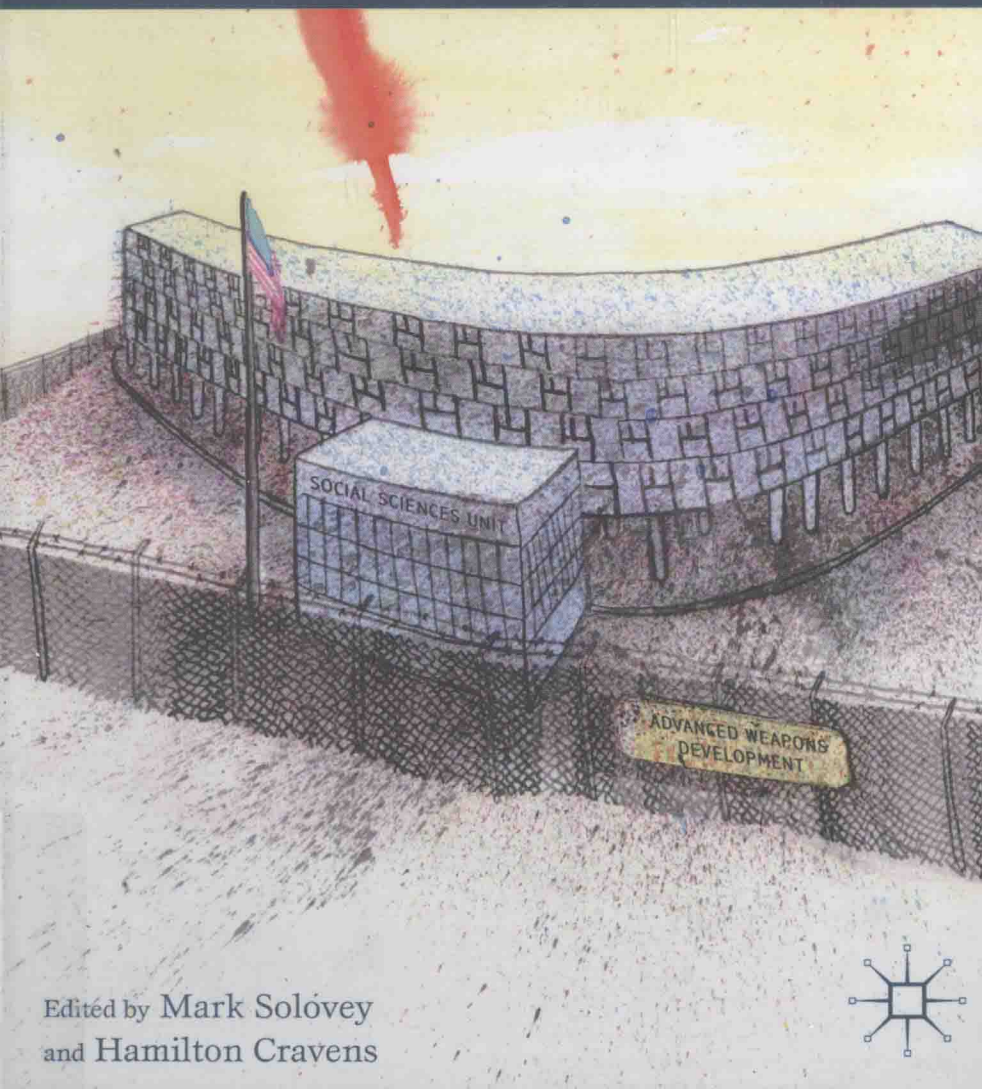
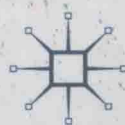


Cold War Social Science

Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature



Edited by Mark Solóvey
and Hamilton Cravens



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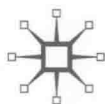
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Foreword

Positioning Social Science in Cold War America

Theodore M. Porter

It would be a delusion for historians to imagine that in postwar America, social science, once free, was now in chains. The life of social science was transformed by the greatly expanded career opportunities and patronage of the postwar era. From the standpoint of more than half a century later, however, social science from 1945 to the late 1960s seems very much bound up with the ideological and practical requirements of the Cold War. Even as the role of the social scientist became more sharply defined and more disciplined than ever before, social science continued to take its meaning partly from its relations to social and economic institutions, and more particularly to state agencies as well as large private patrons. The newly powerful disciplines provided some insulation from direct political meddling. Although anti-Communist witch hunts destroyed some academic careers, McCarthyism did not, on the whole, politicize the academy in a direct way. In the case of social science, it tended rather to depoliticize it, adding one more incentive for scholars and university administrators to emphasize technical tools of science and to insist on its independence and detachment.¹ Yet this preoccupation with neutral objectivity can itself be seen as a form of politicization by virtue of its very claim to stand outside the value-laden character of the processes and interests that shaped the production and uses of social knowledge.

Ideological obfuscation is not the whole story, however. Fear of persecution for socialism was, I think, one of the three intersecting factors favoring this stance of rigorous objectivity. A second was the idealization of natural science as a model of what the social

disciplines might become. Third, and somewhat paradoxically, the desire to win for social science a prominent role in the world, to be recognized as the basis for solutions to social problems, encouraged the assertion of neutrality. Social science objectivity thus mirrored bureaucratic objectivity, in part for the simple reason that officials and administrators made up its principal audience, apart from the academic researchers themselves. Indeed, the most favorable conditions for gaining power and influence arose when social scientists and their students were able to infiltrate these bureaucracies. The frank avowal of political interestedness, acceptable for elected leaders, was out of bounds for career bureaucrats, and even claims of subtle expert judgment were hard to support under conditions of political contestation.²

For the Cold War generation, disciplinary autonomy and the assertion of neutral objectivity were not merely desiderata of social science but defining characteristics. These ideals implied a telescoping of its history, which they now identified with the founding of recognizable disciplines at the end of the nineteenth century. Economists, who did not care so much about institutions, continued to celebrate a much-modernized Adam Smith as founding father. Otherwise, the Cold War generation consigned to prehistory almost all of what had passed as “social science” from the coining of that phrase in the 1790s to the founding of disciplinary societies and university departments in the United States during the 1880s and 1890s. That, indeed, was the era when the social sciences (and humanities) began creating modes of publication in university press books and especially in journals controlled by the specialists themselves. Many of the most prestigious disciplinary journals of the American social sciences today date from the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Still, if we take strict disciplinarity as the standard, a founding so early as the 1880s is unduly generous. *Social science* in the United States was a project of the Progressives, a movement of reform and rationalization with a wide popular audience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Practitioners up to World War I looked outside their disciplines for intellectual inspiration, to evolutionary thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, and to philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and William James. Emile Durkheim and Max Weber were not, in 1900, regarded in America as founding fathers of social science, but were inserted into that role by a new and more self-consciously professionalized generation in the 1930s and 1940s. Up to World War I, at least, American sociologists, political scientists, and economists oriented much of their

work around empirical observations, social problems of the day, and practical issues of administration and reform.³

“Professional social science” in the United States, then, did not, in the 1880s, break abruptly with the forms that had prevailed earlier in the nineteenth century. Few then aspired to a kind of knowledge that transcended human institutions. Many concerned themselves with the history of law or with the character and functioning of institutions, or with economic relationships of agriculture or labor. Parliamentary bodies conducting official inquiries were widely regarded as doing social science, as were census bureaus and other statistical bodies. Indeed, statistics was itself a social science for most of the nineteenth century, and in many ways it was the prototype of empirical, problem-oriented social science. Law, administration, poverty relief, public works, crime, even revolution were all topics of social science, as practiced not just by academics but by officials in treasury ministries or bureaus of labor and trade, by prison superintendents, poor law commissioners, public health officers, and other state bureaucrats, as well as reformers of all kinds. These men and, in growing numbers, women were seen not merely as applying or dabbling in social science, but as practicing it. The American Social Science Association, modeled in some ways on the (British) National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, was largely composed of people like this, though the British organization included first-class elites like dukes and prime ministers. As late as the turn of the twentieth century, few perceived any contradiction between such professional responsibilities and scientific knowledge-making practices. Some, like the French pioneer of family budget studies Frédéric Le Play, held that true social science depended on, or at a minimum was enhanced by, its placement within a network of social duties and obligations.⁴

Up to the early twentieth century, most social science was concerned in some way with the condition of the poor including illiteracy, criminality, disease, and “mental deficiency” as well as social insurance (much discussed in the United States, though enacted initially in Europe). In the era of the world wars and of the depression of the 1930s, ever more attention was given to management of the economy. The social sciences took some interest in military affairs throughout the modern era, but especially after the scale and persistence of World War I became apparent. By 1945, it seemed clear that a strong economy and a healthy population were vital to national security, and the massive expansion of academic social science over the next two

decades was premised on this assumption. On this basis, Cold War programs extended into almost every aspect of life.

"What's good for the American military is good for America," the generals might have said. In the social as in the natural sciences, government agencies dispersed their resources widely, sometimes invoking national defense in support of programs making only the most indirect contribution to arming the military for defense against foreign enemies. The relevance of social science to national security was readily recognized, provided one endorsed the rationalized ideal of systematic (scientific) planning whose upward trajectory during the Depression was so greatly accelerated by the mobilization of farms and factories, of workers and soldiers, to fight World War II. The Cold War was another world war, waged not only on every continent but in almost every domain of human activity, including what we call the economic, social, cultural, religious, and political as well as the specifically military. Even as economic planning fell from favor, national preparedness became an obsession. In such a world, many scholars and scientists as well as workers, managers, and officials became participants in this struggle, fending off America's enemies with their chalkboards and typewriters, their memoranda and filing cards.

For the historian of the social, behavioral, and human sciences, this enlarged sense of our object of study requires a subtle appreciation of its ecology. Quite a lot of social science, as we learn from the papers in this collection, really was supported for specific military purposes, but academic authors preferred not to believe that they were merely performing contract work. Indeed they were not, for what is most interesting here is precisely the wide overlap of what they called fundamental social research with more applied investigations. The leaders of social science had an explanation for this blurring of boundaries. It was, for them, almost axiomatic that the more abstract, theoretically or quantitatively rigorous form of science is inherently the more powerful. Academic research was properly placed atop the hierarchy of knowledge, they insisted, because it provided the theories and methods required to make practical investigations fruitful. This was a key feature of what the natural science ideal, or "physics envy," meant to them. They drew satisfaction from the thought that by liberating defense projects from too narrow a focus, they could advance the goals of foreign policy more effectively than the agencies could have done by focusing on specific pragmatic goals. Yet in retrospect we can see that the shaping was reciprocal. Postwar social science itself was

formed in important ways by its bureaucratic alliances with this military superpower in a world divided ideologically and diplomatically. Even in the late 1940s and 1950s, some social scientists dissented from military-related goals, but these people typically became disaffected with their disciplines as well.

The postwar alliance of state and of capitalism with social science would come in for much stronger and more widespread criticism during the Vietnam War era. In its aftermath, the more diverse and, often enough, alienated stances of social scientists reflected a more polarized political culture. To the early Cold War generation, however, what seemed most striking and most promising was the possibility of building strong social disciplines whose rigor and independence made real objectivity possible. Academic departments and advanced doctoral training defined the institutional structures of self-consciously professional science, while, politically and culturally, social science stood for cosmopolitanism.⁵ Real social science, according to its most prominent advocates, had to stand somewhat apart from the society in which it was done, and especially from every particular institution involved in administering poverty relief, labor relations, education, prisons, banking, tariffs and trade, transportation, immigration, agriculture, foreign aid, or military training and morale. All of these were very much matters of state policy, and all drew on social or economic expertise. The responsible government agencies, along with business corporations, provided jobs for college graduates and increasingly for advanced degree holders in the social sciences. But the disciplinary leaders of social science in Cold War America envisioned professional identity as determined more by academic formation at universities than by bureaucratic places of work. Those with professorial positions, in particular, rarely acknowledged what their methods and theories may have owed to the circumstances of their work.

From the standpoint of this book, the universal claims of postwar social science appear not as a break with its contexts of use, but as an expansion and consolidation of those contexts. University-based social scientists were often less tightly bound than their predecessors had been by the demands of patrons, and this gave them the space to pursue "general theory" and to claim detached objectivity. Yet the break with the past, with traditions reaching well back into the nineteenth century, was not nearly as sharp as they liked to imagine. Many continued to work under the sponsorship of official agencies, and most depended on contacts with experts in the bureaucracies. Notwithstanding the pretensions of grand theory, much social science

retained its focus on specific domains, and even the most determinedly “objective” methods depended for their validation on audiences outside the individual disciplines and even outside the university.

Few interpreters now are inclined to claim that everything fits together seamlessly, as in the structural-functionalism that the institution-builder and grand theorist Talcott Parsons and his allies found so satisfying. But it is hard to specify where the Cold War leaves off and other determinants of social science arise. Then, as now, whole fields of endeavor were organized around national security considerations, even if these fell far short of dominating the work of the disciplines. The authors in this volume show how the Cold War, taken as an organizing principle, facilitates the historical reinterpretation of a wide range of social science researches and activities in the United States during this period of extraordinary expansion. They demonstrate also that, in an era when social sciences achieved unmatched prestige and unprecedented autonomy, they never came close to escaping the gravitational pull of state and society. Rather, their enterprise was given shape by the same forces that allowed them entry to the corridors of power.

Notes

1. Mary Morgan, “Economics,” in *The Cambridge History of Science, Volume 7: Modern Social Sciences*, ed. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 275–305.
2. Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
3. On American social science in this period, the standard work is Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). I argue for a closer alliance of social science with public concerns up through the early twentieth century in “The Social Sciences,” David L. Cahan, ed., *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Historiography of Nineteenth-Century Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 254–299.
4. On statistics and social science see Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Alain Desrosières, *La politique des grands nombres: Histoire de la raison statistique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993). On nineteenth-century social science organizations see Thomas Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977) and Lawrence Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Social Science Association, 1857–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

- 2002). On social science sites and practices, Theodore M. Porter, "Genres and Objects of Social Inquiry, from the Enlightenment to 1890," in Porter and Ross, eds., *Cambridge History*, 13-39; David Lindenfeld, *The Practical Imagination: The German Sciences of State in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). On social and economic surveys in the US in the early twentieth century, Thomas Stapleford, *The Cost of Living in America: A Political History of Economic Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Emmanuel Didier, *En quoi consiste l'Amérique? Les Statistiques, le new deal, et la démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009). On opposition of social-science detachment, Theodore M. Porter, *Karl Pearson: The Scientific Life in a Statistical Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Porter, "Reforming Society: The Engineer Le Play Learns to Observe Society Sagely," in Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck, eds., *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 281-302.
5. David Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

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Cold War Social Science: Specter, Reality, or Useful Concept?

Mark Solovey

From the end of World War II to the early 1970s, American social science expanded in dramatic and unprecedented fashion. Moreover, nothing like it has happened again. Consider the following figures in total membership for the major national professional society for sociologists, the American Sociological Association (ASA, and prior to 1959 known as the American Sociological Society). Founded in 1905, this organization had 1,021 members in 1920, 1,530 in 1930, and, after a significant decline during the Great Depression, 1,034 in 1940. Though World War II saw little change, rapid growth quickly followed, as ASA membership rose to 3,241 in 1950, 6,875 in 1960, and 14,156 in 1970. The peak came in 1972 with 14,934 members, before a sudden leveling off and even slight decline to 13,304 in 1980. As of 2010, total ASA membership had climbed over the 14,000 mark once again, but the total was still lower than the 1972 peak.¹ Other major national professional associations for economists, political scientists, and scholars in nearby disciplines such as those for anthropologists and psychologists follow this general pattern. The steep rise in professional association membership was accompanied by impressive growth in related areas—college courses, undergraduate majors, graduate programs, university departments, academic journals, and scholarly publications.²

In this same period of time, the importance of social scientists in the nation's affairs advanced in other striking ways as well. Social scientists received substantial funding from, consulted for, and sometimes found gainful employment in a variety of federal agencies. These included the Defense Department and its main branches, the Army, Navy, and

Air Force; military think tanks, with the RAND Corporation being the most famous; intelligence agencies, most notably the CIA; civilian agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Science Foundation (NSF), and National Institute of Mental Health; and civilian advisory groups including the Council of Economic Advisors and the Psychological Strategy Board. Social scientists also became closely involved with major new action-oriented initiatives developed by the large private foundations, including the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and some smaller foundations like the Russell Sage Foundation as well as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), which received much of its support from the large private foundations.

In addition, in the post-World War II era, the United States became the world's leader in the social sciences, a stunning departure from earlier European dominance. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, the intertwined processes of scholarly professionalization and academic institutionalization led to the formation of the separate disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and history. Already by the 1920s, the social sciences in the United States had acquired a measure of international prominence, though leading American scholars still often looked up to their European counterparts. During the 1930s and early 1940s, however, the ravages of war and Nazism severely compromised European strength in the social sciences. In the aftermath of World War II and during the Cold War the U.S. social science enterprise became the world's largest and most vigorous. The enormous presence of the United States on the international stage (whether viewed in military, economic, scientific, or technological terms) enabled the nation's social scientists to enjoy a period of unparalleled importance worldwide. At the same time, scholars working on a wide array of topics, from modernization to political culture to mental health, presented their fields as an essential resource for articulating the nation's interests, values, and ideals and for showing how America could serve as a model society for the rest of the world to learn from and emulate.

Recently, historical scholarship in this area has itself been expanding rather impressively. Twenty years ago one could find only a few scattered studies. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the number of publications was clearly growing, but there was still no identifiable field of inquiry or community of scholars. These days, just keeping up with the flood of journal articles and constant stream of new books is difficult. Moreover, valuable contributions are being produced from

a number of different scholarly perspectives: from the nascent field of Cold War studies; from established fields of U.S. history, including military, diplomatic, and political history; from intellectual history, a field that has made an impressive resurgence recently and has had a long-standing interest in the social sciences; from history of science, which has produced a huge body of literature on transformations in American science and technology during World War II and the Cold War; and from the social science disciplines themselves.³ In the last few years as well, a number of collective efforts have given groups of scholars valuable opportunities to exchange ideas and consider where this burgeoning, new field might be headed.⁴

Amidst all of this welcome ferment, a specter has been lurking. This specter is suggested by various notions used by authors studying how the social sciences became enmeshed in the Cold War. In his history of communications research and psychological warfare during the 1940s and 1950s, Christopher Simpson proposed that a new “science of coercion” arose. I have written about the development of the “politics-patronage-social science nexus” and growing criticism of this nexus during the 1960s. Ron Robin has examined how social scientists became an important part of the “military-intellectual” complex. Matthew Farish has investigated the “militarization of geographical knowledge.”⁵ Recent discussions have also brought this specter into clearer view.

Indeed, a name has even been proposed: “Cold War social science.”⁶ Naming something can be useful and lead to a deeper understanding. In the present case, we should begin by considering why the notion of Cold War social science warrants our attention.

One reason is that this notion resonates with certain points of historical interpretation that can be fitted together as follows. The starting point is the assumption that the Cold War marked a new era in world history—even though the Cold War itself emerged from previous developments, especially the uneasy World War II partnership between the Soviet Union and United States. In this new era, the role of science and science-based technologies, including of course weapons technologies, played vital roles. Leading social scientists together with their supporters often claimed their work would be vital to national security and well-being in the Cold War context as well. But for social scientists to make really effective contributions, established scholarly ways of doing things had to be reconsidered, even transformed. A variety of professional, financial, and institutional opportunities encouraged social scientists to produce the right sort of knowledge for the