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Keywords

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Disciplines

Communication | Critical and Cultural Studies | Demography, Population, and Ecology | Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication | Inequality and Stratification | Other Political Science | Place and Environment | Race and Ethnicity | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Urban Studies and Planning

tionalized practice. This Canadian reader was particularly alerted to the tacit influence of the American Civil Rights movement and its legal landmarks, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, on contemporary notions of educability and rights that are spreading around the globe. For instance, we have had no equivalent to *Brown* north of the border, and so Canadian understandings of inclusion have taken a more evolutionary and less overtly politicized course. Countries the world over are adopting a template for recognizing forms of exclusion and disadvantage that is a partial remnant of the struggles of African-Americans. This template has been reworked into contemporary framings of diversity and multicultural education, and those frames are being reassembled and institutionalized in settings quite distant from the communities described in this book.

The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances. By Alford A. Young, Jr. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. 267. \$24.95.

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The discussion of “black men in crisis” has almost reached the level of cliché. This is not to say that the “crisis” is merely made up, only that our superficial responses to it seem far too pat and predictable—both in the academy and in the larger public sphere. Books and conferences on the matter abound, but the newest entries into this ongoing conversation do not always promote constructive approaches to the dilemma. Daily headlines and popular stereotypes often conspire in reducing black men to embodied forms of intrinsic criminality and violence.

Of course, there is a long tradition of scholarship in the social sciences predicated on adding subtlety and nuance to common caricatures of black communities. Alford A. Young, Jr., has written a powerful and moving book, *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, which builds on this scholarly tradition, providing a thoughtful analytical contribution to the canonized qualitative literature on poor black men and their social environs. Offering a corrective to previous studies that extrapolate general claims about black men’s supposed cultural values from readings of their everyday behavior, Young asks for a more robust and sophisticated treatment of African-American men as thinkers and agents, a treatment that replaces too-easy academic invocations of “values” with a more rigorous unpacking of vernacular worldviews and conceptual frameworks, proffering this gesture as a “new cultural analysis” that tries to “get into the heads” of its research subjects.

Young sets out to explain how economically disadvantaged black men make sense of their own social predicament and its implications for their future life trajectory. He places his research squarely in the context of

earlier ethnographic attempts to grapple with urban life and black manhood, arguing that some of the classical works in this genre marshal their evidence to make “arguments about black men’s propensity for violence and aggression” or to offer “psychological portraits . . . of despairing men,” giving short shrift to “the process of meaning-making itself” among poor black men (pp. 27–28).

This nod to lacunae within the literature is only a precursor to Young’s substantive ethnographic treatment of black men on the Near West Side of Chicago, a place not as consistently studied as that city’s South Side. He met with (and interviewed) poor black men from two distinct sections of that community, black men with differently configured social networks: some networks tragically confined to the local community, others outstripping that neighborhood’s geographic and symbolic boundaries.

Young’s argument is relevant not just for urban ethnography, but for cognitive sociology as well, a discipline that analyzes “how the organization of society, and the locations of people within it, affect how individuals read and interpret their world” (p. 134). In deftly capturing the sensibilities of his subjects, Young emphasizes the productive force of their social networks, of these men’s varied levels of exposure to communities unlike the Near West Side. Young divides his subjects into three analytical groups based on their amount of social contact (in the present and the past) beyond that neighborhood: the extremely isolated, the marginally connected (to an outside world), and the provisionally connected. Young is then able to show that black men with more contact (and social history) beyond their immediate environment also have a more consistently macrostructural analysis of their social situation—and qualitatively different kinds of social aspirations for the future. The narrower their social worlds, the smaller their social analyses, devolving either into a pointed self-critique or an intractable uncertainty about the role of larger forces affecting their lives.

Young mobilizes the notion of “capital” to further explain his findings, arguing that *social capital* (the potential resources embedded in one’s social networks) connects to *cultural capital* and *human capital* (the learned skills and intelligences brought to bear on negotiations of everyday life) in ways that form a kind of feedback loop around his subjects. He is careful to complicate every aspect of this important argument, even making a strong case for “the concept of skill” as “both a kind of capital and a product of capital” (p. 178), safely folding some people deeper within an empowering circle of social possibility while concomitantly compounding the exclusion of others. For example, it is not enough that someone espouses positive aspirations (such as wanting to find “a good job”). They also have to operationalize that belief in rational ways. They need to know how and where to look for such a job and how to present themselves to potential employers in ways that signal their suitability for employment. They also have to know what good jobs actually exist. People’s definitions of “a good job” might not fit the job market as presently constituted, but

they will not even know that without a modicum of “cultural capital” allowing them to make sense realistically of their job prospects. For the young men in Young’s study, the problems begin with a “temporal mismatch” (to borrow a phrasing from the “spatial mismatch theory,” which explains low employment rates in certain areas as a function of jobs relocating far away from certain would-be employees). The most extremely isolated men in Young’s study dreamed of jobs that are no longer really available after urban America’s massive deindustrialization. These men seem unable to make sense of this structural shift, mining the present occupational landscape with a nostalgic misperception of employment options that highlights professions already relegated to the past.

As an urban anthropologist, I am particularly impressed by Young’s nimble ability to speak across that contentious dividing line between anthropological and sociological versions of ethnography. His discussion of “conarratives” (as more complex discursive formations than the much-romanticized “counternarratives” often invoked by scholars) is a move that anthropologists should appreciate as a collegial chastisement from across the disciplinary aisle. Moreover, Young has written a gripping narrative that is reflexive without being self-indulgent, and he uses his work to craft an exceptional rejoinder to standard attempts at describing black men’s contemporary crises.

Ethnic Origins: The Adaptation of Cambodian and Hmong Refugees in Four American Cities. By Jeremy Hein. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006. Pp. xxv + 309.

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Most immigrant studies have neglected to pay attention to immigrants’ premigrant cultural, ethnic, and political backgrounds as important factors that influence their adjustment to the United States. Jeremy Hein starts *Ethnic Options* with his discussion of why this unjustifiable neglect has occurred. In his view, it has occurred for two major reasons. First, immigration scholars have avoided providing cultural interpretations because of their conservative political implications. Second, “the post-modernist interpretation of culture in the 1980s and 1990s banished one of its essential meanings that is particularly appropriate for immigrants: values and norms internalized through socialization” (p. 6).

To systematically examine the effects of premigrant factors on immigrant adjustment, Hein has compared two Southeast Asian refugee groups—Cambodians and the Hmong—who have entirely different premigrant characteristics. Hein shows that the two groups have radically different homeland experiences due to their differences in kinship norms, religious values, history of nation-state formation, and political cleavage.