

Jessica Blatt, *Race and the Making of American
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- 1 Jessica Blatt, *Race and the Making of American Political Science*
- 2 Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. Pp.205. ISBN 9870812250046.
- 3 Marcus Walsh-Führung
- 4 While the concept of race has been comprehensively analyzed in History, Sociology, Anthropology, and the Humanities, it has had a complicated history in American Political Science. The current political tensions on the issue of race attest to the relevance in highlighting the social and political realities in society. Current events, like the murder of Freddy Gray in Baltimore to voter suppression in Georgia during the 2019 mid-term elections, have forced contemporary America to grapple with the concept of race. Debates on the issue have left political analysts searching for answers on how to address the race question but, without understanding the historical evolution of race as a concept, social scientists will not be able to address its theoretical and empirical problems.
- 5 In *Race and the Making of American Political Science*, Jessica Blatt presents a historical account of the implication of race as a concept by examining ideologies that have impacted American Political Science. For students of Political Science, the author's analysis is instructive in the role that race has played in the academy. Her decision to focus on the founding and evolution of Political Science as a discipline in the early twentieth century allows for the analysis to draw on the historical context of the race divide. This provides a descriptive account of methodological practices in how the founders approached Political Science. In doing so, the author discusses John W. Burgess' purpose of the state in explaining institutional stability as a result of the Civil War and Reconstruction. For the state to create institutional stability, Burgess promoted the national homogeneity and Anglo-Saxon (Teutonic) domination of a white American race. In the late 1800s, the aim of Political Science was to advance a utopic and ontological understanding of the state. In this context, Burgess illustrated the view point of political

scientists as marginalizing minority groups in institutional and legal structures for political and racial stability.

- 6 To demonstrate the evolution of Political Science as a discipline, the author illustrates a shift from a Teutonic understanding of the state to focusing on state societal relations in America and globally. This shift becomes obvious in the political and ideological debates held by John W. Burgess and Woodrow Wilson on the direction of research in the American Political Science Association (APSA). Despite this change in orientation from a theoretical to a practical implementation of politics, the consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction still lingered on the American psyche. Furthermore, Blatt describes the role of the United States in colonial territories by illustrating the importance of biological determinism as a framework for analysis to create international stability. This, in turn, constrained the concept of race in societal structures to understate the importance of the race question in the national conversation. Biological determinism gave Wilson the justification to redesign institutional relationships for the benefit of white Anglo Saxon countries by allowing the United States to dictate its legal international authority. While the agenda in Political Science evolved, the new generation of political scientists did not directly address the race issue. On the contrary during this time period, the United States Military conducted intelligence tests on different races which helped push Political Psychology to the forefront in Political Science. The methods and results of these tests were met with resistance from the overall political community but impacted general discussions on race to focus on individual racial characteristics. Blatt goes into depth of how the APSA and the Social Research Council were able to push and develop Political Psychology for it to have a significant impact on current Political Science research.
- 7 Blatt states that this Boasian turn in Anthropology created a shift in the Social Sciences to address race in the political sphere of biological determinism by incorporating a holistic approach to counter the Victorian race theory. While Boasian Anthropology faced criticism from the Political Science establishment, Charles E. Merriam promoted the Boasian paradigm that focused and expanded on the autonomous domain of individuals in different races while, at the same time, highlighting biological possibilities and constraints in Political Science. Behavioral sciences in the mid 1920ies changed the role of race in society by focusing on individuals in specific societal groups. As Political Science has built more inroads for theoretical claims in the Behavioral Sciences, biological determinism has lost scientific credibility. At the same time, the focus on individuals and their actions have not led to comprehensive analyses and debates on the role of race in American society.
- 8 *Race and the Making of American Political Science* is a book about the concept of race and its shortcomings in grasping a very pressing topic. It challenges practitioners to think about the implications of race in research. While this book is not a comprehensive study of race in the United States, it addresses why and how the concept of race has been used in Political Science.
- 9 According to Blatt, statistical data from the Progressive Era provided continuity and rationality that helped further the ambitious research goals of Merriam in Political Psychology. This allowed Political Science to expand on the Boasian Anthropology to arrive at a monolithic understanding of the state in the uncovering of the functional form of democratic unity with the aim of social control. Merriam's intention was to create an objective discipline with a focus on political mechanisms and generalization which in

turn pushed Political Science further to Behavioralism and away from addressing the concept of race. As Political Science advanced, it focused on political and policy outcomes of the New Deal and Great Society eras which focused on labor-market relationships, bureaucratic practices, and political institutions. This being the case, literature did not feature the role of race in politics which constrained the patterns and developments of the concept in the historical record.

- 10 The creation of a more pluralistic and comprehensive understanding of concepts should shed light on current historical and contextual debates on the issue of race. To challenge concepts in Political Science has its rewards by provoking and scrutinizing the methodological aspects of the discipline. While it is hard to critique the pillars of academics, there is fundamental interest from scholars, if beneath the surface, in adapting concepts to meet a changing society. For academics working on race, it is important to challenge the assumptions of the founders of Political Science. In drawing on the role of race in Political Science and how the concept has evolved, Jessica Blatt has provided the academy a considerable service.