

Biography - Herbert J. Gans

Robert S. Lynd Professor Emeritus of Sociology
Columbia University

I was born in Cologne, Germany in 1927, left Nazi Germany for England on December 31, 1938, arrived in America in 1940, and became an American citizen in 1945. After graduating from the College of the Univ. of Chicago in 1947, I received my M.A. in Sociology and Social Science from Chicago in 1950, and my Ph.D. in Planning and Sociology from the Univ. of Pennsylvania in 1957. Thus, I was trained both as a sociologist and a planner.

From 1950 to 1953 I was a planner in private and public agencies, including an architectural firm where I did social research to help plan two new towns; and at H.H.F.A., the predecessor of the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. Since then I have been an academic: at the Univ. of Pennsylvania, Teachers College of Columbia University, the Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, and Columbia University, as follows:

1953-1964: Lecturer to Assoc. Professor of Urban Studies, Dept. of City Planning, Univ. of Pennsylvania; 1964-1969: Assoc. and Adjunct Professor, Teachers College; also Research Assoc., Institute for Urban Studies to Senior Staff Sociologist, Center for Urban Education; 1969-1971: Professor of Sociology and Planning, Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning, Mass. Inst. of Technology, and Faculty Associate, M.I.T.- Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies.

Since 1971 I have been in the Dept. of Sociology at Columbia Univ. 1971-1985: Professor of Sociology (Ford Foundation Urban Chair); 1985-2007: Robert S. Lynd Professor; 2007 - : R S Lynd Professor Emeritus and Special Lecturer.

My research and teaching activities have been concentrated in urban poverty and anti-poverty planning; equality and stratification; social planning and social policy; ethnicity and race; the news media and popular culture, and urban and community studies. I have published over a dozen books and several monographs, as well as 200 articles in these fields - and edited or coedited two other books.

My books are: The Urban Villagers (Free Press 1962; Updated and Expanded Edition 1982), The Levittowners (Pantheon Books 1967; Columbia Univ. Press 1982), People and Plans (Basic Books 1968), More Equality (Pantheon Books 1973), Popular Culture and High Culture (Basic Books 1974), Deciding What's News (Pantheon Books 1979), and Middle American Individualism, (Free Press, 1988, Oxford Univ. Press paperback 1991) and People, Plans and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism and Other National Urban Problems

(Columbia Univ. Press and Russell Sage Fndn. 1991); The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy, (Basic Books 1995); Making Sense of America: Sociological Analyses and Essays, (Rowman & Littlefield 1999); the Revised and Updated ed. of Popular Culture and High Culture, (Basic Books 1999). and Democracy and the News, (Oxford Univ. Press 2003, paperback 2004). The 25th Anniversary edition of Deciding What's News was published by Northwestern Univ. Press in 2004. My most recent book is Imagining America in 2033, Univ. of Michigan Press 2008.

My scholarly articles have appeared in journals in sociology, planning, urban affairs, mass communication, etc., and in many anthologies. Other articles have been published in Challenge, Chronicle of Higher Education, Commentary (until 1965), Contexts, Commonweal, Daedalus, Dissent, Huffington Post, The Nation, The New Leader, The New Republic, The New York Times (Op Ed Page and Magazine), Newsday, and the Washington Post; in Partisan Review, Psychology Today, the Public Interest, Saturday Review, Society, and Social Policy. From 1971 to 1978 I was the film critic for Social Policy.

Edited works include: (with Nathan Glazer, Joseph Gusfield and Christopher Jencks), On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1979); and Sociology in America (Sage Publications, 1990).

I have been a consultant for many civil rights, anti-poverty and planning agencies; also for the Ford Foundation and for the federal government: H.E.W. (now H.H.S.), H.U.D., and the National Commission on Civil Disorders. I wrote Chapter 9 of the Commission's "Kerner Report." I was a member of the pre-planning Work Group for the new town of Columbia Maryland, and serve on the boards of many organizations, including scholarly journals.

Honors and awards include: Doctor of Science, hon., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2003; Council of the American Sociological Association, and the Executive Committee of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, 1968-71; President, Eastern Sociological Society, 1973; and President, American Sociological Association, 1988.

Other honors include: Election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1977; German Marshall Fund Fellowship, 1984; Senior Fellowship, Gannett Ctr. for Media Studies, Fall 1985, 1986; Visiting Scholar, Russell Sage Fndn., 1989; Senior Fellow, Media Studies Ctr., 1996; Honorary Member, German Sociological Assn., 1997.

Also: the Excelsior Award of the State Univ. of New York, Albany, November 1987; Robert and Helen Lynd award for "Lifetime Contributions to Research" from the Community and Urban Sociol. Section, Amer. Sociol. Assn. 1992; Lifetime Merit Award for Outstanding Scholarship, Eastern Sociol. Soc.; the Freedom Forum Media Study Center's Award for Distinguished Contribution to Media Studies, both 1995; 1999 Amer. Sociol. Assn. Award for Public Understanding of Sociology, 2004 Distinguished Career Award, International Migration Section, Amer. Sociol. Assn.; 2006 Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award, Amer. Sociol. Assn.

Book Awards include: For Deciding What's News, 1979 Theatre Library Association Award, and 1980 Book Award of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. For War Against the Poor, 1996 PASS Award of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1996 Gustavus Myers Award for Outstanding Book on Human Rights, 1996 Choice Outstanding Academic Book, 2012. Special award, Amer. Sociol. Assn., 50th anniversary of the publication of The Urban Villagers.

Since my retirement, I have been writing articles and blogs for general and scholarly publications.