

# H-Net Reviews

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**Jessica Blatt.** *Race and the Making of American Political Science.* American Governance: Politics, Policy, and Public Law Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 205 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-5004-6.

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In *Race and the Making of American Political Science*, Jessica Blatt demonstrates how race was crucial in the formation and development of American political science. Rather than suggesting that race lay outside of mainstream political science, Blatt argues that race was at its core. Starting from John W. Burgess in the early nineteenth century to Charles Merriam in the early twentieth century, Blatt shows how ideas and conceptions concerning racial difference shaped the expansion of political science as a field of study in the academy to the articulation of different methodologies within the field. One of the most compelling aspects of this text is Blatt's discussion of the role of racial difference both within and outside of the United States. That is, for academics to understand the significance of race domestically, we have to understand how race was also important internationally, as scholars and practitioners alike were seeking to find solutions and policies for US imperialism abroad.

Blatt's text is particularly timely given the prominence of identity politics in the academy. Her text forces us to question the ways in which political scientists have used race as an explanatory variable to understand political phenomena. One of the most pressing questions that political scientists have tried to address since the field's founding in the nineteenth century to today is: why do ethnic minorities have different political behavior from their white counterparts, all else equal? The answers have both theoretical and empirical implications. For example, we need to go beyond race as significance stars in a regression table and spend more time disentangling possible explanations underlying the patterns we see.

In part 1 of the book (chapters 1 through 4), Blatt demonstrates how race was central to the development of the field. From Reconstruction to imperialism in the Philippines, the management of nonwhite populations at home and abroad were on the minds of the first-starters of the field. Part 2 (chapters 5 and 6) moves away from the establishment of the field to the actual development of political science, in terms of different methodologies and theoretical paradigms. Blatt carefully traces and discusses conversations, texts, studies, literature, and memos from political scientists to show how their thoughts concerning race and racial difference helped to shape (and still influence) how we study political science today.

From the onset and throughout many parts of the book, Blatt centers the role of Burgess in making political science a field of social inquiry. She gives special attention to his theory of Teutonism, where the state was the natural unit of analysis and the racial homogeneity of the state was crucial to its development. For Burgess, the implications of this ideology were that the Aryan race was highly political while Asia and Africa were composed of unpolitical nations. Burgess's understanding of political science was to argue that there was a natural order of things and according to Blatt, he made these arguments to justify how and why political science was a field uniquely different from those who philosophized about an ideal world. While Blatt presents these ideologies in juxtaposition with one another, it seems like the political implications for racial minorities amounted to the same. In the *Racial Contract* (1997), Charles Mills argues that ancient philosophers were not concerned with the rights

of nonwhite people. Therefore, whether or not rights are natural or ideal, for Burgess as the leading political scientist of the time, or the philosophers he references, nonwhite people were not presumed capable. Furthermore, as Blatt notes, while some of the founders of political science were not outright committed to white supremacy, race-based science satisfied other demands. This discussion led me to question the centrality of Burgess in this text overall. I began to doubt if the story of political science would have developed differently without Burgess, and ask whether the development of political science (and race in political science) merely reflected the fact that it was primarily white men who had a seat at the table.

I think the greatest strength of this book is how the author discusses the tenuous nature of political science as a natural science versus a social science—particularly, how some natural scientists, such as Robert Yerkes and Carl Brigham, turned to empiricism in the form of intelligence testing to help prove differences between the races. Ultimately, these problematic findings helped influence policy in the form of the Johnson Reed Act, which limited immigration into the US in 1924. On the other end of the spectrum, Blatt discusses the reception of anthro-

pologist Franz Boas's work on cultural relativism and its influences on the field and race-based science. Throughout this thorough discussion, Blatt never fails to weave in the centrality of race in the shifting nature of the field. In all, individuals' prior ideologies concerning race ultimately shaped how these new findings and research were received.

*Race and the Making of American Political Science* is a necessary read for scholars interested in the role of race in political science, both for theorists and political methodologists alike. In contrast to Robert Vitalis's *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (2015), which centers on white efforts at silencing black political scientists and their contributions in the field, Blatt centers the role of white political scientists in the development of race-based science. Blatt shows the centrality and continuity in which conversations about race took place within the academy. From beginning to the present, she shows how race and the changing ideas about race have shaped the field of political science and in doing so, she makes one think about the implications for political science in the future. This is a must read for everyone.

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