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practice realities. Despite these limitations, this well-written and organized book provides valuable insights for both social and medical sciences, especially for the fields of medical anthropology, psychiatry, social work, cultural competence, and health disparity.

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I find it extremely gratifying that Stanley Aronowitz’s intellectual biography of C. Wright Mills revives both his iconoclasm and his centrality to a tradition of public intellectuals and critical sociology which can trace back to Mills’ path-breaking works. Aronowitz’s book is written on several levels: close analysis of Mills’ writings; Mills’ stunning insights into U.S. society and its world role; celebration of Mills’ notion of the public or political intellectual; and Mills’ and Aronowitz’s critique, both explicit and implicit, of the university as an institution.

Until Mills wrote from the late 1940s on, U.S. sociology, unlike its European sibling, rarely (not never) investigated the realities of social class. Sociology in this country was pretty much limited to studying “social problems” like crime, mental illness, cities, the family, religion, and so on. It avoided larger underlying structures of race, class, and gender and tended to focus on supposed scientific methodologies that were acceptable to major figures in the field.

Mills was a radical. In his books The New Men of Power, White Collar, and The Power Elite, he revealed tensions and dynamics that most sociologists avoided. Heavily influenced by George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, towering intellects who insisted on combining analysis with activism, Mills hoped that exposing the structures and dynamics of domination would help set the direction for real efforts at fundamental social change.

In The New Men of Power, Mills was concerned with how labor elites adapted to the conservative political norms of their
society rather than revealing the limits of those norms and the prices paid for adhering to them. The transformation of a middle class from small entrepreneurs and professionals to managers, middle level intellectuals, and clerks marks for Mills the ways the office, in its routinization and industrialization, replicates the factory of the blue collar worker. Just as workers’ unions attended to issues of pay and retirement rather than the role of work and the factory in the larger society, so did the white collar middle class, by looking to job and retirement security, also neglect issues of meaning in work and participation in decision-making at the workplace.

Mills’ challenges to the taboos on exploring the structures and dynamics of class cast him to the margins of his discipline. A man who rather clearly enjoyed that location (he also drove and repaired a BMW motorcycle, practices extremely rare among academics), he was freed to write favorably about the Cuban Revolution (in *Listen Yankee*), to offer a selection of radical writings by Marx and others (in *The Marxists*), to speculate on war clouds hovering over the Cold War (in *The Causes of World War Three*), and to promote an exceptionally powerful critique of his discipline in what remains his best selling book, *The Sociological Imagination*.

Mills was writing against the mainstream influences in his field, like Talcott Parsons at Harvard and two fellow Columbia colleagues, Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton. Aronowitz writes,

Mills was one of the few exceptions to the tendency to confine social theory to identifying norms and discovering the conditions of conformity. He refused the prevailing proposition that, contrary to the European model, in which conflict marked history, the United States was exceptional.

Mills saw fellow academics in this country as leaning only so far left as to allow themselves to pay attention to the welfare state, civil liberties, and liberal democratic institutions. In his time, as in ours, sociologists were extremely reluctant to entertain either the words or practices of radical analysis.

Aronowitz writes that young academics learn most of the time to avoid ruffling mainstream feathers in their disciplines, “[e]xcept for periods when radical thought is
welcomed, largely because the intellectually centrist orientation of the bulk of the professoriate is successfully challenged from outside the university walls by powerful social or intellectual movements that cannot easily be denied…"

Due to pressures from the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women’s movement, and the GLBTQ movement, not all radicals today are as shunned as Mills was in his day, but the overall tendency continues in place, affecting especially younger academics who cannot afford the marginalization that suited Mills and allowed him to thrive.

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