

W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro

Author(s): Elliott M. Rudwick

Source: *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Autumn, 1957), pp. 466-476

Published by: Journal of Negro Education

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2293494>

Accessed: 22-05-2020 18:11 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Journal of Negro Education* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Negro Education*

# W.E.B. Du Bois and the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro\*

ELLIOTT M. RUDWICK

*Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Tampa*

In 1897, W. E. B. Du Bois was called to Atlanta University by President Horace Bumstead. The young Harvard Ph.D. was employed to supervise the sociology program and to direct a series of conferences on Negroes which Atlanta had newly sponsored. The institution was an unusual Negro school because it operated contrary to many of the Southern conventions. Negro students and white faculty shared the same dormitories and dining hall, and white students who sought admission were not turned away. At least partly because of these social deviations, Atlanta received no money from the Georgia Legislature, and not a few Southerners thought of burying the school by means of oppressive taxation. Over the years, local newspapers published a spate of diatribes, and the institution was accused of teaching racial egalitarianism.<sup>1</sup> Northerners on the faculty were looked upon as meddlers seeking to incite Negroes against whites. The General Education Board, which "stood before [Atlanta] almost as an evil monster," was unsympathetic with the manner in which the school was governed, since the foundation advocated a rapprochement with the white South and its mores.<sup>2</sup>

\*(Research for this study was done under a grant from the Albert M. Greenfield Center for Human Relations, Philadelphia.)

<sup>1</sup> Willard Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949* (Athens, Georgia, 1951), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Bumstead, a New Englander, believed strongly in the progress of the Negro race through its "exceptional men;"<sup>3</sup> thus, he was attracted by Du Bois's brilliance and imagination. However, the college president was discouraged by white advisers who feared that the young Negro held no acceptable religious beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Overcoming this obstacle was difficult and Du Bois had to promise to use the Episcopal prayer book when assuming his student chapel responsibilities. (On many occasions the resourceful Du Bois composed his own prayers.<sup>5</sup> Most of them were concerned with exhorting the race to cultivate such virtues as thrift, selflessness, and industriousness; many sound very much like the words of Booker T. Washington.)

Du Bois could not have been considered a popular teacher or colleague, especially in his early years at Atlanta; he was respected because of his academic credentials and because of his undoubted ability, but he had a reputation for being extremely "exacting and impatient."<sup>6</sup> Students may have gladly accepted the opportunity to work under him because he was rapidly becoming important, but he appeared

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Pageant in Seven Decades* (Atlanta, 1938), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> "Prayers," MS., 1898-1900: Du Bois Papers. (I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Francis Broderick, of Phillips-Exeter School, for sharing his transcriptions of Du Bois's letters.)

<sup>6</sup> Range, *op. cit.*, p. 153. Also *Chicago Whip*, April 11, 1925.

too remote and austere to be regarded as a friendly person. Du Bois was somewhat conscious of the reactions of others, and he stated that while he was not always accessible,<sup>7</sup> he did make an effort to drop his "mannerisms" and become "more broadly human."<sup>8</sup>

However, his first address before the Sociological Club at Atlanta could not have won him many friends. He deprecated the previous programs of the organization, telling the membership in no uncertain way that they talked too much and did absolutely nothing worthwhile. He commented upon the superficiality of their recent meeting on the dysgenic effect of slums upon children and instructed them that the Booth work on London and the Hull House volume should have been indispensable reading, followed by a serious discussion on mortality rates, morbidity rates, criminality, illegitimacy, and many other social indices of disorganization. Du Bois announced that after all of this preparation, an inductive study of the Atlanta slums should have been begun.<sup>9</sup>

Atlanta University had been influenced by the Tuskegee Institute conferences for farmers and teachers which Booker T. Washington innovated during the early 1890's. A short time prior to Du Bois's arrival on the campus, President Bumstead and George Bradford, a New England trustee, organized their program of annual conferences on urban Negro problems, probably because so many of the Atlanta students and graduates

lived and worked in cities.<sup>10</sup> In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois wrote that he "peremptorily" revised the design of the Atlanta conferences, which he claimed were meant to follow the Tuskegee pattern of inspiration and consecration. Instead, he stated that he substituted his program of science.<sup>11</sup>

Actually, Du Bois is at variance with what the facts seem to indicate, and an examination of the first two conferences in 1896 and 1897, prior to Du Bois's administration, discloses that although its leaders were interested in creating and re-enforcing an atmosphere of spiritual uplift and social reforms, embryonic inductive studies were made and were clearly spelled out for greater emphasis in the planning of succeeding programs. The introduction to the published proceedings of the first conference stated:<sup>12</sup>

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

Schedules were given to graduates residing in different cities, and such matters as family budgeting, earnings, and occupations, and type of dwellings were to be recorded annually to note any improvements. The following year, some fifty graduates of Fisk, Berea, and Atlanta had interviewed about

<sup>7</sup> John H. Adams, "Rough Sketches," *Voice of the Negro*, II (1905), 180.

<sup>8</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (Washington, 1920), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> "A Program For a Sociological Society," MS., 1897: Du Bois Prs.

<sup>10</sup> *Catalogue of Atlanta University, 1898-1899*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New York, 1940), p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> *Mortality Among Negroes in Cities* (Atlanta, 1896), p. 5.

five thousand persons in seventeen Southern communities and Cambridge, Massachusetts. This data was transmitted for publication to the Commissioner of the United States Department of Labor. The editor of the second conference volume valued these individual city reports and anticipated using more of them during the following year.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Du Bois might have been closer to the facts if he had said that he generated interest into a research program which had already been started by inexperienced men. Under the leadership of Du Bois, the investigations became more encompassing and were conducted during the whole year. The Negro scholar's lack of attention to the scientific contributions of the second Atlanta conference is especially difficult to understand, in view of his early article in *Charities*, in which he extolled the accumulated material as "voluminous" and "important."<sup>14</sup>

Du Bois's association with the conferences continued from 1897 to 1914; during that period he supervised the preparation of 16 monographs. Since the inquiries were made by unpaid individuals on a part-time basis (including his own students in a course dealing with social problems and social research), Du Bois was somewhat limited in the breadth and extensiveness of his projects. In pursuing different areas of Negro life each year, he anticipated that each would have a "logical connection" with subsequent ones, and a "comprehensive whole" would gradually evolve.

<sup>13</sup> *Social and Physical Conditions of Negroes in Cities* (Atlanta, 1897), p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Atlanta University Conferences," *Charities*, X (1903), 436.

The first study treated mortality rates, inspiring an interest in impoverished living conditions and the manner in which they might be ameliorated. Such a focus was related to the economic foundation of the race, and the following conference dealt with *The Negro in Business*. In *The College-Bred Negro*, one year later, half of the subjects who were interviewed were school teachers, and this fact led to an exploration of *The Negro Common School*. Du Bois began to think of the entire work as part of a "ten-year cycle," in which each area was to be re-studied every decade; during each ten year period, all of the research projects were to be continued simultaneously. His "100 year" scheme was grandiose, since he found it difficult to raise the meager amounts of money required for his limited projects. He was unable to study politics and miscegenation because of the wrangle which such subjects would have evoked.

The Atlanta studies were of uneven quality in planning, structure, methods, and content; and in order to demonstrate this disparity, one set of monographs which were poorly done will be contrasted with another group which, in the present writer's judgment, represents sounder research. Du Bois's report, *Some Efforts of Negroes For Their Own Social Betterment*, was first completed in 1898 and repeated in 1909. However, in 1907, Du Bois received a special grant from the Carnegie Foundation and he produced a study entitled, *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans*, which, in part, concerned itself with the same kind of material found in the other two monographs.

In examining "benevolent and re-

formatory" organizations for the 1898 work, Du Bois did not intend to inquire into all Negro communities in the United States, nor to record exhaustively all of the appropriate activities in those areas which were observed. He selected several Southern cities, and the college graduates who collected the data were to examine "typical examples." However, in one community, completeness was sought. Du Bois concluded that the returns "seem to be reliable."<sup>15</sup> Over two hundred "efforts and institutions" were included, many of them sponsored by the churches and secret societies. The church schedule included the following items: religious denominations, number of enrolled members, number of active members, value of real estate indebtedness, religious meetings weekly, entertainments per year, lectures, literary programs per year, suppers and socials per year, concerts per year, fairs per year, other entertainments, number of literary and benevolent and missionary societies, annual income, annual budget, disbursements for charity, number of poor helped, and many other details. He admitted that the responses showed only a partial record of church philanthropy, since help was often given by individuals and forgotten about.<sup>16</sup> Similar schedules were provided for other types of organizations, and Du Bois adjudged that the returns from the beneficial and insurance societies were "not so full" because the enterprises were small and often changed their locations.

He considered that his presentation was of "scientific" significance, because it demonstrated that the Negroes were

not "one vast unorganized, homogeneous mass."<sup>17</sup> However, race prejudice had isolated the group and had caused the accelerated formation of racial institutions for which no adequate preparation had been made. Du Bois believed that more inquiries, such as this one, would provide the answer to the extent of white aid which the race required.<sup>18</sup> At the conclusion of this study, Du Bois helped to prepare a series of resolutions calling for a program of racial austerity; for example, he advised that funerals should be simple, inexpensive, and without tawdry display. Having great faith in the validity of cooperative businesses and consumers' associations, Du Bois offered his services as a consultant to those who wished to form such organizations.<sup>19</sup>

Writing in 1898, he was not seriously troubled by the problem of sampling procedures, either in the selection of his type of cities or in the data to be located within them. Nor did he have a passion for completeness in the one city chosen for intensive research. Although he was fortunate to obtain the services of educated interviewers, he gave few instructions, beyond telling them to submit limited descriptions of some of the benevolent organizations within their own communities. He provided no method for checking the reliability or validity of the material sent to him, and this omission is most crucial when one recalls that an officer of an orphanage was the person who was asked to furnish statistics on his own administration of the institution. Du Bois succeeded in amassing an encyclopedic array of facts (often with

<sup>15</sup> *Some Efforts of American Negroes For Their Own Social Betterment* (Atlanta, 1898), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

little connection to each other), and he simply added them up when he could. He acknowledged that charitable services were performed to an unknown extent by individuals, but he made no attempt to allow for the ratio for the total picture. One also finds an absence of controls in reporting the smaller benevolent societies, and after reading one superficial list after another, there is a tendency to ask, so what?

The "resolutions" do not seem to have grown out of the inductive material presented, and most of them are only exhortations which do not suggest any specific techniques to accomplish the ends sought. In declaring that churches should cut their operating expenses, Du Bois offered no yardstick which presumably might have been developed in this study. Counseling more austerity for funerals and secret societies, he failed to explore adequately the integrative functions of ritual.

Du Bois considered that the 1907 monograph was "a continuation and enlargement" of the 1898 account. In his treatment of the Negro church in 1907, Du Bois did not utilize any of his 1898 material on individual Negro churches; instead he discussed the income, expenses, mission work, and many other details of the larger religious denominations. In this later study, he made no reference to his handling of the beneficial and insurance societies in 1898. The 1898 monograph contained a catalogue of various local "secret societies," giving the usual data on memberships, income, and expenses, while the 1907 volume included the history and purposes of some of the larger societies, such as the Masons. The two treatments were not related to each other.

In the 1898 monograph, Du Bois mentioned several examples of cooperative businesses, and a few of them were described in some detail. One of these organizations was a cotton mill named the Coleman Manufacturing Company, which was also discussed in 1907,<sup>20</sup> but there was no connection made between these two examinations of the same company. Nothing was said about the development of the company in the nine years intervening; in one line, we are told that the founder died, "and a white company bought the mill and is running it with white help." Here was an excellent opportunity for a case study of the failure of a race enterprise, if more information had been gathered and related.

Some "resolutions" were promulgated by the committee of the conference, of which Du Bois was a member, and a "crisis" was stressed in Negro organizational living, with the race depicted<sup>21</sup>

at the crossroads—one way leading to the old trodden ways of grasping individualistic competition, where the shrewd, cunning, skilled and rich among them will prey upon the ignorance and simplicity of the mass of the race and get wealth at the expense of the general well being; the other way leading to cooperation in capital and labor, the massing of small savings, the wide distribution of capital and a more general equality of wealth and comfort.

This conclusion was not developed out of the data presented in the monograph.

The 1909 volume, *Efforts For Social Betterment Among Negro Americans*,

<sup>20</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *Some Efforts of American Negroes For Their Own Social Betterment* (Atlanta, 1898), pp. 26-27. W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, 1907), pp. 159-160.

<sup>21</sup> *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, 1907), p. 2.

contained a section on methodology. Du Bois proposed to embark upon a "careful search for truth," although he admitted that "mathematical accuracy" could not be expected. The conclusions were "incomplete" and the "sources are of varying degree of accuracy." He wrote to people "of standing" in various cities and asked them to compile the names and addresses of the benevolent associations about which they had knowledge. Letters of inquiry were sent directly to the groups named.

Once more, he presented a cornucopia of facts; for instance, some of the questions he asked about Negro church denominations were: the number of communicants, the percentage of male and female members, the seating capacity of the churches, the value of the parsonages, and the total collection of the African Methodist Episcopal Missionary Department from 1904 to 1908. Again, there was no connection drawn between any of the material offered in 1909 with the data given in the earlier volumes.

Obviously, the later monographs would have contributed more to science if Du Bois had developed the data which he introduced in the earlier study on the same subjects. A selected list of orphanages or hospitals could have been studied in 1898 and re-examined a decade later. In this way, a more complete description might have been produced from which some hypotheses might have evolved. Du Bois might have placed his emphasis not on what these associations were supposed to do, but on what they actually did. He might have been concerned with the methods of leadership and the differences in approach.

The monographs on *The Negro*

*Artisan* (1902 and 1912) signified a more thorough and ordered contribution to our knowledge of the Negro. Du Bois recognized that he encountered a "peculiar difficulty," since much of his data came from "interested persons," although, to some extent, part of the material could be checked by "third parties." For instance, in some cases, the word of the workers was validated by making inquiries of their fellow workers and their employers. The 1902 research was based upon many sources. A questionnaire was disseminated to some 1,300 Negro skilled workers residing primarily in Georgia. These men described their work experiences in comparison with the white artisans in the same occupations. Another schedule was sent to "correspondents" in many states, who surveyed artisans in their own communities. (For instance, one man described what trades Negroes entered in Memphis—whether they owned their homes and belonged to the same unions as the whites.) Unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (and independent unions) received a questionnaire on the Negro worker; another schedule was placed in the hands of the central labor bodies in American cities, and state federations were also contacted.

As a result of these sources, Du Bois was able to provide a list of unions which admitted Negroes and the relative proportions of the members of his race to the total membership of the unions. He could pinpoint the trades in which Negroes experienced hostility and he appended the views of labor leaders on race relations in industry. Industrial schools submitted information on their courses of study, and educational leaders in all of the

Southern states were asked about the kind of manual training included in their curricula. They were also requested to comment upon the results obtained from such training. Employers in various parts of the South were asked to appraise Negro efficiency in relation to the whites and to consider whether the Negroes had shown any recent improvement. Comparative data were secured on the amount of money paid to Negroes and whites within various trades.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1912 survey, the same set of questionnaires was sent to many of the same groups. Comparisons of census data for the two periods were made, in an effort to estimate whether the Negroes were holding their own in the various trades. Valuable generalizations were drawn from other data, i.e., most of the Negro trade schools were inadequate in providing their students with sufficient knowledge of a specific trade to enable them to compete satisfactorily with the whites; the schools were teaching their charges only "repair work and tinkering."<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, Du Bois did not say how many questionnaires were distributed and how many were returned. He also failed to quantify most of the responses to the questionnaires in percentages or in some other statistical manner.

The Atlanta monographs were accorded a generally favorable reception. For example, a writer for the *Outlook* commented on the *Negro Artisan*:<sup>24</sup>

No student of the race problem, no person who would either think or speak upon it intelligently, can afford to be ignorant of the facts brought out in the

Atlanta series of sociological studies of the conditions and the progress of the negro. . . . The hand of the skilled and thorough investigator is conspicuous throughout.

A critic for the *School Review* gave his opinion of the *Negro Common School*:<sup>25</sup>

The investigation into the actual conditions in the negro schools has been carried on in a thorough and systematic manner and the revelations in this report justify the appeal of Mr. Du Bois and his colleagues for immediate material assistance in their great work.

In 1904, the reviewer for the Southern History Association remarked:<sup>26</sup>

The work done under the direction of the Atlanta Conference is entitled to the respectful and thoughtful consideration of every man interested in any aspect of the life of the American Negro. The guiding spirit of this work is Dr. Du Bois, and he is entitled to the utmost credit for what has been accomplished in the face of many obstacles confronting his undertaking.

On the other hand, there were some negative comments. For instance, the *Yale Review* recorded its impression of the *Negro Artisan*:<sup>27</sup>

As it was inevitable in a compilation of this character, it contains a great deal that is miscellaneous, scrappy, unimportant and dubious; but it contains also not a few facts and suggestions of interest and value. In publications of another sort, Dr. Du Bois has given free expression to the sensitiveness of spirit, the acute feeling of injustice done to his race, the perplexity amounting almost to despair respecting its future, and the original and often brilliant literary gift which constitute him in certain respects—as Dr. Booker Washington as in other respects—the most

<sup>22</sup> *Negro Artisan* (Atlanta, 1902), pp. 8-12.

<sup>23</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Dill, eds., *Negro American Artisans* (Atlanta, 1912), p. 120.

<sup>24</sup> *Outlook* LXXIII (1903), 593.

<sup>25</sup> *School Review* X (1902), 503.

<sup>26</sup> *Publications of the Southern History Association*, VIII (1904), 459.

<sup>27</sup> *Yale Review*, XI (1903), 221-222.



notable negro of our time. Here, however, he speaks solely as the scientist, the statistician; perhaps the volume, excellent as it is, illustrates the fact that the characteristic gift of its author . . . lies rather in the field of literature than of exact science.

The *Political Science Quarterly* evaluated the monograph on the *Negro Church*:<sup>28</sup>

Mr. Du Bois's theories and opinions may be correct; they are worthy of attention; but they are not well supported by any known facts, nor by the mass of valuable material here collected by himself and his fellow workers. Indeed the effect of the intermingling of facts and theories in this monograph is somewhat confusing and contradictory.

In spite of the shortcomings of the Atlanta studies, what actual merit did they possess for science and society? If Du Bois must be held to his early goal of science, i.e., the ability to measure the extent of prejudice in causing the Negro problem, as differentiated from the Negroes' own cultural shortcomings, his contributions are small.<sup>29</sup> However, other American social scientists were hardly more successful in understanding race prejudice. The truth is that Du Bois's Atlanta studies represent his efforts to introduce systematic induction into the field of race relations, when other men were speculating about the Negro.

Du Bois's monument was his attempt to traverse the society, observing and counting what he saw, using the schedule, questionnaire, and interview. His method of case-counting was naive and elemental and was influenced

by his acquaintance with the work of social reformers and social workers. His decennial program was unique, even though none of the large universities contributed to it, as he had so much hoped.<sup>30</sup> Who knows how much could have been accomplished if he had aroused real professional and financial support? Almost completely in vain, Du Bois made public appeals for help. In 1904, he said, "If Negroes were lost in Africa, money would be available to measure their heads, but \$500 a year is hard to raise for Atlanta."<sup>31</sup> Later that year, President Bumstead informed him that the University's Executive and Finance Committee suspended publication of the last conference report until special funds could be obtained. In addition, future reports were to be sharply limited.<sup>32</sup> In 1905, Du Bois feared that conferences would be held bi-annually.<sup>33</sup> Somehow, the studies continued, but in 1908, President Ware (Bumstead's successor) asked Du Bois to terminate the project, and the move was only narrowly averted because of Ware's success in persuading the Slater Fund to grant a subsidy.<sup>34</sup>

Although his studies were lacking in systematic theory, Du Bois, through the use of his own data and that of others, made negative conclusions concerning the "common sense" generalizations held by many people of the period. For example, it was ordinarily agreed that Negroes were lynched because of well-founded accusations of

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-23.

<sup>29</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Atlanta Conferences," *Voice of the Negro* I (1904), 85-90.

<sup>30</sup> Horace Bumstead to W. E. B. Du Bois, Nov. 26, 1904: Du Bois Papers.

<sup>31</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *A Select Bibliography of the Negro American* (Atlanta, 1905), p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> President Ware to W. E. B. Du Bois, April 22, 1908: Du Bois Papers.

<sup>28</sup> *Political Science Quarterly*, XIX (1904), 702-703.

<sup>29</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Study of Negro Problems," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XI (1898), 7-11.

rape or attempted rape. Du Bois reported, however, that in less than one-quarter of a long series of lynchings, the victim had been charged with assault upon a woman.<sup>35</sup> Through comparative statistics, Du Bois also demonstrated effectively that the Southern Negro child received an inferior education, when one considered such indices as the length of the school term, the salaries of teachers, the value of school property, etc. Furthermore, Du Bois ingeniously tried to disprove the accepted assumption that the whites were the benefactors of Negro education in the South, and he estimated that Negroes paid a prominent proportion of the property taxes and indirect taxes such as those on liquor.<sup>36</sup> He also asserted that Negroes should be credited with their proportionate share of the state school funds received from special Federal grants and from the sales of public lands. This Du Bois "revelation" was widely quoted by many whites.<sup>37</sup>

Du Bois also repudiated the widely held view of Africa as a vast cultural cipher. In the unfolding of the Atlanta studies, he presented a historical version of complex cultural development throughout many parts of Africa. Boas was quoted to prove that the glories of ancient Egypt were based upon "Negro Mediterranean culture."<sup>38</sup> Du Bois attempted to show that developmental

processes became chaotic and stunted, not because of the inherent inferiority of the people, but as a result of the dysgenic influences of the slave traders, the geographical isolation, and the oppressive climatic conditions. He was especially concerned with the incursions of the slave traders, and he contended that as tribes fell apart or were forcibly joined, the more "primitive" folkways and mores were adopted.<sup>39</sup> He presented the natives as helpless victims, whose creative contributions were cruelly beaten down, and whose vast potentialities for growth were ignored or ridiculed.

It should be recognized that although Du Bois stated that the purpose of these Atlanta publications was "primarily scientific," he also admitted that his efforts were meant to "encourage and help social reform."<sup>40</sup> Undoubtedly, the attention given to the latter aim detracted from the former. Furthermore, the type of "social reform" which he sought to further naturally had its basis in the program which he developed before he went to Atlanta. In effect, the Atlanta studies served as a framework for the dissemination of his propaganda on leadership.<sup>41</sup> As Du Bois pictured it, the Negro race would be saved through its own intellectuals who were to interest the rank and file in schooling, literary societies, community centers, social services, and industrial enterprises.

Since the publications covered a long span of years, it is not surprising to discover some revisions of his "social

<sup>35</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Dill, eds., *Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, 1914), p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> *Negro Common School* (Atlanta, 1901), pp. 89-92. Also W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Dill, eds., *The Common School and the Negro American* (Atlanta, 1911), pp. 120-126.

<sup>37</sup> *Outlook*, LXXI (1902), 676-677. *Dial*, XXXII (1902), 353. *Publications of the Southern History Association*, VI (1902), 350.

<sup>38</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Dill, eds., *Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, 1914), p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> *Negro Church* (Atlanta, 1903), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Dill, eds., *College-Bred Negro American* (Atlanta, 1910), p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> *College-Bred Negro* (Atlanta, 1900), p. 114. W. E. B. Du Bois and A. Dill, eds., *College-Bred Negro American* (Atlanta, 1910), pp. 67, 73, 100.

reform." In the 1899 volume, *The Negro in Business*, he deplored the fact that there were not enough Negro businessmen. He said, "it gives the race a one-sided development . . . and puts the mass of the Negro people out of sympathy and touch with the industrial and mercantile spirit of the age."<sup>42</sup> (The 1899 conference advocated the establishment of a national "Negro Business Men's League," comprised of local and state branches. According to Du Bois, the Tuskegeean Afro-American Council offered to make him the director of such a League, within its organization.<sup>43</sup> The next year, Booker T. Washington formed the "National Business League." Washington was clearly familiar with the Atlanta conference on Negro Business—as well as with other "valuable studies" of Du Bois's—and lifted the business league idea without even stating its source.)<sup>44</sup> By 1907, after Du Bois was influenced by American and German socialism, he condemned the exploitation of the common Negroes and emphasized "cooperation in capital and labor, wider distribution of capital and a more general equality of wealth and comfort."

The Atlanta studies may not have improved the conditions of the race very much, but they probably did improve its morale. At a time when political and social restrictions upon the American Negroes were increasing, the Atlanta monographs must have provided many members of the

race with a sense of group integration and ego satisfaction. In recording Negro achievements, Du Bois was verifying the fact that the race was advancing. Negroes could also examine these volumes and find suitable arguments to account for their low status in American society, and these observations had the certified sanctity of "social science."

Although Du Bois's studies never attained any wide circulation, either among Negroes or among whites, reviews of them appeared in important magazines and in some metropolitan newspapers. These accounts probably affected (however negligibly) some whites on at least two levels. First, white citizens learned that one Negro institution of higher education was engaged in serious intellectual activity. This picture of Negroes as social scientists and as individuals who were interested in the findings of social science represented a view which was very far from the traditional racial stereotypes. Second, after reading articles or lengthy reviews of the monographs (if not the studies themselves) some white men might have concluded that something should be done to improve conditions.

Scientific inquiries under the best of circumstances progress slowly and their effects on the general population require even more time. Living in the South, Du Bois was deeply aware of the seething and often erupting anti-Negro forces, and after being confronted with "situations that called—shrieked—for action,"<sup>45</sup> he concluded that social research had a strong element of futility about it. Actually, during the Atlanta period, Du Bois had commuted be-

<sup>42</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro in Business*. Atlanta, 1899, p. 50.

<sup>43</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois to William M. Trotter, May 20, 1905; Du Bois Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Booker T. Washington, "The National Negro Business League," *World's Work*, IV (1902), 2672. Also Booker T. Washington, "The Negro in Business," *Gunton's Magazine*, XX (1901), 215.

<sup>45</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (Washington, 1920), pp. 21–22.

tween his scientific laboratory and the tumultuous world of social action. From 1905 to 1910, he had presided over the Niagara Movement, the first national organization of Negroes which aggressively and unconditionally demanded the same civil rights for their people which other Americans enjoyed. In 1910, after the Niagara Movement failed, Du Bois was invited by white liberals (such as Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard) to leave Atlanta and come to New York as director of publications and research for the organization which was to become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Du Bois was not unhappy to leave Atlanta. For years he hated the caste-ridden city so much that he forced himself to ignore the place. He tried not to give it an opportunity to discriminate against him and he did not even ride the streetcars or attend the theaters.<sup>46</sup> Discontent with the com-

munity only underscored the despair he felt in connection with the monographs. He believed that the Atlanta studies would have thrived if Booker T. Washington (whom he accused of accepting Negro inferiority) had not blocked support of the project. Du Bois was also convinced that "powerful interests," among them the General Education Board, were withholding aid from Atlanta University's other activities because of his association with the institution. According to Willard Range, the administrators of Atlanta "breathed a sigh of relief" when their "embarrassing ornament" headed for New York City.<sup>47</sup> Du Bois was, however, permitted to co-edit (with A. G. Dill) the volumes until 1914. Thus ended "the first attempt to study in a scientific spirit the problems of the Negro in American life."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Range, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>46</sup> Edwin R. Embree, *13 Against the Odds* (New York, 1944), p. 164.

<sup>48</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, Revised Edition. New York, 1957, p. 503.