The original version of The American Sociologist (TAS) has been overlooked by contemporary sociologists. L. L. Bernard edited the publication from 1938 to 1947. This article describes the contents of this publication and places these materials in historical context. While there were profound differences between Bernard's publication and the later TAS, both publications dealt with issues in the sociology of sociology.

A frequent theme of those writing in the sociology of sociology is that American sociologists have no sense of the history of their discipline (Mills 1959; Gouldner 1970; Friedrichs 1970). Sorokin (1956) referred to this academic amnesia as the "Columbus syndrome" in that sociologists continually and incorrectly believe that they are rediscovering the world due to their lack of any sense of intellectual history. The history of The American Sociologist (TAS), whose content overlaps at least to some degree with later publications, represents a classic example of such intellectual amnesia. We will attempt to show that this journal is significant both as an example of early social science publishing and as part of the history of the sociology of sociology.

The original TAS was published between 1938 and 1947 by L. L. Bernard at Washington University in St. Louis, with the help of a few colleagues. During these years there were between four and nine issues per year consisting of four professionally-typeset pages per issue. Publication ceased as Bernard's health failed near the end of his life (Jessie Bernard 1988). It was fairly widely distributed with an average circulation of over 200, including among its subscribers such eminent sociologists as Burgess, Lundberg, Blumer, Sellin, Stouffer, Hughes, Hollingshead,
Newcomb, Ross, Sutherland, Vold, Queen, LaPiere, Becker, Zimmerman, and Bogardus. Even so, its existence is little known and largely overlooked today. The only known source of the journal is in the L. L. Bernard collection in the Labor Archives of the Pattee Library at Pennsylvania State University, which also owns the list of subscribers to the journal.

Bernard was elected president of the American Sociological Society (ASS) in 1932 and in this role helped lead the movement to sever the organization’s ties to the American Journal of Sociology and the Chicago Department of Sociology, and to establish the American Sociological Review as the association’s journal (Lengermann 1979; Bannister 1987). Bernard said “I took these steps because the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago under its leader at the time had become arrogant and was suspected of making the interests of the American Sociological Society subsidiary to those of the Chicago department” (Odum 1951, p. 410). In response to these changes several members of the ASS took it upon themselves in 1936 to create the Sociological Research Association (SRA) to “realize their old dream of an exclusive body of truly ‘scientific’ sociologists” (Bannister 1987, p. 7) and to “attempt to create an elite group within the discipline” (Bannister 1987, p. 189). The SRA could then replace the Chicago department in guiding the association and the discipline. The SRA would be limited to only 100 members “who have made a significant contribution to sociological research” (Bannister 1987, p. 217) and was by invitation only. Understandably, Bernard was not invited to join.

The SRA was created by a coalition of members of the Chicago School, largely under the leadership of Herbert Blumer, in collaboration with a group committed to quantitative research, led by Stuart Rice and William Ogburn (Bannister 1987). Formation of the SRA was announced in the “News and Notes” section of the American Journal of Sociology in 1936. The notice stated: “A group of sociologists representing all the varied interests of the subject, and each a member of the American Sociological Society, met at the Hotel Morrison in Chicago on May 9, 1936 and organized the Sociological Research Association. The object of the Association is the advancement of the science of Sociology” (1936, p. 259). The SRA is widely believed to still exist, although there appear to be no public records of its current activities of membership. Lawrence J. Rhoades, who has written widely on the history of the ASA, observed that the SRA now has no official function except for sponsoring an annual dinner for its members during the ASA meetings (1988).

The American Sociologist Begins

Bernard’s reaction to this apparent flanking action by the SRA was continued rebellion. He resigned from the ASS and as one of the first sociologists of sociology created his own publication, The American Sociologist, in which he would critique the discipline and professional chicanery and elitism. He published two editorial statements, one in the initial issue in December 1938. It read: