only Death would come and take me away.” Death appears; chagrined by the result of his utterance the laborer meekly asks Death for help to place the faggots on his shoulder. *Be careful what you wish for.* By many not-so-superficial measures our profession has become much more friendly to public intellectual work and even to citizen scholars and even to activists. During this evolution, though, our country’s policies have grown more conservative, and even our Great Hope in the White House seems part of that landscape rather than a force for reversal. Perhaps more time will make it all seem better, but in the meantime, it is all part of crazy quilt whose pattern is not so clear.

VIII. Cue the Grateful Dead. Roll tape: images of quilts, electoral maps, hippies, demonstrations and professors at teach-ins. Rostrum camera pans book covers by Wilson, Piven, Gans, Mills. The Marx shelf at the British Museum.



Closing shot: Book cover; Robert Lynd: *Knowledge for What?*

*Robert Ross is Professor of Sociology at Clark University. Among the founders of Students for a Democratic Society he is the author of Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the new sweatshops (Michigan 2004). ##*

## Cornell: Public Sociology Is Sometimes Better Sociology *(continued)*

find an antidote to long-standing and debilitating poverty. Each had natural and other resources that they were willing to devote to development. But while one had established a record of sustained, self-determined, productive economic activity, the other was spinning its wheels. Why?

This seemed a compelling enough question in and of itself. If we could come up with a persuasive answer in this case and perhaps in others like it, we might be able to contribute to the larger academic discussions of economic development. But we had more in mind. American Indian nations were—still are—struggling with a century or more of poverty and powerlessness. If we could figure out what caused these divergent trajectories, and if some of the causal factors turned out to be things Indian nations could influence or control, we might have something of practical use to those nations. That seemed at least as valuable as any intellectual insights we might produce.

A grant from the Ford Foundation, which shared our interest in usable results, let us mount an ambitious research project looking at a dozen cases across what's commonly known as Indian country, including some nations that were succeeding in their economic goals and others that were not. Our method was classic comparative social science: we would try to explain differences in development outcomes across these cases by looking for sources of variation while controlling for as much as we could. We combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, trolling for patterns in such numerical data as we could find, constructing socioeconomic and historical profiles of each nation in our sample, and using unstructured field interviews to nail down stories of development initiatives: where they originated, how they were supported, who made which decisions, what happened, and so forth.

This was pretty straightforward sociology or, given our interdisciplinarity, social science: studying a topic and reporting our results. But as we began to generate results, Indigenous publics began to get involved, affecting the project and, in our view, improving it.

While there was a great deal that Indian nations could not control about their situations, they could control some of the key factors in the development puzzle. In particular, they could alter their own governance structures and could make new structures better fit their own political cultures. This turned out to be crucial: again and again, governance emerged as a critical factor in development patterns, but it wasn't just some generic "good governance" institutions that made a difference. The point was to match the formal institutions of governance to the informal

ideas within the nation about how authority should be organized and exercised, something we came to call cultural match. Where governing systems were not only capable—meaning that, among other things, they could make decisions and implement them, limit the influence of politics in development decisions and enterprise management, establish robust, fair, and reliable methods of resolving disputes—but were organized and functioned in ways that Indigenous communities felt were fundamentally theirs and not some imposed set of imports, development out-

comes improved. This meant that the governance solutions that worked in Indian country tended to be diverse, reflecting not some bureaucrat's template but the realities of variation in Indigenous political cultures and Indigenous circumstances, and in the interactions between the two.

We shared these results with the nations we worked with and with others at Indian country conferences and gatherings. As a result, two things began to happen. First, our field sample rapidly increased

as other nations, hearing our results, invited us to look at their own situations or came asking for help or for reactions to their own development strategies. What began as somewhat variable knowledge of a dozen cases within a few years became comparable knowledge of twice that number—with more cases being added all the time from both the United States and Canada.

Second, many of those nations began to interrogate our results and ideas. They seemed to have three concerns. Experience had taught some of them to be skeptical of academics with career agendas and ivory-tower answers. Others thought that federal policymakers might listen to us, and they worried about what we might say. Still others were intrigued by what they were hearing and wanted to know more. Over time, we found ourselves in a growing dialogue with Indian nations. Instead of approaching that dialogue as if we had answers to their dilemmas, our approach was to say, "here's what we're seeing, what do you think about it, what are we missing, and how can we make this helpful to you?"

As a result, our research began to reflect not only our research agenda but theirs, as they told us what they were trying to do and what they felt they were up against, and as they put their own questions to us. This led to some changes in our project. It became apparent that for many Indian nations, economic success was only one objective, and not necessarily the driver of their actions. Most were less interested simply in improving employment rates or household incomes than in finding ways of sustaining particular kinds of communities and the cultures that

*(Continued, pg. 6)*

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## Cornell: Public Sociology Is Sometimes Better Sociology (continued)

knitted those communities together. Many of them would turn their backs on promising economic opportunities if taking advantage of those opportunities meant compromising either the political autonomy they had spent generations trying to reclaim or the cultural understandings and social relationships that many of them were trying to protect.

This forced us to rethink what our research was about. What began as a concern with Indigenous economy (economic success or the lack of it) became concern with Indigenous efficacy: what makes some nations more effective at achieving their goals—whatever those goals may be—than others?

Some of the Indigenous reactions to our work were quite specific. The leader of one Canadian First Nation challenged one of our conclusions, arguing that it departed from his experience, and he turned out to be right, forcing us to rethink our interpretation of some of our own results. An official in a national Indigenous organization asked us why it was that some nations, on seeing persuasive evidence of what it took to improve their situations, moved quickly to change things, while others seemed stuck, unable to translate understanding into action. His question opened a new line of inquiry for us, leading us to think more deeply about some of the processes of change we'd been looking at. Others helped us to see informal governance arrangements and principles that had stability, clarity, and enormous force in the lives of the citizens of their nations but that our own training and experience, accustomed to tracing the formal contours of constitutional governance, had led us to miss. Still other nations had concluded that they needed to remake their constitutions, most of which were drawn from models promoted by the U.S. government in the 1930s, and wanted to talk to us about it. We organized some symposia on tribal constitution-making that brought together a number of nations who either had completed, were in the middle of, or were contemplating constitutional reform. In intensive dialogue, they learned from each other and we learned from them, not only about the variation in constitutional approaches across Indian country but about the difficulties of creating effective constitutional reform processes in Indigenous communities and how these nations had addressed those challenges.

At one point a tribal leader asked us if we had a handbook for rebuilding the governing structures of Native nations. We didn't, and we weren't sure such a handbook was feasible, but his question led us to produce both a growing collection of web-based digital resources, from case accounts to interviews with Indigenous leaders doing innovative things, and a book called *Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development*. While written with our own disciplines and colleagues at least partly in mind, the book was intended primarily to provide information—drawn from Indian country—to Indigenous peoples wrestling with momentous decisions about their own fu-

tures.

In short, we originally went to Indian country with some specific ideas and questions in mind, some of which were good ones. But we learned at least as much from the ideas and questions that Indian nations had, and from a joint process of searching for answers. We had no idea that we were doing “public sociology” until Michael Burawoy gave us the term in his 2004 ASA Presidential address—but that's what we were up to: a kind of sociology that “strikes up a dialogic relation between sociologist and public in which the agenda of each is brought to the table, in which each adjusts to the other.” Our work had become an interactive process involving not only the two of us, our graduate students, and a growing network of colleagues, but also a set of embedded experts: Indigenous individuals who were living the processes we were trying to understand, who wanted to understand those processes as much as we did, and whose knowledge and perspective were as important as ours to that joint understanding.

That process turned out to have legs. What began in the late 1980s as puzzlement over two nations with different economic trajectories has become a long-term research project about Indigenous governance and efficacy, ranging widely across both policy and geography, from North America to Australia and New Zealand. And it has taught us, in very concrete terms, that sometimes public sociology means better sociology: a richer understanding of the social world, created by incorporating parts of that social world into the process of inquiry.

*\*Both the issues and the research project referred to in this account are discussed in considerably more detail in “Becoming Public Sociology: Indigenous Nations, Dialogue, and Change” in The Handbook of Public Sociology ##*

## Stephens: *The Arithmetic of Income Redistribution* (continued)

related pensions; are actually more unequally distributed than income. This is because contributory social insurance only covers formal sector workers and, at this point in time, over 40% of the labor force in Uruguay was in the informal sector. This is a usual situation in Latin America: Social security is primarily contributory, earnings related pensions which benefit only formal sectors workers and, because the informal sector is 40-60% of the workforce in Latin American countries, these benefits effect little redistribution or are even perversely distributive.

Of course, the informal sector is small to non-existent in the US and other advanced capitalist democracies, so let us turn to the experience of those countries which will be more familiar ground to your students and colleagues to assess the distributive impact of earnings related benefits. I do so for the case of pensions in Table 3. Again we have Ginis in the columns referring to overall income and Quasi-Ginis in the other columns. This table highlights several striking facts about redistribution. The first, which answers questions # 2 and 3, is that the public pension systems of the countries with contributory earnings related (Bismarckian) pensions do redistribute income. This can be seen by comparing the figures for gross income and public pension income for the countries with this type of pension system, the United States, Norway, Germany, and Sweden. Second, while public pension income was the most unequal in Norway, Germany, and Sweden, they had the most equal gross income distributions among the aged. As one can see, all other sources of income (columns 2-4) are much more inegalitarian. What happened is that the generous pension systems of these countries

squeezed out these other sources. Most pensioners in these countries relied almost entirely on public pension income. In addition one could observe that in all three of these countries, pension income among the aged was much more equal than pre-tax and transfer income among the working age population (Ginis between 29 and 31) at this time. Thus, the answer to question # 2 is contingent as it depends on the exact structure of the tax and transfer system, but in the advanced capitalist democracies, including the US, contributory, income related social insurance typically does redistribute income.

Now to question #4 which would appear to be a no brainer: Financing an expansion of higher education with an increase in the sales tax must have a perverse effect on the distribution of income (or more precisely material welfare as the benefit is not a cash transfer but a free or subsidized public service). While there are probably studies of the incidence of public benefits in kind in the United States, I cite a study I do know, a British study carried out in 1993. The ratio of spending per person on higher education in the bottom quintile group to that of the top quintile group was 0.7 (Sefton 1997), which indicates the rich do benefit more from this kind of spending. However, in that year the top quintile received 41.2% of total household income and the bottom quintile received 7.5%, or .18 of what the top received. Thus, if higher education spending were financed by a proportional or even moderately regressive tax, such as a value added or sales tax, there would be a net transfer to the bottom quintile. ##  
Appendix pg.8

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## Stephens: Appendix

**Table 1 Household Income and Government Expenditure by Income Quintile: Uruguay 1998**

	1	2	3	4	5
	Income	Social security	Social assistance	Health	Education
Top quintile	50	52	12	18	15
Fourth quintile	22	24	20	18	16
Third quintile	14	15	17	20	19
Second quintile	9	7	21	20	23
Bottom quintile	5	3	29	24	28
Gini, Quasi-Gini	41	46	-14	-6	-13
ECLAC (2005: 146)					

**Table 2 Illustration of the effect of flat rate benefits financed by a proportional tax using 1998 Uruguayan income distribution**

a. Assume a proportional tax of 20%								
Top quintile	50	-	( 0.2 x	50 )	=	10		
Fourth quintile	22	-	( 0.2 x	22 )	=	4.4		
Third quintile	14	-	( 0.2 x	14 )	=	2.8		
Second quintile	9	-	( 0.2 x	9 )	=	1.8		
Bottom quintile	5	-	( 0.2 x	5 )	=	1		
b. Add a flat rate benefit to after tax income (flat rate universalism)								
Top quintile	50	-	10	=	40	+	4	44
Fourth quintile	22	-	4.4	=	17.6	+	4	21.6
Third quintile	14	-	2.8	=	11.2	+	4	15.2
Second quintile	9	-	1.8	=	7.2	+	4	11.2
Bottom quintile	5	-	1	=	4	+	4	8

**Table 3: Income Inequality among the Aged Population**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Public Pensions	Earnings	Private Pensions	Capital Income	Gross Income	Net (after tax) income
Australia	-7	74	61	63	34	28
Canada	-2	61	53	58	33	30
U K	-1	73	53	61	31	26
Netherlands	4	67	66	82	33	27
U S A	8	63	52	60	38	34
Norway	11	77	60	54	30	24
Germany	12	73	61	41	29	28
Sweden	15	78	49	44	24	14

Columns 1-4 are Quasi-Ginis, 5-6 are Ginis

Sources: Kangas and Palme (1993); Palme, personal correspondence.

## Graduate Horizons: Taxes, Protest and the New Fiscal Sociology in Public A Commentary by Isaac William Martin

*This edition of Graduate Horizons continues our exploration of emerging research areas and novel modes of engagement with the polity and public sphere. We invited Isaac William Martin of the Department of Sociology at UC San Diego to reflect on these issues through the lens of his own research and speaking on property taxation. Isaac has published on fiscal sociology in the Law and Society Review and the American Journal of Sociology. He is the author of The Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics (Stanford 2008) and co-edited The New Fiscal Sociology: Taxation in Comparative and Historical Perspective (Cambridge 2009) with Ajay Mehrotra and Monica Prasad.*

—GAS

My contributions to political sociology until recently have focused on the politics of local property taxation in the U.S. This is not what I thought I would study when I went to graduate school, but you find an interesting problem and you follow where it leads you. In my case, the problem was a classic question in sociology—why do Americans tolerate so much economic inequality? And in particular, why do we redistribute so little through the public sector?

I became convinced that the answer had something to do with the fiscal constraints on state and local governments. One thing led to another, and soon I was studying the property tax revolt that took place in the 1970s.

It turns out that lots of other sociologists were starting to study tax policy at the same time I was. Every so often our discipline rediscovers that the study of public finance is too important to be left to the economists. Usually it is when a fiscal crisis shocks us out of our complacency. Rudolf Goldscheid, one of the founders of the discipline, invented the idea of “fiscal sociology”—by which he meant a kind of comparative historical sociology of taxation and public debt—in the immediate aftermath of World War I, because he wanted to make sense of the looming public debt crisis in Austria. Fiscal sociology had a short-lived vogue among American social scientists in the mid-1970s, when state and local governments were under severe fiscal strain. And now, of course, in the worst state and local budget crisis in the U.S. since the Great Depression, interest in fiscal sociology has revived again.

The current fiscal crisis is particularly severe in California. No doubt for this reason, my work has attracted the most interest in that state. In the last year, I’ve been invited to speak before Democratic Party clubs, at campus teach-ins, to UC alumni, on San

Diego public radio, and for a public television documentary about the effects of the property tax revolt in California. I also have been invited to give more academic talks than usual—most of them to social science departments in public universities where budget crises are very much on peoples’ minds.

This does not make me a celebrity public intellectual, but it does mean I have had an opportunity to learn something about the relationship between social science and the public. In the last “Graduate Horizons” column, Tomás Jiménez described how his experience advising policy makers and writing op-eds had taught him to translate social science ideas into an engaging idiom that policy makers and the public will find useful. What I think my recent public engagement has taught me is that some kinds of ideas may be harder than others to translate—not because they cannot be described in a way that is punchy and engaging, but because their lessons are not obviously useful.

In particular, I think that historical institutionalist models of path dependence may be hard to translate into pragmatic lessons. The story of the current fiscal crisis is well described by just such a model: we are living with a broken fiscal regime that was put into place during a critical juncture in the 1970s, and that is now firmly locked into place by vested interests. I hoped, and I still hope, that identifying the mechanisms that reproduce this regime might help us to change it. But I have found that telling a true story about how we got stuck in this rut is a lot easier than coming up with a compelling story about how we will get out of it. A theory of path dependence is a great resource for pessimists.

Telling a true story about how we got stuck in this rut is a lot easier than coming up with a compelling story about how we will get out of it. A theory of path dependence is a great resource for pessimists.

I offer this lesson here because I think it is a problem, and because I don’t think it is just my problem. Paul Krugman says somewhere that we can blame the disappearance of the old institutional economics on its failure to provide usable advice in a moment of crisis. Although the institutionalists could offer sophisticated historical accounts to explain how we got into the Great Depression, they lost out to the Keynesians, who could offer policy makers a simple, stylized model with manipulable parameters to explain how to get out of it. I worry that Krugman might be right about this.

And so I leave you with what I think will be a crucial challenge for the next generation of political sociologists—scholars of the state who are embarking on intellectual careers at a time when the public sector is in a profound crisis. Historical institutionalism has important insights into the origins of that crisis. How can we reconcile those insights with the aspiration to provide policy-relevant knowledge?##

## Book Abstracts

### RECENT BOOKS

**Leslie Gates. 2010. *Electing Chavez: The Business of Anti-Neoliberal Politics in Venezuela*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.**

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez was the first anti-neoliberal presidential candidate to win in the region. "Electing Chavez" examines the circumstances that facilitated this pivotal election. By 1998, Venezuela had been rocked by two major scandals - the exchange rate incidents of the 1980s and the banking crisis of 1994 - and had suffered rising social inequality. These events created a deep-seated distrust of establishment politicians. Chavez's 1998 victory, however, was far from inevitable. Other presidential candidates also stood against corruption and promised a clean break from politics as usual. Moreover, business opposition to Chavez's anti-neoliberal candidacy should have convinced voters that his victory would provoke a downward economic spiral. In "Electing Chavez", Leslie C. Gates examines how Chavez won over voters and even obtained the secret allegiance of a group of business 'elite outliers', with a reinterpretation of the relationship between business and the state during Venezuela's era of two-party dominance (1959-1998). Through extensive research on corruption and the backgrounds of political leaders, Gates tracks the rise of business-related corruption scandals and documents how business became identified with Venezuela's political establishment. These trends undermined the public's trust in business and converted business opposition into an asset for Chavez. This long history of business-tied politicians and the scandals they often provoked also framed the decisions of elite outliers. As Gates reveals, elite outliers supported Chavez despite his antineoliberal stance because they feared that the success of Chavez's main rival would deny them access to Venezuela's powerful oil state.

<http://www.upress.pitt.edu/BookDetails.aspx?bookId=36091>

**Katja M. Guenther. 2010. *Making Their Place: Feminism after Socialism in Eastern Germany*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.**

The collapse of state socialism in eastern and central Europe in 1989 had a dramatic impact on women. Witnessing the loss of state support for their economic activity, the curtailing of their reproductive rights, and the rise of gender ideologies that value women primarily as mothers and wives rather than as active participants in the workforce, women across eastern and central Europe organized at the local level to resist these changes.

*Making Their Place* brings to light how feminist movements in two eastern German cities, Erfurt and Rostock, utilized local understandings of politics and gender to enhance their possibilities for meaningful social change. The book chronicles the spe-

cific reasons why place matters, the importance of localized experiences during the socialist era, and how history shapes contemporary identities, cultures, and politics. What emerges is the fascinating analysis of the different ways people have struggled to define themselves, their values, and their understandings of gender in a period of monumental social, economic, and political upheaval.

**Erik Olin Wright. 2010. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso.**

"Rising inequality of income and power, along with recent convulsions in the finance sector, have made the search for alternatives to unbridled capitalism more urgent than ever. Yet few are attempting this task—most analysts argue that any attempt to rethink our social and economic relations is utopian. Erik Olin Wright's major new work is a comprehensive assault on the quietism of contemporary social theory. A systematic reconstruction of the core values and feasible goals for Left theorists and political actors, *Envisioning Real Utopias* lays the foundations for a set of concrete, emancipatory alternatives to the capitalist system." —Göran Therborn

"*Envisioning Real Utopias* is many books in one: an incisive normative diagnosis of the harms done by capitalism; a masterful synthesis of the best work in political sociology and political economy over the past thirty years; an innovative theoretical framework for conceptualizing both the goals of progressive change and the strategies for their achievement; an inspiring survey of actually existing challenges to capitalism that have arisen within capitalism itself; and a compelling essay on the relation between the desirable, the viable and the achievable." —Adam Swift.

"Encyclopedic in its breadth, daunting in its ambition, *Envisioning Real Utopias* is the culmination of Erik Olin Wright's re-vamping of Marxism. Dispensing with ruptural change and laws of history, Wright restores the social to socialism. He keeps alive alternatives to capitalism by exploring real utopias—their internal contradictions, their conditions of existence and, thus, their possible dissemination."—Michael Burawoy,

Book website: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ERU.htm>

## Article Abstracts and Announcements

### RECENT ARTICLES

Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap. 2010. "Anti-Reflexivity: The American Conservative Movement's Success in Undermining Climate Science and Policy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 27(2-3): 100-133.

The American conservative movement is a force of anti-reflexivity insofar as it attacks two key elements: the environmental movement and environmental impact science. Learning from its mistakes in overtly attacking environmental regulations in the early 1980s, this countermovement has subsequently exercised a more subtle form of power characterized by non-decision-making. We examine the conservative movement's efforts to undermine climate science and policy in the USA over the last two decades. The conservative movement has employed four non-decision-making techniques to challenge the legitimacy of climate science and prevent progress in policy-making. We argue that scholars should focus more attention on similar forces of anti-reflexivity that continue to shape the overall direction of our social, political and economic order, and the life chances of many citizens. Indeed, better understanding may very well be crucial for societal resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of global environmental problems like climate change.

### UPCOMING CONFERENCES

"Democratizing Inequalities" conference to be held Friday October 15th & Saturday October 16, 2010 at NYU'S Institute for Public Knowledge, 20 Cooper Square, Fifth Floor, NYC. Organized by Caroline Lee (Lafayette College), Michael McQuarrie (UC, Davis), and Edward Walker (University of Vermont and University of Michigan). Open to the public.

See Website: [www.DemocratizingInequalities.com](http://www.DemocratizingInequalities.com) for Participants, Titles, and Working Abstracts

This conference investigates the consequences of the movement since the 1960s to expand participation across the political and economic landscape. Participation, once thought to be a tool for determining shared values within communities, is increasingly a top-down affair, used strategically by institutional actors. Demand for facilitated engagement has elevated new industries, professionals, and bureaucracies; nongovernmental actors have become central facilitators of public debate. Public participation is more widespread than ever, but, contrary to long-held assumptions about the relationship between democratization and social equality, this expansion of political equality has been accompanied by a corresponding decline in social and economic equality.

The goal of the conference is to reconnect the study of participatory projects over the last three decades with analysis of their potentially regressive implications, in order to develop a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the democratic promise of participatory reforms across a variety of institutional contexts. The edited volume resulting from the conference will address four aspects of these changes and their impacts: democratization in governance and administration, the production of new forms of participatory knowledge and practice, the changing role of participation in political and institutional authority, and the production of participatory inequality. Contributions come from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and methods; all seek to reframe an understanding of the conditions that may either link together or, alternatively, divorce citizen voice from citizen power.

Has the new normative political equality enabled increasing social inequality by demobilizing the 1960s critique of expert knowledge? Does participation work to normalize social protest and re-legitimate firms and government agencies? Has social inequality undermined the egalitarian potential of political equality by producing citizens who are insecure and beholden to institutional sponsors of participation? Is the nature of political and institutional authority being restructured?

Call for Submissions: *States, Power, and Societies* (Political Sociology Section newsletter) Volume 16 #1-3 (2010-2011).

We invite your commentaries and suggestions for symposia for the next volumes. I have invited contributors for the last three issues but would be delighted to have input from section members. Please continue to send abstracts of your recently published books, articles, completed dissertations, announcements of meetings, or other opportunities that you think would be of interest to our section members. Your input is welcome!

I want to thank again all the contributors from Vol. 15. Please send your comments and submissions to Kathleen C. Schwartzman ([polsoasa@email.arizona.edu](mailto:polsoasa@email.arizona.edu))

## ASA Annual Meetings Schedule

### Sunday August 15, 12:30-2:10

#### **Regular Session. Political Sociology: Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Political Processes**

##### **Atlanta Marriott Marquis**

Organizer and Presider: Beth Mintz, University of Vermont

Kaiser Russell Shekha. "Determinants of Latin American Welfare State Spending: Global and Religious Politics and International Human Rights"

Kristin Hopewell. "Different Paths to Power: The Rise of Brazil, India and China in Global Economic Governance  
Different Paths to Power: The Rise of Brazil, India and China"

Zeynep Atalay. "Religious Identity and Global Civic Action: Alternatives to Secular NGO Networks."

Nitsan Chorev. "Taking On and Taming Neoliberalism at the World Health Organization."

Discussant: David A. Smith, University of California-Irvine

### Sunday August 15, 2:30-4:10pm

#### **Regular Session. Political Sociology: Labor, Unions, Interest Groups and Political Outcomes**

##### **Atlanta Marriott Marquis**

Organizer and Presider: *Beth Mintz*, University of Vermont

Michael Franklin Thompson. "Increasing the State Minimum Wage: Impacts of Political, Institutional and Demographic Factors."

Matt J. Costello. "Minority Threat and Unemployment Insurance Coverage Rates."

Stephanie Moller and Huiping Li. "Parties, Unions and Poverty across the U.S. States."

Jasmine Olivia Kerrissey and Evan Schofer. "Unions Membership and Political Participation in the United States."

Discussant: *Marc Dixon*, Dartmouth College

### Monday August 16, 8:30-10:10am

#### **Regular Session. Political Sociology: Political Dimensions of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality**

##### **Atlanta Marriott Marquis**

Organizer and Presider: *Beth Mintz*, University of Vermont

Daniel B. Tope and David Jacobs. "Racial Threat, Street Crime, and Republican Strength in the  
Post-Civil Rights Era."

Nicolas Eilbaum. "Immigration Policy and Rhetoric: The Case of Employer Sanctions."

Eric Anthony Grollman, Hubert Izienicki, Oren Pizmony-Levy, and Aaron Ponce. "Competing Frames and (Non)Effects on Public  
Support for Same-Sex Marriage."

Maura Kelly and Gordon William Gauchat. "Contemporary Feminism and U.S. Politics." *Maura Kelly*,

Discussant: Thomas Macias

### Monday August 16, 8:30-10:10am

#### **Section on Political Sociology Paper Session. Gender Equality and Democratic Development**

##### **Hilton Atlanta**

Session Organizer: Catherine I. Bolzendahl,

Presider: Jocelyn S. Viterna

Solen Sanli . "Cultural Citizenship and the Notion of "Politics": "Woman's Voice" as a Case Study."

Eiko Saeki . "Democracy and Troubled Autonomy: Sectarian Politics and Civil Society in Japan"

Doowon Suh. "Movement Institutionalization as a Strategic Choice"

Charles Causey. "Status Inequality and Institutions: Can Institutions Change Gender Attitudes?"

Rola A. El Hussein. "Women, Islam/ism and Democratization."

## ASA Annual Meetings Schedule

### Monday August 16, 10:30-12:10am

#### **Section on Political Sociology Paper Session. Citizenship Rights and Immigration: Separation and Integration**

##### **Hilton Atlanta**

Session Organizer: Paul K. Gellert

Presider: Patricia A. McManus

Maria-Elena D. Diaz. "Asian Embeddedness and Political Participation: An Examination of Social Integration and Asian Voting Behavior"

In-Sook Choi. "Invisible Minority or Visible Citizen? Recent Debates on "Multiculturalism" in South Korea and Japan."

Tasleem Juana Padamsee "Rethinking the Right to Healthcare: HIV, Immigration, and Charging in the British National Health Service."

Edwin F. Ackerman. "How "Illegality" Became a Central Point of Concern in the Immigration Debate."

Christopher A Bail. "Making Terrorists Racists: The Culture of Secrecy in Britain's Domestic Counter-Terrorism Policy, 2001-2008"

### Monday August 16, 2:30-4:10pm

#### **Section on Political Sociology Paper Session. The Politics of Immigration and Citizenship Rights**

##### **Hilton Atlanta**

Session Organizers: Thomas Edward Janoski, and Patricia A. McManus

Presider: Jessica Elizabeth Sprague-Jones

Ruud Koopmans, Ines Michalowski, and Stine Waibel "Citizenship Rights for Immigrants: National Paths and Cross-National Convergence in Western Europe, 1980-2008."

Per Mouritsen. "Citizenship versus Islam? Civic Integration in Germany, Great Britain and Denmark"

Chikako Kashiwazaki. "Incorporating immigrants as foreigners: multicultural politics in Japan"

Kimberly Ebert. "The Changing Politics of Immigration: Examining the Effects of Racial-Political Organizations on State Immigration Legislation"

Discussant: Thomas Edward Janoski

### Monday August 16, 6:30pm

##### **Hilton Atlanta**

#### **Section on Political Sociology Reception**

### Tuesday August 17, 8:30-10:10am

#### **Section on Political Sociology Paper Session. Inequality and Citizenship**

##### **Hilton Atlanta**

Organizer and Presider: Robert M. Fishman

Chaeyoon Lim and Thomas Sanders. "Misery Doesn't Love Company: Civic Consequences of Unemployment.,

Jennifer Oser and Michael Shalev. "A Vicious or Virtuous Circle? Expanded Citizen Participation and Participatory Inequality"

Matt Schroeder. "The Social Cost of Inequality: Economic Segregation's Effects on American Political Life."

Kent Redding. "Political Incorporation from Above or Below? Paths to Citizenship for Western European Women and Men, 1848-1948"

Discussant: Jocelyn S. Viterna

### Tuesday August 17, 10:30am-11:30am

#### **Section on Political Sociology Refereed Roundtable Session**

##### **Hilton Atlanta**

Organizer: Ronald R. Aminzade

## ASA Annual Meetings Schedule

### **Tuesday August 17, 11:30am**

**Section on Political Sociology Business Meeting  
Hilton Atlanta.**

### **Tuesday August 17, 12:30-2:10pm**

**Section on Political Sociology Invited Session. Reducing Social Inequality in Obama's America: Comparative Perspectives**

**Hilton Atlanta**

Organizer and Presider: John D. Stephens

Panelists: David Brady, Janet Gornick, and Bruce Western

### **Tuesday August 17, 2:30-4:10pm**

**Section on Political Sociology Paper Session. Putting Culture in Its Place in Political Sociology**

**Hilton Atlanta**

Organizer and Presider: Richard Lachmann

Paul R. Lichterman. "Contextualizing Social Movements: The Promise of a New Civic Culture Concept"

Elisabeth S. Clemens. "Nationalizing Reciprocity: Aligning Charity and Citizenship in the American Nation-State"

Jin-Yeon Kang. "Colonial Legacies and Struggling for Social Membership in the National Community"

Mabel Berezin. "Experience and Events: An Analytic Typology of Political Facts"

Discussant: Richard Lachmann

*States, Power, and Societies is the official newsletter of the Political Sociology section of the American Sociological Association. All contributions published herein remain the sole property of the authors. Please contact individual authors for more information. All content is left to the discretion of the editors (email: polsoasa@email.arizona.edu)*

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