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THE CENTENNIAL ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF ARCHIVALISM*

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Introduction

My thinking about the possible relationships between centennials and archives was prompted first by my own work on archives and archival methodology (Hill 1989, 1990, Forthcoming) and second by the upcoming centennial of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 2005. It is to the centennial of the Department of Sociology at the University of Kansas, however, to which I owe the specific impetus to prepare this paper. I am very pleased, as a neighbor from Nebraska, to celebrate with you the founding of the world's very first department of sociology at the University of Kansas (Sica 1983). We are, of course, duly proud of our own sociological record at Nebraska (Hertzler 1979; Hill 1988, 1989; Howard 1988; Warner 1989), and I note with some relish that it was a chancellor of the University of Kansas who in 1902 "pointed to Nebraska as an example of what a western university could do, and called upon Kansas supporters to waste no time in emulating the academic work of their neighbor to the north" (Manley 1969: 148). My hope today is that, if I fail to provide a worthy model for emulation, you will at least find food for thought somewhere in my commentary.

The title of this paper purposefully alludes to Max Weber's (1958) programmatic essay on the hand-in-glove relationship between western capitalism and protestant asceticism. I make this

allusion specifically to focus our thinking on the potential interrelationships between the celebration of centennials, on the one hand, and the collection, preservation, and utilization of archival materials, on the other. In the interest of time, I restrict my discussion to the celebration of academic centennials and the use of archival materials in the writing of disciplinary history. Let us first consider the nature of centennials.

Centennials

Centennial celebrations, designed ostensibly to honor institutional origins, past accomplishments, and time worn traditions, look also to the present and toward the future. To ask "from whence have we come?" implies asking "where are we now?" and "where are we going?" Such questions entail assumptions about yardsticks for comparison, for evaluating change, and for judging the contemporary relevance of cherished traditions and honored pioneers. Centennial ceremonies throw open the challenge that present efforts may not measure up to the accomplishments of the past. Launching a gala centennial celebration requires hutzpah and confidence in the present. We ask, in celebrating the past, to be judged worthy of our inheritance.

Given a few years' start to get things organized, the prospect of centennial celebrations appears in the offing with great frequency, together with the comparative evaluations they entail. One need not wait the customary one hundred years to stage a centenary event. Institutions eager to proclaim their accomplishments have done so in a range of variations on the centennial theme. Semi-centennials, for example, are staged at

the fifty year mark, and quarter-centennials after a mere two and a half decades. Such events can be very elaborate.

The quarter-centennial of the University of Chicago in 1916, for example, was a gala affair including exhibits, dinners, convocations, departmental conferences,² the dedication of a new building, graduation exercises, and the regal award of fourteen honorary doctorates. The proceedings were commemorated in a handsome souvenir book published, of course, by the University of Chicago Press (Robertson 1918). Knowing the University of Chicago (especially as we do in sociology), it is not surprising to discover that twenty five years was much too long for its boosters to wait to toot their own horn. Thus, after only twenty years Chicagoans celebrated a sesquidecennial in 1906, and, after only ten years, a decennial in 1901.

One might think this was enough, but institutional adoration apparently has no limits at Chicago. Thus, in 1896, Chicago celebrated a quinquennial only five years after the founding of the school in 1891. We read in Robertson's (1916: 6) account that "those who revere precedents will vainly seek in the record of academic festivals for a quinquennial." If the University of Chicago was not to be the oldest university in the United States, it's faculty and students certainly acted like it was. Robertson (1918: 6) notes that "the program [for the Chicago quinquennial] shows that the celebration had the features of a plan to honor a full-grown institution." What nerve! While it is fun to poke jabs at the pretensions of Chicagoans, my purpose in marshaling these examples is more serious, i.e., to underscore the point that

staging a centennial typically exhibits considerable moxie and confidence in one's accomplishments: past, present, and future.

In short, whether we welcome the opportunity to celebrate a centennial with zest and relish, on the one hand, or with a vague, reluctant feeling that "it's something we ought to do," on the other, mirrors our moral self-assessment of present activities and future goals -- and suggests a definition of centennial activities as an ideal type. To wit, what I mean by the centennial ethic is the joyous celebration of one's origins and predecessors together with a self-confident recognition that today's work and anticipated future outcomes are either faithfully traditional to the celebrant's institutional heritage or in some way transcend that heritage with a sense of honesty and integrity that one's forebears would gladly applaud.³ This definition is offered as an ideal type. Every extant centennial celebration necessarily approaches the centennial ethic with more or less congruence and success.⁴ I turn now to archives, the other major element in my discussion.

Archives

"Archives," one wit has suggested, may be defined as that place "where Noah kept his bees" (Pollard 1935: 13). For my purposes, however, archives are special libraries wherein disciplinary historians find documents and data for analysis. Archives, like centennials, also look to the present and the future as well as to the past. In writing disciplinary history, materials from long ago -- old letters, diaries, unpublished manuscripts, dog-eared lecture notes, and the like -- are used by

today's archival scholars to reconstruct the intellectual and organizational record of sociology for consumption by future generations of readers. The decision to establish an archive, like the decision to stage a centennial, again requires a belief that what one does and what one's predecessors have done are important and should be preserved for future consultation.

Given these considerations, let me offer another ideal type. By the spirit of archivalism, I mean an aggressive consciousness of our shared disciplinary record as a broad, multifaceted temporal frame that is grounded in the collection, preservation, and scholarly analysis of archival resources. It should be noted, however, that many of the published disciplinary histories of sociology do not embody the spirit of archivalism to any marked degree. Several tomes are grounded in no more than hearsay and biased personal recollections. A few other writers make at best limited use of archival data and then typically from but a single archive. It is only recently that sociological scholars have initiated multiple-archive research strategies that correct many of the self-serving and unsubstantiated myths that have too long passed as disciplinary history in sociology.⁵

Archives and Centennials as Parallel Patterns

Having roughed out a couple of ideal definitions, I want to reflect briefly about centennials and archivalism as mutually reinforcing, parallel patterns. Their conjunction suggests a link between celebration and preservation as human activities. On the one side, marking significant milestones with centennial observances increases our interest in the lives of our forbears

and renews our appreciation of their accomplishments. Centennials sensitize us to the historical dimension of our work and to the documentation that archives so often preserve. On the other side, safeguarding the materials needed to excavate our sociological heritage helps us recover and reconstruct the events, ideas, and people that we celebrate in centennial festivities. In the best of worlds, where there is confidence in the importance of the present and the future as well as the past, archives and centennials go hand in hand. Taken to their fullest, the centennial ethic and the spirit of archivalism offer the prospect of emancipatory and empowering disciplinary reconstruction in sociology. This prospect can manifest itself in at least three ways.

1. Personal Empowerment. At the personal level, archival research can empower the individual by linking him/her to a meaningful sociological history. My data here are experiential (Reinharz 1984). For example, in the process of writing my dissertation on Roscoe Pound's work in American sociology, I discovered a roster of early Nebraska sociologists in whom I began to take increasing pride. In addition to Pound (the founder of sociological jurisprudence), I found the likes of Charles Ellwood, E.A. Ross, and George E. Howard (all three ASA presidents), Edith Abbott (a Nebraska student and later Dean of Social Services Administration at the University of Chicago), Lucile Eaves (the first woman to join the sociology faculty at Nebraska), Mari Sandoz (the noted sociological novelist and historian), Hattie Plum Williams (the first person to earn a sociology doctorate at

Nebraska and the first woman anywhere to chair a coeducational doctoral program in sociology), Amos G. Warner (author of American Charities), and Hutton Webster (the first American professor of social anthropology). These pioneering scholars and their work gave me roots.

I can imagine similar experiences for students at the University of Kansas who take to the archives to explore the lives and work of Frank Blackmar, Ernest Burgess, Carroll Clark, Loren Eiseley, Mabel Elliott, Maurice Parmelle, Stuart Queen, Ester Twente, and many others. Archival research brings life to names such as these in a way that simply listing them or reading their published work can never do. I recommend regular trips to the archives as good therapy, if nothing else, and they may also dramatically change your understanding of sociology as a lived professional experience.

2. Institutional Rehabilitation. Secondly, archival research can help unearth the stories of sociology at many academic centers that have remained untold in the domineering shadows of Chicago, Columbia, and the like. Continuing archival work at the University of Kansas, for example, will undoubtedly reveal that there is even more to honor and celebrate here than we now know. New linkages between schools and new collegial networks will also be discovered.⁶ If we are willing to shed our presumptive blinders, we may come to recognize and appreciate that some remarkable sociologists have worked and taught in some pretty unexpected places.⁷

3. Disciplinary Reconstruction. Finally, at the disciplinary level, archival research can deepen and broaden the heritage of American sociology as a whole. It is no small matter that archival research can give to us and inform us about the events, people, and ideas that are grist for centennial celebrations. In selectively citing and pointedly interpreting archival materials in particular ways, surprisingly different stories can unfold from the same, intersubjectively verifiable data. Archival research is by no means simply the mechanical compilation of "facts" and their objective presentation. Modern, archivally-grounded authors selectively determine according to their own agendas and worldviews what the past will look like for their future readers. And by celebrating certain sociological founders rather than others, sociological historians play a major epistemological role in shaping the historical roots -- and thus the interpretation, development, and extension -- of contemporary sociological theory.

Thoughtful and reflexive multiple-archive research that consciously and systematically tries to avoid the distortions of sexist, racist, classist, and regional biases can open the pragmatic, action-oriented origins of sociology for renewed critique and celebration. It is striking that the ASA last year again established a committee on archives just as the centennial of the ASA looms around the corner in the next decade.⁹ This is a hopeful sign, but it must be noted that sociology's track record in archival matters is dismal. A move within the ASA in the 1970s to establish a disciplinary archive, as have our sister disciplines, spent itself and dissipated without result. The Library of Congress has been designated to receive the

organizational records of the ASA, and several files have been deposited, but there is no policy in place to guide the selection and preservation of ASA materials generated within the last decade -- and much has already been lost.⁹ It is my hope, however, that the upcoming ASA centennial will be a catalyst for archival consciousness throughout the discipline. We have much to gain by learning about our variegated past and celebrating our complex diversity.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I want simply to make a pragmatic link between the centennial ethic and the spirit of archivalism. Specifically, I encourage you to commemorate the centennial celebration at Kansas by establishing systematic guidelines for selecting and archiving the materials that will be needed by future scholars to document and understand the day-to-day life of sociology at Kansas in the 1990s. As you have exhibited the confidence to celebrate your past history, there will no doubt be future scholars who will want to honor your present work in like manner. Your thoughtful archival preservation of relevant materials today will make this anticipated future celebration all the more successful and meaningful.

Notes

1. Presented at the annual meetings of the Kansas Sociological Society, Lawrence, Kansas, 6 April 1991.
2. Members of the Chicago Department of Sociology joined with colleagues in the Social Science Groups and the Law School to convene a conference on the theme: "Problems of National Progress." The invited speakers were Irving Fisher of Yale and Roscoe Pound of Harvard (Robertson 1918: 56, 90).
3. This allows for the possibility of self-delusion, especially when centennials are celebrated after the lapse of the traditional one hundred years. Given the present realities of human longevity, an institution's founders are long since dead and buried by the time the centennial festivities that honor them are announced in the university calendar. This avoids the possible embarrassment of having one's founders stand up to declare loudly that our present work not only violates the founding traditions but also corrupts them in ways that the founders could never countenance.
4. Viewed as dramatic rituals, centennial celebrations may also be judged from Victor Turner's (1969) anthropological perspective in the degree to which the celebrations establish communitas. This, in part, turns on the extent to which the ritual incorporates anti-structural elements and results in a liminal journey for the celebrants. More recently, Mary Jo Deegan (1989) explores the nature of rituals in modern society and finds them flawed by the core codes of oppression and repression: sex, class, bureaucratization, and the commodification of time. Roughly speaking, the extent to which these mundane patterns are excluded from ritual events through anti-structural play is directly proportional to the communitas the rituals generate. For an analysis of core codes and anti-structural play in the academic ritual of the doctoral dissertation, see Deegan and Hill (Forthcoming).
5. See, for example, Mary Jo Deegan's (1988) analysis and reconstruction of the origins of the Chicago school of sociology.
6. For example, it turns out that Loren Eiseley completed 21 sociology courses, several at the graduate level, at Nebraska before earning his doctorate at Pennsylvania and eventually securing an appointment at Kansas where he taught sociology as well as anthropology courses (Christianson 1990; Loren C. Eiseley academic transcript, University of Nebraska Archives, Lincoln, Nebraska).
7. Only this past week, for example, we learned that Edwin Sutherland, the noted criminologist, once taught Greek and Latin at Grand Island College in Grand Island, Nebraska, during the years 1904-1906 (Personal communication, 27 March 1990, Aileen F. Maddox, Assistant Librarian, Sioux Falls College).

8. ASA President William Sewell appointed an ad hoc Committee to Study the Feasibility of ASA Archives. The members were: Jessie Bernard, Robert E. L. Faris, Polly Grimshaw, and Charles Page (Chair). (Letters from Alice F. Myers to Bernard, Faris, Grimshaw, and Page, November 19, 1970, ASA Records, Box 7 (temporary), Executive Office and Administration, Chronological File, Jan-June 1970. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.). In like manner, an ad hoc Advisory Committee on Archives was appointed in 1990. The five members of the committee are: Bernard Barber (Chair), John Goering, Michael Hill, Barry Johnston, and Stephen Turner.

9. For example, the cassette tape recordings of most of the recent ASA Council meetings were erased so that the cassettes could be re-used! For some earlier years, by contrast, verbatim minutes were transcribed by a legal stenographer and copies have subsequently been preserved in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

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