

Myths of the Chicago School

By Lee Harvey

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Appendix 7

A note on documentary sources

The primary documentary sources used in this book consisted of the following: published work of the Chicagoans and their contemporaries; Ph.D. theses produced at Chicago up to 1952; unpublished papers, research proposals, letters, minutes of meetings and other documents located in the personal papers of Chicagoans; the private journal of William Fielding Ogburn; minutes and papers of the Society for Social Research; transcripts of tape recordings of interviews conducted in 1972 by James Carey with twenty five surviving Chicagoans of the 1920s; copies of correspondence between Fred Matthews and Chicagoans written during the 1970s.

Apart from the published material and the Ph.D. theses, the source material is all located in the Special Collections Department of the University of Chicago Regenstein Library. The examination of the papers in the Special Collections Department provided a general profile against which other retrospective accounts could be compared. Such accounts included some recollections in Ogburn's journal, the reflections of Anderson, and Cavan amongst others in *Urban Life*, 11, (1983), Matthews' letters (including correspondence with N. Anderson, J. Bernard, and B. Hormann) and, more importantly, Carey's interviewees. Carey interviewed the following in 1972 as part of the research for his book *Sociology and Public Affairs* (1975): Barnhardt, Blumer, Cavan, Bartlett, Carter, Cottrell, Dollard, R.E.L. Faris, Hayner, Mrs. H. Jensen; G.B. Johnson, Karpf, Kincheloe, McCluer, McKay, E. Mowrer, H. Mowrer, Nelson, Neumeyer, Newcomb, Pederson, Reckless, Stephan, Stonequist, Thompson, and Winston. (Full references in bibliography, by contributor, dated 1972).

The range of personal papers located in the Special Collections Department is extensive. The papers of William Fielding Ogburn, Ernest Watson Burgess and Louis Wirth were examined in some detail. These collections are very large and a selective reading was necessary. The selection of material was aided by the Special Collections catalogue that outlined the contents of different files in the collection. In the case of the Burgess papers, however, the catalogue was of limited use as the collection (in 1980) was only partially sorted and it was necessary to resort to a pseudo random selection of file boxes.

The three collections provided a great deal of useful information and as different items were pieced together, a general picture of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago from the 1920s to 1950 emerged. This picture was reinforced and given more depth by the extremely valuable and detailed accounts of meetings found in the papers of the Society for Social Research and by the overview of the research work of the members of the Society available in successive issues of the *Bulletin* of the Society.

The inspection of source documents was primarily directed to the period 1920 to 1950 as this emerged as the period in which there was the greatest

conflict between the Chicagoans activities and the taken-for-granted views of their activities. Additional material on the research activities, social organisation and wider context of the earlier period came from well-researched secondary sources including Bulmer 1980, 1981, 1981a; Burgess 1952; Carey, 1975; Coser 1978; Dibble, 1972; Diner, 1980; Faris, 1967; Furner, 1975; Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954; Martindale, 1976; Matthews, 1977; Odum, 1951; Raushenbush, 1979; Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974; Smith & White, 1929; Wirth, 1947. Additional material on this period relating to research practices and theoretical developments came from published texts of the Chicagoans and Ph.D. theses (see references).

To augment the investigation of the development of sociological work at Chicago a sample of forty-two Ph.D. theses were selected at random from the list of theses completed between 1915 and 1952 and examined in detail (see Appendix 6). This source proved extremely useful and clearly showed the variety and trend of methodological approaches, typological procedures, theoretical orientations, epistemological underpinnings and extent of concern with reform. The progress and development of ideas in substantive areas (such as the sociology of race) were identifiable as a result of this analysis.

In reading primary sources one must be critical of both one's own interpretation and of the content of the material. First, such sources are not self-evident facts. Their sense and meaning are derived from their context and the researcher should be careful of avoiding dislocating text from its context. The context, of course, is, in part, created by the historian. Any documentary source must also be treated not as a static picture but part of a dynamic process. In short, one should not 'fix' any document with too rigid an interpretation, but should be constantly critical of the interpretation.

Second, the material itself may not be fully 'transparent'. For example, in the case of the Chicago material, minutes of meetings did not provide a verbatim report and may have concealed fundamental differences under a gloss of consensus. A précis of a speaker's presentation to a meeting, such as the Society for Social Research, may have tended to be complimentary irrespective of the quality of the contribution, and discussion sessions following such presentations seem to have been underreported. Applications for funding, too, tend to paint the institution in glowing colours and make the most of supporting evidence and on-going research whether or not it is particularly significant for the institution as a whole.

Further note added in 2017: The material was also augmented by very helpful face-to-face interviews with Maurice Janowitz (23 March 1980) and James Coleman (30 March 1980). A similar interview with Anselm Strauss in California yielded little of value and is not included in the references.