

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
ST. CLAIR DRAKE
(1911 - 1990)

St. Clair John Gibbs Drake gained a world-wide reputation for his first-hand research on African peoples in Africa and in several areas of the African Diaspora: the American South; the urban American North; the Caribbean; and the port city of Cardiff, Wales. His writings on African and African-derived peoples were detailed and thorough, as were his trademark class hand-outs – treasured by his students – handwritten in his clear, distinctive style.

Having spent most of his intellectual life in Chicago, first at the University of Chicago and, later, at Roosevelt University, Drake was located where he could meet and know most of the major figures in American anthropology and sociology, and many from British anthropology. As well, he was particularly proud of his acquaintanceship and dialogue with other major black scholars of his generation such as John Hope Franklin, Hugh and Mabel Smythe, Kenneth Clark and W. Montague Cobb.

“Drake,” as he preferred to be called, also was renowned for being a generous mentor to both students and colleagues. He was unselfish with his time, his ideas, and avuncular encouragement. Any criticism he gave was constructive, and oblique. Thus, his students always left a session with him both intellectually fortified and inspired to new heights. Drake was a walking bibliography: he almost always had first-hand knowledge of almost anyone whose works he cited and hence, an anecdote about the author that gave the citation reality and context.

St. Clair formed an early affiliation with the American Society of Friends and, partly because of these Quaker links, throughout his life combined active work for social justice with his scholarship.

Born in Suffolk, Virginia, January 2, 1911 of a West Indian father (who was a Baptist minister) and an Afro-American mother, Drake died on June 14, 1990. His early years were spent partly in Staunton, Virginia, where he attended an all-black high school. Although as Drake put it, he had a narrow exposure to and appreciation for culture, the arts, and academic life during these years, he was influenced by teachers and ministers to seek higher education, if only for practical purposes. His interest in a life of the mind began when he entered Hampton Institute which he attended from 1927 to 1931, receiving a B.S. degree. Motivated by professors, he later attended Pendle Hill Quaker Graduate Center in Pennsylvania, where he became interested in race relations. In 1935, he joined Professor Allison Davis – a pioneering black anthropologist – as a research assistant on a project exploring Black-White race relations, published as *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (1941).

In the fall of 1937, Drake entered the graduate division of the University of Chicago on a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation to begin work on a graduate degree in social anthropology. The following year, he was encouraged to collaborate with a graduate student in sociology, Horace Cayton, on research in urban black life in Chicago. The results of this study were published by the two of them as *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945) – one of this century's most important books on black societies. After a few detours from his studies, Drake received his Ph.D. in 1954 for a dissertation on *Values, Social Structure, and Race Relations in the British Isles*.

His first teaching post was at Chicago's Roosevelt University, which stretched into a lengthy service of twenty three years. During that period he founded the African Studies program and participated in establishing the African Studies Association of the United States. As the first sub-Saharan African states gained independence in the late 1950s, Drake found himself drawn to Ghana, where he served from 1958-1961 as head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Ghana at Legon. During this period, he worked closely with Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of post-colonial Ghana.

Drake came to be acknowledged by many as the dean of Afro-American studies. His writing ranged widely and extensively over a variety of subjects. In 1966, he published an important study, *Race Relations in a Time of Rapid Change*, and in the years to follow articles in scholarly journals on such topics as "The Social and Economic Status of the Negro in the United States," "The Black University in the American Social

Order,” and “The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective,” to mention a few. He wrote regularly for a number of national magazines, among them *Crisis*, *The Nation*, *Ebony*, *Africa Today*, and *Negro Digest*.

As a result of his wide-ranging publications and personal experience, Drake naturally played a crucial role in the development of the new field of black studies in the 1960s. The opportunity came for such a position when he was appointed Professor of Anthropology at Stanford in 1969, a post he held until his retirement in 1976. With his appointment, he also became the first director of the newly established Undergraduate Program in African and Afro-American Studies (AAAS). So significant was his coming to Stanford that the *New York Times* carried an article (March 17, 1969) on it, referring to him as “a leading Negro scholar in sociology and anthropology” and as a “tremendous catch.” His contributions to AAAS were many – building a significant interracial pool of majors; opening new courses on racism and prejudice; creating a number of community-oriented workshops in economics, politics and law; and overseeing the early development of Black Performing Arts within AAAS. Also, his diplomacy and political skills were invaluable in keeping the program’s scholarly agenda foremost. Just as significant, his office on the Quad was a magnet for a steady procession of people; and sometimes, one would find there the great scholars and major politicians of the day, sitting alongside undergraduates, all involved in a kind of informal colloquium on the black world.

Prior to his death, Drake had completed and published a major two-volume work, *Black Folk: Here and There* (Volume I, 1987; Volume 2, 1990). It caps his career with work of exhaustive and brilliant scholarship, in which he traces the origins of prejudice against Blacks based on their color, from ancient Egypt and the beginnings of the African Diaspora to early western societies and through three major religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – through to its culmination in the virulent racial prejudice of sixteenth century Europe, just prior to the transatlantic slave trade. This work earned him honors from the American Sociological Association, the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, and W.E.B. DuBois Institute of Harvard University.

In 1942, Drake married the former Elizabeth Johns, a fellow student at the University of Chicago, who happened to be Caucasian. Elizabeth survives him. Their 48-year long marriage was particularly close. It was a quiet testimony to the fact that while Drake, like his father was a “race man” in his concern for acknowledging the

accomplishments of African and African-derived peoples, he also was profoundly an ecumenical humanist.

The Drakes have two children, Sandra, an associate professor in the Stanford department of English, who is a specialist in African-American literature; and Carl, a computer consultant who lives in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Kennell Jackson, chair
James L. Gibbs, Jr.
Bernard Siegel