

## Editors' Introduction

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In this inaugural issue of *Theory and Social Inquiry*, we want to welcome readers and potential authors and explain why we have taken on the project of creating this journal.

*Theory and Social Inquiry* is a site for unbounded social scientific inquiry and research-informed social critique. The journal encourages work that is expansive and eclectic in topic and method, deploying social scientific knowledge to grapple with the full range of challenges posed by human societies in the past, present, and future. We seek to publish articles that ask big questions, theorize boldly, and draw on careful empirical investigation to arrive at novel understandings of the social world and its possibilities for change.

Our journal is published in partnership with the Open Library of Humanities (OLH), which affords us – the editors – a great deal of flexibility in how we operate as an intellectual community. An association constituted of the editorial board of the journal owns the title *Theory and Social Inquiry*, an arrangement that means that we, now and into the foreseeable future, have full control over the content of the articles we publish. In addition, we are not required to meet publication quotas determining how many articles appear in each issue. We are also one of only a handful of social science journals unconstrained by page limits. Authors can take the space they need to make complicated arguments and offer rich empirical evidence without having to adhere to arbitrary restrictions on word length.

We want to point out another aspect of the partnership with OLH that is particularly appealing to us: OLH publishes using the “diamond” open access model, which means authors do not have to pay to publish in the journal, and readers do not have to pay to read the journal. This model, supported by contributions from an international consortium of libraries, makes it possible for anyone from anywhere in the world to publish in these pages, and anyone from anywhere in the world to read what these pages contain.



From inside and outside the academy, the times call for a journal of this kind. As we write these words in July of 2025, Harvard University is negotiating with the Trump Administration regarding the “viewpoint diversity” of its faculty. At Harvard and elsewhere, the federal government is imposing unprecedented cuts in research funding that have sent higher education into a tailspin. And just one week ago, the President of the University of Virginia resigned from his position, the latest university leader to be ousted for landing on the wrong side of “diversity, equity, and inclusion.” These developments reveal a disturbing trend toward increasingly aggressive public attacks on scholars – and the need to resist them.

We do not have solutions for most of what is going on in the world around us. But the times and circumstances have given us one clear task: to carve out and maintain a space for social scientific and intellectual autonomy. In this journal, scholars are free to defend diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) if that is where the data lead them. They are free to criticize DEI, as many social scientists have done over the years. They are free to challenge and critique capitalism and the current rulers, or to extol them, or to dream up alternative forms of social organization. They are free to investigate any problem of theoretical and empirical significance, using all the methods available in the social sciences and humanities.

In vigorously defending our intellectual autonomy, we draw inspiration from the prescient sociologist Alvin Gouldner, the founder of *Theory and Society*, a pioneering journal that was home to prize-winning social scientific scholarship for half a century. Like Gouldner in the early 1970s, we believe that social scientists should decide what constitutes good social science – not governments, not Boards of Trustees, not funding agencies, and not corporate publishers seeking profit. We belabor this point because in December of 2023, Springer Nature, the commercial publisher of *Theory and Society*, asked the team of senior editors to resign from our positions, thereby ending the journal’s editorial independence.

Our goal in launching *Theory and Social Inquiry* is to demonstrate the promise of a different publishing model, one that can maintain the intellectual integrity of our field. By partnering with OLH, we seek to preserve the ability of social scientists to control the content of the articles they publish. Academics are the ones who should determine what is of theoretical significance for the advancement of the social sciences, what empirical work adds to existing knowledge, and what research techniques meet the standards of good social science.

This inaugural issue represents the theoretical imagination and empirical rigor of social science and social critique at its best: from Jeff Manza reviving mid-century sociological theory to propose a provocative interpretation of our times (indeed,

a meta-commentary on our reasons for launching this journal), to Sarah Babb's investigation into Institutional Review Boards and her surprising conclusion about the consequences of decentralized governance, to Gabriel Lévesque's problem-solving study of why threats to health are addressed or ignored, with his sometimes counter-intuitive findings, to Rogers Brubaker's bravura demonstration of the scientific insights to be gained from steering straight into the heart of the most contentious contemporary political issues.

In our pipeline, there is much more research of this kind: fascinating manuscripts that demonstrate the full potential of the humanistic social sciences, theoretically and empirically. In this spirit, we invite scholars of all stripes to submit their work to *Theory and Social Inquiry*, and readers of all interests to read on. This journal is a testament to hope, to our commitment that, despite attacks on scholarly independence, our conversation will never end.

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