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Information for contributors appears on pages 35–37 of the 4 January 1991 issue. Editorial correspondence, including requests for permission to reprint and reprint orders, should be sent to 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 202-326-6500. **Advertising correspondence** should be sent to Tenth Floor, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. Telephone 212-730-1050 or WU Telex 968082 SCHERAGO, or FAX 212-382-3725. **Subscription/Member Benefits** Questions: 202-326-6417. **Science:** 202-326-6500. **Other AAAS Programs:** 202-326-6400.

Book Reviews in *Science*

Publishers send about 4000 scholarly books a year to *Science* in the hope of having them reviewed. Their success rate is only about 6%. Half the books are set aside because they are devoted to highly specialized topics or for other reasons. The difficult choices from among the remainder are made after consultation with advisers selected from a list of about 500. A consideration that enters final decisions stems from a mission to help balance the overall content of *Science*. Most of the magazine is devoted to exciting news especially relevant to natural scientists and administrators. The book reviews provide sustenance for social scientists. They also furnish food for those scientists, engineers, and physicians who choose occasionally to engage in broader contemplative scholarship.

The tasks of conducting the Book Review section fall on two staff editors. They love books and enjoy interacting by telephone with the advisers. These consultants are usually highly knowledgeable about the subject matter and the author of the book. Conversations with advisers reveal the degree of enthusiasm or antipathy for the book and suggestions for appropriate reviewers. Often a number of advisers are consulted about a book, and it is thus possible to evaluate the advisers.

In choosing reviewers an effort is made to identify up-and-coming people. They are usually diligent and eager. People with established names are sometimes careless. Once a person agrees to review a book, a set of guidelines containing points to consider is sent. For instance, "It should be evident from your review why the book merits attention in a selective journal," and "We cannot undertake to publish reviews whose only purpose is to warn readers against the book." "The finished review should give the reader a good idea of the substance of the book, the author's purpose in writing it, and your estimate of his or her success in achieving that purpose." In dealing with symposium volumes, reviewers are instructed to avoid simply listing papers and contributors. Instead they are asked to spotlight the papers or ideas they find most stimulating.

This issue of *Science* contains a special annual Book Review section. A listing of the reviews provides a cross section of the kinds of books treated during the year. Different readers will make various judgments on the level of interest stimulated and significance of the reviews. Three of the reviews were of special interest to me. Taken together they provide a vivid example of the great changes that have occurred during this century in technology, public health, and the status of women. A book entitled *Electrifying America* provides a glimpse of the enormous difference between the days before electricity and events following its introduction. The introduction of electricity profoundly affected life in and structure of cities, the layout of and work in factories, and life and chores in the home. It was especially helpful to women. It broadened their job opportunities in factory work previously dependent on brute strength. Electrical appliances greatly eased housework. For example, the clothes washer superseded hand work on the washboard. Electric lighting, replacing the kerosene lamp, made evening reading pleasant. Most readers may not be familiar with the impact of the electric streetcar, which in its day shaped the evolution of cities. Books entitled *Fatal Years* and *Save the Babies* tell of the time when infant mortality in the United States was greater than that of the less developed world today. The two volumes provide a "means of understanding one of the major achievements of the 20th century United States, lowering the death rate of the young." The review of a book entitled *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* provides further reminders of the enormous changes that have occurred in the status of women. In the early decades of this century women were barely tolerated as students at universities. As an example of their status at the University of California, they were prohibited from sitting on certain benches and using certain paths reserved for men.

One of the useful features of the annual book issue is a compilation and naming of the titles covered in the preceding 51 issues. All together, 238 books were treated. Of these the subject of 43 was physical sciences; 70 biological sciences; 125 social science, science policy, history of science, and general. For those who might wish to engage in contemplative scholarship, an inviting buffet has been prepared from a selection of the most appetizing of 4000 volumes.—PHILIP H. ABELSON