

Robert Ezra Park

RACE
AND
CULTURE

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ROBERT EZRA PARK

THE COLLECTED PAPERS OF ROBERT EZRA PARK
VOLUME I

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AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

(Dictated by Dr. Park to his secretary at Fisk University and found among his papers after his death)

I CAN trace my interest in sociology to the reading of Goethe's *Faust*. You remember that Faust was tired of books and wanted to see the world—the world of men. At any rate, after leaving college I gave up a position as teacher in a high school at Red Wing, Minnesota, and went to Minneapolis on the chance of getting a job as a reporter. I got the job, and I saw a lot of the world—the kind of a world that a reporter does see. I finished with Minneapolis in about three years and started out for New York. New York was the mecca of every ambitious newspaperman. I did not get to New York at that time but stopped six months in Detroit; went from there to Denver, finally got to New York. But once there I was shortly disenchanted with the prospect. The life of the average newspaperman seemed, at that time to be about eight years. After that if he remained in the profession his value steadily declined.

Meanwhile I had gained an insight into the functioning of the newspaper. The newspaper and news became my problem. About that time I was introduced by John Dewey, who was then at Ann Arbor, to a very interesting man named Franklin Ford. Ford had been a newspaper reporter. He had reported Wall Street and gained a conception of the function of the press by observing the way in which the market responded to news. The market price was, from his point of view, a kind of public opinion, and, being a man of philosophic temperament, he drew from this analogy far-reaching inferences. I cannot go into that. Suffice it to say he came to believe, and I did too, that with more accurate and adequate reporting of current

events the historical process would be appreciably stepped up, and progress would go forward steadily, without the interruption and disorder of depression or violence, and at a rapid pace.

It was interest in the newspaper that sent me back to the university. I had graduated at Ann Arbor. I decided to go to Harvard. I studied philosophy because I hoped to gain insight into the nature and function of the kind of knowledge we call news. Besides I wanted to gain a fundamental point of view from which I could describe the behavior of society, under the influence of news, in the precise and universal language of science.

I spent a year at Harvard and then went abroad. I intended to stay abroad for a year, but I remained for four years. There, listening to the lectures of Georg Simmel, at Berlin, I received my only formal instruction in sociology.

While I was in Berlin I ran across a little treatise on the logic of the social sciences by a Russian, Kistiakowski. It was the first thing I had found anywhere that dealt with the problem with which I was concerned in the terms in which I had come to think of it. Kistiakowski had been a student of Wilhelm Windelband, so I went to Strassburg and later to Heidelberg, when Windelband succeeded Kuno Fischer in the chair of philosophy in that university. I wrote a thesis under Windelband. I called it *Masse und Publikum* ("Crowd and Public"). I returned in 1903 to Harvard, giving my thesis the final touches there. It was during that period that I was assistant, not assistant professor, in philosophy.

By this time, however, I was sick and tired of the academic world, and I wanted to get back into the world of men. I had never given up the ambition I gained from reading *Faust*—the ambition to know human nature, know it widely and intimately.

While I was at Harvard, William James read to us one day his essay on "A Certain Blindness in Human Beings." I was greatly impressed at the time, and, as I have reflected upon it since, the ideas suggested there have assumed a steadily increasing significance.

The "blindness" of which James spoke is the blindness each of us is likely to have for the meaning of other people's lives. At any rate what sociologists most need to know is what goes on behind the faces of men, what it is that makes life for each of us either dull or thrilling. For "if you lose the joy you lose all." But the thing that gives zest to life or makes life dull is, however, as James says, "a personal secret"

which has, in every single case, to be discovered. Otherwise we do not know the world in which we actually live.

Well, this is merely to suggest how, after I had grown tired of books, and while I was looking about for something more thrilling than a logical formula, I discovered a new interest in the study of the Negro and the race problem.

This new interest grew out of meeting Booker Washington. The result of that meeting was that I spent seven winters, partly at Tuskegee but partly roaming about the South, getting acquainted with the life, the customs, and the condition of the Negro people.

It happened in this way: While I was living outside of Boston, having just completed the writing of a Doctor's thesis and having lost for the moment any ambition to teach, as I had once intended to do, I was invited to become secretary of the Congo Reform Association. There were at the time reports of great scandals in the Congo, and the secretary of the Baptist Foreign Missions, Dr. Barbour, wanted someone to help him advertise the atrocities in order to prepare for some sort of political action which would insure reform. I was not, at that time, strong for missions, but I undertook the job. Eventually, however, I became genuinely interested. I discovered what I might have known in advance—that conditions in the Congo were about what one might expect, what they have since become, though not by any means so bad, in Kenya. They were, in short, what they were certain to be whenever a sophisticated people invades the territories of a more primitive people in order to exploit their lands and, incidentally, to uplift and civilize them. I knew enough about civilization even at that time to know that progress, as James once remarked, is a terrible thing. It is so destructive and wasteful.

I was so interested by this time that I was about to go to Africa to study the situation at first hand. It was at this moment that Booker Washington invited me to visit Tuskegee and start my studies of Africa in the southern states. I think I probably learned more about human nature and society, in the South under Booker Washington, than I had learned elsewhere in all my previous studies. I believe in firsthand knowledge not as a substitute but as a basis for more formal and systematic investigation. But the reason I profited as much as I did from this experience was due, I am sure, to the fact that I had a long preparation. As a result I was not, as I found later, interested in the Negro problem as that problem is ordinarily conceived. I was interested in the Negro in the South and in the curious and intricate

system which had grown up to define his relations with white folk. I was interested, most of all, in studying the details of the process by which the Negro was making and has made his slow but steady advance. I became convinced, finally, that I was observing the historical process by which civilization, not merely here but elsewhere, has evolved, drawing into the circle of its influence an ever widening circle of races and peoples.

Since then I have been around a good part of the world. I was a year in Honolulu as research professor, at the University of Hawaii. I was in Peiping a few months, where I learned a great deal about China from the members of my class at Yenching University. I attended the Fourth Pacific Science Congress in Java in 1929. Two years later I visited India, South Africa, and South America. In July, 1937, I went again to Brazil, to visit the city of Bahia, which is a kind of center of African culture, so much as remains of it, in Brazil.

I have told you how I came to be interested in the newspaper, in the crowd and the public, in collective psychology, generally. I have indicated how I came to get interested in the races and racial attitudes and the incidental problems of cultural conflict and cultural change. There remains the studies of the city, of urban and rural communities, what R. D. McKenzie and I call, quite properly I believe, "human ecology."

While I was a newspaper reporter I used to do a good deal of writing for the Sunday papers. In those days the daily papers wrote their own Sunday papers and did not depend to the extent they do now upon syndicated articles.

I found that the Sunday paper was willing to publish anything so long as it concerned the local community and was interesting. I wrote about all sorts of things and became in this way intimately acquainted with many different aspects of city life. I expect that I have actually covered more ground, tramping about in cities in different parts of the world, than any other living man. Out of all this I gained, among other things, a conception of the city, the community, and the region, not as a geographical phenomenon merely but as a kind of social organism.

My interest in the newspaper had grown out of the discovery that a reporter who had the facts was a more effective reformer than an editorial writer who merely thundered from his pulpit, no matter how eloquently.

According to my earliest conception of a sociologist he was to be

a kind of super-reporter, like the men who write for *Fortune*. He was to report a little more accurately, and in a manner a little more detached than the average, what my friend Ford called the "Big News." The "Big News" was the long-time trends which recorded what is actually going on rather than what, on the surface of things, merely seems to be going on.

P REFACE

INTO this first volume of the collected writings of Robert E. Park are gathered his twenty-nine articles, lectures and introductions to books concerning the contacts of peoples different from each other in culture or race or both. The earliest of them was published in 1913, when, a man of nearly fifty years, he was entering upon the only part of his academic career which can be called regular, the years in which he was professor of sociology at the University of Chicago.

It was in the early Chicago years that he started that collaboration with his much younger colleague, Ernest W. Burgess, which produced the *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921). This book, which the authors looked upon as prolegomenon to further research and theory, is especially known for its development of a scheme of four basic processes of social interaction: competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. These concepts have been widely applied in the study of the contacts of peoples: perhaps more so by others than by Park himself. Park by no means regarded them as instruments to be used only for study of what happens when people migrate to a strange land, or when people of one race are enslaved by another. It will also be evident to any reader that Park used the term "social contacts" not for the contacts of peoples or cultures only, but to refer to "the simplest aspect of interaction."

After the first Great War, Park published two books on immigrant problems: *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1921) and, with Herbert A. Miller, *Old World*

Traits Transplanted (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1921). Both were products of the special interest in the loyalty of immigrant populations during and after the war; in neither is an answer given to the question of loyalty, but in both the reader is led to consider the processes of adjustment to a strange land and culture in a more general way. There is external and internal evidence that William I. Thomas had a hand in the *Old World Traits*. Thomas had been influential in bringing Park to Chicago. The two remained friends so long as both lived. Thomas' pioneer work on *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* gave much of the method and much of the conceptual scheme for the *Old World Traits*. The study of European immigrants in North America was the second leg, after his years with the American Negro problem, of Park's exploration of cultural and racial contacts.

The third was an expansion of his interests to include contact of Orient and Occident. In the middle twenties he conducted a survey of communities of Oriental people in our Pacific states and in British Columbia. The "Autobiographical Note" sketches his travels on the rim of the Pacific.

About half the items were written in the period when, having been "retired" from his duties at the university, he travelled about the world to witness the effects of the more dramatic contacts of the races and finally settled down to teaching at Fisk University. These pursuits of "retirement" were shared by his wife, Clara Cahill Park, who put into charming pastels many of the "marginal" men and women of whom he wrote. The last of the papers was published, without his final editing, after his death in 1944.

In an earlier phase of his career, he had written about the same problems in another mood and in another role. It was Park, the muck-raking journalist and press agent who, in 1906, exposed King Leopold of Belgium's exploitation of the natives of the Congo in *Everybody's Magazine*.¹

The "Autobiographical Note" contains hints of a restless search for a career he could continue to find zest in; that is, one that he could continue to believe in. Thus the change from the Park of "The

¹ "A King in Business: Leopold II of Belgium, Autocrat of the Congo and International Broker," *Everybody's Magazine*, Vol. XV (1906), 624-633; "The Terrible Story of the Congo," *Everybody's Magazine*, Vol. XV (1906), 763-772; "The Blood-Money of the Congo," *Everybody's Magazine*, Vol. XVI (1907), 60-70.

Blood-Money of the Congo," to the Park who wrote, "In the relations of races there is a cycle of events which tends everywhere to repeat itself," was not a mere evolution. It was one of several turns from academic speculation to action and back again. Only after his several years of association with Booker T. Washington, including the latter's trip to other parts of the world in search of "The Man Farthest Down," did Park turn finally to an academic career in which he found an enduring, if often uneasy, synthesis of action and thought. But he did not find it; he made it. For there existed no ready-made pattern for his ways of teaching. Indeed, he often seemed much more concerned to learn from the student than to teach him. And it was essentially this desire to learn—even from students—that made him a great teacher. He made his students curious about themselves, and about the social worlds in which they lived; then he gave them a perspective in which to see themselves and thus satisfy the curiosity. The perspective was a system of concepts abstract enough to comprehend all forms of interaction of men with one another, anytime and anywhere, yet vivid and suggestive. Many a student saw himself and others in a new light because of Park's invention of the phrase, "Marginal Man." But because the phrase referred not merely to one's self, but to an order of things, the student also forgot himself, in some measure, and became more curious about others. This dialectic of focus upon the individual case and upon the genus runs through all that Park did.

It is, in a sense, the dialectic of his own life: reform and action as against detached observation; writing the news of the unique event as against the discovery of the eternal themes and processes of history; sympathy for the individual man as against concern for the human race. From this dialectic proceeds the paradox of his work on race relations, and, for that matter, on other aspects of human life. For, as the reader will see, this book contains little or no news of the racial and cultural fronts of the world. It refers to racial news, such as the first major modern defeat of a "white" nation by a "colored" one, and to Hitler's persecution of the Jews. (Park was always an avid follower of the news.) The references are but the occasion for the development of general ideas concerning race relations.

The paradox goes further. Park probably contributed more ideas for analysis of racial relations and cultural contacts than any other modern social scientist. Yet he was not a specialist in race relations. To be sure, he was endlessly curious about peoples of all races and

cultures. He maintained the unspoiled reporter's interest in human behavior. The characters of the play could be of the alley or of the avenue; his middle-class American neighbors, the freaks in a circus, or the people of ancient times or of some exotic country. His interest was more catholic than even the wide field of racial and cultural contacts. It was human. His essays on race relations are, in fact, essays on social processes and social interaction in general. And that is why we who have undertaken to put them into a more accessible form, have done so.

You have before you part of the record of a passionate, but speculative man's thinking about a great theme of human life and history.

EVERETT CHERRINGTON HUGHES

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