

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

PIERRE SAINT-ARNAUD, *African American Pioneers of Sociology: A Critical History*. Translated by Peter Feldstein. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, xii + 318 p., index.

Translated from the original *L'invention de la sociologie noire aux États-Unis d'Amérique: Éssai en sociologie de la connaissance scientifique* (2003), Pierre Saint-Arnaud's book is a worthy addition to the shelf of any sociologist committed to reflecting upon their disciplinary heritage, and makes a valuable contribution to a growing body of literature which seeks to restore to rightful prominence the status of scholars whose work has been diminished, if not rendered invisible, in retellings of the history of the discipline. Engaging with the Anglo-American sociology of race relations from 1865 to 1965, and most prominently with the Chicago School tradition, Saint-Arnaud addresses two main questions. The first asks whether it can be said that there was an original African American sociology during the founding period from 1896 to 1965. The second asks how epistemologically sound were the comparable theories of race and prejudice put forward by African-American sociologists. Whereas the former leads Saint-Arnaud to a critical and contextual examination of key canonical texts of W.E.B. Du Bois, Oliver Cox, Charles S. Johnson, Edward F. Frazier, Horace Clayton and St. Clair Drake, the latter addresses the extent to which their research adhered to the rigours of an empirically based sociological method. Answering both these questions also leads Saint-Arnaud to interrogate the overlapping thresholds between science and ideology, and between academia and activism.

Throughout this volume a substantive focus is placed squarely upon the "scientific" merits of the key publications of each respective sociologist. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, a work "ahead of its scientific time" (139), is discussed at length in regard to its twin methodological pillars of historicism and grounded empiricism. Through the historical contextualization provided by Saint-Arnaud, Du Bois's approach appears as particularly innovative when one considers that challenging the orthodoxy of evolutionary naturalism led him to forge a truly original methodological furrow. Such innovation makes his later institutional ostracism all the more lamentable. A notable merit of Saint-Arnaud's approach is his detailing of how both Du Bois and Johnson were also enthusiastic institutional builders, and yet their endeavours in this regard were hampered by the bifurcation of the university system into a veritable caste system between North and South. In effect, the geographical isolation of African-American sociologists led to a structural isolation and prevention of the emergence of an "epistemic community" akin to that of the Chicago School mainstream. Perhaps inevitably, the pioneering quality of the writings of Du Bois towers over that of his African-American colleagues. Indeed, it would appear

particularly disingenuous to suggest his work to be on a par with the others. Granted, Saint-Arnaud is wise to this. Whilst a chapter each is devoted to Du Bois and Frazier, less space is accorded the publications of Johnson, Cox, Clayton and Drake.

Saint-Arnaud begins by situating this institutional bifurcation in the founding years of the discipline. Borne from an ethos of social reformism, augmented by the methodological practicality of social surveyors, and striving to differentiate itself from the racist proclamations of Southern white essayists, the evolutionary paradigm characteristic of sociology in its early years quickly assumed the status of an epistemological matrix from which a nascent Anglo-American sociology began to build its scientific base. Saint-Arnaud displays erudition in accounting for the contradictory nature of this early process of institutionalization. On the one hand, such paradigmatic dominance provided a nascent sociological practice with a solid disciplinary foundation on which to build. On the other hand, such an orientation was deeply infused with imputations of functional organicism and biological essentialism. Saint-Arnaud details how the “general theory” of such figures as Giddings, Ward, Sumner, and others, gradually ceded space to the more grounded approach of Chicago School human ecology, resulting in what would become the hallmark of Anglo-American sociology, empirical positivism. What Saint-Arnaud carefully enunciates, in detailing the transmutation from the study of the “race problem” to that of “race relations,” is that this paradigm shift from biology to culture did not eradicate ideological bias from the discipline’s theoretical foundations. Within the web of events, practices and disputes making up the American social order between the years of 1895-1925, African-Americans were codified as inferior beings by virtue of their racial identity. Saint-Arnaud addresses how mainstream sociology took up this codification of inferiority and reconfigured it into a problematic of inferiority as social process. In this view, the dominative model of assimilationism retained an implicit reliance upon racial essentialism, and it is through dialogic juxtaposition with the work of Robert Park, Gunnar Myrdal, W. Lloyd Warner and others, that the work of Du Bois, Frazier, Cox, Clayton and Drake is situated.

Whilst the African-American sociologists featured here by no means constituted a unified school of thought, there are notable parallels regarding their criticism, albeit to varying degrees, of prevailing functionalist conceptualizations of race, not to mention the prejudicial implications of the prevailing paradigm of assimilationism. Their identification of the systemic racism implicit within much sociological analysis led them to emphasize the exigencies of political economy and class analysis. That they were denied the requisite funding, resources, and access to graduate students typically granted mainstream (white) sociology emerges as quite an indictment of the hierarchical nature of the institutional settings of the discipline. Stringent critiques of such canonical figures as Park and Booker T. Washington, for instance, resulted in the veritable institutional ostracism of both Cox and Du Bois respectively. Cox, in his refusal to defer to a Parkian orthodoxy, not to mention his deeply unfashionable yet resolute Marxist affiliation, emerges as a particularly marginalized figure. The career of Johnson, by way of contrast, was left relatively unscathed, although this had as much to do with his less heretical approach to Chicago style human ecology. As Saint-Arnaud astutely details, the dogmatic nature of the ecological paradigm assumed

the status of an epistemological straitjacket within which the African-American pioneers were forced to manoeuvre.

A far more provocative appraisal emerges in Saint-Arnaud's suggestion that Park drew upon the groundbreaking class analyses of Frazier and Johnson without citation, thereby sustaining the myth of a self-driven renewal of his ideas. Whilst such accusations of intellectual dishonesty are certainly plausible given that Park cannot have been unaware of the innovative ideas of his African-American counterparts, Saint-Arnaud suggests that the institutional configuration of the academy effectively provided the conditions for the possibility of such intellectual appropriation. When considered in conjunction with concomitant claims made elsewhere concerning the marginalization of the input of women to sociological practice (as detailed most notably by Mary Jo Deegan), the field of sociology as a self-maintaining field of power looms large. Indeed, the "ball and chain" (250) trappings of assimilationism and the refusal to countenance rigorous challenges posed to its dominative tropes provide a partial explanation for the discipline's abject failure in anticipating the social and political upheaval of the 1960s, according to Saint-Arnaud. It is to the author's credit that one cannot help but contemplate how the discipline may have evolved had the scholarship of Du Bois, Cox, and Frazier been heeded at the time. The frustration of being marginalized, according to Saint-Arnaud, led to a gradual seeping of ideological bias into the epistemological integrity of their publications. In answering his two guiding questions, however, Saint-Arnaud persuasively argues that the African-American pioneers were, nonetheless, able to produce an "indigenous space of the imagination" that was not reducible to any other of its time (267).

Saint-Arnaud states his manifest aim as making a contribution to the sociology of scientific knowledge. Whilst he is largely successful in this endeavour, such an approach also leads to a certain, albeit necessary, delimitation of the subject. Biographical details of the sociologists in question are included, but only insofar as they relate to this central concern with the epistemological status of sociology constituted as empirical science. Of greater importance within this delimitation is the consequence of ideological leaning upon scholarship. Whereas the work of Du Bois, for instance, assumed an increasingly ideological and politicized intonation in his later years (as anyone who has read his obituary of Stalin can testify to), Saint-Arnaud takes care to contextualize such trajectories through discussion of the pervasive institutional and systemic racism which besieged African-American scholarship. Whereas white sociologists operated according to a logic of patronage, their black counterparts had little choice outside of accommodation to the status quo if they were to maintain their academic careers, albeit at less prestigious universities. That they succeeded in making an innovative contribution to the evolution of the field stands as a testament to their originality. What is eminently more regrettable is that the significance of their ideas failed to exercise its power at the precise historical juncture in which it could have been most influential.

Although this text is of particular appeal to those with an interest in the history and heritage of the discipline, it is also of great significance to those interested in the sociology of scientific knowledge, as well as the sociology of race and racism. As such, Saint-Arnaud's careful exposition of past practice has much

relevance for the contemporary discipline. Indeed, anyone who has followed recent debates on public sociology and disciplinary relevance will find much of interest here, particularly in regard to how the professional, critical, public, and policy-oriented faces of sociological practice are mediated by the broader institutional order. Although the onus throughout is placed upon the African-American contribution to the discipline's professional axis, regarding the extent to which their research advanced the cause of an empirically based sociological practice, with less attention devoted to each author's more activist work, the text presents an intriguing and valuable portrait of how the disciplinary and institutional configuration of sociological practice is inextricably linked with the enveloping social, cultural, and political context.

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