Why, Where, and How to Infuse the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory into the Sociology Curriculum

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Abstract
The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is the moniker bestowed on scholars engaged in sociological research at Atlanta University between 1895 and 1924. Under the leadership of W. E. B. Du Bois, 1897–1914, this school made substantive yet marginalized contributions to the discipline. Its accomplishments include, but are not limited to, its establishment of the first American school of sociology, the first sociology program to institutionalize the use of the insider researcher, the first sociology program to institutionalize the practice of method triangulation, and the first sociology program to institutionalize the acknowledgment of limitations in its publications. Despite these accomplishments, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory remains unknown to most professional sociologists. This article examines why the accomplishments of this school should be incorporated into the sociology curriculum, where this school should be incorporated into the sociology curriculum, and how this school can be incorporated into the sociology curriculum.

Keywords
W. E. B. Du Bois, black sociology, history of the discipline, race and ethnicity

In 1916, Albion Small, founder of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1892, penned one of the earliest statements on the history of sociology in America. “Fifty Years of Sociology in the United States, 1865–1915,” was Small’s (1916:721) attempt to “plot some of the principal points of departure from which to map the main movement of sociological thinking in the United States during the period indicated in the title.” While every effort was made to gather data from reliable sources, Small (1916:721) acknowledges that he “will incidentally write into the sketch certain details of a semi-autobiographical character.” Although Small (1916) acknowledges the contributions of individual and collective scholars from institutions including the University of Kansas, Johns Hopkins, Columbia University, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago, he fails to mention the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, the moniker bestowed on persons engaged in sociological inquiry at Atlanta University between 1895 and 1924. This oversight is curious given that by the publication of his American Journal of Sociology article, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory had already made numerous and significant, albeit overlooked and minimized, contributions to the discipline and was close to completing its nearly 30-year program of seminal research on blacks in the United States. While Small (1916) did not recognize Atlanta University’s contributions to the

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discipline in his 1916 treatise, 35 years later, another towering figure would become the first prominent white sociologist to acknowledge publicly the W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s significance to the discipline. Howard W. Odum, founder of the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina in 1920, wrote a book about the history of American sociology in which he identifies many early and important contributors to the discipline. According to Green and Driver (1976:321), he should be commended for this contribution because “only Howard Odum in his chronicle of United States sociology from its beginnings to 1950 clearly treats Du Bois [and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory] as . . . important ‘being[s]’ in the sociological enterprise.” Green and Driver (1976:321), continuing their review of Odum’s (1951) book *American Sociology: The Story of Sociology in the United States through 1950*, state,

> Odum says that Du Bois deserves a special place for his contributions to “realistic sociology” and “practical sociology” and for his role in advancing sociology as a university discipline. . . . Odum’s most significant tributes are his acknowledging that Du Bois “was among the earliest to apply sociology to empirical enquiries, producing more than a dozen titles,” and that “few have contributed to more widely read sociological literature.”

Unlike most contemporary reviews of Du Bois’s sociological activities that ignore or gloss over his tenure at Atlanta University, Odum’s (1951:378) book acknowledges the importance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory when it indicates that the accomplishments highlighted above were made largely while Du Bois served “as originator and editor of the pioneering *Atlanta Sociological Studies* from 1897 to 1910.” Odum’s (1951) acknowledgment of the significance of Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s contributions to the discipline was a positive advance for Jim Crow–era sociologists given this nation’s beliefs concerning the perceived intellectual (in)capabilities of blacks during that era. Despite his placement of Du Bois alongside similarly highly accomplished white male sociologists as a person of significance, Odum’s (1951) understanding of the breadth of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s impact on the discipline is limited since he places its works singularly within the frame of “race studies.” Commenting on this obvious flaw within Odum’s (1951) recognition of Du Bois and his school, Green and Driver (1976:321) write,

> While Odum’s tribute is indeed a rare one, he fails to fully develop an appreciation of Du Bois’s sociological contributions. By placing all of Du Bois’s publications under the title, “race/ethnic/groups/folk,” and only under this title, Odum fails to communicate to the reader the relationship of Du Bois’s publications to the specialties of research methods, social problems, the community, the family, and population and ecology—each being a separate chapter in Odum’s book.

While Odum’s (1951) acknowledgment of Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory provided an opportunity for its thorough examination beyond the restrictive frame of race in ways similar to those used for the vaunted Chicago School, sadly, this opportunity was missed by nearly every American sociologist over the next half century. Taken altogether, it is unfortunate that the race-related and non-race-related contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory remain largely ignored by mainstream (white) sociologists and, when acknowledged, are narrowly restricted to the substantive topical area of race. The narrow and limited understanding of Du Bois’s contributions as leader of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is even more disheartening when one considers that the nation’s leading professional organization of sociologists, the American Sociological Association, recently renamed its highest award in his honor. Despite this achievement, the American Sociological Association does not promote Du Bois’s broad non-race-based impact on the discipline in its promotional items for the award. Fortunately, a growing number of scholars are now examining the scholarly artifacts of Du Bois’s school and assessing its relevance beyond the singular frame of race (Gabbidon 1996, 1999; Wright 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009;
Despite the efforts of these scholars, when one inspects contemporary principal texts used to familiarize students with the history of and major contributors to this discipline, Introduction to Sociology textbooks, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s contributions remain blindingly invisible. That none of the leading Introduction to Sociology textbooks provide accurate, detailed, and holistic accounts of the contributions and significance of the W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory serves as the impetus for this inquiry. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to explain why the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory should be infused into the sociology curriculum via Introduction to Sociology textbooks, identify where the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory can be infused into the sociology curriculum via Introduction to Sociology textbooks, and offer suggestions for how the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory can be infused into the sociology curriculum via Introduction to Sociology textbooks.

METHOD

Those who examine current Introduction to Sociology textbooks will find a greater diversity of persons listed as contributors to the discipline than in years past. For example, now included as early contributors to the discipline are Jane Addams, Ida B. Wells, and W. E. B. Du Bois. It is indeed a positive indication of the discipline’s growth that the authors of Introduction to Sociology textbooks are now more inclusive in their citing of founders and early contributors to the discipline. However, if one carefully examines the sections devoted to W. E. B. Du Bois, he or she will find short and limited assessments of his contributions that are generally framed squarely within the prism of race. In this study, the leading Introduction to Sociology textbooks are examined to ascertain if the contributions of the W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are acknowledged beyond the singular frame of race.

The method for selecting the leading contemporary Introduction to Sociology textbooks was a multiple-phase task. First, a thorough examination of the existing literature revealed only one article listing the top-selling Introduction to Sociology textbooks as identified by representatives of textbook publishing companies. Hamilton and Form (2003) list Henslin (2002), Kendall (2001), Kornblum (2000), Macionis (2002), and Schaefer (2001) as the top-selling Introduction to Sociology textbooks in their study. Their analysis of Introduction to Sociology textbooks is limited to these five because they accounted for more than 50 percent of all Introduction to Sociology textbook sales at the time of their study. Additionally, they argue, “These five texts are similar in format and content, as are most other texts, which clearly imitate them (see Lynch & Bogan 1997)” (Hamilton and Form 2003:694). A similar attempt was made in this inquiry to obtain a list of the top-selling Introduction to Sociology textbooks from publishing company representatives. Publishers of the books identified by Hamilton and Form (2003) as well as five additional companies with the highest total number of Introduction to Sociology textbook offerings under their company title were contacted, and the desired information requested. Early responses to this request were not promising and are characterized as follows. Publishing company number 1 responded simply, “I don’t have that kind of information.” Publishing company number 2 stated, “Sorry, I do not have that information at my disposal.” These are representative responses received from four additional publishing companies; three publishing companies did not respond to any of the repeated requests for data. The final response received provided a listing, according to the representative, of “the top-selling books across publishers.” The top-selling Introduction to Sociology textbooks were identified as Macionis’s (2011) Society: The Basics, Henslin’s (2012a) Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-earth Approach, Macionis’s (2012) Sociology, and Henslin’s (2012b) Sociology: A Down-to-earth Approach. Since all four textbooks are produced by the same publishing company, the representative was asked if, in fact, this ranking included the titles released by his or her publishing company only or if the listing was inclusive of all publishing companies. The representative reiterated that the ranking was inclusive of “all publishing companies.”

It was decided that the books identified by Hamilton and Form (2003) would be used for analysis since their listing included condensed versions of the same books identified as the leading
contemporary Introduction to Sociology textbooks produced by the publishing company representative for this inquiry. Additionally, that new and updated editions of each of the textbooks identified by Hamilton and Form (2003) have been released within the past year suggests their continued popularity and provides appropriate coverage of top-selling Introduction to Sociology textbooks as identified by representatives of publishing companies during a nearly 10-year span.

The next phase included a content analysis of the leading Introduction to Sociology textbooks. Specifically, the units of analysis were the words *W. E. B. Du Bois* and *Atlanta University.* *W. E. B. Du Bois* was selected to note the frequency and context of references to the early sociologist, and *Atlanta University* was selected to note the frequency and context of references to the institution where he worked during his years as a practicing sociologist. Once the terms were identified, each page, section, paragraph, and sentence mentioning Du Bois and/or Atlanta University was examined to note specific reference to the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. For this level of assessment, manifest and latent content analysis were employed. Manifest content analysis, the principal technique used in this effort, centered on words (e.g., *W. E. B. Du Bois* and *Atlanta University*) that were physically present in the textbooks and that referenced the contributions or significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Latent content analysis was employed in the few instances where the textbook author(s) made general statements about Du Bois and/or Atlanta University that were potentially unclear to the targeted reader and probably known only to those with extensive knowledge of the career and accomplishments of the Harvard-trained scholar. Conclusions drawn on the level of recognition of Du Bois’s school through manifest and latent content analysis are presented below.

Beyond the general acknowledgment of his ideas on the talented tenth, double consciousness, the veil, “race work” in *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois [1899] 1970) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois [1903] 1994); his role in coestablishing the NAACP; and the obligatory biography, the Introduction to Sociology textbook examined here provide no or cursory attention to W. E. B Du Bois’s sociological contributions at Atlanta University. On the two occasions when Atlanta University is referenced in the Introduction to Sociology textbooks examined, it is only cited as the institution where he worked during his years as a practicing sociologist. The continuum of recognition, or lack thereof, of Du Bois’s accomplishments at Atlanta University begins with John Macionis and ends with Diana Kendall.

Macionis (2012) ignores Du Bois’s sociological accomplishments as leader of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and instead offers brief overviews of his life, double consciousness, and the significance of the *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois [1899] 1970) within a racialized context. Richard T. Schaefer (2011) also fails to mention the significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in his textbook. He does, however, provide a brief biography of Du Bois’s life that, similar to Macionis’s (2012) discussion, includes a statement about double consciousness. Schaefer (2011) misses an opportunity in his textbook to offer an account of Du Bois’s school’s contributions to the discipline in a section titled “Applied and Clinical Sociology.” Instead of providing details, Schaefer (2011) mentions Du Bois along with Jane Addams and George Herbert Mead as early sociologists who advocated social reform, but their works, especially those institutionalized by Du Bois at Atlanta, are excluded from analysis. Although there is no direct reference to the school, Schaefer (2011) does footnote two Atlanta University studies. However, if one does not examine the reference section at the end of his textbook (and it may be safe to assume that the majority of undergraduate students do not), he or she will not know that the study to which he refers is a product of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Additionally, his reference is within a racialized, not substantive, context. Kornblum (2012) also fails to mention directly the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and its significance within the discipline. He does, however, make a vague, one-sentence reference to research conducted by Du Bois on minority communities. This ambiguous reference could be to any number of Du Bois’s studies including *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois [1899] 1970), community studies mentioned in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois [1903] 1994), and similar investigations or to the
Atlanta University Studies on the Negro Problems. Clarification of this reference, especially if directed at the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, provides an opportunity for the author to introduce the school’s sociological accomplishments within and beyond the realm of race.

Only Henslin (2012b) and Kendall (2011) directly identify Atlanta University as Du Bois’s institutional base and reference his Atlanta University–housed program of research on blacks. Henslin (2012b) identifies Atlanta University as having established one of the earliest departments of sociology in the United States, behind the University of Kansas and the University of Chicago. He extends Schaefer’s (2011) statement on Du Bois’s research by mentioning that “each year between 1897 and 1914, Du Bois published a book on relations between African Americans and Whites” (Henslin 2012b:18). For scholars and students deeply immersed in the professional biography of Du Bois, it is well known that the years 1897 through 1914 represent his tenure as a member of the Department of Sociology at Atlanta University and director of the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro. However, professional sociologists and students unaware of this fact deserve a more developed analysis of the significance of those years and the accomplishments made by Du Bois therein. Although the recognition of Du Bois’s tenure at Atlanta University is an advance from the other textbooks cited, Henslin (2012b) incorrectly proposes that the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro Problems were simply examinations of relations between blacks and whites. The Atlanta University studies, as discussed later, extended into areas including, but not limited to, research methodology, religion, and deviance. To limit the scope of this school by proposing its sociological relevance is predicated on its research into relations between blacks and whites. The Atlanta University studies, as discussed later, extended into areas including, but not limited to, research methodology, religion, and deviance. To limit the scope of this school by proposing its sociological relevance is predicated on its research into relations between blacks and whites.

Of the textbooks examined, Kendall (2011) comes closest to articulating the significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory beyond the frame of race. In a section about the development of the discipline in the United States, titled “W. E. B. Du Bois and Atlanta University,” Kendall (2011) lists this school as having established the second American department of sociology. She also states that “[Du Bois] created a laboratory of sociology, instituted a program of systematic research, founded and conducted regular sociological conferences on research” (Kendall 2011:22). Although she acknowledges the contributions of, without directly naming, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, Kendall (2011) fails to elaborate on the substance of the Du Bois–led efforts and extend its contributions beyond the realm of race. Had she highlighted at least one study and contextualized the findings beyond the realm of race, then her textbook would stand as a model starting point for the inclusion of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory in the sociology curriculum.

Taken altogether, the leading Introduction to Sociology textbooks fail to provide holistic accounts of the sociological accomplishments of the man for whom the nation’s leading organization of professional sociologists recently renamed its highest annual award. A discussion about why Du Bois’s Atlanta school should be infused into the sociology curriculum is the focus of the next section.

WHY THE ATLANTA SOCIOLOGICAL LABORATORY SHOULD BE INFUSED INTO THE SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM

Reasonable questions that one may ask include, Should the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory be placed alongside already canonized founders, developers, and important schools of sociology? Are the accomplishments of this particular sociological enterprise unique such that it should assume a distinguished status in the discipline? Are its accomplishments as worthy of note as William Graham Sumner’s teaching of the first sociology course at Yale during the 1872–1873 academic term? Are its accomplishments as worthy of note as the University of Kansas’s being the first institution to
have sociology listed as a department title in 1889 (Department of History and Sociology)? and Are its accomplishments as worthy of note as the Chicago School of Sociology’s well-documented contributions to the establishment of urban sociology? In short, the answer to all of these questions is yes. The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory should be recognized in Introduction to Sociology textbooks because, as a summary statement, it constituted the first successful program of collective sociological research in the United States and its activities led to advances in research methods and seminal sociological studies in multiple topical areas. Taken altogether, the short answer to the question, “Why should this sociological enterprise . . . be infused into the sociology curriculum?” is quite simple. The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory constituted the first American school of sociology (Wright 2002b).

WHERE THE ATLANTA SOCIOLOGICAL LABORATORY SHOULD BE INFUSED INTO THE SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM

It is argued here that the principal course in which students should be introduced to the W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is Introduction to Sociology. This course is recommended as the starting point because it is offered in every sociology program and because it will expose this information to the largest possible number of sociology students since, at least in theory, all majors and minors are required to take this course as it provides a baseline understanding of the discipline. Topical areas where the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory can be infused into specific chapters and sections include the history of the discipline, research methods, religion, and race. It must be emphasized here that this course is a suggestive starting point for the introduction of undergraduate students to this body of literature and that additional and applicable courses and topical areas wherein students can learn about the contributions of this school include demography, family, sociology of health, sociology of the South, and urban sociology. In the next section, some suggestions for how to infuse the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory into Introduction to Sociology are offered.

HOW THE ATLANTA SOCIOLOGICAL LABORATORY SHOULD BE INFUSED INTO THE SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM

Since Introduction to Sociology textbooks often include similar thematic content, the topical areas in which the presentation of information about the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are most relevant and easily infused are sections covering the history of the discipline, research methods, religion, and race. Four specific suggestions for how to infuse the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory into the curriculum are offered. First, instructors may use the paper assignment included in Appendix B. This three- to five-page project allows students to learn about the accomplishments of the school by comparing and contrasting the information included in their Introduction to Sociology textbooks with recommended readings about specific advances of the school. Additionally, students can develop their understanding of sociological theory by using the conflict, functionalist, or symbolic interactionist perspective to explain the exclusion of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s contributions from the textbook. Second, instructors may use the sample paragraphs included in each section below that cover the relevant contributions and significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. The paragraphs are consistent with the standard length and style used in most textbooks and can be provided to students by their instructors. Third, instructors may include the suggested supplemental readings offered in Appendix A in their syllabi. This method is especially useful for instructors who do not use textbooks and want to provide reading material to their students. They may require their students to read, in part or completely, the applicable and relevant information as determined by the instructors. Fourth, instructors may embrace a hybrid of the previous two whereby complete or partial articles or book chapters may be fused into existing textbooks. A relatively new marketing strategy for some publishing companies is the customizing of textbooks to fit the specific pedagogical needs of instructors. Accordingly, instructors have the ability to insert or subtract pages and sections within Introduction to Sociology textbooks. The result is a customized product that includes different and/or supplemental information than that offered in the
original textbook. This option has been used on multiple occasions by this author and is found to be a useful tool as it affords instructors the flexibility to offset perceived or real failings of the originally constructed textbook in a manner that better suits their pedagogical needs. This flexibility is especially important in situations in which textbook authors have not sufficiently incorporated recent or controversial advances and/or perspectives within the discipline into their work. Thus, the need for an alternative manner to infuse advances or new information into the curriculum is satisfied. It is because of the historical negation and marginalization of the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory that textbook customization, until such time that the most popular and widely distributed textbooks in the discipline include this information, is the recommended mode of infusion of this new body of knowledge into the sociology curriculum.

Although the introduction of information about the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory proposed here is principally through the use of a textbook, the author acknowledges that not all instructors use this resource and that multiple forms of instruction exist, including the use of documentaries and Internet resources. For some, the use of videos and Internet sources is a principal means of instruction. For those for whom this is the case, the second option cited above may be the most viable option for infusing this information into their courses, as nontextbook alternatives are limited. Unfortunately, no current documentary provides an account of Du Bois’s accomplishments during his tenure as director of the Atlanta University studies. The one video that comes closest to achieving this task is Massiah’s (1995) *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices*. While Massiah (1995) acknowledges Du Bois’s tenure at Atlanta University, no presentation of the school’s significance or contributions to the discipline of sociology is offered. In addition to the lack of documentaries focusing on the accomplishments of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, there exists only one reputable and long-standing Internet site offering public access to Du Bois’s original sociological writings from the period and articles analyzing their significance. Robert W. Williams of Bennett College (South Carolina) hosts a Web site (.webdubois.org) that houses all the Atlanta University publications and related works that analyze and frame the significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory within the sociological and social science milieu. Beyond this resource, what one finds on the Internet are voluminous data on Du Bois less an emphasis on the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. While an ideal offering of alternative methods of instruction for those who do not use textbooks would be more robust, the dearth of alternative and principal forms of instruction on the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory further reflects the degree to which its accomplishments have, in many respects, been ignored by its contemporaries and potentially lost to history. This fact makes the infusion of relevant data on this school in Introduction to Sociology textbooks even more important.

It must be emphatically stated at this juncture that the information presented in the sections below is not intended to be exhaustive analytic reviews of the arguments made by each author. The quality and significance of each contribution stands on its own merit, and debates about whether one agrees or disagrees with said authors’ positions is not the focus of this inquiry. However, it must be stated that the existing sociological literature includes no inquiries that have challenged or debunked the assertions and arguments made herein by the authors. Additionally, while an analysis of the sociology of textbook adoption is a relevant and related focus of study, it is beyond the scope of this inquiry. Stated simply, the purposes of this offering are to provide brief overviews of the significant contributions of the W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and to serve as a reference point for the infusion of new data into the sociology curriculum. What follows are examples of how this goal can be accomplished.

**History of the Discipline**

The Atlanta University Studies on the Negro Problems were established in 1895 by university president Horace Bumstead and trustee and director of the first two studies George G. Bradford. Established at the request of school graduates concerned about how blacks were managing the transitions from enslavement to freedom and from
rural to urban life, the Atlanta University studies were the first scientific, objective, and systematic studies of the conditions of blacks in the United States (Wright and Calhoun 2006). Heretofore, data on blacks were, for the most part, not reliable because of multiple factors including racism (Wright 2002c). Prior to Du Bois’s arrival, the studies lacked scientific and methodological rigor. In fact, after assuming directorship, Du Bois chided the previous director for having collected only census-style data with no scientific meticulousness. After his arrival in 1897, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory institutionalized a rigorous methodology that resulted in the sociological laboratory at Atlanta becoming the first American school of sociology and home of the first successful program of collective sociological research (Wright 2002b). As presented earlier, this school predates the Chicago School of Sociology by nearly 20 years and, as discussed in the next section, it was the first sociological unit to institutionalize now commonly practiced research methodological techniques. Additionally, as indicated by Howard W. Odum (1951), this school is noteworthy because it was the first sociological unit to institutionalize a program of applied sociological research in the United States. These achievements are not noted in contemporary Introduction to Sociology textbooks, and the following are two sample paragraphs demonstrating how this information can be infused into sections noting this school’s relevance during the establishment of the discipline in the United States.

Atlanta University established one of the earliest departments of sociology and the earliest program of objective, scientific, and systematic research into the condition of blacks in the United States. Starting in 1895, Atlanta University social scientists initiated a more than 20-year program of sociological investigations into the social, economic, and physical condition of blacks in America. Between 1895 and 1924, the school hosted conferences and released 20 studies about varying topics concerning blacks including business, crime, education, health, and philanthropy. Under the leadership of W. E. B. Du Bois, between 1897 and 1914, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, the moniker bestowed on scholars engaged in sociological inquiry at Atlanta University between 1895 and 1924, made numerous contributions to the discipline. Specifically, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory constituted the first American school of sociology and was the first American sociological unit to institutionalize the use of insider researchers, method triangulation, and the public acknowledgment of limitations of its research. Additionally, this school conducted the first American sociological study about religion and the first about the family, and it was among the first to conduct objective and scholarly research in the topical areas of deviance and race. The impact of this sociological laboratory waned after Du Bois’s departure in 1914. By the time it hosted its final conference in 1924, the school had developed an impressive, yet ignored, body of sociological scholarship. Because of race prejudice, the school’s contributions to the discipline have not been sufficiently recognized by the mainstream sociological community. However, that the leading professional organization of American sociologists, the American Sociological Association, recently renamed its highest award in honor of Du Bois is a testament to the research conducted by his school and provides an opening for broader examination and recognition of his non-race-related works during his tenure at Atlanta University.

Research Methods

The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was the first sociological unit in the United States to institutionalize the acknowledgment of limitations in its publications, the first to institutionalize the use of insider researchers, and the first to institutionalize method triangulation (Wright 2002c). The inaugural Atlanta University publication includes an address by the school’s president, who notes the incompleteness of that year’s study and the school’s unwillingness to mislead its readers into believing their inquiry was without error. President Bumstead concedes,

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)

The school’s use of insider researchers developed because of its belief that American blacks, only 30 years removed from the peculiar institution of slavery, were leery of white researchers’ coming into their communities and asking questions about a variety of topics. Noting the potential for whites to misinterpret or receive incorrect data from a participant pool that was distrustful of a group responsible for all-too-common crimes such as the lynching, homicide, and/or beating of innocent blacks, Atlanta University officials purposely utilized blacks, or citizen researchers, to interview black participants (Chase 1897).

Beginning with its 1899 study, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory used two or more techniques to obtain data in its investigations (Wright 2002c). The triangulation techniques used by the school were strengthened upon Du Bois’ arrival, when he implemented, where relevant, data collection strategies including surveys, interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of primary and secondary data. Below is a sample paragraph showing how the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s contributions to research methods can be infused into the sociology curriculum.

During W. E. B. Du Bois’s tenure as director of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, between 1895 and 1914, his school made several contributions to the discipline in research methods. First, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was the first to institutionalize the public acknowledgment of limitations of its research studies. This is significant because it conveyed to the reader that the research investigation was not without error and that all available means were made to ensure reliability and validity. Second, this school was the first to institutionalize the use of insider researchers. Aware that slavery had ended only 30 years prior and that Jim Crow’s America would find many blacks afraid or unwilling to provide detailed information to white researchers on the activities taking place within their communities, the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory consciously utilized blacks, or citizen researchers, to gather data from participants. Third, this school was the first to institutionalize method triangulation. The use of two or more data collection techniques, or method triangulation, was commonplace throughout the life course of the studies, and methods included surveys, interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of primary and secondary data.

Sociology of Religion

The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, under the leadership of W. E. B. Du Bois, conducted the first sociologically grounded study into the sociology of religion. This conclusion extends from the work of Zuckerman (2000), who compares Du Bois’s 1903 Atlanta University investigation into religion to the works of early sociology of religion contributors including Emile Durkheim’s (1915) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Max Weber’s ([1922] 1963) *The Sociology of Religion*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ([1923] 1976) *His Religion and Hers*. In his critique of these works, Zuckerman (2000:242) writes, “It is important to note that Du Bois’ contemporaries (and recognized founders of the sociology of religion), while offering brilliant insights, did so without a similar resonance [as Du Bois] upon what today would constitute standard sociological research methods.” “Du Bois’ emphasis,” according to Zuckerman (2000:242), “upon empirically driven research is clearly evidenced in his study of religion: he got involved in the religious life that surrounded him to a degree unparalleled by other scholars of his day.”

Zuckerman (2000:250) ultimately concludes that Du Bois should be regarded as the first American sociologist of religion . . . [because] he employed standard sociological research methods to a degree unparalleled by the can- onized classical sociologists of religion . . . [and because his research] stressed the ways in which religious institutions can be recognized as social, communal centers which provide this worldly rewards and comforts.

The following is a sample paragraph that illustrates how the Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological
Laboratory can be infused into sections about the sociology of religion.

In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory released a study titled “The Negro Church.” This investigation examines the preslavery religion of blacks, early religious practices of enslaved Africans in America, and current uplift activities of black churches as well as their fiscal status and training of ministers. Du Bois’s 1903 monograph is now recognized as the first “specifically sociological book-length study of religion published in the United States” because of its implementation of a detailed and rigorous research methodology (Zuckerman 2002:239). While sociology of religion offerings by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman are more canonized by mainstream sociologists, Du Bois’s sound methodological investigation provides a scientific baseline of understanding in the topical area of sociology of religion.

**Sociology of Race**

Prior to the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, scientific investigations about blacks were fraught with scientific bias and questionable methodology (Wright 2002b, 2002c; Wright and Calhoun 2006). This school was the first sociological unit in the United States to engage in the scientific and objective study of blacks. Du Bois’s sociological laboratory at Atlanta emerged in an era when science supported and at times bolstered notions of the biological, physical, and intellectual inferiority of blacks vis-à-vis whites (Wright and Calhoun 2006). More specifically, prior to the Atlanta University studies, much of the research conducted on blacks suffered from methodological and ideological flaws, reinforcing existing and incorrect beliefs of Negro inferiority. Du Bois ([1903] 1994:94) addresses this issue in his classic book The Souls of Black Folk, in which he chastises his white colleagues for their shallow “scientific study” of blacks and for being “car window sociologists” who “seek to understand and to know [blacks] by devoting the few leisure hours of a holiday trip to unraveling the snarl of centuries.”

It was against this backdrop that Du Bois embraced the opportunity at the Department of Sociology at Atlanta University to take charge of what would become the first institutionalized program of scientific and objective research into the social, economic, and physical condition of blacks (i.e., sociology of race) in the United States. One result of his 17-year tenure as director of the Atlanta University studies was praise from persons across this nation and the world recognizing the significance of his school’s efforts. Du Bois wrote in a 1913 monograph that “the publish [sic] 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 publish in the last decade which have not acknowledged their indebtedness to our work” (Du Bois and Dill 1913:6). The following is a sample paragraph illustrating how the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory can be infused into sections about the topical area of sociology of race.

Prior to 1895, there were no reliable and objective data on the social condition of blacks in America in the sociological literature. Existing “scientific” studies supported and promoted theories of the intellectual and physical inferiority of blacks. The W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was the first to engage in objective and scientific research on blacks in the United States. This school produced 18 studies about the social conditions of blacks and produced data directly challenging the existing and scientifically supported notions of the biological and intellectual inferiority of blacks held by most American whites and distributed via outlets such as the discipline’s flagship journal, American Journal of Sociology. The Atlanta University study of 1906 best exemplifies the research produced by this school challenging the physical inferiority of blacks. “The Health and Physique of the Negro American” rejected “scientific” findings of physical differences between blacks and whites. Du Bois (1968:vii) stated that according to W. Montague Cobb of the Howard University School of Medicine, “[This inquiry was the] first significant scientific approach to the health problems and biological study of the Negro. . . . But,” said Cobb, “neither the Negro medical profession nor the Negro educational world was
ready for it. Its potential usefulness was not realized by Negroes. Whites were hostile to such a study. . . . This study, Du Bois’s single excursion into the health field, was,” said Cobb, “an extraordinary forward pass heaved the length of the field, but there were no receivers.”

Although Du Bois’s contributions to the sociology of race include books such as The Souls of Black Folk, The Philadelphia Negro, and Black Reconstruction as well as examinations of concepts including double consciousness, the talented tenth, and “the problem of the twentieth century,” perhaps his most significant contribution to the sociology of race was the 17 volumes of the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro Problems that he edited between 1897 and 1914.

CONCLUSION
Since the late 1990s, there has been a concerted effort by a small cadre of scholars to (re)analyze and contextualize the research activity of the W. E. B. Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and place its accomplishments within the sociological milieu (Gabbidon 1996, 1999; Wortham 2005; Wright 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009; Wright and Calhoun 2006; Zuckerman 2000, 2002, 2004). Some of the findings produced by these scholars have caused the history of the discipline to be rewritten and the contributions of long-canonized early sociologists and schools of sociology to be deleted or amended. Despite the efforts of this cadre of scholars, to date, when the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory is mentioned in Introduction to Sociology textbooks, it is almost always within the singularly narrow and limiting frame of race. I drew this conclusion after conducting a content analysis of the leading Introduction to Sociology textbooks as identified in the existing literature and from a source uncovered for this inquiry. I conclusively determined that of the leading Introduction to Sociology textbooks, Kendall (2011) comes closest to articulating the significance of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory beyond the frame of race.

The objectives of this inquiry were to explain why the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory should be infused into the sociology curriculum via introductory and foundational textbooks, identify where the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory can be infused into the sociology curriculum via introductory and foundational textbooks, and offer suggestions for how the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory can be infused into the sociology curriculum via introductory and foundational textbooks. While these overt objectives were accomplished, a covert objective in this inquiry was to demonstrate how the sociological artifacts of this school, while wrapped in the trappings of a race group, extend beyond that limiting frame and into substantive topical areas including, but not limited to, the history of the discipline, research methods, and religion. This task is also deemed to have been successful. A thoughtful question that may arise, given the presentation of the data included herein, is, How long will it take the mainstream (white) sociological community to embrace the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory as an early force within the discipline whose accomplishments, whether lauded by its contemporaries or not, were as immense as those performed in Chicago? One can be hopeful that the answer to this question is, not long. However, it will be a sad statement about the discipline if a number of years from now the contributions of the Du Bois–led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are not appropriately recognized within the discipline at large and in introduction and foundational textbooks specifically. If by some chance this school is not broadly recognized within the discipline given the more than 10-year and increasingly growing body of research on the topic, then the words written by W. E. B. Du Bois in his autobiography will resonate as clearly in the twenty-first century as they did in the twentieth, when he proposed that race was that century’s major social problem: “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).
APPENDIX A

Recommended Readings about the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory

History of the Discipline

Research Methods

Sociology of Religion

Sociology of Race

APPENDIX B

Assignment

Goal. A student completing an Introduction to Sociology course will be able to articulate some contributions of nonwhite sociologists to the discipline during its formative years in the United States.

Assignment goals. At the completion of this project, the student will possess the ability to

1. express some of the contributions of W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory to the discipline during its formative years in the United States;
2. compare and contrast W. E. B. Du Bois’s and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory’s contributions with those identified in Introduction to Sociology textbooks in areas including research methods, sociology of religion, and sociology of race; and
3. demonstrate an understanding of sociological theory.

Assignment. After reading the research methods, sociology of religion, and sociology of race sections of the Introduction to Sociology textbook, the student will read a related and comparable article from the list provided in Appendix A outlining the school’s contribution to a specific area. The student will then write a three- to five-page paper answering the following questions that are reflective of the assignment goals identified above:

1. Briefly summarize the significant contributors to this area who are identified in the textbook.
2. Briefly summarize the significant contributors to this area who are identified in the article.
3. Compare and contrast each set of contributors. For example, Who were the major actors? When did they make their accomplishments? and What were their major accomplishments, the methodological techniques they employed, and
APPENDIX B (continued)

their theoretical orientations (functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interaction)?

4. Use a theoretical perspective (functionalist, conflict, or symbolic interaction) to explain why the significant contributors/contributions in the article are not included in the Introduction to Sociology textbook.

5. Use a theoretical perspective to argue for or against including the significant contributors/contributions in the article who are not included in the Introduction to Sociology textbook.

NOTE

Reviewers for this manuscript were, in alphabetical order, Thomas C. Calhoun, Otis Grant, and Rosemary F. Powers.

REFERENCES


**BIO**

**Earl Wright II** is an associate professor of Africana Studiversity of Cincinnati. His research examines the contributions of African Americans to the origin and development of sociology in the United States. Specifically, his research establishes Atlanta University, not the University of Chicago, as the first American school of sociology; the first sociological school to institutionalize research methods including triangulation and the insider researcher; and the first sociological school to engage in urban sociology and research into what is now known as sociology of the south.