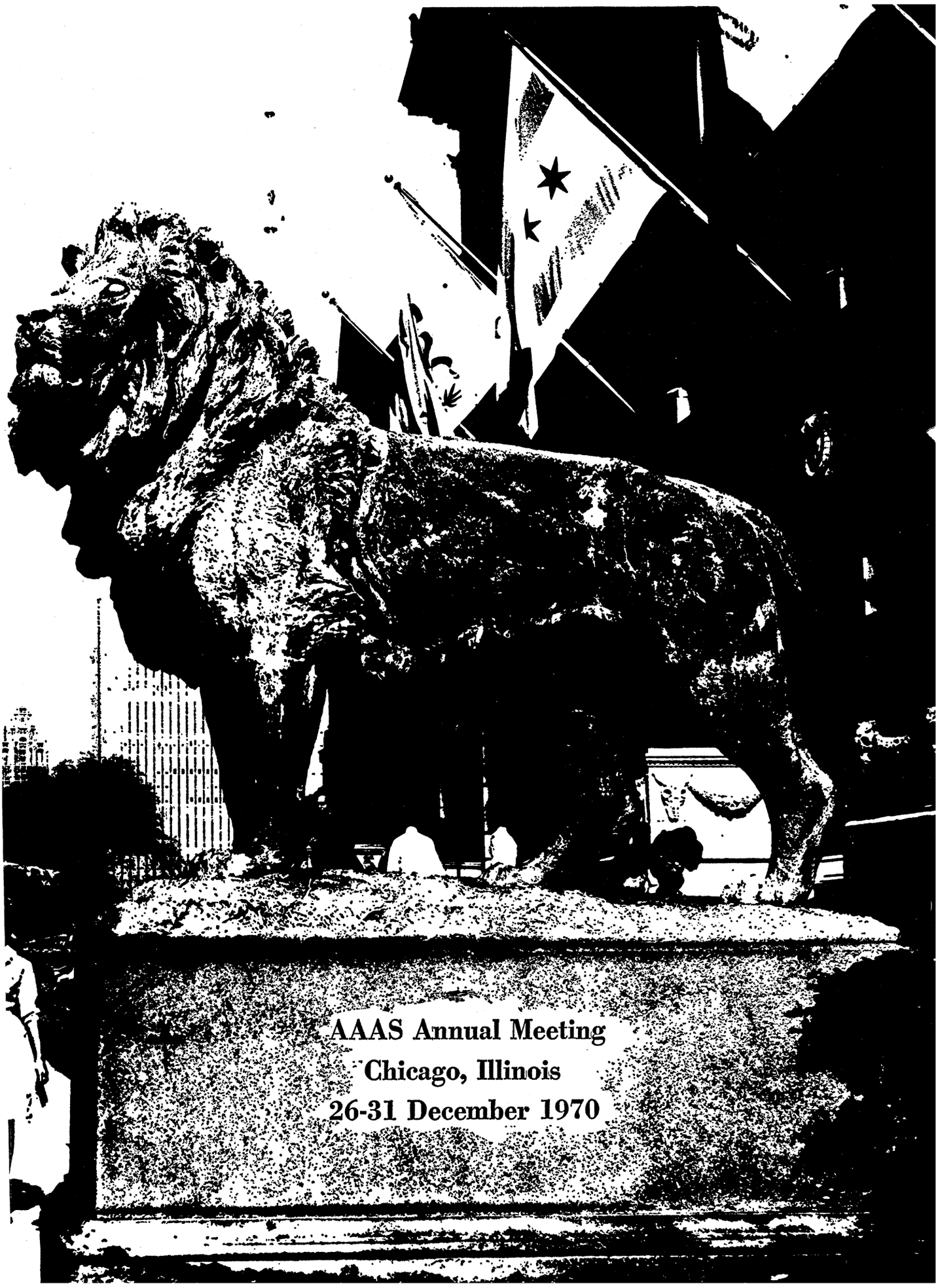

AAAS Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
26-31 December 1970

AAAS Annual Meeting—1970

Walter G. Berl, Meeting Editor

Despite its spectacular successes, science is not yet firmly established in the human mind. . . . Public apprehension and hostility point to the need for an enlargement of science. Scientists must take more to heart the questions which deeply concern human beings; they must learn to give greater prominence to large human values. . . . —RENÉ DUBOS (1965)

In considering the long and nearly unbroken chain of AAAS Annual Meetings, dating back to 1848, one reflects once again on their immediate prospects and longer-ranging aims. The immediate prospects are pleasing. After years of inward turning and increasing specialization, the course is changing. Even a cursory inspection of this year's program shows clearly a direction toward wide-ranging inquiries, a desire to grapple with the great questions of our time.

In part, the symposia and discussions deal with issues where solutions can be obtained only by calling on the insights of several scientific disciplines. In this group are titles such as these:

Mood, Behavior and Drugs
Crime, Violence and Social Control
Urbanization in the Arid Lands
Reducing the Environmental Impact of Population Growth
Man's Impact on the Global Environment
Problems in the Meaning of Death
Advances in Human Genetics and Their Impact on Society
Separation and Depression
World Cities of the Future
Is Population Growth Responsible for the Environmental Crisis?
Industrial Approach to Urban Problems

Equally prominent are discussions that are concerned less with the immediate advancement of science but more with its integration into the social fabric, with questions of ethics and values, and with the unsolved questions of our age—its tragedies and dilemmas, its opportunities and prospects:

Human Behavior and Its Control
Public Policy for the Environment
Computers and Society
Technology: Nuts and Bolts of Social Process
Women in Science
University Open Admissions
How People React to Technology
Science and the Federal Government—1970
Hiroshima: 25 Years Later
Contribution of U.S. Minority Groups to the Development of Science
Is There a Generation Gap in Science?
Scientific Organizations: War/Peace Issues and the Public Policy Process

In addition, numerous symposia planned along "disciplinary" lines will illuminate fields in which new information, with profound implications about man and his environment, is being discovered:

Lake Restoration
Systems Approach to Environmental Pollution
Interstellar Molecules and Chemistry
The Neuropsychology of Feeding
Aleutian Ecosystem
Automobile Pollution
The United States Contribution to the International Biological Program
Prospects for a World Science Information System
Biocybernetics of the Dynamic Communication of Emotions and Qualities
Elementary Particles and Symmetry
The Chemistry of Learning and Memory
Results of the Apollo Program
Minor Metals of the Geochemical Environment, Health and Disease

Of equal importance is a need to reach people who are interested in the results of the scientific endeavor without being active participants in its creations. This audience includes students who, at the beginning of their careers, are entitled to guidance and advice. It includes citizens whose lives are affected by the results of scientific research and by the developments of technology. It includes the public officials, the professional men, the teachers, the writers and artists whose outlook on life is now deeply interwoven with the insights of science.

A separate and substantial part of the program is being arranged for this public: general lectures that include a number of illustrated and demonstration lectures; panel discussions on themes of general interest; informal discussions between students and their chosen adversaries; a showing of the best current science films; tours to places where important work is being done. Funds permitting, much of this will be broadcast, to reach audiences many times larger than those who could attend in person.

What is the basic purpose of this substantial effort? Will these efforts of exposition and communication suffice? Will they contribute to the public understanding, the public dissemination, and the public discussion of those ideas from which the future will be fashioned? Will they fairly reflect the current state of science, its promises and its problems? They will if they conform to a recommendation in a recent prospectus on the "Future of AAAS Annual Meetings":

> . . . avoiding those matters that are better done elsewhere, the Meetings should address themselves boldly to topics of general concern to science and all scientists, to topics that deal with the interaction of science and other human activities; to topics that clarify questions of great public concern and interest; to topics that illuminate advances in particular areas of science in a way that makes their significance accessible to a wide public; and to topics of practical importance that pose novel questions to basic science. . . .

Deep questioning of motives, profound reassessment of objectives, and review of direction is the order of the day. Reacting to these challenges, perhaps the principal value of AAAS Meetings in the years ahead will be to discuss options, to set goals and standards, and to illuminate new approaches, thus clearing away rubbles of error and lifting burdens of ignorance.