VIII. SOME OBJECTIVES OF NEGRO STUDIES

A GENERAL DISCUSSION CONDUCTED AT THE FINAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE

MR. HERSKOVITS: It may be well at this point to consider as a whole the contributions that have been presented at our previous meetings, in the light of such action as you may deem desirable for this group and its continuation committee to make in furthering our common objectives. The floor is open for your suggestions and comments.

MR. WISH: I should like to raise certain points as to the approach we should take in our recommendations, especially as regards the form in which we feel research should be cast. Are we going to try to cover the West Indies by monographic studies dealing with minute areas? Are we going to try to do over the work of Burns and Mathieson? For I don’t quite agree with what has been said regarding the sources used by these and other scholars. If you look through Burns and Mathieson you will find such sources as British colonial papers and newspapers frequently used, sources which contain the most intimate materials. It seems to me that unless we are going to recommend an undertaking thought of in terms of a very extensive series of monographs on the West Indies, it would be much better to limit ourselves to a few of the sections which can be worked most thoroughly. In this respect, especially as regards the question of emphasis, Dr. Williams could perhaps help us more than by merely pointing out the gaps in West Indian research. I would like to have Dr. Williams explain where he would recommend emphasis be placed, so far as needed research is concerned.

MR. WILLIAMS: That is a difficult question. Speaking for my own interest, I would say slavery, but I could not at the same time say that the question of immigration is less important, or that the economic situation in the West Indies is more significant to understand than social conditions.

MR. HARRIS: It seems to me that a relevant proposal has already been made; that is that research in the West Indies might proceed along three lines; first, the study of African capitalism;
second, research in the British West Indies; and third, study in Brazil and Cuba.

Mr. Williams: Or we might restate those problems as first, Africa and the rise of capitalism; secondly, the abolition of the slave system; and third, the Negro in Latin America.

Mr. Herskovits: In considering what we would like to see in the report of the Committee on Recommendations, we might very well give attention to those research tools that are lacking and which we would like to have made available, before considering those areas, either geographical or intellectual, in which research ought to be carried on. We all are going to continue our interests and our investigations in whatever field we are working, if only because we are fascinated by our problems for all those reasons that drive a research man to go on doing his research.

But our greatest collective need is to have available the instruments that our discussions have shown are so sadly lacking in the field of Negro studies—bibliographies, microfilms, surveys of one kind or another, and the like.

Mr. Bunche: Yet we cannot ignore the importance of making clear to ourselves the scope of our interests in terms of the very broad social implications of our deliberations and researches. We have, perhaps, devoted too little time to considering a very important point Mr. Wish made in his paper: the importance of integrating studies of Negro populations with the main currents of the modern world, relating them to international affairs, and so on. As a political scientist, particularly as a Negro political scientist, this strikes me as being highly important.

It is not inconceivable that as things are going in the world the next few years may offer the white social scientist an opportunity to study the reactions of the Negro ex-scholar in the ghettos of a fascist nation. We would be joined, perhaps, by ex-scholars of other groups, Jewish ex-savants, and a few liberal Nordics. What we must do now is take into consideration the status of the Negro populations in the Western World with respect to the directions which the economic and political structures and prevailing philosophies of various countries are taking or may take.

These inert black populations are potential forces which can be
manipulated very effectively. In a study that we are now making we run across countless examples of this sort of thing—the use of the Negro population to maintain the Crump machine in Memphis; the use of the Negro population by the established machine in San Antonio to oppose the liberal candidate, Maverick; or, on the other side of the ledger, the use of the Negro population to put across local bond elections for schools and auditoriums, and so on. Yet this is a population which is given no general political status but is nevertheless handy for whatever group may care to use it for its own ends.

This is a process that has many larger implications, especially when considered in terms of some things that are happening in Africa, such as certain appeals made by fascist elements to the large native populations in South Africa. For the same reason consideration of the colonial policy of England in the Caribbean is of first importance as is American colonial policy, which is so often ignored (when it is not forgotten that we have one).

There are still other subjects we have not mentioned: the organizations of Negro peoples, not merely the churches and secret societies, but the very significant protest, betterment, and reform organizations. Similarly, the question of leadership has been very largely ignored, except for some scattered biographical materials.

From the more practical standpoint, I fail to see why we should not devote some attention to the question as to how the information that is being piled up by scholars in the Negro field can be made a little more available to the laymen. Scholars too often form a kind of closed circle. We each read what others write and know what is going on, but it does not permeate beyond our groups. There is a great need, I think, for some medium to make our findings more generally available.

I might at this point call attention to the fact that here, at Howard, the Division of Social Sciences some time ago drew up a program, which we called a five-year social science research program, that touched upon many of the points that have been raised in this discussion. I may mention a few of the topics listed: Africa and the rise of capitalism: Negro participation in the move-
ment for abolition in the United States, 1830 to 1860; Negro labor in the cotton economy; the black worker since the New Deal; the adjustment of the Negro to modern urban civilization; a comparative study of the cultural and social programs typical of minority counter-assertion and compensatory adjustment, with particular reference to Jewish-Negro parallels; a psychoanalytic study of the motivations and mechanisms of the foregoing; colonial policy in the West Indies; racial policy in the Union of South Africa; the biography of Magloire Pilage, leader in the independence movement of Guadeloupe; Negro social movements, from equal citizenship to communism, and their leaders.

Mr. Herskovits: It is apparent that any report of this conference should indicate both the richness of the field, the breadth of its scope, the problems of certain single disciplines and those of an inter-disciplinary character; and also, suggest many essential aids to study.

Mr. Cobb: I should like to add the suggestion that some organ should be provided which could give representation to the different disciplines involved.

Mr. Locke: I wonder, however, if one of the very things that we are striving to do, that is, to integrate the study of the Negro with the general study of cognate problems, would not be defeated by establishing of such a special organ, which would be some kind of a journal of Negro studies. I was just about to say, when the Chairman spoke, that while I agree heartily with his forecast of what the framework of the findings of the Conference should be, it ought to be definitely stressed that one of the major aims of the newer point of view is not only to integrate the various aspects of the study of the Negro, but also to point out that these studies have something to contribute to the general theory and interpretation of the respective fields concerned. In other words, the object of our research is not merely to find information for and about the Negro, but to exploit what is in many respects a significant laboratory situation that will enable us to throw important light on crucial theoretical questions in the respective disciplines.

Mr. Cobb: What I had in mind was something of a less specialized and technical nature than the kind of publication Dr.
Locke has suggested. I believe that everyone publishes, and must publish, his straight scientific reports in the established journals of the field. But, as Dr. Bunche suggested, such information as we have on the Negro is circulated within a closed group. This is apparent when we consider the types of Negro journals we have: either the more or less civic-political magazines like The Crisis and Opportunity; or the Journal of Negro History, and the Journal of Negro Education, which are definitely specialized.

Mr. Graves: Might I say a word on this question, as more or less a specialist in the development of underworked fields of study? I am under the handicap of not having heard all your discussions, but what I have heard touched upon by Mr. Bunche and Mr. Locke seems to me a major question. That is, how far you are thinking in terms of developing Negro studies only as a field of research; and on the other hand, how far do you think of developing Negro studies as a tool in understanding the world we have to live in? These are two different phases of the problem, and your development of Negro studies as a program of research has significance only so far as you make the case for the development of Negro studies as a tool for understanding the world that we have to live in the second half of the twentieth century.

As Mr. Locke suggested, in all these development fields, one of the first things scholars ask for is a journal; and he pointed out a danger which I have seen develop in Indie studies, in Chinese, and every other underdeveloped field, of aggravating the sense of separation which already exists between groups of specialists by locking their studies into isolated organizations. There is a great tendency for scholars in a restricted field to get off in a corner and work by themselves, and consequently to be considered as queer by practically everybody else. Certainly such a development discourages their having the effect on scholarship in general that their particular competences and their particular interests ought to have. And this tendency is frequently aggravated by the existence of a scientific journal which encourages that type of departmentalization.

Dr. Cobb diverted the matter in a direction which might have better results,—a journal of information or a publication which
would let people know what is going on in the fields of Negro studies, particularly people having a peripheral interest in them. You cannot expect the economists or sociologists, who should be using Negro data in studying these questions you have mentioned—village organization, for instance—to become specialists in Negro studies. You have to supply the tools on the basis of which they can integrate—I think that is the favorite term nowadays—these specific studies into their specific disciplines.

So I think there is a good deal to be said against any activity that sets you up purely as a group interested in a program of research, interesting and fascinating as that program obviously is. I think you must give serious consideration to the problem that Mr. Bunche raised, namely, how these Negro studies are to be made a tool for understanding the world that we are in. It is only when you get your studies on that kind of basis that you are going to lay a real foundation for Negro studies that are of significance in terms of coping with the problems we all must face.

Mr. Herskovits: Despite the importance of the point made by Mr. Graves, we must not overlook a difference of some moment between a gathering such as this and, let us say, a meeting of those interested in Sinological studies, or concerned with work in the Indo-Iranian field. This difference, I think, is that those persons who are concerned with Negro studies represent many disciplines and, as has been pointed out, have been working in isolation from others concerned with related problems to such an extent that our need is for some integrating device. There really is no such thing as a "field" of Negro studies. There merely happen to be sociologists and linguists and political scientists and physical anthropologists and psychologists and ethnologists who are concerned with problems that touch on the Negro. One thing on which all of us will heartily agree is that the problems with which we are concerned have attracted us because they do in a sense consist of materials from the laboratory set up in the New World by history and which are available for the study of problems of far-reaching importance.

Mr. Bunche: We are all opposed to Jim Crow.

Mr. Herskovits: Certainly to scientific Jim Crowism. Yet there has been a serious lack of any source to which one might
turn for studies of the Negro in a given field which have special reference to similar studies in other disciplines. It is here that the importance of bibliographic research, which we have stressed, looms so large.

Mr. Locke: The most useful single project we have mentioned would be a critical annotated bibliography of Negro studies.

Mr. Aptheker: I would like to suggest that in line with our discussion of tools, a point Dr. Reddick made is of some importance—that one of the fundamental instruments of research is the man who does the research, and many of the Negro scholars concerned with Negro research have great difficulty in getting at source material. I wonder if, at least in the record of this Conference, some statement concerning that should not be present, that would at least indicate our feeling of the necessity of doing away with discrimination of this kind.

Mr. Herskovits: I should like to hear Mr. Berrien discuss the possible usefulness of some form of central clearing-house for published materials as it might affect work in South America and Latin America. Suppose, for example, there were some kind of a publication which took a wide bibliographic range, and which would perhaps even accept papers in the languages of the Americas. Could this be expected to have any effect in integrating the whole field, and would it be of use to scholars concerned with Negro studies in Latin America?

Mr. Berrien: Certainly in Brazil and Cuba, and to a lesser extent in Columbia, Venezuela, and Peru, it would be of definite interest, and contributions might be expected, to say nothing of subscriptions. If you could publish the studies as they came, in Spanish or in Portuguese, that would be an additional advantage from the Latin American point of view.

Mr. Herskovits: Would it be worth while to envisage a possible monograph series, which would make available to scholars in all fields extended studies which happen to deal with Negro data?

Mr. Reddick: I should suggest that a guide to available materials is the first essential.

Mr. Bascom: A monograph series could serve the purpose of covering past bibliographies.
MR. WISH: I think there is every argument for putting the materials in one place. For that matter, the American Historical Association, with a Congressional appropriation, publishes regular bibliographies in which they try to include everything of a historical character. The same thing can be said for the *Journal of Negro History*, which covers a specialized field of its own. But when one actually wants to do anything of an inter-disciplinary nature, then the real difficulties arise.

MR. BUNCHE: Concerning the statement made by Dr. Locke, I think we ought to devote some attention to actual possibilities for the publication of articles on the Negro utilizing present available media. In some fields this is relatively easy. Anthropologists deal with the Negro as a respectable topic, and the journals of anthropology take such articles without hesitation. In respect to my own field, which concerns the political status of the Negro, except in so far as papers having to do with colonial problems and the like are involved, there isn't a very cordial reception for papers dealing with the Negro. I wonder what Dr. Harris would say about the actual possibilities for publication of articles on Negro labor problems, and so on, in economic journals?

MR. HARRIS: I am inclined to think that while an occasional article would be welcomed, anyone who would expect to have the *Journal of Economics* or the *Political Science Quarterly*, which we will consider as borderline, publish four or five articles a year, on topics touching the Negro, would be quite disappointed. One of my friends, an editor, told me when I published *The Negro As a Capitalist*, "The technique is all right, but all this stuff about Negroes is outside my interest."

MR. HERSKOVITS: May I ask your feeling about a possible recommendation of this Conference as to the desirability of indicating the importance of some form of publication?

MR. LOCKE: Is not "some form" a little too vague? The question very obviously divides itself into an expression of opinion on the relative value of monographic presentation as against a journal of Negro studies.

MR. BUNCHE: Are these mutually exclusive?
Mr. Johnson: The possible value of abstracts should not be forgotten.

Mr. Puckett: Should not any publication envisaged also be thought of as including lists of research projects under way as well as those that have been brought to publication?

Mr. Herskovits: Is it the feeling of the group, then, that it is desirable to have some kind of centralized means of making known what is going on and what has gone on in Negro studies, in terms of bibliographies, monographs, reports on current researches, reviews and abstracts of literature, and the like?

Mr. Puckett: It seems to me quite probable that this sort of coordination might even lead to further coordination in connection with individual university faculties. The subject of Negro studies would be a good point of integration, at least of various social studies, and possibly there might be more in the way of cooperative publication by people in one given locality, or even among members of a wider group than that.

Mr. Johnson: Might not such a group as this, if permanently organized, attempt also to stimulate original work?

Mr. Herskovits: You mean a possible program of fellowships, or something of that kind?

Mr. Johnson: That, or grants-in-aid.

Mr. Leland: Of course the resources of the Council available for grants-in-aid would be, as they have been, available in any case to those working in this field of Negro studies.

Mr. Herskovits: And the same thing would be true, I take it, of the practical points that have arisen out of our discussion of the need for microfilming, though I suppose that a committee on Negro studies would tend to focus the interest of the Council lying within the field.

Mr. Leland: Certainly the advice of such a committee would be exceedingly valuable to the Council in regard to all proposals concerning Negro studies. I should suppose that all proposals in this field would pass through the committee before being considered by the Council; proposals, that is, coming to us from outside the committee, would be referred to the committee for its advice before the Council acted on them. That is our practice.
with regard to the other fields in which we maintain special committees.

Mr. Johnson: Might we not discuss the advisability of concentrating studies somewhat further?

Mr. Bascom: Do you mean, for example, to select a certain West Indian island, and work it thoroughly with respect to all the disciplines represented here?

Mr. Leland: An approach of that sort would come within the category of large-scale projects, to be carried on by a considerable number of scholars working together on the basis of a general understanding among them. What we should do with a project of this sort that came before us recommended by this Committee, if we thought we could do anything with it at all, would be to try to set it up in some practicable form. Projects of concentration, however, seem to me more suitable for institutions to set up, maintain, and assume the responsibility for them. A committee on Negro studies, however, might be very useful in advising concerning projects of that sort.

Mr. Reddick: I was wondering whether further discussion about microfilming of documents would not be in order.

Mr. Bascom: What of the centralization of some of this material?

Mr. Leland: It seems to me to be much more important to know where materials are than to have them concentrated in one place. It is desirable, of course, in some cases to have certain places that do make a specialty of collecting specific categories of material designated as custodians of other collections. But the important thing is to have a good policy of coordination among institutions that are concerned with related fields so they will cooperate instead of compete with each other. They should have ample information as to their respective resources, and ample facilities for exchanging materials with each other, as well as with outside people, and for microfilming.

Mr. Johnson: Should not reference be made for the record to the projected but long dormant plans for an encyclopedia of the Negro?

Mr. Herskovits: Reference has not been made to many such
things. Thus, the *Journal of Negro History*, and the special job it is doing in the very field we are concerned with, has only received passing mention. But I imagine we all know about these projects.

**Mr. Bunche:** The Carnegie Survey has likewise not received mention.

**Mr. Leland:** The lack of such a body as the proposed committee was very much felt in setting up the encyclopedia project. Many of us called in on that felt rather helpless in not knowing what scholars to bring together for advice. A committee of this sort would have been exceedingly helpful in trying to get that project set up.

**Mr. Herskovits:** If it is apparent that this group feels that a committee on Negro studies would be useful in the many ways indicated in our discussions, your Committee on Recommendations will submit a proposal to this effect to the Council, embodying in its report those points you have stressed as particularly desirable to achieve.
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