



REVIEW: Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens. *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge, Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature*.

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REVIEWS

Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens. *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge, Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature*. x + 270 pp. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.*

Mike Thicke[†]

Cold War Social Science is an edited volume that serves as an ideal entrée into the history of the social sciences in mid-twentieth-century America, as well as an argument for its subject matter as a distinct subfield in the history of the social sciences.

The volume is divided into three themed sections: *Knowledge Production*, *Liberal Democracy*, and *Human Nature*. As David Engerman's chapter shows, social scientists were heavily influenced by their experiences during the Second World War: "They abandoned disciplinary questions in favor of policy concerns; they rejected longstanding traditions of solitary work in favor of collective research enterprises; and they worked closely with the national security organs that sponsored their work" (p. 25). Engerman's and other chapters in the first section detail how wartime and Cold War institutions such as the RAND corporation, along with technological changes and the perceived successes of mathematical economics, led social scientists to focus on quantifiable, theory-driven research projects.

The second section explores the complicated relationship between ideas of liberal democracy and the Cold War. Sometimes, as described in Hamilton Cravens' chapter, scientists invoked liberal ideals in support of the Cold War agenda, emphasizing the importance of individualism for democracy and economic success. Other chapters, such as Joy Rohde's history of the Special Operations Research Office, show how liberal ideals clashed with military priorities. Hunter Heyck's chapter in this section is worthy of special mention: he describes how scientists worried about the consequences of poor decisions in the nuclear age and, when confronted with evidence of systematic human irrationality and error, sought to devise mechanical strategies for producing good decisions.

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The final section describes various ways in which evolving ideas of human nature interacted with postwar society, fears of communism, and the needs of the military. Edward Jones-Imhotep describes how the U.S. Navy sought to improve the robustness of systems despite pervasive human fallibility. Marga Vicedo's paper describes how conservative social views of motherhood found new justification under the spectre of communism. A notable quotation comes from developmental psychologist John Bowlby: "Whenever I hear the issue of maternal deprivation being discussed, I find two groups with a vested interest in shooting down the theory. The Communists are one, for the obvious reason that they need their women at work and thus their children must be cared for by others. The professional women are the second group. They have, in fact, neglected their families. But it's the last thing they want to admit" (p. 242).

What constitutes *Cold War* social science (CWSS) and whether its history should be considered a proper subfield are recurring questions among the authors. Mark Solovey observes that we cannot assume that all developments in the social sciences during the Cold War period can be directly linked to Cold War concerns. For instance, the increasing use of mathematics and computers in linguistics described by Janet Martin-Nielson seems largely due to the decline of behaviorism rather than to any external factors. Solovey suggests that the label of Cold War social science is "probably most useful when there are deep connections between the social science enterprise and Cold War concerns" (p. 16).

In considering the question of whether CWSS should be considered a distinct subfield, it is worth asking to what extent its research projects speak to each other in ways that they do not speak to research outside the subfield. That is, what makes a connection to the Cold War a significant rather than arbitrary demarcation criterion? The most promising common theme amongst the chapters in this volume seems to be the tension between the massive increases in funding for the social sciences coming from government and military sources during the Cold War, and worries about academic autonomy and integrity arising from that funding. Joy Rohde's paper is an excellent example of this; she discusses the Special Operations Research Office, founded by the Pentagon in 1956 on the American University campus in Washington D.C. The office was banished from the University's campus in 1969 as Americans became increasingly worried that military funding distorted scholarship. Rohde argues that, ironically, this served to move the Pentagon's research apparatus out of public view while failing to hurt the national security state in any meaningful way. In contrast, I would not classify the work of Ashley Montagu, described by Nadine Weidman, as Cold War social science. Although Montagu himself was certainly affected by the Cold War—he was forced out of academia by McCarthyism—his work arguing that

race and racial purity are “social myths” arose more from concerns stemming from World War II.

A strength of the volume is its brevity. It packs thirteen articles into 250 pages, including endnotes. Most of the articles are less than twenty pages long. This makes the volume an easy introduction to the field, which is undoubtedly the best role for edited volumes like this to play. Even so, none of the chapters felt perfunctory or incomplete.

I also appreciated the authors’ and editors’ efforts to draw connections between their work. Although the studies reported in these chapters have few direct connections, many of the authors referenced other chapters in the collection. This helped to create context and made it easier to grasp the central issues being discussed. One can always wish for more cohesion, and I would have appreciated more historiographical and “zoomed-out” reflections from the chapters, but the vast array of subjects that fall within the volume’s scope would make this difficult. Perhaps this is an argument for a more restricted notion of Cold War social science.

Overall I quite enjoyed this collection. Its chapters were of consistently high quality and all detailed important episodes and movements in the Cold War period. I do question the inclusion of some of the contributions in a specifically *Cold War* volume, but this is not to detract from the strength of the contributions themselves. I would unhesitatingly recommend this volume to all scholars interested in the history of the social sciences.

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