

# behavioral sciences

Gathered last week in New York at a briefing on the social and behavioral sciences sponsored by the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing

## SOCIAL INDICATORS

### Promises and potential

The task facing social scientists concerned with social policy is enormous. They must bring together and correlate diverse concepts and advances, use these concepts to evaluate existing social programs and recommend goals and priorities for future programs. Since the mid-1960's it has been fashionable to believe that all of these jobs could be accomplished with the aid of a system of social indicators.

Social indicators are measures taken repeatedly at regular intervals that can be broken down to account for differences between people and conditions. Unfortunately the whole concept of social indicators, social accounts or social bookkeeping is vague and elusive and its seemingly obvious benefits are beyond the capacity of social science in its present status, says Dr. Eleanor B. Sheldon, executive associate of the Russell Sage Foundation.

She believes the social indicator movement can contribute to improved description of reporting, the analysis of social change and the prediction of future social events and social life. But, she also feels that the promises and claims made by the "evangelists of the social indicator movement" amount to overkill and will destroy any benefits the movement can offer. "Improvement of the quality of social statistics and the reliability of social science information," she states, "is both in the public and in the academic interest. But the enormity [sic] of the task needs to be underscored."

## THE CENSUS

### Information outflow

One of the oldest and most reliable social indicators is the United States census. It has been taken every 10 years since 1790 and continues to be reliable because all citizens are required by law to contribute to it. (Last week a man was tried and found guilty of refusing to give information to the Bureau of the Census.)

Dr. Conrad Taeuber, associate director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, presented some of the more recently tabulated data from last year's census.

The population of the country has increased by 13 million in the last 10 years. Eighty percent of this growth has taken place in urban areas and 80 percent of the urban growth has taken place in the suburbs.

One-half of the existing housing units have been built since the end of World War II and 18 percent of the total are one-person dwellings (an increase of 57 percent in 10 years). This, says Dr. Taeuber, indicates a growing desire for privacy. Young people leave home at an earlier age and old people continue to maintain a home after their spouses have died and their children left.

The United States population is growing at a rate of one percent a year, and even with lower fertility rates this trend will probably continue. If the fertility rate dropped to 2.1 children per woman the population of the country would level off in the year 2037 at 267 million. But, this would require an unlikely 50 percent decrease in the birth rate.

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## ANTHROPOLOGY

### The growth of the godfather

According to Webster, anthropology is "a study of man." Many persons, however, tend to think of it as the study of either primitive or ancient peoples. They forget that anthropological studies are and should be conducted within their own society.

One such study has been done by Dr. Francis Ianni of Columbia University. He reported the findings of a two-year study of an Italian-American family and its connection with organized crime in the United States. His research covered four generations of family members and the connections between their illegitimate and legitimate businesses. The "capo" or head of the family opened a card parlor and started an importing business in 1900. These diverse but financially connected businesses grew into the numbers racket and loan-sharking as well as into a food processing company, a realty company, a public relations firm, a medical publication, an investment company and many other legitimate businesses.

As the family grew the financial emphasis shifted to the legitimate side and fewer and fewer members of the family actually joined the business. Only four of 27 grandsons are presently in the family business. Fifty percent of their numbers operation in Harlem has been taken over by Puerto Ricans or blacks.

Dr. Ianni believes strongly that this trend will continue. He explained that ethnic groups tend to follow the same path on their way to affluence. First the Irish, then the Jewish and now the Italians have moved from the ghetto to the suburbs and from crime to legitimacy. Now, he says, it is the turn of the blacks and Puerto Ricans.

## PORNOGRAPHY

### Continuing studies

Last year at the Congressional hearings on pornography Dr. Otto Larsen of the University of Washington in Seattle received national publicity for himself and for the U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography when he was hit in the face with a cream pie by a protester. This, however, was only some of the publicity the commission received. Vice President Agnew roundly condemned the report before it was even published and President Nixon ignored it after it was published.

Dr. Larsen, a member of the commission, believes that the published findings are valid and that continuing research will prove this view. Pornography may be arousing, he says, but it cannot be shown that it has any effect on behavior patterns. He says the findings of 39 recent studies on the effects of pornography all indicate that pornography has no connection with antisocial behavior. Fifty-one percent of 2,500 adults and 700 adolescents who were questioned stated that they think all laws against pornography should be abolished if adverse effects cannot be shown. Dr. Larsen strongly favors this. "I do not believe that you can effectively control these things through legal means," he concludes.

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