

# EARLY TRADITIONS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

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**Key Words** theory, culture, social organization, methods

■ **Abstract** This article documents the empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions of African-American sociologists from the late 1800s until 1945, an era that constitutes the early tradition of African-American sociological thought. African-American sociologists came to the discipline with the desire to assess the stake of African Americans in modernity, which centered on their transition to the urban sphere and the industrial socio-economic order in American society. Despite the connections between the sociological project writ-large and the quest of African-American sociologists in particular, the latter remained little regarded in the profession for years to come. While providing an overview of the contributions of African-American sociologists and the assessments made by other scholars about those contributions, this essay focuses upon the ways by which African-American sociologists have depicted the social character of black Americans. This essay also accounts for the ways that such scholars have introduced or enriched the standard paradigms and methodologies employed in American sociology, and documents the legacy that these efforts had on later sociological depictions of African Americans.

## INTRODUCTION

This article documents the empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions of African-American sociologists prior to 1945, an era that constitutes the early tradition of African-American sociological thought. This early tradition, which began in the 1890s, is also considered by historians of African-American sociology to be the “golden age in the sociology of blacks in America (Bracey et al 1971).” It is bounded by the publications of W.E.B. DuBois’ *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996 [1899]) and St. Claire Drake and Horace Cayton’s *Black Metropolis* (1993 [1945]). While these are two of the most well-known publications of the era, dozens more were produced that framed this early tradition along three dimensions: empirical, theoretical, and methodological. The latter half of this era—post 1930—has received considerably more attention than the earlier. This is due, in no small measure, to the training of African-American sociologists in formal departments of

sociology, who then went on to canonize modes of inquiry into African-American social life (McKee 1993, Bracey et al 1971, Janowitz 1977). The first half of this essay, then, is an effort to counter the dearth of scholarly investigations of the beginning of this tradition.

Sociology emerged across Europe and the United States with the project of interpreting and critically assessing modernity, the preeminent social preoccupation of the twentieth century (Hinkle 1954, Martindale 1988, Ross 1991, Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974). Modernity is a concept that has been applied to a wide range of social conditions and circumstances, all of which began to unfold in post-Enlightenment society. Sociology's considerations of modernity most often centered on exploring the proliferation of bureaucracy and formal institutions designed to help regulate social life, urbanization, capitalism, industrialization, and other social developments associated with these occurrences and transformations. African-American sociologists came to the discipline with the desire to assess the stake of African Americans in modernity, which centered on their transition to the urban sphere and the industrial socioeconomic order in American society. Despite the connections between the sociological project writ-large and the quest of African-American sociologists in particular, the latter remained little regarded in the profession for years.

This essay is motivated by a desire to increase sociologists' awareness of that connection. Our objective is to do more than produce a history of African-Americans' sociological contributions during the golden age. That effort implicitly supports a ghettoized vision of the involvement of African Americans in sociology. Moreover, a complete history of African-American sociological contributions, however that might be construed, is beyond the scope of this work.

Instead, this essay offers another approach toward the recovery of African-American sociological thought. While providing an overview of the contributions of African-American sociologists, and the assessments made by other scholars about those contributions, this essay focuses upon the ways by which African-American sociologists have depicted the social character of black Americans. In addition to exploring the ways by which the character of African Americans was framed in the scholarship of African-American sociologists, this essay will also account for the ways that such scholars have introduced or enriched the standard paradigms and methodologies employed in American sociology, and we will document the legacy that these efforts had on later depictions of the state of the African-American populace.

## **The Calling of Early African-American Sociologists: Social and Intellectual Conditions**

African-American sociologists of the first part of the early tradition were barely visible in many of the mainstream sociological publications (Jones 1974). The fact that many of the figures discussed in this essay provided provocative and insightful commentary on the situation of African Americans conveys the extent to which sociology suffered as a consequence of this lack of attention. Moreover, the

traditionally acknowledged early tradition of African-American sociological thought is limited to far fewer figures than were actually involved in the American sociological enterprise because most black Americans were not located in institutions that supported or maintained a strong research environment (Jones 1974). Instead, these individuals most often were located at historically black colleges and universities or in government and public sector agencies that emphasized advocacy more than research.

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, historically black colleges and universities produced legions of African-American sociologists. These institutions were rarely able to sustain any large-scale research agenda, nor become highly prominent research centers for the sociological study of African Americans. Most of the historically black institutions were under-funded for research purposes, and federal government and public sector organizations emphasized programmatic initiatives or policy oriented research more than general scholarship (Jones 1974). Consequently, this examination of three phases of the early tradition of African-American sociological thought only considers the few sociologists who produced research during that time, and not the legacy of scholars who served as educators and mentors to successive generations of African-American sociologists.<sup>1</sup> The pioneer African-American sociologists came of age in the midst of a broader intellectual current in black America near the turn of the century (Fullinwider 1969, Gaines 1996, Meier 1966, Postock 1998). A major current was the emergence of the modern black intellectual stratum in the mid-nineteenth century. The creation of the early black Church, the abolitionist movement, and the post-Civil War black convention movement each provided a milieu for the growth of a black intellectual community. Most of the early African-American scholars who were a part of those milieus were polemical in their writing and public commentary. They sought not simply to investigate and interpret social life, but to redress the conditions affecting the lives of African Americans.

Efforts to form a collective of black intellectuals who foregrounded scholarship culminated in the founding of the American Negro Academy on March 5, 1897 in Washington DC (Moss 1981). Two of the leading figures of the first generation of African-American sociologists, W.E.B. DuBois and Kelly Miller, participated in the organization. The objective of the Academy was to organize black scholars, artists, and “those distinguished in other walks of life, for the promotion of Letters,

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<sup>1</sup>One notable exception to this pattern was Atlanta University. There, under the guidance of W.E.B. DuBois, a Laboratory of Sociology was founded after the turn of the century that served as a headquarters for a series, the “Atlanta University Studies.” While there DuBois also founded two academic journals, *Crisis* and *Phylon*, (Lewis 1993). The other exception was Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. From the late 1930s to the end of 1940s sociologist Charles S. Johnson managed to secure funding for a series of studies that provided graduate training for some African-American sociologists (Blackwell and Janowitz 1974; KcKee 1993; Smith 1974, Stanfield 1982b, 1987). He did so in his capacity as Chair of the Department of Social Science and as President of Fisk University, a position he assumed in 1946.

Science, and Art” (Moss 1981, p. 1). The group published 22 Occasional Papers between 1897 and 1924 on subjects related to the culture, history, religion, social rights, and social institutions of African-American people. While its members were principally committed to intellectual exchange, they believed that their work would inform and direct public action on behalf of black America.

With the Academy serving as a model for scholarly engagement, the first black sociologists entered the field with passionate concern about the African-American condition. These scholars also had their own distinct objectives for the sociological endeavor, which directly spoke to the conditions of the newly emancipated freedmen and women and the public mindset on the connections between race and cultural attributes. For the early black sociologists the objective for scholarly investigation was quite clear; “Is the Negro to demand full integration and risk losing his racial attributes through assimilation, or is he to accept segregation as the means to develop his particular genius, safely protected from the contaminating mores of American civilization?” (Fullinwider 1969, p. 98). These social conditions and strands of thought circumscribed the contributions of the first African-American sociologists.

Empirically, much of the research of the earliest period focused on the social organization and behavioral traits of black Americans, with a special emphasis on class differences in the African-American community and the experiences of urbanization. Another part of the empirical agenda was defining and providing solutions to the social problems of black Americans. This objective drew upon and developed certain theoretical perspectives on the social character of African Americans. There was much overlap in the two leading perspectives, but clear distinctions as well. One was explicitly moralistic. It emphasized profligate behaviors and patterns of cultural adaption as much as structural conditions in discussions of the problematic aspects of the African-American confrontation with modernity. The other perspective involved a racialist discourse that in some ways reflected, and in others rejected, the racialist logic of turn-of-the-century America. This was evident in how some sociologists commented on the so-called inherent qualities or capacities of African Americans to function in, or contribute to, societal advance. Methodologically, most of the research in this era was comprised of comprehensive community-study approaches that entailed participant-observational techniques. Later this effort often was coupled with the analysis of census or other aggregate data garnered from surveys. There were some divergences from these approaches, and they receive appropriate attention in this essay.

### **The Progenitors of the Early Tradition: Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells Barnett, and W.E.B. DuBois**

Anna Julia Cooper occupies an extremely unsettled place in the early tradition of African-American sociological thought. This is because she has only recently been more widely acknowledged as a contributor to that arena of ideas. Although a focus of substantive discussion in the past two decades in literary studies and

African-American intellectual history (Carby, 1987, Gaines 1996, Giddings 1984, hooks 1981), Cooper has only recently been more thoroughly recognized as a pioneer contributor to sociology. This was due, in large part, to her being included in Patricia Hill Collins's discussion of the legacy of African-American female social thinkers in *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) and the republication of Cooper's major work, *A Voice From the South* (originally published in 1892), together with a collection of her essays and correspondences (Lemert & Bhan 1998). Cooper produced most of this work prior to receiving a PhD in Sociology (from the Sorbonne in Paris in 1925).

The lack of that degree did not prevent her from scribing some ideas that are now being recognized as precursors to much of the contemporary sociological debates on African-American womanhood. Rather than engage in any consistent form of data collection, Cooper wrote critical essays that explored the situation of African-American women in the public domain and on the homefront. She argued that these women had particular roles and duties to fulfill in each sphere, each of which were especially suited for women. Moreover, Cooper tied the sociopolitical circumstances concerning and affecting African-American women to those of the country more generally. The increasingly more complex industrial order in American society, she argued, would reach its fullest potential only by including African-American men and women into the citizenry and allowing them to participate fully in social, political, and economic realms of life.

*A Voice from the South* included discussion of sexual exploitation (a phenomenon that at the time of her writing was still decades away from achieving mainstream legitimacy in debates about gender relations and social justice), class differences, gender-specific education, and other issues that remain at the forefront of debates on the social status and prospects for African-American women today. In advancing her claims, Cooper left an impression that she was conservative on some matters (such as emphasizing the homefront as a particularly legitimate space for women in general, not only black women), but progressive on others (such as claiming that women should have a role in the political arena and as formal agitators for social progress). Her life experiences, including the rearing of seven children (five of whom were adopted) as a single parent, the founding and management of a school in Washington, DC, and the constant interchange with Booker T. Washington and other African-American civic leaders and spokespeople, was the best empirical example of the social philosophy that she espoused.

Whereas Cooper's scholarship took the form of critical essays and commentaries, Ida Wells Barnett introduced empirical approaches toward uncovering certain problems and concerns for African Americans. She was born in 1862 and wrote extensively in the late 1800s for the newspaper, *The Memphis Free Speech*. As a journalist, Barnett was even farther removed professionally and socially from academia than was Cooper. Yet, her efforts resulted in the first substantive account of how social analysis could inform public understanding of important social issues and events. More specifically, Barnett provided a keen analysis of the sociological foundations for the lynchings of African Americans (1991). In the course of her

career as a journalist, she prepared statistical accounts of the phenomena (which, as one should imagine, were extremely hard to document). Those accounts, together with data that she amassed while studying the involvement of white women in civic and social organizations that served the African-American community, helped her challenge the public notion that lynchings were a justifiable response to sexual assaults suffered by white women at the hands of African-American men. Not only did Barnett show that occurrences of such assaults were not as common as had been believed, but she also showed that the argument itself was a technique used by whites to sanitize the practice of lynching (1987[1892]).

Barnett also argued against the exclusion of African-American women from the analytical debate on womanhood that was a part of the chivalrous culture of the nineteenth century South. Altogether, her work resulted in a strong theoretical association between racism, sexism, and classism as it existed in southern social relations in the post bellum era. Both Barnett and Cooper precede the scholarship usually regarded as the beginning of an African-American sociological tradition. Yet, each actually introduced the two ends of the continuum, critical commentary on the one hand and empirical investigation on the other, that shape modern sociological inquiry. As African-American women with no formal place in the academy, Cooper and Barnett were left on the margins of an already marginal constituency in American sociological thought.

Most of the theoretical, empirical, and methodological points of origin for many African-American sociological pursuits—indeed for African-American pursuits in social science overall—are found in the works of W.E.B. DuBois, particularly those produced by 1910 (including DuBois 1896, 1987a,b, 1898a,b, 1899a,b, 1900, 1901a,b,c,d, 1902, 1903, 1903a,b, 1904a,b,c, 1906, and 1910, among which are studies that he directed, and material that he authored, co-authored, or edited). Educated at Fisk University, the University of Berlin, and Harvard University (where he became the first African American to receive a PhD in the social sciences, taking one in History in 1895), DuBois is the subject of literature, the sheer amount of which is an affirmation that DuBois was the seminal figure in turn-of-the-century studies of African Americans and race relations. Scholars have assessed his contribution to racial theory (Appiah 1986, Brodwin 1972, Gilman 1972, Holt 1990, Moses 1993, Mostern 1996, Posnock 1998, Rampersad 1976, Schragar 1996, Zamir 1995), his place in the emerging discipline of sociology (Baltzell 1967, Lewis 1993, Rudwick 1974, Segrue & Katz 1997), his academic training and vision of scholarship in public affairs (Broderick 1958a,b, De Marco 1983, Lange 1983, Rudwick 1957, 1969), and his place in American social thought (La Rue 1971, Meier 1966, Reed 1997, West 1990). All of this has been in addition to the comprehensive biographies of him (Broderick 1974, Green & Driver 1976, Hamilton 1972, Lacy 1972, Lewis 1993, Marable 1986, Moore 1981) and anthologies on varied aspects of his life and work (Bracey et al 1971, Freedomways 1965, Logan 1971).

It would be inadequate to describe DuBois's scholarship as strictly sociology, history, or political science. Prior to 1910 (after which he became more an activist),

DuBois's early scholarly mission was to transcend the still-developing formal academic disciplines in order to create a supradisciplinary understanding of the social character, cultural status, and policy needs of African Americans (1898a, Lewis 1993, Fullinwider 1969). However, DuBois did attribute to sociology a particular role in this process, which for him was the discipline's orientation to interpreting, defining, and measuring social problems (1897, 1898a, 1903, 1904, 1940). In a comment published in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1908)—the only publication of his to appear in that journal, DuBois argued that the American Sociological Society (the precursor to the American Sociological Association) and other scholarly organizations should encourage “a most thorough and unbiased scientific study of the race problem in America” (p. 836).

In its early years, sociology had a strong emphasis on social reform, if not by designing reform strategies, then by supplying analyses and arguments about aspects of social life perceived to be in need of reform (Lyman 1972, McKee 1993, Schwendinger & Schwendinger 1974). This makes it all the more disturbing that DuBois's scholarship, which was empirically centered on a reform agenda, was rarely considered by the flagship journal, *American Journal of Sociology* (Bracey et al 1971). In discussing his early ambitions concerning sociology, DuBois said:

I determined to put science into sociology through a study of the conditions and problems of my own group. I was going to study the facts, any and all facts, concerning the American Negro and his plight, and by measurement and comparison and research, work up any valid generalization which I could (1940).<sup>2</sup>

After receiving his PhD (completed while he was teaching at Wilberforce College), DuBois began an academic career that took him to Philadelphia in the mid-1890s [where he conducted his classic study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899)] and then to Atlanta University from 1897 until 1910. Over the course of his academic career, DuBois aimed to design and implement a series of systematic studies on African-American social organization and culture. Although this never unfolded due to a lack of financial and social support, DuBois intended to create an “Atlanta Laboratory” at Atlanta University that would be a “centre of sociological research”

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<sup>2</sup>Some of this agenda was revisited when DuBois returned to Atlanta University in 1933 to become the first Chairman of the Graduate Department of Sociology. This return occurred after years of working with the N.A.A.C.P., and editing its journal, *Crisis*. Upon his return to Atlanta University DuBois founded *Phylon*, an interdisciplinary journal committed to the explorations of race and race relations. Taking all of this into account, making a comprehensive assessment of his still insufficiently recognized contributions to the not yet mature social science disciplines in American higher education would take space beyond that which is granted for this essay. Indeed, an appropriate review of the works that address his contributions to sociology alone would comprise an essay lengthier than the present one. However, the depth and significance of DuBois' contributions to the discipline locate him as the point of origin of any effort to document the early methodological, empirical, and theoretical traditions of African-American sociological thought.

(1898b). While at Atlanta he supervised the preparation of sixteen monographs on topics ranging from the black family, Negro church, Negro education, to Negro economic and business development. This was to be part of his ultimate goal of a 100-year-long study of black Americans, which would entail an exploration of a single theme or topic each year for an initial ten year period, followed by a revisitation of each topic every ten years or so thereafter (Lewis 1993). Following *The Philadelphia Negro*, the studies that initiated this objective constituted DuBois's major empirical contributions prior to 1910. It was through this body of work that DuBois offered a substantive multi-method platform for sociological inquiry that incorporated survey research, ethnography, census reports, and community surveys.

In terms of theoretical, empirical, and methodological dimensions, the scholarly career of DuBois can be categorized as an effort to ascertain the meaningfulness of race as a social category (the theoretical dimension, cf. 1978[1897a], 1986 [1903a].), to document the barriers and obstacles inhibiting the social advancement of African Americans, and to define some strategies and ideas for resolving them (the empirical dimension, cf. 1897b, 1898a,b, 1996 [1899a], 1899b, 1901, 1904a,b, 1906, 1910), and to illustrate how historical analysis, demographic data, field work, and survey research can be employed to further prior objectives (the methodological dimension, cf. 1896, 1996 [1899a], 1898b, 1900, 1969 [1901b], 1901c, 1903b).

Taking theory first, extensive debate has illuminated the changing nature of DuBois's writings on the importance of race in social life. One writer argues that DuBois's personal tribulations with race throughout his life correspond with the changes in his writing on the topic, which are three-fold (Mostern 1996). The first is an individualist orientation, where DuBois maintained that race was an identity construct foisted upon the individual by the external social world, thus circumscribing how the public read and reacted to individuals. The second is an essentialist orientation that causes beings ascribed to a particular race to function in thought and action in ways similar to others of the same race (thus recreating a sense of racial culture and racial collectives). The third involves fostering a claim that the problematics of race must be overcome until race is no longer socially meaningful. DuBois's contributions to sociology appeared as he emerged from the first of these orientations and continued through his immersion into the second.

Early in his scholarly career DuBois became a major voice in the debates in the early black intellectual community on the issue of innate cultural or physiological qualities of African Americans. It is with respect to this matter that DuBois's theoretical contributions to African-American sociology loom large. It is also in this arena that the work of DuBois has been more systematically reviewed after a period of earlier misreadings. The work that most fully reflected DuBois's theoretical approach to race around the turn of the century is *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). This work was celebrated as a literary work at least as much as a contribution to social science. In *Souls* DuBois uncovered the complexities involved in being an African American, including the struggle to affirm identity, to articulate a meaningful and viable approach to social uplift, and to ascertain the meaning of

social equality in American society. Part poetry, part polemic, and part political commentary, this book exemplified DuBois's ability to transcend disciplinary foci on the conditions of African Americans decades before interdisciplinarity gained legitimacy in the American academic enterprise.

In *Souls* and other work (1987a), DuBois argued that racial differences extended beyond the merely physical to spiritual and psychological differences. This did not mean, as some readings suggest (see Fullinwider 1969) that DuBois argued for the existence of any innate qualities or traits in the African-American community that were racially constituted. Instead, it illustrated DuBois's long-standing struggle with the significance of race as a social force—not just in terms of micro-level social interaction, but also in terms of how people apprehend and evaluate aspects of the social world as these are affected by their location in a racial category. The subtleties in DuBois's writings often appear to convey an essentialism that he actually did not intend to advance (Lewis 1993, Mostern 1996, Posnock 1998). DuBois argued that among other things, race profoundly affects how people perceive and conceive reality (perhaps more than any other social force). He did not claim that racial classification determined the inherent agentic capacities of people. Yet casual readings of his work often make it appear that he was a strong essentialist.

The essentialist claims were not the only critical takes on DuBois's scholarship. In his discussions of African Americans and cultural advance (1897, 1897b, 1899, 1901a,b, 1903), he has been read as elitist and as favoring a "whitening" of the race as a means of social uplift (Zamir 1995). For DuBois, cultural advance was the turn away from vice, criminal activity, and folk mores and toward the staples of American modernity. Wage labor in an emerging industrial sphere and community-level organizing for social betterment on the homefront were two such objectives. Others have argued that DuBois did not equate whiteness per se with being culturally advanced (Posnock 1998). Instead, it has been argued that DuBois asserted that without having suffered the burdens of being African Americans, white Americans generally achieved a level of cultural advance that most black Americans had yet to acquire. DuBois's high regard for cultural advance together with his finding that the most socio-economically disadvantaged African Americans lacked his sense of cultural sophistication is what has led some observers to consider him a cultural elitist. DuBois's rigorous pursuit of the social significance of race coupled with his equally adamant stress on cultural advance is the basis for the divergence of opinions on his racial theories.

The strength of DuBois's empirical contributions is best found in his most regarded study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). DuBois's approach to this work was influenced by his reading of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1891–1897) and the *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), authored by the Residents of Hull House. In this work, DuBois observed and documented the life experiences and social conditions affecting African Americans in the city's Seventh Ward, which housed one fifth of the city's African-American population. He set out to document and interpret a range of social issues pertinent to the black experience in Philadelphia, including northern migration, social conditioning, the

social institutions and life styles of the black community, and the enduring effects of slavery. DuBois employed a questionnaire on family structure, income and wealth, and qualities of residential life. He also observed public interaction in the community. Finally he acquired or created diagrams and blueprints of the physical structures throughout the seventh ward in order to offer a comprehensive account of unemployment, family decay, and social hierarchies in the ward.

DuBois's commitment to empirical research emerged during his studies in Germany, where under Gustav von Schmoller he was exposed to empiricism (Broderick 1958a,b, Lewis 1993). His work preceded American sociological forays into empiricism. The multiple method approach to data collection, unparalleled in social research for years afterward, blended structural analysis with microlevel depictions of public interaction and behavior in private settings. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, DuBois provided a masterful weaving of class and racial effects in documenting the conditions of the Seventh Ward in Philadelphia. Through such an effort, he was able to argue that the urban slum was a symptom, and not a cause, of the economic, social, cultural, and political condition of African-American urban life. In the chapters where he presented his agenda for whites and blacks, he divided his discussion of what black Americans must do for racial advance into specific charges for the different class segments of the African-American community. This effort reflected DuBois's reformist inclinations. He aimed to produce not only a scholarly contribution, but an illustration of how scholarship connects to a policy platform for redressing problems, as in Philadelphia's Seventh Ward.

His efforts here helped him to argue that slavery, prejudice, and environmental factors were the three principal causal factors affecting African-American life in Philadelphia. Moreover, he promoted a nonhomogenous depiction of African Americans by elucidating the class distinctions along the behavioral and organizational dimensions of social life. *The Philadelphia Negro* was the first comprehensive community study in American sociology. Indeed, one commentator (Watts 1983) has argued that although DuBois was not acknowledged by his contemporaries as having introduced this kind of approach to sociological research, *The Philadelphia Negro* reflects precisely the kind of community-centered sociology that appeared on the American landscape in the following two decades (in large part because its proponent, and one of the early leaders of the University of Chicago school of sociology, Robert Ezra Park, also studied under the empiricists in Germany). In any case, *The Philadelphia Negro* remains a pathbreaking community study that helped establish a vernacular for writing about the social conditions of black Americans, despite its moralistic claims and an elitist disposition taken toward lower-income black Americans.

Another of DuBois' works, similar in scope and interpretation to *The Philadelphia Negro*, was "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study" (1898). This work, which actually preceded and thus informed the logic of the Philadelphia study, was the first contribution in a project intended to produce studies of "well-defined" Negro groups throughout the United States. That study, as well as "The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches (1899)," "Negroes of Dougherty County, Georgia (1901)", and "The Black North in 1901: New York

(1901)” were commissioned by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Each argued the importance of emerging class differentiation in the social relations within African-American communities.

Yet another area of empirical and methodological contributions is reflected in DuBois’s dissertation (1896), “The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870,” which was published under the same title as the first installment in Harvard University’s Historical Series. In this work, DuBois offered an analysis in the scope of what much later became comparative-historical sociology. He explored the legislative efforts in several states to restrict and suppress the slave trade. He analyzed and compared the outcomes of these initiative to formulate a thesis about how and why the slave trade was conducted in the manner that it was prior to the Emancipation. DuBois argued that moral, political, and economic factors converged at the domestic and international levels to hinder, and then cause the eventual abandonment, of slavery in the United States. A blaring methodological weakness in this work is one that DuBois, himself, acknowledged later in his life (Lewis 1993). In an “Apologia” that appeared in a 1954 edition of the book, DuBois stated that he neglected including the contributions of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud in his analysis, as their efforts would have better informed his discussion of the moral and structural dimensions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Lewis 1993). This matter aside, this publication was one of a number of his analyses that could be categorized as comparative-historical sociology (1935, 1939).

Shortly prior to 1910, as historian David Levering Lewis (1993) argued, DuBois came to the realization that “fourteen years of preparation, research, and writing suddenly seemed mockingly irrelevant” in the face of the terroristic oppression that black Americans confronted. This was brought home to DuBois while he was working at Atlanta University and took note of the lynching of an African-American farmer from Georgia, Sam Hose. That was the moment when W.E.B. DuBois began to abandon his disposition as “a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were being lynched, murdered, and starved” (quoted in Lewis 1993, p. 226).

Determining to move on to more activist involvements, DuBois left behind a pioneering legacy for African-American sociological pursuits. He pioneered the sociological investigation of the black community in two areas. First, he espoused a credible, scientific approach for investigating the social processes of the black community. Secondly, he fostered the idea that racial difference was socially significant beyond mere biological or physiological perspectives. Such was the sociological world that other African-American sociologists became a part of in contributing to a framework for black social identity and cultural status.

### **Contributions to the Early Tradition: Methodological, Empirical, and Theoretical**

As evidenced by Cooper, Wells, and DuBois, the early tradition of African-American sociology was initiated by scholars who were not trained as sociologists,

but who found the emerging discipline an appropriate site for the kinds of inquiry and commentary that they desired to offer on the situation of African Americans at the turn of the century. The rest of the early African-American sociologists produced most of their work from the turn of the century until the early 1920s. The other prolific figures of the tradition include Kelly Miller and George Edmund Haynes, who founded the Departments of Sociology at Howard and Fisk University, respectively.

Some other early scholars produced little work in comparison to these men. For example, James R. Diggs is credited as being the first African American to receive a PhD in sociology as an area of specialization, but not a formal academic discipline (Greene 1946). He earned his PhD from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1906 with a dissertation entitled "The Dynamics of Social Progress," but he did nothing else that endured in any legacy of research.

The first PhD awarded to an African American in the discipline of sociology went to Richard Robert Wright, who earned his degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1911. His dissertation, "History of the Pennsylvania Negro," was published as *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (1911). The work, which addressed the problems emerging from the migration of African Americans to that state, became his most noted publication. Wright was educated at the University of Chicago and the Student Universities of Berlin and Leipzig; he thus acquired much of the same exposure to empiricism that W.E.B. DuBois received a few years before him (Greene 1946). While a significantly less noted figure than the other African-American sociologists of his era, Wright's approach to research fit in with that of his African-American peers in the discipline. In some earlier work he researched the turbulent transition of black Americans to urban life (1905, 1906). Thereafter, while in the midst of becoming a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Wright moved into an area of research and writing on African Americans that can be described as a precursor to liberation theology (Fullinwider 1969).

As for the more prominent of DuBois's peers, Kelly Miller was educated at Howard University (he received a BA in mathematics in 1886) and Johns Hopkins University, where he studied mathematics from 1887 until 1889. In 1890 he returned to Howard to teach mathematics. It was during his return to Howard that Miller gradually became interested in the emerging new discipline of sociology. He became the Dean of Social Sciences at Howard in 1907 and starting teaching sociology courses in 1912. Miller committed himself solely to the field of sociology by 1918, after ending his service as a Dean. He founded Howard University's Department of Sociology in 1918 and led it from then until 1934 (when E. Franklin Frazier assumed the chair). Despite his early study of mathematics, his prominent work derived from the sociological thought and social theory of the turn-of-the-century era.

The other major early figure, George Edmund Haynes, did graduate work at Yale University and the University of Chicago, and received his PhD in Social Economy (the precursor to the Department of Sociology) from Columbia University in 1912. He was that institution's first African-American doctorate. Unlike Miller,

George Edmund Haynes spent most of his intellectual energy conducting empirical research. His formal training, in Columbia University's Department of Social Economy, provided him with the capacity to do so, whereas Miller's training in mathematics left him without a formal background in social research. Haynes also maintained a strong commitment to reformist scholarship, and in fact he worked for social service agencies as much as in the university setting throughout his life. He taught at Fisk University from 1910 until 1921, and between 1908 and 1941 worked for or with agencies such as the Young Men's Christian Association, the National Urban League (known in the early 1900s as the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes), the New York Bureau of Social Research, and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. The differences in approach to sociology between Miller and Haynes are striking, yet they found common ground promoting a certain kind of cultural framing of black Americans.

Miller generally was not an empiricist, and his work reflects more argument and abstract commentary than researched findings or carefully analyzed data (similar, in fact, to the approach taken by Anna Julia Cooper). However, his training in mathematics did provide him with the capacity to make some empirical contributions to the discipline. One was an article that contained a series of corrections to the Census Bureau's undercount of the African-American population in the 1920 census (1922). Another was an assessment of the schooling of African-American children in the south, which became a report to the United States Bureau of Education (1900–1901). Otherwise, much of Miller's work involved polemical contributions and essays in social thought (cf. 1918, 1921, 1924). Such pursuits allowed him to connect with the theoretical dimension of DuBois's contribution to the tradition, which, in large part, rested in arguing that black Americans were less culturally equipped for modernity than were white Americans.

Miller's contribution to the black sociological canon was a brand of racialism similar to that of DuBois. As did many black social thinkers of his era, Miller defined the state of the black community during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in terms of its comparative status with white America. He considered African Americans to be less culturally advanced for success in an emerging industrial society than were white Americans (1908). In other work he located them as more culturally sophisticated than Africans, but not yet on par with white Americans (1900). Indeed much of his scholarship included vociferous arguments about how much black Americans had much to do in order to achieve the degree of social and cultural advancement that had been attained by white Americans (1899, 1900, 1908, 1933, 1936, 1980).

Miller did argue that black Americans possessed some degree of complex culture and modern civilization. Much of this discussion centered on documenting what he felt were some inherent racial qualities of the black Americans. In such commentary, Miller adapted the logic of racialist humanism in making his arguments, which included references to a "smothered mental, moral, and spiritual power" (1899). Such views were reflected in some of his other works as well (1899, 1980).

Despite these character traits, Miller maintained that black Americans necessitated something of a conversion process in order to further enrich those attributes. He went as far as to spell out the stages of development that he believed all social groups underwent in the course of experiencing contact with other groups (1908). In doing so he also relied on much of the racialist discourse of his time to ascertain and frame the potential of African Americans. This was exemplified in his scholarship by his constant references to the role that a Higher Being would play in affecting the destiny of all races and to a cosmic plan of human progress that would incorporate the particular fruits and riches that each racial group could offer toward that end.

Altogether, this commentary reflected both the social Darwinist logic that permeated turn-of-the-century discussions of social progress in American life and the utopian sentiment that flourished during the late nineteenth century (Hofstadter 1955). While vehemently asserting that black Americans were capable of competing in and contributing to America, Miller still accepted the general contours of the social Darwinist logic. He stressed almost as much as the Darwinists, that cultural hierarchies indicated where people stood in terms of their capacity to function in a complex society. Miller did so by speaking of the social problems and social circumstances affecting black Americans, not simply in terms of structural constraints on opportunity, but as indicators of cultural lag (especially in his assessment of the emerging great African-American migration to cities).

The tenets of Miller's cultural thesis also were made evident in his agenda for African-American social uplift. For example, he stressed that the Negro college was the principal institution in which blacks could begin to develop their culture to the level of the stronger (white) race (1933, 1936). In particular, he felt that black commitment to these schools would, (a) provide blacks with the moral stamina and fortitude to face and change an increasingly more complex world, and (b) allow blacks the opportunity to identify and cultivate the particular qualities and endowments of the black race that were superior to those of other races (1908). Miller also believed that such educational opportunities would help blacks to abandon their "boisterousness of manner and extravagant forms of taste" (1908).

Although he promoted a racialist humanism in his discussions of the potential of black Americans, when discussing the actual conditions of African-American urban life, especially in the urban context, Miller was somewhat more inclined to stress social conditioning as the causal force for their troubles in trying to adjust that life there (1908). The challenge for black Americans to overcome, therefore, came from the fact that "the weaker race has been brought into the territory of the stronger as a servant," and that blacks must somehow move forward from that predicament (Miller 1980).

In contrast to Miller, George Edmund Haynes made his objective the translation of empirical findings into a more practical policy agenda (similar to the approach taken by Ida Wells Barnett). Theoretically, his work more forcefully stressed the effects of social conditioning on African Americans. Empirically, it centered on the African-American presence in the urban landscape. Methodologically, Haynes

favored something of an interdisciplinary approach because he saw it as the most fruitful way of discerning the complex condition of African Americans still within a few generations of slavery.<sup>3</sup> Haynes's most regarded work was *The Negro at Work in New York City: A Study in Economic Progress* (1912). With this and subsequent works, including "The Negro Newcomer to Detroit" (1917), and "Negroes and Work During the World War and Reconstruction" (1921), Haynes established himself as the voice of scientific inquiry, in contrast to Miller's more polemical disposition.

Following a trail established by DuBois, Haynes became a pioneer African-American sociologist of the African-American urban transition and its effect on their social and economic status. His emphasis on work and its relationship to mobility contributed a more structural foundation for assessing the social situation and prospects for black Americans. The relationship between these two arenas of life would go on to have a central place in sociological studies of African Americans.

While there were clear differences in the sociological contributions of Miller and Haynes, there were points of overlap as well. Some of this had to do with how each depicted the social position and social character of black Americans. For instance, Kelly Miller maintained that in the post-Civil War environment, the relations of black and white Americans changed from one of informal super-ordinate-subordinate interaction, laden with paternalistic intimate relations, to one of formal business-like interaction between freely functioning human beings (1899). Hence, he argued that it was imperative that black Americans be prepared to navigate the new modes of interaction in modern life. Haynes's work provided empirical evidence about how black Americans stood with respect to this transformation.

Moreover, in other work, Haynes offered a brand of cultural analysis and commentary similar to the work of both Miller and DuBois. This is evident in his *The Trend of the Races* (1922), where he put forth an argument about the cultural traits of black Americans that was couched in the language of inherent and innate capacities. Here, Haynes argued that the marginality that black Americans faced situated them as critical observers of the emerging American industrial order, and made them people who, if encouraged and given the opportunity to do so, could contribute to the humanization of the country as it immersed itself to greater commercialism and economic competition. One commentator argued that Haynes's strong religiosity was the source of his explicit moral voice in this work (Fullinwider 1969). Whatever the case, *The Trend of the Races* sounded much like Kelly Miller's argument that black Americans strive to serve as appraisers of the conscience of the nation in the same way that women function as the "conservators of moral stamina" in American life, despite their being the "weaker" sex (1908). The comments of Haynes and Miller show how much both shared forms of the

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<sup>3</sup>As Fisk University maintained a Department of Social Science rather than departments in specific disciplines, Haynes worked within an institutional arrangement that promoted interdisciplinary considerations of African Americans.

racialist thinking of their times despite their different approaches to sociological inquiry.

Cooper, Barnett, DuBois, Miller, and Haynes fought against certain prevailing notions about the potential for blacks to participate fully in early twentieth century American society. Yet each engaged this effort by using many of the same paradigms, language, and logic employed by the creators of not just racist, but racist American social thought. As pioneer contributors to an African-American sociological discourse, they had no tradition behind them with which to provoke a more critical response to the paradigm of race dialogue that existed at that time. Consequently, their scholarly contributions make more sense when viewed as efforts to address, with the intellectual tools available at the time, issues of civilization for a people who had recently been liberated from the status of chattel and who had traditionally not been thought of by many Americans as competent and capable human beings. These sociologists' sensibilities about modernity were shaped by an environment that defined white American civilization as the standard. Therefore, any effort to defend the humanity of black people would have to be born out of ideological frameworks used to suppress African Americans. Thus, this early phase of the African-American sociological tradition reflected the modernist impulse of turn-of-the-century American social thought.

### **The Second Wave of the Early Tradition: Incorporation into American Sociology**

Sociology was a two-decade old and fully formed academic discipline by the beginning of the second phase of the early tradition. Consequently, the milieu within which the members of this wave produced their scholarship was different in many ways, yet similar in others, to that of the first wave. The similarity is found in the explicit attention to social conditioning as a primary causal force for the dilemmas confronting African Americans (the major exception, as examined later, is found in the work of Oliver Cox). Furthermore, the second wave scholars also adapted a strong social reform logic in their work, which was directly in line with W.E.B. DuBois's initial calling for the discipline. However, the depth of the second wave's emphasis (as well as its different depiction of the social character of black Americans) displaced the earlier, more intense preoccupation with moral and cultural advance as essential for racial uplift.

It was still the case that some argued that this reform agenda often relied too heavily upon a vision of white America as a measuring rod for the possibilities of African Americans in the twentieth century (Watts 1983) and thus fostered a pathological conception of the cultural and social dimension of African-American life (Szwed 1972, Valentine 1968). This claim is found especially in the critical commentary about E. Franklin Frazier, as one commentator argued, because he was far more theoretically committed than were his contemporaries in the second wave, and in doing so Frazier was more assertive in forwarding a theoretical logic that centered on pathology and social disorganization as prominent features of

African-American urban life (Watts 1983). Others claim that Frazier's attention to social disorganization and pathology was aimed at defining neither inherent cultural traits of African-American life nor some long-standing effects of social conditioning. Instead, it was argued that these depictions captured and defined the position African Americans were in during their adjustment to more northern-based, urban patterns of living, as opposed to the southern-based, rural contexts that they had been accustomed to (McKee 1993). This debate makes clear that some of the criticism about how the first wave positioned white Americans relative to black Americans continued to be applicable through the second wave. However, the differences in scholarly tone and argument were quite significant.

Some of the conditions particular to the second generation of African-American sociologists rather than the first were; less concern with the need to refute the racist arguments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; more specific concern with the conditions and effects of urbanism, integration, rural poverty, and segregation on the individual and community psyche of African Americans; more complete adaptation of standard sociological methods and paradigms; more prone to stress the contemporary notion of scientific inquiry rather than abstract theorizing; somewhat less involved in direct action protest or politics; and slightly greater acceptance into the formal sociological community (Key 1978). In large part, the emergence of these factors was due to the connection of many of these scholars to Robert Ezra Park and the early Chicago School of Sociology.

Many commentators have argued that Park's contributions to sociology did not serve to agitate the racial order of his time, nor did he intend to do so (Lyman 1972, Matthews 1977, McKee 1993, Persons 1987, Raushenbush 1979, Stanfield 1982b). Instead, Park assumed the position of the detached observer of social life. Although he brought into sociology the largest number and most renowned African-American sociologists of the early and middle part of the twentieth century, and this was a radical act of some magnitude, his scholarly legacy and that of his African-American students as well, lacked a critical disposition toward the racial attitudes of white Americans and the structural foundations of racism in American life.

Furthermore, the absence of a more critical disposition was also due in part to the increasing role of philanthropic entities in the study of African-American life, particularly the southern-rural to northern-urban migration (Stanfield 1982b). From 1900 until 1940, the evolution of foundation support for research on African Americans moved from a narrow focus on manual training for the freedmen and women of the late nineteenth century to detailed data collection and observation of the urban migration process in the early twentieth century (Stanfield 1982a,b). This transition was mirrored by a shift in the funding of the study of African Americans from white to African-American scholars. However, very narrow parameters circumscribed the kind of issues that could be studied and the kinds of interpretations that could be offered about the findings (Stanfield 1982a,b). Hence, the research of the latter half of the early tradition generally was less critical of the American cultural and social order than would be the case in years to come. In

an extension of the modernist orientation of early American sociology, the second wave promoted an assimilationist paradigm that reflected the first wave's emphasis on cultural advance and improved social organization. However, the principal difference was the absence of an explicit naturalist theme in discussions of culture and social organization.

Much of the work of the second wave evolved from Robert Park's (1950a,b) conception of the race relations cycle, his evolutionary model of racial and ethnic contact and social change.<sup>4</sup> This framework endorsed the Melting Pot vision of American social life, with Anglo-Saxon cultural underpinnings as somewhat predominant. Additionally, Park's approach to urban sociology also informed the work of the second wave. He and his colleagues at the University of Chicago asserted that the city should serve as a natural laboratory for examining the social organization of heterogeneous people in an emerging industrial, financial, commercial, administrative, and cultural sphere, including the negative and positive aspects of such a transformation (Park & Burgess 1921, Wirth 1928). His race relations cycle was a heuristic for exploring cultural transmission in the urban sphere. Park argued that, as black Americans became acclimated to the city, they would gradually abandon the ideas, memories, and norms from prior patterns of social existence, while assuming the dominant (white) culture.

Another major foundational contributor to the scholarship of the second wave was the University of Chicago-based anthropologist, W. Lloyd Warner, who promoted a caste framework for assessing social hierarchies and social inequality (Warner 1936, Warner & Davis 1939). Warner, his students, and his students' students formalized an approach to community studies in rural and urban settings (Davis & Dollard 1940, Davis et al 1941, Dollard 1937). He emphasized the importance of life style and modes of public interaction at the individual and group level as key indicators of the social adjustment of people to geographic and social spaces (Warner et al 1941, Warner & Lunt 1942, Warner & Srole 1945). He also paid careful attention to the movement of African Americans to the northern urban sector, which for him was the source of the formation of the contemporary system of caste and class-based oppression for black Americans. Warner's guidance of St. Claire Drake and Allison Davis was his direct tie to the African-American sociologists in the second wave. Warner's ideas, however, influenced the African-American sociologists who studied under Park at the University of Chicago and

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<sup>4</sup>Here Park argued that racial and ethnic groups, upon coming into contact with each other, would engage a process of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation, occurring in that order. Park argued that this process took place in each of four dimensions of social life; ecological, political, economic, and cultural (Park and Burgess 1921). Changes in any dimension affected what would occur in the others. Empirical study would illustrate exactly how that affect would occur at different points in time and with respect to different ethnic groups. However, Park asserted that irrespective of the different patterns of evolution, the groups entering social relations with the most social power, or control of societal resources, would emerge as dominant.

who engaged in scholarly interaction with anthropologists who were interested in race and the urban sphere.<sup>5</sup>

These and other contributions helped to establish a sociological enterprise that defused an older, more explicitly moralizing emphasis in research and privileging a pragmatic analytical perspective. It also moved sociology away from a sociobiologically to a culturally grounded perspective for exploring racial matters. Unlike Warner, Park did little empirical application of his concepts and framework. However, his African-American students, especially E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson, applied the concepts and framework, as well as the ideology underlining them, to help constitute the second wave of the early tradition

### Empirical, Methodological, and Theoretical Contributions of the Second Wave

The second wave of African-American sociologists sought to investigate the black American rural to urban transition and its consequences for the cultural and organizational disposition of African Americans. The empirical emphases of the second wave included the African-American family (Frazier 1931, 1932, 1940), the transition to urban living (Drake & Cayton 1945, Frazier 1925, 1928, Johnson 1925, Reid 1927, 1939), that status of black Americans in urban employment sectors (Cayton & Mitchell 1939, Reid 1969 [1930], 1936) the etiquette of race relations (Doyle 1937, Johnson 1934a, 1936a), the social organization of southern rural life (Davis & Dollard 1940; Davis et al 1941, Johnson 1934a,b,c, 1941), and the views and orientations of African Americans toward future opportunity (Davis & Dollard 1940, Frazier 1940, Johnson 1941, Reid 1940 ).

Much of this work concerned the social processes, circumstances, and dilemmas of African-American adjustment to industrial society. Theoretically, this wave moved away from either combating or supporting purist racialist arguments that centered on innate racial abilities or character traits. Instead, these scholars asserted notions of culture that focused on shared patterns of adaptation to social contexts rather than on classification according to any grand schema of cultural capacities and potential. Additionally, they argued that black American culture was an American phenomenon, and that social progress for black Americans could be ensured by increasing their opportunities for acculturating and assimilating further into American society. Methodologically, these scholars employed the range of research techniques that had become by their time standard approaches for

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<sup>5</sup>The best evidence of this is *Black Metropolis* [1933(1945)] which was co-authored by St. Claire Drake, a student of Warner's, and Horace Cayton, a student of Robert Park. Moreover, Allison Davis, soon to become a prominent African-American anthropologist, also shared in scholarly exchanges with these and other African-American sociologists, beginning with his tenure as a graduate student at Chicago. The interaction between anthropologists and sociologists was first engineered by the fact that anthropology and sociology became independent departments at Chicago in the early 1930s. Prior to then they constituted a single department.

sociological inquiry (census data analysis, field observations, archival research, interviewing, etc.). These approaches were reflected in community studies (Drake & Cayton 1945, Davis & Dollard 1940, Davis et al 1941, Frazier 1940, Johnson 1934a,c, Reid 1927), participant observation (Doyle 1937), interviewing (Johnson 1934a,c), and analysis of survey and census data (Cayton & Mitchell 1939, Frazier 1932, 1934, Reid 1937).

Much of the empirical agenda had to do with the urban sphere. As much as these scholars affirmed that northern migration was a ticket to a better future, they also acknowledged that the transition to the urban sphere was fraught with problems and difficulties. A major part of their empirical agenda was the exploration of these difficulties. The guiding concept for African-American sociological investigations of the transition to the urban sphere was social disorganization (Frazier 1925, 1931, Johnson 1932, 1934b). This concept was a catch-all phrase for vice, disease, and other social ills that have been associated with the formation of ethnic ghettos. However, unlike some of the earlier scholars who were preoccupied with exploring the racial character of black Americans, the second wave confronted this issue by focusing on how social conditions affected and oppressed and disenfranchised people.

E. Franklin Frazier focused more specifically on the social organizational patterns of African-American life and the stake they had in the urban arena. Having published until the late 1950s, his work spans a number of eras of black scholarly productivity (Platt 1991). However, prior to 1945, Frazier paid much attention to the urban transition and the sedimentation of African Americans into urban communities. He argued that disorganization (crime, vice, illegitimacy, and delinquency) ensued as black Americans began the tumultuous process of adjusting to what was for them a new urban environment (Frazier 1931). He stressed that the social organization of black communities would be enriched by the immersion of black Americans into the industrial infrastructure of the city (1925, 1968).

For Frazier, the city represented an opportunity for social and cultural renewal, and he believed that race consciousness would be cultivated by the proximity of residents in urban enclaves (1932). The significance of migration to the city, in Frazier's mind, was what it meant for the black American family—the unit of observation for most of his empirical work (1931, 1932). He believed that a pattern of social disorganization, followed by a turbulent effort at reorganization, encapsulated the situation of the African-American family's attempt to cohere in city life. Accordingly, Frazier explained profligate behavior in terms of what it indicated about the gradual adjustment process of black Americans to urban life (1932). Here Frazier implied that black Americans began the transition to urban life at the early phase of the race relations cycle. He also alluded to the end-stage of the race relations cycle as the ultimate point of social evolution for black migrants to American cities.

The capacity of African Americans to adjust to the urban context and create their own social world within it was best captured by St. Claire Drake and Horace

Cayton's study *Black Metropolis* (1945). Working mostly in the Warner tradition of the community study approach, these scholars illustrated how interactive and socialization processes in an all-black urban sector (Chicago's south side) maintained status differentials and social hierarchies resembling that of the larger American social landscape. Drake & Cayton's work elucidated how black Americans had adapted to city life, and what social problems remained or were created by pervasive racial discrimination in the midst of the migration effort. Their work depicted a virtual city within a city, where black Americans constructed an institutional ghetto that was self-sustaining in many ways by virtue of local business development, the establishment of churches and civic groups, and the creation of a local newspaper.

Charles Johnson, who assumed the chair of the Department of Social Science at Fisk University in 1927, following George Edmund Haynes, found that the transition to the urban arena meant the release of African Americans from the effects of systemic control in the south. This, to be sure, was a positive outcome in his mind. He believed that black Americans could reorganize their "personalit(ies) upon new basis of greater (self) control" in the city (1934a, p. 457).<sup>6</sup> Whereas Frazier attended to social disorganization, Johnson looked more carefully at the social psychological consequences and effects of black American life, particularly the effect of social structure on the human condition.

Johnson's work on racial consciousness, defensive psychology, and inferiority complexes (1934f, 1934g) was a precursor to social psychological inquiries on black Americans and race relations. The goal here was to fight against the internalization of inferiority that he felt preoccupied so much of black life in the early twentieth century (Fullinwider 1969). He believed that culture was a product of one's position in the social structure. Therefore, a reconstitution of that structure would affect the life styles, social codes, and social attitudes of those who toiled at the bottom (1934a). Johnson also spoke of white Americans as psychologically affected by race relations as well that they cultivated attitudes that legitimated the

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<sup>6</sup>The immense talent of Charles S. Johnson is indicated in the fact that he also carved out his own distinct path away from the Park tradition. His last published work, *Bitter Canaan*, reflected his ability to transcend academic boundaries in order to explore more precisely the social phenomena of his interest. *Bitter Canaan* was a literary work that relied upon the techniques of social scientific investigation to explore the African-American domination of Liberian society in the early 1930s. The uniqueness of this work indicates that Johnson was neither not hindered by the limitations of disciplinary structures or the objectives of the philanthropic entities that he was so heavily involved with in his career. The irony for Johnson was that he considered *Bitter Canaan* his best work, but he could not get it published because of the specific negative reaction that was emitted from reviewers of the manuscript (see Stanfield's "Introductory Essay" in *Bitter Canaan* for more commentary on this aspect of Johnson's life). Here, Johnson was ahead of his time. He had written a book that was critical of oppressive African-American capitalistic exploits at a time when advancement within the cultural parameters of America was considered the ideal for blacks. *Bitter Canaan* was eventually published in 1987, 21 years after Johnson's death.

oppression of African Americans (1934c). However, his comments on that topic were considerably less extensive and less well developed.

Whether the empirical lens was on the urban or rural landscape, much of the theoretical emphasis of the second wave rested in discussions of culture in the African-American community. There was little racial theory from this era of scholars that argued for a distinct and autonomous African-American culture. Instead, the theoretical aims of this generation were to discover and delineate the means by which cultural adaptation could take place such that black Americans could gain parity with white Americans (cf. Johnson 1928). In essence, these scholars believed that African Americans brought unique and important contributions to the American cultural scene, but that these contributions were distinctly American, not artifacts of an African cultural retention. E. Franklin Frazier typified this sentiment most clearly in his denial of African cultural retention. Frazier considered blacks to be culturally and socially bounded within the American experience. He assumed, however, that blacks could distance themselves from the mainstream American panorama. Similar to Park's description of the status of the marginal man, Frazier (1924) believed that the social distance that blacks were subjected to provided them with a means by which to consider ways more conducive for adapting to American society than had immigrants before them.

Frazier (1928, 1934) argued that African cultural elements did not survive the Middle Passage and the multigenerational enslavement of blacks. He asserted that African cultural elements in no way survived the Middle Passage to become a part of the Afro-American cultural system (Frazier 1928, 1934). Frazier defined African-American culture as distinctively American in all but skin color. He considered black religious expression—at that time considered one of the most authentic cultural practices of African Americans—to be a distinctively American tradition. He also stressed that the objectives of black education should be to bind the black American to the American experience (Frazier 1928). Frazier's logic in arguing that black Americans were foremost products of the American experience was that he considered the history of blacks in America as a series of social shocks. The order of shocks was, first, the enslavement of blacks on the coast of Africa, followed by the Middle Passage, then the slave experience itself, and lastly, a profound social disorganization following emancipation. In Frazier's mind, the residue from all of this was a folk culture in the South that exemplified the expression of a people attempting to reconcile their awkward status in American society (Fullinwider 1969:105).

Charles Johnson's confrontation with the issue of a cultural link between Africans, American slaves, and the black American community of the twentieth century was done in a much milder form than that of black social thinkers before him. Johnson had extensive scholarly exposure to African-American life in both the South and the North, which allowed him to regard the black American community as an amalgamation of different kinds of experiences each shaped by different patterns of social adjustment to a particular ecological structure. He stressed that different living arrangements, and access to resources and social networks, create

a foundation for gauging the level of cultural sophistication of any subgroup of black Americans (1934b). In doing so, Johnson dismissed the views of scholars like Kelly Miller who regarded vice, disease, crime, and unsanitary living as phenomena effecting blacks because of their lack of a civilizing experience (1934b). Instead, he embedded these phenomena in the context of the lack of economic and social resources for better adaptation to city life.

Furthermore, Johnson (1936a,b) stated that although cultural differences existed between Europeans and Africans, this did not imply European cultural superiority. While he did not deny that some cultural elements in African-American life may have derived from Africa, Johnson shared with many of his contemporaries the view that black cultural expression, including religious expression, music, and general attitudes, was distinctly American in its manifestations (Johnson 1934b,d). Moreover, Johnson endorsed Park's view that black Americans had as their only viable option acculturation to dominant American cultural patterns (1934e).

For many of these scholars, the transition to the northern urban sphere of living meant the destruction of a backward folk culture that they believed African Americans maintained while living in the South (Drake & Cayton 1945, Frazier 1928, 1932). This transformation would enhance a developmental process toward social and cultural sophistication that blacks had been undergoing, so argued these scholars, since the end of slavery (Frazier 1968, Johnson 1934c).

These perspectives contrasted with their considerations of southern, rural experiences. The rural context was considered by most of these scholars as the site for the preservation of a folk culture that, while helping to build community cohesiveness, inhibited the capacity of black Americans to respond to modernity (Frazier 1925, 1931, 1934, 1940, Johnson 1934a,b,c). A major statement about the response of African Americans in this social milieu was Bertram Doyle's *Etiquette of Race Relations in the South* (1937), a University of Chicago dissertation that became his most respected publication. His work offered a mild critique of racial inequality in American life, without moving toward a systemic critique of American society. Although not intending to, according to historians of race research in sociology (McKee 1993, Persons 1987), Doyle presented what was taken to be an account of the inertia working against change in race relations in the south. By applying William Graham Sumner's framework of social group adaptation to southern race relations, black Americans were depicted in this work as emotionally committed to traditional forms of racial interaction that could not be radically altered by purposive intervention. With the promotion of such an argument, Doyle's work was similar to most other African-American sociologists of his era (Oliver Cox being the principal exception) who did not incorporate profound cultural criticism of the dominant social order in their work.

E. Franklin Frazier was one of the more critical commentators on any notion of an enduring folk culture of African Americans. He considered the folk culture of the South to be fatalistic as it inhibited African-American adjustment to the urban industrial order. In his dissertation, which was later published as *The Negro Family In Chicago* (1932), Frazier pointed out that slavery-era and post-emancipation black

folk culture was an expression of “surrender” to the white man in terms of attitude and acceptance of life.

On the other hand, Johnson provided a slightly different take on the notion of an African-American folk culture. He deemed it an essential arena for social scientific inquiry into the black experience without retreating into the position that such a manifestation was inherently flawed and problematic for African Americans in their struggle to thrive in modern times (Wacker 1983, Stanfield 1987). Johnson believed that the kind of overt, public expressivity displayed by black Americans, a trait strongly associated with African-American folk culture, first emerged as a way to express social criticism of American slavery (1936). Some critics of his view on folk culture asserted that he never clarified whether this phenomenon was an attempt by blacks to create some form of normative culture from what was in the nineteenth century a socially disorganized one, or if this culture was itself a reflection of social disorganization (Stanfield 1985). Regardless of his possible shortcomings in addressing the emergence of black folk culture, a persistent point in Johnson’s thought was that folk culture was a substantive phenomenon that had a clear, instrumental role in the southern rural black community in terms of how black southerners responded to the social conditions affecting their lives.

The dark side of folk culture remained in Johnson’s extension of the ideas expressed by Bertram Doyle about the effects of race relations on the collective psyche of African Americans (Johnson 1934c, 1936). Johnson argued that the effect of social conditioning in this case was a pervasive feeling of inferiority on the part of black Americans. Johnson argued that blacks suffer an “enforced self-consciousness (that) has developed strange distortions of conduct: it has increased sensitiveness of many Negroes to slights, and prompted the fabrication of compensations for their inferior station” (Johnson 1934f, p. 233).

The debate concerning culture was central to the approaches taken toward policy by the scholars in the second phase. Essentially, these scholars argued that ameliorating the social condition of black Americans necessitated their adaptation to what contemporary scholars would consider American mainstream values and norms. There was some caution about how the adaptation process should evolve. For instance, E. Franklin Frazier’s (1928) most persistent concern was that the most capable element of the black community strive for equal footing with whites by way of “temperamental” development rather than focusing on status quests and crass consumption. He hoped that the unique social position of black people would allow them to identify and adopt the best values and mores in American life while disregarding the worst. In making this claim it is evident that Frazier’s nationalistic tendencies—a prominent part of the scholarly activities of his later years—were exemplified as early as the mid-1920s.

On the other hand, Charles Johnson affirmed that as victims of the American experience, black Americans required educational opportunities that would allow them to take into account their history and historical condition in order to develop proper perspective (1934h). Johnson, like many of his scholarly peers, claimed that slave culture caused great difficulty in black adjustment to society following emancipation (1936). However, unlike the tradition encouraged by Kelly Miller,

Johnson (1934h) felt that blacks needed to realize, through education, the insignificance of racial essentialist claims in matters concerning African-American social advancement. Instead, he felt that the emphasis should be placed on defeating the effects of social conditioning. A "character education," Johnson believed, would combat the sentiment of black social inadequacy that was prevalent in his view of black life (1934h, p. 381). Hence, Johnson stressed that black Americans who were more secure socioeconomically and better adapted to the urban, industrial order take the lead in encouraging the sociocultural advancement of other black Americans (1936).

A more radical, and subsequently much less recognized prescription for the condition of African Americans during this period in time was offered by Oliver C. Cox. Having completed his PhD in 1938 from the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, Oliver C. Cox stands at the tail end of the early tradition of African-American sociological thought. With the exception of a few essays that laid the foundation of his thinking (1942, 1943, 1944), all of his major work (1948, 1959, 1962, 1964, 1976) was published after 1945. However, Cox developed his sociological vision during the time of the second wave, and it proposed an alternative framework to that construed by the members of the early tradition. Cox opposed pluralistic and nationalistic approaches to race relations; instead he promoted a world systems approach that was predicated on Marxism, yet critical of some aspects of marxist thought. He argued that the capitalist system grounds the patterns and processes of race relations in American society, and that remaining empirically committed to examining only those relations missed the mark in understanding their manifestation in the larger socio-economic world order. Consequently, Cox's work stood as a precursor to split labor market theories that inspired marxian sociological and economic thought in the years to come, and as a robust critique of the caste arguments forwarded by University of Chicago anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner.

Cox was marginalized within the already marginal African-American sociological tradition. Some attempts have been made to revisit his work (Hunter 1983a,b, Hunter & Abraham 1987, Robinson 1990) and to situate it within both the world systems brand of marxist sociology and race relations studies. Yet, as the golden age of African-American sociological thought had reached its end, Cox remained on the margins largely because of the ingenuity of his contributions at a time when marxist thought held minimal capital in American sociology. The fact that he was an Afro-Caribbean scholar striving to promote such a framework intensified his marginality (Meier 1977).

The second wave of early African-American sociologists helped to further race studies by enhancing methodological and conceptual approaches to the study of black Americans that delegitimated the racialist paradigm preceding their work. The methodologies included case histories, survey research, census data analysis, the construction of social interaction models, and ethnographic analysis. The result of such applications in the research on black Americans revealed that these subjects were a rich and complex group of people who did not possess an inherent lack of civilizing qualities based on their race. By rescuing a sense of the

humanity of black Americans in an era following one in which their humanity was fervently challenged, these scholars helped to facilitate the twentieth century vision of black Americans as a functional, but troubled, constituency. This resultant image comprised the notion of the Negro Problem that social science became preoccupied with when examining the case of black Americans and American race relations.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the span of the “golden age,” African-American sociological thought moved from a defense of the humanity of black Americans to assessments of their social functioning by applying standard conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. However, the contemporary notion of the Negro Problem was, perhaps, the primary negative consequence of the legacy of these scholars. Some of their work helped to constitute a research tradition that objectified black Americans as a marginal community that was, in critical ways, out of step with mainstream American society. Because they were grounded in white American research traditions and paradigms, the negative consequences of the historical path of these scholars were that black American scholars are left today still struggling to identify the most appropriate devices and concepts to extrapolate about the black American situation.

The early tradition of African-American sociological thought was a period in which African Americans were not considered normative referents in social research. The standard for assessing their cultural and social organizational capacities was the cultural and organizational apparatus of mainstream American society. Clearly, African-American sociologists of that period considered racism to be a pathological response of white Americans toward the black presence in American society. Yet, they did little to critically examine other cultural artifacts of white America in order to explicate what linkages might have existed between them and the social phenomena extant in black life. For instance, the framing of much of African-American culture as underdeveloped and in need of social reform indicates how white America was legitimated as normative in the evaluation of American cultural and social life. Yet a more intensive examination of folk culture in the black community might have brought about a vision of how resistance to oppressive sites, scenes, and conditions, and how reconstitution of meaning for black Americans might have been facilitated through such cultural forms. The suppression of this vision left sociological considerations of the black American narrowly and solely focused on how to make black Americans achieve parity with mainstream America. The issue of how and why their subordination in American society in some ways facilitated their creative capacities both culturally and socially became a marginal issue in sociological inquiry until the late twentieth century. Consequently, there remains much left to explore about African-American sociologists and sociological thought.

The past three decades of American sociology have been an era of increasing recognition and deliberation of the century-long contributions of African-American sociologists (Blackwell & Janowitz 1974, Bowser 1981, Bracey et al 1971, Platt 1991, Watts 1983, Stanfield 1982a,b, 1985, Young 1993). Along with this scholarship has come efforts to document the history of American sociological inquiry on race and race relations (Lyman 1972, McKee 1993), and the republication of a series of classic studies by black American sociologists, including *The Philadelphia Negro* by W.E.B. DuBois (1996 [1899]) and *Black Metropolis* by St. Claire Drake and Horace Cayton (1993 [1945]).

By creating a space for other scholars to recognize the breadth of sociological thought on racial theory, race relations, and social power and subordination, these occurrences have rescued significant sociologists and sociological work from obscurity. The possibilities for reconsidering the development of the sociological cannon now stand before American sociology. Success in this pursuit can only be ensured if those that attend to it do more than celebrate the achievement of African-American scholars who produced in eras of extreme racial oppression. Moreover, such efforts must go beyond the project here of documenting the methodological approaches or findings advanced by these scholars. It must be supplemented by critical discussions of the interplay between the contributions of these scholars and the intellectual resources available at the time. Most importantly, this project must include inquiry into the ontological claims about black and white Americans that such research has either affirmed or implied. Pursuit of the latter task will allow African-American sociological thought to become better connected to the epistemological foundations of the discipline, thereby more fully informing the sociological enterprise.

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