



WHY BLACK PEOPLE TEND TO SHOUT! AN EARNEST ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE SOCIOLOGICAL NEGATION OF THE ATLANTA SOCIOLOGICAL LABORATORY DESPITE ITS POSSIBLE UNPLEASANTNESS

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The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1895–1924, comprised the first American school of sociology (Wright 2002). Despite this fact, the sociological accomplishments of this group of scholars are relatively absent from the existing sociological literature. Data collected for this investigation indicate that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory has been rendered sociologically invisible because of race prejudice, the perception that the school's findings were ungeneralizable, that their methods of research unsophisticated and of low quality, and that they omitted theory from their analyses. The findings of this investigation indicate that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory utilized a sophisticated methodology to produce generalizable findings that included theory despite the race prejudice that existed during that period in American history.

[T]here are social problems before us demanding careful study, questions awaiting satisfactory answers. We must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is, not lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness. (Du Bois [1899a] 1967:3)

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In 1895, Atlanta University initiated a series of urban sociological research investigations into the social, economic, and physical condition of African Americans that resulted in the establishment of the first American school of sociology—the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, the moniker bestowed upon scholars engaged in urban sociological study at Atlanta University between 1895–1924.¹ During the almost three decade period of yearly investigations, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory contributed to the relatively young discipline of sociology, albeit unknown or unrecognized by their contemporaries, through advances in research methodology and theory construction (Wright 2000, 2002). Specifically, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was one of the first American research institutions to regularly practice method triangulation, address the benefits and limitations of utilizing outsider/insider researchers, and to promote the use of more than one theory to explain social events (Wright 2000, 2002). Despite its contributions to the academic community under the guidance and leadership of W. E. B. Du Bois, the accomplishments of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory remain virtually invisible within the discipline of sociology (Wright 2000, 2002). Some scholars have highlighted/critiqued the sociological/social scientific contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory (Gabbidon 1999; Rudwick 1957; Turley 1994; and Wright 2000, 2002). Unfortunately, the majority of references to Atlanta University sociology come as addendums to inquiries focused on the life or sociological contributions of Du Bois (Wright 2000). If one illuminates the scholarship of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory he or she will discover one of the first sociological studies on the American family, scientific repudiation of commonly believed theories of the biological inferiority of Negroes, data documenting illegal criminal activities against African Americans by the court system (for example, the convict lease system and inequality in the length of sentences between Blacks and Whites), and the

¹Wright (2002) argues that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1895–1924, not the Chicago School of Sociology, circa 1913–1935, comprised the first American school of sociology. This argument is made using Martin Bulmer's model of a school and applying it to the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.

most current data on race in America during the period (Wright 2000). The rediscovery and presentation of the aforementioned accomplishments of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are timely and worthy endeavors, but are beyond the scope of this investigation. The objective of the present inquiry is to ascertain why the first American school of sociology, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, has remained sociologically invisible (negated) for well over one hundred years. A sociology of knowledge theoretical perspective is employed to accomplish the stated objective.

Beyond Falsifications and Lies

Admittedly, most attempts to understand events of the past are susceptible to the subjective analysis of the researcher in question. Understanding this possibility, the sociology of knowledge theoretical perspective of Karl Mannheim (1968) is employed. This perspective is utilized because it "does not refer only to specific assertions which may be regarded as concealment, falsifications, or lies," (p. 238) but "examines [these issues] on structural, [cultural, and/or ideological] level[s], which it views as not being the same for all men, but rather as allowing the same subject to take on different forms and aspects in the course of social development" (p. 238). Utilization of this perspective enables the author to maneuver through disagreements that may arise over minute social facts in favor of scientific analyses of social structures that could lead critics of Atlanta University to analyze the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in their own, possibly biased, manner. Thus, the sociology of knowledge perspective, although making allowances for the discussion of various debatable social facts, provides a foundation upon which one can understand how data may be viewed differently in light of one's specific social location (i.e., race, class, gender, sexual preference).

Given that it is possible to view data differently in light of one's social location, the author proposes that racism by some early White sociologists was the major cause of the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. The fact that the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory may have been marginalized because

White sociologists, in an era of shameless and penetrating racism in America, chose not to recognize them, signifies the crux of this investigation and the rationale for the utilization of the sociology of knowledge perspective. The possibility that race may have skewed criticisms of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory should come as no surprise given the climate that existed between Whites and Blacks during the period, 1896–1924. Thus, with racism as a motivating factor, the author proposes that the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory were subjectively viewed by its contemporaries in a manner that ultimately caused it to fade into the realm of other scholars (e.g., women sociologists, gay/lesbian sociologists, and Third World sociologists) who are/were seldom, if ever, discussed because they were not accepted by their White, male contemporaries. Therefore, if one views the sociology of knowledge theoretical perspective as a blueprint for this inquiry, they must do so while looking through the lens of an American society in which the same subject took different forms in light of one's particular *racial* social location during the period 1896–1924. The viewing of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in this manner can possibly help explain how racism contributed to the more than 100-year-long sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.

The primary objective of this inquiry is to offer various explanations for the sociological negation of the first American school of sociology, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1896–1924. It is proposed that racism was the primary cause of the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Additionally, data presented in this investigation repudiate the proposal that the research conducted by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was mired in academic obscurity, that the findings were ungeneralizable, that the methods of research were unsophisticated and of low quality, and that there was an omission of theory. Instead, it is proposed that race prejudice caused the academic invisibility of Atlanta University sociology and led to overly critical analyses of its findings, methods of research, and theory constructions. Below, each of the aforementioned causes of the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are addressed.

Racism

When W. E. B. Du Bois (1903a) proposed “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (p. xi), it is reasonable to suggest that he believed the “*race problem*” would be an obstacle for Blacks and Whites, regardless of educational attainment, social status, and class position. Commenting on the possibility that some White academics and other learned individuals may have ignored the contributions of African American scholars because of their race and subject matter, Du Bois (1904a) said they “fail[ed] to recognize the true significance of an attempt to study systematically the greatest social problem that [had] ever faced a great modern nation” (p. 59). Du Bois’ criticism of many in the academic community stemmed, possibly, from their inability to objectively critique the scholarship of African Americans without the influence of race prejudice. Du Bois proposed that many White scholars failed to recognize the true significance of the Atlanta University studies because

So far as the American world of science and letters was concerned, we never “belonged”; we remained unrecognized in learned societies and academic groups. We rated merely as Negroes studying Negroes, and after all, what had Negroes to do with America or science? (Du Bois 1968:228)

Du Bois believed that racism by many White academics contributed to the minimal levels of attention garnered by African American scholars, and possibly, to the overly critical critiques of the scholarship when recognized. The sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is then validated when the dominant group’s ideology only enables them to view the Other as a subordinate and inferior people who conduct, supposedly, unscientific research. The result of such a perspective is often the inaccurate and ethnocentrically based assumption that the issues affecting *our* group and *our* particular way of conceptualizing the world are more accurate and worthy of recognition and high acclaim than others. Du Bois (1904a), articulating the racially based sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, proposed:

[I]f 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 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. (p. 55)

This particular ideology, according to Barbara Peters (1991), has existed in the discipline of sociology since “the founding of the first academic department at the University of Chicago ... [S]ociology has had a history of silencing voices that were different from the dominant White, male, bourgeois, and ‘moral’ voices of the founding ‘fathers’” (pp. 248–49). When viewed in this manner, the sociological negation of African American and female scholars by the White, male, and bourgeois dominated discipline of sociology may be viewed as an attempt to preserve the sociological accomplishments of scholars who erected the discipline upon its foundation of racial and gender discrimination and prejudice. Elliott Rudwick supports this position when he comments on the exclusion of Du Bois from mainstream sociological acceptance and the *American Journal of Sociology’s* exclusion of scientific studies by Du Bois in favor of racist and often unscientific articles. Rudwick (1974) said:

Despite the depth of Du Bois’s commitment to sociology, he was in the main ignored by the elite in the profession. It is interesting that Albion W. Small, a founder of America’s first department of sociology in 1892, of the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1895, and of the American Sociological Society a decade later, had, like Du Bois, been trained in Germany by Schmoller (Barnes 1948, pp. 766–92). In spite of this similarity in professional background and although the *American Journal of Sociology* ... devoted many pages to social welfare problems, Small clearly considered Du Bois’s work of minor importance [because of his relative omission of Du Bois’ works at Atlanta University]. (p. 47)

Rudwick continues his critique of the *American Journal of Sociology* by asserting that

[B]ooks by known racists were reviewed and often warmly praised. In 1906, Thomas Nelson Page's *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* was glowingly lauded by Charles Ellwood, who had been Small's graduate student (*American Journal of Sociology* 11[1905–6:698–99]; Barnes 1948, pp. 853–55). In another review, Ellwood gratuitously commented, "it is only through the full recognition that the average Negro is still a savage child of nature that the North and South can be brought to unite in work to uplift the race." (p. 47)

Charles Lemert (1994) provides additional support for the hypothesis that Atlanta University and Du Bois were sociologically negated because of race prejudice. Lemert avows that "a Du Boisian answer [for his own sociological negation] might just as well be that white sociology does not see clearly beyond the veil [or a persons physical characteristics"] (p. 387). Lemert extends his analysis when he asks, "How can it be that an academic discipline—one noted for its long and serious intellectual (and political) commitment to the race question, one aggressively liberal as to racial inclusiveness—allows the exclusion of Du Bois and his great work?" (p. 387). Lemert answers:

It is easy to conclude that what is at work in canonical exclusions are the indirect but powerful requirements of the dominant culture. Here Du Bois' theory of the veil again suggests that such a dominant culture, not excluding sociology, might operate through the occluded vision of those on the dominant side. It is a widely discussed, and plausible, position that Euroamerican culture was founded upon, and still today proudly entails, a structured inability to see those in the racially Other position. (p. 387)

Ultimately, Lemert suggests that some White American sociologists were unwilling to award Atlanta University and W. E. B. Du Bois "classic" status and mainstream recognition because of race prejudice. Lemert said:

There should be no particular reason to believe that sociology, however excellent its values or pure its motives, has escaped the powerful influence of Western culture. This, then, is the likely more sufficient explanation for the exclusion of Du Bois, and *Souls*, from the sociological cannon. He, and others in his position, having been veiled, were not clearly visible. (p. 388)

Racism is the first, but not the only, component of the machine that propelled the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and W. E. B. Du Bois.

Theory of Academic Obscurity

Some *detractors* of the racism theory of the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory may suggest that academic obscurity, not a racist ideology, is a more compelling and substantive explanation. Academic obscurity is operationalized as the inability of Atlanta University to promote and circulate its sociological scholarship to the national and international academic community. This argument is rendered invalid after examining the papers of W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Conference publications, 1896–1917, and discovering that professors and graduate students from various colleges and universities across the United States requested and received copies of specific Atlanta University Conference publications. Data from the Fourth Atlanta University Conference publication (Du Bois 1899b) indicate that copies of previous conference reports were sent to graduate and undergraduate students at Harvard University (Massachusetts), The Catholic University (Washington, DC), Wellesley College (Massachusetts), Wooster University (Ohio), University of Texas, and to professors at various African-American and predominately White colleges and universities. If graduate and undergraduate students at these particular schools utilized Atlanta University data, is it not reasonable to suggest that their mentors knew of the scholarship taking place at Atlanta University? In addition to the mailing of reports to students and various faculty, conference publications were sent to national organizations and ordinary citizens like the American Missionary Association, *The New Yorkff Independent*, *McClure's Magazine*, the Northern Inter-Collegiate Oratorical League, Carroll D. Wright (United States Bureau of

Labor), Professor Katharine Coman (Wellesley College), Dr. David J. Fuller (Brooklyn, New York), and Miss Jane Porter Scott (Social Settlements Association). In addition to the mailing of reports to graduate students, undergraduate students, ordinary citizens, and national organizations, the Seventh Atlanta University Conference Publication (1902) indicates that "during the past few years lectures [focusing on the sociological investigations initiated at Atlanta University] have been given at the Unitarian Club of New York, American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, and the American Negro Academy" (Du Bois 1902:4). The Eighteenth Atlanta University Conference Publication (1913) reports that "the published results of these studies are used in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Very few books on the Negro problem, or any phase of it, have been published in the last decade which have not acknowledged their indebtedness to our work" (Du Bois and Dill 1913:6). Last, that Du Bois received correspondence from various prominent academics and political figures indicate that Atlanta University's scholarship was not hidden in academic obscurity. Du Bois (1968) said:

I had heartening letters from persons of eminence and character. William James wrote in 1907: "I have just looked through the last installment of your studies on the American Negro. I wish the portraits might have been better printed. But it is splendid scientific work." Frank Taussig of Harvard wrote the same year: "In my judgement no better work is being done in the country, and no better opportunity is afforded for financial support on the part of those who wish to further the understanding of the Negro problem." (p. 218)

In addition to being recognized by noted scholars such as James and Taussig, the Atlanta University studies were recognized by *the* Negro leader of the period. Du Bois said:

Booker Washington, who spoke at our conference on the Negro artisan in 1911, said: "The whole country should be grateful to this institution for the painstaking and systematic manner in which it has developed from year to year a series of

facts which are proving most vital and helpful to the interests of our nation." (p. 218)

Other noted sociologists/social scientists also commented on the Atlanta University studies. According to Du Bois:

Professor E. R. A. Seligman wrote: "I take great pleasure in testifying to my very high appreciation of the studies on the Negro problem which you have been editing for the past few years. They are essentially scholarly and that means sober and temperate, and they are covering a field which is almost untilled and which is not apt to be cultivated by others." Jane Addams attended our conference in 1908 and commended our work. (p. 218)

The data presented to this juncture repudiate the assertion that the sociological accomplishments of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory were not recognized by many White sociologists because they were hidden in academic obscurity. If graduate students, undergraduates, various professors at predominately Black and White institutions utilized Atlanta University data, and ordinary citizens requested and received conference reports and were aware of the Atlanta University Conference publications, how, then, could the gatekeepers of sociological knowledge not have been aware of this body of systematic and scientifically collected scholarship? The data indicate that many White sociologists were aware of the Atlanta University studies but did not deem them scientifically acceptable. Possibly, race prejudice compelled White sociologists to be overly critical in their critiques that suggested the annual investigations lacked generalizability, utilized unsophisticated and low quality methods, and omitted theory.

Alleged Ungeneralizable Findings

A third explanation for the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is the belief that the findings of the annual studies lacked generalizability (Rudwick 1957). From its inception, the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems was conceptualized to generalize, when applicable, to the entire United States population and not serve, solely, as a series of monographs for the singular

benefit of African Americans. In his keynote address at the First Atlanta University Conference in 1896, President Horace Bumstead clearly articulated this objective.

The general subject of this and succeeding conferences—the study of Negro city life—and the 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 . . . The improvement of Negro life anywhere will be a blessing to the life of the nation as a whole, regardless of race or color. (Chase 1896:6–7)

Du Bois (1968), director of sixteen Atlanta University studies, reemphasized this objective some years later when he stated that the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems “[began] with a definite, circumscribed group, but [would eventually] end with the human race” (p. 217). Both President Bumstead and Du Bois believed the intensive investigation of urban African American life could produce data that were beneficial to the nation, regardless of race.

That the Atlanta University studies focused primarily on urban African Americans enabled Elliott Rudwick (1957) to conclude that its findings were limited and not applicable to the general African American or White American population. 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 were generalizable to both groups. For example, the 1904 Atlanta University study, *Some Notes on Negro Crime Particularly in Georgia*, was generalizable to African Americans because it produced data documenting the inequality that many African Americans experienced once entered into the American criminal justice system. Specifically, Atlanta University researchers discovered inequities in the length of sentences between Blacks and Whites, exposed the convict lease system, and uncovered unfair methods of punishment of African Americans as ordered by the state courts—many of which were com-

mon practice in various southern states. The 1906 Atlanta University study, *The Health and Physique of the Negro American*, was generalizable to the African American population because it helped repudiate theories of Negro biological inferiority through experiments achieved with the assistance of 1,000 Hampton University students. The 1911 Atlanta University study, *The Common School and the Negro American*, was generalizable because it catapulted the disfranchisement activities of the Jim Crow American South from the darkness of racial gossip to the light of scientific fact. Data from this particular investigation document barriers that many African Americans faced when attempting to exercise their right to vote (e.g., illiteracy test, property ownership, poll tax, reputation clause, understanding clause, etc.).

The generalization of Atlanta University's findings could have extended beyond African Americans since researchers often uncovered social problems that held social significance in White communities as well. For example, the 1897 Atlanta University study, *Social and Physical Condition of Negroes in Cities*, highlights the negative impact of poor sanitation practices by urban residents. The findings, or resolutions, of this conference promoted the utilization of clean city habits by all new city residents regardless of race and ethnicity. The promotion of this agenda, in theory, could have resulted in *cleaner* urban environments amidst the sprawling and growing American cities of the early 1900's. The 1909 Atlanta University study, *Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans*, includes data indicating the need for nurseries and kindergartens to care for the children of working parents in the burgeoning American cities. These data could have been utilized, proactively, by sociologists, social workers, and/or social scientists as a means by which to prepare for the impending increase of White American women into the labor force some thirty years later. Last, Atlanta University studies released in 1901, *The Negro Common School*, and 1911, *The Common School and the Negro American*, include data documenting vast pay inequality between Black and White teachers in all regions of the United States. These data could have been utilized to argue, theoretically, for pay equity or as evidence of racial inequality. Summarily, the data produced by Atlanta University were generalizable to African Americans and could have been generalized to White

Americans had the scholarship of Atlanta University scholars not been sociologically negated.

Alleged Unsophisticated and Low Quality Methods of Research

A fourth explanation for the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory concerns the *supposed* unsophisticated and low quality methods of research used by Atlanta University scholars (Rudwick 1957). Admittedly, early Atlanta University studies, specifically the first two studies directed by George G. Bradford, lacked scientific depth and a measure of methodological sophistication. Nevertheless, the methods of research were not totally unsophisticated because method triangulation was utilized. In addition to utilizing method triangulation, Atlanta University social scientists, demonstrating a further sophistication in methodology, readily acknowledged the limitations of their annual investigations.

Atlanta University president Horace Bumstead readily admitted the scientific limitations of the early studies in an address at the First Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems. President Bumstead said:

It was not expected that much in the line of scientific reports based upon accurate data could be presented at this first conference, but it was believed that much information could be gathered from the ordinary experiences and observations of graduates and others, and that the subject could be considered in such a manner as to arouse interest and enthusiasm, and so pave the way for collecting and digesting extensive and accurate data. Such it is believed, has been the result of the conference held. (Chase 1896:5)

In addition to President Bumstead's acknowledgment of the scientific limitations of the first two conferences, the records of the Atlanta University Conference publications indicate a further methodological sophistication through the public disclosing of the limitations of specific studies. For example, Atlanta University Conference Publication number three, *Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Betterment*, indicates that the data collected for this study "include many of the more important enterprises, but not all ... of them.

It gives a rough, incomplete and yet fairly characteristic picture of what the freedmen's sons are doing to better their social condition" (Du Bois 1898:42). Atlanta University researchers again acknowledge, in Atlanta University Conference Publication number nine, *Some Notes on Negro Crime Particularly in Georgia*, that "These data are less complete than in the case of most of our previous studies and few conclusions can be drawn until further facts and figures are available. The forthcoming government report on crime will undoubtedly be of great aid in further study" (Du Bois 1904b:v). Last, citing the limitations of the first scientific study of the African American family, Atlanta University Conference Publication number thirteen, *The Negro American Family*, Atlanta University researchers propose that the collected data:

Do not, however, represent properly the proportion of different types among the masses of Negroes. Most of the families studied belong to the upper half of the Black population. Finally, to repeat, this study is but a sketch with no pretense toward attempting to exhaust a fruitful subject. The main cause of its limitation is lack of material. (Du Bois 1908:9–10)

With the hiring of Du Bois in 1896, the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems began utilizing *sophisticated* method triangulation to produce quality data. Although, the records of the Atlanta University Conference Publications indicate that method triangulation (e.g., census data, community studies, and interviews) was used in the first two Atlanta University investigations, Du Bois legitimated the *scientific* promise of the annual studies by expanding the methodology to include complete member participant observation (Adler and Adler 1987), direct correspondence with subjects and organizations, questionnaires, blanks, interviews, schedules, and the examination of the relevant existing literature (Wright 2000). Hence, Atlanta University Conference Publication numbers 3–18² symbolize Du Bois' systematic and scientific brand of sociological inquiry. For example, the methods of research utilized for the 1899 Atlanta University study, *The Negro In Business*, included

² Atlanta University published twenty conference reports between 1896–1917.

questionnaires and census information that resulted in data that were obtained from 1,906 African American businessmen representing thirty states. The 1900 Atlanta University study, *The College-Bred Negro*, utilized data that were obtained through the analysis of admissions data of an unspecified number of colleges and universities, direct correspondence with twelve college and university presidents, a response from the United States Commissioner on Education, and questionnaires received from 1,312 African-American college graduates. When the same topic was addressed at the annual conference ten years later, *The College-Bred Negro American* (1910), the methods of research included the examination of thirty-two catalogues from African-American colleges and universities, questionnaires from the presidents of 35 predominately white colleges/universities, and questionnaires received from 800 African-American college graduates. Data for the 1902 Atlanta University study, *The Negro Artisan*, were obtained through questionnaires received from over 500 artisans and over 200 businesses employing artisans in 32 states, reports from "upstanding citizens" representing 32 states, an unspecified number of correspondence with various educational institutions, and a collaborative project between Atlanta University and a Chattanooga newspaper to replicate a study conducted a few years prior by the Tennessee company. Thus, the assertion that the methods of research utilized by Atlanta University researchers were unsophisticated and of low-quality is negated.

That the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory recognized the benefit of utilizing primarily African American researchers demonstrates a third measure of its methodological sophistication. Rudwick (1957) proposes that the methodology of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was unsophisticated and of low quality, partly, because some of the data were collected by "untrained" graduates and students of Atlanta University. The use of untrained graduates and students of Atlanta University, graduates and students from historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) and predominately White institutions, and ordinary citizens and scholars at predominately White institutions who supported the improvement of the social condition of African Americans was championed and promoted by President Bumstead. In effect,

President Bumstead desired assistance from all United States citizens interested in helping to understand and improve the condition of Negroes in America. Although the Atlanta University studies included non-Atlanta University graduates and students, and non-African Americans, President Bumstead believed African Americans, specifically graduates and students of Atlanta University, should lead the annual investigations. President Bumstead expressed this preference because:

Nearly all of the graduates of Atlanta University are living and working in the cities and larger towns of the South. This fact is very suggestive, for the problems of Negro city life must be settled largely by Negroes themselves, and the body of our alumni are in some respects specifically fitted for this task. (Chase 1896:6)

President Bumstead further outlines the qualities that facilitate the use of Atlanta University graduates and students as researchers.

Not only are they familiar with the conditions of life in cities, but they have acquired, in their training in this institution, some degree of accurate observation and careful reflection, some acquaintance with high standards of living, some familiarity with measures of reform and of social and economic improvement that are indispensable for dealing with such matters. (p. 6)

President Bumstead, arguably, recognized the significance of the studies that were led by African American faculty, students, and graduates of Atlanta University and asserted:

Herein is the great opportunity of Atlanta University and its alumni for the investigation of city problems which we inaugurate this evening. (p. 6)

The use of non-academically trained college graduates and students as researchers should not abrogate the collected data or minimize the significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. The Atlanta University studies were conducted every year for nearly three decades. The repeated use of Atlanta University and other graduates and students enabled

the volunteer/untrained researchers the opportunity to become proficient researchers through on-the-job-training. Du Bois noted that "by calling on the same persons [as researchers] year after year, a body of experienced correspondents had been gradually formed, numbering ... about fifty" (1899b). The records of the First Atlanta University Publication, *Mortality Among Negroes In Cities*, propose an additional benefit of utilizing Atlanta University graduates and students as researchers:

All the data gathered by this body of trained colored leaders, are believed to be, perhaps, more than usually accurate because of the investigators' knowledge of the character, habits, and prejudices of the people, and because of the fact that they were not hindered by the suspicions which confront the white investigator, and which seriously affect the accuracy of the answers to his questions. (Chase 1897:5)

Atlanta University scholars suggest that insider researchers were possibly less prone to misconstrue some of the observed activities of African American life than their White counterparts. Although Atlanta University utilized data collected by scientifically untrained, but college educated African Americans, the quality of the findings was high. Du Bois ([1903b] 1978) proclaims that:

The class of '99 furnished local studies, which, after some rearrangement, were published in No. 22 of the Bulletin of the United States department of labor; the work of another class was used in a series of articles on the housing of the Negro in the *Southern Workman*, and a great deal of the work of other classes has been used in the reports of the Atlanta Conferences. (p. 63)

That Rudwick makes an argument against the methodology of Atlanta University without comparing/contrasting it to those used by its contemporaries at the University of Chicago is mysterious. Possibly, Rudwick was aware that, "For the most part within [the] Chicago [School] ... limited attention seems to have been given to methodology" (Hammersley 1989:86). Martyn Hammersley (1989), discussing the neglect of methodological issues by the Chicago School asserts, "What is also surprising about the Chicago research is the

relative absence of methodological discussion about the use of different kinds of data and the problems of interpreting them. Many types of data are presented in the same form as 'documents'" (p. 83). Hammersley (1989), further discussing the methodological flaws of the Chicago School, said:

It is ironic, then, that in general the Chicagoans provide little information about how their research was carried out or about the data used. Zorbaugh gives virtually no information. Anderson simply lists documents, giving a brief description of each. Cressey wrote an informative article about his research methods, but it was not published at the time. (p. 84)

Platt (1987) bolsters Hammersley's proposal by asserting:

[W]hen we look at the Chicago studies, it seems clear that: . . . it was regarded as relatively unimportant who obtained the material, whether it was originally oral or written, and whether it reported specific incidents or generalizations. What seems to have been taken as of overriding significance is that the documents have 'objective existence' in written form. (p. 3)

Hammersley (1989) ultimately proposes that "The Chicago studies rarely provide any explicit methodological assessment of the data used. The mode of presentation employed is realistic, or naturalistic, description. The process by which the account has been constructed remains largely hidden" (p. 85). The process by which data were collected by Atlanta University researchers was never hidden. In fact, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory openly presented its multiple methods of data collection, the limitations of its methodological techniques, and cited its data sources. Thus, when comparing the methodology of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and the Chicago School one is hard pressed to suggest, even if vicariously, that the methodological sophistication of Atlanta University was less advanced than that of the University of Chicago during the period 1896–1924. That Rudwick discredits the methodology of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory without comparisons to Chicago or references to the current techniques of that period is, once again, mysterious. The author suggests that Rudwick attempts to

place a 1950's intellectual perspective upon a collection of scholarship after more than fifty years of methodological development in the discipline. This critique is similar to Francis L. Broderick (1959) who suggests that "A later generation [of scholars] has doubts about [W. E. B. Du Bois'] methodology, for styles in scholarship change, and men see their grandfathers' ways as quaintly primitive" (p. 42).

Alleged Omission of Theory

A fifth, and final, explanation for the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is the, supposed, omission of theory from the Atlanta University Conference publications. The findings of this inquiry suggest that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory included theoretical analyses in its research findings utilizing a grounded theoretical approach. Gabbidon (1999) critiques the theoretical contributions of Du Bois and Atlanta University and concludes that "[Du Bois] never stated any theoretical perspective that he tested later" (p. 31). This critique of Du Bois' scholarship is problematic because it assumes that a theorist *must* test their ideas before they can become sociologically relevant and/or accepted. This narrow view of intellectual creativity prohibits the testing of theoretical constructions by anyone other than the theorist and can be construed as a form of academic gate keeping. Gabbidon continues his argument by proposing that "Du Bois, as stated earlier, never developed any rigorous theory for future testing. Rudwick, after reviewing his Atlanta Studies, commented that [Du Bois' Atlanta University studies] were lacking in systematic theory" (p. 34). The author suggests that the ambiguous and, possibly, discipline specific definition of a term can sometimes negate an otherwise compelling critique. If one defines a theory as a set of interrelated statements that attempt to explain, predict, or understand social events, and that can be replicated and generalizable, then the resolutions offered in the conclusion of the Atlanta University Conference Publications, after being tested by interested social scientists, qualify as systematic theoretical constructions. Undoubtedly, the presentation of the theories of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory does not mirror that of traditional scholars. For example, the 1904 investigation, *Some Notes on Negro Crime Particularly in Georgia*, offered several theories

to explain the high rates of crime that were committed by African Americans during the early 1900's. The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory proposed that the high amount of Negro crime resulted from the inability of African Americans to make a smooth transition from slavery, race prejudice from Whites, less protection under the law—particularly for African American women, unfairness in jail sentences, and the belief that the methods of punishment bred additional crime. Theories offered to ameliorate high Negro crime included an appeal to Whites for fairer criminal laws, abolition of the convict lease system, more intelligent methods of punishment, the refusal to allow free labor to be displaced by convict labor, and the acknowledgment that most crime is committed by the *lower* classes of people and not necessarily by *all* African Americans. Despite its difference in presentation from standard sociological theories, should Atlanta University's theoretical contributions be minimized because, although they qualify for theoretical status according to a strict definition of the term, they do not qualify ideologically?

As proposed earlier, not only did the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory include theoretical analyses in its research investigations, it did so while utilizing a grounded theoretical approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that grounded theories evolve from systematic research investigations that allow theories to emerge from collected data. More specifically, Glaser and Strauss state that "a grounded theory is derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data" (p. 5). This conceptualization of grounded theory captures the essence of the theoretical offerings of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory—that the collected data provided researchers with the information needed to develop theories directed at improving and/or understanding the social, economic, and physical condition of African Americans. Admittedly, a number of theories presented in some of the early Atlanta University Conference Publications did not derive from the collected data. For example, Atlanta University Conference Publication number two, *Social and Physical Condition of Negroes in Cities*, offers a theory to explain how the inability of African American men to support their families had a deleterious effect on the development of the race. Specifically, researchers propose that the inability of Black men to adequately support their families, in

light of their emancipated status, harms the race socially, physically, and economically. Publication number two contains another theory, also not supported by data, that attempts to explain the high death rate and high level of immorality of African Americans. The cause of these two problems, according to researchers, was neglect of the home by both African American parents, especially the mothers, who were often forced to work outside of the home because of financial reasons. The solution to these problems would seemingly be for African American mothers to (re)gain their *rightful* place as *mothers* within the family unit. Such unsupported assertions by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are few, yet can be found in some of the early investigations. Although some early theories presented by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory lacked supporting data, the majority of theories offered by this school were directly linked to data collected by Atlanta University researchers. For example, Atlanta University Conference Publication number three, *Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Social Betterment*, focuses on identifying and ascertaining the self-help activities of African Americans during post-reconstruction. Data collected from cities such as Atlanta (Georgia), Washington, DC, Mobile (Alabama), Bowling Green (Kentucky), and four additional southern cities indicate that many African American churches during the late 1800s managed their monies frivolously. Resultantly, Atlanta University researchers proposed that African American churches could better utilize their financial resources for self-help purposes by reducing building and running expenses and establishing much needed elderly homes and orphanages for African Americans. Additionally, data indicated a need to reduce the amount of money spent on the "pomp and circumstance" of funerals and instead use those monies to support the community directed activities of the church. This publication also produced theories citing ways in which African American businesses could *intelligently* engage in self-help activities. Collected data indicated that African American businessmen were not extensively engaging in *intelligent* cooperative business ventures. Thus, Atlanta University researchers encouraged the establishment of African American business networks and also warned of the need to be aware of unstable and unscrupulous White

owned insurance companies. The warning against insurance companies was offered because Atlanta University researchers had collected data indicating that White insurance companies were acutely aware that "the Freedmen [was] noted for his effort to ward off accidents and a pauper's grave by insurance against sickness and death" (Du Bois 1898:19) and some White insurance companies saw this as an opportunity to exploit and ignorant and uneducated people. These limited examples are reflective of the grounded theoretical contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Repeatedly, although a number of early studies promoted theories without data, the overwhelming majority of theories offered by the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory were supported by data that enabled researchers to produce grounded theories.

CONCLUSION

In his book, *Why Black People Tend to Shout: Cold Wry Views from a Black Man's World*, Ralph Wiley discusses race and racial issues from the perspective of an African American male whose career brings him into contact with racism, overt and subtle, in formal and informal settings. Doggedly tired of being asked, as W. E. B. Du Bois ([1903a] 1969) once so eloquently stated "How does it feel to be a problem?" (p. 44), Wiley proposes that one can only entertain *so many* such inquiries before they shout out in frustration and anger over the race question. Wiley (1991) proposes that Black people tend to shout "because, when joy, pain, anger, confusion and frustration, ego and thought, mix it up, the way they do inside Black people, the uproar is too big to hold inside. The feeling must be aired" (p. 1). Further proposing why Black people tend to shout, Wiley extorts that "Black people tend to shout because they want the answers to questions that go unasked" (p. 2). The unasked question driving this inquiry is, Why have the sociological accomplishments of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory been marginalized/negated for well over one-hundred years?

The author suggests that racism is the primary factor that led to the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. That the author proposes the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory rests in the racism

of early White sociologists necessitates the utilization of the sociology of knowledge theoretical perspective that enables one to understand how social events can be viewed differently given the social context (i.e., race, class, gender, sexual preference) under which the event is evaluated. Data presented in previous investigations (Wright 2002; Wright 2000) and this inquiry indicate that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was the first American school of sociology and that it utilized the current methods of research during its tenure. Given these findings, how is it possible that the contributions of this group of scholars have been marginalized for well over one-hundred years? The primary conclusion that one can deduce is that the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory were viewed *differently* by some of its White colleagues because of racial biases. The author suggests that race-free analyses of the sociological contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory may have prevented the scholarship of this school from drifting to the margins of the sociological netherworld. As such, the racial deletion of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory from mainstream sociological recognition has led to the insufficient recognition of the schools contributions in the current sociological literature. For example, very few scholars cite Du Bois' 1908 [Atlanta Sociological Laboratory] study, *The Negro American Family*, [which] was the first study of the sociology of family in the United States (Dennis 1975:106). Additionally, that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was one of the earliest practitioners of grounded theory goes unrecognized by the main proponents of this perspective (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990) and writers of sociology theory texts (Adams and Sydie 2001³; Collins 1994; Munch 1994a, 1994b, and 1994c; Ritzer 2000a and 2000b; and Turner 1991). Possibly, a value-free analysis of the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory by early sociologists would have resulted in proper literature

³W. E. B. Du Bois' personal theoretical offerings (e.g., double consciousness and his race, class, and gender focus) are included in this book, but there is no mention of the theoretical offerings of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory or references to Du Bois' theories emanating from the Atlanta University investigations.

recognition and a better understanding of the sociological contributions of this group of scholars.

Repeatedly, the author suggests that racism led to the sociological negation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and to overly critical analyses of this school when analyzed—for example, academic obscurity, non-generalizable findings, unsophisticated and low quality methods of research, and the omission of theory. Despite the author's best attempt to identify the major causes of the sociological negation of the first American school of sociology, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, the most compelling explanation is offered by the director of sixteen of the twenty Atlanta University Conference Publications, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1968):

So far as the American world of science and letters was concerned, we never "belonged"; we remained unrecognized in learned societies and academic groups. We rated merely as Negroes studying Negroes, and after all, what had Negroes to do with America or science? (p. 228)

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APPENDIX

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