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W.E.B. DuBois and The First Scientific Study of Afro-America

DURING ITS FORMATIVE YEARS in the late nineteenth century, American anthropology was deeply influenced by the prevailing notions of white supremacy. It remained a blackless science well into the twentieth century and, like the society in which it operates, American anthropology never succeeded in fully eradicating vestiges of racism within its ranks. Relegating racism to vestigial status in anthropology was, of course, no mean task. Though Franz Boas and his antiracist progeny were largely responsible for placing the racist tradition in American anthropology and other social sciences on the defensive during the whole of the twentieth century,¹ black scholars played the critical role in finally establishing a scientific approach in the study of Afro-America. Foremost among these was William Edward Burghardt DuBois, the first social scientist of, for and by Afro-America.

Racist denunciation of blacks by American anthropologists and other institutionalized forces in the late nineteenth century abetted the rise of its negation by blacks themselves. During the turn of the century, the United States witnessed the emergence of several black cultural organizations, the earliest organized expressions of the modern Black Liberation movement, and the first scientific studies of black people.² It was the latter manifestation of antiracism which had the most devastating effects upon racism within American social sciences, particularly anthropology. DuBois led that struggle within the scientific community.

W.E.B. DuBois, of course, was not recognized as an anthropologist in the early part of this century.³ Even to this day within anthropological circles, the name DuBois normally evokes images of *Pithecanthropus erectus* (the name given a hominid whose jaw was discovered in Java by Eugene

¹ Among the earliest published expressions of antiracism by Franz Boas, who delivered the 1906 Commencement address at Atlanta University upon the invitation of W.E.B. DuBois, were: "What the Negro has done in Africa," *Ethical Record*, 5 (March 1904): 106-09. The first Boasian, Alexander Chamberlain of Clark University, continued this antiracist tradition with publications such as: "The Contribution of the Negro to Human Civilization," *Journal of Race Development*, 1 (1911): 482-502. For a general survey of Boas' contributions to early American anthropology, see George Stocking, *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911: A Franz Boas Reader* (New York, 1974). See also St. Clair Drake, "Anthropology and the Black Experience," *The Black Scholar* (Sept/Oct. 1980): 2-31. It should be noted, however, that Drake is incorrect in suggesting that Boas obstructed the anthropological education and career of J.E. Kwegyir Aggrey; see Boas' letter to Booker T. Washington, *The Professional Correspondence of Franz Boas* (Philadelphia, Nov. 30, 1904).

² Among these organizations were: Negro Historical Society of Philadelphia, 1897; American Negro Academy, 1897; The Society for the Collection of Negro Folk Lore, 1890; The Negro Society for Historical Research, 1912; The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915; First Pan-African Conference, 1900; Niagara Movement, 1905; and the N.A.A.C.P., 1909.

³ Indeed no black was so recognized until Caroline Bond Day and Zora Neale Hurston received their anthropological training under Ernest Hooten and Franz Boas, respectively. Though such ranking figures in American anthropology as Melville Herskovits and Oscar Lewis honored him and sought his advice, DuBois himself was not consistently identified as an anthropologist until well after the Second World War. For example, a 1950 press release of the Peace Information Center, which he directed until its operations were shut down by the US government, identified him as a "noted Negro anthropologist and historian" *The Papers of W.E.B. DuBois* (Amherst, August 24, 1950), reel 65, frame 405. For the Herskovits and Lewis correspondence, see *ibid.* (Feb. 20, 1948), reel 62, frame 49 and (April 6, 1948) reel 62, frame 258.

DuBois, a Dutch anatomist, in 1891) or Alorese cultural manifestations (the subject of a classic ethnographic account in 1944 by Cora DuBois). Nevertheless, the pioneering studies of African cultures and Afro-American realities and history initiated by W.E.B. DuBois from 1894 until 1915 stand not only as the first studies of black people on a firm scientific basis altogether — whether classified among the social or historical sciences — but they also represent the earliest ethnographies of Afro-America as well as a major contribution to the earliest corpus of social scientific literature from the United States. As such, these studies filled a tremendous gap in American anthropology created by its early white supremacist promoters.

Taken as a collectivity, the publications of DuBois up to 1915 (listed below) do indeed provide a comprehensive ethnography of Afro-America. Had DuBois enjoyed the patronage provided other ethnological expeditions of the time (e.g., the Jesup Expedition to the North Pacific),⁴ there is little doubt that these scattered pieces could have been concentrated into an impressive set of volumes, which American social scientists could not have afforded to ignore. Nevertheless, they still constitute a scientific analysis of an ethnic grouping within the United States that rivals any ethnological survey of its time.⁵

THE FIRST ETHNOGRAPHY OF AFRO-AMERICA, 1894-1915

1. Environment/Demography:
 - a. *Health and Physique of the Negro American* (1906)
 - b. "The Negro in Large Cities" (1907)
 - c. "The Negro Race in the United States of America" (1911)
 - d. "The Rural South" (1912)
2. History:
 - a. *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1896)
 - b. "The Beginning of Slavery" (1905)
 - c. "Die Negerfrage in den Vereinigten Staaten" (1906)
 - d. "The Social Evolution of the Black South" (1911)
 - e. *The Negro* (1915)
3. Economic Organization:
 - a. "Die landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in den Südstaaten der Vereinigten Staaten" (1894)
 - b. *The Negro in Business* (1899)
 - c. "The Negro Landholder of Georgia" (1901)
 - d. *The Negro Artisan* (1902)
 - e. "The Negro Farmer" (1904)
 - f. "The Economic Future of the Negro" (1906)
 - g. *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* (1907)
 - h. "The Economics of Negro Emancipation in the United States" (1911)
 - i. *The Negro American Artisan* (1912)
4. Social Organization and Stratification:
 - a. *Some Efforts of Negroes for Social Betterment* (1898)

⁴ In fact, it is doubtful that in the whole history of American social science that any American scholar had contributed more to the body of scientific knowledge with less research funding than did W.E.B. DuBois during his first tenure at Atlanta University.

⁵ Its only weakness as a collective work of anthropology lies in neglect of linguistic studies and, to a lesser degree, documentation of material culture. One major strength, on the other hand, is the fact that when dealing with Afro-American values and literary arts, DuBois was simultaneously a creative agent as well as an astute observer — a rather unique case of participant observation.

- b. *The College-Bred Negro* (1900)
- c. *The Negro Common School* (1901)
- d. *The Negro American Family* (1908)
- e. *Efforts for Social Betterment among Negro Americans* (1909)
- f. *The College-Bred Negro American* (1910)
- g. "The Marrying of Black Folk" (1910)
- h. *The Common School of the Negro American* (1911)
- i. "Intermarriage" (1913)
- j. "The Social Effects of Emancipation" (1913)
- 5. Political Organization:
 - a. "To the Nations of the World" (1900)
 - b. "The Training of Negroes for Social Power" (1904)
 - c. "The Black Vote of Philadelphia" (1905)
 - d. "The Niagara Movement" (1906)
- 6. Ideology/Values:
 - a. "Strivings of the Negro People" (1897)
 - b. "The Conservation of Races" (1897)
 - c. *The Negro Church* (1903)
 - d. *Morals and Manners among Negro Americans* (1914)
 - e. Any one of the editorials in *The Moon, The Horizon* or *The Crisis*
- 7. Art/Literature:
 - a. *Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
 - b. "Litany at Atlanta" (1906)
 - c. *Prayers for Dark People* (1909)
 - d. *Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911)
- 8. Social Problems:
 - a. "The Problem of Amusement" (1897)
 - b. "The Negro and Crime" (1899)
 - c. "The Problem of Negro Crime" (1900)
 - d. "The Problem of Housing the Negro" (1901)
 - e. "Crime and our Colored Population" (1902)
 - f. *Some Notes on Negro Crime, Particularly in Georgia* (1904)
 - g. "Race Friction Between Black and White" (1908)
- 9. Community Case Studies:
 - a. *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study* (1898)
 - b. *The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches* (1899)
 - c. *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899)
 - d. *The Negroes of Dougherty County, Georgia* (1901)
 - e. "Some Notes on the Negroes in New York City" (1903)
 - f. *The Black North in 1901: A Social Study* (1903)

In contrast to all other peoples (white or nonwhite) in the United States, the scientific study of black people developed independent of and in negation to American anthropology. Had it not been for DuBois' prodigious efforts, that study may well have been postponed for over two decades and thereby have allowed significant developments in the black community to have been lost in a quagmire of antiquated anthropometry and obscurantist statistics. DuBois almost singlehandedly averted this disaster.⁶

⁶The contributions to the scientific study of black people by other black scholars during the formative years of American social science is certainly not to be discounted. Among those contributions are the following: Kelly Miller, "A Review of Hoofman's Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro" (Washington, 1896); Alexander Crummel, "Civilization the Primal Need of the Race" (Washington, 1898); William Hayes Ward, "Address to National Negro Conference," *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference 1909* (New York, 1909), pp. 9-14; Henri Gregorie's *An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties and Literature of*

Disasters of a different sort visited themselves upon Afro-America during this troublesome period. Between 1890 and 1908, every Southern state had disfranchised all its black voters through poll taxes, white primaries, and literacy and property qualification tests. The same repressive period witnessed the passage of a host of Jim Crow legislation ushering into existence an American form of apartheid. Riots, such as the disastrous racial conflagration in Atlanta during 1906 (which, incidentally, included an invasion of the DuBois home by white pogromists), erupted in several American cities during the same lamentable decade. And at least 934 blacks were lynched in the ten years preceding 1908. It was in this environment of racist terror that DuBois began, inter alia, the scientific study of his people.

Racism made neutrality in studying Afro-America an impossibility. There are those who would conclude that it therefore also made objectivity an impossibility. DuBois was clearly not among them. He did not subscribe to a positivist fetishism of data collection as an end in itself. Needless to say, he also had little use for Social Darwinism or any other racist (in later years, bourgeois) notion of human developments so common among his contemporaries in American academe, industry and government. "O I wonder what I am — I wonder what the world is —," wrote the twenty five year old DuBois in Berlin during his second semester at the Kaiser Wilhelm Friedrich University, "I wonder if life is worth the *Sturm*. I do not know — perhaps I never shall know: But this I do know: be the Truth what it may I will seek it on the pure assumption that it is worth seeking — and Heaven nor Hell, God nor Devil shall turn me from my purpose till I die."⁷

When he did die in Africa some seventy years later, he could honestly say that he had kept his vow. It was his search for the truth that ultimately compelled him to confront the lies about black people propagated by American social scientists. The confrontation took various forms. Though certainly a major one, accumulation of accurate data on black life was not the only means employed by DuBois in his battle with the myth-makers of his day. "We must agitate, complain, protest . . .," DuBois exhorted the two hundred delegates to the First Annual Meeting of the Equal Rights Association in 1900, "and above all organize these million brothers of ours into one great fist which shall never cease to pound at the gates of opportunity until they fly open."⁸ In the same year he formulated the historic resolutions of the First Pan-African Conference, while in the previous year he had assumed the Presidency of the American Negro Academy, founded in 1897. Many other organizational affiliations were to follow. To lose sight of this activist dimension of DuBois, which

Negroes (London, 1910); and William H. Ferris, *The African Abroad, or His Evolution in Western Civilization tracing his Development under Caucasian Milieu* (New York, 1968).

⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois, A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York, 1968), p. 170.

⁸ Cited in Herbert Aptheker, "W.E.B. DuBois: Story of a Half Century of Distinguished Service to Humanity," *National Guardian*, New York, Feb. 8, 1950.

remained an inextricable part of his scholarship, is surely to lose sight of DuBois altogether. It was the struggle against racism and its peculiar manifestations in America that led him to do what no other American social scientist of his time — in direct contradiction to the principles of the science of society and culture — was either willing or able to adequately do: seriously study black culture and history.

“The Negro,” wrote DuBois in the preface to his *Black Folk Then and Now* (with the notable subtitle: “An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race”), published in the first year of the Second World War, “has long been the clown of history; the football of anthropology; and the slave of industry. I am trying to show here why these attitudes can no longer be maintained.”⁹ That text was not his first attempt to throw the light of “calm Science” upon the favorite football of anthropologists, the popular clown of historians and the profitable slave of industrialists. By the outbreak of the Second World War, DuBois had already written more scientific analyses on black history, culture and realities than any other American. His, like every scientific work, was a partisan account. However, in contrast to conventional appraisals of black people, his came from “within the Veil.” Moreover, it came from a man who had himself significantly contributed to the black culture and helped shape the Afro-American realities he scrutinized and embraced. Under such conditions, it was impossible to avoid subjectivity or to equate objectivity with outsidership. For those who would see in that formula the chemistry of non-science and subscribe to a philosophy demanding an objectivity of the impossible (i.e., that social scientists think, talk and write as if they were independent of history, culture and society), the increasing value placed by social scientists and historians throughout the world on the “subjective” works by DuBois regarding the black experience should come as a highly critical commentary on their philosophical allegiances. Science, after all, demands truth, not neutrality. For DuBois, documentation of what truthfully is or was provided the indicator for what realistically is to be accomplished.

In a dialectical fashion so characteristic of his contributions to science and social progress, DuBois realized early in his academic career that one project desperately in need of accomplishment was a comprehensive and truthful account of Afro-American life and history. Shortly before receiving his first degree from Harvard in 1890, DuBois expressed the reasons for his interest in social science in a letter to Harvard’s Academic Council: “I have devoted most of my college work to Philosophy, Political Economy, and History, and wish after graduation to study in the graduate department for the degree of *social science* under *political science* with a view to the ultimate application of its principles to the social and economic advancement of the Negro people.”¹⁰ Among the first products of that study was a paper on the African slave trade which he delivered in

⁹ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Folk Then and Now, An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (New York, 1939), p. ix.

¹⁰ Letter contained in Herbert Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. DuBois, Selections, 1877-1934*, 1 (Amherst, 1973), p. 7.

1891 to the American Historical Association.¹¹ The paper eventually developed into his PhD dissertation (*The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*), which subsequently was published as the inaugural number of the Harvard Historical Series. His mentor at the University of Berlin, Gustav Schmoller,¹² encouraged the young black scholar to focus upon contemporary realities of Afro-American life. During his first semester at Berlin, DuBois composed an economic analysis of Southern agriculture ("Der Gross-und Klein-Betrieb des Ackerbaus in den Südstaaten der Vereinigten Staaten, 1840-1890") for Schmoller's seminar and two semesters later developed it into his (unsubmitted) doctoral thesis, *Die landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in den Südstaaten der Vereinigten Staaten*. In an unsuccessful attempt to secure financial support from the Slater Fund for an additional semester at Berlin, DuBois shared his academic goals with the trustees in a letter on March 10, 1893:

My plan is something like this: to get a position in one of the Negro universities, and to seek to build up there a department of history and social science, with two objects in view: a) to study scientifically the Negro question past and present with a view to its best solution. b) to collect capable young Negro students, and to see how far they are capable of furthering, by independent study and research, the best scientific work of the day.¹³

He eventually accomplished both goals, but not without frustrating setbacks and delays of original plans. Unable to pursue his goals or pay his bills through his low-paying teaching position at Wilberforce University, DuBois welcomed the opportunity afforded by an appointment as "assistant instructor" at the University of Pennsylvania in 1896, to pursue his (as well as social science's) first fieldwork in an urban black community. For over a year (mid-1896 to mid-1897) DuBois and his young wife lived in the slums of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward in order, as he described his "general aim," "to ascertain something of the geographical distribution of this race [over 40,000 blacks in Philadelphia], their occupations and daily life, their homes, their organizations and, above all, their relation to their million white fellow-citizens."¹⁴ DuBois accomplished this challenging goal

¹¹ He was, incidentally, the first Afro-American to deliver a paper before the American Historical Association. To be the first black (or American) in a variety of illustrious realms became almost commonplace for DuBois in later years: e.g., Harvard PhD; publication in Max Weber's journal, the only American to ever enjoy this status during Weber's lifetime; National Institute of Arts and Letters; World Peace Award; Lenin Peace Prize.

¹² Schmoller was also the mentor of Albion Small, one of the recognized founders of American sociology.

¹³ Letter contained in Aptheker, op. cit., 1973, p. 25.

¹⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro, A Social Study* (Philadelphia, 1899), p. 1. Save for the last item mentioned by DuBois, this was generally in line with what C.C. Harrison, a representative of the University of Pennsylvania, stated the purposes to be in a letter (August 15, 1896): "the University has entered upon this work as a part of its duty and wishes to make the investigation as thorough and exact as possible. We want to know precisely how this class of people live; what occupations they follow; from what occupations they are excluded; how many of their children go to school; and to ascertain every fact which will throw light upon this social problem; and then having this information and these accurate statistics before us, to see to what extent and in what way, proper remedies may be applied." Aptheker, op. cit., 1973, p. 40. Nearly fifty years after completing the remarkable study, DuBois interpreted the intent of his employer to have been considerably less than honorable: "My study of the Philadelphia Negro was designed by its promoters to shunt the blame of dirty politics on Negro politicians. I showed what Negroes had meant in the history of Pennsylvania." W.E.B. DuBois, "Negro History Week," *New York Compass* (New York, Feb. 11, 1951). "The ultimate evil was stupidity," DuBois stated in an unpublished assessment of this seminal work sent to the editor of *The American Scholar* in 1960, "the cure for it was knowledge based on scientific study." W.E.B. DuBois, "The Scientific Study of the American Negro," *The Papers of W.E.B. DuBois* (Amherst, October 5, 1960).

by personally interviewing over 5,000 black Philadelphians, consulting all available documents on the Seventh Ward and its black residents and by amassing a wealth of information through six "schedules" (i.e., questionnaires on the family, individual, home, street, institution and servant). Nearly a half-century after it was published, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, was assessed by Gunnar Myrdal as a model "of what a study of a Negro community should be."¹⁵ That study may as rightfully be classified anthropological as sociological. The format of the pioneering work reveals the basic structure, though not modern arrangement, of an ethnographic account of an ethnic community: History of the Negro in Philadelphia; Demography; Family and Marriage; Education and Illiteracy; Health; Organized Life of Negroes; The Negro Criminal; Pauperism and Alcoholism; Environment of the Negro; Contact of the Races; Negro Suffrage; and Negro Domestic Service. The mass of data, charts and graphs contained in the text certainly qualify it as an empirical work, but DuBois himself acknowledged the impossibility of convictionless objectivity: "Convictions on all great matters of human interest one must have to a greater or less degree, and they will enter to some degree into the most cold-blooded scientific research as a disturbing factor."¹⁶

One of those convictions firmly held and openly expressed by DuBois while engaged in his "social study" of Philadelphia Negroes is that "There does not stand today upon God's earth a race more capable in muscle, intellect, in morals, than the American Negro, if he will bend his energies in the right direction."¹⁷ Hardly another American social scientist of the time shared that conviction, and many bent their intellectual energies in substantiating its opposite.

DuBois continued his solitary scientific study of Afro-America under the auspices of Atlanta University and, for a more limited period, the US Bureau of Labor. His relationship to both institutions developed at approximately the same time. Carroll Davidson Wright, Commissioner of the US Bureau of Labor and himself author of a pioneering sociological work,¹⁸ requested DuBois in Spring 1897 to help research the effects of industrialization among Afro-Americans. While still engaged with the demands of his Philadelphia study, DuBois presented several research proposals to Wright in May, 1897; his preference was for a "preliminary study" to be conducted "in some typical village of the South" during July and August and designed to provide data on "Occupations, Wages, Ownership of Homes, Hours of labor, Economic history, Cost of Living, Organizations, and Crops." In a refrain which characterized his methodological aspirations in subsequent years, DuBois suggested that "This plan could be repeated from time to time until these preliminary studies conducted in various circumstances would give a basis of fact and experience upon

¹⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944), p. 1132.

¹⁶ DuBois, op. cit., 1899, p. 3.

¹⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Conservation of Races*, Occasional Papers, No.2, The American Negro Academy (Washington, 1897), p. 14.

¹⁸ Carroll Davidson Wright, *Outline of Practical Sociology* (New York, 1899).

which a larger investigation could be planned with a great saving in time & expense."¹⁹ Two such studies, the first based on fieldwork research by DuBois in Virginia during mid-1897, materialized from the DuBois-Wright relationship: *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia* (1898) and *The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches* (1899). Not only does DuBois' description of Negro life in Farmville have the structure and flavor of future community studies conducted by American anthropologists,²⁰ but his participant-observation methods certainly belong to the mainstream of American ethnographic classics: "The investigator spent the months of July and August in the town; he lived with the colored people, joined in their social life, and visited their homes."²¹ In the same year, DuBois published a seminal paper ("The Study of the Negro Problems") in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. In it, he refers to the "remaining traces" among Afro-Americans of "African tribal life"²² — some fifty years before Melville Herskovits' *Myth of the Negro Past*; he upbraids a researcher for generalizing about the physical condition of eight million Afro-Americans based upon data collected from "the measurement of fifteen black boys in a New York reformatory" — over a half-century before *The Mark of Oppression* by Abram Kardiner, a cultural anthropologist, and Lionel Ovessey, a psychiatrist, who aspired to describe "the personality of the American Negro" through interviews with twenty five Afro-Americans;²³ and finally he calls for comprehensive anthropometrical studies of black Americans — several years before Franz Boas and other American anthropologists made similar pleas:

The third division of study is anthropological measurement, and it includes a scientific study of the Negro body. The most obvious peculiarity of the Negro — a peculiarity which is a large element in many of the problems affecting him — is his physical unlikeness to the people with whom he has been brought into contact. This difference is so striking that it has become the basis of a mass of theory, assumption and suggestion which is deep-rooted and yet rests on the flimsiest basis of scientific fact. That there are differences between the white and black races is certain, but just what those differences are is known to none with an approach to accuracy. Yet here in America is the most remarkable opportunity ever offered of studying these differences, of noting influences of climate and physical environment, and particularly of studying the effect of amalgamating two of the most diverse races in the world — another subject which rests under a cloud of ignorance.²⁴

It is important to note that DuBois, evidently operating upon the conception of anthropology as "Anthropologie" (i.e., physical anthropology and classified to this day at German universities under the biological

¹⁹ Letter contained in Aptheker, op. cit., 1973, p. 43.

²⁰ E.g., James West, *Plainville USA* (New York, 1944).

²¹ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia" in Dan Green and Edwin Driver, eds., *DuBois on Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago, 1978), p. 169.

²² W.E.B. DuBois, "The Study of Negro Problems" in Green and Driver, op. cit., 1978 (Orig. 1898), p. 78.

²³ In this refrain, it is also interesting to note that DuBois referred to homo sapiens as a "featherless biped" in his model community study in 1899, well over a half century before the publication of *The Naked Ape* (New York, 1967) by Desmond Morris; see DuBois, op. cit., 1899; p. 385.

²⁴ DuBois, op. cit., 1978 (Orig. 1898), p. 83.

sciences), clearly delineated four approaches to "the study of the Negro as a social group": (1) historical study; (2) statistical investigation; (3) anthropological measurement; and (4) sociological interpretation. The fact that these social scientific domains — now departmentally separated at most United States universities — constituted a single unit for DuBois reflects the degree to which the young scholar valued and used a cross-disciplinary approach in his work. He was an accomplished historian, sociologist, statistician and anthropologist at a time when these disciplines were in their infancy in the United States. However, it was not until the biologization of American anthropology retreated — largely under the impact of the Boasians — that DuBois began referring to himself as an anthropologist. Though handled differently than his call in 1898 for a "systematic study" of the "growth and evolution of society," particularly of "the group of social phenomena arising from the presence in this land of eight million persons of African descent,"²⁵ would certainly today fall largely into the hands of anthropologists. In fact, his unsuccessful effort in 1897 to form a "Sociological Society" — eight years, incidentally, before the American Sociological Society emerged from the American Economic Association — had a strong anthropological bent since its central focus was to be an analysis of a single cultural grouping, namely Afro-America. Surely his grand plan, publicly formulated in 1903, to study American blacks over a hundred-year period would have led to an early dissolution of barriers between American anthropology and Afro-America. According to his research proposal, data on various dimensions of black life (e.g., population distribution, health, socialization, cultural patterns of moral behavior, education, religion, crime, government, literature and art) would be collected and published in "ten-year cycles," with a view of basing domestic policy upon accurate information about American blacks and their development. Funds for the plan could not be secured beyond a single ten-year cycle. Commenting on misguided research priorities in 1904, certainly not a peculiarity of his times alone, an outraged DuBois indirectly took American anthropology and its funding organizations to task:

If the Negroes were still lost in the forests of central Africa we could have a government commission to go and measure their heads, but with 10 million of them here under your noses I have in the past besought the Universities almost in vain to spend a single cent in a rational study of their characteristics and conditions. We can go to the South Sea Islands half way around the world and beat and shoot a weak people longing for freedom into the slavery of American color prejudice at the cost of hundreds of millions, and yet at Atlanta University we beg annually and beg in vain for the paltry sum of \$500 simply to aid us in replacing gross and vindictive ignorance of race conditions with enlightening knowledge and systemic observation. There is no question before the scientific world in regard to which there is more guess work and wild theorizing than in regard to causes and characteristics of the diverse human species. And yet here in America we have not only the opportunity to observe and measure nearly all the world's races in

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

juxta-position, but more than that to watch a long and intricate process of amalgamation carried on hundreds of years and resulting in millions of men of mixed blood. And yet because the subject of amalgamation with black races is a sore point with us, we have hitherto utterly neglected and thrown away every opportunity to study and know this vast mulatto population and have deliberately and doggedly based our statements and conclusions concerning this class upon pure fiction or unvarnished lies.²⁶

The lack of knowledge on the plethora of stereotypes about and massive illiteracy of black people in the United States disturbed DuBois for more than mere pedagogical reasons. Mass ignorance has far-reaching societal ramifications. "Either the United States will destroy ignorance," declared DuBois in the 1906 resolutions of the Niagara Movement, a lineal ancestor of the N.A.A.C.P., "or ignorance will destroy the United States."²⁷ It was the ignorance about Afro-American realities which he targeted for destruction with the Atlanta University studies:

Studies of this kind do not naturally appeal to the general public, but rather to the interested few and to students. Nevertheless there ought to be growing in this land a general conviction that a careful study of the condition and needs of the Negro population — a study conducted with scientific calm and accuracy, and removed so far as possible from prejudice or partisan bias — that such a study is necessary and worthy of liberal support. The twelfth census has, let us hope, set at rest silly predictions of the dying out of the Negro in any reasonably near future. The nine million Negroes here in the land, increasing steadily at the rate of over 150,000 a year are destined to be part and parcel of the Nation for many a day if not forever. We must no longer guess at their condition, we must know it. We must not experiment blindly and wildly, trusting to our proverbial good luck, but like rational, civilized, philanthropic men, spend time and money in finding what can be done before we attempt to do it. Americans must learn that in social reform as well as in other rational endeavors, wish and prejudice must be sternly guided by knowledge, else it is bound to blunder, if not to fail.²⁸

DuBois was appointed professor of economics and history at Atlanta University as well as director of the Sociological Laboratory and the Atlanta University Conferences in 1897. Two reports ("Morality Among Negroes in Cities" and "Social and Physical Conditions of Negroes in Cities," published in 1896 and 1897, respectively) had appeared prior to his arrival and a few were published after he relinquished his editorship in 1914. Every other number (no.3-no.18)²⁹ carried the indelible mark of DuBois. One characteristic feature of that mark, particularly after he wished "to bring the whole subject matter into a better integrated

²⁶ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Atlanta Conferences" in Green and Driver, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

²⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *An ABC of Color* (New York, 1963), p. 33.

²⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro Common School*, Atlanta University Publication No. 6 (Atlanta, 1901), p. 1.

²⁹ The Atlanta University Conference Reports edited by DuBois included: *Some Efforts of Negroes for Social Betterment* (1898); *The Negro in Business* (1899); *The College-Bred Negro* (1900); *The Negro Common School* (1901); *The Negro Artisan* (1902); *The Negro Church* (1903); *Some Notes on Negro Crime, Particularly in Georgia* (1904); *A Select Bibliography of the American Negro* (1905); *Health and Physique of the Negro American* (1906); *Economic Cooperation among Negro Americans* (1907); *The Negro American Family* (1908); *Efforts for Social Betterment among Negro Americans* (1909); *The College-Bred Negro American* (1910); *The Common School and the Negro American* (1911); *The Negro American Artisan* (1912); and *Morals and Manners among Negro Americans* (1914).

whole,³⁰ was information on Africa. Accordingly, he devoted seven pages of his 1907 report (*Economic Co-operation Among Negro Americans*) to "traces in Africa," quoting liberally from the works of Ratzel, Schneider, Buecher and Hayford; the same report also contained a section, albeit less detailed than the African one, on the West Indies. Even more extensive on African cultural patterns were the published results of the thirteenth Annual Atlanta University Conference, *The Negro American Family*; in fact, that report contained several case studies of black families — a technique used by several future American anthropologists (e.g., Oscar Lewis) in their analyses of financially distressed families. Though many of his earliest descriptions of African cultures relied heavily upon descriptions provided by others, DuBois developed himself into an Africanist well before American anthropology had produced its first. In the last Atlanta University Report (*Morals and Manners among Negro Americans*) he edited, DuBois provided a capsule appraisal of Africa which was to be a harbinger of things to come from his pen:

Africa is distinctly the land of the Mother. In subtle and mysterious ways, despite her curious history, her slavery, polygamy and toil, the spell of the African Mother pervades her land. Isis, the Mother, is still titular goddess in that, if not in name, of the dark continent. This does not seem to be solely a survival of the historic matriarchate thru which all nations pass. It appears to be more than this; as if the black race in passing down the steps of human culture gave the world not only the Iron Age, the cultivation of the soil and the domestication of animals but also in peculiar emphasis the Mother-idea.³¹

His first book on Africa, *The Negro*, was published in 1915 — a turning point in the scientific study of black people. That study had reached, by 1915, a higher stage of development as well as a clearer delineation of intellectual forces. For it was in this first year of the First World War — which DuBois argued was caused by white supremacist repression of non-white peoples³² — that Carter Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. It was also in 1915 that Gobineau's vindication for eternal enslavement of nonwhites (*The Inequality of Human Races*) was first published in English and that D.W. Griffith produced his technically accomplished but ideologically depraved *Birth of a Nation*. The scientific study of and the antiscientific reaction against black people had come of age. Never again would the scientific debate return to the Neanderthal concerns and intellectual atavisms of phrenology, anthroposociology, Lamarckianism and other racist doctrines of nineteenth century American "ethnology." Although racism in American anthropology and other sciences was not immediately eradicated by the scientific studies of blacks initiated by DuBois, it was served irrevocable notice that its days within scientific circles, and indeed society altogether, were numbered.

³⁰ DuBois, op. cit., in Green and Driver, op. cit., p. 47.

³¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *Morals and Manners among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, 1914); p. 67; it was fashionable at the time to use *that* and *thru* for *thought* and *through*, respectively.

³² W.E.B. DuBois, "The African Roots of War," *Atlantic Monthly*, 115 (May 1915). 707-14.

W.E.B. DuBois was certainly no armchair scholar. The multifaceted contributions his incisive scholarship made to the development of American social sciences during their infancy were not intended merely to provide just another interpretation of realities faced by Afro-Americans at the turn of the century. They were intended to change those realities. Similarly, the systematic analyses of Afro-American culture he provided during the two decades following his emergence as Harvard's first black Ph.D. and the institutionalized consolidation of Jim Crowism in America, were designed to do more than simply counter prevailing racist doctrines. They were intended to obliterate them. For W.E.B. DuBois was a black American scholar dedicated to the finest principles of scholarship of his times but confronted by a thoroughly racist society as well as an infantile and blackless science of that society. This historic confrontation left both the society and its scientific study fundamentally and irrevocably changed. Indeed it is the central thesis of this essay that the heroic efforts of W.E.B. DuBois as a scholar from 1894 until 1915 provided social science with its first acceptable and comprehensive analysis of Afro-American culture. Consequently, DuBois should be viewed not only as the foremost pioneer of Black Studies, but also as a founder of American social sciences in general.

Two conditions continue to obstruct his full recognition as such. Due to persistent discipline territorialism among American social sciences, it is difficult to categorize accurately and properly any profound (i.e., cross-disciplinary) scholar, such as DuBois, whose vision and scholarship knew no provincial limits. However, another persistent condition of American society is primarily responsible for denying DuBois his rightful place among the fathers of American sociology and anthropology. DuBois was a black man and he became a Marxist scholar. Neither black scholars nor Marxist ones ever found themselves fully accepted or recognized in the confines of American social sciences, let alone American society, during the duration of DuBois' long and fruitful life. In fact, forces antagonistic to Marxism and blacks eventually drove DuBois from the United States altogether. It is, however, certain that as the social sciences initiated in part by DuBois continue to develop and as the racism he so diligently combatted continues to recede, that this courageous scholar will be recognized universally because of his pioneering studies on black America as an American founder of the scientific study of society and culture. That recognition, in effect given DuBois by none other than Max Weber nearly eighty years ago, is long overdue on this side of the Atlantic.
