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## Participatory Democracy in the New Millennium

Francesca Polletta

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## CRITICAL-RETROSPECTIVE ESSAYS

### The Sociology of Sexualities: Taking Stock of the Field

MARY BERNSTEIN

University of Connecticut  
[mary.bernstein@uconn.edu](mailto:mary.bernstein@uconn.edu)

*Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex*, by **Elizabeth Bernstein**. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 291pp. \$27.50 paper. ISBN: 9780226044583.

*The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, by **Margot Canaday**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. 277pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 9780691149936.

*The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men*, by **Lionel Cantú**. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009. 245pp. \$23.00 paper. ISBN: 9780814758496.

*Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, by **Patricia Hill Collins**. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005. 375pp. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415951500.

*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (Volume I)*, by **Michel Foucault**. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1978. \$14.00 paper. ISBN: 0394417755.

*Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives*, by **Gloria González-López**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. 320pp. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 0520231392.

*Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, by **C.J. Pascoe**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. 227pp. \$22.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520252301.

*Queer Theory/Sociology*, edited by **Steven Seidman**. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996. 450pp. \$54.95 paper. ISBN: 9781557867407.

*Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights in the United States and Canada*, by **Miriam Smith**. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008. 230pp. \$45.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415988711.

*The Longest War: Sex Differences in Perspective*, by **Carol Tavris** and **Carole Wade**. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984. 416pp. O.P. paper. ISBN: 0155511866.

*Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, by **David Valentine**. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. 302pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822338697.

Scholars wanting to study sexualities in the 1960s and 1970s had to first make what was then the novel claim that sexualities could be studied sociologically. Scholars argued against the conventional wisdom that sexuality was the result of biological or psychological drives, outside the reach of social forces. Non-normative sexuality, especially homosexuality, was studied primarily as a type of deviance. Feminist scholars, who were responsible for the theoretical innovation of separating the concepts sex and gender, began to study and deconstruct stereotypes about male and female sexuality and to link existing differences to social rather than biological factors (e.g., Tavris and Wade 1984). By the early 1980s, scholars began to distinguish sexual behavior from sexual identity, recognizing variation in

sexual behaviors and sexual meaning over time (e.g., Weeks 1996[1981]). Scholars also argued that sexualities were a touchstone for social anxieties and thus were a source of political conflict (Weeks 1996[1981]). Yet it quickly became apparent that traditional understandings of power as being exercised through force or the threat of force could not explain how sexuality was regulated. To understand the politics and regulation of sexuality required new theories of power. For example, Gayle Rubin (1984) argued that there was a hierarchy of sexual practices, with some practices deemed normal, natural and good, while others were labeled unnatural or deviant. Others identified institutions, such as law and religion (Weeks 1996[1981]) and kinship systems and definitions of community (Ross and Rapp 1981) as important factors influencing the regulation of sexual behavior. Yet the study of sexualities was slow to develop and how exactly society shapes sexuality remained abstract (Ross and Rapp 1981).

In the 1990s, queer theory emerged as the most provocative theoretical innovation in the field. Based largely on the work of Michel Foucault (1978), this scholarship challenged the very categories of identity and desire—straight, gay, bisexual—that were previously taken for granted and separated the study of sexuality from the study of gender. Foucault developed a theory of power and discourse that could explain the regulation of sexuality. He illustrated the power of discourse to structure what was seen as natural. Historically specific regulatory regimes produced different ways of understanding and speaking about sexuality and were structured by diverse institutions such as psychology. These insights profoundly shifted understandings of how sexuality was regulated.

While the study of sexuality owes much to Foucault, Steven Seidman (1996) maintains that the seeds of much contemporary theorizing about sexualities (including many of the insights of queer theory) can be found in diverse sociological traditions. Nonetheless, these Foucauldian theoretical insights were slow to be incorporated into a sociology of sexualities and were largely the province of humanities scholars who paid significant attention to culture, but neglected the

relationship between identity, discourse, desire, and institutional contexts. As late as 1996, in the groundbreaking collection, *Queer Theory/Sociology* (1996), Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer described the missing sexual revolution in sociology. Although Stein and Plummer were focusing predominantly on studies of lesbian and gay life, they raised the larger question: "How can sociology seriously purport to understand the social stratification system, for example, while ignoring quite profound social processes connected to heterosexism, homophobia, erotic hierarchies, and so forth...? Sexuality does not operate simply in the family, or through gender dynamics" (pp. 138–139). In other words, the study of sexualities was tacitly deemed irrelevant through its invisibility in other sociological areas of inquiry.

In the past decade, there has been an explosion of work by scholars of sexualities that address this lacuna by linking large scale social processes such as immigration, state-building, globalization, with meso-level institutional contexts, discourse, identity, and interactions. Feminist scholars have underscored the importance of understanding sexuality (and gender, race, and class) through an intersectional lens. The books that have most advanced the field, in my view, pull together disparate levels of analysis. The books that I examine in this essay illustrate the relationship between macro-level processes of social change, relating to politics, culture, institutions, and the economy, and the more meso- and micro-level issues of the social organization of and experience of identity and desire. These books also challenge categories of sexuality and gender and complicate the earlier insight that sexuality and gender should be understood as different realms of experience; they study not only homosexuality, but heterosexuality as well; they take an intersectional approach; they highlight the role of globalization<sup>1</sup>; and they cross disciplinary subfields. I begin with a focus on more micro-level studies and move to the macro-level.

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the growing scholarship on transnational sexualities, see Bose forthcoming.

### Sexuality, Gender, and Social Meaning

The first books that I discuss argue for a complex intertwining of the concepts sexuality, gender, sex, and race that is both theoretically and empirically rich.

David Valentine's book, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (2007), interrogates the very categories that have come to define the fields of the sociology of sexualities and sex and gender. Examining the category "transgender," Valentine argues that it "is in fact a central cultural site where meanings about gender and sexuality are being worked out" (pp. 14–15). Historically, gender and sexuality have been fused through the assumption that homosexual desires were linked to gender variant people, so that masculine women would desire women and effeminate men would desire other men. Both scholars and activists have worked to untangle that connection and to argue that gender variance or "transgender" is distinct from the sexual desires of homosexuality or heterosexuality. While this separation was lauded as an important theoretical advance, Valentine, while not advocating a return to the fusion of these concepts, questions the separation of the categories "gender" and "sexuality" as different realms of experience. Valentine's overarching claim is that ontologically separating gender and sexuality "ignores the complexity of lived experience, the historical constructedness of the categories themselves, the racial and class locations of different experiences and theorizations of gender and sexuality as systemic and powerladen, and transforms an analytic distinction into a naturalized transhistorical, transcultural fact" (p. 62). The spate of recent scholarly and activist efforts to reclaim historical figures as either homosexual or transgender is emblematic of this problematic conflation of sexuality and gender. Even efforts to claim Stonewall as a rebellion by transgender people ignores the idea that the lived experience of people at the time did not distinguish people based on these categories.

Through his ethnographic research with contemporary groups in New York City that could fit under the umbrella term "transgender," Valentine further illustrates the disjuncture between the category

transgender and the lived experience of people and groups such as cross-dressers, drag queens, and gender benders. For cross-dressers ("biological" men who cross-dress as female in the groups Valentine studied) who are often well-to-do married white men from the suburbs, gender bending is a sexualized act that does not disrupt the participants' understanding of their identity as someone who has a male gender. Conversely, other transgender male-to-female individuals who may have had or may desire sex reassignment surgery, identify as the gender that does not match their biological sex and thus their "cross-dressing" is a signifier of their identity as a woman, rather than a sexual practice per se. Still others actively seek to challenge (or bend) binary gender categories and identities. Racial and class differences in understandings of gender, sexuality, and identity also highlight disjunctures between lived experience and categories such as transgender. These disparate groups rankle at being grouped together and the category itself obscures this diversity of experience. Furthermore, Valentine underscores the political issues at stake in the separation of transgender from homosexuality or gender from sexuality. He argues that the mainstream lesbian and gay movement has worked to distance itself from those who are gender variant in order to make a case for sameness to heterosexuals as a justification for claiming civil rights. This separation of transgender from homosexuality also enabled homosexuality to be presented as a private act that would not disrupt the public sphere through displays of gender variance. Thus the separation of sexuality from gender in this case is more pernicious and appears to disadvantage anyone who is gender variant.

While Valentine focuses on the disjuncture between categories and lived experiences, several recent books look at the relationship between sexuality and black subjectivity. Most prominent in this area is Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (2005). By understanding sexuality through an intersectional lens, Collins illustrates how traditional racist ideology, including the effects of slavery, colonialism, and segregation interact with elements of a "new racism"

that is the result of transnationalism, globalization, and the proliferation of the mass media as an agent of socialization. Collins illustrates how racialized, gendered, and homophobic discourses of sexuality are integral parts of racialized systems of domination. As part of the "new racism," the media disseminates racist sexualized and gendered images and ideologies of African Americans that include a series of sexual stereotypes of black women rooted in slavery, what Collins calls "controlling images." For example, the "Jezebel" and the "welfare recipient" images portray sexually aggressive or uncontrollable black women who produce too many children and thus are responsible for their own poverty. Under slavery, "Jezebel" justified sexual assaults on black women, while actually having many children helped the slave economy. Controlling images of black men as being hypersexual, for example, are also used to justify oppression and domination. Because of globalization, these images are disseminated more widely than ever before.

Collins' analysis concretely illustrates how these images support systems of domination, but her main focus is on how African Americans market themselves and produce some of these images through such popular culture venues as black films and music, especially rap. These images are internalized and influence black subjectivity. As a result, the new racism is particularly insidious because it creates a subjectivity among African Americans that inhibits liberation. Forms of social control, such as those found in prisons that incarcerate disproportionate numbers of black men, construct a gendered inequality, whereby black men are subject to sexual violence. Collins argues, "Moreover, within prisons, the connections among hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, violence, and sexuality may converge in ways that mimic and help structure the 'prison' of racial oppression" (p. 234). In order to achieve an antiracist African American politics, a progressive black sexual politics must focus not only on state violence, but on "rethinking Black gender ideology, especially the ways in which ideas about masculinity and femininity shape Black politics" (p. 245). Weaving together an analysis of racism and heterosexism, Collins argues that the

discursive construction of black people as hyper-heterosexual and the association of homosexuality with white people stands in the way of developing a progressive black sexual politics. With personal empowerment as a starting point, Collins calls for a transformation in black consciousness and for a progressive black sexual politics that requires a broad scale reconfiguration of black gender ideologies. While Collins' work calls for needed attention to the impact on consciousness of popular culture derived from current and historical forms of domination, it is not clear that simply calling for a cognitive shift will accomplish the task.

C.J. Pascoe's book *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (2007) provides clear links across levels of analysis through her study of how gendered, sexual, and racialized discourses are anchored in concrete institutional practices. Pascoe examines the ways in which "heteronormative and homophobic discourses, practices, and interactions in an American high school produce masculine identities" (p. 5). Pascoe argues that gender is a set of discourses and practices that are sexualized and racialized and through this fascinating ethnography sets out to identify the practices, rituals and discourses that constitute masculinity. Central to the discursive construction of masculinity is the epithet "fag." The insult is lobbed by boys at one another for doing anything perceived as feminine or incompetent, as a way to impugn another boy's masculinity while simultaneously achieving one's own masculinity. But "fag," Pascoe argues, is not simply about homophobia, but rather about not being sufficiently masculine. In fact, most boys claimed that they would not actually call someone who was gay a fag, although Pascoe finds that feminine gay boys were indeed subject to this insult. Furthermore, the fag epithet is used far more frequently by white boys than by African American boys who are more likely to call each other "white" as a way to challenge another African American boy's masculinity. Similar to Collins, Pascoe argues that because of the perceived hypersexualization of African American boys and men, "white" becomes a stand-in for "fag" to mean feminine or not sufficiently masculine. And, there is

also a racialized distinction between the type of behavior that can earn someone the fag label. So while neat appearance and dancing ability will earn a white boy the epithet fag, these traits in African American boys are instead associated with a “cool pose” or hip hop identity and so do not lower their status in the way that they do for white boys. Thus heterosexuality is both racialized and gendered. As in Valentine’s study, Pascoe illustrates the complex relationship between sexuality, race, and gender at the interactional and experiential level.

Pascoe’s analysis moves seamlessly between levels of analysis; examining how the institution of the school is “itself an organizer of sexual practices, identities, and meanings” (p. 27). School rituals, pedagogy, and forms of discipline structure sexual practices that are based on rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity. Pascoe also argues that scholars must decouple an understanding of masculinity which is associated strictly with male bodies. She finds several sets of girls who engage in masculine practices through their clothing, discourse, and interactions. Theoretically, she examines whether or not these masculine behaviors constitute resistance. Taking on both queer theory and poststructural theory, Pascoe argues that gender transgression or gender “play” in itself cannot alter the gender order. For example the “Basketball Girls” Pascoe discusses adopt masculine clothes and discourse and reap social benefits for this behavior, thus challenging the gender order. But the Basketball Girls also belittle girls who engage in normative femininity, effectively reconstituting the gender order. Girls associated with the Gay-Straight Alliance, on the other hand have a clear political understanding of the gender and sexual order in their high school, and their blending of both feminine and masculine traits presents a greater challenge to the gender order. Not surprisingly, the GSA girls also meet with greater resistance from the school administration. Absent institutional change, Pascoe argues, gender play will create little change.

### **Sexuality and the State**

The next two books examine the complexity of the state and the regulation

and constitution of sexuality and citizenship. Margot Canaday, in her ambitious book, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (2009), tackles the thorny issue of the relationship between the state, the regulation of sexuality, and the construction of sexual categories. What is remarkable about this book is its level of on-the-ground detail as the reader witnesses the quotidian efforts of state officials to make sense out of a dizzying variety of bodies, gender presentations, and sexual behaviors, as they fit those bodies, genders, and behaviors into slowly evolving frameworks linked to class, race, gender, and sexuality. According to Canaday, “The state did not... simply encounter homosexual citizens, fully formed and waiting to be counted, classified, administered or disciplined... Rather, the state’s identification of certain sexual behaviors, gender traits, and emotional ties as grounds for exclusion (from entering the country, serving in the military, or collecting benefits) was a catalyst in the formation of homosexual identity. The state, in other words, did not merely implicate but also *constituted* homosexuality in the construction of a stratified citizenry” (p. 3). Through this fascinating history, Canaday examines how the process of state-building in three arenas—immigration, the military, and welfare policy from the early 1900s to the 1980s—drew attention to and provided the state with the tools needed to regulate sexual and gender deviance through the constitution of a heterosexual-homosexual binary attached to citizenship rights and the instantiation of the straight state. She challenges the standard wisdom that the explosion of gay visibility during World War II was responsible for the subsequent onslaught of anti-gay/lesbian state regulation. Canaday illustrates how in the beginning of the twentieth century, immigration officials encountered what they saw as sexual and gender perversion as well as anatomical abnormalities (often relating to the shape of the genitals or the body that somehow signified to officials an inappropriate female or male form) but had no concepts or legal tools to deal directly with perversion. Instead, they identified such immigrants as degenerates and assumed that perversion would lead to economic dependence

and thus used the public charge clause to refuse entry to or to deport aliens. However, some immigrants who were seen as perverted, were not poor, thus highlighting the limits of the current regulatory scheme.

The military during World War I was also concerned with perversion and sexual stigma and began to see such behavior not as degeneracy, but as evidence of a psychopathic personality. Shifting the locus of perversion from physical morphology to the mind, allows for the possibility that perverts might also be intelligent, marking a shift from the former paradigm of degeneracy and toward what would eventually become a paradigm based on sexual object choice. However, during this time period, the focus was on violent nonconsensual sex as well as public sex, reflecting the military's attempts to ward off the stigma of perversion. In her discussion of state welfare provision, Canaday enters an area that has been almost completely neglected by sexuality scholars. She contrasts the disparate fate of two New Deal programs, the Federal Transient Program (FTP) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The FTP provided gender segregated camps and assistance for unattached men, while the CCC fashioned itself as a military-like job training program for men with dependents. While both programs were sex-segregated and replete with homosexual sex, the FTP was not able to fight the stigma that it was creating perverts who were unattached to heterosexual family structures. The CCC, on the other hand, mandated that men send the majority of their paycheck to a dependent, loosely defined, and so were able to stave off the stigma of perversion. As a result, the FTP was quickly eliminated, while the CCC continued, regardless of actual homosexual behavior at CCC camps. By eliminating aid to unattached men (there was no aid to unattached women), Canaday argues that the state effectively suppressed the "queer side" of the welfare state. Instead, the straight state became instantiated through formal policies such as the GI Bill that emerged during and after WWII that explicitly codified the heterosexual family and the heterosexual-homosexual binary that had heretofore been inchoate. Thus citizenship was entwined with both gender and

sexuality and lesbians and gay men were officially excluded from the rights of citizenship.

In *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights in the United States and Canada* (2008), Miriam Smith examines the impact of the state on the politics and outcomes related to lesbian and gay rights. While Canaday examines the development of a state apparatus that simultaneously constituted and regulated homosexuality (and heterosexuality), Smith's study compares lesbian and gay policy outcomes in the United States and Canada in order to extend historical institutionalist approaches to understanding the state and public policy trajectories. By comparing and contrasting the political-institutional features of states, including the structure of the courts, constitutions, the types of federalism, variations in political party structure, and differing access to direct democracy, Smith illustrates that the shape of the lesbian and gay movements in Canada and the United States and the trajectory of policy change is, in large part, the result of these institutionalist features of states. This argument challenges explanations for the United States' relatively laggard status with regard to such policies as sodomy law reform that attribute it to public opinion and the level of religiosity. Instead, Smith demonstrates that it is features of political systems, such as access to direct democracy, that allow the American Christian Right to place obstacles in the way of the lesbian and gay rights movement.

Smith's most insightful contribution is her argument that the ways in which "sexuality, race, and gender are situated in partisan political debates in the U.S. and Canada" (p. 169) have influenced the policy trajectories of lesbian and gay rights issues. For example, Smith illustrates how the U.S. Constitution and in particular the Fourteenth Amendment's roots in chattel slavery have provided a unique obstacle for lesbian and gay rights activists. The Fourteenth Amendment's interpretation over the past century or so has resulted in a three-tiered approach that relies on claims of immutability as a requirement for the fullest legal protection and all but requires that analogies be made to race in order for discriminatory laws to be subject to "strict scrutiny." Smith

illustrates clearly how the fate of the lesbian and gay rights movement in the United States is inextricably linked to the “racialization of American politics” (p. 171). Social policies designed to shore up the heterosexual nuclear family are tethered to the politics of race that have “linked welfare dependency to family forms and policies” (p. 171). Thus lesbian and gay demands for the recognition of same-sex marriage are understood as yet another threat to “family, social and even national stability” (p. 171). Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in contrast, and its association with Canadian nationalism that values the rights of minorities, has provided a unique opportunity for lesbian and gay rights activists to achieve policy changes through the courts, unhindered by antigay/lesbian referenda that have plagued the U.S. movement. This analysis is particularly important because it moves debates in the scholarly literature that criticize the strategies and discourse employed by the lesbian and gay rights movement to a more analytic level. For example, critics charge that the lesbian and gay movement’s use of arguments that sexual orientation is immutable is conservative, because it seems to be saying that if lesbians and gay men could change their sexual orientation, they would change it or that choosing to be in a same-sex relationship would be a bad choice. Similarly, the lesbian and gay movement also relies on analogies to interracial marriage in its current fight for same-sex marriage, which is often viewed as problematic because it appears to equate the civil rights struggles of lesbians and gay men to those of African Americans. Thus while these debates about the political limits of strategies and discourse used by the lesbian and gay rights movement in the United States will no doubt continue, Smith’s book sheds light on the more sociological question of *why* lesbian and gay politics and discourse takes certain forms and not others.

### **Globalization, Social Structure and the Organization of Sexualities**

The next three books I will discuss share a focus on the relationship between sexuality and large-scale social processes related to globalization, the state, immigration,

urbanization, and shifts in the organization of work. Together, they make clear that a wide variety of social processes of interest to sociologists must be examined through the lens of sexualities.

Lionel Cantú’s book, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (2009), illustrates how sexuality is imbricated in the political economy of immigration. He incorporates the insights of feminist and queer theory to challenge the division between research on the political economy, immigration, and sexuality through the development of a “queer political economy of migration.” By incorporating attention to the political economy, he also challenges prior research that presents a uniform view of Mexican sexualities, through a reductionism based on assertions of cultural difference. He examines the relationship between sexuality and immigration through a study of Mexican men who have sex with men (MSMs) who immigrate to the United States. Moving beyond merely asserting that identities are socially constructed, Cantú argues that examining racial and class hierarchies, the division of labor, forms of production and distribution, globalization, as well as tourism and consumption allow one to understand identity as fluid, something that is constructed and reconstructed based on social location and on the economic and political context. Thus, “sexuality shapes and organizes processes of migration and modes of incorporation” (Naples and Vidal-Ortiz 2009:1).

One of Cantú’s main goals is to “queer” political economy approaches to immigration. For example, he shows that one way in which sexuality is linked to the political economy of migration is through the family. Many men who have sex with men are marginalized and suffer discrimination and prejudice which constrains their socioeconomic opportunities. MSMs who do not create a heteronormative family unit as an adult are subject to more discrimination. And thus for some MSMs, sexuality contributes to a lack of financial opportunities which provides an incentive to immigrate. However, the economic impact of discrimination based on sexuality is not the only reason that these men immigrate. For example, Cantú deftly illustrates how tourists who come to Mexico create networks with



MSMs, helping to facilitate migration, despite the fact that queer tourism also depends fundamentally on racist stereotypes. Through the process of migration, sexuality itself is reshaped. Cantú illustrates the ways in which the cultural communities that MSMs develop after they arrive in the United States differ from traditional ethnic enclaves and serve as “landing pads” for these immigrants. Finally, through a discussion of how immigration law and asylum cases instantiate heterosexuality, Cantú, like Canaday, illustrates the complex relationship between the state and the regulation of sexuality. Norms about sexuality and gender shape such concepts as citizen and alien, making sexuality integral to the study of immigration, citizenship and law.

A focus on the relationship between large-scale social processes such as globalization, immigration, changes in the structure of work due to immigration and historical changes in capitalism such as the shift to a service economy characterize the next two books that I examine. In her poignant study, *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives*, Gloria González-López illustrates the ways that the most intimate details of Mexican’s immigrants’ lives can be linked to concrete institutional and structural locations. She examines how the “various dimensions of migration, such as social networks and the changing experiences of work, media, motherhood, and religion, reshape sexual ideologies and practices” (p. 2). Utilizing a comparative framework, González-López examines the social organization of desire in an urban (Mexico City) and rural (Jalisco) environment and how the organization of sexuality is affected after immigration to the United States. Through this comparison, she argues for the existence of “regional patriarchies,” illustrating how patriarchy itself varies based on regional characteristics such as urbanization and job opportunities. These different political economies render the significance of female virginity as a form of social capital—what she calls “capital femenino”—more or less important. And, about half the women González-López interviewed were not virgins when they married. Furthermore, she illustrates that Mexican men’s initiation into sex often takes place with a sex worker,

and is arranged by older males as a rite of passage. These experiences are fraught—in that they are simultaneously frightening and a mark of masculine achievement and camaraderie. This analysis of regional patriarchies and differences among the sexuality of Mexicans also challenges the stereotypes of machismo and marianismo that characterize earlier literature.

González-López also examines how the social and economic changes related to immigration influence the experience of sexuality for these Mexican immigrants. For women, increased economic power leads to a greater sense of egalitarianism in sexual relationships. Yet the faster pace of life leads to decreasing desire and the “Taylorization of sex.” The social networks formed by these Mexican immigrants provide an opportunity to share information about sexual experiences, risk of disease, and gender inequality within relationships that facilitate a reconfiguration of sexual experience in terms of what is possible, and at times contests and at times reproduces gender inequality. Thus González-López challenges the homogeneous view of Mexican and more generally Latino/a sexuality, links differences in sexual experience and desire to differences in the political economy, as well as to the meso-level factors of family (respect for family means females must remain virgins; this also ensures their economic well-being) and she examines how immigration reconfigures sexual experiences, relationships, and desire.

*Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (2007) by Elizabeth Bernstein also addresses the ways in which large scale social processes related to globalization and changes in the political economy influence the social organization of desire, focusing specifically on the commercial sex industry. Bernstein argues, “This book is about the ways in which recent transformations in economic and cultural life have played themselves out at the most intimate of levels: the individual experience of bodily attributes and integrity, and the meaning afforded to sexual expression” (p. 1). Bernstein links large-scale shifts in capitalism from the early modern era to modern-industrial capitalism, to late-capitalism to changes in the organization of prostitution.

Compared to the first two eras which are characterized by carnal urges and consummated in the modern-industrial era as a quickie in the car, the contemporary era reflects the social organization of work and the emergence of the service economy. Rather than merely selling sex, prostitutes sell a service that is known as “the girlfriend experience,” or what Bernstein terms “bounded intimacy.” Reflecting the contemporary organization of social life, Bernstein explains the transformation to bounded intimacy, which includes not only sex, but emotional intimacy as well, to be the result of the “proliferation of forms of service work, the new global information economy, and ‘postmodern’ families peopled by isolable individuals” (p. 6). Bernstein’s moving interviews with clients who desire bounded intimacy illustrate the complex desire for closeness without commitment that is often coupled with feelings of guilt or fear that one is addicted.

Bernstein also examines the impact of state regulation on the social organization of prostitution and finds that while state regulation plays a role, other factors are also important such as the new technology of the internet. She finds that the major shift in prostitution from the streets to indoor prostitution is the result of a confluence of factors, including gentrification of city areas such as San Francisco’s tenderloin district, which has become a haven for real estate development, coupled with increased police enforcement of anti-prostitution laws. Bernstein also adds a cross-national comparative analysis to her study by examining prostitution in Stockholm and the Netherlands. Sweden criminalizes the solicitation of sex while indoor sex services are legal in Amsterdam. Despite these different policy approaches, the result has been the removal of prostitution from city streets and the growth of indoor and online markets. As a result, Bernstein argues that these disparate policies are less important than the impact of globalization and the internet in shaping the sex trade.

Cantú, González-López and Bernstein each illustrate how the material structure of globalization, the economy, and work shape the social organization of relationships and sexuality. These books demonstrate the social processes that explain the ways in

which expectations regarding relationships shift not only over time and place on a cultural level, but how structural and institutional factors alter individuals’ experience of sexuality as well.

## Conclusion

The books that I have analyzed in this essay significantly advance the study of sexualities. The most intimate aspects of our lives, sexual identities, ideologies, discourses, consciousness and practices are shaped by large-scale social processes and a variety of social institutions. The regulation of sexuality and gender both constitute and identify the object of regulation, including how the objects of regulation will be defined—whether by sexual behavior, gender presentation, physiology, sexual object choice, by some combination of these factors, or in some other way. These books also show that the very categories of sexuality and gender, femininity and masculinity that we use to organize our thinking are the result of complex historical and institutional processes and, if not used carefully, can obscure as much as illuminate. Furthermore, attention to the shifting meanings attached to the terms sexuality and gender will better allow researchers to situate their analyses in terms of the relationship between these meanings and large scale social and political processes, institutional locations, and social interactions. While many subfields within sociology already pay significant attention to sexualities (e.g., sex and gender, sociology of the family, social movements), other subfields such as immigration, political sociology, education, work and occupations, and organizations could also benefit from a sustained analysis of sexualities.

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*The last shall be first: Best Books in the Race Field Since 2000*

EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA

Duke University

ebc@soc.duke.edu

*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by **Michelle Alexander**. New York, NY: The New Press, 2010. 290pp. \$27.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781595581037.

*Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, by **Eduardo Bonilla-Silva**. 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010. 301pp. \$28.95 paper. ISBN: 9781442202184.

*Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, by **Joe R. Feagin**. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010. 360pp. \$31.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415992077.

*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, by **Michel Foucault**. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994. 387pp. \$16.95 paper. ISBN: 9780679753353.

*Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*, by **Evelyn Nakano Glenn**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. 306pp. \$27.00 paper. ISBN: 0674007328.

*Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*, by **Hasan Kwame Jeffries**. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010. 348pp. \$22.00 paper. ISBN: 9780814743315.

*Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii's Interracial Labor Movement*, by **Moon-Kie Jung**. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006. 292pp. \$26.50 paper. ISBN: 9780231135351.

*Characteristics of the American Negro*, by **Otto Klineberg**. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1969[1944]. 409pp. O.P. cloth.

*Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities*, by **Amanda E. Lewis**. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003. 243pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780813532257.

*Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, by **Karl Marx**. Edited by David McLellan. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977. 625pp. O.P. cloth. ISBN: 9780198760382.

*The Racial Contract*, by **Charles W. Mills**. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997. 171pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 9780801484636.

*Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, by **Charles W. Mills**. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998. 244pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780801484711.

*From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, by

**Charles W. Mills.** Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. 285pp. \$33.95 paper. ISBN: 9780742513020.

*Radical Theory, Caribbean Reality: Race, Class, and Social Domination*, by **Charles W. Mills.** Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2010. 284pp. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9789766402273.

*Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*, by **Mary Pattillo-McCoy.** Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999. 276pp. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780226649283.

*Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, by **Michael Omi** and **Howard Winant.** New York, NY: Routledge, 1994. 226pp. \$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415908641.

*Making Sense of Race, Class, and Gender: Commonsense, Power, and Privilege in the United States*, by **Celine-Marie Pascale.** New York, NY: Routledge., 2007. 153pp. \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415955379.

*Contract and Domination*, by **Carol Pateman** and **Charles W. Mills.** Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007. 306pp. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 9780745640044.

*Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century*, by **Dorothy Roberts.** New York, NY: The New Press, 2011. 388pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 9781595584953.

*Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-Collar Jobs*, by **Deirdre Royster.** Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003. 226pp. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520239517.

*The Politics of Exclusion: The Failure of Race-Neutral Policies in Urban America*, by **Leland Saito.** Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. 275pp. \$22.95 paper. ISBN: 9780804759304.

*The Scar of Race*, by **Paul M. Sniderman** and **Thomas Piazza.** Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. 212pp. N.P.L. cloth. ISBN: 9780674790100.

*Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*, by **Edward E. Telles.** Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 324 pp. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9780691127927.

*The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*, by **William Julius Wilson.** Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 243pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN: 9780226901297.

*The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*, by **Alfred A. Young, Jr.** Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 266pp. \$32.95 paper. ISBN: 9780691127022.

*Thicker Than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie*, by **Tukufu Zuberi.** Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. 193pp. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780816639086.

*White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, edited by **Tukufu Zuberi** and **Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.** Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008. 416pp. \$42.95 paper. ISBN: 9780742542815.

## Introduction

I am a free man of color and have behaved as such in my twenty years as a professional sociologist. Accordingly, given my reputation, I was pleasantly surprised when Alan Sica invited me to write an essay for *Contemporary Sociology* on the best books in my field written in the last decade. My field, which I define as the "race field," encompasses work on race matters in the social sciences and humanities. Before emitting my judgment on the top books, however, I must begin with a statement. Most of the books that receive accolades in sociology—and my

claim applies to books in *all* areas<sup>1</sup>—are not necessarily the “best.” Many are selected due to how power operates in our business—networked people have friends in committees, get “notables” to endorse their books, and work magic to produce outcomes. Hence, several books that the ASA has canonized are not that good and, conversely, some of the books that have never received awards are actually very good. Probably the best example of the latter is Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s (1994) *Racial Formation in the United States*, a book that has influenced a generation of race scholars and never received an award from the ASA. Although some of the books sanctified by the “sociological power elite”<sup>2</sup> are quite good, the majority of the books that made my list did not receive accolades, hence the biblical allusion in the title of this essay.

In what follows I do three things. First, I introduce in a very personal way the books I regard as “best,” second, list other books that could have easily made my list, and, lastly, enumerate subjects in the field that deserve investigation hoping to stimulate young folks to tackle them.

### My “Mano-a-Mano” With the Best Books

I remember discussing with Tukufu Zuberi the content of his *Thicker Than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie* (2001), before he published the book. I told him the book was going to be important, but that it was not going to generate much debate in our

discipline because normative sociologists were not going to engage him, his work, or his book directly. (I leave to others to assess whether or not I was right on this point.) So what is Zuberi’s book about? In this book Zuberi details the racist origins<sup>3</sup> of statistics. We learn that almost all the founding fathers of the field (Galton, Pearson, Fisher, etc.) were not only racist but centrally involved in the eugenics project. However, Zuberi’s book is masterful not because he documents the racism of the founding fathers of statistics, but because he asks a much deeper question: can we do “racial statistics” at all? His answer, which I believe is the reason few white sociologists have challenged him in public albeit some do behind his back,<sup>4</sup> is that we cannot. Unless we “deracialize” statistics as well as the logic of our race-based analyses,<sup>5</sup> doing racial statistically helps reify race and reproduce the racial order. “Race,” Zuberi contends, cannot be the cause of *anything* because race does not exist. What exists is “racial domination” and this is what produces what we wrongly label as “race effects” (he advocates calling this “racial stratification effects”). Thus, even “good people” doing racial statistics to combat the effects of racism

<sup>1</sup> I have received several accolades in sociology and admit that networks, the composition of awarding committees, and lobbying (not by me) had a lot to do with my awards. Although I doubt others will accept that the political economy of awards in sociology had anything to do with their own accolades, I ask readers to be sociological about this matter. If we teach folks that societies are not meritocratic, why do we believe our discipline is? Do we truly believe sociologists are different from the rest of people?

<sup>2</sup> By the “sociological power elite” I mean the network of about 100 sociologists mostly from top departments that rules the discipline.

<sup>3</sup> In truth, the statistical field emerged as part of the modernity project to classify and differentiate peoples and things and as such, it was as much about race as it was about class and gender; about governing and controlling or, in Foucault’s work, it was about “the order of things” (1994).

<sup>4</sup> In 2002, I overheard a conversation by some big-time West Coast white demographers criticizing this book. I was then an unknown dark-skinned sociologist, so I assume these white sociologists saw me as staff in the restaurant (many sociologists of color tell stories about being confused with staff by fellow white sociologists in the ASA meetings). I overheard them saying things such as, “How can this fellow argue statistics are racist? This is ridiculous!” (For the answer to these seemingly burning questions, you must read Zuberi’s book.)

<sup>5</sup> In 2008, Professor Zuberi and I co-edited a book on this subject titled *White Logic. White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, which we thought would be a great follow-up to his book on racial statistics.

contribute to the reproduction of the (racial) house that statistics built. Zuberi makes this point very well with his discussion of the “progressive” work of Otto Klineberg (1944) and Arnold and Caroline Rose in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as with his examination of recent statistically-based work on race in *ASR*, *AJS*, and *Demography*. His challenge, accordingly, is nothing short of revolutionary and I sincerely hope every sociology student reads this book and pays serious attention to his call to deracialize our statistical praxis.

Sometimes you read a book truly blindly. You have no idea who the author is or what her take is on things. This was the case with *Race and the Invisible Hand* by Deidre Royster (2003). Immediately after I finished the book, I sent a note to Royster letting her know how important I thought her book was. In this little gem of a book (and the book was recognized by SSSP), Royster shows that the invisible hand of the market is white and slaps people of color very hard even before they enter the labor market. By studying students in a vocational school who have similar characteristics (scholastic aptitude, etc.), Royster is able to assess the impact of racial stratification in terms of job outcomes. If these students are about the same in terms of skills (in fact, black students are slightly better and the best student in the school happens to be African American), why do white students get the best jobs? The answer is racialized networks, racist bosses, and ineffective school controls. Companies looking for electricians or plumbers, which tend to be small, ask specifically for white students. And neither the (mostly white) teachers they call about job candidates nor the school administrators do much to challenge this racist practice. This finding, by the way, does not support the “birds of a feather flock together” biological,<sup>6</sup> cultural, or network-based arguments we hear all the time. What it shows is the

power of racialized networks and the urgent need to undo them. This book, which is a direct challenge to some of the central claims of William Julius Wilson (1978)—his claim that non-racial structural changes in the economy account for the status of poor blacks, can help refocus the field of “network analysis” and move it beyond the descriptive level in which this field finds itself (more on this below). Budding sociologists should pick up this book and explore replicating the research design in other organizations and venues.

As you age in sociology, you should have progeny. One of the students I worked with while doing time at Michigan was Amanda E. Lewis, author of *Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities* (2003). Although I wish I could claim her as one of my sociological children, I simply cannot. Her Michigan sociological parents must be mighty proud of her as this book is a true classic. Lewis examines “racial formation” at the micro-level in two elementary schools in California (an almost all-white school and one “integrated”) through ethnographic work, and uncovers the specific ways in which race and racially-exclusionary practices are produced and reproduced despite the best intentions of administrators, teachers, and parents. There are three things Lewis does very well in this book. First, she convincingly argues that the colorblind arguments which whites use to transact race matters is in fact the new way of reproducing racial inequality in educational settings. Teachers accusing 9-year-old minority children of “playing the race card” or white parents claiming to teach their children that everyone is equal even as they discuss choosing to live in almost all-white communities are examples of the new, sophisticated way in which race works in contemporary America. Second, Lewis illustrates how racial identities are not free-floating cultural representations but are fashioned, imposed, and transformed according to institutionalized patterns of cultural value that define some identities as more worthy (white, middle-class ones) than others (non-white). Hence, white and non-white children in these racially-loaded settings have to accommodate (some accept gladly and some resist as

<sup>6</sup> This is not a biological or so-called cultural process, because in more racially-mixed societies, jobs like these are more randomly organized. Also, if it were a biologically-driven process, the outcomes would be close to 100 percent, that is, people of color would never be hired by whites.

much as they can) to the meanings and expectations of being black or white. These distinctions have profound material consequences in how teachers and white parents educate children, how they treat them, and how they encourage them. Finally, when so much of what passes these days as ethnography is decontextualized, anecdotal, and largely in the tradition I refer to as “cowboy ethnography,” this book is a great example of how ethnography can capture not only what people say about race but what they do and, more importantly, what are the consequences. Budding ethnographers looking for examples of “how to do it” should definitely read this book.

For over thirty years, the underclass paradigm has controlled how we think about poor people of color. (In truth, the paradigm is simply a reflection of whites’ racial common sense on blacks and has a much longer history.) Poor blacks are depicted in much social science as degenerate, disorganized, and delinquent; as beings who deserve prison, cultural uplifting, or at best, Moynihan’s “benign neglect” approach. In *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*, Alford Young (2006) finally allowed poor blacks to speak for sociological audiences. The worldviews of young adult, urban-based, low-income African Americans regarding socio-economic mobility and the significance of race, gender, and class in their configurations are presented in straightforward fashion. Young, relying on extensive interviews with 26 subjects, shows the capacity of these men to think (sometimes quite critically and creatively) about the ways in which mobility and opportunity operate in American society while also showing how they situate their own lives within the broader social and economic forces that they believe circumscribe them. Young also shows how the racialized structures of life inhibit many of these men from experiencing the kind of cross-racial interactions and socialization patterns that facilitate understandings of how race operates in social mobility processes. Although these men may talk about “the man,” they ultimately default to an individualistic logic of social action (work hard, accumulate, go to school, etc.) to account for social mobility

processes. Hence, their views on mobility are as American as apple pie! Although Young reports how these men consistently experience racial discrimination—most often through incarceration, intense exposure to the criminal justice/penal system, and athletic competition—they seem unable to develop elaborate arguments about the roles that race plays in American society and in their lives more particularly. This seeming paradox, according to Young, is the product of how racial segregation and isolation affect the way these men “make sense” of their lives. Finally, *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men* shows that in an era of colorblind racism, where a national discourse on race is muted or minimized, the public discourse on race further reduces people’s capacities to envision the social relevance of race for socioeconomic mobility and opportunity.

A confession: I wrote a blurb for Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century* (2011), before I read the book. I did skim the entire book and got the basics before drafting my blurb, but the fact remains: I had not read the book properly. Recently however, I had the opportunity of reading her book in its entirety and felt like a kid at the proverbial candy store. I seldom get as excited by a book as I did with this one. This book is full of ideas, innovations, and even racial theory. Her book deals not just with the origins of the “fatal invention” (and readers should not skip Chapter One, which provides a brilliant and concise way of thinking about race as a “political system”) but, more importantly, with how that invention remains central to “racial science.” Roberts cogently and painstakingly explains how the racial science of yesteryears (the one we label “racist science”) as well as that of today, reproduces racial domination. Roberts’ scholarship in this book is simply impressive. She read all she needed to make her case, but also conducted interviews with numerous key actors and attended all relevant conferences on the subjects of her book. Thus, readers learn that the human genome project did not end racial science, but has given a new, perhaps more sophisticated scientific mantle to it, and in a very engaging way. We learn about

people doing biomedical research, racial pharmacology, and even about folks in the (silly but) highly profitable business of tracing the ancestry roots of individuals through (bad) genetic data. The book is so rich that in my view, at least two of the chapters can be the foundation for two more books. In one of these chapters, Roberts examines how race (in truth, class-race inequality) can be “embodied”—and she cites all the people doing good work on the interaction between the social and the genetic, while in another she addresses the important subject of “biocitizenship”—in our brave new world, some people will have the resources to access whatever good things emerge out of genetic research and the rest (poor and minority) will be monitored in ways that not even Foucault would have predicted. I really look forward to reading Roberts’ next book.

After suffering for a long time in this business, I have finally gained some “standing” and, therefore, publishers and desperate authors send me “free” books hoping I will endorse them. Most of the books I receive are not worth the paper on which they are written, but this was not the case with *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt*, written by historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries (2010). This is a major contribution to the history of the civil rights movement as well as to the analysis and theorization about social movements in general. Jeffries examines the long history of racial domination and resistance in Lowndes County, Alabama, and in doing so addresses four issues central to the analysis of the civil rights movement. First, Jeffries suggests the struggle for civil rights was around “freedom rights” (all the rights allowed to full citizens) and that its roots are founded in the struggles and aspirations of blacks in the period of emancipation. Second, by examining the micro-history of racial domination in one of the most brutal places in America and showing that blacks fought back and won some important victories, Jeffries re-opened the debate on “reform or revolution” (and the revolution side of the debate looks good in this book). Third, Black Power politics and Malcolm’s idea of self-defense take on a new light as Jeffries shows that violence from regular white folks against blacks was central to the

maintenance of Jim Crow. Fourth, Jeffries’ analysis of the historical record in Lowndes County reveals that for electoral politics to advance blacks’ collective interests, electoral work has to be intrinsically connected (perhaps even subordinated) to social movement activity. The book is also a great read as Jeffries knows how to tell a story. Historical subjects become real characters (people who do not know what day it is, will realize that Stokely Carmichael was a central actor in the freedom struggles of black folks in this county) and Jeffries knows how to keep readers interested and wanting more. Lastly, Jeffries is a great historian. He is careful and systematic in the use of the data and draws on countless sources, but also, as with all good historians, it is clear that Jeffries thought deeply about how his case is relevant today. Thus, as I read the book I was constantly thinking about the Obama phenomenon and about whether or not, having a black leader disconnected from the people is a progressive development.

The first article I ever read by the ASA’s Past-President Evelyn Nakano Glenn, was her 1992 piece in *Signs* titled, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor” and it blew my mind. This piece connected the dots for me on how race, class, and gender could be analytically examined together. This is exactly what she did in her magisterial 2002 book *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. In this book she argues cogently that the formal category “citizen” and the potential of labor unity as the salvation for bringing democracy for the people have not materialized because race and gender have been central to the making of these categories. Using available studies on three regions (American South, Southwest, and Hawaii), Glenn examines how labor markets and citizenship were produced in tandem with racial and gender structures in the United States between Reconstruction and the 1940s. Among the many important contributions of this book, I wish to highlight four. First, Glenn shows in a powerful way how the formal categories “citizen” or “free laborer” are ultimately meaningless as they are constituted in practical contexts of material inequalities of race and gender



which produce substantively different experiences for people of color and women compared to white men. Second, Glenn advances a “relationality” theoretical argument whereby race and gender always work together to sustain mutually the matrix of domination. Third, rather than focusing on one racial dyad (black-white, Asian-white, or Latino-white), she insists in bringing them together in her analysis—a practice we should all follow. Lastly, Glenn shows how “people make their own history” as people of color and women fought to expand the notion of citizenship and the restrictions they experienced in the labor market. Accordingly, Glenn (1) contributes practically to the debate on the merits of “liberalism” and formal categories such as “citizen,” “democracy,” and “human rights” as tools for human emancipation, (2) helps move forward the discussion and theorization on intersectionality, (3) makes the case empirically of why we should do our best to study multiple groups together, and (4) shows the fundamental role of resistance and protest by the oppressed in the making of the (still very limited) American democracy

Now let me tweet my own horn. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (2010), now in its third edition (and stay tuned as a fourth one is on its way), has not received awards from major sociology associations yet it is a commercial success, has received praise in other intellectual houses, and it is very widely cited. So why has my book done well? I believe that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, many people were ready for a deeper explanation of whites’ “racial attitudes” (I refer to this in my work as whites’ racial ideology). The mostly happy explanations of whites’ racial views (e.g., Howard Schuman’s argument) and the naïve claim that whites were “beyond race” (e.g., Sniderman and Piazza 1993) had reached their explanatory limit as the bubbling American racial cauldron kept getting hotter. The book, then, came out at an opportune moment and because I produced a “thick description” of whites’ post-racial nonsense and employed an innovative conceptual map to name the elements of whites’ racial ideology, readers found it appealing. It also helped that my analysis

was the first *systematic*, qualitative-driven analysis of the “souls of white folks” (see my sampling design in the book).

My argument in this book is that whites have developed a seemingly non-racial way of defending racial inequality, which I label “color-blind racism,” based on the decontextualized use of liberal arguments to account for race matters (“I am all for equal opportunity, that is why I oppose affirmative action because it is discrimination in reverse”). I deconstruct this ideology into three parts: *frames* such as the notion of “abstract liberalism,” *stylistic components* such as semantic moves like “I am not a racist, but. . .,” and *racial stories* such as “I did not own any slaves.” In the second and third editions of the book I added important arguments such as my contention that racial stratification in post-Civil Rights America is becoming Latin America-like (second edition) or my explanation of the Obama phenomenon (third edition). But there is another reason why so many folks seem to like my book: readers appreciate that I make every word count and do not hide behind the scientific-sounding “passive voice” (“Table 1 shows”). I show where my passion and commitments lie yet try to be rigorous and open to alternative interpretations. Whereas the high priests of sociology wish to make “objective” automatons of all of us (“The d-a-t-a show t-h-i-s. . .”), I believe this is not only a terrible mistake (we can never be better at the objectivity game than economists or political scientists), but is also a disingenuous way of “taking sides” (“objective” and “scientific” sociologists take sides indeed, most often, the *wrong* side).

### Other Books That Deserve Praise Even If They Are Not On My Best Books List

There are other books deserving recognition. One that could have easily made my list is Edward E. Telles (2006), *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*, a book that received awards from the ASA as well as from the Latin American Studies Association. In this book Telles, an authority on race matters in Brazil as well as on Latino issues in the United States, provides the most up-to-date account of all the debates and data on race in Brazil. For

that alone, this book is a must read. Nevertheless, I respectfully disagree with his overall take on race in Brazil and by extension, in the Americas. For Telles, “vertical (race) relations” (relations at the economic level) are more discriminatory and exclusionary than “horizontal relations” (level of sociability) in Latin America. In my view this conceptual anchoring of racial stratification in Brazil obfuscates more than illuminates. The issue at hand is explaining how hierarchy operates in the seemingly fluid race relations of Latin America; how *racismo cordial* is a more effective mechanism for reproducing racial domination (blacks in horizontally nice Brazil are *worse* off than blacks in the horizontally nasty United States). However, despite my disagreement with Telles, this is a very well-researched book and scholars interested in learning about Brazil should read it—I, for instance, assign it in my graduate seminars and will continue doing so. Telles and I will have plenty of time to debate how race works in the Americas and hopefully, down some beers or a few *caipirinhas* while doing so.

Another important book that did not make my list is Michelle Alexander’s, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010). This is the best and most engaging exposition of how mass incarceration deeply affects blacks’ life chances in contemporary America. However, her claim that “mass incarceration” is the new Jim Crow is problematic. Like the work of Wacquant on prisons, Alexander lacks a coherent theory and explanation of how the criminal justice (racial) system is completely responsible for the *overall* position of all blacks in society (poor, working, and middle-class). Yet, if looking for a book on racism and the criminal justice system, look no more. Alexander’s is hands down the best in this field and it is written in a clear and captivating way.

Other books that deserve recognition are Mary Patillo McCoy’s (1999) *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*, an excellent demonstration of how class and race matters for the black middle class; Leland Saito’s (2009) *The Politics of Exclusion: The Failure of Race-Neutral Policies in Urban America*, which examines case studies of colorblind policies, their racial effects,

and how people of color organize to fight so-called race-neutral policies; Joe R. Feagin’s (2010) *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, a book that provides foundational knowledge on how race has mattered in the making of America from the seventeenth century until the Obama era; Moon-Kie Jung’s (2006) *Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii’s Interracial Labor Movement*, which shows that race and class can work together to produce solidarity and progressive politics (an empirical case that challenges some of my ideas as well as those of Evelyn Nakano Glenn); and, lastly, George Reid Andrews (2004), *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000*, a wonderful compendium of the black experience in the “new world” which should make people rethink how we theorize race and racial formations.

Lastly, there is a genius in American philosophy and I am sure most sociologists do not know him. In their fascination with intellectual whiteness (particularly of the European variety), they keep finding inspiration in Bourdieu (time to bury him *for real*), Habermas, Rorty, Rawls, and, of course, Foucault—and do not know that Charles W. Mills, author of *The Racial Contract* (1997), *From Class to Race, Blackness Visible* (2003), *Contract and Domination* with Carole Pateman (2007), *Radical Theory, Caribbean Reality: Race, Class, and Social Domination* (2010) has produced work that could potentially help us deal with the conceptual, analytical, and practical matter of intersectional domination. (Had *The Racial Contract*, arguably Mills’ best book, come out after 2000, I would have included it in my list.)

## The Future

In this final section I highlight several gaps in the race literature. The first one—and it is a huge one—is in the area of race and networks. So far the networks explosion in sociology has produced mostly descriptive maps of human associations with hidden explanations. This general problem is even more glaring when it comes to the description of “race outcomes.” For most analysts in this tradition, race “networks” seem to be the product of “culture” or biology. Therefore, network analysts are content with repeating again and again their finding

that blacks associate mostly with blacks, whites with whites, and Asians with Asians, a phenomenon they regard as homophily. What is needed, however, is network analysis that begins with the examination of the sociopolitical construction of the categories under investigation (whether race, class, or gender). This track would lead to explanations that are no longer of the “birds of a feather” kind as analysts would have to bring to the fore historical variation in the levels of association in one society, comparative data showing that the levels of association are not the same across societies, and how power relations determine levels of racial, class, or gender associations. Description is important, but is no substitute for solid interpretation.

Another area that deserves more attention is the problematic field of race and genetics. Far too many social scientists still assume “race” is a real biological variable and continue working to “show” there is a “race effect” in everything—usually, that blacks are deficient in some way and whites are not. Unfortunately, NSF, NIH, and other agencies keep funding this racist research even though these analysts (1) do mostly correlational analysis of social data to “demonstrate” biological claims and (2) rely on an independent variable (i.e., “race”) that is not so, as Zuberi has cogently argued. Foundations and government agencies alike must sponsor work to debunk so-called “genetic” explanations of racial inequality. And if they continue funding this work in the name of science,<sup>7</sup> we must challenge them vigorously as sponsors of racism.

The racialization of Latinos and their position(s) in the emerging racial order is another subject deserving investigation. It is disappointing that most analysis of race matters is still organized around the black-white dyad. This dynamic, which was never enough to fully capture the racial happenings in the nation, has become an obstacle for understanding the

present and future of race. We need work on Latinos that goes beyond “identity” (i.e., the idea that Latinos are becoming white because many claim so in the Census) and silly attitudes (i.e., the idea that Latinos are racist). We need work examining how Latinos are racially framed by whites in various locales and what Latinos are doing to counter (or to accept) this framing.

First-generation work on intersectionality (e.g., Denise Segura, Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Andalzúa, and Alfredo Mirandé) needs to be superseded by fine-tuned theorizations of the “matrix of domination” (Hall 1980). We need a better theory (actually *a theory*, as we do not have one yet) and empirical examples showing how to apply it. The work of Glenn, Celine-Marie Pascale (2007), and a few others has opened possibilities, but much more remains to be done. An emerging theme in the race literature is on the notion of “racial regimes” (King and Rogers 2005). This is a healthy development, but since *all* racial life is lived locally, we also need meso- and micro-level work on “racial formations.” We should be able to explain how and why cities within regions have different modalities of the national and regional racial formation. For instance, although Indianola, Mississippi, and Charlotte, North Carolina are both in the South, (racial) life in these places is very different. Some of this work should be historical, but most should examine contemporary racial formations at the local level. This work will likely produce new racial theory that will supersede both Omi and Winant’s work as well as mine (1997).

Lastly, after finishing a course on “Race in the Americas,” I have realized the urgent need for innovative work on race in the Americas and the world-system. Race in the United States was but part of the racialization of human relations in modernity. Therefore, since the United States entered the racial game late, the category and the orders that emerged early must be examined first in order to appreciate what is truly unique and what is not in our own experience. Unfortunately, we put the cart before the horse and developed race theories and research methods to account for race based on the U.S. experience.

I end by strongly asserting my belief that most of the books profiled in this essay will withstand the test of time. That is, after all,

<sup>7</sup> Their science is phony, as these organizations would not now fund (they did so in the past) *anyone* wanting to investigate if there is a genetic basis for Jewish *anything*, or someone wishing to investigate explicitly white genetic superiority. The former would be, rightly so, labeled as anti-Semitic, and the latter as white supremacist.

the test of civilization for a book. Awards matter for authors' careers, but do not determine if a book will be read and be influential or be destined to endure "the gnawing criticism of the mice" (Marx 1977: 390). This is why, in terms of books in the race field, I believe "the last shall be first, and the first last!"

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## Participatory Democracy in the New Millennium

FRANCESCA POLLETTA  
*University of California, Irvine*  
 polletta@uci.edu

*Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre*, by **Gianpaolo Baiocchi**. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005. 224pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780804751230.

*Enabling Creative Chaos: The Organization Behind the Burning Man Event*, by **Katherine Chen**. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 240pp. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 9780226102382.

*Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*, by **Jennifer Earl** and **Katrina Kimport**. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011. 258pp. \$32.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780262015103.

*Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End*, by **Nina Eliasoph**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011. 308pp. \$39.50 cloth. ISBN: 9780691147093.

*Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization*, by **Jeffrey S. Juris**. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. 378pp. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822342694.

*Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama*, by **Daniel Kreiss**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 248pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780199936786.

*Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, by **Clay Shirky**. New York, NY: Penguin, 2009. 327pp. \$16.00 paper. ISBN: 9780143114949.

By the 1980s, experiments in participatory democracy seemed to have been relegated by scholars to the category of quixotic exercises in idealism, undertaken by committed (and often aging) activists who were unconcerned with political effectiveness or economic efficiency. Today, bottom-up decision making seems all the rage. Crowdsourcing and Open Source, flat management in business, horizontalism in protest politics, collaborative governance in policymaking—these are the buzzwords now and they are all about the virtues of nonhierarchical and participatory decision making.

What accounts for this new enthusiasm for radical democracy? Is it warranted? Are champions of this form understanding key

terms like equality and consensus differently than did radical democrats in the 1960s and 70s? And is there any reason to believe that today's radical democrats are better equipped than their forebears to avoid the old dangers of endless meetings and rule by friendship cliques? In this admittedly selective review, I will take up recent books on participatory democracy in social movements, non- and for-profit organizations, local governments, and electoral campaigning. These are perhaps not the most influential books on participatory democracy since 2000—after all, most of them are brand new—but they speak interestingly to the state of participatory democracy today. Taken together, they suggest that, on one hand, innovations in technology and in activism have made democratic decision making both easier and fairer. On the other hand, the popularity of radical democracy may be diluting its force. If radical democracy comes to mean simply public participation, then spectacles of participation may be made to stand in for mechanisms of democratic accountability.

### Participatory Democracy's Recent Past

First, a look back. Direct forms of democracy go back to ancient Athens, New England town meetings, the Society of Friends, and European anarcho-syndicalism. In the United States, experiments with consensus decision making featured in the abolitionist, women's suffrage, and pacifist movements. But it was in the 1960s that they exploded into the public consciousness. In 1962, the new left group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) called for a "participatory democracy" in which decisions were made by the people affected by them. SDS activists intended the term to describe a political system, not a mode of organizational decision making. However, at the time decision making within SDS itself was collectivist and consensus-oriented. For thousands of activists in the new left, antiwar, radical feminist, and cooperative movements, consensus-based decision making, decentralized administration, and rotating leadership or no leadership became organizational commitments.

For sociologists writing about the surge of collectivist organizations during this period,

the participatory democratic impulse reflected a youthful repudiation of authority that was at odds with the demands of effective political reform. Wini Breines (1989) challenged that view when she characterized new leftists' efforts as animated by a prefigurative impulse to enact within the movement itself the values of equality, freedom, and community which they sought to bring about in society at large. Experiments with egalitarian and cooperative decision making were political—just not the politics of parliamentary maneuver and bureaucratic manipulation. Still, Breines saw participatory democrats' prefigurative goals as in constant, and eventually debilitating, tension with the strategic demands of political reform, for which centralized and hierarchical organizations were better suited.

Other scholars identified different fault lines in participatory democratic organizations. Eliminating formal structures of authority only made it easier for informal cliques to rule freely, Jo Freeman (1973) argued. The problem was not participatory democracy's inefficiency, but its inequality. As Jane Mansbridge (1983) pointed out, however, inequalities in speaking time or influence are not a problem if everyone agrees with the resulting decision. The participatory democratic dilemma was rather that it offered no means of overcoming fundamental differences of opinion. I argued that when participatory democrats were joined by relations of friendship, religious fellowship, or tutelage, differences of opinion or disparities in workload did not seem threatening—until tensions characteristic of each relationship made it newly difficult to operate collectively (Polletta 2002). Suzanne Staggenborg (1993), Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (1995), and Nancy Matthews (1994) detailed the pressures on women's movement organizations from government and foundation funders to adopt conventional hierarchical structures.

Works by these and other authors were sympathetic to activists' efforts to create organizations that were radically egalitarian. But they emphasized the fragility of the form. They treated participatory democracy as a worthy ideal but one that inevitably generated inefficiencies, inequities, and debilitating stalemates.

Then several things happened. One was the Internet. New digital technologies made communicating with many people easier, faster, and cheaper, and made it possible to organize people without being anywhere near them. They also generated new ideas about collaboration and new models for acting collectively. The second thing that happened was Seattle. The massive street protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 secured international attention for the anti-corporate globalization movement. They also launched a cadre of activists committed to new versions of radically democratic decision making.

The third development, one longer in the making, was the diffusion of participatory models of governance across for-profit, non-profit, and governmental organizations. There was no single source: some champions of participatory governance came out of the human potential movements of the 1970s; others were inspired by theories of deliberative democracy associated with Jürgen Habermas; still others looked to Japanese firms' collaborative style at a time when the traditional vertically-integrated, bureaucratic firm seemed in crisis. And the resulting projects have been diverse: public deliberative forums where citizens make recommendations about local development, police-community relations, or the national deficit; quality circles in businesses; collaborative governance across government agencies. Still, the common antagonist in these efforts is bureaucracy; the favored alternatives are flexible structures, bottom-up decision making, and broad input.

Together, these developments have made for democratic enthusiasms in some predictable places like progressive social movements, and some odd ones, like corporate boardrooms and local real estate development. They have led to new optimism about the prospects for decentralized, nonhierarchical organizations to actually get things done, and not only within small groups of like-minded activists. They have led also to new ideas about just what democracy is and requires.

### **Networked Activism**

As I noted, the internet looms large in accounting for the new enthusiasm for

participatory decision making. In brief, new digital technologies have made it much, much easier to form, join, and coordinate groups. According to Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (2009), this means that you do not have to care deeply about an issue to mobilize. For example, when passengers on an American Airlines flight waited on the tarmac for a gate in Austin, Texas, for eight hours, with toilets overflowing and food supplies exhausted, they were understandably furious. They were probably no more furious than the many airline passengers who, from the beginning of airline travel, have experienced equally annoying delays. But when one of their members, a Californian real estate agent, used the Internet to start a petition, this group of passengers launched a national movement for airline reform. They lobbied Congress for the passage of an Airline Passengers' Bill of Rights and succeeded in getting airlines to voluntarily accept such standards. This was not a top-down, hierarchical group. Nor was it what we customarily think of as a participatory democratic group. Rather it was a group of strangers for whom collaboration was as easy as signing your name on an email petition. With the costs of participation practically nil, organization is no longer necessary for collective action, Shirky argues. He describes a variety of collaborative projects—from Open Source software to a massive protest against the Catholic Church—all accomplished without centralized coordination.

Not all collaborations are successful, and this is one of Shirky's main points: given the fact that online collaboration requires so little in the way of effort, it is no great loss to anyone if their effort does not go anywhere. Indeed, far from egalitarian, online collaboration depends on an acceptance of substantial inequalities. Fewer than two percent of Wikipedia users ever write or edit entries. And among those contributors, there is no effort to ensure that their contributions are equal. To the contrary, Shirky argues, "most large social experiments are engines for harnessing inequality rather than limiting it" (p. 125). So why would anyone participate? Because they like participating, because they get recognition and pride

from participating, because they can participate in diverse ways, and most important, because it is so easy to participate. In other words, disparities in workload are not a problem if participating is not perceived as work.

In *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (2011), Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport explore what the lowered costs of participation and coordination mean for social movements. In 2004, the authors analyzed a sample of websites offering one of several e-tactics: petitions, email and letter-writing campaigns, and boycotts. E-campaigns were mounted on behalf of diverse causes, they found. Petitions dedicated to persuading a television network to keep airing a favorite television show or a baseball team to trade a player had thousands of signatories. The line between activism and fandom seemed fairly permeable.

Campaigns, whether on behalf of a television show or a political cause, were organized by a few people or even by one person. Interestingly, organizers usually did not see themselves as activists. They did not come from social movements; they often did not refer to social movements on their websites; and when asked about other websites that they admired, they rarely likened theirs to social movement websites. "I just wanted to write about things that were important to me," one website creator told the authors. People launched campaigns because an issue was important to them. Other people then participated—signed the petition, sent the emails, boycotted the product—because they identified with the cause and because it was easy to do. Again, disparities in workload would not matter as long as the work was not particularly onerous. And indeed, several of Earl and Kimport's organizers said explicitly that they preferred to do the work themselves than risk "too many cooks in the kitchen" (p. 158).

Now, one could imagine that at some point, the work of an e-campaign could become more onerous. One or two people would not want to do it all any longer. Moreover, if the campaign took off, and its prospects for impact increased, participants might begin to care much more about the decisions being made by those one or two people. In that case, Earl and Kimport and Shirky's

accounts suggest, the group might fall apart. But that would not be such a tragedy for anyone concerned, given the low investment even the organizers had made in the group.

There is another possibility, though. In a world in which "power laws" are increasingly familiar—where a small number of contributors do most of the work, à la Wikipedia, Flickr, and countless other online projects—perhaps people's ideas about what counts as equality are changing. Or perhaps, freedom and openness are becoming more important to people's definition of democracy than equality. Earl and Kimport note that Internet activists are much more concerned about protecting the privacy of site users than off-line activists were in the past. Activists' ideas about privacy are coming from the Internet—perhaps their ideas about democracy are as well.

In *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization* (2008), Jeffrey Juris makes just this argument. Juris spent more than a year with anti-corporate globalization activists: participating in direct action protests against the G8 in Prague and Genoa, traveling with activists to Brazil for the World Social Forum, joining in long-running online debates about the future of the movement and on-the-spot consensus decisions about how to respond when a line of riot police appeared. The activists Juris studied were committed to decentralized and participatory decision making. Yet a 1960s participatory democrat would find their practices unfamiliar: the affinity groups and spokes councils, the facilitators, time-keepers, and vibes-watchers, the twinkling, blocking, and standing aside.

This new apparatus of consensus decision making was bequeathed to the anti-corporate globalization movement by activists from the antinuclear and environmental movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and then practiced and refined in countless workshops and direct actions. So participatory democracy has become formalized since the 1960s. But it is also animated by new commitments. Participatory democrats talk about autonomy more than equality; about self-management more than leaderlessness; about diversity more than unity. Their model—and this is conscious, Juris says—is the online network. Activists

envisage a society in which autonomous spheres or publics are linked in multiple ways along the lines of a virtual network. And they try to enact that vision in their movement practice: in loose collaborations that form, dissolve, and reform; in a bottom line commitment to participants' freedom to adopt violent or nonviolent tactics; in an emphasis on negotiating acceptable plans rather than reaching a single consensus decision. Juris quotes a fascinating exchange between an activist of the new stripe and a Trotskyist who had come to a meeting, he readily acknowledged, to try to recruit new members. "But there is another idea," the activist offered, "the network... where the goal isn't to recruit more members to your particular group, but to bring as many different groups, people, and nodes into the network as possible, so it expands outward, horizontally" (p. 96).

In some ways, a network logic makes obsolete the old antagonism between the prefigurative and strategic. In the midst of a direct action, where participants have diverse tastes in tactics and police forces can easily isolate leaders, a top-down command logic hardly makes sense. More generally, anti-globalization activists favored a pragmatic style in their politics, an emphasis on practical problem-solving that was in some contrast with the long-winded ideological speeches made by traditional left groups in joint meetings.

This is not to say that anticorporate globalization activists have taken the tension out of prefigurative politics. While activists in Genoa negotiated agreements among each other that Black Bloc demonstrators would keep to a different zone than nonviolent ones, the police did not operate on the same logic and brutalized peaceful marchers. Activists continually struggled with the dilemma of how to build organizations that could sustain mass mobilization without becoming bureaucratized. Their suspicion that consensus could be too easily imposed led to a skittishness about joint actions.

Juris discusses only briefly another problem: that global justice activists' distinctive deliberative style sometimes alienated activists who had not had the exposure to the forums, workshops, cosmopolitan travel, and online discussions that they had.

Indeed, the pragmatic style favored by activists in meetings was disliked not only by leftist ideologues but also by Southern indigent activists, who found Northern activists' strict meeting facilitation off-putting. The battles between "horizontalists" and "verticalists" at European Social Forums had as much to do with class as they did with preferences for organizational forms. Horizontalists were seen by verticalists as self-indulgent middle-class kids; verticalists were seen by horizontalists as stuffy old leftists. The point is that deliberative styles come to be associated with particular groups in a way that makes them unappealing to other groups, whatever their intrinsic value. Ironically then, the norms and procedures that activists have developed since the 1960s to make participatory democracy workable—the pragmatic style, the hand signals, the knowledge of how to talk about issues—may also make it more exclusive.

### **Participatory Democracy in Surprising Places**

Participatory democracy is alive and well in social movements, as the recent Occupy protests attest. But what about outside movements? Can decentralized and consensus-based decision making work for ordinary people with jobs and families and interests outside prefiguring the radically democratic society of the future? Can it work to make decisions that are complex and contentious, and with real import for people's lives? Recent books show the spread of a participatory democratic ethos beyond progressive activists: among people trying variously to get a presidential candidate elected, to build and then dismantle a small city on a Nevada desert, to determine budget allocations in a Brazilian municipality, and to help disadvantaged minority kids get into college. Again, though, they suggest that it is in some ways a distinctively new incarnation of participatory democracy.

Daniel Kreiss' *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama* (2012) punctures the myth that the 2008 online Obama campaign was a grand experiment in bottom-up democracy. The Obama "brand" was about the transformative possibilities of grassroots



participation. The Obama campaign was not. Centrally and hierarchically organized, relentlessly focused on “money, message, and mobilization” (p. 4), the campaign’s Internet Division figured out how to persuade supporters to donate millions of dollars and thousands of hours of volunteer time while supplying the ever-more precise data that allowed campaign operatives to target their fundraising appeals. Campaign analysts systematically tested what color buttons led website visitors to contribute more money; what tone the personal emails from “Michelle” (Obama) and “Joe” (Biden) should strike; and how people could be motivated to participate without thinking they should have a say in setting campaign strategy. A staffer who was in charge of writing engaging profiles of Obama’s supporters was deliberately kept insulated from the rest of the campaign. Getting “too close to the sausage making,” his boss told him, would make the ring of people-power in his posts seem less authentic (p. 137).

This all suggests that the vaunted participatory ethos of the campaign was a sham. Grassroots participation was a great talking point and nothing more than that. But Kreiss makes two observations at odds with that conclusion. One was that campaign staff really did care about participatory democracy; the other was that Obama supporters did not.

Many of Obama’s internet operatives came to the campaign by way of the 2004 Howard Dean campaign. They were young, from the world of internet start-ups rather than electoral politics, and they came with an enthusiasm for bottom-up decision making. “Open Source” was their model: the software programming code that was freely accessible to anyone who wanted to use and improve it. Kreiss observes that they were committed to “participatory democracy” (p. 56)—but also that they interpreted the term in very different ways. Some staffers envisaged a campaign in which Dean supporters truly set the agenda. Others interpreted participatory democracy rather to mean a campaign “that invited meaningful participation” (p. 56). One can see that “meaningful participation” could be interpreted to mean merely ponying up time and money. And indeed, by the time the

2008 Obama campaign got off the ground, it mostly had been defined that way. Still, when activists used the interactive campaign website to demand that Obama return to his earlier position opposing legal immunity for the Bush-era telecommunications firms that had been involved in warrantless wiretapping, staffers were not surprised. And indeed, when the candidate responded with an open letter politely restating his new position, some staffers saw it as a cop-out.

As for Obama’s supporters, the people who absorbed the participatory democratic rhetoric and dutifully coughed up money and time and effort without any chance of input, by and large did not mind, says Kreiss. They wanted their candidate to win. And so, all talk of democracy aside, they were content to serve as foot soldiers in Obama’s high-tech army.

But that raises all kinds of questions. Did Obama’s supporters give up the chance for input into their candidate’s platform on the belief that campaign operatives knew better than they did what winning required? Did they experience the campaign’s rhetoric of citizens controlling the political agenda as just rhetoric? Did they feel that they *were* controlling the political agenda? Or did they too understand participatory democracy as more about participation than control; more about contributing than making the decisions that mattered?

Katherine Chen’s *Enabling Creative Chaos: The Organization Behind the Burning Man Event* (2009) raises parallel and fascinating questions. What began as a bonfire held by a group of friends on a San Francisco beach in the mid-1980s today involves the construction of a temporary city in the Nevada desert each year, complete with sanitation, medical facilities, roads, and upwards of 47,000 people dedicated to experiencing participatory art. The event follows months of planning by paid staffers operating from a San Francisco headquarters.

Chen spent four years working with Burning Man’s core staff as a volunteer and many more attending the Burning Man event, and she interviewed participants, volunteers, and staffers. The festival’s growth might have led founders to bureaucratize, Chen points out, but doing so would have stifled the creativity that was at the heart of Burning

Man. Instead, organizers joined bureaucratic practices with collectivist ones. Bureaucracy supplied efficiency, stability, and fairness. Collectivism supplied flexibility, responsiveness, and meaning. Together, they enabled the group to avoid the perils both of overorganizing and underorganizing. For example, when staffers realized that people interested in volunteering were finding it hard to work their way into the inner circle responsible for planning the event, they did two things: they formalized the application process for volunteer jobs (a bureaucratic practice) and they promoted an ethos of “radical inclusion” in which the point was not to fill slots but to accommodate people’s desire for satisfying roles (a collectivist practice). Stung by media coverage that focused on drug use, nudity, and public sex, staffers required that media representatives register with the organization, but also worked to involve reporters in the festival as participants rather than spectators.

Burning Man seems to have been surprisingly successful in balancing commitments to participation and efficiency through a period of exceptional growth. After all, countless organizations have foundered on the shoals of those commitments, with some in the organization charging that others have compromised the principle of participation for the sake of efficiency. That did not happen in Burning Man, even though at times the organization’s practices seemed out of kilter with its rhetoric. Staffers touted the group’s commitment to consensus decision making, which they described conventionally: “for a decision to be adopted, everyone must give his or her consent” (p. 56). Yet when a volunteer complained on the listserv that decisions were being made by the Burning Man board without the input of participants, a board member sought to disabuse her of the idea that organizers would implement all participants’ ideas. “It’s a democracy as far as it asks for people to contribute” (p. 54), she explained. In another meeting, she clarified, “It’s a do-ocracy.” Burning Man founder Larry Harvey agreed, “It’s a do-ocracy, you come in and do” (p. 54). As in the Obama campaign, encouraging rank and file to exercise initiative in their voluntary contributions seemed to be understood—by rank and file as well as supervisors—as democratic.

Perhaps consensus was reserved for decisions made by the senior staff who constituted the organization’s board. But Chen points out that, “Although organizers decide members by consensus, the board has a designated leader. As the executive director, Larry Harvey exercises the final say” (p. 38). Harvey assigned responsibilities to senior staff members, evaluated their performance, and set their salaries; he chaired meetings, supervised organizational finances, and came up with the festival’s annual theme. This seems a far cry from consensus decision making. But the interesting question is why it did not seem to bother people much. Chen describes occasional rumbles of discontent, but nothing like the kind of full-throated complaints that the organization was betraying its democratic principles that one might have expected.

Why? Was it because Larry Harvey was so charismatic that simply by listening to people, he made his organization seem collectivist? Was it because members felt not that they were part of the Burning Man LLC but part of the once-a-year-happening, and therefore did not much care who ran things between happenings? Or was it because their models of democracy came from business management more than politics? So-called “flat” decision making structures in business are not completely flat—there are just fewer layers of management. After soliciting input, the manager makes a decision. Is it a business logic that is responsible for defining “consensus” in Burning Man as something like getting people on board with a decision? Have collectivist practices that were popularized in the 1960s retained their countercultural glamour even as they have been turned into a management strategy?

### **The Worlds in which Participatory Democracy Lives**

In the settings I have described so far, participatory democracy has been championed as a way to give people a sense of ownership of, and therefore commitment to, the enterprise, and to prefigure an alternative to a world in which bureaucratic structures stifle creativity, autonomy, and equality. There is another rationale for participatory democracy,

though: that it teaches people the skills they need to become effective political actors. This developmental rationale for collectivist practices was prominent in the 1960s: the idea was that by participating in decision making in the movement, people who had been denied access to the political system would gain the skills they needed to take political power. Eventually, this orientation to building leadership was overtaken by the “no-leaders” ethos of the late 1960s but it continued to infuse Alinsky-styled and faith-based community organizing.

It also continues in the participatory budgeting process for which the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre has become famous. Say “Porto Alegre,” and many people think of a participatory democratic utopia, a city where ordinary citizens, many poor and illiterate, make the decisions that affect their lives in a kind of never-ending deliberative workshop. In *Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre* (2005), Gianpaolo Baiocchi does not try to debunk that view. Rather, he focuses on the circumstances that make Porto Alegre possible.

In the public budgeting forums that Baiocchi observed, residents made decisions that mattered. They debated, negotiated, and sometimes revised their original preferences. They were eager to learn about the issues and the process. They fought for their projects, but they were also firmly committed to the common good. But this was only true in some neighborhoods, Baiocchi argues. Truly deliberative forums depended on the involvement of activists. This was true in an historical sense, since it was activists who, in the late 1980s, pushed the governing party to expand participatory mechanisms in a way that made them effective routes to impact. But more important, activists played a critical role in facilitating constructive political dialogue within the forums once they were established. Long experienced in negotiating among diverse interests and possessing strong oppositional credentials with residents, activists kept discussion focused and temperate. They recruited people to forums, negotiated among parties before, after, and during meetings, and secured information that residents needed to deliberate effectively. They were not afraid to confront stonewalling

officials, but they also regularly pressed participants to adopt a pragmatic stance, while at the same time pushing past the bounds of the immediate to promote political learning.

Baiocchi compares three municipal districts with very different kinds of relationships between neighborhood activists and officials. The district with longstanding activist networks and a popular council that functioned independently of the government-sponsored forum produced high levels of citizen participation and trust and few occasions in which the deliberative process broke down. By comparison, forums in a district lacking opportunities for civic interaction outside the forum were well attended but tended to become platforms for participants to attack and defend each other’s personal reputations. This is not to say that activists and officials always worked together harmoniously. In a third district, activists were cohesive and mobilized but they consistently opposed the administration and sought to derail the budgeting forums. The result was that residents distrusted both the budgeting process and even their own delegates and breakdowns in deliberation were frequent.

The punch line is that government-sponsored participatory democracy depends on the existence of civil society associations, but ones that are unafraid to work within the system as well as outside it. One of the several virtues of *Militants and Citizens* is that it makes clear the extent to which participatory democratic organizations require a supportive institutional context to operate effectively. Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting process required not only a municipal administration committed to acting on its decisions but also networks of activists who were seen as independent of the administration, yet were willing to work with it. I wonder, though, just how singular that context is. Porto Alegrean activists were a special breed: simultaneously community organizers and national movement activists, neighborhood-based and party-connected. I wonder if activists who are unused to performing on so many stages simultaneously could do all the things that Baiocchi expects of them.

How much the institutional context matters in making it possible to do participatory democracy is poignantly clear in Nina Eliasoph's *Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End* (2011). Eliasoph's subjects are empowerment projects, those non-profit programs that are funded by a mix of government, foundations, and corporations and are aimed at helping disadvantaged people by giving them the tools to transform their lives. Increasingly prominent as government funding has continued to shrink, empowerment projects depend on usually well-off volunteers and they emphasize the virtues of civic engagement: for example, having interracial teams of teenagers visit a hospital or plan a literacy program.

Eliasoph spent years volunteering, observing, and participating in several empowerment projects and she shows how much they drew on the participatory democratic ethos of the 1960s. Organizers really believed that they would develop leadership among disadvantaged youths by treating them as leaders. They would develop community by building on the resources that the community already had. They would foster relationships of trust and affection among diverse participants without regard for class. Rejecting the rigid rules and roles and bureaucracy, their organizations would be "open and undefined and up to you to decide 'whatever'" (p. xvi).

Yet, just as the network logic of Juris' anti-corporate globalization activists was no match for the command logic on which the police operated, Eliasoph's organizers worked in a world not of their own making: a world of scarce funding and tight funding cycles, of volunteers who were supposed to become like "beloved aunts" to their charges but could really only fit an hour a week into their busy schedules, and a world in which it is considered impolite to talk about wealth or poverty. The people who ran the empowerment projects simply could not do the things they said they would, as hard as they tried. They could not leave it up to the teenagers in the program to come up with their own project if they had to have a funding proposal in for the project before the teenagers had even enrolled in the program. They could not easily surmount

boundaries of race and class at the same time they were providing a steady stream of precise figures to funders on how many at-risk youths they had helped and how many pregnancies or crimes they had prevented.

And their charges? The young people Eliasoph studied certainly learned things. They learned to ignore organizers' declaration that everything was "open and undefined and up to you to decide 'whatever,'" and instead pick up on organizers' hints as to what they should be doing. They learned to talk about themselves as social problems ("I'm involved instead of being out on the streets or taking drugs or doing something illegal" [p. 17]). They learned to perform their diversity on cue for funders and then go back to hanging with their same-race friends. The really smart kids learned to hide in a basement to do their homework undisturbed by the hinder/helper volunteers.

If this was empowering, it was empowering in a strange way. Those empowered learned both to recognize hypocrisy and to accommodate it. They learned to enact values of community, equality, and care in ways that were measurable by distant bureaucrats. If in Burning Man, bureaucratic and participatory democratic practices worked in productive combination, here participatory democracy was shaped to bureaucracy's mandate.

## Conclusion

So where do these portraits of participatory democracy in diverse settings—in social movements and electoral campaigns, municipal policymaking, nonprofit charities, and for-profit arts organizations—leave us? Taken together, they suggest first that participatory democracy has gone mainstream. It is championed by businesspeople and political strategists, municipal bureaucrats and social workers.

Though participatory democracy's prefigurative dimension continues to be appealing, many champions emphasize instead its benefits in the here and now. Participatory democracy gives people a sense of involvement and investment in a project, it builds responsibility and drive among people who have faced steep obstacles to success, and it produces decisions that reflect people's

deeper preferences rather than their superficial ones. A pragmatic bent comes across strongly in these books. Today's participatory democrats are anything but doctrinaire. They prize flexibility, experimentalism, and getting things done.

Participatory democrats' practical style probably reflects several things. Activists have learned to do participatory democracy more effectively over the last few decades. Even neophytes have access to handbooks and workshops on what "modified consensus" is or when it is appropriate to "stand aside." Not having to reinvent the form has made it easier to practice. The loose collaborative styles that are typical of online networks and projects have affected how participatory democracy is done offline as well as online. And briefs for participation from the world of for-profit management have made participatory democracy seem appealingly consistent with the "bottom line."

Even in this new world of participatory democracy however, some of the old dilemmas persist. In particular, I am struck by the barriers to participation in the projects I have described. Sometimes those barriers were unintentional and undesired: for example, global justice activists' use of a meeting style that was off-putting to those outside the loop. In other cases, however, the barriers to participation were deliberate. Obama's senior online strategists were open about the fact that they wanted supporters to participate in raising money, not in making decisions about the campaign. Burning Man board members knew that Larry Harvey could override their consensus decision if he chose to. Burning Man volunteers knew that they could launch and manage an initiative only if it was approved by senior staff. Empowerment organizers knew that they could not really have teenagers deciding what projects they wanted to do.

What is surprising to me is that members' only limited involvement did not seem to bother them. Why? It is easy to say that participatory democracy in these cases was a sham, a feel-good rhetoric that led people to cough up money and time and energy without any expectation of being involved in the decisions that mattered. And more

broadly, of course, the danger is that democracy comes to mean only participation. Everyone gets an equal opportunity for input into a decision, not an equal opportunity for impact on a decision. So you have an organization that claims to operate by consensus but the founder makes the decisions. Or a public forum where the public is invited to deliberate over local planning decisions and the recommendations are compiled into a glossy brochure and never seen or heard from again. The danger is that spectacles of public participation substitute for mechanisms of public accountability.

But these books caution against reaching that conclusion too quickly. Kreiss argues that Obama supporters were comfortable with their limited forms of participation because they wanted their candidate to win. Perhaps their expectations of democracy would be different in another setting. The larger question that these books invite us to ask is just how people understand democracy today. And they point more broadly to what I think of as a cultural sociology of democracy. Not democracy at the level of the nation state, but democracy as people encounter it in their workplaces and schools, in volunteering and mobilizing. And a cultural sociology of democracy not in the sense of the cultural conditions for democratic organizations, but rather how and why certain understandings and practices of democracy come to be taken for granted. Where do people's models of what democracy is and requires come from? What are the consequences of those models for how much people want and get from their political and economic institutions? If those expectations are stunted, why is that the case? And are there settings or occasions in which people's expectations of democracy are more expansive? We have plenty of scholarly work on the gap between democratic ideals and the institutional practices of democracy. These books push us to ask just how people experience that gap.

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