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Park, Robert E. (1864–1944)

Robert E. Park is considered to be one of the most influential academics of early U.S. sociology. Throughout his life, Park was concerned with social issues, especially racial problems in urban settings. He is widely known for his focus on the city as a laboratory for social investigation and for his involvement in the development of the "Chicago School" of sociology. Park served as president of both the American Sociological Society and the Chicago Urban League. He was also a member of the Social Science Research Council.

Early Years

Park was born February 14, 1864, in rural Pennsylvania. His mother, Theodosia Warner, was a schoolteacher, and his father, Hiram Asa Park, fought as a soldier for the Union army. When the U.S. Civil War ended, the Parks moved to Red Wing, Minnesota, where Robert Park lived for the next 18 years. He did not excel in school, although he took an interest in the personal histories of his townspeople and studied the immigrant community of the family's household helper, Litza. Park graduated from high school in 1882 and left home against his father's wishes to begin college at the University of Minnesota. Hiram Park initially opposed the idea of Robert going to college but decided to finance his son's education after Robert passed all of his first-year courses. The elder Park even convinced Robert to enroll in the more reputable University of Michigan, where he studied under professors Calvin Thomas and John Dewey.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in philology in 1887, Park turned down a position as a schoolteacher in Red Wing, Minnesota, and instead moved to Minneapolis in the hopes of landing a job as a reporter. Inspired by Goethe's *Faust,* Park wanted to see the world. He found work as a reporter and held positions in several metropolitan areas, including Detroit, Denver, and New York. At this time, Park continued to gain insight into the functioning of newspapers and made the acquaintance of Franklin Ford, a Wall Street reporter. Under Ford's guidance, Park came to believe that better reporting would revolutionize the progressive historical process and, in turn, would lead to the demise of depression and violence.

Ford and Park began planning an experimental newspaper, *The Thought News,* that would unite scholarship and journalism, but the newspaper was never published. While working on the project, Park met an artist named Clara Cahill, whom he married in 1894 and with whom he eventually had four children.

Park's interest in reporting led him to study philosophy at Harvard University. He wanted to describe the behavior of society in scientific language, which he considered to be precise and universal. After a year at Harvard, he went abroad to study at Friederich Wilhelm University in Germany, where he took his one and only formal class in sociology from Georg Simmel. Park later described Simmel as "the greatest of all sociologists."

While in Berlin, Park also discovered a book on the logic of the social sciences written by Bogdan Kistiakowski, a student of Wilhelm Windelband. Park soon left Berlin to study under Windelband and eventually followed him to Heidelberg, where Windelband was chair of the philosophy department. Park wrote most of his dissertation, "Masse und Publikum" (Crowd and Public), in Heidelberg and presented it to the faculty there, but he did not finish it until he returned to Harvard in 1903.

Professional Career

Although Park secured a job as an assistant in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard, he had grown weary of the academic world and, still inspired by Faust, longed to know human nature widely and intimately. He worked as a newspaper editor and as

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secretary of the Congo Reform Association. The latter job motivated Park to study inequality in the Congo. Believing that inequality was inherent in colonialism, Park decided to travel to Africa to study the effects of colonialism firsthand.

Before leaving for Africa, Park sought the advice of Booker T. Washington, who invited him to visit the Tuskegee Institute to begin his study of Africa in the southern states. Park never made it to Africa; instead, he accepted a job as publicity handler for the Institute. Over the next seven years, Park worked for Washington, did field research, and took courses. In 1910, he traveled to Europe with Washington to compare European poverty with U.S. poverty. Following that trip, Washington wrote *The Man Farthest Down* (1913) with the collaboration of Park. Later, Park claimed to have learned more about human nature and society while in the South working under Washington than he had in all of his previous studies. Park's primary interest was in the system that had evolved to define Black–White relations in the South.

In 1914, Park accepted a job at the University of Chicago, where he taught until 1932. During that time, he continued to study race relations and to advance his theory of human ecology. To further his study of race relations on the Pacific Coast, Park traveled to Hawai'i, Japan, and China, and in 1921 he and Ernest W. Burgess coauthored *Introduction to the Science of Sociology,* which became the standard textbook for the study of the discipline.

After retiring from the University of Chicago, Park and his wife took a trip around the world and then settled in Nashville, Tennessee, where he taught at Fisk University until his death in 1944. Park claimed that his biggest contribution to sociology was in giving it working concepts and a systematic basis. Park is better known today for his theories of assimilation, community structure, human ecology, natural areas, and racial mobility.

Duke W. Austin

See also Assimilation; Chicago School of Race Relations; Colonialism; Culture of Poverty; Immigration, U.S.; Social Mobility

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Parks, Rosa (1913–2005)

Rosa Parks died October 24, 2005, at 92 years of age, just a little more than a month before the fiftieth anniversary of the event that came to define her life and make her the stuff of myth—her quiet refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a White man in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955. Her arrest triggered the Montgomery Bus Boycott and led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that struck down Jim Crow segregation laws in the South.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott propelled Martin Luther King, Jr., into a leadership position in the Civil Rights Movement, but Parks is often represented as the "mother" of the movement with King as the "father." Her arrest is reenacted again and again on elementary school stages and in classrooms across the country, most often during African American History Month. One of the reasons why Parks's story has received so much attention is that it can be condensed down to very basic elements of time (the afternoon of December 1, 1955), space (a bus in Montgomery), and affirmation of rights (Parks's refusal to give up her seat).

In 1999, Parks received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Bill Clinton. In introducing Parks, the president said, "For most of us alive today, in a very real sense the journey began 43 years ago." Parks has been transformed into a national hero for everyone, a member of the canon of heroes inaugurated into the newly revised multicultural history of the nation. The phrases "a seat on the bus" and "the back of the bus" have become metaphors used again and again by many social groups—from women, to gays and lesbians, to the physically challenged—as part of their struggle for equal rights.

Role in Civil Rights

At the time of her arrest, Parks was secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and