

MONITORING SOCIAL CHANGE

Discussion: Robert B. Voight, Bureau of the Census

I consider this paper a most timely assessment of the many issues with which social scientists, in the broadest sense of the term, should concern themselves in the present atmosphere of interest in social issues. Not since the early 1930s, perhaps, has there been the need for as well as the opportunity to monitor social change.

The authors have identified the areas of most pressing concern at a point where technological advances in methods of communication, and the statistical manipulation and display of the total inventory of data permit an open dialogue between scientists in many disciplines. In fact the opportunities presented by data banks, computerized information systems, and the ability to collect and store information appear so glamorous at the moment that we are most susceptible to the ingenious possibilities of the systems and may easily lose sight of the end purposes to be served. Dr. Moore and Dr. Sheldon remind us of the real responsibilities which these conveniences make possible to achieve. A recent example of a well balanced approach to the collection, storage, and treatment of social data is the Inter-University Consortium for Political Behavior where some 50 major universities across the country have joined forces to exploit the advantages of a central information system.

In scanning the broad spectrum of social changes for which the authors point out the need for monitorship, I suggest there is a need for anticipating future potential development and ensuring that such phenomena be

subjected to constructive continuing evaluation as early as possible. Effective monitorship, I believe, calls for the refinement of measures, the need to establish priorities among the various phenomena being observed to narrow the consideration of the investigators to the more crucial issues, and greater concern with the attitudes and intentions of people which induce social change. Here it would be appropriate to pay particular attention to the risk takers and innovators in our society for here is the opportunity to anticipate and forecast future change.

While the paper was not explicit in indicating the group or groups that logically should take the lead in monitoring social change, it would appear most logical that the direction and impetus come from those outside the Government. It would be unfortunate for those closely involved in the administration of programs directly effecting change to also act as monitors.

The authors are to be commended for issuing a provocative challenge to the social science disciplines and I urge that the topic be considered for further discussion at next year's meetings of this association.