

**RACISM, SEGREGATION, ACCEPTANCE:
THE AMERICAN ECONOMICS PROFESSION AND BLACK STUDIES,
1890-2022.**

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Abstract

The American economics profession has a tortured relationship with the study of issues relating to Black Americans. This paper traces that history beginning with the overt racism in the period up to about 1910. During this time, W. E. B. Du Bois' attempts to gain acceptance from the American Economic Association failed. Following this, there was a long period during which economic issues relating to the Black population were rarely considered at all by White economists. This despite the Great Migration of Blacks to Northern cities. These issues were dealt with by Black scholars working within Black organizations and colleges and mostly in sociology or history rather than economics. They created what has become known as Black labour studies, but the work they produced was largely ignored by the established economics profession. It is only after World War II that work dealing with Black issues became acceptable enough to appear in leading economics journals, and much more recently still that any substantial literature has emerged within the economics profession.

Keywords: Economics Profession, Racism, Du Bois, Great Migration, SSRC, Discrimination, Black Labor Studies, Stratification Economics.

JEL Classification: B10, B15, J15; J51, J61, J71, N01, N31, N32, Z13

Introduction

This paper came about as the result of an absence. In my previous work on the history of American institutional economics over the inter-war period (Rutherford 2011) I read a great deal of the labor economics literature produced by leading economists at Wisconsin, Columbia, Harvard, Berkeley and elsewhere. This included standard labor economics texts such as T. S. Adams and Helen L. Sumner's *Labor Problems* first published in 1905 but remaining in use for many years, works by Commons and his Wisconsin colleagues, Solomon Blum's *Labor Economics* (1925), Sumner Slichter's *Modern Economic Society* (1931), as well as other textbooks and a large number of books dealing more generally with current economic problems (for example Hamilton 1919). What struck me about these books was the absence of any discussion of the issues facing Black Americans in the labour market. There are discussions of immigration, women and children in the labor market, trade unions, labor unrest, settlement of disputes, unemployment, labor legislation, social insurance, and so on, but virtually no discussion of specific issues facing Black people, except for brief mentions of craft unions discriminating against Black workers (Commons et al. 1918: Vol 2, 136-138). This absence struck me as noteworthy given the Great Migration of Black labor from the South to Northern cities that began around the First World War. This migration developed from the demand for labour in the industrial North due to the War combined with the poor living standards and Jim Crow conditions in the South, but reading the labor economics authored by White academic economists in the North, one would not know of Jim Crow, discrimination and segregation in the South, or of the huge migration of Black people from South to North. Nor would one obtain any hint of the many race riots that targeted Black communities, destroying Black lives and businesses, such as those that occurred in the "Red Summer" of 1919.

As I read further, however, what I discovered was not simply an absence of literature dealing with Black labor issues. In an earlier period, before 1918, Black issues, in the form of “race problems,” *were* discussed in economics but generally in terms of Black racial and/or cultural inferiority. The most obvious exception to this, of course, was W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois did attempt to engage with the economics profession but ultimately failed in his efforts to be accepted. What followed in the interwar period was a silence, an almost complete absence of work of any kind on Black issues published in major outlets in economics. However, I soon found that work on Black issues was being done, but by Black scholars working outside of the White economics profession. What occurred was a *segregation*. The notion of a segregated literature on Black labor issues I first came across in Francille Rusan Wilson’s wonderful book *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies 1890-1950* (Wilson 2006). I will in no way attempt here to replicate Wilson’s work, but what I do hope to do is to chart the tortured relationship between the American economics establishment and the inclusion of Black scholars and work on those economic issues of special concern to the Black population.

Economics and the Black Race: 1890-1910

In the period between 1890 and 1910 American economists produced a number of substantial pieces on aspects of what was then commonly called “race problems” or “The Negro Problem.” Richmond Mayo-Smith considered the issue in his book *Emigration and Immigration* (1890) and significant papers were published in the *American Economic Association Publications* series by Frederick L. Hoffman (1896), Joseph A. Tillinghast (1902), and Alfred H. Stone (1902, 1906). Outside of the *AEA Publications*, Walter F. Willcox and Stone both

published relevant papers in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (Willcox 1905, Stone 1905), and co-authored a book *Studies in the American Race Problem* (Stone and Willcox 1908).

Further, John R. Commons published his *Races and Immigrants in America* in 1907, with its third chapter specifically about “The Negro.” In this period, then, economists did not ignore “race issues” but as these various works clearly demonstrate, the bulk of the profession adopted ideas and arguments either assuming or purporting to show the racial and cultural inferiority of Black people relative to Whites.¹

Columbia economist Richmond Mayo-Smith argued that the Black population by virtue of both race and the effect of slavery will always remain inferior to Whites, and will always be a social and political problem (Mayo-Smith 1890: 64-65; Aldrich 1979: 3; Prasch 2007: 130).

Walter Willcox, discussed below, was his student and largely shared his views.

Hoffman’s 329-page article “The Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro” (1896) claims to be a statistical work. It does contain a great deal of statistical information on Black population, migration patterns, and health, but also includes discussions of race amalgamation, education, crime, morality, and economic conditions that are full of racist ideas.²

Hoffman’s conclusion is that:

All the facts brought together in this work prove that the colored population is gradually parting with the virtues and the moderate degree of economic efficiency developed under the regime of slavery. All the facts prove that a low standard of sexual morality is the main and underlying cause of the low and anti-social condition of the race at the present

¹ This literature is also discussed in Darity (1994), Prasch (2007), and more fully in Aldrich (1979). There was also a much broader concern with biology and genetics within the economics profession related to immigration and eugenics. See Cherry (1976) and Leonard (2016).

² Hoffman’s statistics in the light of the 1890 Census and other work were critically discussed by W. Z. Ripley (1899a). See also Darity (1994).

time. All the facts prove that education, philanthropy and religion have failed to develop a higher appreciation of the stern and uncompromising virtues of the Aryan race. The conclusion is warranted that it is merely a question of time when the actual downward course, that is, a decrease in the population, will take place. In the meantime, however, the presence of the colored population is a serious hindrance to the economic progress of the white race (Hoffman 1896: 329).³

Hoffman originally intended to have the piece published by the American Statistical Society, but was persuaded by Walter Willcox to send it to the AEA instead (Aldrich 1979: 8). Hoffman's article was generally well received, commented on in favorable terms, and extra copies were printed and sold. Jeremiah Jenks, then Secretary of the AEA, did think the piece "unduly pessimistic" about the progress of the race, but that it was still "the most thorough and careful study of the subject" since the Civil War.⁴ The major dissent came from Booker T. Washington who wrote that Hoffman "sets out to prove the worthlessness of the race and he marshals all his figures with that in view."⁵

Tillinghast was the son of a Southern slaveholder and had been a student of Willcox's at Cornell. His article "The Negro in Africa and America" (1902) is also very lengthy at 231 pages, and comes with a preface by Willcox. His thesis is that the African racial, environmental, and cultural origins of the formerly slave population must be taken into account, as well as the effects of slavery. Then "suddenly released" from slavery the "Negro finds it surpassingly

³ The history and prevalence of the "Black Disappearance Hypothesis" is discussed by Darity (1994).

⁴ J. Jenks to Walter Willcox, January 23, 1897. American Economic Association Records, Correspondence of the Secretary Treasurer, 1888-1964, Box 6, Folder 3. Duke University.

⁵ Booker T. Washington to J. Jenks, September 7, 1896. American Economic Association Records, Correspondence of the Secretary Treasurer, 1888-1964, Box 8, Folder 2. Duke University.

difficult to suppress the hereditary instincts that do not harmonize with American social organization.” He is tending to “revert” (Tillinghast 1902: 226). As, in America, the Black population faces competition from superior Whites, it faces the possibility of “elimination” (Tillinghast 1902: 227).

According to Willcox’s preface, Tillinghast shows that many of the adverse effects attributed to slavery are actually the result of African inheritance, putting a better light on slavery as an institution. Some readers expressed doubts about the depth of Tillinghast’s research on Africa, but, as with Hoffman’s article, the overall reaction received by the AEA was positive, and extra copies were printed for sale.⁶ The major criticism came from Du Bois who scathingly remarked that the book “represents a modern view of the Negro and slavery as seen by the son of a slaveholder, and by one, who perhaps naturally, feels that there was much of good in slavery and much of bad in the Negro” (Du Bois 1903a: 697).

It is noteworthy that John R. Commons in his chapter “The Negro” (Commons 1907) refers to both Hoffman and Tillinghast, but Commons reverses Tillinghast’s view of the relative importance of inheritance and of the conditions of Blacks under slavery. Nevertheless, Commons is still of the view that the assimilation of the Black population into American civilization is unlikely to occur simply through education or efforts at uplift. Maintaining a biological view, but in stark contrast to Hoffman, Commons argues that “amalgamation” through interbreeding, or “that mixture of blood that unites races in a single stock,” is their “door to assimilation.”⁷ The “mulatto” Commons sees as differing very little from the White race

⁶ See the correspondence between C. F. Adams and Willcox, and between Frank Fetter and Tillinghast in American Economic Association Records, Correspondence of the Secretary Treasurer, Box 9, Folder 9, and Box 10. Folder 1. Duke University. The Tillinghast piece required a great deal of editorial work done by Fetter. See the correspondence in Box 9, Folder 8.

⁷ Hoffman argues the mulatto is the substantially physically inferior to the “pure negro,” much more prone to disease, and that the crossing of the races has had detrimental effects (Hoffman 1896: 164-188).

(Commons 1907: 210), and “it is the tragedy of race antagonism that they with their longings should suffer the fate of the more contented and thoughtless blacks” (Commons 1907: 210).

Walter Willcox presents a particularly interesting case. He publicly presented himself as an objective statistician, and as a person with some sympathy for the economic condition of the Black population. He made modest financial contributions both to Atlanta University and to the Tuskegee Institute (Aldrich 1979: 3-4), and involved Du Bois in some of his projects (discussed below). Nevertheless, his racial attitudes appear in his support of both Hoffman and Tillinghast, and in the nature of his statistical work. As Aldrich puts it: “the questions on which Willcox gathered his facts, and his tentative explanations of them, were often motivated and shaped by a deeply held conviction of the inferiority of Negroes” (Aldrich 1979: 3). An example is Willcox’s work on “negro criminality” based on prison statistics (Willcox 1899). While he claimed he did not believe that all of the observed differences between the races were due to inheritance, and that the precise role of inheritance had not yet been firmly established, he clearly did believe that inheritance played a significant part. Like Hoffman and Tillinghast, Willcox thought that Blacks would fare badly in competition with Whites. Willcox’s *QJE* article (Willcox 1905) and essays in his book with Stone (Stone and Willcox 1908) are based on his work on “The Negro Population” for the Census Bureau (Willcox 1904).⁸ The repeated point is that Blacks are faring poorly in competition with Whites, and that this was due to the characteristics of Blacks themselves (and therefore, implicitly, not due to discrimination or political repression). Willcox’s many publications and conference papers making this argument,

⁸ Willcox served as one of the Chief Statisticians for the 1900 Census. In a later, 1906, discussion about whether the Census should collect lynching statistics Willcox was opposed and sought to remove any explicit reference to lynching (Aldrich 1979: 12-13). Darity (1994) discusses what he calls the “Willcox School” of those who believed that Blacks could not compete with Whites.

and his status within the profession, “mark Willcox as far and away the most important economist promulgating scientific racist arguments” (Aldrich 1979: 7).

Willcox also heavily promoted the work and career of Mississippi planter Alfred Stone. Stone’s “Negro in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta” (1902) and his “A Plantation Experiment” (1905) are peons of praise for the conditions to be found in the Delta area and in his own plantation experiment. The former includes a maintenance of the pre-Civil War demarcation between the races in terms of position and occupation (there being no White laboring class in the area) that has, according to Stone, preserved harmonious race relations, while the latter includes a system of tenancies that provide, via a detailed contract, for “absolute control” by the plantation management over “all plantation affairs” (Stone 1902: 265; 1905).⁹ Stone denies that “motives of self-interest do not operate with the negro at all,” but he “emphatically asserts” that they “do not intelligently control him” (Stone 1902: 260). Stone was not confident concerning the future prospects for the Black population, and, like Commons, he attributed “whatever successes Negro Americans had achieved to the infusion of white blood, and pointed to both Du Bois and Booker T. Washington as leading examples” (Aldrich 1979: 9).

It is important to recognize, however, that there are some significant exceptions to this catalogue of racism among White economists of the period. Prasch (2007) mentions J. B. Clark as an exception, based largely on an early paper displaying Clark’s Social Christian beliefs (Clark 1891). Clark expresses considerable optimism concerning the future progress of Black Americans based on his opinion that Blacks are showing gradually increasing interest in land ownership. There are problems in the form of the existing psychology of Blacks, but these are “not permanently in the blood” and can be eradicated (Clark 1891: 95). For Clark owning land is

⁹ Stone’s experiment ultimately failed (Oliver 2014: 63).

the first step in a movement toward making Black land-owners full citizens, “competent voters,” and good Christians (Clark 1891: 95-96).

More significant is the case of Carroll D. Wright. Wright served as US Commissioner for Labor from 1885 to 1905 and was placed in charge of the 1890 Census. Despite opposition, Carroll Wright won approval to undertake studies of Blacks, and his Department of Labor published a total of nine social and economic statistical studies of Black populations in a variety of locations (Wilson 2007: 20-21). These were all published in the *Department of Labor Bulletin* as follows:¹⁰

1. Atlanta University, "Conditions of the Negro in Various Cities," (1897).
2. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study," (1898b).
3. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro in the Black Belt: Some Social Sketches," (1899a).
4. William Thom, "The Negroes of Sandy Spring, Maryland: A Social Study," (1901a).
5. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro Landholder of Georgia," (1901).
6. William Thom, "The Negroes of Litwalton, Virginia: A Social Study of the 'Oyster Negro'," (1901b).
7. J. Bradford Laws, "The Negroes of Cinclare Central Factory and Calumet Plantation, Louisiana,"(1902).
8. William Thom, "The True Reformers," (1902).
9. Richard R. Wright, Jr., "The Negroes of Xenia, Ohio: A Social Study," (1903).

The first study with no named author was headed by George G. Bradford, a Trustee of Atlanta University. He won the approval of the University to initiate studies of Black city life, also involving Black researcher R. R. Wright Jr., and with the data “gathered exclusively by

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/blackstudieslist>

representative colored men and women” (Grossman 1974). Three of the other studies were done by Du Bois and one by R. R. Wright Jr. Carroll Wright also consulted with Du Bois over the survey methods and the overall design of the research was largely Du Bois’ (Wilson 2007: 22-23). Du Bois remarked upon the “hopefulness” concerning the future of his Farmville subjects and R. R. Wright Jr. made a similar finding in his study. The four studies done by White researchers (Thom and Laws) reached different conclusions, Thom finding little hopefulness and “degeneration” or “reversion,” while Laws found no progress and concluded that Blacks were “hopelessly inferior” (Grossman 1974). Nevertheless, the promotion of Black studies and the opportunities given by Carroll Wright to Black researchers were unprecedented.

W. Z. Ripley of Harvard reviewed both the Hoffman monograph and Du Bois’ Farmville study, along with various other studies of Census information. One conclusion of Ripley’s is interesting for its criticism of Hoffman:

it seems to me far more probable that Dr. Du Bois is right in ascribing the relatively slow rate of increase of the average negro family to the fact that it is economically on the ‘upgrade,’ than to accept Hoffman's explanation that hybridity, vice and ignorance are accountable for it. . . . In short, not excessive mortality alone, but a decreased birth rate as well, due to the first glimmer of ambition to get ahead in the world, should be taken into consideration (Ripley 1899a: 47).

Ripley recommended further careful study. Unfortunately, the conditions favorable to Black studies at the Department of Labor were not to continue. Opposition from Southern politicians resulted in downgrades to the Department, and budget problems. Carroll Wright left in 1905. A tenth study done by Du Bois, with the assistance of R. R. Wright Jr. and Monroe Work, on Black

social and economic conditions in Lowndes County, Alabama, and that he regarded as his best work, was never published and his manuscript destroyed (Grossman 1974).

Du Bois and the Economics Profession

The details of Du Bois' career are well known. What will be briefly detailed here are his efforts to be accepted as a peer by economists in the Northern universities. After completing a second bachelor's degree and two years of graduate study at Harvard, Du Bois went to Germany where he attended Berlin University and worked with Adolf Wagner and Gustav Schmoller. He also took lectures from Max Weber,¹¹ then a visiting professor at Berlin, and participated in Schmoller's *Verein fur Sozialpolitik*. Du Bois was in Berlin for three semesters but then forced to return to the US due to lack of funding. Although Du Bois' PhD would eventually be in history from Harvard (awarded in 1895), I agree with Prasch (2008), and Oliver (2014) that Du Bois should not be regarded as purely a historian or sociologist, but as a social scientist working in the German historical tradition. In that tradition economics, sociology, and history are not clearly separated. Many American economists had gone to Germany for advanced training and Du Bois could have seen himself as fully a member of the large cohort of German trained American progressive social scientists, and as much an economist as anything else. On the other hand, many of the supposed problems with the Black population were thought to be matters of health, family, morality, and social environment. Their low economic position being seen as either due to heredity or to sociological factors, and Du Bois often described his investigations as sociological: as "social studies" of specific groups.¹² Du Bois' identification with sociology (and

¹¹ Du Bois met Weber in Germany. They corresponded concerning the "color line" in America in 1904-5 when Weber was in the US and immediately afterwards. See Chandler (2006).

¹² Wilson notes that in the period before WW1 the American Sociological Society (later changed to American Sociological Association in 1959) gave little attention to Black life (Wilson 2006: 75).

his difficulties with economics) may have been a factor in later Black social scientists tending to that discipline.

Both Prasch and Oliver detail the close linkage between Du Bois' early studies, particularly the research program he pursued in the Department of Labor and his remarkable study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899b), and his German historical training. In his 1898 article "The Study of Negro Problems,"¹³ Du Bois lays out his hopes for the future properly scientific study of Black issues: "The most baneful cause of uncritical study of the Negro is the manifest and far-reaching bias of writers" (Du Bois 1898a: 14). He argues for more studies "of the Negro as a social group" including the economic and social development and the conditions of life of many specific groups, as well as studies of "his peculiar social environment," including the environment of prejudice and discrimination: "The attempt should be made to isolate and study the tangible phenomena of Negro prejudice in all possible cases; its effect on the Negro's physical development, on his mental acquisitiveness, on his moral and social condition, as manifested in economic life, in legal sanctions and in crime and lawlessness" (Du Bois 1898a: 18-20). In *The Philadelphia Negro* Du Bois writes:

No matter how well trained a Negro may be, or how fitted for work of any kind, he cannot in the ordinary course of competition hope to be much more than a menial servant. He cannot get clerical or supervisory work to do save in exceptional cases. He cannot teach save in a few of the remaining Negro schools. He cannot become a mechanic except for small transient jobs, and cannot join a trades union (Du Bois 1899b: 323).

¹³ This paper was published in the *Annals* of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. The AAPSS had been founded by Edmund James with an interdisciplinary focus on pressing social problems. It was more open to Black scholars and discussion of Black issues than the leading disciplinary journals in either economics or sociology.

What Du Bois hoped to see was the development of one or more of the Black colleges as research centers to work in collaboration with major Northern universities such as Pennsylvania, Columbia, John Hopkins, or Harvard. Du Bois had been employed by the University of Pennsylvania during his *Philadelphia* study, but he was not offered a further position there, and joined the faculty of Atlanta University in 1897, taking over the Atlanta Conference studies.¹⁴

Du Bois' work brought him to the attention of Walter Willcox, and as noted above Willcox involved Du Bois in some of his projects. As early as December 1899 Willcox had agreed to Chair a "Committee on the Economic Condition of the Negro" to be established by the AEA.¹⁵ One condition of his agreement was that he should select the other Committee members. He chose Du Bois, Harry T. Newcomb, Alfred Stone, and W. Z. Ripley. Newcomb was a specialist in railway economics and public regulation, while Harvard economist Ripley had previously reviewed work by Du Bois and Hoffman, and had just published his *The Races of Europe* (1899b), a discussion of what he considered the three major racial types in Europe using geographic and anthropometric data. As mentioned above, Stone was a Southern planter and protégé of Willcox. During the time this Committee existed Du Bois was producing some of his most significant work: *The Negro Artisan* (1902), and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903b). These were controversial works outlining both the failings in Black culture, and the prejudice and discrimination facing Blacks leading to Blacks being pushed out of artisan occupations. Willcox invited Du Bois to join him in a project concerning Black economic conditions for the Census

¹⁴ The Atlanta Conferences and their related studies had been begun by R. R. Wright Sr, father to R. R. Wright Jr. He was Vice President of the Atlanta University Trustees and instrumental in bringing Du Bois to Atlanta. For details of the Atlanta Conference program see Rudwick (1957).

¹⁵ Letter from Charles H. Hull to Willcox, December 8, 1899, and Willcox to Hull, December 12, 1899. American Economic Association Records, Correspondence of the Secretary Treasurer, Box 8, Folder 9. Duke University. At this point Willcox was Secretary of the AEA and Hull was Treasurer.

Bureau, and also to join the AEA. Du Bois did both. Willcox's contribution to the Census studies, "The Negro Population," was discussed above. Du Bois' contribution "The Negro Farmer" is a presentation of statistics concerning Black owned or tenanted farms mainly concerned with proportions and trends in various areas of the country. Du Bois found a generally increasing trend of farm ownership except where the conditions of tenancy were adverse, land prices high, or educational opportunities lacking (Du Bois 1904).¹⁶

The Committee on the Economic condition of the Negro produced a preliminary report "The Economic Position of the American Negro" for the AEA conference in 1904 and published in 1905 (Willcox et al. 1905). The report begins as follows:

The committee was constituted in the hope that its members, two of whom were then connected with the Census Bureau, might aid in the presentation or interpretation of the important statistical results of the Twelfth Census bearing upon the economic position of the negro. . . . As three of the five members of your committee assisted in the preparation of that bulletin and as a copy of it has been mailed by the Census Bureau to each member of the Council of this Association, it will be treated as a part of our report (Willcox et al. 1905: 216).¹⁷

¹⁶ Du Bois' attempts to engage members of the AEA also included an invitation to E. R. A. Seligman, then President of the AEA, and other AEA members to visit Atlanta University on their way to the 1903 AEA convention in New Orleans. Seligman accepted, and according to Oliver (2014) this began a "long friendship" between Du Bois and Seligman.

¹⁷ Bureau of the Census, Bulletin 8, 1904. It is not clear who the third contributor from the Committee was but likely Stone.

The Committee report did little more than summarize some of the findings of the Census Bulletin with respect to occupations, earnings, and wealth of Black households with essentially no analysis or commentary. Du Bois objected to Willcox's and Stone's estimates of Black wealth and property holdings in the report and refused to sign it. Willcox published it anyway with Du Bois' name attached (Wilson 2006: 79).

The Committee did continue, and prepared a conference session for the 1905 AEA meeting involving papers by Du Bois and Stone with discussion. These appeared as Du Bois "The Economics Future of the Negro" (Du Bois 1906), and Stone "The Economic Future of the Negro: The Factor of White Competition" (Stone 1906), with Roscoe C. Bruce, Charles L. Raper, Thomas Marberg, M. B. Hammond, and H. W. Farnam as discussants. Du Bois used the opportunity to discuss the economic position of various differently situated groups of Black workers. He weights in strongly on the role of discrimination in hindering the economic advance of Blacks:

An American of Negro descent will find more or less concerted effort on the part of his white neighbors: (a.) To keep him from all positions of authority. (b.) To prevent his promotion to higher grades. (c.) To exclude him entirely from certain lines of industry. (d.) To prevent him from competing upon equal terms with white workingmen. (e.) To prevent his buying land. (f.) To prevent his defense of his economic rights and status by the ballot (Du Bois 1906: 224).

Du Bois argues that the group of "independents" are making progress despite concerted efforts to "beat them back," particularly in the towns and cities. These are the farmers, teachers,

clergymen, merchants and professional men. Much of their progress has come from economic activity within the Black communities they live in, what Du Bois calls “group economy.”

Others, such as artisans and tenant farmers are “struggling” due to trade union opposition in the industrial trades and oppressive tenancy arrangements in the country. Here Du Bois refers to his unpublished work on Lowndes County, Alabama:

In this county, during the last ten years there has been carried on a scheme of cooperative land buying under the Calhoun School. It was asked for by a few Negroes who could not get land; it was engineered by a Negro graduate of Hampton; it was made possible by the willingness of a white landlord to sell his plantation and actively further the enterprise by advice and good will. It was capitalized by white northerners and inspired by a New England woman. Here was every element in partnership and the experiment began in 1897. It involved the buying of 3000 acres by 100 men. It encountered all sorts of difficulty . . . And yet what are the results? Nine years ago not one of the 100 men had a deed to a single acre of land; today they hold 77 warranty deeds conveying to them over 3000 acres of absolutely unencumbered land (Du Bois 1906: 234-235).

In other places the group of unskilled laborers remain in a “precarious” position. The laws of contract, wages, and vagrancy in the South continually push people into crime or pauperism; his condition is so intolerable that he is “running away to the cities.” Better economic opportunities, legal changes, and educational facilities are necessary for further progress, and for Du Bois that requires that Black people be given the vote and a political voice (Du Bois 1906).

Stone’s paper is in complete contrast. The problems of the Black population come not from prejudice and discrimination but from lack of efficiency, meaning that the Black of any

occupation cannot compete with Whites. Stone even argues that White immigrant labor (particularly Italian) is out-competing Black labor in the area of sugar and cotton production in the South. Despite Du Bois' data, Stone sees only the opposite of economic progress. Moreover, for Stone, the foundation of real prosperity is to be found in moral qualities lacking in Blacks: pure domestic life, commercial integrity, high standards of moral worth, courage, uprightness, and soundness of judgement. Without these qualities a race will always be "an inferior people" (Stone 1906).

Of the discussants none agree with the degree of Du Bois' emphasis on the role of prejudice or his view of the importance of Blacks in the South gaining the vote. Roscoe does agree with Du Bois that conditions for Blacks are improving at least within the "Black Belt," and approves of the efforts of the Tuskegee Institute. Raper fully accepts Stone's position. Marburg considers Stone's point about White competition a "fundamental consideration." While superficially agreeing with Du Bois' plea for greater equality of opportunity, Marburg characterizes Jim Crow as the outcome of a "natural tendency" and concludes that "the indications are that the negro, instead of acquiring greater social equality as time goes on, will be relegated to a still lower social position." Hammond agrees with Du Bois that race prejudice is a problem in the South, but not in the North where White workers and employers have simply found Blacks less efficient and reliable. He does dispute a number of Stone's assertions but argues that the Black worker must improve his efficiency if he is to compete with Whites, and sees the Tuskegee program as the way forward. Farnam comes closest to Du Bois in praising his mention of "the land owning system at Calhoun." On the other hand, while he agrees that there is a restrictive caste system in place in the South, one that generates individual harms and race friction, Farnam turns Du Bois' point around and asks whether this might not provide

“protection” in the sense of promoting a Black “group economy” (Bruce et al. 1906: 295-324). There was also some public discussion of this session with strong support for Stone’s position coming from W. G. Leland of the Carnegie Institution. For Leland Du Bois was a “blind optimist,” and Stone “truly the friend” of Black people (Wilson 2006: 78). The significance here is that Du Bois hoped to obtain funding from Carnegie.

Prior to the conference session Du Bois sent Willcox a copy of his paper. Willcox’s response was non-committal claiming it “was not possible to judge” how much the condition of Blacks was due to “persistent characteristics of the people” and how much to the “color line in society.” Du Bois responded angrily bringing up Willcox’s article on Black criminality and his support of Tillinghast: “How on earth any fair-minded student of the situation could have stood sponsor for a book like Tillinghast’s and actually praised it is simply beyond my comprehension” (Wilson 2006: 74). Du Bois invited Willcox to Atlanta University to see the work being done by his students. Willcox accepted and attended the 10th Conference in 1905 and praised the work being done there (Oliver 2014: 59), but Willcox continued to promote Stone over Du Bois. In 1908 Stone and Willcox published *Studies in the American Race Problem* containing essays by both men including Stone’s 1906 *AEA* paper. Willcox wrote the introduction and contributed three previously published papers of his own. Willcox also promoted Stone for the Carnegie Foundation funding that Du Bois also had hopes for.

In 1906 Du Bois invited Franz Boas to attend the 11th Conference and also give the commencement address. Boas strongly argued against the notion of Black racial inferiority, spoke of the many technical and cultural achievements made by African peoples, and advised the students he was addressing that they should not look to White people for encouragement or approval (Boas 1906). Boas’ talk put him, like Du Bois, at odds with Booker T. Washington, at

least for a time, and may have cost him funding (Zumwalt and Willis 1906). Similarly, without Carnegie support the Atlanta University Conference program became short of money, and Du Bois was obliged to accept money from Stone in order to run the Conference in 1907 (Wilson 2006: 80). Stone was in charge and this infuriated Du Bois. On top of this Du Bois had failed to interest any Northern university in co-operating with Atlanta University and help to create a research center there.

Du Bois inevitably became disillusioned with the “American world of science and letters.” In his autobiography he wrote “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). He left Atlanta University in 1910 to take the position of Director of Publications and Research for the NAACP.¹⁸

White Economics and Black Issues 1910-1940

A search of JSTOR economics journals between 1910 and 1920 with the word “Negro” in the title reveals one article in the *AER* in 1914 concerning the movement of Black population in the 1900 Census (Rose 1914), and one article in the *JPE* in 1917 concerning the Great Migration (Scroggs 1917). There were 19 other results, all articles published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, most of them in one special issue “The Negro’s Progress in 50 Years” published in 1913. The contributors included Black authors Du Bois, R. R. Wright Jr, Monroe Work, George Haynes, Kelly Miller, Booker T. Washington, and White sociologists Robert E. Park (then working with Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee

¹⁸ Du Bois was one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It was first formed in 1909 and incorporated in 1911. Du Bois edited the NAACP journal *Crisis*.

Institute, and soon to move to Chicago) and Howard W. Odum (then at the University of Georgia). No well-known economist contributed. A similar search for the years following up to 1929 reveals nothing at all in major journals in economics, but 26 papers in the *Annals*, all but one in a single special issue on “The American Negro” published in November 1928. The contributors included a good number of Black writers and White sociologists (Park, Ernest Burgess, and L. L. and J. S. Bernard) but again no recognizable economists. From 1930 to 1940 a few papers appear in *Science and Society* (mostly by Herbert Aptheker),¹⁹ one two page note in the *Journal of Farm Economics* on the training of Black farmers, and article in the *Southern Economic Journal* on “The Negro in Southern Trade Unionism” (Mitchell 1936). Outside of major economics journals there was some interest in studies of Black labor among economists, but not enough to result in any significant publications.

Rose’s 1914 paper on the 1900 Census appears to be mostly concerned with reassuring a White audience that the fears of a rising proportion of Blacks in the population and of growing “race amalgamation” are unfounded:

We have now ten millions of negro inhabitants. They are, in the New Testament sense, our neighbors. It will not be easy to bring about a working adjustment between the Golden Rule and the deep-seated convictions, instincts, or prejudices of so many American white men. But the problem can be approached free from any apprehension that the darker race will ever be, in any considerable portion of the country, numerically predominant (Rose 1914: 286).

¹⁹ Aptheker was a Jewish member of the Communist party who as a youth had been shocked by a visit to the South. He obtained MA and PhD degrees from Columbia and wrote on slave rebellions for his MA, which he was awarded in 1937. He obtained his PhD in 1943. He became a well-known Marxist historian. He was chosen by Du Bois to be his literary executor.

Scroggs' 1917 paper in the *Journal of Political Economy*, is the *only* paper on the Great Migration published in a leading academic economics journal over this period.²⁰ The article opens by relating Black migration to the North as an aspect of some inherent tendency of Blacks to “wander” and change location, often without very much advance planning or forethought—which would suggest little economic rationality and implying the same about the Great Migration. However, he goes on to locate the additional causes of the Great Migration in “beckoning” and “driving” factors. Beckoning being the better job opportunities and lesser discrimination in the North, driving being “low wages paid farm labor, an unsatisfactory tenant or crop-sharing system, the boll weevil, the crop failures of 1916, lynching, disfranchisement, segregation, poor schools, and the monotony, isolation, and drudgery of farm life” (Scroggs 1917: 1041). Scroggs observes that the driving conditions are not new and have existed for decades, so the factor that has changed is the attractive job prospects in the North. This argument is contrary to Du Bois' findings in earlier work such as *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), as movement to the North on a smaller scale had been occurring for some time. It is also the case that the development of Jim Crow in the South had materially worsened the social condition of Blacks, so it could hardly be said that those conditions had not changed over decades. Scroggs agreed that the movement to Northern cities was likely to improve the economic condition of Blacks in the North, but this was because they could learn from Whites. In the South, migration could lead to shortages of labor that he suggests might improve economic conditions and even lead Southern planters to declare “that the colored race shall be accorded the practical enjoyment of all rights, civil and political, guaranteed by the said constitutions and

²⁰ On the lack of work by economists on the great migration see also Collins (2021: n11) and Darity (1994).

laws” (Scroggs 1917: 1042). The idea that Black migration from the south would lead to a substantial change in Southern attitudes had appeal to White commentators, but was never a realistic possibility. Scroggs also claimed that migration had its “debit side” in the creation of crowding, poor housing and other adverse conditions in the Black areas of Northern cities. These, according to Scroggs, work against forming a stable family life and a solid foundation for “true” progress. Without quite saying so, Scroggs suggests that Blacks might be better off staying in the South, a view by no means limited to himself. Scroggs’ article still displays racist attitudes and its publication in the *JPE* gave it particular visibility and status. The idea that the “pull” factors dominated during the years of the Great Migration itself became a common view.

It is also worth mentioning the Social Science Research Council project on Human Migration that was operating between 1924 and 1927 (Fisher 1993: 41). This project is interesting as it shows some shift in attitude away from notions of inherited Black inferiority. This project, the first undertaken by the newly formed SSRC,²¹ grew out of a similar project on Scientific Problems of Human Migration being undertaken by the National Research Council. The NRC project did contain a proposal from the National Bureau of Economic Research involving Wesley Mitchell and Harry Jerome, and dealing with the effects of migration on business cycles and mechanization. But most of the projects considered were biological or psychological and focused on measuring and evaluating the “human traits” of different immigrant groups. The file contains a description of a project on eugenic lines from Harry H. Laughlin, presented at a Conference on Human Migration, called “The Measure of Specific Degeneracies in Immigrant and Native Population Groups of the United States,” including such things as feeble-mindedness, insanity, criminality, epilepsy, inebriety, disease, blindness and

²¹ The SSRC was formally incorporated in late 1923. Wesley Mitchell became the second Chairman of the SSRC in 1927, after Charles Merriam. For a study of the SSRC see Fisher (1993).

deafness, deformity, and dependency. To do this the proposal was to survey the inmates of “state institutions for the socially inadequate” and to obtain an estimate of the frequency of deficiencies for each group. The project included Blacks, but failed to get a result in their case due to the low number of blacks who were institutionalized.²²

When discussions began on the formation of the Social Science Research Council, the NRC took the view that its social science programs should be transferred. The SSRC, once established, set up its own Committee on Human Migration with Edith Abbott as Chair. Members on the Committee were Abbott, three members from the NRC Migration Committee (Mary Van Kleeck, Clark Whistler, and Robert Yerkes), and eight others including Wesley Mitchell, and John R. Commons. Funding was received from the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation (LSRM). The Committee was later expanded to include anthropologists and psychologists. Despite this there was something of a shift from the NRC to the SSRC program away from the measurement of race traits and issues of intermixing that were prominent in the NRC Committee program. Although the issue did not entirely disappear, the SSRC Migration Committee wanted to focus on social and economic factors, a view that became stronger as Franz Boas’ critique of the idea of stable racial characteristics became more widely accepted.²³

Harry Jerome’s second project on immigration and mechanization, designed to ascertain if mechanization could substitute for immigration from Europe, was carried over from the NRC to the SSRC Migration Committee,²⁴ but there was a great deal of discussion over other possible

²² Rockefeller Archive Center, LRSM Series 3.6, Box 58, Folder 629. This project was not actually funded by the NRC, but it was discussed. Both Laughlin and C. B. Davenport were involved in discussions with the NRC over projects. For a more detailed discussion of the NRC project see Walsh (1997).

²³ See the discussion of Boas in the Committee on Human Migration report of December 27, 1926. LRSM Series 3.6, Box 64, Folder 687. RAC.

²⁴ The first, *Migration and Business Cycles* by Harry Jerome (1926) was completed under the NRC.

projects with many considered and rejected for various reasons. There was clear interest in having a project dealing with Black migration from the South but finding a suitable project proved difficult. A proposal from labor economist Don Lescohier of Wisconsin involving the study of both “Negro and Mexican” migration within the US, was considered but it was felt to be too large and financially “impossible” (Walsh 1997: 16). In any case Lescohier failed to get teaching release from Wisconsin. Harold Moulton and Edwin Nourse of Brookings also expressed interest in the topic of Black migration, but nothing definite developed.²⁵ So, a few economists of institutionalist persuasion expressed interest in the topic, but failed to produce a viable project. Eventually Wesley Mitchell encouraged his Columbia colleague, sociologist Frank A. Ross, to present a proposal to Edith Abbott. He did produce a proposal which was funded.²⁶

Ross’s outline promised a substantial and sophisticated statistical investigation of Black migration to the North utilizing census and many other sources of information.²⁷ What he proposed was significantly more than what was eventually produced, but Ross did involve four White graduate students all of whom received PhDs in sociology from Columbia for their work. Along with Louise Kennedy, Ross produced a vast bibliography of relevant work. Ross and Kennedy’s bibliography and the other four volumes were all produced only after the SSRC Migration Committee had officially wrapped up.²⁸ They were:

²⁵ “Report of the Committee on Human Migration, November 28, 1924,” LRSM, Series 3.6, Box 68, Folder 710, RAC.

²⁶ Other funded projects included “World statistics of Migration” by Walter Willcox (with the NBER), “Antecedents of Mexican Migration” by Manuel Gamio (to be conducted in Mexico), a small project on “Swedish Migration” by Florence Janson, and “The Mexican Labor Problem in California” by Paul Taylor, a Berkeley labor economist (DeWind 1999). For discussion of the Mexican projects see Walsh (1997) and Chapter 7 of Hendrickson (2013).

²⁷ Ross’s outline is contained in “Report of the Committee on Human Migration,” December 27, 1926, LRSM, Series 3.6, Box 64, Folder 687, RAC.

²⁸ Because of this, the project was classified as not having produced any publications in the 1930 report by E. B. Wilson (Report on Projects by President E. B. Wilson, SSRC, Accession 1, Series 9, Box 351, Folder 2083, RAC). This is repeated by Walsh (1997) and Hendrickson (2013: 260).

1. Louise V. Kennedy: *The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward*, 1930.
2. Dean Dutcher: *The Negro in Modern Industrial Society*, 1930.
3. Edward E. Lewis: *The Mobility of the Negro*, 1931.
4. Clyde V. Kiser: *Sea Island to City*, 1932.
5. Frank A. Ross and Louise V. Kennedy: *A Bibliography of Negro Migration*, 1934.

Ross's own view was that Black migration patterns are to be seen primarily as a part of the *general* population movement to urban areas (Ross 1931). Louise Kennedy's book makes frequent reference to Scroggs. Her emphasis generally is on the "pull" of the prospects of Northern employment, rather than the "push" of discrimination, although poor economic conditions in the South are given a role.²⁹ Edward Lewis' book explicitly concentrates on economic factors, and also explores the push/pull argument. He finds that the pull of industrial conditions in the North to be the dominant factor, except for the South East section of the cotton belt where poor agricultural conditions also played a role (Lewis 1932; 1933). It is noticeable that although Lewis' 1933 paper explicitly concerned labor supply it was published in the *Political Science Quarterly* and not in an economics journal. Lewis later became a faculty member in economics at Howard and a colleague of Abram Harris. Dean Dutcher's book examines changes in occupations of Black workers between 1910 and 1920, while Clyde Kiser's book examines the St Helena Island migrants after their move to Harlem.³⁰

²⁹ See Marks (1985) and Schwartz (2020) for critical comments on Kennedy.

³⁰ Kennedy and Kiser married. He became an expert on population for the Millbank Memorial Fund. Louise Kennedy served for a number of years in the research division of Princeton University. Dutcher became a faculty member in social science at Millersville University. As far as I have been able to discover Lewis was White. He does not appear in lists of Black PhDs. See Greene (1946).

George Mitchell's article on Southern trade unionism is a lonely publication from 1936 and considers the effect of New Deal programs on Southern unionism. He begins by observing that: "the Southern trade unionism of the last thirty-odd years has been in good measure a protective device for the march of White artisans into places held by Negroes" (Mitchell 1936: 27). Mitchell details the racial division of jobs in the South and the inroads White unions have made in taking over previously Black occupations. White locals were "jealous of every skilled place held by Negroes" (Mitchell 1936: 28). Mitchell then goes on to detail the positive effects of the National Industrial Recovery Act in promoting Black union membership. Many locals were segregated but some had mixed membership, the latter resulting in significant shift in attitude on the part of White unionists. Given the significance of New Deal labor programs for Black workers it is surprising to find only this single article on the topic.³¹

What we see in this period, then, is (1) some (although incomplete) movement away from arguments about inherent inferiority, and towards a focus on economic and social conditions and incentives; but at the same time (2) a fairly general abdication of investigation and discussion of Black labor issues by White economists. The lack of an economics literature on Black labor issues in this period has been remarked upon before by Robert E. Prasch (2007) and, more recently, by William Collins (2021). The Great Migration raised many purely economic issues relating to the demand and supply of labor and the functioning of the American labor market generally which might have attracted economists. Also, as Prasch states "it is difficult to understand on purely intellectual grounds why the dynamics of racial inequality, conflict, and discrimination would be anything other than a compelling subject of research" (Prasch 2007: 158). Collins also notes the "comparatively little" attention to the Great Migration in economic

³¹ For discussion of the New Deal in relation to Black union membership see Moreno (2006: 163-196).

journals and points to the lack of diversity in the profession: “It is surely possible that a more diverse economics profession would have engaged the study of the Great Migration differently, more intensively, or more continuously over time” (Collins 2021: 6). As will be seen below such issues tended to be left to Black researchers operating largely outside of the White academic system, and to a few White sociologists such as Park at Chicago, and Odum and T. J. Woofter Jr. in North Carolina.³² In this period sociology became a profession more open to work on Black issues than economics. Sociology departments also appear to have been significantly more open to Black students than were economics departments.

With only a few exceptions, White American economists seem to have been unable themselves to embrace the study of the economic issues facing Black people,³³ and, apart from Wesley Mitchell, were not even particularly well represented on the various Committees and Commissions that did come to sponsor Black labor studies. These committees were populated mostly by reform minded Whites such as Jane Adams, Paul Kellogg, Edward Devine, Frances Kellor, and Mary Ovington (Wilson 2006: 83). For the most part economists simply ignored Black labor issues.

Black Social Scientists 1900-1940

Up until the First World War W. E. B. Du Bois was by far the most prominent Black scholar working in the social sciences. But Du Bois’ example inspired many others to take degrees in history, economics, or sociology and to make contributions to the field of Black

³² For a discussion of the racial views of White sociologists such as Park, W. I. Thomas, Odum, Guy B. Johnson, and Woofter see McKee (1993). Odum’s work mostly concerned Black folk culture. Thomas was a popular instructor for Black students at Chicago due to his anti-racist views.

³³ In 1929 Scott Nearing published his searing indictment of racism against Blacks: *Black America*. Nearing was a student of Simon Patten’s and had been a faculty member at Wharton until let go due to his anti-business writings. By 1929 he was outside of the academic world writing for the Communist paper *The Daily Worker*.

labor studies. Wilson calls this group “the segregated scholars” as they did not obtain appointments in major universities or publish in major journals. Instead, they worked at Black colleges or for organizations such as the National Urban League, and their work funded through various committees such as the LSRM sponsored National Interracial Conference, or the Southern Commission for Interracial Cooperation, that generally consisted of reform minded Whites. At the Rockefeller Foundation, Leonard Outhwaite was an important advocate of research on Blacks in the 1920s, and Rockefeller money for that purpose went to the SSRC and other organizations. The SSRC created an “Advisory Committee on Problems Related to the Negro” in 1925, and a year later changed its name to “The Advisory Committee on Interracial Relations.” The Committee consisted of White sociologists Howard Odum and Frank Ross, economist F. S. Deibler, and anthropologist Clark Wissler. This Committee funded Howard Odum’s studies of St. Helena Island, other White sociologists working on Black issues such as Thomas J. Woofter Jr., and Black researchers Charles S. Johnson, and Franklin Frazier (Fisher 1993: 54). Other sources of funding came from the Rosenwald Fund and the Russell Sage Foundation (Stanfield 2011: 99-120). The limits of this model were severe:

The foundation sponsorship of the career development of black social scientists succeeded by conforming with the Jim Crow racial attitudes and policies that maintained formal segregation and restricted Blacks to clearly circumscribed roles and occupations (e.g. “Negro jobs,” “race leader,” and “Negro sociologist”). . . . Foundations did not encourage Blacks to “get out of their place” by developing careers in non-racial areas. (Stanfield 2011: 106).

White dominated committees concerned with Black issues tended to think that Black researchers would be better able to connect with the subjects of such research both in terms of data gathering and knowledge of Black life (Stanfield 2011: 105), but there was no doubt who was in overall control. Because Blacks did not have access to White universities, the foundations did help create greater social science teaching and research capacity at Black colleges such as Atlanta University, Howard University, and especially Fisk University (Stanfield 2011: 106), but this simply institutionalized the segregation of Black scholars. In the development of Black social scientists, economists and economics departments played a minor role, the vast majority obtained degrees in sociology or history (see Table 1).

Du Bois was discussed above. As mentioned, both R. R. Wright Jr. and Nathan Work collaborated with Du Bois on the Department of Labor studies developed under Carroll D. Wright. R. R. Wright Jr.'s thesis was on "The History of the Pennsylvania Negro," and he wrote the section on Black steel workers in the *Pittsburg Survey* (R. R. Wright Jr. 1914), finding them perfectly efficient and capable of supervising both Black and White workers. In 1928 he returned to his previous interest in the ministry.

Monroe Work's thesis related the proportion of Black people living in slums to their rates of crime, very much in contrast to the earlier work on Black crime by people such as Willcox. His article on this subject became the first published by a Black social scientist in the *Journal of Sociology* (Work 1900). For many years he worked at the Tuskegee Institute and edited the *Negro Yearbook*.

Haynes, Woodson, Johnson, and Reid all worked on the Great Migration and their careers intersected in many ways. These men really cemented the place of Black labor studies in sociology and history. George Haynes helped found the National Urban League, served as its

Table 1:
African-American Contributors to Black Labor Studies
Graduate Degrees and Disciplines, 1895-1940³⁴

W. E. B. Du Bois	Graduate work, Germany	PhD 1895 Harvard	History
Monroe Work	AM 1903 Chicago	--	Sociology
R. R. Wright Jr.	AM 1904 Chicago (Div)	PhD 1911 Pennsylvania	Sociology
George E. Haynes	AM 1904 Yale	PhD 1912 Columbia	Sociology
Carter G. Woodson	AM 1908 Chicago (Soc)	PhD 1912 Harvard	History
Charles S. Johnson	PhB 1917 Chicago ³⁵	Graduate work, Chicago	Sociology
Sadie T. M. Alexander	AM 1919 Pennsylvania	PhD 1921 Pennsylvania	Economics
Charles H. Wesley	AM 1913 Yale	PhD 1925 Harvard	History
Henderson H. Donald	AM 1920 Yale	PhD 1926 Yale	Econ/Soc ³⁶
Abram L. Harris	MA 1924 Pittsburgh	PhD 1930 Columbia	Economics
E. Franklin Frazier	MA 1920 Clark	PhD 1931 Chicago	Sociology
Robert C. Weaver	MA 1931 Harvard	PhD 1934 Harvard	Economics
Ira De Augustine Reid	MA 1925 Pittsburgh	PhD 1939 Columbia	Sociology
Lorenzo Greene	MA 1926 Columbia	PhD 1942 Columbia	History

³⁴ This information is culled from Greene 1946. The MA dates give a better indication of generational cohorts than the PhD dates.

³⁵ Most sources say that Johnson received a PhD from Chicago in 1917. This is not correct. His highest degree was a PhB (Bachelor of Philosophy). His graduate studies in Chicago were interrupted by World War I and then by the Chicago riots. See Wilson (2006: 145-146), and Greene (1946).

³⁶ Wilson (2006: 122) describes him as an economist, but according to Greene (1946) his degree was in "Economics, Government and Sociology." Correspondence with Yale Archives suggests Economics/Sociology is the correct description.

first Director (1911-1918) and co-edited its journal *Opportunity*. He was involved in establishing the social work training center at Fisk. It is worth noting that the NUL was generally anti-union in attitude due to union restrictions on Black membership.³⁷

Haynes' research focused on the conditions for migrant Blacks in cities (Haynes 1913). Anticipating Ross, he sees Black migration as a part of a general move to urban areas, the size of the flow depending on the particular push/pull factors operating at any given time. Black migration was based on primarily on economic considerations both in terms of Northern employment opportunities and the economic conditions in the South. The problems faced by Black migrants are difficulties of adjusting to urban life, lack of skills, and discrimination on the part of unions and employers. In Haynes' view, this discrimination was due in part to the lower skill level of many Black migrants, but also to a view of Blacks as properly occupying a place "fixed by a previous condition of servitude" (Haynes 1913: 112-113). However, Haynes is recognized as tending to "sublimate" the role of discrimination (Stewart 1991), and of being a "moderate" when it came to issues of race relations (Wilson 2006: 120-127).

In 1918 Woodrow Wilson appointed Haynes to head the new "Division of Negro Economics" which had the job of organizing "cooperative committees of white and colored citizens in the States and localities where problems of Negro labor arise, due to large numbers of Negro workers" (Haynes 1921: 12-13; Stewart 1997: 213). Initially, the proposal for the Division had come from a Black opponent of the migration of Blacks from the South. His appointment to lead the Committee was only prevented by a campaign of opposition by Du Bois and other leaders of "black and interracial organizations" (Wilson 2006: 129). While leading the Division, Haynes published (with difficulty) a report "The Negro at Work in World War and

³⁷ For a detailed study of the attitude of black organizations to trade unions see Moreno (2006). Black workers were not infrequently used as strike-breakers, something that added to the hostility of unions to Black membership.

Reconstruction” (Haynes 1921). Haynes noted the wartime concentration of Black workers in certain jobs, such as foundries. He argued that Congress should investigate race riots and lynching. The Committee set up “Negro Workers Advisory Councils” to deal with employment issues, and Haynes always selected a prominent White businessman as the Chair of such Councils. Despite these efforts, Democratic Party opposition led to the funding for the Division being deleted and Haynes left in 1921 (Hendrickson 2013: 229-238).³⁸

Charles Johnson’s graduate work was in Chicago. While still a graduate student he was involved in a study of the Great Migration, also involving Monroe Work, and supported by the Tuskegee Institute, the NUL, and Carter Woodson. This project was written up by Emmett J. Scott (1920).³⁹ Johnson left Chicago after the Chicago riot for New York, without completing his PhD. He took a position as research director at the NUL and co-editing *Opportunity* with Haynes. Johnson’s philosophy of promoting interracial cooperation reflected that of Haynes and the NUL. While at the NUL Johnson wrote about the Chicago riot for the Chicago Commission on Race Relations (Johnson 1922; Hendrickson 2013: 239-246). Once in New York he involved himself with the Harlem Renaissance encouraging Black writers and artists. In 1926 he took the position of Chair of the Department of Sociology at Fisk University, later, in 1946, to become President. Johnson was appointed as research secretary in a project created by the National Interracial Conference, organized by Haynes, to review and summarize contemporary scholarship on African Americans. The SSRC Committee on Interracial Relations funded research assistants and the result appeared as *The Negro in American Civilization* (Johnson 1930). Wesley Mitchell strongly supported this project:

³⁸ The Wilson administration re-segregated the Federal Civil Service resulting in a significant downgrading of Black employment.

³⁹ Scott had been a special advisor for Black affairs to the Secretary of War, working on the mobilization of Black Americans (Moreno 2006: 123).

There seems to be no group of social problems in which men's attitudes have been characterized by a larger measure of emotion and a smaller measure of science than the problems with which the National Interracial Conference is dealing. Whatever the Conference can contribute towards raising the discussion from the level of feeling to the level of knowledge will be a gain. The surest way to promote social progress is to seek clearer insight into human behavior.⁴⁰

The book was descriptive and was criticized for its lack of interpretation. Johnson distinguished between the migrations of 1916-1919 and 1921-1924. The first arose from extremely poor economic conditions in the South combined with a growing demand for labor in the North. It was "a leaderless mass movement" (Johnson 1930: 22). In other work, Johnson outlined how changing conditions in the South had led to Blacks being pushed out of more skilled artisan employments, depressing the economic conditions for Blacks. Combined with worsening crop yields this creating a restless pool of surplus labor. Restrictions on immigration and then the War created a new demand for labor in the North (Johnson 1928). The new arrival of Blacks in the North prompted the race riots of 1919. In contrast, the second migration occurred "without excitement" as they were absorbed into already established Black communities. Why had the migrations not occurred before? In the earlier work published by Scott (1920) and in his own 1928 article an answer is provided: even before 1916 Blacks in the South desired better conditions, but Northern employers and unions were opposed, preferring immigrants from Europe to Southern Blacks, and actively working to keep Black labor out of the

⁴⁰ Quoted in Mary van Kleeck's Foreword to Johnson (1930: vii)

North. This message is softened in Johnson's 1930 book, although he does list the unions then still opposed to Black membership. Johnson's book was about much more than the Great Migration. It discussed segregation in employment, housing, health, education, crime, law and administration, and citizenship. Mary van Kleeck wrote in her Preface that the importance of the book was in its clear undermining of the claims of the racial inferiority of Blacks.

Reid joined the NUL in 1924 and worked alongside Johnson, succeeding him as director of research and editor of *Opportunity*. Johnson also headed a project that resulted in *Negro Membership in American Labor Unions* (NUL 1930), researched and "largely written" by Ira Reid. Johnson and Reid collaborated on other projects. Du Bois, newly returned to Atlanta University, hired Reid in 1934, and five years later Reid produced his own major book *The Negro Immigrant* (Reid 1939), focusing on issues of adjustment to urban life.

Carter Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), and *The Journal of Negro History*. Both provided outlets for younger Black scholars, and Woodson was instrumental in helping them get into graduate school and publish their work. Woodson himself provides the first detailed treatment of the Great Migration (Woodson 1918), arguing that economic motivations are primary, and that Blacks respond to economic incentives as do Whites. Racial violence and segregation in the South he treats as secondary. In a point of sharp difference with Haynes and Johnson, Woodson develops a highly critical interpretation of the role of the Southern Black elite. He sees them as becoming co-operators with Southern segregation, as "assistant oppressors" (Wilson 2006: 123). Woodson also published extensively on the wage earner and other Black occupational groups, and on how the educational system mis-educates and indoctrinates Black students, creating a lack of ambition and dependency (Greene and Woodson 1930; Woodson 1933).

Woodson mentored and helped many young Black Scholars. In 1925 Charles Wesley became the third Black man, after Du Bois and Woodson, to obtain a PhD from Harvard. He was mentored by both Haynes and Woodson, and later became a colleague of Woodson when they were both at Howard University. Wesley wrote *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925* (1927), and published several articles in the *Journal of Negro History* with a strong international orientation. Much later he took on the job of Director of Research of ASNLH. Woodson was also associated with Lorenzo Greene who obtained an MA in History from Columbia in 1926 and, much later, a PhD in History in 1942 also from Columbia (Wilson 2006:139-144). In addition, Woodson arranged for the publication of Henderson Donald's work on the early phase of the Great Migration (Donald 1921), based on his 1920 MA thesis from Yale. This took up a whole issue of *The Journal of Negro History*.⁴¹

Franklin Frazier dealt mostly with different issues, focusing on the sociology of the Black family (Frazier 1928; 1939). He published an early provocative piece in which he claimed that racial prejudice was abnormal behavior involving delusion, projection, and paranoia; a form of insanity (Frazier 1927). He also wrote many articles on aspects of Black family life, including topics such as the effect of "urban civilization" on the Black family, and on the effect of the Great Depression on Northern urban Blacks (Frazier 1938). He could be critical, if understanding, of the patterns of family life, or the lack of such, found among certain groups of Black people, especially those without stable employment. In several pieces he makes use of work by Ross, Kennedy, and Kiser. In a later work he discusses the Black middle class (Frazier 1957) dealing with its emergence, especially in the North, and with its failure to obtain White recognition and resulting feelings of inferiority. He worked at Fisk (1929-1934) and Howard

⁴¹ Much later Donald published *The Negro Freedman* (1952).

(1934-1962). He became the first African American President of the American Sociological Society in 1948.⁴²

Turning to the economists: Sadie Mossell Alexander was the first Black PhD in economics in 1921, but being both Black and a woman she was not able to establish a research career after her PhD (Malveaux 1991) and moved to law, using her position to bring civil rights cases (Banks 2008). Her thesis “The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia” (Mossell 1921) must have been inspired by Du Bois. Her work was a part of the “Standards of Living” approach to consumption economics that had developed among women economists of institutionalist orientation, but in her case, it also provided information concerning the families’ adjustment to urban life and the impact of discrimination on income and consumption. Alexander’s writings and later speeches have recently been published (Alexander and Banks 2021). She criticized racist ideology and race laws, including New Deal legislation that had adverse effects on Black farm tenants and workers (Banks and Whatley 2022).

Abram Harris was the “first Black American economist to gain academic prominence” (Darity 1990). He began by working for the NUL and Charles Johnson in New York. At this time, he wrote an article in *Current History* (Harris 1923) critical of the attitudes of Black leaders associated with Tuskegee, considering them too conservative. Even Haynes he considered as sharing the Tuskegee philosophy, signaling his shift to a more radical position. Harris moved to Pittsburg for his MA giving him exposure to conditions in local industry, and giving rise to his MA thesis “New Negro Worker in Pittsburgh” (1924). Harris began to focus on the rift between White and Black in the workplace and the role of unions in creating division (Harris 1926), and attacked the stereotypical White view of Blacks (Harris 1927). He was to

⁴² Arthur Lewis was the first Black President of the AEA in 1983.

move further from the moderate NUL position during his time at Columbia. Harris was the first Black PhD from Columbia's Economics Department, and only the second Black PhD in from any economics graduate program in the US. Harris took history of economics courses from Wesley Mitchell and became interested in Veblen and Marx. Harris's PhD work on the American labor movement in its relation "to the segregated, circumscribed, and restricted Negro minority" (Spero and Harris 1931: vii) was supported by a Columbia research grant arranged by Wesley Mitchell and Franz Boas, and supervised by Henry Seager.⁴³ It was published in 1931, combined with contributions from Sterling Spero (a PhD student in Political Science): *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (Spero and Harris 1931). Influenced by his reading of Veblen and Marx, he argued for the development of a class solidarity between White and Black labor, attacking both the anti-union attitudes of the NUL and the anti-Black policies of the Unions. According to William Darity Jr. the book "provided the definitive study of white labor's attempts to exclude blacks from the workplace" (Darity 1997: 233). He was involved in an attempt to establish a working-class political party. In 1927, and while still a graduate student, Harris became a faculty member at Howard University where he was in the company of Franklin Frazier, as well as such distinguished scholars as Alain Locke in philosophy and Ralph Bunche⁴⁴ in political science (Johnson 2020). Harris, Frazier, and Bunche strongly attacked the older generation of Black leaders at the NAACP conference in 1933 for not taking a more activist approach. With the onset of the Great Depression Harris developed a critique of Black businesses based on his class analysis. He disputed that Black businesses could provide a way out of Black poverty and discrimination. The Black "masses" have no greater "exploiter than the black capitalist" (Harris 1936; Darity 1997). This argument led to serious divisions with other

⁴³ Committee members included Robert Chaddock and Paul Brissenden.

⁴⁴ Bunche was America's first Nobel Prize winner in 1950. He won the Peace Prize for his mediation in Israel.

Black leaders such as Woodson who wholeheartedly supported Black business development (Wilson 2006: 221-225).⁴⁵

Harris also continued to work on the history of economics and published two papers in the *JPE* dealing with institutionalism, Veblen, and Marx (Harris 1932; 1934). These papers brought Harris to the attention of Frank Knight, then editor of the *JPE*, who also had an abiding interest in issues of institutional change and taught a course “Economics from an Institutional Standpoint” that included discussion of Veblen, Sombart, and Weber. This course soon included Harris’s critique of Veblen (Rutherford 2015). Harris was not uncritical of Veblen and Marx even then, but he remained clearly on the political left for his time at Howard. The contact between Knight and Harris later resulted in Harris being given a position at Chicago in 1945, but not in the graduate department. As has been discussed by Darity (1987), Harris’ move to Chicago was accompanied by a shift in ideological position to one critical of all forms of paternalism and more in line with orthodox economics.⁴⁶

Robert Weaver’s career transitions between the period of the segregated scholars and the more desegregated world that emerged after the Second World War. Weaver obtained his PhD in economics from Harvard in 1934, writing about the high wage theory, but he went directly into government service during the New Deal becoming Advisor on Negro Affairs under Harold Ickes in the Department of the Interior, and a consultant on housing issues in the Public Works Administration. He became a leading member of Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet” that worked to increase the participation of Black groups in New Deal Programs. Ralph Bunche was also a member of this group. He drafted the 1937 U.S. Housing Program for the Roosevelt

⁴⁵ For further discussion of Harris and Woodson see Peart and Levy (2022: 63-75).

⁴⁶ See Levy and Peart (2023). Frank Knight visited Harris at Howard early in their relationship. In his eulogy for Harris, Knight criticized American racism and expressed anger at the discrimination that had hindered Harris’ career.

administration. At the same time, he was publishing in the house journals of the NUL and NAACP on issues involving the training and employment of Black workers, and housing (Weaver 1921; 1935; 1938). Later, he moved to wartime administration and was Chief of the Negro Employment and Training Branch of the War Production Board. This work was the basis of his publications in the *JPE* and *QJE* (Weaver 1944; 1945) discussed below. After the War he left the Federal Government and taught and wrote mainly on urban housing issues. His academic appointments were usually short-term summer or visiting positions.⁴⁷ He worked for the State of New York on housing, and in the 1960s was appointed by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, becoming the head of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1966 (Conrad and Sherer 1997).

The Black social scientists considered in this section were trained within the Northern White academic system, but primarily in sociology or history departments. After they graduated, they found themselves in a segregated world of race-relations committees, organizations such as NUL, Tuskegee, and the NAACP, and Black colleges such as Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard. Despite this, they built a network of individuals and institutions that provided the support required for them to create the discipline of Black labor studies. Economists and economics departments played only a minor role in this development, despite so many of the issues being matters of labor markets: migration, labor supply, unions, and discrimination in labor markets. Even today most of the Black labor studies literature is to be found in sociology and history, not in economics, and few economists are aware of it.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ 1947 Summer, Visiting Professor, Columbia University Teachers College; 1947-8, Lecturer, Northwestern University; 1948-51, Visiting Professor, New York University, School of Education; 1949, Summer, Visiting Professor, New School for Social Research, Summer Session in Europe. In 1971 he became Distinguished Professor at Hunter College in New York. Source: Robert C. Weaver Papers, New York Public Library.

⁴⁸ This is beginning to change. See Collins (2021), and Banks and Whatley (2022).

The Economics Profession (Slowly) Rediscovered Black Labor

In 1937 the Carnegie Corporation commissioned Gunnar Myrdal to write a book about America's race problem. The choice of a non-American outsider was a deliberate attempt to bring in an unbiased view. Black scholars George Haynes, Franklin Frazer, Ira Reid, Lloyd Bailer, Charles Johnson and Ralph Bunche all contributed to Myrdal's research effort, as did white sociologists T. J. Woofter and Guy B. Johnson. Louise Kennedy Kiser also contributed:

The project brought together collaborators representing different values and schools of thought, social science scholars and reformers, black and white representatives of major civil rights and reform organizations. Edwards Shils, Charles Dollard, William F. Ogburn, Samuel A. Stouffer and Dorothy S. Thomas among others contributed to the project, as did a number of black intellectuals, Sterling Brown, Doxey Wilkerson, Franklin E. Frazier and Kenneth Clark among them. With one man in particular, Ralph Bunche. . . Myrdal formed a long-lasting personal relationship. Bunche wrote four manuscripts for the report, including a major report on Southern politics, and his contributions were the more influential as far as the final work was concerned (Lyon 2004: 205).⁴⁹

An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy appeared in 1944 (Myrdal 1944). Myrdal used the concept of cumulative causation to argue that Black Americans were caught in a vicious cycle of a negative view of Blacks leading to their poor economic and health conditions that in turn confirm and reinforce the prejudice. The book has been credited

⁴⁹ Neither Woodson nor Harris were involved with the Myrdal study. Woodson was skeptical of Foundation involvement and Harris may have been thought of as too radical (Peart and Levy 2022).

with changing Americans' perspective on race, and Prasch (2007) discusses the book in terms of its role in the "postwar revival of interest in the economics of race and discrimination."⁵⁰

Myrdal's book did inspire and promote others to work on Black issues, but other 1940s contributions stemmed more directly from the Black labor studies tradition. Within economics, Robert Weaver and Herbert Northrup illustrate these two trajectories.

Weaver and Northrup led the way in publishing on Black issues in the *JPE* and *QJE*. Weaver was introduced in the previous section: a Black scholar and closely connected to the tradition of Black labor studies. A considerable amount of his work throughout his career appeared in *The Journal of Negro History*, and the *Journal of Negro Education*. He wrote most widely on the educational and housing issues facing Black people, but his work related to his wartime involvement in Negro training and employment led to his publications in the *QJE* and *JPE*. His 1944 *JPE* paper concerns the relationship between unions and Black workers (Weaver 1944), and his 1945 *QJE* paper discusses Black employment in the aircraft industry during the War (Weaver 1945b). In these papers, Weaver reviews the history of the color line in industry, and the history of union discrimination against Black workers. Weaver's point is that these problems continued and interfered with wartime production. During the War, efforts were made to break down the barriers to Black employment with some success, and the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), with its more open policies, helped to introduce Black workers to unions in a positive way. This had potentially large effects:

Certainly, the fact that tens of thousands of Negroes are working in plants under the jurisdiction of these unions will strengthen the hands of those who would remove barriers

⁵⁰ Peart and Levy (2022: 74), however, note the lack of reviews by economists, an indication a continued lack of interest by economists in racial issues.

to Negro membership in them. Conceivably, it may also become the occasion for the rise of a strong movement for the removal of color lines and second-class membership based on race (Weaver 1944).

Weaver also wrote two widely reviewed books: *Negro Labor: A National Problem* (1946a), and *The Negro Ghetto* (1948). The former also goes over the efforts at wartime mobilization of Black labor, and the successes that were made after Pearl Harbor, but counters his previous optimism by detailing the subsequent post-War reconversion with a tendency to previous patterns of discrimination (Weaver 1946a: 266-305). The latter, as the title indicates, is a detailed and penetrating study of housing discrimination against Blacks and its many deleterious effects.

Weaver was joined in his analysis of discrimination by unions by Herbert R. Northrup. As a White scholar, Northrup came from a very different background, with initially no contact with Black labor scholars. Northrup first became interested in issues involving Black labor due to time spent in Duke University:

I noticed the great increase of the union movement in this New Deal period, and I also noticed that in the tobacco factories the racial factor was very strong with separate local unions and a racial-occupational segregation pattern whereas the textile industry excluded blacks almost entirely. That fascinated me. I switched my major from accounting to economics (Kaufman 1998: 671).

Northrup then moved to Harvard to study with Sumner Slichter. Northrup states that Slichter “had not given serious thought to black employment problems before I came along, which was

typical among labor economists and most others” (Kaufman 1998: 671-672). All the same, Slichter arranged for his student to take a position “during the summers of 1940 and 1941 with the Negro in America Survey under the direction of the Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal.” Northrup drove down the East Coast and then “went up the east side of the Mississippi River” through Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Northrup “learned a great deal” and “obtained volumes of notes and ideas and materials” for his dissertation (Kaufman 1998: 672).

Northrup’s PhD thesis work became the basis for his publications in the *QJE* (Northrup 1942), and *JPE* (Northrup 1943a), and his 1944 book *Organized Labor and the Negro*. Clearly, Northrup had become familiar with the Black labor studies literature and cites Du Bois, Haynes, Johnson, Reid, Spero and Harris, and Weaver. Northrup’s investigations found a variety of union responses to Black labor, depending on the pre-existing pattern of employment, the industry structure, the philosophy of the union, and the state of the labor market. Northrup was highly critical of those unions resisting Black membership on equal terms, and suggested a comprehensive anti-discrimination policy (Northrup 1944: 237-238, 250). In his criticism of discriminating (usually craft) unions Northrup is clear that the color bar works to the economic advantage of the White union members: “the color bar results not only from race prejudice, but also from a desire to monopolize job opportunities for the unions’ white membership” (Northrup 1946: 45). Northrup always included race relations in his labor economics textbook with Gordon Bloom (Bloom and Northrup 1950).

Wartime issues involving Black labor clearly sparked interest among economists. In addition to the items mentioned above, Robert Weaver published in special issues of the *Annals* dealing with wartime problems for minorities and postwar problems for veterans in 1942 and

1945 (Weaver 1942; 1945a). Black economist and labor mediator Lloyd Bailer⁵¹ published on the Negro worker in the automobile industry in the *JPE* in 1943, detailing the increased race friction with the upgrading of Black employees during the war (Bailer 1943). Another special issue of the *Annals* on group prejudice in 1946 contained papers by Weaver on housing segregation (1946b), and Northrup on discrimination by unions (1946).

It is interesting that despite his success Northrup still faced pushback from the profession, due both to his critical views on unions and his general area of study. His response to criticism of his view of unions was that a "disaffected and discriminated against minority" was not consistent with the ideal of the free market. On his job market experience, he recalls one interviewer telling him: "don't fool around with this stuff it will never get you anywhere." He indicates that attitudes only really changed with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Kaufman 1998: 673).

The Myrdal study also inspired a reaction from Donald Dewey. Writing in 1952 Dewey commented on the lack of work on job discrimination in the South done by economists:

In the South, of course, a rigid division of labor is a striking feature of the everyday business of life in almost every town from Maryland to western Texas. I believe it no exaggeration to say that most southerners view their economy as divided into "white" and "Negro" jobs. Certainly these categories are invoked whenever Negro employment problems are under discussion. Nevertheless, this phenomenon has been largely ignored by economists both in the South and elsewhere. *The Southern Economic Journal* has

⁵¹ Bailer was a 1943 PhD in economics from the University of Michigan. He was for a time a colleague of Abram Harris' at Howard and Bailer thanks him for input into the paper. The paper is based on his thesis. At the time Bailer was also serving with the War Production Board. His career was primarily as a labor arbitrator.

never carried an article analyzing the racial division of labor; and I wonder whether the editors have ever received one (Dewey 1952: 280).

Dewey explains the lack of work by economists in terms of data problems and the difficulty in applying standard marginal theory in the face of a labor market characterized by racial discrimination. He is aware of the work that has been done by Black sociologists, but he complains that this work has not “systematically examined the interaction of competition and color prejudice in the American economy” (Dewey 1952: 279). He includes Myrdal’s work in this as: “Myrdal's formidable staff of experts apparently included only one American economist, Herbert R. Northrup.” The “Carnegie studies which went into American Dilemma were almost wholly tour de force by sociologists” (Dewey 1952: 279, n.3).

For Dewey, what the economist can add is an analysis of the terms on which the competition between White and Black workers takes place. The first task is to define the nature of the constraints that racial discrimination place on competition between Black and White workers in the labor market. The exact pattern of discrimination varies significantly over the South, but Dewey finds two common elements: (i) Blacks are not placed above White workers in the chain of command; and (ii) Blacks and whites do not work together at the same jobs. This limits direct personal competition for jobs between Whites and Blacks to those jobs that are “isolated” in nature and also “dead-end” with no possibility of promotion over Whites. For most other purposes Whites and Blacks can compete only as alternative “work groups,” and this greatly hinders employers’ ability to “upgrade” Black workers. Individual Black workers cannot be introduced into White groups to gain experience in new tasks. A whole new Black work group would have to be created and trained up to substitute for a White group. Employers have

little incentive to substitute Black groups for White due to training costs and the ready availability of White unskilled labor. This leads to great stability in the racial patterns of hiring, a stability that becomes “petrified” with the arrival of unions that adopt a policy of “segregated locals for each organized plant” (Dewey 1952: 290).

The observed result is a lack of economic progress for Black workers in the South except for those in isolated and dead-end occupations. Dewey’s analysis is *economic* in that he does explicitly consider the employers’ costs and benefits of switching employment patterns or retaining the racial status quo, but he is also including sociological factors in the two common features of employment discrimination he references. What his analysis does do is to treat the employers’ decision about upgrading Black employment as one driven by cost and not by the racial prejudice of employers or concern about adverse reaction from other employees (except in the case of unions) or the community at large (Dewey 1952: 281). Dewey has said that he believed that he had “done something to show how racial discrimination ‘really’ operated in American labor markets before 1965,”⁵² but his inclusion of the two rules of discrimination in his analysis seems to have had no immediate follow up either in his own work or elsewhere in economics.

Becker’s (1957) treatment of discrimination provides a more purely neoclassical interpretation of discrimination. Becker considers discrimination primarily a matter of individual employers having a preference for certain types of employee. If there are many employers discriminating against some group such as Black workers, their wages will be depressed relative to others. Provided there are a sufficient number of non-discriminating employers, and workers have similar levels of productivity, market competition should work to gradually reduce

⁵² https://prabook.com/web/donald_jefferson.dewey/953382

discrimination. There is no doubt that Becker's analysis provided a way for economists to think about discrimination in more familiar terms, and led to a great deal of work along a number of different lines, including regression-based approaches, estimates of wage differentials and productivity at the firm level, and experimental approaches attempting to locate biases in hiring decisions (Neumark 1918: 799). Becker does talk about "pre-market discrimination" such as in education that can affect productivity, but his model is not designed to capture the full range of disability Black labor faced historically in the US. In particular, it does not predict the division of jobs into White jobs and Black jobs that was so much a pattern of US racial discrimination as discussed by Dewey and previously by numerous Black scholars. Neumark considers that "perspectives on discrimination from other fields, such as those emphasizing norms regarding who does which job, might fit these facts better" (Neumark 2018: 857).

Over the late 1960s and 70s organizations and journals aimed towards Black scholars in economics emerged. Black faculty began to be hired at the leading universities but in very small numbers.⁵³ The National Economic Association was founded in 1969 and *The Review of Black Political Economy* was established in 1970 (Handy 2008). The most significant recent development in the literature has been William Darity "stratification economics" (Darity 2005). His objective is "to perform bypass surgery on the argument that groups in a subordinate position are so ranked because of their own deficiencies or self-defeating behaviors" (Darity 2022: 401). Darity's analysis is of a society stratified into a hierarchy of groups, with each group concerned with maintaining or improving its relative position. Darity draws on Veblen's theories of emulation and the importance of relative social position, theories of group identity, sociologist

⁵³ In 1994 the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* identified only 11 Black economists in the top 25 economics departments. In 2006 it found only two more. https://www.jbhe.com/news_views/50_no_black_economists.html. See also Slater (1998-99), for information on the first Black faculty hired in leading universities regardless of discipline.

Herbert Bulmer's work on race prejudice as a matter of group position (Bulmer 1958), as well as work by Du Bois (1935) and Franklin Frazier (1957). In Darity's view:

The key point is that group-based systems of hierarchy, accompanied by bias against and denigration of subaltern groups, are effectual. Their design fulfills a redistributive objective on behalf of the group on top. Race (or ethnic or religious or class) prejudice is not an arbitrary taste, nor a matter of whim or ignorance, nor an atavistic throwback to a more primitive or backward stage of human civilization. Race prejudice is instrumental for the promotion and perpetuation of dominance of one group over another; it is purposive and functional. There is a collective rationality to race prejudice, given a dominant social group's desire to maintain and harden their position of dominance (Darity 2022: 406).

The stratification approach to discrimination has resulted in a large amount of recent Work, much of it by Black scholars in economics and other disciplines (see Darity 2022, and Francis, Hardy, and Jones 2022). Although Darity recounts difficulty in having this work fully recognized by the AEA as a proper part of economics, the recent (2020) statement by the Executive Committee of the AEA⁵⁴ encourages economists to "seek out" scholarship on race, stratification economics, and related topics. The same statement includes the following:

We recognize that we have only begun to understand racism and its impact on our profession and our discipline. We have learned that our professional climate is a hostile

⁵⁴ <https://www.aeaweb.org/news/member-announcements-june-5-2020>

one for Black economists. As documented in our 2019 survey, only 3% of the profession identifies as Black (compared with 13% of the U.S. population) and almost half (47%) of Black respondents reported experiences of discrimination in economics. Only 45% of all survey respondents (regardless of race) believed that economists who are not White are respected in the field.

Conclusion

This history of the economics profession in relation to Black studies indicates three periods. A period of overt racism, during which the perspective of Du Bois was explicitly rejected by the profession; a period of neglect and silence in which Black labor studies was very largely left to a cadre of Black “segregated scholars” working outside of the established institutions of academic economics; and, finally, a period of gradual acceptance that the study of Black issues did belong within the discipline. The first phase has been discussed to a small extent by historians of economics (Darity 1994; Prasch 2007; 2008). Unfortunately, none of this work has appeared in places prominent to most economists and is not widely known in the profession at large. In my discussion of this research with colleagues, however, it became clear that even fewer people know about the second phase. This despite the fact that a truly vast secondary literature on the history of Black labor studies now exists in both sociology and history. Economics now does include work on issues of discrimination against Black people. The work by Weaver and Northrup did explicitly relate itself back to earlier Black social scientists such as Du Bois, Haynes, Johnson, and Harris. Much of the more recent work up until 2005 is often related back only as far as Becker. Only very recently, and since Darity’s paper

introducing stratification economics, have references back to the earlier Black labor studies scholars reappeared.

The evident and widespread racism in the economics literature in the first period is not surprising given the degree of prejudice concerning Black people that existed throughout American society in the decades immediately after emancipation and reconstruction. Within the academic world the notions of racial inheritance and racial hierarchy were widespread and, at the time, seemed to be supported by scientific measurement and statistics. What undoubtedly made the prejudice against Blacks particularly strong and deeply entrenched was the association of Blacks with slavery. As is made clear in Willcox's introduction to Tillinghast, to argue for the inherent inferiority of Blacks was to both cast a better light on slavery, and to justify continued racial inequality.

In many ways it is harder to understand the very slight degree of interest and involvement of economists in issues relating to Black labor in the second period. In this period the belief in the inherited inferiority of Blacks was under attack from people such as Franz Boas, and while far from eliminated, was gradually becoming less scientifically respectable. If the conditions of the Black population are considered a matter of economic and social conditions, and not of inheritance, then there should be *more* interest in studying the economic issues not less. There were a significant number of Committees and organizations set up that worked to promote Black studies, as well as sources of funding, so the lack of uptake in economics is surprising. Despite Dewey's attempt to explain the lack of work by economists on racial discrimination in terms of data difficulties and problems of applying marginal theory to racialized labor markets, there is nothing in the analysis Dewey produced that could not have been accomplished previously. This absence of interest produced not just very little work on Black issues by White economists

themselves, but a lack of involvement in sponsoring Black studies and Black students, especially as compared with neighboring disciplines such as sociology. Sociology had a number of very well-known White scholars studying Black issues, as well as a significant number of Black scholars associated with the field, even if working in Black colleges. Economics had none of the first and very few of the second. This difference in response is remarkable, particularly as many of the issues facing Black people were clearly economic in nature: Black migration to the North, the behavior of unions towards Blacks, poverty and poor living conditions, lack of access to education, training and skilled employment, and more. If writers of labor economics text books could produce chapters on women and children in the labor market, why not on Black people in the labor market? Yet there was a dearth of interest. Northrup's comment about Slichter not having given serious thought to such issues is extremely telling, especially as it applied to Northern White labor economists quite generally. Even later on, Becker remarked on the slow response to his 1957 book, commenting that "most economists did not think racial discrimination was economics."⁵⁵ But why did they think that way? The only explanation is that the silence of most economists was a less overt expression of continued racist attitudes. The economic position of the Black population was taken as a result of sociological factors, including their own cultural failings, and therefore outside of the scope of the discipline. In both of the first two periods White economists' almost complete avoidance of admitting to or analyzing racial discrimination is hard to miss.

The third period is one in which an acceptance that Black labor issues such as discrimination do belong within the economics discipline has gradually developed. This development, however, was both slow and often partial. The work by Weaver and Northrup on

⁵⁵ <https://www.chicagobooth.edu/review/how-gary-becker-saw-the-scourge-of-discrimination>

discrimination against Blacks led the way, but the work published in the leading economics journals focused exclusively on discrimination by trade unions, while discrimination against Blacks in the 1940s was far from limited to that. However, in these pieces it is recognized that white workers gain from the discrimination against Blacks, so there is an economic motive as well as prejudice. Dewey's article refers to broader patterns of discrimination in the South, but for the most part these are taken as a given result of a general Southern prejudice against Blacks working with or having authority over Whites. Employers are presented as responding both to these prejudices and to the training costs of upgrading groups of Black workers, and not themselves as necessarily wishing to discriminate. Unions, again, are a different matter, their economic interests reinforcing the existing pattern of employment. In contrast, Becker treats discrimination as a matter of individual taste on the part of employers, but likely to be undercut through market competition provided that a sufficient number of non-discriminators exist and productivity is similar across groups. For Becker, discrimination by employers results in costs to them, a price for indulging their taste for discrimination.

None of these efforts gets fully to the range of discrimination against Blacks that is discussed by the likes of Du Bois and other Black scholars. They are talking about a set of social norms, conventions, and, in the South, laws, that were intended to keep Black people in a lower, subordinate, position to White people. The benefit to the higher status group is both psychic (in terms of status) and material. Discrimination affects not only employment, but access to housing, education, health, politics, and the behavior of police and the justice system. For a people subject to such prejudice and discrimination, established institutions, *including markets*, are inevitably seen and experienced not as impartial or efficient but rather as the channels through which prejudice finds concrete expression. Given the way markets have traditionally

been presented in economics⁵⁶ it is hardly surprising that Black people find that economics presents a “hostile climate” in which their concerns are not addressed.

Stratification economics represents a very different approach, and does get to a much fuller range of issues involved in discrimination against particular groups of people, but it presents a challenge to orthodox economic ways of thinking. It focuses on group status, and draws on sociology, but it is exactly the sociological thinness of orthodox economics that makes it an inadequate basis for the consideration of issues that involve group identity and conflict.

This history with its various omissions and blind spots reveals the consequences of the lack of diversity in the profession. A more diverse profession could not have produced this history. One part of this is that there has been no proper recognition of the contribution of the earlier Black labor scholars in economics until very recently. In introducing his subject, Northrup’s interviewer, a leading historian of industrial relations, felt he could say of Northrup that: “he was one of the first scholars to devote serious attention to the economic position of the Negro in both the organized labor movement and American industry” (Kaufman 1998: 669). The word “White” is missing before the word “scholars.” This too, has begun to change with recent work on Abram Harris and Sadie Alexander and with the developing discussions concerning stratification economics. It is my hope that future histories of labor economics will more fully recognise the work of the pioneers of Black labor studies.

⁵⁶ Institutionalists have often claimed to be interested in power relationships, but even the institutionalist literature contains remarkably little concerning discrimination against Black people.

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