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Lee D. Baker. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998. 313 pp. \$19.95

Lee D. Baker's *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* charts the complex relationships between anthropological and legal conceptions of race, beginning with the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which established the "separate but equal" doctrine, and the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that ended *de jure* segregation. Part of what made both rulings possible, Baker argues, were scientific constructions of race that endorsed and perpetuated views of African Americans as either inferior or equal to whites. The institutional creation of meaningful racial distinctions, and of race itself, is the broader focus of this book. The vast sweep of this study occasionally impedes its impact; but, on the whole, Baker has produced a valuable analysis of the ways in

which institutions and the individuals in them exert an influence powerful enough to produce the belief that racial categories actually reflect natural fact.

In the introduction, Baker provides a frightening example of how such influence can work. The Swiss-born Harvard professor of science, Louis Aggasiz, played mentor to several students who would ultimately disseminate his scientific racism among yet another generation of students. By the turn of the century, racial essentialism dominated anthropology. Early World's Fairs--particularly the 1893 Columbian Exposition, and the 1904 St. Louis Exposition--contributed to the popularization of both racialist and racist theories. Baker effectively demonstrates how the post-Reconstruction era--often referred to as the "decades of disappointment" for African Americans--reflects a complex matrix of popular, legal, and academic discourses that together created the notion of African Americans as uncivilized and intellectually inferior.

Slowly, however, biological and essentialist formations of race gave way to cultural and sociological models of difference. Baker argues that the notion of the "New Negro" in part reflected the growing influence of Franz Boas, whose work in cultural anthropology became an increasingly dominant model for interrogations of race after the turn of the century. Baker's discussion of Boas is a fascinating one, and does an especially good job of recreating struggles for power within the American Anthropological Association. His account of the relationship between the Harlem Renaissance and Boasian anthropology proves less compelling. Baker's discussion of Zora Neale Hurston--who notably contributed to the collection of Negro Folklore--presents a valuable opportunity for complicating accounts of racial construction, since Hurston herself appeared variously in her writing to essentialize and de-essentialize race.

This points to a larger criticism of Baker's text. Each one of the book's ten chapters ends with what is meant, presumably, to be a recapitulation of findings. These conclusions adequately summarize information, but frequently fail to draw out larger implications. The book succeeds on the level of analysis; as synthesis, however, it sometimes falls short. For example, the conclusion of chapter seven ends with the following sentence: "The social and political processes that fostered changes in the construction of race during the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance gave rise to changes in an American anthropology that began to espouse racial equality" (167). This is a textbook style conclusion for a book that, in many ways, resembles a textbook in its neat divisions: of the twenty-five pages that make up chapter seven, for instance, there are ten separate divisions, with subjects ranging from Franz Boas to Zora Neale Hurston. Despite usually deft transitions from one section to the next, one sometimes feels that the momentum of the argument gets lost, only to erupt again several pages later.

Overall, however, this book is an important contribution to the fields of anthropology, cultural studies, and history. The final chapters, which explore the legal implications of race in the post-war era, effectively show the intersections of race, law, science, and popular movements for change. Baker provides an important and interesting account of how Howard University, along with the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund, employed work by sociologists such as Gunnar Myrdal to formulate a sociological account of race and the effects of racism. Important to the plaintiff's argumentative strategy in *Brown v. Board of Education* was the notion that "African Americans were poised to embrace un-American values if they were not educated in desegregated schools" (198). Baker sees complex cultural forces at work in this claim: "In a sense [this] strategy was like Brer Rabbit tricking Brer Fox by playing the fool: the LDEF [Legal Defense and Education Fund] employed a strategy that disparaged African American culture by evoking a distinctive tradition of African American culture--the trickster" (198). The final chapter, aptly entitled "The Color-Blind Bind," offers a well-reasoned discussion of how racial categories and disciplinary constructions of race have come to impact contemporary American law and politics. Baker cites Murray and Herrnstein's infamous 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*, in order to demonstrate the continuing influence of popular scientific theories upon the public. Baker concludes with this observation: although the current Supreme Court has adopted the view that racial categories are not, in fact, sanctioned by legitimate science, it refuses to see that racial categories are still socially meaningful, and that attendant stereotypes and discriminatory practices remain.

Meticulously researched, carefully argued, and undeniably relevant, *From Savage to Negro* deserves reading. What it sometimes lacks in elegance it makes up for in its iteration of why race, however conceived, matters as much now as it ever has.



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