

201 W. Evergreen Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19118

September 14, 2010

Professor Dimitri Shalin
7540 Hartwell Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89123

Dear Dimitri,

Apologies for sending this so late. I left town shortly after initially writing to you and have only recently returned.

In any event, with the enclosed you now have pretty much the whole story. When I showed Erving the letter he said to me: "You are a small nation threatening a large one." To which I replied, "Yes Erving, but I have the bomb."

The panel I had proposed was reinstated in the A.S.A. program, but we – Robert Bellah, Aaron Cicourel, Jeffery Alexander, Victor Lidz and I -- were then re-scheduled (by Erving or with his instructions, I assume) to meet at 8 AM Sunday morning, the earliest hour of the last day of the meetings. Although this was the least attractive meeting time possible, nonetheless, about 50 or so people came to hear us, and the session was quite lively.

I understood that Erving's animus was not directed towards me or any of the panelists, but against Talcott Parsons' work. And of course, he understood the program I had organized would be about Parsons' work. I could never find out why Erving was so vigorously opposed to Parsons' work. I cannot imagine there was anything personal in this.

It's now all water over the dam, as they say.

In many of his personal relationships Erving left a wide swath of anger and disappointment. But the actors and the anger are slowly fading from memory and the beauty and intelligence of his work will remain.

All the best,



Harold

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA 19104

Faculty of Arts & Sciences

January 19, 1982

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
3718 LOCUST WALK CR

Mr. Erving Goffman
Benjamin Franklin Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
518 University Museum/F1
University of Pennsylvania

Dear Erving,

When we talked last September, 1981 on the panel, "New Refinements in Conceptions of Social Action," that I wished to organize for the national meetings of the A. S. A. in August, 1982, you told me the following: First, that whatever your own views of the subject or of the members of the panel, you did not believe that it was appropriate for you, as president of the A. S. A., either unilaterally -- "by fiat," as you put it -- to approve or disapprove of the panel's place on the program of the meetings. But second, that if I were successful in putting together a panel that would have among its participants the well-known sociologists I described, I should then submit the plan to Frank Furstenberg for his judgment. If Frank approved of the panel, you said, the panel would be placed on the program.

I have in the intervening months, as you know, received the agreement of Robert Bellah, Aaron Cicourel and Victor Lidz to be members of the panel. I yet await word from Egon Bittner. I myself plan to do more than coordinate the panel, but also to present a paper.

I spoke to Frank Furstenberg about the panel a week ago. He told me that he was in favor of it, thought the members of the panel distinguished, the subject of interest, and that he would speak with you about placing the panel on the program.

When you and I talked on Friday, January 15, you told me that you had spoken with Frank and had decided against having the panel appear on the program. You did not say that Frank had disapproved of the panel. Among the reasons you gave was that the participants had not submitted papers. I could, you said, either request papers -- in which case, if the papers passed muster, the panel would be re-considered -- or, if I wished, convert the panel into an informal discussion. Under such heading there might be -- you could not say whether there would be -- a place on the program of the meetings to air the concerns I had originally planned.

I consider your most recent decision on the panel I have been organizing to be a reneging on our original agreement. Of course the participants will give papers. But to ask them to submit papers in the next few weeks, and it would have to be the next few weeks to meet the latest deadline, is not only to place a virtually impossible condition on the panel, it violates the original understanding we had of last September. I would have been glad to request

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papers when I first contacted these people months ago if that was indeed part of our agreement. To ask for papers now, however, to be judged after the panelists have assented in good faith to serve, is insulting. And to take the second, uncertain option you suggested, to re-organize the panel into an informal discussion, is equally insulting. This would not produce the written documents that would serve the intellectual interests of the panel, is not what the panelists have agreed to, and is not what you promised in September. The panelists have given me their commitments to participate on the basis of a specific design for the session. It would not be appropriate for me now to ask them to play the diminished role that you are requesting. Not least, it is important to me that my own word be considered reliable, and you are asking me to cheapen that word.

If you are not able to reconsider your latest decision, Erving, I will have to send a copy of this letter to each of the panelists in order to explain why an interesting session cannot go forward this year.

Sincerely yours,



Harold J. Bershad
Associate Professor

CC: Frank Furstenberg