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Between Science and Politics: Donald Pierson and the quest for a scientific sociology in Brazil

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the political dimension embedded in the work of the American sociologist Donald Pierson in Brazil. A former student of Robert Park at the University of Chicago, Pierson played a major role in the institutionalization of the social sciences in Brazil from the 1930s through the 1950s. While Pierson's intellectual ambitions were centered on an academic agenda and he defended a strict division between science and politics, we argue that a proper historical understanding of his endeavor can only be achieved through an analysis of his underlying assumptions about the nature of both science and society – assumptions that were rooted in a reformist, liberal-democratic understanding of the world. To bring to light these values, we examine two key moments in Pierson's career: 1) his doctoral research on race relations in Bahia, done in the mid-1930s; 2) his efforts to promote the field of sociology in Brazil during the Good Neighbor Policy and World War II, when he was hired to teach at the São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics.

Keywords: History of Social Sciences in Brazil, Donald Pierson, Chicago School of Sociology, development, race relations.

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Entre a ciência e a política: Donald Pierson e a busca por uma sociologia científica no Brasil

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a dimensão política contida na obra do sociólogo americano Donald Pierson no Brasil. Ex-aluno de Robert Park na Universidade de Chicago, Pierson desempenhou um papel importante na institucionalização das ciências sociais no Brasil entre os anos 1930 e 1950. Embora as ambições intelectuais de Pierson estivessem centradas em uma agenda acadêmica e ele defendesse uma estrita separação entre ciência e política, argumentamos que uma compreensão histórica precisa de seus esforços só pode ser alcançada por meio da análise dos pressupostos subjacentes à sua visão sobre a natureza da ciência e da sociedade – pressupostos esses que tinham raízes em uma perspectiva reformista e liberal-democrática do mundo. Para trazer à luz esses valores, examinamos dois momentos-chave na carreira de Pierson: 1) sua pesquisa de doutorado sobre relações raciais na Bahia, realizada em meados da década de 1930; 2) seus esforços para promover o campo da sociologia no Brasil durante a Política da Boa Vizinhança e a Segunda Guerra Mundial, quando foi contratado para lecionar na Escola Livre de Sociologia e Política.

Palavras-chave: História das Ciências Sociais no Brasil, Donald Pierson, Escola de Sociologia de Chicago, desenvolvimento, relações raciais.

Introduction

Of the foreign sociologists who took part in the institutionalization of the social sciences in Brazil from the 1930s through the 1950s, one of the most notable was Donald Pierson, who received his doctorate at the University of Chicago under the advisership of Robert E. Park. While Pierson was serving as professor at the São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics (Escola Livre de Sociologia e Política de São Paulo, or ELSP), where he taught, conducted research, and engaged in science communication, he played a fundamental role in creating space within academia for Brazilian social scientists and in forging their professional identity.

Pierson's time in Brazil has often been analyzed from the perspective of these endeavors, but the resultant interpretations of his participation in the local history of the social sciences have tended to reproduce the sociologist's own image of himself: that of a researcher, or man of science, free of attachments with both politics and society, who was devoted to advancing scientific knowledge by professionalizing the social scientist's academic activities and making it a norm to rely on intellectual production practices that were guided by the ideal of systematic empirical research.[1]

While Pierson's intellectual ambitions were centered on an academic agenda and he defended a strict division between science and politics in his discourse, attributing axiological neutrality to sociology, we argue that his work was filled with values and engagement with the issues of the day, particularly those concerning U.S. domestic and foreign policies. Little can be found in the literature about this facet of Pierson's trajectory, although it has the potential to enhance our understanding of his role in the history of scientific exchange between Brazil and the United States in the mid-

[1] References to Pierson's efforts toward the establishment of sociology as a science in Brazil tended to follow his own account (Pierson, 1987). See, for example, Oliveira (1995), Villa Nova (1998), and Brochier (2011).

twentieth century, when the social sciences were first making their way into the Brazilian academic world.

From its earliest days, in the nineteenth century, sociology has had a normative concern with setting apart the spheres of science and politics and establishing itself as a scientific discipline, as Max Weber (2004) made clear in his paradigmatic essay on the topic. But when an analyst seeks to understand the historicity of the field's concepts and practices over the course of its trajectory, these boundaries should be taken neither as natural nor as definitive givens but seen instead as contingent constructs open to ongoing negotiation, grounded in values, worldviews, and interests of certain actors and social groups and set within specific times and places (Shapin, 1992).

In this article, we examine both the societal ideals that informed Pierson's efforts to delineate the boundaries of what he called scientific sociology as well as the theoretical approaches and frames he deemed pertinent to the study of social life. It is not our intent to uncover any potentially unacknowledged ideological motivations behind his scientific production; rather, by adopting a perspective informed by history and contemporary social studies of science, we will analyze how his efforts to ensure that Brazilian sociology adopted a specific epistemic regime also in fact defended certain ways of framing the social world.[2]

To bring to light how Pierson's sociological thought and academic work were inextricably linked to views on how society should be organized as well as to political concerns of the period, we will analyze two key moments in

[2] The contemporary field of the social studies of science has emphasized the co-production of science and society; in other words, more recent studies have carefully investigated the practices and processes that simultaneously shape what we understand as "society" and "science," rather than following more traditional approaches, which assumed that certain social and political factors, identifiable a priori, wielded external pressure on scientific activities (Felt *et al*. 2017). The work of social scientists such as Bruno Latour (1987) and Michel Callon (1987) has played a leading role in defining the debate in these terms, as have history of science studies influenced by the so-called Strong Program, in particular the well-known book by Shapin and Schaffer (1985/2011).

his career: 1) his doctoral research on race relations in Bahia, done in the mid-1930s in the early days of the Good Neighbor Policy; 2) his efforts to promote the field of sociology in Brazil during World War II, when he was hired to teach at the São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics.

In our investigation of these two moments, we have looked at Pierson's published articles and books as well as at his correspondence with Brazilian and U.S. social scientists and intellectuals, as found in archives in Brazil and the United States. These records enabled us to better relate Pierson's conceptions about scientific activity and his substantive analysis of local society to the specific historical circumstances in which they were produced. Through this internal, systematic analysis of his work, in conjunction with an exploration of the ties between text and context, we hope to reveal how values, worldviews, and practical considerations, particularly regarding the significance of Brazil-U.S. relations, contributed to shaping his sociological work.

Pierson's substantive views of Brazilian society and his definition of the field of scientific sociology were not static during his time in the country but were altered and modified in response to changes in the international context and to agendas and dialogue with local intellectuals. By focusing on the two distinct moments mentioned earlier, we can identify influential factors that weighed on his scientific concepts and intellectual production.

While Pierson was almost fanatical in his presentation of sociology as a rigorous scientific practice secure from ideological bias, his diagnosis of Bahia's racial situation, based on his study conducted in the 1930s, exhibited the markings of the accommodationist positions defended by both Robert Park and the Black leader Booker T. Washington as part of the intellectual and political debate about the integration of Black people into U.S. society. As we will show in our first section, Pierson had a favorable assessment of the way Black people and *mulatos* were becoming part of the Bahian community, without any clashes or abrupt interventions by the State but

in tune with gradual transformations conceived organically within society itself. This conclusion shared common ground with the idea that social ascent was the preferential way for Black people to enter the world of U.S. citizenship in a non-disruptive fashion – a reading typical of Washington. Pierson's positive interpretation of Brazilian social history, which he saw as a progressive dismantling of the old caste system through the ascent of *mulatos*, drew inspiration from the intellectual climate of the Roosevelt era, which tended to underscore the socially constructive aspects of Latin American civilizing experiences, at a moment when liberal capitalism was facing a crisis at home.

When Pierson moved to São Paulo a few years later, in 1939, to accept a teaching position at the São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics, he took up his ambitious intellectual agenda to transform the "social disciplines into science." While his recurrent argument that social scientists should adopt a scientific ethos bore the distinct imprint of the U.S. academic "establishment," where sociologists were then concerned with guaranteeing themselves a place in the world of the sciences, Pierson's insistence that sociology be considered an axiologically neutral discipline, equidistant from ethics and politics, also dovetailed with salient diplomatic imperatives of the Good Neighbor Policy. Brazil-U.S. relations had entered a delicate period in the early days of the Cold War, and this was coupled with a need to assuage Brazil's intellectual and political elites, who were dubious about the motivations behind the U.S. presence in their country. Within the context of the Cold War – in ideological terms, often seen as a clash between the forces of totalitarianism and democracy – Pierson's reluctance to tie sociology to any explicit political commitment further reflected an interest in safeguarding scientific autonomy and protecting the field from any interference or intrusions from authoritarian forms of power, a concern then expressed in the work of Robert Merton.

Robert Park's agenda and Donald Pierson's accommodationist perspective

The political dimension of Donald Pierson's sociological production is evident in his doctoral research on race relations in Bahia, conducted from 1935 to 1937. Pierson defended his dissertation at the University of Chicago in 1939, with Robert Park as his advisor; he published his findings in 1942 under the title *Negroes in Brazil: a study of race contact at Bahia*. Pierson's research was part of an initiative led by Park, who started the Seminar in Race and Culture at the University of Chicago, after having traveled the world in the early 1930s. Park made it his goal to expand the scope of investigations on race relations beyond the United States in an attempt to develop a comparative sociology that addressed forms of ethnic and racial co-existence born of contact between peoples during the European colonization of the world (Pierson, 1936c, 1944b; Valladares, 2010; Brochier, 2011; Silva, 2012).

Park tried to delineate the exclusively academic purpose of his investigations and set sociology apart as a science distinct from other spheres of activity, like social service or political activism, and this left a lasting impression on Pierson, as we will see in the second section of this article. Both social scientists' strong desire to establish sociology as an autonomous scientific field should not, however, prevent us from examining the political aspects of their sociological inquiries on race relations. As a matter of fact, Park's research agenda, intended to illuminate the causal mechanisms underlying different patterns of racial interaction throughout the world, can only be fully understood within the wider political and intellectual context, where liberal reform sectors of U.S. society were eager to address one of the country's key political challenges: how to incorporate Black people and immigrants into the nation and into the world of citizenship. This axiological dimension of Park's research interests should be kept in mind if we wish

to place Pierson's ideas in their proper historical context, thus avoiding the risk of reifying the concepts and approaches he employed.[3]

The road Park traveled to reach the topic of race relations, with particular attention to the fate of the Black population, sheds light on decisive assumptions underlying his sociological understanding of the issue, even before he joined the University of Chicago faculty. Park first trained academically at prestigious universities in the United States and Germany, next pursued a career as a journalist in a number of U.S. cities, and then worked as an aide and publicist for Booker T. Washington, a prominent Black leader in the United States in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries.

The United States was a racially divided country, then the setting for myriad conflicts, riots, and lynching, particularly in former Confederate states, where whites were firmly opposed to Reconstruction Era efforts to extend civil and political rights to former enslaved people. Against this backdrop, Washington had embraced *accommodationism*. While saying nothing about demands for immediate legal and political equality, he argued that Black economic ascent would be achieved by expanding occupational training in the areas of manual and factory work, at a moment when industrial development was proceeding apace. This idea gave birth to the Tuskegee Institute, in the state of Alabama, dedicated to technical education. Washington believed that if Black people engaged in self-discipline, held regular jobs, and had stable sources of income, it would pave the way for their material progress while undercutting suspicions and stereotypes about racial inferiority, thus prompting a portion of whites to recognize Black people and eventually opening the world of citizenship to them. Integration would be a slow and gradual process, while the Black population's effective political participation depended on their improving their skills, aptitudes, and conduct as free men.[4]

The conciliatory tone adopted by Washington, who rose to fame following his speech before the Cotton States and International Exposition

[3] On Park's sociological views, see Chapoulie (2011).
[4] On debates within Black activism during this period, see, for example, Moore (2003).

in Atlanta in 1895, appealed to white politicians and intellectuals in the North and South alike, although he was also the target of some criticism.[5] The most well-known of these critiques came from the Black sociologist and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, who, in a set of essays entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, rebuked Washington for his complacent attitude toward both the system of racial segregation then being institutionalized in the U.S. South as well as the setbacks suffered in post-Abolition efforts to secure legal and political equity for Black people. Du Bois argued that the effective inclusion of the former enslaved population in the world of citizenship demanded an intransigent fight to guarantee rights, above all suffrage. During the ensuing years of controversy, Du Bois, who was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), came to be identified as a trenchant critic of accommodationism, while he disputed political leadership of the Black community with Washington.

These debates left a lasting impression on Park, who had a closeup view of the lives of the Black population in the South during his work with the Tuskegee Institute from 1905 to 1914, under Washington's direction.

[5] One of the exposition's goals was to make the international public aware of the economic advances achieved by states in the U.S. South. In his "Atlanta compromise" speech, given before a mostly white audience, Washington argued that Black people could contribute to the region's development if they were given opportunities to study and work. Their willingness to cooperate with whites should be beyond question: "As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." As to those who demanded immediate equal rights, Washington had this to say: "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercise of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house" (Washington, 1974, p. 586-587).

The Black leader's gradualist stance had a significant influence on the sociological imagination of Park, whose approach to the study of race relations, later applied at the University of Chicago and passed along to his students, tended to focus on what he considered long-term social processes (Morris, 2015). Park's sociology emphasized transformations to the racial context that would occur gradually, at a deep level, beyond the day's most noted events and independent from human agency; accordingly, in the political realm he had reservations about abrupt interventions and legal measures aimed at immediate changes to the status quo, which he saw as artificial. According to Park, these structural tendencies were so entrenched in social institutions that it was useless, if not counterproductive, for political agitators, intellectuals, and "do-gooders" to try to accelerate change. This perspective reflected not only Washington's misgivings about more radical Black activism but also his assessment, endorsed by Park, that Reconstruction had greatly disrupted the organic development of race relations in the U.S. South. According to this view, despite the hierarchies produced by slavery, the Black and white populations had been gradually weaving moral ties through their close contact on the plantation (Morris, 2015).

Washington's accommodationist principles meshed well with Park's sociological framework for analyzing race relations, often referred to as the "race relations cycle," which took inspiration from concepts of plant ecology then in circulation. Park held that when different populations were concentrated in the same space, it inevitably triggered disputes over space and resources; these might be processed subconsciously, in the form of "competition," or in the form of open clashes, that is, "conflict." In Park's view, this would eventually lead to the formation of more or less stable social arrangements, through the shaping and crystallization of race-specific niches, occupations, and roles ("accommodation") or the merger of disputing groups into a new ethnic and cultural unit ("assimilation"); in both cases, the tendency was to do away with conflict or reduce it to bearable levels (Park; Burgess, 1921). The notion of assimilation, central to Park's perspective,

can only be grasped within the context of the era's public debate over the possibility of integrating Black people into U.S. society – a society that was implicitly imagined as a social and political unit organized according to the values of Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture (Chapoulie, 2001, p. 315-320). The Parkian approach had factored heavily into Pierson's study in Brazil, as we will see later.

In the 1930s, when the social scientists from Chicago included Bahia in their studies encompassing different areas of the world, it was their understanding that there were clear differences between race relations in Brazil and the United States, in the sense that race relations were believed to be in a more advanced process of interethnic integration in Brazilian society. We can find evidence of this comparative interest, which was to inform Pierson's study, in a research note published in a University of Chicago Bulletin around the time the sociologist was preparing for his trip to Brazil: "The fact that the former slave class [in Brazil] have attained relatively complete economic, social and political equality with the former master class is a notable point of contrast between the Negro-white situation in Brazil and that of the United States." (University of Chicago, 1935). In the words of Robert Redfield, who sat on the research project's supervisory committee, it was the "strikingly different outcome" of Black-white interactions in Brazil vis-à-vis the United States that stirred intellectual curiosity about Brazil (Redfield, 1935). In the opinion of Park and his Chicago colleagues, Brazil had apparently found a politically more pleasing solution to problems stemming from contact and clashes between different racial groups. In Park's eyes, the Brazilian race relations cycle seemed to follow the path envisioned by leaders like Washington, with the Black and white populations gradually sorting things out between themselves without any major friction, in contrast with the conflict-ridden experience in the United States.

The idea of exploring Brazil and the United States from a comparative prism was not exactly a new one; indeed, the approach had been adopted implicitly or explicitly under different circumstances as part of the discourse regarding the two countries' racial situations, as voiced by actors with ties

to both national contexts (Seigel, 2005). Comparisons had sometimes been used to lend support to segregationist policies in the United States, as when racial miscegenation was blamed for Brazil's alleged lag in the civilizing process. At the time of Pierson's study, however, some of those in the United States, especially among academics and reformist intellectuals, drew their view of Brazil in part from the intellectual climate favorable to Latin America that had prevailed throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s, a climate that served as ideological leavening for the new U.S. posture toward the region, implemented during the Roosevelt era (Pike, 1985). With liberal capitalism in crisis in the United States, the imagination regarding Latin America acquired positive albeit sometimes stereotyped tones. Considered relatively untouched by the evils of urban-industrial civilization, embodied by U.S. metropolises and their individualism, Latin American countries were seen as offering original societal experiments that might prove valuable to a re-examination of the modern order at home.

In a preface to *Brancos e Pretos na Bahia: estudo de contacto racial* (1945) – the Brazilian edition of his book *Negroes in Brazil: A Study in Racial Contact* (1942) – Pierson, who maintained that the scientist's role was to describe and analyze more than to "applaud" or "condemn," wrote that he had been impressed by the Bahian community, a "people whose society is imbued with sentiments that lend so much flavor and satisfaction to life that – to use Sapir's expression – we could call it 'a full cup'" (Pierson, 1942/1945b, p. 28). This reference to Sapir, and more precisely to his article "Culture, Genuine and Spurius," is not fortuitous. In the latter text, published in 1924, the anthropologist drew a sharp contrast between genuine culture on the one hand – which he held to be harmonious, integrated, and the source of deep meaning for the individual, examples of which would be so-called primitive people, like American Indigenous tribes – and, on the other, the "fragmentary existence" characteristic of societies oriented to the idea of progress, like the United States, utilitarian and technically efficient but spiritually poor (Sapir, 1924, p. 413-414). Grounded in this viewpoint that was quite sympathetic to Latin America, Pierson conducted

an analysis of race relations in Bahia that heavily valued the role played by face-to-face contact and personal and family relations in the construction of a social order less prone to racialized forms of conflict, in contrast with the United States. In his view, the Brazilian patriarchal tradition, set in an environment not yet dominated by the impersonality and economic competition typical of modern urban centers, had cleared the way for a type of social stratification where the Black population could enjoy greater vertical mobility.

Pierson arrived in Salvador, Bahia, in late 1935, after a brief stay at Fisk University, a historically Black school in the U.S. South, followed by a stopover in Rio de Janeiro, where he met with scholars of race relations in Brazil, including Arthur Ramos, Gilberto Freyre, and Oliveira Vianna.[6] He conducted his research in Bahia mostly from Park's sociological perspective, which seems to view conflict as intrinsic to inter-racial relations and to consider the assimilation of minorities into the dominant racial group as one of the only conceivable – if not the most desirable – outcomes of a meeting of the races.

In order to assess the degree of Black integration into Bahian society, whose culture was identified with the Portuguese colonizer, Pierson adopted Park's suggested conceptual dyad of caste and class, notions then employed in research such as that conducted by W. Lloyd Warner and his students on the U.S. South. Among these studies was a research report by University of Chicago sociologist Buford H. Junker on the impact of segregation on the educational system in a community in Houston County, Georgia. This research had caught Park's eye because it showed "how it is possible to discover and define race relations from a study of concrete materials" (Park, 1936).

Pierson used the concepts of class and caste much as they were used in these studies, that is, he conceived of class as an open layer permeable to vertical mobility, in contrast with caste, regarded as a closed layer whose

[6] On the circumstances surrounding Pierson's national and international travels at the time of his research, see Pierson (1987); Silva (2012); Maio and Lopes (2017).

members were determined at birth and who were subject to sanctions when marrying outside the group (Pierson, 1945b; Warner, 1936; Cox, 1942). However, Pierson had some reservations about Junker's use of the category "caste," a concept, he argued, that should not be applied indiscriminately to both the Indian and U.S. situations. Pierson felt that, despite the persistent taboo against inter-racial marriage in the U.S. South, it was increasingly common for Black people to move into positions formerly reserved for whites, thereby signaling the emergence of a social order halfway between the caste system and a class society (Pierson, 1936a). Pierson's comments on Junker's work aligned with the position taken by Park, who, instead of using the concept "caste" to characterize race relations in the South as Warner did, argued that Black people constituted a "racial minority," which, while not socially accepted by whites, was conquering ever higher levels within professional ranks (Chapoulie, 2001, p. 320-1), a perspective that somehow reflected Park's accommodationist disposition to see the fulfillment of the Black community political goals in the U.S. as a gradual and non-disruptive process of change. In Park's words:

> You seem to have in Bahia, as we here in the United States, a combination of a class and caste system or a situation in which class is replacing caste. Each race, including the mixed bloods, provided it has a name and some degree of self-consciousness, is likely to be represented in all the occupational classes. But the racial group that has the superior status will have proportionately larger numbers in upper brackets, and the racial groups having inferior status will have the larger number in lower brackets (Park, 1936, p. 3).

At the close of his research in Bahia, Pierson concluded that color had little to do with determining a person's social position as compared to other markers, such as wealth, education, intellectual ability, and professional level, and that race was therefore not a decisive factor in social stratification in Salvador. He attributed this to the fact that the colonization process had sparked a process of uninterrupted miscegenation. Initially stimulated by the Portuguese settlers themselves due to the lack of women of European origin in the region, the meeting of the races continued through the centuries,

without being interrupted by any other factor, contrary to the U.S., South African, and Indian experiences. The result was a miscegenationist culture where personal relations within multiracial families could more easily forge ties of interethnic solidarity.

The abolition process had been favored by this trend. In Brazil, Pierson argued, slavery had ended through gradual change rather than a violent shift in the social order, reinforcing a tendency for Black people and *mulatos* to be integrated into society as a whole. While color and other racial markers continued to bear the stigma of slavery in the present, he felt their negative connotations would gradually fade, as racial mixing (in the sense of "whitening") advanced and a growing number of *mulatos* and Black people proved their personal abilities and merit and climbed the socioeconomic ladder, as evidenced by the fact that Black people, *mulatos*, and white people were represented in all occupations, albeit still unequally. Pierson's findings led to the conclusion that Bahia, like Hawaii, constituted a "multiracial society of classes," distancing it both from U.S. society, where a Black middle class was not yet fully accepted on equal footing by whites and could only rise within its own community, and also from the extreme case of the Indian caste system.

Pierson's study was accused at times of obscuring racial conflicts or reducing them to a class issue, that is, the negative attitudes toward Black people would reflect prejudice and contempt for their social and economic condition and not necessarily for their skin color or other racial traits. It is true that the ethnographical content of his work reveals a variety of tensions. Pierson wrote that daily friction, displays of Black dissatisfaction, and resistance to marriage with Black people by the white and *mulato* populations were observed in Bahia. At times, he depicted clashes between Blacks, whites, and *mulatos* in a quite racialized fashion.[7] Nevertheless,

[7] Pierson (1945b, p. 222-228) portrayed conflict situations throughout his work, particularly in his analyses of how Blacks, whites, and *mulatos* related to each other in their daily lives.

it would be more accurate to say that Pierson's treatment of the racial character of these conflicts is marked by ambivalence.

As we can see from Pierson's research reports to his professors at the time he was conducting fieldwork in Bahia, he expressed doubts and reservations about the nature of prejudice suffered by the local Black population, hesitating to interpret it as a form of class prejudice (Pierson, 1936b, d).[8] Faced with a baffling ethnographic context, Pierson placed emphasis on empirical evidence that was more in accordance with his own implicit projections about the future development of race relations in Bahia when writing his book's final conclusions. Such projections, in turn, can only be understood in the light of the political values underlying his interpretive framework.

In his dissertation, when Pierson addressed the nature of the unfavorable attitudes toward the Black population found to be prevalent in Bahia, he provided a strict definition of racial prejudice: "a social attitude that emerges during conflict situations to help maintain a threatened status," an attitude that should not be confused with "aversion," "hostility," or "unequal treatment" (Pierson, 1945b, p. 419-455).[9] Couched in these terms, the concept did not seem to apply to Bahia, because, according to Pierson's interpretation of the Brazilian past, dominant white groups had not been confronted during abolition by a hostile Black population that represented "any serious threat to [their] own status" and therefore had never experienced feelings of distrust, apprehension, or resentment (Pierson, 1945b, p. 347).

On the other hand, abolition in the United States had been preceded by "a wave of fear […] which swept our South after the Negro uprising in Haiti and the disorders attendant on the subsequent annihilation of the Haitian whites," constituting "an incident of civil strife" aggravated

[8] Some authors have indicated Pierson's hesitations during his fieldwork. See Romo (2010); Brochier (2011).

[9] Pierson (1945b) would cling to this definition in subsequent years, when his work started facing growing criticism.

by "a program of 'reconstruction' imposed by armed conquest from outside" (Pierson, 1945b, p. 346-347). In the U.S. South, Black people had experienced a change of status that was not born from within the communities and had not grown organically, but that had transpired abruptly and through force, fostering resentment among whites and giving rise to a social imagination that assigned harshly negative connotations to representations of Black people.

Pierson underscored the gradual, cumulative, and non-disruptive nature of the transformation of Bahia's caste society into a "competitive social order" in order to explain why prejudice against Black people in Salvador was not expressed as in the U.S. South. While he constructed the case of Bahia by way of comparison with the U.S. experience, this comparison only becomes meaningful because both cases are viewed through the lens of the political principles implicit to Park's interpretive framework. According to this perspective, processes of change involving racial relations should be conducted gradually and without relying on the State's coercive apparatus to implement racial integration programs. Somehow, Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois' early 20th century controversy on how the Black community in the U.S. should conduct their struggles resonated through Pierson' analysis. Following the accommodationist path, Pierson rejected the political radicalism represented by federal government intervention in the Confederate states during the Civil War, while he apparently saw Brazilian abolition as having much in common with the normative suppositions of Park's sociology, that is, as the culmination of a gradualist process of change, marked by society's wholesale acceptance of emancipation and devoid of any drastic break with the prevailing social order.

In Pierson's view, upward mobility in Bahia reflected community-wide recognition of persons of color as well as the fact that the latter could have close relations with the white elites. This was one of the key phenomena examined in Pierson's study, because he felt it contrasted

with the race situation both in the United States, where a Black middle class had formed through social ascent within the narrow confines of an endogamous racial group, and also in India, where intermediary and biologically mixed strata were closed in on themselves and prevented from seeking higher positions. If Pierson came to view this hypothesis as plausible, it was in large measure because of the interpretive frameworks developed in Brazilian social history by such prestigious intellectuals as Oliveira Vianna and Gilberto Freyre.[10]

Pierson's emphasis on social mobility in Salvador ultimately stemmed from his expectations about the future of this society, and these expectations in turn derived from the axiological suppositions for classifying different types of racial situations that are to be found in Park's framework, as mentioned earlier. While Pierson recognized that color still represented a social stigma and, therefore, a handicap for the Black population in Bahia, he believed, quite optimistically, that this was a remnant of a former slave society destined to vanish. As an increasingly larger contingent of people of color enjoyed upward mobility, he thought it was only a matter of time before Bahia's social classes would grow less unequal in racial composition, eventually producing a social stratification based solely on "individual merit" and "favorable circumstance" and no longer on color or racial heritage, traits that lay outside individual control (Pierson, 1945b, p. 399-422). This perspective reflected the accommodationist aspirations of Black integration through a gradualist process of social mobility.

In this regard, Pierson's Bahia seemed on the verge of realizing the political ideals of a social meritocracy. He believed that Bahia displayed status distinctions, inequalities, and conflicts natural to all forms of society,

[10] While Pierson (1945b) seems to have found in Vianna backing for his thesis that the Bahian population had been gradually whitening as *mulatos* mixed with Blacks and whites mixed with *mulatos*, when the U.S. sociologist examined how the process of gradual social ascent by *mulatos* contributed to shaping the standard of race relations characteristic of Brazil, he drew support from Freyre.

but that, unlike the situation with racial prejudice in the United States, this did not jeopardize its chances of achieving democracy in the form of equality of opportunity and free competition (Pierson, 1945b, p. 422). This political perspective is blatantly evident in a research report where Pierson ventured an analysis of Bahia's racial situation, using the conceptual dyad of caste and class. He stated:

> The body of social relations […] peculiar to India, the United States and Brazil, respectively, do not constitute different kinds of caste, but different social organizations which for schematic analysis may be visualized as occupying varying positions along a cultural gradient, one pole of which may be denominated "caste", the other (for want, perhaps, of a better term) "pure democracy" (Pierson, 1936b).

The Bahia that emerges from Pierson's work is the product of a game of contrasts between images from different regions around the globe, like the Deep South, India, and Hawaii; it is also a picture that reflects political misgivings about the race situation in the United States and how it presented a challenge to democratic ideas.

Donald Pierson, science, and the public arena

Pierson's research helped bring Bahia into the international circuit of social sciences. In subsequent years, U.S. researchers who traveled to the region to study it, like Ruth Landes and Franklin Frazier, relied on the networks woven by Pierson and Park (Valladares, 2010; Sansone, 2012). Pierson's research experience in Bahia also had much to do with an invitation he received in the late 1930s, when the Roosevelt administration was strengthening its policies of cultural approximation with Latin America and stepping up diplomatic exchange between Brazil and the United States in the realm of science. He accepted an invitation to serve as professor of sociology at the São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics (ELSP), where he had a hand in constructing the field of social science in Brazil and where

he would remain through the early 1950s (Limongi, 1989; Vila Nova, 1998).[11] During this period, Pierson played a major role as an intermediary of intellectual exchange between Brazil and the United States. On this front, he was able to secure fellowships for Brazilians at U.S. universities.

After arriving in São Paulo in late 1939, Pierson organized and headed the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the ELSP, where he established a seminar in Research Methods and Techniques. In 1941, together with anthropologists Herbert Baldus and Emílio Willems, he founded Brazil's first graduate program in the social sciences (Seção de Estudos Pós-Graduados em Ciências Sociais). In the early 1940s, he led a survey on food and housing in the city of São Paulo to train students in research. In 1945, he became responsible for the Brazilian section of the Smithsonian Institution's Institute of Social Anthropology and in this role obtained research funding. He first conducted surveys in the interior of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro, and then, from 1947 to 1948, he led a community study in Araçariguama, in the interior of São Paulo; the results were published in *Cruz das Almas: a Brazilian village* (Pierson, 1951). In the early 1950s, he led a series of research studies in various locations of the São Francisco Valley (Pierson, 1949, 1972a, b, c, 1987).

Pierson also worked as a translator and an editor of science journals such as *Sociologia*, in addition to editing collections of books in the field of social science. In tune with the research tradition promoted by Park at the University of Chicago, Pierson endeavored to foster a type of sociology in Brazil grounded in empirical investigation. He also strove to forge a

[11] Samuel Lowrie had suggested that Pierson replace him, teaching and conducting research in São Paulo. According to Lowrie, while Pierson, unlike other candidates, did not yet have a well-established academic reputation, he had been studying Brazil, the country's intellectuals were familiar with him, and he was about to publish his dissertation under the advisership of Park, one of the leading authorities on race relations in the United States (Lowrie, 1939).

professional identity for the sociologist as a scientist and researcher, detached from the world of interests and political values. Pierson's push to delineate the field of scientific sociology finds expression in the motto he sometimes used to sum up the essence of his activities in Brazil, a motto that lent this drive something of the air of a mission: "For the establishment of the social disciplines as sciences."[12]

Pierson was intent on shaping a broad network of people interested in the social sciences in order to circulate his ideas on how sociological work should be conducted in order to achieve the epistemological status of science. His perspective on the role of sociology and the sociologist not only influenced ELSP students, like Oracy Nogueira, Florestan Fernandes, Darcy Ribeiro, Virgínia Leone Bicudo, and Hiroshi Saito;[13] his desire to spread his ideas is also apparent in his correspondence with social scientists from around Brazil, including Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, who were among the earliest graduates in social science at the National School of Philosophy, University of Brazil (Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia, Universidade do Brasil), in Rio de Janeiro (Maio; Lopes, 2015).

In this section, we analyze Pierson's ideas concerning the conceptualization of the very field of sociology, the professional identity he idealized for its practitioners, and how these were enmeshed with debates about the nature of both science and society in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Not only was Pierson's substantive sociological analysis about Brazilian society rooted in historically circumscribed political concerns as

[12] This expression, which encapsulates Pierson's drive to forge a professional identity for the social scientist, appears repeatedly in his correspondence (Pierson, 1944a). Darcy Ribeiro used the same terms to affirm his commitment to Pierson's project. Ribeiro was part of the "circle of correspondence" set up by Pierson in 1943, along with Oracy Nogueira, Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto, and others (Ribeiro, 1943).

[13] A number of authors have addressed Pierson's contribution to the training of Oracy Nogueira, Florestan Fernandes, Darcy Ribeiro, and Virgínia Leone Bicudo. See Cavalcanti (1996), Arruda (1995), Bomeny (2001), Maio (2010), and Cotrim and Maio (2021).

indicated above. In attempting to demarcate the discipline boundaries, he invariably had to address the issues of the day, particularly the strategies concerning U.S. cultural diplomatic policies in Latin America and the value of Western liberal democracies to science amid the rise of the totalitarian powers. Pierson's advocacy of axiological neutrality for sociology, while part of his normative discourse on the new science, should not prevent us from examining how his own foundational efforts drew from social and political contingencies related to both U.S.-Brazil relations and the international context.

During Pierson's time at the University of Chicago, researchers there were devoted to defining the disciplinary boundaries of sociology and setting it apart from the field of social work. This concern is apparent in Park, who had serious misgivings about the kind of intervention typical of "do-gooders" and reformers in general, as indicated previously. In its early years, sociology practiced in Chicago had been intertwined with the very movement to reform living conditions in the city, a movement that was fostered by Protestant middle sectors of U.S. society in response to social problems fueled by the population explosion and by accelerated urban-industrial growth (Coulon, 1995; Valladares, 2005).[14] However, as indicated by Bannister (1987) in his well-known study, the discipline felt the impact of a strong wave of objectivism in the 1920s, when an increasing number of its practitioners began to follow the natural sciences paradigm. There was greater appreciation for analytical tools that lent themselves more readily to quantification, like statistics.[15] Humanitarian, reformist rhetoric was superseded by language that presented sociology as a descriptive,

[14] On these close connections between sociology and social work in U.S. social sciences early days, see: Lengermann and Niebrugge (2007).

[15] Even Park, who had reservations about the quantification of the social sciences, coined terms to designate new fields of research, such as "human ecology," that reflected the valorization of the natural sciences model. He also urged his students to avoid making judgments (Camic, 2007). According to Steinmetz (2007), naturalist and positivist models only gained hegemony in the U.S. social sciences following World War II.

analytical science and that identified the tendency to engage in normative prescriptions and evaluations as overstepping boundaries.[16]

In texts that he wrote in Brazil in the early 1940s, Pierson repeatedly characterized the activities of the professional sociologist and the norms that should inform his conduct and also insistently distinguished sociology from other branches of knowledge concerned with social life, such as social thought, social philosophy, ethics, and social work. He argued that sociology, unlike these other fields, systematically checked hypotheses and theories against new facts uncovered through research, using the latter to confirm, modify, or refute the former. By putting the sociologist in contact with *things*, beyond the debate of *ideas*, research would lead to the progressive enhancement of theory and the accumulation of universally valid propositions, and this, Pierson believed, was the best way for sociologists to move beyond philosophical controversies between national schools and traditions and, based on the neutral realm of empirical reality, produce relatively enduring epistemic consensuses (Pierson, 1945a).

It was Pierson's assessment that Brazilian sociology was still at a pre-scientific stage, in large part because it lacked professionals who had trained in research and were capable of using one same conceptual language while working jointly and in a coordinated fashion. In his correspondence with Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto, then assistant professor of sociology at the National School of Philosophy in Rio de Janeiro and one of the

[16] Some authors have interpreted the objectifying trend in sociology against the backdrop of more general transformations in U.S. thinking and society, such as growing concern about matters of "efficiency" and "social control," associated with the erosion of shared values and norms (Bannister, 1987). Others see this trend as related to the impact of Fordism on the organization of social life, especially in the metropolitan context, conducive to a way of perceiving the "social" that stressed regularities and patterns and signaled the possibility of an external, non-subjective apprehension of the "social" (Steinmetz, 2007). In our case, we have used Pierson's trajectory and work in Brazil less to elucidate the genesis of these epistemological viewpoints and more to examine how they persisted or changed in step with shifting political circumstances.

school's first graduates in social science, Pierson said that the field in Brazil tended to be dominated by "all-talk boys" or "amateurs," usually doctors, engineers, or attorneys who produced nothing but treatises that mixed heterogeneous viewpoints and theories and that loosely manipulated data without any empirical backing. Pierson's statements were not at odds with local intellectual aspirations for turning sociology into a genuine science. As is known, the key players in the push to institutionalize the social sciences in Brazilian academe often sought to mark their own identity by differentiating themselves from past intellectual traditions. It was in this spirit that Pierson stated that a great deal of "eclecticism," "intellectual gymnastics," and "false shows of erudition" was passed off as sociology in Brazil (Pierson, 1943a, b, c).[17]

While he did not use this same tone publicly, particularly given the diplomatic context during his time in Brazil, Pierson's assessment of local sociological production remained largely unchanged in his articles, as we will see. When the sociologist evaluated the bibliography published in Brazil up to 1940, he noted that it consisted either of studies linked to other areas, like history, geography, economics, or ethnology, or of scholarly commentaries on Brazilian society and culture. He held that while this literature offered valuable insights and research hypotheses, mainly in the field of historical studies, novels, and travelogues, most of it consisted of data compiled unsystematically or of analyses that were speculative and normative in nature (Pierson, 1945c).

Pierson nonetheless displayed optimism about the future of Brazilian sociology and thought its development would follow a path similar to the field in the United States. In his estimation, social change would do much to propel the institutionalization of sociology (Pierson, 1943c). Growing industrialization and urbanization would eventually spur society's broad

[17] On how the social sciences endeavored to set themselves apart from Brazil's essayistic tradition during this process of institutionalization, see Botelho (2010).

interest in the discipline, given the need to understand the social problems associated with such disruptions to the traditional world as organized crime, juvenile delinquency, immigration, mental illness, and suicide, all phenomena that sociologists from the University of Chicago associated with the urban context of modern metropolises (Pierson, 1946, p. 102). Writing to Costa Pinto, in an excerpt characteristic of the pragmatic understanding of knowledge shared by the Chicago sociologists, Pierson observed: "Given that man only thinks when he has to confront a problem, there will be more thinking about social matters here [in Brazil]. And, along with greater concern, there will undoubtedly be a greater desire to study and research in our field" (Pierson, 1943c).

Pierson's understanding of scientific knowledge shares commonalities with the U.S. pragmatist philosophical tradition, which his academic mentor, Park, had followed closely in his formative years.[18] Pierson nevertheless had some reservations about the actual applications of sociology in the short run. While he stated that the goal of controlling nature (including therein social phenomena) was part of modernity's scientific enterprise, he felt social processes could only be efficaciously addressed if the social sciences reached a level of development comparable with that of physics. Until then, no matter how much sociologists might be "under pressure from some, actually well-intentioned, governments to solve their practical problems soon," it would be presumptuous and dishonest to think they could "correctly provide all the desired advice" (Pierson, 1946, p. 102).

It is symptomatic of his interpretation of the sociologist's role that Pierson approached the application of knowledge as a moment distinct from the production of knowledge per se or as a derivative of theoretical advances in science. Turning to an argument akin to one used by the earliest professors at the University of Chicago school, like William Thomas,

[18] On the relations of Pierson's sociology to philosophical pragmatism, see Vila Nova (1998).

Pierson pointed out that, even though applicability was a relevant criterion in validating scientific knowledge, application concerns should be left out of the process of knowledge making. According to this argument, if sociologists were to tailor their research toward practical ends from the outset, this could endanger the objectivity demanded by scientific inquiry and ultimately jeopardize the possibility of extracting practical results from basic research.[19] In Pierson's mind, a sociologist's receptivity to interests outside the realm of science was incompatible with his professional commitment to the imperative of controlling the different biases related to the social scientist's place within a given culture, era, and social class (Pierson, 1946, p. 90).

When Pierson insisted on distinguishing the production of sociological knowledge from its application, this also reflected his concern that sociologists might overreach in their professional activities, attempting to define the social applications of their research findings. Even though sociologists could elucidate the mechanisms underlying social processes, they should remain within the strict sphere of science and never attempt to determine the ends or ideals to be pursued by individuals and groups.

Although Pierson's efforts to preserve the boundaries of sociology had clear ties to the U.S. intellectual context, this concern acquired its own contours within the context of his years in Brazil, when it was necessary to dispel any suspicions about the possible political nature of his work.

Pierson was invited to join the ELSP faculty in 1939, when the Good Neighbor Policy inaugurated by the Roosevelt administration finally advanced into the realm of cultural relations.[20] His hiring was in fact facilitated by the Department of State and the Consul General in São Paulo, Carol Foster,

[19] For William Thomas's views on the matter, see Wegner (1993).

[20] In 1938, some years after an agreement on academic exchange in the Americas was signed at one of the Pan American conferences, the Division of Cultural Relations was created inside the U.S. State Department, with its initial work focused above all on Latin America. Espinosa (1977) analyzed decisive steps in the construction of this policy.

who made contact with members of the São Paulo elite sympathetic to the United States. With war looming in Europe, this was a time when Washington D.C. was increasingly concerned about the ideological and cultural penetration of Nazi-Fascism in Latin America and its potential security threat to the Western Hemisphere.[21]

On the occasion of the Eighth International Conference of American States, held in Lima, Peru, in December 1938, Ben Cherrington, head of the State Department's newly inaugurated Division of Cultural Relations, took a reconnaissance trip to a number of South American cities. In early 1939, U.S. government staff deemed the city of São Paulo a strategic location from which the United States could tighten its academic, scientific, intellectual, and artistic ties with countries in the region. Previously, U.S. scholars had maintained a timid presence in Brazilian academia as compared to their European counterparts, whose work received significant support from their governments. In point of fact, the United States was still hesitant to let the State play a greater role in cultural relations, clinging instead to the more conventional position in this arena, informed by the belief that bringing peoples and cultures together fell to the private sector and to interested institutions of civil society.[22]

Pierson's first years in the country were critical to Brazil-U.S. relations, given that Washington was then concerned about the Vargas administration's ambivalent position toward the warring forces abroad, classified by Moura (2012) as a foreign policy of "pragmatic equilibrium." Nazi-Fascist sympathizers numbered among government ministers, such

[21] In a telegram to the State Department, Foster had stressed the importance of having an American professor in Brazil who could support "the promotion of intellectual and cultural cooperation between the two countries" (Foster, 1939).

[22] In 1940, shortly after Hitler's troops occupied Paris, Roosevelt opened the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, an agency headed by Nelson Rockefeller and established under an emergency order by the Council of National Defense with the purpose of countering Nazi-Fascist influence on the continent. This measure signaled a significant shift in the U.S. preference for non-government interference in the field of international scientific, intellectual, and artistic exchange, as the country moved to engage more openly in pro-U.S. propaganda (Ninkovich, 1981).

as Francisco Campos and Eurico Gaspar Dutra, and Italian and French professors maintained a conspicuous presence in the university world then under construction. Furthermore, diplomatic incidents involving U.S. intellectuals had alerted the American consulate in São Paulo to the fact that Brazilians might be distrustful about what could be perceived as undue foreign interference in their country's domestic affairs.

The case of Paul Vanorden Shaw, professor of the history of American civilization at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), is a noteworthy example. The son of a Presbyterian missionary who had come to Brazil to lecture at Mackenzie High School in São Paulo in the late nineteenth century, Shaw had majored in history at Columbia University and then worked in Panama as a professor of Latin American history. Carol Foster, who had served as intermediary during contract negotiations, viewed Shaw's hiring by the USP in 1936 as a crucial step in the development of cultural relations. Yet it was not long before Shaw had raised alarms within the diplomatic corps. As an advocate of a more assertive U.S. posture toward academic exchange with Brazil, capable of counterbalancing European influence, he began writing about sensitive aspects of the national and international situation for newspapers like *Estado de São Paulo*, counterposing "American democracy" to the "totalitarianisms" of central Europe. His public stances undermined his position at the USP, and on a few occasions the U.S. ambassador himself, Jefferson Caffery, had to step in and speak to minister Francisco Campos to guarantee Shaw's job. In a talk to Harvard students on a visit to São Paulo, Shaw – who diplomats considered a big mouth – painted a pessimistic picture of Brazil's ability to defend itself in the case of war, given its overall social and economic problems. The talk was poorly received by Brazilians and ultimately precipitated Shaw's dismissal from the university in late 1940.[23]

The fact that a U.S. scholar had roused Brazilian government hostility did not go unnoticed by Pierson, who believed Shaw had a somewhat

[23] For an examination of this diplomatic incident vis-à-vis the implementation of U.S. cultural diplomacy in Brazil at that time, see Lopes (2020).

fanciful view of his own involvement in the day's diplomatic disputes. Pierson, on the other hand, had felt it best to adopt a more discreet line of action right from the outset of his activities in São Paulo. As he confided in a letter to Park, he had opted for rigorous, methodical scientific work rather than blatant expressions of support for the United States. He felt Brazilians would inevitably recognize the fruit of well-conducted academic activity:

> In a quiet and unobtrusive way, with the intent of letting the idea appear to have occurred to him alone, I tried to suggest [to Mr. Shaw] (unsuccessfully, I fear) the advantage, as I see it, of laying a firm and relatively permanent basis of cooperation by bringing in American scholars and research men already interested in Brazil as a field for research, and letting them stand on their own feet as individuals rather than as a "mission" with something like a holy resolve to advance the colors of American culture (Pierson, 1939).

Given the political nature of the criticisms that had turned the Brazilian authorities against Shaw, Pierson was evidently relieved when the ELSP said he would not have to teach political science along with sociology, substituting the former with social anthropology. In the same letter to his ex-professor, Pierson said he had left phenomena like "revolutions" out of his introductory sociology course, planned for 1940 (Pierson, 1939).

While Pierson had been influenced by the scientizing ethos of mainstream U.S. sociology during his training, his concern with rigidly demarcating the boundaries between science and politics likewise reflected the delicate diplomatic context prevailing during his early work in Brazil. The social sciences were at a fragile, incipient stage of institutionalization in Brazil and the very viability of Pierson's academic-intellectual project, which in his eyes held its own worth, depended on how much the United States could manage to tighten its cooperative relationship with Latin America.

The matter of funding for Pierson's activities in Brazil – an ongoing challenge for the sociologist – demonstrates the link between his academic

efforts and the diplomatic agenda. When he arrived in São Paulo, Pierson expected that one of the large philanthropic institutions in the United States, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, would supplement his income from the ELSP. But in the early years of World War II, when the school was in dire financial straits and could no longer afford the sociologist's services, the continuation of his activities in Brazil always seemed under threat.

After spending more than a year wrestling with red tape and working to prove the value of his work for U.S. cultural diplomacy, Pierson received special funding for 1942 and 1943 from U.S. government coffers administered by the Nelson Rockefeller office (Mauck, 1942). At the end of this time, the U.S. consul in São Paulo, Cecil Cross, wrote to Washington D.C. and asked the federal government to seriously consider continuing their aid to the ELSP professor, given his contribution to the "reputation of American scholarship" in Brazil (Cross, 1943). Pierson received a grant for 1944 and 1945 as a visiting professor attached to the Department of State in the category "professorial mission," a position created within the department's Division of Cultural Relations, and this allowed him to remain in São Paulo (Brickell, 1945). Writing in late 1944 to his former Chicago professor, the anthropologist Robert Redfield, Pierson observed yet again: "Our primary problem at present is financial. My own support is still in the rather precarious hands of U.S. politicians who do not always understand research interests and activities" (Pierson, 1944c).

As Pierson saw it, his academic project depended not only on the strengthening of Brazil-U.S. diplomatic relations but also on certain more general political conditions of modern societies. The context of the war, often construed on an ideological plane as a test of how well democracies could prevail over emerging totalitarian regimes, seemed to reinforce Pierson's ideal of an axiologically neutral social science separated from the world of politics. In this case, defending institutionalized scientific practice seemed to depend on defending the liberal-democratic order, as much as the other

way around. According to a common interpretation that drew followers through the writings of Robert Merton, the modern liberal order promoted a pluralistic distribution of authority and thus laid the sociopolitical and institutional conditions for science to shelter itself from external pressures once it had been recognized as a legitimate social activity in and of itself (Merton, 1938, p. 327).

In an article published in 1938, Merton warned his readers that ongoing, ubiquitous agitation and the politicization of society within totalitarian regimes like Hitler's Germany ultimately blurred the boundaries between science and politics, undermining the former's relative autonomy. In Merton's mind, the idea that certain traits of scientific ethos, such as disinterest and impersonality, were merely chimera and that scientific discoveries and propositions were inevitably manifestations of a scientist's national, ethnic, or class ties reflected a totalitarian tendency to subject all segments of the social structure, including the scientific community, to the expansionist logic of State power, demanding loyalty to party principles. If this reductionist interpretation (which Merton likewise detected in variations of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge then current in Germany) were to gain ground among the lay, it would encourage disbelief in science and diminish the prestige of the products of scientific work by making them seem arbitrary (Merton, 1938, p. 328).

Pierson was apparently driven by similar considerations when he reacted to what he saw as overstepping the boundaries of a sociologist's realm of expertise. He left his position resoundingly clear in March 1944, when he criticized Costa Pinto, his regular correspondent in Rio de Janeiro's social scientific circles, for arguing in the media that sociologists should take a stand on the war. The American Sociological Society had issued a report on the relation between the teaching of sociology in the United States and World War II, spurring Costa Pinto to declare in an article published in the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* that professors of sociology should

intervene in a world racked by social upheaval by conveying to their students values that inspired the "anti-fascist war," like "basic freedoms," and by helping to rebuild the world order, based on the application of these principles (Costa Pinto, 1944). In an excerpt that seems to draw from Merton, Pierson warned Costa Pinto that social scientists who practiced this risked becoming "mere servants and propagandists of a particular, limited '-ism' like unfortunately occurred in Germany in recent years" (Pierson, 1944a). In a Weberian tone, Pierson stated categorically that science could never define the moral and political ends that individuals should pursue. While social scientists should not remain aloof from "social problems," he debated, they should recognize the limits of the exercise of their scientific authority: "I cannot agree […] .that the role of the social scientist is to tell people '*o que é certo e o que é errado*' [what's right and what's wrong]. This is the task of ethics and religion. Science is able to tell men what they can do, never what they should do [emphasis in the original]" (Pierson, 1944a). In a world where manifestations of totalitarianism were threatening to push political power into all spheres of social life while erasing boundaries and discrediting science, Pierson felt the best way for sociologists to bolster their scientific authority would be to confine themselves to their own area of action.

Epistemologically speaking, Pierson believed that ensuring the autonomy of the sociologist's scientific activities was important to safeguarding science from the influence of external values and interests; on a political level, this idea came from the premise that while experts and specialists might be able to contribute to public opinion and government by clarifying content and policy implementation procedures, they should also recognize that it was ultimately up to the entire citizenry to make political decisions about the future of the collectivity. Science could give people the means but not the ends. The work of the professional sociologist, as envisioned by Pierson, was a corollary of a form of social organization intended to be democratic, in the style of political liberalism.

It was only in the latter half of the 1940s that Pierson came to enjoy a more solid academic position, when the Institute of Social Anthropology (ISA) made him their chief representative in Brazil, alongside the Canadian-born anthropologist Kalervo Oberg. The ISA was founded in 1943 in response to Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and the concomitant effort to tighten scientific exchange within the Americas. As a division of the Department of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution – a set of museums and research centers based in Washington D.C. and administered by the U.S. government – it received funding from the State Department. Under its first director, the anthropologist Julian Steward, the agency initially applied itself to promoting teaching and research in Latin American countries, based on cooperation agreements between the United States and local institutions. In the mid-1940s, Pierson's work in São Paulo helped inspire the organization and expansion of ISA activities in such countries as Mexico, Peru, and Colombia. Under the agency's sponsorship, Pierson surveyed rural areas of São Paulo state with the assistance of his students, producing a more in-depth study in Araçariguama. Also under the aegis of the ISA, the sociologist conducted a broad collective research project in the São Francisco Valley (Maio *et al.*, 2013).

Final considerations

Donald Pierson is known for his academic initiatives while in Brazil, especially for his efforts to institutionalize the social sciences at the university level. Settling in Brazil a few years after defending his dissertation on race relations in Bahia, he pursued an intellectual agenda centered on these goals. Yet his activities as a man of science who was devoted to advancing knowledge were not devoid of social and political values. His definition of the field of sociology necessarily contained assumptions about the social order model where this scientific discipline could flourish. An examination

of the specific circumstances that formed the backdrop for his endeavor to demarcate the boundaries of scientific sociology, lending it autonomy vis-à-vis other spheres of social life, contributes to our understanding of the historicity of the ideas and scientific practices advocated by Pierson. An analysis of his substantive sociological views of Brazilian society further shows how Pierson's intellectual production fit in with the period's burning political discussions. From a historical perspective, this careful investigation of the context in which his ideas developed and of his continual efforts to protect sociology from values and interests deemed external to science has shed light on the first steps taken by the social sciences in Brazil and the role of Brazil-U.S. relations in this process.

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