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Cynthia H. Tolentino, *America's Experts: Race and the Fictions of Sociology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, \$67.50 cloth/\$22.50 paper). Pp. xxvi + 125. ISBN 978 0 8166 5110 8, 978 0 8166 5111 5.

Reflecting on his encounters with Chicago school sociology, Richard Wright commented,

I did not know what my story was, and it was not until I stumbled upon science that I discovered some of the meanings of the environment that battered and taunted me ... I found that sincere art and honest science were not far apart, that each could enrich the other.

Cynthia Tolentino's *America's Experts: Race and the Fictions of Sociology* adds to a growing body of American studies scholarship that examines why sociology held such fascination for mid-twentieth-century writers of color such as Wright. This development is welcome, as students of American studies have too often ignored the social sciences. A slim volume, *America's Experts* offers four case studies on the relationship between literature, race and sociology. These focus on Wright's *Native Son*, Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, Carlos Bulosan's *America is the Heart*, and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*.

America's Experts is at its best when it demonstrates the combination of attraction and skepticism with which mid-twentieth-century American writers approached the sociology of race. Tolentino astutely notes how sociological discourse both allowed space for members of ethnoracial minorities to become subjects of scientific knowledge and at the same time tended to treat all non-whites as its objects. By highlighting writers' engagements with a sociological discourse in which racial minorities could become assimilated to American society through what Tolentino calls a "professionalization process," she intriguingly aims to draw insights into today's discourse of the "model minority."

America's Experts should interest scholars of Wright, Bulosan, and Wong. However, it offers a flawed understanding of the complicated relationship between American literature and sociology of race. Tolentino rejects "intellectual history's common focus on the direct, explicit engagements between intellectuals of color and academic sociologists" (xi), but offers no alternative methodology that would provide an empirical basis for her historical claims. The result is a reified depiction of American sociology that inadequately recognizes its diversity, historicity, or place within American society. At times, *America's Experts* renders sociological ideas inaccurately, as when Tolentino alleges that Myrdal believed that blacks were "biologically incapable of objectivity" (41). More commonly, it caricatures American sociology, reducing it to a white liberal ideology of racial uplift and assimilation of non-white minorities. In so doing, Tolentino effaces key differences among sociological ideas as they developed over time, at one point conflating the mid-century racial liberalism of Myrdal with both early twentieth-century notions of benevolent assimilation in the Philippines and contemporary neoliberalism (48).

Most problematically, *America's Experts* does not make clear the boundaries between sociological discourse about race and more popular social attitudes. As a result, it overstates the influence of sociologists in shaping American racial thought.

For example, Tolentino characterizes mid-twentieth-century sociology as the “official national discourse on race” (25) and places sociologists at the “center of national politics” (57). In overrating the roles of sociologists in constructing American racial discourse, *America’s Experts* typifies a larger flaw in American studies writing about the sociology of race, also evident in Henry Yu’s otherwise excellent *Thinking Orientals*. Like Yu, Tolentino correctly faults sociology for often objectifying and pathologizing racial minorities. Yet she discounts the extent to which this was a much larger social phenomenon in which sociologists played only minor roles and fails to delineate those moments when sociologists aimed to examine or even challenge rather than reinforce this process. For example, when Robert Park defined Asians and blacks as groups that were stigmatized in American society because of their “racial uniforms” (i.e. skin color) he was not himself pathologizing these groups but rather analyzing an existing social phenomenon.

Finally, Tolentino often overstates the extent to which ethnoracial minority writers viewed sociology as an oppressive rather than a liberating force. For example, her claim that Wright “sought to critique sociology’s hold on African American writing” (7) contradicts his statements of indebtedness to the Chicago school *Black Metropolis*. Despite its flashes of insight, *America’s Experts* does not provide an accurate, nuanced, or contextualized account of the relationship of writers of color with mid-twentieth-century American sociology of race.

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