Book Review/Compte rendu

Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *African American Pioneers of Sociology: A Critical History*. Translated by Peter Feldstein. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, 381 pp. $29.95 paper (978-0-8020-9405-6), $80.00 hardcover (978-0-8020-9122-2)

The difference between the translated English title and the original French title — *L'invention de la sociologie noire aux États-Unis d'Amérique: Essai en sociologie de la connaissance scientifique* — of Pierre Saint-Arnaud's important and richly researched book (or "essay") seems to indicate a productive tension within its core argument. The work is indeed a "critical history" of a subfield of sociology in the US from 1865 (the end of the Civil War) to 1965 (the year after the passage of the Civil Rights Act), as well as a "sociology of scientific knowledge" in which sociopolitical events and processes, cultural values and ideologies are shown to shape the empirical topics and methodological standards pursued by the field's primary players. Without conceding that the contents of sociology are somehow "socially determined" in some restricted way, Saint-Arnaud develops a kind of "genealogy of ideas" which also accounts for the influence of institutional settings and biographical factors on personal and social consciousness. In what ways can W.E.B. Du Bois, Charles Johnson, Horace Clayton, H.G. St. Clair Drake, Oliver Cox, and Edward Frazier be considered "African American pioneers" of sociology, or as having "invented" a distinctively "black sociology"? And can these intellectuals be said to be "pioneers" engaged in exploring or even conquering new territories for sociological research while breaking down barriers of racial prejudice and institutional discrimination? Like the works of many of the most intriguing figures discussed in this book, Saint-Arnaud's study is as remarkable for posing or provoking such questions as it is for coming up with some interesting if debatable answers to them.

Saint-Arnaud's main thesis is that "two sociologies of race" — a dominant Anglo-American and a peripheral Afro-American version — can be seen to emerge during this formative century, but that the two were mutually interdependent through asymmetrical academic exchanges, not all of which have ever been fully acknowledged. The prehistory of this bifurcation stems from the racist arguments of two early books

which also happen to be the first in the US to self-identify as "sociological," but which conflated ideological polemics with scientific study — George Fitzhugh's *Sociology of the South* and Henry Hughes's *Treatise on Sociology, Theoretical and Practical*, both published in 1854. Their legacy consists in sketching a workable rhetorical model for justifying social and cultural arrangements between races with assertions concerning the innate inequality, hereditary hierarchy, and biological inferiority of Negroes. It was then left to Du Bois to *combine* sophisticated theoretical speculation, systematic empirical inquiry, detailed historical exposition, and eloquent critical evaluation in his groundbreaking *Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899. Frustrated with the lack of institutional support for his research at Atlanta University and increasingly committed to social activism and political journalism, Du Bois withdrew from full-time academic study in 1910. The rest of the story of these "two sociologies" can thus be told in terms of the careers and publications of subsequent white and black sociologists. The founding of the Chicago School in 1892 marks a turning point, especially in the pivotal role of Lester Ward in reshaping "sociology" as a departmental discipline through the formation of collaborative research teams and the production of comprehensive social surveys and detailed case studies, in which the dynamics and "cycles" of race relations often figured prominently. With varying degrees of overlap and departure, the second generation of "pioneering" Afro-American authors and classic works which are the focus of this book can each be traced to Park's influential program: Clayton and Drake's *Black Metropolis* (1945), Cox's *Cast, Class and Race* (1948), and Frazier's *The Negro in the United States* (1949).

One of Saint-Arnaud's most valuable contributions to the "critical history" of American sociology consists in meticulously tracing the personal and institutional networks which advanced the careers of some sociologists while leaving others at the periphery of the American university system. For the most part, these relationships followed a logic of patronage and qualified accommodation rather than a principle of equality and full inclusion. Park was mentored early on by Du Bois's rival, Booker T. Washington, whose ideas on Negro accommodation and potential assimilation (rather than integration) had a deep effect on Park (and those influenced by him); Johnson and Frazier (later a good friend of Du Bois) came under Park's wing as students at the University of Chicago, where Cox also received his doctorate. Through Park, Gunnar Myrdal, a powerful "outsider" in this history, recruited Frazier, Clayton, and Johnson to participate in his massive project *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy* (1944). Beyond these relations of personal mentorship and academic interaction, other linkages

also helped direct the careers of these scholars and shape their research projects, including corporate sponsorship, editorial support, invitations to participate in conferences, research funding, and citations in publications. The fact that none of the black sociologists profiled here was able to secure a permanent position at a high status core academic establishment, despite having equal or superior qualifications to others who did, indicates that the stratified American university system was a site for repression and intolerance as well as a centre for open inquiry and reciprocal (if asymmetrical) relations of intellectual exchange.

In addition to (and on the basis of) these fascinating empirical descriptions Saint-Arnaud also wants to advance a theoretical claim: "the early black American sociology of race relations [can] legitimately [be said] to aspire to the major epistemological status of a distinctive tradition equal in validity to its mainstream counterpart" (p. 267). Here the argument appears more debatable, or at least less well developed. Saint-Arnaud simply rejects assertions made about racial difference or hierarchy in terms of nature or biology, from Hughes and Fitzhugh to Sumner and even Park, as ultimately unscientific or ideologically biased, and so comes down in favour of "culturalist" arguments from Boas to Frazier as more empirically convincing and conceptually clear. Left underinvestigated here are the scientifically ambitious and arguably unideological strains of *biosocial inquiry* inaugurated by Comte and Spencer which Du Bois and others attempted both to advance and undermine. As Albion Small notes in his *General Sociology*, which Arnaud quotes, the objective was to encourage "'a graduate shifting of effort away from analogical representation of social structures to real analysis of social processes'" (p. 48). The latter could take the form of the hypothesis of an ecology of race-relations cycles from isolation to assimilation (Park) or the history of class struggles in which exploitation or emancipation are shown to be justified on the basis of racial differences (Cox). Whatever the case, the crucial question is not just whether the biological factors of race are taken to be "objective facts," but in what ways the research itself explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or covertly advances value judgments or empirical propositions, and whether such arguments consider "race" as an object of social investigation or as a standpoint from which to assess a social problem. By rushing to endorse culturalist over naturalist arguments concerning race, Saint-Arnaud tends to gloss over the significance of these significant conceptual and methodological distinctions.

From this perspective, the French title of the book with the English subtitle would seem to offer the most precise indication of its strengths, and of its ambition to expose the "Veil of Sociology" which both hides and reveals, divides and connects these alternative and mutually consti-

tuting traditions, as Saint-Arnaud asserts in a footnote (pp. 339–340). The short postface, "Imagining a Different History," suggestively returns to the moment when Du Bois's creative vision might have set a different course for these "pioneers of sociology" if his originality and innovativeness had been fully recognized and rewarded. In a sense, then, sociology could have combined the best features of German idealism and American empiricism, the political insights and passion of Marxism with the methodological precision and conceptual systematicity of structural functionalism. Although it is difficult to see what Saint-Arnaud calls Du Bois's "missteps" — his supposed "deep segregationalism," "isolationist nationalism," and "pan-Africanism" (pp. 123, 260–261) — at least from the passages quoted and the evidence of *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and other works from before 1910, it is clear that the many detours taken by the thinkers in his account project another kind of sociology — a counter- or allo-sociology. Cox's *Capitalism as a Social System* (1964) confirms his reputation as an iconoclast and an outsider (to "both" sociologies), for example, but also his significance as an innovator and inaugurator of a new sociology. Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957), first published in French, likewise sketches a novel critique of consumer culture along with an analysis of the politically subversive and emancipatory potential of movements in the arts. And as Saint-Arnaud perceptively points out, imaginative writers like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, among other heirs of the Harlem Renaissance, not only produced great literary works with sociological insights but also profound sociological works with a lyrical flair. Together all these "African American pioneers of black sociology" enlarged the very notion of what "sociology" is, or could have been.

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