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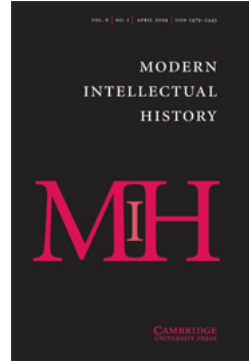
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INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW: SOCIAL INVESTIGATION IN HISTORY AND THEORY*

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Investigating investigations, inquiring into inquiries, surveying the results of earlier surveys: for well over a century historians have been digging into the mountains of data amassed by generations of social investigators, seeking evidence to use in reconstructing past economic relations and social conditions. Like Karl Marx hunched over parliamentary Blue Books in the British Museum, we have parsed the tables and decoded the responses, searching for the stuff of social and cultural life. All this intense scrutiny suggests something of the importance of the subject. For social historians seeking nonelite sources, for policy historians studying conditions to be addressed by state or communal action, for cultural historians recovering elusive past identities, for intellectual historians listening for points of contact between action and belief, the accumulated lore deposited in past social inquiries provides indispensable concrete evidence.

Particularly regarding the lives and conditions of the largely anonymous “ordinary people,” even studies with serious flaws in design and execution have sometimes offered nearly all there was to go on, and we always hunger for more. Recent books by Oz Frankel and Sarah Igo help to placate this hunger by describing and contextualizing investigations of social groups that were relatively unknown and inarticulate prior to the wide dissemination of knowledge gained in social inquiries that exposed them to public scrutiny.¹

These compelling studies focus on different types of inquiry. Oz Frankel looks at studies commissioned in the mid-nineteenth century by US and British

* I am grateful to *MIH* editors Charles Capper and Tony La Vopa for helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

¹ Oz Frankel, *States of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Page references are given in parentheses in the text.

legislative bodies aiming to throw a beam of light into hidden places peopled by unknown segments of the two consolidating nations. For the US case, Frankel follows John Wilkes and John C. Fremont, rough-and-ready explorers with a taxonomic bent sent in the 1840s to explore the Pacific coast and southwestern lands; document the terrain; describe its Indian, Hispanic, and Mestizo occupants; catalog its flora and fauna; seek out routes for railroads; and even attempt—in Wilkes’s case—to locate the boundary between the United States and Mexico established by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Frankel also describes the dedicated work of American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission (AFIC) members Samuel Gridley Howe, Robert Dale Owen, and James McKaye, champions of Negro rights dispatched to study the status and potential of emancipated slaves after the Civil War. And he thoughtfully assesses reports by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and Lewis Henry Morgan, amateur ethnographers and self-identified “friends of the Indian” eager to introduce the “vanishing Indians” to the “palefaces” who had displaced them. For the British case, he examines parliamentary inquiries into the conditions of child and adult workers in factories and mines, the quality of education in Wales, and municipal efforts to regulate the sanitary conditions of the poor.

In Frankel’s study, then, the social unknowns exposed to public view were lower social groups created in significant part by national policies that promoted industrialization and, in the US case, westward expansion and emancipation. The position of the investigated groups as in some sense wards of the state, and the deeply divided state of public opinion regarding “what should be done” with or for them, presented an urgent need for policy knowledge in response to what became the “Indian question,” the “Negro question,” or the “condition of England” question.

In Sarah Igo’s study, by contrast, the social unknowns calling investigators to action were neither exotics at society’s fringes nor elements considered particularly problematic. They were the burgeoning urban American middle class, a complex aggregation whose members by the 1920s were so different, by way of experiences and attitudes, from their rural or small-town forebears as to constitute a kind of unknown territory in the midst of modernity. Igo’s subjects are Robert and Helen Lynd’s “Middletown” studies, early opinion polls by George Gallup and Elmo Roper, and Alfred Kinsey’s accounting of male and female sexual practices. Carried out by non-state actors, these were quantitatively oriented, privately sponsored social surveys designed to ascertain the content of mass opinion, chart the frequencies of specific mass behaviors, and thus discover and document the average American “we.” Neither Kinsey nor the pollsters admitted an intention to lay the ground for reform. Indeed the Lynds initially did their best to downplay their dependence for funding on a religiously oriented foundation, while stressing the originality and significance of their

scientific contribution. Rather than to policymakers, Igo suggests, these studies were of greatest use to their own subjects, to anxiety-ridden citizens seeking—in the face of onrushing modernity, depression, and world war—to get their moral and cultural bearings, and thus to comprehend what it meant to be an American.

The historical literature that these studies augment is now quite large and sophisticated. Historians of social investigation in the United States and Britain have looked over the shoulders of all kinds of inquirers, among them legions of anonymous census-takers and sanitary inspectors, humanitarian reformers, mid-nineteenth-century social science association members, travelers across the class divide in Victorian London or Gilded Age Chicago, social surveyors at Pittsburgh and elsewhere, “classy bureaucrats” such as Carroll Wright and William Beveridge, Hoover-era foundation-sponsored trend trackers, depression-era and postwar planners in both countries, US “poverty warriors” documenting social programs’ effects, denizens of ideologically branded think tanks of the late twentieth century, and many more.

Theoretical approaches have changed over time, in line more or less with trends in historiography more generally. Typified by William Brock’s *Investigation and Responsibility*,² excellent older studies often followed a progressive historiography approach, showing how concerned citizens gathered data that exposed an existing evil, and then a suitably aroused public opinion pressured lawmakers to enact a remedy. Recent studies have reflected newer theoretical currents, among them the “new” social historians’ interest in the making of class, renewed awareness of the constitutive role of ideas, an institutional turn that linked investigation to state-building and social movements, an emphasis on the historicity and malleability of cultural identity as objects of historical research, a consequent concern for how social investigators assigned meanings for identity markers—such as race, gender, and sexual preference—that often grounded discriminatory practices, and an awareness of the silences as well as the shouts in the historical record.

Along these lines over recent decades, an inherently reflexive, transformative process has been under way in studies of social knowledge construction. As attention turned from the data produced to the investigators who produced them, the subject has often become the object. For specific moments in this history, scholars have recovered the social origins, training, associations, motives, assumptions, theories, and practices that guided specific social inquirers; the institutional cultures and structures of power and influence in which they

² William R. Brock, *Investigation and Responsibility: Public Responsibility in the United States, 1865–1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

worked; the national and transnational discourses they inhabited; the traffic between them and those they studied; the sponsors they relied upon or served; the audiences they sought; the mobilizations in civil society they energized; and the myriad implications and effects of inquiries—including policy consequences, expected and unexpected, but reaching well beyond them into areas of conceptual innovation entwined with political and cultural change. In attempting to establish the provenance of data from such sources, historians have been eager as well to reconstruct what social inquirers in specific historical moments understood as creditable grounding and appropriate uses for social knowledge, and—alternatively—to track the ways that some inquirers questioned, and attempted to reframe, the meaning of social “truth.”³

Over time, social knowledge has lost a good deal of the finiteness and solidity it once had and become a matter of unstable and essentially contested meanings. Reflecting back briefly upon earlier studies of social inquiry can set the stage for a fuller recognition of what these latest ones by Frankel and Igo offer that enhances how we think about the history of social investigation and social knowledge creation more generally. For nineteenth- and twentieth-century US and Britain alone, a short list of key “takes” on the nature of social knowledge would include Lockean empiricists, Scottish Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith and David Hume, antebellum humanitarians influenced by Kant and Emerson, mid-century social empiricists, evolutionary optimists in the manner of Lester Ward, and reform Darwinists. The list would also feature transatlantic networks of social scientists, social provision advocates, feminists, critical journalists influenced by civic republicanism, various strands of socialism, German historicism, and Anglo-US “new liberalism.” It would contain both pragmatists, for whom the consequences of belief became criteria for detecting “truth,” and also neopragmatists, the latter inspired in recent decades by a Habermasian vision in which collective agreement on principles and ethics can arise discursively, in settings where intersubjective communication promotes a form of collective rationality that transcends the immediate interests of individual subjects. Finally, it would include critics of liberal knowledge as “bourgeois ideology” and, particularly among them, skeptics in the different but related traditions of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Michel Foucault, for whom what has passed historically for knowledge was often contrived and deployed in pursuit of domination.

³ On the essentially contested nature of conceptual knowledge, see John Gray, “On Liberty, Liberalism, and Essential Contestability,” *British Journal of Political Science* 8/4 (1978), 365–402; Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson, eds., *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Pared to the basics, and beyond the age-old juxtapositions of the “real” and the “ideal,” the most illuminating among the varied approaches to studying social knowledge construction have been two: a sociological approach that explains conflicting understandings of social phenomena by referring to “objective” factors, mainly differences in the social location of the observers; and a hermeneutic approach, associated with modern linguistics and cultural studies, that grounds conflicting perceptions of social “realities” in alternative, historically constructed subjectivities, discourses, and structures of meaning.

The classic articulation of the sociological approach to knowledge was Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), which broadened the definition of ideology to include intellectual work in general. In his thinking on objectivity and subjectivity, Mannheim dangled—figuratively—between two conflicting conceptions. The most congenial to him initially was a Marxist conception of ideas and knowledge as relational, concocted to justify expropriations of property, and therefore fictions of a sort, intended to disguise or defend inequalities of privilege and power. Yet he was also aware of intellectual influences at work in the production and circulation of ideas that could not be adequately represented as mere superstructure over an economic base. Although key thinkers might be credited with originating specific theories, they typically articulated perspectives emergent among wider social groupings. Their access to these perspectives was inconceivable outside the dawning perceptual awareness of the group, in the specific context of its creation. Although the conflicting perceptions of reality held by opposing social groups reflected partial, self-referential, self-justifying values and beliefs, they were based not entirely in interest, but in vantage point as well. Perspectives formed in different social locations disclosed different realities, and the consciousnesses they produced were more partial than “false.” Even though ideology was ubiquitous, therefore, Mannheim concluded in his mature reflection that facticity or objective actuality nevertheless existed “out there.” And thus the prospect remained that critical intelligence, employed by “free-floating” or “socially unattached” intellectuals, might correct for errors, catch the wave of each fruitful new perspective, and arrive at “truth.”⁴

Mannheim’s near contemporaries, renegade US economist Thorstein Veblen and Italian Marxist sociologist Antonio Gramsci, shared his conviction that social

⁴ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1936; first published in German 1929); Willard A. Mullins, “Truth and Ideology: Reflections on Mannheim’s Paradox,” *History and Theory* 18/2 (1979), 141–54; Harvey Goldman, “From Social Theory to the Sociology of Knowledge and back: Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Intellectual Production,” *Sociological Theory* 12/3 (1994), 266–78.

position powerfully influenced belief, and also his faith in the existence of an objective, knowable social reality “out there” and accessible to those who sought it scientifically. For Veblen, the key insight was the way that evolutionary processes in human social organization admitted inequalities in property and power. Wary of the cultural power of the “vested interests” over the “common man,” he warned of a widespread failure to distinguish genuine “knowledge,” rooted in evolutionary science, from mere “belief,” which reflected widely accepted though manifestly false propositions, such as the hoary idea of a natural right to private property, or the claimed, but fictive, naturally just distribution of income posited by neoclassical economists. In a similar vein, Gramsci credited capitalist hegemony largely to the work of “organic intellectuals” of the rising capitalist class who spread and naturalized ideas, contrary to the objective realities of class, that were favorable to the ambitions of the ruling group. Like Mannheim, these influential thinkers encouraged reflection upon the character and agendas of intellectuals engaged in producing knowledge that revealed—or, more predictably, masked—objective social laws and conditions.

Outside leftist circles in the late nineteenth century and after, a similar preoccupation with the grounding of belief led in a different direction, toward a historicist and relativist view of social knowledge that developers of the modern hermeneutic approach could later build upon. Pragmatists William James and John Dewey held out for an experience-grounded, pluralistic, probabilistic view of knowledge and belief. James imagined consciousness as a raging stream of perceptions, but he empowered individuals with the freedom to choose where to focus their attention and thus mitigated significantly the determinism that rooted perception and ideology in a group’s “objective” social position. For Dewey as well, and those he influenced, social knowledge need not be sociologically relational, in the sense that where one sat would be where one stood. Nor was apprehended reality a picture of nature in the sense that positivist contemporaries understood science. Rather, social knowledge was the constructed and continuously reconstructed product of a discursive process, led by a “community of the competent” perhaps, but democratic in essence, and open (as Jürgen Habermas’s ideal “public sphere” would later be) to all qualified comers. To the frustration of “realists” among both his contemporaries and ours, the Deweyan ideal of expertise in the service of democracy was not a cover for domination; policy innovations that resulted in social learning could count as experiments in the direction of collective responsibility.⁵

For US intellectual historians, the hermeneutic turn presaged in pragmatism gathered steam in the 1960s, as both world events and influences external to the

⁵ Robert Westbrook, *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

discipline called the significance of tired debates between conflict historians (including Marxist) and consensus historians into question. For historians attracted to the progressive tradition, the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz provided a bridge from sociological to hermeneutic understanding of the creation and uses of social knowledge. When Geertz made his move against a habit entrenched in post-Boasian anthropology of viewing a culture as a basket of practices and artifacts that could be used to reconstitute a map of its reality, a formidable hurdle was crossed, not only in anthropology but in cultural studies more generally. Geertz argued for shifting attention from behavior to meaning, and from searching for law-like generalizations, as scientists do, to viewing cultural practices as something like texts and attempting to decipher their meaning. His 1973 classic *Interpretation of Cultures* recast ideology as a “cultural system.” Ideologies thus appeared anew as distinctive and coequal ways of assigning meanings, rather than as world views ordered hierarchically, in relation to what Westerners recognized as rational. Interpretation in this vein consisted of asking not (as in pluralist political theory) “what do they want,” not (as in psychological theory) “what do they fear,” but rather (as in a proposed new cultural theory) “what do their symbols and rituals signify; what do they mean?” Thus, departing from both the Marxian/Gramscian idea of false consciousness and the Veblenian view of belief as antipodal to knowledge, Geertzian ethnography endorsed studying multiple meanings, and configurations of them, each conceived as situationally true, but with no conventional expectation of discovering “capital-T” truth.⁶

In executing this version of a hermeneutic turn, Geertz contributed to a revolution in critical theory also informed by theoretical developments in philosophy and linguistics, under way initially in Europe and later in the US, in which post-structuralists attacked what they saw as the scientific pretensions of structuralist literary theory. Constituting more a set of negations than a school, post-structuralists argued that texts contained a multiplicity of meanings, only minimally reflecting the intentions of their authors, and derived largely instead from the biases and presuppositions brought to them by readers.

The proposition that the meanings of texts (including, of course, the products of social inquiry) are inconstant, plural, variable across time and contexts, and often tacitly supportive of inequalities of gender, race, and class proved particularly liberating in its application to work, then burgeoning, involving subaltern struggles and identities, and thus was quickly adopted in historical

⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Paul Shankman *et al.*, “The Thick and the Thin: On the Interpretive Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz,” *Current Anthropology* 25/3 (1984), 261–80.

analysis. Additional impetus along these lines has come from initiatives in the tradition of the later Frankfurt school figures Adorno, Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse, whose critical stance toward mass culture exposed what they saw as an emptying out of meaning in “late capitalism.” Even more important and often problematic for historians of social inquiry, the complex body of work by French critical theorist Michel Foucault interpreted knowledge production, even for ostensibly humanitarian or “enlightened” purposes, as a device historically empowering to intellectual and technical elites who controlled and deployed it. Foucault essentially reframed class struggle to account for the increased cultural power of the knowing, and not merely the owning, classes. Thus, like the Frankfurt school, he cast a shadow of doubt over the concept, hallowed in the West, of the Enlightenment as a great advance in human freedom.

In their historical considerations of social inquiry, Igo and Frankel draw from both the sociological and the hermeneutic veins of analysis. Working sociologically, both pay careful attention to the training, experience, and social position of the inquirers they study. It matters to Frankel, as mentioned, that those he studied were assigned to their work by an agency, and specifically a legislative agency, of the British or American state(s). Thus their fortunes as inquirers depended on who led the government, what party held a majority, and what clout they or their agency wielded, though—depending on their reputations and expertise—there was room for negotiation. Recognition of this qualified dependency might actually have suggested more attention than Frankel awarded to the British and American party systems at mid-century, to class-and-party battles over suffrage extension and workers’ rights, and to Britain’s highly contested support for the southern Confederacy during the American Civil War.

In a similar vein, it counted for Igo that the seekers of the American mean whom she studied were not officials, but were rather self-constituted and thus presumably more independent inquirers. Even so, as she shows, they also experienced dependencies of other kinds. The Lynds and Kinsey faced scrutiny by academic colleagues, administrators, funders, and keepers of conventional morality, and the pollsters—Gallup, Roper, and their ilk—had to consider public acceptance of their sampling techniques and weigh the market, in the media and to private clients, for their results.

Thus a sociology-of-knowledge approach is certainly present in these books, but the main thrust of both studies reflects the hermeneutic turn by investing their subjects with authority over the representation and interpretation of cultures. Igo credits the Lynds and Kinsey for weighing the force of traditional values against the enervating—and liberating—impact of modernity, variously defined, upon US culture. Even more explicitly concerned with inquiry as the construction of

meaning, Frankel explores how Schoolcraft and Morgan understood surviving symbolic structures and cultural resources of Native American groups, what aspiring British middle-class civil servants who were “unfamiliar with local peculiarities” (143) presented as noteworthy in the underground, underclass lives of Welsh child miners, and how US liberal humanitarians weighed the work ethic and family habits of US freedmen against those expected of independent (white) male citizens. In his analyses of reports on “unknown” subjects such as Indians and industrial workers, Frankel gains traction by reifying and examining binaries—between familiar and strange, understood and unknown, we and other—that informed (or clouded) examiners’ perceptions. And Igo is drawn, particularly in handling the work of the Lynds, toward exploring their intensely critical view of consumer culture.

The binary that matters most in the more theoretically complex of these studies is the tension evident in Frankel’s work between insights drawn from Habermas and Foucault. Referencing Foucault, Frankel recognizes possible punitive and disciplinary uses for observation and inquiry. Yet, in considering discourses that used the language of otherness and inclusion, he inclines toward a Habermasian view of the rise and functioning of the public sphere. In this view, in the context of (supposed) universally accessible public deliberations carried on in liberal democracies, individual subjectivities formed by desire for material or psychological gain are replaced by a longer-term collective rationality of the public good. In Habermas’s ideal of the public sphere, inquiry opens principles and policies to reflection and revision, admitting diverse, even clashing, perspectives, rather than—as in a Foucauldian reading—imposing an officially sanctioned reading from behind a veil of artfully concealed power. To wit, regarding the work of inspecting and representing populations, Frankel notes,

In Michel Foucault’s writings, observing a “population” is one of the radical innovations of the Enlightenment, an expression of its desire for social transparency. This visibility was symptomatic of the spatial configuration of power along lines that separated the visible and the invisible, the observed and the hidden. The [Benthamite] panopticon was the quintessential product of the new technologies of government. In this model prison, power was to be endemic yet unverifiable; its gaze objectified and disciplined inmates, making them autonomous “self-governed” subjects. The panopticon seems particularly pertinent for our discussion for, in the early Victorian period, social research brought an ambitious state together with a few of Jeremy Bentham’s most diligent disciples. However, as against the privileged status that Foucault bestowed on this utopian model—the house that Jeremy envisaged but never built—state-sponsored inquiries afforded numerous opportunities for observation (and, importantly, conversation). They were conducted from different viewpoints and involved alternating gestures of the eye, from close focus to

panoramic view . . . At times ocular power was a feature of scuffles among a diverse group of poor-spotters themselves rather than a means to control the poor. (140)⁷

Drawing upon a genealogy of theoretical constructions such as these, Frankel (as does Igo) repeatedly interrogates the layered and multidirectional interactions of subject and object, observers and observed.

Alive to another trend in recent historiography, these two enterprising historians also attend to the role of social inquiry in the constituting of states and civil societies. Igo explores how quantitative investigation and report definitively altered perceptions of the moral character, material aspirations, and political inclinations of civil society that had previously been based largely on ideals expressed in patriotic documents and symbols. Playing off Benedict Anderson's idea of "print capitalism," Frankel coins the category of "print statism" to encompass the escalation of print production that governments set in motion in response to the rising expectation that they would inform increasingly aware and active publics on matters of consequence in the national life.

Print statism, as Frankel envisages it, catered to a demand for representation in three distinct senses of that term. One meaning was the need to represent, in the sense of putting textually and pictorially on display, unknown social types residing within, and serving in various ways the needs of, society. Concern for people working in mills or down mines and peasants starving in Ireland raised ruckuses in Parliament, but these groups remained largely unknown to most of England. For US citizens, aboriginal people still roaming free or held on reservations existed largely as "noble savages" or "wild Indians." Diverse needs could be met—governmental, cultural, even commercial—by reporting authentically on their appearances, languages, customs, character, and conditions. Timely information about these disadvantaged groups also served a civic purpose: citizens possessing new social knowledge were better equipped to do their duty.

But this matter of representation did not stop with satisfying curiosity, promoting empathy, or informing policy debates, Frankel argues. A second meaning of representation, which print statism also addressed, involved bringing these liminal unknowns into view in order to take them into the privileged circle of persons enjoying political representation. There is a suggestion here that print statism may have been intended among at least some convening officials, explorers of unknown groups, and their publicists to promote what Gary Gerstle had described as "civic nationalism," a civic republican ideology of inclusion that represented ethnic and racial "others" as sufficiently like "us" to be eligible

⁷ On these two thinkers see Lloyd Kramer, "Habermas, Foucault, and the Legacy of Enlightenment Intellectuals," in Leon Fink *et al.*, eds., *Intellectuals and Public Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Bent Flyvbjerg, "Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?" *British Journal of Sociology* 49/2 (1998), 210–33.

for full citizenship and deserving of equal rights. Thus representation as invoked here involved giving voice to lower groups in both these senses, though in the case of Native Americans, certainly, representation of Indian tribes as needing a push toward liberal individualism also conveniently urged their relinquishing of tribal lands and identity.⁸

Finally, Frankel's idea of print statism includes the ways that national (and in the US case state-level) governments came to rely on the preparation and dissemination of voluminous printed reports to represent and empower the states themselves. Print statism put the state creditably on display before its citizens. It separated the nobler arts of governing from mere politics, always a suspect arena in civic republican terms, and a particularly divisive one in both England and the US during the period Frankel covers. Though Frankel explicitly denies an attraction to the "growth of the state" genre, his vivid recovery of ways that print statism aided the British and US states in appropriating new subjects and functions as their own approximates at least one familiar model of "state-building."

Frankel's analysis of the widening scope of state-sponsored inquiries directs our gaze well beyond the investigative agencies and the unknown social groups being investigated. He adroitly draws us into a compound and complex "traffic in knowledge" to observe the actions and explore the intentions of a multitude of traffickers in the new knowledge economy. In inspiring inquiries (or agreeing to sponsor those promoted by others), legislatures interacted with the diverse cast of characters engaged in all the operations involved in mounting a report, from conception to dissemination. Legislatures dealt with, funded, instructed, corrected, and occasionally were duped by the often dedicated but at times blatantly self-interested, dishonest, or careless subordinate agents whom it empowered to visit, observe, interview, count, measure, paint, draw, photograph, collect artifacts from, and print reports upon the objects of concern. In England the key investigative role was usually delegated to elite royal commissions that followed conventions established under the rubric of "Blue Book" production, whereas in the US, as we have seen, less tradition-bound legislators authorized inquiries by intrepid explorers, erstwhile liberal reformers, and amateur ethnographers drawn to Native American traditions.

Frankel gives generous space to the character and motives, the interiorities and subjectivities, of these investigators. Thus a chapter titled "The Purloined Indian" describes how, as the market revolution, religious revivals, and rising feminism undermined customary patterns of patriarchy in western New York, white males turned to Indian pageantry to enact identities and experiment

⁸ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

with new ways of practicing manhood. Copying the Iroquois federal structure, members of all-male lodges dressed themselves meticulously in authentic Indian costume, painted their faces, and reproduced important native ceremonies. The “purloining” involved bestowing Indian identities on new members through elaborate rites of adoption, called “indianation,” that built an imagined family relationship with the Iroquois. These rites simultaneously evoked complicated acts of substitution, wherein white invaders who had replaced the first Americans now brought them back through ceremonies of reenactment, cross-dressing, and masquerade.

Yet there was more at stake here than young men “playing Indian,” for leaders of their Grand Council of the Iroquois insisted that their ceremonies be accurate, Frankel demonstrates. Responding to this need, Morgan determined to document the lives of the Iroquois in five key categories: government, people, laws, religious systems, and historical events. Such ambitions initiated a relationship of dependency on Indian informants. Frankel documents the intimate relationships that Morgan and Schoolcraft cultivated with Native tribes—through actual adoption into Iroquois nations, Schoolcraft’s marriage to the granddaughter of a Powhatan chief, and Morgan’s close friendship with Ely Parker, a Seneca who introduced him to his grandfather Jemmy Johnson, “the most revered living authority on Iroquois culture” and a vital informant on the Iroquois constitution.

Both Parker and Morgan were “bridges” between cultures. Morgan translated the meanings of strange Iroquois ways to white society. Parker, whose personal saga had included childhood study at a residential Indian school, recapitulated the experience of the colonized, even as he later studied law and engineering, represented his people in Albany and Washington, hobnobbed with President Polk and his wife, served as an aide to General U. S. Grant, and stood beside him during Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. In turn, the continuous access that adoption permitted allowed Morgan to progress from antiquarianism to the kind of ethnography practiced in modern anthropology. Morgan’s discovery of the Iroquois matrilineal kinship structure, the obligation of sons to marry outside the tribe, and the resulting transference of their allegiance to the wider Iroquois society introduced a new historicism into the study of human social organization.

Frankel’s poignant account of Parker’s life in two worlds brilliantly evokes the contradictions that he faced and, ironically, had helped to instate. Living a “twoness” similar to that evoked subsequently by W. E. B. Du Bois, he worked to memorialize his race. Yet as a public figure and as Indian commissioner, he was implicated in acts of domination that the United States committed against Indians. By advocating a civilization policy as much as by pleading for preservation of a Seneca burial ground, Frankel avers, Parker helped to consign the Indian to the past (298–9).

Episodes such as these of complicity, transference, and two-way commerce in knowledge between inquirers and their subjects raise interesting questions for Frankel regarding who, indeed, were the “objects,” who were the “subjects,” and who was actually in charge of inquiries. He provides fascinating accounts of how state figures, supposedly in control of investigations, at times either willingly or unwittingly acceded to the initiatives of others, or lost control altogether. Frankel provides excruciating details of how Henry Schoolcraft manipulated the New York State legislature and the US Congress into providing subventions for an Iroquois census that was never completed and a sprawling, disorderly multivolume compendium of information, of uneven value and often doubtful authenticity, titled *Inquiries Respecting the History, Present Condition, and Future Prospects, of the Indian Tribes of the United States*. After an initial official publication of the handsome volumes, Congress actually transferred the copyright to Schoolcraft, which Frankel cites as an example of “confusion over governmental and personal stakes in intellectual property” (267).

Not only authors but others engaged in producing reports won similar concessions. Hansards publishing house in England, for example, and US government printers and private publishers controlled decisions regarding how reports would be presented. They determined in what size (quarto or folio was a major object of controversy in England), in what format, on paper of what quality, in what quantity, and through what manner of distribution, whether—conceived as commodities—for sale or free, the reports would reach how wide a public.

Both the authors of reports and their state sponsors had to be concerned about readership and reception, Frankel shows, reflecting the hermeneutic question of who gives texts their meaning. Having directed the authorial gaze in their chosen directions, authors then had to respond to reactions, often bitter complaints, as from members of investigated communities of angry Welsh miners or disgruntled Midlands factory owners who, feeling themselves wrongly portrayed, charged investigators with bringing biases and preconceptions with them to the factory or the pits. Occasionally subjects simply refused to cooperate, as when an Iroquois tribe refused to submit to a census for fear the state would use it against them. Or employers were warned that inspectors were coming, and thus accurate observation and representation were blocked. Yet what the public took away from these educative enterprises—completed as desired or not—conditioned the performance of citizens, just as public reception of the quality and honesty of government reports conditioned citizens’ perception of the competence of the state.

Frankel’s subtle consideration of the processes and personnel of investigation, his situating of the legislative reports as texts comprising a central portion of the entire print production of the state, his skillful detection of the conflicting meanings assigned to those texts, and his attention to unexpected twists and turns in a multidirectional traffic in knowledge yield fascinating insights. For

one, there were distinctive national “economies of information.” Social inquiry in England was organized mainly around constructions and distinctions of class, whereas in the US class and race were typically in tension, or race trumped class. The American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission attempted to historicize its inquiries by evoking a diaspora story of capture, enslavement, and forced transport of millions of Africans to the Americas. Even so, Frankel suggests, and despite its members’ commitment to free-labor ideology, the AFIC ultimately presented African Americans not primarily as formerly enslaved and now legally free citizen workers, but rather, essentializing their heredity, as members of a race, with distinctive racially inscribed traits.

Addressing racial injustice was far from the concern of the mid-twentieth-century social inquirers that Sarah Igo selected to study. Instead, as her introduction—titled “America in Aggregate”—candidly conveys, the Lynds, Gallup and Roper, and Kinsey and associates either excluded or drastically marginalized people of color in their samples. Igo distinguishes this generation of social researchers from those engaged in the well-studied social survey tradition of the Progressive Era, in which the surveyors typically aimed at identifying victims of social evils and augmenting the state to protect them. In the new era of statistical surveying, Igo detects an opposite incentive at work, toward locating not the deprived, the defective, the dependent, or the abnormal as judged by then-current expectations and standards of decency, but rather the average. Amidst frighteningly rapid changes associated with a restructuring of the US economy and social order, Americans wanted to find out what the new normal was, and at the same time to be reassured that cherished values and traditional lifeways survived. They were hungry for the type of study the Lynds produced after living for months in Middletown as participant observers; they were more than willing, Igo argues, as the study was publicized surprisingly widely, to accept what its authors found there as “typical.”

Thus experts who studied the working and consuming lives of Americans, their political opinions, and their sex lives satisfied a longing on the part of an American “mass public” to know what opinions and behaviors were “normal,” to be normal themselves, or at the very least to discover that a spectrum of behaviors existed across a range to the left and right of the mean, and that this—a normal curve rather than a fixed point—was itself normal. For outliers who might earlier have been branded—or have guiltily branded themselves—as deviant, this way of measuring behavior brought reassurance that even an individual far from the statistical average (e.g. a homosexual male or a “cold” woman) was neither “abnormal” nor out there all alone.

Yet the mass public that these intrepid investigators counted, averaged, and reported via radio, newspapers, newsreels, and popular magazines was in significant part their own creation. The consciously selective, “scientifically”

engineered construction of middle America by social investigators provides much of the structure for Igo's book. Her six chapters are arranged in pairs, so as first to describe the Lynds', the pollsters', and Kinsey's attempts to locate and report on the normal or "averaged" American, and then to fill out each story in a companion chapter representing, with a fascinating array of anecdotes, how the subjects, the private sponsors, and Americans more generally received these reports.

Looking carefully at these exemplary texts and at the biographies of their producers, and mixing sociological and hermeneutic approaches, Igo excels at ferreting out assumptions and commitments that the investigators carried with them, and particularly tellingly so in the case of the Lynds. Robert Lynd is best known to historians as the Columbia sociologist whose *Knowledge for What* (1939) hurled angry condemnation at what he saw as self-satisfied claims to "objectivity" pronounced, in the dominant social science research tradition of the Hoover era, by the authors of *Recent Social Trends*. Yet when he and his wife Helen went to Middletown (a.k.a. Muncie, Indiana) in 1924, they were little-known "social scientific amateurs," according to Igo. Having studied theology, and still torn between the ministry and social science, Robert Lynd was eligible to be chosen to conduct the Small City Study for the Rockefeller-funded Institute for Social and Religious Research. Somewhat under false pretenses, and continually assuring foundation trustees that the Middletown study had moral content, the Lynds converted the inquiry into one focused mainly on assessing the impact of rapid economic and social change on a town only recently drawn into the industrial milieu. In a manner quite different from the collaborative methods of the Hoover-inspired trend studies, which summarized recent professional scholarship on topics ranging from business cycles, labor unions, and immigration to education, government regulation, and health, the Lynds addressed contemporary American life by offering current information about what their manageable sample of Middletowners actually said, thought, and did. As Igo puts it, they aimed to compile "facts and figures about the daily lives of ordinary individuals—their work, their homes, their schooling, their modes of worship and leisure" (24).

And their shopping! Consumption is a telling signifier of identity in the new cultural history, and consumers are often both objects of manipulation and complicit in their own degradation. For US intellectual historians a significant tradition persists of treating ideas about consumption historically, as a pivotal issue in situated discourses regarding how the world works. In this vein, Kathleen Donohue's excellent *Freedom from Want* (2003) argued convincingly that from the 1880s through the 1940s consumption was on the minds of thinkers and policymakers interested in breaking free from the ideologically confining republican producerism that had pervaded nineteenth-century public philosophy. Donohue divided thinkers interested in advocating the increasing importance of consumption according to differences in ideology. One type,

influenced by Thorstein Veblen, whom she labeled “consumerists,” sought to democratize consumption in a highly stratified society and to establish a citizenship right to consume. The other group, followers of German-trained economist Simon Nelson Patten, whom she termed “consumptionists,” valued expanded—but always prudent—consumption as a method for stabilizing the unruly corporate order. In this dichotomy, straight through the Middletown years and during his New Deal service with the National Recovery Administration, Donohue placed Robert Lynd with the erstwhile democratic, redistributionist consumerists.⁹

There is some difference between Donohue’s Lynd and Igo’s. Igo does credit much of Lynd’s thinking about how to design the Middletown study to Veblen’s influence. Lynd took from Veblen a vision of the country as two Americas, worker–producers toiling virtuously to provide necessities for use, and a predatory capitalist class claiming inordinate profits as a vested right. Since manufacturing had created a permanent wage-earning class in Muncie, old-time producerism had waned, supplanted by an ethic in which the meaning in life came from consumption, and the family goal was getting enough money to engage in what Veblen had called pecuniary emulation. The “long arm of the job” reached into every corner of life, fixing the time a family rose for the day, what it ate, how it dressed and played, where it worshipped. Yet, strangely, Igo reports, the Lynds did not initially interrogate the degree of control exercised by Muncie’s propertied elites, particularly the Ball family that owned the city’s major industry. Only on their return visit during the Great Depression did they expose “the family’s vast influence in matters ranging from banking and industry to education policy, news reportage, and local politics” (62). Even here they were prompted by local critics of the first report, who had faulted them for understressing inequality, ignoring capitalist power, and exaggerating unity and comity in town. In the words of these critics, Muncie sounded a lot like Pullman. Yet in Igo’s telling, the Lynds did not use their study to advocate for democracy.

And, indeed, a crucial element of their work was decidedly undemocratic. Igo emphasizes that the Lynds’ initial design was to locate and distill for sociological purposes what “normal” people in a “typical” American town did, wanted, and believed. Thus they deliberately selected the Mid-western town with the smallest black population and the largest majority of “old stock” residents. Claiming a need to simplify a daunting process of compilation and analysis, they took no data at all from or regarding nonwhites. (And this as the Mid-western Klan flourished, the Dyer anti-lynching bill had only recently failed, and Congress was adopting national origins quotas for immigration.) The Lynds’ representation

⁹ Kathleen Donohue, *Freedom from Want: American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

of America, which Igo alleges was taken up enthusiastically across the land, in fact reproduced exactly the “racial nationalism” (Gary Gerstle’s label) that had rationalized excluding nonwhite migrants to the US and Jim Crowing American blacks. Ironically, Igo might have said, the Lynds “Jim Crowed” *Middletown*.

Igo’s explanation may cause some second thinking among intellectual historians regarding the liberating influence of Boasian anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s. Given the vogue of reporting by Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Bronislaw Malinowski on exotic natives in faraway lands, Americans were prepared to accept a meaning of culture as shared patterns. Thus, exposed as well to the language of the new science of statistics, they were preprogrammed to adopt enthusiastically an “averaged” view of the US as a giant Muncie, even though realities there differed dramatically from those in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Birmingham, or Detroit. Why shouldn’t Americans get the same treatment? Along with what Igo credits as a longing to believe that the lofty ideals of a storied past were surviving the perils of modernity, this line of thinking may suffice to explain how so many in the media also bought into *Middletown* as the real America. But does it suffice to explain how the Robert Lynd that Kathleen Donohue and others have painted as leftist, consumerist, and democratic could have deliberately excluded blacks and even non-native-born whites? Strange indeed.

Nor did everyone buy into *Middletown* as normal and average, or accept as accurate the Hoosier city’s portrayal by the Lynds. Reflecting current scholarly interest in readership and reception, and drawing extensively upon the Lynd correspondence, Igo includes a wealth of colorful commentary from Middletowners delighted by the representation of their town, but she also quotes numerous residents who insisted that the authors got something—the boosterism of the Rotary Club; the watered-down, feel-good religion; the clinging to *laissez-faire* assumptions—or maybe nearly everything wrong. Interestingly, there was little criticism at the time of the initial choice of *Middletown*, either from Muncie or from the higher reaches of US social inquiry. Lynd partially absolved himself, perhaps, by the increased class consciousness of *Middletown Revisited*, and by his nearly contemporary, markedly judgmental *Knowledge for What*, which urged social scientists to eschew a feckless neutrality and carry values into their research.

The reception of the first public opinion surveys revealed more controversy. Sharing backgrounds in commercial advertising, and embarking on the work in the 1930s and 1940s, Roper and Gallup indulged a priori the assumption that a mass public existed, Igo finds. They proposed to locate it by asking questions, initially of a group of respondents selected to represent specific population segments that interviewers would visit door to door, and later by employing more technically advanced statistical sampling.

The idea of a public was not a new one, of course. Indeed, as Igo notes, John Dewey and Walter Lippmann had famously disagreed by this time regarding

how capable of forming well-based opinions the American mass public could be. Igo might also have noted that Dewey's conception of a public was bound up with his reflection upon what role government should play in modern America. He juxtaposed areas that the capitalist legal regime marked as off limits for the state, which antistatists argued that the market or private negotiation could take care of, against areas he defined as necessarily invested with a public interest, where the state must and could justly go. Dewey defined this second class as spaces where effects from the bargaining of contracting parties spilled over onto third parties who had not been represented in the bargaining, and who, though unprotected by contract, were often the primary bearers of resulting social costs.¹⁰

What Dewey was after, in other words, was a method of defining and pursuing the public interest, whereas the pollsters were up to something significantly different, not only from this idea of a public, but also from defining the "middle" America that the Lynds sought. Roper and Gallup were actually interested in finding not an aggregate but a preponderance, which they conveyed by reporting percentages for and against this or that, implicitly letting the majority speak for the mass. The way the pollsters "sold" the value of their measurements of political opinions was little different from the way—as marketing consultants on the side—they sold the efficacy of determining what people wanted in a perfume or dish soap. Ostensibly the soap that more people liked was the best. In defending the polling of political opinions, they claimed to be augmenting—even surpassing—the value of elections. By invoking the "science" of opinion research they were promoting democracy, they claimed; the "man in the street" could register his views on issues as momentous as war and peace every single day.

But what Gallup and Roper sold as a route to civic empowerment, Igo cautions, could just as easily work as a means of opinion control. The way surveys were reported concealed actual misrepresentation of the "we," glossing significant differences in the balance of views according to gender, class, and most certainly race. Pollsters found the poor neighborhoods where most African Americans lived baffling, if not scary, and tended to skip houses there and fill in forms themselves. Nor were fieldworkers really expected to poll such groups according to their share of the population, as the pollsters biased their surveys heavily toward groups they expected to vote. As Lynd complained at the time, the pollsters' imagined public had an anti-labor bias, and the assumed obligatory stance of nonpartisanship kept important questions off the survey sheets. Igo's account of the shortcomings of this method of "averaging Americans" so as to identify a

¹⁰ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927).

single, mass voice, carried on as it was by private entrepreneurs who necessarily relied on keeping good relations with profit-maximizing media, is fascinating and shrewd.

If sampling based on mathematical probability theory had its shortcomings, so, Igo explains, did the strategies that Alfred Kinsey invented for finding out how Americans were behaving sexually. Like the Lynds, Kinsey had to satisfy both a university and foundation funders (another offshoot of the Rockefeller Foundation) that his interest was purely scientific, and that he had the credentials to carry out such a sensitive project without attracting negative publicity. In this regard, his reputation as a distinguished entomologist who obsessively collected and classified gall wasps served him well. Also, Igo avers, opinion polling and marketing research had paved the way for an extension of the survey technique into new territory. A public that had been tantalized by Margaret Mead's accounts of the sexual practices of aboriginal peoples and likely to have become familiar with Freud was inclined to accept as legitimate social science a tabulation of the frequency of orgasms.

Kinsey's standardized interviewing techniques were generically similar to those of the pollsters and the Lynds, but the tens of thousands of interviews that Kinsey and associates collected were far more extensive and detailed. Their subjects' willingness to disclose intimate details of their sex lives required a degree of confidence in the process. It therefore proved effective to recruit new subjects from friends and acquaintances of those already surveyed and to attempt to assure accuracy by amassing a large quantity of interviews, as, in Kinsey's view, random or probability sampling was not possible in work on intimate human behavior. Initially interviewing essentially anyone willing, Kinsey adopted for some of the work what he called the "hundred per cent method," which meant that the sex researchers worked their way through all members of a social unit such as a college dorm, a professional organization, a working-class lodge, or a prison ward, a routine that led to under- or overrepresentation of various groups. Critics have argued that Kinsey oversurveyed gay men, and, like the Lynds, he confined his interviewing to whites. Also, Igo argues, by identifying sexual outlet with orgasm, Kinsey biased his studies toward showing a higher level of male than female sexual satisfaction.

Rather than looking for a point on a line that was normal, typical, or "American," Kinsey devoutly intended to identify anything that people actually did as normal. Yet he was not in control of what others made of his data. By establishing an index of frequencies at which his subjects had engaged in six types of sexual practices (masturbation, nocturnal emissions, heterosexual petting, heterosexual intercourse, homosexual outlet, and animal contacts), and by representing these data in numerous charts showing frequency curves, he opened the way for others to infer for themselves what was "middle," "normal,"

or “average.” Correlating various frequencies with age, gender, and class suggested significant cultural differences.

In the end, readers made what they would of Kinsey’s reports on the sexual practices of male and female Americans. And readers they had, in tens of thousands, as sales of the separate reports on men and women were simply off the charts. Distilled for countless magazines, newspaper articles, and radio shows and discussed in clubs and college classes, the studies dramatically extended willingness to talk openly about sex. Igo’s marvelously detailed reporting from Kinsey’s correspondence—often extensive and sustained with subjects who contacted him with questions or for reassurance—indicates that one significant consequence of the research was enormous relief on the part of many who had thought they were abnormal. Yet others worried that there was no defense left for privacy, and that one of life’s most meaningful acts had been reduced to numbers. Igo quotes Margaret Mead as saying of the report, “The major abstraction an anthropologist from Mars would get from reading the Kinsey reports is that sex in this country is an important, meaningless physical act which men have to perform fairly often, but oftener if they have not gone to college” (249). Not appreciating Kinsey’s desire to encourage tolerance, others maintained that by failing to establish a moral standard for appropriate sexual expression he encouraged deviancy, even criminality.

Scholarly assessment of the quality of the inquiries Igo considers has differed from popular assessment. Although all three can be seen as pioneering attempts to reveal Americans to themselves, only the Middletown studies, particularly *Middletown in Transition*, have been treated as pivotal works in the history of social science. Even here, historians differ on whether to chastise Lynd for succumbing to scientism (Igo cites a review by Clarence Ayers, a die-hard Veblenian, who went after Lynd for pulling his critical punches), or to count him among a group (also including Charles Beard and Harold Lasswell) whom historian Mark C. Smith has labeled “purposivists” interested in reform, and thus unlike Wesley Mitchell and Charles Merriam, whom Smith classed as “objectivists.” In the latter vein, Alice O’Connor’s recent *Social Science for What?* takes Robert Lynd as a stellar exemplar of a lost tradition in the social sciences of doing first-class research from an awowedly principled, reformist perspective, rather than donning a spurious mantle of objectivity.¹¹

¹¹ Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Alice O’Connor, *Social Science for What? Philanthropy and the Social Question in a World Turned Rightside Up* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007). In the latter, see particularly the illuminating sketch of Lynd’s career and concerns, 59–65.

Igo comes down somewhere in between. The Lynds hoped, in her view, that cultivating a heightened awareness of their distinctive values would force Americans to look more critically at their own culture. But by pulling their punches, straining for objectivity or its appearance, indicating what was, and not what should be, they failed to “enlighten their readers in ways the authors had expected” (67). Reifying the typical, Igo claims, the Lynds, Gallup, Roper, and even Kinsey succeeded in accustoming Americans to constructing a unique national character through social investigations of these types, and to being satisfied—even pleased—with what they saw.

Yet it somewhat strains belief that readers persuaded by the Lynds could have been pleased by what they saw in Kinsey. The more persuasive argument may be that it was the medium—quantifying and reporting the numbers—that caught on, rather than the message that there actually was an “average,” as against an “averaged,” American. Histories of capitalism and class suggest dramatic movement in the opposite direction during much of Igo’s period, toward a heightened sense of division. Through the 1930s, certainly, although reaching less popular audiences perhaps, Charles Beard, Thorstein Veblen, and John Dewey, among numerous others, sustained an analysis of class division. And despite the talk of a vital center and Cold War consensus, in sociology, the discipline closest to the survey tradition, Gunnar Myrdal’s *American Dilemma* and C. Wright Mills’s *Power Elite* in the 1940s and 1950s offered segregation, domination, and cooptation as the main motifs in their representations of American society.

What to say, then, finally, of these stimulating books, and the implications of the blend of older and recent preoccupations in intellectual and cultural history that, in distinctive combinations, they reflect? Coming fortuitously together, the two studies ingeniously illustrate ways of combining sociological and hermeneutic approaches to framing the creation of social knowledge. In both, the central problematic is representation, meaning how inquirers positioned the populations they investigated in specific historical moments; how (and why) they identified what was distinctive about these objects of inquiry; how this framing inevitably arose in relation to the perceived qualities of other observed and remembered groups, including the “we” of the “host” societies; how—in the reflexive mode mentioned earlier—the qualities and circumstances of the inquirers, their social and political locations, presuppositions, sponsors, audiences, mechanisms of reportage, and various contextual factors within and beyond their control conditioned the framing; and how reader reception reacted back upon authorship.

For Igo and Frankel, a highly consequential identifier of the “seers” they studied was whether they came from the state-commissioned or the self-appointed side of a public–private binary. A public mandate conferred access and authority, whereas private initiative allowed inquirers fewer resources perhaps, but more

independence. Yet comparing the two classes of inquirers in light of constraints they faced and ways that social and political contexts shaped their agendas raises a question as to how much difference the inquirers' positions along the public–private continuum actually made. Interestingly, Frankel suggests that intrusive investigations by mid-nineteenth-century state figures may actually have started the erosion of the public sphere, which Habermas, citing the corrosive impact on reasoned deliberation of welfare dependency, consumerism, and a general “dumbing down” by mass media, dates only from the end of the nineteenth century.

Beyond reckoning with Habermas and perhaps with recent national and world events since the end of the Cold War and the “return to the market” that also heightened scholarly interest in civil society, an echo of Benedict Anderson can be detected here. It is audible not only in the interest both authors take in how their inquirers imagined selected communities of the “we,” the “other,” or the “average,” but also in their charting of the way those social fragments imagined themselves, represented themselves, and answered back. Interestingly, in these studies, discussion of the double meaning of representation—being portrayed by and for others, as against having a political voice of one’s own—compelled little attention to crucial contextual matters such as, in Frankel’s case, the highly contested proposals for extension of the suffrage to less privileged and non-propertied classes in Britain, certainly a major issue from Chartism forward through the Gladstone–Disraeli era. Discussions of representation in Igo’s study are silent on the profound ideological questions at issue between the Hoover and Eisenhower eras regarding what should be decided through the mechanisms of representative democracy and what should be delegated to private groups and relatively insulated professional expertise. The role of investigation in mirroring society did not extend, in either of these studies, to serious consideration of how investigations were engendered by, or played into, contemporary political struggles, or how they related to episodes of ideological fracturing and reconstruction. Curiously, ideology is largely absent from considerations of representation—among either the observers or the observed.

Politics and ideology in this broader, societal sense have been—as the saying goes—decentered in much of recent historical scholarship; culture, in the current constructed, transactional sense, is “in.” Thus, though British and US governments sent inquirers to survey conditions of work and the habits of workers, we learn little from Frankel of where either these emissaries or the legislative majorities in charge of them stood on what states might legitimately be expected to do in relation to labor, as against what should be left to employers or to workers’ own exertions. Interestingly, these investigations fell within what Karl Polanyi’s classic study of modernity presented as a time in England of

profound ideological ferment, when English radicals referenced the degradation of rural labor as their reason for undoing commitments regarding social welfare embodied in the Speenhamland system of parish relief and, through radical revisions in trade and poor laws, created a mobile labor pool and installed the liberal England (and Atlantic world) whose later crisis impelled a spate of “social protection” movements still under way in the decades that Igo examines.

Frankel’s emphasis on the production and reception of, and reader response to, public inquiries owes a clearly acknowledged debt to the history of the book, which he enhances by organizing his analysis around his core concept of print statism. But beyond taking up a portion of the national budget and putting textual and visual material in the hands and before the eyes of a literate public, how “statist” was print statism after all? When statism, state-building, or a “statist turn” have figured prominently in other histories, more has typically been at stake, once again, in the realm of ideology or public philosophy. As a term of art, print statism, which apparently “grew” the states in question, seems in the final analysis to have had more to do with volume of output and with technique than with substantive content. Reports that “estranged” British poor and working-class subjects, or that fell back on racial categories when the issue before the country was on whose account freed black people would labor, raise the same question: to what extent were the representations they offered inflected not only by the fact that they were government-sponsored, but also by the uses of inquiry in the ideological contests under way, in all of these cases, between established, challenged, and rising conceptions of modern, post-Enlightenment liberalism? Could more meaning have been teased out here?

Like Frankel’s, Igo’s analysis of inquiries into the habits and beliefs of average Americans stays away from matters of public philosophy. One can legitimately wonder whether, in her conclusions about what Americans actually came to believe as a result of the dissemination of survey results, Igo has a tendency occasionally to go beyond her evidence. Do we actually know from what is reported here that “Americans” changed in the way they thought about what it meant to be American, that “they” shifted from an attribute model based on traditional ideals to a statistically based view of what was normal or typical as the “us”? In light of intentional biases in sampling by the pollsters, the Lynds, and Kinsey, can we be so certain regarding what “the public” took as truth? Did the inquirers reproduce mid-twentieth-century US culture, or vice versa?

There is ground for us still to gain on questions regarding the ways that competing social knowledges arise and establish authority, how competing knowledges relate to cycles of ideological fracture and reconstruction, the seductive impact of actually existing and emergent public spheres on what

“knowledge-makers” attempt, and the perennial “Dewey question” about the relations of democracy and expertise. All this aside, these provocative studies establish Sarah Igo and Oz Frankel as first-rate scholars. They build intelligently on earlier work, carry out difficult and demanding research, use critical theory to good advantage, write vibrantly, and make original, highly illuminating contributions to the history of social investigation.