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# The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory 1896-1924: A Historical Account of the First American School of Sociology

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EARL WRIGHT II—UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

## *Abstract*

*The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory comprised the first American school of sociology. Despite this accomplishment, the contributions of Atlanta University sociologists and social scientists are, mostly, omitted from classical and contemporary discussions concerning early sociologists who contributed to the discipline during its formative years in America. The exclusion of this institution from canonical recognition is astonishing given that W.E.B. Du Bois was the chairperson of the sociology department from 1897-1910 and that Atlanta University housed the first systematic and scientific program of collective sociological research in the United States—the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems, 1896-1924. The objective of this investigation is to provide a historical account of the first American school of sociology—the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory.*

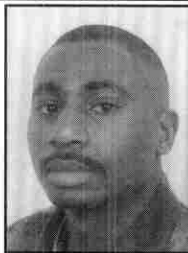
## *Introduction*

The discipline of sociology is replete with historical data citing theoretical formulations, methodological advancements, and other significant contributions by some of the founders, advocates, and innovators of the discipline. Men such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx are canonized classical sociologists that every student of the discipline is required to study because their scholarship, presumably, exemplifies sociological excellence. Now included within many discussions of influential, yet historically overlooked, sociologists and social scientists are women such as Harriet Martineau, Ida B. Wells, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Jane Addams and the women of the Hull-House settlement (Cannon, 1997; Deegan, 1988; Macionis, 2001; Riedesel, 1981; Ritzer, 2000; Sheth and Prasch, 1996; and Terry, 1983). The ideas of these women and men represent a vast continuum upon which a variety of sociological concepts, theories, methodologies, and investigations have contributed to the relatively young discipline. Many of the individuals who participated in the construction of so-

ciology through their theoretical and empirical research efforts did not do so in a vacuum. Institutions of higher learning were very instrumental in the development and maturation of sociology. Schools such as Kansas University, Columbia University, University of Nebraska, University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago are locations where many American social scientists received institutional support and guidance and were afforded the intellectual freedom to develop sociology into the area of study that it is today. These American institutions, through advancements in sociological theory and methodology, seemingly, replaced Europe as the central locations of innovative sociological developments during the late 1800's and early 1900's. One American university rose above the rest to become a leader in sociological developments, in part, because of tremendous institutional support that resulted in, supposedly, groundbreaking theoretical formulations and methodological techniques.

### *The Chicago School of Sociology, 1913-1930*

In 1892 the University of Chicago established the first "named" sociology department in the United States



Earl Wright II is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Central Florida and has recent publications in *The Journal of Black Studies*, *Sociological Spectrum*, *Race and Society*, *Challenge: A Journal of Research on African American Men*, and *Deviant Behavior*. Earl's areas of research include W.E.B. Du Bois, Popular Culture (rap music), and Black Sociology.

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(Harvey, 1987). Founded through the philanthropic efforts of John D. Rockefeller, the University of Chicago, from its inception, placed an immense importance upon an extensive and ambitious research agenda. Research, as defined by the University of Chicago Committee on Development (1925), is

*...the employment of human curiosity for the purpose of enlarging the field of human knowledge in the interest of human progress (1).*

To that end, the Committee on Development proclaimed:

*'Here is to be found intellectual freedom.' [The University of Chicago] established as its official motto, and has kept it: 'Let knowledge grow, that life may be enriched.' By setting up lofty ideals of scholarship, by recognizing research as one of its primary aims, and by encouraging freedom of investigation as a prime condition of success in research, [The University of Chicago] began on a plane to which many other institution has been slowly ascending (9).*

One beneficiary of the ambitious research agenda of the University of Chicago was the newly formed sociology department. Albion Small was chosen to lead this new department through its formative years. University of Chicago officials thought so highly of Small upon his hiring that they declared,

*In Sociology, the name of a man like Professor Albion W. Small, Head of that Department of the University, stands for pioneer work in organizing a subject that belongs to the present generation and has made for a broader view of human society (39).*

Despite the lavish praise bestowed upon Small, the sociology program at the University of Chicago did not become the school of American sociology until Robert Park, Ernest Watson Burgess, and the second generation of University of Chicago sociologists entered the department and pioneered extensive urban research investigations. Nevertheless, Lester R. Kurtz (1984) suggests that

*Although the notion of Chicago as a laboratory for social research is usually associated with Park and Burgess, [urban sociology] was part of the program much earlier (60).*

Kurtz's evidence of an earlier urban research program in the sociology department at the University of Chicago consists, singularly, of a general description of the aims of the sociology graduate program in the 1902 university catalog. If the first generation of Chicago sociologists initiated an institutionalized urban sociological research agenda as Kurtz suggests, why, then, does he not list any of their studies among the twenty-one "most important treatments of urban research at Chicago" (61)? Kurtz's avowal could only be strengthened by including at least one example of an early urban research study initiated by a first generation University of Chicago scholar in his list of twenty-one. Kurtz's exclusion of

urban sociological research studies conducted by first generation University of Chicago sociologists makes his assertion, that the University of Chicago engaged in systematic urban sociological research projects prior to Park and Burgess, tenuous at best. Although first generation University of Chicago sociologists are noticeably absent from Kurtz's list, the second generation of University of Chicago sociologists are well represented.

The second generation of University of Chicago sociologists is generally credited for advancing urban sociological research to such a level that the label, "Chicago School of Sociology," has become an applicable moniker. Kurtz (1984) asserts that

*...the general outlines of urban research in sociology were first developed by Park and Burgess and their students (60).*

Relatedly, Martin Bulmer (1984) alleges that

*...the Chicago school represented the first successful American program of collective sociological research (xv).*

Bulmer, further lauding the urban sociological accomplishments of the University of Chicago, proposes that

*...what characterized above all the achievement[s] of the Chicago school of sociology was the ability to bring theory and research together in a fruitful way (xv).*

When viewed in this manner, the contributions of the second generation of University of Chicago sociologists are, supposedly, some of the earliest and, perhaps, most important to the discipline of sociology—particularly, in the area of urban sociological research. Accordingly, there has been a plethora of historical research conducted on the urban sociological accomplishments of the Chicago School of Sociology (e.g., Bulmer, 1984, 1985; Farris, 1967; Matthews, 1977; and Smith, 1988). After reviewing the urban sociological accomplishments of University of Chicago sociologists, one question remains to be answered,

*Was any other American institution engaged in urban research that could warrant academic adulation comparable to that bestowed upon the second generation of Chicago sociologists?*

The answer to this question may be found in the historical records of the first American school of sociology—the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1895-1924.

### ***The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1895-1924***

Although recognized as having established the first American school of sociology (Wright, 2002), the contributions of Atlanta University sociologists and social scientists are, mostly, omitted from classical and contemporary discussions concerning prominent and early

scholars who contributed to the discipline of sociology during its formative years in America (Wright, 2000). This exclusion is astonishing given that W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the preeminent sociologists in the history of the discipline, was the chairperson of the sociology department from 1897-1910 and that Atlanta University housed the first systematic and scientific program of collective sociological research in the United States—the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems, 1896-1924 (Wright, 2000). Between 1895 and 1924, Atlanta University regularly conducted extensive urban sociological research investigations into the social, economic, and physical condition of formerly enslaved Africans in America. However, if one were to examine the existing literature, strictly seeking information pertaining to the sociological accomplishments of Atlanta University sociologists, he or she will find a paucity of data (Wright, 2000). The omission of Atlanta University sociology from extensive investigation and analysis is even more fascinating when one takes into account that some supporters of the Chicago School of Sociology suggest those scholars to have been the first group of academic researchers to systematically and scientifically investigate the urban social condition with theoretical implications (Bulmer, 1985). An exhaustive reading of the Atlanta University Conference Publications, a series of sociological research investigations published between 1896-1917, indicates that the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory—the moniker bestowed upon the scholars engaged in urban sociological research at Atlanta University between 1895 and 1924, not the Chicago School of Sociology, comprised the first collection of sociological scholars who systematically and scientifically investigated the urban sociological condition with theoretical implications (Wright, 2000). Contained within almost every Atlanta University Conference Publication is a list of resolutions or theories that serve as guidelines to understand and/or ameliorate the social problems discovered in each year's investigation. If one defines a theory as a set of interrelated statements that attempt to explain, predict, and/or understand social facts and are replicable and generalizable, then the resolutions of the Atlanta University Conference qualify for "theory status" and, thus, discredit Bulmer's (1984) assertion that the scholars of the Chicago School of Sociology were the first to combine research and theory.

By most accounts, the Chicago School of Sociology, or the tenure of the second generation of University of Chicago sociologists, developed circa 1913 and lasted until around 1935 (Harvey, 1987). Conversely, the

Atlanta Sociological Laboratory began conducting its urban sociological research investigations almost twenty years before the Chicago School (Chase, 1896). Repeatedly, investigations charting the historical development and sociological contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are, seemingly, nonexistent within the very discipline that it helped develop, even if vicariously. Inquiries into the sociological invisibility (negation) and contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory are worthy endeavors, but are beyond the scope of this investigation. The objective of this investigation is to provide a historical account of the first American school of sociology—the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, 1896-1924.

### ***"I Will Find a Way or Make One"***

Between 1555 and 1863 the United States of America supported and promoted one of the most abominable degradations of human life the world has ever witnessed—the peculiar institution of slavery. For over two-hundred years many of the states comprising this nation were governed by laws prohibiting the promotion of education among its second class citizens. With a stroke of Abraham Lincoln's pen, the legalized illiteracy that had been allowed to function as a form of social control over the enslaved Africans in America was brought to an end. The abolition of slavery was both a blessing and curse for the millions of freedmen and women. The blessing was found in the freedom that finally enabled Africans in America to decide for themselves how best to live their lives and to whom they could sell their services. The freedmen were cursed because, although they were physically free, men like Frederick Douglass astutely recognized that the newly freed Africans were now "free to die" (Martin, 1984). Douglass asserted that this populous of people, newly delivered to the promised land from the fell clutches of their American Pharaoh, were free to die because the institution of slavery had not properly prepared them for the responsibilities of freedom. Indeed, Africans were free, but they did not possess the proper life skills, specifically an adequate education, to procure the basic necessities of life—decent food, clothing, shelter, and the intellectual acuity necessary to obtain employment in the supposed land of equality. Many philanthropic organizations, including some supported by the United States government, initiated educational crusades designed to properly educate Blacks so that they could take advantage of the rewards available to an educated cadre (Du Bois, 1900).

Institutions of higher learning were erected for African Americans before the Civil War and are reflective of the Abolitionists' efforts to provide free Blacks with the basic skills needed to survive and thrive in the American society. The three schools erected during this period were Lincoln University (PA) in 1854, Berea College (KY) in 1855, and Wilberforce University (OH) in 1856. After the Civil War, schools were

*...established...by Missionary and Freedmen's Aid Societies under the protection and for the most part under the patronage of the Freedmen's Bureau (Du Bois, 1900, 6).*

Some of the schools established by these organizations were Roger Williams University (TN) in 1864, Southland College (AR) in 1864, Fisk University (TN) in 1866, Lincoln Institute (MO) in 1866, Howard University (Washington, D.C.) in 1867, and Atlanta Baptist College (GA) in 1867. Atlanta University was "established by the American Missionary Association aided by the Freedmen's Bureau" in 1867 (6). The *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Atlanta University* (1897) indicates that the founding of Atlanta University:

*Dates back to the days immediately succeeding the Civil War, when farsighted missionary teachers and officers of the Freedmen's Bureau saw the necessity of founding an institution in which opportunities for higher instruction should be afforded to colored youth, and which should be able to furnish teachers and other educated leaders to the newly emancipated race. By money procured from the Freedmen's Bureau and other sources, a site was purchased, and in 1869 the first building was opened and at once crowded with students (43).*

When Atlanta University officially opened in 1869, it became

*...the first educational institution of higher learning in Georgia to open its doors to all people, regardless of race, color, or creed (24).*

The university's insistence upon an all-inclusive university community quickly affected the revenues extended from the Georgia state government to the all-Black school.

Du Bois (1968) reflects on Atlanta University's all inclusive philosophy and the repercussions that followed.

*The University from the beginning had taken a strong and unbending attitude toward Negro prejudice and discrimination; white teachers and black students ate together in the same dining room and lived in the same dormitories. The charter of the institution opened the doors of Atlanta University to any student who applied, of any race or color, and when the State in 1887 objected to the presence of a few white students who were all children of teachers and professors, the institution gave up the small appropriation from the State rather than repudiate its principles (222-223).*

Atlanta University administrators, aware of the tremendous need for adequate educational facilities, col-

lege educated African Americans, and firm in their philosophy of integration, chose to decline all funding from the state of Georgia instead of bowing to the racial pressure applied by state politicians. In so doing, university administrators placed themselves and their students in a situation in which the university motto, "I will find a way or make one," was quickly tested. Fortunately, the amount of money withheld by the state of Georgia did not drastically impede university plans and university administrators proceeded with their objective of developing Atlanta University into the educational oasis that it was conceptualized to become. However, the rejection of financial contributions would greatly affect the annual investigations and conferences in later years.

Although Atlanta University was founded as a "university," this institution of higher learning served also as a normal and common school for the class of eighty-nine students originally enrolled in 1869. Normal and common schools are similar to contemporary high schools and middle schools in that they equipped adolescents and young adults with the necessary knowledge to not only survive in American society, but to prepare them for post-secondary education. The first three years of Atlanta University's existence were dedicated to this objective. Noteworthy, one must be reminded that the institution of slavery had only been eradicated a scant four years before Atlanta University opened. When viewed in this manner, this "university" served a functional purpose by attempting to bring into the intellectual and educational community of America a group of people who had heretofore been denied legal educational privileges. Atlanta University officials, relatedly and readily, asserted that

*This Institution was called a University at first in the faith of what it was to be, and in accordance with the lines upon which it was projected (Chase, 1896, 44).*

Atlanta University's application of the term "university" should not denote inferior instruction by assumed non-university level teachers, but rather a mission centered upon providing holistic education to a people in dire need of instruction from the ground up. Referring to the quality of instruction offered by early Atlanta University teachers, Atlanta University President Horace Bumstead asserts that

*throughout its entire history, this institution has been fortunate in having on its teaching force men and women of marked ability and consequence (Adams, 1930, 15).*

Atlanta University admitted its first class of college students, consisting of twelve individuals, in 1872 and in 1876 bestowed college degrees upon its first class

of graduates. The graduating class that began with twelve students in 1872 only had six to fulfill the requirements for graduation by 1876. The first graduating class of Atlanta University, referred to in future years as "The Class," consisted of six men who proved to be very successful. William Henry Cogman served as the president of Clark University (Atlanta), Samuel Benjamin Morse was a professor of Latin at Lincoln University (MO), Edgar James Penney was the dean of the Bible School at the Normal and Industrial Institute (Tuskegee, AL), Henry Harrison Williams worked as a mail agent in Atlanta, Richard Robert Wright served as the president of State Industrial College (Savannah, GA), and there is no information concerning the professional career of London Humes Waters (Atlanta University, 1897). The prominent social positions and high social standing of these and subsequent Atlanta University graduates contributed to their selection as researchers for the sociological laboratory that was established at Atlanta University.

### ***The Sociological Laboratory at Atlanta University***

From its inception Atlanta University sought to improve the condition of African Americans through educational instruction and personal mentorship. This objective was achieved with much success during the university's first twenty years of existence. Graduates of Atlanta University often corresponded with faculty, administrators, and mentors who instructed and guided them through the often tumultuous educational mine field (Chase, 1896). It is through these correspondences that many university faculty and administrators learned of an emerging social phenomenon that would demand increasing attention. Immediately after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation many formerly enslaved Africans were resigned to maintain a rural existence. However, in an effort to obtain better wages and/or escape the ghosts of the plantation, many African Americans severed their rural roots in favor of the growing American cities that they often heard of during their years of forced servitude. Among the many African Americans seeking a better life in the growing cities of America were Atlanta University graduates.

On July 1, 1895, Atlanta University President Horace Bumstead submitted a proposal before the university board of trustees requesting to conduct yearly investigations into the social and physical condition of urban African Americans. This topic was selected because:

*Atlanta University always [drew] its students exclusively from the cities and large towns, and a great portion of its graduates*

*[were] holding positions at these centers of influence. From these workers information [came] to the faculty and trustees of the University from time to time that led them to believe there exist[ed] a great need for a systematic and thorough investigation into the conditions of living among the Negro population of cities (Chase, 1896, 5).*

Atlanta University, under the leadership and guidance of President Horace Bumstead and George G. Bradford, an Atlanta University trustee, outlined a plan of study to address the concerns of urban African Americans. On July 1, 1895, the Atlanta University Board of Trustees approved Bumstead and Bradford's proposal and the first conference on Negro problems was scheduled to take place during the Atlanta Exposition later that year. However, "after further consideration, it was deemed wise to change the time to the Commencement in May, 1896" (5).

George G. Bradford served as the lead researcher for the initial series of Atlanta University Conference investigations. W. E. B. Du Bois (1968) expounds upon the origin and original plan for the Atlanta University Conference on the Negro Problem as outlined by George G. Bradford.

*This program was grafted on an attempt by George Bradford of Boston to open for Atlanta University a field of usefulness for city Negroes comparable to what Hampton and Tuskegee were doing for rural districts in agriculture and industry. At the Hampton and Tuskegee Conferences, there came together annually and in increasing numbers, workers, experts and observers to encourage by speeches and interchange of experience the Negro farmers and laborers of adjoining areas. Mr. Bradford's idea was to establish at Atlanta a similar conference, devoted especially to problems of city Negroes (213-214).*

The original plan for the Atlanta University Conference called for the investigation of general social problems experienced by African Americans in cities in a manner similar to that of the conferences held at Hampton and Tuskegee. However, three features separated the Atlanta University Conference from the existing conferences.

First, the Atlanta University Conference focused on the concerns of African Americans in cities while Tuskegee focused on agriculture and vocation and Hampton's conferences were directed at the concerns of African Americans in industry. Second, the Atlanta University Conference studies were conceptualized and designed to generalize 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.

*Let us not forget the general subject of this and succeeding conferences—the study of Negro city life—and the particular subject of this year constitute a human problem 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 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 (Chase, 1896, 6-7).*

Du Bois (1968), director of sixteen Atlanta University Conference 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” (217). Both President Bumstead and Du Bois believed the data obtained for the Atlanta University conferences could be utilized to benefit African Americans as well as future American ethnic groups in the growing American cities. The result of the Atlanta University Conference studies, possibly, would then be a template that new city residents could safely and intelligently follow. Third, President Bumstead and the Executive Board invited as researchers for the conference, all United States citizens interested in helping improve the condition of Negroes in America. Graduates and students from Atlanta University, other historically black colleges and universities, and supporters of the improvement of the social condition of African Americans (i.e., faculty and students at “White” colleges and universities) were especially encouraged to support and participate in this ambitious series of research investigations. Despite the inclusion of outside researchers, President Bumstead earnestly believed that the annual investigations should be led mostly by African Americans, and specifically by graduates and students of Atlanta University. During his opening remarks at the First Atlanta University Conference President Bumstead stated:

*Nearly all of the graduates of Atlanta University are living and working in the cities and larger towns of the South. 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. 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 familiarity with measures of reform and of social and economic improvement that are indispensable for dealing with such matter (Chase, 1896, 6).*

Summarily, the original plan of the Atlanta University Conference differed from the existing Tuskegee and Hampton conferences concerning Negro issues through its focus on city problems, generalizability, and the substantial utilization of students and citizens as researchers.

### ***The Atlanta University Conferences and Publications, 1896-1924***

The first two Atlanta University Conferences, held in 1896 and 1897, followed President Bumstead and

George G. Bradford’s original plan. However, a programmatic shift occurred when “[W. E. B. Du Bois] was approached by President Bumstead . . . in 1896 and asked to take charge of the work in sociology, and of the new conferences which they were inaugurating on the Negro problem” (Du Bois, 1968, p. 209). Du Bois, upon his hiring, was highly critical of the first two Atlanta University Conferences. Specifically commenting on the 1896 investigation, Du Bois said “as a scientific accomplishment the first conference was not important” (Du Bois, [1940] 1965, p. 797). Du Bois believed the first two Atlanta University conferences offered little scientific value because “[the investigations] followed the Hampton and Tuskegee models of being primarily meetings of inspiration, directed toward specific efforts at social reform and aimed at propaganda for social uplift in certain preconceived lines” (Du Bois, 1968, p. 214). After being selected to lead the Atlanta University conferences studies in 1896, Du Bois immediately implemented his own agenda for the conferences and investigations and “did not pause to consider how far [his] developed plans agreed or disagreed with the ideas of the already launched project” (214). Du Bois ([1940] 1965) later asserted:

*Without any thought or consultation I rather peremptorily changed the plans of the first two Atlanta Conferences. They had been conceived as conferences limited to city problems, contrasting with the increasing popular conferences on rural problems held at Tuskegee. But I was not thinking of mere conferences. I was thinking of a comprehensive plan for studying a human group (62).*

Du Bois believed the first two Atlanta University Conference studies were void of scientific importance and, thus, sought to make subsequent studies scientific through the use of systematic method triangulation with theoretical implications. Du Bois (1968), some years later, expounded on his original plan for the Atlanta University Conference studies.

*This program at Atlanta, I sought to swing as on a pivot to one of scientific investigation into social conditions, primarily for scientific ends. I put no special effort on special reform effort, but increasing and widening emphasis on the collection of a basic body of fact concerning the social condition of American Negroes, endeavoring to reduce that condition to exact measurement whenever or wherever occasion permitted (214).*

Du Bois’ ultimate objective was to upgrade the Atlanta University Conference studies from purely descriptive analyses of human behavior and the collection of census type data, to one grounded in scientific truths and systematic inquiry.

In addition to making the conference more scientific, Du Bois proposed that each year’s investigation focus on one specific aspect of African American life instead of a hodgepodge of issues to be addressed

every year as Bradford's original plan suggested. According to Du Bois ([1904] 1978):

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

Du Bois' grand plan for the Atlanta University studies was to compile a massive collection of sociological data for the express purpose of charting the social condition of African Americans from the first generation free from the shackles of slavery to subsequent generations totally oblivious to the peculiar institution. Once again, such an accomplishment was conceptualized and designed to serve, also, as a possible template for other groups.

Du Bois resigned from the Sociology Department at Atlanta University in 1910 after thirteen years of service. Although Du Bois was no longer an Atlanta University faculty member, he continued to serve as the director of the Atlanta University Conference from 1910-1914. In fact, Du Bois, at that time employed by the NAACP, served as the co-editor of the annual Atlanta University Conference Publications with Augustus Granville Dill for the next four years. When Du Bois totally severed his connection with Atlanta University and the annual investigations in 1914, the conference was poised to produce only two monographs. Of the two Atlanta University Conference Publications released after Du Bois' departure, one was based upon a sociological research investigation and the other was an edited collection of essays authored by leading race scholars of the time.

The first era of Atlanta University Conference Publications lasted from 1896-1917, but the annual conference continued until 1924. Du Bois spearheaded the preparation of sixteen monographs (four in collaboration with Augustus Granville Dill), George Bradford prepared two monographs, and Thomas I. Brown and J. A. Bingham each authored one monograph. By 1924 the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems were canceled due to a lack of funding (Du Bois, 1968).

### ***“I Insist On My Right To Think and Speak”***

The final Atlanta University Conference Publication was released in 1917 and the last conference took place in 1924. W. E. B. Du Bois, director of sixteen pub-

lications, later identified a number of factors that led to the termination of the Atlanta University Conference publications and conferences.

First, Du Bois cited the lack of advertising by Atlanta University and himself as a major reason why the publications ended. Du Bois (1968) said:

*Where had I failed? There were many answers, but one was typically American, as the event proved; I did the deed but I did not advertise it. Either myself or someone for me should have called public attention to what had been done or otherwise it would quickly be forgotten (221).*

Du Bois proposed that “the Deed without Advertising was worthless and in the long-run Advertising without the Deed was the only lasting value. Perhaps Americans do not realize how completely they have adopted this philosophy. But Madison Avenue does” (221).

Second, Du Bois suggested that a lack of financial support from philanthropists and academic support from scholars who could not fathom the value of scholarly investigations focusing on African Americans could have been a reason for the demise of the annual studies. Accordingly, Du Bois states:

*It was crazy of me to dream that America, in the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with colonial imperialism, based upon the suppression of colored folk, at its zenith, would encourage, much less adequately finance, such a program at a Negro college under Negro scholars (227-226).*

Critiquing his colleagues, Du Bois declared:

*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 (228)?*

Third, Atlanta University's “unbending attitude toward Negro prejudice and discrimination” (221) resulted in a lack of funding for the conference and, ultimately, the termination of the annual publications and conferences. As stated earlier, Atlanta University refused monies from the state of Georgia because of its integrationalist ideals. In later years, Atlanta University's refusal of government funding would have a deleterious financial effect on the conference. According to Du Bois, had Atlanta University accepted funding from the state of Georgia it would have been forced to succumb to the racial intolerance that contradicted the original charter of the university, but the school would not have experienced the level of financial crisis it was later troubled by (Du Bois, 1968). Hence, Atlanta University's refusal to succumb to racist educational policies contributed to the demise of the annual conferences and publications.

The fourth, and perhaps, most decisive factor leading to the termination of the Atlanta University Conferences was Dr. Du Bois' ideological battle with Booker T. Washington. Du Bois (1968) asserted that

*there came a controversy between myself and Booker Washington, which became more personal and bitter than I had ever dreamed and which necessarily dragged in the University . . . I did not at the time see the handwriting on the wall. I did not realize how strong the forces were back of [Booker T. Washington's] Tuskegee [University] and how they might interfere with my scientific study of the Negro" (223-224).*

Du Bois alleges that Booker T. Washington, the Negro leader at the time, campaigned against his efforts to obtain financial support for the Atlanta University Conference studies and other endeavors. For example, in 1905 Du Bois wrote to a prominent philanthropist in the hopes of procuring funding for a "high-class journal to circulate among the intelligent Negroes" (224). According to Du Bois:

*Mr. Schiff wrote back courteously, saying: 'Your plans to establish a high-class journal to circulate among the intelligent Negroes is in itself interesting, and on its face has my sympathy. But before I can decide whether I can become of advantage in carrying your plans into effect, I would wish to advise with men whose opinion in such a matter I consider of much value.' Nothing ever came of this, because, as I might have known, most of Mr. Schiff's friends were strong and sincere advocates of [Booker T. Washington and] Tuskegee (224-225).*

Shortly thereafter, Du Bois was finally able to view the handwriting on the wall. He soon resigned from Atlanta University hoping that the conference and university would be able to obtain philanthropic support in his absence. In his 1910 letter of resignation, Du Bois wrote that:

*I insist on my right to think and speak; but if that freedom is made an excuse for abuse of and denial of aid to Atlanta University, then with regret I shall withdraw from Atlanta University (229).*

Du Bois resigned from the Atlanta University Sociology Department in 1910 but remained as director of the Atlanta University Conference until 1914. As indicated earlier, the final Atlanta University Conference Publication was released in 1917 and the annual conference ended in 1924. The conference reemerged almost twenty years later when Du Bois rejoined the Sociology Department at Atlanta University in 1933. In an unpublished manuscript, Du Bois (1960) discusses the rebirth of the Atlanta University Conference studies.

*In 1934 John Hope and I set out to revive the old Atlanta University conferences and studies of the Negro problems. Hope sought unsuccessfully to obtain funds for this enterprise. After his death I tried to see if some cooperative plan might supply some funds. Frederick Keppell of the Carnegie Foundation gave us some money for preliminary work in 1940 and 1941. I called the 'First Phylon Conference' in April 1941. A good cross section of Negro leaders in education attended. Reports*

*were made from each state on the economic condition of Negroes (19).*

The new Atlanta University Conference, now titled The Phylon Institute, released publications in 1941, 1943, and 1944. However, in 1944,

*Without notice to [Du Bois] of any kind, [he] was retired from [his] professorship and headship of the department of Sociology at Atlanta University" (36).*

The conditions surrounding Du Bois' dismissal from Atlanta University were unclear and vary depending upon whom is asked. According to Dorothy C. Yancy (1978):

*[I]n 1939 the university instituted a system of rank and tenure and, according to Mrs. Lucy Grigsby, Du Bois voted for the program. The University, in 1939, gave Dr. Du Bois a five-year appointment which expired June 30, 1944. At this time Dr. Du Bois was 'seventy-six years of age, eleven years beyond retirement age.' However, Du Bois was not ready to retire. President Rufus Clement recommended Du Bois' retirement to the Board of Trustees and the Board agreed (64).*

Dr. Du Bois, however, believed that Atlanta University's President Clement may have had an ulterior motive for pushing his retirement. Accordingly, Du Bois (1960) proclaimed:

*My sudden retirement then savored of a deliberate plot, although this cannot be proven. The retirement age at Atlanta University was sixty-five. But I was sixty-five when President Hope called me to the University. Nothing was said between us about the conditions of eventual retirement—due to my usual neglect of financial considerations and because my good health gave me no thought of stopping my work at any near time. Hope must have mentioned the matter to Florence Reed, treasurer, but they reached no decision that I knew of (37).*

Du Bois lays out a scenario in which his opposition to Florence Reed's candidacy for president of Atlanta University may have led to his forced dismissal. Du Bois said:

*Later I opposed Miss Reed's election as president to succeed Hope; and the new plan gained me wide acclaim. Even the General Education Board which handled Rockefeller funds favored my plan. President Clement while supporting the plan was not enthusiastic. As a new young unknown president, perhaps, he saw my reputation overshadowing him. Letters came to me; visitors asked for me and no doubt Miss Reed encouraged his jealousy. I was conscious that this might occur and tried to be careful (37).*

Despite Du Bois' attempts to appease the possible jealousy of the new and young Atlanta University president, something of a *deliberate plot* resulted in his forced retirement.

*Neither Miss Reed nor President Clement said a word to me about retirement; but at the meeting of the Board of Trustees in 1944, Miss Reed proposed that I be retired. President Clement seconded the motion and apparently with little or no objection the Board passed the vote. Presumably most of the members assumed that the matter had been discussed with me and had my agreement. No pension was mentioned (38).*

Although Atlanta University's forced retirement, or termination, of W. E. B. Du Bois signaled the end of its support of the annual studies on Negro problems,

*there were some earnest attempts to carry the proposed program on. [The Phylon Institute] was transferred to Howard University, with E. Franklin Frazier in charge. An excellent conference was held in 1945. But Frazier was not given funds for continuing the project and the Land Grant Colleges gradually ceased to cooperate. The whole scheme died within a year or two. It has never been revived" (39).*

## Conclusion

Between 1895 and 1924 the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory engaged in urban sociological research investigations directed at ascertaining the physical, economic, and social condition of urban African Americans. Although the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory comprised the first American school of sociology (Wright, 2002 & Wright, 2000), its academic contributions remain invisible within the very discipline it helped develop. As stated previously, the objective of this investigation is not to detail the contributions of Atlanta University sociology, but to provide a historical overview of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. The data presented in this inquiry indicate that the Atlanta University Conference on Negro Problems began in 1895 because of correspondence between Atlanta University graduates and school faculty that indicated the need for sociological investigations into the condition of African Americans in cities. George G. Bradford led the first two Atlanta University studies and was later replaced by Du Bois. After Du Bois was selected to lead the annual investigations in 1896 he altered the annual investigations from their previous unscientific foundation by engaging in systematic method triangulation with theoretical implications. Among Du Bois' additional changes were the annual investigation of single issues instead of the mixture that Bradford championed, the

repeated investigation of those single issues every ten years, and, in theory, the collection of one hundred years of sociological data on Africans in America. After Du Bois' departure in 1914, Thomas I. Brown and J. A. Bigham each authored a remaining monograph and the first era of Atlanta University Conferences on Negro Problems ended with its final publication in 1917 and its final conference in 1924. According to Du Bois, lack of advertising, lack of philanthropic and collegial support, the integrationalist ideals of the university, and his own ideological battle with Booker T. Washington all contributed to the demise of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. The short-lived second era of Atlanta University Conferences on Negro Problems, otherwise known as "The Phylon Institute," began in 1941 and ended in 1945 after E. Franklin Frazier and other noted Black scholars were unable to procure adequate funding to support the annual investigations.

Although the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory conducted systematic urban sociological investigations for almost thirty years, it remains sociologically marginalized with an ambiguous legacy. According to Charles Lemert (1994), the legacy of Atlanta University sociology and W. E. B. Du Bois will not be determined until the discipline of sociology—"noted for its long and serious intellectual (and political) commitment to the race question, one aggressively liberal as to racial inclusiveness" (387)—maneuvers beyond the veil of race that rendered the accomplishments of Atlanta University sociologically invisible. Fittingly, W. E. B. Du Bois (1968) offers a testament to the legacy of Atlanta University sociology.

*It must be remembered that the significance of these studies lay not so much in what they were actually able to accomplish, as in the fact that at the time of their publication Atlanta University was the only institution in the world carrying on a systematic study of the Negro and his development, and putting the result in a form available for the scholars of the world (219).*

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