IV. PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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The problem of integrating the findings of the various social sciences dealing with the Negro includes the difficulties, experienced in other fields, resulting from increasing scientific specialization. Present-day tendencies towards an autonomous position for each discipline threaten to erect an intellectual Chinese wall which may become a permanent barrier to free cooperation among scholars in the social studies. Each science is itself a product of a history and a deterministic tradition, which have shaped the nature of its techniques and set the chronological limits of its investigations.

These centrifugal tendencies are counteracted only in part by bibliographic handbooks, for the increasing refinements of vocabulary alone in each discipline, however necessary they may be, tend to weaken the common language of the social scientists. Within the field of Negro studies, as elsewhere, specialized sociological work without historical perspective is frequently evident, against which can unfortunately be balanced the historical volume which has buried social perspective beneath a multitude of unique instances. One type of specialist who has tended to complicate the study of the Negro has been the student of Southern Life who uses the data concerning the Negro only when the facts obviously relate to the pattern of the dominant culture, thus creating a serious problem of balance and proportion. The reverse of this type is the specialist who seeks to establish a chauvinistic thesis by minimizing non-racial factors which may explain the position of the Negro. Any attempt at scientific integration must avoid these common pitfalls in favor of some balanced interdisciplinary treatment.

Between the superficiality of the completely unspecialized and the serious limitations of the minute specialist must lie middle ground. There are important interstitial areas among the social sciences—a virtual no man's land—which remain to be explored by the more catholic-minded investigator. The institutional approach of J. Franklin Frazier in his recent work, The Negro
Family in the United States, is fertile in a combination of historical and sociological techniques. The series of monographs in sociology and economics sponsored by the Committee on Negroes in Economic Reconstruction, which includes such works as Charles S. Johnson's *Collapse of Cotton Tenancy*, and Arthur Raper's *A Preface to Peasantry*, appears to have presented the operation of the historical conditioning forces upon the contemporary scene. The conjunction of African and New World studies fostered by the *Journal of Negro History* has been of increasing importance for the multiple type of analysis. One must note, however, the serious dangers which beset studies that stress exclusively what is unique in Negro development rather than considering the full context of national and world conflicts of which the Negro problem is, after all, an integral part. Remedial efforts in this direction may well follow the principles laid down in Donald Young's *American Minority Groups*, which considers the broader social and psychological framework which explains minority status.

Within the past six years there has been an increasing utilization of the Marxian approach to Negro studies. The monographs of the International Workers Press, such as those of James S. Allen, deal with the Negro in a setting of class warfare, but while careful in the presentation of the facts these studies have tended to arouse professional criticism as to proper emphasis and selection. The same difficulty is encountered in Dr. W. E. B. DuBois's *Black Reconstruction*. Most fortunate, perhaps, in the cautious application of a Marxian technique is Professor Abram Harris's *The Negro as Capitalist*, which shows an excellent interdisciplinary approach, based on good historical scholarship as well as upon sound economic and sociological techniques. Certainly, one need not embrace Stalin and the Comintern to profit by the wealth of suggestive material in the Marxist analysis. This has been done with outstanding success in the general historical field by students well-grounded in the several social sciences, such as Charles A. Beard, Louis Hacker, and the late Vernon L. Parrington.

The recent rise of the Southern Historical Association, the various new historical societies, such as that in Mississippi, and their journals, tend to add fresh perspective to the field of Negro studies.

[372]
There is reason for optimism in noting the relatively objective standards set, for example, by the *Journal of Southern History*, although the book reviews occasionally remind one that some of the membership are not fully satisfied with the settlement at Appomattox. The rich source materials of these articles, frequently transcriptions of previously unpublished manuscripts, contrast with the relative dearth of like material in the field of Negro studies. That these new Southern historical societies may be regarded as auxiliary for our purposes rather than as destructively competitive is evident from their continuous accessions of manuscript collections dealing with the Negro. This year, for example, Louisiana State University, which publishes the *Journal of Southern History*, has acquired the magnificent Johnson Collection, dealing with the ante-bellum activities of a free Negro family. The coöperative publishing venture of the Louisiana State University and the University of Texas in the Southern Biography Series, and the monographic series in Southern history, are apparently to be undertaken in the same spirit of free inquiry as characterizes the work of the University of North Carolina Press. Inevitably these activities must affect our knowledge of Negro history, although one is entitled to the inference that the rôle of the Negro will not receive the same proportionate emphasis that a less sectional enterprise might offer. One must also note the promising new quarterly of Negro studies, *Phylon*, issued by Atlanta University.

Inevitably our discussion must embrace this serious problem of original sources, since further historical research upon the Negro is contingent upon it, and since the other social sciences usually await the historian's spade before completing their own groundwork and perspective. This problem of bibliography has been dealt with today by Mr. Reddick, but I should nonetheless like to point out that the time has come for an adequate extension to date of Munroe R. Work's *Bibliography of the Negro*, with some provision for the listing of manuscript sources dealing with the subject. The supplementary issues of the biennial *Negro Year Book*, however excellent for some purposes, are not adequate as far as articles and certain other types of publications are concerned.
Students would be benefited immeasurably if the excellent indexes in the separate volumes of the *Journal of Negro History* were converted into a single master index. In this connection, also, I may remark that I have had occasion, in the course of my own work, to note how inaccessible for the study of Negro history are such Southern journals as the *ante-bellum Southern Quarterly Review*, for the simple reason that they are not indexed. It would be well, therefore, to consider to what extent some of the WPA projects could undertake the task of making a master index of all these various journals.

With more adequate bibliographic sources, it should be possible to develop another important field—that of Negro biography in the "life and times" tradition. Works like those of Emmet J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe on Booker T. Washington, and Charles Wesley on Richard Allen, suggest further possibilities of this type. Such biographies would be an excellent foundation for studies in Negro leadership.

While no monographic work seems to be impending in Negro history and life on the scale of the old *Johns Hopkins University Studies in History and Political Science* relating to the Negro, a number of recent significant works have appeared. Professor Charles Wesley in his *Collapse of the Confederacy* seems to have undone what the traditions evident in *Gone With the Wind* have tended to establish. It is gratifying to note that the Daughters of the Confederacy have subsidized so truthful and iconoclastic a work as Bell I. Wiley's *Southern Negroes, 1861–1865*, which destroys the older belief that the slaves were indifferent to freedom. Professor Wiley, an active member of both the Southern Historical Association and the Mississippi State Historical Society, has given an intimate picture of the various cooperative steps taken by the slave in behalf of the Union cause. Slave disloyalty to the Confederacy he shows, was the rule; loyalty the exception. Similar conclusions were reached independently by Joseph Carroll, Herbert Aptheker, and the present speaker.

Various students have pointed out in the past that major gaps still exist in the field of Negro studies for certain geographic areas, as we also learned from what has already been said this morning.
Professor Herskovits' paper, "The Significance of West Africa for Negro Research," still remains a challenge to the enterprising scholar; and his work in the Caribbean, together with that of other students, particularly in history, such as Professors W. L. Burn, William L. Mathiesen, and others for the West Indies, suggests the possibilities of further researches into these newer areas, such as the Virgin Islands. The work of Professor Burn of the University of St. Andrews, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies*, proves that the problem of bibliography is not as formidable as is generally feared. One wonders also whether the time has not come, in view of the increasing output in the field of African studies, for the historian to transform the more or less static descriptive studies of the anthropologist for this area into narratives possessing a larger degree of continuity of a more dynamic character. It would also be advantageous to consider a coöperative historical work upon Negro slavery on a large scale by competent scholars, which would expand and revise the basic work of U. B. Phillips into a more interpretive as well as factual form. A comprehensive Dictionary of Negro Life and History, along the lines of the *Dictionary of American History*, would be of obvious value.

Let us return once more to the original problem of an interdisciplinary approach and seek concrete applications of this idea. The historian, who would modestly refuse to deal with a highly complex contemporary economic problem as outside his province, is nevertheless expected to attack such problems when they are no longer contemporary. But is the historian's ability to comprehend a technical problem increased by the mere fact that it is over thirty years old? The implications of the new history would seem to encourage so absurd a conclusion, and this, in turn, engenders an attitude that has been inevitably carried over into the field of Negro studies, with the result that sociologists, political scientists, economists, and others have waited for the historian, with his more or less blunt tools, to bring data of an institutional character to them. If the sociologist were to read original sources when undertaking institutional studies, would he not grasp relationships hidden to the ordinary historian? Or if the historian came with
a fund of basic concepts from sociology, would his descriptive powers not improve?

The value of this multiple approach was deeply impressed upon me when undertaking graduate investigations in Negro history and anthropology some years ago under the direction of Professor Herskovits. Beginning with studies in American slave insurrections on slave ships and the plantation, I became aware of the variety of social factors involved but not conventionally treated by historians. Professor William Sumner Jenkins, a sociologist, in his comprehensive work, *Pro-slavery Thought in the Old South*, has endeavored to describe the various Southern schools defending slavery, but he has not attempted to coördinate his evidence nor to give the proper historical perspective to each of these schools of thought.

To defend slavery, the Southern leaders were compelled to reject liberalism as a system. George Fitzhugh and George Frederick Holmes, both of Virginia, attempted to make that rejection complete in every field, politics, economics, and literature, and finally to create a new sociological and political theory based upon the premises of Aristotle relating to the natural inequality of man. Fitzhugh proclaimed a so-called universal law of slavery which made for paternalistic societies, carefully graded as to social rank, and dominated by aristocracies founded on primogeniture and entail. Almost every important southern newspaper and magazine of the time paid high praise to these views, some declaring themselves convinced for the first time; and *De Bow's Review* aggressively championed such arguments. The pro-slavery group was driven to demand the removal of Northern text-books from the schools, the appointment of active proponents of slavery to the universities, and the punishment of all critics. In the middle fifties there was an important movement, inspired by L. W. Spratt, a lawyer of South Carolina, to reopen the African slave trade and thereby provide the entire Southern white population with slaves, thus developing the motives of self-interest in the perpetuation of slavery. Only the fear among Southern politicians of alienating the border states which exported slaves finally ended this agitation, but not until the controversy had
revealed the growing acceptance of a social order opposed to the doctrines of liberalism.

It is significant that the first two books on sociology written in the United States appeared as an attempt to create fundamental principles which would eternally justify slavery. In 1854, Fitzhugh published his pioneer work, *Sociology for the South*, and Henry Hughes, of Mississippi, that same year wrote *A Treatise on Sociology*.

The doctrinal predecessor of these two men was George Frederick Holmes, the most prolific contributor to periodical literature in the South, an editor of the *Southern Quarterly Review*, and a professor of history and literature at the University of Virginia. Holmes had begun to discuss the necessity of a “sociology” antithetic to liberalism in 1849 while a professor at the College of William and Mary. He had been born on the plantations of British Guiana and had evidently acquired in his youth the attitudes and defenses characteristic of a slave-holder. The writings of August Comte exerted a profound influence over him, although he rejected the religious heterodoxy of the father of sociology. By 1852, Holmes became the foremost interpreter of Comte in America, and in 1882 he gave the first university courses in the novel science of sociology.

American anthropology was also affected by the slavery controversy. In examining the anthropological literature of the 1840’s and 1850’s, one becomes aware of the common complaint of some scholars that the attempt to justify slavery had determined the conclusions of others of their colleagues. Dr. Van Evrie, despite his amazing lack of logic, seems to have enjoyed an excellent reputation among some of the London anthropologists, who approvingly quoted his alleged proofs of Negro inferiority. Special consideration was accorded a Southern anthropologist like J. C. Nott, on the ground that Southerners were most familiar with the Negro. Van Evrie converted Fitzhugh to a racialism of the Gobineau brand, and Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, and others lent their public endorsements.

The combination of slavery and the rising Southern nationalism produced an aggressive type of imperialistic thought which came as