This monograph challenged the then prevalent views of residential mobility, showing that it was an adjustment to changes in household size, age, and gender mixes, rather than housing appropriate for one life-cycle stage becoming inappropriate at a later stage. Household life-cycle interpretations of residential mobility have since become the prevailing models of residential changes. The study was designed primarily to show what effects on the determinants of residential mobility in 1948 and 1949 were quite predictable, being driven by the association between household size and composition and the housing involved, conditional upon sufficient household income. This was the greatest discovery: residential mobility was based on housing, and households that could afford to move from housing units that did not meet their needs for space and amenities to units that did meet those needs. At first I was quite disappointed with these findings because they seemed to make some conventional views of mobility. There did not seem to be any discernible effects. Furthermore, there was a great deal more residential mobility than there was social mobility, and the two appeared relatively unconnected.

In contrast, there were some very strong findings, not on effects but on the determinants of residential shifts: mobility in 1948 and 1949 was quite predictable. When published, the monograph was panned by almost every reviewer. One called me the “Kinsey of the moving industry,” adding that my findings had about as much to do with the real reasons why families moved as Kinsey’s findings had to do with love and substantiating his critique with several anecdotes about families moving from the Eastside to the Westside of Manhattan in order to bring their residential addresses into line with their social status aspirations. For about a decade after publication, the monograph was largely ignored by every relevant field. Then, somehow, the intellectual climate changed, possibly because subsequent researchers found the same processes at work. The monograph began to be cited more frequently and was finally reprinted in 1980 by Sage Publications.

It is sometimes disturbing to have become a “classic” author. Recently, I received a phone call from a graduate student, who excitedly told me he had just read the “great classic” and had to call me when he learned that I was still alive, apparently believing that the monograph was the climax rather than the beginning of my professional work.