JIM CROW SOCIOLOGY: TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORIGIN AND PRINCIPLES OF BLACK SOCIOLOGY VIA THE ATLANTA SOCIOLOGICAL LABORATORY*

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Using the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory as a reference, this inquiry offers a definition of and principles for Black Sociology. The authors conclude that Black Sociology emerged at Atlanta University in 1895 not as a conscious or purposeful antithesis to mainstream sociology, but as a means by which Black and White scholars could help eliminate Blacks from social oppression through objective scientific investigations into the social, economic, and physical condition for the express purpose of obtaining data aimed at understanding, explaining, and ameliorating the problems discovered in the African American community in a manner that could have social policy implications.

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THE DEATH OF WHITE SOCIOLOGY AND THE RE-BIRTH OF BLACK SOCIOLOGY

In 1973, Joyce A. Ladner edited an anthology that "attempt[ed] to define the emerging field of Black Sociology" (Ladner 1973:xix). *The Death of White Sociology* championed the development of a "discipline" that would focus primarily on Black Americans while producing definitions, concepts, and theories unique to that particular group. During the years immediately following this work, other scholars offered definitions of and guidelines for Black sociology. Foremost among scholars venturing toward a definition of Black sociology were Robert Staples (1973 and 1976), Darryl Le Duff (1975), and Wilbur Watson (1976). Although these and other scholars offered definitions and conceptualizations of the emerging area of Black sociology, none utilized the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, the first American school of sociology, as a template to develop their concepts (Wright 2002a). At best, Staples (1976) acknowledged, "It was W. E. B. Du Bois who provided the foundation for Black sociology, both in terms of subject and methodology" (3). While crediting Du Bois for conceptualizing Black sociology, Staples does not specifically highlight Du Bois' contributions nor directly identify his works at Atlanta University as critical to the development of this "discipline." The objective of this inquiry, using the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory as a point of reference, is to highlight the origin and principles of Black sociology.

THE ORIGIN OF BLACK SOCIOLOGY

Black sociology developed, as proposed by Du Bois ([1904] 1978), in an American academic and social climate whereby some White academics were uninterested in scientifically studying Blacks and when most persons of intellect uncritically accepted the, arguably, biased research that was conducted on America's second class citizens. Both of these factors, which led to the development of Black sociology, are detailed below.

Lack of Interest by White Scholars

Du Bois, describing his efforts to convince his peers to enter this area of research, suggests that a sizable number of Whites were reluctant to embrace a research agenda with Blacks at the center of analysis because of the perceived marginal status of its members and the belief that any scientific study centered on race, at least during this period in America's development, could not produce research findings that were devoid of subjective racial motives. Commenting on the obstacles he confronted while attempting to gain support from White academics and philanthropists, Du Bois said:

> **We have been unable as yet to convince any considerable number of the American people of the burning necessity of work of this sort and its deep scientific significance . . . The mass of thinking people, however, fail to recognize the true significance of an attempt to study systematically the greatest social problem that has ever faced a great modern nation (Du Bois[1904] 1978:58-59).**

Du Bois' disdain for and frustration with the White intelligentsia for failing to understand the importance of scientifically studying a group of people sojourning from the toils of chattel slavery as they moved to freedom and from rural to urban life is captured in his admonition that:

> **Such an attitude is allowable to the ignorant – it is expected among horses and among the uncultivated masses of men, but it is not expected of the scientific leaders of a great nation (Du Bois [1904] 1978:56).**

Du Bois' frustration with the academic community stemmed from its failure to recognize the significance of long-term, systematic, and scientific study of the American Negro. Du Bois considered the scientific study of the social, economic, and physical condition of Black Americans to be of the utmost importance since "we have here going on before our eyes the evolution of a vast group of men from simpler primitive conditions to higher more complex civilization" (Du Bois [1904] 1978:54). Repeatedly, Du Bois relished the opportunity for all scholars, Black and White, to engage in objective scientific inquiry centered on Black Americans. In a 1961 interview, Du Bois reveals that, immediately after completing research for his seminal text, *The Philadelphia Negro*, he desired to ground a program for the scientific study of Black Americans within the member institutions of what is now known as the Ivy League:

> **What we needed was an academic study of the American Negro. I wanted the Universities of Pennsylvania and Harvard and Yale and so forth to go into a sort of partnership by which this kind of study could be forwarded. But they of course didn't do anything at all. (P. 3)**

Arguably, his biggest frustration with White academics and philanthropists extended from their inability to sufficiently understand the significance and importance of engaging in research on a human group making the transitions from slavery to freedom and rural to city life. Du Bois said:

> **I think it may safely be asserted that never before in the history of the modern world has there been presented to men of a great nation so rare an opportunity to observe and measure and study the evolution of a great branch of the human race as is given to Americans in the study of the American Negro ([1904] 1978:54).**

Although Du Bois was fascinated with the idea of studying this once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon, his colleagues, for the most part, were not. Two explanations are offered for the hesitance of some White academics to engage in research on Black Americans.

First, according to Du Bois, many White academics and philanthropists viewed Blacks as marginal people who were not deserving of serious scientific attention by social scientists. He theorized:

> **If the Negroes are not ordinary human beings, if their development is simply the retrogression of an inferior people, and the only possible future for the Negro, a future of inferiority, decline and death, then it is manifest that a study of such a group, while still of interest and scientific value is of less pressing and immediate necessity than the study of a group which is distinctly recognized as belonging to the great human family, whose advancement is possible, and whose future depends on its own efforts and the fairness and reasonableness of the dominant and surrounding group ([1904] 1978:56-57).**

Du Bois' second explanation centers on objectivity.

> **It is of course perfectly clear as to why scientific men have long fought shy of [the study of Black Americans]. The presence of the Negro in America has long been the subject of bitter and repeated controversy-of war and hate, of strife and turmoil. It has been said that so dangerous a field, where feelings were deep-seated and turbulent, was not the place for scientific calm of clear headed investigation (Du Bois [1904] 1978:56).**

Summarily, while Du Bois openly and actively championed the scientific study of post emancipation and industrialization era Black Americans, he suggests that many White academics and philanthropists shied away from this research agenda because of the perception that Blacks, at best, were marginal Americans and because they were concerned with issues of objectivity.

Biased Research and the Uncritical Response of Academics

Perhaps the most significant factor leading to the development of Black sociology, according to Du Bois, was the biased research conducted by some White scholars and the uncritical response of academics, Black and White, to various methodological issues. In an 1898 article entitled, "The Study of the Negro Problems," Du Bois stated:

> **Americans are born in many cases with deep, fierce convictions on the Negro question, and in other cases imbibe them from their environment. When such men come to write on the subject, without technical training, without breadth of view, and in some cases without a deep sense of the sanctity of scientific truth, their testimony, however interesting as opinion, must of necessity be worthless as science ([1898] 1978:76).**

Du Bois alludes here to the difficulty that a White scholar may have in conducting objective scientific research on Black Americans less than ten years after the establishment of sociology at Chicago and two years after the Plessey decision. Reared in an American culture that psychologically maligned and physically brutalized its second class citizens while simultaneously promoting its biological, physical, and intellectual inferiority, it is apparent that Du Bois is of the opinion that a great many of his colleagues were not able or willing to relinquish the negative perception of Black Americans that was emblazoned in the minds of many White Americans from birth and cultivated during the American socialization process. Du Bois concludes, allowing for a number of exceptions, that many of those who mature in such a culture may not necessarily be equipped to engage in research that one may define as value free.

In his 1974 article, "W. E. B. Du Bois as Sociologist," Elliott Rudwick presents data from E. Franklin Frazier, a prominent early Black sociologist, supporting Du Bois' indictment that some early American scientific studies on Black Americans were not value free. According to Rudwick (1974):

> **As Frazier has described the situation, the "general point of view" of the first sociologists to study the black man was that "the Negro is an inferior race because of either biological or social hereditary or both." . . . These conclusions were generally supported by the marshalling of a vast amount of statistical data on the pathological aspects of Negro life. In short, "The sociological theories which were implicit in the writings on the Negro problem were merely rationalizations of the existing racial situation." (P. 48)**

Examples of scholarship that produced theories consistent with the racial beliefs of the era can be found, according to Rudwick, in, arguably, the most prestigious journal in the discipline of sociology, the *American Journal of Sociology*:

> **It is true that the *Journal* did carry articles by a man like W. I. Thomas, who criticized racist theories, but other items displayed the racial biases of their authors. The September 1903 issue included an article by H. E. Berlin entitled "The Civil War as Seen through Southern Glasses," in which the author described slavery as "the most humane and the most practical method ever devised for 'bearing the white man's burden.'" The publication of such views in the *American Journal of Sociology* reflected theories about race held in the profession at the time. (P. 48)**

In addition to the publication of articles supporting biological theories of Negro

inferiority, an "examination of the writings of [the 'Big Five'] presidents of [the American Sociological Association] from 1905, when the Association was founded, to 1914, reveals that this general ideology [was] present, varying from one president to another in its degree of subtlety" (Green and Driver 1976:331). Green and Driver expound on this notion by asserting:

> **[R. Charles] Key's analysis of the writings of Sumner, Giddings, Small, Ward, and Ross leads him to conclude [that] ... The racism of the pioneer sociologists and the incidents of racism found in their works seems to range from unashamed bigotry to tacit acceptance. Their racism can be understood in the same manner by which their theories and prophecies can be understood; with reference to the socio-culture in which they took meaning and shape; their opportunity structures, 'styles of life,' and world views. (P. 331)**

Almost as appalling as the subjective race theories espoused during the early years of American sociology, according to Du Bois, was the fact that many scholars were uncritical in their examination of the often racist and inaccurate literature on Black Americans. Du Bois said:

> **We continually assume the material we have at hand to be typical; we reverently receive a column of figures without asking who collected them, how they were arranged, how far are they valid and what chances of error they contain; we receive the testimony of men without asking whether they were trained or ignorant, careful or careless, truthful or given to exaggeration, and above all, whether they are giving facts or opinions ([1898] 1978:77-78).**

The lack of interest in studying Blacks by many Whites and the often biased conclusions produced by those Whites who ventured into this area combined to provide fertile ground for the development of Black sociology at Atlanta University in 1895.

Birth of Black Sociology

Although W. E. B. Du Bois' writings are included to theorize the rationale for the development of Black sociology, the practical development of this "discipline" traces back to Atlanta University prior to his arrival. Black sociology, we argue, emerged at Atlanta University as a result of correspondence between school alumni and administrators. It is through their correspondence that Atlanta University officials learned of the pressing need and desire for the scientific study of Black Americans making the transition from slavery to freedom and rural to urban life. In 1895 Atlanta University president Horace Bumstead and trustee George G. Bradford requested and received approval to initiate a series of investigations into the social, economic, and physical condition of Black Americans. These men deemed this area of research to be of the utmost importance in the era of de jure and de facto segregation and intense racial violence because of the possibility that the findings could be utilized to improve the social, economic, and physical condition of the group (Chase 1896). With this objective in mind, the first Atlanta University Conference on the Negro Problem was held in the spring of 1896 and the first publication of the findings of that conference was released later that year. Over the next twenty-eight years, Atlanta University hosted conferences where the findings from each year's investigation were presented. The findings of the annual investigations were published between 1896 and 1917. Wright (2002a, 2002b, and 2002c) suggests that the annual studies and publications ended because of a lack of funding caused by American racism, Du Bois' agitation of White philanthropists, and Du Bois' ideological disagreement with Booker T. Washington. Atlanta University's twenty monographs

provided, arguably, the most complete data concerning Black Americans during the era. Specific studies conducted by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory include, among others, *Social and Physical Condition of Negroes in Cities* (1897), *The Negro in Business* (1899), *The Negro Church* (1903), *Notes on Negro Crime Particularly in Georgia* (1904), *The Health and Physique of the Negro American* (1906), and *The Negro American Family* (1908). Without question, the research activity of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was not conducted in a vacuum. Atlanta University records indicate that conference monographs were sent to academics and students at institutions such as Mercer University, Hampton Institute, Harvard, Catholic University, Wellesley College, and the University of Texas. Additionally, monographs were sent to individuals such as Carroll D. Wright (U. S. Bureau of Labor), Walter F. Wilcox (U. S. Census Office), and Jane Porter Scott (Social Settlements Association), and groups such as the Insurance Press of London, Penn Mutual Insurance Company, Northern Inter-Collegiate Oratorical League, members of the Legislature of Georgia, and the American Negro Academy (Du Bois 1899). The reach of the Atlanta University studies was immense and extended beyond Atlanta, Georgia, as evidenced by Du Bois' contention, "the publisht [sic] results of these [Atlanta University] studies are used in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Very few books on the Negro problem, or any phase of it, have been publisht in the last decade which have not acknowledged their indebtedness to our work" (Du Bois and Dill 1912:6).

Du Bois, director of sixteen Atlanta University studies, is the figure most associated with the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory; however, he did not initiate, direct, or lay the outline for the initial Atlanta University studies or Black sociology. George G. Bradford served as the first director and lead researcher of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.[1] Despite not playing a role in the establishment of the sociological laboratory at Atlanta University, Du Bois did, in fact, elevate the scientific direction of the yearly studies to such a degree that this institution is now recognized as housing the first American sociological school.[2] Du Bois, in his posthumously published 1968 autobiography, expounds on President Bumstead and Trustee Bradford's plan for the Atlanta University studies prior to his arrival in 1897.

> **[The Atlanta Studies were] grafted on an attempt by George Bradford of Boston, one of the trustees, to open for Atlanta University a field of usefulness for city Negroes comparable to what Hampton and Tuskegee were doing for rural districts in agriculture and industry . . . Mr. Bradford's idea was to establish at Atlanta a similar conference, devoted especially to problems of city Negroes (1968:213-214).**

Bradford's primary objective for the Atlanta University studies was to develop a body of literature examining the social, economic, and physical condition of urban Black Americans during a period of immense societal transition. In so doing, Bradford and Atlanta University officials wanted to distinguish their conference from these conferences at Hampton and Tuskegee. Atlanta University's attempt to separate itself from the existing conferences produced many of the guiding principles for what we term "Black sociology." The principles of Black sociology, developed in part from the Atlanta University monographs and previous scholarly attempts to define this area, are that:

1) the research be led, primarily, by Black Americans; 2) the research center on Black Americans; 3) the research be interdisciplinary; 4) the findings, whenever possible, be generalizable; and 5) the findings, whenever possible, have social/public policy implications.

THE PRINCIPLES OF BLACK SOCIOLOGY

1) Black Researchers Must Lead the Investigations

President Bumstead articulated the first principle of Black sociology at the 1st Atlanta University Conference on the Negro Problem in 1896 when he charged Black Americans with the task of leading the scientific investigations of their communities. Bumstead stated "the problems of Negro city life must be settled largely by Negroes themselves" (Chase 1896:5). Although Bumstead suggests that inquiries into Negro problems be spearheaded largely by Blacks, it should be noted that the lead researcher of the initial studies was George G. Bradford, a White male. While instrumental in establishing the Atlanta University studies, Bradford's lack of training in social science research and minimal knowledge concerning race issues did not comport with President Bumstead's desire to establish at Atlanta University the very best program of institutionalized research on Black Americans in the nation (Wright 2005). Providentially, Bumstead's desire to have a Black American lead the investigations coalesced with an opportunity to hire the most qualified scholar in the nation to direct this line of research. According to Bumstead, "We wanted a professor of sociology with special reference to investigating conditions concerning the Negro; I said that Doctor Du Bois was the one man, white or black, far and away best fitted for the position" (Du Bois 1980:1). Over the next sixteen years Du Bois spearheaded the preparation of sixteen of the twenty monographs published by Atlanta University. Although Du Bois is usually identified as the singular driving force behind the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, at various points he collaborated with prominent Black American scholars, educators, and leaders such as H. R. Butler, M.D. (Atlanta), John Hope (Atlanta Baptist College), Lucy C. Laney (Haines Normal & Industrial School, Augusta, Georgia), Keller Miller (Howard University), George A. Towns (Atlanta University), and Monroe N. Work (Tuskegee University). In addition to including prominent Black Americans, it can be argued that Atlanta University president Horace Bumstead's philosophy of interracial cooperation served as the stimulus for support from and collaborative endeavors with non-Black scholars, educators, and leaders such as Jane Addams, Franz Boaz, Georgia Governor Allan D. Chandler, Thomas N. Chase, Edward Cummings, William James, Frank Taussig, and Max Weber (Wright 2000; 2002a; 2002b).

2) Research Must Focus on Blacks

The second principle of Black sociology stipulates that the research focus principally on Black Americans. President Horace Bumstead, also at the 1st Atlanta University Conference on the Negro Problem in 1896, articulated this objective.

> **Very little attention, too, has been given to the specific problems arising out of the changed conditions under which this large proportion of the Negro population is now sharing the city life of their white brethren. The Negro has been thought of chiefly as a tiller of the soil, as in fact he is; and much has been done, and very properly, for the improvement of his plantation life. But the problems connected with his life in the cities and larger towns need even more careful study and thorough treatment (Chase 1896:5).**

From its inception the research agenda of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory centered squarely on the social, economic, and physical condition of Black Americans. Specific problems addressed by this school include, but are not limited to, disfranchisement, black codes, convict lease system, and lynching.

Although the early research agenda of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory focused on Black Americans, one scholar deemed the initial studies to be insignificant, in part, because they lacked a systematic method for investigating the myriad problems experienced by Black Americans. Du Bois believed the expansive research focus of the early studies produced findings that could be more accurately categorized as census style data than scientifically relevant data. One of his first acts upon accepting the directorship of the Atlanta University studies was to limit the topical focus of each year's investigation instead of addressing a hodgepodge of issues like his predecessor. According to Du Bois:

> **Instead of trying to study the whole mass of social conditions and discuss the whole Negro problem, I deliberately put an 's' upon 'problem' and emphasized the study of Negro problems and then took up one problem or one phase of a social problem affecting Negroes for a year's intensive study (1904:3).**

In addition to narrowing the focus of the annual investigations, Du Bois tailored the annual studies along certain research themes. According to Du Bois:

> **The method employed is to divide the various aspects of [the condition of Black Americans] into ten great subjects. To treat one of these subjects each year as carefully and exhaustively as means will allow until the cycle is completed. To begin then again on the same cycle for a second ten years. So that in the course of a century, if the work is well done we shall have a continuous record of the condition and development of a group of 10 to 20 million of men – a body of sociological materials unsurpassed in human annals (1904:58).**

Summarily, Du Bois advanced the already existing research program by altering the name to reflect the myriad problems facing Black Americans (e.g., the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems), addressing one topic per year, and instituting a systematic plan of study that included studying ten topics per decade then revisiting the same topic in ten year intervals. The ten themes of inquiry chosen by Du Bois were college education, crime, economic cooperation, family, health, religion/ morality, secondary education, social betterment, skilled workers, and a periodic review of the scientific literature on Black Americans. Five studies are highlighted below to demonstrate how Blacks Americans formed the crux of the research conducted at Atlanta University.

The 5th Atlanta University Conference publication, "The College-Bred Negro" (1900), focused primarily on the "number, distribution, occupations, and success of College-bred Negroes" (Du Bois 1900:5). Data were obtained by analyzing admissions information from multiple colleges and universities; correspondence from 23 predominately White and Black college presidents; and questionnaires received from 1,312 African American college graduates.

The 7th Atlanta University Conference publication focused on "The Negro Artisan" (1902). An "artisan" was defined by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory as "a skilled laborer--a person who works with his hands but has attained a degree of skill and efficiency above that of an ordinary manual laborer--as, for instance, carpenters, masons, engineers, blacksmiths, etc. Omit barbers, ordinary laborers in factories, who do not do skilled work, etc" (Du Bois 1902:9). Data for this inquiry were obtained through secondary analysis of the existing literature; and questionnaires, schedules, and correspondences received from 1,300 Black skilled laborers, 600 Black public school children, 200 industrial plant managers, and 97 trade unions.

"The Negro Church" (1903), subject of the 8th Atlanta University Conference publication, was selected because Atlanta University officials wanted to ascertain the "religion of Negroes and its influence on their moral habits" (Du Bois 1903:v). The findings for this study evolved from the examination of 250 special reports from Black pastors and church officials; 175 special reports from Black laymen; 117 special reports from the heads of schools of prominent men, Black and White; 54 special reports of southern White persons; 13 special reports from Black American theological schools; 109 special reports from northern theological schools; questionnaires administered to 1,300 Black school-aged children; and a review of the existing literature.

The 11th Atlanta University Conference publication, "The Health and Physique of the Negro American" (1906), "mark[ed] the beginning of a second cycle of stud[ies] and [addressed] again the subject of the physical condition of Negroes, [first addressed in the 1896 and 1897 investigations], but enlarge[d] the inquiry beyond the mere matter of mortality" (Du Bois 1906:5). Data for this investigation were obtained from special reports of the United States Census (1790-1900); reports of 34 life insurance companies; vital records of more than 10 cities and towns with large Black American populations; reports of the United States Surgeon General; reports from African American hospitals and drug stores; reports from 23 White medical schools; letters from physicians; measurements of 1,000 Hampton University students; and an examination of the general literature.

The 13th Atlanta University Conference publication focused on "The Negro Family" (1908) and was a continuation of previous Atlanta University Conferences.

> **In 1897 the Atlanta University Negro Conference made an investigation into the [Negro] which involved a study of 4742 individuals gathered in 1137 families, living in 59 different groups, in 18 different cities . . . The object of the investigation was to study the mortality of Negroes and the social and family conditions. The study of Mortality was continued in 1906 by Atlanta University publication number eleven. The present study continues the study of social conditions from the point of view of the family group (Du Bois 1908:5).**

The findings of this study emanated from examinations of the existing slavery literature; United States Census Bureau reports; reports from the United States Bureau of Labor; previous Atlanta University Conference studies; and a local study of 32 Black American families conducted by Atlanta University undergraduate students.

While the examples presented here represent only one-fourth of the monographs produced by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, they are representative of the research agenda promoted by the school and illustrate how Black Americans, in fulfilling the second principle of Black sociology, formed the crux of the research.

3) Research Must Be Interdisciplinary

The third principle of Black sociology, that the research be interdisciplinary, evolves not from the pronouncements of President Bumstead, Trustee Bradford, or Director Du Bois, but from the fact that this school addressed a variety of substantive topics. Interdisciplinarity is broadly operationalized as the incorporation of discipline specific topics (e.g., economics, education, history, medicine, etc.) into the sociologically based research agenda of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and the conference participation of specialists in those areas. The authors are mindful that contemporary conceptualizations of "interdisciplinary" may extend our definition to include the use of discipline-specific methods of research and theoretical assumptions. On a contemporary

theoretical basis, we agree with such a proposal. However, we approach this issue from a historical theoretical base that acknowledges that over the past one hundred years there has been increased fragmentation of formerly uniform disciplines along the divide "areas of specialization" within specific fields of study. We acknowledge that the Atlanta school's claim to interdisciplinarity in this current era would be tenuous. However, if we define interdisciplinarity broadly and within its proper historical context, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, as demonstrated in the examples below, qualifies.

The 1899 inquiry "Negro In Business" is one of three examples presented to illustrate the practice of interdisciplinary research. The objective of this study was to ascertain the number, types, and condition of Black American businesses. This objective was fulfilled with the participation of various businesspersons who submitted papers on the topic and assisted in the collection of data. Some notable contributors include Mrs. Rosa Bass (Businesswoman, Savannah, Georgia), Allan D. Chandler (Governor, State of Georgia), John Hope (Professor, Atlanta Baptist College now Morehouse College), C. H. Fearn (Manager, Southern Stove Hollowware and Foundry Company), and Hugh Young (Trustee, Atlanta University). Similar to subsequent examples, the interdisciplinary investigations carried out by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory produced impressive results. For example, most scholars are aware that Du Bois and Booker T. Washington were, at one point, engaged in an ideological disagreement concerning the education of Black Americans. However, few realize that the National Negro Business League, an influential national organization established by Washington in 1900 to promote his agenda of economic independence, at the expense of civil and political rights, some may argue, emanated from discussions held at the 1899 Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems. A 'Lelia Bundles (2001), in her biography of the first Black American female millionaire, Madame C. J. Walker, states:

> **The seeds for the [National Negro Business League] first sprouted in May 1899 during a discussion of the topic 'The Negro in Business' at Atlanta University when conference planner W. E. B. Du Bois recommended 'the organization in every town and hamlet where the colored people dwell, of Negro Business Men's Leagues, and the gradual federation from these of state and national organizations. (P. 130)**

The 1903 "Negro Church" monograph is another example of interdisciplinary research. This publication, while including only one section penned by a minister, Rev. W. H. Holloway (Pastor - Thomas County, Georgia), best exemplifies disciplinary collaboration through the numerous special reports received and presented at the conference. Notable persons who presented conference papers on the topic, but were not included in the published proceedings, were Rev. F. J. Grimke (Pastor, Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church of Washington, D. C.), Rev. Dr. Washington Gladden (President, American Missionary Association), Mary Church Terrell (President, National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs), and Rev. C. B. Wilmer (Rector, St. Luke's Protestant Episcopal Church of Atlanta, GA). Similar to the previous study, the successful construction and completion of this monograph produced a unique result. According to Phil Zuckman (2004), the 1903 study of the Negro church was the first systematic sociological inquiry of the church in the United States.

Arguably, the most significant example of interdisciplinary collaboration is found in the 1906 publication, "The Health and Physique of the Negro American." In an era of perceived inferiority of people along racial, gender, and class lines, the findings of this study promoted the idea that there were no physical differences between Blacks and

Whites. Dr. W. Montague Cobb, Howard University School of Medicine, commenting on the significance of this study stated:

> **[This inquiry was the] first significant scientific approach to the health problems and biological study of the Negro . . . But,' said Cobb, 'neither the Negro medical profession nor the Negro educational world was ready for it. Its potential usefulness was not realized by Negroes. Whites were hostile to such a study . . . This study, Du Bois's single excursion into the health field, was,' said Cobb, 'an extraordinary forward pass heaved the length of the field, but there were no receivers" (Du Bois 1968b:vi).**

While lavish praise is bestowed on Du Bois by Dr. Montague, it must be noted that myriad specialists contributed to the findings. Among the notables were Dr. Franz Boas (Professor, Columbia University), Dr. C. V. Roman (Meharry Medical College), and Dr. W. F. Penn (medical doctor in private practice).

Repeatedly, we note that contemporary conceptualizations of what constitutes interdisciplinary research may differ from its usage here. Nevertheless, it is suggested that interdisciplinary research is defined as the incorporation of discipline specific topics (e.g., economics, education, history, medicine, etc.) into the sociologically-based research agenda of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and the conference participation of specialists in those areas.

4) Findings Must Be Generalizable[3]

The fourth principle of Black sociology, that the findings be generalizable, was a stated objective from the inception of the Atlanta University studies. President Bumstead, again in his address at the 1st Atlanta University Conference on the Negro Problem in 1896, clearly articulates this objective:

> **Let us not forget that the general subject of this and succeeding conferences-the study of Negro city life-and the particular subject of this year--the morality of Negroes in cities--constitute a human problem far more than a Negro problem. We shall use the words 'Negro' and 'colored,' not to emphasize distinctions of race but as terms of convenience. We are simply to study human life under certain conditions-conditions which, if repeated with any other race, would have practically the same result (Chase 1896:6-7).**

While the Atlanta University studies were designed to focus primarily on urban Black Americans, according to President Bumstead, many of the findings of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory would be generalizable beyond the sample group, given that the research focus of the investigations would center principally on specific social conditions experienced by a group without, in many instances, specific regard to race. Hence, a research agenda aimed at investigating specific social conditions, at the exclusion of adhering to a specific racial research agenda, would probably produce findings that are generalizable beyond the sample group. Du Bois bolsters President Bumstead's mandate some years later when he proclaims that the Atlanta University studies began "with a definite, circumscribed group, but [would eventually] end with the human race" (Du Bois 1968a:217). Wright (2002b), specifically addressing this issue, contends that, "Although Atlanta University researchers focused primarily on urban African Americans, many of the social problems identified in the investigations and the resolutions offered to ameliorate the problems [discovered] were generalizable to [Blacks and Whites]" (345). Wright ardently suggests that many of the findings of the annual investigations conducted by the Atlanta school, while consisting of a subject pool largely comprised of urban Black Americans, were applicable to Whites and rural

Blacks. Without restating the works of Wright, he argues that the monographs of 1904 (Some Notes on Negro Crime), 1906 (The Health and Physique of the Negro American), and 1911 (The Common School and the Negro American) are generalizable because some of the findings extend beyond regional and class barriers within the Black American community. For example, the 1904 investigation is generalizable: this study produced findings that were applicable to all Black Americans concerning the unequal meting out of justice (i.e., length of sentence, unfair methods of punishment, convict lease system, etc.) that was uncovered with nationally representative data from various geographical regions of the United States. Additionally, the 1906 investigation is generalizable to all Black Americans because data were collected and findings presented, with the assistance of 1,000 Hampton Institute undergraduates, which refuted the popular theories of the physical inferiority of Blacks vis-à-vis Whites.

Extending the generalizability of the findings, Wright contends that the monographs of 1897 (Social and Physical Condition of Negroes in Cities), 1901 (The Negro Common School), 1909 (Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans), and 1911 (The Common School and the Negro American) are generalizable to Whites as well as Blacks. For example, the 1897 study focused primarily on the poor sanitation condition of early American cities and the resultant health problems. Data collected regarding the lack of adequate ventilation and the health problems such as consumption (or tuberculosis as it is known today) are typical findings of this investigation and were generalizable beyond Black Americans, since the problems experienced by Blacks living in poorly constructed housing units during the early twentieth were shared by American Whites and newly arrived European immigrants. The 1909 study uncovered data indicating the need for the establishment of nurseries and kindergartens for the children of working parents. Notwithstanding that, in the main, White women did not enter the workforce in large numbers until World War II, this study remains generalizable given that the findings are applicable to working class parents of varied races and ethnicities employed outside of the home and desirous of child care needs.

5) Research Findings Should Have Social/Public Policy Implications

The fifth principle of Black sociology, that the investigations, when applicable, produce data with social/public policy implications, was an *implied* objective explicated by the authors from some of the resolutions of the Atlanta University Conference publications, the works of Du Bois, and the definitional constructions of Black sociology penned by various scholars. It is suggested that this principle was implied and not overtly stated due to the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory's possible concern with being perceived as a subjective tool of research and propaganda for Black America, as has been suggested by at least one scholar (Rudwick 1957). While Du Bois believed social science research could enhance social/public policy, he was adamant, at least during his years as a practicing sociologist, that the route toward social/public policy development by social scientists be, at best, circuitous. Du Bois proclaimed, "any attempt to give [science] a double aim, to make social reform the immediate instead of the mediate object of a search for truth, will inevitably tend to defeat both objects" ([1898] 1978:80). Du Bois proposes here that social/public policy initiatives should be tangential, not primary, products of social science research. If the primary goal of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory had been to influence social/public policy, then, according to Du Bois, the school would have run the risk of having its findings publicly debunked as subjective, race-based

research possessing little or no objective scientific significance. Du Bois' preoccupation with avoiding the double aim of scientific inquiry focused on Black Americans stemmed from the possibility that "There [would] be at first some difficulty in bringing the Southern people, both black and white, to conceive of an earnest, careful study of the Negro problem which [had] not back of it some scheme of race amalgamation, political jobbery, or deportation to Africa" (Du Bois [1898] 1978:80). Repeatedly, Du Bois was concerned that the academic and non-academic communities might discredit the research offerings of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory had they brazenly stated that one of their objectives was to influence social/public policy. Avoiding such a risk, Du Bois (1968a) championed an objective research agenda that produced, when applicable, findings that could be utilized for social/public policy purposes by interested persons. According to Du Bois:

> **I put no special emphasis on specific reform effort, but increasing and widening emphasis on the collection of a basic body of fact concerning the social condition of American Negroes, endeavoring to reduce that condition to exact measurement whenever or wherever occasion permitted. As time passed, it happened that many uplift efforts were in fact based on our studies. (P. 46)**

Although Du Bois never specifically identifies the exact "uplift efforts" that were based on studies produced by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, it is possible that he may have been alluding to, at a minimum, the school's scholarly offerings in the areas of education and the criminal justice system.

The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was one of the first institutions to scientifically investigate the combined substantive areas of education and Black Americans. The findings presented in at least three of the monographs produced by this school could have been used in the uplift efforts of those interested in arguing that the "separate but equal" mandate resulting from the 1896 Plessey case was not being upheld. The 1901 monograph, "The Negro Common School," produced data which indicated that many states were not funding Black schools at the same rate as White schools and that the pay between Black and White teachers was unequal. The data for this study included school reports from several states, reports from the Freedmen's Bureau and the United States Bureau of Education, and questionnaires received from 42 county superintendents and 34 city superintendents. Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, after analyzing the data, offered a resolution calling for increased state and national aid for Black high schools, because the data revealed that state monies allotted for the maintenance and operation of Black schools was less than that of comparable White schools. For example, in 1896, the state of Delaware expended $1.66 per capita for its White students and $0.81 for its Black students. It was also discovered that Black Americans were charged with bearing the brunt of the financial support of their schools more than White Americans were. States such as Delaware, Arkansas, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana all reported that the cost of running their Negro schools was almost totally supported by the contributions of Blacks themselves. Last, the disparity in pay between Blacks and Whites also fueled the call for increased state and national funding for teachers. A typical example is Maryland, which paid its White teachers $8.76 while its Black teachers received $4.07. These findings, and others presented below, clearly have social/public policy implications.

The 1911 monograph, "The Common School and the Negro American," also produced data indicating an immense disparity in school funding and teacher pay. Data

for this investigation were obtained from the United States Department of Education, state school reports, reports from various county and city school superintendents, and reports from teachers and citizens in multiple southern communities. The findings of this query mirror those of the study conducted ten years prior. For example, a report from Houston County, Georgia, revealed that that school system had educated 3,165 Black students and 1,044 White students. However, the amount of funding received from the state government for each group was $4,509 and $10,678 respectively. Additional findings uncovered by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory reveal that many school districts preferred to hire poorly trained and under-prepared teachers rather than those who were better qualified in an effort to maintain lower salaries. In North Carolina, for example, "the colored teachers were paid $224,800 in 1907 and $221,800 in 1908; during the same time the amount paid White teachers in the rural districts increased by $50,000" (Du Bois and Dill 1911:117).

A second area that may have provided fertile ground for uplift activity was the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory's research in crime/deviance. The 1904 study, "Some Notes on Negro Crime, Particularly in Georgia," examined the scope of crime in the South, with particular attention to Georgia, and produced findings that uncovered vast disparities in the ways in which Blacks and Whites were treated within the criminal justice system. The data for this investigation were obtained from the reports of mayors, chiefs of police, and other officers in thirty-seven Georgia counties, reports from Black and White citizens in thirty-seven Georgia counties, police data from twenty United States cities, seven reports from the Georgia Prison Commission, and questionnaires distributed to 2,000 Black school-aged children. The most notable finding of this investigation was the unfair treatment of Black Americans who were part of the convict lease system.

Having begun in Alabama in 1846, the convict lease system was an unethical, but legal, means by which slavery could be maintained after emancipation through the subjective application of the Black codes whereby "convicted persons" were hired out to private businesspersons for a profit garnered by the governing agency. In addition to regulating Negro crime and maintaining the racial status quo hierarchy, records of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory indicate that the convict lease system was, at least regionally, a profitable enterprise. 1909 data indicate that only the southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas) earned a profit through the convict lease system. The southern states expended $890,132, earned $938,106, and profited $47,974. While Du Bois could not ascertain if the effect of the convict lease system was worse for Blacks than Whites, he noted that the application of this practice on Blacks was deplorable, given that almost half of Black prisoners were jailed for crimes against property, one fourth of Black prisoners were incarcerated for crimes against the person, and one-sixth of all criminals jailed were charged with crimes against society (drunkenness, gambling, and adultery). These factors led the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory to make an appeal to White citizens, not a direct appeal to politicians, for fairer treatment of Black Americans in the criminal justice system.

Related to the 1904 appeal to Whites is the 1911 investigation that outlined specific barriers in most southern states to prevent Black Americans from voting in significant numbers. Disfranchisement effectively, according to Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, prevented Black Americans from using the vote as a means

to create equity in the public school system and enact laws to end practices such as the convict lease system. Barriers to voting identified by Du Bois include illiteracy, property, poll tax, employment, reputation, grandfather clause, and the understanding clause. While the evils of Jim Crow disfranchisement were scientifically unearthed by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in the early 1900's, it would take many years before national legislators acted on the inhumane treatment received by Black Americans who attempted to exercise their constitutional right to vote. The convict lease system, although first addressed by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in 1904, wasn't ended until 1928 when a future United States president, Herbert Hoover, then serving as secretary of commerce, spearheaded passage of the Hayes Cooper Act that prohibited the shipment of interstate commerce produced by prison labor. Additionally, while the disfranchisement activities of the American South were scientifically exposed as early as 1911, the *discriminatory election practices* of the south were not challenged nationally until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Summarily, this principle of Black sociology, that the research findings, when applicable, have social/public policy implications and be acted upon by interested third parties, can be only successfully performed, according to Du Bois, upon the completion of an objective and methodologically sound investigation. Providing a concluding statement on this principle, Du Bois proposes:

> **Only by such rigid adherence to the true object of the scholar, [objectivity], can statesmen and philanthropists of all shades of belief be put into possession of a reliable body of truth which may guide their efforts to the best and largest success ([1898] 1978:81).**

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A NEW DEFINITION WITH OLD PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this paper, utilizing the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory as a point of reference, was to highlight the origin of this discipline and demonstrate how the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory could have served as a guide for those attempting to develop a definition of and principles for Black sociology. However, before initiating a review of the main points of this investigation, we believe it essential to provide the reader with a detailed understanding of how the present query fits into the relatively new and small literature centered on the sociological significance and legacy of the research conducted at Atlanta University between 1896-1924.

Prior to 1999, the authors found only one scholarly article solely focused on the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Elliott Rudwick's (1957) article on the sociological significance of the Atlanta Sociological laboratory was highly critical of Du Bois as the leader of the school and ultimately concluded that its sociological significance was negligible. Renewed scholarly interest into the accomplishments of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory re-emerged in 1999 when Shaun L. Gabbidon, using the model of a "school" penned by Martin Bulmer (1985) applied his nine characteristics to Atlanta. Gabbidon ultimately concluded that, although the laboratory at Atlanta University should be recognized as a sociological school, it did not meet all of the qualifications for a school as outlined by Bulmer. Gabbidon's (2000) subsequent contribution is noteworthy because, while only focusing on one specific research investigation conducted by Atlanta researchers, it centers mostly on the significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in the sociologically related area of criminal justice. In 2002, Earl Wright

II published three scholarly articles on the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Wright's (2002a) first publication, similar to Gabbidon, challenged Bulmer's notion that the University of Chicago established the first American school of sociology. Using Bulmer's conceptualization of a school, Wright convincingly argued that, not only did Atlanta qualify for school status, its origin predated Chicago by roughly twenty years. Wright's (2002b) second publication focused on the factors that led to the sociological negation of the first American school of sociology for over one hundred years. He ultimately concluded that racism, the unfounded notion of academic obscurity, alleged ungeneralizable findings and unsophisticated and low quality methodology, and the alleged omission of theory all contributed to the sociological invisibility of this school. Wright's (2002c) third offering of that year provided an historical account of the development of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. In 2005 the literature again grew when Wright (2005), once again providing historical context for the establishment of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, directed a scholarly inquiry at the significant role played by George G. Bradford in establishing the yearly investigations in the three years prior to Du Bois' arrival. To date, these articles comprise the entire literature on the sociological legacy and significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Future lines of research may include a comprehensive comparison of the methodology of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory vis-à-vis the Chicago School of Sociology, a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical offerings of the school, an examination of the research exploits of some of the forgotten men and women, excluding Du Bois, of the Atlanta school, and a sociology of knowledge examination of Black sociology vis-à-vis mainstream, or "White" sociology. While the literature now includes a growing number of important studies focusing on the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, future investigations, including the present offering, should be viewed as essential components in the construction of a body of data into the sociological and social scientific significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.

As indicated previously, the objective of this investigation was to establish the origin of Black sociology and demonstrate how the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory could have served as a guide for those attempting to develop a definition of and principles for Black sociology. As a result, we define Black Sociology as an area of research, which may be performed by Black or White scholars, that is focused on eliminating Blacks from social oppression through objective scientific investigations into their social, economic, and physical condition for the express purpose of obtaining data aimed at understanding, explaining, and ameliorating the problems discovered in the Black American community in a manner that could have social policy implications. The principles of Black sociology are that: 1) the research be conducted primarily by Black American scholars; 2) the focus of research center on the experiences of Black Americans; 3) the research efforts of Black sociology be interdisciplinary; 4) the findings, whenever possible, be generalizable beyond the Black Americans; and 5) the findings, whenever possible, produce data that could have social policy implications. This conceptualization of Black sociology is important insomuch as it does not suggest a difference in methodological techniques or theoretical assumptions between Black sociology and mainstream sociology, but a more focused line of inquiry into the social, economic, and physical conditions affecting Black Americans and the production of findings that may be utilized for social policy purposes.

NOTES

1) See Wright 2005 for a more detailed discussion of George G. Bradford's contributions to the development of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.

2) See Wright 2002a, Wright 2002b, and Wright 2002c for a more detailed discussion of the scientific direction of the Atlanta University Studies.

3) See Wright 2002b for a more detailed discussion of the generalizability of the findings presented by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.

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