

The Problem of 'Race' in Talcott Parsons's Account of the Citizenship Complex

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Notwithstanding the longstanding significance of racial divisions in US society and politics, as well as the wide scope of Parsons's sociological interests, the topic is something that is relatively undeveloped within his *oeuvre*. He writes very little on race, when compared, say, to wider issues of socio-economic inequality and class as an ascriptive restriction on social mobility, or when compared to issues of ageing and youth, all of which he returns to at different points in the development of his thought.

Uta Gerhardt (2017) divides Parsons's writings into three analytical phases. The first is associated with the development of the voluntaristic theory of action and the critique of utilitarianism (exemplified by *The Structure of Social Action* [1937]), the second associated with the development of structural functionalism and the theory of the social system (as set out in *The Social System* [1951]), and the third with the theory of the societal community (as set out in *The System of Modern Societies* [1971]). Her strong thesis is that in each of these phases, Parsons develops his theories with a strong practical engagement with social and political issues which are explored in complementary essays. His manner of proceeding may always be conceptual and theoretical, but it also always has a strong empirical focus. So, in the first phase he develops a strong empirical interest in the role of the professions in modern society, but also in the rise of fascism and its place in the development of modernity. In the second phase, his practical interests are associated with the relation between sociology and Marxism, with the proper (secondary) location of class within processes of social stratification. He also develops interests in the Cold War, including the impact of McCarthyism. In the third phase his interests are in the development of the citizenship complex and practical issues of the role of universities, the student movement and associated other movements. Throughout there is a profound engagement with US society, its significance and wider context.

The US is argued by Parsons (1971) to be the new 'lead society' of modernity, but it is not until the third phase of his theoretical development that Parsons takes on a direct engagement with the role of race in the US. However, I shall suggest that this does not so much represent a moment of renewal in Parsons's theory, but one of crisis. Yet, it is a moment of crisis that is of great significance, precisely because of the very integrity and perceptiveness that Gerhardt attributes to him. In what follows, I will broadly follow the later revisionist views of Parsons, views associated, most recently, with Alexander (2006), Gerhardt (2002, 2017), Sciortino (2010) among others.¹ However, I will suggest that any attempt to suggest that Parsons properly resolved the problems he raises can only proceed by diluting the very significance of what he identifies. We will see that this is most evident in Alexander's (2006) 're-writing' of the theory of societal community (or civil society) to elide social rights of citizenship.

Revisionism and its dilemmas

¹ Nielsen (1991) is the first to argue that Parsons should properly be understood as a social democrat.

Let me begin with a brief account of the main claims of the revisionist account. Essentially, it takes issue with the dominant view of Parsons as a conservative, functionalist theorist, a view which in the US is most strongly associated with C. Wright Mills (1959) and Gouldner (1970) and taken up by conflict theorists (Lockwood 1956, Dahrendorf 1958 and Rex 1963) and critical theorists (Habermas 1971) in Europe. The dominant view presents Parsons as developing his theoretical perspective from the point of view of an integrated system and, therefore, as expressing an implicit preference for order over conflict, and stability over change (for discussion, see Holmwood 1996). For many writing at the time, this emphasis on the 'system' constituted a form of 'positivism'. By allying sociology as a profession with its 'functionaries' sociology was represented as, at best, a form of disinterested knowledge, and, at worst, undemocratic (just in so far as the 'system' was argued to express differentials of power, as distinct from the interests of the collectivity).

This kind of criticism got going in the late 1950s and 1960s in the light of the rise of new social movements. Contemporary societies seemed to many sociologists to be in crisis and Parsons's theory was ill-equipped to deal with it. In consequence, many sociologists turned to Marx (or, more properly, a Marx-inflected Weber) to renew a critical tradition in sociological thought. Whatever its other merits, the turn to Marx (or Weber) would not be particularly helpful as far as the issues of racial division were concerned. The latter would always be subsumed under class and, thus, displaced from view, notwithstanding the visibility of the movement for civil rights. Paradoxically, the shift of (white) sociology (Ladner 1973) toward Marxism occurred at a time when African American sociology – frequently operating within a segregated academy (Wilson 2006) – was moving in the opposite direction away from 'class' and back towards an expression of racial divisions as 'caste' (Saint-Arnaud 2009).

This latter duality had played out in Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944), where Myrdal understood racialized inequality as a failure in the realization of American values because of contradictory caste-like restrictions enacted by Southern whites. Ralph Bunche and other African American researchers employed within the project were uneasy with Myrdal's framework. For them, 'American values' were experienced as directly exclusionary and it was 'class' that offered the possibility of a universalism across racial divisions (Southern 1987). 'Class' could unite white and black workers, where 'American values' never would. Indeed, the concern with 'values' rather than 'structures' continued to characterize white sociology's relation to the 'problem' of race through to *Brown versus Board of Education*, where, in the words of Payne (2006), 'southern values' came to be generalized in the representation of African American culture as being in deficit, a deficit that could be repaired by integration under white culture.

Surprisingly, Parsons never engaged with *An American Dilemma* and wrote virtually nothing on the topic of race until the *Daedalus* project on *The Negro American* (1965), which he edited together with the African American scholar and activist, Kenneth B. Clark, and which was presented as a comprehensive survey equivalent to Myrdal's earlier collective project. It is possible that this direct engagement with African American sociology opened his eyes to a new and fateful prognosis for American society, albeit in ways which were quickly forgotten and which it is my purpose here to revive. As I shall show, while it might be expected – on the basis of the usual interpretation of his arguments – that Parsons would argue that the

issue was one of values and their fuller realization, in contrast, he argued that the problem was one of racialized structures.

To make a long story short, 'class' failed to do its work either for African American sociologists of the 1940s and 1950s, nor for critical sociologists of the 1970s and 1980s. As class receded as a critical sociological concept, so the revisionist Parsonsian position came to the fore. Even among critical sociologists like Habermas (1984), Marx came to be understood as a 'radical utilitarian', rather than as transcending the utilitarian framing, as Parsons himself had argued. Parsons's criticism of utilitarianism was now put forward as a resource for a critical sociology beginning to confront the early intimations of neo-liberalism (Gould 1991, Honneth 2014). Alexander (2006), for his part, developed a theory of binary cultural codes organizing civil society, one universal and inclusionary, the other particular and exclusionary, to understand the structure and dynamics of civil society. Despite four long chapters on race, Alexander fails to mention Myrdal's work, but it is clear that his argument is a generalization of the latter's 'values dialectic' which was expressive of the 'American dilemma'. Moreover, it is a general argument that Alexander attributes to Parsons although the latter is chided for being relatively blind to possibilities of reversion, of new particularisms undermining the possibilities of inclusion.

I shall suggest that this convergence on an idea of Parsons vindicated against his critics is problematic when compared with what he wrote and the implications that he himself drew from the problem of race in American society. Parsons, I shall suggest, entertained that the possibilities of reversion were more real than even Alexander and other revisionists imagine, a reversion that would potentially call into question his very understanding of the US as the 'lead society of modernity'.

In this context, and in passing, I draw a comparison with Marx and his failure to publish the three volumes of *Capital* in his own lifetime. As the historian of economic doctrines, T.W. Hutchinson proposes, one possibility for that failure is that events had already superseded its theoretical claims (of the impossibility of reform within capitalism, of the development of public utilities, etc) by the time that volume one was published (Hutchinson 1981; see also Campbell 1996). In a similar way, Parsons had long planned a magnum opus on the societal community (subsequently published in 2007 as *American Society*). It was already superseded in his lifetime by political events, including the failure of the civil rights movement, something he had foreseen as a possibility in his article published in the *Daedalus* volume. This, he suggested, *could presage the end of the American societal community*, not the bland realization represented in the posthumously published book. Here it is salutary to note Sciortino's eulogy to American society in his foreword to the book, "Despite its gnawing injustices and horrendous exclusions, from the 1960s to the present, American society has displayed – in its domestic relations – a relatively progressive and incorporative power that has confounded critics" (2007: xv). It is the latter claim that Parsons comes to doubt.

The 'citizenship complex', modern society and its sociology

The 'revisionist' account of Parsons's arguments is made easier by a recent convergence upon it from within the critical theory tradition of the Frankfurt school. It is a convergence

which is largely unacknowledged in the case of Habermas (see, Holmwood 2009), but explicit in the case of Honneth (2014) who presents Parsons's sociological account of modernity as the successor to that of Marx and one which is required by a reinvigorated (critical) Hegelian normative theory of modernity.

For Honneth, the issue is how to understand the different spheres of modern society as expressing normative values. Essentially, for him, these spheres are those of personal relationships, market, and political will-formation (or family-household, market and public sphere). In this way, values are not assigned to the sphere of a distinct and separate lifeworld, but also embed spheres otherwise usually understood as instrumental, or only 'externally' regulated. Instrumentalisation - what Habermas refers to as the colonization of the life-world (1988) - is a possible 'deformation' within each sphere, but it is not intrinsic to any sphere as its internal 'logic'. This, then, begs the question of what the normative basis of each sphere might be and how they are inter-related.

It is here that Parsons's treatment of modernity has interest for Honneth. In effect, Parsons's theory of modernity has the form of a projection forward of tendencies he believed to be evident in the 1960s and 1970s as representing intrinsic features of modern society. As Brick (2006) has written, this was a moment when a number of US sociologists believed in the transcendence of capitalism, reinterpreting the developments otherwise identified by Habermas at more or less the same time in a fundamentally more positive register. Rather than the reduction of modern society to capitalist economy, what was occurring, it was argued, was the embedding of capitalist economy within modern values of achievement and egalitarianism, providing, thereby, not simply a normative grounding of the public sphere, but also of the market economy itself.

Parsons broadly accepted T.H. Marshall's (1950a) account of this process in terms of the development and extension of civil and political rights to include social rights. These refer to membership in what Parsons calls the 'societal community', a domain broadly equivalent to civil society in Habermas (see, Mayhew 1997). Civil rights provide the framework of the boundary relations between the societal community and the state in terms of norms of free expression and assembly. Political rights determine participation in the selection of government and are expressed through the extension of the franchise. Finally, social rights address the welfare of citizens, "treated as a public responsibility" to secure the "provision of realistic opportunities to make good use of such rights" (Parsons 1971: 21); that is such rights represented as political and civil rights. Social rights seek, "to ensure that adequate minimum standards of 'living', health care, and education are available." (1971:22). Parsons goes on to argue that "it is particularly notable that the spread of education to ever wider circles of the population, as well as an upgrading of the levels of education has been closely connected with the development of the citizenship complex" (Parsons 1971: 22).

A long-neglected aspect of Marshall's account has been his treatment of trade union rights and what he terms a 'secondary system of industrial citizenship' (Marshall 1950a. See, Holmwood 2000). It is not simply that there is pressure for redistribution of resources outside employment, but also pressure to transform employment itself through trade unions and rights of representation and association. In part, this involved the transformation of an earlier status distinction between salaried employment and waged

employment. In effect, the labour contract and its regulation become part of 'employment citizenship', with similar rights and protections across different occupations.

Notwithstanding that Parsons was much less sympathetic than was Marshall to framing these issues in terms of *class*, he does provide a similar discussion, which is, perhaps, more telling for our purposes. For Parsons, the 'citizenship complex' is understood as transforming the corporation, *not from below, but from above*. In effect, Parsons traces the 'civil', 'political' and 'social' development of organizational forms. This occurs first in terms of orientation to the market, where increased scale introduces distinct occupational roles associated with management and its separation from labour. This is found in the rise of bureaucratic forms of organization. Finally, 'associational' forms of organization emerge. These extend throughout the societal community and become increasingly important in the 'fiduciary boards' of large corporations. With significantly much less emphasis on struggle than Marshall, Parsons nonetheless identifies employment as a form of membership of a collectivity (beyond a simple contract). Different forms of associative membership both define a modern societal community and interpenetrate with organizational forms. Significantly another severe critic of Parsons, David Lockwood, also came to a similar view, drawing on Marshall to argue for an "institutional unity consisting of citizenship, market and bureaucratic relationships" (1996: 532). It is that 'unity' which later breaks down with race as a significant factor in its demise, as Parsons will come to suggest and from which he then backs away.

The fragmentation of the unity of citizenship, market and bureaucracy has profound consequences, too, for the sociological role. What is significant about the account of its unity is that Parsons explicitly understands the core structure of the university to be 'associational' (that is, 'collegial') and uses its mode of organization to understand wider developments. In other words, if the modern university becomes more like a corporation, as Habermas (1971) suggested, this is also because, at the same time, the *corporation becomes more like a university*. In part, Parsons attributes this to the rise of the large corporation and the separation of ownership from the functions of management. This latter development assigns managers a 'political' role in the corporation, reconciling different claims upon it. In this way, management is able to take on the status of a 'profession' similar to the rise of other 'professions'.

The development and transformation of the profession was, for Parsons, one of the key features of associative membership in the modern societal community. Professions enjoy a monopoly of practice in the light of claims for special expertise requiring considerable trust on the part of clients who are not able to judge services provided in terms of a principle of *caveat emptor* that might operate in other contractual relations. This poses a moral hazard, or information asymmetry, where clients may be vulnerable to a self-interested professional's pursuit of profit. However, according to Parsons, professional associations serve to regulate the relations between practitioners and clients and do so both by certifying knowledge and by codes of practice that establish a 'professional ethics' (something he develops from Durkheim). The point is not that the professional person is less driven by self-interested motivations, but that these are constrained by new social structures toward a reconciliation of private and public interest in terms of self-conscious duties and responsibilities (see, Holmwood 2006).

Once again, this is an argument also set out by Marshall (1950b). In an article first written in 1939, but specifically selected by him for publication alongside his more well-known 'Citizenship and Social Class', he makes the point that the development of rights also requires special occupational groups to deliver them, namely professions. Under the dominance of civil and political rights, the professions are associated with an 'individualist' form of transcendence of self-interest related to pecuniary advantage. This involves, "the belief that the individual is the true unit of service, because service depends on individual qualities and individual judgement, supported by an individual responsibility which cannot be shifted on to the shoulders of others... it is not concerned with self-interest, but with the welfare of the client" (1950b: 140). With the development of social rights and services provided directly through public authorities, however, this involves that, "the professions are being socialized and the social and public services are being professionalized" (1950b: 147). With regard to the first aspect, professions are brought to connect the welfare of the individual client with obligations to the wider public. With regard to the second, the professionalisation of services means that they are provided in a manner befitting social rights of citizenship. They are provided as a service to individuals regarded as equal members of the political community, rather than as recipients of charity.

To some extent the development of the professions follows the track of the university itself. Just as the professions once recruited from those with high status backgrounds because they served people of a similar status (an argument that goes back to Adam Smith), so the university was initially associated with the reproduction of elite culture. However, with the development of the 'citizenship complex', as the professions are democratized, so, too, is the university. This is not the democracy that might be claimed by a student movement concerned to disrupt all hierarchies, but the latter orientation, for Parsons, was a symptom of changes to the university and not in itself the direct expression of the new meaning of the university for democracy.

This is so not least because the university is responsible for what Parsons calls the 'cognitive complex' and its normative significance within modern societies. While the professions are the 'outward' face of the knowledge society and its demand for specialized expertise, the university is increasingly the guarantor of the knowledge base of that expertise and its development through research. Professional associations continue to regulate practice, but increasingly the knowledge they certify is credentialised through universities and their professional schools (including business schools). At the same time, for Parsons, this means that the "profession of higher education, and of scholarly research, has also been acquiring greater relative importance" (1971: 26), along with the notable fact that the educational revolution has begun to "transform the whole structure of modern society. Above all, it reduces the relative importance of the two major ideological concerns, the market and bureaucratic organization. The emerging emphasis is on associational organization, especially its collegial form" (1971: 98).

It should be stressed at this point that Parsons's functional analysis of systems (cultural, social and behavioural) and sub-systems within systems creates a complex set of locations (nodes) and exchanges, such that while associational forms arise in different organisations, they also have an expression specific to their functional location. A university is not the

same as a business organization, although it does have its business side (for example, it has to generate revenues and make material provision for its activities and this requires a distinctive – functionally specific - type of employee different from the academic). In a similar way, the business organization has its aspects similar to the university, but with a different ordering under the pursuit of profitability over the long term, while the university is defined by its pursuit of cognitive rationality.

By emphasizing the rise of associational organization, Parsons is, of course, mobilizing a theme of American democracy that goes back to de Tocqueville. Nowhere does Parsons use the idea of the ‘public university’ as a distinct form – in contrast, his preferred terminology is the research university and the professional school, and their functions of research, teaching, general education and socialization. Nor does he use the language of the ‘public sphere’ to account for the changing roles of the university. However, as I have suggested, he does locate the university (and, by extension, its academics) centrally within the societal community as an expression of a citizenship complex that secures social rights and defines overall legitimacy within the societal community by reconciling private and public interests. The ‘autonomy’ of the university, then, takes on a new meaning within this citizenship complex. Its knowledge is at service to a societal community in which, “the principle of equality has broken through to a new level of pervasiveness and generality. A societal community as *basically* composed of equals seems to be the ‘end of the line’ in the long process of undermining the legitimacy of ... older, more particularistic ascriptive bases of membership” (1971: 119).

Intimations of problems

I have already argued that a dominant interpretation of Parsons’s approach was to assimilate him to a general ‘positivism’ and academic disinterestedness toward practical issues of policy and reform. This was, indeed, a dominant position within US social science throughout the 1940s and 50s (see, for example, Haney 2008, Isaac 2012, Jewett 2012). It was not, in fact, the view that Parsons himself espoused. His claim was that the role of the professions was sustained by a general amelioration and reform of social institutions that constituted the development of the societal community. More importantly, Parsons set out why those connections are not contingent, but necessary, and that ‘professionalism’ severed from its relation to democratic values would be a self-interested and monopolistic claim to the appropriation of knowledge.

This was a charge that was levelled by radical sociologists in the name of a deeper democratization. Yet, as that argument was being unfolded, what occurred was not greater democratization, but widening inequality and the erosion of social rights, albeit rights that many radicals had initially rejected as merely reformist. Once we understand the force of what Parsons sought to demonstrate, the expression of supposedly professional values in our present neo-liberal universities cannot claim continuity with the values that sustained the professionalisation of sociology and other social sciences in the period of the expansion of higher education in the context of the enhancement of the societal community. It is precisely Parsons argument that professional values are framed within the idea of the citizenship complex of modern society. It is the unexpected – from a sociological

perspective, including that of Parsons himself – fate of the citizenship complex itself since Parsons wrote, that poses our greatest challenge.

The problem I will suggest lies in Parsons's theory of modern society, aspects of which are widely shared, if not their precise framing. But before setting that out in the rest of this chapter, let me return to a further consequence of Parsons's arguments. I have already indicated that he is usually regarded as the least reflexive of sociologists, yet he is one of the few to provide a detailed account of the sociological conditions of knowledge production. That account is salutary. Within his general theory of modernity, he places the USA as its 'lead society' and associates the development of modernity to three constitutive revolutions. These are the 'democratic revolution', the 'industrial revolution' and the 'education revolution'. With regard to the latter, Parsons and Platt write that, "the modern university, especially in its American version, is the current culmination of the educational revolution. It has become the lead component of an extensive process of change permeating modern society at many levels" (1973: 3). The implication is clear, as academics, as sociologists, we have been insensible of the very undermining of the university and its wider implications that has happened unnoticed in front of our eyes.

Parsons and Platt planned their study of the American university during a period of considerable unrest in universities associated with the rise of the civil rights movement and the development of a separate student movement in the 1960s. They regarded this unrest as contingent - a consequences of the expansion of higher education - and argued that fundamental change would be unlikely. The reasons given are characteristically hubristic – "our analysis will be built upon a theoretical framework ... Consequently, our analysis is more likely to be valid" (1973: 346). It is precisely the limitations of that framework which is at issue, but I shall address them in the context of the wider theory of modern society.²

In general, Parsons's account of modern society involves processes of functional differentiation and the development of specialised institutional forms around those differentiated functions – institutional forms reflecting the separation of political and economic functions, for example, and separate institutions of the societal community and 'fiduciary' system. As in the case of the university, different institutions are also internally differentiated by the same functions whilst deriving their specific separate identity from the function in dominance. It is this 'interpenetration' that steers them in complementary ways.

This is an arcane framework, but it has certain significant features. De-differentiation – that is, reversion – is a formal possibility, but it is less 'rational' than a fully differentiated development and, in consequence, it would require a special explanation, for example, in terms of 'lags' and temporary adjustments. In addition, the different levels of systems are defined by a 'cybernetic hierarchy' where values and their generalization represent the overarching framing for the relations among functionally differentiated institutional forms. In this context, the citizenship complex develops according to the values associated with

² The functional complexity of the university leads Parsons and Platt to describe it as a 'bundle'. The most recent changes to universities are presented as their 'unbundling'. See Barber et al (2013).

equality and the undermining of the ascriptive bases of positions. For Parsons (2007), this is also embedded in an American ethos of 'institutional activism', which describes a practical engagement with reforming institutions in the light of an individualism of equal worth, oriented to full membership in the societal community.

Parsons's most important contemporary follower, Jeffrey Alexander seeks to address the problem of reversion in his book on the *Civil Sphere* (2006). In it he suggests that the societal community is defined by a binary code of liberty and repression, which is set out in terms both of inclusion and exclusion. Apparently, Parsons's problem was an over-emphasis on processes of inclusion to the neglect of the particularistic solidarities of exclusion. However, it is not clear that the problem of explaining de-differentiation (in Parsons's terms) is best approached by setting up an abstract binary that defines the possible codes that are available to different groups, since it is clear that they are asymmetrical, with one being universal and describing solidarity *across* groups and the other the solidarity of one group *against* another. Since the issue that Alexander seeks to address is how civil society is extended to others (2006: 34), the code of universality is always already available with which to make a claim for recognition, while, at the same time, claiming one's place makes no contribution to the reconstruction of the code.

Alexander is writing about the civil rights movement in USA and seeking to understand the different phases of its development and also to place that in the context of resistance to its claims by white nativists. Significantly, in upholding the communicative possibilities of the 'universal' code, he fails to consider the fate of civil rights after the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. Perhaps related to the fact that the book is written after the demise of social rights, he also fails to consider the importance of the rise of neo-liberalism and the civil rights implications of the carceral state (M. Alexander 2010) with the Black Lives Matter movement yet to come.³ In effect, this means that Alexander can give no specific substance to the recent history of civil rights in the US and their implications. His failure even to discuss the role of *social rights* is a serious omission. Bluntly, Parsons understood that the recognition of a distinct domain of social rights was a crucial part of the development of the citizenship complex and, as we have seen, it is in relation to social rights that the university is grounded in the societal community (or civil sphere).

As I have commented, Parsons did not write very much about the situation of African Americans (or, as he wrote, the Negro), but he contributed his first major article on the topic to a special issue of the journal *Daedalus* in 1965, some 20 years after the publication of Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (1944). Parsons initially seems to follow Myrdal's line of thinking, writing about the latter's summary of the 'American creed', and that, "in understanding what has been going on, it is crucial to remember that the societal commitment to this value pattern has exerted steady pressure toward its implementation in behavior and institutions, though this has often been counteracted in specific ways" (1965: 1019). Indeed, a major part of the article is a less than original discussion of immigration to the USA that follows the line of early Chicago school thinking about 'Americanization',

³ See, King's (2017) discussion of resistance to 'forceful federalism' against racial inequality.

where immigrant assimilation follows a cycle of 'contact, competition, accommodation and assimilation' (Park 1950. See Lyman 1968 for discussion).⁴ However, he does something quite significant when he discusses what is distinctive about the situation of African Americans. Full inclusion, he argues, "requires the implementation of the social component in such a way that the realistic handicaps, so conspicuous in the back ground, are reduced to the point that, though they cannot be expected to disappear in the short run, they become more or less manageable" (1965b: 1021).

Thus, although there have been key victories – *Brown versus Board of Education* in 1954, which Parsons sees as an issue of legal rights – and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, which he sees as addressing political rights – what remained missing was the domain of social rights. Full inclusion required an address of the social and material disadvantage deriving from the heritage of slavery. Strikingly, Parsons proposed that the 'universalism' of social rights is something that will be a product of the agency of the African American: "He can become the spokesman for the much broader category of the disadvantaged, those excluded on this egregious ground. The Negro movement, then, can become the American style "socialist" movement. This is to say that the basic demand is for full inclusion, not for domination or for equality on a basis of separateness" (1965b: 1040).⁵

Notwithstanding the general character of his theory, his realism about the likelihood of full citizenship - and it is significant that he punctuated the title of his article with a question mark – placed a significant query over the future of social rights in the USA at the moment of their apparent embrace. At the same time, he identified the obstacle to lie in the re-emergence of the radical right under Barry Goldwater. Thus, Parsons suggested that, while social rights complete the citizenship complex, they do so in circumstances where they are likely to be contested on racial grounds. He writes that, "the alignment of the resistance to Negro inclusion, directly or through resistance to various measures essential to its success (such as federal support of education and the war against poverty), with a generalized political conservatism is a highly important development" (1965b: 1043).

Parsons thought that such a development was not likely to succeed. In retrospect, we can see that it did, with profound implications. However, Sciortino's comment that Parsons, "never doubted that the social component of citizenship was well entrenched and bound to

⁴ This formulation seems involve an elision of ethnicity and race common in many discussions which move quickly to a discussion of immigration. This is evident in Sciortino's (2010: 249) citation of Parsons's statement that, "the best indicator of inclusion is when 'it is no longer safe to infer that a person has a working-class background from knowing that he is a Catholic of Irish descent'" (Parsons, 1965a: xxi). Sciortino omits the sentence that follows, "in the present situation, the special position of the Negro, as occupying at 'total' status by virtue of his race, has become increasingly anomalous" (1965a: xxi).

⁵ Notice that here, too, Sciortino euphemises what is explicit in Parsons, writing that, "[Parsons] even claimed that the civil rights movement, if able to assume a more general definition of the structurally disadvantaged had the potential to become the American equivalent of a socialist movement" (2010: 248)

expand" (2010: 248) needs to be tempered. He did doubt it, and the basis of that doubt was to be found in the dynamics of race.

In fact, T.H. Marshall was more sanguine about the future and, in particular, about whether a coalition of professionals can hold together were pecuniary interests to come to the fore. Within the existing status order, business occupations he suggested are accorded the status of profession that are, "furthest removed in character from the professional ideal, in that they are most completely devoted to money values, money profits and speculation." He goes on, "if one were ruminating on the probable alignment of forces in case of a future crisis one would have to note the affinities between the upper ranks of certain professions and of financial capitalism, and hazard a guess that capitalist interests would be the dominating influence in the group... But at a lower social level the picture is different" (1950b: 151). We might suggest that the 'de-professionalisation' of the academic role under the marketization of higher education shows a similar tendency for the upper ranks within the university to align with financial interests.

We would also be warranted within the terms of Parsons's theory in considering the subsequent rise of conservatism and neo-liberal policies in the USA to be not only a reversion to utilitarianism, but also to be a *racial* project. Moreover, to the extent that social rights are denied, in his terms it would be something that undermined the status of the USA as a 'lead society' of *modernity*, and of higher education as the lead component of change. Rather higher education and with it the sociological role would be transformed by a project external to itself (for further discussion, see Holmwood 2018).

Conclusion

One of the difficulties in the interpretation of sociological arguments is that they are produced within a particular context and contain within their constructions a projection forward to circumstances claimed to be entailed by the processes being described. It is clear how Parsons perceived the future as the realisation of the modern citizenship complex and the overcoming of what he saw as ascriptive exclusions to full citizenship. At the time, among his critics, it was not so much that this trajectory was challenged as that it was regarded as too pallid and insufficiently radical. However, the radical response to it – at least within white sociology - did not focus on the issue of *race* and social rights, but rather on that of *class* and the limitations of the reformism implicit to Parsons's account of amelioration and the upgrading of jobs that seemed to him to diminish the significance of ascriptive processes of class.

Parsons's analysis looks different from the perspective of 2018 than it did in the 1970s when the radical criticism got going. One of the consequences of the new-found discovery of class would be that issues of race (and gender) would be seen as reflecting a politics of identity and, therefore, would be represented as particularistic in character. What should be clear is that from Parsons's reformist perspective, it was race not class which carried the universalistic claim of full inclusion for all under a regime of social rights, and it is the opposition to social rights that derives from a politics of identity associated with whiteness.

We do Parsons a disservice if we fail to understand how he thought that racial division might threaten the very idea of the modern societal community and how that could be bound up with a new utilitarianism associated with a right wing political economy that would seek to reduce professional expertise to the market. Equally, we do ourselves a disservice if we fail to understand how the practice of sociology itself is put at risk. Sociology is implicated not least because the nature of Parsons's theory is to bind it to the very developments that are now disrupted, namely to, "the alignment of the society's more progressive political forces in support of the inclusion process..." (1965b: 1043).

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