

Book Reviews

The Construction of Race

Lee D. Baker. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. xi + 325 pp.

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In 1999, the *American Renaissance* webpage boldly discussed African Americans' genetic predisposition to lawlessness and unbridled sexuality. The online supporting evidence for these claims was provided by a Florida State University psychology professor, Glayde Whitney. Whitney asserts that race is a biological phenomenon and that, as a race, African Americans are intellectually inferior to Euro-Americans. *American Renaissance* is the journal of the Council of Conservative Citizens, an organization of educated, influential, and wealthy white supremacists. Among its most prominent supporters are House Judiciary Committee Member Bob Barr and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (Diane Roberts, "Well-Connected Racists Keep Friends in High Places," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 17, 1999). Compare this late-20th-century intersection of media, politics, social science, and racism with a passage from Lee Baker's meticulously researched book, *From Savage to Negro*:

In 1899 [Jabez L. M. Curry] shared his expertise on the Negro with the audience of *Popular Science Monthly* by writing a timely article on "The Negro Question." The article was intended to explain the differences between "the Caucasian and the negro" in an effort to marshal evidence to support African American disfranchisement. . . . [Curry] asserted that Negroes were racially inferior and did not possess the moral and intellectual fortitude to participate in the political process. [p. 77]

Curry's influential arguments, 100 years ago, shaped the philanthropic policies on education for black Americans and helped to perpetuate enduring stereotypes that justified the dehumanization of black people. Whitney's assertions in the post-civil rights, anti-affirmative action era could be no less damaging considering his powerful political contacts. Both Curry and Whitney exemplify the ways in which scientific authority can be used to distort deeply systemic issues. The impact of this scientific authority on public opinion as well as on federal legislation is one of the foremost themes of Baker's book.

Why do quasi-scientific arguments supporting the notion of racial inferiority persist? Why does racism continue to infect American society like an uncontrollable virus? These are just two of the very worn and complex questions that Baker requires us to consider again. More importantly, Baker skillfully examines the intricate relationship between racial science and racial politics and asks, "How did anthropology contribute to the structures that upheld legalized racism in America?" In addressing these questions, Baker's scholarship fills a gap in our understanding of the racialized and politicized nature of social science.

Through explorations of American racial politics from 1896 to 1954, Baker's work makes a formidable contribution to humanistic concerns in anthropology

in at least three important ways. First, he interweaves multiple and complex histories that put our racialized worldviews in perspective. Through an intricate examination of U.S. anthropology in its formative years, Baker reveals the racist themes that were reproduced and canonized for public consumption by the well-respected men of 19th-century social science. Once again we are reminded of the insidiously influential nature of scientifically sanctioned images presented in popular magazines, exhibits, and films. Second, Baker emphasizes the social, political, and scholarly resistance to racism by African Americans, which also influenced dramatic changes in anthropology. From black intellectuals' use of folklore to document and celebrate their African heritage in the 1920s to the NAACP use of progressive anthropological research in the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education* case in 1954, we witness an intriguing and potentially empowering relationship between anthropology and black life. This is certainly remarkable when we consider that, at its inception, anthropology was a powerful force in perpetuating black oppression. Finally, Baker ponders the impact of the selective and political appropriation of anthropological research in forwarding the notion of a "color-blind" society. While the biological category of race may be meaningless, a multitude of racialized issues still thrives in the world of human interactions. Baker argues for honest and public discourse by cultural anthropologists on the increasing significance of race in our lives. From 1899 to 1999 and into this new millennium, race in the United States has indeed been a very powerful social marker that "still dictates life chances and opportunities" (p. 227), as well as how we view the world.

(Re)Inventing Modes of "Ethnographic Showing"

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. xviii + 326 pp.

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Reading *Destination Culture* gives one a sense that its writing was indeed a pleasurable form of discovery for Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Meticulously researched, this readable book of essays is sustained by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's creative energy. Since the 1985 publication of George Stocking's collection of essays on museums, *Objects and Others*, many authors—from James Clifford to Donna Haraway—have critiqued anthropology's representation of peoples and objects. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has enlivened this multidisciplinary conversation from its outset in critical ways. A performance studies professor at New York University, she has critiqued folklore studies, researched tourists photographing Masai warriors, and written a poetics of "Internet vernacular." Yet *Destination Culture*, a collection of eight essays written since 1988, embodies Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's renewed engagement with the often contradictory relationships among museums, tourism, and heritage attractions.

Part 1 begins with the seminal piece "Objects of Ethnography," in which Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines anthropological modes of exhibiting the objects and, often, the bodies of cultural Others. She identifies two contrasting approaches to "exhibiting the fragment," *in situ* and *in context*. The former is an early convention of metonymic display, in which the cultural artifact "is a part that stands in a contiguous relationship to an absent whole that may or may not