

Fellows

Eric Hounshell

Fulbright/IFK_Junior Fellow

Duration of fellowship

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Eric Hounshell

PROJECT TITLE

Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Modern Social Research

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

What do marketing, social welfare, foreign intelligence, mass media, electoral politics, and the philosophy of social science have in common? Incongruous as these items may seem, each was shaped by the work of Austrian émigré social-psychologist, mathematician, and central figure of my dissertation project, Paul F. Lazarsfeld (1901-1976). Today, Lazarsfeld is known primarily for his pioneering work in mass communications research and his innovations in the organization of empirical social science research and training. My research reconstructs the European and American contexts in which he developed his empirical social science. This includes intellectual traditions in Germany, Austria, and America; his immediate political, cultural, and social contexts in Vienna and the U.S.; and the “intellectual migration”. Lazarsfeld's applied social science also reshaped its context and contributed to broad structural transformations in governance, economy, and mass culture on both sides of the Atlantic: although his science developed within specific contexts, once the basic premises and empirical techniques were available, his methods could be widely applied in government and industry. Thus, Lazarsfeld participated in the general mid-century boom of social

science which created a new class of white-collar technocrats, managers, and experts. Moreover, he successfully exported his science and its institutional framework to Cold War Europe through international organizations and philanthropies. A cardinal aim of the dissertation is to bring Lazarsfeld, who has previously been studied mainly within the development of his specialized discipline, into the broader intellectual and social histories of the “short” twentieth century.

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Eric Hounshell is a doctoral student in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He earned a bachelor's degree in history, with additional coursework in philosophy and Chinese, at the University of California, Berkeley from 2002 to 2006.