

# Social Science and the Public Interest

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## Editorial: 50th Anniversary Issue of *Society*

I write here as Editor-in-Chief of a publication that has more than managed to endure to achieve its 50th year of uninterrupted publication. Despite so many factors of change in publishing over that time, this is good fortune, the account of which must be due to both individual and institutional commitments. In honor of this occasion and those commitments, the masthead of *Society* will henceforth include the name of Irving Louis Horowitz (1928–2012) as Founding Editor. Irving's perspicuity about the fortunes and vagaries of publishing enabled him not only to preserve and cherish the publication of *Society* for 35 years as Editor-in-Chief, but also to see to its secure future under the stewardship of Springer Science + Business Media. Irving's vision for *Society*, which I have shared and sought to further for the past 15 years, was always that the next issue would be its best one so far. He was not reticent about his abiding belief in a hope for social science at once in tension with a host of diverse ideological commitments but always distinct from them. This can be a tricky business, as one learns in the give and take and push and pull of contemporary controversies.

Fifteen years ago, in my inaugural editorial, "The Ethos of Social Science," intended as an acknowledgment and honoring of Robert K. Merton's 1942 essay, "Science and Technology in a Democratic Order" (and later as "Science and Democratic Social Structure," and finally as "The Normative Structure of Science"), I wrote: "No scientist today can pursue scientific investigation without coming face-to-face with tenacious forms of resistance, which range between inerrant readers of sacred texts and relativist interpreters of profane ones. On one side the guardians of what is absolutely given compete for public attention with those

who can only affirm what is absolutely not. Whether fundamentalists or deconstructionists, both share one thing in common: they disclaim the progress of enlightenment. These forms of resistance ought to be one of the central subjects of social science. Yet they should not be confused for social science." (Jonathan B. Imber, "The Ethos of Social Science," *Society*, Vol. 35, No. 3, March/April 1998, p. 8). In my opinion, this assessment still holds as one way to establish the enduring ambitions of an intellectual and publishing endeavor in the social sciences whose prospects continue to be bright as we move into the next half century of work and service.

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## Past, Present, Future

This issue of *Society* devotes its symposium section to a broad host of topics that touch upon past, present, and future concerns of social, political, and moral significance. The final piece by the late Irving Louis Horowitz was among the very last on which he worked before his death. We are grateful to Mary E. Curtis, President, Transaction Publishers, for allowing "Relativists and Absolutists: Grand Strategies in a World of Fractured Norms" to be published in *Society*. We have not definitively determined if this is the case, but we believe that the 50th anniversary issue is the first time that a poem has graced its pages. For this, thanks are in order to Dan Chiasson for his honoring of this occasion. Finally, the masthead for Vol. 50, No. 1 reflects new appointments of senior, advisory, and international advisory editors. Their presence in and support for *Society* are gratefully acknowledged.