Keynote Howard Winant (Sociology, UC Santa Barbara)

Dark Energy: Race and the Development of Sociology

In a recent paper (2014) I presented race as the "dark matter" of modernity, exercising a gravitational pull on the economic, political, and social development of the US and indeed the entire world. In this talk I shift the focus to the field of sociology. And I shift analogies too: by "dark energy" I mean the ongoing efforts by antiracist sociologists to reconfigure the field, especially in the 20th century. The dark energy of WEB Du Bois, in particular, virtually invented modern sociology, and arguably created the American, pragmatist paradigm that still dominates the field. Du Bois's idiographic sociology both drew on and influenced Weber, and undermined the positivist and nomothetic aspirations of what we still like to call "social science." Du Bois's radical descendants have both battled and influenced their mainstream colleagues, who drew upon the antiracist tradition he founded, and also sought continually to marginalize it. From the Chicago School (of which USC’s Emory Bogardus was a prominent example) through Parsonian and Mertonian sociology, and even through the neoMarxism of the new left, mainstream sociology has sought to immunize itself from the explosive dark energy of race. That is, we have sought to incorporate a greater degree of racial awareness, but always within acceptable limits. Today as in the past the normal paradigm of American sociology remains safely within the liberal (in the US sense of that term) and indeed American exceptionalist and nationalist framework, especially in respect to the central questions of race and racism. Still, the dark energy, particularly nurtured by sociologists of color (and white antiracist scholars as well), lives on. The prevalence and influence of a deeper antiracism may be gaining force in our field. Our racial identity and orientation -- both among faculty and students -- is undergoing a demographic shift along with US society at large. At the same time such political movements as #BlackLivesMatter and Immigrants Rights are gaining importance.